Making meaning, making a home:
students watching G*enerations*.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a reception analysis using qualitative interviews to investigate black students' watching of a South African soap opera, *Generations*, taking into account the context of a largely white South African university campus.

The findings of this study are that students find pleasure in talking about *Generations* and hold seemingly contradictory views on whether it is 'realistic' or not. The analysis concludes that watching *Generations* does serve to affirm these students' black identity, since there is a particular need to do so on a campus where black students witness and experience racial discrimination.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In February 2001, I arrived at Rhodes University in Grahamstown to study, and moved into a university residence called Truro House, which catered for postgraduate women students.

The course I chose was called the Higher Diploma in Journalism and Media Studies. Incorporating both practical journalistic training and media theory, it was the first time I had come across the subject called cultural studies, which was a thread running strongly through media theory. Professor Larry Strelitz introduced us to some of the work done by Stuart Hall, Ien Ang, David Morley, and John Fiske, among others, and we learnt about the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (the CCCS). It was also the first time in many years that I had read analyses of what I thought of as the behaviour of ordinary people: What television do people watch, and why? Why do people enjoy soap operas? Why is reggae so popular? What is the key to Madonna's success? The way these studies metaphorically prise open the box labelled 'popular culture' and rummage about inside, while making links between it and broader social patterns and power structures, was very appealing to me.

At the end of 2001, I wrote an essay on soap operas, and decided to flesh it out by doing a quick, informal survey of five of the women I lived with in residence, asking who enjoyed what soap operas, and why. This short essay left me with more questions than answers – I did not feel that I had a clear idea of why soap operas were so eagerly followed by the majority of women in the residence, for instance – and I concluded the piece by reflecting that "analysing South African media would be a rich, complex area of study, since our history has located us socially in complicated and shifting ways". (At the time, though, I had not fully considered what I meant by "us" and "our", for the women I lived with were mostly not South African.)

In 2002, I began the MA programme in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, and again I found digging into the field of audience studies and cultural studies to be the most interesting part of the coursework. At roughly the same time, I noticed that it was only the black women in our residence who could be seen glued to the communal television at 8pm on weekdays, watching a South Africa soap opera, *Generations*. Why, I wondered? What was the appeal? Was it simply a way to escape from the rigours of studying? Was it because they were hooked on the storyline? Did they, as so many studies have found, relish the opportunity to discuss TV characters with each other? Were they bonding, as black women, as some sort of defence against the fact that the upper echelons of the university were predominantly white, and the city was a landscape dominated by monuments of nineteenth-century English settlers? Thus my interest in writing my MA thesis on black women students watching *Generations* was born.

My investigation, then, happened at two levels. On one level, I wanted to investigate the appeal of this particular soap opera along the lines of some of the theorists I had studied, by asking about the pleasures gained from watching it. On another level, I wanted to find out why it was black students, in particular, who watched it. This second level was in many ways a deeper investigation, enquiring into whether the power structures on campus impacted their consumption, and whether getting together with other black students to watch a programme that featured successful black characters was a way of cementing their identity as black students.

By the end of 2002, I had many pages of transcriptions of my Truro House interviews. However, towards the end of 2003 as I was writing up my findings, I realised that, since I was inexperienced at interviewing, the first interviews sometimes lacked the probing and prompting required. I therefore decided to conduct another group interview, and because many of the 2002 Truro residents had graduated and left Grahamstown, I chose to interview students living in a residence called Lilian Britten. Like Truro House, it was for

postgraduate women students only, and I had heard that as in Truro House, only black students watched *Generations*.

This thesis, then, is the result of reading in the field, plus those interviews. It is divided into the following sections:

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section covers some of the literature that is germane to my study, tracing a path through text-audience relationships in cultural studies. Beginning with an overview of cultural studies as a discipline, it incorporates an outline of some seminal studies in the field, before examining the concept of the active audience. After briefly examining the links between qualitative audience research and cultural studies, it looks at the importance of context in reception analysis. The second section gives an overview of media as shapers of identity. The chapter concludes by examining the role of television as a cultural resource and delineates some of the characteristics of the soap opera genre.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The third chapter looks at the notion of the two separate camps of research methodology: quantitative and qualitative. It then briefly outlines quantitative research, and why some theorists feel it is not suited to social science research, before examining qualitative methodology in more detail. The next section focuses on the overlap that exists between the 'uses and gratifications' approach to research and cultural studies as a means of explaining my chosen research method: a reception analysis using qualitative interviews. The chapter then examines the advantages and drawbacks of both the individual qualitative interview as well as focus group interviews, both of which I used. The rest of the chapter describes my data collection process.

Chapter 4: The Context of This Study

As the title suggests, the fourth chapter focuses on the context of my interviewees' television viewing, concentrating on the links between South Africa's policy of apartheid, socio-economic disparities and race relations on campus. The two residences are also briefly described.

Chapter 5: Findings

Here I analyse my interviewees' answers to the questions I asked. The chapter is divided into sections that match the aims of my research, namely: The pleasure of talk; realism; how the students' viewing of the programme connects with their experience of their viewing context; and finally, whether students' watching of *Generations* is part of a ritual to affirm their black identity. I conclude with a brief analysis of six interviews conducted with some of those Truro House students who do *not* watch *Generations*.

The thesis ends with a few concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines seminal works in the field of media studies and reception analysis, which is the branch of media studies that informs my research.

I have arranged this chapter into themes, each of which I will explore.

These themes are:

2.2 Text-audience relationships in cultural studies
2.2.1 What is cultural studies?
2.2.2 Cultural studies and the active audience
2.2.3 Cultural studies and qualitative audience research
2.2.4 The importance of context
2.2.5 Conclusion
2.3 Media as shapers of identity
2.4 Television, soap operas
    2.4.1 Television as a cultural resource
    2.4.2 *Generations* and the soap opera genre
    2.4.3 Key reception analyses of soap operas
2.5 Conclusion

My thesis draws on reception analysis, which is a particular way of regarding audiences and their relationship to the media texts they consume. Focusing on television consumption, I will therefore begin this section by examining briefly the ways in which theorists have conceived of text-audience relationships in the last 30 to 40 years. Various ways of understanding television audiences, in particular, have dominated communications research (Ang 1996: 3; Seiter et al 1989: 2), probably because media

organisations themselves need to research media reach for reasons of policy, planning, and finances (McQuail 2000: 377-8).

Since the media text that underpins this study is a soap opera, this section also briefly examines some recent studies of television audiences, focusing particularly on soap operas.

2.2 TEXT-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIPS IN CULTURAL STUDIES

2.2.1 What is cultural studies?

Theorists have noted the increase in interest in the concept of "culture" over the last 30 years in various social spheres, from the political to the academic (Du Gay and Hall et al 1997: 1).

Defining "culture", though, has proved to be a challenging task, as the term has been used to cover a range of concepts (Thompson 1990: 122, Storey 1993: 2). Inglis repeats Geertz's maxim "that culture simply is 'the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves'" (1993: xi). Tensions and debates between two definitions of culture haven't been resolved: namely, between culture as a way of life, and culture as the production and circulation of meaning (Du Gay and Hall 1997: 13). The word "culture" in the phrase "cultural studies" means more than this, though: Fiske points out that the term has a political emphasis, since it refers to a way of living in an industrial society, encompassing "all the meanings of that social experience" (1987b: 255).

John Hartley gives this succinct definition of cultural studies, highlighting the relationship between meaning and power:

> It's the study of power within the context of meaning. So if you're looking at the contemporary media, for example, cultural studies is classically the way in which media meanings reproduce relations of power, usually unequal relations of power, based on class or some other kind of demographic difference. That's the standard approach to cultural studies, these days. Power and meaning.
> (Hartley in an interview with Brooker 1998: 124)

To further unpick what cultural studies is and what it does, it is useful to look at the theoretical origins of cultural studies. The study of English is the "first parent" of cultural studies (Inglis 1993: 30), which also blends the theoretical frameworks of ethics (Kant), Hegelian and Marxist history, psychoanalysis (Freud), and "the long Anglo-American tradition of empirical data collection from large-scale social survey, as well as from more strictly economic and mathematical sources" (Inglis 1993: 69).

Cultural studies, then, is as Inglis (1993: 79) puts it, "both more and less than political sociology". It studies "culture in action"; what some have called "the making of meaning" (Inglis 1993: 247), developing rapidly in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s at the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (Fiske 1987b: 254). Integral to British cultural studies are Marxist principles (Fiske 1987b: 254; Sparks 1996: 71). For instance, the process of making meanings is seen as linked to the social structure in which people operate, and capitalist societies are viewed as divided by various axes, such as race, class and gender (Fiske 1987b: 254-255). And social relations are seen in terms of a struggle for dominance, in which the more powerful groups "attempt to 'neutralise' the meanings that serve their interests into the 'common sense' of the society as a whole", while the subordinate classes resist this domination in various ways (Fiske 1987b: 255).

Cultural studies is interested in how cultural forms allow the dominant class to entrench their domination, and how subordinate classes resist this domination (Kellner 1995: 6). One of the concepts that it draws on to explain this domination and resistance is Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and counterhegemony. Simply put, hegemony is "the complex interlocking of cultural institutions… which won the wholehearted consent of the people to the way things were" (Inglis 1993: 76), while counterhegemony is the subverting of and resistance to this process. Hegemony is not a static power relationship, however, as consent is continually sought – resulting in a never-ending process of struggle and negotiation (Fiske 1987b: 259; During 1995: 5).

In addition to Gramsci, a theorist with a major influence on cultural studies is Louis Althusser. Together, the two theorists provide a way of "accommodating both structuralism… and the history of capitalism in the twentieth century with Marxism" (Fiske 1987b: 256). Althusser is known for his theory of ideology – a dynamic process that is constantly reproduced and reconstituted – and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), the range of social institutions that encourage people to think and behave in socially acceptable ways (Fiske 1987b: 256).

During (1995: 6) notes that according to Althusser, individuals are seduced by ideology because it allows them to make sense of the world, and to create an image of themselves as powerful and attractive, while it reproduces inequitable social relations. Yet, says During (1995: 6), politico-psychoanalytical structuralism of this kind did not pay enough heed to the ability of communities and individuals to generate their own meanings and effects. This came later.

Stuart Hall, one of the CCCS's most prominent theorists, turned Althusser's ideology "into a diagnostic instrument for the analysis of motive" (Inglis 1993: 84). A series of analyses by CCCS analysts of the ways in which people signal their resistance to or compliance with particular ideologies "has become part of the canon" of cultural studies (Inglis 1993: 84).

In the late 1970s, writers like Hall began to challenge the view of audiences as powerless subjects (Fiske 1987a: 62). One strand of semiotic thought that entered cultural studies with some profound ramifications was that of 'polysemy', referring to the notion that one sign could have many signifieds, so that one text could have more than one meaning (During 1995: 6-7). While the concept of polysemy is limited in itself, it led to more complex theories of cultural production as hybridisation and negotiation, concepts that "help us describe how cultural products may be combined with new elements to produce different effects in different situations" (During 1995: 7).

Livingstone (1998b: 237-239) notes that six "routes" towards reception analysis converged during the late 1970s. These routes were:

- Hall's theory of encoding and decoding;
- Cultural studies' concept of the active audience;
- Focus on the resistant audience, as part of questioning the dominant ideology thesis; the cultural imperialism thesis, and the political economy approach;
- A dismantling of the structuralist approach, with influences from the Birmingham school and the American reader-response theory, leading to an integrated approach to text and reader;
- Feminist approaches leading to an emphasis on the marginalized audience; and
- The analysis of the culture of the everyday, stressing "thick description", as part of the "ethnographic turn" (Livingstone 1998b: 238).

I will now explore the first and second "routes", namely, Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding, and cultural studies' concept of the active audience, as my thesis rests on these ideas.

On the one hand, it seems artificial to examine these concepts as two separate "routes" when they are more like intertwined "roots" of a tree, supporting the growth of an entire subject and growing from the soil of philosophy, language studies, psychology and sociology. On the other hand, adhering to Livingstone's (1998b) classification makes it possible to perform a systematic examination of some of the literature around the subject.

So, firstly, I will begin with Hall's encoding/decoding model.

In 1980, Hall published his "Encoding/decoding" essay, which proved to be a groundbreaking piece of work (Moores 1990: 14), offering a way beyond the uses and

gratifications model (Gray 1999: 27), and becoming one of the "routes" towards reception analysis (Livingstone 1998b: 238).

In it, Hall pointed out that the (transmission) model of communication had been conceived of as a loop, but that it was also possible to think of it as a series of articulated, linked moments: production, circulation, distribution/consumption and reproduction (Hall 1980: 128). He suggested that communicative messages were coded by the sender, and decoded by the receiver. Problems tended to crop up when there was a "lack of fit" between the codes used by the encoder and decoder (1980: 131).

Hall also hypothesised that there were three potential positions of decoding: *dominant-hegemonic,* when the viewer decodes and accepts the connoted message; *negotiated*, when the decoding contains adaptive and oppositional elements, and *oppositional*, when the viewer understands the message, but chooses to read it in a way opposite to the way in which it was intended (Hall 1980: 136-8). Fiske (1987a: 264) says that Gramsci's notion of hegemony underlies Hall's two reading strategies – those that produce negotiated and oppositional readings.

Hall's approach signalled a shift from one paradigm of understanding text-audience relations to another, and unlike the preceding behavioural paradigm, examined questions of how ideology works (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 10). The emergence of such discursive theories of power also encouraged the use of research methodologies based on immersion into the worlds of audiences that took on board notions of pleasure and affect in addition to meaning (Ruddock 2001: 153).

Other theorists later noted that the value of Hall's encoding/decoding theory is that it locates the site of a text's meaning nearer to the reader than the text itself, thus sounding the death-knell of the kind of textual studies of television that treat it as a closed text (Fiske 1987a: 64). There has been some dispute about the interpretation of this point,

though. As discussed in Chapter 3, Curran (1990) and Morley (1992c) engaged in a debate about what Curran felt was an over-emphasis on the notion of the active reader, with Morley remaining convinced that Hall's notion of the 'preferred reading', while problematic, is preferable to a conception of the media text as open to any interpretation (1992c: 282).

In an interview in 1989 (in Cruz and Lewis 1994: 253-274), Hall discussed his encoding/decoding model. He explained that the model was specifically constructed in opposition to the transmission model, maintaining that it suggests an approach, rather than claiming absolute authority. He acknowledged that Althusser and Marx were important influences, which he had not made explicit in the paper. In the same interview, he said (Cruz and Lewis 1994: 270): "Your readings arise from the family in which you were brought up, the places of work, the institutions you belong to, the other practices you do." This observation is pertinent to my thesis, as I have researched the ways in which people's readings of TV texts connect with their lived realities.

Now that Hall's encoding/decoding model has been briefly examined, another of the tenets of cultural studies that is relevant to my thesis can be considered, namely that of the active audience.

2.2.2 Cultural studies and the active audience

Influenced by Hall's work, analyses conducted by Hebdige and Willis at the CCCS on subcultures and the 'pleasures of consumption' saw people as "active agents who play a crucial role in creating their own identities through consumption" (Du Gay and Hall

1997: 104)[1]. Groups like punks and teddy boys were seen as translating the commodified object "from being an apparent symbol of estrangement (alienation at work) to being an artifact which symbolizes identity and 'belongingness'…" (Du Gay and Hall 1997: 103). For cultural studies, media culture provides the materials for constructing identities, behaviour and views of the world (Kellner 1995: 6, Hardt 1986: 110), and a critical cultural studies enables readers to analyse artefacts of contemporary media culture (Kellner 1995: 8).

An approach that led to the notion of TV's "active viewer" was that of the 'uses and gratifications' theory of mass media; the notion of investigating what audiences 'do' with texts (Livingstone 1998a: 36). The active viewer is a notion central to cultural studies, and Du Gay and Hall (1997: 85) summarise it thus: "A focus on practices of consumption … helps us to understand that meanings are… *made in usage*" [original emphasis]. (I discuss the 'uses and gratifications' approach and the way in which it overlaps with, and differs from, cultural studies in the next chapter.)

Here entered a new type of cultural studies, as it shifted its attention to small groups who were busy with the task of maintaining and elaborating values and identities (During 1995: 15). An example is that of Liebes and Katz's (1993) study on various ethnic groups watching the soap opera *Dallas.* The authors point out that readings of *Dallas* differed, depending on specific frames of reference (Liebes and Katz 1993: 13). This study, The

[1] However, these models have been criticised for projecting a vision of consumption practices that are divorced from production entirely, and as uniformly implicitly subversive (Du Gay and Hall 1997: 104).

Export of Meaning, was seen as one of "a growing perspective in media research which sees the audience as active and the process of meaning construction as one of 'negotiation' with the text in a particular cultural context" (Tomlinson 1991: 47).

Another prominent theorist whose work rests on the notion of the active audience is John Fiske. He maintains that making sense of popular television "is the process of activating meanings from it", a process determined by the social situation of the viewer (Fiske 1989b: 58).[2]

Although in this article Fiske maintains that viewers have "considerable" freedoms to make meanings from television texts – a view he has been roundly criticised for[3] – he states in Understanding Popular Culture that "[h]owever productive popular readers may be, they cannot make *any* meanings out of a text, nor will they choose to read *any* text thrust before them" (1989a: 137).

Yet Fiske's fundamental stance, typical of cultural studies theorists (Moores 1990: 16; Hall 1980), is that media messages are polysemic and cannot impose their meanings on their audiences (1989a: 158). This conception of media texts has an important bearing on

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[2] The Incorporation/Resistance Paradigm (IRP) is defined by the debate between those who believe audiences resist the dominant ideology and those who believe they are incorporated into it (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 15). Fiske, in this quote, extracted from Seiter's *Remote Control*, is at the 'audience power' end of the paradigm (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 22-24)

[3] Strelitz (2000: 40), for example, notes that Fiske's writings are often held up as examples of "uncritical populist politics".

my thesis, focusing as it does on what Fiske has called the "producerly activity" (1989a: 148) of soap opera fans' discussions. Fiske notes that in such discussion, new texts are made from the original text – a process that he sees as popular culture at work (1989a: 146-9). He thus focuses on the way that audiences, who are free to subvert cultural messages, can resist dominant socio-economic forces (Strelitz 2000: 41).

2.2.3 Cultural studies and qualitative audience research

In Chapter 2, I focus on qualitative research in some detail, since it is the methodology that I use. However, it seems appropriate to mention it here briefly too, as qualitative audience research and cultural studies have an inherent link.

Hardt (1996: 102-111) notes that communication and media studies in the United States, dominated by the liberal-pluralist tradition in the 1970s, were heavily influenced by British cultural studies, specifically the CCCS, in the 1980s. This incursion provided a political challenge, as the critical/Marxist theories of the CCCS competed with the prevailing US social research agendas (Hardt 1996: 106). Hardt's explication points to the political weft and warp of cultural studies' investigations, its "sense of engagement between political practice and theoretical consideration" (Hardt 1996: 110), and its provision of a particular approach to the study of cultural processes (Hardt 1996: 104).

Cultural studies is thus interested in why differences in interpretations and experiences occur (Ang 1989: 107-8). For those researchers investigating media usage, then, the question is "just *how* 'complex' or 'contradictory' it is, for *which* types of consumers, in *which* social positions, in relation to *which* types of texts or objects" (Morley 1992: 274). I explore this further in Chapter 2.

This focus on social positions leads on to the next issue, namely, the importance of context in cultural studies.

2.2.4 The importance of context

Many prominent theorists in the media studies tradition in the 1980s and 1990s have agreed that the *context* of media (and especially television) reception is vital to take into account when analysing media usage.

One such theorist is David Morley, whose 1980 The 'Nationwide' Audience study signalled a new focus on ethnography as a form of study (Ang 1989: 96). Morley posited that to understand the role that TV plays in a household, a researcher would need to understand the family dynamics, structures of everyday life, and family system (Morley and Silverstone 1991: 153).

Hall's encoding/decoding model provided the framework Morley's study (Gray 1999: 27), in which he showed the television programme *Nationwide* to a number of groups in the UK, followed by discussion groups. This study was "genuinely seminal" (Sparks 1996: 93), "an important landmark in modern media texts" (Moores 1990: 15), because it "challenged the 'hard news' focus of existing work, …placed textuality clearly in the communication dynamic, and … was suggestive of different reader positions" (Gray 1999: 28).

Morley was thus one of the first to do qualitative research in the domestic TV-watching environment (Gauntlett and Hill 1999: 3). He refuted the existing theory of classic realism, proposing that television audience members engage in a process of negotiation between their socially constructed position and the one proposed by the audience themselves (Fiske 1987a: 65-66).

In an introduction to Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure, a later (1986) work by Morley, Hall describes Morley's work as overhauling "old-style audience surveys, with their monolithic conception of 'the viewer' and simple-minded notion of

message, meaning and influence". Morley had begun to map various "different factors in the social contexts of viewing" (Hall in Morley 1986: 7).

The central thesis of Family Television "was that the changing patterns of television viewing could only be understood in the overall context of family leisure activity" (Morley 1986: 13). At one point in this study, he notes the parallels his work has with Janice Radway's research; specifically, Reading the Romance (1984), an investigation into the reading habits of a small community of American women who were avid readers of romance novels, which Morley later calls a key work in the area of reception analysis (Morley 1993: 14).

Radway critically examined the notion of escapism (Moores 1990: 21), which is an aspect of the appeal of *Generations* that I explore in my investigation. And, Morley maintains, once researchers examine the notion of escapism in relation to power relations, as Radway did, "this activity begins to acquire a whole different meaning" (Morley 1986: 37), with Radway's study highlighting how one reading practice can contain contradictory positionings (Ang 1996: 121).

Reading the Romance is one of a few studies that Gray (1999) picks out as placing media readings "within complex webs of determinations… such as class, gender and, still to a lesser extent, race and ethnicity…" (Gray 1999: 31).

Although Radway initially focused on the textual features of the romance novel, she soon realised she had to relinquish this focus and instead concentrate on the meaning of the act of reading, which for the women she interviewed was a way to ease the tensions and pressures of their everyday lives (Radway 1984: 86) – specifically, the cultural roles of wife and mother in patriarchal western society. This, too, has resonance for my study, as I investigated the extent to which the act of watching a soap opera was a way for students to relax and 'shut off' from the demands of their studies.

The study of culture, then, cannot be confined to simply reading the text, because "the conditions of a text's reception necessarily become part of the meanings and pleasures it offers the viewer" (Fiske 1987a: 72). Such pleasure needs to be understood as a cultural formation that arises from the interaction of text, context and audience (Moores 1990: 25).

This is why Hall's words quoted earlier ("Your readings arise from the family in which you were brought up, the places of work, the institutions you belong to" (in Cruz and Lewis 1994: 270) have relevance for my own study, as I aim to show that the structure of the everyday life of the "family" (i.e. university residence) and the system in which it is situated, have relevance to the television watching patterns of the "family" members. For, as Thompson says,

> …[R]eception is always a situated activity, it is also an activity which enables individuals to take some distance from the practical contexts of their daily life… and part of the significance that particular kinds of reception have for individuals derives from the ways in which they relate to other aspects of their lives. (Thompson 1995: 39)

Reception is also a hermeneutic (interpretive) activity, and since each person brings a particular framework to bear on the interpretation, the ways in which people understand media messages will vary between individuals and between "one social-historical context to another" (Thompson 1995: 41).

Similarly, Ang (1996: 70) says, "television's meanings for audiences … cannot be decided upon outside of the multidimensional intersubjective networks in which the object is inserted and made to mean in concrete contextual settings". She refers to the ways in which people "encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think and talk about television and other media in everyday life" as being "context-bound" (Ang 1996: 70-71), and calls for researchers to recognise this and produce what she calls "radical contextualism". This is discussed further in the following chapter on Methodology.

The approach advocated by Höijer (1998a and 1998b) is also congruent with that of the reception analysis that I am using. She notes that viewers use many cognitive schemas when interpreting texts, describing schemas as complex cognitive structures that represent generic experiences and cultural knowledge (1998a: 171). This approach, known as social cognition, asks how people understand their social worlds, and has been drawn on in the 1980s and 1990s to address questions of audience interpretation (Livingstone 1998a: 28).

Thus it is clear that in reception analysis of the media, there is a need "to address contextual specificity in relation to broader structural factors" (Morley 1992: 276). For this reason, a description of context constitutes Chapter 3 of this thesis, and part of my Findings chapter looks at interviewees' perceptions of their own environment.

2.2.5 Conclusion

By the late 1980s, the task for audience research became that of reflecting upon what media consumption means for the way that people lead their lives (Ruddock 2001: 149), and, in the late 1990s, the ways in which media build (or undermine) interpersonal relationships (Livingstone 1998b: 251). In the last decade, there has been a shift in emphasis in reception analysis from a focus on decoding to one on practice and use (Hagen 1998: 65). "Context", in this case, has often meant the time and space of TV viewing, or particular social relationships such as the family or household, but Hagen (1998: 65) calls for "context" to include the larger, cultural environment. Similarly, Livingstone (1998b: 246-7) calls for wider, more integrated research, linking audience research with work, politics, family, and various social and cultural agencies.

Like Strelitz (2002c), who notes that a theme that runs through his study is that consumption of particular cultural forms "takes place within particular socio-political contexts" (Strelitz 2002c: 4) and thus that meaning for audiences is context related, I attempt to link audience research with various social and cultural agencies in my thesis.

Now that I have provided a broad overview of cultural studies' view of text-audience relationships, focusing on an exploration of what cultural studies embodies, its notions of the active audience, and a brief summary of the ties between cultural studies and qualitative research methods, I will focus on the role that media plays in shaping identity.

2.3 MEDIA AS SHAPERS OF IDENTITY

One of the issues that my thesis attempts to address is to what extent the habit of a group of students of watching the same soap opera together night after night, and thus forming an "interpretive community" (as used by Radway (1991)), serves to reaffirm their black identity? For we need to pay attention to:

> how 'cultural identities' are produced…and ask what role the various media play in our construction of ourselves, as individuals and as 'members' of communities at various levels, whether as members of families, regions, nations, or communities of other types. (Morley 1992b: 81-82).

We thus need to understand identities as produced in "specific historical and institutional sites" (Hall 1996: 4), and as functioning as points of attachment because of their capacity to exclude and leave out. They proclaim a unity, and this unity is also "constructed within the play of power and exclusion" (Hall 1996: 4) – which is why it was of interest to me that only black, and not white, students watched *Generations* together.

Yet I do not wish to overstate the importance of media, which Tomlinson (1991: 61) warns against, saying that the media are themselves mediated by cultural experience. Instead, as Tomlinson says, we can view "the relationship between media and culture as a subtle interplay of mediations" (1991: 61). We could therefore conceive of the media as representing modern culture, he suggests, constantly mediated by, as well as mediating, culture as lived experience.

It should be noted that my thesis has strong parallels with that of Larry Strelitz's investigation (Strelitz 2002a) into media consumption and identity formation of a group of students on Rhodes campus in 2000. While he agrees with Tomlinson, arguing against

theories that privilege media consumption at the expense of other factors in identity formation, he concludes that the meanings that students took from the local television programmes they watched played an important role in "cementing their particular identities" (Strelitz 2002a: 479) and helped to mediate their experience of Rhodes University. One of the aims of this study is to attempt to investigate whether Truro and Lilian Britten students experience television in a similar way.

2.4 TELEVISION, SOAP OPERAS

This section briefly examines some of the key studies in the field of television audience research and, specifically, soap operas and the meanings made from them – since it is the audience of a soap opera who are the focus of this study.

2.4.1 Television as a cultural resource

Television is a significant cultural resource for many people (Morley 1992b: 81), and the TV programmes we watch "are part of the world we live in,… they are … part of our shared experience. They give us topics to talk about and examples from which we can reflect on our own lives and values" (Alasuutari 1992: 580). Thus it makes sense for media studies research to focus on television audiences.

Furthermore, the study of popular culture is the study of the circulation of meanings (Fiske 1989a: 24), and popular television programmes like *Dallas* are "a supermarket of meanings from which its viewers make their selection, which in turn they cook up into their culture" (Fiske 1989a: 132). As discussed earlier in this chapter, this is one of the reasons that researchers in the cultural studies tradition have focused on television audiences in recent years. Recent examples include Lembo's study of 60 Californian TV viewers, with the aim of accounting for "the social relations that were a part of people's television use" (Lembo 2000: 119); Wilson's reception analysis of Malaysian audiences watching the Oprah Winfrey show (Wilson 2001); and McMillan's study of identity and commercial television in India (McMillan 2002).

Thus researchers can engage in studies "designed to identify and investigate the differences hidden behind the catch-all description 'watching television'" (Morley 1986: 50) with a variety of foci, and draw on a variety of theories.

The following sub-section considers *Generations* as an example of the soap opera genre, a genre whose popularity has been scrutinised by many media researchers.

2.4.2 *Generations* and the soap opera genre

Soap operas have featured prominently in recent media studies (McQuail 2000: 333). While this genre is frequently regarded with disdain, it is the most popular form of television fiction, attracting millions of viewers over the last fifty years (Allen 1995: 3) and, before that, was a popular form of radio entertainment.

Since interviewees in this study talked about "soapies" (the popular contraction for 'soap operas') and many clearly had an understanding of the features of the genre, it seems appropriate to briefly examine the features of the soap opera as explicated by media theorists, and some of the ways in which these apply to *Generations*.

One of its interesting features is that as a genre, the soap opera is textually complex and subtle – or, at least complex and subtle enough to have "engaged the imaginations of millions of readers for over half a century" (Allen 1985: 61). For one thing, it is "the only narrative form…predicated upon the impossibility of closure" (Allen 1985: 13). Soap operas use the Hollywood narrative style to produce a "seamless, possible world" (Allen 1985: 64). Interior monologues are often employed so that audiences are given an insight into what characters are saying (Allen 1985: 67).

Soap operas are known for their repetition, or what Allen calls "intraepisodic redundancy" (1985: 70). While Allen maintains that this repetition is paradigmatically not redundant, as it signifies a great deal about relationships between the characters, I have

found that regular viewers of soap operas are often annoyed by this repetition.[4] Other theorists maintain that this feature of soaps' structure functions to keep viewers up to date, even if they miss an episode (Hobson 1989: 161). While *Generations* scriptwriters sometimes drag out a particular storyline over many episodes (Dentlinger 1999: 83), its storyline generally unfolds at a fairly rapid pace, which as I discuss in Chapter 5, makes for more exciting viewing than other soap operas.

Matelski (1999: 3-6) quotes Christine Geraghty's 1981 article "The continuous serial – a definition", which lists identifying features of the soap opera as organisation of time (both the regularity of the broadcast and the way time is treated in the soap: sometimes events are presented in "real time", and sometimes events are drawn out over a while); the sense of a future; the interweaving of stories; and an ensemble cast. Featuring several families is the norm; and sometimes the "core" families are occupational, not biological, where main characters all work together – in a hospital, for example (Matelski 1999: 5). *Generations* is no exception in this regard, featuring the Moroka and Mthembu families, each of whom runs an advertising agency.

Weibel (1977) (quoted in Hobson 1982: 28) listed some of the soap's frequent themes as the evil woman, the great sacrifice, winning back an estranged lover/spouse, marrying for

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[4] In a mini-survey of five women students that I conducted in 2001, before beginning work on this thesis, all five saw repetition in soap operas as a strategy by writers. Four interpreted this negatively (for example, one respondent said: "Writers may only know a few ways to sort out problems"), with just one attributing the repetition to the writers "[knowing] what viewers would like to see and what they enjoy most".

money or respectability, deceptions about the paternity of children, and the alcoholic woman (or occasionally man). Themes and sub-plots in *Generations* are thus typical of the soap opera, as its narrative is largely about relationships, including a marriage of convenience, love triangles, divorce (Dentlinger 109-111), and power struggles in the workplace.

Allen (1985: 74) is one of those who has noted that "the world of the soap opera is overwhelmingly white" (Modleski 1979, quoted in Hobson 1982: 27; Brunsdon 1995: 59-60).[5] These writers are referring mostly to British and American soaps, and there are exceptions even among these. On the other hand, *Generations,* like other South African soaps, has a multiracial cast, with black characters featured more than those of other races. A semiotic analysis of *Generations* found that the fact that its cast consists largely of black characters as well as people of other races, all of whom have inter-racial relationships, is one of the ways in which the programme fosters national identity and employs the discourse of the 'rainbow nation' (Dentlinger 1999: 84,122) – for it is "as if they [*Generations* characters] are all 'colour' blind" (Dentlinger 1999: 105).

2.4.3 Key reception analyses of soap operas

Hobson's study of the British soap opera *Crossroads* was one of the first studies to foreground the production of meanings and pleasures, which she says are embedded in the social contexts of its viewing, and so vary from viewer to viewer (Allen 1995: 8-9). Hobson noted that people watch television for various reasons, "and make different 'readings' of those programmes" (Hobson 1982: 105-106). This observation is pivotal to

[5] "[B]lack characters are restricted to a relational ghetto" (Allen 1995: 23).

my investigation of the reasons that the women I have interviewed choose to watch *Generations*, and is explicated in my Findings chapter.

Ang's Watching *Dallas* (1985) is another key text in the field of media studies and reception analysis. Morley feels that Ang's Watching *Dallas*, together with Radway's Reading the Romance and his own The 'Nationwide' Audience, "offer counterevidence to a simple-minded dominant ideology thesis" (1993: 14).

In her study, Ang analysed the 42 replies to an advertisement she placed in a Dutch woman's magazine asking for people to write and tell her why they enjoyed watching the American TV soap opera *Dallas* (Ang 1985: 10). Largely concerned with pleasure and feminist ideology, Watching *Dallas* focuses on the sociocultural and psychological consumption of *Dallas*, with the viewer a mediator of ideological meanings (Livingstone 1998a: 65). (My own thesis has parallels with Watching *Dallas*, as I also interviewed a small group of women about their watching of a soap opera, and enquired into the reasons for their enjoyment of it.)

Ang saw *Dallas* as being popular for a number of complex reasons, but largely because of the pleasure viewers derived from its melodramatic narrative structure. Her study is noteworthy because cultural critics had previously overlooked the ability of audiences to negotiate the contradictions between alien cultural values and the pleasures of the text (Tomlinson 1991: 46).

Ang argued that the pleasure that viewers take in popular culture is one of recognising it as realistic, not necessarily empirically, but on an emotional level (Morley 1989: 31) – in the case of *Dallas*, as recognising the "tragic structure of feeling" (Ang 1985: 43), suggesting that this is the pleasure that many women take in soap operas.

One of the pleasures of watching television is talking about it, for television promotes talk (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 110, Lee and Cho 1990: 32-33). For instance, in a 1998 reception analysis of the South African soap opera, *Egoli*, Pitout concludes the programme served as a cultural form for social discourse (1998: 73), as *Egoli* proved to be a popular topic for discussion.

Another reception analysis of *Dallas*, that of Liebes and Katz (1993) was, as I mentioned in an earlier part of this chapter, seen as significant because of its focus on the intersection between text, audience, and cultural context (Tomlinson 1991: 47). For this reason, it is significant to my thesis too, as discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Chapter 2 examined some seminal works pertaining to my research. The first section focused on text-audience relationships in cultural studies, beginning with an exploration of what cultural studies is, including an acknowledgement of the impact of analysts Althusser and Gramsci on the field. After explaining the implications of polysemy, I discussed Hall's theory of encoding and decoding and the concept of the active audience, noting that these were important influences on reception analysis.

I then went on to acknowledge the link between qualitative audience research and cultural studies, which will be explored further in Chapter 3. The following section examined the importance of context in recent reception studies, a trend that began with Morley (1980, 1986), who was influenced by Radway (1984).

The next section looked at the media as shapers of identity, while heeding Tomlinson's warning that the importance of the media in the formation of identity should not be overstated (1991: 61).

The chapter concluded by presenting an overview of some key studies, first in the field of television audience research, and then specifically soap operas: from Morley and Fiske to Ang, Allen, Hobson, and Liebes and Katz. It also examined the genre of the soap opera with specific reference to *Generations*.

The topics I have covered in this chapter – text-audience relationships, media as shapers of identity, television as a cultural resources, and soap operas – all inform my research.

In Chapter 3, I will move on to Research Methodology.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

My thesis is informed by reception theory, which states that the meaning of a text cannot be determined "outside of concrete viewer readings of it" (Ang 1996: 69); in other words, it aims to "understand the lived experiences of media consumers" (Moores 1993: 32). Therefore, this thesis aims to understand the lived realities of a small group of students, and the ways in which these realities impact (and are impacted by) the consumption of a particular medium, using reception analysis.

Reception theory is connected to one of the two main 'camps' of research methodology, namely, qualitative analysis. Thus Ang comments that Morley's 1980 study, The 'Nationwide' Audience*,* signalled a new focus on qualitative research on media consumption, whereby conducting in-depth interviews with a small number of people was recognised "as one of the most adequate ways to learn about the differentiated subtleties of people's engagements with television and other media" (Ang 1989: 96).

The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to examine the philosophy underpinning qualitative analysis. I will begin by looking at the ways in which it contrasts with quantitative methodology. The next section examines the precedent set by media theorists of using qualitative research methods for this particular kind of study, and the last section describes my own research process.

3.2 TWO METHODOLOGIES

Research methodology can be divided into two paradigms: quantitative and qualitative. Bryman points out that these two types, while sometimes regarded as "competing views about the ways in which social reality ought to be studied" (1988: 5) because of their divergent epistemological assumptions, can be thought of as two literary genres, which use different rhetoric and frameworks to approach research.[6]

McQuail (1994: 41-48) sees these two methodologies as being part of two kinds of research models for mass communication: the dominant paradigm, and the alternative paradigm. The dominant paradigm, which prevailed until well into the 1960s, is normative, combining a view of powerful mass media in a mass society with *quantitative* research techniques.

The other view of the communication process is the "alternative paradigm" of communication. Some of the characteristics of this paradigm listed by McQuail (1994: 48) include the rejection of the transmission model of communication; a non-deterministic view of media communication; a concern with the unequal distribution of

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[6] There is a body of researchers who do not support the view that there are two separate paradigms of research methods. For example, Bryman (1988: 79-81) maintains that the two main research methodologies, qualitative and quantitative, have been explicated in various discussions at the epistemological level. Yet theorists have attempted to make links between the methodologies and the practice of social research (i.e. the technical level). However, Bryman argues, one cannot say that one technique is better than another, but only whether a particular research technique is *appropriate* to the research question (1988: 79).

power in society; and the use of *qualitative* research methodology. This latter development provided an impetus to the development of cultural studies (McQuail 1994: 47), as noted in Chapter 2. An important part of cultural studies has been theorists' recognition that TV texts are polysemic and audiences are heterogeneous, and thus trying to discover how audience groups use television to make meanings that are useful to them, to make sense of their own social experiences (Fiske 1987b: 267). (This is expanded on in a later section of this chapter.)

So what is qualitative research? I will describe its main features and philosophical underpinnings, highlighting the ways in which it differs from quantitative methodology.

3.2.1 Qualitative research methodology

The epistemological underpinnings[7] of quantitative research are that of the natural sciences, which are in turn informed by positivism. To put it briefly, positivism is the idea that scientific knowledge underpins and unifies all knowledge (Hughes and Sharrock 1990: 16). The philosophical basis of quantitative research also has its roots in modernism, as clarified by the philosophers Descartes and Locke, who stressed the orderly, quantifiable nature of the world, and the need for systematic investigation into it (Hughes and Sharrock 1990: 8-9).

Positivism, also known as "objectivist science", depends on "meaning realism", which is the notion that meanings "always have fixed phenomenal referents", says Lindlof (1995:

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[7] Epistemology is "the inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of knowledge … [it is] concerned with evaluating claims about the way in which the world can be known to us" (Hughes and Sharrock 1990: 4-5).

23). So the aim of objectivist science is to be nomothetic, meaning that explanations apply to all general types. According to the positivist view, behaviour is always motivated, social conduct is governed by rules, and motives are patterned and produced by social structure (Hughes and Sharrock 1990: 105-107).

Qualitative research methods, on the other hand, arise out of a different methodology to quantitative methods. They assume that human subjectivity is constantly changing, rendering quantitative methods unsuitable for research on attitudes. Instead, qualitative researchers emphasise the understanding and descriptions of individuals' subjective meanings (Grinnell 1985: 264). Similarly, Bryman holds that the main characteristic of qualitative research is that it emphasises the way that people "understand and interpret their social realities" (1988: 8). Unlike positivism, which holds that 'reality' is a fixed external truth, qualitative research insists that people construct and reconstruct social realities through routine social practices and the conceptual categories underpinning them (Deacon 1999: 7).

Interpretive science (as opposed to objectivist science, or positivism) is the origin of qualitative research methods. Hence theorists such as Deacon call qualitative methodology "the interpretive tradition" (1999: 6). According to interpretive science, meanings arise from social actors. Therefore, the one kind of knowledge that qualitative researchers seek is the understanding of human beings' lived experience, as Lindlof (1995: 4) puts it. It is a flexible form of research, calling for personal, involved inquiry, in order to analyse human behaviour and make sense of human understanding (Lindlof 1995: 5, 21).

Proponents of interpretive social research argue that not everything can be measured (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 35). Such researchers seek rich descriptions of interviewees' lives, with the goal of understanding specific circumstances in a complex world (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 35, 38).

Grinnell thus describes the main features of qualitative research as follows: it is used to describe; it rests on the researcher's subjective point of view; and it uses natural language (1985: 265). Qualitative research uses inductive logic, which makes inferences or general statements from specific observations (Grinnell 1985: 61). The central condition of qualitative research is to see the social world from the point of view of those being researched (Bryman 1988: 77).

Qualitative research can take many forms, including interviews, participant observation, field studies, phenomenological research, focus groups and ethnography. I chose the qualitative interview for my study.

The implication of this research design is that interviewers have some kind of relationship with interviewees (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 39-41), unlike survey interviewers, for example. The survey and the census are two of the research techniques associated with quantitative methodology. Quantitative research uses experimental and quasi-experimental design and tends to use numerical language. It is used for prediction and testing; and the researcher is expected to maintain an objective point of view (Grinnell 1985: 256).

The idea that underlies much qualitative interviewing, however, is that there may be several different realities, and that research participants construct events differently. This idea is "unacceptable" in quantitative research (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 33), and becomes problematic in the positivist survey questionnaire, for example, where people's understandings of concepts can be culturally bound.

Positivists tend to underestimate the difficulties of measuring social sciences, and to disparage qualitative forms of research (Hughes and Sharrock 1990: 18). What's more, the authors maintain, formulating fixed laws is not possible in the field of social science, since it is not possible to simplify problems sufficiently. Yet Hughes and Sharrock allow

that positivist methods are "not…entirely useless" (1990: 71). Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (1995: 33-34) point out that although it omits the complications of individual behaviour, quantitative research can be useful in revealing trends, as it aims to measure and to produce averages.

In quantitative research, the technical requirements of the research are a major focus, with a concern about the validity and reliability of measurement (Bryman 1988: 28), as well as whether it can be generalised beyond the location of the research (Bryman 1988: 34). 'Validity' is about ensuring that "a measure really does reflect the concept to which it is supposed to be referring" (Bryman 1988: 28), while 'reliability' is about ensuring that the indices or scales of a study are consistent (internal consistency), and that the measure is consistent over time, which entails administering the research more than once (Bryman 1988: 29).

However, these are not the concerns of qualitative research, with its emphasis on "discovering novel or unanticipated findings and the possibility of altering research plans in response to… such occurrences" (Bryman 1984: 78). Rather than aiming for objectivity, qualitative research is committed to viewing events, norms, values and so on from the perspective of the people being studied (Bryman 1988: 61).

The implications of this for theorists studying mass media with a cultural studies perspective is that has been a move towards what Ang (1996: 66-81) calls "radical contextualism", meaning that researchers need to let go of preconceived ideas, such as perceiving TV as an entertainment medium, and instead recognise that "the meanings of television within the domestic realm only emerge within contextualised audience practices" (1996: 70):

The various approaches to research have political agendas, too (Deacon 1999: 13). Positivism can be used to regulate and control, while interpretive approaches, by charting

the ways that people make sense of their world, tend to foster respect for differences (Deacon 1999: 13).

Morley and Silverstone (1991: 151) say that qualitative techniques are useful for analysing broadcasting's "inscription within the routines of everyday life". Qualitative methodology was therefore particularly suited to my research, which aimed to understand both the lived realities of the students I interviewed, and the ways in which these intersected with a particular aspect of their TV-watching.

3.3 FROM USES AND GRATIFICATIONS TO CULTURAL STUDIES

This short section focuses on the overlap that many feel exists between two approaches to audience research: the 'uses and gratifications' approach and the cultural studies approach. The reason for this focus is that my thesis, while rooted in the cultural studies tradition, also investigates students' perceptions of the gratifications (or pleasures) they experience when watching *Generations*. Thus the questions asked of students ranged from enquiring about the nature of their enjoyment of the programme to their perceptions of their social context (i.e. Rhodes University campus).

As stated in the previous chapter, cultural studies is interested in why differences in interpretations occur (Ang 1989: 107-108). For this reason, researchers working in the cultural studies tradition will study audiences and the processes through which those audiences are constituted (Ang 1989: 101), producing incomplete and temporary interpretations. So while the relation between, for example, TV and audiences is an empirical question, the answer cannot be empirical; instead, it is a constructed interpretation (Ang 1989: 106), which is "always historically located, subjective and relative" (Ang 1989: 105).

While theorists have warned against confusing technical considerations of appropriate method with epistemological issues (Bryman 1984: 80-81), the prevailing conception of

such interpretive work as Ang describes above "has led to a widespread rejection of any form of counting or calculating" (Deacon 1999: 8). And quantitative research concerns itself with "counts and measures of things" as Berg (2001: 3) succinctly puts it; as opposed to qualitative research methodologies, which have to do with "descriptions of things" (Berg 2001: 3).

As stated earlier in this chapter, the rising popularity of qualitative research methodology could be viewed as part of the development of cultural studies (McQuail 1994: 47), as critical theorists "discovered" qualitative inquiry via cultural studies (Lindlof 1995: 11). However, before looking at this development of media research in the 1980s it is necessary to take a step back to look at an earlier development in audience research that also has a bearing on this study. For an approach that was prominent in the 1940s and early 1950s was that of the 'uses and gratifications' approach to media research. This approach examines the functionalist role that media plays in people's lives as they use the media to satisfy a range of social and psychological needs (Ruddock 2001: 68-69). 'Uses and gratifications' theorists maintained that the audience is free to use the media however they wish (Ang 1989: 102), a position that was later discredited as cognisance was taken of the structured nature of media, as well as that of audiences.

Curran (1990) and Morley (1992c) argued about this shift in audience research: what Curran called the "new revisionism" in mass communications. Curran maintained that the over-emphasis of the role of the reader meant a denial of media power and the politics of communication (Morley 1992c: 279). Curran also said that effects research was *not* dominated by the 'hypodermic model' of media influence, but had taken cognisance of audience independence since the 1940s (1990: 264). The new revisionists were misreading the history of mass communications, he said, and were assuming that media research began "with textual analyses of films and TV programmes in the journal *Screen*, and everything before that is shrouded in the eddying mists of time" (1990: 265). As it so happened, Morley agreed with Curran that an over-emphasis of the polysemy of media

messages is facile, and that the notion of an active audience does not equate with that of a powerful audience (1992c: 281, 290). Morley also claimed that Curran's version of history was not unproblematic, and that it was precisely the 'new revisionism' that allowed Curran to re-read mass communications history in this way, that is, highlighting neglected authors and looking at the history of audience research with new eyes (1992c: 284). The two critics concluded their argument some years later, with Morley saying that the reason he had criticised Curran's 1990 article was that it seemed to be a part of a trend of dismissing much cultural studies work because of a weakness of *some* of this work, namely, over-romanticising audience resistance (1996: 302).

Some scholars assert that uses and gratifications research began to ask questions that were taken up by cultural studies (Ruddock 2001: 70). McQuail, for instance, divides audience research traditions into three categories: structural, behavioural and cultural, but maintains that the uses and gratifications approach is not strictly 'behavioural', pointing out that "its main emphasis is on the social origins of media gratifications and on the wider social functions of media" (1997: 18), so it overlaps with the cultural research tradition. Again, a study by Morley is a case in point. His seminal 1986 analysis, Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure, built on the uses and gratifications approach, but took the unit of study to be not the individual viewer – typical of uses and gratifications (McQuail 1997: 18) – but the family/household, attempting to analyse viewing activity within the social and familial relations in which it operates (Morley 1986: 15). This approach is typical of a reception analysis in the cultural studies tradition, which will tend to look at *clusters* of readings in order to understand the rules governing the social phenomenon of reading texts (Morley 1981: 13-14).

Many recent studies of media audiences thus investigate the uses and gratifications of media use, as mine does, while being firmly rooted in the cultural studies tradition. Examples include Livingstone's study of the reasons people watch soap operas (1988), which is discussed further in Chapter 5, Ang's study of women watching *Dallas* (1985)

Liebes and Katz's study of groups of various ethnicities watching *Dallas* (1993: 35) and Pitout's study of the parasocial dimension of soap opera viewing (1998).

The theoretical underpinnings of cultural studies have been covered in Chapter 2, so it is not necessary to focus on more than just one aspect of it here: its preferred research methods. It has been noted that one strand of the culturalist approach was viewing media use as a significant part of everyday life (McQuail 1997: 19), so that researchers working in the cultural studies tradition will study audiences, and the processes through which those audiences are constituted (Ang 1989: 101). It was therefore natural that reception analysis, using qualitative methods, grew in popularity, as reception analysis is "the audience research arm of modern cultural studies" (McQuail 1997: 19).

Having examined some of the theory in which qualitative methodology, and reception analysis in particular, is located (and examined the 'uses and gratifications' tinge to my questions) in the first half of this chapter, the second half describes my choice of method, and the process of collecting data for this thesis.

3.4 MY CHOICE OF METHOD: INDIVIDUAL QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

As Newell (1993: 98) notes, it is important to explore previous work carried out in a subject before engaging in research. My exploration revealed that authors like Morley (1980, 1986), Hobson (1989), and Liebes and Katz (1993) had effectively used small groups and qualitative interviews to ascertain people's attitudes to media usage.

Therefore, the method of research used in this thesis was primarily the qualitative interview, as the interview is regarded as a "key method of attitude research" (Fielding 1993: 135), and has become increasingly popular. Indeed, the rise in popularity of the last 20 years on the focus group interview has been part of a general trend in media research of rejecting traditional quantitative approaches (Hansen et al 1998: 259). So I chose to

conduct focus group interviews. For reasons explained under the heading "Conducting the interviews", I also conducted several individual qualitative interviews.

The advantages of individual interviews are that the interviewer has more control, and each respondent has a greater chance of conveying his or her point of view than in group interviews (Morgan 1997: 10). Paradoxically, though, group interviews can have the advantage over individual interviews in that the group interaction can provoke discussion in a way that an individual interview cannot (Morgan 1997: 11).

While focus group interviews are "basically group interviews", their distinguishing characteristic is the interaction between group members (Morgan 1997: 2), the "dynamic effects of interaction on expressed opinion" (Fielding 1993: 137). In a focus group, the researcher gathers a small group of people, normally 6 to 12, to talk about something in particular: a product or experience. The interviewer then becomes the facilitator or moderator of the discussion, giving direction to the conversation while allowing the group to do most of the talking and trying to ensure that people have equal opportunity to contribute (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 139-140).

The strengths and weaknesses of focus groups emanate from their two defining features (Morgan 1997: 13). The first defining feature is that they rely on the researcher's focus, which means plenty of data can be generated on the researcher's area – but then the interaction could be less natural than participant observation, say, and like other research methods, the group could be open to influence by the researcher. The second defining feature is the group's interaction: members will compare and comment on each other's experiences, which can provide valuable input on complex phenomena, but with the possible drawback that the group itself could influence the nature of the data it produces (Morgan 1997: 15).

Another drawback of the focus group is that it is difficult to arrange, as the researcher needs to establish a convenient time and place to meet (Deacon et al 1999: 66). As explained below, under the heading "Conducting the interviews", establishing a convenient time for a group of students to meet when examinations were looming proved to be very difficult. Another logistical difficulty is that it is difficult to record group interviews (Fielding 1993: 142).

Lastly, less confident interviewees can be marginalised or silenced in group interviews (Deacon et al 1999: 67), which I sometimes found to be the case in my interviews. Similarly, interviewer anxiety can make for a rushed interview (Gillham 2000: 35), and I realised when reading over the transcripts, months after conducting the original interviews, that there were times when I should have dug a little more for information, but held back – probably because of inexperience and consequent lack of confidence.[8]

This section on choice of method would be incomplete without addressing the question of validity. Can individual and group interviews with different respondents be used in one study without invalidating that study? Morgan (1997: 12-13) notes that an interest in individual behaviour might not be served by using data from group interviews, but concludes that most research cannot be neatly divided into either purely individual or purely group behaviour. This is true of my study too, for it aims to find out why certain

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[8] For instance, when I asked in the first interview whether the group felt Truro House was racially integrated, one interviewee replied, "More or less, but there is an element. That's all I'm going to say. There is an element!" I should have probed further, but was instead floored by her insistent "That's all I'm going to say." By the last interview, though, I was more at ease, probed more, and so arguably gained more useable material.

individual students form a group in a particular context. Morgan (1997: 13) concludes that "it will take more research using both techniques [individual and group interviews] to provide an answer" as to which method is preferable in which circumstances.

3.5 COLLECTING THE DATA

3.5.1 Background

Most of the subjects lived together in a postgraduate women's residence, Truro House, on Rhodes University campus in 2002. In late 2003 I decided to supplement my findings by interviewing students in a similar postgraduate women's residence on Rhodes campus, called Lilian Britten.

These groups were chosen on the basis that each formed an "interpretive community" (Radway 1991; Ang 1996: 101), as they lived together and most of them watched television together, albeit in various configurations of subgroups. Although these students were all black, they were not from the same ethnic background.

None of the 2002 Truro House students come from Grahamstown. (Neither did the group of Lilian Britten students that I interviewed.) Instead, they were mostly from all over southern Africa; one student came from Kenya and one from Germany. For various reasons, they chose to live in a university residence, in single rooms with communal living rooms and bathrooms, while they studied at Rhodes University. The residences are described in more detail in Chapter 4.

I began the process by asking women in Truro House whether they watched soap operas and if so, which ones, noting their answers. This brief questioning functioned as a sort of "pilot interview", since it served to gather basic information about people's television watching habits (Fielding 1993: 137). From this I learnt that the most popular soap opera watched in Truro House was the South African *Generations*, which prompted me to choose it as the focus of my study.

I then decided to select the qualitative interview as my research method, because its characteristics suited my aims, for it generally yields rich and sensitive data on the dynamics of audiences (Hansen et al 1998: 258), and is more flexible and yields more information than, for example, a written survey (Newell 1993: 97). Besides, I was interested in the kind of knowledge that qualitative researchers seek, namely (as stated earlier) the understanding of human beings' lived experience (Lindlof 1995: 4).

I thus noted the names of *Generation*-watchers in Truro House and began to compile possible interview questions.

Morley (1992a: 203) says studying TV as a domestic technology requires an understanding of the place of families and households "in the wider culture and society, where issues of class, ethnicity, ideology and power define... the materialities of the everyday-life world". However, he notes that "the domestic" is not a simple, unproblematic category, since households are not families, and families extend beyond households (Morley 1992a: 203). This seemed to be relevant to my study, because for students, a residence is a 'home away from home'. A 2001 Rhodes University brochure, describing the way the residences are designed and run, says, "Rhodes students agree that the friends they make in residence are the most important factor in their daily lives."

Morley's words thus prompted me to regard the residents of Truro House as a household, and to focus my questions on several areas, since theorists such as Morley and Silverstone (1991: 153) maintain that to understand the role that TV plays in a household, one needs to understand the "family" dynamics, the structures of everyday life, and the "family" system. I thus regarded the students in this residence as a family, with its own dynamics, and all of its members dealing with similar daily realities.

3.5.2 The interview guide

The usual way to differentiate between interviews is on the basis of their structure (Fielding 1993: 135). Interviews therefore range from the highly structured to the highly unstructured (Deacon et al 1999: 64)[9].

I decided on a 'semi-structured' interview, where I worked from an interview guide, or list of questions, but could deviate from it where necessary. Thus the interaction was more like a conversation than that of highly structured interviews (where interviewers ensure that they state each question in exactly the same way from interview to interview), and so could be described as "conversations with a purpose" (Lindlof 1995, quoted in Deacon et al 1999: 65).

In constructing my interview guide, I drew on Liebes and Katz's 1993 international study of the meanings people made of American soap opera *Dallas*: The Export of Meaning. The authors chose focus-group interviews on the assumption that small-group discussion "is a key to understanding the mediating process via which a programme such as this enters into the culture" (Liebes and Katz 1993: 28). Since my study thus had parallels to theirs, I adapted and revised their "Focus Guidelines for Interview" (1993: 159-163). (See Appendix 1 at the end of this thesis.)

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[9] However, Gillham (2000: 3) holds that this classification based on structure is "false", maintaining that interviews always have some sort of structure.

My guide focused on the respondent's social background; the content of the soap opera; the context in which they watched; and their experience and opinions of the residence and the campus they lived in. It was thus a mixture of demographic and attitudinal questions.

Even when using 'open' questions, which means the interviewer has less control than if only 'closed' questions are used, probes and prompts are necessary (Gillham 2000: 45). Probes, a key interviewing skill, are supplementary questions to clarify or extend the response, while prompts encourage respondents to answer or remind them of points they have not mentioned (Gillham 2000: 14, Fielding 1993: 140). However, it has been noted (Gillham 2000: 3) that novice interviewers tend to work "relentlessly" from a prepared list of questions, and I certainly found that I became more adept at deviating from my list of questions to pursue interesting points as the interviews progressed. Probing is a skill best attained through practice (Fielding 1993: 141).

3.5.3 Conducting the interviews

Recruiting interviewees was fairly straightforward, as I simply explained that I was writing a thesis about the reasons that people watched *Generations*, and asked people face-to-face if they would mind being interviewed. No-one refused. As Hansen et al (1998: 268) note, drawing research participants from naturally existing groups is easier than finding interviewees randomly.

My initial plan was to use focus group interviews, because (as noted above) these offer insights into the effects of group interaction on opinion (Fielding 1993: 137) and have often been used to examine "how media audiences relate to, make sense of, use, negotiate, and interpret media content" (Hansen et al 1998: 261).

However, after my first two focus group interviews, the disadvantages of such interviews became clear: it was hard to get a clear recording of everyone's voices – a drawback that Fielding notes (1993: 142) – and because the interviews took place at the end of the year,

students were busy with exams. This is no doubt the reason that only one of the three invited people arrived for my third interview, which was held at the beginning of November with exams just days away. It was this third interview that marked the beginning of individual interviews, as it became clear that asking individual students to give me 15 to 20 minutes of their time was easier than asking four students to do so.

I found that these individual interviews worked well. Firstly, I could probe people's responses – which is "especially important in open-ended questions" (Fielding 1993: 141) – without being diverted by other group members' input. Secondly, respondents seemed less inhibited with fewer people in the room: like Strelitz, I found that during group interviews, "less vocal members became marginalised during the discussion" (2002b: 14).

Another logistical issue that has a bearing on what the interviewee can contribute is the choice of interview venue. It is ideal to offer interviewees the choice of neutral venue or home ground (Gillham 2000: 8). My choice of venue for these interviews – my room in Truro House – proved to be a limiting factor, because it was too small for more than four people to gather. Yet Hansen et al (1998: 270) stipulate that the ideal group size of a focus group discussion is between five and nine people. However, I chose this venue because it was the most convenient, as I lived among the women I was interviewing, so it was indeed 'home ground'. At the time, I had no office of my own to use, and the common rooms in Truro House were, by their nature, always occupied. I also thought that my room provided a sufficiently relaxed venue in which to conduct interviews. Since I could not afford to pay people for their time, I could provide interviewees with tea or coffee using my own facilities.

I taped every interview, since the interviews were not precisely standardised and data would have been lost without taping. Besides, if I had paused every few seconds to write down interviewees' responses, the interaction would have been "stilted and peculiar"

(Fielding, 1993: 146). Since my sample was relatively small, I transcribed every interview verbatim.

In total, I interviewed 17 students in 11 interviews. Ten of these were conducted during October, November and December of 2002, and the last one was conducted in October 2003. Three of the 11 were group interviews; two with three students, and one with four. (I interviewed one student twice, as she moved from Truro to Lilian Britten.) Of the eight individual interviews, two were with those who do watch *Generations*, while the other six were with those student who do not watch the programme.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed the way in which research methodology can be divided into the paradigms of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The epistemological basis of quantitative methodology is positivism, while qualitative methodology has a different philosophical underpinning, resting instead on interpretive science and seeking to explore subjective understandings of lived experience. As such, it was the chosen methodology of researchers working in the cultural studies tradition who seek to understand how people use, interpret and talk about the mass media.

This chapter also explored the way in which the 'uses and gratifications' method of research both differs from and overlaps with the interests of cultural studies, since my research draws on both, and described why my study uses reception analysis in the form of interviews. I also explained the constraints of time and space that led me to conduct individual interviews rather than focus group interviews, and described the process of my data collection.

CHAPTER 4: THE CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Having discussed the methodology of my research project, I will now briefly examine the context in which the interviewees in my research live (or lived, at the time of research), before discussing the findings of those interviews.

As discussed in previous chapters, it is important to examine the context in which these students consume media, because there is a general need, in researching media use, to address some of the contexts in which audiences watch television, specifically, as it is in those contexts that meanings are made (Morley 1992a: 276; Ang 1996: 70).

Therefore, this chapter concentrates on aspects of the context of my interviewees' television viewing:

- Country: South Africa
- University: Rhodes University
- University residences: Truro House and Lilian Britten House

I will examine each of these separately in the rest of the chapter:

4.2 SOUTH AFRICA

It is important to acknowledge the one particular aspect of South African history that I contend is an influential one for all Rhodes University students; namely, that the country became a democracy only in 1994. Before that, decades were spent building a system – apartheid – that discriminated against people on the basis of their socially constructed race, which has dramatically scarred the social landscape.

Here, I do not mean to suggest that it is only in South Africa that racism exists, for, as Dyer points out:

> The myriad minute decisions that constitute the practices of the world are at every point informed by … racial judgements. Race is… never not a factor, never not in play.
> (1997: 1)

However, South Africa was unique in the twentieth century for inscribing race into its legislation and into its social policies. Apartheid involved state repression, police brutality, apartheid bureaucracy and ideology, prescribing whom every South African could marry, play sport with, even see films with (Maylam 2001: 184-185). During apartheid, communities were separated into "enclaves within a broad separatist statutory framework and discriminatory legal architecture" (Le Pere and Lambrechts 1999: 26). Significant aspects of apartheid included:

> [p]olitical exclusion and differentiation, territorial segregation, the racialised control over African mobility, urban segregation, and the racial division of labour… But apartheid permeated all spheres of South African society.
> (Maylam 2001: 183)

Another aspect of South African history that touches my research is its colonialist past. After many years of Dutch colonisation, the nineteenth century became the era of British imperialism and colonisation in South Africa (Maylam 2001: 66). A group of 4000 British immigrants, known as the 1820 settlers, settled in the Eastern Cape, and in the mid-1830s clashed with the Xhosa people in a series of frontier wars (Maylam 2001: 82).

As I attempt to demonstrate in Sections 3 and 4 below, South Africa's colonialist past is inscribed in the campus; as, I would argue, is its racist past. Although the latter is not overt, "[t]he apartheid landscape embodies and defines the collective memory" (Le Pere and Lambrechts 1999: 27). Despite the fact that few students in my study were South African, I would argue that this aspect of South African history is an important part of their lived context, as the university is set in South Africa and run by South Africans.

One particular aspect of apartheid ideology and practice that is significant for my research (see Chapter 5) was the construction of "homelands" during the apartheid years. Promoted in the 1950s, implemented in the early 1960s, and teetering towards collapse in the 1970s, these eight homelands were regions of South Africa assigned to various African groups, each supposedly ethnically and culturally distinct. All Africans had to become citizens of a homeland, even if they'd spent all their lives in South Africa. Since the policy was one of divide-and-rule, and the underlying aim that of spatial apartheid, these areas were essentially "dumping-grounds for African people" (Maylam 2001: 180-181). It can be understood, then, that when one student reveals that the small room where viewing occurs is jokingly called a "homeland" (see Chapter 5), this term has significant resonance with South Africa's past.

In contemporary South Africa, though, the government is trying to create new forms of allegiance out of the apartheid "social wreckage" (Le Pere and Lambrechts 1999: 27) – one means of which is advancing the idea of a common South Africanness, the 'rainbow nation'. One of the stated objectives of the South African Broadcasting Act No. 4 of 1999 is to help ensure that broadcasting "contribute to democracy, development of society, gender equality, [and] nation building"[10]. It has therefore been common for several years now for locally made programmes and television advertisements to show South Africans socialising and living together, representing just such a racism-free idyll. *Generations*, the soap opera that students in my study gather to watch, is no exception. Dentlinger (1999) concurs, concluding in her study of *Generations* that it is "a uniquely 'South

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[10] From http: //www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/legislation/1999/act99-004.html?rebookmark=1 (Retrieved 22 Oct 2003)

African' product" (Dentlinger 1999: 122), flagging a South African identity through its multiracial, but largely black, cast; its choice of Johannesburg as its location; the fact that characters speak a variety of South African languages (Dentlinger 1999: 122-124); and references to "small things", like traditional Afrikaans food (Dentlinger 1999: 99).

An examination of the politics of identity in post-apartheid SA must take globalisation ("the gradual integration of political, economic and social space across national borders") into account (Le Pere and Lambrechts 1999: 11). However, this doesn't mean that all communities have been integrated into a global space, as our identities are still heavily influenced by our particular locations (Le Pere and Lambrechts 1999: 20-21). Globalisation fosters buyers and sellers, not citizens, so that "[t]he only available remaining identity then, is that of… ethnic cohort, communal kinswoman or tribal clansman" (Le Pere and Lambrechts 1999: 31).

In South Africa, empirical research conducted in the mid-nineties found that important sources of identification for South Africans include ethnic, cultural and racial categories (Bornman 1999: 45). It could be argued, then, that even those students in Grahamstown who are not South African feel the effects of years of apartheid when they interact with 'locals' – when black students, for instance, find it harder to find 'digs' to live in than their white counterparts.

For even though the new Constitution, which guarantees equality before the law, has been adopted in this country, "it would be naïve to assume that groups will become less relevant now that the system of official stratification based on group membership has been overthrown" (Bornman 1999: 61). Or, as Maylam (2001: 243) puts it: "Racial consciousness, race categorisation and racial differentiation have not disappeared." Needless to say, the effects of these categorisations and differentiations are widespread, as studies in South Africa and in the United States (to mention just two nations) show that

"a simple division into groups based on the most prevalent differences can produce a common group identity, ingroup bias and discrimination" (Bornman 1999: 44).

Rhodes University is in Grahamstown, a small city in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Nearly 6.8 million people live in the Eastern Cape, of whom nearly 6.2 million are African. It is one of the poorest provinces, whose average annual household income in 2000 was R29 000 – the second lowest in the country (Kane-Berman 2003: 174). Racial disparities are striking: for while the average per annum household income for Africans in the Eastern Cape was R19 000 in 2000, the figure for whites was R145 000 (Kane-Berman 2003: 177).

In Grahamstown, poverty and unemployment are rife, as they are in the province as a whole, and socio-economic divisions between the poor and the wealthy are enormous and highly visible.[11] The city offers several pubs, clubs, fast-food venues, and a four-screen cinema, while the university has many sporting, social and religious clubs and societies. However, this is a limited selection compared to the wide variety of entertainment offered by larger cities, where many students come from. (The implications of this are discussed in Chapter 5.)

[11] A 1999 survey by ISER, the Institute of Social and Economic Research (edited by V. Møller) of 862 households in the poor Grahamstown East area found that the median household income was R594 per month. Approximately 100 000 people live in Grahamstown East. However, few Rhodes students are directly affected by this hardship, or even see it. The main signal of this poverty is the number of obviously poor people in the streets of the city.

4.3 RHODES UNIVERSITY

Rhodes University, founded in 1904, is the biggest institution in Grahamstown. As mentioned in Section 1, the university is grappling with the need to transform itself to match the needs of a democratic South Africa.

Its intentions in this regard can be read in the university's Mission statement, part of which reads as follows:

> to acknowledge and be sensitive to the problems created by the legacy of apartheid, to reject all forms of unfair discrimination and to ensure that appropriate corrective measures are employed to redress past imbalances…
> (From: http: //www.ru.ac.za/general/dedication.html; Retrieved 22 Oct 2003)

Its Digest of Statistics also shows that, from 1998, the number of black students has been rising. However, the following figures show that white students still dominate numerically. In 2002, the Grahamstown campus had 5304 registered students, 1076 (20%) of whom were postgraduate[12]. The ethnic breakdown of the Grahamstown student body is as follows:

2775 white (52%)
1923 black (36%)
390 Asian (7%)
216 "coloured" (4%)

[12] All figures pertaining to student and staff numbers at Rhodes University from the Rhodes University Digest of Statistics Version 7: 2003

It should also be noted that 20% of all students at Rhodes in 2002 were not South African. Most of these were Zimbabwean (670), with 460 from other African states, and 330 from 'overseas' – mostly the UK. Of the black students at Rhodes, 38% were not from South Africa. So the students interviewed in this study were fairly typical of the student body in their cosmopolitan make-up: of the 11 *Generations*-watchers interviewed, only three are South African.

The fact that so many of the students who watched *Generations* were not South African does not negate the powerful effects of their South African context, however. Some of the inequalities that existed under apartheid "are still evidenced on the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University" (Strelitz 2002a: 462) and as shown in Chapter 5, both South African and non-South African interviewees clearly perceive this and experience some of its effects in the form of overt and implicit racism and racial segregation.

As for staff members on the Grahamstown Rhodes campus, 27% of senior academic staff and 100% of academic service staff and 55%[13] of administrative staff in 2002 were black, "coloured" and Asian. It is thus clear that most academic staff are white.

4.4 TRURO HOUSE AND LILIAN BRITTEN HOUSE

As was discussed in the previous chapter, to understand the role that TV plays in a household, one needs to understand the family dynamics, structures of everyday life, and family system (Morley and Silverstone 1991: 153). It is therefore important that the two

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[13] The Rhodes University Digest of Statistics 2003 gives a figures of 72.1% of Asian, black and coloured staff – but this includes the East London campus staff. I therefore subtracted the latter figure and worked out the average for Grahamstown campus alone.

residences, who constituted a 'home away from home' for the interviewees, are mentioned here.

First a brief look at Truro House. It is a double-storey residence for postgraduate women students, built in the 1960s. It accommodates 22 students, 14 of whom were interviewees in this study. The residence is one of four that constitute a hall, the Allan Webb Hall. Situated in grounds known as St Peter's, this part of the University was formerly the Grahamstown Training College[14]. The four residences are named after British cathedral cities – Canterbury, Truro, Salisbury, and Winchester. Pictures of these cathedrals hang on the walls of the Allan Webb dining hall, where students from all four residences eat every day. I would argue that the choice of names of these residences, like the name of Rhodes University itself, is another example of the British cultural heritage that strongly flavours the campus.

Many students choose to live there because, at the time of research, it is rated as "Grade C". In other words, it does not have as many amenities as more modern, plush residences – only four students have washbasins in their rooms, for instance – so students pay slightly lower fees: R14 877 for the year for their single, furnished rooms and three meals a day, as opposed to the R15 770 that students in "Grade A" residences pay[15]. 'Truro', as it is commonly known, has a "common room" downstairs, which is mostly used as a TV lounge. Off the common room is a smaller room housing the communal microwave oven and fridge. It was in this smaller room that a second TV was placed, its size being attractive to some and uncomfortable for others. This is discussed in Chapter 5.

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[14] From: http: //www.ru.ac.za/studentZONE/residences/allanwebb/ (Retrieved 22 Oct 2003)

[15] From Rhodes University's Digest of Statistics Version 7: 2003

Adding to the interpersonal friction and stresses that some students refer to in their interviews is the noise: noise from the computer laboratory next door, from the laundry, from students watching television, and from those stomping upstairs to the communal showers along wooden floors that are thinly carpeted.

Lilian Britten, the only other residence on campus catering specifically for postgraduate women, is part of St Mary's Hall, along with three other residences, and was built in 1942. Originally the university sanatorium, and named after a Rhodes graduate of 1907, later a lecturer, the residence is very similar to Truro[16]. It too has a warden's flat attached to it; it too has two common rooms, each with a television in it, and the bedrooms are similar. However, "LB", as it is known, is a Grade A residence, and is thus more comfortably furnished than Truro. While it houses a similar number of students – 24 – it is noticeably more spacious and more comfortably furnished than Truro House.

The common rooms in both residences are rarely empty in the evenings. From roughly 5pm, students come in and out to watch their favourite television programmes and then leave again. Occasionally, students can be found watching cartoons in the morning, or films at other odd times of the day, as both residences have access to three 'pay TV' channels, as well as SABC and etv. Although white students were a minority in both residences, I had noticed that some racial mixing occurred when students watched most television programmes. *Generations* (and one or two films) was an exception, and seemed to draw an audience of only black students in both Lilian Britten and Truro.

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[16] Historical information about Lilian Britten House comes from unpublished notes by Jean Wright, ex-warden of St Mary's Hall.

Residents in both houses feel the pressure of studying and writing exams and theses. This, combined with the fact that students come from differing backgrounds, can foster tension and frustration, especially at exam time. Although the effect of intergroup contact is complex and its effect is not always easy to predict, living and working in a multicultural environment can be highly stressful, and can eventually strengthen people's identification with their own group (Bornman 1999: 49-50).

Another part of the context of viewing, I contend, is the fact that most students were studying in vastly different fields to one another: so because Futhi was studying Journalism and Media Studies, for instance, she had access to a different reading of her situation and her own media consumption to that of, say, Rosa, who was studying Economics. For interpretation "is fundamentally socially located so that the experience and knowledge of the reader plays a central role in decoding the text" (Livingstone 1998a: 177). (Thus it could be argued that an aspect of interviewees' "cognitive schemas", as described by Hoïjer (1998) in Chapter 2, is their education, which will have a bearing on their readings of not only their viewing, but the process of viewing.)

4.5 CONCLUSION

One Rhodes University handbook notes that Grahamstown is at the intersection of four climatic zones, which explains its sometimes astonishingly variable weather. Equally, we could say that Rhodes university students in the early 2000s are situated at an interesting intersection of power structures in South Africa that are struggling to transform: a relatively well-equipped university in a relatively poor city; young students from all over Africa living and working on a 100-year-old campus that still bears the imprint of its colonial heritage. The students in my study live in university residences that were not designed to be residences, and which house dozens of students from a variety of backgrounds – mostly black, on a white-dominated campus.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Having described the context in which the interviewees in this study watched *Generations* in Chapter 4, in this chapter I present an analysis of the interviews that I conducted with Rhodes students towards the end of 2002, and at the end of 2003.

To reiterate, the purpose of the interviews was to investigate what pleasure students gained from watching *Generations*; whether students saw *Generations* as 'realistic'; how these students' viewing of *Generations* connects with their experience of Rhodes campus; and whether watching *Generations* is part of a ritual to affirm their black identity.

In a study of the reasons that people watch soap operas, Livingstone (1988: 66-67) questioned 52 British viewers of soap operas by means of a questionnaire. She grouped responses in the following way:

- the role of soap operas in the viewer's life (watching becomes a habit);
- entertaining and relaxing;
- realism: viewers relate to the events and problems;
- emotional experience: readers enjoy the actors' attractiveness, the suspense, and the excitement;
- relationship with characters: viewers can relate to characters, feel involved and identify with them;
- problem solving: viewers learn about how other people cope with problems, which seems to make their own diminish;
- escapism to a world of glamour and wealth;
- critical response: viewers enjoy the quality of the programmes; but also enjoy being critical, ridiculing absurdities.

Students interviewed in this study gave all of the above reasons for watching *Generations* – with the exception, interestingly, of escapism to a world of glamour and wealth. The reason for this could be that *Generations*, unlike many popular American soap operas, does not focus on the super-wealthy. For the interviewees, the attraction of this programme above other soap operas seems to lie in a combination of identifying with the characters, enjoying the communication it sparks in the residence common room, and the programme's easy but gripping story line. (The issues of identifying with characters and discussing the programme will be dealt with further in this chapter.) Three interviewees said that by comparison, American soap *The Bold and the Beautiful* drew out story lines for an inordinately long time, with one interviewee describing this programme as "a broken tape". Dentlinger (1999: 89) concurs, suggesting that the themes and subplots of *Generations* are resolved far more quickly than those of its American counterparts.

I also interviewed six students who did not watch *Generations*, mainly to establish their reasons for not watching and to enquire about some of their perceptions of their environment. Of these six, three expressed their dislike of soap operas generally and three of South African programmes particularly, with the latter being critical of local television production values.

Drawing conclusions about the function of watching *Generations* together, though, was complicated by the fact that Ndimu, Ntseketse, Futhi and Veronica (all from South Africa) watched the programme at home before coming to Rhodes, while those whose home was further afield, such as Rosa (from Namibia) and Sam and Annah (from Zimbabwe) either did not have access to the programme at all, or did have access but were put off watching it because only old episodes were screened. Betty, from Tanzania and Elizabeth, from Nigeria, were exceptions, as they said they did watch the programme before coming to Rhodes.

Therefore, it was not possible to deduce that people made an unequivocal change in their television patterns once they came to Rhodes – which would have made for some unambiguous findings. Instead, the task of this researcher was to tease out patterns and meanings from the myriad of opinions, insights and attitudes offered up by the 17 women interviewed. (Eleven of the interviewees were *Generations* watchers.) For while one cannot conclude that the text of a soap opera is so open that the range of interpretations is infinite (Liebes and Katz 1993: 13), "soaps offer amazingly complex fields of semiotic possibilities which a variety of audience members can use in a variety of ways" (Allen 1983: 105-106).

This chapter is divided into sections, each of which deals with a particular aspect of this reception study:

5.2 The pleasure of talk

5.3 Realism

5.4 How the students' viewing of the programme connects with their experience of their viewing context

5.5 Whether students' watching of *Generations* is part of a ritual to affirm their black identity.

Overleaf is a summary of interviewees' details.

Interviewees' details

Name	**Home country**	**Race**	**Class background**	**Watch *Generations*?**
1. Futhi	South Africa	Black	Working class	Yes
2. Ntseketse	Lesotho	Black	Working class	Yes
3. Ndimhu	South Africa	Black	Middle class	Yes
4. Linda	Swaziland	Black	Middle class?	Yes
5. Annah	Zimbabwe	Black	Middle class	Yes
6. Rosa	Namibia	Black	Middle class	Yes
7. Sam	Zimbabwe	Black	Middle class	Yes
8. Veronica	South Africa	Black	Working class	Yes
9. Elizabeth	Nigeria	Black	Middle class	Yes
10. Nozi	Lesotho	Black	Middle class	Yes
11. Betty	Tanzania	Black	Middle class	Yes
12. Iyanla	Nigeria	Black	Middle class	No
13. Ansuya	South Africa	Indian	Middle class	No
14. Cath	South Africa	White	Middle class	No
15. Louise	South Africa	White	Middle class	No
16. Nuraan	South Africa	Indian	Middle class?	No
17. Muthoni	Kenya	Black	Middle class	No

5.2 THE PLEASURE OF TALK

Popular culture generally circulates in a number of ways, such as by:

> conversation, both before and after the event, with others in one's social formation. Indeed, some meanings and pleasures are deferred… until they can be activated in later conversation with friends.
> (Fiske 1989a: 174).

Many reception analyses of soap operas have found that a large part of the enjoyment that people derive from watching soap operas is talking about them with others (Hobson 1989: 150, Lee and Cho 1990: 33-34, Liebes and Katz 1993: 27, Pitout 1998: 73, Gauntlett and Hill 1999: 139), and the students in this study were no exception.

Futhi (below) is one of the seven students, out of the 11 *Generations*-watching students interviewed, who spontaneously mentioned their enjoyment of talking to other students about the programme:

> **Futhi**: You sort of talk about it [*Generations*] afterwards. Like, ooh, what's going to happen next, or … it raises topics.
> [Noises of agreement from other interviewees, Ndimu and Ntseketse.]

In another interview, Sam clearly described the way in which watching television can be a bonding exercise with others in the Truro House residence:

> **Sam**: I hardly used to talk to people in this res, hey. But because of watching TV, and because, you know, you comment on what's happening, and you get to hear someone else's view and you think, oh, they're cool.

For Ndimu, too, talking in front of the TV was a way of connecting with other students:

> **Ndimu**: The only time I feel at peace is when we are watching TV. If Ntseketse, if I think she is not right, I wait for her when we are watching TV. And if I comment and she doesn't answer, then I know she is not right with me. But if we connect, then I know, ah, she is not angry, she was just probably, you know…

Sam and Ndimu here illustrate a phenomenon that Liebes and Katz (1993: 91), in their studies of groups of varying ethnicities watching the American soap opera *Dallas,* found when they analysed interviewees' conversation after watching the programme. The authors noted that this 1980s US soap opera was used as a conversational resource (Liebes and Katz 1993: 91), or as "a symbolic vocabulary", which was used to facilitate further group interaction. These conversational resources are called *phatic*.

> The phatic function serves to keep open the channels of communication among group members. It is empty and content-free. [*Dallas*]… brings people indoors, seats them

> together, offers them a shared experience and a subject for safe, ceremonial conversation. (Liebes and Katz 1993: 92).

It is my contention that watching *Generations* fulfils the same function, in both Truro House and Lilian Britten residences.

The following extract from an interview illustrates the animated conversation that can arise when discussing aspects of this soap opera, with interviewees interrupting and talking over each other in their eagerness:

> **Interviewer**: What are your favourite characters?
> **Nozi**: I tell you my worst character: Queen. [Noise from the others.] That woman is just too much for me.
> **Elizabeth** (interrupting): Queen is my favourite! [laughs]
> **Nozi**: Uh-uh. The whole soapie could do without Queen. She doesn't do anything but just [inaudible] annoy me! [In the background Elizabeth makes indignant disagreeing noises.]
> **Elizabeth** (giggling): Nozi, Nozi! Queen is my best in there.
> **Betty**: Ja, [inaudible]
> **Elizabeth**: She's always making things up, and…
> **Nozi**: She does, but in a stupid way! She does different things that…
> **Elizabeth** (interrupting again): Queen is more real. She makes women look real, you know, these women who have nothing to do, who have – she doesn't have a husband, she doesn't have to take care of kids, so she goes nosing about other people's matters and where people are going. She wants to make them happy, you know, she's always happy! Whenever there is a story around her it boils up to be happy. Everyone's just smiling all the time…
> **Nozi**: Okay, I guess you've got my point. She's always in other people's business and always gossiping. [Elizabeth says something in the background and laughs.] She's always in other people's business and gossiping. Mm-mm!

Of course, the above interaction occurred as part of an interview, but I found it significant that one question about favourite characters sparked a lively discussion with contributions from even the quiet interviewees. The frequent laughter in this interaction indicated that the interviewees enjoyed this disagreement about the character of Queen, in accordance with Pitout's findings that "although viewers get emotionally involved with characters… it is a playful, light-hearted interaction" (1998: 65).

In the two interviews quoted below, it seems clear that mutual aid in interpretation and evaluation occurred among the students in this study. In their study, Liebes and Katz (1993: 83-87) organised viewers' mutual aid in the decoding of the programme into categories, which included *mutual aid in interpretation* and *mutual aid in evaluation*.

As Liebes and Katz (1993: 85) explain it, aid in interpretation involves explaining and debating plot and character behaviour (which occurred in the interview extract above, too). These discussions sometimes become referential; i.e. there is talk about the personal and communal experience from which the interpretation is drawn. Typically, an argument happens between those who hold different explanations, with each person supporting his or her case with evidence drawn from the programme and from life. Mutual aid in evaluation (moral, aesthetic, ideological) occurs when audience members judge characters, issues and themes by marshalling their own values (1993: 85-87).

> **Interviewer**: So when you're sitting together and you're having a discussion, do you find that you have similar interpretations of people and events that happen?
> **Ntseketse**: No, no, we always argue about so many things.
> **Interviewer**: Why?
> **Ntseketse**: Because we don't always agree.
> **Interviewer**: Do you think it's because you come from different countries, or…?
> **Elizabeth**: I think it's because we have different backgrounds. So we all try to [relate?] what he have seen to what we know. So someone says "This is what we do in Lesotho," and I say, "This is what we do in Nigeria." So it brings up a lot of conversation.
> [Hubbub in the background as several people talk at once.]
> **Ntseketse**: Especially between me and you. [Laughs.] This woman!
> [Elizabeth and Nozi laugh and talk at once.]
> **Ntseketse**: And we are like, uh-uh. This is South Africa, my dear, we don't do those things.

So it is clear that for this group of women in Lilian Britten residence, part of the enjoyment of watching *Generations* is to cement their national identities. The issue of identity in relation to media consumption is discussed further in Section 4.

Annah's response was more serious in tone, and concurs with Hobson's (1989: 164-165) findings, as she noted that the women showed a strong affinity for one particular

character, and would become involved in her dilemmas, comparing the decisions she made with ones they feel they would make.

> **Annah**: I usually discuss *Generations* with my good friend Candace. Like, when Baba was going to ask Sonny out, and she actually goes, "I think we have a future together," and the guy is like, kind of backing off, and we learnt that when you ask a guy out you should kind of, take it easy. And we identify with that kind of thing. It helps a lot, when it comes to that.

The above two quotes also illustrate how students' meanings of the programme are mediated by their discussions of it. Annah and Candace come to regard the programme as having something to teach them, while Elizabeth and Ntseketse's discussions mean that *Generations* becomes, in some ways, a hallmark of South African identity for them.
It is noteworthy that the interview with Ntseketse and Elizabeth et al was conducted in Lilian Britten House, where there was a greater variety in the ages of students than in Truro. Some were in their twenties, and some were more mature students who had returned to do an MA or PhD, whereas Truro House students were younger, often doing their second degree straight after their first. So in response to a question about whether discussing *Generations* leads to her developing a new perspective on what she has viewed, Rosa, from Truro House, replied thus:

> **Rosa**: Sometimes you get a new perspective, but most often I think we all agree, you know – this person isn't going the right way, or not. It's not … I think it has to do with us all being the same age, so we have the same interpretation.

Thus it could be argued that in Rosa's eyes, age is an important marker of identity, with the views of this group in Truro more likely to coincide with each other than with older generations of viewers. Thus the Truro viewers cemented their world view as they watched *Generations*. However, this is a surmise, as the topic of age was not explored in detail.

That some Truro watchers feel similarly about the way they bond, though, was borne out in a separate interview by Futhi's revealing comments as she discussed the smaller of the two Truro common rooms in which she preferred to watch the soap opera:

> **Futhi**: It's become like a, like that small room where we meet – I don't know, we even joke about it, maybe because I attended Larry's class – we say it's like a homeland. It's where we get to talk about this sort of stuff and watch. … And when people say "Let's swap, let's go to the other place," [that is, the larger common room], I'm like, *why*?

The reference to "a homeland" needs explanation (and will be revisited later in this chapter in the section on identities). In the course of Larry Strelitz's PhD research, he discovered that a group of black African male students ritually watched television programmes (including *Generations*) together on Rhodes campus (2002a). They separated themselves from the other students in order to do this, and called their shared viewing space the "homeland". This name refers to the quasi-nations created by the apartheid South African government for various African groups, but which ceased to exist once the 1994 democratic elections were held. Futhi, a Journalism and Media Studies student, had been taught by Strelitz and so light-heartedly applied the concept she had learnt from him to the viewing context she shared with others in Truro House. She thus clearly saw some parallels between the group of viewers in Truro and the group in Strelitz's study. Again it could be surmised that in discussing their shared understandings of the programme, the women were cementing their world view (and thus their identity as black students – a concept explored later in this chapter).

There was also a slightly more subtle process at work than straightforward bonding when students talked to each other about television, for conversations can "make use of the shared reference points, in relation to social issues and popular culture, established by television" (Gauntlett and Hill 1999: 139). Sam revealed this when she was asked why she watched *Generations*:

> **Sam**: Okay, well first of all, I think it's peer pressure, maybe. Because everyone else watches it. So, you know, you gotta know what's happening as well.

Sam was an example of a viewer who was less involved in the programme than others, such as Annah, who found the programme "helpful" in some ways. Instead, Sam. had a cooler, more critical, "ludic" (playful) response – as Liebes and Katz (1993: 128) put it –

to the programme and the behaviour of the characters. Referential readings link the program with real life, as Annah does, while critical readings regard the program "as a fictional construction with aesthetic rules"… (Liebes and Katz 1993: 100), as Sam does:

> **Sam**: …[T]he characters are also funny. It gives you a lighter view to things. I mean in the real world, really, are people really that bitchy and so on?

What was interesting about investigating how students talk about the programme, however, was that students seemed to use their watching of the programme to mediate their relationships with other black students in the two residences, as the quotes by Sam ("you gotta know what's happening"), Futhi ("we say it's like a homeland") and Ndimu ("if I think [Ntseketse] is not right, I wait for her when we are watching TV") indicate, rather than mediating the meanings of the programme itself. Eight out of 11 *Generations*-watchers mentioned the "phatic function" as one of the primary attractions of watching the programme, although not quite in those words, of course. Most of these students, therefore, enjoyed talking to the others about the programme. While this seems to be typical of soap opera fans, this finding links to an aspect of my research discussed in Section 4; namely, whether students' watching of this soap opera affirms their identity as black students.

5.3 REALISM

One of my findings was that students judged soap operas in terms of their 'realism', and this topic engendered much animated discussion, even in interviews with those who do not watch *Generations*. For instance, Muthoni said the following when asked why she did not watch the programme:

> **Muthoni**: Well, the fact that it's so much like *The Bold and the Beautiful*, which is really so unrealistic to me. I mean, for me those kinds of things don't exist. I mean the way they live, their lifestyles, and… I think, especially in South Africa, South African soaps should concentrate on South African issues…. like Aids and homosexuality and democratisation, those kinds of things.

This focus on realism is not surprising, as soap operas are commonly judged in terms of their realism (Liebes and Katz 1993: 16).

Several theorists maintain that the term 'realism', when applied to representations in cinema and television, has multiple layers of meaning. Ang (1985) is one of these theorists, as *Dallas* fans in her study judged the programme in terms of its emotional realism, not its "empirical realism" (Livingstone 1998a: 65). In other words, fans of *Dallas* experienced its characters as emotionally realistic, as having plausible, reasonable emotional reactions.

Ellis (1982) is another analyst who concluded that audiences of cinema and television have various kinds of expectations concerning realism. It seems the term 'realism' (or 'realistic') is " used to describe a whole series of principles of artistic construction and of audience expectation alike" (1982: 6). These expectations include that the representation on screen should have "surface accuracy" (which is related to costume, setting and props); it should conform to audience expectations of events (which relates to audience 'common sense' and taken-for-granted notions of events); and it should conform to audience ideas of psychology and character motivation. "Hence there is no *realism*, but there are *realisms*" (Ellis 1982: 7-8) [emphasis mine].

The analyses described above by Ellis (1982) and Ang (1985) help to explain the variety of answers to the question, "Do you think *Generations* is realistic?" For instance, Sam and Veronica, quoted below, gave widely differing answers (in separate interviews) to this question:

> **Veronica**: Yes, I think it is. I also think the other soapies are. They deal with things that are happening in real life, but that maybe we aren't aware of. [Talks about a character in another soap opera who married for revenge.] Things like that happen.
>
> **Sam**: No, it's not realistic. Because I mean – please! [Sam and interviewer laugh.] I mean, someone can just walk into the town and make it within two months, and that's not realistic at all.

The differences in the above two reactions could be ascribed to the different class positions that Veronica and Sam inhabit, as Veronica's background is working class, and Sam is middle class. This concurs with Strelitz's study, as he found that the largely working class students in his study "find greater 'realism' in local productions because they connect more with their own lived reality" (Strelitz 2002a: 467). Thus I would contend that differing class positions have a bearing on differing interpretations here, despite Rosa's earlier assertion that because all the Truro House viewers were the same age, they tended to have the same perspective. This might be true of their judgement of characters, but not of their judgement of the realism of the programme. (The majority of the interviewees (7 out of 11) were middle class, as far as I could ascertain, which concurs with a survey of Rhodes University's Grahamstown campus in 1998 where it was found that most Rhodes students came from middle class backgrounds (Strelitz 2002d: 77).) The issue of class is discussed further later in this chapter.

Nozi, part of the last group interview, appears to contradict herself when giving her perceptions of the realism of *Generations* – a point I did not pick up on until reading over the transcript:

> **Interviewer**: How do the others feel about that, the unrealistic stuff?
> **Nozi** (fiercely): They are real, because they happen in life!
> **Elizabeth**: I think they are real, but they [creators of *Generations*] have to think of funny stories just to keep it on and somehow they come around and come up with a good story. So I think they are just real.
> **Interviewer**: So do you think it will improve – or has improved already?
> **Elizabeth**: Ah! You can never tell with soapies! [Giggling from the others.] Sometimes you like a storyline, sometimes you go down the drag.
> **Ntseketse**: The [inaudible] story was just too much. [More giggling.] I don't think…
> **Nozi**: Just the same as this Queen woman shutting up [referring to a character taking a bet that she wouldn't talk for a day or two] – it was too, too much. But some of those things, hey, it's a soapie!

So Nozi, at first glance, seems to be voicing two opposing opinions: that events in *Generations* "are real", but also that sometimes they are "too, too much", even taking

cognisance of the characteristics of the soap opera genre. That 'realism' has multiple meanings could explain Nozi's seemingly contradictory positions.

Ellis's analysis (1982: 6-8), given earlier, explains the divergent views of Sam and Veronica, as they each seized on particular aspects of the programme to judge as realistic. It also explains Nozi's divided view, as she found some character motivations depicted on the soap opera did not match her ideas of what was 'realistic', but that many events on the programme did make sense to her. She was not alone in finding the programme realistic in some ways and implausible in others, as the excerpt below by Ndimu and Futhi reveals:

> **Ntseketse**: It's the way they talk. It's not realistic.
> **Ndimu**: Maybe to some extent, but the way they go on with relationships, that is just not right.
> **Futhi**: Mm.
> **Interviewer**: You mean the way the characters are always talking about relationships…?
> **Futhi**: Sometimes they are realistic. Like if someone's dead, for example, that's where you get to see the African culture, and you see [one character] wearing black, and not supposed to have sex with [another character], but they end up having sex anyway, and it's like breaking the taboo. You know, so in that way, it is realistic.
> Interviewer: You were talking the other night about the fact that they were using African languages, but in a funny way.
> **Ndimu**: It's the tone. They don't bring themselves to that African tone.
> **Futhi**: Ja.
> **Ndimu**: They speak Zulu and English…
> **Futhi**: It's as if they're reading.
> **Interviewer**: Do you mean they sound 'posh'? Trying to sound proper?
> **All**: Mm. Ja.

Livingstone notes that analysing audience's pleasure in soap operas should be twofold, taking into account both enjoyment of escapism and vicarious emotional experience, and the pleasure of recognition and validation of everyday experience, thus functioning as a sort of "cultural myth… connecting with basic human concerns, explaining complex social phenomena, providing categories for thought and moral precepts to live by" (1998a: 59). So it could be argued that soap operas tend to be valued by these students both for their realism and for the way in which they are different from their everyday

lives (*Generations*, for instance, portrays black women succeeding in a business environment, a situation far removed from student life on Rhodes campus), as most of those who watch *Generations* in this study mentioned appreciating the programme's entertainment value – which I explore further in the following section.

5.4 HOW THE STUDENTS' VIEWING OF THE PROGRAMME CONNECTS WITH THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THEIR VIEWING CONTEXT

Many theorists have emphasised the importance of context in the field of media studies (for example, Fiske 1987a: 72, Tomlinson 1991: 47, Morley 1986: 13). As context is central to this thesis, in Chapter 3 I explored the importance of this concept in cultural studies. To briefly summarise the significance of context: "people happen to live in groups... and their opinions are shaped and anchored in these social and stratified contexts" (Liebes and Katz 1993: 156). Then in Chapter 3, I examined the context of this study; namely, two postgraduate residences on Rhodes University campus in South Africa.

I will now examine how students' viewing of a television programme connects with their experiences of being students at Rhodes University, and lastly the context of the viewing space itself. (It should be noted that separating the contexts in this manner has its drawbacks, as it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between contexts when each one, as set out here, is in many ways a microcosm of a larger one. However, in the interests of an orderly analysis, I have chosen to treat them separately, as in Chapter 4.)

5.4.1 Context of studying

Viewers seek various kinds of pleasure in TV dramas: the text/audience relationship is not straightforward (Livingstone 1998a: 59). Given this observation, and the fact that the life of a student can be intensely cerebral, a good starting point for exploring the pleasure students experience in watching *Generations* is its value as light entertainment.

Indeed, most of the students interviewed mentioned this factor, saying that the programme functioned as "a study break", that it was "easy to follow", "it's entertainment". It was clear that one of the attractions of watching *Generations* was that it offered an opportunity for escapism; a break from the demands of studying.

This is evocative of Radway's (1984) findings. Although her well-known study of a group of women in the Midwestern US focused on their consumption of novels, and not soap operas, her conclusion about the value of romance novels to the Smithton women has echoes in my study. The women in Radway's study valued their reading, she said,

> because the experience itself is different from ordinary existence … a relaxing release from the tension produced by daily problems and responsibilities.
> (Radway 1984: 61)

Radway's study is important, because it focuses on the social production of pleasure in the context of the uneven power relations in patriarchal marriage. Pleasure thus needs to be understood as a cultural formation that arises from the interaction of text, audience and context (Moores 1990: 25).

Morley (1986: 15,16) argues that one has to understand TV-watching in terms of other, competing leisure activities, as well as in the wider context of lifestyle, work, and the way these interact with the broadcasting schedule. In the context of student life, in particular, that which Modleski (1983) calls "the rhythms of reception" is important to note. Her thesis was that "[t]he formal properties of daytime television… accord closely with the rhythms of women's work in the home" (Modleski 1983: 73). I was therefore interested in finding out whether the formal properties of *Generations* was a factor in its popularity.

One of these properties is the timing of the soap opera: *Generations* is screened not during the day, but during 'prime time', namely 8pm, and lasts for 30 minutes. This divides the evening neatly into two for students, as, at the time of research, supper was

served in residence dining halls from 5pm to 6pm. Students can then study for a few hours after supper, have a break by watching television, then resume studying again. So it seems that at least one "formal property" of this prime-time television programme accords closely with the rhythms of student life, as these extracts from three interviews show:

> **Veronica**: Well, I can watch *Generations* [when studying for exams] – [it's] only for 30 minutes.
>
> **Betty**: Ja, the past four years it was my study break. Because I've been watching it for the past four years. So 8 o'clock was quite a great time…
> **Annah**: You know, tests and exams are different, and during exams I kind of like try to... You know, it's difficult to stay in your room. I just go [i.e. downstairs, to watch *Generations*] for 30 minutes and then come back.

For students in this study, then, part of the appeal of this soap opera lay both in its entertainment value and in the time of its broadcast, as both factors met their needs in the context of their lives as students. However, the notion of escapism mentioned earlier should not be taken at face value. Morley notes that Radway's examination of the concept of escapism reveals that once it is examined in relation to power relations, "this [escapist] activity begins to acquire a whole different meaning" (1986: 37). I will return to this observation later in this chapter.

5.4.2 Context of university residence: Truro House and Lilian Britten House

I was also interested to find out how the context of the university residence connected with students' television watching habits. To this end, one of my questions was whether Truro House, the residence in which most of the students lived[17], felt like home to them.

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[17] All but Elizabeth, Nozi and Betty lived in Truro House. Ntseketse lived in Truro House in 2002, then in Lilian Britten in 2003. Thus I interviewed her twice.

Of the 14 Truro House students interviewed (8 who watch *Generations* and 6 who do not), two replied that they liked their rooms. But most answered in the negative, with Ansuya being the most vehement:

> **Ansuya**: If I came from a broken, dysfunctional home that produces serial killers [laughter], then, yes, it would be home to me. Luckily, I don't.

Ndimu, although not replying to a specific question about Truro, summed up many people's feelings when she commented on relationships that had become frayed by the strain of living at close quarters for about nine months:

> **Ndimu**: I think there are too many tensions in this house… so many problems in this res.

These tensions were caused by a variety of factors, from personality clashes to irritation with institutional living, as mentioned in Chapter 4. However, as discussed later in this chapter, most interviewees also perceived divisions between racial groups in the two residences.

Ndimu also said, as mentioned earlier, that, the only time she "feel[s] at peace is when we are watching TV". In this vein, it has been found in other studies that watching television is a way for groups to bond. For example, Gauntlett and Hill found in their UK study of 500 people's television consumption habits over five years that television could be "a focal point around which households bond – particularly … households of students or friends" (1999: 50).

Truro House has a lounge, or "common room", where students gathered to watch television. Next to it is a smaller room housing the communal microwave oven and fridge, which is also equipped with a TV and offering Truro residents a choice in television programmes. (One or two students had television in their rooms, but this is against the rules.)

It was in this smaller room that some *Generations*-watchers preferred to gather, even though not everyone could be seated comfortably. The choice of venue was the cause of some dissent, which cropped up in an answer to a seemingly unrelated question in my first group interview:

> **Interviewer**: Do you talk about *Generations* with classmates, or is it mainly people in Truro?
> **Futhi**: It's become like a – like that small room where we meet – I don't know, we even joke about it, maybe because I attended Larry's class [i.e. Professor Larry Strelitz] – we say it's like a homeland. It's where we get to talk about this sort of stuff and watch. … And when people say "Let's swap, let's go to the other place", I'm like, *why*?…
> **Ntseketse**: Like today…
> **Futhi**: ...Why do we have to go? It's our place. […] that's become the place to watch.
> **Ndimu**: But it's just too small, because some of us, we end up watching standing.
> **Ntsektse and Futhi**: Ja.
> **Ndimu**: Maybe if there were more seats or something.
> **Futhi**: It's become homely.
> **Ndimu**: It does become homely, but the capacity does not accommodate everyone who wants to watch *Generations*. And you don't want to stand and watch for the whole 30 minutes, or sit on the floor for the whole 30 minutes.

The context of viewing *Generations* thus became important to some people. It was interesting that in a residence that few people felt was "like home", this particular cramped TV room was described as "homely" by Futhi, suggesting that watching *Generations* here was a comforting and comfortable experience for her.

In another interview, with Annah, Rosa and Linda, opinions were different:

> **Annah**: The problem is, you know, every time you want to watch, people want to watch M-Net in the big common room, and we all squash in the small one. Sometimes we've tried telling them, like, we can change, you know. […]
> **Rosa**: .[..] For me, I like the space, it is cosy.
> **Annah**: I don't like it myself. I'm not used to it! I'm not used to it! I like the big common room. You can just sit in the big sofa, with the heater there […]
> **Linda**: I don't mind. As long as I find there are other people watching I'll watch what they're watching. [Laughter.] Ja.

So even among those who are enthusiastic *Generations*-watchers, there were different attitudes to the viewing context. Interpretations of 'comfort' varied: some enjoyed the

intimacy and homeliness of the smaller room, while others preferred the greater physical comfort offered by the larger one. Theorists have noted the need to take into account "elementary considerations – such as, for instance, the use of television to create personal space in a restricted physical environment" (Morley 1986: 21) – and the finding here indicates that there is some conflict over different ideas about what constitutes the ideal viewing space in just such a "restricted physical environment".

Apart from the general interpersonal conflict mentioned by Ndimu earlier, some students perceived racial tension in Truro, which I will discuss further in Section 4 of this chapter. What is significant here is that in answer to a question about whether they felt at home, or at ease, in Truro House, most interviewees said they did not – a fact that, I would argue, drew them some of them together to watch *Generations*, where they could negotiate their relationships.

5.5 WHETHER STUDENTS' WATCHING OF *GENERATIONS* IS PART OF A RITUAL TO AFFIRM THEIR BLACK IDENTITY

This section is in many respects a continuation of Section 3, and has links to Chapter 4 too. For it is my contention that South Africa's socio-political history (as discussed in Chapter 4) impacts directly on their experience of their viewing context (as discussed in Section 3) and thus creates a need in black students to affirm their black identity.

Analysing identity as a "moment" in the circuit of culture, Woodward maintains that identities are:

> produced, consumed and regulated within culture – creating meanings through symbolic systems of representation about the identity positions which we might adopt.
> (1997: 2)

Another aim of this study was therefore to find out whether watching *Generations* with other black students helps to affirm black students' racial identity – because groups "only get to know themselves as groups… through cultural activity" (Frith 1996: 138), our

identities are partly constructed out of what we consume (Storey 1999: 136), and in the home, particularly, "we are viewers of media representations through which identities are produced – for example, through the narrative of soap operas…"(Woodward 1997: 22).

In this regard, my thesis has strong parallels with that of Larry Strelitz's investigation into media consumption and identity formation of a small group of students on Rhodes campus in 2000. While Strelitz argues against theories that privilege media consumption at the expense of other factors in identity formation, he concludes that the meanings that students took from the local television programmes they watched played an important role in "cementing their particular identities" (Strelitz 2002a: 479) and helped to mediate their experience of Rhodes University.

I also set out at the beginning of this study wondering if class was an issue too, for Strelitz found that the students in his study all came from "rural peasant or working class backgrounds", and so felt doubly separated from other, urban and middle class students (Strelitz 2002a 459, 465). The students in his study were also all South Africans. However, I could not find divisions along class lines, for both Truro House and Lilian Britten are small residences, which means that dividing students along lines of race, nationality, language and class meant that the numbers in each category would be small. So, like Morley (1986: 175), I found that class soon dropped out of focus from my analysis. (It is interesting that Gauntlett and Hill (1999: 132) and Woodward (1997: 22) maintain that class has become less significant as a key category of identity – whether in the United Kingdom alone, or generally, they do not say. Strelitz's research indicates that South Africa could differ in this respect.)

While I did not set out to mirror Strelitz's study, the question of whether watching *Generations* served to cement these students' racial identity as black students was an aspect of my research. Linked to that question was another: why did black students, and not white ones, watch this soap opera in the two women's residences?

I have divided students' comments about race relations and power dynamics into the contexts of Rhodes University and the residences, as these were the categories used previously.

5.5.1 Perceptions of race relations at Rhodes University

As noted in the previous chapter, 52% of the student body on Rhodes campus is white, and only 27% of senior academic staff is black: a markedly different ratio to that of the population of South Africa, where black people constitute well over 90% of the population.

The four students interviewed in Lilian Britten residence had this to say about their perceptions of Rhodes:

> **Interviewer**: Rhodes has been described as "white-dominated". What do you think about that?
> **Ntseketse**: I think it is. Most people are white. Most students are white.
> **Betty**: Ja, I think so. [inaudible] More the numbers [inaudible] so, ja.
> **Elizabeth**: I think the thing is Rhodes has been a white university for all the generations, all the years. So it will take a long time before people will see – even some white people don't believe that there are as many black as we are now in Rhodes University. So it will take a long time before people know blacks are there. Then another thing about Rhodes is that there is a consciousness of wanting you to know that it is a white university. So you find that – for someone like me it is quite discouraging. It really is discouraging. Because you want to be known you either bring yourself to behave like a white person [Nozi giggles] – so for such people if they are strict blacks they probably will say they're not coming to Rhodes University, they'd rather go to another university.
> **Ntseketse**: Ja, like most people at home [Lesotho], they would rather go to Wits or other universities in South Africa and not here. I remember somebody, when I told her that I am coming to Rhodes, she was like, hey, do you think you are going to cope there? And I'm like, ja, why not? I didn't even know, truly, that there are so many whites.
> **Nozi**: Someone also said that to me when I was applying to come to Rhodes. They said, "What? Are you out of your mind? That place is like, yo, it's just too much. Why don't you go to Wits or UCT at best, you know."

Students in Truro House had similar views, with Annah and Linda commenting on the racism they perceived in the classroom:

> **Linda**: …sometimes, if you don't get such a good mark, it seems to be because you're black. I've looked at another student's essay and thought, 'Mine is better than that, but you're white!' So I don't know if that's how the system operates.

> **Annah**: I don't know if I should say this, but there are certain lecturers – it seems as though they actually treat black students differently from white students. You'll find white students go to the lecturers and ask for help, and they'll get notes that you never knew they had. Or they give them more tips for exams. They actually know …if you have an exam and you don't want to study, just get a white person by your side. Ask them, you know. Ask them! But if you go to a lecturer, they'll tell you, "Just go and read everything."

Elizabeth also had an example of racism in the classroom:

> **Elizabeth**: Ja, because the thing is as I said, not me, but I've heard so many complaints of people with lecturers, you know, the moment they – like a friend of mine had such an experience with a man who said, "I don't know how you expected to pass, you know. You from your side of the world, you can't cope with our system."

Sam and Muthoni, in separate interviews, commented on the racial segregation in student pubs and clubs:

> **Sam**: Initially, when I got here, it kind of struck me that, you know, there was the Union, full of white people. And there was Masakhane, for the black people. And Pop Art, sometimes white people or coloured people… you know, it just seems so segregated.

> **Muthoni**: … if you go to pubs and stuff, you find little groups of white people and little groups of black people, and little groups of Indians, which I think is not right, especially in this day and age. You should be able to feel comfortable socialising with whoever shares your interests, you know, not just looking at colour basis. And I find it very weird because where I come from [Nairobi], it just doesn't happen.

It was interesting that at times during interviews students would disavow that race was an issue on campus, or in the residence, while using " 'us' and 'them' language. For identity is most clearly defined by difference, by polarization, and "by the markings of inclusion or exclusion – insiders and outsiders, 'us' and 'them'" (Woodward 1997: 2). The following interchange, for example, was revealing. I asked the question about whether Rhodes was 'white-dominated' of Ndimu, Ntseketse and Futhi:

> **Ndimu**: No, it's [i.e. campus] white and foreign dominated. Okay, I'm speaking from a South African point of view. By foreign, I don't mean Lesotho, and…. [inaudible] you know, I forget these people are foreign.
> **Futhi**: [Something about Swaziland]
> **Ndimu**: No, they [other South African black students] don't dominate, they are just like us. [Answering the question:] It is. You just know, if there's a function, they [white students] will be more catered for. It doesn't matter if it's a class function…

> **Ntseketse**: Mm, everything.
> **Ndimu**… Every function of Rhodes will be more catered for the other side. Everything they do, they only consider their own beliefs and their own cultural standards.
> **Ntseketse**: Mm, like the regulations…

Here Ndimu was constructing her identity as not only black, but specifically black and South African, as opposed to black and "foreign" (that is, non-South African), which is not surprising, given that identities are never unified, but multiply constructed (Hall 1996: 4), and although we might see ourselves as the same people in various contexts, we are differently positioned at different times (Woodward 1997: 22).

So students in this study were nearly unanimous in noting racial divisions in their environment. Even those who did not agree that Rhodes was "white dominated" revealed that they worked hard to ignore racism:

> **Betty**: No – some people from some departments do complain, but in our department, no, not at all, or anywhere else. I just ignore it, I just – that's the thing, if you want to see it, you will see it, but if you ignore it, you won't see it and you won't feel it at all. But if you keep an eye out for all these things, you will see them, because they're always happening.

Another example was Veronica:

> **Veronica**: Maybe I don't want to see that [i.e. racial divisions]. Or maybe I close my eyes or just block out that thing.

The students interviewed thus mostly perceived the unequal power relations around them on campus, and that these were often constructed along racial lines. Many of them agreed, whether directly or indirectly, with the observation that the campus is white-dominated. Below I further discuss the implications of this view.

5.5.2 Perceptions of race relations in Truro House and Lilian Britten House

In discussions about the watching of *Generations* in the two residences the 'us and them' language kept recurring:

> **Interviewer**: Why do you think white students in res [i.e. Truro House] don't watch *Generations*? Because I've noticed it's only the black students.
> **Veronica**: Ja, no, I don't know exactly. Maybe they're not as interested as we are.

Thus Veronica identified herself as part of a group, the 'we', who are black students, and therefore presumably exclude 'them', the white students. The same language was used by a Truro House student (who did not watch *Generations*) in response to the question about whether Rhodes was white-dominated:

> **Cath**: White-dominated? No, definitely not. I think there's quite a lot of black people here, and… The thing is, you don't look at them as black people, because they're educated, and they're like, um, like any of us. The only time I've really come into contact with different cultures as in black and white – not that it's a different culture, but – is in this res. I don't know whether it's because they are… That's terrible, to say "they", but [inaudible].

Ndimu and Futhi had noticed other forms of exclusion and separation in Truro House:

> **Ndimu**: You know, it's just those things, I don't know. Like you guys [i.e. white interviewer] have your own day for TV, and we have our own day.
> […]
> **Futhi**: …It's like whiter upstairs [in Truro] and blacker downstairs. [Giggles.] I mean, I know that's really petty or whatever…
> **Ndimu**: But it's always been like that. Even last year it was like that.
> […]
> **Futhi**: We're all civil and polite to each other, but we don't know each other at all.

In saying that Truro was "whiter upstairs and blacker downstairs", Futhi is referring to the fact that the five white women out of 22 in Truro all lived upstairs, quite near each other. The rest of the first floor was occupied by black students, and all the rooms downstairs were occupied by black students. This was not the students' choice, as rooms were allocated before they arrived on campus at the beginning of the year.

Most interviewees acknowledged that, as one interview put it, "There is some kind of separation" between the race groups in res. During an interview with some of the black women in Lilian Britten who watch *Generations*, I asked about racial mixing in the residence. Betty wryly said the following:

> **Betty**: I'm sure the interview already told you something. You can see the racial … [pause as she indicates the four black women sitting on the couch].

Those who didn't watch *Generations* had similar perceptions, with Nuraan's response being typical of the 'non-watchers':

> **Interviewer**: Do you think there's racial integration in Truro?
> **Nuraan**: Some. There is some. But not as fully as some people might think. I don't know, I think a lot of the black girls tend to stick together.

Given that out of the total of 17 students interviewed in this study, only one was emphatic that she had not perceived racism or racial divisions on campus[18], we could return here to Morley's (1986: 37) point that in Radway's study, the activity of reading romance novels acquires "a whole different meaning" when it is examined in relation to power structures. This finding could be applied to students watching *Generations* in Rhodes campus: black students in a context that they feel is dominated by another racial group, at best, and discriminated against, at worst. In such a context, I would argue that escaping into the seductive world of a soap opera, especially one deploying the South African discourse of the "rainbow nation" (Dentlinger 1999) depicting a world where black men and, to an even greater degree, women are powerful and successful (Denlinger 1999: 105), is attractive for black students particularly. The programme might be 'unrealistic' in this

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[18] The one exception, Iyanla, was emphatic that the campus was "integrated". although she did concede that there were more white students on campus. However, Iyanla was highly uncomfortable being interviewed, did not want her real name used, cited a need to "escape" as her reason for watching television for hours every day, and said Truro "doesn't feel like home". So it could be surmised that she did, in fact, perceive unequal power relations on campus, but either could not put her finger on it, or for some reason did not want to talk about it.

regard, but it depicts a world for black people to aspire to[19] (and which, it could be argued, does exist to at least some degree in bigger South African cities). Ansuya, an Indian interviewee who does not watch *Generations,* made a similar point:

> **Interviewer**: Why do you think only black students watch *Generations*, despite its 'rainbow nation' message?
> **Ansuya**: It's something to do with cultural capital, which is where people who are exposed to a western lifestyle, which is all of us, tend to internalise those role models, or ways of being, or whatever it is. And it's only recently that we've seen black people on TV. I still don't see Indian people on TV. Do you know what I'm saying? Sometimes I'll watch an absolutely crap something – maybe for 15 minutes when I'm walking past and Nuraan's watching Indian movies – I'll sit and I'll watch. I can't understand the language, but I'll watch it just for the novelty of seeing Indian people on screen, I mean, it's bizarre. … So it's possible that for the black girls in this res, and maybe black people in South Africa, it's wonderful to finally see somebody like you on TV.

Ansuya's point about identifying with TV characters links to the next part of this chapter.

5.5.3 Identifying with characters

In response to a question about what it was that they liked about *Generations*, Annah raised the issue of identifying with the successful black characters in the soap:

> **Annah**: Basically, I enjoy the characters… because it is easy for you to identify with the characters …: I enjoy watching black characters in very successful positions – they're very successful, they're doing well for themselves.

Identification, which is a process of perceiving similarities with others, is a notion drawn from psychoanalysis and taken up by cultural studies to explain the process whereby we

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[19] Commissioning producer of *Generations*, Mfundi Vundla, told Dentlinger in personal communication that he "hoped to show 'black' people the opportunities that awaited them" (Denlinger 1999: 104).

see ourselves in the images presented to us (Woodward 1997: 14, 15). Several interviewees, then, saw themselves in the images that *Generations* presented to them. For instance, Annah later elaborated on her above answer, and Rosa agreed, when replying to a question about why they thought that white students did not watch *Generations*:

> **Annah**: I think it's because most people who feature in *Generations* are blacks. A person tends to identify with people who are your own race.
> Rosa: …. I think it's because you can identify, maybe.

For *Generations* espouses the 'rainbow nation' ideal, depicting characters of varying 'races' working and socialising together, with white characters a minority as they are in South Africa's population. It is "as if they [*Generations* characters] are all 'colour' blind" (Dentlinger 1999: 105).

Similarly, in a separate interview, Sam said, in response to the same question:

> **Sam**: I think maybe… it's because most of the actors in it, you know. They're black, or coloured. Very few white people in there. And the issues are usually of upcoming black people trying to make it in the world. Most of us black people can relate to that. So maybe it just doesn't tie in with their [white students'] interests.

The students in Lilian Britten also raise the issue of identifying with the characters and events when explaining the appeal of the programme:

> **Elizabeth**: I think the idea of something with a natural setting. You see, somehow you watch it and you can relate to what is happening. You can relate to the people there. That's what makes it really interesting.
> **Nozi**: Ja, a programme will draw you if you can relate to the characters – the things they talk about, the jokes they tell, you can laugh at them, you know. People from certain cultures and different backgrounds, when they tell jokes everyone else will be laughing but you won't catch the joke, right? So in *Generations* it's people you can relate to, you know why they do certain things and why not others. 'Cos you are also in a sort of similar situation.
> **Interviewer**: So it would be fair to say you identify with them?
> **Someone**: Mm. [Laughter]

Lilian Britten *Generations*-watchers also clearly perceived themselves as a group, with Nozi saying the following in response to a question about whether they would notice if someone who did not normally watch the programme joined them:

> **Nozi**: We would ask her, "*What*? How come you're watching today?"
> **Ntseketse**: Ja, and if someone is not here we would notice that Nozi is not here today.

This illustrates Hall's point that identities function as points of attachment: they proclaim a unity, and this unity is also "constructed within the play of power and exclusion" (Hall 1996: 5). I would contend, then, that black students on a campus in which they perceive that power rests in the hands of white people, watching a television programme that show black people as powerful and in control would be highly attractive.

In the students' use of language and descriptions of their television watching, we can hear resonances with the words of Ellis, who posits that watching television confirms the domestic isolation of the viewer, and his/her position in a world divided between 'inside' and 'outside', where the 'inside' becomes the area of safety, of confirmation of identity; and the 'outside' that of risk, of challenge to identity (1982: 166).

5.6 CONCLUSION

At the start of this study, I thought it significant that black students chose to watch *Generations* together, and that white students did not join in.

It is possible to infer that, given the context of their viewing as described by the interviewees, watching *Generations,* in offering these black students "a shared experience and a subject for safe, ceremonial conversation" (Liebes and Katz 1993: 92) was indeed a way of affirming their identities as black students. The various observations, quoted in this chapter, of racial segregation and of the fact that much of the power at Rhodes University rests in the hands of whites (for a range of complex reasons that have much to do with the history of South Africa, as briefly set out in Chapter 4) confirmed this for me.

These quotes range from Futhi's description of the small TV room as a "homeland", to various students' experiences of both subtle and overt racism.

> **Veronica**: Like, in Truro, we don't watch the same thing. And we don't […] Maybe because the whites are few, and then the blacks – you know, maybe that's the case. 'Cos I know we tend to stick to people like us, you know. That's the way it is.

Thus, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the fact that many of the students interviewed were not South African does not seem to have a bearing on this aspect of their everyday lives, as both South African students like Veronica and Futhi, and non-South African students like Elizabeth and Sam, talked about the racial divisions that they saw around them.

Just as Morley (1986) found that gender roles (and hence their different social roles in the home), interacting with other contexts, was the most important "structural principle" in terms of television viewing habits in his study, I would contend that the structures of power divided along racial lines played a strong role in determining how students socialise together in residence. This explains, for instance, why Ndimu remarked that white students "have your own day for TV, and we [black students] have our own day".

The point made above is a typical of an analysis in the cultural studies tradition, which looks for shared meanings in a specific context (as discussed in Chapter 3). However, as I have mentioned, my research was influenced by the uses and gratifications approach too, which has an individual focus, hence the attention paid to the students' perceptions of the pleasures of watching *Generations.*

I would contend, then, that while students can find a variety of pleasures in watching *Generations*, the fact that they are black students together watching a South African soap opera featuring mostly black characters in the context of a white-dominated town, campus, and university residence, means that, even unconsciously, they find that this activity does indeed affirm their identity as black students.

I conclude with a quote, which summarises my findings: "Identities are negotiated in relation to TV and other media material, but in subtle ways..." (Gauntlett and Hill 1999: 139).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

As I found when conducting interviews, interpreting the meanings that people make of soap operas is a complicated process, as they draw on personal experiences and schemas of the real world (Höijer 1998b: 92, Hagen 1998: 65), as well as on identification and the recognition of episodic structure and genre convention.

Interpreting the meanings people make of their *watching* of a particular programme is even more complex. For people contradict themselves, change their minds, vary widely in their responses, and sometimes seem not to notice what is going on around them, let alone reflect on what they see. Yet research in the field of cultural studies looks for the shared meanings of "interpretive communities" (McQuail 1997: 19), and I certainly did find these too.

My own position as an older, white student also cannot be ignored, as theorists in the field urge researchers to be self-reflexive (Morley and Silverstone 1991: 154; Ang 1989: 97). In retrospect, then, I can surmise that some interviewees might have perceived me as one of 'them', and were accordingly careful in their responses, especially to my questions about race.

Nevertheless, I was able to contend that watching certain TV programmes – in this case, *Generations* – is a way of cementing their identities as black students. I assert this at the risk of sounding arrogant, since some students in my study denied that they had noticed racial tensions, or felt that whites were in a position of power on campus. However, enough of these viewers then went on to talk about 'us and them', meaning black students and white students, or to describe racist incidents they had seen or heard of, to convince me that they do indeed perceive racially based inequalities in power on campus. In the end, only one student steadfastly maintained that she had neither seen nor experienced any racial inequalities in her environment.

I also found that the pleasures students gained from watching *Generations* are multifarious, though not unexpected, and vary in intensity. As I discuss in Chapter 5, these range from the enjoyment of light, escapist entertainment (in contrast to the stress of studying), to the enjoyment of the comments and discussion that it engenders, to the pleasure of identifying with successful, powerful characters. These pleasures intersect with students' lived realities in various ways, and tend to have powerful links, I would argue, with their social positioning in a South African campus.

In many respects, then, I found some significant parallels with other studies done in the field, and was left half-wishing that I could have had the resources to undertake a campus-wide study, or even a study of campuses across South Africa, to investigate further who watches what television programmes, and why. My sample was too small to investigate whether social class had an impact on students' television consumption, for instance, and I would have been interested to find out the extent to which gender impacts on this activity, too.

Race and how this socially constructed marker of identity impacts on daily life also remains an abiding interest of mine. Despite South Africa's recent celebrating of 10 years of democracy, it is sometimes astonishing how people still discriminate against each other on the basis of race, and it would be interesting to see further studies done on how South Africans respond to those local TV dramas that espouse the 'rainbow nation' ideology. For at the time of writing this thesis, colleagues and I were marking essays in which students had to analyse South African print media. Several students felt free to opine that the local media is "too black" – this from people who were young children at the time apartheid was abolished.

I mention this to illustrate that old attitudes die hard, and while South Africa's educational system is changing outwardly to keep up with the times, this does not mean that traditionally 'white' universities are comfortable places for black students. Not yet.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

(Some of these questions are influenced by Liebes, T and Katz, E. 1993. The Export of Meaning. Cambridge: The Oxford University Press.)

ABOUT YOU:

Where do you come from?

What do your parents do?

What are you studying?

What language do you speak at home?

ABOUT WATCHING *GENERATIONS:*

How often do you watch *Generations*?

How does watching it fit in with your work? (Do you think of it as a "study break"?)

Did you watch *Generations* before coming to Rhodes?

What is it that you enjoy about *Generations*?

Do you think *Generations* is 'realistic'?

Why, or why not?

Do you think the writers/producers of *Generations* have a message they want to convey in the programme?

Who is your favourite character? Why?

With whom do you discuss *Generations*? What is your relationship with these people?

Do you ever find that you change your mind about the characters after discussing the programme?

At Rhodes, do you watch *Generations* with the same people, or with anyone?

If it's with the same people, how would you describe your relationship with them?

Would you watch *Generations* if it were just you, alone in the common room?

If someone said you couldn't watch *Generations* any more, how would you feel, and why?

Why do you think white students in res don't watch *Generations?*

Why do you think other students don't watch it?

ABOUT RHODES:

[General, open-ended question to begin with, perhaps, like: What is your perception of the way Rhodes students socialise?]

Rhodes has been described as "white-dominated". What do you think of this statement? [Agree, or disagree, and why?]

Do you think there is racial integration in the residence? Why do you say this?

Does your residence feel like home to you? How and why?

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