

**The Representation of 'South Africanness' in the
locally produced television production, *Generations*.**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyse selected episodes of the locally produced television programme *Generations*, in order to identify specific ways in which the programme seeks to forge a South African identity, and in so doing, 'flag' our nationhood as South Africans. These elements of 'South Africanness' are broadly defined as connections to a South African way of life, context, values and experiences.

Generations is a programme produced under South African broadcasting local content provisions. These provisions arise out of the need, *inter alia*, to reflect the identity and multi-cultural nature of South Africa in order to foster 'national identity' and 'national culture'.

These elements of 'South Africanness' are extracted through a genre and ideological analysis of selected sample episodes, taking into consideration the theoretical frameworks of the politics of representation and identity.

The production context of, and representations made, in *Generations*, are found to be situated largely within the context of the South African discourses of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment'.

The analysis concludes that through the various categories of representations of 'South Africanness' in the selected episodes of *Generations*, specific instances of identity, that of national culture and national identity are formed.

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INTRODUCTION

On the night of his electoral victory, following the first democratic election in South Africa after years of racist oligarchy, Nelson Mandela began his victory address in a conventional style: "My fellow South Africans – the people of South Africa" (Guardian 3 May 1994 cited in Billig 1997:97). He went on to describe the new South Africa – "the type of South Africa we can build". From his message it was clear that the country he spoke of had a unique, identifiable and addressable people: "We might have our differences, but we are one people with a common destiny in our rich variety of culture, race and tradition." While the speech might not have been appealing to chauvinistic sentiments it appealed to 'us', the people, the country, the nation. A common national identity was being invoked. While the utterance of such words marked an extraordinary moment, the words themselves were reassuringly banal (Billig 1997: 97).

As Michael Billig notes in his book Banal Nationalism, "Nationhood is still being reproduced: it can still call for the ultimate sacrifices; and daily, its symbols and assumptions are flagged" (1995: 8).

Furthermore, Langer (1989) makes the point that:

....national identity in an established nation is remembered because it is embedded in routines of life, which constantly remind, or 'flag' nationhood. However, these reminders, or 'flaggings', are so numerous that they are such a familiar part of the social environment, that they operate mindlessly, rather than mindfully (cited in Billig 1995: 38).

The South African national government's initiative to unite in diversity, the people of South Africa's varying cultures and identities into a uniquely identifiable South African national identity, has also been instituted in the public broadcasting sector. Broadcasting policy thus dictates that there be a greater concern to produce local programmes about the people of this country and their way of life. Following from this, the aim of this study is primarily to explore the construction and representation of 'South Africanness' in selected episodes of the local soap opera series, *Generations*. It will examine the ways in which a sense of 'national identity' is constructed, and 'flagged', through elements of 'South Africanness', in particular episodes of this daily series.

CHAPTER ONE

LOCAL CONTENT BROADCASTING AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY

For decades the South African broadcasting system existed as one of the most politicised broadcasting systems in the world. A government department set policies, created monopoly conditions and directed the activities of the sole broadcaster. This system disseminated racial stereotypes and fragmented the South African population along racial lines. The content it produced was often political, especially in the coverage of news and political events (White Paper on Broadcasting 1998).

Reforms of the past four years have been built upon legal foundations established just prior to the first democratic elections in 1994. With the transition to democracy, South Africa is addressing years of deliberate fragmentation of the country's people at the hands of the National Party. The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) was established in 1993 with the mandate to reform and regulate the whole of the broadcasting sector. The IBA Act of 1993 put this framework in place.

Despite initiatives to overcome the practices of the past, inequalities continue in the broadcast sector in respect of language, and cultural and educational programming. According to the White Paper on Broadcasting (1998), the South African broadcasting system currently finds itself within a context characterised by the quest to utilise the powerful broadcasting media in the task of fostering a 'national identity' and 'national culture'. This quest is largely instituted by a 'local content' mandate, which refers to the "imposition of license conditions on broadcasters to oblige them to carry broadcasting material which originates from and/or reflects all aspects of public life in their respective countries" (White Paper on Broadcasting 1998: 23).

According to the White Paper on Broadcasting (1998: 18), the reflection of the cultural realities of South Africa decreases at a rate that is proportional to the increase of foreign programmes in the South African broadcasting system.

The more our broadcasting system is defined by programmes about other cultures and from the creative output of others, the less it is defined by programmes about the South African way of life, values and context (White Paper on Broadcasting 1998:18).

Following from this, the White Paper explicitly states that the South African broadcasting system should reflect the identity and multi-cultural nature of South Africa by promoting the entire spectrum of cultural backgrounds in South Africa. This calls for a deliberate policy to ensure that the South African broadcasting system offers programmes about the conditions, life styles, behaviour and cultural heritage of all South Africans (White Paper on Broadcasting 1998: 18). The Green Paper for Public Discussion on Broadcasting Policy (1997: chap 5), stresses world broadcasting policy's great capacity to influence communities' attitudes and to promote national identity. Accordingly, different kinds of policies have been put in place to take into account the power of broadcasting and the role it can play in promoting national culture. Broadcasting policy in South Africa has never until recently displayed any significant interest in South Africa's cultural mix and cultural heritage.

Local content provisions arise out of a need to protect national cultural heritages, attitudes, norms, ways of behaviour and values from undue influence that cultural products from other countries may have on a nation's public life. Local content seeks to protect all of those socio-cultural, political and economic traits that could be characterised as unique to a sovereign nation, and therefore make it distinct from another. Local content is defined differently from one country to another, depending on the dynamics that exist in the cultural industry of a particular country (White Paper on Broadcasting 1998: 24).

Following from the reasons given for local content provisions in the White Paper on Broadcasting, it would appear that it is assumed that audiences will respond in particular ways to local programming, and that 'foreign' broadcasts cannot be taken up positively to build constituents of South African identity. This becomes particularly important when considering genre types (such as the soap opera), which are largely intended to be trans-national products.

But local content also poses a number of challenges to a broadcasting system, the biggest of which is that purchasing programmes from the international market is preferable because the production of local programmes is so costly.

In a submission by the SABC to the IBA in 1994, the SABC acknowledged the critical importance of supporting local production both internally and in the independent sector. According to the SABC, this is necessary if the national public broadcaster is

to help in nurturing cultural identity, develop an informed citizenry and contribute to the growth and maturation of audio-visual industries in South Africa.

As Mpofu (1996:14) notes, a public service broadcaster must reflect national concerns, interests, events and culture. His research indicates that there is a consensus across the broad spectrum of South African society on the need for a public service broadcaster which is nationally reflective. Accompanying these sentiments, are strong arguments articulating the need for the SABC to forge a South African national identity.

The South African broadcasting system thus finds itself in a position in which it is expected to reflect the identity and multi-cultural nature of South Africa, in line with the democratic ethos underpinned by the constitution, through locally produced productions. The challenge facing the broadcasting system is to locate South Africa's place in the world and the African region and to move away from previous 'Eurocentric' perspectives.

Regulations specifying that local product should reflect indigenous characteristics exist in the international context. In Canada, the government provides financial and other incentives to ensure that a local production exhibits features or tone or attitude or subject matter that will make it 'Canadian'. The goals of this policy is firstly aimed at promoting national culture, and secondly to promote infrastructural development in the film and television industries (Mpofu 1996: 33).

Generations was first screened by the SABC in 1992 as a result of the need to prioritise locally produced programming. The SABC gave Mfundu Vundla (subsequently chairperson of the Independent Producers Organisation), the go-ahead to produce a series which symbolically represented aspects of South African society. This resulted in South Africa's first, and for a long time, only local 'soap opera' on SABC. Over the past few years, *Generations* has developed into what has been seen by some as a uniquely South African soap, which has attracted a large and loyal audience.

In April 1998, it changed from being screened once weekly, to being screened daily on SABC 1's 8:00pm prime time slot. It now has an average of 11 million dedicated viewers. On any particular day *Generations* falls within the top five programmes watched on SABC 1, and is in close contention for the number one slot with such

popular overseas soaps as *'Bold and the Beautiful'* and *'Days of our Lives'* as well as with local productions *'Lisenethini'* and *'Izwi Labantu'* (Mpeki, B – SABC Research, September 1998).

The series has been sold to seven sub-Saharan countries and negotiations are underway with France, New Zealand and Scandinavia all of which have expressed interest.

Aim and Methodology of Study

The aim of the study is to analyse selected episodes of *Generations* in order to identify specific ways in which the programme seeks to forge a South African identity and in so doing 'flag' our nationhood. This will be done by describing the ways in which imagery and 'common-sense understandings' which inform our sense of national identity, is created. For the purpose of this study, 'South Africanness' is defined as connections to a South African way of life (and culture), context and values which allows us to form a sense of self and thus construct a South African identity. This definition takes into consideration that identities are formed and transformed *inter alia* through media representations (in this case the formula of the soap opera), rather than being something with which we are born. My working definition of 'South Africanness' further includes reference to elements and symbols which help us make sense of both who we are, as well as our experiences as South African citizens.

The foundation of this study is grounded in theories of representation and identity, and thus the first chapter is dedicated to a review of literature with regard to these two concepts. The second chapter is dedicated to the social context of *Generations*. This will be done by firstly considering typical South African discourses such as the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' which have emerged post-1994 to describe the need for the emergence of an African identity in the broader context, and closer to home, the building of a new South African nation and the formation of a new South African national identity and national culture. The chapter also considers the discourses' origins in theorisations of African philosophy, culture and thought. The second part of the chapter sketches the production context of *Generations*, as an instance of local content programming, with an emphasis on the ideas expressed by SABC 1's General Manager, Eric Nhlapo, Head Scriptwriter for *Generations*, Elsje Stark and the programmes' executive

producer, Mfundi Vundla in interviews conducted with them in October 1998, about local content production and the representation of a South African nation and South African identity.

The discussion of the representation of the 'black' subject in Chapter 3 arises out of the discussion in the preceding chapter in which the importance of portraying 'black' South Africans in a different light from the way in which they have previously been portrayed on South African television, becomes evident. Furthermore, it would seem that what is largely involved in determining what constitutes a South African identity, is a concern with 'black' South Africans. Chapter four briefly describes the formula of the soap opera and its relation to the representation of identities. This means that my analysis of the soap opera *Generations*, will be concerned with the questions of representation at the level of story form, including different types of story type or genre, and questions of narrative organisation (i.e. the way in which the story unfolds), since these are factors which bear on the pleasure-producing, representational and signifying work of fictional forms and the subject-positions they create.

Since *Generations* is primarily a soap opera, the texts will be analysed in terms of this particular genre in the fifth chapter. The sample of texts consists of twenty-four episodes recorded from SABC 1 over a six week period from the 28 September 1998 until the 6 November 1998. The textual analysis entails a close analysis of character formation, narrative structure, use of space, time and location in terms of its genre. According to Kellner (1995:56), an analysis of generic codes, their dominant images, discourses and their formal aesthetic elements, all manifest certain political and ideological positions. Therefore this will lead me to consider a more ideological level of analysis in terms of the broader social and cultural context (as dealt with in Chapter 2) in which the representations operate. Of importance are the meanings and ideas that are generated and which provide the resources for the construction of South African identities. The generation of these meanings and ideas are analysed in terms of the elements of 'South Africanness'; the representation of 'black' South Africans; the narratives of a South African generation; and the representation of elements which establish South Africans, and South African local programming, as 'different' from any other nation.

In order to analyse instances of 'South Africanness' within particular episodes of *Generations*, it is necessary to explore firstly the politics of representation, and secondly, that of identity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I. REPRESENTATION

In the most simplistic of explanations, the term representation refers to the way images and language actively construct meanings according to sets of conventions shared by and familiar to makers and audiences. Assumptions, 'common knowledge', common-sense, general knowledge, widespread beliefs and popular attitudes are all part of the context of meanings within which representations are produced and circulate. In this system, there is a hierarchy in which some meanings come to be dominant and others marginalised (Swanson in Lusted 1991: 123). Therefore, representation also raises questions about power i.e. how and why some meanings are preferred. All signifying practices that produce meaning involve relations of power. This includes the power to define who is included and who is excluded.

Representation includes the signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced and which position us as subjects. Representations produce meanings through which we can make sense of our experience and who we are. It could be suggested that these symbolic systems create the possibilities of what we are, and what we can become. Discourse and systems of representations construct places from which individuals can position themselves and from which they can speak (Woodward 1997: 36).

Representation, Meaning and Language

The concept of representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture. This is largely because representation connects meaning and language to culture. Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It involves both the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things (Hall 1997: 15). What then does the process of representation involve and how does it work?

According to Hall (1997: 17), representation is the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds, through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events.

There are two processes or systems of representation. Firstly, the system by which all sorts of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of concepts or mental representations which we carry around in our heads. Without them, we could not interpret the world meaningfully at all. This is because meaning depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our thoughts which can stand for or 'represent' the world, enabling us to refer to things both inside and outside our heads.

A second system of representation consists not of individual concepts, but of different ways of organising, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them. For example, we use the principles of similarity and difference to establish relationships between concepts or to distinguish them from one another. Thus meaning depends on the relationship between things in the world – people, objects, and events both real and fictional – and the conceptual system, which we can operate as mental representations of them (Hall 1997: 17-18).

It is obvious that the conceptual map that one person carries around in his/her head may differ totally from one carried by someone else. This would mean that their respective interpretations of the world would also differ. Each of us in all probability interprets and understands the world in a unique and individual way. However, we are able to communicate because we share the same conceptual maps and thus make sense of, or interpret the world in roughly similar ways. That is indeed what it means when we say we 'belong to the same culture' and/or that we are South African. Because we interpret the world in roughly similar ways, we are able to build up a shared culture of meanings and thus construct a social world which we inhabit together. That is why 'culture' is sometimes defined in terms of 'shared meanings or shared conceptual maps' (Hall 1997: 18).

The relationship between 'things', concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language and it is thus the process which links these three elements together which Hall (1997:19) refers to as 'representation'.

Theories of Representation

There are broadly speaking three approaches to explaining how representation of meaning works through language. These three approaches are called the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist or constructivist approaches. These approaches attempt to answer the questions, “where do meanings come from?” and “how can we tell the ‘true’ meaning of a word or image?”

In the reflective approach, meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world. Language functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world. There would seem to be some truth to this mimetic theory, in that language works by simply reflecting or imitating the truth that is already there and fixed in the world, and since visual signs do bear some relationship to the shape and texture of the objects which they represent. However, there are many words, sounds and images which we fully understand, but which are entirely fictional or fanciful and refer to worlds which are wholly imaginary. Thus the second approach to meaning argues this opposite case. It holds that it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language. Words mean what the author intends them to mean. This is called the intentional approach. While we as individuals do use language to convey or communicate things which are special or unique to us, to our way of seeing the world, this approach is flawed in that we cannot be the sole or unique source of meanings in language, since that would mean that we could express ourselves in entirely private languages. The essence of language is communication and that in turn depends on shared linguistic conventions and shared codes. Thus our private intended meanings, however personal to us, have to enter into the rules, codes and conventions of language to be shared and understood. This means that our private thoughts have to negotiate with all other meanings for words or images which have been stored in language, which our use of the language system will inevitably trigger into action (Hall 1997: 25).

The third approach recognises this public social character of language. It acknowledges that neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning into language. Things don’t mean – we construct meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs. Hence it is called the constructivist or constructionist approach to meaning in language. While constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world, it argues that it is not the material world

which conveys meaning, but rather it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts (Hall 1997: 25).

How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group and how that group is represented in the sense of being spoken for and on behalf of - these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, as well as how they see their place in society and their claim to the rights of society. How we are seen, determines in part how we are treated. In turn, how we treat others, is based on how we see them. Such seeing comes from representation (Dyer 1993:1).

Representations are presentations. This means that representation entails the use of codes and conventions of the available cultural forms of presentation. Cultural forms set the wider terms of limitation and possibility for the (re)presentation of particularities and it is necessary to understand the way in which the latter are caught up in the former, in order to understand why something gets represented in the way it does. Failing to understand the way images function in terms of narrative, genre or spectacle, leads to an incomplete understanding as to why they turn out the way they do.

According to Dyer (1993), one apprehends reality only through representations of reality, through texts, discourses and images. There is no such thing as unmediated access to reality and it is only through representation that we can see reality.

The complexity of representation lies in its embeddedness in cultural forms, its unequal but not monolithic relations of production and reception, its tense and unfinished, unfinishable relation to the reality to which it refers and which affects it. The complexity further lies in its comprehensiveness (Dyer 1993: 4).

The relationship between the media and representation lies in the notion that the media can be conceived of as a set of 'representations', an ensemble of texts. These texts are important because of their ubiquity and because there is widespread belief that they contribute to the production of our 'common-sense' understandings of the world (in the case of this thesis, what it means to be South African). As such, media texts are thought to affect, in a very real sense, the way in which we understand ourselves and others and the way in which we lead our lives. Some media theorists work from the assumption that representations at least partially,

construct the social fabric of people's lives. As mentioned earlier, the reason that representations are considered such an important issue, is that they do not entail a straightforward presentation of the world and the relationships between people in it (Briggs and Cobley 1998: 278).

Representation implies the active work of selecting, and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of already existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean. Representation as the "active labour of making things mean", necessarily embraces ideas and values. It follows then, that representations are ideological. However, ideology operates beyond the realm of representation, since it also occupies the space of people's concrete experience, donating a sense of coherence, consistency and 'naturalness' to our lived existence (Briggs and Cobley 1998: 278).

Ideology, it is argued, functions to 'naturalise' our actual modes of living and working. In so doing, it serves to perpetuate and extend existing power relations which may serve the interests of some at the expense of others. Therefore, ideology frequently attempts to make that which is historically and culturally determined not only appear to be, but also be experienced as, the product of 'human nature'.

Ideology also underpins and endows with meaning, the constituent components of our identities and what these entail. That is: what it is to 'belong' to a particular nation, social class, age, 'race', gender, sexuality group etc. Thus ideology precedes media representations but it also charges them with the task of disseminating nutshell versions of the complex configurations of our identities. Media representations reduce, shrink, condense and select/reject aspects of intricate social relations in order to represent them as fixed, 'natural', 'obvious' and ready to consume. Media representations as the bearers of ideology, sometimes trade in stereotypes. Just as there are many possible competing ideologies, so too representations offer a multitude of stereotypes and thus many stereotypes conflict with our own experiences and ideologies. In fact, representation in general can be considered to be ideological, because the very processes of selection and condensation serve not only to stereotype, but also to exclude many features and ways of understanding the social world (Briggs and Cobley 1998: 279).

For these reasons it is easier to understand why meaning, language and representation are such critical elements in the study of culture. To belong to a

culture is to belong to roughly the same conceptual and linguistic universe, to know how concepts and ideas translate into different languages, and how language can be interpreted to refer to or reference the world. To share these things is to see the world from within the same conceptual map and to make sense of it through the same language systems (Hall 1997: 22).

Media representation not only acts to tell other people about 'us' (i.e. South Africans), but also tell us about other people and tells us what it means to be ourselves (South African). They therefore play out the repertoire of some identities extensively (such as what it is to be able-bodied or middle class) but conversely, can also play out the repertoire of others in a very limited way (what it is to be lesbian or gay). This leads me to consider a second body of literature, that of the politics of identity.

II IDENTITY

The question of identity is currently being vigorously debated in social theory. In essence, the argument is that the old identities which stabilised the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as unified subjects.

According to Hall (1992b: 275), three very different conceptions of identity can be distinguished. These conceptions arise out of the Enlightenment, sociology and post-modernity respectively. The enlightenment subjects held a very individualist conception of the subject. Hence, the enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action. The subject's centre consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born and unfolded with it. This inner core remained essentially the same throughout the individual's existence and was seen to be continuous or 'identical' with itself. This essential centre of the self was a person's identity.

A second sociological perspective held that the subject reflected the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness of this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient. This inner core was seen to be formed in relation to 'significant others' who mediated values, meanings and symbols to subjects – the culture of the world he/she inhabited. This is an 'interactive' conception of identity and self, since identity is formed in the 'interaction' between

self and society. It is acknowledged that the subject still has an inner core or essence, but it is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds 'outside' and the identities which they offer. This conception of identity thus bridges the gap between the personal (inside) and the public (outside) worlds (Hall 1992b: 276).

The fact that we project 'ourselves' into these cultural identities, at the same time internalising their meanings and values, making them 'part of us', helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world. Previously it was held that identity stabilises both the subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable. However, these are exactly what are in post-modern times, said to be shifting.

The subject which previously experienced a unified and stable identity is becoming fragmented and composed of several contradictory or unresolved identities previously thought to be a single identity. Hall (1992b: 277) argues that

..the identities which composed the social landscapes 'out there', and which ensured our subjective conformity with the objective 'needs' of the culture, are breaking up as a result of structural and institutional change.

The very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become open-ended, variable and problematic. This produces the post-modern subject, conceptualised as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity (Hall 1992b: 275-277).

Identity becomes movable. This means that it is formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways in which we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. Identity is thus historically defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times. These identities are not unified around a coherent 'self'. The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is thus a fantasy. As systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, so we are confronted with a multiplicity of possible identities any one of which we could identify with, even if only temporarily (Hall 1992b: 277).

The issue of identity relates to the character of change in late modernity, particularly the process of identification. Modern societies are ones of constant, rapid and permanent change. These characteristics distinguish it from traditional societies in

which, according to Anthony Giddens (1990), the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of generations. In contrast, modernity is defined as the experience of living with rapid, extensive and continuous change. It is a highly reflexive form of life in which "social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices and thus constitutively altering their character" (Giddens 1990: 37-38).

Woodward (1997:29) argues that in today's world identities are forged through the marking of difference. This marking of difference takes place both through the symbolic systems of representation and through forms of social exclusion. In social relations these forms of symbolic and social differences are established, in least in part, through the operation of classificatory systems. A classificatory system applies a principle of difference to a population in such a way as to be able to divide them and all their characteristics into at least two opposing groups: us/them and self/other.

The ways in which culture sets boundaries and marks differences are crucial to our understanding of identities. Difference is what marks out one identity from another and establishes distinctions, often in the form of oppositions. The marking of difference is thus the key component in any system of classification (Woodward 1997: 30). Thus determining what makes *Generations* uniquely South African is to identify instances of representations which mark 'our' identity as different from 'other' identities. Coupled with this of course, is the question – what is the narrative/s of a new South African generation?

Hall (1997) believes that the social order is maintained through binary oppositions in the creation of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', as well as through the construction of different categories within the social structure where it is symbolic systems and culture which mediate classification. Social control is exercised through producing categories whereby individuals who transgress, are relegated to 'outsider' status, according to the social system in operation. Symbolic classification is thus intimately related to the social order. The identity of the 'outsider' is produced in relation to the 'insider' (Woodward 1997:33).

Furthermore, according to Woodward (1997:33), identities are constructed in the way in which they are formed in relation to other identities i.e. in relation to what they are not. The notion of difference is integral to an understanding of the cultural constructions of identities. Difference can be construed negatively, as the exclusion

and marginalisation of those who are defined as 'other' or as the outsiders. On the other hand, it can be celebrated as a source of diversity, heterogeneity and hybridity, where the recognition of change and difference is seen as enriching (Woodward 1997:35) – in the South African context the instances of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' are viewed in this way.

Difference is marked through symbolic representation which gives meaning to social relations. Representation as a cultural process establishes individual and collective identities and symbolic systems. However the exploration of difference does not tell us why people invest in the positions they do, nor why there is such personal investment in difference. Why then, do we invest in identities?

Woodward (1997:39) is of the opinion that we invest in identities because of our subjectivity. Subjectivity includes our sense of self and it involves the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions which constitute our sense of 'who we are' and the feelings which are brought to different positions within culture. However, we experience our subjectivity in a social context where language and culture give meaning to our experience of ourselves and where we adopt an identity. In turn, the positions which we take up and identify with, constitute our identities. Thus, the concept of subjectivity allows for an exploration of the feelings which are brought and the personal investment which is made in positions of identity and of the reasons why we are attached to particular identities.

Global changes and shifts in political and economic structures and allegiance in the contemporary world foreground identity questions, and the struggle to assert and maintain national and ethnic identities. Conflicting identities are located within the social, political and economic changes to which they contribute. The identities that are constructed by culture, are contested in particular ways in the contemporary, post-colonial world, but this is a historical period characterised by the break up of what are reconstructed as old certainties and the production of new possibilities. This site of struggle and contestation is the cultural construction of identities.

This leads to the consideration of two specific instances of identity formation, that of national culture and that of a national identity.

National Culture

National culture is a distinctly modern form. The allegiance and identification which, in pre-modern age or in more traditional societies, were given to tribe, people, religion and region, became gradually subsumed beneath what Gellner (1983) calls the 'political roof' of the nation state, and which thus became a powerful source of meanings for modern cultural identities (Hall 1992b:292).

National cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions, but of symbols and representations. While national culture is bounded by territorial confines of a given nation-state, the national characteristics are not given. National cultures are not simple repositories of shared symbols to which the entire population stands in identical relation. Rather, they are to be approached as sites of contestation in which competitions of definitions takes place. The national culture is a repository, *inter alia*, of classificatory systems. It allows 'us' to define ourselves against 'them' (as suggested by Woodward, 1997) – understood as those beyond the boundaries of the nation (Schlesinger 1991:173-174).

A national culture is a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises both our actions and our conception of ourselves. National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation', with which we can identify. These meanings are contained in the stories which are told about it, the memories which connect its present with its past and images which are constructed of it.

Culture shapes identity through giving it meaning to experience, making it possible to opt for one mode of subjectivity. We are constrained not only by the range of possibilities which culture offers (the variety of symbolic representations), but also by social relations.

Hall (1992b:293), has suggested some elements to explain the way in which the narrative of the national culture is told. Firstly, there exists the narrative of the nation. This includes what is told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media and popular culture. These provide a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenario, historical events, national symbols and rituals which stand for, or represent shared experience, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation. As members of such an 'imagined community', we see ourselves in our mind's eye, sharing this narrative. Investing in this kind of identity lends significance and

importance to our existence, connecting our everyday lives with a national destiny that pre-existed us and will outlive us.

Secondly, there is an emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness. National identity is represented as primordial. This means that it is there in the very nature of things. The essentials of the national culture remains unchanged through all the vicissitudes of history. It is there from birth, unified and continuous. Hall (1992b: 294-295) has argued that the discourse of national culture is thus not as modern as it appears to be. National culture constructs identities which are ambiguously placed between past and future.

Hall (1992b:297) argues that a national culture has never been simply a point of allegiance, bonding and symbolic identification. It is also a structure of cultural power. Most modern nations consist of disparate cultures which are only unified by a lengthy process of violent conquest. Nations are also always composed of different social classes, gender and ethnic groups.

Thus instead of thinking of national culture as unified, Hall (1992b) suggests that we should think of it as constituting a discursive device which represents difference as unified or identity. They are cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences, and 'unified' only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power. Despite these considerations, national identities continue to be represented as unified. One way of unifying them has been to represent them as the expression of the underlying culture of 'one people' (South Africa is one such example). Ethnicity is the term given to cultural features such as, *inter alia*, language, religion, custom, traditions and feeling for 'place' shared by a people. Modern nations are seldom composed of only one people, one culture or ethnicity – but rather are cultural hybrids.

No matter how different its members may be in terms of class, gender or race, a national culture seeks to unify them into one cultural identity, to represent them as all belonging to the same great national family. But is national identity a unifying identity of its kind, which cancels or subsumes cultural difference?

Aspects of national culture however, pull it in a direction which questions how it functions as a system of representation, and whether national identities are really as unified and homogenous as they represent themselves to be. National identity thus becomes what Anderson (1983) has termed an 'imagined community'.

National Identity

National identity is generally understood to be the shared identity of the naturalised inhabitants of a particular political-geographical space i.e. a particular nation (Higson 1998: 354). But how is that identity generated? How do members of a particular nation come to take on that identity?

National identity has become an all-purpose catchword at the centre of contemporary discussion of the relationship between the production and consumption of culture and the constitution of the state. Television (specifically particular programmes) is ascribed a major role in "developing and nurturing awareness of the rich variety of common cultural and national heritage" and in promoting the recognition of a 'common destiny' (Schlesinger 1991: 41).

National identity is constructed within a definite social space i.e. territorial and juridico-political givens. The social space occupied by the nation-state does not resolve the problem of how identity is constructed. It merely sets a limit upon its possible elaborations.

The argument is that national identities are not things we are born with. Rather they are formed and transformed within and in relation to representation (Hall 1992b:291). We only know what it is to be 'South African' because of the way in which 'South Africanness' has come to be represented, as a set of meanings, by South African national culture. It follows then that a nation is not only a political entity, but something which produces meanings – a system of cultural representation.

According to Bloom (1990:52), national identity does not simply exist because a group is externally identified as a nation or told that they are a nation. For national identity to exist, the people *en masse* must have gone through the actual psychological process of making that general identification with the nation.

National identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols – have internalised the symbols of the nation – so that they may act as one psychological group when there is a threat to, or the possibility of enhancement of, these symbols of national identity (Bloom, 1990: 52).

Furthermore, for the individual to internalise the symbols of the nation, the nation in one representational or symbolic form or another, direct or indirect, must be such that

it actually benefits the individual, in terms of psychological security, to make an identification with the nation (Bloom 1990: 59).

Once the mass of people have made an identification with their nation state, then family and other social groupings will tend to socialise new generations into that same identification. People participate in the idea of a nation as represented in its national culture.

Schlesinger (1991:153) argues that national identity is a specific form of collective identity. Collective identity relates to “collective memory through which the contemporary group recognises itself through a common past, remembrance, commemoration, interpretation and reinterpretation”. This means that national identity is an identity constituted at a given strategic level of a society. An analysis of *Generations* may indicate that these elements may be used to form an idea of a South African identity.

There is an ongoing need for nation building. It is not a finite process in that it is not just that every new nation requires socialising into the national community. It is also that during the lives of individuals, the constellation of socio-economic and political realities are constantly changing. As the identification imperative is always seeking to maximise psychological security, new identification and new loyalties may come about (Bloom 1990:71).

Imagined Communities

Anderson (1983), argues that the difference between nations lies in the different ways in which they are imagined. How this nation is imagined relies on the kinds of representational strategies deployed to construct our common-sense views of national belonging or identity. His argument is that our understanding of national identity must also include the idea we have of it. Since it would not be possible to know all those who share our identity, we must have a shared idea of what it constitutes. The difference between national identities therefore lies in the different ways in which they are imagined (Woodward 1997:18).

What is of particular relevance is how the ‘fragmented’ subject is placed in terms of cultural identities, especially that of national identity. In the modern world, the national cultures into which we are born are one of the principal sources of cultural identity. Definitions of one's identity as being English, Chinese or German, are all

metaphorical since these identities are not literally imprinted into our genes. However, we do think of them as being part of our essential natures. Ernest Gellner (1983:6) believes that without a sense of national identification, the modern subject would experience a deep sense of subjective loss. He adds that while having a nation is not an inherent attribute to humanity, it has now come to appear as such.

Nationhood

Ernest Gellner (1983) has written that in today's world man (sic) must have a nationality and it would seem natural to have such an identity. In his writings his main objective is to explain the origins of nationalism. In established nations people do not generally forget their national identity. National identity is not only something which is thought natural to possess, but also something natural to remember (Billig 1995: 37).

Broadly speaking, he argues that the formation of nation-states is the inevitable outcome of processes of centralisation by the demands of industrialisation, with its concomitant complex division of labour. The impact of industrial forms of production it is argued, results in the reorganisation of earlier, agrarian forms of social organisation. This process Gellner argues, brings about an inevitable "deep adjustment in the relationship between polity and culture", that is 'nationalism'. The new formation entails "the organisation of human groups into large, centrally educated, culturally homogenous groups" with the consequences that "modern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or a faith, but to a culture. State and culture therefore becomes linked" (1983:35).

Gellner's theory of nationalism has been classified as a language theory of nationalism, since language is seen as the decisive element in any culture, expressing clearly the collective personality of the group. It follows that nationalism is primarily a linguistic movement and that differences in language will, under certain conditions, produce strife and lead to national secession.

People in established nations overlook the routine flagging of nationhood. The flags melt into the background, as 'our' particular world is experienced as 'the world'. However it is not merely the unwaved flags which have evaded attention. Even the saluted ones can seem so routinely familiar – so near to home – that they are ignored (Billig 1995:50). So why do we, in established democratic nations, not forget

'our' national identity? The short answer is that 'we' are constantly reminded that 'we' live in nations: 'our' identity is continually being flagged.

Banal Nationalism

According to Billig (1995:5), nationalism is often associated with those who struggle to create new states (as South Africa is), or with extreme right-wing politics. Those in established nations – at the centre of things – are led to see nationalism as the property of others, not of 'us'.

Daily, countries such as the USA, UK and France, are reproduced as nations and their citizenry, as nationals. These nations are reproduced within a wider world of nations. For such daily reproduction to occur, one might hypothesise that a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices must also be reproduced. Moreover, this complex must be reproduced in a banally mundane way, for the world of nations is the everyday world, the familiar terrain of contemporary times.

The ideological habits by which 'our' nations are reproduced as nations, are unnamed and, thereby, unnoticed. For this reason Billig (1995) has introduced the term 'banal nationalism' to cover the ideological habits (a notion expressed by Briggs and Copley 1998: 279) which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced. It is argued that these habits are not removed from everyday life, as some observers have supposed. One point that also needs stressing is that banal does not imply benign. It would be wrong to assume that 'banal nationalism' is 'benign' because it seems to possess a reassuring normality, or because it appears to lack the violent passions of the extreme right (Billig 1995:7).

According to Billig (1995:7-8), to call nationalism an identity or a tie, explains little in itself. As far as nationality is concerned, one needs to look for the reasons why people in the contemporary world do not forget their nationality. He further adds that to have a national identity is to possess ways of talking about nationhood. From this it follows that having a national identity also involves being situated in the world of nations. And, only if people believe that they have national identities, will such homelands, and the world of national homelands, be reproduced.

Thus Billig (1995:10) is of the opinion that nationalism is more than merely one form of identity amongst countless others. It is a way of thinking or ideological

consciousness. In this consciousness, nations, national identities and national homelands appear as 'natural'. Most crucially, the 'world of nations' is represented as a 'natural', moral order. The imagining of 'us', 'them', homelands and so on, must be habitual or unimaginatively accomplished; yet it also provides a complex way of talking about the world.

Ways of talking, or ideological discourses, do not develop in social vacuums, but they are related to forms of life. In this respect, 'identity', if it is to be understood as a form of talking, is also to be understood as a form of life. The saluted and unsaluted flags are not stimuli that evoke 'identity-reactions' – they belong to the forms of life which constitute what could be called national identities (Billig 1995: 60). Nationalism is more than a feeling of identity and more than an interpretation or theory of the world. It is also a way of being within the world of nations. If 'our' nation is to be imagined in all its peculiarity, it must be imagined as a nation amongst other nations. The consciousness of national identity normally assumes an international context, which itself needs to be imagined every bit as much as does the national community. Thus, foreigners are not simply 'others', symbolising the obverse of 'us': 'they' are also like 'us' in that they are part of the imagined universal code of nationhood.

CHAPTER TWO

SOUTH AFRICAN DISCOURSES AND THE PRODUCTION CONTEXT OF LOCAL CONTENT PROGRAMMING

The new constitution in 1994, provided the basis for the establishment of a national identity and culture for South Africa (in contrast to the Apartheid doctrine of dividing people), something which has never been achieved in the past. Nation building efforts and especially forging a national identity became priorities for the government of the day. Subsequently broadcasting became a vehicle for promoting the ideals of a unitary South African nation, and to represent a national identity that the entire country could identify with.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, broadcasting in the new South Africa is dedicated to the reflection of a South African identity and the country's multi-cultural character, largely through a local content mandate. It aims to promote the entire spectrum of cultural backgrounds in South Africa. Newly produced programmes strive to tell stories about South African conditions, life styles, behaviour and to represent the cultural heritage of all South Africans. The need to forge a South African identity through the broadcast media has been clearly articulated in various policy documents. South African producers are faced with the challenge of locating South Africa's place in the world and the African region, and to move away from previous 'Eurocentric' perspectives.

In addition to the changes in policy perspective, a new South African discourse has emerged since 1994, encouraging South Africans to recognise the different cultures within the country, and in recognising diversity, form a unitary South African nation with a distinct South African identity. Phrases such as the 'rainbow nation', the 'African Renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' (and the extension thereof 'affirmative action') are some of the notions which have been coined to describe the need for the emergence of an 'African' identity in the broader context. And closer to home, the building of a new South African nation assumes the formation of a new South African national identity and national culture. Hall (1992b) notes that no matter how different its members may be in terms of class, gender or race, the search for a national culture seeks to unify the nation into one cultural identity, to represent them as all belonging to the same great national family. This is the case in South Africa.

SOUTH AFRICAN DISCOURSES AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

i) The Rainbow Nation

The idea of the 'rainbow nation', used in South Africa shortly after the 1994 elections by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (following Jesse Jackson) was presumably meant to describe all the people of South Africa, in their cultural diversity, as having enough in common to work towards a common goal of building a new country.

The idea of the 'rainbow nation' plays an important role in popular imagery, but the ANC warn that when used to express the character of South African society as one made up of 'black' Africans who pay allegiance to Africa, 'whites' who pay allegiance to Europe, 'Indians' who pay allegiance to India and 'coloureds' somewhere in the undefined middle of the rainbow, it can become problematic, for it would fail to recognise the healthy osmosis among the various groups in the process towards the emergence of a new South African nation (Mda 1997).

Mda (1997) notes that as South Africa moves into the year of elections, the euphoria born in April 1994 has somewhat dissipated, and the rainbow has frayed at the edges for a while. Despite this assertion, she expresses the opinion that the concept of a rainbow is essential in the South Africa of today, as an acknowledgement of the existence of all South Africans – their memories, identities, knowing the past and their rights to be here and to benefit equally from the bounty of the country (sentiments expressed by Schlesinger (1991:153) on the subject of the formation of a collective identity).

Without the ideal that is enshrined in the concept of the 'rainbow nation', the dream of a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society will remain a 'pipe' dream.

ii) The African Renaissance

On May 8 1996, the then South African Deputy President Thabo Mbeki made the following statement in the National Assembly - "I am an African" in his opening address to the house. While sending ripples of consternation in some circles of South African society, and creating elation and enthusiasm in others, he went on to describe the ideals of an 'African renaissance'. Usually it is interpreted as referring to the best of all possible futures for Africa: a glorious world where all economic,

political and social shackles have been thrown off - and an Africa which has confidently taken control of her own future, on equal terms with the rest of the world.

Professor of Medical Research at Witwatersrand University, William Makgoba, has spoken and written quite vehemently during the past few years about his ideas on the 'African Renaissance' and the 'African identity'. He writes that there are three interrelated issues that have been emerging in Africa over the past 40 years and which are trends that are dominating or evolving from African society as we approach the end of the twentieth century. They are the concepts of 'African', the 'African identity' and the 'African renaissance' (Makgoba 1998b:85). His explanations of who the 'African' is and what constitutes the 'African identity' will be taken up later in the chapter, however it is worth noting here that according to him being 'African' gives meaning to the strategic vision of the 'African renaissance'. And the renaissance is about ridding Africa of its sad colonial and apartheid history and legacy, and turning adversity into success. This is why according to him, the renaissance is such an important national project.

According to *Business Times* journalist Frank Meintjies (13 September 1998) the 'African renaissance' is a clever but necessary device. Meintjies (1998) is of the opinion that the 'African renaissance' relates to what South Africans do. Its focus would seem to be a kind of psychological and cultural empowerment that motivates useful social and economic action. The 'African' part of the phrase indicates a clear sense of place in a highly globalised world. On the other hand, 'renaissance' speaks of growth, renewal, liberation and an exploration of new ideas.

For many, the concept is open to misinterpretation, particularly by those who equate African assertion with an obsessive fight against Eurocentricity. Some critiques view it as backward-looking, with a focus on an idealised rural, tribal existence and customs. Is it a nationalistic smokescreen to sidetrack the working class and the poor, asks Meintjies? (1998). However, he is of the opinion that the renaissance idea is useful, firstly because "it moves us beyond the ghastly rainbow nation concept which is static, inanely happy-go-lucky and decontextualised". Secondly, the talk of a renaissance opens up a place for debate and imagination for all of us. The 'African Renaissance' seeks positively to situate us as 'Africans' in a fast-changing and competitive modern world.

Thus the 'African renaissance' encourages players to locate themselves in a new framework of consciousness. It challenges South Africans to take greater note of

their home continent, its rhythms and sounds, as well as lessons and potentials. It invokes a link between South African intellectuals and their counterparts in the rest of Africa.

The new African world which the 'African Renaissance' seeks to build, is one of democracy, peace and stability, sustainable development and a better life for the people, non-racism and non-sexism, equality among the nations and a just and democratic system of international governance.

iii) Black Economic Empowerment

Following from the economic ideals enshrined in the concept of the 'African renaissance', a third discourse which has become a hot topic in post-apartheid South Africa is 'black economic empowerment'. This term is used to describe the involvement of 'black' people at all levels of business management in South Africa.

A sign of 'black economic empowerment' has been the appointment of high profile 'black' personalities to senior positions both in parastatal organisations and the corporate world (a form of affirmative action). However as a result of the high demand for qualified 'black' managers and professionals, salary packages have risen fast and there has been very high job mobility.

Sikhakhane (1998:50) writes that 'black empowerment' has never been about enriching every 'black' man and woman. Rather it is a process aimed at redressing the imbalances in the ownership and control of South Africa's economic resources. It is and has been about creating opportunities and paving the way for 'blacks' to enter business. The notion that in terms of African values, Africans should not become rich unless they benefit the rest of their communities at the same time, Sikhakhane (1998:50) says is nonsensical, since even before the white man set foot in Africa, there were disparities in wealth or ownership, and African societies had their own exclusive and upwardly mobile elites.

Many countries have had to address the problems of a disadvantaged minority - South Africa's problem concerns the majority. South Africa is now making a proactive and conscious effort to redress the disadvantages and imbalances of the past.

While the above mentioned discourses may all seem to have come about in recent years, the ideas of Africa and 'Africans' taking hold of their own destiny are all rooted in the broader context of theorisations of African philosophy, culture and thought. As a result, the identity envisioned for South Africa is largely contextualised within and gets its meaning from theorisations of what constitutes an 'African' identity. But closer to home, it still leaves many sceptics questioning the origins of this identity, asking who is the South African and whether a national identity and national culture is important during a time when world citizenry is becoming increasingly important as we move into the 21st century, and also since the past has shown that the assertion of a single identity has precluded the assertion of other identities (a sentiment expressed by Woodward, 1997).

In terms of broadcasting, television has been given the task of contributing to the creation and development of a national identity and culture by telling South African stories and representing the South African lifestyle, culture etc. Van Poecke and van den Bulck (1993) in their article National Language, Identity, and Culture in the Light of the Increasing Globalisation of the Media Culture, also questions whether in the future, people will find national identity just as important as it has been in the past, particularly in view of the fact that we live in a consumption and media culture in which industries are becoming more and more trans-national. Products offered are intended for the global market and these products are increasingly bearing an American signature (1993:5).

Appiah (1996:12) writes that the anxiety of cosmopolitanism is one that should be expelled, arguing that the estimate of the rate of disappearance of cultural homogeneity is exaggerated. While he admits that within the global system of cultural exchange, processes of homogenisation are going on and certain forms of human life are disappearing, nevertheless, neither of these phenomena is particularly new, but their range and speed probably is. As forms of culture disappear, new forms are created, and they are created locally, which means that they have exactly the regional inflections that the cosmopolitan celebrates. The disappearance of old cultural forms is consistent with a rich variety of forms of human life, just because new cultural forms, which differ from each other, are being created all the time as well (Appiah 1996:13).

So if fostering a national identity is indeed important for South Africa, how are we to fully understand what this means and entails? Appiah (1992) draws on the writings of African and African-American thinkers to explore the possibilities and pitfalls of an African identity in the late twentieth century. At the heart of these debates on African identity are the seminal works of politicians, creative writers and philosophers from Africa and her Diaspora.

According to Chinua Achebe (in Appiah 1992: 173-174), an African identity is still in the making. There is no final identity that is 'African'. However at the same time these African thinkers write that there is an identity coming into existence in the 21st century, which has both a certain context and a certain meaning. The domains from which we can extract what our being 'African' means, he cites as being institutions such as the OAU (Organisation for African Unity) and the African Development Bank. Previously, Appiah (1992: 176) argues, the cultural life of most of black Africa remained largely unaffected by European ideas until the last years of the 19th century.

The basis for the African identity has largely been theorised through 'race', which according to Du Bois (cited in Appiah 1992:176), is a common historical experience and a shared metaphysics. Central however to all of this theorisation, is that human identity is both constructed and historical. Invented histories, invented biologies and invented cultural affinities come with every identity and Appiah warns that a biologically rooted conception of 'race' is both dangerous in practice and misleading in theory. African unity and African identity need securer foundations than that of 'race'. The reasons for this is as follows: 'race' disables us because it proposes as a basis for common action the illusion that black, white and yellow people are fundamentally allied by nature and thus without effort. Also, there is no biological evidence to support the categorisation imposed by the concept of 'races'. It therefore also leaves us unprepared to handle the 'intra-racial' conflicts that arise from the very different situations of black, white and yellow people in different parts of the economy and of the world (Appiah 1992: 176).

If an African identity is to empower us, so it seems to me, what is required is not so much that we throw out falsehood, but that we acknowledge first of all that race and history and metaphysics do not enforce an identity: that we can choose, within broad limits set by ecological, political and economic realities, what it will mean to be African in the coming years (Appiah 1992:176).

But identity is something that we must continue to reshape. This reshaping process must be done bearing in mind the fact that the African identity is, for its bearers, only one among many. Identities are complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political and cultural forces, almost always in opposition to other identities - sentiments expressed by theorists such as Hall (1997) and Woodward (1997) quoted in the previous chapter.

For Makgoba (1997: 174-178), 'Africanisation' is the argument he puts forward for the creation of a national identity. He describes 'Africanisation' as the aim toward the ability for 'us' to determine 'our' destiny ourselves. Furthermore it refers to "serving the needs of Africa and the aspirations of African people", "challenging the imposition of foreign and alienating influences from outsiders", "providing a basis for originality and uniqueness" and that 'African' should be seen as "synonymous with humanity", rather than a particular race. To this end, van Vuuren (1998:161) criticises these descriptions for not really distinguishing 'Africanism' from any other ideology that expresses typical nationalistic sentiments in terms of deriving a special national destiny and universalistic claims about a particular group identity.

'Africanisation' according to Makgoba (1997: 199), is not about expelling Europeans from their cultures, but rather about affirming the 'African' culture and identity in a world community. To him, the integration of other cultures, entails the subordination of minority cultures to that of the majority, since the present culture/identity is European and hence does not enjoy majority support and therefore has to be Africanised on a majoritarian basis. Van Vuuren (1998:162) is concerned about whether this would mean that cultural minorities would have to sever all cultural ties with their countries of descent in order to gain acceptance as part of a common national culture? Imposed common 'national culture' is the very antithesis of the 'rainbow nation' concept.

Taking into consideration the various classes, languages, cultures, genders, ethnicities, religions etc. that the 'African' identity encompasses, we are brought to question - especially in terms of broadcasting and more specifically local content - whose story, and whose identity is relevant to South Africa in the 21st century? In his paper The South African Story: Identities at the Crossroads presented as part of a panel discussion at a Literary Studies conference, Chapman (1997:210) argues that both literary and cultural studies need to pursue methods of comparison and

translation in breaking beyond the linguistic-ethnic enclaves of the past, towards complex understandings of what might constitute a South African identity. Chapman is of the opinion that we are the subjects of our own concerns or our own stories. But the concern remains, whose story and more to the point, whose language, whose identity and whose authority? Of crucial importance to answer who 'we' are and "what our stories are", are the concepts of memory and national identity. In a history of racial and cultural divisiveness, should the consolidating metaphor be that of the nation or that of the society?

Furthermore Chapman also questions what it is to be a South African and what it is to live in a 'new' South Africa (post-apartheid)? Is South Africa a nation, and if so, what is its mythos? What requires to be forgotten and what remembered as we scour the past in order to understand the present and seek a path forward into an unknown future? (Chapman 1997: 213)

Chapman (1997: 215) is of the opinion that South African identities cut across one another in multiple contexts. The distinctive feature of South Africa's layers of difference is that identities have always been either too fragmented or too solid to have permitted utterly bi-polar conflict. In answer to one story or many stories, Chapman (1997) suggests that the South African story has been and should continue to be a massive 'translation' project, in which the insights of one culture are made accessible to the other, while respect is retained for the epistemological autonomy of the cultures between which the interchange is taking place. In seeking a South African story, the difficulty is to know not only what to remember, but what to forget. In any South African story then, detail should not be erased. At the same time, detail should neither be permitted to overwhelm the possibilities of reconstitution nor to forsake the desire for trajectory (Chapman 1997: 217). In illuminating our cultural differences, we should also be equally alert to our challenging commonalities (Chapman 1997: 220-221).

Appiah (1992:180) is not surprised that a continental identity, he cautions, is coming into cultural and institutional reality through regional and subregional organisations, since he says we share a continent and its ecological problems, as well as a relation of dependency to the world economy, and the problem of racism in the way that the industrialised world thinks of us. We share the possibilities of the development of regional markets and local circuits of production and our intellectuals participate

through the shared contingencies of our various histories, in a common discourse. However, while Africa is a usable identity he cautions that we should not forget that all of us belong to multifarious communities with their local customs. In dreaming of a single African state we shouldn't forget the complexly different trajectories of the continent's many languages and cultures, genders, ethnicities and classes of families, religions and nations.

Appiah (1996:24) is in agreement with Van Vuuren (1998), and argues that it is a mistake to think that we need shared values and a common culture. Rather we need citizens committed to common institutions and to the conditions necessary for a common life. What is required to live together in a nation is that we all share a commitment to the organisation of the state – the institutions that provide the overarching order of our common life. This does not require that we have the same commitment to those institutions, in the sense that the institutions must carry the same meaning for all of us. Similarly the institutions of democracy – elections, public debate, the protection of minority rights - have different meanings to different subcultures. Again there is no reason to require that we all value them in the same way, for the same reasons. All that is required is that everybody is willing to “play the game”.

A second reason for his scepticism about the creation of a common national culture, and for us to centre ourselves on a national culture, is that the state would have to take up the cudgels in defining both the content of that culture and the means of its dissemination. Collective identities he argues have the tendency to dominate not only people of other identities, but the other identities themselves, whose shape is exactly what makes each of us what we individually and distinctively are. Here again, it is crucial to remember that we do not simply have one identity, but multiple ones (Appiah 1996:25).

Who is an ‘African’?

Based on the ideas of the debates about the meaning of an ‘African identity’ and ‘Africanisation’, how are we to understand who or what it means to be an ‘African’? And in the South African situation, who or what it means to be South African? Mda (1997) writes that South Africans have no clue as to who they are. And in order to be part of the rainbow, you have to know who you are first. Prah (1998:62) writes that if the fact of being an ‘African’ is so contentious in Africa, so also is the question, who

is an 'African'? He is especially wary of the school of thought, especially popular in South Africa, that defines an 'African' as "anybody committed to Africa". To this school he asks what is commitment, what does it amount to, how is it measured, is a peasant 'African' committed to Africa?

The question of who is 'African' is important particularly for those who want to see a united Africa. He questions whether being 'African' is equated with citizenship, in which case if everybody is 'African', then nobody is 'African'. The racial definition of an 'African' is clearly flawed. Most 'Africans' Prah (1998:63) maintains are 'black', and not all 'blacks' have African cultural and historical roots.

There are many groups in Africa today which are not African, do not describe themselves or wish to be so regarded, people whose cultures and histories are linked and derived from extra-African sources (Prah 1998:63).

He writes that the cultures of the minorities amongst whom we live, have helped in the enrichment and cosmopolitanization of social life and tastes in large areas of Africa. Some of these groups may in due course of time also come to regard themselves as 'African' and they have the right to their culture and its usage. It is important to remember that cultures are not stagnant or fixed entities, but rather that cultural change is a permanent feature of all societies.

Culture, history, and attachment to these, and consciousness of identity, and not skin colour, primarily defines the African. The fact that most South Africans or people of African historical and cultural descent are black is only one characteristic, a bonus which generalises and typifies the African (Prah 1998: 86).

He writes that in the absence of a strong unifying religion or single language, colour has become an easy and fortunate identifying attribute for most people who regard themselves as 'African'. 'Africans' have existed long before periods of oppression, and therefore cannot be defined mainly on the basis of this experience. Therefore according to Prah (1998:63) definitionally, being an 'African' is not simply or essentially a reaction to the history of oppression. It includes this, but also stands before and transcends this history.

Makgoba writes that 'Africans' are a diverse group of people from different origins, and varying combinations of these basic patterns give rise to an unlimited diversity of people of all colours. He strongly believes that just as scholars are willing to accept

the idea of 'Western' or 'Oriental' thought: a system of beliefs, ideas, aesthetics, metaphysics and values, so to should one accept the idea of 'African' thought. What constitutes 'Western' or 'Oriental', is referred to as such because of profound and prolonged areas of convergence within each group. A common ancestry exists somewhere either in the philosophy, culture or socialisation of each of these groups. This consistency that can be attributed to the group, is culture (1998b: 85).

According to Makgoba, being 'African' is a way of life, a mind-set and a commitment to certain values, culture, thought processes, interpretation, world view and particular responses to external signals. Declaring oneself an 'African' is profound in its meaning as opposed to being simply located in Africa. Being 'African' is everything, but colour. Africa encompasses all of humanity that is committed to Africanism. Being 'African' thus gives meaning to the strategic vision of the African renaissance (1998b:85-86).

Simple logic dictates that only Africans can understand, declare, initiate, implement, commit themselves to lead an African Renaissance, just as elephants can and should understand an elephant renaissance (Makgoba 1998b:86).

Makgoba (1998a:40) maintains that the reality of South Africa today and in the future is no longer 'European' or 'white', but 'African' and more often 'black'. On the same point, Lawuyi (1995:119), still questions whether the 'white' South African is 'African'. To some he says the answer may be no, however some 'whites' do consider themselves 'Africans' not because South Africa is on the African continent, but because they were born and nurtured in South Africa. For these 'white' South Africans, domicility and not racial identity focuses a claim.

From these arguments, it is obvious that individuals are social beings with different social experiences, class backgrounds, political histories, religious affiliations etc. According to Appiah (1996:18), the freedom to create ourselves requires a range of socially-transmitted options from which to invent what we have come to call our identities. Our families, schools, churches, professional associations and clubs provide two essential elements in self-creation: firstly, they provide ready-made identities, such as son, husband, doctor, teacher, whose shapes are constituted by norms and expectations, stereotypes and demands, rights and obligations, and secondly, they give us a language in which to think about these identities and with which we may shape new ones. But it is social life that endows us with the full

richness of resources available for self-creation. Even when we are constructing new and counter-normative identities, it is the old and the normative that provide the language and the background. A new identity is always post-some-old identity (Appiah 1996: 18).

Appiah's (1992:26) point is that 'Africans' do not share a common traditional culture, common languages, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary. Prah (1998:86) like Appiah (1992) reminds us that it is important to bear in mind, that the 'African' identity (like all other identities) is not a closed phenomenon cast in stone. It is a changing condition with evolving terms and conditions of reference. The emerging understandings of 'Africanness' must be emancipatory for 'Africans' and the rest of humanity.

With regard to the national question, colour, ethnic origins, language and sometimes even religion, have an important role to play in defining a person's identity. Above all, the fact of belonging to this country and this state, is itself an important definer of identity. Among the resources made available in our contemporary form of social life is something that we can call a national identity – a form of identity that is central to the possibility of patriotism. Therefore, individuals will have multiple identities: for instance being a South African with a specific mother tongue, class position, political and religious affiliation and so on. These identities do not necessarily disappear in the melting pot of broad South Africanism. Rather, they can all co-exist in healthy combination. The fundamental question that has to be asked is which identity assumes prominence, and under what conditions? (Draft White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service – 3rd Draft: http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/white_papers/draftaa.html).

The main thrust of these arguments seem to be against the promotion of fractured identities, but to encourage the emergence of a common South African identity. At the same time, it should be noted that some of the identities associated with "culture" or "ethnicity" or "religion" can in fact be contradictory to the building of a new nation that is based on principles of equity. It is clear then that the national question can never be fully resolved. This is because it is not merely a material question, or one that is related solely to various forms of power. This derives from the fact that emotional and psychological factors are attached to it. In addition, people will continue to have multiple identities. Instead, the challenge is to maintain a healthy

equilibrium between centrifugal ("disintegrative") and centripetal ("integrative") tendencies (Draft White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service – 3rd Draft: http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/white_papers/draftaa.html).

Indeed, as we seek to integrate South African society across racial, language, ethnic and other barriers, we are also engaged in the process of developing those individual elements that distinguish these various communities from one another (sentiments of Billig, 1995). It will not be possible to achieve the kind of balance that will satisfy everyone for all time, even if the broad principle is attained in practice. This is aggravated by the fact that individuals compete for positions in politics, the academic terrain, the economy and elsewhere. The more dishonest and underhanded ones among them might seek to use criteria which exclude those who have historically been disadvantaged, or to use the racial, ethnic and /or language card to advance their personal ambitions (Discussion Paper: Nation formation and Nation Building – the National Question in South Africa: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/discussion/nation.html>).

The discourses of the 'rainbow nation', the 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' have not been left to be debated purely within the political arena nor has it become the responsibility of their advocates, to bring across these ideas to the rest of the South African nation. Clearly the ideals enshrined within these concepts have become incorporated into the realms of broadcasting: in writing for local content productions and in terms of the structural changes that have taken place at the SABC over the past few years i.e. managerial and editorial positions moving from 'white' to 'black' hands.

SABC's corporate identity is "The Pulse of Africa's Creative Spirit". The station indent of SABC 1 (the channel on which *Generations* is broadcast) is *Simunye*, a Zulu word meaning 'We are One'. Jingles show young people from different colour groups enjoying one another's company and having fun. On the other hand, SABC 2 has openly announced that this channel is dedicated to fostering the ideals of the 'African renaissance' and encourages viewers to "Come Alive with Us". The jingle goes on to sing about "sharing", "the nation's pride" and the "soul of Africa". Before, during and after locally produced programming the jingle "Made in Africa" is sung. Someone is sewing the label with these words onto a tape cover - next to other labels which read "No imports" and "100% local". These slogans and station jingles

are arguably spin-offs from desires enshrined in the concepts of the 'rainbow nation', the 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment'. The soap opera *Generations* is an instance of a programme produced and based on the premises of local content: to represent national identity and national culture. Because its creation coincided with a period of change in South Africa, and because it is still being produced within the emergence of a new South Africa, it is arguable that its production context also lies largely within the milieu of the above-mentioned South African discourses and that these discourses could thus be viewed as part of the social context or the back drop to the production of locally produced programming in South Africa.

***Generations* - the beginning**

Upon his return to South Africa during the early 90s, after having been out of the country for a long time, Mfundi Vundla approached the SABC about writing a drama. His initial contact was someone on the board, with whom he had gone to school. This friend passed his curriculum vitae to Quentin Green, the commissioning editor. At this time the SABC was undergoing a period of transition. Vundla's brief from Quentin Green was to: "show African people in a different light from the way in which they have been shown..." (pers comm. Vundla 1998).

Vundla then set about drawing up the framework for *Generations*. The idea of the story, which revolves around two 'black' advertising agencies, was inspired by the fact that Vundla's brother owned the only 'black' advertising agency in South Africa at the time. To him, showing 'African' people in a different light, meant showing them as active participants in a corporate, business world. Due to the apartheid dispensation, 'black' people were marginalised from the corporate world. Only a few 'black' families succeeded in becoming successful, wealthy business people. By centring the story on the corporate advertising world, he hoped to show 'black' people other opportunities that awaited them. Furthermore, Vundla strived to entertain his audiences and in so doing bring about the desire to aspire towards a better life than the one most 'black' South Africans were forced to live during apartheid South Africa. He had no fear that the working classes would find his story unappealing, for according to him "the aspirational aspect is too great to be overlooked." (Vundla 1998). His ideas for a local production thus strongly emerged out of South African discourses and concepts, which are grounded in strong economic imperatives, namely the 'African renaissance' and even more so 'black economic empowerment'.

Once Vundla's idea was accepted in 1992, *Generations* became an in-house production of the SABC, produced by their internal production house, Safritel. Vundla was thus contracted by the SABC to write the first fifty-two episodes. In the past, dramas have always been commissioned for a short period of time - usually thirteen parts or a maximum of twenty-six episodes. These first episodes of *Generations* were screened until the end of 1993, which coincided with the closure of Safritel. After that the production of *Generations* was moved to Morula Pictures, a production company established by Vundla purely for the production for *Generations*. (Today, Morula Pictures works on a number of other productions in conjunction with Prime Media). It wasn't easy for Vundla to get the SABC to agree to the move - they were adamant that *Generations* remain within the SABC.

Since the move, Morula Pictures has produced four series of fifty-two episodes each, which were broadcast once weekly until April 1998. Each of these series was commissioned in stages. After the completion of each series, lengthy negotiations took place with the SABC to debate the continuity of the production. According to Vundla (1998) and head scriptwriter Elsje Stark (1998), it was a battle for them to convince the SABC that *Generations* should become a daily soap opera rather than a weekly drama. But according to the general manager of SABC 1 Eric Nhlapo (1998), it was the natural growth of the series that led to it becoming a daily programme. Due to its popularity, it always features within the top ten programmes screened on the channel. After much upheaval, *Generations* became SABC's first local soap opera, screened four times a week in April 1998.

Generations is produced by a team of approximately two hundred members. It casts about 14-16 permanent members and depending on the stories, a number of guest appearances are made.

Generally drama is both an expensive and difficult genre to produce. The cost of *Generations* amounts to R4800 per minute for a twenty-four minute episode, which according to Stark (1998) is low for studio production. Initial costs she says are always high, when considering the construction of sets and the labour involved. In addition to these demands, actors and crew members regularly demand higher salaries.

Since 9 November 1998, *Generations* is screened from Tuesday to Friday each week, as opposed to Monday to Thursday. This is a purely strategic move on behalf of the channel. So many things happen on a Friday night and it is thought that by positioning it correctly, they will be able to retain the audience gathered for *Generations* for the rest of the evening (Nhlapo 1998).

Commissioning Procedure - SABC 1

Since *Generations* was first commissioned, local content policy and SABC commissioning procedures have both changed. In order to determine what it means to produce a programme reflective of the South African identity, national culture and the South African lifestyle, conditions and behaviour, it is worth considering the commissioning procedure of local content productions. In October 1998, SABC 1 launched their new commissioning procedure for a variety of genres into the year 2000. The schedule outlines the needs of the channel for the period 5 July 1999 to 31 March 2000, and in the case of drama, April 2000.

According to the brief, prime time programming - (18h00 - 22h00) the time in which *Generations* is screened - should have a strong appeal to the channel's target market, which is defined as youth between the ages of 16 and 24. On the subject of both the content produced and the target market of the channel, section 2.1 of the commissioning brief states the following:

We believe that our programmes appeal to this audience when they offer high quality popular entertainment or when they offer innovative treatments of compelling and provocative stories about contemporary or recent historical issues and people (SABC 1: 1998).

The brief also calls upon and recognises the need for surprising, new and original ideas that will have a strong impact on its target audience. In accordance with the lifestyles of SABC 1's target audience, the schedule from July 1999 has been developed to give the viewer an opportunity to develop regular viewing patterns. This means that soap opera series such as *Generations*, is an ideal means for developing habitual viewing patterns. Besides looking for a 'mix' in programming, the channel is also on the lookout for top-quality programming - defined as "programmes to die for!" (pers comm. Nhlapo 1998).

Some of the above-mentioned needs have already been met by the successful programmes in the present schedule (such as *Generations*). It has been said that

drama is a very important genre for the channel, drawing the highest audience ratings (ARs). In the first year of the new millennium, the channel is looking for drama that is emotionally charged and fast-paced, and which is either entertaining or provokes thinking about the changing sensibilities in the new South Africa.

In an interview with the general manager of SABC 1, Eric Nhlapo in early October 1998 (the day the new commissioning procedures were launched at the SABC), he made it clear that there was a move towards "opening up" the whole system of local productions. He also stated that SABC 1 has a great push for local content and it is used as the channel's guiding force. Prior to the launch, the schedules were carefully audited to determine what current productions were "working for them" and to decide what they needed more of. Research indicators such as audience ratings (ARs) and audience share indicate that dramas, soap operas and comedies are popular genres.

But before decisions can be taken as to type of programming, the station's audience must be determined and assessed. Income is related to the audience and therefore once audience demographics have been determined, only then can programmes be placed on the schedule according to the kind of money it will generate. "Our role is to deliver the audience to the advertisers" (Nhlapo 1998).

So what kind of 'top' show is SABC 1 looking for? In the case of drama, they are looking for a show that deals with contemporary issues and events, and that which reflects the people of the time and their attitudes. The channel is strictly looking for programmes that will cater for the category of people between 16 and 24. Programmes should be tailor-made for this age group and should also be capable of attracting an audience that can identify with this type of programming. Crudely put, SABC 1 is trying to set the agenda for the channel, which previously had no clear agenda; rather the industry was dictating what they thought the SABC 1 schedule should contain (Nhlapo, 1998). Thus, for SABC 1 to compete, and compete successfully with other channels, and to serve their audiences adequately, a certain type of programming was identified, and hence the commissioning procedure was also changed.

For a long time now, SABC 1 has screened two popular international soaps between five and six each evening. According to Nhlapo (1998), "*Generations* was a natural

thing to do...to begin screening four times a week, so that we now have our own soap locally produced." But to what aspect/s can its popularity be attributed?

According to Nhlapo (1998), its popularity lies in the fact that its stories are relevant to the South African lifestyle. A very important aspect of the programme is its 'aspirational' features - which is what SABC 1 wants - to target youths between the ages of 16 and 24 who have aspirations to succeed. While the story largely revolves around wealthy, upper class black individuals (not a reality for many black nor white South Africans), research undertaken by the scriptwriters has shown that this touches the element of aspiration within people, rather than it being viewed as a negative, 'unrealistic' feature of the story. Many South Africans live in conditions which are not exciting, so the intention is for the audience to relate to someone who has already made a better life for him/herself, rather than for the programme to concentrate on reflecting some current, depressing living situations. The aim is for a particular group of audience members to fantasise and to aspire to better things - sentiments expressed by Vundla (1998), Stark (1998) and Nhlapo (1998).

Head scriptwriter of *Generations* Elsje Stark (1998) says that their brief from SABC from the very beginning has been to

"give the audience programmes that they can look at and aspire to what they see. Portray the 'black' person as someone who has achieved in life and has success, lived well, has a good job and drives a car.....not dull, trodden upon by the apartheid era."

While she acknowledges that a story of largely middle to upper class individuals may not be truly reflective of all 'black' South Africans, she firmly believes that it is representative of a section of the 'black' population in South Africa. While this sector can identify with these characters, the rural sector is given something to aspire to. Despite the fact that *Generations* is largely aimed at a 'black' audience, Stark (1998) believes that it is reflective of a broader South African society since the cast does consist of characters from other colour groups.

These aspects of aspiration and fantasisation which the producers of *Generations* stress as important for local productions coincide with the writings of Ang (1985) about Dallas. She writes that a text (in specific the text of the soap opera), can be read at various levels. Firstly, the literal, denotative level concerns the literal, manifest content of the narrative. This includes the discussions between characters,

their actions, their reactions to one another, and so on. The narrative at the level of denotation is not exactly regarded as realistic. Literal resemblances are scarcely seen between the fictional world as it is constructed within the soap opera and the 'real' world.

Secondly, the text can be read at the connotative level. This level relates to the associative meanings which can be attributed to elements of the text. The serial contains a semblance of humanity. It is not so unreal that you can't relate to it any more. There are recognisable things, recognisable people, recognisable relations and situations in it. So while at the denotative level the same things, people, relations and situations which are regarded at the denotative level as unrealistic and unreal, are at connotative level apparently not seen at all as unreal, but in fact as 'recognisable'. This is what Ang calls 'emotional realism'. Viewers thus only find certain elements of the whole text relevant, striking and pleasurable. In other words, a text is never read in its totality. During reading, a selection process is always taking place (1985:41-43).

For *Generations* this would mean that while not all of the text will be directly representative of the audiences' 'reality', there will nevertheless be some features which they will recognise as 'real' in the fictional world of the text. The aspirational elements of the text relates to the feature of 'escapism' which Ang writes is a term often with negative connotations. While it would seem that the term refers to a division between 'reality' and 'fantasy', Ang prefers to see interaction between the two. She writes that viewers are able to place limits on the fictional and the real under discussion in the text. The imaginary participation in the fictional world is experienced as pleasurable. The pleasure of the text lies in the recognition of ideas that fit in with the viewers' imaginative world. They are able to lose themselves in the text because the programme symbolises a structure of feeling which connects with one of the ways in which they encounter life. Imagination she writes, is an essential component of our psychological world, for only through the imagination (which is always subjective), is the 'objective reality' assimilated. A life without an imagination does not exist (Ang 1985: 81-83).

Nhlapo (1998) maintains that like all other programmes in the world, those that are locally produced and acted by local talent will always have an appeal to that particular nation, especially if it is a good programme. "It has all the right ingredients.

Generations was the right idea, at the right time, and is doing great." Stark (1998) says that *Generations'* uniqueness lies in the sense that it is about local stories, the cast consists of local actors, and local people work on the production.

Regular research is aimed at strengthening the production and it is organised in such a way that the producers stay in touch with what the audience wants to see. It has emerged from focus groups that *Generations'* popularity lies in the fact that it would seem to reflect South Africans, although there have been criticisms by members of the audience that 'true', 'black' South African culture (e.g. funerals and the mourning process) has not always been reflected accurately. The scriptwriters (who happen all to be 'white' and largely of Afrikaans background) have acknowledged these mistakes, and the SABC and the writers of *Generations* maintain a close working relationship to discuss instances of misrepresentation. Stark (1998) says when aspects of traditional culture are included in the story (such as funerals, weddings, courting, and entrance into manhood), they have to be very careful not to go by modern Johannesburg practices. They make a point of calling in people to discuss the finer details carefully. Research has also indicated that *Generations* has become a habit-forming type of programme (which is the intention of the channel).

Writing about the South African experience, identity and culture

So, in keeping with the channel's push for local content and the reflection of contemporary South African stories, what do the managers of the channel perceive to be the South African identity? For Nhlapo (1998), the South African identity is a reflection of the 'rainbow nation', and according to him *Generations* achieves this, since its cast represents all colour groups. In addition to the 'rainbow nation', the notion of the 'African renaissance' is a new concept which is being considered within the realm of local content broadcasting.

Elsje Stark says that she has never really thought about making *Generations* 'South African' so to speak. Nor has she had to grapple with writing for a largely 'black' audience because she is a 'white' Afrikaner. Writing about the South African experience comes naturally to her.

"We all live here, we're all South African. We're just writing about people...the way we see them in South Africa. It is the easiest thing in the world...because we have never written an American soap, so we don't need to change our pattern, it just happens." (Stark 1998)

She also doesn't concentrate much on writing about South African stories, but rather about human stories.

"Characters are treated like human beings with human emotions such as pain, love, fear, hate, ambition....somehow it just falls into place....They are just people with human emotions."

She attributes *Generations'* success to this feature of 'universal emotions'. She never considers the fact that a particular character is 'black' and therefore won't act or say something in a particular way. Executive producer of *Generations*, Mfundi Vundla is in agreement with her. He feels that stories don't have to be consciously South African but that *Generations'* success lies within the formula that it deals with human beings with universal emotions.

Stark (1998) says that they concentrate on looking into the future for South Africa. Ideas and situations that might seem to be in a period of transition for many South Africans, or the reality for only a few is represented as natural and as if South Africa has already reached that stage e.g. the representation of various colour groups living together in a commune.

"For some the story might be a representation of the 'now', but for others it might mean a move to the future - the way things could be" (Vundla 1998).

For Stark (1998) the incorporation of a South African flavour, happens by chance. While she believes that the programme contains uniquely South African instances, be it events or actions, it is not an intentional action on her part. She firmly believes that by virtue of the stories being written and produced in South Africa, *Generations* becomes a 'South African' product.

"It is not an American culture that comes across...but a South African culture: the way we are, what we eat...pap in the morning...tiny little things....."

Stark (1998) is also aware that as scriptwriters they have a very influential agenda-setting role. Without preaching they do make use of the programme as a vehicle to disseminate social messages about AIDS, alcoholism, teenage pregnancies and so on, but they are all intertwined in the story and it is hoped that they do not come across as trying to inform. They also occasionally aim to include contentious issues into their story line, to open people's eyes to issues that they hadn't thought about previously, and to encourage active discussion and debate.

Rather than having the ability to tell 'one' South African story representative of all South Africans, Vundla (1998) believes that the stories the scriptwriters choose to tell, will inevitably be different from what some other South Africans might opt to tell, since telling stories is dependent on one's perception of reality. According to Vundla (1998), the creativity of the story, lies in the writer's perceptions of emotions and his/her ability to entertain rather than the kind of story that is being told.

"A good story's emotions are universal and that is why *Generations* is popular in other countries" (Vundla 1998).

Besides giving South Africans the opportunity to see themselves on screen, Vundla (1998) believes that his team have a responsibility to their viewers to entertain: creating instances of fantasy and escapism and hence the concentration of the 'aspirational' aspect of the programme. Furthermore, their work should make viewers proud of local productions and of the cast of local actors and local producers.

It is important to note the importance Vundla (1998) places on 'entertaining' his audience through *Generations*. Ang (1985: 19) writes that entertainment is usually associated with simple, uncomplicated pleasure. This is to evade the obligation to investigate which mechanisms lie at the basis of that pleasure, how that pleasure is produced and how it works - as though that pleasure were something natural and automatic. Nothing is less true, however. Any form of pleasure is constructed and functions in a specific social and historical context. *Generations* is explicitly offered to the public as an object for pleasurable consumption. The promise of pleasure is the use-value by which the industry tries to seduce viewers to watch *Generations* on their television sets. But to achieve this aim, the producers have to have a definite idea of what the audience will find pleasurable. They must have a certain self-confidence that their own definition of pleasure will coincide with that of (large sections of) the public. Therefore the strategy of the producers will be directed at the elaboration of what they already know about popular pleasures. In the case of *Generations*, merely seeing South Africans on screen excites viewers. What matters about the production of soap opera is the possibility of identifying oneself with it in some way or other, to integrate it into everyday life. In other words, popular pleasure is first and foremost a pleasure of recognition (Ang 1985: 18-20).

Ang writes that it is not possible to isolate the pleasure of a particular programme from pleasure in television in general. For the great majority of the population, television viewing is associated with entertainment. It means relaxation, resting after the day's work. Entertainment belongs to the domain of leisure, and leisure is regarded in the everyday experiential world as "time for yourself". Entertainment has for most people expressly positive associations; it is seen as a right, as something earned (Ang 1985: 20-21). For this reason, it is possible for her to associate the pleasures of Dallas with the pleasure of the freedom of entertainment, in which people feel released from the prohibitions and demands of society.

Despite the fact that *Generations* was commissioned a number of years before the SABC's commissioning procedure was refined last year, and that it has already been identified by the SABC as one of the programmes which fits the channel's new image, it has to maintain its strong appeal to the channel's target market as well as stick to its intentions of invoking the aspirational element within its viewers, if it is to remain a successful local production in terms of SABC 1's new agenda.

From interviews with the general manager of SABC 1, executive producer of *Generations* Mfundu Vundla, and the head scriptwriter, Elsje Stark, it has very obviously been brought to my attention that besides representing contemporary South African people and their way of life, giving people something to which they can aspire, is high on the agenda when writing for a local audience. Without sidelining the past, representing South Africans with ideas of what the future could be like for both them and their country, and in so doing invoking a strong sense of identity and nationhood, is a priority for local programming. These visions for the content of local productions do not arise out of nowhere - they are all sentiments expressed daily through the notions and discourses of the 'rainbow nation', the 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' (and affirmative action) by politicians and the popular media. As has appeared earlier in this chapter, a tendency of some discourses of the 'African renaissance' exists which aims to essentialise what is 'African', yet ironically this very popular programme, which ostensibly admires these critics, is written by 'white' Afrikaner women.

When considered more closely, the commissioning procedure of locally produced programming as directly linked to local content policy, raises several

issues and questions related to the representation of the South African national identity and national culture, and by extension the idea of 'South Africanness'.

Firstly, the commissioning procedure for SABC 1 calls for programming which "provokes thinking about the changing sensibilities in the new South Africa". What these changing sensibilities are, is not explicitly stated. Presumably they are the changing sensibilities enshrined in the ideals of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment'?

Secondly, within the commissioning procedure documents, it would seem that local content programming is defined as that which deals with "contemporary issues and events, and that which reflects the people of the time and their attitudes" (Commissioning Procedure, SABC 1: 1998). The kinds of contemporary issues and events are again not explicitly stated, nor which South African people. Are these issues and events to be interpreted as political, social or cultural - or all of them? Is there only one South African people, or do they acknowledge more than one group of people? Presumably what is meant, is the idea of 'a people'. If so, this would imply that they would share a certain national identity, as well as identities of class, colour, gender, generations, experiences and histories to mention but a few. If on the other hand what is meant is several groups of people, on what basis are they divided as such - colour, language, religion, culture, class, ethnicity....? If a particular programme is produced for a certain group of people, should it have aspects relevant to other groups? Such issues once again point to the complexity of identities.

The views of the producers of local content programming also raise several issues when trying to unpack the idea of 'South Africanness'. It is clear that while not always a conscious part of the production process, they do have perceptions about what constitutes the South African identity and how they interpret the specifics of local content programming. For both Nhlapo (1998) and Stark (1998), what is not of crucial importance is that *Generations* be something different from international soaps in terms of content, but rather that South Africa has its own soap opera, locally produced. This means that great importance is placed on *Generations* by virtue of the fact that the programme makes use of a South African cast and that it is produced by South African people. These two elements seem to play an important role for Nhlapo (1998) and Stark (1998) in locally produced South African productions. With these two elements in place, a production becomes 'South African'.

Nhlapo (1998) does however acknowledge that *Generations*' popularity also lies in the stories it tells, which are "relevant to the South African lifestyle". While I wouldn't argue that Nhlapo or the producers of *Generations* perceive there only to be one South African lifestyle, it is true that they speak of 'the South African lifestyle' as if there were only one. Stark (1998) and Vundla (1998) make it explicit that while *Generations* largely represents a middle to upper class black South African lifestyle its universal story-telling elements and the 'human emotions' it represents, turns the focus away from the representation of only one instance of South African life, and gives it greater appeal to a wider group than that which is represented. What is more important to them is that "South Africans see themselves on screen" and that the production entertains. The entertaining aspect of *Generations*, is guessed to lie in the pleasures the audience gains from recognitions with identifiable elements of the South African nation. I don't think that the SABC nor the production team of *Generations*, in representing only one section of South African life, hope to represent or think they are representing the whole of South African life. They are aware that there is more than one lifestyle within South Africa. Stark (1998) is insistent that the programme is not purely for a 'black' audience, because it casts members from other population groups - an idealistic 'rainbow nation'.

The effort the scriptwriters place on representing a 'future' South Africa is testimony again that albeit not intentionally or consciously, they are informed by these South African discourses that envision a better life for all South Africans. For those who view the ideals of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' with scepticism, *Generations* tries to represent a 'new South Africa', "the way things could be" for South Africa and South Africans.

Lastly, elements of 'aspiration' to succeed which are so strongly expressed as imperative to the production of *Generations*, again points to some of the ideals enshrined in these South African discourses which could be seen as important reference points for the producers and scriptwriters of local content programming.

From brief sketches of the South African discourses of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' and their histories which are largely contextualised within theorisations of what constitutes an 'African' identity, it has come to light that what these discourses and theorisations of Africa are largely

concerned about, is 'black' Africans in the broader context, and closer to home, 'black' South Africans. Furthermore, the production of *Generations* is about representing 'black' South Africans and their experiences for a largely 'black' South African audience. Because of the emphasis placed on 'blackness' in these discourses, and in theorisations of what it means to be 'African' and 'South African', as well as on the production of *Generations*, I feel it is necessary to take up the issue of the representation of 'black' people - how it is constructed, reproduced and challenged - specifically within the South African situation, bearing in mind the discourses which could be viewed as the social and cultural context of local productions in this country. The exploration of the representation issues as it involves 'black' people, is also necessary before one can fully explore the representations of 'South Africanness', since what this chapter has largely indicated is that elements of 'South Africanness' has a lot to do with 'black' South Africans. The following chapter explores what Hall (1992b), West (1993) and Gray (1995) amongst others, have theorised and written about the representation of 'blacks' in popular cultural forms such as *Generations*.

CHAPTER THREE

THE REPRESENTATION OF 'BLACKNESS'

From the discussion in the preceding chapter it would seem that the new South African discourses are largely concerned with what Appiah (1992:176) refers to as "black Africa". When theorists such as Makgoba (1998) and Prah (1998) speak of an 'African renaissance' and the move away from 'Eurocentric' notions and ideas, it largely concerns a move of 'black' Africans, despite Makgoba's (1997:174-178) insistence that 'African' should be seen as synonymous with humanity rather than with a particular 'race' or colour group. Prah (1998:63) maintains that despite the fact that most South Africans are 'black', colour is only one characteristic that generalises and typifies the 'African'. Be that as it may, Makgoba (1998a:38) reminds us that in South Africa, 'African' has always had a 'racial' connotation of meaning 'black' Africans. Despite his remarks that 'African' should be inclusive of all citizens of South Africa, irrespective of who is in the majority, he writes that the reality of the country's future "is no longer European but African and more often black" (Makgoba 1998a:40).

South African discourses such as the 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' largely concern the upliftment of 'black' South Africans. 'Black economic empowerment' aims to provide opportunities for greater participation by 'blacks' in the country's economy while affirmative action aims to redress the disadvantaged status particularly of 'black' people, women and people with disabilities.

In the past, the representation of 'black' South Africans in the country's popular media such as film and television has also been very marginal. As an instance of local content programming (and in an attempt to rectify the past imbalances within the broadcasting sector when it comes to representing 'black' South Africans), *Generations* is specifically aimed at a 'black audience' and tasked with representing the 'black' population in South Africa - to tell the stories of their lifestyles, behaviour, cultural heritage, contemporary issues and events. The programme should entertain and provoke thinking about "the changing sensibilities in the new South Africa". The majority of the cast of *Generations*, are 'black' South Africans and according to its producers, it aims to show 'black' people in a different light from the way in which they have previously been portrayed on South African television. According to the

programme's executive producer Mfundi Vundla (1998) this means showing 'black' people on screen as active participants in a business world, and to show viewers the opportunities that await historically disadvantaged 'black' South Africans. Head scriptwriter Elsje Stark works from the premise of "portraying the black person as someone who has achieved in life". Being a 'white, Afrikaans-speaking' South African she says, does not play a role in writing about 'black' people and 'black' experiences. She is a South African, and writing about the South African experience comes naturally to her, because primarily she is writing about people with human emotions.

The explicit intention of producing a programme about 'black' people and 'black' experiences primarily for a 'black' audience, has brought about a concern about how we are to talk about, theorise and understand the representation of what has been termed 'blackness' within popular culture. How is it constructed, reproduced and challenged?

Theorists such as Hall (1992a) and West (1993) have been writing about the representation of 'blacks' in the Diaspora for quite some time now. Gray (1995:1-5), in his book Watching Race: Television and the struggle for 'Blackness', examines critical debates about black expressive culture and black cultural productions within television in the United States. He is of the opinion that commercial culture serves as both a resource and a site in which 'blackness' as a cultural sign is produced, circulated and enacted and hence is both a site of and resource for 'black cultural politics'. Commercial culture is increasingly the central place where various memories, myths, histories, traditions and practices circulate.

It is within the realm of commercial culture and representation that we are constantly being constituted and positioned, as well as reconstituting ourselves collectively and individually (Gray 1995:7).

He approaches popular culture in terms of its power to organise, articulate and disarticulate feelings and understandings that move people, enlisting and positioning them in different political and social configurations. To talk about popular culture in this way is to talk about the social, economic, and political struggles operating in society as well as about cultural sites such as commercial network television, film and popular music in which those struggles take place and are made representable. Popular culture (of which *Generations* is one such instance), always has its base in

the experiences, pleasures, memories and traditions of the people. It has connections with local hopes and local aspirations, local tragedies and local scenarios that are the everyday practices and everyday experiences of ordinary folks. Popular culture, is rooted in the experiences of communities from which they draw their strength, allowing us to see them as expressive of a particular subordinate social experience that resists it being constantly made over as low and outside (Hall 1996:469). This would indicate that forms of 'popular culture' are good vehicles for representing the 'local' to South African viewers - *Generations* potentially being one such vehicle.

The field of cultural studies is a useful point of departure Gray says, because its conceptual focus helps us think about the relationship between the representational practices produced 'in' television and their relationship to the material experiences and locations of people who use, make meaning of and offer critiques on, and derive pleasure from their encounters with television (1995:3).

Gray argues that one cannot begin the task of understanding the complex cultural meanings of 'black' television representation and television's representations of 'blacks' without situating them in terms of the cultural discourses in which these representations are produced and the social locations across which these images and representations circulate (1995:45). This means that in order to understand the ways in which 'black' people are represented in *Generations*, it is necessary to locate the representations within the context of the South African situation. The South African discourses explored in the previous chapter are a potentially useful starting point for situating the representation of 'black' people within local content programming in South Africa, and in particular the representation of 'black' South Africans in *Generations*.

REPRESENTATIONS OF 'BLACKNESS'

In trying to understand the ways in which 'black' people have been represented in popular culture, Hall attempts to identify and characterise a significant shift that has been happening and one that continues to happen, in what he terms 'black cultural politics'.

This shift is not definitive in the sense that there are two discernable phases. Rather they are two phases of the same movement, which constantly overlap and

interweave. Both are framed by the same historical conjuncture and both are rooted in the politics of anti-racism and the post-war 'black' experience in Britain (1992:252).

The cultural politics and strategies which developed around this critique had many facets, but its two principal objects were: firstly, the question of access to the rights of representation by 'black' artists and 'black' cultural workers themselves; and secondly the contestation of the marginality, the stereotypical quality and the fetishised nature of images of 'blacks', by the counter-position of a 'positive' black imagery.

Hall (1992a:252) writes that 'blacks' have typically been the objects, but rarely the subjects, of the practices of representation. The struggle to come into representation was predicated on a critique of the degree of fetishisation, objectification and negative figuration which are so much a feature of the representation of the 'black' subject. This could also be said to be valid for the South African instance. Hall's concern is thus with the simplification and stereotypical character of the 'black' experience and not simply with the absence or marginality thereof.

These strategies were principally addressed to changing what he calls the 'relations of representation'. Rather than thinking of this new phase as a substitution of one kind of politics for another, the shift can best be thought of in terms of a change from a struggle over the relations of representation (i.e. access to the rights of representation by black artists/cultural workers) to a politics of representation itself (i.e. the concept of representation: how things are represented, the role it plays in culture, the scenarios of representation such as subjectivity, identity, politics - and its place in the constitution of social and political life).

West (1993) is of the opinion that the modern 'black' Diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness can be understood as the condition of the relative lack of power of 'black' people to represent themselves to themselves and others, as complex human beings, and thereby to contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by 'white' supremacist ideologies.

He writes that every modern 'black' person, especially cultural disseminators, encounters this problem of invisibility and namelessness. The initial Black Diaspora response was a mode of resistance that was moralistic in content and communal in character. This means that the fight for representation and recognition highlighted

moral judgements regarding black 'positive' images over and against 'white' supremacist stereotypes. These images 're-presented' monolithic and homogeneous 'black' communities in a way that could displace past misrepresentations of these communities. This was largely due to access to the rights of representation. These images which tried to replace past misrepresentations of 'black' communities, Hall (1992a) has discussed as attempts to change the 'relations of representation'.

Writing about the problems and politics of representation, Kobena Mercer notes that British television has failed to 'reflect' the multi-cultural character of British society. 'Black' characters tend to be confined to minor or marginal roles in mainstream drama. Alternatively, when 'blacks' do appear in realist drama it tends to be as deviants or 'problem orientated' characters, either aggressively threatening or victimised into submission. This is largely true of South African television during the apartheid era.

The key problem with this argument, which she terms the realist argument, is that even if television could achieve a one-to-one correspondence with the real world 'out there' the resulting picture might not be all that flattering either. 'Black' communities, Mercer writes, "are neither homogenous nor all sweetness and light". The demand for positive images therefore fails to acknowledge the contradictions and conflicts that exist within 'black' communities as much as between 'black' people and 'white' society at large. One may concede that plausible and credible 'black' roles are few and far between in popular soaps. Television should necessarily depict the 'negative' aspects of antagonism and unhappiness that also characterise life in a multi-racial society (Mercer 1989: 4-5).

Mercer's second major line of argument - the social engineering argument - claims that as a public institution, television is morally obliged to offer positive images of disadvantaged groups in order to motivate their aspirations and correct the distorted expectations of the majority culture. In this case television is called upon not so much to mirror the real world, as to represent an ideal world of achieved quality. This is what Mfundu Vundla was expected to do when called upon to produce SABC's first local soap opera - to represent 'black' South Africans as successful people, who have achieved in life. Representing the world of achieved quality was interpreted by Mfundu Vundla as representing 'black' South Africans as active participants in a corporate, business world - taken from the ideals of 'black economic empowerment'.

Mercer's third argument picks up elements from the preceding two, which mainly focus on the quality of television representations and the 'effects' of television on its audience. The third strand focuses more directly on what is considered the central cause of the problem: the lack of employment opportunities for 'black' actors, writers, producers and directors within the broadcasting profession. The institutional barriers that restrict equal access to television as an institution, play a major role in the reproduction of stereotypical imagery (1989:6-7). In South Africa, the SABC attempts to address these imbalances, which is also true of the South African broadcasting system of the past. Their new commissioning procedure invites all South Africans irrespective of colour, to submit proposals for local content productions.

SABC could also be seen as attempting to change the 'relations of representation', in affording 'black' South Africans the opportunity to represent the people of South Africa and to tell their stories. Such an opportunity was afforded to Mfundu Vundla.

West (1993:211) offers two arguments (in similar vein to Mercer) for the fight for 'black' representation and recognition and against 'white' racist stereotypes. Firstly, representations must reflect or mirror the real 'black' community, not simply the negative and depressing representations of it. An idea that Stark (1998) expressed strongly in writing for *Generations*. Secondly, taking into consideration that any form of representation is constructed, 'black' representation (especially given the difficulty of 'blacks' gaining access to positions of power to produce any 'black' imagery), should offer positive images, thereby countering racist stereotypes. Again, an aspect of representation Vundla (1998) intended to improve upon, when he created *Generations*. The hidden assumption of both arguments is to have unmediated access to what the 'real black community' is and what 'positive images' are. Hall (in West 1993) has called this encounter "the end of innocence or the end of the innocent notions of the essential black subject". Furthermore he writes that any notions of 'the real Black community' and 'positive images' are value laden, socially loaded and ideologically charged. What this means is, that it is necessary to recognise that 'black' is a politically and culturally constructed category.

One of the most forceful critiques articulated by theorists and critics working within this framework has concerned the question of difference. The critiques and deconstructions, and the notion of fixed and unified subject positions, identities, and historical forces have opened important new theoretical spaces. Representation and

the meanings of the popular are very much the subjects and objects of struggles across and within difference.

What is at issue then, is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black' - what Hall has termed 'the end of the essential Black subject'. In so doing, there is a recognition that 'black' is a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore is not a category of essence. What this also brings into play, is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experiences of 'black' subjects.

This is not simply to appreciate the historical and experiential differences within and between communities, regions, country and city, across national cultures, between diasporas, but also to recognise the other kinds of difference that place, position, and locate black people (Hall 1996:473).

This inevitably entails a weakening or fading of the notion that 'race' or some composite notion of race around the term 'black', will either guarantee the effectivity of any cultural practice or determine in any final sense its aesthetic value. This means that films are not necessarily good because 'black' people make them. They are also not necessarily 'right-on' by virtue of the fact that they deal with the 'black' experience (Hall 1992a:254).

Hall's sentiments have great significance for locally produced programming in the South African situation. What does the category 'black' mean in South Africa? Who should all be categorised as such, since it has been expressed by more than one theorist that it is not a category of essence. As expressed in the preceding chapter, it once again raises the question of 'whose' story and 'whose' experience/s are applicable to a production about the 'black' subject. Furthermore, it would seem irrelevant that the scriptwriters of *Generations* are not 'black' in colour, since Hall (1992a) explicitly states that films are not necessarily 'black' nor 'right-on' about the 'black' experience by virtue of the fact that they are made by 'black' people.

Hall (1992a:254) is of the opinion that the question of the 'black' subject cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. He notes that 'black' radical politics has frequently been stabilised around particular conceptions of 'black' masculinity and at certain points 'black' politics has

also been underpinned by a deep absence or more typically an evasive silence with reference to class.

In the call for a 'new cultural politics of difference', Cornel West (1993:48) forcefully articulates and sharply focuses the complex issues at stake in the cultural debates over the sign of 'blackness'. He has recognised and exposed the theoretical fallacy and political seduction of constructing a totalising definition built on false unities that are themselves structured by tensions, contradictions, and the repression of significant differences within 'blackness'. Hence, many critical 'black' intellectuals argue against a totalising and authoritarian conception of 'blackness' built on a romantic 'African' past, an imagined nation, racial purity, or a cultural authenticity that denies differences of gender, sexuality, class, and history (ideas enshrined in many of the discourses concerned about uplifting the African continent and 'African' people). Rather there is a call for productive ways of thinking about 'black' differences and their contemporary conditions, conditions that of necessity demand recognition of the different modalities of 'black' experiences and the historical, material, and cultural circumstances that structured those experiences.

Gray (1995:8) writes that television readings of 'black' representations can be and often are evaluated according to the degree to which they correspond as it were to 'black' experiences beyond the screen. Their resonance and appeal may also be judged in terms of the degree to which they offer improvements and even more so, new possibilities for imagining 'blacks'. This is a crucial element of the production of *Generations*. Both Vundla (1998) and Stark (1998) have explicitly stated that it is a premise from which they work and an explicit intention, to offer both improvements upon previous representations of 'blacks' on South African television and also to provide new possibilities for imagining 'black' people in the new South Africa through the representation of what they term "elements of aspiration". The element of 'aspiration' is an ideological one in *Generations*, in that it presents middle-class experience as the new 'norm' of 'black' experience. Both the producers of *Generations* and Nhlapo (1998) from the SABC, have strongly stressed how crucial the element of 'aspiration' is to the production of *Generations*. Their opinion on the issue also corresponds with Gray's writings about 'new' representations of the 'black' subject. These 'new' representations of the 'black' subject open up the possibility that new stereotypes of 'black' South Africans could be in the making.

In order for television to achieve its work - that is to make meaning and produce pleasure – it has to draw upon and operate on the basis of a kind of generalised societal common-sense about the terms of the society and people's social location in it. The social ground and the cultural terms on which it works depend on assumptions about experience, knowledge, familiarity and the accessibility of viewers to these assumptions (Gray 1995:9).

It is Gray's contention that American television representations of 'blackness' operate squarely within the boundaries of middle-class patriarchal discourses about 'whiteness' as well as the historic racialisation of the social order. An opinion held by West (1993) as well. These dominant social and cultural discourses maintain normative universes within which all other representations and marginalisation of difference – race, class, ethnic, gender, sexual – are constructed and positioned. That is to say, 'black' representations in American commercial network television are situated within the existing material and institutional hierarchies of privilege and power based on class (middle-class), 'race' (whiteness), gender (patriarchal), and sexual (heterosexual) differences (1995: 10-11).

Hall's (1996) article What is this 'black' in black popular culture? reminds us that popular culture is not at all the arena where we find who we really are, or the truth of our experience. Rather it is an arena that is profoundly mythic.

It is a theatre of popular desires, a theatre of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message but to ourselves for the first time (Hall 1996:474).

Generations as an instance of popular culture, can thus be seen as a "theatre of popular desire and fantasy" where we as South Africans are imagined and represented and thus could potentially play a very important role in the discovery and fostering of a South African identity and culture.

Following from this, Hall (1992a) argues that if the 'black' subject and the 'black experience' are not stabilised by nature or by some other essential guarantee, then it must be the case that they are constructed historically, culturally, politically, and the concept which refers to this is 'ethnicity'.

The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is positioned and situated and all knowledge is contextual. Representation is possible only because enunciation is always produced within codes which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time. The new politics of representation therefore also sets in motion an ideological contestation around the term 'ethnicity' (Hall 1992a:257).

What is involved is the splitting of the notion of ethnicity between, on the one hand, the dominant notion which connects it to the nation and 'race', and on the other hand what Hall (1992a:258) thinks is the beginning of a positive conception of ethnicity on the margins of the periphery. That is to say a recognition that we all speak from a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position as 'ethnic artists' or filmmakers. We are all, in that sense, ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are. The politics of ethnicity (just like that of identities) is thus predicated on difference and diversity.

Brah (1992:126), writes about the various notions of 'difference' that have emerged in recent discussions of how extensively the term 'black' can be used to define the experience of African-Caribbean and South-Asian groups in post-war Britain. According to him, the 'black' in 'Black Power' ideology referred specifically to the historical experience of people of sub-Saharan descent, and was designed to create a positive political and cultural identity amongst 'black' Americans. The Black Power movement's mobilisation of the term 'black' was an attempt at reclaiming an African heritage that had been denied to 'black' Americans by racism (1992:128).

He is of the opinion that the term 'black' does not have to be construed in essentialist terms, but that it can have different political and cultural meanings in different contexts. He also adds that the term 'black' in Britain serves to conceal Caribbean origin. This particular critique is often steeped in 'ethnicism'. Cultural needs are defined largely as independent of other social experiences centred around class, gender, racism or sexuality. This means that a group identified as culturally different is assumed to be internally homogenous, when this is patently not the case (Brah 1992:128-129). In other words, ethnicist discourses seek to impose stereotypic notions of 'common cultural need' upon heterogeneous groups with diverse social aspirations and interests. They often fail to address the relationship between

'difference' and the social relations of power in which difference may be inscribed (Brah 1992:129).

Brah's (1992) arguments are also applicable to the South African situation and local content productions. While the production team of *Generations* doesn't seem to assume the category 'black' in South Africa to be internally homogenous, this view could be held by producers of other South African local productions.

It is thus only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are. There is no escape from the politics of representation. 'How life really is out there' cannot be used as a test against which the political rightness or wrongness of a particular text can be measured.

Taking into consideration that theorists such as Hall (1992a), West (1993), Gray (1995) and Brah (1992) are largely writing about the experiences of representing 'blacks' in the Diaspora, how applicable are their views within the 'African' situation and the production of 'African' television?

Writing about film, Ukadike (1993:43) notes that the story of African films speaks to the experience of African nations, and continues to represent many present-day situations. In its historical and cultural milieu, African film structures have been created in the spirit of 'alternative' cinema, which means that it deconstructs dominant cinemas by expressing views of people who are considered 'other'. Subjects marginalised by mainstream cinematic practices are always confronting their 'otherness' by applying indigenous standards to the subjugating dominant cinema codes, thereby creating new identities, histories and cultures. The main attribute of the endeavour of African cinema derives from the use of film to explore cultural identity and to give expression to the conflicts of a troubled continent, bringing to knowledge the historical transformation of political, social and cultural change.

Tomaselli (1993:2) writes that there are questions which are not easily resolved on the issue of African cinema for example: What constitutes Africa? Are Arab and South African (because it was not colonised in the same way as the rest of Africa) productions part of African cinema? During the apartheid era, Tomaselli questioned

whether 'black' cinema was necessarily 'African' in origin? And when we consider the writings of Gray (1995), Hall (1992a) and West (1993), should African cinema necessarily be likened to 'its black diasporic equivalent' in the United States and Britain?

Furthermore he questions the idea of a truly African cinema as being too limiting in terms of regional differences, forms of resistance, discursive strategies and definitions of Africa. Can there be a single African aesthetic (Tomaselli 1993:5)?

In his article titled In whose Image?, Tomaselli (1991:18) probes the idea of a 'white' director making a film reflecting the 'black' experience. When and when not, is it acceptable? In terms of African film, Tomaselli suggests that the issue is best resolved when one distinguishes between films which are rooted in the struggle against apartheid, and those which are simply about struggle. (One has to bear in mind that his writing is pre-1994). Determining whether a film in South Africa is 'black' or 'white', becomes a question of whether the film is anti-apartheid or not. Ultimately then, the struggle over images and portrayals in films is not based on whether one director possesses the key to a character just because both are 'black', or that a 'white' director or actor cannot convey 'black' realities. The judgement is dependent on how the film relates to a particular struggle. It also depends on where viewers locate themselves with regard to the film's topic (Tomaselli 1991: 20). This judgement is thus a political call (which is also a spectrum) rather than a colour issue.

In distinct ways West (1993) and Hall (1992a) and others have emphasised the continuing necessity to describe, theorise and evaluate our assumptions about the cultural labours and social effects of 'blackness' as a force of political solidarity, social change and cultural identity. By focusing on the internal struggles for and over the meaning of 'blackness' as an expression of opposition and affirmation, Gray (1995) notes the multiple and contradictory ways in which the trope of 'blackness' operates in media - as opposition, as affirmation and as difference.

In addition to political and social science discourses, claims and counterclaims over the meanings and uses of 'blackness' that found their way into television were shaped by and deeply embedded in the rich representations that emerged from 'black' popular

culture. Like political and social science debates, popular media representations were formed and pressured by the contradictions of difference and unity within 'blackness' (Gray 1995:50).

'Black' cultural representations and the debates they stimulate are in dialogue with, borrow from, organise and structure television representations of 'blacks'. Along with film and popular music, 'black' expressive culture offers television a 'black' cultural vocabulary of style that can be seen politically. They constitute a bricolage of dress, attitudes, language, postures, gestures, habits, and tastes all of which are constantly replenished and which travel with increasing frequency and velocity across the landscape of commercial media, in advertising, situation comedy, sports, talk shows, fashion runways, magazine layouts, comedy, music television, and the news (Gray 1995:55).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GENRE OF THE SOAP OPERA AS A SIGNIFYING PRACTICE

A CBS programming chief Bud Grant, once said that soap operas are "the most durable form of drama we have" (Lipton 1981:58). Audiences have been intensely loyal to the soaps since they were first broadcast on radio. It has been said that soap opera is the most popular genre in the most popular medium on earth. It is therefore not surprising that Vundla chose the soap opera, as a largely domestic drama to represent the South African people, their lifestyle and experiences. Despite the genre's popularity, it is often dismissed, denigrated and misunderstood by those who write about radio and television. Kerta Herzog concluded in the early 1940s, that soaps are successful because they provide emotional release: momentary escape from real problems and the characters may advise the listener on coping with daily life (Lipton 1981:58). Modern audiences are still loyal to the soaps and they are watched faithfully. Lipton (1981) has suggested that viewers have become addicted to this television form because soap operas are real. What soap characters do is approximately what American television viewers do: they are born, they marry, they hope, they worry, they succeed, they fail and they even die when they get sick. It is in failure and death that the secret of soap opera lies.

The popularity of the soap opera

Research conducted by Livingstone (1990) indicates that there are various reasons why the soap opera is a popular genre in Britain. Soap operas clearly play a role in viewers' lives. The regularity of the programmes become part of people's routine. They provide something to be followed and kept up with. Viewers also describe soap operas as "entertaining, enjoyable, humorous, relaxing, enlivening, interesting and intriguing". Soap operas are seen as containing an element of realism. Viewers describe being able to relate to the events, situations and problems portrayed in the soap opera. They allow viewers to recognise events, situations and problems of their own life.

The emotional element of this genre can also not be dismissed. Viewers enjoy the sex appeal of the characters. The soaps provide both excitement and suspense and viewers experience a wide range of emotions towards the characters as well as sharing the emotional experiences of the characters. Viewers also establish

relationships with these characters. They feel they can relate to them and they experience understanding and sympathy for them. Furthermore, they feel that they can recognise the characters who remind them of familiar people (Livingstone 1990: 56).

Soap operas also contain an element of problem-solving for their viewers. They describe how they learn about other people and how they live and cope through the soaps. Viewers no longer feel alone with coping with a problem and the characters' problems make the viewers' own problems seem smaller. Linked to this is the element of escapism. Viewers value the soap opera for allowing them to escape from their own life generally, and specifically to escape from their problems and worries. They can escape to a world of glamour - a spectacle to observe and enjoy and an enactment of their own dreams, desires and fantasies. Finally, while viewers describe their satisfaction with the quality of programmes (in terms of scripts, acting and production), and appreciate the diversity of views and motives, they also enjoy being critical and watching for fault and ridicule. They realise the compromise between realism and entertainment and that the genre balances the needs for fantasy and realism. They also appreciate the programmes' basic social, moral and human messages, believing that the programmes treat basic life issues and thus reflect and/or create a common culture (Livingstone 1990: 57).

Thus soap opera pleasures includes both the pleasures of escapism and vicarious emotional experience, but also the pleasures of recognition and validation of one's own everyday experiences.

WHAT IS A SOAP OPERA?

A soap opera has a specific location and a core set of characters around whose lives the main storylines are woven. There are additional characters who may come and go and whose lives in some way touch those of the main characters. Each episode has a number of themes or stories running through it and the cliff-hanger at the end of the episode holds the audience in suspense until the next episode, and encourages them to watch again (Hobson 1982: 33).

These serials have traditionally offered a range of strong female characters and this has proved a popular feature of the genre for its audience. They show women of different ages, class and personality types, and offer characters with whom many members of their female audience can empathise. They also include male

characters often for romantic interest, sometimes as 'bad' characters, but men do not have the leading roles within the serials. While children figure largely in many of the plots, they don't appear on the screen all that often, nor do the very old. Their infrequent screen appearance tends to detract from the soap opera's representation of 'real life', but this is caused by the difficulties in sustaining babies and children in long-running serials (Hobson 1982: 33).

Some soap operas do have definite aims to include areas of social concern (as does *Generations*), which are interwoven with the lives of the characters within the drama. They are designed specifically to connect with everyday life and aim to reflect reality. The location may be a family, farming community, a street or a hospital ward, a motel or a ranch. The drama may show a work situation or people at leisure in the corner pub, but this is always secondary to the main theme of the drama (Hobson 1982: 33-34).

Primarily soaps are about the problems of everyday personal life and personal relationships. They may include representations of class, work or gender, but they cut across classes by sharing with their predominantly female audience the problems which are experienced by women whatever their age or class (Hobson 1982: 34). Livingstone is of the opinion that while American soaps are largely prime-time, expensive and melodramatic, British soaps tend to be early evening, cheap and everyday subject matter. The former concern the wealthy while the latter concern the working-class poor (1990:54).

Soap operas take the form of the continuous serial whose internal time is supposed to coincide with 'real' time. However time in the serial is restricted to calendar time, the day or week, not to time of day. The coincidence with real time is not normally emphasised in the programmes, but is highlighted when special calendar times, like Christmas and New Year or Valentine's Day, are made part of the events within the serial, with appropriate reference being made both visually and in the storylines (Hobson 1982: 34).

Because time is continuous and seemingly infinite in a soap opera, it does mean that there is a need for any storyline to have a final resolution. Indeed it is only through the death or removal of one of the characters or the ending of the serial, that anything 'final' happens in soap operas. To try to introduce an 'ending' in this sense

is an event, which brings down the wrath of the viewers on the programme-makers (Hobson 1982: 35).

THE SOAP FORMULA

Soap operas are usually shown daily and are half an hour to an hour long. There are the odd exceptions, but soaps are generally set in small towns and involve two or three families intimately connected with one another. Families are often composed of several generations and the proliferation of generations is accelerated by the propensity of soap characters to mature at an incredibly rapid rate. Occasionally one of the families will be fairly well to do, and another will be somewhat lower on the social scale though still as a rule, identifiably middle-class. Since there is so much intermingling and intermarrying, class distinctions quickly become blurred. 'Black' people and other minorities are almost completely excluded in most American and European soap operas (Hobson 1982: 27).

Women as well as men frequently work outside the home, usually in professions such as law and medicine and women are generally on a professional par with men. But most of everyone's time is spent experiencing and discussing personal and domestic crises. Controversial social problems such as rape, are introduced from time to time and for the most part are handled in a sensitive manner. Even though soaps contain more references to social problems than do most other forms of mass entertainment, they tend to be faulted due to their lack of social realism. Fans insist on soap opera's extreme lifelikeness and claim that the characters have to cope with problems very like their own (Hobson 1982: 28).

Soap operas create the illusion that the characters in the location exist and life continues whether the viewers are there or not. They invite their viewers to drop in and see the characters and share their lives, but the illusion depends on the credibility that life goes on, even when the viewers are not watching.

Until very recently the analysis of soap operas has been the domain of elitist criticism and mass media 'content analysis'. Elitist critics view soap operas as assembly-line products, comic book-like in their lack of closure, and formally transparent. Content analysts, on the other hand take soap operas seriously enough as a social phenomenon to go beyond simply dismissing them as garbage. To them, they are pseudo-realities that "present curiously distorted reflections of empirical social reality". Content analysts assume that what a soap opera means can be separated

from how a soap opera means. To them the production of meaning in soap opera is simple and unproblematic (Allen 1983: 97).

Allen (1983) has argued that the lack of serious aesthetic attention given to soap operas is not due to their apparent simple-mindedness, but rather the inability of critics to read them as texts. He claims that soap operas should be studied as a social phenomenon. Thus the analysis of social and cultural aspects of soap operas and soap opera viewing must be predicated upon a better understanding of how soaps work as producers of meaning and pleasure.

Essentially the soap opera can be seen as a text. Typically this kind of text is resistant to narrative closure. While subplots are regularly resolved, the story of the soap itself is never completed and never can be. Even when soaps have been cancelled, their final episodes seldom tie all the narrative ends together. Its open-endedness makes it resistant to many types of narrative and textual analysis, since textual models presume narrative closure. They assume that one of the chief operations of the text is solving the enigma/s posed at the beginning of the work, and bringing the text to resolution, audience satisfaction and closure. Thus Allen (1983) proposes that the text can be specified only as the sum of all its episodes broadcast, since it began. It is this quality of openness, that helps to explain the wide appeal and longevity of the soap opera form.

Livingstone is of the opinion that soap operas are both open and closed texts. They are open because of the absence of a central figure. Instead the drama involves a cluster of interrelated characters who at different times come to the fore or retreat to the background. Secondly, the main theme of the soap opera is not that of individual quest but that of human relationships, and preferably a tangle of relationships centrally involving several characters in each story. Thirdly, there is no shared understanding between the viewers/readers, hero and other characters and story-teller about the story. It is the multiple and often conflicting understandings that create the interest, tension, irony and humour. Fourthly, he shares a point made by Allen (1983), that typically closed texts are bounded by an identifiable and discrete beginning and ending to each story (1990: 62-63).

But, Livingstone also writes that soap operas are also closed texts that they reassure the viewer in his/her age-old beliefs in the power of the individual, in traditional values of stability, community, patriarchy, and resistance to change. They systematically

exclude certain phenomena in their apparent general treatment of everyday concerns, particularly by re-directing attention from the political to the personal. They are also closed in that conclusions may be reached about the moral superiority of one of the expressed views - usually the 'establishment' view (1990: 63-64).

In soap opera, the variety of perspectives expressed are individually personified in the various characters. Each issue (abortion, marriage, loyalty etc.) is given an open treatment because different characters each express a different perspective on the issue. The viewer is presented with a range of often conflicting viewpoints, and the interest lies in their juxtaposition, in the fact that there is no simple answer, and in the space for the viewer to impose his/her own views on the issue (Livingstone 1990: 64).

Rather than criticising soap opera viewing as being "mindless mass media passivity", one should consider the idea that a complex exchange between viewer and text occurs. Cognisance must be taken of certain codes, when reading a soap opera. These distinct codes, engage the reader in the interpretative process.

The soap opera shares with most other narrative television forms, complex codes borrowed from Classical Hollywood Cinema, known as the video cinematic code. The unmotivated camera movement is a departure from the norm in soap opera style. Its use privileges the content of the shot for the audience. The viewer reads this device as meaning that something important is about to happen.

From the form of the soap opera, a set of distinctive codes have evolved, which overlap with forms of the narrative. Of special significance is the soap's use of time and space. Events are prolonged rather than compressed as in other narrative forms, and the construction of a 'world' is mostly an interior one. Facial expressions have the same semiotic function as does dialogue. Furthermore, the following are all characteristic of the soap opera form: multiple intersecting narratives, the use of non-diegetic music, the use of commercials as a structuring device in each episode and a high degree of both inter-episode and intra-episode narrative redundancy (Allen 1983: 100).

While many soaps share the same codes, each is different. Each soap sets up its own set of expectations in terms of content and style recognised by the audience and

used by them to derive meaning from each episode. The network of interpersonal relationships is an important aspect of this textual code.

As is the case with all cultural products, soap operas exist within networks of other texts. The reader is constantly comparing the text under consideration with other texts he/she has experienced. The code of intertextuality, is sometimes used explicitly by soap writers in the search for new plot twists. The level of meaning is produced by reference to another text or set of texts (Allen 1983: 101).

In making sense of an action, the viewer will rely upon his/her own experience in the world, sense of right and wrong, truth and realism. Eco (cited in Allen 1983) has called these “common frames”. Consequently, the viewer compares actions with what should happen in a given situation, what is plausible, veristic and morally correct not in terms of the world of the soap, but in terms of the viewer’s own world of experience and values. This phenomenon is known as the ideological code (Allen 1983: 98-102).

THE SEMIOTIC OPERATION OF THE SOAP OPERA TEXT

The text of the soap opera operates within multiple levels of meaning. One day’s plots are reiterated on the following day to keep non-daily viewers up to date on narrative developments. This is known as inter-episodic redundancy. In addition to this, intra-episodic redundancy, which is the repetition of information from character to character within each daily episode, also aims to keep viewers abreast of the day to day happenings (Allen 1983:102).

According to Geraghty (1992), this problem can be handled by making the text enjoyable and to give the audience a sense of familiarity with setting and characters so that to return to them is pleasurable. Repetition permits a familiar geography to be established through camera-work and cutting which allows the audience to build up on a sense of the fictional space.

Furthermore, these texts contain thirty or more characters, most of them related to each other and this network of relationships has a history. Frequently the viewer is taken back in time and required to make references to departed characters or past relationships. For this reason many critics treat soaps with disdain. That is, they are unable to decode this paradigmatic textual code. As suggested by Geraghty (1992),

familiarity with the characters allows the viewer to bring meaning to the narrative rather than having to rely on what is shown in a particular episode.

According to Allen, soap operas are overcoded. Overcoding helps to account for the diversity of the soap opera audience and the variety of functions its viewing serves. When the reader encounters what is believed to be a fictional text, it is decoded by the attempt of assigning patterns of significations found in the text, to its author. Conversely when the reader encounters what seems to be a non-authored text, it is decoded by inferring meaning from it by reference to real life experiences. The characters and situations are made sense of by integrating them into the viewer's own field of knowledge, values and experiences (1983: 102-105).

The close relationship between soaps and their audiences, the intimate knowledge regular viewers have of the programmes and their identification with particular characters, are still a source of puzzled dismay to those who do not watch soap operas. Concern is expressed that soaps are a substitute for 'real life', that viewers believe that the characters really exist and think that 'Albert Square' and 'Southfork' are something more than sets grown familiar with through repeated viewing. These criticisms are ill-founded but they do hint at the crucial relationship which soaps have with their audiences. Geraghty maintains that only soaps invite the audience both to enter intimately into a fictional world and to stand back and view with dispassion the formal conventions through which that world is constructed (1992: 9-10).

The Plot

According to Buckmann (1984), there are seven themes in all drama. These revolve around love (both happy and unhappy), ambition, jealousy, revenge, madness and confused identity. To this the soaps have added 'hysterical illness'. The plots are mere vehicles for the characters to ride in: while their destination is known, viewer interest centres on their style of driving, or on how they are going to get to their destination. What is extraordinary about the genre, is the efficiency of the writers to provide plots which entertain and satisfy huge audiences day after day, and year after year. Supplying plots is a complicated mechanical process. A large cast of permanent characters has to be provided for. The story has to be capable of infinite protraction, in order to fill the endless hours and it also has to accommodate a certain amount of repetition and recapitulation for the benefit of those viewers who might have missed something.

The plot is the engine for the workings of destiny, which means the punishment of evil and the rewarding of good. At the centre of every plot there is love. Most of the basic themes spring from it. The principal story lines in American soaps, have shown to be rape, the problems of motherhood, illegitimacy, the sharp points of the triangular love-affair, divorce, amnesia and/or insanity caused by grief at the apparent loss of a loved one, and death. Themes less obviously connected with love are that of drug peddling and the foiling of sinister plots. English soaps are no less love-lorn, and forgotten lovers, presumed dead, turn up unannounced (Buckmann 1984: 66-67).

The characters

Buckmann (1984) has classified the characters of soap operas as saints, sufferers and sinners. The decent husband with a fatal weakness, a scheming bitch who does her damnest to cheat him, or his children out of their rightful inheritance; the long suffering wife; the 'king' or 'queen' whose wealth, power or experience puts them outside conventional morality, and who is the target of every man's envy and if male, every maiden's desire; the romantic hero who despite making wrong decisions at crucial times, ends up with the right girl; the innocent heroine, forever endangered by the wrong man and the ruthless villain greedy for anything in skirts or folded into a wallet - these are the stereotypes of folk myth and soap opera.

Although you may never find out what these characters think about the great issues of our time, they will always react to given circumstances exactly as you would expect i.e. based on social norms and normative values. The decent husband will wrestle with his weakness, succumb, repent, confess and begin all over again. The bitch (found in American rather than British soaps), will bring the family to the brink of total disaster, only to be thwarted at the very last moment. The devoted wife will survive poisonous gossip, social ostracism, adultery, abortion, argument and amnesia to retain the love of her husband. The 'king' or 'queen' will fight off attempts at usurpation, financial annihilation, assassination, blackmail, entrapment and fraud, to rise triumphant and assert his or her divine invulnerability. And so it is that they behave with some predictability. But these are merely stereotypes, and not all characters can be placed into these categories (Buckmann 1984: 37-38).

These are the conventions which define soap opera as a genre. They are shared by the makers and audience of a genre product and to a degree have to be followed if we are to recognise what genre a particular film or television programme belongs to.

One aspect of the genre product is that it is recognised by its similarity to other products of its kind, and what often leads to the frequent complaint of its predictability.

In common-sense terms, watching a TV drama is to enter an imaginary world which offers a qualitatively different experience from the activities of everyday life and from those media forms which claim to deal with the real world - such as news or photojournalism. The term fiction suggests a separation from real life. Stories are by definition only stories: they are not real life. This often leads to the dismissal of popular fictions as 'only' or 'harmless' entertainment. But granted that popular fictions are entertainment and do have to be profitable, Gledhill (1997:340) questions whether for these reasons they are either irrelevant to lived experience or without significance?

SOAP OPERA AS A TEXT AND SIGNIFYING PRACTICE

Such questioning leads to a consideration of how a soap opera works as a semiotic site for the production and negotiation of representations, meanings and identities. How does soap opera produce its meanings in terms of the institutional, discursive and formal mechanisms which enable soap opera and other popular fictional TV programmes to function as sites for the negotiation of meanings and identities, sites of cultural struggle over representation, sites for the construction of the 'real', and for the production of popular pleasures? Furthermore, what does it mean to define this genre as a 'signifying practice'?

Gledhill (1997:340) suggests that in order to answer these questions, one needs to consider concepts which deal with the work of soap opera as a mass-produced form of entertainment that can handle the work of its conventions and stereotypes in relation to the social world of the audience, without presuming either a fixed reality or a fixed set of codes for representing that reality. One also needs a model of the discursive work of soap opera which can address questions of power and hegemony and the process of cultural negotiation taking place in popular culture. As one of a range of popular fictional types or genres, soap opera belongs to the overarching genre system that governs the division of mass-produced print and audio-visual fictions into distinct kinds, one of those being soap operas. A particular genre category refers to the way the individual fictions which belong to it can be grouped together in terms of similar plots, stereotypes, settings, themes, style, emotional effects etc. These conventions represent a body of rules or codes, signifiers and

signs, and the potential combinations of, and relations between, signs which together constitute the genre (Gledhill 1997: 351).

At its most basic level the genre system orchestrates signifiers which determine the attributes of different fictional worlds: for example settings, locations, character types, iconography, plots etc. At first sight, generic codes consist of rules of inclusion and exclusion governing what can and cannot appear or happen within particular generic worlds. Particular settings, character types and images become signs for a particular kind of fictional world. Although the rules or codes establish limits, they are not eternally fixed (e.g. never expecting to see the 'outside' world in a soap opera - today, many make use of exterior shots and settings).

Semiotic principles of signification determine that generic signs produce meanings through relationships of similarity and difference. Meaning is produced through the difference between signs, and generic conventions produce meanings through a process of constantly shifting combination and difference (Gledhill 1997:356).

From this we learn that it is not possible to fix the meaning of particular generic signifiers, neither is it possible to define genres through a fixed set of attributes unique to themselves. What defines the genre is not the specific convention itself but its placing in a particular relationship with other elements - a relationship which generates different meanings and narrative possibilities according to the genre. Thus despite a grounding in repetition and similarity, difference is key to the work of genre. According to Gledhill, our knowledge of any generic system can only be provisional (1997:358).

SIGNIFICATION AND REFERENCE OF THE SOAP OPERA

Central to the topic of this thesis is the question of the relation between the production of genre fictions and social reference, which is also central to the consideration of a genre's work of cultural negotiation. Although Hall (1997) has stressed the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified, which produces a sign that refers to and represents, but does not reflect the real world, the genre's codes takes signs from our social and cultural world not simply to represent that world, but to produce another, fictional, one. What exactly is the relation between the signifiers of the generic world and social reality, and how does genre production engage in the social world, while in the process of constructing a fictional one?

Steve Neale (1981) makes two useful distinctions which are helpful in understanding the work of the referent in genre films. His first distinction is between that of verisimilitude and realism. These terms refer in significantly different ways to the work of the referent. Realism is the more familiar term used today through which one judges whether a fiction constructs a world we recognise as like our own. Neale (1981) does however note that realism is not an unproblematic category. He underlines the fact that in fiction, 'reality' is always constructed. On the other hand, verisimilitude he argues, refers not to what may or may not actually be the case, but rather to what the dominant culture believes to be the case - to what is generally accepted as credible, suitable and proper.

A genre such as soap opera - a daily 'story of everyday life', itself incorporated into the daily routines of listeners and viewers - is heavily invested in cultural verisimilitude (i.e. the norms, mores and common-sense of the social world outside the fiction), since the conventions of cultural verisimilitude are constantly mutating under pressure from shifting cultural discourses and newly emerging social groups, soap operas are driven to engage in some way with social change. They need to maintain the recognition of existing audiences and attract newly emerging ones, together with the constant need for new story material and the need for an edge over competitors, makes topicality, being up-to-date and controversy, all vital factors in the form's continuance (Gledhill 1997:361).

Issues of signification and reference are thus also concerned with the ideology contained in the narrative of the genre. Ideological analysis of this nature is based on the assumption that cultural artifacts are seen as expressing and promoting values, beliefs and ideas in relation to the contexts in which they are produced, distributed and received. Ideological analysis aims to understand how a cultural text specifically embodies and enacts particular ranges of values, beliefs and ideas.

Ang writes that ideologies not only organise the ideas and images people make of reality, but they also enable people to form an image of themselves and thus to occupy a position in the world. Through ideologies people acquire an identity. They become subjects with their own convictions, own will and their own preferences. In addition to an image of oneself, ideology also offers an image of others. One's own identity takes form in this way, but the ideology serves also to outline the identity of other people (1994: 276-277).

IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Ideological analysis is often associated with a Marxist perspective on culture and ideology. From this perspective emerges the question of the link between social and cultural domination. According to Marx, those groups who own the means of production thereby control the means of producing and circulating a society's ideas. Through their ownership of publishing houses, newspapers and lately the electronic media, the dominant classes 'subject' the masses to ideologies which make the social relations of domination and oppression appear natural and so mystify the 'real' conditions of existence - ideology is defined as 'false consciousness'. Classical Marxists might argue that while the mass audience believes that television is harmless entertainment, offering a pleasant way to relax at the end of a hard work day, in actuality the mass audience is lulled into passive inaction where bourgeois aspirations and values are instilled, while this audience believes in the promise that personal fulfilment can come through the practices and products of current consumer society. Thus, this mass audience exists in a state of 'false consciousness' by failing to recognise how their ideas and values are formed for them to serve the interests of others. They are dupes of ideology (White 1992:165). For Marxists the media have figured as a major instrument of ideological domination (Gledhill 1997:347-348).

The problem with this notion of ideological domination by the media is that it makes it difficult to conceptualise a position from which to resist or challenge it, except through the values or ideas of the dominant elite which necessarily exclude the mystified masses. A way of moving beyond this, was offered in the thinking of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. He displaced the notion of domination by that of hegemony. According to Gramsci, since power in a bourgeois democracy is as much a matter of persuasion and consent as of force, it is never secured once and for all. Hegemony describes the general predominance of particular class, political and ideological interests within a given society. Although society is composed of varied and conflicting class interests, the ruling class exercises hegemony insofar as its interests are recognised and accepted as the prevailing ones. Social and cultural conflict is expressed as a struggle for hegemony - a struggle over which ideas are recognised as the prevailing common-sense view for the majority of social participants. Hegemony appears to be spontaneous, even natural, but it is the historical result of the prestige enjoyed by the ruling class by virtue of their position and function in the world of production (White 1992: 167). Any dominant group has to a greater or lesser degree to acknowledge the existence of those whom it dominates by winning the consent of competing or marginalised groups in society.

Unlike the fixed grip over society implied by 'domination', 'hegemony' is won in the to-and-fro of negotiation between competing social, political and ideological forces through which power is contested, shifted or reformed.

Following this, it is possible to argue that television programmes express a range of positions and ideas. From this perspective, the medium functions as a forum for negotiating hegemony, although dominant interests will prevail most of the time and may even restrict the range of competing voices that get heard (White 1992: 168).

Representation is a key site in such struggle, since the power of definition is a major source of hegemony. Thus in the process of negotiating hegemony, ideologies may shift their ground, the central consensus may be changed, and 'the real' reconstructed (Gledhill 1997: 348). The concepts of hegemony and negotiation enable us to rethink the 'real' and representation in a way which avoids the model of a fixed reality or fixed sets of codes for representing it. They also enable us to conceptualise the production of definitions and identities by the media industries in a way that acknowledges both the unequal power relations involved in the struggle, and at the same time the space for negotiation and resistance from subordinated groups. Thus the 'real' is, as it were, an on-going production in constant process of transformation, and subject to struggle and contest through equally dynamic processes of signification. Media forms and representations constitute major sites for conflict and negotiation, a central goal of which is the definition of what is to be taken as 'real', and the struggle to name and win support for certain kinds of cultural value and identity over others.

Regardless of the various methods used to analyse texts (e.g. semiotics, genre study, narrative analysis), the ideological perspective assumes that television offers a particular construction of the world rather than a universal, abstract truth. In other words, ideological criticism examines texts to clarify how the meanings and pleasures generated by television express a specific social, material, and class interests. This does not necessarily mean that a given programme or episode directly expresses the beliefs of a particular producer, writer or director (although these may obviously be contributing influences and viewpoints), nor does it mean that there is some conspiracy among television executives to control the ideas expressed through the medium. Rather ideological analysis focuses on the systematic meanings and contradictions embodied in textual practices. This would include the way in which familiar narrative, visual or generic structures orient our understanding of what we

see and how they naturalise the events and stories on television (White 1992:172-173).

Narrative and generic conventions are crucial ways in which television handles social tensions and contradictions. Ideological criticism can begin with a narrative analysis to see how the structural and functional logic of plot development explains and naturalises a sequence of events, within a particular episode. Ideological analysis is also not necessarily a simple or self-evident practice, since the underlying theoretical perspectives that support ideological analysis encourages an understanding of the contradictions and instabilities in culture as the places where the dominant system is most clearly exposed. In this regard, it is important to recall the ideas of uneven development and of hegemony as negotiated terrain. It is also necessary to remember that ideology is not a fixed set of beliefs, but an arena of representational practice and therefore a site of struggle and contestation. These ideas suggest that the expression, even of a dominant ideology, necessarily includes tensions and contradictions. But it is only more or less successful, never finally achieving a homogenous set of representational practices or a unified social subject (White 1992: 179).

Complicating matters, is television's textual system which in itself is dense and complex. As a medium that usually aims to attract the largest possible audience for any given programme, television's ideological system is relatively diffuse. It achieves this in practice by aiming its programming at specific core audiences. The production of multiple ideological positions can be viewed as an effect of programming practices, as individual episodes and programmes are situated within the larger system of programme flow. Whatever the institutional imperatives that generate a context for ideological dispersion, the texts that comprise television are not discrete and delimited, but are juxtaposed with, and bump up against one another. In other words, individual episodes are segmented and interspersed with commercials, news briefs, and programme previews, all of which are themselves sequences of mini-narratives. These sequences are, in turn, positioned within an unceasing flow from programme to programme, giving the appearance of an never-ending text (White 1992: 180).

Ideological criticism aims at understanding contradictions as constitutive of the text's ideological problematic. The ideological problematic refers to the field of representational possibilities offered by a text and the structuration of issues in

particular ways. In this vein, ideological criticism is less concerned with finding a specific message in a text than with delineating the range of issues and questions raised within a programme or across a set of texts (a number of episodes or a programme and the advertisements, or an evening of programming). The ideological problematic also refers to the nature and range of issues raised and how they are raised, and to the systems of representation that are thereby promoted or excluded, in implicit or explicit terms (White 1992:182).

Depending on where and how one focuses one's attention, a range of belief systems can be partially satisfied and fulfilled, though they are received in a context of contestation moderated by the other perspectives that accompany them. An awareness of this field of multiple meanings and the world of ideology is crucial to understanding the appeal of television as a mass medium.

The issue of identity politics is a useful one to bring up in the context of ideological criticism because it points to the way in which individuals can recognise and use the meanings made available through the heterogeneity of television's systems of representation. (However much the system may strive to 'contain' extreme or disruptive meanings.) Focussing our attention on readings, highlights the fact that a dominant ideology is less a fixed set of meanings and beliefs than it is a negotiated position within a system of contradictory and contestatory meanings that are expressed in cultural texts, including television (White 1992:191).

Finally, ideological criticism is concerned with texts as social processes and as social products. Given television's prominent position in contemporary social life, its dense network of texts, and its pervasive implication in a larger consumer culture, it constitutes a major arena of contemporary ideological practice. It is thus clearly important to subject the medium to ideological investigation. Because of its fragmentation and heterogeneity, television constantly draws viewers into its world of representation, but it does so in uneven or variable ways. This representation of heterogeneity mainly functions as a limited and regulated pluralism, striving to hold things in balance and to develop all subjects and points of view in relation to normative frames of reference (White 1992: 196).

Besides these normative frames of reference, we are confronted with a variety of issues, ideas, and values that cannot easily be subsumed under the heading of 'ruling ideology', which in itself is a contradiction. The process is further complicated by the fact that, in the current social formation, television itself contributes to, and exists in highly fragmented and dispersed systems of representation, so that it is difficult to identify a single normative or dominant voice. According to White (1992: 197), in the face of this heterogeneity, it is all the more crucial that we directly confront and analyse the mobilisation of multiple perspectives and contradictions, through and across the texts that comprise television, in order to develop our understanding of ideological practice in all its complexity.

Thus, because of the great insights ideological analysis can offer in understanding the complexities of identity politics, it is crucial that this method is employed in the subsequent analysis to determine the broader social and cultural context in which the representations operate, the meanings and ideas that are generated and which provide the resources for the construction of identities. However, because *Generations* is an instance of a genre which employs very specific codes to make it the semiotic text and powerful signifying practice that it is, it is necessary first to analyse this particular programme, in terms of the typical features of the soap opera, as explored in this chapter. The following chapter is dedicated to an analysis of instances of 'South Africanness' in particular episodes of *Generations*.

CHAPTER 5

THE REPRESENTATION OF 'SOUTH AFRICANNESS' IN THE LOCALLY PRODUCED TELEVISION PRODUCTION, *GENERATIONS*

This chapter is dedicated to both a genre and an ideological analysis of particular episodes of *Generations* in order to determine the instances of 'South Africanness' which provide the resources for the construction of South African identities. Firstly, the genre analysis attempts to ascertain the drama's validity as an instance of the soap genre, so as better to inform the second section, namely an ideological analysis, which is reliant on the text of *Generations* being a signifying practice, which works as a semiotic site for the production and negotiation of representations, meanings and identities.

The following analysis is based upon a sample of twenty-four episodes recorded on SABC 1, over a six week period from the 28 September 1998 until the 6 November 1999, bearing in mind that as from the beginning of October 1998, the screening of *Generations* changed from Tuesday to Friday, as opposed to the usual Monday to Thursday. For easy reference the sample episodes have been numbered from one to twenty four, and will be referred to as such.

THE SOAP FORMULA

As mentioned previously *Generations* is screened on SABC 1, four times a week, for half an hour each day. This includes the time allowed for advertisements during the episode, making the duration of actual drama time about 23 minutes. But instead of being screened during the usual soapie early evening prime time slot (between four and six), it is screened during the eight o'clock prime time slot, traditionally news and current affairs hour on South African television. The previous night's episode is repeated on SABC 1 the following morning.

From the sample analysed, it is clear that *Generations* takes the form of the soap opera both as regards its formula and the semiotic operation of the text. As a starting point, the title of the soap opera *Generations*, is very notable when considering its genre. The name is one that expresses both continuity and longevity over an undetermined and indefinite period of time, and thus adds to its resistance to narrative closure. It gives us the idea that the story deals with several groups of

people (young and old) who may come and go over many years. But very important to note is that usually people of the same generation share similar histories. This means that the current generation whose lives we become engrossed in, not only seemingly come from a shared past, but are also seemingly heading towards a similar, shared destiny. These are important elements to the production, in terms of fostering the idea of a national culture.

Characters

Generations has approximately twenty permanent characters at any one time around whose lives the main storylines are woven. But there are a few others who feature less often and make guest appearances depending on the story. The soap opera revolves primarily around two wealthy families: previously the Morokas (a few of whom are still left) and now, the Madaus; and a group of young, middle class characters who live together in what is termed “the commune”. Essentially all the characters’ lives revolve around their places of work: the two rival advertising houses *New Horizons* (owned and run previously by the Morokas and now by the Madaus) and *Isis* (co-owned by Hilda and previously Max, and since his death, by his sister Shaan Naidu). Other places of work are *Moniks*, a hairdresser and beauty salon (owned and run by Karabo Moroka) and as in keeping with the typical soap formula, *Generations* also has a place of leisure: the *Back of the Moon* - a club and bar (owned and run by Sonny Jacobs and his friend Lennon). Most characters have some affiliation to these places of work and hence most of the action takes place in these venues as well as at the “commune”, and the home of the Madau family.

What makes the places of work in *Generations* quite exceptional is the fact that other than at *The Back of the Moon*, where characters who work here include the owners and waiters and waitresses, the characters’ careers are quite different to the ones described by Hobson (1982). None of the characters are lawyers or doctors, and instead are ambitious, successful advertising executives. Men and women typically work within the same environments in *Generations*, namely the advertising houses, the hairdresser and the bar. However, what must be noted is that men do not necessarily hold more powerful positions than their female counterparts in these places of work. This feature of the soap opera could be read as stressing the importance the producers place on representing the ideals of the discourse of 'black economic empowerment'. Representing business is more important than the representation of other professions typical of the genre.

While *New Horizons* is owned by the powerful Mike Mudau, advertising deals are clinched by the bitchy and crafty Ntsiki, who moves from *Isis* to *New Horizons* during the sample episodes. The rival company *Isis* is run by two women, Hilda and Shaan. Glen and Sarah-Lee both work there (and previously also Ntsiki), all in equal positions.

The hairdresser, *Moniks* is run and owned by Karabo, but her hairdressers are both male and female: Neville and Thembi. Besides being a beauty therapist, Thembi works concurrently on her career as a successful singer.

As is the case with most soap operas, *Generations* offers a strong range of female characters, and while male characters are their rivals within the world of work, they also feature largely in the romantic lives of these female characters.

As is true of male characters in international soap operas, 'bad' characters within *Generations* are also largely male. Max Naidu and Archie Moroka are the two 'baddies' viewers are most familiar with, even though they have left the story. While Ntsiki and Ingrid are also seen as a baddies - their characters are made up of more stereotypical characteristics of 'evil' women. Ntsiki is bitchy and crafty and plots and plans for her own gain - to marry rich, become more powerful at work, turn people against other people etc. Ingrid blinds Karabo and poisons her own child in attempts to win her ex-husband back. On the other hand, Max and Archie are known for more heinous crimes such as fraudulent behaviour, drug trafficking and having committed murder. The soapie also features 'baddies' who appear less often and as the story dictates, such as the loan sharks who threaten to kill Neville in Episode 11 if he doesn't repay them. In the final scene of Episode 10, the characters are wondering where Lennon is. The story turns to Carol, Neville and Peter for a little while until Lennon appears. He tells Sonny to call the police as he has just killed Hilda's rapist. It would appear that only men are capable of murder in *Generations*.

While soap operas generally feature characters representative of several generations, this is not the case with *Generations* despite its name. All the characters are young (roughly between the late twenties to thirties) and there are no 'grandparents' or elderly aunts and uncles. *Generations* in this case would appear to mean a group of people from the same generation. Children do feature in *Generations*, but not all that often. In the analysed sample one child appeared very briefly, while another was only ever spoken about, but never appeared on screen.

For several episodes Glen talks about his sick son, Andrew, and even after he and his mother Ingrid arrive in Johannesburg, we don't see him for quite some time. Sarah-Lee is fighting a custody battle and even after she has won the right to keep her child Naledi, we never see her. Furthermore, minority groups such as gays and lesbians and the disabled do not feature at all.

A substantial number of the characters reside in a large home called the commune, run by Baba and Stoffel Swanepoel. Here a lot of action involving the trials and tribulations of everyday life happen. Other than at the commune and their places of work, the daily drama continues in three other households: the luxurious home of the Madaus, and the flats of *Isis* owners, Hilda and Shaan.

In the past few years, actors have come and gone, and some have even turned up again to make guest appearances. Viewers are thus required to make references to departed characters or past relationships from time to time. In scene 5 of episode 1 Baba is baking. She answers the front door. Karabo has arrived to visit Glen. Baba tells her that he is not back from work yet and the two of them begin to talk about the renovations at the commune. Baba in her usual enquiring way asks whether Karabo and Glen are going out that night. Karabo tells her that she thinks their relationship may be over. Baba says that she noticed Karabo stayed the night the previous week and she thought that they were "engaged again". Karabo replies that Glen doesn't think it is a good idea that they get back together. She blames herself since she feels that Glen can't forgive her for cancelling their wedding previously. This scene clearly brings viewers up to date with the past relationship between Glen and Karabo. This also confirms Allen's (1983) assertion about inter-episodic redundancy - that this technique aims to keep viewers up to date on narrative developments. A scene such as this is intended to bring new viewers up to date with how the characters have developed and the ordeals they have been through while the viewer was not watching or wasn't present, while requiring older viewers to make reference to the past.

Like most of their American counterparts, a deceased cast member has reappeared, and in sample episode 6, a character presumed dead, made an unexpected return to the set. In Episode 6 Karabo tells Mike that she thinks she saw Max (who is supposedly dead) at her brother's funeral, confirming her suspicions that Max was involved in her brother's death, just as he was with the other Morokas who have died.

In Episode 12 Max's sister, Shaan, receives flowers with a message which tells her to listen to her answering machine. Her brother's message on the answering machine is that he enjoyed the funeral in Amsterdam. In Episode 19 Shaan is at the *Isis* office and Carol is there too, doing some weekend work. Max makes his first appearance since he left the story a while ago. She confronts her brother about the death of Karabo's brother. He says he has come to collect money from her, and reminds her that he still owns *Isis*. She has only inherited the company, because he is supposedly dead. He threatens her to end her relationship with Peter, or he will see to his end.

With the intention of bringing Max back to the story, the scriptwriters drag his appearance out indefinitely, only making short references to him over a number of episodes. Viewers who are familiar with Max's character probably always presumed that he wasn't really dead, and are expecting his return as these small references are made to him. New viewers are confronted with a character whom they only know through what they have heard about him from other characters, but probably expect to be confronted with an unfamiliar character very soon.

In opposition to what Hobson (1982) suggests, the characters do not seem to mature at an alarming rate, especially with regard to children. But this could also be as a result of the fact that *Generations* has only been running for a few years. While 'black' people are almost completely excluded from most American and European soap operas screened on South African television, *Generations* is markedly different in that its core set of characters are largely 'black'. Only three 'white' people are part of the core set of characters, along with three 'coloured' and two Indian characters. This would seem to reflect the norm in South Africa, since the country is largely populated by 'black' people. An all South African and largely 'black' cast, is also a marking of difference – South African soap opera as different from other trans-national soap operas. This element will be taken up later.

The characters within *Generations* have clearly developed individual personalities which enable the audience to identify with them, recognise their actions as part of their character and to predict possible future action - all because of their familiarity with them. The writers of this soapie have thus shown the ability to maintain its host of characters, as well as bring back old ones and invite new ones from time to time through the provision of new plots.

Storyline

Although corporate business is the central theme around which other storylines emerge, a lot of time is spent experiencing and discussing personal and domestic crises and thus each episode has a number of themes and stories running through it. This will be made evident in the following analysis.

As typical of most soap operas, *Generations* lacks a central figure and instead this soap opera involves a cluster of interrelated characters who at different times come to the fore and then retreat into the background. Rather than the main theme of the story revolving around an individual conquest, *Generations* is about human relationships. As is the case with most international soap operas, the story of *Generations* revolves around a fairly well to do family (first the Morokas and now the Madaus) while the other characters are middle class. This means that not all characters are from the same class, but the intermingling both socially and in the work place, blurs the class distinctions somewhat. The plot of the story of *Generations* can be said to revolve around four of Buckmann's (1984) seven themes popular in all drama. They are love, ambition, jealousy and revenge. *Generations* does not really focus on stories related to madness, and hysterical illness, which seem to be very popular in American soapies. But as Buckmann (1984) writes, love is often the central theme of soap opera drama. This too is the case with *Generations*. Most of the other themes which are dealt with in *Generations* such as rape, the problems of motherhood, the triangular love-affair, and divorce have sprung from this central theme.

Stories that have developed from the theme of love in the sample series include the following: Sonny and Thembi's marriage threatens to fall apart because of Thembi's desire to have a baby, and Sonny's seemingly indifferent attitude towards the situation. Glen and Karabo have previously broken off their engagement. In the sample episodes, Karabo tries endlessly to give their relationship another chance but is faced with dealing with Ingrid, Glen's ex-wife who returns to the story determined to win Glen back. Glen on the other hand is not sure whether he wants to build on his previous relationship with Karabo, and when Kgomotso returns to the story (having run away from her husband who abuses her) he is attracted to her. These 'inter-racial' romances are significant to the South African soap opera in comparison to their European and American counterparts, in whose storylines such romances are

seldom, if ever a feature, and never represented as the norm. Usually, relationships are established between people of the same 'colour'.

Hilda and Lennon's relationship fails because he is unable to come to terms with the fact that she has been raped. Baba and Stoffel are endlessly trying to work on their very new marriage, while Neville starts dating Carol, someone supposedly way above his league, considering that she is a class above him. Ntsiki and Mike are also romantically involved, but for different reasons. Ntsiki wants to run and control *New Horizons* and marrying Mike is the way to do this. Mike on the other hand is truly interested in Ntsiki, despite his previous two failed marriages. Sarah-Lee is going through a divorce and fighting for the custody of her child, while Shaan and Peter's relationship runs into difficulties, when Peter finds out that she is being dishonest about her brother Max.

Other themes typical of soap operas such as drug peddling and the foiling of sinister plots are also ones that have been dealt with in *Generations*.

As in keeping with many soapies, *Generations* has definite aims to include areas of social concern which are interwoven with the lives of the characters within the drama. In the selected sample, *Generations* has touched on social problems such as rape, alcoholism, gambling and AIDS. Other areas of social concern which fit very well into the soap genre's concern with domestic drama includes that of 'mixed marriages', adoption, divorce, physical abuse and drug related issues. In dealing with these issues the scriptwriters hope not only to connect the audience and the characters with everyday life and in so doing to reflect South African reality, but to inform them of social issues. A discussion of these social issues will be taken up later in this chapter.

As expressed by Hobson (1982), soaps are typically about the problems of everyday life within a family or particular community, and this is exactly what *Generations* has managed to achieve. Life goes on in *Generations* whether the audience is present or not, and everyday is a new day with new problems.

With respect to the codes Allen (1983) suggests soap operas consist of, *Generations* is most definitely a text in which subplots are regularly resolved after which new ones are created and the story as such is never completed. Its wide appeal and longevity can be appreciated, in terms of the fact that the story of

Generations is the sum of all its episodes since its inception. Thus a complex exchange takes place between the faithful viewer and the text and meaning is achieved through familiarity with the text.

As mentioned earlier, the phenomena of inter- and intra-episodic redundancy keeps viewers abreast of narrative developments. There are quite a few instances of inter-episodic redundancy in the analysed sample. In scene 10 of episode 2 Karabo is trying to convince Glen to give their relationship another chance. Glen recalls his previous marriage. The viewers thus learn that Glen has been married before. In the second scene of episode 3, Junior and Carol are discussing their father's relationship with Ntsiki. Junior says that it is unlikely his father will get married for a third time. Viewers learn that should Mike marry Ntsiki, this will be his third marriage.

Through this technique, viewers are also brought up to date about characters who have left the story. In the first scene of episode 4, Mike and Glen are discussing Karabo's bereavement. Her brother has just died in Amsterdam. They talk of the past ordeal she has had to face: her father, Paul Moroka, her brother Archie and Archie's wife Priscilla, have all died in cruel freak accidents. Glen wants to know whether this will cause her to have another nervous breakdown. Mike says that Kgomotso will fly from the Ivory Coast to meet her in Amsterdam. From this scene viewers can infer a lot from the past, not only about the deceased Morokas and Karabo's illness, but also about a character who has left the story, is elsewhere but could return.

Another form of inter-episodic redundancy within *Generations* occurs each time a new episode begins. Each episode begins with three short scenes from the previous day's episode. Thereafter the theme tune is played, the credits role and the new episode begins. The three scenes which provide the base for Episode 3 are as follows: firstly, the argument between Baba and Stoffel; secondly, Ntsiki berating Sarah-Lee for being caught drinking and driving; and thirdly the final scene of the previous day's episode, Glen telling Karabo that his love for her has died. These three scenes occurred in the previous episode.

Just as inter-episodic redundancy adds to the semiotic operation of the text, so does intra-episodic redundancy which is also a technique used frequently in *Generations*. This means that information is often repeated from character to character within each daily episode. Episode 17 enables a lot of discussion of Karabo's blindness. In the

previous episode she uses what she thinks are pure eye-drops but which have actually been tampered with and which causes her blindness. In scene 2 of Episode 17, Ntsiki, Junior, Mike and Queen are talking about their visit to the hospital and Karabo's accident. In the following scene, Glen tells Baba that he has found a school for Andrew to attend. Glen and Peter begin to talk about Karabo's accident. Glen explains that there was ammonia in her eye-drops and tells Peter and Baba that he suspects Ingrid is behind this incident. In scene 6, Queen, Baba and Carol are also talking about what happened to Karabo. Throughout this episode the same information i.e. Karabo's blindness, has been repeated in several scenes by various characters.

Location

It is clear that *Generations* takes place in a specific location - South Africa and more specifically Johannesburg. This is an exceptional element in terms of its genre, considering that traditionally soap operas are set in small towns. However, this does not change the important element of soap operas: two or three intimately connected families involved in the drama. As viewers we are made aware both through visual images and the storyline that they are in this big South African city. Occasionally we are shown an external shot of the sunrise or sunset (which also gives us a sense of time within the episode) over central Johannesburg - the landmark of the tall radio tower is clearly visible.

The final scenes of both episodes 2 and 3 begin with an exterior shot of central Johannesburg. Scene 1 of episode 2 begins with an exterior shot of the Mudau house. Inside Mike is sitting at the breakfast table reading the newspaper. Viewers infer from this that it is the beginning of a new day. Scene 2 begins with the exterior shot of the signboard of *Back of the Moon* and the action is taken inside. Sonny is behind the bar, cleaning and drying glasses. For him too, it is the beginning of a new day. Scene 3 takes place in the commune. Stoffel and Baba are talking about the renovations to the commune. The beginning of scene 4 yet again begins with an exterior shot - this time of the apartment building where Ntsiki lives. Scenes 5 and 6 contains action at the characters' places of work: at *New Horizons* and *Moniks* respectively. Scene 7 takes the viewer back to the commune. Glen arrives home from a round of golf. Scene 8 begins with an exterior of Johannesburg city. It is clearly early evening since the shot shows the sun is beginning to set. This exterior shot takes us to Shaan's flat. Sarah-Lee arrives, presumably on her way back from work, and they arrange to make dinner together. Shaan pours them a drink. Scenes

9 and 10 contain action in the commune and at the Mudau house respectively. The viewer infers that it is evening and that the characters have arrived home from work.

The location of the drama is also made evident through the storyline. Characters speak about their lives in this city - they are mugged, raped and hijacked; typical experiences of living in Johannesburg and South Africa in the nineties. Other than knowing that they live in Johannesburg, we are not told exactly in which suburbs they live and work, and external shots of their homes and places of work do not detail their location within Johannesburg either.

Another feature of *Generations* which contributes to establishing its location, is language. While no literature exactly verifies this, American soapies typically seem to make use of one language for the purpose of speech. The fact that *Generations* makes use of more than one, sets it apart from the rest. It is obvious that the main language used is English. All the characters speak in English most of the time and less often some characters speak Afrikaans, Zulu and Sotho, albeit only a few lines at a time. Whatever is said, appears simultaneously in English as subtitles. Most characters sometimes speak more than one language and may answer in a different language from the one they were originally addressed in. An example of such a conversation takes place in the third scene of Episode 2 between Baba and Stoffel.

Baba: Kon jy daai kraantjie reg kry of moet ek 'n plumber bel?
Stoffel: Nee wat. Somer net die wassertjie wat stukkend was.
Baba: I can't believe nobody said anything about that dripping tap.
We must have wasted buckets of water by now.
Stoffel: Ja, ek gaan gou winkel toe.
Baba: Vir wat nou weer?
Stoffel: Jy moet maar op die lysie kyk.
Baba: You know I can't believe the wedding presents some people gave us. Just imagine - ses stelle bierglasse. Seker met jou in gedagte.
Stoffel: En die bank en twee stoele?
Baba: Vir ons nuwe sitkamer.
Stoffel: Wat nog nie eens gebou is nie. Dit is wragtig die kar voor die perde span.
Baba: What's done is done.

- Stoffel: Nonsense. And you better remember something - you've got to start saving.
- Baba: I don't believe this. Jy's die een wat my gedwing om my werk te bedank. Dit is nie my fout dat ek jou in die oë moet kyk vir elke sent nie.

The conversation continues with Stoffel and Baba switching between English and Afrikaans. Because of the use of subtitles, it is not imperative, that the viewer be proficient in both languages, for it to be fully comprehensible.

Time and Space

Although *Generations* does make use of time and space to prolong events, I would like to suggest that themes/subplots are resolved in much less time in comparison to their American counterparts, who have a tendency to drag plots on indefinitely. This phenomenon viewers can really appreciate about *Generations*, and the viewer is not easily bored nor does he/she lose track of a never-ending plot.

As is the case with most soap operas, the viewer is unable to decode the exact day of the week or time of day from any particular episode, but judging by the linear sequence of the scenes and the action taking place within any particular one, an episode usually follows a normal working day. The story begins with breakfast (at the commune or at the Mudau house) and the characters leaving for work. It gradually moves through a typical day at the respective offices and then follows the characters back home or out for a drink at *The Back of the Moon*. Besides this, one can make no inference about the approximate time of day within any one particular episode.

While not broadcast on weekends, characters within certain episodes frequently make reference to the fact that it is weekend. This means that we might be watching an episode whose story takes place on a Saturday or Sunday, but is watched during the normal working week. An example of this is Episode 3. Scene 1 begins at the commune. Baba is cooking breakfast and telling Thembi that she is not appreciated by her husband Stoffel. Scene 2 takes place in the Mudau's living area. Carol is reading. She and her brother discuss their father's relationship with Ntsiki. Karabo also joins the action. Scene 3 begins with a day time exterior shot of the bar and club, *Back of the Moon*.

Sonny is drying glasses, while Neville and Thembi are sitting at the bar.

Neville: Quiet today isn't it?
Sonny: Ja, well, Sundays can go either way.
Neville: Mmm. I suppose it depends on the weather. If it's nice, people do things outside.
Sonny: It's more to do with what's on TV. When it's a big match they are all glued to their sets.
Neville: Maybe you should get a TV in here. Then all the regulars can watch sport and pay for their drinks while they're doing it.
Sonny: Uuh. That sounds like a brilliant idea. I'll mention it to Lennon.

In scene 4 the action returns to the Mudau house, followed by action at the commune where Baba is cooking and Glen is reading, at *Back of the Moon* where the pub is filling with customers; back to the Mudau house as Neville arrives to visit Carol; and then the commune again, where Baba is finishing off dinner. Scene 9 begins with the exterior of the sunset over Johannesburg and Shaan's flat. The action then moves to Hilda's flat - she is resting on the couch in the lounge. The final episode again is at the commune. The living area is filled with both inhabitants and guests having drinks and enjoying each other's company.

Besides the fact that it is mentioned that it is Sunday in Scene 3, we can also infer that it is weekend since none of the action occurs at places of work. In all the scenes, the characters are relaxing, reading, visiting each other or just talking about general things.

As is the case with most soap operas, it is also true of *Generations* that their 'world', although consisting of a variety of scenes, is mainly an interior one. Unlike their American counterparts who introduce different consecutive scenes by merely cutting between interior shots, *Generations* often cuts between scenes, by first showing an exterior shot of the house, building or shop they are about to 'enter', or of the city of Johannesburg. The aerial view of Johannesburg is often either a sunrise or sunset, which gives the viewer the sense that the subsequent scenes are either taking place during the early morning hours or after work. Thereafter the shot is taken 'indoors' to where the action is happening. During none of the sample episodes, have shots been used where the action takes place on location outdoors.

The interior world of *Generations* is worth considering more than merely in passing, since it is quite obvious that the interior world of *Generations* is markedly different from its American and European counterparts. All the sets in *Generations* are unusually bright in colour. Usually soap operas are quite heavily lit because they are largely filmed indoors, but most of the sets, be it homes or offices, are quite subtle in colour. On the contrary, both the home and office sets of *Generations* are painted largely in deep tones of orange, green, terracotta, blue and purple. These rich colours are even more emphasised because of the strong lighting.

Examples of these deep coloured sets include the commune kitchen which is very rich pink and blue. Even the refrigerator is pink! The kitchen and living room is open plan and the staircase in the centre separates the two areas. Characters thus move freely between the kitchen and the living room where the furniture is deep blue and red. The Mudau house while more lavishly furnished than the commune, boasts very deep orange and green walls and pillars with chequered and striped furniture. Shaan's flat is largely shades of dark green with big bright paintings of abstract art in yellows and reds.

The entire *Isis* office is a bright terracotta, with deep mustard, while the hairsalon, *Moniks* is turquoise, purple, silver and pink; and *The Back of the Moon*, royal blue and maroon. Even Mike's hospital room is decorated in mauve and purple, with bright yellow and orange paintings on the walls. All the colours used are very deep and very unusual for soap opera sets. This feature of *Generations* is one to which I will return to later in the chapter.

Techniques

Generations makes use of all the video cinematic codes typical of the soap opera genre. Unmotivated camera movement emphasises the content of the shot and the viewer deduces that something important is going to happen. A large percentage of shots are medium close-ups and close-up shots. Characters are seldom seen at full length, except when entering a scene. Most of the scenes are established by a wide shot of the particular venue, and this is when people are either already busy in the scene, (such as extras in *The Back of the Moon* or *Moniks*) or they are entering or leaving such as at the reception areas of *New Horizons* and *Isis* where people are usually arriving or leaving as the elevator door opens at the beginning of a scene.

Conversations taking place between two characters largely consist of point of view shots of the other person taken from the shoulder up, moving into close-up shots of the face only. These close-up shots are largely used when the facial expressions of the characters are prolonged at the end of a scene, and in this way much meaning can be deduced from these expressions.

Furthermore, *Generations* makes use of non-diegetic music, usually used to set the first scene of a particular episode. The theme tune of the drama is very distinctive and plays an important role in recognising that a particular episode is about to start or that one has just ended. Usually three separate commercial slots appear during the half hour of any one particular episode. A short segment of the music is played in-between these commercial breaks.

Having considered the various aspects of the formula and generic code of *Generations*, it appears that *Generations* does indeed make reference to the general soap formula as proposed by Hobson (1982), Buckmann (1984), Geraghty (1992), Livingstone (1990) and Allen (1983). On the basis of the adherence to these conventions and codes, I propose that *Generations* can definitely be classified as a true soap opera. At this stage of the analysis it would seem that *Generations* is the same as any soap opera produced anywhere else in the world, and thus can be viewed as potentially a 'trans-national' commodity due to its strong generic coding. What however needs to be focussed on is how this generic structure is locally coded and transformed into a 'South African' product.

Following from a genre analysis of *Generations*, I would like to use these pre-liminary findings to identify the ways in which the programme seeks to forge a South African identity and in so doing 'flag' our nationhood. Kellner (1995:56) asserts that generic codes, dominant images, discourses and their formal aesthetic elements, all manifest certain political and ideological positions. As expressed in chapter 4, ideological analysis is based on the assumption that cultural artefacts are seen as expressing and promoting values, beliefs and ideas in relation to the contexts in which they are produced, distributed and received.

An ideological analysis in terms of the broader social and cultural context in which the representations operate, as well as the meanings and ideas that are generated and which provide the resources for the construction of identities, is necessarily reliant on a description of the ways in which imagery and 'common-sense

understandings', which inform our sense of national identity, are created. For the purpose of this study, 'South Africanness' was defined in chapter 1 as "connections to a South African way of life (and culture), context and values which allows us to form a sense of self and thus construct a South African identity". Furthermore 'South Africanness' includes "reference to elements and symbols which help us make sense of both who we are, as well as our experiences as South African citizens".

In the following analysis elements of 'South Africanness' as defined above, will be extracted. These elements are constructed through representation. The analysis attempts to clarify how the potential meanings (not pleasures, because no audience study is involved and thus meanings cannot be guaranteed) generated by *Generations* express specific social, material and class interests. This would include the ways in which the familiar narrative, visual and generic structures orient our understanding of what is seen and how the events and stories are naturalised. The following ideological criticism is concerned with delineating the range and nature of issues and questions raised in the sample number of episodes. How these issues are raised are also part of the ideological problematic. An analysis of this nature aims to understand how a cultural text (in this case *Generations*), specifically embodies and enacts particular ranges of values, beliefs and ideas.

The issue of identity politics (specifically the formation of a South African identity within *Generations* and the representation and formation of a 'new' 'black' subject) is raised in the context of ideological criticism since it points to the ways in which individuals can recognise and use the potential meanings made available through the heterogeneity of television's systems of representation. It is the generation of these meanings and ideas which provide the resources for the construction of identities. Much of the ground work for this criticism has emerged from the genre analysis at the beginning of this chapter.

GENERATIONS and the REPRESENTATION OF IDENTITIES

Before determining the kinds of representations made in the text of *Generations*, it is worth recapping some important phenomena about representational strategies and the formation of identities which were discussed in earlier chapters and which are applicable to the text of *Generations*.

Representation is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events (Hall 1997:17). When considering the ways in which the images and language actively construct meaning in *Generations*, it must be remembered that the programme does not operate in isolation. This means that there is already an existing set of assumptions, 'common-knowledge', 'common-sense', general knowledge, widespread beliefs and popular attitudes which both the producers and receivers of the programme possess before creating, and engaging respectively, in the text of *Generations*.

Belonging to the same culture or claiming that we are 'South African', means that we interpret the world in roughly similar ways despite the fact that we all have different conceptual maps. Hall claims that because of our similar interpretations of the world we are able to build up a shared culture of meanings and thus construct a social world which we inhabit together (1997:18). Even though this analysis does not consider audience reception and the production of pleasures, we can assume for the purpose of this analysis that the audience of *Generations* interpret the representations made, in broadly similar ways.

It is the ideology behind media representations, which underpins and endows with meaning, the constituent components of our identities and what they entail. This means that these media representations give the consumer the idea of what it means to 'belong' to a particular nation, social class, age, race, gender or sexuality group etc. Representation is also ideological because of the types of stereotypes created and the choices made as to which features and ways of understanding the social world to exclude or include (Briggs and Cobley 1998:279).

Media representation not only acts to tell other people about 'us' (i.e. South Africans), but also tell us about other people and tells us what it means to be ourselves (South African). These representations therefore play out the repertoire of some identities extensively (such as what it is to be able-bodied or middle class) but conversely, can also play out the repertoire of others in a very limited way (what it is to be lesbian or gay).

It must be borne in mind that identities are not something innate nor do individuals possess a single identity. Identities are formed and transformed *inter alia*, through media representations (in this case the formula of the soap opera). Identity is also

not fixed, which means that it is formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. Identity is thus historically constructed. The subject assumes different identities at different times, but not in an ad hoc way. As systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, so we are confronted with a multiplicity of possible identities any one of which we could identify with, even if only temporarily (Hall 1992b: 277). Various character types are represented in *Generations*. These character types could change as the world around us does. Thus the representation of a particular character type at this moment may not be applicable in a few months or years, as the South African lifestyle and people change. At any moment in time, viewers of *Generations* could identify with only one, or several characters for an indefinite amount of time and this could change depending on the individual identity of the viewer and as his/her conceptual map about what South African life is, changes.

A variety of both local and international programming is screened on South African television. South African viewers thus in all probability engage with the South African identities forged on *Generations* in comparison to the American, British, Australian and other South African identities they are confronted with in other programming on South African television. These programmes could potentially offer viewers other representations of identity, giving them ideas of what it means to be American, British, Australian etc. Other South African programmes may even represent new or different South African identities. (Such an analysis is beyond the scope of this study). If this is the case, it would confirm Woodward's assertion that in today's world identities are forged through the marking of difference. Difference is what marks out one identity from another and establishes distinctions, often in the form of oppositions. South African identities will thus be created and recognised in the ways in which they differ from other identities viewers confront in trans-national programming.

Coupled with the kinds of identities represented in *Generations* and which marks South African identities as different from other identities, is an exploration of what the narratives of a new South African generation are. In order to establish the kinds of identities represented in the text of *Generations*, the following ideological analysis of the representation of 'South Africanness' is broken up as follows:

- Elements of 'South Africanness'
- New ways of representing 'black' South Africans
- The narratives of a South African generation
- Elements of difference

The representations which are categorised according to the above-mentioned categories, overlap, meaning that none of them on their own construct constituents of South African identities. These elements overlap and intersect in the various categories and together they construct representations of 'South Africanness' which in turn aid in the formation of particular 'South African identities'. The South African instances and elements in episodes of *Generations* lie largely, but not exclusively, in the generic codes of character formation and narrative structure.

ELEMENTS OF 'SOUTH AFRICANNESS'

i) The cast of characters

As a point of departure, the cast of *Generations* largely consists of 'black' South Africans. An all South African cast is probably the most basic level at which viewers can identify with the text. The three 'white', two/three 'Indian' (depending on guest appearances) and three 'coloured' characters offer a broader range of characters for viewers to identify with, than 'black' characters alone and plays an important role in the ideas raised and explored in the narrative of the text. The composition of the cast also recognises the diversity of the South African nation in respect of *inter alia*, their culture, language, gender, class, 'colour', etc.

The story's revolving around characters from different colour groups, very much fits into the ideals of a 'rainbow nation'. The variety of characters acknowledges the existence of different South Africans with equal rights to benefit from the bounty of the country. In so doing, the programme is able to meet the needs of SABC 1 as spelled out in its commissioning procedure – “to reflect people of our time and provoke thinking about the changing sensibilities in the new South Africa”. An all South African cast has proven to be an important criterion for local productions.

ii) '*Generations*'

As mentioned in the genre analysis, the title '*Generations*' makes the programme seemingly uniquely 'South African'. It gives us the idea that the story deals with several groups of South African people (young and old) who may come and go over many years. The programme in all probability also deals with people from diverse backgrounds. The title would lead South African viewers to believe that despite their differences, they are united in that they all belong to the same South African generation and thus share similar histories. This means that the current generation whose lives we become engrossed in, not only seemingly come from a shared past, but are also seemingly heading towards a similar, shared destiny - yet again important ideals enshrined in the discourses of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment'. Reference to "shared histories" and "memories of the past", are important aspects to incorporate in local content programming when one of the intentions behind it is fostering national culture.

iii) Location and language of drama

Two very important elements of 'South Africanness' in *Generations* lie once again in features of its generic code, namely that of location and language. As has emerged from the genre analysis, it is clear that *Generations* takes place in a specific location - South Africa and more specifically Johannesburg. Connecting viewers to this South African reality is done largely through visual images and the storyline. Occasionally viewers are shown an external shot of the sunrise or sunset over central Johannesburg - the landmark of the tall radio tower is clearly visible. Examples of this phenomena were detailed earlier in the genre analysis.

Other locations within the drama are more likely to be national destinations or international destinations on the African continent. In Episode 17, Thembi arrives at the *Back of the Moon*, tells Sonny of her new gig and calls herself "The Janet Jackson of Johannesburg".

Sonny: Where will you be singing?
Thembi: As some larny club in Sandton. Even better.....there's this
 huge rally in Thabong.
Sonny: Where's that?
Thembi: In Welkom.

This episode stresses the drama's location as being in South Africa and more specifically in Johannesburg.

In Episode 12 scene 10, Ingrid informs Karabo and Glen that she will be moving to Johannesburg permanently. Glen and Karabo tell her that they think it would be best if she stayed in Cape Town. Again these national destinations are reinforced.

In Episode 14 Thembi mentions to Sonny that she needs a change in her life. Sonny suggests that she visits her family in Zimbabwe. Also, Philippe, Kgomotso's husband is a 'French African' living in the Ivory Coast. Thus reference is made to other 'African' destinations, with people who are seen to have a connection to us, by virtue of them also living in Africa, and presumably sharing the same desire for a 'African renaissance'?

The location of the drama is also made evident through the storyline. Characters speak about their lives in this city - they are mugged, raped and hijacked; typical experiences of living in Johannesburg and South Africa in the nineties. These are issues which will be taken up later in this analysis.

The club, *Back of the Moon*, potentially plays a significant role in fostering national culture in terms of the memories which it could be creating for certain of its older audience members. For those who recognise the name '*Back of the Moon*' as the name of a famous shebeen in Sophiatown where journalists, artists and activists used to gather in the 1950s and 60s, it could be connecting South Africa's present with its past. The name of the club, is thus a very specific South African element, potentially aimed at bringing back memories and making links to a shared, familiar past. Making reference to the past, is an important element of national culture, and of 'flagging' our nationhood - sentiments expressed by Hall (1992b) and Billig (1995) respectively.

Another feature of *Generations* which contributes to establishing its location in the South African context, is language. While the main dialogue is usually in English, most of the characters also speak another South African language (Afrikaans, Zulu or Sotho) some time or another during any particular episode. Characters may also answer in a different language to the one they were originally addressed in. Whatever is said, appears simultaneously in English as subtitles. An example of this has been detailed previously in this analysis.

These two features play a very important role in locating *Generations* as a specifically South African production. When one considers the roles location and language play in the South African narrative/s, it also comes to light that these features also serve to transcend the elements of pure fiction in the genre, and to transform and use them to make more 'real' life connections.

i) Other elements of 'South Africanness'

In an interview with Elsje Stark, headwriter for *Generations*, she expressed the opinion that what makes *Generations* uniquely South African are the "small things" which make reference to a South African lifestyle. In scene 1 of Episode 1, Peter is sitting at the breakfast table while Baba is rushing around him preparing an elaborate breakfast. The following conversation ensues:

Peter: (Picking up a rusk from the table) Did you make these rusks?
They look really delicious.

Baba: (Smiling appreciatively) Dis karringmelk biskuit.
(It's buttermilk rusks)
I used a secret recipe. Been in my family for years.

Sarah-Lee comes downstairs and joins them and the conversation changes slightly. Towards the end of the conversation, Peter returns to the topic of the rusks.

Peter: I read this really interesting travel article. This guy who came to South Africa described rusks as dried biscuits that never go stale 'cause they are already stale when they are made.

Baba: Nonsense.

The topic of the rusks is by no means the main thrust of the conversation (which is Baba cooking large breakfasts for the residents of the commune which they never seem to eat, and Sarah-Lee's mood because she is hungover). Rather, the topic of the rusks, is inserted more as means for linking these two main topics of the conversation - as a 'filler' so to speak. Nevertheless it makes a 'banal' reference to South African food - in specific traditional 'boere kos'. "I used a secret recipe. Been in my family for years", again instills a feeling of shared narratives passed down through generations.

In Episode 4, Thembi is sitting at the kitchen counter with Baba, paging through magazines. While Baba is getting excited at all the pictures of baby clothes, Thembi is becoming agitated with her. An excerpt from the conversation is as follows:

- Thembi: Didn't you hear what I said? The test was negative. I'm not pregnant.
- Baba: One miss is nothing. You're young. There's lots of time.
- Thembi: Maybe there's something wrong with me.
- Baba: A strong healthy girl like you. Never. But if you want to help nature along a bit, I have a few 'boererate' that never fail.
- Thembi: Believe me, I'm willing to try anything.
- Baba: My aunty Mabel has eight children. Now her husband worked on the mines. He worked shifts. Now every time he worked the evening shift she'd fall pregnant. Just like clockwork. She reckons two o'clock in the morning is the best time.
- Thembi: But I'd never be able to wake Sonny up.
- Baba: Make him take a cold shower first. That will help. Also to get the blood pumping. (Pause) Also to get the best results, make him jog around the house a couple of times first.
- Thembi: Baba, Sonny hates exercise.
- Baba: A few sacrifices are not too much to ask. And he should never wear tight underpants. And as for you, you must watch your diet. They say if you want a boy you must eat lots of liver and spinach. Anything with a high iron content. For a girl, eat lots of sweet things.
- Thembi: Baba, where do you get your information from?
- Baba: Aah, its been passed down from generation to generation.

Again, Baba is associated with 'boere' tradition and culture. The fact that she says the 'boereraad' has been "passed down from generation to generation", gives viewers the feeling that she is telling a traditional South African narrative which has a shared history with other South Africans of a previous or the same generation. Some viewers may very well recognise her 'recipe' for successful conception.

In scene 3 of Episode 3, Neville encourages Sonny to purchase a TV for the club (dialogue of this scene is detailed in the genre analysis). Sonny mentions that if there is sport on TV, regular customers are probably glued to their sets and that is

why the club is empty. Making this reference to sport, indicates a growing 'reality' in South Africa, since many citizens have become very engrossed in watching various sports on the weekend, especially since South Africa's re-admission to international sporting events. So too, has South African television become dedicated to broadcasting sports on the weekends. Sports bars and clubs have been established to cater for social gatherings to watch sport. In this scene, Sonny makes it sound quite natural, typical and plausible that South Africans could be watching sport on a Sunday, rather than being outdoors doing something else.

Other small 'banal' references which 'flag' our nationhood includes that made to South African money. Very often in the selected sample reference is made to South African currency in a variety of different plots involving different characters.

In scene 2 of Episode 1, Ntsiki and her uncle James are having lunch in a restaurant. She holds up a perfume bottle and the following conversation ensues:

Ntsiki: Look at what Mr Mike Mudau had delivered to me at the crack of dawn.

James: Doesn't look like anything to get excited about to me.

Ntsiki: You're wrong. This perfume is the proof that I have the man eating out of the palm of my hand.

James: That tiny bottle says that to you?

Ntsiki: Oh yes. This costs over R1000, believe it or not.

James: Wow.

Ntsiki: And its not available locally yet. Which means he had it flown in from France especially.

Not only does this conversation make reference to South African money, but once again by constantly establishing the location of the drama - South Africa as 'local' and France as a faraway place - the drama establishes our familiarity with South Africa. This feature once again attempts to bridge the gap between the fictional and the 'real'.

In Episode 22 Thembi is serving a customer in Moniks.

Thembi: What was it? Relax and style?

Customer: (Nods)

Thembi: That will be one hundred rand.

References to money such as this, are often made in the sample episodes, such as in Episode 5 scene 6, where Queen demands the R2000 back that Carol borrowed from her; in Episode 9 scene 9 when Karabo confronts her workers because there is R2000 missing from her float; and in Episode 12, Carol gives Neville R10 000 to help his nephew.

On the other hand, to enforce the 'reality' that the drama takes place in South Africa as opposed to anywhere else in the world, regular inferences to other South African destinations are made in the sample episodes. In Episode 5 scene 7, Glen mentions to Ntsiki and Shaan that he is considering flying to Cape Town to visit Ingrid and Andrew.

In scene 8 of Episode 5, Queen is complaining about what a nuisance being mugged is. She now has to cancel her stolen identity document at the Home Affairs office - a typical South African experience.

In the sample episodes, reference to a current event happening in South Africa at that time, namely the Local Council Elections, is also made over a number of episodes. The following conversation occurred between Queen and Carol in Episode 1 of the sample.

Carol: (As Junior leaves) Probably the first time my brother sees a lawyer without being in trouble. He seems to be really efficient these days.

Queen: Tell me about it. I can barely keep up with his demands.

Carol: You know you wouldn't have to be the slave to his demands if you stood for the Local Council (emphasised).

Queen: That. I have actually given it a lot of thought.

(In Zulu/Sotho) You know, you're right. I don't want to be a receptionist for the rest of my life.

Carol: I don't blame you. I found it incredibly boring.

Queen: Before your dad's time, I practically ran this company.
Carol: I don't doubt that for a moment.
Queen: (Looking around) He doesn't see my true potential.
Carol: I'm telling you, women have to stand up for themselves and take control.
Queen: It's just that I am not sure if I am cut out for the job of a councillor.
Carol: What nonsense. You have the money, style and class to win.

In Episode 2, Queen informs Mike that she will be working flexi-time since she will be running for local council elections coming up soon. Mike laughs when she tells him that Carol is her campaign manager.

In scene 2 of Episode 7, Queen is talking about work at New Horizons while Mike is reading the newspaper. She starts talking about running for local council and asks Mike which issues he thinks are relevant for her campaign - housing, electricity, refuse removal.... He offers her a raise if she abandons the idea of running for council.

In the following episode, Queen is practicing her speech on animal rights that Carol has written for her. She is unhappy about the speech, and is not convinced that she should be campaigning for animal rights. Neville arrives to fetch Carol for their date and Queen reminds Carol about the money she borrowed to buy the bike from Neville.

This is an example of the kinds of 'events' local content legislation prescribes should be included in the stories of local programming. In so doing, South African viewers are made aware of what is happening in the country at that particular time. Not only that, the scene in Episode 1 is an example of the new ways in which South African women are represented i.e. able to take charge of their own lives, capable of holding a position in local government and being a successful career woman despite being discouraged and ridiculed by male characters. Episode 7 also alerts viewers as to the kinds of issues local councils in South Africa should be dealing with.

These little references to 'South Africanness' 'flag' our nationhood through the routines of the lives of the characters and storyline of *Generations*, and thus in the 'banal' manner Billig (1995) refers to such 'flaggings'.

NEW WAYS OF REPRESENTING 'BLACK' SOUTH AFRICANS

Vundla's brief from the then commissioning editor Quentin Green for the production of *Generations* was to "show African people in a different light from the way in which they have been shown" (pers comm. Vundla 1998). Vundla interpreted this brief as showing 'African' people as active participants in a corporate, business world. In so doing, he hoped to show 'black' people, the opportunities that awaited them. Through the story of *Generations*, he strived to entertain his audiences and to bring about a desire to aspire towards a better life than the one most 'black' South Africans were forced to live during apartheid South Africa.

Following from this, *Generations* offers a very strong range of female characters with well developed personalities. While most of them are romantically involved, they are nevertheless independent, powerful women not reliant on their male counterparts even for emotional support. The range of female characters stereotypically consists of the power-hungry, scheming bitch Ntsiki, who will stop at nothing to get what she wants; the insanely jealous ex-wife Ingrid who will do anything to win her ex-husband back; the placid, homely and nosy 'white' Afrikaner housewife Baba, who runs the commune; successful advertising executives Sarah-Lee ('white'), Hilda ('black') and Shaan ('Indian') who despite their success in the career-world, are not without emotional traumas; the range of beautiful women and the desire of most male characters - Karabo who owns and runs the hairdressing and beauty salon *Moniks*; her assistant Thembi, with the golden voice, fast becoming a singing celebrity; the young, innocent, rich adolescent Carol; bitchy Kgomotso and the very funny, vain and self-absorbed Queen, the receptionist at *New Horizons*.

All these women (except for Baba) are always impeccably dressed and extremely well groomed in terms of their make-up and hairstyles. They are seldom if ever seen in casual, untidy clothes and most of them are dressed in two piece linen suits during the 'day' at their places of work and evening dresses for special occasions. Baba on the other hand seldom appears in scenes in locations other than at the commune. Here she is always preparing food, cleaning or entertaining her house guests. Her wardrobe mainly consists of plain dresses.

I think the personalities of the female characters, their careers and styles of dress add a lot to the very distinct identities created. The women in this programme are largely represented as being middle to upper class, able to take charge of their own lives and successful career women, some of whom hold powerful positions. As

referenced above, the plot of Queen running for local council, as opposed to any of the male characters, is indicative of the ways in which producers wish to represent single 'black' South African women - as successful career women capable of holding a political position. The importance placed on a career is also played out in several scenes involving the development of Thembi's singing career. As she becomes more successful, it would seem that Sonny, Thembi's husband, is also becoming increasingly more jealous of her fame. In Episode 14, Junior suggests that Queen rents an escort seeing as she can't find a date to her high school reunion. She tells him the reason she can't find a date is because, "Today's men are threatened by successful women".

Besides being successful career women, single women such as Hilda and Shaan, also live in their own well-furnished apartments. Despite the seemingly glamorous and successful lives they lead, they are not without the emotional upheavals of romantic relationships, marriage and divorce. They are also vulnerable to social conditions of our time such as muggings, rape, alcoholism, illness and physical abuse. (These issues will be taken up later as part of the narrative analysis.)

These women largely have amicable relationships with one another, across the 'colour' barrier, except of course for the obvious one or two bitchy characters such as Ntsiki and Ingrid, who don't necessarily get on well with all the other women because of their dislikable personalities. 'Black' characters do not necessarily befriend other 'black' characters. Sarah-Lee ('white') and Ntsiki ('black') are best friends, so too are Karabo ('black') and Kgomotso ('black'). But Sarah-Lee is also good friends with Shaan ('Indian'). Baba ('white') who runs the commune in which many of the characters reside, does not have one friend in particular, but is friendly to all the other female characters. Friendships across the colour barrier are naturalised, and no character ever makes reference to another character's colour. It is as if they are all 'colour' blind. Rather, their friendships are based on similarities and differences in personalities, the traumas they experience and the events that happen in their lives. Through these friendships, class distinctions also become blurred. This illustrates the point made by Stark (1998), that "characters are treated like human beings with human emotions such as pain, love, fear, hate, ambition.....".

While the cast of female characters outweighs that of male characters, very distinct characteristics have been scripted for them too. As is the case with the female characters, their male counterparts are also largely middle to upper class, except

maybe for Neville who is always experiencing financial difficulties, and Peter who is currently unemployed but is seeking new employment. The advertising executives Mike, Glen and Junior are always well dressed and place importance on the success of their careers. Mike, the owner of *New Horizons* resides in a large home where much of the action happens. Exterior shots show a large garden and the outside of an upmarket home.

Sonny Jacobs and Lennon are always working hard to keep their business, the *Back of the Moon*, running smoothly and so that they can "pay off their loan". They are helped by Baba's husband Stoffel and they employ part-time help like Peter and Carol. Thembi also sings here. Neville who works at *Moniks* is in demand by the women who visit the salon. He is *Moniks'* best hairdresser.

Most of these men are likeable characters and are either married or romantically involved with one of the female characters. Even the male characters who make guest appearances, the rapist; Phillipe, Kgomotso's husband from West Africa; and Thabelo, Thembi's agent are all well-dressed. However the 'baddies' who appear in the sample episodes namely the loan sharks and Max Naidu are scruffily dressed in leather, wearing caps or hats, are unshaven and they come across as having frightening personalities.

For both the male and female characters of *Generations*, great importance is placed on looking good and having a job. It would seem that because they all work and are largely successful at what they do, they are able to enjoy a drink at the bar, go out for a meal at a fancy restaurant, have parties at their homes, renovate and decorate their homes and they can afford to visit the salon to have their hair and nails done or even have a massage.

As is the case with friendships, romantic relationships are also forged across colour. Sonny ('coloured') is married to Thembi ('black', originally from Zimbabwe). Peter ('black') is dating Shaan ('Indian'). Baba and Stoffel (both 'white') are married. Glen ('coloured') previously married to Ingrid ('Indian') is now involved with Karabo ('black'). Neville ('coloured') is also involved with a 'black' woman, Carol.

Some of the characters live together in a "commune". 'Black' and 'coloured' characters live together in a large home run by two 'white' Afrikaners - Baba and Stoffel Swanepoel. This arrangement is represented as a natural phenomenon in

the South African context. For those who do not view it as such, it provides a representation of a possible future reality for South Africans as advocated through the discourses of the 'rainbow nation' and the 'African renaissance'.

Representing South African males and females as strong, beautiful, successful career people; doing well in life; living together and forging amicable friendships across class and 'colour'; relates very much to the ideals enshrined in the discourses of the 'rainbow nation', the 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' particularly as related to the ways in which it is hoped that South Africans citizens can live.

Representing 'black' people as having built a better life for themselves than was possible during apartheid South Africa and representing 'black' men and women both as active participants in the corporate world is the future advocated for 'black' South Africans by those who uphold the ideals of the 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment'. In *Generations*, 'black' South Africans are the subjects of representation rather than the objects - they are not the subjects of fetishisation, objectification and negative figuration, which are the ways in which 'black people' are often represented according to Hall (1992a:252). Despite the number of 'white' people involved in the production of *Generations*, negative, degrading stereotypes have not been created of the 'black' characters. Quite the contrary. Whether these representations 'mirror' or reflect the 'real', 'black' community, and the degree to which they can be said to correspond to " 'black' experiences beyond the screen" (Gray (1995:8)) in South Africa, is debatable. The scriptwriters and producers of *Generations* believe that even though the types of characters and the portrayal of their lives is admittedly not representative of all of 'black' South African society, it is a reality for some 'black' South Africans. Just as Cornel West (1993) has argued against negative, depressing representations of 'black' society, so too has Stark (1998) in writing for *Generations*.

But rather than judge *Generations* for accurate reflections of South African people and their experiences, I would prefer to judge the text's resonance and appeal in terms of the degree to which they offer improvements and even more so, new possibilities for imagining 'black' people in South Africa, since this is an important aspect in determining the kinds of South African identities created. Creating new possibilities for imagining 'black' people in South Africa, and giving the South African

audience something to aspire, has emerged as important elements in the production of *Generations* according to its producers Vundla (1998) and Stark (1998), as well as commissioning editors and station managers such as Nhlapo (1998) at the SABC.

The element of 'aspiration' is heavily embedded in the ideology of the producers of the text of *Generations*, in that it presents middle to upper class experiences of characters as the new 'norm' for 'black' South Africans. Having a good job, being successful, living well and looking good, is the identity created for young 'black' South Africans and which ideally they conceive about themselves. Young South Africans are encouraged to forge friendships and relationships beyond the colour barrier.

But, what these elements of 'aspiration' also achieve is obliterating South Africa's past as a country divided upon 'racial' lines during years of apartheid rule, and the hardships that accompanied such political oppression such as poverty and unemployment amongst many others. In part, it also obliterates certain aspects of the historical present, again poverty and unemployment to mention but two, – realities for many South Africans today as well. The reference to the name '*Back of the Moon*', is the only reference made to South Africa's past in anyway in the sample episodes. One could also not assume that this reference is made by many of today's young viewers, and if this is the case, then viewers would not be able to infer anything about South Africa's history in the sample episodes.

Some 'black' South Africans may already identify with the characters in *Generations* - living comfortably, having a good job and friends across colour barriers. For others who are not quite there or do not necessarily aspire to reaching these ideals, *Generations* has created new and attractive images and signifiers of what it means to be a 'South African' in post-apartheid South Africa, working towards the goals of the 'rainbow nation', 'African Renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment'. The creation and representations of these South African identities gives one some insight as to how the producers of this text 'imagine' the South African nation. These representations will eventually also aid South Africans in imagining their own nation and to have an idea of what it constitutes, since following Anderson (1983), it is never possible to know all who share a particular identity (in this case South African identities). Judging from the character types represented in *Generations*, it is evident that identities are never fixed, nor is there ever just one identity.

THE NARRATIVES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GENERATION

Hall (1992b: 292) has written that national cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation', with which we can identify. These meanings are contained in the stories which are told about it, the memories which connect its present with its past and images which are constructed of it.

National culture is also a discourse - a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises both our actions and our conception of ourselves. One of the ways in which the narrative of the 'national culture' is told is through the narrative of the 'nation'. This includes what is told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media and popular culture. These provide a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenario, historical events, national symbols and rituals which stand for, or represent shared experience, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation. As members of such an 'imagined community', we see ourselves in our mind's eye, sharing this narrative. Investing in this kind of identity lends significance and importance to our existence, connecting our everyday lives with a national destiny that pre-existed us and will outlive us. Thus the narrative of *Generations* plays an important role in giving meaning to what constitutes the South African generation as we move into the 21st century, as well as shaping how members of a South African nation imagine the broader community of South African people.

As noted in the genre analysis, the narrative of *Generations* is largely about human relationships and most of the other themes dealt with have emerged from the central theme of love. It is these general themes of human relationships and emotions that tend to be more of a universal phenomenon of the soap genre, rather than something specific to the South African situation. There is nothing really intrinsic about relationship problems described in the genre analysis to the South African nation only, yet these topics are probably identifiable to South African viewers because it is probably first and foremost affords audiences pleasure. While these are universal themes of the soap genre, there is nevertheless the possibility that South Africans can identify in some way or the other with these themes and that it is possible to integrate them into everyday life. This means that *Generations* contains both elements of 'universalness' and 'localness'. The universal elements of the soap opera genre, are transformed in little ways to establish 'localness' and the product's uniqueness to South Africa.

The South African element which the producers of the text of *Generations* do try to incorporate into these universal relationships and emotions of the narratives, is that they once again occur across the 'colour barrier'. No stereotypes are created as to what emotions only 'white' characters can experience or relationship problems that only 'black' couples can experience. Good and failed relationships, emotions of hate, love and revenge are experienced equally amongst all characters. No character displays a certain type of emotion more than another because he/she is 'black' or not 'black'.

No judgement is also made about relationships across the colour barrier. These relationships include the one between Shaan ('Indian') and Peter ('black') which threatens to fall apart because of Shaan's dishonesty about her brother. Sonny's ('coloured') and Thembi's ('black') marriage was one of convenience so that Thembi didn't have to return to her native Zimbabwe. But this arrangement has since turned into true love. Their marriage is threatened firstly because of Thembi's desire to have a baby and then her fast rise to fame as she builds her music career. Glen ('coloured') previously married to Ingrid ('Indian') is caught up in a love triangle with Kgomotso ('black') and her best friend Karabo ('black'). The problems experienced in these relationships are universal problems, and not ones due to them specifically being involved with someone from another colour group. Relationships across the colour group are naturalised in *Generations*, by the fact that the problems they experience are universal to human relationships. As mentioned earlier, this is a significant element of this production when comparing it to American and European soaps, in which 'inter-racial' romances are seldom represented. It is also an important aspect considering South Africa's apartheid past whereby law such relationships were forbidden. Once again the representation of relationships across 'colour' obliterates 'realities' of the past.

Other than the narrative of human relationships which is more a universal phenomenon than specifically a South African one, it has emerged from the genre analysis, that the so-called areas of social concern which are interwoven into the lives of the characters, can be seen to contain more of a 'South African' flavour than the human relationships alone. It must be noted however that these areas of social concern are yet again not exclusively South African phenomena. However, in the case of rape, which is more prevalent in South Africa than in other parts of the world, this issue becomes more identifiably 'South African'. All the social issues represented in the sample episodes, are definitely ones with which the South African

nation can identify, albeit that they are not exclusively identifiable by South Africans. The areas of social concern dealt with in *Generations* can thus definitely be seen as instances of 'South Africanness' since they make connections to a South African way of life (and culture), context and values.

Muggings, rape, alcoholism, AIDS, divorce, adoption, abuse, suicide and gambling are experiences familiar to many South African citizens in the South African context. Experiencing these things also helps South Africans make sense of who they are - victims of muggings, hijacking and rape and their vulnerability to the scourge of AIDS and addictions to alcoholism and gambling.

In scene 6 of episode 3, the action takes place at the *Back of the Moon*. Sonny is on the phone to Thembi, Lennon is busy behind the bar, and Peter is paging through the newspaper looking for a job. Flustered, Queen arrives. She has just been mugged. She avidly tells everybody that her bag, cellphone and jewellery have been stolen. While Sonny says that muggers are cowards in that they attack defenceless women, Queen questions why women constantly have to live in fear of being hijacked, robbed or raped. A man sitting at the bar (who is not a regular cast member) retorts with the comment that rape is a conspiracy women develop against men. Queen is angered, telling him that women have the right to say no. He tells her that women who dress and act like 'tarts' are asking to be raped. Lennon agrees with him and Queen is both appalled and shocked at their responses.

Later in this same episode, Hilda is sleeping on the couch in her apartment. She wakes up to a knock at the door. Upon opening she is confronted with the same unknown man who was in *Back of the Moon*. He is suggestive about them going to bed together. She tries to fight him off, and he hits her. During this struggle, Ntsiki arrives unexpectedly and he leaves, having upset Hilda a lot. Ntsiki encourages her to go to the police. While the actual episode of the rape is not part of the sample episodes, it can be inferred from both these scenes that Hilda has previously been raped by this man.

The fact that Hilda has been raped is confirmed in episode 4. Hilda and a friend are talking in her office at *Isis*. Hilda tells her that she is relieved that she is not HIV+. Her friend (not a regular cast member), reminds her that the results can change until the end of the 'window period'. Hilda is emotional and her friend notices that she is edgy. She tells her friend that the rapist came back to her flat the night before. Her

friend tells her to go to the police saying that the rapist returns because he feels powerful knowing he was let off the hook the first time. He will not leave her alone, until she makes contact with the police.

In Episode 5, Hilda is at Ntsiki's flat. She tells Ntsiki that she went to the police but that they can't help her because she has no evidence or proof that she was raped, and because she has only laid a charge weeks after it happened. She should have gone to them immediately after she was raped, before taking a bath. Ntsiki reminds her of the importance of having laid a charge, since this man could turn up at her flat any time again.

This issue of rape is also coupled with Hilda waiting for the results of her HIV test. In Episode 7, Peter, Sonny, Thembi and Neville are talking about Hilda's rape. Lennon, her boyfriend, is angry because the incident has upset his relationship with her. He threatens to exact revenge on the rapist. The others encourage him to support Hilda instead, and he storms out of the bar. As the viewers, we get a premonition that something bad is about to happen. In Episode 9, Hilda tells Lennon that they will have to use precaution before they can be absolutely sure that she is not infected with HIV.

An issue that started off with a rape becomes coupled with HIV, murder and eventually suicide. Lennon, Hilda's boyfriend, murders the rapist and is imprisoned. For several episodes after, Hilda appears to have disappeared. She doesn't turn up at work and several people call looking for her. Eventually we learn that her body has been washed up on the beach in Cape Town. Upon learning that she is HIV positive, she commits suicide.

In dealing with these issues the scriptwriters hope not only to connect the audience and the characters with everyday life and in so doing to reflect South African reality, but to inform them about social issues. The way in which Hilda's rape is dealt with is informative about the incorrect way in which many women deal with rape immediately after it has happened. Viewers learn how important taking immediate action is after being raped, and the necessity of having an HIV test immediately after. Not reporting the incident, also empowers the rapist to repeat such actions in future. Viewers also learn that taking justice into one's own hands serves no purpose, as well as that the victims of rape can become extremely depressed to the point of becoming suicidal.

Another social issue dealt with in the sample episodes is that of alcoholism. Each of the sample episodes contains a scene revolving around Sarah-Lee's drinking habit. In episode 1 she is irritable and defensive, and snaps at Baba and Glen when she is innocently teased by Glen of being hungover. Towards the end of the episode she is seen sneaking herself a drink. She looks very perturbed, starts to make a phonecall and then changes her mind. Shaan arrives and we learn that she is upset about the possibility of not winning the adoption case.

In episode 2 Sarah-Lee visits Shaan to apologise for her rude behaviour the night before. Shaan offers her something to drink, and the scene ends with them preparing dinner. Later in this same episode Sarah-Lee arrives home at the commune supported by Ntsiki who is shouting at her as they enter the house. Sarah-Lee has been arrested for drunken driving. In the following episode she is hungover and becomes defensive when Glen again innocently, offers her a beer.

In episode 4 Sarah-Lee is drunk and falls down the stairs of the commune. Having hurt her ankle, Baba tries to bandage it for her while Sarah-Lee is rude to her for trying to help her. Later she lies about what happened to her ankle when asked by others. In subsequent episodes, Baba finds empty alcohol bottles hidden in various places around the house. She suspects that Glen is drinking and confronts his ex-wife Ingrid about it.

Sarah-Lee's drinking problem is one that is coupled with her divorce and the adoption case. It is also an issue that scriptwriters have successfully drawn out over a number of episodes until such time when Sarah-Lee eventually admits to having a problem once she has won the adoption case. Her brother Lesley (a departed character of the story) comes to fetch her and her daughter, Naledi, and takes them to Jeffrey's Bay where Sarah-Lee can attend Alcoholics Anonymous. The way in which the issue is dealt with in *Generations* is indicative of the behaviour of alcoholics - irritability, nervousness, defensiveness, denial and the sneaky way in which they consume alcohol when they share a home with other people.

In Episode 20, Sonny is approached by a group of men asking him to allow them to gamble at the club. In return he will receive payment and is allowed to participate in their games. In scene 6 of Episode 21 Sonny tells Peter about renting the club and about his winnings from the night before. Peter does not look overly impressed. The following conversation ensues between them:

Sonny: I'm telling you, those guys have money. They were betting 2000 bucks. Just like that - in one go.

Peter: (Shaking his head) Sonny, Sonny...

Sonny: Okay, sometimes they lose, but the next time they win. Thousands at a time. I'm telling you. A guy can't help dreaming. With only last night's winnings, I'd be a much more relaxed man today.

Peter: Listen pal. If you get into trouble, don't even mention my name, 'cause it will be my PI licence out the window.

Sonny: Ag, c'mon man. You're just being paranoid. They paid me more just renting the club, than I've ever made on a Thursday night before.

Peter: Look Sonny, just as long as you don't get involved in their games.

Sonny: Why not? I watched them carefully. I started to get the hang of it. It's not that complicated.

Peter: Fine, then don't come to me, don't come crying to me.....

Sonny: (interjects laughing) I was only joking man. I wouldn't dare gambling with those guys. They're sharper than razor blades.

Peter: I'm glad you realised that.

The conversation changes to the relationship between Peter and Shaan.

In Episode 22, Stoffel and Sonny are talking about Thembi's career. Stoffel tells Sonny that he wants to start his own business - rubbish removals. He has already thought of how he is going to avoid paying tax. Peter tells him that there is no such thing as easy money. The close-up of Sonny's face implies that he feels guilty about his new gambling habit.

In Episode 24, Sonny and Mike are chatting at the Back of the Moon.

Sonny: You know, I wish I had listened to you. Looks like that horse of yours won all the races. I could have done with the extra cash.

Mike: It seems my partner knew what he was talking about when he said Blue Lightning is a winner. (He sighs)

Sonny: And that sigh. I wouldn't have thought a guy like you with so much dough would have any reason to be down in the dumps.

Mike: Believe me, the old clichés are very true. Money doesn't buy happiness.

Sonny: I'd rather be happy with it, than unhappy without it.

While not strongly advocating that gambling is a bad habit when one revels in it, the scriptwriters have rather included subtle overtones about how easily one can be persuaded to become involved in gambling. It is clear that Sonny is impressed about the 'easy' and quick way in which to make money. Having lots of money is also important to him, he thinks it could be the end to his problems and make him happy, and he admires those like Mike, who are rich. Peter and Mike are the 'advocates' in these scenes, trying to make Sonny understand that gambling both illegally and legally, could lead to his downfall. Unfortunately one is unable to determine from the sample episodes whether gambling is detrimental to or becomes Sonny's downfall. However, it is still quite obvious that gambling is negatively represented in *Generations*. Gambling is of special concern in South Africa to those who are concerned about the welfare of South African citizens, as laws regulating gambling houses in South Africa found a place in the spotlight around the time these episodes were broadcast.

In an article by Angella Johnson in the *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, titled Search for the Elusive Pot of Gold, she writes that she has found the 'rainbow nation'.

Nelson Mandela's multi-racial dream is alive and kicking under the busking new Sundome Casino on the outskirts of Johannesburg. All racial groups are represented....from Muslim women to high flying business people.

She writes that in the gambling world all are equal if "one has money and a desire to toss it to the wind" (30 October 1998). The Sundome was the first of Gauteng's six licensed casinos.

In Episode 7, Kgomotso arrives back in Johannesburg with Karabo after her brother's funeral in Amsterdam. Kgomotso is edgy most of the time, especially when asked about her husband Phillipe, who lives in the Ivory Coast. In scene 4 of Episode 22, Kgomotso and Queen are talking about Karabo's blindness. Ntsiki arrives and Queen leaves to answer the phone. It is Kgomotso's husband on the phone. She looks distressed as she leaves to answer the phone. The scene changes to Phillipe,

wearing West African clothes and speaking in a strong French accent. He is angry with Kgomotso for leaving him. In the following episode, Kgomotso and Ntsiki are having lunch together at a restaurant. Ntsiki is shouting at the waiter about the food. As Kgomotso rolls up her sleeves, scars are clearly visible on her lower arms. The following dialogue ensues between them:

Ntsiki: Kgomotso, your arm! That looks like burn marks.
Kgomotso: (Quickly rolls down her sleeves)
Ntsiki: Well, what have you done to your arms?
Kgomotso: Nothing
Ntsiki: Well those marks look terrible.
Kgomotso: Oh I was bitten by some strange insect on the Ivory Coast. It went sceptic, but I am fine now.
Ntsiki: Dangerous insect if you ask me. If you hadn't have told me I would have said those are burn marks.
Kgomotso: (Looks down) I suppose they would appear to be so to the untrained eye.

The subject changes to Kgomotso moving to the commune and about Mike.

In the final episode of the sample series, Ntsiki, Mike and Phillipe are talking to each other in the lounge of the Mudau house. The doorbell rings, and Phillipe hides. As Kgomotso enters he reveals himself and hugs her embarrassingly. Mike and Ntsiki leave and Phillipe's personality changes drastically. He grabs Kgomotso and starts squeezing her face while threatening her. Kgomotso is terrified.

In a later scene, James (the 'bum', Ntsiki's uncle) is sitting on the couch with Kgomotso and Phillipe, enjoying a cigar Phillipe offered him. In French Phillipe says to Kgomotso, " Darling this man bores me". She replies, "That is your problem". James is getting up to leave, and Kgomotso encourages him to stay. Once alone, Kgomotso tells Phillipe that she wants to divorce him. He says he will rather kill her than divorce her. He grabs a lit cigar and threatens to burn her.

Again, it is not certain how this issue turns out, since it moves beyond the sample series, nevertheless these few episodes alone, tells the viewer a lot about the realities of spousal abuse: a threatening overpowering husband, a terrified wife who

runs away but who, rather than share her experiences with somebody, tries to cover up about the abuse she is suffering.

By illustrating the ways in which these issues are dealt with in *Generations*, it is hoped that it has been made clear how they are particularly relevant to the South African lifestyle, culture and people. In representing these issues, South African people can identify with the fact that they live in a violent society where muggings and rape are daily occurrences. AIDS, spousal abuse and alcoholism are phenomena that can happen to anybody irrespective of colour, class or gender. Hilda, the successful owner of a large company, contracted HIV through no fault of her own, while Sarah-Lee was weakened by her addiction to alcohol. Even level-headed Sonny was easily influenced and swayed into becoming involved in gambling and being duped by his apparent success. The nice West African character Phillippe, turned out to be a cruel, hard man who abused his wife. On the other hand, Kgomotso, a seemingly powerful woman suffered abuse at the hands of her husband. Not only 'weak' women suffer spousal abuse.

ELEMENTS OF DIFFERENCE

Woodward (1997:33-35) has written that identities are constructed in the way in which they are formed in relation to other identities i.e. in relation to what they are not. For Woodward, the notion of difference is integral to an understanding of the cultural constructions of identities. Difference can be construed both negatively and positively. The former would be represented as the exclusion and marginalisation of those who are defined as 'other' or as the outsiders, while the latter can be celebrated as a source of diversity, heterogeneity and hybridity - the recognition of change and difference is seen as enriching.

It is clear that the South African nation differs immensely in terms of class, gender, 'race' to mention but a few differences, but local content programming such as *Generations*, aims to transcend those boundaries and create a unified nation (through diversity) with one cultural identity - a South African identity. This point refers to earlier assumptions that the discourses of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' are part of the social context that informs local content programming. The discourse of the 'rainbow nation' describes all the people of South Africa in their cultural diversity as having enough in common to work towards a common goal of building a new country, while the discourse of the 'African renaissance' in particular goes a long way to instill the idea of difference -

situating 'us' as 'Africans' in a fast-changing and competitive world - amongst 'them'. According to the White Paper on Broadcasting (1998:24), local content seeks “to protect all of the socio-cultural, political and economic traits that could be characterised as unique to a sovereign nation, and therefore make it distinct from another”.

Thus the element of 'difference' plays an important role in creating and fostering two specific instances of identity formation through local content programming: national identity and national culture. One way of forming and fostering these identities in the South African instance is through the representation of 'us' as South Africans as different from the representation of any other nation we may come in contact with, be it through the media or any other way.

From the above analysis, various ways in which the producers of *Generations* have used elements of difference both through generic and ideological codes to create a programme which is 'different' largely in comparison with apartheid drama as well as to other trans-national products screened in South Africa, have emerged. In using elements of difference they also create a product which is 'uniquely South African' and in so doing, foster the South African national identity and national culture.

What creates differences in the generic form of the soap opera *Generations* from other international soap operas, is firstly its set of core characters. These characters are not only all South African, but are largely also 'black' South Africans. This makes *Generations* different from its American and European counterparts in that 'black' people are almost completely excluded from these soap operas. A cast of largely 'black' characters also establishes difference from other nations of the world such as the USA and Europe, where 'black' people are not in the majority. As mentioned earlier, these characters also engage in 'inter-racial' relationships - not the norm in most international soap operas.

Very distinct differences between a South African production such as *Generations* and other trans-national products are also created through the location and language of the drama. While we are mostly aware of the country or continent in which the drama of most soap operas are set, some international soaps nevertheless make use of fictional names of towns. In *Generations* we are not only aware that the drama takes place in South Africa, but more specifically reference is made to the city of Johannesburg both through the narrative and visual images as well as to other

national destinations such as Cape Town, Welkom and Jeffrey's Bay, as indicated in previous examples. Choosing to use languages unique to South Africa such as Afrikaans, Sotho and Zulu, as opposed to only an international language like English, strengthens the difference in the people of South Africa to people of other nations.

Advocates of the 'African renaissance' wish that as 'Africans' we do not only consider ourselves as belonging only to the nation of our country, but also that we recognise 'Africans' across our boundaries as part of the larger nation of the African continent. In the sample episodes reference is made to characters which live in Zimbabwe and the Ivory Coast, other destinations on the African continent. Rather than these references establishing difference between us and 'them', it establishes similarity because of our shared history as 'Africans' and presumably because of our shared vision for an 'African renaissance'. But reference is also made to faraway international destinations such as France and Holland, strengthening our position on the African continent and as different from international nations. Very seldom is reference made to an African destination in international soaps. Faraway destinations in American soap operas usually include Europe and the Far East. This feature again relates to the peculiarity of the relationship between the universality of the soap opera genre and the particular ways in which it is transformed and inflected to construct difference.

In general, while the narratives of *Generations* in the sample episodes are not exclusively South African only stories (such as the social issues of rape and alcoholism dealt with in the sample episodes), I would however like to suggest that some of the issues such as hijackings and muggings are more typical experiences of living in South Africa than in other city or country in the world and thus would not be typical issues dealt with in international soap operas. The "little things" which Stark (1998) referred to which makes *Generations* 'South African' - such as talking about 'boereraad' and the frequent mention of South African currency, also create distinct differences between South African local productions like *Generations*, and other 'trans-national' products. These 'banal' references which 'flag' our nationhood become powerful elements of difference in local production like *Generations*.

The new ways in which 'black' people (in this case 'black' South Africans) are represented in *Generations* goes along way to improve on the negative representations of 'black' people and to address what Hall (1992a) has termed "the end of the essential black subject". Much of these new representations have to do

with the South African discourses which form part of the social context of local content programming. Nevertheless these new representations create differences in the ways in which 'black' South Africans have previously been represented on South African television. This point has been highlighted in Chapter 2, as an express intention of SABC - "to show African people in a different light from the way in which they have been shown" (pers comm. Vundla 1998). These new representations and the differences they have created from previous representations, have been detailed in a previous section of this chapter.

Lastly, a distinct difference of *Generations*, in comparison with other international soap operas, lies in its set design. While no literature I have encountered, strictly verifies the 'general' look of the sets of soap operas, I feel that the strong use of colour in the sets of *Generations*, definitely is a noteworthy element of difference. Generally, soap opera sets are fairly subtle in colour, and the very strong lighting often used, gives the set a 'glossy' look. However, this use of lighting does not make the background colours stand out so much in that they become very noticeable or even distracting. On the other hand, the use of colour in *Generations*, appears to be unusual for its genre. There would appear to be no legitimate reason for such brightly coloured sets, other than the express intention to create an interior world markedly different from that of conventional soap operas. This difference could be considered as an express intention to create a contemporary South African phenomenon – to make the production look identifiably 'South African'. Maybe the strong use of colour will be taken up in future local productions and become a recognisable South African distinction.

Both the genre and ideological analyses in this chapter have illustrated that *Generations* as an instance of local content programming which aims to foster both a South African national identity and national culture, contains various instances of 'South Africanness' i.e.

"connections to a South African way of life (and culture), context and values which allows us to form a sense of self and thus construct a South African identity, as well as reference to elements and symbols which help us make sense of both who we are, as well as our experiences as South African citizens and which provide the resources for the construction of South African identities"

The genre analysis has shown *Generations'* validity as a soap opera and thus also a signifying practice which works as a semiotic site for the production and negotiation of representations, meanings and identities. In order to establish the kinds of identities represented in the text of *Generations*, the ideological analysis of the range and nature of issues raised in the sample episodes was made against the background of the South African discourses of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' and were categorised as follows: elements of 'South Africanness'; new ways of representing 'black' South Africans; the narratives of a South African generation and elements of difference.

The analysis indicated that none of the elements in the above-mentioned categories operated in isolation, but overlapped and intersected to construct representations of 'South Africanness' which in turn, provide the resources for the construction of South African identities. Peculiar as it may seem, these **particular** elements of our 'distinct' and 'diverse' nation, are 'flagged' through the **universal** genre of the soap opera.

CONCLUSION

From this study, it can be concluded that the locally produced television programme *Generations*, is a product of a universal genre - that of the soap opera, by virtue of the many typical features it shares with other products of that same genre and the semiotic operation of the text. The generic codes of the soap opera are however used and transformed to create a uniquely 'South African' product.

An analysis of the selected episodes of *Generations*, concludes that the elements of 'South Africanness' extracted from the selection, potentially construct constituents of two instances of identity formation - that of national culture and national identity. The following can be considered representations of 'South Africanness' in the selected episodes of *Generations*: Firstly, the cast of *Generations* largely consists of 'black' South Africans, but also casts people from other 'colour' groups. The composition of the cast reflects the diverse nature of the South African nation - an idealistic 'rainbow nation'.

From the title of the soap opera, we can infer that this 'generation' in its diversity, presumably share similar histories, and are heading towards a similar destination. Shared histories play a role in the formation of a national culture, so do the memories which connects the present with the past. This however, is not a feature played out extensively in *Generations*. Other than the reference made to the *Back of the Moon* (a shebeen in Sophiatown where journalists, artists and activists used to gather in the 1950s and 60s), no other references are made to South Africa's history. It would seem that the producers choose to make reference only to the present situation (for some) in South Africa, representing "the way things could be for South Africans" and choosing to sideline the past or maybe even forget it?

Very specific references are made to the location of the drama in South Africa. This is achieved largely through the generic codes of visual images and the storyline. The characters not only speak an international language i.e. English, but also uniquely South African languages - Sotho, Zulu and Afrikaans. These features not only work to 'flag' our nationhood, but also serve to connect the fictional world of the soap opera text, with the 'realities' of South Africa and its people. The range of languages used for the purpose of dialogue, also once again points to the diversity of the South African nation.

The "small things" that Stark (1998) says are included in the story of *Generations*, to give it its "South African flavour", could be viewed as the 'banal' references to our nationhood which Billig (1995) refers to. In the selected sample, these small references of 'South Africanness' included conversation about traditional 'boere kos', 'boereraad', South African currency and local council elections. In very small ways these elements 'flag' our nationhood, but they also work to connect the fictional world of the soap opera to 'realities' of South African life.

National cultures are also constructed through the stories that are told about it (Hall 1992b: 292) and *Generations* tells very specific stories about what it means to be 'South African' and the experience of living in South Africa. While, the stories of human relationships and human emotions are by no means unique to the South African context, the areas of social concern dealt with in *Generations*, do bear some similarity to the South African experience. In the sample episodes, characters were victims of muggings, rape, alcoholism and AIDS. Other characters had to deal with domestic issues such as divorce, adoption, suicide and spousal abuse. While these experiences are by no means uniquely South African, they do occur within the South African context and thus they aid South Africans in making sense of who they are and their experiences of living in South Africa. Telling the narratives of a South African generation in *Generations*, is largely an intermingling of the universal features of the soap opera genre (i.e. human relationships and human emotions) and references to specific South African experiences (e.g. rape, muggings and AIDS). Again, this feature serves to bridge the divide between the fictional story and 'real' South African experiences and way of life.

Apart from these representations of 'South Africanness', the text of *Generations* also creates new possibilities for imagining South Africans - in particular 'black' South Africans. This has largely been achieved through what the producers have termed "elements of aspiration". These representations also fall largely within the context of the South African discourses of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment'. The soap opera features a strong range of male and in particular, female characters. 'Black' South Africans are represented as active participants in a corporate, business world. They are largely middle to upper class, place importance on successful careers, and live well. But what these "elements of aspiration" also do, is obliterate South Africa's past as a country strongly divided along 'racial' lines during years of apartheid rule. The hardships that accompanied such legislation (and which in many ways still affect many aspects of South African society), are totally omitted in these new representations. Rather, emphasis has been placed on the creation and representation of new and attractive images and signifiers of what it means to be 'South

African'. These ideas are presumably largely obtained from the ideals outlined in the discourses of the 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment'.

Many of the above-mentioned features of 'South Africanness' as represented in *Generations*, work to establish difference - that is, difference between 'us' as a South African nation and 'them' - other nations of the world. In so doing, not only is our nationhood 'flagged', but a South African national identity and national culture is also fostered. These differences lie in the cast of characters (largely 'black' - not the norm for trans-national soap operas); enforcing specific features of language and location; the narratives of a South African generation (experiences of a South African way of life, values and context); 'banal' references of 'South Africanness' (the "small things" such as mentioning South African currency); the new ways of representing 'black' South Africans (as opposed to the ways in which they were represented during the apartheid years); and the distinct difference in terms of its set design and use of colour.

These elements of 'South Africanness' which have been identified in the locally produced production *Generations*, could be seen to appeal to 'us' - the people, country and nation of South Africa. These elements i.e. connections to a South African way of life, context, values and experiences could be viewed as the 'flaggings' - the symbols and assumptions of our nationhood, which Billig (1995:8) refers to. These representations could help us form a sense of self as South Africans. *Generations* is thus a production which is utilised by the South African broadcast media to foster a South African 'national identity' and 'national culture' through the reflection of aspects of public life in South Africa. In so doing, it fulfils the mandate of local content production in South Africa: utilising South African producers and a South African cast to tell the stories of South African people - their experiences and their way of life and ultimately "allowing South Africans to see themselves on screen".

These representations of 'South Africanness' are largely situated within the context of the South African discourses of the 'rainbow nation', 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment'. The 'African renaissance' in particular seeks to positively situate us as Africans in a fast changing and competitive modern world. It also describes the need for the emergence of an African identity - from which we can draw ideas of what the South African nation and identity is ideally all about. Through the characters and the storyline of *Generations*, South Africa is located as a place in the world, and more specifically in the African region.

It is clear that the meanings which are produced and which position us as subjects, is done through representation: signifying practices and symbolic systems i.e. the use of language, signs and images which stand for, or represent things. It is the link between the concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events in South Africa, or to the imaginary world of fictional objects, people and events in *Generations*. It is also these media representations that serve to tell other people about 'us' and what it means to be 'ourselves' i.e. South Africans. But they also serve to tell us about other people, in terms of what they are not. The marking of difference is an important aspect of representational practices which cannot be overlooked in this analysis of *Generations*. The South African discourses which have been viewed as the backdrop to the production of *Generations* in this analysis, work not only towards determining our unique identity as 'South Africans' and 'Africans', but also to establish us as 'different' from other nations, and in so doing allows us to locate OUR place in the world.

The representations in *Generations* not only strive to tell us who we are as South Africans, but also what we can become. According to Woodward, signifying practices are capable of achieving this (1997:36). This is achieved in *Generations* through the new possibilities which are created for imagining 'black' South Africans. Not only do they offer improvements upon previous representations of 'black' people on South African television, but new stereotypes of 'black' South Africans are also being created.

As is the case with many forms of media representations, *Generations* plays out certain identities extensively - being middle class, successful, with a good job and a comfortable home, while others are limited - being lower class, poor and jobless. On the other hand, certain identities are not played out at all such as being handicapped, gay or lesbian.

But while the representations in *Generations* possibly serve to help 'us' form an idea of South African identities, which in turn helps us to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world, these identities are not unified, fixed or stable. They are transformed constantly through the ways in which we are represented. Thus the representations of what it means to be 'South African', and the identities that these representations create in these sample episodes of *Generations*, could change at any time. At a later stage new representations could tell us something different about what it means to be 'South African'. The "elements of aspiration" which appear in *Generations* are probably at this moment not the reality for many South Africans, and many viewers as a result do not identify themselves with the identities

represented. For this reason, these particular "elements of aspiration" are successful in their intentions, only for as long as it is not the reality for the majority. But as time progresses and the country undergoes changes presumably for the better, these identities could become the reality for more South Africans and thus as more people identify themselves with these representations, South African identities are also likely to change. Hall writes that it is possible to assume different identities at different times. When confronted with a multiplicity of possible identities we could identify with any one of them even if only temporarily (1992b:277).

Stark (1998) and Vundla (1998) the producers of *Generations* and Ang (1985) in her writings about Dallas, stress that "elements of aspiration" are not so unreal that viewers cannot relate to them. *Generations* contains recognisable people, things, relations and situations to most South Africans. Because of its ability to entertain, it also creates both instances of fantasy and escapism. It is those instances of identifying oneself in one way or another with the programme that pleasure is derived. Pleasure is thus derived from recognition.

Taking all of the above into consideration, it is worth returning to a re-examination of the ideals of local content provisions in the South African broadcasting system, since this analysis raises the issue of the use of a universal genre (in this case that of the soap opera), to create a distinctly 'local', 'South African' production. So many of the features of *Generations* are so obviously similar to that of trans-national products of the same genre. While it is clear that *Generations* originates from South Africa, and it is 'local' by virtue of its local cast of actors, local people work on the production and it is to some extent about local stories, I am still left to question the extent to which it is able to "reflect all aspects of public life in South Africa", when so many of the features of the programme are no different from other international soap operas. These features of similarity are largely those of a generic nature: character types, unfolding of the narrative, kinds of narrative (aspects of human relationships and emotions), use of time and space, production techniques and so on. Are the elements of 'South Africanness' sufficient and powerful enough to make it 'distinct'? And to establish *Generations* as an identifiably 'unique' South African production?

In her writings about Dallas, Ang (1985), has shown that audiences can draw on 'foreign' resources to help in the construction of their own 'local', personal identities. As indicated before, genres like the soap opera, contain some recognisable features to most viewers. A text is never read in its totality and a selection process is always taking place. Therefore it is possible for viewers of a 'foreign' product to extract those elements which

he/she can identify with. No product is totally 'unreal' to a viewer. This is also true of the South African situation, in which audiences have been loyal viewers (and continue to be, despite 'local' productions such as *Generations*) of international soap operas for years. Even considering the emergence of more local productions such as *Generations*, these productions still have to compete with their international counterparts for local audiences. In fact, international soap operas on SABC 1 often still have the highest audience ratings ahead of *Generations* (Mpeki 1998).

The imposition of local content provisions, also raises the issue of how important fostering nationalism really is, when increasingly television productions are created with a global audience in mind, and when productions are intended to circulate in foreign markets.

What these issues bring to light, is that local content policy is not without its contradictions and difficulties. On the one hand, the aim is to foster national identity and national culture through local productions, but on the other hand, universal genres are used to do so. Are the elements of 'difference' included in these 'local' productions powerful enough to establish it as 'different' from any other? Furthermore, in the wake of globalism how important is 'flagging' our nationhood and how are we affected by the trans-national products which find their way onto our screens? The screening of trans-national products can also not be avoided, considering the high cost involved in local production.

Despite the complexities involved in local content policy, *Generations* can nevertheless be seen as fulfilling the intentions of such policy. The representations of 'South Africanness', can be said to provide the resources for the construction of two specific instances of identity: that of national culture and national identity - the desires of local content mandates. The representations produce meanings about 'the nation' with which we can identify. These meanings are contained in the representations of South African people; the stories that are told about them; the images which are constructed of them; and the elements which distinguish the South African nation as different from other nations.

Although national identity is generally understood to be the shared identity of a particular nation, it is also according to Anderson (1983) about the way in which a particular nation is 'imagined'. How the South African nation is imagined thus relies on the kinds of representational strategies (*Generations* being one such strategy), deployed to construct our common-sense views of national belonging or identity. As Anderson reminds us, it is not possible to know all those who share our identity, and so we must have a shared

idea of what it constitutes. If our nation is to be imagined, it must also be imagined amongst other nations. *Generations* as a signifying practice provides a platform for us to do this.

Because we are constantly reminded that 'we' live in nations and because 'our' identity is continually being flagged in such signifying practices like *Generations*, national identity becomes something natural to remember. Yet, despite the attempt to incorporate the ideals of a unified nation through the South African discourses of the 'rainbow nation', the 'African renaissance' and 'black economic empowerment' into many aspects of public life in South Africa (broadcasting being one such realm analysed in this thesis), a lot of the establishment of a South African nation, identity and culture lies in whether we believe such an identity exists. Only if we believe this to be the case, will the world of national homelands be reproduced (Billig 1995:50). This too, I believe will be the case in South Africa.

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