

**WHERE THE GLOBAL MEETS THE LOCAL: SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH
AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF GLOBAL MEDIA**

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ABSTRACT

Within the context of debates concerning the impact of global media on local youth, this study explores how a sample of South African youth responds to texts which were produced internationally, but distributed locally. Recognising the profound rootedness of media consumption in everyday life, the research examines the way these youth, differentially embedded in the South African economic and ideological formation, use these texts as part of their ongoing attempts to make sense of their lives. The study rejects the 'either/or' formulations that often accompany competing structuralist and culturalist approaches to text/audience relationships. Instead, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, it seeks to highlight the interplay between agency and structure, between individual choice and the structuring of experience by wider social and historical factors. The findings of the study point to the complex individual and social reasons that lie behind media consumption choices, and the diverse (and socially patterned) reasons why local audiences are either attracted to, or reject, global media. These and other findings, the study argues, highlight the deficiencies of the media imperialism thesis with its definitive claims for cultural homogenisation, seen as the primary, or most politically significant, effect of the globalisation of media. As such, this study should be read as a dialogue with those schools of thought that take a more unequivocal point of view on the impact of globalised media culture.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

If we hope to understand how people choose to express themselves in everyday life, we must come to terms with our own reasons for studying them. (Lindloff, 1995: 5)

1. Introduction: on a personal note

A few deeply etched memories have provided the impetus for this study. It is the early 1970s. I'm 12 or 13 years old, and I am standing at an ironing board pressing a multi-coloured tie-dyed headband, which I've made from a strip of linen. The strip is loaded with meaning. It signifies my identification with the American counter-culture and putting it on imaginatively transports me to Haight-Ashbury, the centre of this emergent youth culture. This distant place signifies communal living, sharing, personal freedom, and experimentation, and contrasts strongly with the isolation, conservatism and restriction I experience growing up in a small South African town, part of a Jewish, white middle class nuclear family. Significantly, my knowledge of this distant culture is mass mediated. It comes to me through magazine images and increasingly, through the music of American West Coast bands – the Grateful Dead, the Quicksilver Messenger Service, and the Jefferson Airplane – whose songs celebrate these counter-cultural values, and against which my own lived 'reality' is judged and found wanting. This latter 'reality' has been shaped by the discursive practices of local 'ideological state apparatuses', including my family, the militaristic all-white school I attend, the state-controlled radio I listen to, and the local newspaper I read. All of these institutions generate the discourses appropriate to the maintenance of the deeply conservative political consensus of white South Africa prevalent at the time.

The second memory comes from the same period. It's late at night and I should be asleep. Instead I am turning the short-wave dial on my radio hoping to pick up a foreign station. By chance I tune in to Radio Freedom, the external radio service of the African National Congress (ANC), broadcasting from Lusaka, Zambia. The presenter condemns the "racist

white boers”¹ who hold the reigns of power in South Africa. I find the broadcast deeply unsettling. This is a voice of the ‘hidden’ black majority, a voice silenced in the local white-controlled state and independent media. It is a voice from the margins, to which I have not been exposed. It poses a threat to the ‘white’ reality I inhabit.

Many years later, I am studying for a Masters degree at London University. It is my first time outside of South Africa and I find myself living in a university residence with a black South African exile, a member of the ANC. He has been living in Tanzania since the Soweto uprisings in 1976. Although the ANC is still banned, and its literature unavailable inside South Africa, I consider myself politically well informed. However, my surprise at his eloquence and the ‘reasonableness’ of the ANC political position he presents, is a stark example of how my political understandings have been shaped by years of negative representation of black political movements by South Africa’s mainstream media.

These incidents illustrate contradictory roles played by the media at certain points in my life. On the one hand, via the media, I was transported (symbolically, at least) from the oppressive confines of my local culture and given access to other worlds and ways of being, provided for the first time with an external vantage point from which to make sense of my own life circumstances. At the same time, as the other two incidents attest, my worldview remained informed by the ideology of *apartheid*, hegemonic in white South Africa at the time, sustained by the local media to which I had access.

2. ‘Audience’ power versus ‘media power’

Years later, as a lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, I started reading contemporary media theory debates. I was struck by the fact that my contradictory experiences of the media reflected the polar alternatives – ‘audience power’ versus ‘media power’ – which media theorists have used to explain the effects that media texts have on the cultural, political and economic lives of their audiences.

The argument for ‘audience power’ was largely informed by the growing number of qualitative audience studies emerging from what came to be known as Cultural Studies. Underpinning this approach was a recognition that capitalist societies were divided along axes of class, ‘race’, gender, and that those groups who had social power would attempt to ‘naturalise’ cultural meanings to support their social and economic interests.ⁱⁱ The media, owned as they were by the dominant economic classes, were said to be important purveyors of these dominant cultural values. However, these studies did not limit their focus to media institutions and the texts they produced. They examined how individuals negotiated and used these texts in the course of giving meaning to their daily lives in capitalist society. Importantly, argued many of these studies, subordinate groups would often resist the ideologies promoted by these texts and, to varying degrees, produce textual readings that served their own interests.

The other group of theorists, the Political Economists, argued that the ability of audiences to make their own meanings from these institutionally produced texts contributed nothing to social change. At the end of the day, the existing power relations remained in place. Furthermore, they argued, economic pressures on the media (for example, their dependence on advertising) resulted in them producing meanings largely in keeping with the status quo. This was achieved by labelling as deviant, or simply ignoring, social understandings which fell outside of the mainstream. Meaningful opposition to the status quo, it was argued, was dependent on having access to alternative social understandings. Rather than celebrating the limited audience freedom to oppose what was on offer, one should instead be working towards the creation of a social reality in which there were wider possibilities for the exercise of symbolic and economic power.

I was thus faced with two approaches to understanding the relationship between texts and audiences. The one emphasised bottom-up resistance to the media, the other, top-down media power. I wasn’t the only one who found these positions difficult to reconcile. Academic journals were replete with vitriolic attacks, and counter-attacks, between supporters of each position.

3. The globalisation of the media

These debates were given new fuel with the rapid development in the 1990s of transnational media corporations that increasingly dominated the global media space. Media theorists generally agreed that these developments had cultural consequences, but there was little agreement as to what these were. As before, your conclusions were dependent on whether you focused your analysis on institutions and texts, or on audience reception. The media imperialism thesis, relying primarily on institutional and textual analyses, held that as a result of the increased control of media production and dissemination by a handful of Western powers, we were currently witnessing the extension of Western (particularly American) culture. The result of this, this thesis argued, was the creation of global cultural homogenisation, which ultimately paved the way for the spread of Western economic interests.

A different set of conclusions were reached by the qualitative audience researchers who argued that one could not predict, solely on the basis of textual and institutional analysis, what *actual* meanings *actual* audiences made of these global media texts. In fact, empirical audience research often pointed to the highly contradictory and unpredictable roles played by global media in the lives of local audiences. For example, many empirical studies purported to show how these global texts played an important role in providing audiences with the symbolic means to critique their own local cultural hierarchies. These studies argued that we should not protect local cultures at all costs from the influence of global media, especially when aspects of local cultures were politically regressive.

4. Youth as the focus of the study

As noted, the contradictory roles that had been played by the media in my own life, as well as the way in which these experiences were reflected in contemporary media studies debates, provided the impetus for this study. There were specific reasons, however, for my decision to focus the research on youthful consumers of media. 'Youth' is a term that marks the transition from childhood – and dependence on parents and other institutional authorities – to adulthood and independence. The media become a key resource for young people as they try to navigate this transition because they have free time, and because

media-use can be more easily integrated into their daily lives. Given my research interest in media consumption and identity formation, this seemed an ideal group to research.

Another deciding factor was the fact that in South Africa, where 43 % of the population falls into the age category of 14 to 20 years, and 73 % are under the age of 35, most aspects of local youth remain remarkably under-researched. In particular, there is a complete absence of qualitative research examining the complex ways local and global media are incorporated into the everyday lives of young people.

I decided to use students on the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University as the subjects of this study. In 1998 (the start of this study) the majority of students on campus were white (55%), although there were also significant numbers of students from other 'race' groups.ⁱⁱⁱ Fortunately, as a result of the availability of study loans to financially needy students from the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA), the campus was home to students who came from a range of class backgrounds. I thus had access, in one space, to a cross-section of South African youth. I was aware that these students did not represent the full range of South African youth and that this would raise the issue of the generalisability of my research findings to the rest of the population. However, in line with the position taken by qualitative researchers on this issue, I believed that the critical issue would be the cogency of my theoretical reasoning, couched in terms of generalisability of cases to theoretical propositions, rather than to populations or universes. In other words, I was using my findings amongst a particular group of youth, to reflect on the debates within media studies concerning the relationship between texts and audiences in the age of globalisation. I was not setting out to provide a comprehensive picture of media consumption patterns amongst South African youth.

5. The outline of the thesis

This study investigates the meanings that students on the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University take from global media as part of their ongoing attempts to make sense of their lives and the class, gender, 'race' and other identities they inhabit. The research focus is part of a wider interest amongst media scholars and culture critics in the

relationship between media texts and their audiences. Chapter 2 explores the theoretical debates pertaining to this relationship, highlighting issues pertinent to my study. These debates provide the framework against which my primary research data is discussed in later chapters.

Chapter 3 extends the discussion of text/audience relationships by placing it within the context of the contemporary economic and cultural processes of globalisation. Most theorists would agree that in assessing the impact of global media on local audiences we need to keep in mind the complex processes of interaction between the spheres of culture, politics, technology, and economy. This chapter argues that for analytic purposes we can treat these as distinct levels of analysis. It argues for the isolation and examination of what is referred to in the literature as ‘cultural globalisation’, concerned with the impact that the consumption of global media has on the cultural understandings of local consumers. An important role has been played by the media imperialism thesis in shaping the initial understandings of this process, and this chapter examines and critiques this thesis.

Chapter 4 provides an outline of some of the main features of the South African socio-political context in order to locate this study. This chapter examines the impact that initial segregationist, and later apartheid social policies, have had on the lives of local youth. Finally, this chapter locates this study within the context of local and international studies on youth media consumption.

Having provided the theoretical justification for this study, as well as the social context within which it takes place, Chapter 5 discusses the choice of research methods employed. It outlines some of the main features of the qualitative and quantitative research approaches in the social sciences, and discusses the debates concerning their combined use in a single research design.

Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 examine the impact of global media (particularly television, music, and film) on a sector of local youth, as represented by the students on the

Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University. In line with the relatively open and unstructured research strategy favoured by qualitative researchers, the issues explored in these chapters were not decided upon in advance. Rather, they emerged during the process of research.

Chapter 6 draws on focus group and individual in-depth interviews with students in order to examine the role played by global media in enabling local consumers to put a symbolic and imaginative distance between themselves and the conditions of their day-to-day lives. This distance provides individuals with insights into ways of life which differ significantly from their lived experience. These media, this chapter argues, provide a resource for individuals to think critically about their own lives and life conditions (in a similar way to my own youthful attraction to American media rooted in the counter-culture). This chapter provides examples of the role played by Western media as ‘carriers of modernity’, pointing out how, in particular circumstances, the meanings they convey help to undermine local cultural relationships of domination and subordination, and generally widen the cultural horizons of local audiences.

Chapter 7 examines the uneven penetration of global media into local cultures. It examines the argument that in many societies, there is a desire by the ‘lower classes’ for ‘cultural proximity’, which is translated into a preference for local media. A recognition of this uneven penetration obviously provides a counter to the media imperialism thesis which often presumes the total obliteration of local cultures by global media. In exploring this issue, this chapter examines the media consumption practices of a group of local African students primarily from rural working class and peasant backgrounds, who socialise almost exclusively with one another. One sign of their separation from the rest of campus is their choice to view television in isolation, in a specially created viewing room attached to one of the university residences. They have named this viewing space the ‘homeland’, which recalls the term used to describe the areas to which the apartheid government consigned Africans when they denied them South African citizenship. The rationale was that Africans had their own ‘homelands’ to return to – the 13% of land set aside for Africans in the 1913 Land Act. What is significant about these African students’

television consumption is that it is restricted solely to local productions. This chapter establishes that this preference for local television is a recent phenomenon, coinciding with their entry into the cultural space of Rhodes University. Given the impact of this new location on their media consumption preferences, this chapter questions those theories which posit the centrality of media consumption to identity formation. Instead, it argues, the relationship between media and lived culture is an interplay of mediations. On the one hand, the media is the dominant representational aspect of modern culture, while on the other there is the 'lived experience' of culture. Thus, in contrast to the media-centric position underpinning the media imperialism thesis, this chapter argues that we need to see the media as mediating, rather than determining, cultural experience.

Chapter 8 discusses two of the dominant explanatory discourses by which students explain their attraction to global or local media: 'realism' and 'quality'. The chapter probes students' understandings of these terms. It examines the 'empiricist' understanding of realism which seeks a correspondence, at a denotative level, between the 'realities' internal and external to the text, arguing that a desire by many students for such a correspondence, explains their preference for local productions. The chapter also points out that for other students it is ironically, global rather than local productions which most adequately and accurately reflect their 'local' lives and are thus experienced as being 'realistic'. This chapter also points out that for many students, a preference for global media is premised on their perceived superior technical 'quality' of these media. It further notes that the discourse of 'quality' is the one most often relied on by South African media producers to explain the relatively poor state of the local film and television industries. It is here, this chapter argues, that we can most clearly see the ideological results of the American domination of the global film and television industries. They set the standards (underpinned by huge budgets) against which local productions are judged and found wanting.

Chapter 9 critiques the assumption, central to the media imperialism thesis, that before the United States-led media/cultural invasion, Third World cultures were largely untouched by outside influences. It argues that cultural encounters – often in conjunction

with coercive political and military power – have been taking place for centuries. Interactions between these societies and globalised forms of electronic media represent only the latest such encounter. The chapter draws on theories of creolisation to make sense of these ongoing cultural encounters, and provides local examples to support the argument. The chapter also examines the claim of the media imperialism thesis, that global media provide a threat to ‘national cultures’. Drawing on survey results and interviews, it demonstrates that far from there being a shared national culture amongst students, they are deeply divided along lines of ‘race’ and class, and that the global media they consume both reflect and help constitute them in this difference.

Chapter 10 extends the discussion started in Chapter 9 by drawing on research into the role that global media play in the construction of hybrid identities amongst youth. This chapter argues that we need to recognize that there are degrees of hybridisation amongst local youth. At the one extreme, we have mainly African students who, while they may adopt certain aspects of Western culture, are generally highly suspicious of global Western media and the values they convey. At the other extreme, we find white students who strongly identify with Western European culture as experienced, in part, via the mass media. At the same time there are many African middle class students who, as modern subjects, reject what they perceive to be the traditional values of their parent culture. This chapter argues that the media consumed by these middle class groups reflects and helps construct their modern subjectivities. Positioned between the two ends of the continuum are primarily black middle class students.^{iv} While their family traditions, which they hold onto, clash with the values they perceive as being promoted by Western media, they are still avid consumers of these media. It is this latter group of students who clearly live in the hybrid intersection of tradition and modernity. The diversity of student responses are yet another pointer to the uneven, and complex, penetration of global media into local cultures.

6. Afterward: on a personal note

Just over four years have passed since I started on this research project. For the first five months I worked on my first chapter, a literature review of debates within media studies

on the relationship between texts and audiences. My external supervisor, Professor Peter Dahlgren, read the chapter, made helpful suggestions, and then asked when was I going to start on the actual research. His question forced me to recognise that, having never before conducted empirical research, I was petrified to go ‘into the field’. It represented a venture into the unknown. So I started on the process of data collection, aided by my local supervisor, Professor Jan Coetzee. Under his guidance I administered a survey in which I examined the social attitudes and media preferences of students on the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University. The survey provided me with an initial map of students’ attitudes, media tastes and consumption patterns. On the basis of these findings I planned my individual and focus group interviews. The views expressed in these interviews put flesh on the bones of the survey findings, and took me along unexpected paths of discovery. I came to appreciate the complex reasons that lie behind media consumption choices, and the diverse reasons why local audiences are either attracted to, or reject, global media. I learnt by doing, and in the process, I came of age as a researcher, publishing several articles from my ongoing research in local and international journals and contributing two chapters to international media studies books.^v

Equally important was the lesson I learnt in staying with a process. There were many times when, because of work pressures, family demands, and confusion about where the research was going, I felt it would never reach completion. However, I developed a dogged persistence, and no matter how lost or disheartened I felt, I returned day after day to the text I was writing. I also learnt not to think about the whole, but to trust that each small daily effort would eventually bring me to the end. Having concluded the study, I read an exchange between the Japanese Zen master Shunryu Suzuki and one of his American students. The student asked Suzuki Rōshi, “What is nirvana?” To which he replied: “Nirvana is seeing one thing through to the end” (Chadwick, 2001: 4). I could only agree.

ⁱ The term 'boer' is Afrikaans for farmer, but during the apartheid era was a derogatory term, used by Africans, to Afrikaners, the apartheid government, and sometimes white people in general.

ⁱⁱ In this study I put the term 'race' in single quotes because of the scientific conclusion that there are no 'races'. The racism of the apartheid state was precisely the division of its population into different 'races', and then to discriminate between them on the basis of this supposed difference.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 1998 there were 4231 registered students on the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University. Fifty-five per cent of these were white, 30% were African, 11% were Indian, and 4% were coloured.

^{iv} 'Black' is a political term, coined by the Black Consciousness movement in the 1970s, to describe all formerly disenfranchised South Africans. It was used in opposition to the apartheid states' use of the divisive ethnic categories of African, coloured, and Indian. In this thesis I use it as a political term. The term 'coloured' is National Party terminology for descendants of people from the union of white colonizers and indigenous peoples.

^v The following articles were published during the period of my research: "Globalisation: Good and Bad", *Rhodes Journalism Review*, December, 1999; "Approaches to Understanding the Relationship between Texts and Audiences", *Communicatio*, 26(2), 2000; "Where the Global Meets the Local: Media Studies and the Myth of Cultural Homogenisation", *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, no. 6, Spring/Summer, 2001; "Global Media/Local Meanings", *Communicatio*, vol. 27(2), 2001; "Media Consumption and Identity Formation", forthcoming in *Media, Culture, and Society*, vol. 24(4), 2002; "Global Media/Local Meanings", forthcoming in Linde, R-A. (ed) *Race/Gender/Media: Considering Diversity Across Audiences, Content, Producers*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002; "The 'Homeland' Students, Identity Formation and Cultural Consumption", forthcoming in Tufte, T. (ed) *Global Encounters*, Luton: University of Luton Press, 2002.

Chapter 2

Approaches to understanding the relationship between texts and audiences

It is a truism, but nonetheless true, that what you see depends on where you stand and in what direction you look. (Murdock, 1989: 37)

1. Introduction

As noted in the Introduction, this study investigates the meanings local social subjects take from global media as part of their ongoing attempts to make sense of their lives and the specific class, gender, race and other identities they inhabit. This research focus is part of a wider interest amongst media scholars and culture critics in the relationship between media texts and their audiences. This chapter will thus explore the theoretical debates pertaining to this relationship, which provide the framework against which my primary data will be discussed.

2. Audience autonomy versus textual determination

Ever since conservative mass culture critics, in the late 1800s, articulated their negative reactions to the related processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, and the emergence of contemporary forms of mass media, theorists have been concerned with the relationship between texts and their audiences, and, as Silverstone (1990: 173) notes, of the effects of the media on their moral, political and economic lives. The history of these debates oscillates between continents and perspectives, between theories that stress textual power over audiences and those that stress audience power over texts.

At the most general level one can argue that competing attempts to make sense of text/audience relationships are due to differences amongst theorists about how to analyse the social formation as a whole (Hall, 1982: 56). Thus Bennett, in examining the way theorists have historically approached the mass media, argues that “the sorts of assumptions made about the broader structure of society within different bodies of theory have determined both the sorts of questions that have been posed in relation to the media and the way in which those questions have been pursued” (1982: 31).

For example, the Frankfurt School theorists' preoccupation with factors impeding radical social and economic transformation in Europe led them to focus on the role of the 'culture industries' as ideological apparatuses serving dominant societal interests. The social and political assumptions of Marxist materialism shaped their concerns and their theoretical approach to this issue. On the other hand, 'mainstream' American approaches, drawing on liberal pluralist political philosophy, have tended to take as a given that value consensus is deeply embedded in society and that as such, the best the media can do is reflect that already-achieved consensus. Thus if media effects are sought they are short term and restricted.¹ For the Frankfurt School theorists the media are powerful instruments which aid the maintenance of class oppression while in the 'mainstream' American approach, they are seen as relatively weak, but important, instruments in the circulation and reinforcement of shared values (Hall, 1982: 56-90).

Another way of looking at competing approaches is to distinguish between those approaches stressing the determining power of the media, and those that highlight the interpretive freedom of audiences (Silverstone, 1990; Bennett, 1982; Hall, 1982; Morley, 1989; Dahlgren, 1998). The first position is represented by the 'effects' tradition that draws on a 'hypodermic' model of media influence. While theorists working within this tradition differ in their political perspectives and their focus on short-term behavioural changes or long-term cultural and ideological changes, what they do share is the view that the media, as powerful social institutions, are able to 'inject' their audiences with their messages, and thus affect their behaviour. In this tradition one can group the Frankfurt School theorists, those liberal pluralist theorists working within the behavioural effects tradition, critical theorists, political economy approaches to the media, and psychoanalytic theories of text/audience relationships perhaps best represented by what has come to be known as the British *Screen* tradition.

Opposing the shared assumptions of the above approaches is one that stresses audience autonomy as opposed to textual determination. Again there are a number of differences, related to underlying political philosophy. Whether it is 'uses-and-

gratifications' research, or the 'two-step-flow' approach, mainstream theories rooted in liberal pluralist philosophy, have emphasised individual, psychological meanings rather than social ones (Seiter et al., 1989: 2). The limitation of this perspective is that differences of response or interpretation are attributed to individual differences of personality (Morley, 1989: 17). On the other hand, cultural studies theorists attempt to uncover clusters of readings that correspond to significant axes of power within particular social contexts (Moore, 1993: 27-31).

A third way of classifying the competing theories of text/audience relationships is to examine the 'moments' they emphasize in the 'circuit of culture' (Johnson, 1983: 48; du Gay et al., 1997: 3). Johnson (1983: 48) identifies four such moments in the circuit of cultural products - production, texts, readings and lived cultures. Related to these different moments he identifies three main models of research: production-based studies, text-based studies, and studies of lived cultures. Importantly, both Johnson (1983: 48) and du Gay et al. (1997: 3) point out that different theoretical approaches within media studies tend to focus on different moments in the circuit, conflating that moment with the meaning of the circuit as a whole. As Johnson observes,

Each approach has a rationality in relation to that moment it has closely in view, but is quite evidently inadequate, even 'ideological', as an account of the whole. Yet different approaches acquire an independence in the various theoretical paradigms, and are also related to the specialisms of academic disciplines. (1983: 48)

If we map the previously-discussed approaches onto the 'circuit of culture', it is clear that those theories which focus on media power in the determination of meaning tend to cluster around the 'production' and 'text' moments of the circuit, while those which focus on interpretive freedom tend to cluster around the 'readings' and 'lived cultures' moments of the circuit. However, as du Gay et al. advise, "rather than privileging one single phenomenon – such as the process of production – in explaining the meaning that an artefact comes to possess...it is in a combination of processes – in their articulation – that the beginnings of an explanation are to be found" (1997: 3). In attempting to get at the 'meaning' of a text, therefore, we need to acknowledge both the moments of production/text/distribution and audience/consumption/lived culture.

3. Cultural Studies and Political Economy

Despite the recommendations of Johnson (1983) and du Gay et al. (1997) that we attend to all ‘moments’ of the circuit, Kellner (1997: 19) observes that this advice has rarely been heeded. It is arguably their focus on different ‘moments’ in the circuit of culture which best explains the theoretical divisions and resultant hostilities existing between the cultural studies and political economy theorists. So deep has the animosity between the two approaches become, that Kellner refers to the “war” between them (1997: 19).

Let me briefly outline these two opposing approaches to the study of media in society.

While cultural studies is a “polymorphous tradition” (Dahlgren, 1998: 298), the “ethnographic turn” (Moore, 1995: 1) within this approach is often signified as representing the main tendency (Gitlin, 1997: 32; Kellner, 1997: 116; Curran, 1990: 135). A key precursor to this focus on audiences, consumption and the accompanying ‘turn’ was Stuart Hall’s (1980) essay “Encoding/Decoding”. Originally circulated in 1973 as a working paper at the Birmingham Centre, it proposed an analytic separation of the encoding and decoding moments in textual production and reception. It argued that the text has the power to propose or suggest particular ideological readings, the audience should be seen as active decoders who will not necessarily accept the positions being offered.

This understanding of text/audience relationships gave impetus to the emergence of ethnographic approaches to media consumption as well a number of well-known works on youth subcultures (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1977; Hebdige, 1979). Drawing on qualitative research methods (in depth interviewing and/or participant observation) the aim was to provide detailed descriptions of how audiences negotiate and use media texts in the course of their everyday lives, constructing their own meanings within an autonomous cultural economy (Curran, 1990). Thus, against the emphasis of the critical paradigm on top-down power – a perspective which informs political economy – the ethnographic perspective emphasised bottom-up resistance as itself a form of subordinate power. The meanings around which this resistance was

organized were obtained from the consumption of mass-produced popular cultural forms.

Media theorists informed by political economy have argued that the ethnographic emphasis on meaning-making at the point of consumption has resulted in an approach which downplays the structuration of experience via objective factors (for example, class and organizational structure) which stand outside of our subjectivity (Curran, 1990; Kellner, 1997; Garnham, 1995; Murdock, 1989; Gitlin, 1997). As a result, they argue, cultural studies has often lapsed into a naïve humanism, in which the power of the text (often replaced with the notion of ‘textuality’ and its implication of unlimited semic potential) is completely subordinated to the semiotic creativity of the consumer. In particular, political economists argue that the production and distribution of culture takes place within a specific economic system and that this places constraints on the range of textual meanings made available by the producing institutions.

For their part, cultural studies theorists argue that the reductionism and economism of some versions of political economy result in the failure to engage concretely with texts and audiences. Thus while Garnham has argued that within cultural studies there “has been the overwhelming focus on cultural consumption rather than on cultural production” (1995: 64), Grossberg has replied that while too much work in cultural studies admittedly fails to take economics seriously enough, “political economy...fails to take culture seriously enough” (1995: 78).

In the remainder of this chapter I will deal primarily with the theoretical issues raised by the two opposing approaches arguing, as do an increasing number of other theorists (Dahlgren, 1998; Murdock, 1995; Ang, 1990; Kellner, 1997; Moores, 1993), that they present a false dichotomy, and that combining insights from both presents the most fruitful way to proceed in studying text/audience relationships.

Besides the tendency to emphasise different ‘moments’ in the circuit of culture, differences in political and philosophical premises also separate theorists from these two traditions. Curran (1990: 139) argues that while there were originally differences in emphasis between the two approaches – depending on whether they stressed

economic or ideological reasons for the media's subordination to dominant social interests – they both worked within a neo-Marxist model of society. Thus they both perceive a connection between economic interests and ideological representations, and both portray the media as serving dominant social interests.ⁱⁱ Both Curran (1990) and Kellner attribute the rupture in the unity of the radical tradition to the “postmodern turn” in cultural studies, whereby, according to Kellner, “economics, history, and politics are decentred in favour of emphasis on local pleasures, consumption, and the construction of hybrid identities from the material of the popular” (1997: 20). Implied in this explanation for the separation, is that political economy has still held onto the modernist project. While Kellner's (1997) description of cultural studies may be objected to, I do believe that the tension between postmodernist and modernist theorising goes some way to explaining the differences between the two theoretical approaches.

Briefly stated, Morley argues that underlying the modernist project is a set of interrelated notions: “modernization, rationalization and progress, and an implicit vision of the gradual perfectibility of society, to be achieved by rational planning and social reform” (1996: 52). Thus modernists, according to Berman (1992: 33), celebrate and identify with all those activities – science, art, technology, and politics – that enable mankind to ‘make all things new’. As Berman further points out, the modernist project demands deep and radical renewals: “modern men and women must become the subjects as well as the objects of modernization; they must learn to change the world that is changing them, and to make it their own” (1992: 33). Underlying the modernist project are the aspirations of the Enlightenment – that we can define essential human nature, prescribe a particular destiny to human history, and define collective human goals (Morley, 1996: 52). Finally, for the modernists, one can discover the ‘truth’ behind the surface of appearances through totalising explanatory theories such as Marxism, psychoanalysis and structuralism.

The postmodernists reject the claims of modernist discourses – “...to know the truth of the human condition, or to speak in the name of abstract concepts of justice or society” (Morley, 1996: 59). In its place is the search for ‘local knowledges’ as opposed to truth; the rejection of hierarchies of value; and the emphasis on the active

production (or ‘construction’) of meaning (Gitlin, 1997: 27). Foucault’s stress on manifold relationships of power at play in different situations – relationships that cannot be traced to the mode of production or social formation – provided a key impetus for this shift of focus within the cultural studies approach (Curran, 1990: 139). Thus Fiske (1989a: 179) has written that, “One of the many debts we owe to Foucault is his insistence that power relations cannot be adequately explained by class relations, that power is discursive and is to be understood in the specific contexts of its exercise, not in generalized social structures.” Zavarzadeh (1991) notes further that postmodern theories of resistance – evident in this strand of cultural studies – can be traced to Foucault’s insistence that power always activates counterpower (resistance). “Wherever there is power there is resistance” (Foucault quoted in Zavarzadeh, 1991: 34).

Emerging from these different social and political assumptions are different ways of understanding text/audience relationships. The cultural studies approach, through ethnographic studies into media consumption, has increasingly focused on how different social groupings use the meanings circulated by the mainstream media in their ongoing attempts to make sense of their lives and the specific class, gender, ‘race’, and other identities which they inhabit. For them, ‘opposition’ occurs at the level of discourse. In line with Foucault, the stress is often on opposition, subjectivity, audience freedom, consumption, and localised truths as ‘the people’ take on ‘the power bloc’. In contrast, political economy, rooted in Marxist materialism, insists that power operates not only through discourse, but also through material relations. As such, political economy theorists stress the need to interrogate the interplay between the economic and the symbolic. They argue that the system of production often determines what sorts of cultural texts will be produced and the discursive limits of these texts. As Garnham writes:

A delimited social group, pursuing economic or political ends, determines which meanings circulate and which do not, which stories are told and about what, which arguments are given prominence and what cultural resources are made available and to whom. The analysis of this process is vital to an understanding of the power relationships

involved in culture and their relationship to wider structures of domination. (1995: 65)

4. Cultural Populism

It is ironic that Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding essay has given rise to the cultural populism approach to consumption within cultural studies. Ironic, because although critiquing the notion of an all-powerful media able to make people behave in certain ways through its notion of 'preferred readings', it still held onto the notion of the media promoting cultural frameworks and categories within which members of the culture will tend to operate. Thus, commenting on Hall's essay, Morley (1989: 19) points out that while it had its shortcomings – for example, how one transfers the notion of "preferred reading", initially applied to news and current affairs television, to the analysis of fictional television – it provided a middle ground between the notion of a text having a determinate meaning and the equally problematic notion of a text being completely 'open', upon which the reader projects his/her own meaning. As Morley notes, "The point of the preferred reading model was to insist that readers are, of course, engaged in productive work, but under determinate conditions. Those determinate conditions are of course supplied both by the text, the producing institutions and the social history of the audience" (1989: 19).

Despite this, audience ethnographies have arguably had, with a few exceptions (for example, Radway 1988), very little to say about 'determinate conditions' resulting in Morley's admission that within cultural studies, the model has been "quite transformed" to the point "where it is often maintained that the majority of audience members routinely modify or deflect any dominant ideology reflected in media content and the concept of a preferred reading, or of a structured polysemy, drops entirely from view" (1997: 124).ⁱⁱⁱ However, as McGuigan (1997: 138-151) points out, with the attempt to reconcile the dominant ideology thesis (preferred reading) with the active audience, there was always the danger that the latter would invert the former. Like Morley, he believes that this has actually happened, resulting in a drift, within cultural studies, into an uncritical cultural populist position with its narrow focus on interpretation and related uncritical celebration of popular readings, at the expense of questions of power. He argues that this is largely a result of the

commitment of cultural studies to a hermeneutic methodology at the expense of the perspective of political economy. Furthermore, he argues, the celebration of the consumer has led to a crisis of qualitative judgement whereby the value of cultural forms resides in their popularity, rather than being judged by any external criteria. In line with postmodern theorising, this means there is no Archimedean point from which we can make value judgements on the cultural form under discussion – their value lies in their popularity.

In his critique of this position, Gitlin argues that it assumes “that the people who render it popular are not misguided when they do so; not fooled; not dominated; not distracted; not passive...[rather] the premise is that popular culture is popular because and only because the people find in it channels of desire, pleasure, initiative, freedom” (1997: 33). Jane Root, a British writer on popular television, exemplifies this approach: “Rather than sitting like gawping zombies, viewers choose programmes. Banal as it may sound, people watch *Crossroads* and *Dallas* because they like them” (1986: 26).

Critics usually hold up the writings of John Fiske as exemplifying cultural studies’ drift into uncritical populist politics (McGuigan, 1997: 140). For this reason, and other reasons noted below, I wish briefly to look at Fiske’s approach to the text/audience problematic. Firstly, his populist position arguably represents the dominant position in cultural studies (certainly as witnessed in the American appropriation of British cultural studies – see Morley 1997: 122). Secondly, Fiske’s work represents one end of the continuum, between textual determinism and audience freedom, resulting in condemnation or praise (sometimes both) from media and cultural theorists (see, for example, Curran, 1990; Dahlgren, 1998; Murdock, 1989; McGuigan, 1997; Storey, 1993). Examining the cultural populist tendency through the work of Fiske thus enables me to clarify what is at stake in theorising the politics of consumption, especially as it pertains to my own approach.

5. The theoretical approach of John Fiske

Fiske (1987a) draws on the neo-Marxist understanding of capitalist societies as divided societies, but his rootedness in postmodern theorising results in a Marxism

without the materialism. His reliance on de Certeau's and Foucault's stress on 'popular resistance' results in a reading of cultural consumption that stresses its inherently oppositional function. Fiske argues that,

Everyday life is constituted by the practices of popular culture, and is characterised by the creativity of the weak in using the resources provided by a disempowering system while refusing finally to submit to that power. The culture of everyday life is best described through metaphors of struggle or antagonism: strategies opposed by tactics, the bourgeoisie by the proletariat; hegemony met by resistance, ideology countered or evaded; top-down power opposed by bottom-up power, social discipline faced with disorder. (1989a: 47)

Fiske rejects the view that the "capitalist culture industries produce only an apparent variety of products whose variety is finally illusory because they all promote the same capitalist ideology" (1987b: 309), and related to this, that people are 'cultural dupes' (1987b: 309). In support of his position Fiske (1987b: 311) argues that the production and distribution of cultural commodities takes place in two parallel, semi-autonomous economies, the *financial* (where production is located) and the *cultural* (the symbolic exchange between texts and audiences). Separating the two economies allows Fiske to argue that, "the cultural commodity cannot adequately be described in financial terms only: the circulation that is crucial to its popularity occurs in the parallel economy – the cultural. What is exchanged and circulated here is not wealth but meanings, pleasures, and social identities" (1987b: 311).

This separation of the two economies enables Fiske to downplay any notion of economic determination of textual meaning. It also enables him to focus on reception as the locus of meaning. He argues that because it is not uniformly decoded by its audience, the notion of a concrete 'text' needs to be replaced by the more abstract notion of 'textuality'. Thus, with regard to television viewing, he argues that, "What the set in the living-room delivers is 'television', visual and aural signifiers that are potential provokers of meaning and pleasure. This potential is its textuality which is mobilised differently in the variety of its moments of viewing" (1991: 56). Being polysemic, argues Fiske (1987b: 15), texts provide multiple potential meanings and

pleasures. The polysemic potential of texts allied to the inherently oppositional stance of 'the people' in their cultural struggles against the 'power bloc', means that "these popular forces transform the cultural commodity into a cultural resource, pluralise the meanings and pleasures it offers, evade or resist its disciplinary efforts, fracture its homogeneity and coherence, raid or poach on its terrain" (1989a: 28).

Fiske's focus on the active audience enables him to downplay the importance of institutional production by re-theorising 'production' as part of 'consumption'. Thus, he argues that

Every act of consumption is an act of cultural production, for consumption is always the production of meaning. At the point of sale the commodity exhausts its role in the distribution economy, but begins its work in the cultural. Detached from the strategies of capitalism, its work for the bosses completed, it becomes a resource for the culture of everyday life. (1989a: 35)

Ultimately, this power of the consumer is attested to by the fact that while the cultural industries produce a repertoire of products, they cannot predict which of their commodities will be chosen by which sectors of the market to be the provoker of meanings and pleasures that serve their interests as well as those of the producer (Fiske, 1987b: 15).

6. Theoretical gains and critiques

In Fiske's work we clearly see the interplay between the focus on the reception moment in the circuit of culture and the championing of a position that stresses audience interpretive freedom. What has been gained from this viewpoint? Fiske, and the turn to ethnography in general, has provided an important corrective to the ideological homogenising tendencies implicit in critical theory. At the same time, within this variant of cultural studies, there has been the acknowledgement that capitalist societies are divided societies, and that the making of meaning from textual consumption is deeply implicated in ongoing social struggle. Thus while Fiske accepts the power of the forces of dominance, his focus is on the ways in which these forces are resisted. The artefacts produced by the culture industries often provide the

resources for this process of cultural resistance. Popular cultural consumption is thus an important site of ongoing social struggle in which dominant meanings are challenged by subordinate meanings.

Fiske (1987b) provides a number of examples in support of his position. For example, he quotes from Hodge and Tripp's study of the viewing, by Australian schoolchildren, of *Prisoner*, an American soap opera dealing with female prison inmates. Reading against the dominant ideological discourse encoded into the program, the children were able to find significant parallels between the experiences of the prisoners and their own school experiences. The programme thus became a cultural resource for the pupils in their attempt to resist the dominant cultural meanings that circulated within the school system. According to Fiske,

Prisoner provided Australian school students with a language, a set of cultural categories complete with connotations, value systems, and ideological inflection with which to think through their experience of school from their own position, to make a kind of sense of school that suited *their* social interests in that it enabled them to articulate their powerlessness and offered them a positive way of understanding it. (1987b: 69)

In South Africa, the appropriation of American gangster styles evident in Hollywood movies by the *tsotsi* gangsters of the 1940s and 1950s, provides another fascinating example of this process of using dominantly encoded texts for counter-hegemonic purposes. As an urban African criminal subculture, the *tsotsis* were identifiable by their speech, behaviour and dress, central to the latter being the American 'city slicker' style comprising 'zoot-suits', long floppy coats, and wide-brimmed hats. Reading 'against the grain', or what Hall (1980: 138) refers to as 'oppositional decoding' was central to the *tsotsis*' viewing of the American gangster films. Anthony Sampson, a journalist at the time, provides a graphic description of watching the American gangster film, *Street with No Name*, at a 'non-European' cinema at which *tsotsis* made up the majority of the audience:

The lights dimmed, and the film began, with a sequence showing the F.B.I. at work, and a personal message from Edgar Hoover, F.B.I.

chief, to say that crime does not pay. A tough police detective was preparing to smash a gang of killers. The *tsotsis* went on talking and shouting and cuddling their girl-friends in the dark. Occasionally they jeered at the F.B.I. A scene shifted to the gangster's hide out. A hush from the audience. Richard Widmark appeared in one corner. A shriek from the whole house. "Stiles! Attaboy! Go it, Stiles!" A tense silence. Stiles wore a long overcoat, sniffed a Benzedrine inhaler, and occasionally bit an apple. Beside him slouched his henchman, wearing a belted raincoat with slits at the back. "When this film first came out," Can [Themba] whispered, "the sales of Benzedrine rocketed. Everybody munched apples. All the *tsotsis* wore those raincoats." (1956: 101-2)

There are a number of significant aspects to this account. Firstly, following Fiske (1987b: 69) one could argue that the *tsotsis*, through their identification with the styles, actions and attitudes of the filmic gangsters, inserted the meanings of the programme into their social experience as gangsters in a way that informed both – the meanings of being a *tsotsi*, and the meanings of these films. Each was influenced by the other, and the fit between them ensured that each validated the other.

7. *The ideology of pleasure*

For Fiske, the obtaining of pleasure cannot be separated from resistance to structures of domination: "pleasure requires a sense of control over meanings and an active participation in the cultural process" (1987b: 19). In a later work he writes: "These antagonisms, these clashes of social interest...are motivated primarily by pleasure: the pleasure of producing one's own meanings of social experience and the pleasure of avoiding the social discipline of the power-bloc" (1989a: 47). Commenting on this aspect of Fiske's work, Dahlgren argues that "the emphasis on the pleasure involved in sense-making draws attention to the fact that meaning making *per se* is not merely a rational/cognitive operation but also has an affective dimension. This can be seen as a corrective of the critical trajectory, which had for the most part been operating with a rather rationalistic psychology model" (1998: 299). However, he goes on to warn against the tendency amongst some cultural studies theorists to celebrate resistance

and pleasure *per se* without distinguishing between types of resistance and pleasure.

In this regard I would agree with Garnham, who argues:

Surely the aim should not be to bow down in ethnographic worship of these cultural practices, but to create a social reality in which there are wider possibilities for the exercise of both symbolic and (in my view more importantly) material power. Can we not admit that these are extremely constrained and impoverished cultural practices that contribute nothing to social change? We may wish to salute the courage and inventiveness shown in such circumstances, but at the same time wish to change them. (1995: 64)

Furthermore, as Williamson (1986: 14) points out, we should examine how personal needs feed into these pleasures without therefore assuming that they are a ‘good thing’, while Gray (1987: 29) argues that the often uncritical acceptance of the aesthetic preference and pleasures of viewers begs the question not only of their effect, but also their origins. Thus Gray (1987: 29) writes that rather than taking these preferences and pleasures as a given, we should ask how these popular pleasures come about and what dimensions of the social structure they help to hold in place.

Two local examples illustrate the need to interrogate the politics of pleasure critically. The first concerns the *tsotis*, mentioned above. While they may have represented, at one level, an alternative culture, their opposition to dominant bourgeois norms was never translated into political action. They were, and remained, juvenile gangsters. As such, one could argue, they played no significant role in the transformation of the structures through which they lived their oppression (evidenced in poor education, high unemployment, migratory labour system and so on). They were involved in the ‘magical resolution’ of structural contradictions, the term used by Phil Cohen (1980: 82) with regard to the post-war British youth subcultures. ‘Magical’, because while they offered resistance at the symbolic level, their actions never addressed the social and political reasons for their felt oppression. Arguably they were ‘coping’ with, rather than ‘resisting’ their daily lived oppression (Garnham, 1995: 69). This raises the issue of the extent to which a variant interpretation of a text constitutes ideological resistance in any significant way.

The second local example concerns Kwaito, the music that lies at the heart of contemporary township dance culture. It provides an example which draws together many of the themes discussed thus far in this section. Drawing heavily in both form and content on American Rap music, Kwaito gets heavy airplay from Youth FM (YFM), the fastest growing regional music station in the country. Because of massive local sales, and the obvious significance of this music to local black youth, it has attracted much favourable media attention. Most of the media coverage either profiles the musicians or uncritically charts the sales success of this generically unique musical form. So popular is this form that the organisers of the South African music awards introduced, from 1999, a Kwaito category. With few exceptions, what has been missing from media discussions of Kwaito has been the overwhelming misogynism evidenced in the lyrics. As one song typically attests, “Di beerie di cheapile/le baba ba tletse/Bai kutlwa bufebe/ba batla lerete” which translates as “the beer is cheap, the girls are feeling bitchy and want to be fucked” (Mutume, 1997: 12). “Koko ke koko” are the entire lyrics of another Kwaito song which, translated into English is “Pussy is Pussy”. When we consider the context of reception – a country deeply rooted in patriarchy with the worst rape statistics in the world with estimates at 99,7 per 100 000 inhabitants (Mutume, 1997: 12) – we surely need to interrogate the kinds of pleasures that are gained from such music, and the social relationships they help hold in place.

In furthering this discussion, it is useful to re-visit the debate that took place within cultural studies in the 1980s – that between the culturalists and the structuralists – discussed in Hall’s (1981a) seminal essay, *Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms*. The culturalist focus on questions of culture, consciousness and experience, with its accent on agency, I would argue, is reflected in the approach discussed thus far. In contrast, the structuralist focus on the structuring of experience via factors which stand outside our subjectivity seem to connect closely with the concerns of political economists. The structuralists assert that the categories, classifications and frameworks of a culture do not arise from experience but rather that experience is their effect. This is reflected in Murdock’s claim that we need to move away from the expressive individualism that informs much of the work on audiences to “a more thorough

engagement with the ways that meanings and identities are negotiated socially, and with the ways that these grounded processes are structured by wider economic and ideological formations” (1989: 41).

While not downplaying the importance of culturalist insights – such as the insistence on the affirmative moment of the development of conscious struggle – the strength of structuralism is, according to Hall (1981a: 33) its stress on ‘determinate conditions’. Not only does structuralism avoid the often naïve humanism of culturalism and its privileging of the category of ‘experience’, but at the centre of the analysis is the concept of ideology. As Hall argues,

It is difficult to conceive of a Cultural Studies thought within a Marxist paradigm which is innocent of the category of ‘ideology’. Of course, culturalism constantly makes reference to this concept: but it does not in fact lie at the centre of its conceptual universe. The authenticating power and reference of ‘experience’ imposes a barrier between culturalism and a proper conception of ‘ideology’. (1981a: 33)

I would argue that in analysing media consumption we need recourse to the notion of ideology – “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 1990: 7) – for without it, it is difficult to move beyond the level of description to theoretical abstraction. Thus Murdock (1989: 40) notes that the impulse to decode only in terms of opposition and resistance means that instances are often missed when interpretations and practices are taken over intact from the dominant culture. Rather, we need to interrogate what kinds of media frameworks are likely to be produced under different economic conditions, and what effects these frameworks and classifications are likely to have on audiences. Murdock (1989: 40) argues that Fiske is correct to argue that the polysemic nature of dominant cultural texts ensures their popularity by enabling them to connect with the lives and values of a variety of social groups. But this argument ignores the ideological constraints that such programmes work within. For example, with regard to television broadcasting he points out that,

Whilst it is self-evidently the case that prime-time programming has to provide multiple points of pleasure for a socially differentiated audience, the formats it employs clearly operate to regulate the range

of discourses and presentations called into play in important ways, preferring some whilst marginalizing or excluding others. As a consequence there are identities, experiences, and forms of knowledge which are consistently pushed to or off the edge of schedules. To argue otherwise is to accept commercial television's claim that it gives people what they want and need, and to undermine the case for new forms of public broadcasting that can address the full range of contemporary cultures. (1989: 40)

Here we see the difference between Murdock's modernist stress on audiences as citizens requiring a full range of information in order to make informed political choices, and the postmodern tendency in cultural studies ethnographic audience research to view media primarily as a resource for the structuring of identity. As was pointed out earlier, while the modernist position evidences a trust in reason and in our ability to approach 'truth', the postmodernist position rejects these universalist claims of modernist discourse, denying that we can "know the truth of the human condition, or speak in the name of abstract concepts of justice or society" (Morley, 1996: 59).

Murdock's argument also points to the centrality of the economics of cultural production as a 'determinate condition'. As business enterprises the primary aim of the commercial media is to make profits. As Smythe (1977: 1-27) reminds us, this is done by selling audiences to advertisers. One way of ensuring that a publication reaches the greatest number of readers/viewers is for it to remain within the confines of 'what everyone agrees' to: the consensus. As Hall argues, this has consequences, for "in orienting themselves in 'the consensus' and at the same time...operating on it in a formative fashion, the media become part and parcel of that dialectical process of the 'production of consent' – shaping the consensus while reflecting it – which orientates them within the field of force of the dominant social interests represented within the state" (1982: 87).

There are numerous examples of this interplay between economics and ideology. Baker (1997: 30) points to a current trend in the United States for major advertisers to pressure magazines to keep their content within dominant normative bounds. He

quotes from a letter sent by Chrysler Motor Corporation's advertising agency, PentaCom, to magazines requesting their written agreement to the following policy:

[I]t is required that Chrysler Corporation be alerted in advance of any and all editorial content that encompasses sexual, political, social issues or any editorial that might be construed as provocative or offensive. Each and every issue that carries Chrysler advertising requires a written summary outlining major themes/articles appearing in upcoming issues. (quoted in Baker, 1997: 30)

Guy Berger, writing on the operation of the liberal press under apartheid, provides a local example of economic pressures on mainstream media to work within the ideological confines of the dominant culture:

The liberal press operated in, and took its cues from, the prevailing white landscape. A handful of white editors rose above the conventional wisdom of the day. They 'opened an account' and they paid the price: exile for Donald Woods, loss of their jobs in the cases of Raymond Louw, Allister Sparks, and Tony Hurd. White journalists like these, who tried to lead the white readership market, rather than follow its prejudices and interests, also ran into falling circulation. The decline was not compensated for by black readers who failed to attract advertising revenue. (1997: 25)

Yet another illuminating example of the interplay between economics and ideology is provided by Allen (1985) in his examination of soap operas, the staple of most television networks. In his discussion of the paradigmatic structure of the genre, he points to the overwhelming whiteness of the world they represent. He argues that the reasons for this is the limited range of relationships open to soap opera characters: kinship, romantic and social. Since these categories tend to overlap in soap operas, to include minorities, soap operas would have to embrace interracial romance, marriage and parentage as a community norm. Allen (1985: 74-75) argues that the producers' desire not to offend large numbers of their target audience (white women) means that they prefer to stay within the confines of the hegemonic normative bounds, thus reflecting and reproducing these bounds.

Similarly, Gerbner et al., in discussing some of the conclusions of the Cultural Indicators Project started in 1967-1968, point to the cultural and ideological consequences that economic pressure has on American commercial television:

When many millions of dollars of revenue ride on a single ratings point, there are few degrees of freedom to indulge egos or yield to many other pressures. Competition for the largest possible audience at the least cost means striving for the broadest and most conventional appeals, blurring sharp conflicts, blending and balancing competing perspectives, and presenting divergent or deviant images as mostly to be shunned, feared, or suppressed. (1982: 105)

These institutional pressures, the authors argue, enforce the cultivation of relatively ‘moderate’ or ‘middle-of-the-road’ presentations and orientations. They also note that a content analysis of prime-time television indicates an over-representation of “well-to-do white males in the prime of life” (1982: 106) concluding that television’s general demography bears greater resemblance to the patterns of consumer spending than to the U.S. census. Placing themselves squarely in the critical theory tradition, the authors stress that media representations have social consequences. The repetitive lessons we learn from television are likely to become the basis for a broader worldview, “making television a significant source of general values, ideologies, and perspectives as well as specific assumptions, beliefs, and images” (Gerbner et al., 1994: 30). In support of this claim the authors quote from their studies which indicate that amongst American audiences, long-term exposure to television violence cultivates the image of a relatively mean and dangerous world. In other words, the heavier the viewing, the meaner the world inhabited by viewers.

While I do not believe that audiences are ‘dupes’ totally at the mercy of an all-powerful media, I would accept Hall’s claim that the “first great cultural function” of the media is the “provision and selective construction of social knowledge” (1977: 340). The media provide frames on ‘reality’ and this is not the result of some great conspiracy. Besides the already noted logic and pressure of the market, journalists are inserted into a number of reinforcing discursive fields – sport, school, business, the

military and so on – from which they draw their social knowledge. The role of the South African mainstream ‘white’ media in both reflecting and reinforcing the already achieved white consensus was graphically highlighted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings into the role of the commercial media during the apartheid years. According to *Rhodes Journalism Review* editor, Anthea Garman, who attended the media hearings, the testimony of journalists from the mainstream press indicated their unwitting complicity with the apartheid government in their reportage of the social and political ‘reality’ of apartheid. Referring to the commercial English-language press, she notes that “ideology was far more of a constraining force on white journalists’ reporting than apartheid legislation.”^{iv}

That the mainstream mass circulation media, because of economic and ideological pressures, work within a narrow cultural range, is argued by Sut Jhally (1991) in his documentary *Dreamworlds II: Desire, Sex, and Power In Music Video*. Exploring the systematic representations of women in music videos, Jhally concludes that the stories told by music videos in commercial culture define women in objectified and dehumanised ways - as objects of the male gaze. He points out that 90% of these videos are directed and written by men and the videos thus reflect the sexual ‘dreamworld’ of these men. Importantly, he argues, if they did not reflect the already-achieved ideological consensus pertaining to male and female sexuality, they would not attain the wide viewership that they do. What we should ask with regard to the representation of sexuality not only in music videos, but in other areas of commercial media culture, is “whose stories about sexuality are not told, whose visions of the world do we not see, who is silenced in our culture?” Jhally is against censoring these images, claiming, ironically, that they exist as a result of censorship – the censor being not the government but the market which ensures that only the voices of commercial and corporate interests are heard. Rather than limiting what imagery already exists, Jhally argues for more diversity of representation, more democratic access so that the fantasy images do not work their influence without other stories being told.

Following Raymond Williams's discussion of the Marxist notion of 'determination', it is important to see the relationship between the economic and the ideological realms

in terms of "setting limits, exerting pressures" rather than "essentially prefigured, predicted and controlled by a pre-existing external force" (Williams, 1980: 32). That decoding takes place within ideological limits (Hall's 'preferred reading'), primarily a result of the interplay between the symbolic and the economic, is largely ignored by those ethnographic approaches that collapse the production and consumption moments and thus celebrate resistance and opposition. It is one thing to decode aberrantly within the confines of what is presented on the screen or on the page, but quite another thing to be actively presented with different ways of understanding the world, different identifications, and discourses which fall outside of the ideological limits of what everyone agrees to. Curran and Gurevitch, in their discussion of Marxist perspectives on the media, argue a similar point:

The media taken as a whole, relay interpretive frameworks consonant with the interests of the dominant classes, and media audiences, while sometimes negotiating and contesting these frameworks, lack ready access to alternative meaning systems that would enable them to reject the definitions offered by the media in favor of oppositional definitions. (Curran and Gurevitch quoted in Curran, 1990: 136-137)

Similarly, in his discussion of the relationship between power and ideology, Steven Lukes asks whether or not it is,

...the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial. (1974: 24)

Thus, I would argue, exposing students to the class analysis of Chilean society explored in *The Battle for Chile*, or some of the debates and films emerging from the African film movement, is an overtly political act quite different in substance to the aberrant decoding of the latest Hollywood blockbuster. Similarly, there is a vast difference between Madonna's appeals to young girls' desires to be sexy and thus

‘important’, and a sustained feminist critique of patriarchal culture. Pursuing this line and drawing on her own experience in adult education, Judith Williamson writes that what has transformed the experience of generations of working-class people “is not the perception that TV is fun, but the perception that there are radically different ways of thinking and explaining the everyday experience in which mass popular culture plays a major part” (1986: 14).

8. *A ‘polymorphous tradition’*

As Dahlgren (1998: 298) has pointed out, cultural studies is a ‘polymorphous tradition’, and while I have thus far focused on what is arguably the ‘dominant line’ (Gitlin, 1997: 32) in cultural studies, this should not blind us to some of the very real gains made in this area by theorists who are far more cautious in theorising the relationship between textual determination and audience autonomy.

If the central aim of reception ethnography is to understand the lived experiences of media consumers, then it has to engage, as Moores (1993: 32-69) points out, with the situational contexts – primarily the everyday micro-settings of reception – within which the media are used and interpreted. This growing recognition of the importance of context of reception – as significant as the object of viewing – represents, according to Morley (1989: 36), one of the most important advances in recent audience work. Morley (1989: 36) argues that, with regard to television viewing, this implies a recognition of the domestic context. As he notes,

This perspective relocates television viewing within the overall context of domestic leisure. Given that television is a domestic medium it follows that the appropriate mode of analysis must take the unit of consumption of television as the family or household rather than the individual viewer. This is to situate individual viewing within the household relations in which it operates, and to insist that individual viewing only makes sense inside this frame. (Morley, 1989: 36)

As Morley (1989: 37) further argues, once we take into consideration the family context of viewing, we can no longer treat the viewer as a free or rational consumer. We have to consider issues of power that translate, in this context, to negotiations

around programme choice. Age and gender power within the family need to be considered in relation to programme choice. Morley's (1989) approach tries to get beyond the view that sees television as disruptive of family life. His focus is on the way in which television is used to construct 'occasions' around viewing, in which various types of interaction can be pursued. As Morley (1989: 37-38) notes, instead of holding onto the idea that people *either* live in social relations *or* watch television, we need to consider how viewing is done *within* the social relations of the household.

Another important issue addressed by Morley is the attraction of media genres to diverse 'taste publics'. Morley (1992b: 119-130) argues that translating our concerns from the encoding/decoding model to genre theory enables us to shift our focus away from dealing only with the overtly political dimensions of communication. This leads the researcher to deal with the relevance/irrelevance and comprehension/incomprehension dimensions of decoding rather than being concerned primarily with the acceptance or rejection of the ideological propositions contained in the text. Such a shift in focus forces us to start plotting the attraction of media genres to various categories of readers, to ask "who likes what?" so as to uncover the organised diversity of public tastes. Drawing on Bourdieu's work on the social structuration of taste, Morley (1992b: 128) stresses the need to see the diversity of tastes and cultural competencies as socially organised and patterned. For example, the competency required of the soap opera viewer is different from that of the current affairs viewer. The one needs to be familiar with the consequences of actions in the fictive domestic/familial sphere, the other needs competency in the codes of parliamentary democracy and economics. In the light of this, Morley argues the need "to establish the forms of interdiscursive connections which can account for the purchase of particular textual forms on particular categories of readers, under determinate socio-historical conditions" (1992b: 128). Moore's notes in this regard that, "[a] theory of genre or an ethnography of taste sets out...to specify the interdiscursive articulations through which salience and pleasure are produced. To the 'who likes what?' question, then, it adds a 'why do they like it?'" (1993: 30).

9. Across the great divide

Discussing the relative merits of the cultural studies and political economy approaches, Murdock points out that,

Critical political economy is at its strongest in explaining who gets to speak to whom and what forms these symbiotic encounters take in the major spaces of public culture. But cultural studies, at its best, has much of value to say about how the discourses and imagery are organised in complex and shifting patterns of meaning and how these meanings are reproduced, negotiated, and struggled over in the flow and flux of everyday life. (1995: 94)

The need to draw on the relative strengths of these different approaches has been voiced by a number of leading media theorists. For example, Dahlgren (1998), in rejecting the “two extreme positions”, has called for an approach which is both sensitive to the determining power of structures (economic and ideological) as well the relative interpretive freedom of audiences. “Thus”, Dahlgren argues, “we end up somewhere between these poles, where some mix of the specifics of the output and the interpretive practices of the media both have a bearing. We can assume that the balance between them will vary considerably between people, social circumstances and media output...” (1998: 303).

Similarly, Ang (1990: 244) in defence of what she refers to as “the ethnography of media audiences” calls for an approach which sees reception as an integral part of popular cultural practices that articulates both ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’, both ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ processes. In response to some of the criticisms which have been levelled at this approach to studying text/audience relationships, Ang (1990: 244) argues that reception analysis has been one of the most prominent developments in recent communications studies. She argues that it has highlighted the ways in which people actively and creatively make their own meanings and create their own culture, rather than passively absorb pre-given meanings imposed on them. Still, she admits that there has been a tendency in audience ethnographies to “foreground the social-psychological moment of direct contact between media and audience members, and thus to isolate and reify that particular moment as the preferred instance that merits

ethnographic examination” (1990: 244). In contrast to this tendency, Ang argues for the importance of “not reducing reception to an essentially psychological process” but rather to see it “as a deeply politicised, cultural one” (1990: 244). She thus calls for a ‘critical ethnography’ which will uncover “...the unrecognised, unconscious and contradictory effectivity of the hegemonic within the popular, the relations of power that are inscribed within the texture of reception practices” (1990: 244).

Kellner has also called for an integration of the two approaches into a “multiperspectival cultural studies” which “aims at critique of domination and social transformation” (1997: 103). He feels that one of the reasons for the hostility of those in cultural studies towards political economy relates to the reductionism and economism of some versions of political economy, and the reluctance of this tradition to consider texts and audiences. However, he argues that as the construction of media texts and their reception by audiences is shaped by the systems of media production and distribution, we need to include the ‘political economy’ of culture in cultural analysis (Kellner, 1997: 104).

The case of South African television is instructive in this regard. According to Liza Heysteke, head of the Technical Policies and Planning Department at the public service broadcaster, South African Broadcasting Association (SABC), the cost of local television production is approximately ten times higher than that of foreign programmes. At the time of writing, the average local drama series costs the SABC between R6 000 and R10 000 per minute as against the R600 to R700 for the equivalent import.^v According to the SABC annual report 1997/8, the category of ‘drama’ dominates the television schedule, with 89% in this genre category being imports. The relatively high cost of local production has meant that the broadcasting regulator, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), has had to restrict its minimum local content stipulations on the two independent broadcasters. The subscription channel M-Net must allocate a weekly average of 6% to local content while the newly licensed free-to-air channel, e.tv should carry 45% local content by its third year of operation. (The cost of local production has meant that e.tv has been unable to meet its local content quota since its inception in 1998.)^{vi} Here we have an indication of how the ways of financing cultural production and

distribution have consequences for what is circulated in the public domain. However, as I have already indicated, the consequences for viewers cannot be evaluated outside of ethnographic audience research.

The study of media consumption brings together a number of related issues – for example, those of pleasure, resistance, ‘structuration’ of experience, economic determinism, audience freedom, audience constraint – which, I would argue, need to be held in place if a satisfactory approach to the study of the subject is to be achieved. I have also argued that in attempting to understand the implications of audience consumption within a particular context, we need to consider issues of production, text, and consumption. While I agree that we need to take into account the affective dimensions of meaning making, I have argued against an uncritical valorisation of audience pleasures. These pleasures are they produced, not innate, and they can often support and naturalise relations of domination. Following Lukes (1974) and Williamson (1986) I believe that ideology operates as much by absence as by presence, and that there may be new pleasures – pleasures related to understanding rather than identification – to be experienced by exposing audiences to ‘difference’ rather than ploughing the same well-worn furrows of the ideologically safe.

The writings of John B. Thompson on ideology represent, to my mind, one of the most satisfactory ways of uniting the culturalist emphasis on meaning-making with the structuralist emphasis on ideology and the structuration of experience. Central to his writings is his desire that ideology retains its critical edge and reformulates its content in the relationship between meaning and power. Thompson (1990: 6) argues for what he refers to as a ‘critical conception’ of ideology. Rooting this approach within the concerns of critical theory, he claims that it “preserves the negative connotation which has been conveyed by the concept throughout most of its history and binds the analysis of ideology to the question of critique” (1990: 6). Thompson proposes that,

[T]he concept of ideology can be used to refer to the ways in which meaning serves...to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical...Ideology...is *meaning in the service of power*. Hence the study of ideology requires us to investigate the ways

in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds, from everyday linguistic utterances to complex images and texts; it requires us to investigate the social contexts within which symbolic forms are employed and deployed; and it calls upon us to ask whether, and if so how, the meanings mobilized by symbolic forms serve, in specific contexts, to establish and sustain relations of domination. (1990: 7)

While he acknowledges the difficulty of judging when a particular symbolic form is acting in the service of power, Thompson believes that ‘domination’ occurs “when established relations of power are ‘systematically asymmetrical’, that is, when particular agents or groups of agents are endowed with power in a durable way which excludes, and to some significant degree remains inaccessible to, other agents or groups of agents, irrespective of the basis upon which such exclusion is carried out” (1990: 59).

Thompson, like Hall (1981b: 235), puts forward a restricted definition of the concept of ideology. Rather than thinking of ideology as ‘built in’ to media products themselves, his conception stresses the need to look concretely at the ways in which these products are understood and used by the individuals who receive them, and how the localised use of these products are interwoven with forms of power. He writes:

To study ideology, I propose, is to study the ways in which symbolic forms serve, in particular social-historical circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of domination. It follows from this conception that particular symbolic forms, or particular sets of ideas or belief systems are not ideological in and for themselves. One can determine whether particular symbolic forms are ideological only by analysing them *in situ*, in relation to the structured patterns of power which they may (or may not, as the case may be) help to establish and sustain. (1994b: 134) ^{vii}

What this formulation points to is that the social conditions of reception of the symbolic are as important in our analysis as are the properties of the forms themselves

– an insight at the centre of the media ethnography tradition. This approach insists that, according to the context of reception, particular forms might be ideological. It does not link ideology to truth or falsity, but rather to the relationship between symbolic forms and power. Again, this relationship can only be analysed within the context of the existing social relations of the consumers of the forms. Thus for Thompson, cultural analysis can be construed as “...the study of symbolic forms in relation to the historically specific and socially structured contexts and processes within which, and by means of which, these symbolic forms are produced, transmitted and received - in short, it is the study of the meaningful constitution and social contextualisation of symbolic forms” (1990: 279).

10. Conclusion

As I noted at the start of this chapter, this study investigates the meanings local social subjects take from global media as part of their ongoing attempts to make sense of their lives and the class, gender, race and other identities they inhabit. I pointed out that this research relates to the interest amongst media scholars and culture critics in the relationship between media texts and their audiences.

I have argued that ethnographic audience research, with its focus on how audiences create meaning out of items of popular culture, has provided an important corrective to the textual and institutional reductionism of critical theory and political economy respectively. However, in contrast to the voluntarism that underpins much ethnographic audience research, critical theory and political economy correctly highlight, in my view, the fact that the range of those cultural products available to us in our process of meaning-making is largely circumscribed by macro political and economic factors. These meanings tend to work within a narrow ideological range, helping to support existing social patterns of power. In order to reconcile the competing emphases of these theoretical approaches to text/audience relationships, I referred to the theory of John Thompson (1994b: 134). While he still holds onto a theory of ideology (often missing from ethnographic research), he argues that symbolic forms are not ideological in and of themselves, but that they need to be analysed *in situ*, in relation to the structures of power which they may, or may not, help sustain (Thompson, 1994b: 134). It is this need for situational analysis in

assessing text/audience relationships, which informs my approach to the analysis of my data in this study.

ⁱ This need to relate media theories to their underpinning social and political theories has also been highlighted by Biltereyst (1995). In his discussion of the two dominant paradigms in international communication research, he argues that the *dependency* paradigm, shaped as it is by the explanatory frame of neo-Marxism, sees the dominance of mainly American cultural products as an extension of Western imperialism in which capitalist values are transmitted. Contrasted to this, the *free-flow paradigm*, informed by a liberal political and economic perspective, sees the flow of American cultural products as being largely determined by audience demand. In the one theory power lies with the producer, while in the other it lies with the audience.

ⁱⁱ Curran (1990) distinguishes one approach associated with the Leicester Centre for Mass Communication Research which adopted a political economy interpretation, emphasizing the centrality of economic ownership and the structure and logic of the market. An alternative radical culturalist approach, associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, attributed the media's subordination primarily to ideological control.

ⁱⁱⁱ Despite Morley's remonstrance at the way the encoding/decoding model was appropriated, Gitlin (1997) provides a convincing argument that given the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of the moment from which cultural studies arose, this was inevitable. This context, according to Gitlin (1997) was the boom in the scale and significance of popular culture in the West emerging in the 1960s and coinciding with the defeat of the English-speaking left and labor movement. Thus Gitlin (1997) observes that cultural experience – and in particular the vitality and rebelliousness of youth culture – dovetailed with the leftover political quest for a class, or its equivalent, that might lead the way to radical change. Culture thus became a site of struggle between forces of liberation and oppression. The other move in cultural studies, according to Gitlin (1997) was to claim that culture continued radical politics by other means. "If 'the revolution' had receded to the point of invisibility", writes Gitlin (1997: 30), "it was depressing to contemplate the victory of a hegemonic culture imposed by strong, virtually irresistible media. How much more reassuring to detect 'resistance' saturating the pores of everyday life!" This is the social and intellectual context, argues Gitlin (1997) for the emergence of those studies claiming to discover not only the 'active' participation of audiences in shaping the meaning of popular culture, but the resistance of those audiences to hegemonic ideology.

^{iv} Interview with Anthea Garman. Grahamstown, 13 October, 1997.

^v Telephonic interview with Liza Heysteke, 2 May, 1999.

^{vi} Figures supplied by Helen Van de Walt, chief researcher with the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA).

^{vii} This is not dissimilar to the point made by Hall that, "The meaning of a cultural form and its place or position in the cultural field is not inscribed inside its form. Nor is its position fixed once and forever... The meaning of a cultural symbol is given in part by the social field into which it is incorporated, the practices with which it articulates and is made to resonate. What matters is *not* the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of play in cultural relations...." (1981b: 235).

Chapter 3

Media theory in the age of globalisation

Indeed after years of anti-apartheid sanctions...South Africa is a country awash in American consumer goods, colonised by American pop culture, and obsessed with American celebrities. (Keller, 1993: 5)

If American popular culture seems so attractive to so many in the world, how do people incorporate it into their activities, fantasies, values and so on? What multifarious and contradictory meanings are attached to images of the 'American way of life' in what specific circumstances? (Ang, 1990: 256)

The media are increasingly everywhere, but not everywhere in the same way (Ang, 1996: 80).

1. Introduction

As I concluded in the previous chapter, and as Ang (1990: 250) reminds us, contemporary practices of media reception and consumption now occur within the changing context of the world media system. Ang writes:

[T]he communications industries, as part of the ever expanding capitalist system, have been in the process of profound economic and institutional restructure and transformation, which can be characterised by accelerated transnationalisation and globalisation. We can see this in the emergence of truly global, decentered corporations in which diverse media products (film and television, press and publishing, music and video) are being combined and integrated into overarching communications empires such as those of Bertelsmann, Murdoch, Berlusconi and Time-Warner. This process is accompanied by an increased pressure towards the creation of

transnational markets and transnational distribution systems (made possible by new communication technologies such as satellite and cable, transgressing established boundaries and subverting existing territories – a process which, of course has profound political and cultural consequences. (1990: 250)

As we saw in the previous chapter, there is a divide between theoretical positions which stress the determining power of texts over audiences, and those that affirm the ability of audiences to construct their own meanings from texts. In seeking a middle path between these two extremes, Ang argues that in this age of global media, “...there is no way to know in advance which strategies and tactics different people in the world will invent to negotiate with the intrusions of global forces in their lives” (1990: 251). She adds that we can only hope for “provisional answers” informed by “ethnographic sensitivity” to how the global is incorporated into the local (1990: 251). Ang’s “particularistic” approach remains alert to “...contextual specificities and contradictions” while at the same time displaying a sensitivity to “...the way in which the hegemonic and the popular interpenetrate one another...” (1990: 251). Her approach to understanding the relationship between texts and their audiences, sensitive to both ideology and audience power, is not unlike Thompson’s (1994a: 134), discussed at the end of Chapter 1.

Ang’s (1990) broad approach, together with the insights of the previous chapter, provide the framework for my examination of the interface between global cultural forms and locally lived cultures. In this chapter, I first review some of the current changes in media ownership and distribution taking place at both the global and local levels. I then examine the media imperialism thesis, which, while remaining primarily a text-centred approach to the text/audience relationship, represents within media studies an important theoretical response to global developments in the media. Finally, I consider some of the theoretical responses to the media imperialism thesis (largely drawing on ethnographic research into text/audience relationships), illustrating my argument with interviews.

2. The media and globalisation

As Thompson points out, a feature of communication in the modern world is that it takes place on a scale that is increasingly global, giving individuals instantaneous access to messages that originate from geographically distant sources:

Distance has been eclipsed by proliferating networks of electronic communication. Individuals can interact with one another, or can act within frameworks of mediated quasi-interaction, even though they are situated, in terms of the practical contexts of their day-to-day lives, in different parts of the world. (1995: 149)

This “reordering of time and space” by the electronic media is, according to Thompson (1995: 149), part of a broader set of processes, commonly described today as globalisation. Globalisation is not a new process (Ferguson, 1992: 70; Robertson, 1991: 72; Appadurai, 1990: 1; Garnham, 1997: 62; Thompson, 1995: 150; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1997: 51), being an integral part of the history of both capitalism and modernism, originating in the commercial expansion and conquest by European powers in the late fifteenth century (Hall, 1991: 19). However, we need to keep in mind the distinctiveness of the current phase of this process. As McGrew writes:

While early phases of globalisation brought about the physical unification of the world, more recent phases have remade the world into a single global system in which previously distinct historical societies or civilisations have been thrust together...[I]t defines a far more complex condition, one in which patterns of human interaction, interconnectedness, and awareness are reconstituting the world as a single social space. (1992: 469)

There are theoretical differences by writers on globalisation – Ferguson refers to as “the problem of meaning” (1992: 69) and Sreberny-Mohammadi points to the “contentious theoretical debates about its causes” (1997: 51-52). However, there do seem to be certain agreed-upon key descriptors of the process. These include world-wide interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions and individuals (Tomlinson, 1999a: 165); the

compression of time and space (Giddens, 1991: 16) which helps to create “complex relations between *local involvements* (circumstances of co-presence) and *interactions across distance* (connections of presence and absence)” (Srebrny-Mohammadi, 1991: 118); the loss of sovereignty of the nation states which make up the modern world system (McGrew, 1992: 470; Ferguson, 1992: 70); and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson, 1991: 73). Reflecting this underlying theme of ‘inter-connectedness’, Tomlinson writes that: “...[G]lobalisation refers to the rapidly developing and ever-densening networks of interconnections and interdependence that characterise modern social life” (1999b: 2). Similarly, according to Giddens, globalisation refers to “...the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (1990: 64).

In assessing the impact of global media on local audiences we need to keep in mind the complex processes of interaction between the spheres of culture, politics, technology, and economy. However, following Tomlinson (1999a: 166; 1999b: 20), I will propose that for analytic purposes we treat these as distinct levels of analysis. As Tomlinson writes:

What I understand as the cultural dimension of globalisation, or ‘cultural globalisation’ for convenience, is the particular effects which these general social processes of time-space compression and distanciation have on that realm of practices and experiences in which people symbolically construct meaning. I do not suppose that this cultural realm is in practice separable from other social realms and certainly not from the political-economic. Nevertheless, to argue we have to make, albeit artificial, distinctions whilst not losing sight of the points at which processes and logics in other realms become significantly determining: for example, the point at which cultural experiences depend on material resource distribution. Given these caveats, we can talk of something called ‘cultural globalisation’. (1999a: 166)

In her discussion of the cultural dimension of globalisation, Sreberny-Mohammadi points out that besides the “corporate channels of the culture industries” (1997: 51) there were and are many more carriers of Western culture to the Third World. These include the exportation of Christian missionary activity and the spread of European education. However, given my interest in the impact of global media on “locally situated life” (Tomlinson, 1999b: 20), my discussion of the cultural aspect of globalisation will be restricted to that of the media’s role. In fact, both Thompson (1995: 149) and Giddens point to the centrality of the media in this process of cultural globalisation, resulting in what Giddens refers to as “local transformations” (1990: 64).

In a period in which we are witnessing the increasing commercialisation, deregulation, vertical integration and concentration of ownership of the media (Ang, 1990: 250; Herman and McChesney, 1999: 178-210), the economic, political, cultural and technological impact of the global on the local – and the resultant ‘local transformations’ – continues to divide social theorists writing on globalisation. Before I discuss these theoretical disputes, I first briefly discuss some of the economic and technological trends indicative of media globalisation.

3. Technological and economic trends in media globalisation

Thompson (1995: 151-159) notes the development of new technologies in the globalisation of communication in the late twentieth century. He points to three interrelated developments. Firstly, the digitalisation of information combined with related electronic technologies has not only increased the ability to store and transmit information, but has also enabled convergence between the different media (see Murdock, 1994: 3-6). Secondly, the development of cable systems has provided the capacity for the increased transmission of electronically coded information. Finally, the increased use of satellites has provided the technical means for long-distance communication.

In conjunction with these changes in technology for the production, distribution and reception of media, important institutional changes have taken place within the global

mediascape. The most obvious of these has been the consolidation of global media providers into the hands of an increasingly smaller number of largely American-based transnational conglomerates (Herman and McChesney, 1999; Murdock, 1994; Schiller, 1976, 1991; Morley and Robbins, 1995). Accompanying this process of consolidation, and aided by the technological developments, has been the move towards transnational markets and distribution systems which cross national boundaries (Ang, 1990: 250).

The defining feature of this trend has been the “unprecedented wave of mergers and acquisitions among global media giants” that accelerated during the 1990s (Herman and McChesney, 1999: 188). What is emerging, write Herman and McChesney (1999: 188), is a tiered global media market. In the first tier are ten huge vertically integrated media conglomerates with annual sales in the \$10 - 25 billion range. They include News Corporation, Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, and TCI. The second tier comprises approximately three dozen large media firms with annual sales in the \$2 -10 billion range. Herman and McChesney (1999: 189) point out that most of these firms tend to have working agreements and/or joint ventures with one or more of the first tier giants and with each other. Finally, there are the thousands of relatively small national and local firms that provide services to the large firms and their prosperity is thus dependent in part upon the decisions of the large firms. According to Herman and McChesney (1999: 189), the market situation is forcing all media firms to move toward becoming, or linking to, these huge, global, vertically integrated conglomerates. Such integration, they argue, makes economic sense because it results in distinct cost savings through fuller utilization of existing personnel, facilities, and content resources. Thus, when a conglomerate such as NBC or News Corporation wishes to launch a new enterprise, it can draw upon its existing staff and resources, with low marginal costs.

The authors point to a second source of profitability deriving from conglomeration and vertical integration – “the exploitation of new opportunities for cross-selling, cross-promotion, and privileged access” (1999: 189). As they observe in this regard, commercially successful films are those that lend themselves specifically to the complementary merchandising of products. The revenues so generated can be greater

than total box-office sales or video rentals. For example, *The Lion King* earned over \$300 million at the US box office, yet in total generated over \$1 billion in profits for the studio (Herman and McChesney, 1999: 190).

According to *The Economist*, this vertical integration model can be conceived as a wheel: “At the hub lies content creation. The spokes that spread out from it are the many different ways of exploiting the resulting brands: the movie studio, the television networks, the music, the publishing, the merchandising, the theme parks, the Internet sites. Looked at this way, the distinction between manufacturing and distribution begin to blur, because the various ways of selling the brand also serve to enhance its value. So every “Rugrats” video sells another toy, and every toy gets somebody else interested in the forthcoming movie. You are starting a virtuous circle” (1998: 8). As Thompson (1995: 160) observes, nearly all of the large conglomerates are based in North America, Western Europe, Australia or Japan with very few based in Third World countries. “Hence”, writes Thompson, “the development of communication conglomerates has led to the formation of large concentrations of economic and symbolic power which are privately owned and unevenly distributed, and which can deploy massive resources to pursue corporate objectives in the global arena” (1995: 160-1).

The South African media have not been exempt from these international trends. In 1994 Irish magnate Tony O’Reilly bought 35% of the Argus newspaper company, this figure rising to 58% in 1995. He renamed the company Independent Newspapers and in 1999 he bought out what were then the last remaining Argus shareholders (24%), with the reported value of his investment reaching R1.3 billion (Berger, 2000: 2). He then proceeded to de-list the company in South Africa. In addition O’Reilly took control of other newspapers: *The Cape Times*, *The Natal Mercury*, and *The Pretoria News* (Berger, 2000: 2). As Berger notes, “In terms of concentration, this foreign investment was not a positive development from the vantage point of pluralistic democracy, in that in Cape Town and Durban the same company now owns both morning and evening papers” (2000: 2).

Following O'Reilly's initiatives, the UK-based Pearson group bought half of *Business Day* and the *Financial Mail* from Times Media Limited. They later established, with Times Media Limited, a large new Internet publishing operation called I-Net Bridge (Berger, 2000: 2). In 1998, 62% of the *Mail and Guardian* was bought out by the UK-based *Guardian* while the Swedish group Dagens Industri bought 24% of the black-owned Mafube Publishing during this same period (Berger, 2000: 2). In the field of television broadcasting, Time Warner holds a 20% share in the recently established Midi group which controls *e.tv*, South Africa's only independent free-to-air television station (Berger, 2000: 4). These changes to the South African media system show how local media systems have been integrated into the wider, international/global media system. They show how media products (for example, the *Cape Times* or *e.tv*) in local media markets, have become part of the parent company's strategy in the wider global media market.

The coming to power of South Africa's democratically elected government in 1994 heralded the death of the 'alternative press', mainly as a result of the drying up of the foreign funding so much in evidence during the final years of apartheid rule. *South*, *Vrye Weekblad*, and *New Nation* died, as did their magazine counterparts like *Work-in-Progress*. The Independent Media Diversity Trust, whose contributors from the mainstream South African media industry had come to an end, also ran short of print media funds from foreign sources (Berger, 2000: 2). These trends led one commentator on the South African media scene to refer to "...the irony of a press which is politically free, but commercially hamstrung, leading to a situation in which minority views are sidelined when not completely ignored" (Maya-Pearce, 1995: 261).

I have briefly outlined some of the structural changes that have taken place in the realm of ownership and distribution of the global media conglomerates, especially as it pertains to the media in South Africa. As I noted earlier in this chapter, and as I discussed at some length in the previous chapter, the implications of these changes for meaning-making at the point of reception remains highly contentious amongst media scholars. The remainder of this chapter examines these opposing views.

4. The media/cultural imperialism thesis

The most satisfactory way of proceeding is by examining what has come to be known as the media imperialism or cultural imperialism thesis (see for example, Boyd-Barrett, 1977; Schiller, 1976; 1986; 1991; 1998; Hamelink, 1993; Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975) and the critiques of this thesis. The reasons for proceeding in this manner will become clear.ⁱ

The media imperialism thesis shaped much of the research in international communications in the 1970s and early 1980s (Thompson, 1995: 165) and as such, it provided the theoretical understandings for the initial reception among many scholars, of the process of cultural globalisation (Tomlinson, 1991: 2). Within international communications theory, this approach evolved to deal with questions which earlier communication models generally ignored (Fejes, 1981: 281; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1991: 119). Where the earlier models perceived modern media as tools for development, the media imperialism approach, by placing the media in a transnational context, viewed them as an obstacle to meaningful socio-economic progress. The media imperialism approach can therefore be seen as a corollary to the dependency model of development (Fejes, 1981: 283). In the field of media, White (2001: 1) points out, the theory of media imperialism provided one of the major conceptual thrusts behind the movement for the New World Information and Communication Order's (NWICO) concern with the flow of information between nations of the world, involving international organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

In contrast to the earlier models of modernisation which assumed a basic mutuality of interest between developed and Third World countries, the cultural imperialist thesis is built on a conflictual model of the world system and presents a pessimistic view of Third World development. As Fejes (1981: 283) writes, its major conclusion is that the Third World countries occupy a subordinate position in the international economic and political system, understood as being structured primarily according to the needs of the developed countries. Developed countries, he argues, maintain their dominant position and continue

their own development at the expense of the developmental needs of the Third World. Thus, according to Fejes, “The penetration of Third World countries by multinational corporations, the political objectives and foreign aid policies of developed countries, the subordinate position of Third World countries in the international market and credit system, all are seen as aspects of the dependency phenomenon” (1981: 283).

From the above we can see that the relationship between economic and cultural dependence is central to the media imperialism position. It argues that the transnational media provide the necessary cultural context for the reception of developed countries’ economic policies. As Schiller remarks, “...the media-cultural component in a developed, corporate economy supports the economic objectives of the decisive industrial-financial sectors (i.e. the creation and extension of the consumer society); the cultural and economic spheres are indivisible” (1991: 14).

As we saw earlier, the media are central to the general process of globalisation (Thompson, 1995: 149; Giddens, 1990: 64). They are seen to play an “overwhelming role” in the process of cultural imperialism, hence the cultural imperialism theorists’ tendency to interchange the terms ‘cultural’ and ‘media’ (White, 2001: 4). Pointing to the centrality of the media to this process, Lemish et al. write: “Media are often perceived as a central mechanism perpetuating globalisation. Media products originating in the Western world provide a Western perspective, being embedded in Western value systems and cultural tastes that often serve western economic and political interests” (1998: 540). Outlining the main tenets of this approach, Tomlinson writes that, “[G]lobalised culture is the enforced installation, world-wide, of one particular culture, born out of one particular, privileged historical experience. It is, in short, simply the global extension of *Western* culture” (1999b: 167). Underpinning this argument is the claim that “...a form of domination exists in the modern world, not just in the political and economic spheres but also over those practices by which collectivities make sense of their lives” (Tomlinson, 1991: 7).

A central tenet of the media imperialism thesis is that media globalisation is resulting in global cultural homogenisation. According to Hamelink (1983: 3), “One conclusion still seems unanimously shared: the impressive variety of the world’s cultural systems is waning due to a process of ‘cultural synchronisation’ that is without historic precedent”. Summarising this claim, Lemish et al. write: “Globalisation has been perceived as a form of Western ethnocentric and patronising cultural imperialism, which invades local cultures and lifestyles, deepens the insecurities in indigenous identities and contributes to the erosion of national cultures and historical traditions” (1998: 540).ⁱⁱ

These core themes are found in the writings of Herbert I. Schiller (1976; 1986; 1991; 1998), the theorist who is most often identified with the position that globalisation is an expression of American cultural imperialism. It is useful to outline some of his main theoretical claims and concerns, for assessing their strengths and weaknesses will enable us to focus on some of the key issues relating to the impact of global media on local audiences.

According to Schiller, the context for the development of “media-cultural imperialism” (1991: 14) is the *world system* – the modern world capitalist economy – with its single market organised by the global market imperatives of the American and the West European-controlled multinational corporations. The character of production is determined in the core of that market (primarily the United States) and radiates outwards. Central to this system are multinational corporations, largely American owned, which dominate the market in the production and distribution of goods and services, including “communications-cultural” (1976: 6) outputs. These outputs are largely determined by the same market imperatives that govern the overall system’s production of goods and services and importantly, we find a “largely one-directional flow of information from core to periphery” (1976: 6). The role of these communication-cultural outputs is not only informational, but also ideological, in that they promote and develop popular support for the values and artefacts of the capitalist system. In his more recent writings Schiller has argued that,

Media-cultural imperialism is a subset of the *general* system of

imperialism. It is not freestanding; the media-cultural component in a developed, corporate economy supports the economic objectives of the decisive industrial-financial sectors (i.e. the creation and extension of the consumer society); the cultural and economic spheres are indivisible. Cultural, no less than automobile, production has its political economy. Consequently, what is regarded as cultural output also is ideological and profit-serving to the system at large. Finally, in its latest mode of operation, in the late twentieth century, the corporate economy is increasingly dependent on the media-cultural sector. (1991: 14)

So, according to Schiller, while it is the commercial imperative that provides the impetus for the dissemination of Western cultural forms around the world “the impact inevitably is felt throughout the realm of individual and social consciousness in the penetrated provinces” (1976: 8). Central to this penetrative ideological process are the mass media and, more specifically, the commercial mass media. For, as Schiller (1976: 17) argues, once commercial, a series of economic imperatives ensure that the broadcast media everywhere will carry the cultural material produced in the core areas – the United States, Britain, Germany and a few other centres. Everywhere, the content and style of local programming will bear the ideological imprint of the main centres of the capitalist world economy.ⁱⁱⁱ The result of this, as was noted earlier, is “...*the cultural and ideological homogenisation of the world*” (1976: 17) which is not pursued by a single nation but by an integrated *system* of different national sectors committed to capitalistic economic organization. “In this sense” writes Schiller, “the concept of cultural imperialism today best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system” (1976: 9). Thus, according to Schiller, “...it is the imagery and cultural perspectives of this ruling sector in the centre that shape and structure consciousness throughout the system at large” (1976: 17).

Schiller (1986: 12) also points to the role played by transnational corporations in

breaking down national broadcasting and telecommunications entities so that they can saturate the defenceless cultural space of the nation. The result is that "...as the trans-national corporate order grows stronger, in large part with the assistance of deregulated private information networks, it usurps and corrupts cultural expression and information diversity globally" (Schiller, 1986: 17).

Writing in the 1990s, Schiller argued that the corporate media-cultural industries had expanded remarkably in recent decades and now occupy most of the global social space:

For this reason alone, cultural domination today cannot be measured by a simple index of exposure to American television programming. The cultural submersion now includes the English language itself, shopping in American-styled malls, going to theme parks (of which Disney is the foremost but not exclusive example), listening to the music of internationally publicized performers, watching Cable News Network in scores of foreign locales, reading translations of commercial best sellers, and eating in franchised fast-food restaurants around the world. (1991: 15)

To end this description of the main tenets of the media imperialism thesis, let me mention another important theorist within this tradition, namely Oliver Boyd-Barrett. In an influential essay Boyd-Barrett defines media imperialism as, "...the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected" (1977: 117). Boyd-Barrett lists the United States as the dominant source country followed by Britain, France, West Germany and Russia. He points out that, "The country which is affected by a media influence either *adopts* this influence as a deliberate commercial or political strategy, or simply *absorbs* this influence unreflectively as the result of contact" (1977: 119). According to Boyd-Barrett, the absence of reciprocation of media influence by the affected country "combines both the element of cultural invasion by another power and the element of imbalances of power resources between the countries concerned" (1977: 118).

To sum up the media imperialism thesis: cultural homogenisation is resulting from the global circulation of western media; this is something to be deplored; and local audiences are, against their best interests, powerless to stop this process. In the next section I will discuss some of the theoretical objections to these claims.

5. Critiques of the media imperialism thesis

5.1. Old and new forms of global economic and cultural power

Schiller's vision of the world under Western media dominance is one in which we are experiencing "*the cultural and ideological homogenisation of the world*" (1976: 17), a result of the integrated *system* of different national economies embracing or forced into capitalist economic organisation. According to Schiller: "...it is the imagery and cultural perspectives of this ruling sector in the centre that shape and structure consciousness throughout the system at large" (1976: 17). He argues that transnational media provide the necessary cultural context for the reception of capitalist economic policies in countries on the periphery and so, "...the media-cultural component in a developed, corporate economy supports the economic objectives of the decisive industrial-financial sectors (i.e. the creation and extension of the consumer society); the cultural and economic spheres are indivisible" (1991: 14). Media-cultural imperialism is therefore seen as a continuation of the cultural and economic dependence first witnessed during the initial period of Western imperialist expansion (Fejes, 1981: 283).

However, a number of theorists have pointed to the need to distinguish between old and newer forms of global economic and cultural power (Robertson, 1992, 1994; Hannerz, 1989; Hannerz, 1996; Hall, 1991a; Hall 1991b; Ang, 1996; Tomlinson, 1991). For example, Hannerz (1996: 174) contrasts the cultural power of the West during the period of imperial expansion from the seventeenth century onwards with the 'soft' cultural imperialism of contemporary globalisation. Drawing on the writings of Giddens and Bauman, he writes that although the process of 'globalising modernity' may have begun as an extension of Western institutions, their very global ubiquity now represents a decline in the differentials between the West and the rest of the world. In the early phase

of globalisation the West had pretensions to universalism (based on the project of enlightenment rationalism), while in the late phase no such pretensions exist. Thus he writes that, “The globalisation of the West’s cultural practices is now simply occurring without any real sense that this is part of its collective project or ‘mission’, or that these practices are, indeed, the tokens of an ideal human civilization. Early globalisation involves the self-conscious cultural project of universality, whilst late globalisation – globality – is mere ubiquity” (1996: 174).

Similarly, Ang argues that culture under global capitalism should not be seen as a centralising process which ensures a ‘common culture’, but rather as a “decentralised, self-perpetuating mechanism which operates through an endless proliferation of choice insistently put on offer by the market forces of an increasingly global, disorganised capitalism” (1996: 12) (for a similar view see Appadurai, 1990: 6).

5.2. Glocalisation

Roland Robertson (1994) provides another important critique of the ‘myth’ of cultural homogenisation central to the media-cultural imperialism thesis. In his discussion of the Japanese business term ‘glocalisation’, Robertson defines it as the “tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets” (1994: 36). These differentiated markets do not exist in and of themselves, but are generated through the process of micro-marketing. So, rather than aiming at homogenisation, glocalisation constructs socially differentiated consumers. Like Ang (1996: 12), Robertson argues that from the point of view of consumers, the array of cultural commodities on offer provide rich resources for cultural capital formation. Similarly, Tomlinson (1991: 114) points out that while the spread of uniform ‘world brands’ has been one of the main factors linking the threat of homogenisation to the spread of capitalism, this remains an ideal for multinational capitalism, rather than an achieved end. Marketers, he notes, consider the ‘cultural defences’ of their target market and adopt appropriate strategies to penetrate these markets. He quotes Sinclair:

Indeed an awareness of cultural differences may become decisive in oligopolistic markets of the kind which transnational consumer goods manufacturers have already created in many countries of the world. As one economist points out, ‘When global competition is driven by scale economies, at a certain point everyone gets equalised...the competitive advantage will go to the companies that are sensitive to individual market developments’...Accordingly we find very few products which are true world brands, ‘manufactured, packaged and positioned in roughly the same manner worldwide, regardless of individual economies, cultures and life styles’. (Sinclair quoted in Tomlinson, 1991: 114)

Thus, Tomlinson notes, “The logic of capitalist competition may therefore point to other cultural outcomes than homogenisation in the crudest form” (1991: 114). As Robertson (1994: 36) describes it, one of the ways that the process of glocalisation takes place is via the insertion of the messages of advertisements into the connotational strings which make up the stocks of knowledge that constitute ‘national cultural identity’. While it is beyond the scope of this study to go into detail of how this has impacted on the advertising of global brands in South Africa, the advertising of Coca-Cola is a good example of glocalisation. The *Sunday Times* of October 15, 2000 reported, “The brief bout of competition between Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola a few years ago inspired a splash of refreshing advertisements that drew from the rich culture of townships”. The article quotes Coca-Cola’s client service director as saying that the qualities of the brand were transformed to that of a ‘trusted friend’ and that it was linked to the experiences of local consumers which would be widely recognised and identified with. Tapping into folklore and local hero tales was crucial to their new advertising strategy. It led to their involvement in the annual Godfrey Moloji soccer event in Soweto around Christmas time – held in honour of Moloji, one of Soweto’s entrepreneurial heroes. According to this spokesperson, the latest advert is designed to capture *seriti* (community respect) bestowed on the thousands of urban and rural entrepreneurs in South Africa: “The creative work features the realisation of an African boy’s dream of owning his own business selling Coca-Cola products, so that one day he can fend for his family and also

create jobs and become a man of honour in his community” (*Sunday Times*, 2000: 7). One of the advertising executives is quoted as saying that the challenge to marketers is to localise international brands like Coca-Cola via a unique understanding of South African behaviour, and that one of the ways they try to achieve this is by employing a diversity of staff. Coca-Cola, in this instance, has become as much a local as a global product.

As Massey writes, in a discussion of global brands, “Even the ‘global products’ ... penetrate different national markets in different ways. Their globality, and the consequent ability of companies to produce them on a mass scale, comes from their finding different niche-markets in all corners of the earth” (1992: 5). She concludes, “globalisation can in no way be equated with homogenisation” (1992: 5).

5.3. *The ethnographic critique*

In their introduction to *Media Cultures: Reappraising Transnational Media* (1992), editors Skovmand and Schroder argue that the ‘general drift’ of media research over the last twenty years “has been to take popular cultural forms more seriously and, more specifically, to examine what popular audiences are doing with the cultural products that they consume in their everyday lives” (1992: 3). They further note: “The basic premise [of this approach] has been to try and understand popular cultural practices as meaningful activities: as part of people’s ongoing attempts to make sense of their lives and the specific class, gender, race, and other identities they inhabit” (1992: 3).

This focus on the ongoing subjective ‘use’ of media products by consumers also underpins Thompson’s (1995: 164-178) critique of the media imperialism thesis. According to Thompson, the thesis “fails to take account of the fact that the reception and appropriation of cultural phenomena are fundamentally hermeneutical processes in which individuals draw on material and symbolic resources available to them, as well as on the interpretative assistance offered by those with whom they interact in their day-to-day lives, in order to make sense of the messages they receive and to find some way of relating to them” (1995: 172). These observations by Skovmand and Schroder (1992) and Thompson (1995) are part of what Moores (1993: 1) has referred to as “the ethnographic

‘turn’”, and Murdock (1997: 179) as “the ‘turn’ towards interpretation” in media studies.

Fiske (1987b: 63) has also offered a definition of media ethnography which underpins much of his work on media consumption as discussed in Chapter 1. Fiske writes with regard to television viewing:

The object of ethnographic study is the way that people live their culture. Its value for us lies in its shift of emphasis away from the textual and ideological construction of the subject to socially and historically situated people. It reminds us that actual people in actual situations watch and enjoy actual television programmes. It acknowledges the differences between people despite their social construction, and pluralizes the meanings and pleasures that they find in television. It thus contradicts theories that stress the singularity of television’s meanings and its reading subjects. It enables us to account for diversity both within the social formation and within the processes of culture. (1987b: 63)

Texts contain plural meanings and pleasures, according to Fiske (1987b: 15), because they are polysemic. Meaning is no longer a privilege of the text alone, but arises out of the interaction between the text and socially situated viewers. Reception is the locus of meaning. At the same time, our subjectivity is composed, Fiske (1987b: 66) writes, of the different discourses that we use to make sense of the domains that make up our social experience. However, because our social experience varies so much, our subjectivity comprises highly contradictory ideologies and discourses (1987b: 66-67). We need, therefore, to see our subjectivity “...as disunited, as a site of struggle, not as a unified site of ideological reconciliation” (1987b: 67). These different discourses, already in place as a result of our social situatedness, we bring to the text in the act of decoding it.

Texts are therefore not uniformly decoded by audiences, and Fiske (1991: 56) argues that the notion of a concrete ‘text’ needs to be replaced by the more abstract notion of ‘textuality’. With regard to television viewing he writes, “What the set in the living-room delivers is ‘television,’ visual and aural signifiers that are potential provokers of meaning and pleasure. This potential is its textuality which is mobilised differently in the variety

of its moments of viewing” (1991: 56) enabling multiple or contradictory readings to be made by different viewers.

Thus, according to youth researcher Bo Reimer, a central insight emerging from ethnographic research into media consumption is that while the media play a crucial role in young people’s lives, what they have on offer is of an ambivalent character: “It cannot possibly be reduced to any one single common denominator, and, depending on social situation, the same material can be used and interpreted in several different ways” (1995: 139) (see also Willis, 1990: 20; Livingstone, 1998: 443; Reimer, 1995: 113; Dolby, 1999: 291).

Commenting on research by Hodge and Tripp into the multiple readings by Australian schoolchildren of *Prisoner*, an American soap opera dealing with prison inmates, Fiske writes:

They did not ask what effect television has on its audience, nor what use does the audience make of television; rather they asked how a particular television text, seen as a polysemic potential of meanings, connects with the social life of the viewer or group of viewers. They were concerned with how a television text is read, with how meanings are made by the active reading of an audience, and how this activity can be explained in terms of a theory of culture, that is, the process of making common sense out of social experience. (1987b: 67)

The argument that textual meaning resides at the interface between socially situated viewers, already constructed in discourse, and polysemic media texts, presents a serious challenge to the media imperialism thesis, premised as it is on the singularity of encoded textual meanings. Thus an important critique of the media-cultural imperialism thesis is that while it theorises the production, distribution and content of global media, it remains notably silent on the reception of texts by local audiences.

As I noted in the previous chapter, the conflation of the ‘moments’ of production and

reception – and the tendency to ‘read off’ the latter from the former – has been the weakness of many Marxist theories of the media, wedded as they are to the belief in textual determinism. To the extent that the media-cultural imperialism thesis discussed above has been informed by Marxist theory (and in particular by Marxist theories of social reproduction and ‘false’ consciousness), it too suffers from this theoretical lacuna. Thus Chaffee (1992: 38) observes that while the theory of media-cultural imperialism sounds plausible at face value, it has rarely been tested empirically (a similar point is made by White, 2001: 3).

The ethnographic critique of the media imperialism thesis provides the theoretical impetus of my own investigation into the way in which mass mediated popular cultural forms are consumed by local audiences. In line with Moores (1993: 5), I advocate a ‘critical’ ethnography. Moores outlines the approach I also take:

In attending to the meanings produced by social subjects and to the daily activities they perform, qualitative audience researchers have frequently sought to explain those significances and practices by locating them in relation to broader frameworks of interpretation and to structures of power and inequality. This is the mark [of]...a ‘critical’ ethnography. It is an approach which takes extremely seriously the interpretations of the media constructed by consumers in their everyday routines. At the same time, it is not afraid to interrogate and situate their spoken accounts. (1993: 5)

The call by Moores (1993: 5) for a ‘critical’ ethnography reflects Murdock’s earlier claim that we need to move away from the expressive individualism that informs much of the work on audiences to “a more thorough engagement with the ways that meanings and identities are negotiated socially, and with the ways that these grounded processes are structured by wider economic and ideological formations” (1989: 41) (see also Willis, 1990: 20; Reimer, 1995: 113; Dolby, 1999: 291).

My study attempts to answer this call with respect to aspects of South African youth consumption of global media products. The next chapter sets the stage for such an

examination by providing overviews of the South African social and political context, and international and local youth studies. Together they will provide the framework for the critical ethnography that follows.

ⁱ Boyd-Barrett argues for the use of the term ‘media imperialism’ as opposed to the term ‘cultural imperialism’ (Tomlinson, 1991) or ‘media-cultural imperialism’ (Schiller, 1976) saying, “It refers to a much more specific range of phenomena than the term ‘cultural imperialism’ and lends itself much more easily to rigorous study” (1977: 119). Furthermore, he argues, “It is also possibly the single most important component of cultural imperialism outside formal educational institutions, from the view-point of those who are actively engaged in extending or containing given cultural influences” (1977: 119). Commenting on the different terms used by theorists to describe the impact that global media have on local cultures, Tomlinson points out that neo-Marxists tend to use the term ‘cultural imperialism’ as they see the media as central to the general process of cultural domination, whereas pluralist theorists prefer the term ‘media imperialism’ since they do not accept the general theory of cultural domination: “They (pluralist theorists) tend to keep the focus on the media so as to try to establish the ‘facts’ without making more general theoretical assumptions about cultural imperialism” (1991: 21). Tomlinson (1991) rejects the pluralist position for two reasons. Firstly, while we may be able to make an analytical separation between the media and other cultural phenomena, they are experienced as an interwoven totality by people. For example, he argues, television viewing cannot be separated from the politics of the family, or patriarchal ideologies. Secondly, he argues, the pluralist desire to separate these two terms mirrors the generally anti-theoreticist stance of this position (in their attempt to get at the ‘facts’ without making more general theoretical assumptions about cultural imperialism) and can easily result in the loss of the critical sense of the term ‘media imperialism’. Thus Tomlinson writes, “Media imperialism...as I understand it, is a particular way of discussing cultural imperialism. It is not simply a name for the study of the media in developing countries or of the international market in communications. It involves all the complex political issues – and indeed, of political *commitments* – entailed in the notion of cultural domination” (1991: 22). That the media provide information (news), entertain, and educate is undeniable. However, like Tomlinson (1991) I believe that in carrying out these functions, the media also play important cultural and ideological roles, generating and circulating meanings which help either sustain or challenge social relationships of domination and subordination. But at the same time, I also believe that the cultural and ideological role played by the media needs to be distinguished from that of other cultural agencies (for example, the school system, religious institutions). So, when referring to the perceived role of the media in obtaining and maintaining Western cultural hegemony, I will use Schiller’s (1992) term ‘media-cultural imperialism’.

ⁱⁱ Whether media imperialism is a result of ‘inevitable’ market laws, unaffected by ideological motives, or whether it needs to be seen as a deliberate political and ideological process is open to dispute amongst theorists (Biltreyest, 1996: 4). Biltreyest (1996: 4) refers to these as the ‘free-market’ and ‘dependency’ paradigms respectively.

ⁱⁱⁱ In this regard, Oliveira (1993) writing on Brazilian television, remarks that the major influence of programmes imported from the West has never been so much their foreign source, but the institutionalisation of a model. With regard to the Brazilian soap opera, the telenovela, he argues that it should not be seen as a reaction against an imported worldview. “On the contrary, it exemplifies the creolisation of U.S. cultural products. It is the spiced up Third World copy of Western values, norms, patterns of behaviour, and models of social relations” (1993: 119).

Chapter 4

The social contexts of this research

Rather than looking at how global media impact locality, I pose locality in its cultural complexity. I then ask how locality is best analysed and what importance communication practices may have in its constitution. (Kraidy, 1999: 457)

1. Introduction

At the end of the previous chapter I pointed to the need to move beyond the expressive individualism in which much ethnographic audience research has been trapped, by relating meaning-making and identity formation to the wider economic and ideological formations in which these practices take place. Given this, I will now discuss some of the main features of the South African social context, as this will help us make sense of the way students on the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes university interact with both global and local media and what forms of cultural identity they assume in the process.

2. The South African social and political context

Up until the first democratically held elections in South Africa in 1994, the dominant South African socio-political system was *apartheid* (separateness), the segregationist policies introduced by the Nationalist Party government on assuming office in 1948 (Davenport, 1991: 518). While, as Ross (1999: 116) observes, it was initially not clear what apartheid meant in practice, it entailed from the start the identification and separation of specific groups of people. According to Ross, “[T]he National Party ideologues always emphasised the importance of ethnicity, seeing the various nations of South Africa as God-created entities, on the model of their own self-image of Afrikanerdom. These had to be preserved in all their purity” (1999: 116).

As a corollary to this, the newly elected Nationalist Party government believed that the only way to avoid ‘race’ conflict was to keep the ‘races’ separated – hence separate

residential areas, schooling, amenities and so on. This ideology was premised upon the belief that, “The greater the number of competitive points of contact, the greater the friction. Hence the apartheid formula: reduce the points of contact by increasing separation at all levels of society, be they political, economic or social” (Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 54). Under apartheid each group would be able, at least in theory, to exercise political rights and enjoy economic opportunity within its own territory. ⁱ

The apartheid system was built on the forms of domination and privilege that arose during the period of European conquest and settlement following the arrival of the Dutch in the Cape in 1652, and the segregationist policies that developed along with the later industrialisation of South Africa following the discovery of diamonds in 1869 and of gold in 1886 (Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 1; Wolpe, 1988: 63; Davenport, 1991: 518; Marks and Trapido, 1987: 7).ⁱⁱ Resistance from the indigenous African groups to the initial phase of colonial conquest lasted almost two centuries, ending with the subjugation of the Venda in the Northern Transvaal and Pondo in the Eastern Cape during the last decade of the nineteenth century (Lacey, 1981: 12-51). Thereafter, the defeat of the Boers by the British paved the way for the industrial development of a South Africa subordinate to imperial capital.

The South African Union of 1910 was founded on an economy based on foreign mining capital, later to be dominated by manufacturing (local English and later Afrikaner capital). From the 1890s, legislation passed by the emergent South African state was mainly concerned with mobilising an African industrial labour force (Bozzoli, 1981). This was achieved by limiting access to the land, thus forcing Africans into wage employment (Stadler, 1987: 87). For example, the Native Land Act of 1913 prohibited Africans (except those in the Cape Colony) from buying or renting any land except in the 7 to 8% of the territory of South Africa which had been designated as ‘reserves’ (Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 14). These areas were supposed to act as a subsistence base for migrant workers. But, with the capitalisation of industry, and later farming, and the mass influx of Africans to the towns, the reserves became impoverished wastelands, but which now fulfilled a second function. Under the policy of separate development,

the reserves, known as Bantustans, together with other bits and pieces of land, were consolidated into ten ethnic geo-physical units. These 'national states', cynically re-named 'Homelands', were the only places where Africans were allowed to exercise political and economic rights (Stadler, 1987: 34). Outside of the scheduled 13% of land set aside for exclusive African occupation, Africans were denied political rights and privileges.

The need for cheap labour, and the competition for labour between different sectors of the capitalist economy, necessitated the implementation of influx controls (Stadler, 1987: 87). This meant controlling access to the urban areas by migrant African workers as well as controlling their movement and settlement within the urban areas. Impetus for the implementation of influx control was provided by the Stallard Commission of 1922 which argued that the African was only required in the urban industrial areas to serve the needs of whites and should leave when these services were no longer required (Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 15).

Given the ideology of racial segregation and the economic domination at the time by English capital, it is significant that the period of unification in 1910 also witnessed the emergence of new ethnic identities:

That this unification did not lead to a single pan-South African, pan-ethnic nationalism was the outcome of a history of regional divisions, the racism and social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century and the specific political-cum-class struggles which were being legitimated by the discourse of nationalism. Despite their numerical inferiority in the new Union, it was English-speaking South Africans who dominated the twentieth-century political economy of South Africa... For them nationalism was an alien and perhaps unnecessary ideology. Continuing ties of language and kinship to Britain reinforced by economic self-interest meant that despite a sporadic South Africanism the sense of English-speaking identity was based on far more diffuse notions of racial and political identity. Confronted with the economic domination of

English-speakers, the Afrikaner objective came to be the capture of the state through ethnic mobilisation. (Marks and Trapido, 1987: 2-3)

At the same time, the deliberate manipulation of group differences to prevent interracial class solidarity shaped the ethnic consciousness of minority groups such as coloureds and Indians (Marks and Trapido, 1987: 1). For example, while racist ideology portrayed coloureds as a 'mixed race', their 'European blood' made them hierarchically superior to the Africans (Marks and Trapido, 1987: 29). As residential and other controls over Africans increased, so the advantages of a separate identity for coloureds came to be appreciated by those who benefited. This was made law in 1923 by the Urban Areas Act which specifically exempted coloureds from carrying passes (Marks and Trapido, 1987: 29). Similarly, in 1930 coloureds were exempted from influx controls and from legislation governing urban segregation and as Marx and Trapido comment, "The divide between those classified as Africans and those classified as coloureds was growing greater and the racial hierarchy, sustained since the turn of the century, was greatly reinforced" (1987: 29-30).

The presence of Indians in South Africa dated back to the early 1860s, when they were brought to South Africa from India to work on the sugar plantations in Natal (Ross, 1999: 57). In many respects the Indians in Natal occupied the same structural position as coloureds in the Cape, situated between the African majority and the white ruling class. Furthermore, their own internal divisions along lines of religion, language, culture and class, meant that any sense of common identity of Indians was absent at the start of the century (Marx and Trapido, 1987: 32).

Assuming power in 1948, the National Party took a number of legislative measures to implement what Liebenberg and Spies (1993: 322) refer to as 'social apartheid', in order to prevent inter-racial integration. They introduced legislation to establish distinct biological categories among the population groups, and legislation to prevent their residential mixing once the biological distinctions had been made (Davenport, 1991: 328). The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 made marriages between whites

and people other than whites illegal, the aim of which was to freeze racial categories for all time (Ross, 1999: 116). This was followed by the Population Registration Act in 1950, which was designed to assign everyone to a racial group. Also in 1950, an amendment to the Immorality Act of 1927 prohibited sexual intercourse across the colour line (Ross, 1999: 116). In addition to the whites and the Africans, the Population Registration Act also recognised, as different 'race' groups, coloureds and Indians.

Through the Group Areas Act of 1950, the Government proclaimed residential and business areas for specific race groups (Davenport, 1991: 328). The Group Areas Act did not have as devastating an impact on Africans since they were already controlled under the Urban areas Act (originally the Native Affairs Act of 1920) (Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 86). But the Indian and coloured people suffered the social consequences of this act. Giliomee and Schlemmer write:

Effectively this meant that no person belonging to a particular apartheid community was allowed to live in the 'wrong' group area. But the Group Areas Act went even further than this. It did not regulate only the ownership and occupation of domestic and business premises but also the provision of entertainment, in particular the 'occupation' of places of entertainment. This law effectively excluded blacks from restaurants, theatres, cinemas and sports clubs in white residential areas or in the central business districts. As a rule this meant that in the white part of town a black could only be served over the counter, and that it was virtually impossible for whites and blacks to have a meal or a drink together in a hotel, café or restaurant. (1989: 87)

Apartheid ideology recast liberal values in nationalist terms and applied them to South Africa: "The country was projected not as a nation-state, but as a region comprised of several national states and national communities. Liberty was defined as national self-determination, and equality as equal full nationhood. It was envisaged that people would attain political rights in their respective homelands or, in the case of the coloured

people and Indians, in their respective communities” (Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 58).ⁱⁱⁱ

In practice there was no semblance of equality. The legal/political system defined a category of white subjects who had the right to vote, economic rights of land and property ownership, monopoly rights to certain kinds of jobs, social rights to education and training, state medical care, and an array of other public amenities (Wolpe, 1988: 63). Black subjects were defined by their exclusion from the right to vote, to own property outside of the 13% set aside as reserves, to engage in skilled labour or to form trade unions. In other words, as Wolpe writes,

White domination and black subordination were embedded in the political/economic institutions of the state and sustained by coercive, political and ideological apparatuses in all spheres, supported by an alliance of white social forces. (1988: 63)

3. The racially segregated education system

The physical separation of the different population groups was powerfully reinforced by a segregated educational system (Davenport, 1991: 533; Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 93; Ross, 1999: 121). When the National Party came to power in 1948, church and mission schools catered for a large part of African education (Ross, 1999: 121). Then in 1951 the Eiselen Commission came up with a new concept called ‘Bantu Education’, brought into being by the National Party’s Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Davenport, 1991: 535). Bantu Education’s differential syllabus, with an emphasis on practical subjects, was clearly designed to prepare Africans for subordination in the workplace (Davenport, 1991: 535). The 1954 senate speech by Dr H.F. Verwoed, the then Minister of Native Affairs, spelled out the link between education and apartheid ideology:

The (old) curriculum...and educational practice, by ignoring the segregation or ‘apartheid’ policy, was unable to prepare for service within the Bantu community. By blindly producing pupils trained on a European model, the vain hope was created among Natives that they

could occupy posts within the European community despite the country's policy of 'apartheid'. This is what is meant by the creation of unhealthy 'white collar ideals' and the causation of widespread frustration among the so-called Natives. (Verwoed quoted in Hartshorne, 1992: 40)

The role of Bantu education was both to help preserve what the government saw as indigenous Bantu culture as well as provide an education for subordination in the workplace (Davenport, 1993: 535). To implement these ideological imperatives, control of African schools was taken away from the missionary bodies and placed under the Native Affairs Department (Christie and Collins, 1984: 161). The immediate result was a dramatic decline in the quality of African education, evidenced by a decline in the number of African teachers in training and a rise in pupil-teacher ratios in African schools, and a corresponding deterioration in examination results (Liebenberg and Spies, 1993: 326). In 1963, legislation was passed which transferred control of coloured education from the provinces to the Department of Coloured Affairs. The advantage enjoyed by white children over pupils of other races, bolstered by much more lavish budgets, thus became a feature of South African education (Davenport, 1991: 533).

University education was not immune from the requirements of apartheid ideology. In 1959, a Bill segregating university education was introduced (Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 92). The Minister of Education remarked in introducing the Bill: "[The] Government's policy of separate development requires that non-Whites should be given every opportunity to develop as individuals and for development as separate communities. If it is to be a balanced development, separate development demands that every individual national unit should produce from its own ranks, the necessary leaders, thinkers, educationalists, professional and technical people... [A] higher education can best be provided in one's own separate institution. Every national group of any consequence, if it wishes to hold its own, should have its own schools and its own university or universities..." (quoted in Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 93).

As response to the post-Soweto educational crisis in 1976, some private schools in South Africa opened their doors to black children. This was the beginning of a trend that gained momentum after the Catholic Church took an official decision in 1976 to desegregate schools under its control (Gaganakis, 1992: 46). In 1992 the white government issued an Education Renewal Strategy in preparation for its political negotiations with the African National Congress. This strategy allowed for 'Model C' schools, which became non-racial, subject to the approval of parent bodies and the ability of parents to pay the required fees. After 1994, all schools became non-racial, but because of the fee structure of various schools, and the limited access of most black students to 'Model C' and private schools, most South African students are effectively still schooled within the old apartheid school system.

The major disparities in spending between the different racially defined educational systems meant that black teachers received inferior training and had to deal with a much larger ratio of teachers to pupils than their white counterparts. These disparities were attested to by the educational attainments of the different population groups. In 1995, of the 15 676 000 Africans 20 years and older in South Africa, only 188 000 (1%) had attained a university degree. Of the 2 079 000 coloureds of 20 years and older, 24 000 (1%) had attained a university degree. Of the 644 000 Indians in this category, 35 000 (5%) had degrees, and of the 3 700 000 whites in this category, 403 000 (11%) had achieved degrees (SAIRR, 1998).

4. Opposition to apartheid

The draconian legislation introduced by the new state strengthened mass opposition, which in turn resulted in increasingly stringent security legislation. The period between 1948 and 1960 was marked by legislative changes that narrowed the space for legal opposition to the state. The most notorious of these was the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 which "empowered the arbitrary proscription of any organization or individual who opposed the regime" (quoted in Wolpe, 1988: 66). Wolpe writes:

Under this act the Communist Party and other organizations were banned and hundreds of individuals were prohibited from attending public

meetings, or belonging to political organizations and trade unions. (1988: 66)

Despite the extensive use of coercion by the state, popular opposition did not cease. This situation contained the seeds of crisis for the state:

On the one hand, the regime's policies generated intense, and continuous, opposition reflected in the growing involvement of the black masses in the national liberation struggles. On the other hand, it was incapable of subordinating and controlling the political opposition on the basis of its existing 'normal' powers, extensive though they were. (Wolpe, 1988: 67)

Opposition to the apartheid regime went through a number of stages. In 1960 the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned. In 1973 the wide-spread strikes by African workers ushered in a period of intense labour unrest and the growth of black trade unionism. In 1976 the Soweto students' uprising sparked off school closures and student/police battles nationwide, followed by a strengthening of exile and extra-parliamentary political opposition in the 1980s.

Wolpe (1988: 103) notes that while the government used emergency powers to control opposition, it was restrained from adopting the 'Chile option' by external pressures from the United States (which imposed economic sanctions in October 1986), various European and Commonwealth countries, as well as from corporate capital and liberal forces within its own ranks. Within a few years deadlock had been reached between the forces of oppression and those of the people. A negotiated settlement was the only way out of the impasse, and this necessitated the recognition of the ANC and other opposition forces. In November 1987, Govan Mbeki, a prominent ANC leader was released from prison, followed by the other Rivonia trial defendants including Walter Sisulu in 1989, and the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990. In this way the ANC was effectively unbanned, and negotiations could proceed. This process culminated in the first democratic elections in South Africa, held in 1994, which brought the ANC to power.

5. The transition to democracy

Despite the transition to democracy that followed the elections in 1994, the social effects of apartheid are very much still in evidence. South Africa, with Brazil, tops international tables of Gini coefficients and other measures of inter-household income inequality (Seeking, 2000: 53; Leibrandt et al., 2000: 31). Statistical indicators show the racial dimension of poverty and inequality in South Africa: 95% of the very poor are African and 5% are coloured. Poverty has a rural dimension, with 75% of the poor living in rural areas. Poverty also has an age dimension, with 45% of the poor being children below the age of 15 (Jennings et al., 1997: 8). Forty-nine percent of African youth live in households that at some point during 1994/5 were unable to feed their children. This applies to 35% of coloured youth, 11% of Asians and 6% of white youth (Jennings et al., 1997: 23). Similar ratios are borne out by life expectancy rates amongst the different population groups. For the years 1996 to 2001, the average life expectancy for Africans is 64.5 years, for Asians 70.2 years, for coloureds 64.4 years, and for whites 73.6 years (SAIRR, 1998).

However, the inequalities in South Africa correspond largely but not exclusively to racial divisions and among Africans, huge disparities have opened. Marais (2001: 106) points out that the mean income of the lowest-earning 40% of African households declined by almost 40% between 1975 and 1991, while that of the richest 20% of African households rose by 40%. African professionals, skilled workers and entrepreneurs benefited from the collapse of apartheid making them the most upwardly mobile 'race' group. As a result, South Africa is currently witnessing the emergence of a differentiated class structure among the African population, which includes a strong middle class and professional stratum, and a tiny economic elite. In other words, the country's income maldistribution is increasingly shifting from being 'race' to class-based (Marais, 2001: 106).

The post-apartheid state is a modernising state, strongly influenced by conventional neoliberal wisdom, and thus closely allied to the institutions of global capitalism (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) (Bond, 2000: 216; Mangcu, 2001: 9). Marais argues that the basis for the transition from apartheid to democracy in South

Africa rested on "...the dire need to modernise and reinvigorate the processes of capital accumulation, on the apartheid state's simultaneous inability to manage the expansive forms of restructuring that were required, and on the democratic opposition's ability to challenge and veto the haphazard 'modernization' attempts of the state and capital" (2001: 3). The neoliberal features of the African National Congress government's macro-economic strategy, which include bowing to the demands of capital and the building of a black 'patriotic bourgeoisie', are not surprising. Marais notes, "By 1996...the ANC government's economic policy had acquired an overt class character. It was geared to service the respective prerogatives of domestic and international capital and the aspirations of the emerging black *bourgeoisie* – at the expense of the impoverished majority's hopes for a less iniquitous social and economic order" (2001: 123-124).

6. Modernity and tradition

The penetration of modernity into Africa as a whole has been uneven (Balcomb, 1999: 5). Marais (2001: 303) quotes Mamdani who writes that the cleavage between 'modern' and 'traditional' society ranks as the most fundamental, unresolved contradiction in much of post-colonial Africa. In South Africa, for example, millions of rural inhabitants continue to live under the rule of local chiefs operating within the ambit of customary law (Marais, 2001: 3).

Marais (2001: 303) sees a schism between the democratic movement, which framed its struggle against apartheid in Enlightenment terms – hinging on civil and political liberties – and the tribal chieftaincies, which see themselves protecting traditional African customary law. According to Marais, "At the root of the chiefs' power is an admixture of ethnicised tradition, inherited authority and clientelism that fits uneasily with the principles of individual rights and democratic processes that underpin the new political system. The severely diminished status of women under traditional authorities is emblematic of this contradiction" (2001: 303).

This tension is reflected in the ongoing disputes between the ANC-led government and the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) over the place of

traditional culture, norms, and customs, and the role of traditional (non-elected) leaders in post-apartheid South Africa in their traditional rural strongholds (see, for example, Gevisser 1996: 14). The President of Contralesa, Patekile Holimisa writes: “[T]he present struggle [with the ANC-led government] is not about the retention of power for its own sake, it is for the retention of power so that it can be used to safeguard the African value systems which are the bedrock of society” (Gevisser, 2000: 29). Thus, for example, at the 1992 Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) negotiations at the Johannesburg World Trade Centre, Contralesa’s delegations insisted on exemptions for customary law and from gender equality clause in the Bill of Rights (Gevisser, 1996: 14).

As we can see from the above discussion, South African is a deeply divided society.

Samir Amin has recently characterised the divisions thus:

There is the overwhelmingly white section of the population whose popular culture and standard of living seem to belong to the ‘first’ (advanced capitalist) world... Much of the urban black population belongs to the modern, industrialising ‘third’ world, while rural Africans do not differ much from their counterparts in ‘fourth’ world Africa. (“Foreward” to Marais, 2001: vii)

These inequalities are reflected in the lives of young people in contemporary society. Writing on the social and educational inequalities that exist amongst South African youth, Van Zyl Slabbert et al. (1994: 56-60) have noted that the country’s social dynamics have placed white South African youth in areas where housing is readily available. Almost all whites have electricity, water and water-borne sewerage in their homes, refuse removal, tarred roads and street lighting. White income levels are relatively high and poverty is minimal. Whites have access to adequate schooling with high enrolments. Retention levels at school level are good and white youth dominate tertiary education institutions. The white population growth is low. White people as a group are largely urbanised and relatively unaffected by unemployment (Van Zyl Slabbert et al., 1994: 56).

While Van Zyl Slabbert et al. (1994: 57-58) distinguish between poor rural and urban middle class Africans, they feel that on the whole, African youth live in a different world compared to white youth. It is a world of unemployment, poverty, high population growth rate, inadequate schooling and largely unavailable basic social amenities (1994: 57-58). Coloured and Indian youth in South Africa appear to be positioned between African and white youth. Population growth and urban/rural ratios among the coloured and Indian communities are similar to those of the white community (Van Zyl Slabbert et al., 1994: 57-58).

7. Rhodes University

Rhodes University has two Eastern Cape campuses, one in Grahamstown and a smaller one in East London. The Grahamstown campus, where this research took place, is largely residential. It takes its name from the British imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes, after the Rhodes Trustees donated 50 000 pounds towards the establishment of Rhodes University College in 1904 (Currey, 1970). In 1951 it was converted to a university.

The social and educational inequalities discussed above are, to a certain extent, evidenced on the Grahamstown campus. The campus currently has 4 411 registered students: white (50%), African (36%), Indian, coloured (4%) (Rhodes University, 2000). This student composition does not reflect the demographics of the country as a whole which, according to the most recent census figures, gives the percentages of the population in South Africa by 'population group' as white (11%), African (77%), Indian (3%), and coloured (9%) (CSS, 1997). Nor do Rhodes University's enrolment figures reflect the fact that African students comprise 83% of the total school population. The figures can, however, be explained – the result of the generally inferior education that most African pupils receive, as well as the high cost of tertiary education.^{iv} For example, the education levels of people 20 years and older by population group for 1996, reveal that only 12% of African students passed grade 12, compared to 30% of Indians, 12% of coloureds, and 41% of whites (SAIRR, 1999).

Besides the skewing by 'population group', there is also a skewing according to class,

and in terms of school background. In a random sample survey conducted amongst students on the Grahamstown campus, 31% classified themselves as coming from a working class or peasant background. The remaining 69% classified themselves as middle class (Strelitz and Coetzee, 1998). There was a significant correlation between class and population group. While 72% of African students, 52% of coloured students and 44% of Indian students classified themselves as working class or peasant, the corresponding figure for white students was only 9%. Almost 60% of the African students attended DET schools while 76% of coloured, 73% of Indian and 98% of white students attended the vastly superior Model C or private schools (Strelitz and Coetzee, 1998).

The staff complement at Rhodes University also reflects the existing social disparities. According to the university's Digest of Statistics for the year 2000, 89% of the academic staff are white, 2% Indian, 2% coloured, and 7% African. Of the senior administrative staff we find that 68% are white, 2% Indian, 13% coloured, and 17% African. On the other hand, the service staff are largely African – 100% in academic departments, and 96% in the residences (Rhodes University, 2000).

This then is the historical and current social context of this research. The remainder of this chapter provides a literature review of local and international youth studies which together with the social and political context, provides the framework for my study.

8. Defining youth

As Van Zyl Slabbert et al. (1994: 12) point out, the concepts of 'childhood' and 'adulthood' do not refer to fixed points on a continuum. They are not physiological facts but social constructions. The authors quote Reynolds in this regard:

Youth lie on a continuum between childhood and adulthood and the demarcations are socially constructed so that there are few absolutes. In one community a person is a child until he or she marries so that adulthood may be achieved at age twelve or twenty-four: in another community, a person may remain a child (in terms of dependence) until

education is completed which may be at age twelve or twenty-four.
(Reynolds quoted in Van Zyl Slabbert et al., 1994: 12-13)

The difficulties in assigning distinct age-markers to the period of 'youth' are evidenced in the literature. For example, Bonfadellie (1993: 235-6), writing on his research into youth in German-speaking countries in Europe, states that adolescence or youth is a psycho-social period of transition from childhood to adulthood. As he notes: "Although it is difficult to fix its boundaries precisely in time, most researchers take as their entry point the beginning of puberty, the age of 12 to 13 years, and consider adolescence as finished at the point when all the adult social roles are taken over by the individual, eg. taking up a trade and establishing a family" (1993: 235) (see also Braungart and Braungart, 1995: 86). However, Bonfadellie points out that in recent decades the end of adolescence shifted to a later point in life and that now the transition from adolescence to adulthood takes place between the ages of 18 and 25 or even later (1993: 236). Similarly, Jennings et al. (1997: 2) state that the most commonly used international definition of youth is between the ages of 16 and 24. However, the Swedish youth researcher Fornas (1995: 3) points out that there is little agreement amongst researchers on an exact definition of the term 'youth'. Fornas (1995: 3) points to three different discourses which frame the concept. Firstly, it refers to a particular stage in physiological development; secondly, it is a social category framed by particular social institutions and rituals, and thirdly, youth is culturally determined by the interplay with musical, visual and verbal signs which mark this stage as being different from the child or adult. While the above three dimensions of youth are interlinked, Fornas (1995: 3) points out that youth researchers are particularly interested in the latter phenomenon (also see McRobbie, 1996: 31).

In South Africa, the problems of the definition of youth are especially acute. According to Van Zyl Slabbert et al., the unstable socio-political conditions in South Africa have made any attempt at gaining conceptual clarity when talking about youth "...a frustrating and enigmatic exercise" (1994: 12). They write:

Whilst it is trite to say that life itself is a process and not an event, this observation gets specific meaning when one tries to pin down youth as a

social category. Infancy, adulthood, old age, marriage, birth, death are concepts that enable us to identify clear patterns of social interaction and institutional organisation. In relatively stable societies, organised education provides the best arena in which to explore the transient characteristics of youth; but in unstable, unequal and deeply polarised and divided societies, problems in educational organisation very often add to the difficulties in coming to grips with youth as a social category. (Van Zyl Slabbert et al., 1994: 12)

Because of these considerations, these authors advocate adopting the broadest possible definition of youth, namely to South Africans of all population groups between 15 and 30 years of age. The authors admit that this conceptual definition of youth is much more one of operational convenience than of any philosophical substance (Van Zyl Slabbert et al., 1994: 13). However, as they note, this broad definition "...enables us to cluster and clarify research results which relate to young people who fall in this age category and who, from different points of view, and for varying purposes, are referred to as 'youth'" (Van Zyl Slabbert et al., 1994: 13).

The broad definition of youth is echoed in the National Youth Commission Act (no. 19 of 1996), which takes into account the fact that people between the ages of 25 and 30 bore the brunt of the recent political struggles in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. The National Youth Commission therefore defines the range of youth from 14 to 35 (NYC, 1997: 7).

9. International youth research

However much the age markers of 'youth' vary between societies, there is agreement amongst researchers regarding the psychological dynamics of this phase of life. For example, Bonfadellie writes:

From a psychological perspective, adolescence is a very dynamic and unstable phase where the individual has to acquire the skills to fulfil adult roles and norms and has to search for and develop an identity.

Adolescence is thus a period of rapid physical and intellectual development and emotional intensity. (1993: 236)

Reflecting on these themes of dynamism, instability and identity construction, Willis (1990: 7-8) points out that it is during adolescence when people are formed most self-consciously through their own symbolic and other activities. He writes that during this period they form 'symbolic moulds' through which they understand themselves and their possibilities for the rest of their lives. Adolescence is the period, he writes, when people begin to construct themselves through nuance and complexity, through difference as well as similarity (Willis, 1990: 7-8).

Similarly, Drotner writes that youth and media are discursively connected through the metaphor of change, which, in itself, is central to our understanding of modernity: "Since the Romantic period, youth has been defined as the epitome of transition whether viewed in social, cultural or psychological terms: to be young is to move away from home, gain economic independence, experiment with new cultural forms and transfer sexual and emotional energies away from parents and onto partners" (2000: 150). Equally, she points out, the mass media are premised on notions of change: "With seriality as a foundation of mass-mediated production, the concept of change in the form of innovation has become established as an important counterbalance in the contract between producers and receivers..." (2000: 150).

Youth is thus a period of "socially and culturally-conditioned flexibility" (Fornas, 1995: 1) and a primary reason for this is, according to Reimer (1995a: 63), that youth, by definition, have more free time and less responsibility than adults. This would seem to apply to students on the Grahamstown campus. An extract from an editorial in the Rhodes University student newspaper *Activate* aimed at newly arrived students reflects this well:

Take it from someone with 3 years out here behind them. The best and worst of the human experience somehow finds its way to Grahamstown. To some it's the last bohemian paradise. To some it's a sort of last ditch

stand against established norms and attitudes. To quite a few it's their out-card from parental smothering and the hackneyed routines of their home existence...Once the dust settles, the hangover fades and you wind up actually appraising where the hell you've wound up, you'll find yourself in a charming little university town surrounded by a rogues gallery of cultures and ideas. (Koseff, J, 2000: 2)

Much of the literature on youth points to the centrality of the media to the creation and sustenance of individual and group identities (Fornas, 1995: 5; Willis, 1990: 17; Boethius, 1995: 150; Livingstone, 1998: 443). As Fornas notes, "Young people are culturally-oriented, express themselves to an unusual degree in texts, pictures, music, styles and are considered by others as publicly culturally significant" (1995: 5). The use of symbolic forms in the creation of symbolic meaning (of which the media are an important example) is part of the human condition although it is especially evidenced in youth (Willis, 1990: 10). Willis describes 'symbolic work' as follows:

This is the application of human capacities to and through, on and with symbolic resources and raw materials (collections of signs and symbols – for instance, the language as we inherit it as well as texts, songs, films, images and artefacts of all kinds) to produce meanings. This is broader than, logically prior to and a condition of material production, but its 'necessariness' has been forgotten. (1990: 10)

According to Willis (1990: 11), symbolic work produces a number of outcomes. They produce individual identities – "who and what 'I am' and could become" (1990: 11). As Willis notes,

[S]ymbolic work and creativity place identities in larger wholes. Identities do not stand alone above and beyond history. They are related in time, place and things...Memberships of race, class, gender, age and region are not only learned, they're lived and experimented with...[S]ymbolic work...develops and affirms our active senses of our own vital capacities,

the powers of the self and how they might be applied to the cultural world.
(1990: 12)

For middle class youth in first world countries, the role that the media play in their identity formation has become increasingly important. One reason is the media's greatly increased supply and availability (Boethius, 1995: 151). Another reason, according to Miles et al. (1998: 82), is that in the late twentieth century young people's life experiences are becoming increasingly tenuous. Young people now have to make important life decisions without the social stability previously associated with the family. Miles et al. quote Chisolm and duBois-Reymond who argue that "...few things are certain, where many choices are possible, and where it is not clear which options will be possible and impossible and for whom" (Chisholm and duBois-Reymond quoted in Miles et al., 1998: 83).

The psychic vacuum caused by the loss of legitimacy of many of the traditional sources of social meaning and the importance of media in providing alternative social and individual meanings, are twin themes which run through the literature on youth in modern and late modern societies (Willis, 1990: 13-14; Reimer, 1989: 113; Livingstone, 1998: 443; Nielsen, 1993: 3; Slater, 1997: 29). In fact most discussion on identity formation in modern society highlights the increasingly important role of media consumption to this process. Drawing on the work of Giddens, Thompson (1995: 210) describes how, with the development of modern societies, this process of self-formation becomes more reflexive and open-ended. Young people therefore fall back increasingly on their own resources to construct a coherent identity for themselves. In line with other authors, Thompson says that central to this process of self-formation – the construction of "a narrative of self identity" (1995: 210) – are mediated symbolic materials:

The process of self-formation becomes increasingly dependent on access to mediated forms of communication – both printed and, subsequently, electronically mediated forms. Local knowledge is supplemented by, and increasingly displaced by, new forms of non-local knowledge which are

fixed in a material substratum, reproduced technically and transmitted via the media. (1995: 211)

All this takes place within the context of the increased centralisation and monopolisation of media production and circulation on a global level. Therefore most of us start the 21st century as consumers of, and participants in, the global phenomenon of popular culture (Dolby, 1999: 291). Livingstone observes that, “As traditional structures, at all levels from the family to the nation-state, which confer identity are being undermined, others are actively sought by young people, and these are readily provided by the market...Clearly...the processes of globalisation of media and culture are seen by many as the means par excellence by which social changes are effected...” (1998: 443). This obviously raises important questions for media and youth researchers regarding the nature of the social knowledge and social identities offered to local youth by these transnational media.

10. Local youth research

The area of media consumption by youth is under-researched worldwide. Drotner (2000: 152) points to the paucity of general empirical information on media consumption amongst youth, while Lemish et al. (1998: 541) note that little empirical work has been undertaken on understanding media globalisation from the perspective of youth. With the exception of Dolby (1999), this certainly holds true for South African youth research. In fact, in a country where 43% of the population falls into the age category 14 to 20 years and 73 % are under the age of 35 (Jennings et al., 1997: 4), most aspects of local youth remain remarkably under-researched (Everatt, 1994: 2; Tomaselli, 2000: 1; Mkhasibe, 1995: 3). For example, Mkhasibe, in her study of South African youth in the Johannesburg and Pretoria areas, refers to “...a general lack of knowledge about South African youth” (1995: 3), while Everatt has commented that in South Africa, “...the broader social values of young people remain largely unexplored and unknown...” (1994: 2). Even the South African Advertising Research Foundation’s (SAARF) survey, the main source of quantitative data on consumption patterns amongst the South African population, includes the 15 to 25 year olds in the adult survey. In particular, there is a

paucity of theoretically-informed qualitative research into youth and their media consumption practices (Tomaselli, 2000: 1).

Using the keywords ‘media’, ‘media use’ and ‘youth’, an online search of South African dissertation abstracts turned up only one result. This was a study, completed in 1994, of intertextuality in the local soap opera, *Egoli*. A search of the South African Bibliographic and Information Network (Sabinet), which covers theses and articles published in South African journals from 1979 to 2000 was undertaken using the keywords ‘youth’, ‘teens/teenagers’, ‘adolescents’, ‘media’, and ‘consumption’. Of the 55 records listed, none examined, through qualitative investigation, the way young people interact with either transnational or local media.

The research into youth that has been done has tended to focus on the macro-political issues of youth unemployment, inadequate housing and schooling (for example, Jennings et al., 1997; Van Zyl Slabbert et al., 1994; Everatt, 1994). In the book length report of the Co-operative Research Programme into South African Youth edited by Van Zyl Slabbert et al. (1994) titled *Youth in the New South Africa*, there is no chapter devoted to media consumption by local youth. Even the chapters titled “Social Forces Moulding Youth” and “Social and Cultural Life” respectively, omit any mention of the role that the media play in helping or hindering South African youth to make sense of themselves and their social world. A recently published volume on South African cultural studies devotes just four of its 25 chapters to the media. Three of these are limited to the analysis of media texts (Nuttall and Michael, 2000). This then, is the research vacuum in which this study is located.

11. Conclusion

At the start of this chapter I pointed to the need to move beyond the expressive individualism in which much ethnographic audience research has been trapped, by relating meaning-making and identity formation to the wider economic and ideological formations in which these practices take place. This chapter, by discussing the historical and contemporary South African socio-political environment, provides the context for the

critical analysis of my research data. So also does my overview of some of the local and international research into media consumption amongst youth. The next chapter discusses the choice of research methods employed in the collecting of empirical data with respect to the research focus of the study.

ⁱ As Giliomee and Schlemmer point out, to apartheid advocates, state-enforced separation was necessary to ensure the survival of whites: “[O]nly through apartheid could whites maintain themselves in a society in which they were outnumbered and in which there existed fundamental differences between white and black in civilization, culture, and a general way of life. They believed that failure to impose apartheid would lead to the political suicide of whites. Consequently, Africans should exercise and have rights only in their own areas and communities. Economically, white workers should be protected in the labor market to enable them to maintain their living standards. Socially the policy should aim at maintaining racial differences” (1989: 54). Black South Africans were deprived of their South African citizenship as more and more homelands became ‘independent’.

ⁱⁱ Giliomee and Schlemmer (1989) point out that although apartheid was founded upon the policy of segregation, it also differed from it: “Whereas segregation implied a horizontal division between the races, apartheid envisaged a vertical division between equal ethnic groups or nations. Apartheid also differed from the liberal model which English-speaking opinion formers of the time used to categorize society. The liberal model is based on the individual who is invested with rights. The apartheid model portrays man as a social being who finds fulfillment only in a community. The individual is seen to have no rights while the *volk* has a God-given right to exist; whatever rights the individual enjoys are derived from the collectivity” (1989: 40 – 41). Apartheid was aimed at enhancing Afrikaner nationalism by entrenching white political control in South Africa: “Through apartheid, Afrikaners governed not only themselves, but also all other groups in the society” (1989: 41). As the authors note, “Afrikaner nationalists defined *volk* as a collectivity whose members were of similar descent and racial stock, and who shared a common history, culture and sense of destiny” (1989: 45).

ⁱⁱⁱ Giliomee and Schlemmer (1988) argue that if one is to understand apartheid, one needs to understand that Afrikaner nationalism urged Afrikaners to separate themselves from both non-Afrikaner whites and various black groups. Underlying this ideology was a primary claim to the land and a fear of being overwhelmed. The claim to the land was based on the myth that the land had been vacant at the time of white colonization and that Afrikaners had been in South Africa before the English-speaking settlers. With regard to the second claim or ‘fear’ of being overwhelmed, the National Party ideologues argued that since Afrikaners had nowhere else to go, they needed to ensure their survival within South Africa: “The only way they could safeguard their culture, language and ‘bio-genetic’ identity was through exclusive political control over ‘white’ South Africa. In any unitary state Afrikaners (and other whites) would be swamped” (1989: 42).

^{iv} After 1954, “Bantu” education was administered by the Department of Education and Training (DET). The Eiselen Commission (1949-1951) had recommended schooling for African children which, in accordance with apartheid ideology, would strengthen their roots in African culture and society, and prepare them to take up their ‘places’ in the South African economy. From about 1960 onwards, secondary schooling for Africans was concentrated in the ‘Bantustans’. Bantu education sought to retribalise Africans with a heavy emphasis on teaching in the African mother-tongues. The Homelands policy was supported by the establishment of Black Tertiary Institutions. Prior to 1994, all coloured and Indian education was administered by the Provincial Governments. The coloured Affairs Department (CAD) was established by the Nationalist Party Government after 1948 to serve the special social and welfare interests of the coloured people. In 1964 the CAD assumed control of coloured education. According to the De Vos Malan Commission their education had to make them conscious of their separate existence and readiness to work’. Indian education followed a similar route. After 1948, the government promoted Christian National Education for white schools. White education was comparatively generously funded for the provision of buildings, amenities, teachers and so on to accommodate the Compulsory Schooling Act. In 1992 the National Government issued an Education Renewal Strategy which established Model C schools. After 1994, all schools became non-racial but fee structures ensured that Model C schools were mainly white.

Chapter 5

Research methodology

If the central aim of reception ethnography is to understand the lived experiences of media consumers...then it has to engage with the situational contexts in which the media are used and interpreted. (Moore, 1993: 32)

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2)

Quantitative research can establish regularities in social life while qualitative evidence can allow the processes which link the variables to be revealed. (Bryman, 1988: 142)

It is not a matter of starting from certain theoretical or methodological problems: it is a matter of starting from what we want to *do*, and then seeing which methods and theories will help us to achieve these ends. (Eagleton quoted in Lindloff, 1995: 25-6)

1. Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1, this study investigates the meanings individual students at Rhodes University take from global media as part of their ongoing attempts to make sense of their lives and the specific class, gender, 'race' and other identities they inhabit. With a view to generating empirical data with respect to this research focus, a triangulated four-stage research process was designed, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. This chapter describes and discusses the four stages of this research process as well as my

sampling procedures and modes of data analysis. Some methodological issues are also discussed, including the debates amongst social scientists regarding the desirability of combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a single research design.

2. Methodological considerations

2.1. The idea of triangulation

Triangulation in social research can be described as the use of more than one method of investigation and hence more than one type of data. Within this approach, quantitative and qualitative research methods are seen as different ways of examining the same research problem (Bryman, 1988: 131).

Some researchers resist the concept of triangulation, arguing that quantitative and qualitative research methodologies are based on mutually exclusive ontological and epistemological assumptions, and that therefore, one cannot combine their respective methods in a single research design. Support for this claim is often made by reference to these two approaches as distinct paradigms (Bryman, 1984: 79; 1988: 172). As Guba writes, “we *are* dealing with an either-or proposition, in which one must pledge allegiance to one paradigm or the other” (Guba quoted in Bryman, 1988: 107-8). Or as Guba and Lincoln put it: “The methodological question cannot be reduced to a question of methods: methods must be fitted to a predetermined methodology” (1994: 108).

2.2. Distinct methodologies

Philosophically, qualitative and quantitative research methods draw on distinct methodologies. Survey research epitomises quantitative analysis with its emphasis on measurement standardisation and representativeness. It draws on the Durkheimian tradition of broad, comparative analysis and the search for social facts. Qualitative research approaches, on the other hand, draw on the Weberian tradition, and emphasises the importance of finding the subjective meanings of actors in a social context. In qualitative analysis, conclusions about meaning are interpretive and dependent on the context in which the actions take place. In contrast to quantitative analysis, qualitative

analysis resists either quantification or standardised comparison (Wolff et al., 1993: 118). I will discuss each of these methodologies in turn.

2.2.1. Quantitative research

The quantitative research tradition is usually depicted as a natural science approach in its adherence to the norms of logical positivism, and it is often referred to as the classical empiricist point of view (Stempel and Westley, 1989: 13). Bryman (1988: 14-16) has outlined the key characteristics of this approach. Firstly, there is the belief that there is little difference in principle to investigating the natural and social worlds and that one can apply the same basic research procedures to both (also see Deacon et al., 1999: 4). This belief, writes Bryman (1988: 14), draws on the principle of ‘methodological monism or methodological naturalism’. By this is meant that the study of human beings can be undertaken by scientific method, despite the fact that people – who are the objects of the social sciences – communicate through language, have feelings, and attribute meaning to their environment.

Another tenet of positivism is the doctrine of ‘phenomenalism’ or ‘empiricism’.ⁱ This entails the belief that only those phenomena which are observable, in the sense of being amenable to the senses, can count as knowledge – the subjective experiences of the observed does not count as scientific knowledge unless they can be rendered observable. This implies that observations, rather than theories, are the final arbiters of theoretical disputes (Bryman, 1988: 16).

The doctrine of ‘inductivism’ provides another key tenet of positivism. As Bryman (1988: 15) explains, positivism proposes that scientific knowledge is arrived at through the accumulation of verified facts, which then feed into the general body of theoretical understandings pertaining to the particular domain of knowledge being investigated. Thus, according to Bryman (1988: 15), theory expresses and reflects the accumulated findings of empirical research. These findings point to empirically established regularities, often referred to as ‘laws’.

Another characteristic of positivism is that science is 'deductive', because it seeks to make specific propositions from general accounts of reality (Bryman, 1988: 15). The logic of deduction is "seeking to construct a scientific theory to explain the laws pertaining to a particular field; a hypothesis (or possibly more than one) is derived in order to enable the scientist to test the theory; if the hypothesis is rejected when submitted to rigorous empirical examination the theory must be revised" (Bryman, 1988: 15). Thus, science is seen by positivists to be both an inductive as well as deductive activity, a process whereby hypotheses are deduced from general theories and submitted to empirical test, with the results being absorbed into general theories (Bryman, 1988: 16). This principle, taken together with the doctrine of phenomenalism, makes a sharp distinction between theory and observation. As Bryman notes, "Empirical verification is taken to entail devising observations which are independent of scientific theories and are hence neutral. Observations are viewed as uncontaminated by the scientist's theoretical or personal predilections" (1988: 16).

Positivism argues for objectivity and neutrality in the collection of scientific facts, so that the researchers' own values should not influence his or her work (Bryman, 1988: 15; Deacon et al., 1999: 4). This stance on values means drawing a distinction between scientific issues and statements and normative ones. Bryman explains: "Positivism denies the appropriateness of the sphere of the normative to its purview because normative statements cannot be verified in relation to experience. While positivists recognise that they can investigate the implications of a particular normative position, they cannot verify or falsify the position itself" (1988: 15).

In short, the positivist approach to social enquiry claims that there is a 'real', independent reality that can be apprehended by an objective, detached, and value-free inquirer. This requires, as Guba and Lincoln put it, "the ability to be objective and a real world to be objective about" (1994: 108) (also see Deacon et al., 1999: 7).

The social survey is the research method preferred by the quantitative researcher in the social sciences. As Harvey and MacDonald (1993: 101) note, it gives one access to large

amounts of data which are representative of the population, and from which one can generalise one's findings. Bryman writes in this regard: "The survey's capacity for generating quantifiable data on large numbers of people who are known to be representative of a wider population in order to test theories or hypotheses has been viewed by many practitioners as a means of capturing many of the ingredients of science" (1988: 11). Furthermore, it is believed that if one is measuring social phenomena, then the only instrument that can provide reliable and valid data is the survey. Here reliability refers to the extent to which the method of data collection is consistent and repeatable by the same or other researchers, while validity refers to whether or not the data collected reflect the concept being measured (Harvey and MacDonald, 1993: 31-2; Bryman, 1988: 28-30).

Finally, in quantitative research deductive reasoning is the highest mode of scientific logic. As Tichenor and Mcleod (1989: 14) indicate, the quantitative approach has tended to endorse the philosophical and procedural perspective termed 'hypothetico-deductive empiricism', in which specific empirical hypotheses are deduced from a set of higher-order statements which are taken as assumptions.

2.2.2. Qualitative research

The alternative research tradition, which has gained increased momentum since the 1960s, has taken many forms and is known by different labels including critical theory, interpretive social science, hermeneutics, and naturalistic enquiry. However, following Christians and Carey (1989: 356), I will refer to this approach as qualitative research.

According to the writers,

Qualitative studies start from the assumption that in studying humans we are examining a creative process whereby people produce and maintain forms of life and society and systems of meaning and value. This creative activity is grounded in the ability to build cultural forms from symbols that express this will to live and assert meaning. Humans live by interpretations. They do not merely react or respond but rather live by interpreting experience through the agency of culture. This is as true of the

microscopic forms of human interaction (conversation and gatherings) as it is of the most macroscopic forms of human initiative (the attempt to build religious systems of ultimate meaning and significance). It is, then, to this attempt at recovering the fact of human agency – the ways persons live by intentions, purposes, and values – that qualitative studies are dedicated. Thus we do not ask “how do the media affect us” (could we figure that out if we wanted to?), but “what are the interpretations of meaning and value created in the media and what is their relation to the rest of life?” (1989: 358-9)

In contrast to positivism, in which the researcher tends to view events from the outside and to impose empirical concerns upon social reality (Bryman, 1984: 78), qualitative research stresses the need to see through the eyes of one’s subjects and to understand social behaviour in its social context (Moore, 1993: 33). Bryman (1988: 52) points to two themes underpinning qualitative research. Firstly, the subject matter of the social sciences (people and their social reality) is seen as fundamentally different from the subject matter of the natural sciences. Qualitative research thus rejects the application of scientific methods to society. Secondly, any attempt to understand social reality must proceed from people’s understanding of their own reality. This means that the social scientist must grasp the interpretive devices by which the individual makes sense of his/her reality, as these provide the motivation for his/her actions.

Another way to understand the differences between quantitative and qualitative methodologies is through their respective commitments to ‘nomothetic’ and ‘ideographic’ modes of reasoning. According to Bryman,

A nomothetic approach seeks to establish general law-like findings which can be deemed to hold irrespective of time and place; an ideographic approach locates its findings in specific time-periods and locales. The former mode is taken to be indicative of the scientific approach, whereas ideographic reasoning is often more closely associated with the historian’s method. By taking random, and hence representative, samples, survey

research is taken to exhibit a nomothetic approach because of the investigator's ability to infer findings to larger populations...By contrast, the qualitative researcher frequently conducts research in a specific milieu (a case study) whose representativeness is unknown and probably unknowable, so that the generalisability of such findings is also unknown. (1988: 100) (see Lindloff, 1995: 23)

Similarly, both Maxwell (1992: 296) and Ang (1996: 71) describe how qualitative research aims primarily at understanding particulars rather than generalising to universals (1992: 296). Ang writes:

The understanding emerging from this kind of [qualitative] inquiry favours interpretive particularisation over explanatory generalisation, historical and local concreteness rather than formal abstraction, 'thick' description of details rather than extensive but 'thin' survey. (1996: 71)

It is not surprising, therefore, that many qualitative researchers reject the survey method as providing 'thin' or superficial evidence on the social world. While they acknowledge that surveys can point to causal relationships between arbitrarily chosen variables, they argue that these findings may have little meaning to those individuals whose social worlds they are meant to represent (Bryman, 1984: 79).

For its part, qualitative research is 'multimethod' in focus. Its most favoured methods for capturing the inside view and 'thick' descriptions are case studies, life stories, observation, and interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2; Bryman, 1984: 78). In keeping with their ontological and epistemological assumptions, qualitative researchers insist that the use of multiple methods does not attempt to capture an objective reality, but rather attempts to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2).

The methodological approach of Ien Ang exemplifies the twin commitment of qualitative studies to contextual understandings and the insiders' view. With regard to studies of television consumption, she writes:

To put it more generally, both 'television' and 'audience' are fundamentally indeterminate categories: it is impossible to list *a priori* which possible meanings and characteristics each category acquires in any specific situation in which people engage in television consumption. As a result of this contingency of meaning, the range of potential variety in audience practices and experiences becomes exponentially multiplied, indefinite if not infinite. Which meanings are concretely actualised, however, remains undecided until we have caught the full, multicontextually determined situation in which historical instances of television consumption take place. From this perspective, what the audience researcher needs to do is to secure the 'catch'. (1996: 70)

Ang (1996: 73) admits that because of the difficulty of taking into consideration the whole 'contextual horizon' of media consumption, it is easier to talk about ethnography than do actual ethnographic research on audiences. While we may acknowledge the need to take into account social, political and economic realities, a full list of these is virtually endless – for example, 'race', class, gender, ethnicity and so on. As Ang writes, "If not held in check, awareness of the infinity of intercontextuality could lead to contextualization gone mad!" (1996: 73). She asks how we can escape this dead-end. Her answer is: admit that the ethnographer always speaks and writes from a position, while at the same time acknowledge that all descriptions we make are by definition constitutive of the object we describe:

Portraying a 'culture' implies the discursive knocking-up of a unitary picture out of bits and pieces of carefully selected and combined observations, a picture that makes sense within the framework of a set of preconceived problematics and sensitising concepts which the researcher employs as cognitive and linguistic tools to make her or his descriptions in the first place. (1996: 75)

Because of these considerations Ang asks us to rethink qualitative research, to move away from its status as realist knowledge, in the direction of narrative:

Any cultural description is not only constructive (or, as some might say, 'fictive'), but also of a provisional nature, creating the discursive objectification and sedimentation of 'culture' through the singling out and highlighting of a series of discontinuous occurrences from an ongoing, neverending flux, and therefore by definition always already falling short and falling behind. (1996: 75)

Similarly, Lindloff writes,

In the final analysis, qualitative reports are all about perspectives of lived experience. The researcher must decide what kind of author he or she will be, and what sort of story to construct of the 'facts' of the case... Qualitative research involves the production of knowledge, not its discovery. (1995: 24-5)

As will be seen in the chapter that follows, I attempt to make sense of my qualitative interview data by drawing on understandings of the media as 'carriers of modernity' (Berger et al., 1973: 45). In line with Berman (1982: 36), I view the passage from tradition to modernity positively, because I see it as a process in which individuals are offered new ways of understanding the relationship between self and community. The narrative account I construct to make sense of my interview data, focuses on the role played by the media in enabling my interviewees to distance themselves (symbolically) from their oppressive parental cultures, rooted as they are in patriarchy. It acknowledges that a researcher who does not share my enthusiasm for Western modernity, could construct a very different narrative from the same interview data, one which tells how global media is destroying local cultural traditions.

The constructivist approach to research as explicated by Ang (1996), Lindloff (1995) and other qualitative researchers, has led to criticisms from quantitative researchers regarding

the validity of the results. However, as Maxwell argues, there are criteria for validity in qualitative research if one applies the concept of validity primarily to accounts, not to methods:

The applicability of the concept of validity... does not depend on the existence of some absolute truth or reality to which an account can be compared, but only on the fact that there exist ways of assessing accounts that do not depend entirely on features of the account itself, but in some way relate to those things that the account claims to be about. (1992: 283)

Maxwell (1992: 285-88) refers to 'descriptive validity', which means that researchers should not make up or distort what they saw or heard. He refers to 'interpretive validity' – the accuracy of the concepts used by the researcher in relation to the perspective of the individuals included in the account. The core issue regarding validity in qualitative research is whether or not we are providing a valid description of what events, utterances, and behaviors *mean* to the people engaged with them (Maxwell, 1992: 288-91).

Maxwell (1992: 293) also discusses the issue of 'generalisability' – how far one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to other people, times, or settings than those directly studied. Qualitative studies are usually not designed to allow systematic generalisations to wider population. Rather, Maxwell argues, "Generalisation in qualitative research usually takes place through the development of a theory that not only makes sense of the particular persons or situations studied, but also shows how the same process, in different situations, can lead to different results" (1992: 293).

Generalisability, therefore, assumes that theory may be useful in making sense of similar situations. Similarly, Bryman (1988: 123) writes that criticisms of the lack of generalisability of case studies (and therefore much qualitative research) miss the central point. The critical issue, he argues, is the cogency of the theoretical reasoning, and this should be judged by the generalisability of cases to theoretical propositions, rather than to populations or universes (1988: 90; 123).

Maxwell (1992: 294) distinguishes between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ generalisability. Internal generalisability involves generalising within the community, group or institution studied to persons, events, and settings that were not directly observed or interviewed. External generalisability refers to generalising to other communities, groups or institutions. As Maxwell (1992: 294) reminds us, qualitative research seldom makes claims for external generalisability.

In contrast to the deductive reasoning of quantitative research, qualitative research is based on inductive reasoning. It proceeds inferentially from particulars to more general statements (Tichenor and Stempel, 1989: 16), with a flexibility of research design. Qualitative researchers often favour a relatively open and unstructured research strategy as opposed to one which has been decided in advance, which dictates what ought to be investigated or how it ought to be done. As a result of a flexible approach researchers often come across important topics, which may be worth further investigation (see Bryman, 1988: 66-67). In my study, the importance of some issues only arose as worth pursuing during the qualitative interview stage of the research.

I will now discuss the reasons behind my deciding to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single research design.

2.3. The argument for triangulation

Those arguing for triangulation acknowledge the methodological differences between quantitative and qualitative research, but maintain that fusing the two approaches in a single research design enables one to draw on their respective strengths. They insist that technical rather than epistemological issues should decide which research methods are appropriate, and that the issues being investigated should ultimately determine which style of research is employed. Bryman summarises the debate on whether quantitative and qualitative approaches can be triangulated as follows:

In some treatments they are viewed as competing views about the ways in which social reality ought to be studied, and as such, they are essentially divergent clusters of epistemological assumptions, that is, of what should

pass as warrantable knowledge about the social world. For other writers, quantitative and qualitative research are simply denotations of different ways of conducting social investigations and which may be conceived of as being appropriate to different kinds of research question and even as capable of being integrated. When this second view is taken, they are more or less simply different approaches to data collection, so that preferences for one or the other or some hybrid approach are based on technical issues. (1988: 5).

As Bryman (1984: 89) observes, those who claim that research methods belong to different sides of the epistemological divide have exaggerated the differences between these methods and ignored their common features. For example, he points out that quantitative researchers often include in their research reports brief transcripts of the verbalisations of their respondents; on the other hand, qualitative researchers often make claims of a quantitative nature ('many', 'frequently', or 'some of the time'). After all, he points out, analyses committed to the actors' point of view are not incompatible with causes (see Deacon et al., 1999: 7).

Thus, Bryman (1988: 173) supports those who adopt the 'technical' position in the debate, and disapproves of what he considers the 'doctrinaire posturing' of those researchers who are against combining the approaches. He believes that researchers should address the full complexity of the social world and choose methods in relation to the research problems posed:

If some research topics are more suited to a survey, while others would be better served by a qualitative approach, still others will be even better served by a marriage of the two traditions, whereas the integrated strategy may not fit some issues. The critical issue is to be aware of the appropriateness of particular methods (or combinations of methods) for particular issues. (1988: 173)

Quantitative and qualitative techniques not only have different strengths and weaknesses, but the strengths of one tend to be the weakness of the other. This is argued by Wolff et al. in their discussion of using focus groups and surveys as complementary research methods: “Although survey and focus group techniques are derived from divergent theoretical approaches, there is nothing inherent in the methods themselves that forbids their combination. In fact, the particular strengths and limitations inherent in different methods might suit them ideally to complement one another in a unified research design” (1993: 119).

Both Bryman (1998: 132; 158) and Deacon et al. (1999: 9) argue that quantitative research is best suited to the elucidation of structural regularities in social life, while qualitative investigation provides access to processes which link the variables, putting ‘flesh on the bones’ of statistical findings. If one accepts that each has a perspective to offer, a combination of the two traditions can readily be envisioned.

I will discuss how I have made such a combination in my triangulated research design.

3. Data collection methods

I have used a triangulated, four-stage approach to examining local youth consumption of global media in the process of identity construction. The four stages were:

- (i) A random sample survey, conducted in 1998, which examined, amongst other things, students’ social attitudes, media usage, and their preferences for local or global media.
- (ii) A series of 18 follow-up focus group interviews with a total of 84 students, conducted between 1999 and 2001, in order to further explore the survey findings.
- (iii) A series of 23 semi-structured in-depth individual interviews, conducted between 2000 and 2001. These interviews probed students’ changing media consumption practices over time.
- (iv) An evaluation of essays written in 2000 by second-year students who had just completed a course I gave in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. The course examined the main tenets, and criticisms of, the

media imperialism thesis. The course assignment comprised an essay in which students were asked to reflect on their preference for local or global media.

I will now discuss each of these research stages.

4. The questionnaire

4.1. Background

The social survey is one of the primary methods of quantitative research. According to Bryman (1988: 134), in a triangulated research design, qualitative research is usually a precursor to the formulation of problems and the development of instruments for quantitative research. The findings from the qualitative phase act as a source of hunches or hypotheses to be tested during the quantitative phase. However, as Wolff et al. (1993: 120) note, it is not uncommon to conduct focus groups after survey results have been analysed, with the aim to corroborate findings or explore in greater depth the relationships suggested by the quantitative analysis (also see Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990: 17; Hansen et al., 1998: 260). I took this latter approach. In this study, the quantitative research preceded and provided an aid to the collection of qualitative data.

There was a cogent reason for designing my research in this way. Given the historical divisions along lines of 'race' and class in South Africa, I was keen to test via a survey whether or not these corresponded with cultural tastes and preferences. In this I was following Morley's call to media researchers, "to establish the forms of interdiscursive connections which can account for the purchase of particular textual forms on particular categories of readers, under determinate socio-historical conditions" (1992b: 128). I was hoping that the survey results would provide me with a 'cartography' of student taste, allowing me to identify significant relationships between variables so that subsequent interviews would enable me to further probe the reasons for these socially structured preferences. I was hoping that my quantitative research would reveal the connection between variables at a particular juncture (see Bryman, 1988: 101), and that qualitative research would reveal the social processes linking these variables (see Hansen et al., 1998: 257)

My questionnaire conformed to what Wimmer and Dominick (1991: 107) call a 'descriptive survey'. Such a survey attempts to document current conditions or attitudes, to describe what exists at the moment (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991: 107; Procter, 1993: 117). I was hoping to gain insight into the social distribution of media tastes, in particular preferences for global or local media. At the same time the survey also conformed to Wimmer and Dominick's (1991: 107) description of an 'analytical survey' because it examined the relationships among variables and drew explanatory inferences. For example, I was keen to explore my hypothesis that there would be a correspondence between the students' class positions and their preference for local or global media.

4.2. The questionnaire design

With the aid of Professor Jan Coetzee of the Rhodes University Sociology Department, a questionnaire with 117 questions was constructed. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 1. One-hundred-and-nine of the items were close-ended and had 5 or fewer response categories. Respondents were asked to respond to each question by placing their responses on (typically) a five-point Likert scale.

Besides aiming to provide me with an insight into the relationship between demographic variables and students' media preferences, the survey also aimed to explore a number of different theoretical issues pertinent to media studies. One such issue related to the claims made by a number of theorists (for example, Thompson, 1991: 75; Willis, 1990: 13; Reimer, 1995: 113; Nielsen, 1993: 2) that in late modern society, many of the traditional sources of identity – particularly religion and the family – have lost their legitimacy for young people. As a result, these writers argue, individuals depend increasingly on their own resources for identity construction with 'mediated symbolic materials' playing a crucial role in this process (see, for example, Thompson, 1995: 211). The implication of this argument is that the greater the respondents' reliance on 'mediated symbolic materials' for identity construction, the more open they would be to the ideological influences of Western media. Likert scaled statements such as, "Most values our parents hold onto still have much relevance to today's youth" and "There are absolutely clear

guidelines about what is good and evil and that these always apply to everyone whatever the circumstances” were used to test the relevance of these claims for different sectors of the student population. Students were also asked to rank their confidence in a number of religious, state, and political institutions, including the churches, the police, and parliament.

Another focus of the survey was on students’ preference for local or global media.

Responses to Likert scaled statements such as “I connect more with American music, TV, and film than with South African music, TV, and film” were used to explore this issue. I wanted to test a central tenet of the media imperialism thesis that the process of media and cultural globalisation is resulting in global cultural homogenisation (see, for example, Hamelink, 1983: 3). The media imperialism thesis invariably assumes that the media play a key role in identity formation (Tomlinson, 1991: 58), often downplaying the role played by other cultural factors. I wanted to find out whether or not the apparent homogenisation of global culture had helped construct a shared youth culture, or whether the historical social divisions which divide different sectors of the South African population, remained in place. I probed these issues through responses to Likert scaled statements such as, “On Rhodes campus black and white youth lead separate lives”, “The spread of American popular culture around the world is a good thing”, “In attitude South African youth are becoming increasingly like American youth”, and “Youth have more in common with each other than they do with their parents”. The survey also examined the relationship between independent variables such as ‘race’, class, gender, and media genre preference.

Yet another focus of the survey was on the extent to which the ideology of capitalism has, as claimed by the media imperialism thesis, been internalised by local youth. This was explored via responses to Likert scaled statements such as, “The whole world is moving towards adopting Western capitalist values”, “Money and material possessions are the main indicators of success in the world”, and “Money and material possessions are central to ensuring a happy life”.

Finally I wished to test claims made by two media theorists, Katz (1992: 33) and

Buckingham (1997: 348), that young people are no longer interested in conventional news media but are instead getting their sense of what is happening in the world via popular cultural forms such as music and film. I tested this claim through responses to Likert scaled statements such as, “Having access to ‘hard’ news (newspapers, TV news) and being up to date with current affairs is important to me”, “I need to read newspapers regularly in order to get a sense of what is going on in the world”, “With the news and entertainment I get from other sources I could quite easily do without newspapers”, and “All responsible citizens should read newspapers so that they can make informed political choices”.

4.3. Data collection and analysis

The survey data collection was conducted under the supervision of Professor Jan Coetzee of the Sociology Department at Rhodes University, with the aid of his second-year research methods class who were responsible for distributing the self-administered questionnaire.

A list of students on the Grahamstown campus was obtained from the Rhodes University administration and provided the sampling frame for the self-administered questionnaire. In order to make sure that we had a comprehensive cover of the different study directions, the frame was structured by faculty. The drawing of the sample resulted in a well-represented group of students, and the distribution in ethnic composition and gender was close to the universe.

As Wimmer and Dominick (1991: 120) note, self-administered questionnaires should be pre-tested with the type of respondent who will participate in the study. Any problems should be noted immediately and areas of misunderstanding or confusion corrected. With this in mind, a first draft of the questionnaire was given to the sociology class for comment, and their suggested changes to wording and choice of question were incorporated into its final draft.

Next, a systematic sample of students living in university residences was taken from the sampling frame, and in the first phase of the survey, each sociology student was assigned 15 names from this list. Each sociology student was thus responsible for 15 questionnaires and was expected to return a minimum of 10 correctly completed forms. As this was a self-administered questionnaire, the sociology students were advised that the shorter the delay between distribution and collection, the higher the likely success rate would be in getting them fully completed. (For a list of instructions given to the sociology students, see Appendix 2.)

Non-residential students living off campus were also sampled. These students were identified as they appeared on the sampling frame used to sample the residential students, and then selected according to the procedures of systematic sampling. A number of the sociology students agreed to distribute questionnaires to the non-residential students. Again, each sociology student was responsible for 15 questionnaires and was expected to return a minimum of 10 correctly completed forms.

In order to increase the response rate, an introduction to the survey was written which explained the purpose of the survey and ensured respondents of the anonymity of their answers (this is reproduced in Appendix 3). The survey distributors were asked to verify the questionnaire results by choosing and checking a small subsample to ensure that the forms had been correctly completed. Despite this, a number of the questionnaires were returned with incomplete data. This could perhaps be accounted for by the length of the survey, which was commented on by a number of the respondents.

A total of 424 completed questionnaires were returned, representing 11,4% of the total student population on the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University in 1998 (Rhodes University, 1999).

The survey data was analysed by Professor Sarah Radloff of the Department of Statistics at Rhodes University using BMDP (biomedical data programme) software. The chi-square test was used for testing significant differences in the frequency distributions of

the responses for different groups (type of school, gender, 'race', and so on). The tests were conducted at the 5% level of significance with Bonferoni adjustments to the level of significance for multiple comparison. ⁱⁱ

The findings that emerged during this initial quantitative phase provided the themes that were explored during the qualitative phase, discussed further below.

5. The focus group interviews

5.1. Background

Lunt and Livingstone provide a succinct definition of focus group research: "Briefly, the focus group method involves bringing together a group, or, more often, a series of groups, of subjects to discuss an issue in the presence of a moderator" (1996: 80). Deacon et al. (1999: 55) write that although the use of focus groups in communication research has a long history (for example, Merton's studies in 1956), it is really since the early 1980s that they have become a popular means for analysing media audiences. Focus groups have become closely associated with reception analysis (Deacon et al., 1995: 55), which, as I showed in Chapter 2, highlights the social context of media consumption and the creative role that audience members play in decoding media texts.

In many instances (see for example, Morley, 1980) focus group research in the field of media studies involves discussion of particular texts by the participants. In my study, however, focus groups were used to further probe survey results. As Morgan (1988: 10) notes, focus group interviews are often used in this way, in conjunction with other, complementary, types of data-collection. Following the analysis of my survey data, a series of 18 follow-up focus group interviews with a total of 84 students, were conducted.

Group discussion on a particular topic or set of themes is the heart of focus group research. The interaction between respondents produces data and insights that would not necessarily arise in individual interviews, as the group discussion stimulates, elicits and elaborates responses from the interviewees (Hansen et al., 1998: 262; Morgan, 1988: 12; Frey and Fontana, 1993: 25). As Hansen et al. note, "It is precisely the group dynamics

and interaction found where several people are brought together to discuss a subject, that is seen as the attraction of this mode of data-collection over individual interviews” (1998: 262). Focus groups are also more cost-effective than individual in-depth interviews.

However, focus groups do have their disadvantages. Some individuals in the group may dominate the discussion, so that other members are silenced. Group discussions tend to work towards ‘consensus’, so dissenting views may be marginalized (Morgan, 1988: 20; Hansen et al., 1998: 263). Finally, as Morgan (1988: 21) observes, one pays the price for relying on group interaction – compared to the one-to-one interview, the researcher has less control in managing what data is actually collected.

5.2. Sampling and recruitment of groups

As Hansen et al. (1998: 265) point out, audience studies using focus group methodology often draw participants from ‘naturally’ existing communities (such as, in my case, Rhodes University) and that this clearly makes the task of engaging the desired participants easier than drawing them completely at random. Focus group studies in media research have rarely sought to obtain groups representative of the general population. Rather, they have selected groups according to specific dimensions thought to be of significance to the way in which people use and interpret media content (Hansen et al. 1998: 265). According to Deacon et al. (1999: 54), what is common to all qualitative sampling procedures, is that the selection of sample units is consciously shaped by the research agenda.

My sampling technique for the focus groups was non-random in that I deliberately selected sample units (Deacon et al, 1999: 41). My choice of focus group interviewees was shaped by a number of factors significant in students’ media preferences, particularly ‘race’ and school education (an important marker of social class in South Africa, as discussed in Chapter 3).

My non-random sampling techniques included ‘snowball’, ‘convenience’, and ‘typical-case’ sampling techniques. My reliance on three different sampling procedures is not

uncommon in focus group research. As Deacon et al. (1999: 54) observe, there is no consistency in sampling procedures used in focus-group research and so the various sampling methods used are often hybrids of existing sampling strategies. Qualitative sampling strategies are rarely straightforward matters involving well-established sampling protocols. They often depend upon the creativity and resourcefulness of the researcher. As such, Deacon et al., 1999: 54-55) observe, there is no consensus in the methods adopted by focus group researchers in the field of media studies.

Snowball sampling depends on initial contacts suggesting further people for the researcher to approach. Convenience sampling is even less preconceived and directed than snowball sampling and is instead the product of expediency and chance (Deacon et al., 1999: 54). Finally, typical-case sampling depends on the researcher identifying a case that exemplifies the key features of the phenomenon being investigated. According to Deacon et al. (1999: 53), this method needs to be supported by other, more generalised sampling evidence (in my case the results from my random sample survey) to support the claims for typicality. As I will show, all three sampling techniques played a role in my focus group research.

My overall sampling strategy was ‘purposive’ in nature, that is I applied ‘purposeful’ or ‘theoretical’ sampling rather than random sampling. According to Maxwell, the goal of this type of sampling is “to make sure that one has adequately understood the variation in the phenomenon of interest in the setting, and to test developing ideas about the setting by selecting phenomena that are crucial to the validity of those ideas” (1992: 293).

Given the correspondence, confirmed by my survey, of ‘race’, school education, and media consumption preferences, I tried, where possible, to constitute homogeneous focus groups around these variables. Many researchers believe that homogeneous groups are more enabling for discussion as participants feel more comfortable with each other than in heterogeneous groups (see Morgan, 1988: 47). Initial focus groups were recruited from my students in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. In a number of instances I asked respondents to suggest volunteers for further focus group

interviews. On a few occasions I went to the student union where I sought out students who fitted my research needs – for example, Indian or coloured students. In these instances I would ask the person I had made contact with to bring along people he or she knew to the interview. A combination of expedient and typical-case sampling occurred when I came across a group of fashionably dressed African students, speaking with an American drawl and discussing hip-hop music. I (correctly) predicted, as a result of these signs, that they had attended Model C or private schools. I recruited them for a focus group interview. Another way of recruiting respondents (in that it often resulted in heterogeneous groups) was to approach lecturers in different departments asking them to announce in their classes that I was looking for focus group volunteers. Because I knew that a large proportion of Indian students on campus study Pharmacy, I deliberately recruited volunteers from this Department. This was another example of typical case sampling.

To ensure that the students turned up for the interviews, and also because I was asking each participant to give up approximately 90 minutes of their time, I decided to pay each volunteer R30 for the focus group session. (On the issue of payment of interviewees see Hansen et al., 1998: 271.)

Hansen et al. (1998: 268) note that the number of focus groups one decides to form depends on the aims of the research and the available resources. They say that one should have a minimum of six groups, and recruit more groups until comments begin to repeat and little new material is generated. Lunt and Livingstone concur: “A useful rule of thumb holds that for any given category of people discussing a particular topic there are only so many stories to be told. Hence one should continue to run new groups until the last group has nothing new to add, but merely repeats previous contributions” (1996: 82-3). (For a similar view see Knodel, 1993: 36.) Thus, Hansen et al. (1998: 268) conclude that the single main factor in deciding on the number of groups must be the types of comparisons across different groups or population characteristics specified by the objectives of the research. (For a similar view see Morgan, 1988: 42.) Taking these considerations into account I constituted focus groups along lines of ‘race’ (African,

Indian, white, and coloured) and school education (DET, private/Model C, which in most cases corresponded with social class differences). Whenever possible these were homogeneous, but in a number of instances they were mixed.

Because students sometimes did not turn up for the pre-arranged focus group interview, it was not always possible for me to achieve the optimum size of between five and nine people (Hansen et al., 1998: 270). In one instance only two of my volunteers arrived for the interview. Despite the claims by some writers (for example, Lunt and Livingstone, 1998: 82-3; Morgan 1988: 43) that with fewer than six people it might be hard to generate discussion, this proved to be one of my most productive sessions (see the interview with Sharon and Remembrance in Chapter 10). On the other hand, on the two occasions that I had larger than optimum groups, I did observe that less vocal members became marginalized during the discussion. (For a discussion of this potential problem see Lunt and Livingstone, 1998: 82-3; Morgan 1988: 43.)

5.3. Interview setting

Morgan (1988: 60) states that the interview site must balance the needs of the researcher with those of the participants, recommending the most likely venues are at the researcher's office, at participants' homes, or at some neutral site such as a church (also see Krueger, 1993: 68). I chose my office because of its convenience to me as well as the students situated as it is, on campus. I felt that the topic (media consumption patterns) was uncontroversial enough for me not to have to seek out a more neutral setting.

5.4. My role as moderator

Following Hansen et al. (1998: 272) and Morgan (1988: 57), I saw my role as moderator of the focus group discussions to facilitate and stimulate discussion and not dominate proceedings. I had to ensure that the research topics and foci were covered in the course of the discussion, that a reasonable balance of contributions was maintained, and that the discussion was kept on course. While in many instances my own socio-demographic profile (white, middle-aged, heterosexual, and male) did not match those of the

interviewees, given the nature of the topic, this did not, I believe, impede the discussions. In all cases, I believe, I was able to establish a rapport with the students.

5.5. The interview guide

To ensure that the discussion remained focused on the subjects and issues relevant to my research, I drew up an interview guide (see Appendix 4). This was done partly to ensure that similar issues were discussed in different groups to enable later comparison (see Knodel, 1993: 37). As discussed, I conducted the focus groups after the survey results had been analysed, with the aim of corroborating findings and exploring in greater depth the relationships suggested by the survey. My interview guide was shaped by these considerations. I isolated the main themes of my survey and then listed the appropriate survey questions accordingly (see Morgan, 1988: 56; Knodel, 1993: 36-7). For example, the theme of students' attitudes towards American media and popular culture was covered by five related questions at various points in the survey.

However, on Morgan's (1988: 56) suggestion, I did not follow the guide in too rigid a fashion. I felt free to probe more deeply when necessary, and follow new topics if they arose. This is to be expected in qualitative interviewing where evidence can allow the processes which link the variables, revealed in the quantitative stage of the research, to be revealed (Bryman, 1988: 142; Hansen et al., 1998: 257). So for example, while my survey results revealed that African students who had attended DET schools were less likely to consume American media than African, Indian, white, and coloured students who had attended Model C or private schools, they did not reveal the reasons for this. These reasons, however, emerged in my focus group interviews with African students, and as a result, I spent more time dealing with this issue with them than with other groups (my discussion and analysis of this interview is reported in Chapter 7). Similarly, a strong theme to emerge in my focus group interviews with Indian students, African middle class students, and Shona students from Zimbabwe, was the hybridisation of identity (discussed in Chapter 10). As a result, more time was spent discussing this issue with these students than with other students.

5.6. Recording the data

Before each discussion I asked participants' permission to record the proceedings on cassette tape. Having obtained this, I asked each participant, at the start of the discussion, to introduce her/himself for the purposes of voice-identification in the transcription. To cross-check my interview findings with my survey findings, I also asked each student to give me information on their age, social class, 'race', study direction, and school education (Model C, private, or DET).

5.7. Analysing and reporting the focus group discussions

The focus group interviews generated information on the topics chosen for my research guide. I was able to categorise and label the responses and exchanges recorded. In most cases the categories corresponded with the 'headings' used in my interview guide. The focus group interviews also generated a number of unexpected themes and these were also categorised accordingly. Having categorised the responses from all the interview transcripts, I consolidated these thematically. These themes formed the index for my focus group interview transcripts.

When reporting the interviews in my study I had to maintain a balance between 'letting the data speak for itself', summarising, and analysing the material. In giving verbatim quotes I generally limited these to representative illustrations.

6. The individual in-depth interviews

6.1. Background

My decision to conduct individual in-depth interviews arose from a series of focus group interviews I conducted with African students, in which they discussed their rejection of American mediated popular cultural forms. What emerged was that for most of these students this rejection was a recent phenomenon which coincided with their entering the social and cultural space of Rhodes University as first-year students. This was an unexpected finding, because most of these students had grown up watching American television programmes and films and listening to American music music. (I discuss these students in detail in Chapter 7.) These discussions alerted me to the complex relationship

between media consumption and identity formation. They seemed to contradict (or at least modify) the strong claims made by a number of theorists for the centrality of consumption in general (Featherstone, 1987: 55-70; Slater, 1997: 24; Mackay, 1997: 8; Brown et al., 1994: 813-827; Miles et al., 1998: 81-84), and media consumption in particular, to identity formation (Kellner, 1995: 1; Bly, 1996: vii; Willis, 1990: 13).

My interviews with these African students seemed to support Tomlinson's (1991: 58) claim that media messages are themselves mediated by other modes of cultural experience. Tomlinson urges us to view their relationship as a "subtle interplay of mediations" (1991: 61). On the one hand, the media are the dominant representational aspect of modern culture, on the other hand there is the 'lived experience' of culture. Accordingly, Tomlinson (1991: 61) writes, overly strong claims for media power arise as a result of media theorists seeing the media as determining, rather than mediating, cultural experience. I hoped to probe the role of the media in mediating, rather than determining cultural experience.

My decision to conduct individual in-depth interviews to examine changing media consumption patterns over time was also influenced by the writings of a number of theorists who have pointed to the need to understand the interplay between the individual and the social in any theorising of media consumption (Silverstone, 1990: 175; Hoijer, 1998: 169; Bonfadelli, 1993: 232). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 in which I correlate biographical experience with various media in the context of social structures and relationships (for example, school, family, university).

6.2. Sampling and recruitment of individual interviewees

Following much qualitative research, I drew on a small, non-random sample of unknown representativeness (Bryman, 1988: 104). In keeping with the research aims of qualitative research, as already discussed, it is not the generalisability of cases to populations or universes that is important, but rather the generalisability to theoretical propositions (Bryman, 1988: 90; 123).

In total I conducted 23 semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with a range of students across ethnic composition, study directions, and social classes.

7. The student essays

When planning the design of this research, I decided to include essays written by second-year students who had just completed a course I had given in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. This course examined the main tenets, and criticisms of, the media imperialism thesis. The course assignment was an essay in which students were asked to reflect on their preference for local or global media.

The course was taught concurrently with my research and given this, the essays provided another opportunity to survey the views of a particular group of students, especially as they came from the same population as the survey and interview subjects, namely Rhodes University students. I have used the essay comments selectively to the extent that they supported, complemented, or offered a different view to those already found through the focus group discussions and individual interviews.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the four stages of my research process as well as the sampling procedures and modes of data analysis employed. I also discussed the concept of triangulation in justifying my decision to combine qualitative and quantitative research techniques. In the next chapter I draw on focus group and individual in-depth interviews with students in order to examine the role played by global media in enabling local consumers to put a symbolic and imaginative distance between themselves and the conditions of their day-to-day lives.

ⁱ Bryman (1988: 15) does note that some writers would probably challenge the treatment of the two terms as synonyms.

ⁱⁱ All significance tests examine a null hypothesis which states that there is no difference between two samples or that there is no relation between two variables. The significance test works out the probability that the null hypothesis is true. In the social sciences the cut-off point, referred to as the significance level, is usually 5% (0,05) (equivalent to 95% confidence limits). If the probability that results from the test is less than 5%, then we reject the null hypothesis. This means that we reject the idea that this is due to sampling error and that the difference in the sample reflects a difference in the population. Chi square is a frequently used test of significance in the social sciences (Harvey and MacDonald, 1993: 248; Babbie, 1989: 460).

Chapter 6

Global media and symbolic distancing

The idea of ‘self as story’ both overlaps and contrasts with other models of identity. It also extends the idea of ‘culture’ and ‘media’ beyond the organisational structures of, say, the culture industries, broadcasting or the published media, into the everyday modes in which we express and construct our lives in personal terms, telling our own stories. It makes the assumption that it is valuable to look not just at the products of professionals and specialists but also at the practices of ordinary people in their everyday lives. (Finnegan, 1997: 69)

Qualitative research involves the production of knowledge, not its discovery. (Lindloff, 1995: 25)

1. Symbolic distancing

In his critique of the media imperialism thesis, Thompson points out that part of the attraction of global media for local audiences is that their consumption often provides meanings which enable “...the accentuation of symbolic distancing from the spatial-temporal contexts of everyday life” (1995: 175). The appropriation of these materials, he further notes, enables individuals “...to take some distance from the conditions of their day-to-day lives – not literally but symbolically, imaginatively, vicariously” (1995: 175). Through this process, he writes, “...[I]ndividuals are able to gain some conception, however partial, of ways of life and life conditions which differ significantly from their own” (1995: 175). Thus, global media images can provide a resource for individuals to think critically about their own lives and life conditions (1995: 175).

Davis and Davis (1995) provide an example of such ‘symbolic distancing’. Writing about the exposure of young people in a semi-rural Moroccan town to an increasing array of Western media between the early 1980s and 1990s, they note:

The rapidly expanding array of media was used by adolescents in a period of rapid social change to re-imagine many aspects of their lives, including a desire for more autonomy, for more variety in heterosexual interactions, and for more choice of job and of a mate. While male and female media consumption varied, they used media with similar goals. (1995: 578)

Similarly, Appadurai (1990: 7) and Deswaan (1989: 720) argue that the attraction of global media forms is that they provide cultural meanings which transcend the confines of local meanings. Writing on the impact of global media on Dutch youth, Deswaan notes:

The power of attraction of the nationless culture lies precisely in its internationalism, in the absence of frontiers. For the young it is a way of distancing themselves from parental authority, which operates precisely through local frameworks. For the poor it is a way of escaping, at least symbolically, from the place to which they are tied. And for everyone the world-wide dimension has a fascination, an excitement and an emotional power of its own. (1989: 720)

These insights into ‘symbolic distancing’ are part of a wider theoretical claim, discussed in Chapter 1, which argues that the artefacts produced by the culture industries provide the resources for cultural resistance to dominant or hegemonic societal meanings.

There was a similar response to black American culture among people in Sophiatown in the 1950s. Hannerz writes:

The Sophiatowners were confronted with an adversary – the government and all those supporting it... To the people of the township, a cosmopolitan aesthetic thus became a form of local resistance. Accepting New York could be a way of rejecting Pretoria... (1996: 169)

Morley (1992) has also written of the potential role played by global or transnational media in symbolically transporting consumers out of the confines of local cultural

hierarchies. He describes the attraction that American popular cultural forms had for the British working class in the 1950s and 1960s, despite much criticism from the British cultural elites:

For those consumers, these products represented positive symbols of massive improvements in the material quality of their lives. For them ‘America’ was a very positive symbol functioning largely by opposition to what they perceived as the dead hand of traditional English culture, as defined by the cultural elite. (1992: 78)

Morley (1992: 76) quotes Hebdige on the perceived homogenising impact of American culture on British working-class life in the 1950s. Hebdige argues that American culture constituted a space in which meanings oppositional to the dominant traditions of British culture could be negotiated and expressed. Morley (1992: 77) also quotes Kora Kaplan who shows how the same products can have different meanings in different national contexts. Kaplan notes that in their ‘home’ context, in the 1950s and 1960s,

American thrillers/westerns etc. were seen as somehow ‘essentially’ right-wing, in some ideological sense....[However] in Britain the genres and narratives of American popular culture acted as a kind of wedge, forcing into the open, by contrast...a recognition of the class-bound complacency of the ‘Great Tradition’ of British Culture. (Kaplan quoted in Morley, 1992: 77)

Another South African example of symbolic distancing is the appropriation of American gangster styles evident in Hollywood movies by *tsotsi* gangsters of the 1940s and 1950s. The American gangsters’ opposition to the dominant normative values reflected, and gave meaning to, the *tsotsis*’ own attempt to create a cultural space uncontaminated by both dominant apartheid discourse and the social and political conservatism of their parent culture.

Similar themes emerge in a number of my interviews with African students. One such theme was the way media representation of Afro-Americans helped puncture the ‘reality’

of being black in South Africa. This was articulated in the following focus group interview with African middle class students:

Ann-Mary: I think in a way there is a sense of freedom [in American music]. It was sort of like black people have become suddenly like white people...like a sense of freedom, of inspiration. Things that we are not really used to. At home you sit down and shut up kind of thing, but you know we could see black people expressing themselves and that was cool.

Lwazi: Also I can understand why most people would be attracted to that. You see these guys driving fancy Bentleys, nice women, gold chains and all that...and how the society is being materialistic. I mean we also aspire. We also want to be like that so we imitate those guys.

Ann-Mary: It's an image thing.

Ntsika: Certainly there are similarities that you see with black American society. In terms of the struggle between blacks and whites they seem to have empowered themselves. You see before, it was like to be successful you had to be like a white person. Now you see that blacks can also get the money so we have to empower ourselves in that. So they can be like role models.

Ann-Mary: I also like the spirit of those black Americans. They don't have this inferiority complex. They're like up there.

Lwazi: It gives you hope that if a black person is given a chance he can succeed in anything. Look at sports, music, movies...all those things.

In 2000 I gave a course in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University for second year students which critically evaluated the media imperialism thesis. The course assignment was an essay in which I asked students to reflect on their

consumption of global media. Sibusiso, a female student from a traditional African background, wrote that her favourite programme was *Seinfeld*. She contrasted this to the local comedy *Emzini Wezintsizwa*.

Emzini Wezintsizwa is basically a comedy about life of men in the mine hostels. The programme enables me to learn about the suffering and exploitation of miners. However, this is something I have known for years and honestly, I believe there is nothing new to it. On the other hand, global sitcoms like *Seinfeld* show me life in the developed world. I then learn how Westerners are not allowing [traditional] culture to dominate their lives. I also learn a lot about women's issues. In *Seinfeld* I often see Seinfeld dating or being interested in successful, independent women. To him and his friends there is nothing strange or wrong if a woman has a job and takes care of herself. However, on *Emzini Wezintsizwa*, you see men who have left their women in the rural areas so as to take care of the households. In this programme women's subordination is encouraged. Women are not allowed to think for themselves or be independent. I think that when local women watch *Seinfeld*, they see proof that women can be independent and as successful as men. This is a women's revolution coming to the South with Western television programmes.

These examples show that the 'essentialist' approach to the globalisation of the media is not necessarily an accurate description of consumers' experience (Morley, 1992: 77). Or, as Hall puts it, we need to disarticulate local/global questions "...from their somewhat over-integrated, and somewhat over-systematised formulations" (1991b: 41). While Hall is not willing to dispose of questions of power, he proposes that we need to conceptualise global/local relations "...within a more open-ended and contingent cultural politics" (1991b: 41). Or, as Silverstone, quoting Katz and Lazarsfeld, points out, "...an understanding of the use we make of the media must be contextualized by an understanding of the social world through which the media pass" (Katz and Lazarsfeld, quoted in Silverstone, 1990: 176). These more flexible approaches to the impact of global media on local audiences have been helpful in this research.

2. The individual and the social

In order to investigate the meanings that global media have for local audiences we need to be sensitive to "...the plurality of the social and the individual, a plurality which in turn involves both a sociology and a psychology, and their interrelationship..." (Silverstone, 1990: 175). He adds, "The isolation of the audience from social context which much psychological work insists upon, and the collectivisation of the audience which much sociological work insists upon, both distort the complex realities of an audience's identity and culture" (Silverstone, 1990: 175). Similarly, Grisprud has noted the need for media theorists to develop "more nuanced ideas about how socio-cultural structures and forces on the one hand and individuals and their minds and choices on the other work in relation to each other in the reception of media texts" (1995: 9).

Hoijer also argues for the need to take into account "...the interplay between culture and cognition", writing that "...[W]e need a mental perspective based on theories about how culture is turned into conceptualisations, ideas, memories, knowledge, and images in our heads" (1998: 168-9). She argues against the bias in reception theory towards seeing external behaviour and external circumstances as the very centre for reception: "Of course, such factors do have an influence on interpretation, but they cannot compete with the more basic influences of our collected social knowledge and experiences which we carry within ourselves" (1998: 169).

According to Hoijer (1998: 169), cognitive structures are built up in the intersection between three contexts: (1) socio-historical process, (2) socio-cultural interaction with the world, and (3) inner psychic processes:

All human experience has two faces: one side faces external life and social activity, and the other faces our inner mental life and cognitive activity. It is in the interaction between these activities that meaning construction – a socio-cognitive phenomenon – is generated. (1998: 169)

Thus Hoijer (1998: 170) distinguishes between cultural experiences which are products of a specific society or culture, and personal experiences, which are unique to the individual (Hoijer, 1998: 170). Thorburn, in his essay on power and ideology, makes a similar point when he writes that the forms of human subjectivity "...are constituted by the intersections of the psychic and the social, and may be seen as the outer, more conscious, and more socially changeable aspects of the person" (1980: 16).

Hoijer's (1998) view goes some way towards countering the bias in reception theory which sees external behaviour and external circumstances as the centre for reception (also see Bausinger, 1984: 343-351). In this study I have found that the interplay between culture and cognition avoids, on the one hand, the overly psychological bias of the uses-and-gratifications approach (Morley, 1992) and on the other hand, the overly-cultural approach often taken by a cultural studies-informed reception theory (Hoijer, 1998: 169).

Accepting both the cognitive and the cultural provides us with a more complex picture of how media are incorporated into the lives of individual consumers. The meanings that 'global' and 'local' media take on for individual consumers is more subtle than their textual content alone would suggest. My research has led me to agree with Bonfadelli (1993: 232) that media use and competency has to be perceived as the result of biographical experience with various media, and that these processes are embedded in the ecological contexts of family, neighbourhood, school and so on.

3. The interplay of culture and cognition

According to Silverstone, "To understand...the quality of 'audiencing', we must focus on the temporal qualities of everyday life, their narratives and their sequences, their short and their long *durees* and the role of the mass media in defining and sustaining them" (1990: 177). To illustrate this, I present in this chapter two of the in-depth individual interviews. These interviews are partly biographical in that they attempt to chart the complex ways local and global media are incorporated into the unfolding lives of the students. They also demonstrate the difficulty of predicting in advance the cultural, political, and ideological impact of global media on local consumers. This does not mean

that cultural power should not be ignored. As Morley writes, showing how American media are reworked within the context of locally lived conditions, “should not suggest to us that cultural power does not exist, or that the American dominated international media have no effect whatsoever – rather it should alert us to the *complexity of the modes in which cultural power is both exercised and resisted*” (my emphasis, 1994: 143). Or as Thompson (1994b: 134) writes, we can only determine whether particular symbolic forms are ideological by analysing them *in situ*, in relation to the structured patterns of power which they may or may not help to establish and sustain.

3.1. Zukile, American television and the ‘naturalisation’ of oppression

Zukile, a male student was born in 1970. His parents were both teachers at a mission school on a white-owned farm near the rural town of Adelaide in the Eastern Cape. The family, four brothers and two sisters, lived with his parents at the school. Although he grew up considering himself as coloured – “my father had very strong coloured blood, but he would not talk about it – the family was later classified as African. His father was deeply rooted in traditional Xhosa culture – “we lived our lives the Xhosa way in every respect”.

Even in the home, for example in my culture, the structure is that you respect authority. You cannot refer to them by name but you must use other references. For instance, I never called my father by name, and I’m sure I never will. I went to see my parents last week for a traditional occasion and told them that I did not want my little daughter to call me father or *buti*ⁱ or any other name. I want her to call me by my name. He asked me why I said that and I told him that I wanted to engage her in a way that would be open and where she would not be inhibited by having to refer to me in that respectful way because I felt that I would become inaccessible. He turned to my wife and said that she should never allow such a thing to happen even after he died as it would make him deeply angry with me. I cannot call my mother and father by name to this day. They were my first teachers in primary school and I call my mother ma’am and my father teacher.

A similar formality of relationships between parents and children was a theme that emerged in a number of interviews conducted with a range of African students. As Ann-Mary noted earlier, “At home you sit down and shut up...”.

From a young age Zukile’s identity was shaped by the separation of ‘races’ and the poverty of rural Africans under apartheid:

In Adelaide there were factors that brought that sense of community [amongst the Africans]. It was a downtrodden town and we were always angry and talked a lot about our circumstances as we were in the same boat. If we went to town on a Sunday, the white kids from the high school would beat you up and do all sorts of things. These are things that brought us together, not as friends, but because we felt that we belonged together in a situation that belonged to us alone.

The farm school was Zukile’s primary school. His parents were his first teachers. It was a Department of Education and Training (DET), solely for African pupils and under-resourced when compared to the white schools in Adelaide. From an early age Zukile’s identity was shaped by both his identification with other African children in similar circumstances as well as his perceived difference from the white children he encountered on his trips to town.

I was affected. I feel the effects in my personality and character and even in my temperament sometimes. But when I relate to other people I begin to ask myself whether it is a natural thing and has got to be like this because you still feel different. You talk to black people and begin to identify a lot of similarities in terms of your feelings and their feelings. There is the “you will always be different” in the daily discourse. You will always be black.

Zukile’s identity as a black subject, living under apartheid, was therefore produced as much by what he was as what he wasn’t. As Hall reminds us, identities, like language, are

constructed through, not outside of, difference: “Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’, abjected” (1996: 5). In other words, identities are not natural but are produced in a relationship with another. Morley expresses a similar view:

[R]ather than analysing cultural or (national) identities one by one and then subsequently (as an optional move) thinking about how they are related to each other (through relations of alliance or opposition, domination or subordination), we must grasp how these ‘identities’, in Saussure’s terms, are only constituted in and through their relations to each other. (1992: 68)

As a youth Zukile found himself drawn to foreign television productions because, ironically, they reflected his lived reality more adequately than local productions. American programmes were not experienced as ‘foreign’; rather, to the extent that they reflected local conditions, they were experienced as ‘local’.

There were very few local productions in fact that I could relate to. When I talk of local productions I think of things that were relevant to my culture. *Dallas* was, for example, a very extravagant kind of drama but it still had white people in comfort and luxury and that is what I grew up seeing on the farm and I could immediately contextualise it. In fact I was not aware for a long time that *Dallas* was not a (he laughs) local production. I did not bother to ask because why would I ask? It was life; it reflected life to us.

For Zukile, then, the American programmes he watched in his youth helped ‘naturalise’ his lived reality of class and ‘race’ oppression as structured by apartheid. This process of ‘naturalisation’ is one of the ideological functions of the media. As John Fiske writes, “...[T]he social structure is held in place by, among other forces, the meanings that culture produces. These meanings are not only meanings of social experience, but also meanings of self, that is, constructions of social identity...” (1987a: 254-255). In Zukile’s

case, the textual meanings he obtained from *Dallas* both reflected and reinforced his self-identity and his experience of apartheid South Africa. What *Dallas* and his lived experience both told him was that as a black person, he was somehow inferior to white people.

On television we'd see that these shapely glasses, cars and all those gadgets were white man's things. If you broke a glass in our home you'd be told, even by a family member, that you cannot handle white man's things.

Interestingly, Zukile pointed out that so deeply naturalised was his sense of individual and social inferiority, that anyone who appeared happy and rich on television was automatically 'read' as a white person.

Even Michael Jackson, for example, he came across to me as a white person, because he looked happy and so rich. So I never really bothered to look at him closely because he was so happy, I just assumed he was white.ⁱⁱ

Another example from Zukile's boyhood of the symbolic importance of media images was the televised boxing match between the white South African champion, Kallie Knoetze and the black American, John Tate in which the Tate emerged victorious.

The Kallie Knoetze/John Tate fight was very important for black identity. It had some special significance because we lived with the aftermath of the fight for a very long time. We talked about it for a very long time and when you visualise the fight, the picture that comes to me is of a black man and white man, it is not of Tate and Knoetze. I did not even bother knowing their names, but I always have a vivid picture of a very strong black man beating a very strong white man.

However, given Zukile's identity as a subjugated black apartheid subject, it was difficult for him to read Tate's victory as a symbol for black opposition to white domination.

I never thought things should or could change. But I got a sense of satisfaction from this vicarious experience in the victory of this black man. But I never tried to apply it to my broader context. I never even thought that there was anything wrong with the way things were arranged. But those occasional victories were really a source of great satisfaction.

Zukile had internalised the ideology which supported the racial status quo in South Africa. The satisfaction he got from Tate's victory was a localised satisfaction, read against his own lived conditions of existence. He had not acquired, yet, the intellectual tools to relate his personal life experiences to the macro structures of apartheid. Certainly the media he consumed did not promote these understandings. His response to the boxing match provides an example of what Hall refers to as a negotiated textual reading:

Decoding within the *negotiated version* contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while at a more restricted (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule. It accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to 'local conditions', to its own more *corporate* positions. This negotiated version of the dominant ideology is thus shot through with contradictions, though these are only on certain occasions brought to full visibility. Negotiated codes operate through what we might call particular or situated logics: and these logics are sustained by their differential and unequal relation to the discourses and logics of power. (1980: 137)

3.2. Zukile attends the University of Fort Hare

After completing his schooling, Zukile went to the blacks-only University of Fort Hare where "politics became a serious discourse". While at Fort Hare he came into contact with the ideas of Black Consciousness, as advocated by Steve Biko, who had attended Fort Hare University, and had died at the hands of the police some 10 years earlier. Black Consciousness made an immediate impact on Zukile. He rejected the identity of black

inferiority – so central to apartheid ideology and discourse – that had been engendered in him by both his family and the foreign television programmes he watched while growing up.

I began to feel black. Black had a kind of significance for me. You see the way it was before then it was quite a natural role that I had to play, to be subservient, to be whoever I was. But again, at Fort Hare, I could get out of myself and look at myself and say: “You do not have to be this”. I started wanting better things; I started seeing myself elsewhere in life, other than where I was assigned by my circumstances. So I became a different person.

The late 1980s, when Zukile was at Fort Hare, was a period of massive social protest against apartheid. Television was the main medium Zukile used at this time to keep in touch with local political events. Even though he knew that the news “was quite controlled” by the government, he would “not miss a bulletin”.

For example, when we went to watch I would simply look at the people singing and chanting. It ended there for me. We knew a lot was happening and we would reinforce that and say, “If other people are doing it, why are we not doing it. The interpretation [of the newscaster] that followed, and that negated what people were doing, did not have an effect on us because once a white face or a black puppet came on trying to explain, we did not listen. We switched ourselves off until the next time and then we would watch it again. Seeing people rising up...for us it helped show that things were happening.

This is a clear example of what Hall (1980: 137-138) refers to as “oppositional decoding”:

It is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way. He/she detotalises the message in the preferred

code in order to retotalise the message within some alternative framework of reference. (1980: 137-138)

Coming into contact with radical political discourse at Fort Hare gave Zukile an alternative framework within which to decode the television news. However, the oppositional decoding that he applied to the news broadcasts did not extend to his consumption of mainstream American dramas. During this period a particular favourite was the soap opera, *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Zukile saw no clash between his aspirations to social 'liberation' and success in white terms, in a white world.

The Bold and the Beautiful did not contradict my worldview...it addressed my aspirations. It was this beautiful world lived in by white people. My political awareness did not relegate whites into any status inferior to what they always were in my life. They remained the same as I'd always experienced them, so I felt closer when I started watching *The Bold and the Beautiful*. I did not set out to bring down whites, but I wanted to get there. For me, the whites were a paragon of excellence, they set the standards so I wanted to get there and I believed that all people could get there.

The ideology of competitive individualism perpetuated by the soap opera, resonated with his own lived experience at the time, and his own desire to improve his life circumstances.

At Fort Hare it was a very competitive environment. All we wanted was to be the best. So we had internalised the capitalistic adverts in that sense, even in the "Bold" I did not see it as odd because that is how life had to be. People became better than others from the effort they put into it. The issues there were business related. How to get ahead in life, how to be better than the rest, how crime does not pay, and how criminals are punished. That was the gist of those programmes.

In line with the crude Social Darwinism which pervaded this programme, Zukile was oblivious to the structural causes of poverty and oppression.

All the white people that I saw had worked to be where they were. It was not something they woke up to. At Fort Hare we talked about these things and said that whoever wins, works for it. There was nothing political about it, no political inhibition that created them to be the people they were. If you were poor, that was your own fault. For example, the people drinking would never get anywhere with it. In the drama that I watched, for example, people that did things like drinking and did not work became nothing. There was an abundance of explanation of why those people were where they were. They did not want to work. They were dumb and they were black. That black defined a lot of things and not just colour. That qualified them for their status.

At the same time these programmes also gave him a sense that he could be better than he was, and that there were alternatives to the harsh treatment he received from his family.

Also, you see in my family there was no competition and no positive feedback. My relationship with my father was very distant. I could not look at him in the eye, and if I did, tears would come into my eyes, because I was so afraid of him, as he was so fierce. He would not talk to you at a personal level even if you achieved. For example throughout my school I had been trying to do things and my passing Matric [final year of high school] with an A symbol. [When I achieved this] it was in the local paper but was not recognized by him. It was never reinforced. No one in my family ever came to say “well done” or anything like that. I got it from TV, that you’ve got to be the best. I knew what I wanted, and I could see it in the TV but not from what my father. I could see it in the TV. They always impressed upon me that you have got to be the best at what you are doing.

3.3. *The contradictory nature of Zukile's subjectivity*

As a black South African, Zukile was able to decode the news oppositionally. His locally situated knowledge of racial oppression provided the framework for his decoding of news texts. However, because the American dramas, like his earlier experience of Michael Jackson, originated outside of the South African context, he used them symbolically in ways that transcended their denotative representations of white American society. They did not carry the overt traces of racial South African politics and therefore could become resources for 'symbolic distancing'. When he visited home, part of the attraction of viewing American programmes was that they contrasted with the locally produced programmes watched by his family, more strongly rooted in traditional culture. These American programmes provided him with the symbolic means to distance himself from the family culture he found so oppressive and unsupportive.

Yes, and *The Bold and the Beautiful* was not their kind of local drama; it was international and it was white. The few black faces that there are now were not there then. So it kind of placed me somewhere different from them.

Zukile's identity as a modern, educated subject was constructed in relation to the rural and traditional identities of his parents. However, it is worth noting that Zukile's decoding of these programmes operated within what Hall (1980: 136) refers to as the *dominant code*. Hall writes:

When a viewer takes the connoted meaning from, say, a television newscast or current affairs programme full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, we might say that the viewer *is operating inside the dominant code*. (1980: 137)

Hall (1980), as did many of the British media theorists developing the cultural studies approach to media reception at this time, limits himself specifically to news and current affairs genres. However, his analysis obviously can be extended to the consumption of a wide range of television genres.

The need to distance himself symbolically from his family influenced his decision to watch American sitcoms in their presence.

I used to watch American comedy, not understanding a word. But, whenever there was laughter [on the soundtrack] (laughs), I would laugh alone. People at home would be amazed that I could understand these things and they could not. My grasp of the language was at a very elementary stage, but I wanted to create an impression. So TV provided this opportunity for me to develop an identity for myself – who am I... I am going somewhere, I am better, I've got to be better. My reality and that of my immediate environment was quite different from what the TV was bringing to me, but as I say, those were my aspirations then.

Of significance is that these programmes were in English, a language Zukile had come to use increasingly at Fort Hare University. English was associated with the modern subject that he wished to become. In the traditional rural environment within which he was raised, and in which his parents still lived, "...it was odd to speak in English or even to include a word of English in a sentence".

Featherstone (1990: 9-10), drawing on Douglas and Isherwood's research, provides insight into some of the dynamics described by Zukile. Featherstone emphasises the way in which goods are used to draw the lines of social relationships:

Our enjoyment of goods... is only partly related to their physical consumption, being also crucially linked to their use as markers; we enjoy, for example, sharing the names of goods with others... In addition the mastery of the cultural person entails a seemingly 'natural' mastery not only of information... but also of how to use and consume appropriately and with natural ease in every situation. (1990b: 9-10)

The social context of Zukile's consumption practices was one in which modernity was opposed by tradition. The pleasure Zukile obtained from these foreign television

programmes resulted in a large degree from the way they were able to act as a sign for modernity. His signs of enjoyment were meant to signal his participation in the modern world the programmes described, rather than the pre-modern circumstances of his viewing.

Besides Zukile's need to distance himself from his family, his preference for foreign television programmes was also rooted in his desire to improve himself. Given the oppressive climate of apartheid South Africa, he found that he had to look outside of the country in order to find relevant role models.

I got these [role models] from the media because even in Adelaide, there were no role models. People that made it were those that were selling dagga, people who owned *shebeens* [illegal drinking taverns], those are the ones for us that made it. I am glad that I did not take after them even though they were the only available models. So even in my social environment, there was no reinforcement of competitiveness, it was only when you watched TV that you saw the different life.

At Fort Hare, American popular cultural forms carried a status associated with sophistication. While local black productions often dealt with traditional themes, the modern was represented largely by foreign productions. Given Zukile's desire to remake himself, the lure of modernity is unsurprising.

We impressed one another, because the movies that we watched defined you. It said something about you. For example, you would not want to be seen going to watch only the isiXhosa movies, you would want to be seen to be watching something with status; and status was what it was. *The Bold and the Beautiful* was status, knowing these kinds of personalities in movies. People would come back talking about Schwarzenegger, James Bond, and so you had to know those people to be a person that knew something. America was a powerful nation. Americans came first, they were the role models.

As he had done earlier with regard to Michael Jackson, Zukile now disassociated the white American culture he experienced in film and television from its 'whiteness'. America came to represent modernity in the sense that there one could make and re-make oneself as a result of one's own actions.

I was disaffected by the white [South African] culture. We did not like it. It was very complex because *Bold and Beautiful* did not come across as white culture...it was American. White culture for me is someone that comes and speaks in Afrikaans. Afrikaners defined the white culture for me. The Boeremusiek [Afrikaans folk music], for example, that was the white culture. My perception of the white culture was anything that was aligned to oppressive Afrikaans. America was not oppressive; it was the role model, a land of opportunity. Let me look at that with the example of the Kennedys of America in relation to what was happening in South Africa...that used to define America for us. Those people were not like our whites. They were different. Jesse Jackson stands up to speak and they honour Martin Luther King...so America was perfect.

Zukile did not question the ideology of capitalism, nor of course did the media he was consuming. These media presented no political alternatives.

There was no alternative for us, capitalism was the system...People talked about communism, but I do not know if we all understood what it was. Even then, what I wanted was to employ people in my house, send my children to the best schools so that they could get the best jobs so that they could get rich...

With hindsight Zukile now acknowledges the shortcomings of his social understandings.

We had our rebellious attitudes but these did really not break the status quo, they did not. We wanted a better place within the status quo. It is only now when you engage with it that you see that the whole thing is wrong. Then, we were looking at targeting aspects of our daily lives, not the

whole system, which subjugated whatever we did. All we wanted was to have material things.

Nevertheless, for Zukile at that time, ‘white’ America provided a symbolic alternative to the oppressiveness and traditionalism of his parental culture, as well as the oppressiveness of white South African culture. One could posit that these representations were not read as ‘white’ but as universal. What these representations signified for him, mainly modernity, were very different to what they signified for black Americans (white oppression, black invisibility).

3.4. Zukile attends Rhodes University

Zukile only came to realise the ideological ‘effects’ of this identification with America when he studied for a Masters degree in Media Studies at Rhodes University.

Because of the theories that I have accessed, I am now critical of capitalism. I am also more conscious of what is around me. You walk down one street in Grahamstown and see the social mess of people...despondent, beggars. There has to be a reason for this and for me it is the system that we are running. It is capitalism, it is only for profit. Now that I am conscious of my surroundings, and matured by other peers here, I am beginning to form my own picture of what this world is like. So TV is not what I thought it was. Now I am engaging myself consciously with TV and things and my whole being is upside down. I think I am becoming a new person. At Rhodes I’ve been introduced to very useful theories...I do not know why they were shut out to me before. They could have helped me very early. I am beginning now to look back and to say that even our struggle was not a struggle because it revolved within the system. But now I’m beginning to look at the whole picture and say: “What is that? Why is that? How can this be like that?” I am beginning to raise questions.

Coming to Rhodes University which, he feels, “defines [things] very much within the

white culture” has reinforced Zukile’s sense of difference from this culture. He pointed out that “Model C kids who have come to Rhodes...have been in that particular situation [inserted into white culture] for an extended period of time” and as a result, find the move to Rhodes University relatively easy. For Zukile it has been difficult. He recognises parts of himself that remain strongly shaped by his traditional parental culture.

You see, the [white] lecturers, I cannot blame them, they do not have in mind a sense of culture in terms of basic ways of relating to each other and respecting [each other]. The way they open themselves to me is very much defined by their own selves. So I am expected to be that, but I cannot be like that. I do not want to be like that. But I cannot assert myself because I am aware of the weak position that I occupy here [as a student]. So it means that I have to assume the different self to fit in the situation.

Basically it emanates from that premise of lack of experience in other people’s ways and how people see human relations.

As a result of Zukile’s experience of the cultural politics at Rhodes University, his relationship to global popular culture changed. He no longer watches American soap operas. He occasionally watches an American sitcom “because they are not real, they are clearly divorced from reality”. As he noted, “I now try to protect my identity quite consciously. I have begun to watch things quite consciously”. He now prefers local programmes, like the drama series *Soul City*, which he feels play an educative role.ⁱⁱⁱ

3.5. The contradictory role played by American media in the life of Zukile

Zukile’s story reveals the contradictory role played in his life by American media. On the one hand, American television programmes enabled him to escape the inferiority, so much a young person’s experience of apartheid. On the other hand, American television played a liberatory role, giving him access to a ‘universal’ doctrine of self-improvement and social mobility, giving him the confidence to extend himself in his striving for individual excellence.

At the same time these media promoted the values of the internationalist capitalist system

(like, competitive individualism) thus supporting Schiller's (1991: 14) claim that the media-cultural component in a developed, corporate economy (in this case the United States) supports the economic objectives of the decisive industrial-sector, which is the global dissemination of capitalist relations of production. Zukile's experience of Rhodes University has resulted in a shift in his television consumption preferences which is a reminder that we need to view the relationship between media and culture as a "subtle interplay of mediations" (Tomlinson, 1991: 61). On the one hand we have the media as the dominant representational aspect of modern culture, while on the other, we have the 'lived experience' of the culture: "[W]e may think of the media as the dominant *representational* aspect of modern culture. But the 'lived experience' of culture may also include the discursive interaction of families and friends and the material-existential experience of the routines of life..." (Tomlinson, 1991: 61).

Zukile's interview reminds us that on the whole commercial media, being large capitalist conglomerates committed to bringing together audiences and advertisers, do not provide meanings critical of the ideological core of capitalist society. But at the same time, access to radically different ways of understanding the world can have a profound impact. As Judith Williamson pointed out in a polemical attack on those media theorists who now uncritically "grovel before popular culture", "...people's lives are *transformed* by the discovery of radical ideas..." (1986: 14). This was demonstrated in Zukile's case by his transformation after coming into contact with alternative ideas in his MA course.

3.6. Siphon: American media and patriarchal culture

As with Zukile, the next interview also highlights the complex interplay of personal biography, social structure, and media consumption in the creation of identity.

Siphon is a male social science student who grew up in a strongly traditional Zulu family in Empangeni in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Like Zukile, he is a product of Bantu education, having attended an all-African DET school where he was taught in Zulu – "even English was taught in my own language". Although he is 26 years old, Rhodes University represents his first experience of a multi-racial environment.

I will say something about my culture. It is still very strong...we're still embedded in our culture. My culture is Zulu, my ethnic group is just Zulu so we value everything, even the type of marriage that we involve ourselves in, that is based in my culture. We use our cultural ways of doing things. Everything is traditional.

As Siphso explains it, in traditional Zulu culture the mother liaises between the children and the father. The relationship between father and child is formal and distant.

If I'm maybe short of money, I have to go to my mother. I can't go to my father because that would be so rude. So I have to go to my mother. My mother is a liaison officer...so there's that distant relationship between ourselves and our fathers. I think with our mother we are so close because each and every time we share our problems. I can't go to my father with any problems. I can ask from him, but only through my mother. My mother will liaise on my behalf. We do not call our fathers by their names...or any elder person by their first names because that's being disrespectful. We also don't look at them in the eye as this is also seen as a sign of disrespect.

His father decided that because of the detrimental effects of Western culture, the family should not have a television set in the home. Siphso explains: "He believes that television is so polluted with a lot of Western stuff and that it can pollute our minds". As a result, Siphso's first sustained exposure to Western culture came after he had finished high school and moved to Johannesburg to seek employment. For just over six months he resided in the George Goch men's hostel, where he watched television for the first time. He was particularly drawn to the American soap operas *Days of our Lives* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. He would watch every evening and then, to reinforce his understandings, he would watch the re-runs the following morning.

I was very, very happy with that soapie [*Day's of our Lives*] because of the manner in which gender is being played there...there are no boundaries between them [males and females]. In our culture there are

clear distinctions between a male and a female in terms of roles and the way they relate. In *Days* there was a problem between Kerry, Austin and Sally. What I saw there was so amazing actually, because in our culture a girl can't approach you and say what she feels about you. She can't even fight for you. What I saw there was so foreign because these two ladies were fighting for Austin. I liked that programme because I learnt that everyone has got a right, if they feel strongly about something, to express it.

When you're brought up you're led to believe that whatever you see on TV is bad for our minds. But there is some stuff that is very good, like that one. If you love this boy and you can't approach him, how can you let him know? I learnt a lot, especially relationship-wise. If a guy can tell a woman that he loves her she should be able to do the same. I like that thing because if we can go along those lines I think our nation will be very strong because you won't have people who will become victims of their own feelings. Women should be taught to be pro-active, to be independent, to stand up for themselves...allowed room to think. Not like in a patriarchal society like where I come from. A woman there is just told to be passive and soft and beautiful. Whereas in this [Western] culture you can still be beautiful but you must also be strong and pro-active.

Sipho pointed out that traditional Zulu culture is antithetical towards whites because "...they are the cause of us losing our culture...because they make our culture look stupid". However, having been exposed to the soap operas while living in Johannesburg, "...I sort of thought that there are things we can learn from these other cultures...".

From watching soap operas, Sipho learnt that relationships between fathers and children could be different from what he had experienced with his own father.

After watching these programmes I realised that I should be allowed to speak to my father. He should be my friend rather than just my

father...just to dismantle that wall of formality. I think that if we can adopt that it will be great, because the manner in which we relate is not satisfactory at all. Maybe your mother passes away and then you don't have someone to liaise with your father. Also, if your father then takes some other woman who doesn't like you, how will she liaise...that's a problem.

Sipho believes that the notion of a woman working outside the home, which he first observed on television, could be usefully incorporated into traditional Zulu culture.

In terms of our culture, a woman is not expected to work. She's only expected to care for her family and kids...she should just be a housewife. I think that one is a terrible mistake that we just have to rectify because, if only a man is expected to provide, that can prove to be problematic when the father dies...This makes life very difficult for kids. You find them dropping out of school because the father is no longer there. Since our culture was created by men for men, we should change some aspects of that to make it suitable. Whereas in the American culture, which I found out when I watched television, a woman is also expected to work. Working is just normal for both partners. It makes life easier and I think that we have to incorporate that aspect of America into our culture.

Sipho believes that his exposure to these programmes will enable him to *choose* the manner in which he wishes to interact with his future wife and children. He is no longer bound by tradition.

I think it's sort of prepared me for my own life that I wish to live in the future when I've got my own family. I can't change an old person like my father. So it affected me positively because when I've got my own family in future, I will make sure that I practice those values that I find to be positive. In terms of relating to my own kids I will make sure that they are my friends, they are my brothers. I will make sure that my wife is my

equal. No one person is a head of a family...we are all heads. So as soon as we kill those mentalities that will be better.

I put it to Siphso that there must have been other factors besides the television programme, for example relationships with work colleagues, which changed his perceptions of gender and parental relationships. He denied this, pointing out that during this time he was unemployed and spending most of his time seeking work. He only discussed the programmes with the friend with whom used to watch television. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the other residents in the hostel were primarily mineworkers, and as Siphso points out, they tended not to watch these American soap operas: "They were not educated and they couldn't understand the language that was spoken [English]." Secondly, he felt embarrassed by the fact that his viewing of television was a recent phenomenon. This was a further reason for making his viewing a private activity. In recollecting this period he notes: "I can't think of anything that actually influenced me apart from the media part of it."

As the above discussion indicates, Siphso's exposure to American television programmes *contributed* to a shift in his understanding of gender relationships – he came to understand that males and females could relate in potentially different ways to those prescribed in his traditional culture.

3.7. The co-existence of Western and traditional values

Siphso's adoption of certain Western values, picked up in part from American soap operas, did not lead to a complete denial or obliteration of his Zulu identity. Rather, he occupies a space in which traditional and Western values coexist.

I feel I'm a very, very strong Zulu man. I feel I know what is good for the Zulu nation. Our nation will be very progressive and strong should we address those imbalances like having a woman just sit and care for her kids only. I will address those imbalances by starting with my own family and will talk with other people from my own culture.

Tomlinson (1991: 74) points out that Western cultural influence does not constitute an indivisible package that is simply adopted by local cultures. Rather, some aspects of Western culture are adopted while others are found irrelevant and are resisted. (This issue is also discussed in Chapter 9). Siphon makes it clear that there are Western values that he rejects.

In terms of our culture, a girl is expected to enter into relationships when she is about 20. In the Western culture a girl can be exposed to a relationship as early as 15 or 16. That one we shouldn't adopt in our culture. Another thing we shouldn't adopt from the Western culture has to do with the way they treat elderly people. I wouldn't like my family to be sent into an old-age home. According to our culture we support our elders, we bury them when they're dead. In the Western culture everyone only cares for themselves.

3.8. Pornographic films as educative tools

Siphon also discussed the educative role pornographic films played for him and his friends in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Some of my friends back home they like those blue movies. They like to explore new ways of making love and all that. That's something that is not there in our culture because a woman is expected to just lie back and a man must do his thing. But guys back home, they like to get the woman involved as well. A woman should be active in a love-relationship. That relationship tends to be very, very successful.

I think it's also very good if a woman can also watch blue movies because they should be active in as much as we are. I don't think that thinking should be done by one person only. Everyone should be allowed to think, everyone should be allowed to express an opinion. There should be a difference between respect and fear. Some of our fathers say that my wife respects me but she actually fears me. When everyone can communicate, whenever one is just free to say whatever, you'll be able to pick up

whether a woman respects or fears her husband.

Sipho's describes the 'progressive' role played by pornographic films in a strongly patriarchal culture. This is a good example of how ideology is not 'built in' to media products themselves. Rather to we need to examine the ways in which these products are understood and used by the individuals who receive them, and how the use of these products are interwoven with local forms of power. The social conditions of reception of the symbolic are as important as the formal properties of the forms themselves – an insight at the centre of the media ethnography approach. This approach does not link ideology to truth or falsity, but rather to the relationship between symbolic forms and power. This in turn can only be analysed in the context of the social relations of the consumers.

4. Conclusion

The 'progressive' meanings that Sipho derived from American soap operas and pornographic films emerged from the interplay between the context of reception and the formal properties of the text. For another consumer in another context meanings derived from the same text might be culturally and politically regressive. Morley (1994: 145) argues that one of the problems with the 'defensive' model of resistance to foreign cultural imperialism is that it equates the 'foreign' with cultural regression. It can be argued, he writes, that 'foreign' materials often play a subversive, and potentially progressive role, by undermining the certainties of established national or local cultural hierarchies (see also de Sola Pool, 1979: 124).^{iv} This would certainly seem to apply to Sipho.

It is because of the complex ways that global media are incorporated into local lives that Ang, in her discussion of the politics of television production and consumption, has proposed that we drop the "utopian search for a definite, substantial guarantee of what constitutes 'progressive television'" (1987: 12) which informs much structuralist text-based criticism (and the media imperialism thesis). She elaborates:

‘Progressive television’ should not be situated in a fixed, formal opposition against dominant television, but has to be seen as a temporary and local politico-cultural effect, the dynamic and overdetermined result of a specific confrontation between television and viewers, often unpredictable and seemingly accidental. (1987: 12)

Ang asks, “...[W]ho can tell in advance what happens when ‘the images of women constructed in glossy US soap operas collide with those daily enforced by the rituals of southern Italian Catholicism’?” (1987: 12). She adds that while it would be absurd to believe that soap opera representations would result in feminist consciousness-raising, “under certain conditions, that collision might help to articulate female objections to traditional constructions of femininity” (1987: 12). This correlates with the anti-patriarchal awareness the American soap operas engendered in Siphon.

Ang’s remarks bring to mind a remark made by one of my students. After a lecture I had given on ethnographic studies of the viewing of soap operas, he informed me that he had been ‘dumped’ by his lover because, as she told him, he was “not sensitive like the men in *The Bold and the Beautiful*”. She told him that unlike the male characters in the American soap opera, he was unable to adequately express his feelings.

The views expressed by Siphon, resonate with those of Schou (1992) in his description of the impact of American popular culture on Danish society after World War II. He describes out how American popular culture became a guide to “mental transformation” as Denmark underwent the process of modernisation during this period:

In Denmark, daily existence was changing for many as we left our agrarian past and approached a new status as an industrial nation. A new self-awareness was sought in order to come to terms with this changing world, new and more sophisticated ways of looking at life, new ways to communicate. The inspiration had to come from the most industrial nation in the world. American popular culture became a guide during this mental

transformation...One could say that it was instrumental in bringing about the 'mental' modernisation of Denmark. (1992: 157)

Schou (1992: 157) points to the role of mass mediated popular culture as a 'carrier of modernity'. Similarly Berger et al. point out that while modernisation is the "growth of a set of institutions rooted in the transformation of the economy by means of technology" (1973: 15), it also gives rise to a set of discourses and ways of seeing the world. This "modern world view" (1973: 43) is diffused through a multiplicity of channels so that it is no longer dependent upon any direct connection with the processes of technological production. They write: "Like other fully developed world views, the world view of modernity takes on a dynamic of its own" (1973: 43). Similarly, both Tomlinson (1991: 140) and Drotner (1992: 44) believe that the attraction of Western media has to be seen in the context of the attraction and subsequent spread of capitalist modernity.

According to Reimer (1995: 128) modernity is an attempt to combine the diverse and apparently disparate processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, secularisation, and mediatation, and to try to see these processes as expressions of a common intrinsic logic. Nielsen (1993: 2) believes the essence of cultural modernisation is to be sought in the process of 'individualisation', the expanding degree of separation of the individual from his or her traditional ties and restrictions. He points out that in highly developed capitalist countries in the post-second world war era, these processes of separation have shown an almost exponential rise and that "...traditional ties and ways of living that historically have constituted binding supra-individual relations have disintegrated" (1993: 3).

It is therefore unsurprising that Western media carry these modern values and that, as we saw in the case of Siphon and Zukile, these values can be highly attractive to individuals still living according to pre-modern social relationships, although their adoption is a highly uneven process. Modernity involves them in a process of individuation in which the individual is offered new ways of understanding the relationship between self and community (Nielsen, 1993: 2). The modernist theme of individuation is something to be welcomed because it implies, according to Berman, "a liberation of the human spirit"

(1992: 36). However, we must not forget that the journey from tradition to modernity does have an imperialist dimension. As Berger et al. (1973: 119) point out, an essential difference between Third World societies today (which includes most of South African society) and the process of modernisation in Western societies is that in Third World societies, the impulse to modernisation comes from outside the local culture. Thus they write: “To a large extent, modernisation in the Third World has been tantamount to Westernisation, both in objective social fact and in the subjective perceptions of the people affected. In these countries the economic and political carriers [are] alien importations” (1973: 119).

According to some contemporary South African intellectuals, alien Western cultural importations are undermining attempts at bringing about an African Renaissance (Pityana, 1999: 144). Such a Renaissance would include the re-vitalisation and application of traditional African norms and mores in contemporary South Africa. Pityana refers to the concept of *Ubuntu* which he regards as “...the most abiding principle of value in African thought and system of morality” (1999: 144), with an emphasis on human solidarity and the belief that one achieves true humanity through other people. Pityana (1999: 144) is directly opposed to the notion of individuation so central to modernist theory. On *ubuntu*, Pityana quotes Justice Dr Yvonne Mokgoro of the Constitutional Court who states that, “...its value has been viewed as its basis for a morality of co-operation, compassion, communalism, concern for the interests of the collective respect...” (Mokgoro quoted in Pityana, 1999: 144). It is the lack of *ubuntu*, Pityana (1999: 147) believes, that lies behind the high crime rates, rape, and corruption prevalent in South Africa.

This chapter shows how the complexity of meanings made by audiences at the point of media consumption makes it difficult to take a position that is entirely in favour or opposed to the penetration of global media into local cultures. As we have seen, in certain circumstances, global media can undermine local hierarchies of power, while in other circumstances they help naturalise unequal relations of power. Ang’s (1996: 70) call for ‘radical contextualism’ argues that any judgements we may wish to make on the effects

of the media are provisional. Ang argues for the need to understand the media's meanings for its audiences within the context of the "multidimensional intersubjective networks in which the object is inserted and made to mean in concrete contextual settings" (1996: 70).

Global media, rather than simply obliterating local cultural values, more often than not result in the creation of hybrid cultures, in which some 'foreign' elements are incorporated while others are rejected. It is the rejection of Western media by a particular group of students that is the subject of the next chapter.

ⁱ The term used to refer to a man in Xhosa culture.

ⁱⁱ This highly aberrant decoding of the Michael Jackson image might seem far-fetched, but research into cross-cultural decodings of American television programmes by Katz and Liebes (1985) points out that viewer understandings of the same programmes can differ markedly across cultures.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Soul City* is a locally produced drama series which tackles social issues such as HIV aids and violence against women.

^{iv} It was the tacit recognition by the National Party government that foreign television programmes could undermine the ideology of apartheid that led to the delayed introduction of television into South Africa. The Meyer Commission of Enquiry which was set up to consider “matters relating to television” was very clear about the political imperatives of the new service which was eventually introduced in 1976:

A television service for South Africa...should be founded on such principles as will ensure that the Christian system of values, the national identity and the social structure of its various commitments will be respected, preserved and enriched...(quoted in Strelitz and Steenveld, 1994: 38)

Chapter 7

The uneven penetration of global media into local cultures: the case of the 'homeland' viewers

The traditions of different groups are increasingly brought into contact with one another, partly as a result of cultural migrations and partly due to the globalisation of media products. But the increasing contact between traditions is not necessarily accompanied by an increase of mutual comprehension on the part of the individuals who belong to different groups. On the contrary, the encounter of traditions may give rise to intense forms of conflict which are based on varying degrees of incomprehension and intolerance – conflicts which are all the more intense when they are linked to broader relations of power and inequality. (Thompson, 1995: 205)

1. Introduction

Although, as I noted in Chapter 4, youth are intensive users of media, little empirical work has been undertaken to understand how *globalisation* becomes embedded into the life of youth through the media they consume (Lemish et al., 1998: 541). Given this, Lemish et al. urge media researchers to address the manifestation of globalisation in the everyday cultures of youth "...in terms of the cultural content which fills a significant niche in their lives" (1998: 542). In other words, we need to investigate the relevance, or salience, that global media texts have for different sectors of the youth audience. This was an issue investigated in my 1998 survey into media consumption patterns of students on the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University, as well as the follow up interviews conducted in 1999, 2000, and 2001. The survey was conducted by second-year sociology students under the supervision of Professor Jan Coetzee of the Rhodes University Sociology Department.

2. Demographic particulars of the sample representing Rhodes University

Tables 1 to 4 provide a demographic profile of the students surveyed in the self-completed questionnaire administered on the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University.

Table 1

Research sample compared to Rhodes University (Grahamstown) statistics by 'race'

<u>'Race'</u>	<u>Research sample (%)</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Rhodes University (%)</u>	<u>N</u>
African	24,9	103	29,5	1251
Coloured	5,1	21	4,0	168
Indian	11,4	47	11,2	474
White	58,6	242	55,4	2338
Total		413		4231

Table 1 shows that the 'race' distribution of the research sample closely reflects the Rhodes University (Grahamstown) statistics by 'race' for 1998.

Table 2

Place of origin of students, analysed in terms of 'race'

<u>'Race'</u>	<u>Place of origin (%)</u>			<u>N</u>
	<u>City</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Rural area</u>	
African	37,9	38,9	23,2	95
Coloured	70,0	20,0	10,0	20
Indian	53,2	44,7	2,1	47
White	68,7	26,2	5,2	233
Total	59,5	31,1	9,4	395

p-value: < 0,0001

Table 3

Social class of students, analysed in terms of 'race'

<u>'Race'</u>	<u>Social class (%)</u>			<u>N</u>
	<u>Working class</u>	<u>Peasant class</u>	<u>Middle class</u>	
African	62,0	10,0	28,0	100
Coloured	47,6	4,8	47,6	21
Indian	39,1	4,3	56,5	46
White	9,4	0,0	90,6	233
Total	27,5	3,8	68,8	400

p-value: < 0,0001

The class ascriptions, as reported in table 3, were based on the students' own understanding of their class position.

Table 4

Type of school attended, analysed in terms of population group

'Race'	School (%)			N
	Private school	Model C school	DET school	
African	24,8	16,8	58,4	101
Coloured	28,6	47,6	23,8	21
Indian	22,5	50,0	27,5	40
White	36,7	60,4	2,9	240
Total	31,8	47,8	20,4	402

p-value: < 0,0001

From the information presented in tables 2, 3, and 4 we observe the following:

- The majority of white, coloured and Indian students surveyed came from cities.
- Most African students came from small towns or rural areas.
- The majority of white and Indian students came from middle class backgrounds.
- Most African students came from peasant or working class backgrounds.
- Coloured students came equally from middle class and working or peasant class backgrounds.
- The majority of white, Indian, and coloured students attended either private or Model C schools.
- Most African students attended educationally-inferior township schools which fell under the Department of Education and Training (DET).

These figures clearly demonstrate the different worlds inhabited by African and white students, with Indian and coloured students positioned in-between these two groups. The majority of white students live in an urban, middle class world and have had access to relatively good schooling. In contrast, the majority of African students have come from a non-urban, working class or peasant environment and have experienced the grossly inferior education offered by the Department of Education and Training. (These findings are consistent with the South African trends discussed in Chapter 4).

3. *The uneven penetration of global media into local cultures.*

In the light of my interest in the globalisation of media, the survey explored whether or not the students showed a preference for global, as opposed to local media. These findings provided the basis for my focus group and individual interviews in which I probed the reasons for these preferences (tables 5, 6, and 7).

Table 5

Responses to the statement “I connect more with American music, TV and film than with South African music, TV and film” analysed in terms of population group, social class, and type of school attended.

<u>“I connect more with American music, TV and film than with South African music, TV and film” (%)</u>				
<u>‘Race’</u>	<u>Strongly disagree/ disagree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Strongly agree/ agree</u>	<u>N</u>
African	40,2	4,9	54,9	102
Coloured	23,8	0,00	76,2	21
Indian	12,5	4,2	83,3	48
White	13,2	7,0	79,8	242
Total	20,3	5,8	73,8	413
p-value: < 0,0001				
<u>Social class</u>				
Working class/ peasant	35,4	3,9	40,2	127
Middle class	12,5	7,1	80,4	280
Total	19,7	6,1	74,2	407
p-value: < 0,0001				
<u>School</u>				
Model C/ Private	15,1	5,8	79,1	326
DET	38,5	6,0	55,4	83
Total	19,8	5,9	74,3	409
p-value: < 0,0001				

Table 6
Responses to the question “When watching television do you prefer local or foreign programmes?”
analysed in terms origin, population group, social class, and type of school attended.

<u>“When watching television do you prefer local or foreign programmes?” (%)</u>			
<u>Origin</u>	<u>local programmes</u>	<u>foreign programmes</u>	<u>N</u>
City	5,1	94,9	236
Town/rural	17,2	82,8	169
<hr/>			
Total sample	10,1	89,9	405
p-value: < 0,0001			
<u>‘Race’</u>			
African	33,0	67,0	94
Coloured	14,3	85,7	21
Indian	8,9	91,1	45
White	1,2	98,7	239
<hr/>			
Total	10,3	89,7	399
p-value: < 0,0001			
<u>Social class</u>			
Working class/ peasant	25,0	75,0	120
Middle class	2,1	97,1	276
<hr/>			
Total	9,6	90,4	396
p-value: < 0,0001			
<u>School</u>			
Model C/ Private	3,4	96,6	322
DET	38,2	61,8	76
<hr/>			
Total	10,1	89,9	398
p-value: < 0,0001			

Table 7

Responses to the question “When listening to music do you prefer local or foreign musicians/groups?” analysed in terms of origin, population group, social class, and type of school attended.

“When listening to music do you prefer local or foreign musicians/groups?” (%)			
<u>Origin</u>	<u>local musicians/groups</u>	<u>foreign musicians/groups</u>	<u>N</u>
City	8,3	91,7	205
Town/rural	18,8	81,2	154
Total	12,8	87,2	359
p-value: 0,0031			
<u>‘Race’</u>			
African	31,1	68,9	90
Coloured	15,0	85,0	20
Indian	9,1	90,9	44
White	5,6	94,4	198
Total	13,1	86,9	352
p-value: < 0,0001			
<u>Social class</u>			
Working class/ peasant	27,2	72,8	114
Middle class	5,1	94,9	235
Total	12,3	87,7	349
p-value: < 0,0001			
<u>School</u>			
Model C/ Private	6,4	93,6	281
DET	38,9	61,1	72
Total sample	13,0	87,0	353
p-value: < 0,0001			

The survey findings show that students have an overwhelming preference for global media (for similar findings amongst youth in Israel, Denmark and France, see Lemish et al., 1998: 545). However, the figures also show that white and Indian, middle class, urban students are the most receptive to global media, while African, working class/peasant, rural students are the most resistant. This is not surprising given the correlation between

the preference/lack of preference for global media and social origin, 'race', social class, and schooling of the students.

The uneven penetration of global media into local cultures has been reported elsewhere. Straubhaar (1991), in his examination of media consumption in Latin America, has coined the term 'cultural proximity' to describe the desire by the 'lower classes' to consume local media. This forms the basis of his critique of claims for cultural homogenisation central to the media imperialism thesis. According to Straubhaar,

New research seems to point to a greater traditionalism and loyalty to national and local cultures by lower or popular classes, who show the strongest tendency to seek greater cultural proximity in television programs and other cultural products. They seem to prefer nationally or locally produced material that is closer to and more reinforcing of traditional identities, based in regional, ethnic, dialect/language, religious, and other elements...[T]he desire for cultural proximity that leads lower classes and middle classes (in terms of education) toward national culture may not be as strong for elites, who seem much more internationalised, as dependency theory would predict. (1991: 51) (also see Abu-Lughod, 1995)

Straubhaar (1991) fails to clarify what constitutes 'cultural proximity' for local audiences. While it could refer to the use of language, the narrative construction, or the thematic concerns of the text, the concept is, at a descriptive level, reflected in South African radio and television consumption patterns. For example, local music content averages for the public broadcaster radio services in South Africa indicate that the urban-based, English language stations play a much lower percentage of local music than do the rural, indigenous language stations (IBA, 1999). Two radio stations, 5 FM and Ukhozi FM provide cases in point. Seventy-four percent of 5 FM's listeners are white, while 99% of Ukhozi FM's listeners are black. According to the Independent Broadcasting Association's Monitoring and Complaints Unit, during 1998, 14, 7% of the music played

on Five FM was local. By contrast, 71% of the music played on Ukhozi FM was of local content (IBA, 1999).

The South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) has divided the South African population into 8 different Living Standard Measures (LSMs). LSM group 8 is the most highly educated, with most of this group in white-collar jobs. They are better educated than the other LSM groups, have low unemployment and have the highest representation of professionals and self-employed across all groups. At the other end of the continuum we have LSM 1. Two-thirds of this group have no more than 'some' primary school education. Literacy levels are below average, with one in every three people being illiterate. Almost 41% of this group are unemployed. The LSM categories were created by the advertising industry as a means of getting away from racial classification, but because of the historical legacy of apartheid, one finds that whites (and some blacks) tend to occupy the higher LSM categories, while the lower categories are mostly occupied by blacks.

If we examine the LSMs of the audiences of the two radio stations, we find that over 50% of 5 FM's listeners fall into LSM 8, while 34% into LSM 7, and less than 3% fall into LSMs 1, 2, and 3. By contrast, 47% of Ukhozi FM's listeners fall into LSMs 1, 2, and 3 with just 6% falling into groups 7 and 8. Similarly, 75% of 5 FM's listeners earn R4000 or more a month, while this is true for only 7% of Ukhozi FM's listeners. In fact, nearly one third of Ukhozi FM's listeners earn less than R500 a month. If we look at occupation, 45% of 5 FM's listeners can be classified as white collar, compared with 21% for Ukhozi FM. Fifty-six percent of 5 FM's listeners list English as their home language, with just 7% listing an indigenous African language. Ukhozi has no English home-language speakers, and 94% listing Nguni (SAARF, 1997a). Seventy-four percent of 5 FM's listeners have a Standard 10 or further qualification, while the corresponding figure for Ukhozi FM is 9%. Thirty-five percent of Ukhozi FM's listeners have either no schooling or some primary schooling. While there are no figures for the urban/rural split in listenership, we can get some indication if we take into account that 89% of 5 FM listeners live in communities of 40 000 or more, while the corresponding figure for

Ukhozi FM is 37%. In fact, over half (56%) of Ukhozi FM's listeners live in communities of less than 500 in size. What these figures indicate is that for rural, black, relatively poor and ill-educated South Africans, local music has a strong resonance while for white, urban, well-educated and relatively affluent South Africans, the opposite is true.

Similarly, television viewing shows a preference by the low LSM groups for local content and vice versa. For example, 60% of programming on the South African Broadcasting Corporation's SABC 1 station is locally produced. For the SABC 2 station the figure is 69%, and for SABC 3 it falls to 24%. Just 20% of SABC 1's viewers fall into the LSM groups 7 and 8. SABC2 has 38% of viewers in these groups while SABC 3 has 72% of its viewers in these groupings (SAARF, 1997a). Looking at the highest rated programmes on the different channels one finds that SABC 1 and 2 audiences rate local productions above foreign imports, while SABC3 viewers prefer foreign productions (SAARF, 1999).

Finally, if we consider South Africa's one encoded television station, M-Net, we find that 95% of their viewers fall within the top three LSM groups. With the exception of one local investigative journalism programme, *Carte Blanche*, the top-rated shows are all foreign (SAARF, 1999).

These statistics indicate that the penetration of foreign cultural forms into local cultures is a far more complex process than the media-cultural imperialism thesis allows for. In some sectors of society the global media resonate with local audiences (although this still begs the question of the meanings audiences make of these media), while in other sectors of society it is less popular than local forms. These considerations have led Mattelart to point out that,

[T]he idea of a monolithic, triumphant imperialism, wiping out all diversity and homogenising all cultures is absurd... The idea that imperialism invades different sectors of a society in a uniform way must be abandoned. What must be substituted is the demand for an analysis that

illuminates the particular milieu that favour [or hinder] this penetration.
(Mattelart quoted in Morley, 1992: 72)

In line with Mattelart's 'demand', the remainder of this chapter examines why a particular group of students, within the milieu of the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University, prefer local to foreign media, especially television. As we will see, this involves an exploration of the interplay between text and context of reception in the production of meaning and identity formation.

4. The 're-mooring' of tradition

John Thompson (1995), in his discussion of the complex relationship between modernity and tradition, raises a number of issues relevant to my research. Thompson (1995: 179) writes that one of the most powerful legacies of classical social thought – especially in the writings of Marx and Weber – is the idea that in the development of modern societies, tradition gradually declines in significance and eventually ceases to play a significant role in the daily lives of most individuals. Thompson (1995: 179) further notes that while this view formed an integral part of the 1950s – 1960s theories of modernisation, there are still many theorists who claim that the development of modern societies involves a process of 'detraditionalisation'.

In critiquing these claims, Thompson (1995: 191) argues that the theories of modernisation were simplistic for a number of reasons. Firstly, they envisage the process as inevitable, a one-way track from traditional to modern society. Secondly, they often see the existence of traditional and modern beliefs and life-styles as mutually exclusive. But as Thompson puts it:

For many people, the option of maintaining traditional ways or adopting modern lifestyles does not present itself as an either/or choice. On the contrary, they are able to organise their day-to-day lives in such a manner as to integrate elements of tradition with new styles of living. Tradition is not necessarily abandoned in the quest for 'bread and enlightenment' but

is, on the contrary, reshaped, transformed, perhaps even strengthened and reinvigorated through the encounter with other ways of life. (1995: 192)

The reason for this, Thompson (1995: 194) argues, is that secular humanism, which has accompanied the rise of modern societies, does not necessarily present a universal set of attractive and acceptable values. He writes:

But what seemed self-evident to some was to others nothing more than a choice; it was a privileging of certain concepts, values and beliefs at the expense of others, a privileging which had some indisputable gains but also, in the eyes of critics, some losses. Among the losses is what one could describe as a 'moral deficit' – that is, an incapacity to deal with certain questions of a fundamental kind concerning life and death, right and wrong, etc...Secular humanism is morally insufficient – or even, in the eyes of some, morally bankrupt. (1995: 194)

Thompson (1995: 194) points to the value of the “identity forming aspect of tradition”, which, he argues, has not been eliminated by the development of modern societies. For example, traditional beliefs provide individuals with a sense of belonging to a community, giving individual a sense of identity as “...an integral part of a broader collectivity of individuals who share similar beliefs and who have, to some extent, a common history and a collective fate” (1995: 194).

If we agree with Thompson (1995) (as I do), and if we wish to understand the cultural impact of the media in the modern world, we need to abandon the idea that exposure to global media will lead inevitably to the adoption of modern lifestyles and the abandonment of traditional ways of life.

Thompson (1995: 203) also points out that as people move from one part of the world to another, they often carry with them the sets of beliefs and values that form part of traditions. The quest for roots, he writes, bears a strong but ambivalent, relation to migrant populations. The appeal of the quest is the possibility of recovering and, indeed,

inventing traditions which reconnect individuals to real or imaginary places of origin (Thompson, 1995: 204).

Finally, Thompson (1995: 205) notes that contact between different traditions, in this case, modern contacting traditional, can give rise to intensified forms of boundary-defining (identity-as-difference) activity:

Attempts may be made to protect the integrity of traditions, and to reassert forms of collective identity which are linked to traditions, by excluding others in one's midst. These boundary-defining activities can both be symbolic and territorial – symbolic in the sense that the primary concern may be to protect traditions from the incursion of extraneous symbolic content, territorial in the sense that the protection of traditions may be combined with the attempt to re-moor these traditions to particular regions or locales in a way that forcibly excludes others. A region becomes a 'homeland' which is seen by some as bearing a privileged relation to a group of people whose collective identity is shaped in part by an enduring set of traditions. (1995: 205)

A number of these themes run through the interviews discussed below. Thompson's argument (1995) dovetails with the insights into 'cultural proximity' put forward by Straubhaar (1991). Both imply a critique of the assumed homogenising impact of global culture, a theme central to the media/cultural imperialism thesis. To develop this critique further I now examine the relationship between media consumption and identity formation.

5. Media consumption and identity formation

The centrality of consumption in general to identity formation has been argued by a number of writers (Featherstone, 1987: 55-70; Slater, 1997: 24; Mackay, 1997: 8; Brown et al., 1994: 813-827; Miles et al., 1998: 81-84). According to Miller (1997: 26), whereas a century ago the identity of individuals was rooted in production – as workers or owners

– today it is consumption which confers identity. This is because consumption is the one domain over which individuals feel they still have some power.

For some writers it is media consumption in particular that lies at the heart of the identity formation process (Kellner, 1995: 1; Bly, 1996: vii; Willis, 1990: 13). It is argued that the reason for an increased reliance on media consumption for identity formation is that in late modern society, many of the traditional sources of identity – religion, the family especially – have lost their legitimacy, especially for young people. As a result, individuals fall back increasingly on their own resources for identity construction, with ‘mediated symbolic materials’ (Thompson, 1995: 211) playing a crucial role in this process (Thompson, 1991: 75; Willis, 1990: 13; Reimer, 1995: 113; Nielsen, 1993: 2).

Dolby (1999: 296), for example, writes that popular culture at the end of the 20th century is a key site for the formation of identities and for the ways in which we make sense of the world and locate ourselves. She quotes Grossberg’s comments that popular culture is “precisely where our identities and experiences are produced” (Grossberg quoted in Dolby, 1999: 296). In her study of popular culture consumption amongst students at Fernwood, a racially mixed school in Durban, South Africa, Dolby writes that, “Popular culture, *instead of other dynamics*, such as politics, history or even family ties, becomes the ground on which affiliation is built and maintained (my emphasis, 1999: 301).

Dolby (1999: 305) argues that it is important to understand popular culture’s role in racial and class politics, and how it structures and dismantles alliances. She writes that with only vague memories of apartheid, and little knowledge of politics or history, taste becomes the basis for explaining racial dynamics: “The students at Fernwood negotiate racialised selves through engaging with popular culture; it is a site that is dynamic, constantly fluctuating and remapping itself” (1999: 305).

Similarly, Martin-Barbero (1987: 34) quotes Daniel Bell et al. who argue that the entire process of socialisation has changed because the site where life styles are formed has changed: “Today the site for the mediation of life styles is found in mass communication”

(Bell et al. quoted in Martin-Barbero, 1987: 34). According to Martin-Barbero, the old realms of ideological formation, the family and the school, are no longer the places of socialisation. He quotes Bell et al. who write: “The mentors of behaviour are films, television and advertising. They begin by changing fashion and end by provoking a metamorphosis of the deepest moral aspects” (Bell et al. quoted in Martin-Barbero, 1987: 34).

One final example of the privileging of the media and popular culture in the process of identity formation is provided by Kellner (1995). He argues that in contemporary industrial society a ‘media culture’ has emerged which helps “produce the fabric of everyday life...shaping political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities” (1995: 1). He continues:

Radio, television, film, and the other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless. Media culture also provides the materials out of which many people construct their sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of “us” and “them”. Media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories and images provide the symbols, myths, and resources which help constitute a common culture for the majority of individuals in many parts of the world today. Media culture provides the materials to create identities whereby individuals insert themselves into contemporary techno-capitalist societies and which is producing a new form of global culture. (1995: 1)

In Kellner (1995) we see the necessary link between the thesis of media imperialism – the spread of a global culture, usually American in origin – and the notion of a media powerful enough to shape our self-identities and our views of the world. As has been pointed out by a number of theorists, and was discussed in Chapter 2, theories which purport the spread of a homogenised global culture usually focus on the production,

distribution, and content of global media, as opposed to their reception. Similarly, the belief that we are witnessing the spread of a global culture is often premised on the assumption that the media are the primary shapers of identity.

The claim has not gone unchallenged. Tomlinson cautions against the ‘media-centeredness’ of media theory, which refers to “...the tendency of people working in this area to assume the cultural and ideological processes they study are at the centre of social reality” (Tomlinson, 1991: 58). As he reminds us, media messages are themselves mediated by other modes of cultural experience. In contrast to Kellner (1995), who collapses the distinction between ‘media’ and ‘culture’, Tomlinson urges us to view their relationship as a “subtle interplay of mediations” (1991: 61). On the one hand, we have the media as the dominant representational aspect of modern culture, while on the other we have the ‘lived experience’ of culture. Tomlinson (1991: 61) believes that overly strong claims for media power arise when media theorists see the media as determining, rather than mediating, cultural experience.

Similarly, Warde (1996) writes that more consideration should be given to other sources of cultural experience – for example, identification with national, ethnic, occupational and kin groups. This experience is not dependent upon shared patterns of commercial consumption. According to Warde, strong claims for the centrality of consumption lack experiential and phenomenological support:

While acknowledging that in some part the artefacts of consumer culture are deployed performatively in the attempt to differentiate the actor from others within and beyond a given relevant social circle, a more measured analysis will maintain that the answer to the question ‘who am I?’ is closely bound to that of ‘who are we?’, and that the answer to both these questions is likely to involve consideration of social location, involvement in social networks, involuntary exposure to persuasive communications, and so forth. The production view of the self not only underestimates the social context of identity formation but also *overemphasises the role of cultural products (particularly media outputs and icons of fashion)* at the

expense of the variety of practices which create and sustain social relations of kinship, friendship and association. (my emphasis, 1996: 305)

Finally, the research findings of Gaganakis (1992: 48), who investigated the experience of African pupils in predominantly white private schools in South Africa, indicate a fluidity of identity clearly dependent on context and situation.

The claims of Warde (1996), Tomlinson (1991) and Gaganakis (1992) on the relationship between media consumption and identity formation find support in this research. The remainder of this chapter investigates two inter-related themes discussed thus far: the penetration of global media into local South African youth cultures, and the interplay between text and context in the formation of individual identity.

6. The 'homeland'

In investigating the relationship between media consumption (and television in particular), identity formation, and the spread of global culture, I came across a group of African male South African students, primarily from rural working class and peasant backgrounds, who socialise almost exclusively with one another. One sign of their separation from other students is their choice to view television together in a specially created viewing room attached to one of the university residences. Every evening, with the regularity of the ritual it has become, 15 to 20 students gather to watch their favourite programmes. The viewing sessions start at 18.30, when they gather to watch *Isidingo* a local African drama set on a goldmine. At 19.00 they disperse for supper in the residences, returning at 19.30 for the African language news. At 20.00 they view a local black drama *Generations*, set in an advertising agency. At weekends they often meet to watch South African soccer. *Missing from their daily television diet are any foreign productions.*

These students have chosen to call their shared viewing space the 'homeland', a name resonant with meaning in South African history. Interestingly, the choice of name also resonates strongly with Thompson's (1995: 205) reference to the symbolic significance

of a 'homeland'.

As was discussed in Chapter 4, apartheid was premised on the classification of people into different 'race' groups and their segregation into different residential areas, educational systems and public amenities. Under this policy, the reserves, known as Bantustans or the Homelands, saw land, which had been set aside in 1913 and 1936 (by the 1913 Land Act and the 1936 Native Land and Trust Act) consolidated into ten ethnic geo-physical units. These 'national states' were the only places where Africans were allowed to exercise political and economic 'rights' (Stadler, 1987: 34). Disenfranchised from the South African state, it was here that Africans were supposed to express their political, economic and cultural aspirations – no longer as South Africans but as citizens of these independent states. However, since the first national democratic elections in 1994, the African National Congress-led government has promoted the idea of a unified South African national identity (Steenveld and Strelitz, 1998). The voluntary return to a symbolic 'homeland' by these students, and their rejection of foreign television, therefore requires an explanation.

What emerged in focus group and individual interviews was that many of these students grew up watching foreign television programmes at home. Their rejection of these programmes coincided with their coming to Rhodes University. Faced with an institutional culture in which they feel white and black middle class norms dominate, they have felt the need to consolidate and signify their difference. The nightly ritual of local television consumption in the 'homeland' is one of the means of achieving this. As Thompson notes (1995: 204), migrant populations – these students have 'migrated' to Rhodes University – often display a strong quest for roots. As Thompson (1995: 204) further points out, the appeal of the quest for roots is that it offers a way of recovering and, indeed, inventing traditions which reconnect individuals to (real or imaginary) places of origin.

Following Tomlinson (1991: 61) this chapter examines how their experience of Rhodes University has impacted on their television programme choices and how the meanings

carried by these programmes help mediate their lived cultural experience.

7. The 'homeland' viewers

7.1. Rhodes University as an alien environment

The majority of 'homeland' viewers come from the rural areas, having attended rural and township schools under the control of the Department of Education and Training (DET). Coming to Rhodes University provided them with their first close contact with urban, middle class African, white, Indian, and coloured students, and with white lecturers and administrators. The sense of being in an alien environment is reflected in their general lack of confidence in the Rhodes University administration, as indicated in the results obtained to a survey question on this issue (table 8).

Table 8

Responses to the question "How much confidence do you have in the Rhodes University administration?" analysed in terms of origin, population group, and social class.

<u>"How much confidence do you have in the Rhodes University administration?" (%)</u>			
<u>Origin</u>	<u>none/not much</u>	<u>quite a lot/a great deal</u>	<u>N</u>
City	29,9	70,1	241
Town/rural	42,7	57,3	178
Total	35,3	64,7	419
p-value: 0,0146			
<u>'Race'</u>			
African	59,2	40,8	103
Coloured	42,9	57,1	21
Indian	31,3	68,8	48
White	25,3	74,7	241
Total	35,3	64,7	413
p-value: < 0,0001			
<u>Social class</u>			
Working class/ peasant	52,0	48,0	127
Middle class	27,5	72,5	280
Total	35,2	64,9	407
p-value: < 0,0001			

The survey shows that African students from a working or peasant class background have the least confidence in the Rhodes University administration. This is confirmed by the qualitative interviews.

The 'homeland' viewers feel estranged from the dominant student culture at Rhodes University. The majority of them were initiated traditionally into manhood ("been to the bush"ⁱ) and thus find themselves at odds with what they regard as the infantile behaviour, such as excessive drinking and prank-playing, of other students in residential accommodation.

Andile: Because of my background I experience it [Rhodes University] as a white institution. Because I've already gone to the bush, I don't involve myself with some of the activities there. If I did, I would be compromising my manhood. I can give an example of the students water-bombing each other during exams. I don't like that. So instead of changing me, it has reinforced my sense of being a black South African.

Luxolo: Drinking...acting stupid when you're drunk, doing stupid things like shouting and trying to tackle trees. Broadly speaking, this white culture, they feel you have to be flexible, just take everything. If they throw water at you, you mustn't have any problems with that...everything, you must take it. If there is a formal dinner you must be seen to drink that wine big time (laughs). If you don't drink that wine you're not 'one of us'. Even the attire...you have to wear these big shoes. You have to be seen going to that gym everyday. These are some of the things that are disadvantaging us.

The 'homeland' viewers feel that the majority of African middle class students are no different to their white counterparts. They refer to them as 'coconuts' – black on the outside but white on the inside. One of the most obvious signs of the perceived assimilation of middle class African students into white culture is their preference for the English language.

Andile: You meet someone here [at Rhodes] and you greet him in your own language, and he responds to you in English. These are things which make us say that these people are fake.

To be fake is thus to deny your black culture. This is their perception of many South African black middle class students, and also many black Zimbabwean students.

Michael: There's one thing I don't like about (black) Zimbabwean students. I've never met one Zimbabwean person who is proud of his or her background. Everything they do is something that is done by whites. I've never seen the culture that is unique to them and them being proud of that culture. You know some white guys they drink, and then they take off their clothes and they run around campus naked. You see amongst them some Zim guys. Now you begin to ask yourself whether they grew up like that, or else it was only the foreign culture they adopted. And you'll find four of them talking together and although they can all speak Shona, they'll be speaking in English.ⁱⁱ

As noted earlier, there is a class dimension to this.

Luxolo: There are people from the urban areas we don't have any problems with. This again comes to the question of which people from the urban areas...If you look at them you'll find they're mainly from the middle class. They're the ones we have trouble with.

The relative poverty of the 'homeland' students, often reflected in their dress, also impacts on how they experience this university institution.

Luxolo: Even in the administration, the way they look at you because of your dress, they think maybe you're a *tsotsi* or something.

The lack of African content in the courses is also a source of much frustration for these students.

Michael: The identity of the courses is still largely white. I did politics for

example and we did Utopia and Saint-Simone. It was really hard. It's core European history and it's really hard for us. First of all we don't have the interest, and secondly, we don't have the background. We meet those things for the first time here in university, and it's certainly very difficult for us to master such subjects. Blacks who master these subjects come from Model C or private schools. They have the background and maybe they gained their interest while they were at school. So the content is very white.

7.2. The 'homeland' viewing room as a comforting space

The 'homeland' represents a space within which these students can live out their feelings of difference – "it's comforting" notes Luxolo. I spent a number of viewing sessions with these students. They provided a running commentary on what was taking place on screen. This was one way of reconfirming for each other the 'correct' reading of the texts. For example, in the local drama *Isidingo*, one of the African characters was asked by his wife to seek help from a therapist.

Andile: So we took this aspect and we talked about it. We said, "hey no, you can't go".

Luxolo: In our culture you don't talk to some other people about your problems. You're supposed to have the support of your family...not to go to a professional.

Thus the attraction of such local dramas is that they raise issues of cultural concern for further discussion. This in turn helps to cement a particular world-view amongst the 'homeland' viewers.

Andile: When watching *Isidingo*, it's quick for us to select a particular aspect of what is happening and talk about it. But when it comes to these white soapies, I find it very difficult. In *Isidingo* there's this guy on the

mine who doesn't want to go underground because he had this dream which said he shouldn't. Those are things that happen in our culture and they reflect the way we think.

The highly vocal discussion and running commentary echoes what Katz and Liebes found in their study of ethnic audiences of *Dallas*:

[D]uring and after the programme, people discuss what they have seen, and come to collective understandings... Viewers selectively perceive, interpret and evaluate the programme in terms of local cultures and personal experiences, selectively incorporating it into their minds and lives. (1984: 28)

All of the 'homeland' discussions took place in Xhosa. For ideological as well as practical reasons, English remains a foreign language. (The generally inferior education received at DET schools meant that compared to students who have attended Model C and private schools, the English language skills of the 'homeland' students was relatively weak.) As Andile noted, "We don't like English because of its restrictions to us".

The 'homeland', where only Xhosa is spoken, allows these students to interact with each other confidently, free from the ridicule of the better educated, more urbane, middle class students.

Andile: Whenever I meet with my friends we discuss things from where we've come. So people tend to say that we are traditionalists. That perception gives us the spirit to stay together to share this one vision. They don't see traditionalism as positive, they talk about it as a negative thing...you're backwards. We don't see a reason why we have to change because we are at Rhodes. If we can tolerate them, why can't they tolerate us? When we are sitting with these people watching TV, they'll make a silly comment about someone who can't speak English. We understand that in our places we were never exposed to many things and we didn't get a good education...so how can you laugh at someone who can't speak

good English? So we said, let's not sit with them because we'll always be angry. Rather sit with these people because we share the same perception of things.

Luxolo: We watch in the 'homeland' because of our interests. When I watch in the TV room with some other guys, they often make comments that offend. But when I'm in the 'homeland', I know we share the same views, we share the same things. So if they comment, I know what they mean and I understand it. Those who grew up in the townships [as opposed to the rural areas] have that mentality that we are stupid, so we tend not to mix.

7.3. The 'realism' of local productions

In contrast to many white students, whose preference for foreign television is because of its greater dramatic realism – better acting, staging, scripting and so on – the 'homeland' students find greater realism in local productions.

Luxolo: When I watch American movies I get bored with these technological things. I like it to be more realistic. In most cases I don't believe these overseas things...that the main actor will survive the whole movie...but he shoots everyone and everyone dies. So I don't like that...these are lies. When I watch South African dramas, these are realistic to me. They speak about what is happening, what I know. I understand why this guy is doing this. Not understanding someone's culture is a problem.

Andile: My personal response to *Isidingo* is one that is informed by my background. The very fact that our fathers and brothers were working on the mines...they used to come back and talk and relate these stories to us. So now what is happening in *Isidingo* is the confirmation of that. So everytime I see that setting I reflect back on those things they used to tell us – tribal conflicts, faction fights within that work setting. So it's a

confirmation of those things that I used to hear.

Luxolo: It's a true reflection of what is going on in South Africa. In [American] soapies, the poor person doesn't have a romantic life. They are only servants and it is only the rich who have a romantic life. *Isidingo* shows that these people also have feelings...they're not just mineworkers. They go to shebeens [drinking taverns] and they look for girls. In this soapie they show you this poor woman who works in the kitchen of a mine manager and is in love with this man who works on the mine. That is what is happening. Those are the kinds of affairs that we can get involved in ourselves, so we identify with that.

Luxolo's comment highlights the identification that these 'homeland' students have with the African poor in South Africa, many of whose lives are portrayed in dramas such as *Isidingo*.

7.4. The importance of news media for the 'homeland' students

In contrast to many of the white students on campus, the 'homeland' viewers read newspapers regularly, and are avid viewers of television news.

Andile: The media I consume are those which cater for me, which informs me about things I am interested in. For example, I don't like watching M-Netⁱⁱⁱ because it's full of fiction, there's no truth. I don't listen to Radio Algoa and Rhodes Music Radio because they just play music and I don't get any knowledge or information.

Lwazi: A friend of mine said something very interesting. He said white students here at Rhodes think that they are in England or somewhere else. For them to watch the news would be to force them to face the reality that they are in South Africa. To be ignorant about the news is much better for them, so that's why they don't watch the news. I like being informed, I feel comfortable that way.

Andile: Also the content of the news is one that begins to make you interested because you find out the news covers everything in the country, even the places we are coming from. The mere fact that you see a dam or a water scheme at a place that you are coming from makes you interested because you can relate to the content of the news. Everything I don't know about South Africa is being portrayed there. If there's a bus that's overturned in Durban, I identify with that bus. Everything that is happening in South Africa I identify with.

Luxolo: Also the debates about what is happening in South Africa and Africa. If you don't watch the news it will be very difficult to pick up what's going on. We like to debate these things amongst ourselves.

Lwazi: In the 'homeland' there are lots of debates and you can be ridiculed if you didn't know the current issues. So in a way it's important to know what's going on in the news.

The desire for news, indicated in these interviews with the 'homeland' group, contradicts the findings of Katz (1992: 33) and Buckingham (1997: 348) that young people in America are no longer interested in conventional news media. Katz notes, "[W]hat is significant is that younger viewers and readers find conventional journalism of no particular use in their daily lives" (1992: 40). Katz distinguishes between what he refers to as the Old News or Straight News – news reporting in conventional media – and the New News – “a heady concoction, part Hollywood film and TV movie, part pop music and pop art, mixed with popular culture and celebrity magazines, tabloid telecasts, cable and home video” (1992: 33). He believes that it is the New News that is increasingly playing the role of mainstream journalism of the past, “...sparking conversations and setting the country's social and political agenda” (1992: 33).

Commenting on, and supporting Katz's claim that Old News is irrelevant for today's

youth, Buckingham argues that, “Researchers have increasingly challenged the idea that young people’s lack of interest in news is somehow symptomatic of laziness or irresponsibility: on the contrary, it is argued that conventional forms of news journalism have proven signally ineffective in enabling them to “translate” broader political events into the context of their own everyday lives” (1997: 348).

In contrast to their findings amongst American youth, the survey results show that there is high interest in ‘conventional’ news amongst South African youth, typically through newspapers and television news, documentary and current affairs programmes. While this interest was lowest amongst white middle class students (confirming the claims made by the ‘homeland’ students in this regard), it was higher overall than the claims by Katz (1993) and Buckingham (1997) would suggest.

Table 9

Responses to the question “Having access to ‘hard’ news (newspapers, TV news) and being up to date with current affairs is important to me” analysed in terms of population group.

<u>“Having access to ‘hard’ news (newspapers, TV news) and being up to date with current affairs is important to me” (%)</u>				
<u>‘Race’</u>	<u>Strongly disagree/ disagree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Strongly agree/ agree</u>	<u>N</u>
African	12,6	3,9	83,5	103
Coloured	14,3	9,5	76,2	21
Indian	4,2	2,1	93,8	48
White	30,0	4,9	65,0	243
Total	21,9	4,6	73,5	415
p-value: < 0,0001				

As we can see from table 9, 74% of the students agreed that it was important to have access to ‘hard’ news and be up to date with current affairs. This was most important to African and Indian students and least important to white students. This finding is confirmed by the survey results reported in table 10.

Table 10

Responses to the question “Do you read newspapers in your leisure time?” analysed in terms of population group and social class.

“Do you read newspapers in your leisure time?” (%)

<u>‘Race’</u>	<u>Always</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>N</u>
African	50,5	49,5	99
Coloured	52,4	47,6	21
Indian	36,2	67,3	47
White	32,6	67,3	239
<hr/>			
Total	38,4	61,5	406
p-value: 0,0293			
 <u>Social class</u>			
Working class/ peasant	49,2	50,8	124
Middle class	34,2	65,9	278
<hr/>			
Total	38,8	61,2	402
p-value: 0,0121			

Table 10 indicates that African and coloured students from a working or peasant class backgrounds are most likely to read newspapers while white and coloured middle class students are the least likely to.

Table 11

Responses to the question “Do you enjoy television news/documentary programmes?” analysed in terms of population group, class, type of school attended, and gender.

“Do you enjoy television news/documentary programmes?” (%)

<u>‘Race’</u>	<u>enjoyment</u>	<u>unsure</u>	<u>no enjoyment</u>	<u>N</u>
African	56,3	9,7	34,0	103
Coloured	38,1	33,3	28,6	21
Indian	41,7	8,3	50,0	48
White	46,9	16,0	37,0	243
<hr/>				
Total	48,2	14,5	37,3	421
p-value: 0,00217				

<u>Social class</u>				
Working class/ peasant	57,0	9,4	33,6	128
Middle class	42,3	16,4	41,3	281
Total	46,9	14,2	38,9	409
p-value: 0,0011				
<u>School</u>				
Model C/ Private	45,1	14,9	39,9	328
DET	59,0	13,3	27,7	83
Total	48,0	14,6	37,5	411
P-value: 0,0009				
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	44,7	15,6	39,7	257
Male	56,7	11,5	35,8	165
Total sample	47,9	14,0	38,2	422
p-value: 0,0034				

As indicated in table 11, African students from a working or peasant class background are those who most enjoy television news and documentary programmes. The findings also indicate a male preference for these genres, unsurprising given the fact that news is often socially perceived as a male genre. (For further survey results which probe the importance to students of having access to news, see Appendix 5.)

7.5. Other cultural habits of the 'homeland' students

The identification of the 'homeland' students with the poor rather than with their fellow students, is further reflected in their preference for spending their spare time in the local township shebeens (drinking taverns) rather than the pubs frequented by university students.

Andile: Some of us say that Rhodes is an island in Grahamstown because it's got its own things different from greater Grahamstown. I feel at home when I'm there [the black township]...you get people of the same background. As black South Africans we mustn't forget about these people outside of Rhodes...we are from there. We must continue

interacting with those people. Going to the township on Fridays, reaffirms that we are black South Africans. Even if I finish here at Rhodes, I will go and work there [in the impoverished rural areas]. I won't forget those people back there. I am better because I grew up there...much more than a person who grew up in a township who doesn't know these things...you cannot forget your background.

The 'homeland' students, all male also talk a lot about the problem of 'getting girls'. These discussions also reflect their distance from mainstream campus culture. The problem they frequently encounter is that the female students who interest them have an active involvement in Western culture. This creates another pressure for them, especially as they are judged by their peers according to their ability to 'get a girl'.

Luxolo: At home we had girlfriends and we had a different view of relationships. We saw that even girls from the same background as us, when they come here they become impossible to get. You must have money to take her out, you've got to buy a rose and things like that. We refuse to do that. All those perceptions have reinforced our understanding of who we are.

Lwazi: They behave differently on campus. If I met this person in Mdantsane, she would behave normally. But when she's here it's a different case. That's what I don't understand. Like her, when you propose to her you have to take her out, buy a rose and things like that. That's what I don't understand.

As I've already discussed in Chapter 6, and as Hall (1996: 5) and Morley (1992: 68) observe, identities are also constructed through difference. From this perspective, traditional African culture is constituted precisely through its distinction from and opposition to Western European culture. The interviews show that the 'homeland' viewers' sense of their identity has been brought into sharp focus by their entrance into the cultural space of the campus. Some of the ways they have used to reaffirm this

identity are: their separation from other students on campus, their nightly gatherings in the shared space they've named the 'homeland', and their rejection of foreign television programmes. For Andile, American culture is now associated with "this whole culture of consumerism...people buying things, having things, lots of money in the banks while there are still poor people...this individualistic thinking". Significantly, the rejection of foreign television is a fairly new phenomenon for most of the 'homeland' students. It is a reminder that identity formation is, in part, context-dependent and situationally bound. Before coming to Rhodes University, Andile, for example, was an avid consumer of American television. How this was experienced, and how it changed are issues I explored with him in a biographical interview.

8. Andile's life story

Andile grew up in Payne, a small rural village in the heart of the former Transkei. His mother worked occasionally as a domestic servant in white homes. She was however, financially dependant on money sent by her husband, a truck driver in the urban centre of East London.^{iv} Payments were irregular and this led to Andile's first visit to the East London when he was nine years old. His mother took him to visit his father who was living in a "shack" in Duncan Village, one of East London's African townships.

The actual fact that brought us to East London was to get money from my father. My mother took me for that reason. Just to go there so that my father would see that really at home, people are suffering. I didn't have shoes, toys...all those things.

It was in East London that he had contact with television for the first time. He visited his cousins in the township of Mdantsane, bordering Duncan Village. They were watching the American series *Knightrider*, and the programme deeply impressed young Andile.

Everything in that film just shifted my thinking. I saw that this guy doesn't have any suffering...his life is just moving. Even though there are these fights, this guy seems to be enjoying himself. His life is just smooth.

The relative affluence he experienced in East London, and the visions of America he

experienced on the television screen melded into one. For the first time Andile was given a vantage point from which to view his own impoverished rural existence.

Actually the only thing that I understood from visiting East London and watching television is that I recognized the place that I was staying in. I could see it was really in the dark. I thought why are these people in East London having these nice things...motor cars, televisions...everything is nice here. I could distinguish clearly between my cousins and the guys with whom I'm staying in the rural areas. These people in town are clean, they are always wearing these nice things.

What he saw on television during that first visit to East London resonated with his experiences growing up as a poor African in rural Transkei, surrounded by relatively affluent whites.

I saw these white people on television as people who are actually high in terms of living. These people are owning nice cars, are having money, their kids are having bicycles...They had a lot in their possessions which we didn't possess as black, and in particular in my family. There was always that quest to be like those people because those people don't have that problem. I would love to be like them...to have a car, to have all those things. Of course from that television those were the conclusions that I had. When I saw them on the naked eye on the farm...these people that I saw...the picture that I saw on television was no different...these [white] people are having so many head of cattle, tractors and all these things...and my aunt was working for them.

For Andile, America, as experienced through television, seemed even more attractive.

Having watched *Knightrider* and all those stuff...yes, there was this *Dallas*, America was really a nice place to be. It was totally different from the place I was staying. So there was a need for me to advance to live in that particular place. The houses were nice, the people there were speaking nice English...although I didn't know what nice English was, I could see

that this was nice English. So those were some of the things that influenced me. These people are always having nice offices. These people, even though they are serious at the same time they entertain themselves. So there is that balance as compared to us where we will have maybe one thing...go to school and then afterwards just kick that soccer ball...there was nothing else. So these people had a right way of doing things. To know those programmes was just to know that people do different things...there are different things that are happening which are nice.

As Andile indicates above, the fact that the foreign programmes were in English, as opposed to the local dramas in Xhosa, was another reason he was attracted to them.

The teacher would tell us that you must know English if you want to be successful. They were telling us that it is a world language. You can talk to anyone in the world as compared to speaking Xhosa to say someone from Japan. So I was interested in English even though I never practised English at home where I would only speak Xhosa. I really wanted to speak English.

Television, and American programmes in particular, provided a glimpse of the modern world. Returning home after his visit to East London, he felt that he'd been exposed to a world not available to his rural friends.

I knew that with these guys I knew something that they didn't know.

Every holiday I wanted to spend in East London just to watch television.

As we've seen, the world Andile experienced via American television programmes was one of relative affluence and choice. American television was thus instrumental in bringing about Andile's 'mental modernisation' (Schou, 1992: 24). His experiences accord with Tomlinson's claim that at an existential level modernity involves "the emergence of new senses of possibility – new options, new desires, new freedoms..." (1991: 41). However, it is the very openness of this experience that creates existential dilemmas for the modern subject. For Fromm, freedom from pre-modern certainties bring

“complete aloneness and doubt” (1960: 29), while for Berman “it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish” (1982: 15). It is this tension between the promise and the dangers of modernity that Berman (1983) explores in *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*. As he points out in his introduction:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. (1983: 15)

Despite these threats to pre-modern certainties, there is the belief amongst certain writers that, with the growth of the global capitalist market, cultures are ‘condemned to modernity’ (Tomlinson, 1991: 41). This may be so. But what the ‘homeland’ interviews demonstrate is the unevenness of this transition. The adoption of ‘modern’ values is always context bound. For Andile, living an impoverished rural existence in the Transkei, America signified abundance and the possibility of making life choices. Coming to Rhodes exposed him, for the first time on an ongoing basis, to students who were modern subjects. He couldn’t speak the dominant English language as well as they could, he came from an impoverished background, his education at a rural DET school was comparatively inferior. He recognised that he came from a conservative traditional Xhosa culture.

Within the new context of Rhodes University, this same America that had seemed so attractive, now became associated with the middle class student culture from which he felt alienated. From being able to make choices in life he experienced, as Luxolo put it, the feeling “that you have to be flexible, just take everything”. This is the ‘moral deficit’ of secular humanism discussed by Thompson (1995: 194), which I noted at the start of this chapter. In the face of the uncertainty and doubt underlying the modern experience, the ‘homeland’ students find security in what Lwazi referred to as the “comfort of the homeland”.

Importantly, this nightly ritual of television viewing doesn't only reflect traditional identities; it also helps to produce them. As Frith observes:

[S]ocial groups [do not] agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities...but...they only get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement. (1996: 138)

This was true of the 'homeland' students. Their regular meetings in a separate space, together with their discussions about the programmes viewed, contributed to their gaining knowledge of themselves as a group.

9. The politics of media consumption

9.1. The desire to reaffirm traditional rural African identities

Given the cultural and institutional pressures the 'homeland' students experience at Rhodes University, their desire to reaffirm their traditional rural African identities is understandable. The strong identification that they maintain with the African rural poor and working class outside the confines of the university distinguishes them from the other students on campus. One of the ways this is lived out is in weekly visits to the local township 'shebeens'. Another manifestation is in the respect they show towards the black cleaning and kitchen staff in the residences.

Luxolo: The issue of respect for my elders is important and it's what makes me a Xhosa. For example, the way we talk to the 'aunties' in the kitchen...these guys from the emerging black middle class, they don't have respect. They act like they're white, calling these 'aunties' by their names even though in our culture it's not right to do that.

9.2. The desire for political news and information

The 'homeland' students' desire for political news and information, as discussed earlier, cannot be separated from their commitment to uplifting, and respecting, the black urban and rural poor in South Africa.

Luxolo: I am happy about the political changes but then I feel that black people are free politically, but not economically.

Andile: At this stage we cannot afford the emerging black middle class as they forget their roots and don't want to invest in people on the ground. Also in terms of their values I've also got a problem. They're just interested in parties...they don't want to go to the rural areas to see their grandmothers. They no longer hold those values. I don't know why their fathers don't try to impart those values. They go to these multi-racial schools and they come out different people.

9.3. The cultural conservatism of the 'homeland' students

While the traditional cultural values the 'homeland' students espouse may help shield them against the cultural anarchy they experience on campus, they exhibit some of the more static and regressive elements of pre-modern culture. For example, they are highly critical of an unemployed male character in *Isidingo* and mention of his name, Matabane, evokes much laughter from the group. Because he no longer has a job, he has lost the traditional authority he would have automatically have expected (and they would have expected) as the male head of the household. The televisual portrayal of the strong wife who takes charge of the family has reinforced, rather than challenged, their traditional patriarchal beliefs.

Andile: Like there's this guy Matabane (laughter)...he's not working but his wife is working. So now the wife has much power over him because he can't earn any money. So the way she treats her husband is different to the way we understand the relationship should be. So we respond quickly to things like that.

Lwazi: That situation is getting common in our society because our fathers are being retrenched and their role as head of the family is undermined. This is bad because sometimes Matabane (laughter) is not treated with the respect that he deserves.

Luxolo: When Matabane was working, it was a different case. He was in charge of his wife.

Andile: I won't say he was bullying, but he was doing what was right. The way we understand things is that a man should be giving direction to his family. He was doing that last year, but now he's being given direction (laughter). These are things we talk about.

Lwazi: In our comments we're always saying that Mr Matabane is weak.

The attitude towards Mr Matabane is reflective of a more general conservatism regarding the role and status of women in society.

Lwazi: These feminists don't only want equal power, they want more of it. In some aspects they want to be subordinate to men when it comes to spending money. But when it comes to power, they want to be equal to men. It doesn't balance. They mustn't be selective.

Andile: Equality shouldn't downgrade the man.

Luxolo: In some things we can't be equal. In most cases it is the man who must initiate the relationship...you must go to the woman. Even with marriage you are the one who says I would like to get married. Even in the family, the man must take a leading role...that's how we are.

The relative cultural conservatism of male students who had attended DET schools is reflected in table 12, which indicates that 15,6% of students who had attended DET schools felt that a woman's place is in the home. By far the majority who felt this way were male students.

Table 12

Responses to the statement “A women’s place is in the home” analysed in terms of type of school attended and gender.

<u>“A women’s place is in the home” (%)</u>				
<u>School</u>	<u>Strongly disagree/ disagree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Strongly agree/ agree</u>	<u>N</u>
Model C/ Private	91,7	3,4	4,9	327
DET	81,9	2,4	15,6	83
Total	89,8	3,2	7,0	410
p-value: 0,0046				
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	93,8	2,3	3,9	256
Male	83,1	4,2	12,7	165
Total sample	89,5	3,1	7,4	421
p-value: < 0,0001				

Students who attended DET schools were more than twice as likely to feel that a woman needs children in order to be fulfilled. Again, male students more likely to hold this view than female students as indicated in table 13.

Table 13

Responses to the statement “A woman needs to have children in order to be fulfilled” analysed in terms of type of school attended and gender.

<u>“A woman needs to have children in order to be fulfilled” (%)</u>				
<u>School</u>	<u>Strongly disagree/ disagree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Strongly agree/ agree</u>	<u>N</u>
Model C/ Private	75,0	12,5	12,5	328
DET	62,6	10,8	26,5	23
Total sample	72,5	12,2	15,3	411
p-value: 0,0224				
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	79,4	7,4	13,2	257
Male	61,8	20,0	18,2	165
Total	72,5	12,3	15,1	422
p-value: < 0,0001				

Finally, as we saw, the suspicion of the ‘homeland’ students towards the African middle class students (because of their supposed loss of traditional cultural values), easily translates into xenophobic attitudes towards non-South African students, especially Zimbabweans.

10. Conclusion

In Chapter 5, I discussed Ang’s (1996: 70) claim that we should acknowledge the dynamic complexity of media consumption practices and no longer attempt a comprehensive theory of the audience. Calling for a ‘radical contextualism’ in audience studies, Ang believes that we need to understand its meanings for its audiences within the context of the “multidimensional intersubjective networks in which the object is inserted and made to mean in concrete contextual settings” (1996: 70). This approach, as I pointed out, entails a form of ‘methodological situationalism’, which recognises the importance of context in trying to make sense of how people interact with the media in everyday life. In line with this approach, I have examined the impact that context has on the formation of a particular reception community. In doing this I have argued against those theoretical approaches which, when it comes to questions of identity formation, over-privilege the role played by media consumption in the process. The rejection of foreign television programmes by this group of students needs to be understood as a result of their insertion into the ‘white’ and middle class cultural space of Rhodes University.

Unlike many other ethnographic approaches to media consumption, my focus has not been on the meanings made at the moment of textual reception. Rather, I have examined the relative importance of media consumption and lived context in the process of identity formation. I have tried to avoid the trap of seeing the media as mediating rather than determining cultural experience.

ⁱ This takes place any time after the age of 17 and consists of various rites of passage (amongst others, circumcision) towards becoming an adult.

ⁱⁱ Because the Zimbabwean students are not eligible for bursaries at South African universities, the majority tend to come from middle class families who can afford the fees.

ⁱⁱⁱ M-Net is a local subscription channel which screens primarily American films, sitcoms and drama series.

^{iv} During the years of apartheid, many black families were split up in this way. As the overcrowded and impoverished rural 'homelands' were increasingly unable to support and sustain black families, fathers were often forced to seek work in the cities, sending money home to their rural families.

Chapter 8

Global media ‘quality’ and local ‘empirical realism’

1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I drew on the experiences of a small number of students (Zukile and Sipho, and the ‘homeland’ students) in order to make specific observations regarding the relationship between media consumption and identity formation. In line with qualitative research, I generalised from cases to theoretical propositions (Bryman, 1988: 90). I also related my theoretical propositions to the quantitative results obtained from a survey. I used what Bryman (1988: 131) refers to as ‘triangulation of measurement’: more than one method of investigation and more than one type of data.

This chapter is also dependent on inductive reasoning in that it departs from specific observation to make general pronouncements. However, in contrast to the previous two chapters, it draws its data primarily from focus group interviews with a cross-section of students in order to illustrate certain theoretical claims. In particular, this chapter examines two of the dominant explanatory discourses through which students explain their attraction to global or local media, those of ‘realism’ and ‘quality’.

2. ‘Realism’

An important consideration in deciding the popularity of a programme is the degree to which audiences find it ‘realistic’. As Ellis explains, “Notions of realism are some of the most enduring means of judgement of film and TV creations” (1982: 6). Similarly, Ang (1982: 34), in her study of the viewing of the American soap opera *Dallas* by Dutch women, noted that ‘realism’ seemed to be a favourite criterion among viewers for passing judgement on the series.

Both Ellis (1982: 8) and Ang (1982: 35) emphasise the multi-accentuality of the term ‘realism’, meaning that what constitutes the ‘reality’ of a programme, differs for different

viewers. This emerged in the written responses to *Dallas*, obtained by Ang (1982: 35-36), from different female viewers. As she notes in her study,

For some the represented reality must coincide with the social reality of 'ordinary people' (i.e. 'real' problems such as unemployment and housing shortages and not the 'mock problems' of the rich); for others that reality must be 'recognisable', ...and for others again the world presented must be 'probable' ...Finally, a text is also occasionally called 'unrealistic' if people find that it simplifies the 'real' reality (whatever that may be), exaggerates it or reflects it in cliches. (1982: 35-6)

Despite these differences in emphasis, what unites these contrasting understandings of realism is that a comparison is made between the realities 'in' and 'outside' a text. Ang (1982: 36) refers to this approach to realism as 'empiricist realism'. It is cognitively based and works primarily at the level of denotative meaning, in which a literal resemblance is sought between the fictional world of the text and the 'real' world as experienced by the audience member. Judgements are made accordingly, and as Ang explains, "...a text which can be seen as an 'unrealistic' rendering of social reality (however that is defined) is 'bad'" (1982: 36).

Ellis (1982: 6-7) also describes the dominance, amongst audiences and producers alike, of an empirical understanding of realism. He defines 'realism' as the expectation that a particular representation should present a 'realistic portrayal' of characters and events. These include surface accuracy; that it should conform to notions of what we expect to happen; that it should explain itself adequately; and that it should conform to expected notions of psychology and character motivation (1982: 6-7).

In this research, focus group interviews revealed that many students relied on an empiricist understanding of 'realism' in judging the worth of media and justifying their media consumption choices. For example, as was noted in Chapter 7, African students from a rural, working or peasant class background, tended to reject foreign television productions as 'unrealistic' – they were judged not to reflect, at a denotative level, these viewers' known, lived reality. This antipathy towards foreign television and film

productions, a result of their lack of empirical realism, is evidenced in following extracts from focus group interviews with ‘homeland’ students and others from similar backgrounds.

Luxolo: When I watch [American] movies I get bored with these technological things...I like it to be more realistic...So, in most cases I don’t believe these overseas things...that the main actor will survive the whole movie, that when he’s shot in the arm, he won’t be shot anywhere else...or shot in the stomach so that he doesn’t die. But he shoots everyone and everyone dies. So I don’t like that...these are lies.

When I watch South African dramas, these are realistic to me. They speak about what is happening, what I know. I understand why this guy is doing this. Sometimes not understanding someone’s culture is a problem. For example, these alien things...seeing these aliens on TV. When I see these funny people that don’t look like us I don’t know what the person producing had in mind.

Andile: My personal response to *Isidingo* [a South African soap opera] is one that is informed by my background. The very fact that our fathers and brothers were working on the mines...they used to come back and talk and relate these stories to us. So now what is happening is *Isidingo* is the confirmation of that. So every time I see that setting I reflect back on those things they used to tell us...working at Iscor [steel refinery], things like that. Tribal conflicts, faction fights...within that setting. So it’s a confirmation of those things that I used to hear.

Duminsani: [Reflecting on his preference for local television dramas when he was growing up]: ‘Cause I think it was the reflection of what was going on in South Africa. Some of the dramas took place in the rural areas...I knew everything that was going on there and I was interested in it ...as compared to the foreign movies where you see, even if you are a 5 year

old, that what is happening here in real life, doesn't happen. Because in real life nobody can jump over this building and you cannot see a human being flying. So I just told myself that this is childish, so I never got interested.

Thikhithiwi: I prefer local programmes. For me I think it's just getting in touch with my roots, to feel at home, something that you know. Right now I am watching this local drama *Nughato*.

However, these sentiments were not solely class based. Recourse to empiricist notions of realism was also encountered in my interviews with African urban, middle class students, as shown by this student exchange from a focus group interview.

Pearl: I watch South African and American 'soapies' but I think South African is far more realistic and you can identify more...in American movies people die ten times and they come back to life, that's a bit ...

Lwazi: Ja its true, it's the standard. But there are very good local programmes like *Generations*, for instance. Those guys are professional.

Ann-Mary: But it's unrealistic, its not real life. But *Isidingo* is a good one.

Lwazi: Ja, its good and its real. If they [the television broadcasters] could go out more...even go out to jazz clubs and just sit there and video tape the guys who are performing there.

In this exchange, Ann-Mary rejects Lwazi's recourse to technical quality as a criterion of judgement ("Those guys are professional") in favour of an empiricist notion of realism ("...it's not real life") presumably because *Generations* deals primarily with the lives of the new urban black elite. In contrast, *Isidingo* deals with the lives of working class Africans and is thus seen by Ann-Mary as being truer to the 'reality' of Africans living in

South Africa. Lwazi agrees with Ann-Mary's assessment. He enlarges the theme of 'realism' insisting that broadcasters should capture the reality of jazz club performances.

In the next interview, a group of Indian female middle class students discuss the relative merits of local and foreign soap operas. The literal resemblance (resemblance at the level of denotation) between the fictional world of the text and the 'real' world as they know it is used as the primary criterion for judgement.

Sumayya: Yeh, some American soaps I don't like because they're not good.

Prensen: I find the South African ones more realistic. You don't really think that people get divorced and married five times [as they do in American soap operas].

Pranasuna: I can identify better with the local persons than with the *Bold and the Beautiful* [an American soap opera very popular in South Africa]. I don't know a single non-white...are there any non-whites [in the *Bold and the Beautiful*] ?

Jenny: There is one. In *Days of our Lives* [an American soap opera also popular in South Africa] there are just a couple who are non-white. This we can identify with more.

Prenesen: When my mother started watching *Generations* she was shocked at Shaar [played by an Indian actress]....

Shalen: The marriage between Shaar and the black guy.

Prenesen: Across the racial lines...they're quite willing to do that. You still don't see that in *Days of our Lives*.

Interviewer: Is that inter-racial relationship quite important for you to see?

Prenesen: Yeh, yeh.

Nirvana: If I like someone from a different race I'm not gonna just let it go because of its culture or something (laughter).

Interviewer: How do your parents feel about this?

Nirvana: No, they're against this (laughter).

Pranusha: But it's nice for them to watch these programmes and accept this and for us to move away from old fashions.

Sumayya: I understand it's difficult for them. It's easy for us because we're so young. They weren't brought up this way and suddenly they must change everything.

As was discussed in Chapter 6 global media can provide local youth with the resources for 'symbolic distancing' from traditional parent cultures. However, local media can also play this role. The extract above shows how, in contrast to American media, it is local media that reflect the newly-emergent culture of non-racialism in South Africa, a culture which is alien to the culture of these students' parents.

In the following interview, African middle class students show a similar preference for local soap operas over the American equivalents. Again we see recourse to 'empiricist' notions of realism.

Moketsi: I think something like *Generations*; it's the style - it's just a 'soapie', a local 'soapie'. They speak a bit of Afrikaans, Zulu, Sotho – it's a little closer to home than watching *Santa Barbara*, you know, *Days of our Lives*, *Bold and the Beautiful*.

Siyanda: Those tend to be really far fetched, and I mean – I know my mom loves *Days of Our Lives*, and forever people are just coming back to life. People die and come back to life, you know.

Mbuso: The same with *Sunset Beach*. It's not real. Everyone is muscular, all the girls are beautiful.

Siyanda: *Isidingo*, I like. I can relate to that. I mean, the mine...it's like that. There's always those cats who run the mines, the undercover thugs. Like my dad and I would joke and say "that's like uncle so and so". I can sit and watch it because I can relate.

Mooketsi: In a way I guess it's entertaining and it's from South Africa, that's why I can sit and watch.

Again we witness how, for some students, their ability to 'relate' to a text is dependent on its literal reflection of local 'reality' as it is known and experienced. Empiricist notions of realism seem to apply across all classes and 'race' groups. The following interview with Candice, a white, urban, middle class student was interesting because she prefers local soap operas to American equivalents.

I do not view many soap operas, but the ones I do watch are South African. I find it difficult to watch the American soap operas which show on local television. This is partly because I cannot relate to most of the events in these soap operas. For me to watch something like a soap opera, it must be realistic. Because when you watch a soap opera, it's almost like you're keeping in touch with other people's lives and for a moment, while you watch it, it seems real. In this sense it's not like a science fiction or horror film. In *Days of our Lives*, for instance, people die and later come back to life and do other things which are unimaginable in real life. I cannot watch things like that because I can't identify with it. I really enjoy

watching *Backstage*, which is a local series. I can identify with the characters on this programme, probably because they're young South Africans who face the challenges that I face as a young South African. The programmes are also current. What I mean by current is that they follow the exact same calendar dates as we do. For example, if it's Friday, then they would talk about the fact that it's Friday, or if it's a public holiday, the plot would be written so that the characters point out the fact that it's a holiday. This makes it seem more real, unlike *Days of our Lives*, which is quite outdated.

Other white middle class students also referred to the greater realism of local television and film productions.

Pearl: I watch South African and American soapies, but I think the South African ones are more realistic...and you can identify more. In American movies people die ten times and come back to life...that's a bit...

Jen: I wouldn't give the *Bold and the Beautiful* the time of day. But *Isidingo* I will watch, *Generations* I will watch...I find them much more real.

Similar sentiments were expressed by a number of students with regard to local music. In discussing his music preferences, 'Toast', a white Afrikaans student from a middle class background, said he had more foreign than local Compact Discs (CD's) "because there's a bigger volume of quality stuff from overseas". However, he said that if he had to choose one favourite CD, it would be a local one recorded by Mathew van der Want and Chris Letcher.

I'd take that with me because it says more about my life than anything else I have. Not necessarily what the music is, but the lyrics...what they say and what they mean.

The preference shown by the students quoted above for local media, tally with some of the findings of Lemish et al. (1998: 546) in their study of global media consumption

amongst the youth in Israel, France and Denmark. They write "...when older children and young people are being offered a local version of media output that deals with people and relationships, spoken in their own language, set in a familiar context and obeying those formal properties that the young associate with a 'good story', then they will develop a strong preference for it" (Lemish et al., 1998: 546) (for similar findings see Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1991: 24).

However, as Morley (1994: 145) reminds us, 'foreign' is a problematic category in that "what is 'foreign' to whom?" needs to be posed as an experiential question. In other words, sometimes 'foreign' productions have a 'local' relevance which renders them empirically real. As I noted earlier, what unites the different understandings of 'empiricist realism' is that at some level, a similarity is found between the realities 'in' and 'outside' a text. In Chapter 6, Zukile was attracted to *Dallas* precisely because its representation of white affluence on an American rural homestead reflected his lived reality on a white-owned South African farm better than anything he had seen in local productions.

Other interviews provided me with further examples of how foreign media can, in certain instances, accurately reflect local lived conditions. One of the interviewees, Mandela, grew up in the black urban township of Soweto during the 1980s at the height of the armed resistance to the apartheid regime. His parents were members of the then-banned African National Congress (ANC). In his interview extract, he discusses the resonance that American rap music had for him during these turbulent times.

There used to be a lady living in our street who was an MK [Umkonto weSizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress] cadre. In fact, there used to be quite a lot [of MK operatives] because they used to come to our home and ask if they could sleep over for two days. I used to see these guys and my mom used to say, "That guy can fire an AK" [the Russian-made rifle most often used by members of Umkonto weSizwe and synonymous with liberation struggles around the world] and I used to say like "damn!" The thing is that Ice-Cube [a rap artist] and those guys from America wrote about AK 47's. And here was a guy in my house with a

trenchcoat and he's sleeping under the table, or some woman and she can fire an AK 47.

Bongani, an African middle class student from Motherwell township in Port Elizabeth, grew up watching African-American films and television programmes. The pleasure he derived from these programmes came from the way they reflected his 'local' reality.

Even though me and my friends were into black American movies and whatever...at the same time we were still Xhosa. While we could relate to black American culture, America is America and South Africa is South Africa. But there are some things that are just common to every African person, like family life. We as Xhosa people have a strong connection to our families and that was one thing I got to find out about black American families, they have strong relations to their families whereby you'd get second cousins living in the same house, and grandfathers and grandmothers living in the same house.

And also the image I got about black American people from the outside is that in their neighbourhoods people knew each other. There was a sense of community. You get a neighbour like coming in and asking for sugar, something I could relate to in my own culture as well. So there was like similarities between the cultures. Even before I got exposed to American sitcoms, there was always something like in the township where someone would come up to you and say: "Let's just 'diss' (insult) each other". Then he'd come up with a 'diss' and then you'd have to come up with a 'diss' as well...: "Your mother does this and this and this". Surprising enough that happened even before I could understand English. Later on I found that in black American humour they liked 'dissing' as well.

Bongani was attracted to black American hip hop culture. Again, he could relate this 'foreign' culture to his experience of growing up in a 'local' African township.

At first I was listening to this very violent hip hop and everything. The township is also violent, you know, so you can identify...I think it's with many followers of hip hop from the township...you'll find many of the times you can find things you can identify with. But especially nowadays, I think the townships have just got worse...there's even a lot more you can identify with that violence in rap music.

For many white students, on the other hand, their identification with Western/European culture (in South Africa the term 'European' is often applied to whites as a way of denoting their historical roots in Europe rather than Africa) means that it is foreign, rather than local productions, that are experienced as being more 'realistic'. I mentioned earlier the course assignment in which I asked students to write an essay on their consumption of global media. Loren, who comes from a white, middle class family, wrote that her favourite television programme was the American series *Ally McBeal*.

Monday nights in the Olive Schreiner [female residence] common room are always full when *Ally McBeal* is on, and one has to arrive early to get a seat. It is a programme I watch religiously because it gives me an hour in which to laugh at familiar characters, and essentially, at myself. Also, much of the appeal lies in the opportunity to interact socially with peers of the same outlook, backgrounds and spheres of reference. The next day the plot, the court cases, Nelle's latest outfit and the romantic mishaps of the characters are analysed and debated around the lunch table, each girl contributing her own opinion on the episode.

The characters in *Ally McBeal* enjoy a First World lifestyle in a capitalist, consumer-driven society in which male and female colleagues enjoy the same legal status. Although not applicable to all South Africans by virtue of their vastly differing cultural and socio-economic status, I, as a white, educated and middle-class female, identify with the context of the show, and can draw many similarities with the programme and my present environment. I dress similarly, aspire to be similarly successful in my

career, use the same products and seek out the same forms of social entertainment. The group of heterosexual colleagues and friends working closely together for a common objective and sharing in each other's daily life experiences relates particularly to my university experience wherein females and males mix together comfortably in classes, social situations and residence.

As in *Ally McBeal*, there is a degree of sexual tension between me and friends as many of us are engaging in our first relationships with members of the opposite sex. There is jealousy and rivalry amongst competing individuals, both in my sphere of reality and in the show. Similarly, there are the same miscommunications that arise between the sexes which are, more often than not, humorously addressed in the show. It can be said that this factor is a strong motivation for the popular viewership amongst my colleagues. It is a frame of reference by which we construct meaning for ourselves in our daily environment.

As Loren indicates, there is a degree of 'fit' between the realities in *Ally McBeal* and the realities of being a modern white, middle class, heterosexual subject in South Africa.

Similarly, Jessamy, a white female middle class student wrote that her favourite programme was the American sitcom, *Friends*. Her essay gave the reasons for this preference and also offered reasons for her rejection of local television productions.

The answer to this seems relatively straightforward – the availability of South African-produced programmes is inadequate to satisfy my demands. However, it goes further than this. Locally produced programmes tend not to cater for white, upper-class citizens such as myself but rather for the African people who are largely under-represented and catered for in foreign productions. On this note I identify more with the 'cliquey' and humorous bunch of 'twenty-somethings', with their smooth American accents, than with, what seems to me, the comparatively primitive actors

and actresses in *Isidingo*. South African productions seem to place their emphasis on providing viewing material which depicts life as experienced by the working-class majority in our country. My reality, on the other hand, is not reminiscent of this way of life, and it is in this context that I relentlessly turn to foreign (mostly American) programmes for my television entertainment. I experience myself as a ‘global’ being.

Jessamy thus rejects as inappropriate to her identity as a ‘global being’ the ‘realities’ portrayed in local productions. She also rejects local productions because of what she considers to be the poor quality of the acting. Along with the discourse of ‘realism’, the discourse of ‘quality’ was the one most commonly used by students to justify their preference for global or local media.

3. *‘Quality’ defined as technique*

3.1. *Perceptions regarding lack of quality of local productions*

In line with the findings of Lemish et al. (1998: 545) in their study of transnational media consumption amongst youth in Israel, Denmark and France, a theme that emerged in my interviews with Rhodes University students was that for many of them, a preference for global media was as a result of its perceived superior technical quality (camerawork, scripting, acting, lighting and so on) when compared to local equivalents (for similar findings see Kraidy, 1999: 465). While neither Ellis (1982) nor Ang (1982) discuss the relationship between ‘technical quality’ and empiricist notions of ‘realism’, given the dominance of Western models of technical production, it is arguable that these models constitute a ‘textual reality’ against which local texts are judged and often found wanting. In this sense production technique contributes to the sense of ‘reality’, i.e. empirical realism, as experienced by the audience.

Recourse to notions of technical quality as the basis of judging the ‘worth’ of a production is evidenced in the following extracts from focus group interviews.

Barbara (white, urban, middle class): I watch more foreign programmes. I think the standard is a bit higher...the filming techniques and lighting and

dialogue...And I find the South Africans overact, they over-dramatise. It's not natural, trying to be funny all the time, putting on funny accents...

Marshall (African, urban, middle class): [When watching television] I pick and choose what I am looking for. I think if I am looking for humour, I definitely choose foreign...I think definitely mostly foreign because it's of a better quality. There's more money there, and we know this. It's a lot more entertaining.

Andrew (white, urban, middle class): [The music I listen to is] totally foreign. South African music is slowly improving. My preference for foreign music is based on pure sound.

Machemo (African, urban, middle class): I don't have any preferences. It must be something good, something I can relate to. But there are some South African dramas where you think, "Oh my God, what am I watching"? It's the quality, the acting, the storyline, everything. In a way, you can say I like American more.

Dave: (white, urban, middle class): It's just the professionalism [of foreign film and television productions]...the technical quality just doesn't seem to be as good [in local productions]...I think South African commercial films are slack. Also, if you look at the presenters and how they present kids shows on TV...the quality is definitely just not there.

Preneesen (Indian, urban, middle class): I like American sitcoms like *Spin City*, and *Seinfeld* which was on last year. I also like those American dramas like *Homicide Life on the Street*. Also, the African-American sitcoms. I think it's the acting capability. Whatever they do, they do it in style.

Siyanda (African, urban, middle class): I would support any African music or movie that's done, that's produced properly. But just because it's African I'm not going to make noise about it. It all boils down to quality.

Alison (white, urban, middle class): They're just so much more advanced. I mean in music videos, watching overseas television or music videos, it's fantastic. They use fantastic camera angles; they obviously have more high-tech equipment to work with, therefore producing better footage to watch.

Ann-Mary (African, urban, middle class): I enjoy foreign more than local television. I don't think local actors are good – whether it is black films, white films or whatever films. The South African standard is not that good.

Earl (coloured, urban, middle class): I've looked at some of the acting and the local dramas, etc., and you can see that there's time needed for them to progress to a more professionalistic (sic) way of acting. It mustn't feel like it's an act, like you can see that there's a camera there. You must feel that it's natural. I think that the West or American culture has got that natural sort of flair.

Belinda (white, urban, middle class): South African television irritates me. I'm actually not sure why but I think it's perhaps because the whole thing tends to be low budget. You can see that in the programmes, and that irritates me.

Michael (white, urban, middle class): I think that quality refers to the actual production. Say for instance in music...I think there's a quality of sound that comes through on CD...the music that comes through and not necessarily a distinct sound of either being rock or whatever, but how it

comes across, the effort put into it. What you see in America is that they've put their whole culture around it and that's why they produce very good quality. There've been a lot of South African movies that have come out that have been really decent, but there's not enough. And then there are other ones you look at and you can see the quality is shocking. I've seen stuff late at night and I don't know how it got onto television.

As noted above, a number of students pointed out that while they watch primarily American films and television programmes, this was because of the lack of availability of 'quality' local alternatives.

In the next focus group exchange, between African urban, middle class students, they discuss the lack of availability of good 'quality' local films. Again 'quality' is perceived as a feature of the technical aspects of production (a result of the larger production budgets available). They admit they would prefer to watch local productions that deal with South African issues, but their lack of 'quality' makes them unattractive. On the other hand, while American films are 'quality' productions, the interviewees express ambivalence towards their sole focus on American culture.

Ann-Mary: Ja, the films from South Africa...there's no special effects or nothing.

Lwazi: Just drama, drama.

Ann-Mary: And if they produce good stuff, I'm sure we will watch it. I mean there have been a few good films...a few that I have enjoyed...South African made. I thought they were brilliant and I watched them and supported a lot of what they were saying. But the rest of the things are just cheap crap...

Lwazi: We are responding to what is available. If you had a choice you would get your own identity. Because, everybody likes to feel part of

themselves and their country, to feel part of their country as their own identity...

Ann-Mary: I agree. I mean, what does Bill Clinton have to do with you? More Americanised stuff...more focussed on America than our own country...I don't think it's a good thing.

Interviewer: What you seem to be saying, is that it's only because local film and television productions are of such poor quality that you prefer foreign productions.

Ann-Mary: Ja, but then I guess it's poor quality because we compare it to American standards. So it would be.

Ntsika. I think it's because they've got the money that they can produce good things.

3.2. Perceptions of the quality of local music

In the next focus group discussion, African urban middle class students discuss the perceived poor quality of local music. As with films, 'quality' is perceived primarily as a technical aspect of production. The ability of local productions (through lyrics and musical style) to reflect local cultural conditions is not deemed particularly important.

Lecoko: I listen to more foreign music than local. I have a problem with some local contents.

Bongi: You're wasting your money.

Lecoko: Local stuff seems as if it's going to die out soon.

Bongi: It's not going to, but it's something I would tape from other people but I would never buy it.

Lecoko: Ja, get a whole lot of tapes.

Interviewer: But isn't there something about it being local that attracts you?

Lecoko: No.

Bongi: It has to do with whether it's good quality or not.

Lecoko: Whether it's South African or not is another issue. If it's good, it's good. I believe when you buy a CD you must ask if in two years time you'll get tired of listening to it. For instance we say a lot of the Kwaito songs become national anthems and after a while you don't even want to play it anymore.

Nanatundu: For me, the foreign artists put a lot of work into their thing.

Lecoko: Lyrics are so important... 'cause I mean if you had to remove the lyrics out of some of the Kwaito songs, it would be "I wanna have cheese, I wanna buy shoes"...it wouldn't make a difference what you said. Also, some of the Kwaito songs insult women. I know one particular person who really upsets me and that is Thebe...Oscar as well.

3.3. 'Quality' and technical production standards

A number of significant issues emerge around the issue of 'quality' as expressed by the students quoted above. Firstly, the students who referred to the issue of quality when discussing their media preferences are primarily middle class. For most of these students, it was primarily global media are seen to embody 'quality'. While many students had difficulty in defining what they meant by 'quality', it does seem to mean for them a set of technical production standards inherited from North America.

However, as we have seen, for others it is the ability of media texts to mirror their local lives, rather than technical quality, which informed their media preferences. It is important to note that the discourses of ‘quality’ and ‘empiricist realism’ are not mutually exclusive. Finally, many students pointed to the greater realism of local productions while at the same time bemoaning their general lack of availability.

The perception that local television, music and film often lack technical quality is also evident in the discourse of media workers and producers. For example, in a telephone interview with the author (August, 1999), Jill Stewart, programme manager of Radio Algoa, a music station that broadcasts to the Eastern Cape, complained about the lack of quality of local music.

There is still a lack of good quality local stuff. To define quality is a difficult thing and I know that music is probably the worst thing in the world for one person to start defining because it’s such a subjective thing. But it’s about the actual production of the CD first of all. Particularly the newer stuff I’m getting, the voice is drowned by these screaming guitars... You need something to hook the listener, like a chorus which is melodic...

Stewart said that the lack of availability of suitable ‘quality’ music made it difficult to fulfil the 20% local music content on radio imposed by the authority then regulating local content quotas, the Independent Broadcasting Association (IBA).

Similarly, Clarence Hamilton, an independent television producer and executive member of the Independent Producers Association (IPO), in a telephone interview with the author (October, 1999), pointed to the financial constraints facing local television programme makers. These constraints, he felt, prevented local producers from competing with ‘quality’ foreign imports.

Clarence Hamilton: Because they experienced losses, it seems that a new philosophy was adopted by the SABC, and that was that all drama has to

make a profit on the basis of projections prepared by their financial people. Now, a good drama costs money in the first place. Secondly, something that we've been trying to say to the SABC is that if money is a concern in terms of these productions recouping their costs, then in fact they should spend a lot more money on them so that they can sell the stuff internationally. As long as we are restricted to the kinds of budgets that the SABC allows us, we'll never get the quality.

Similar sentiments were expressed by independent film and television producer, Mark Newman, at a conference on film-making in South Africa. As he argued, production costs are "...too low to be viable on any level: to neither sustain a programme production industry, to produce quality films and television, nor to compete effectively on the international market." A one-hour documentary in the United Kingdom, he said, would have a budget of approximately R900 000 compared to R182 000 in South Africa. A one-hour drama made in the United States would have a budget of R4,5 million, while a similar production made in South Africa would have a budget of R450 000 (*Mail and Guardian*, November 28, 1997: 2). These financial constraints were seen by Newman and other film-makers to compromise quality.

It seems that the ideology of technical quality is accepted by producers, distributors and audiences alike. In television production this is supported by the oft-quoted fact that it makes economic sense for broadcasters to import cheaper, 'better quality' foreign productions than to commission local productions. This helps explain the increasing number of American programmes traded overseas (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1991: 25). According to Hoskins et al, "[T]he low U.S. export price for programmes of high production quality makes it extremely difficult for domestic producers...to compete in their home market (let alone foreign markets)" (1989: 57). This is confirmed by Liza Heystek, Manager of International Programme Sales at the SABC. In a telephone interview with the author (August, 2001), he pointed out that local productions cost the corporation on average six times more than foreign imports. The added bonus for the SABC is that because of the higher budgets of these cheaper imports they are more often

than not of higher ‘quality’ than the local equivalents.

As we saw in the interview with Clarence Hamilton, the ideology of ‘quality’ is closely linked with the need, because of the small local market (less than 5-million out of 40-million South Africans regularly attend the cinema), to find foreign audiences for product in order to recoup their production costs. Thus, reporting on the lack of take-off of the local film industry, the *Mail and Guardian* reported that two locally made and financed films, *A Reasonable Man* and *Inside Out* cost R10-million and R3-million respectively but failed to earn more than R100 000 on the local market. *A Reasonable Man*, as a result of foreign sales, ended up making a profit. *Inside Out*, earned only R400 00 locally but notched up \$220 000 in overseas sales to Germany, Turkey and Scandanavia (*Mail and Guardian*, August 11, 1999: 2). These financial constraints help explain the lack of ‘quality’ local film and television productions mentioned by students interviewed. As independent film producer, Jeremy Nathan pointed out in a newspaper interview, Iceland, a country of 250 000 people, makes more films than South Africa does (*Mail and Guardian*, August 11, 2000: 5). These constraints also mean that if South African productions are to find a foreign audience, they need to meet foreign production standards and their narratives must not be South African specific.

3.4. *The grammar of American film and television*

The above discussion gives some credence to Oliveira’s claim that the major influence of programmes imported from the West is “the institutionalisation of a model” that asks for “whatever programmes might attract the size and kind of audiences required by advertisers” (1992: 119). Oliveira focuses primarily on content – “Western values, norms, patterns of behaviour, and models of social relations” (1992: 119) – but it is useful to look at his concept in broader terms. The export of Western production values, made possible by huge production budgets, has a large impact on audience expectations. Production companies in peripheral countries find this impossible to emulate. Morley, examining why the United States is the world’s number one television exporter, argues similarly:

It is not simply that America exports a lot of television programmes –

beyond that, America has written the ‘grammar’ of international television – the formats of television developed in America have literally set the frame for the production of television in most other countries. (1994: 142)

Recourse to technique as an arbiter of ‘quality’ goes some way to explaining why a majority of students claimed to connect more with American media and mediated popular cultural forms (see tables 5, 6, and 7 in Chapter 7), while at the same time remaining critical of the spread of American culture around the world (see table 1 below). As we have seen, many students prefer foreign productions because of the dearth of good ‘quality’ local productions. However, as we saw in the interchange between Lwazi and Ann-Mary quoted earlier, this does not mean that students remain uncritical of the cultural values and representations promoted by American productions.

Table 1

Responses to the statement “The spread of American culture around the world is a good thing” analysed in terms of social class, and type of school attended.

<u>The spread of American culture around the world is a good thing” (%)</u>				
	<u>Strongly disagree/ disagree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Strongly agree/ agree</u>	<u>N</u>
<u>Social Class</u>				
Working class/ peasant	72,2	11,9	15,9	126
Middle class	68,7	20,3	11,0	281
Total	69,8	17,7	12,5	407
p-value: 0,0060				
<u>School</u>				
Model C/ Private	66,8	21,0	12,2	328
DET	76,5	7,4	16,0	81
Total	67,7	18,3	12,9	409
p-value: 0,0026				

Over two-thirds of the students felt that the spread of American culture around the world was not a good thing. African students from working class or peasant backgrounds felt more strongly about this issue than middle class students who had attended Model C or private schools.

Even when students explicitly stated that they enjoyed American film and television productions, they remained critical of the cultural values promoted by these productions. There was a desire to dissociate entertainment value (a result of the perceived technical quality) from the cultural content. The following extract from a focus group interview with middle class female Indian students illustrates this:

Khavita: Another example I would like to use is *Days of Our Lives* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* [American soap operas]. You know many of our Indian people watch that and there are so many things in it that are immoral you know...the things they do, the story line...but we enjoy it, it's got such a hold on you...you want to know what's going to happen.

Seema: And you know it's ridiculous...the things are so ridiculous, you just laugh at it. You know you're not going to follow what they're doing...you know it's wrong but you're just watching it, it's just entertainment.

Amina: When you watch something like TV you've got, like you know, divorce and whatever...I mean a woman with a child and she doesn't even know who the father is or something like that whereas you look at your own parents who have been together for 50 years of marriage or whatever.

A further illustration is this focus group exchange between male Indian middle class students:

Ravi: We basically watch what's showing on circuit...we watch that every Friday or Wednesday and by the end of the week we've all watched the same movie.

Shakti: Personally I don't really follow America's propaganda stories. If there's this guy and he spends R200 million on making that spaceship fly I'll think "ah, let's just watch it". Personally I don't really follow America's propaganda stories.

Ravi: In most cases all I've learned from American culture is what not to do.

Amichad: I have learned to question certain things because when I was small, I mean, you know you were just told to go and pray. Then I was told as to why I should do this and do that...they would make me understand and then I would want to do that. So maybe the questioning part of their culture has made me appreciate my culture more.

Shakti: Well, personally I can tell you I watch Western movies, but my life is Indian movies. But not a single one of these movies is ever promoted in this country.

Ravi: But there's also a reason why the youngsters don't go for the Indian movies, they don't understand them.

Amichad: We can't speak the language. But yet back in the old days, back at home the parents spoke to the kids in the mother tongue, in Tamil, Gutai, Hindi, everything, so that by the age of five or six they could speak the language fluently. So watching a Hindi movie was like us watching an English movie, you could understand every word of it.

Ravi: I think in my household my grandparents speak to my parents in the mother tongue, but it's from my parents to me that we don't. I don't know the mother tongue...something happened along the line.

A number of issues emerge in this extract. Firstly, their choice of film is determined by what is available, and what is available is primarily determined by the economics of film production. Secondly, their inability to understand the language used in Indian films means that they are primarily confined to viewing American films. But this does not mean, contrary to the claims of the media/cultural imperialism theorists, that they are uncritical of many of the values espoused in these films. Rather, they – and many of the other students interviewed – are aware of “America's propaganda stories”. For example, “Toast”, the Afrikaans student quoted earlier, admitted to enjoying American music, film, and television, but he remained highly critical of the American media industry and their impact on how we perceive the world.

America tells you what's happening in the world. They document the history of the world more or less at the moment. When you switch on the SABC late at night, there's CNN and they're documenting all the time, everyday, day in and day out. They tell us why they should fight the Gulf war and why it's good for them to protect their oil or whatever, and you don't really see the other side of it. I think it's because of that that we think that Americans are arrogant...

A final example of a pleasurable response to American television productions, while remaining critical of the values they espouse, is evidenced in the following focus group extract with African middle class students.

Dumebi: The thing I find really, like when I watch *Ally McBeal* and stuff like that, is the way like there is no such thing as morality anymore. You know what I mean? Like if you've got morals, like there is something wrong with you...In African culture there are strong morals.

Interviewer: But you still watch *Ally McBeal* and continue to get pleasure from it.

Dumebi: Yeah.

Interviewer: Even though you disagree with the moral issues.

Dumebi: Yeah. I think it's also because we have somewhere to go back to, you know. You watch Western culture but you still have to compare it to African culture. If we were born in Western culture we would have nothing else to compare it to.

Lebo: I think you try and find a compromise.

Machemo: And also its kind of like out there because it's on TV...and you're thinking like you know, like when you see something on TV it's like a story, you know...and everyday life for you is not like that so it's quite easy to relate to it.

Interviewer: Can I ask you why you watch *Ally McBeal*?

Dumebi: Because it's interesting, it's funny.

Effie: Yeah, and it's outrageous, I kind of enjoy seeing...but I mean it's okay because it's on TV...But like I mean in real life it's not okay. It's just how I feel.

Dumebi: It's acting.

Effie: I feel they're acting and that's fine. But if it was in real life I wouldn't find it that amusing, you know.

In this exchange we again witness the process of dissociation. The interviewees obtain pleasure from watching the production but remain critical of the values it espouses. These students articulate their identities between two competing discourses, 'modernity', represented the West and Western media and 'tradition'. It is similar to the tension between local and global, which we witnessed in my discussion of Siphho (cf. Chapter 6), which for Kraidy (1999: 472) points to the reality of cultural hybridity at both the level of individual identity as well as the level of national culture. In the following two chapters I examine cultural hybridity and its implications for the media imperialism thesis.

4. Conclusion

My interviews identified the two dominant explanatory discourses of 'realism' and 'quality' as those that students most often use to explain their preference for local or global media. I pointed out that an 'empiricist' understanding of realism seeks a correspondence, at a denotative level, between the 'realities' internal and external to the text. A desire by many students for this correspondence explained their preference for local productions. Ironically, it is in many instances, global, rather than local productions, which most adequately reflected local lived conditions.

Many students' preference for global media was premised on the perceived superior 'quality' of these media which they associated with production technique – camerawork, lighting, acting, and scripting. I further noted that the discourse of 'quality' was one most often used by South African media producers to explain the relatively poor state of the local film and television industries. It is here that we can most clearly see the results of the American domination of the global film and television industries, as they set the standards (thanks to huge budgets) against which local productions are seen to fall short.

However, as this study has argued thus far, the complexity of cultural consumption means that we cannot presume that the consumption of global media is leading to the spread of a homogenous global culture. In the following two chapters I examine this issue in further depth.

Chapter 9

Cultural authenticity and polysemic texts

Americans who are twenty years old see others who look like them in Czechoslovakia (sic), Greece, China, France, Brazil, Germany, and Russia wearing the same jeans, listening to the same music, speaking a universal language that computer literacy demands. Sometimes they feel more vitally connected to siblings elsewhere than to family members in the next room. (Bly, 1996: vii)

Can it be that...young people today are living in what McLuhan provocatively termed ‘The Global Village’? All over the world children seem to be spending their leisure time in front of television and computer screens, wearing similar style jeans, humming similar pop tunes, eating similar fast foods. Are these children indeed living in a shared world culture? Are they part of a global value system captured by the term ‘McDonalidization’ or are they rooted in local cultures despite the increasing output of transnational media? Are they perhaps rather straddling local, national and global media cultures? (Lemish et al., 1998: 540)

[W]e need to commit to the recognition that cultural hybridity is the rule rather than the exception in that what we commonly refer to as “local” and “global” have been long hybridised. (Kraidy, 1999: 472)

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I noted that ‘realism’ and ‘quality’ were the two discourses most used by students when explaining their preferences for local or global media. I pointed out that an ‘empiricist’ understanding of realism seeks a correspondence, at a denotative level, between the ‘realities’ internal and external to the text, and that a desire by many

students for such a correspondence, explained their preference for local productions. However, I also noted that for other students, ironically, it was global, rather than local productions, which most adequately reflected their 'local' lives.

A number of related questions now need further explanation: What do we mean by the term 'local culture'? What constitutes 'global culture'? How do we understand the relationship between 'local' and 'global' cultures? Finally, is there another understanding of realism, besides that of 'empiricist realism', that can help us make sense of text/audience relationships? These issues will be addressed in this chapter.

2. 'Authenticity' in local and global cultures

An assumption that runs consistently through the media imperialism thesis is that before the United States-led media/cultural invasion, Third World cultures were largely untouched by outside influences (Tunstall, 1977: 57-59; Thompson, 1995: 169; Massey, 1992: 9; Hannerz, 1996: 66). This bi-polar vision pits a culturally destructive and damaging 'global' against the 'local', with the latter seen as a site of "pristine cultural authenticity" (Ang, 1996: 153). As Morley observes,

The conventional model of cultural imperialism presumes the existence of a pure internally homogeneous, authentic, indigenous culture, which then becomes subverted or corrupted by foreign influence. The reality, however, is that every culture has ingested foreign elements from exogenous sources with the various elements becoming 'naturalised' within it. (1994: 151)

Hannerz (1989: 70) believes that assumptions based on notions of cultural purity and authenticity, explain the alarmist reactions to the perceived threat of cultural homogenisation. Thompson (1995: 170) reminds us of the romanticism inherent in this purist position. Cultural encounters – often backed by coercive political and military power – have, after all, been taking place for centuries. Given this, encounters between these societies and globalised forms of electronic media represent only the latest such cultural encounter.

Providing a similar argument, Kraidy (1999: 459) writes that the media imperialism theorists assume a polarisation between the global and the local in the mistaken belief that they are separate realms connected by the mass media. This, he says, glosses over years of osmosis between different nations and cultures: “For centuries immigration, trade relations, and colonial expansion, political alliances, wars, and invasions have contributed to blending heterogeneous elements of different cultures” (Kraidy, 1999: 459). Thus Kraidy (1999: 459) believes that, even though such approaches are rare in media reception studies, perspectives of cultural hybridity, with no assumptions of separatedness between local and global spheres, offer the best frameworks for grasping complex local/global interactions.

In her discussion of the postmodern condition, Massey (1992: 9-10) also questions the concept of national cultural authenticity. She observes that contemporary writings on postmodernity make much of the fact that this period involves a *new* sense of dislocation, and that “penetrability of boundaries” (1992: 9) is a recent phenomenon. This view, she argues, is a predominantly white/first-world one. For the inhabitants of all countries colonised by the West, there is a long history of destabilising contact with alien cultures. What is new is the “reverse invasion”, partly as a result of patterns of immigration, whereby “the periphery has infiltrated the colonial core” (1992: 10).

The theme of reverse cultural invasion has been taken up by a number of theorists critical of the media/cultural imperialism thesis. These writers believe that besides studying how local cultures shape and re-work the meanings attached to global products, we must also consider the extent to which the peripheries ‘talk back’ to the centres (Hannerz, 1989: 69; Hall, 1991a: 38-9; Robertson, 1994: 46). For example, Robertson observes that, “Much of global ‘mass culture’ is in fact impregnated with ‘Third World’ ideas, styles and genres concerning religion, music, art, cooking, and so on” (1994: 46). Popular music reflects this ongoing interchange of images, sounds and discourses between the centre and the periphery with Rap, Reggae, and World Music providing recent examples. Thus Hall observes that, “All the most explosive modern musics are crossovers. The aesthetics

of modern popular music is the aesthetic of the hybrid, the aesthetic of the crossover, the aesthetic of the diaspora, the aesthetic of creolisation” (1991a: 38-9).

As Hannerz (1996: 66) describes it, there used to be only a handful of historically recognised creole cultures, mostly in the plantation areas of the New World. It seems now that most of the world’s cultures are creolised to some degree. This seriously undermines the conventional model of cultural imperialism, which presumes the existence of pure internally homogeneous, authentic, indigenous cultures, which then become subverted or corrupted by equally homogeneous foreign cultures (primarily American). Such an argument, as we’ve already seen, posits the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ in, as Morley observes, “unhelpfully ‘essentialist’ terms” (1992: 77).

Furthermore, not only is creolisation increasingly a cultural reality, but in contrast to the pessimistic claims made by the media and cultural imperialism theorists, Hannerz (1996: 66) believes that this trend is something to celebrate. For, as Hannerz writes, at the core of the concept of creole culture, “...is a combination of diversity, interconnectedness, and innovation, in the context of global centre-periphery relationships” (1996: 67). For Hannerz (1989: 70), the hope for continued cultural diversity in the world is dependent on coexistence, as well as creative interaction between the global and the indigenous:

To me, at least, ‘creole’ has connotations of creativity and of richness of expression. Creolist concepts also intimate that there is hope yet for cultural variety. Globalisation need not be a matter only of far-reaching or complete homogenisation; the increasing interconnectedness of the world also results in some cultural gain. Again, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. (Hannerz, 1996: 66)

In their examination of the creolisation of culture in South Africa, Nuttall and Michael point out that in many studies – in the fields of literature, photography, art and so on – the focus has tended to be on separation and stratification, “...obscuring other co-existing configurations” (2000: 2). As the authors explain, “Such studies broadly echoed the logic of a generalized anti-apartheid movement that strategically emphasized enforced

separation over the cultural fusions, intimacies and creolizations of which South Africa also spoke” (Nuttall and Michael, 2000: 2). Similarly, according to the authors, studies examining workers and working-class life have focussed on South Africa’s distinctiveness and difference, ignoring the cultural dimensions of continental mixing that has shaped identity (Nuttall and Michael, 2000: 3). However, the authors do acknowledge that critics and writers are starting to appreciate the hybrid history of South Africa. Nuttall and Michael quote Morphet, for example, who has written on architecture in Durban: “In topographical and climatic terms the city has more in common with port cities to the north – Maputo, Zanzibar, Mombasa – than it does with the highveld Johannesburg or the Mediterranean Cape” (Morphet quoted in Nuttall and Michael, 2000: 4). Such studies, as the authors point out, represent a move away from seeing South Africa as a closed space.

Martin (1999), also writing on the creolisation of South African culture, has focussed particularly on developments in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He points out that during this period in Cape Town, there were no rich blacks, but there were poor whites, and that the poor of all complexions lived side-by-side in certain neighbourhoods, forming an integrated proletariat:

Africans, coloureds, white colonists and foreigners lived together, worked together, frequented taverns, canteens and hotels. During the nineteenth century and until the dawn of the twentieth century, intermarrying was not infrequent. (1999: 66)

Emerging from this milieu were particular forms of local music:

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Cape Town’s music was incredibly composite. An open-minded music lover ready to have a drink in a canteen, dance in a wealthy mansion, go to the theatre, accept an invitation to a *khalifa* or a Muslim wedding and wander the moonlit streets would have found occasions of hearing European dances and songs, bits of opera, military marches, Christian hymns and creole innovations, among which would have featured prominently Muslim chants, cantillations and

songs including *djiekers* and *ghoemaliedjies*. These genres were not tightly isolated from each other, performers crossed their boundaries, and listeners even more so. (1999: 74-75)

There are numerous other examples of the creolisation of local cultural expression, a result of the centres talking to the peripheries and *vice versa*. In their discussion of South African jazz musician, Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), Carr et al. point to his diverse musical influences, from his own African heritage to various strands of American popular music, all strongly evident in his sound:

He grew up with the hymns, gospel songs and spirituals of the American-influenced African Methodist Episcopal Church; also heard Louis Jordan and the Tympany Five popular hits blaring from the township ice-cream vans; and Duke Ellington's music was so familiar that he was 'not regarded as a foreign musician, but rather as something like a wise old man of our community *in absentia*. (Carr et al., 1987: 246)

Lucia points to yet further influences in the creation of Ibrahim's distinctive sound:

Ibrahim used the piano, an instrument central to western classical music for 200 years and central to jazz for 100 years, as a vehicle for expressing a kind of South African music that contained American and South African jazz styles, Islamic chant, Cape Malay drumming, African traditional music, European parlour songs, hymns and gospel music. (1999: 2)

The result of this mix is, according to Swenson, a sound that has had a "subtle but profound influence on modern music" (1985: 109). Swenson continues: "His knowledge of and sympathy for Africa makes him a first-hand practitioner of styles and feelings many other musicians have adopted from afar, while his wide-ranging control of rhythmic dynamics and melodic improvisations mark him as a musical modernist" (1985: 109). Thus the periphery talks back to the centre.

Ballantine's (1993) writings on the development of South African black jazz in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s also point to the hybrid nature of local popular cultural expression. Discussing the musical repertoire of South African bands such as the Jazz Maniacs, he poses the question:

Whence did this repertoire derive? Broadly, from two huge, complex source areas, one American and the other local, which were absorbed into the repertoire in different ways and in different proportions. (Ballentine, 1993: 13)

Ballentine observes that for several decades, urban Africans were "held in thrall" (1993: 13) by American culture and above all, by the activities and achievements of blacks in that society – another example of 'symbolic distancing'. As Ballentine writes, "Where American culture fascinated, *black* American culture infatuated" (1993: 13). With regard to the output of the South African jazz bands, Ballentine notes that this infatuation provided inspiration, "...examples for imitation, standards to be striven for and exhortations to achievement" (1993: 14). He describes how the whole Harlem subculture was being emulated with the hope that this subculture would one day take root in Johannesburg, or any other South African city. With regard to the development of an urban-based local music culture, Ballentine notes that American films played an important role from the 1930s onwards:

For jazz and vaudeville artists, films were an apparently infinite source of things to be emulated or developed: ideas, melodies, songs, routines, dance steps, styles of presentation, ways of dressing, ways of playing; and of course they also provided ways of estimating local achievements. (1993: 20)

Ballentine reminds us that the terms of the discourse in which jazz was self-consciously accommodated were the familiar ones of identity-in-difference:

Jazz had been developed in distant parts of the world but its developers – even though they might have been unaware of it – were in essence 'Africans in America' who, under the impress of changed social and

economic conditions, had transmuted their ancient cultural heritage and made it relevant to new circumstances. It was a compelling argument for doing likewise in South Africa. (1993: 23)

Black American culture provided the main source of influence on local jazz, but Ballentine (1993: 23) notes that the development of an authentic South African jazz also depended on the use of local styles and elements, the most obvious of these being the various types of traditional music. Ballentine (1993: 25) observes that in addition to their appropriation of dance music from abroad, the mix of local music developing in the slums and ghettos since at least the First World War, and American jazz resulted in a hybrid generically known as *marabi*. Local influences on *marabi* included Sotho music, Zulu music, Xhosa music, African Christian hymns, commercially popular tunes of the day, types of coloured-Afrikaans and white-Afrikaans music known as *tiekie-draai* and *vastrap*, as well as the *ghoemaliedjies* of the Cape Malays (Ballentine, 1993: 26-27).

The students I interviewed often showed an appreciation of the 'local' roots of global popular culture. For example, Jabavu, an African male student, said that part of the reason for his enthusiasm for American jazz was because it is essentially an African musical form.

Ja, because if you listen to Miles Davis, or if you listen to John Coltrane, or any of those guys who were in the vanguard of revolutionizing jazz...[I]t's an historical fact that when blacks were taken to the US without their cultural set-up and background and within that, without their cultural instruments, they wanted to play that music that they used to play back in Africa. It was that attempt to do that, and the fact that you were now using European instruments, and the fact that there was a lot of classical music, that tended to influence a thing that just came into being. So I look at jazz as the purest of African music forms and the fact that it is played by Americans I think for me is incidental. I see it as African music.

Similarly, another African student pointed to what she perceives to be the African roots

of the American hip hop culture. Again, this goes some way to explaining her attraction to this particular culture.

Moagi: This appeal to all things African can even be seen in the fashion of hip hop, from the Afrocentric dreadlocks and head-wraps, to the African inspired jewellery and dashikis. There is now a certain confidence with which African-American youth are finding inspiration in their distant African heritage fusing such elements with intellectual messages that call for a worldwide African renaissance. This form of hip hop is informed by a philosophy that appeals to me because it recognises the development of African people who, even though they've been absorbed into a dominant Eurocentric culture, draw on their emotional ties with an African culture.

The centuries of cultural mixing that have taken place historically, both in South Africa and elsewhere, between locals from different continents and cultural traditions, leads to the question: What it is that constitutes the local culture currently being invaded by global culture?

3. National cultures and national identity

3.1. The threat posed to national cultures by global media

According to the media/cultural imperialism thesis, global media pose a major threat to 'national cultures' (Tomlinson, 1991: 68). So widespread is this belief that over the years it has profoundly influenced national media policies in a number of countries, including South Africa (for a discussion of the impact such assumptions have had on European media policy, see Schlesinger, 1991; 1993). As Baines (1998: 2) points out, the South African Independent Broadcasting Authority's (IBA) 1994 report on the need for local content quotas in South African media, was premised on the need to preserve South Africa's national identity.

However, as Tomlinson argues, it is difficult to define national cultures and relate these in any unproblematic way to the nation state:

‘Cultures’ – in the sense of communal practices, values and shared meanings of social collectivities – do not map neatly on to the political grid of nation-states. There is obviously some sense in which we can speak of a ‘national culture’ but we have also to realise that within nation-states, and even possibly across national boundaries, there exist patterns of cultural identification which are quite different from, and often in direct conflict with, the ‘national culture’. (1991: 68-9)

For Ang (1990: 252), the concept of national identity is also problematic. As she observes, “[I]t tends to subordinate other, more specific and differential sources for the construction of cultural identity (for example, those based upon class, locality, gender, generation, ethnicity, religion, politics, etc.) to the hegemonic and seemingly natural one of *nationality*” (Ang, 1990: 252). National identity therefore needs to be viewed as a highly mediated sense of belonging, which co-exists with other forms of cultural identity (see also Ferguson, 1992: 80; Hall, 1991b: 41).

According to Hall (1991: 44) the fragmentation and erosion of a collective social or national identity begins with the decline and instability of the nation-state and the self-sufficiency of national economies:

These collective social identities were formed in, and stabilised by, the huge long-range historical processes which have produced the modern world... They were staged and stabilised by industrialisation, by capitalism, by urbanisation, by the formation of the world market, by the social and sexual division of labour, by the great punctuation of civil and social life into the public and the private; by the dominance of the nation state, and by the identification between Westernisation and the notion of modernity itself. (1991b: 45)

Hall observes that these “great collective social identities” have not altogether disappeared, but we need to take note of, he observes, “...their inner differences, their inner contradictions, segmentations and their fragmentations...” (1991b: 45).

Tomlinson (1991: 73) believes that to discuss these issues, we need to distinguish between national identity and cultural identity. Media imperialism, he argues, encapsulated by the term ‘Americanisation’, describes the domination of one national culture by another national culture, a conceptualisation which only makes sense where we can speak of a unified national culture in the ‘invaded’ country (1991: 73). Otherwise, claims to an erosion of national culture “...might mean imputing a cultural unity where none exists” (1991: 73). According to Tomlinson, the recognition of cultural diversity within a nation state, weakens the ‘national’ formulation in two ways:

[Not] only may there be difficulty in identifying a unified national cultural identity in the ‘invaded’ country, but the same might be said of the putative ‘invader’ What, then, *is* the ‘American way’ that threatens global hegemony? (1991: 74)

Thus, for example, Berger (1993: 3) believes that there is no single ‘American way’. As he puts it, there may be some generalisations one can make about American culture and society, but one must recognise that there are numerous Americas. There are regional cultures, and within each region great varieties of life-styles, belief structures, and values. Berger concludes: “If it is dangerous, then, to offer generalisations about the culture of San Francisco or California culture or American culture; it is even more perilous to compare and contrast national cultures...” (1993: 3).

3.2. Is there a South African national identity?

In South Africa, given the deep divisions – both historical and current – along lines of ‘race’, class, tradition, and modernity, it is not surprising to find that a unified national identity does not exist. One reason is the lack of a sense of common descent, culture and language necessary for the creation of a communal/national culture (Degenaar, 1994: 23). Another is the primordial view of ethnic identity promoted by segregationist and apartheid ideologies and social policies which created a divided society (Steenveld and Strelitz, 1998: 610). The discourse of ‘nation-building’, much in evidence after the first democratically held elections in 1994, reflected the desire amongst politicians and social

theorists to create a national identity. Such an identity, it was felt, would help South Africa transcend its deep social divisions and the ongoing internal conflict. Rhodie and Liebenberg write of conflict as follows:

The large number of internal conflicts currently occurring in ethnically, culturally, ideologically and historically divided countries worldwide is bringing home to decision makers the realisation that the key to socio-political stability lies in democratic nation-building and a culture of tolerance and reconciliation. Governments that are still nursing the wounds inflicted by many decades of internal conflict, are coming to the conclusion that democratic nation-building is the most effective means of conflict management...[T]his country is no exception. (1994: 1)

An example of the attempt at nation-building, was the decision by the then newly-elected Mandela government to use the 1995 Rugby World Cup tournament, held in South Africa, to promote a vision of South Africanism which transcended cultural and ethnic differences. Uniting all of South Africa behind the rugby team, it was felt, would provide the impetus for the creation of a common South African identity, or, in the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a 'rainbow nation' (Steenveld and Strelitz, 1998: 610). As President Mandela said at the official banquet concluding the tournament, "[W]hen the final whistle blew...the foundations for reconciliation and nation-building had been truly strengthened" (*Eastern Province Herald*, 17 August, 1995). Less than a year later, the *Mail and Guardian* reported that:

In the first two years of majority government, non-racism, equality, integration and the rainbow nation have been proclaimed from every political pulpit by the African National Congress. But, ironically, the ANC is finding it more difficult than it had imagined to convert all South Africans to true non-racialism and it has been forced to accept that ethnic identities – coloured, Zulu, Shangaan, Afrikaner – are part of the current South African reality, part of its troubling inheritance. (24-30 May, 1996)

In 1999, the issue of South African national identity played itself out in the South African media. Max du Preez, former editor of *Vrye Weekblad*, and producer of the SABC's *Special Assignment*, an investigative documentary programme, took issue in a newspaper article with the term 'African' being applied "...to mean exclusively black, as both Mr Nelson Mandela and Mr Thabo Mbeki did during their election campaigns". He pointed to their reference to "whites, coloureds, Indians and Africans" which in his view "implies absolutely that whites, coloureds and Indians can't be Africans" (*Daily News*, 17 June, 1999). Du Preez's article drew many responses including one from Professor Thobeka Mda of the University of South Africa (Unisa), and convenor of the Education and Culture Commission of the African Renaissance Working Group. She asserted that white South Africans were 'Europeans' and that "they are not insisting on being African to claim closeness or nationality with us. They are saying so to claim a piece (huge pieces in fact) of land in this country, and therefore, this continent" (*Daily News*, 28 June 1999). Again, the conflict over who is an 'African', reflected the deep historical divisions in South Africa and, in this case, was presented in 'race'-essentialist terms.

3.3. *A divided campus*

The random sample survey conducted on campus confirmed these divisions within the student population, both along lines of 'race' and class.

Table 1
Responses to the statement "On Rhodes campus black and white students lead separate lives" analysed in terms of 'race', social class, and type of school attended.

<u>"On Rhodes campus black and white students lead separate lives" (%)</u>				
<u>'Race'</u>	<u>Strongly disagree/ disagree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Strongly agree/ agree</u>	<u>N</u>
African	11,7	3,9	84,5	103
Coloured	19,0	9,5	71,4	21
Indian	27,1	8,3	64,6	48
White	21,8	11,5	66,7	243
Total	19,8	9,2	71,1	415
p-value: 0,0364				

<u>Social class</u>				
Working class/ peasant	16,4	6,3	77,4	128
Middle class	21,3	10,3	68,3	281
Total	19,8	9,0	71,1	409
p-value: < 0,0001				

<u>School</u>				
Model C/ Private	20,4	10,1	69,5	328
DET	18,1	4,8	77,1	83
Total	19,9	9,0	71,0	411
p-value: 0,0002				

As the survey results indicate, an average of 71,7% of students agreed that black and white students lead separate lives. The greatest level of agreement was amongst African students from a working class/peasant background who had attended township or rural-based DET schools. White and Indian middle class students who had attended either Model C or Private schools agreed least with the statement. The following extract from a focus group interview with African middle class students, who had attended either Model C or private schools, reveals the divisions between them and African working class students who had attended DET schools.

Siyanda: You've been called...remember you're like a private school kid, segregated man, you're like put into a box, you know.

Mxolosisi: They assume things about you, because of what they know.

Moketsi: They don't get to know you. They assume things first, before they get to know you.

Interviewer: Do any of you ever go to the 'homeland'? Do you know about the 'homeland'?

Siyanda: Homeland, as in the reserves? As in farms?

Interviewer: No, it's a television viewing room on campus. It's part of Founders Hall.

Siyanda: Oh, no.

Mbuso: The DET students go there, and ...

Interviewer: Have you ever tried to view television there?

Mbuso: Ja, I've been there and they looked at me funny. There you have to speak Xhosa, and it's so serious.

The reference to the speaking of Xhosa by the 'homeland' students is significant because, as I pointed out in Chapter 7, language use is a marker of class difference and upward mobility amongst African students. In her study of language use amongst African students at private schools, Gaganakis points out that their elite status resided in access to a better education, particularly the ability to speak fluent English: "The use of English is perceived as a means of effecting social closure or signalling distance from township peers; those who attempt to project a particular social identity as an elite often refuse to speak the vernacular" (1992: 53). In contrast, as discussed in Chapter 7, African students who have attended township DET schools don't share this English language proficiency and prefer to use a vernacular African language. Language use is thus a marker of social difference between African students on campus.

Moketsi: Ja, the thing is we have nothing in common. I think it's no longer a race issue, it's more like a class issue. I mean like I'm the only black middle class person in my house [residence] and I don't get on with the DET's or whatever you call them. They speak Xhosa, we're not interested in the same things. They're all about black consciousness, got to play

football, you've got to listen to Kwaito, you've got to wear All Stars [a brand of shoes favoured by the DET students]...

Siyanda: I think for me it started way back, this whole thing. Because even back at school you find somebody that comes from like Mokashe, which is in the location, would look at me and say "coconut" – that you're black on the outside and white on the inside. But it's not something we chose. It's just where you grew up. It's like Moketsi said, it's a class issue. Even now at varsity I get people coming up to me and saying, if I say something in an African language, "wow, you can actually speak an African language". And because I went to a private school, they assume that now I'm wealthy beyond words...I mean black people [working class] will tend to push us out...

This contrast provides support for Gaganakis's (1992: 52) claim that one of the abiding effects of private schooling, whether intended or not, is to produce an exclusionary and elite group.

Mbuso: Okay, what can I say. They tend to push us out, and obviously if you get pushed out, you're going to move in another direction. I mean like right now we're pretty diverse when it comes to music. You can go to a white club and you can go to a black club. It's not a huge thing. But it's huge when I go to my relatives in the location because like the whole tradition thing and everything. I don't know all of it. So it's difficult to relate to them sometimes.

Moketsi: That's a culture thing, you know. It's no longer a race thing. I can go to the Union [where white students are dancing] and straight from the Union I can go and walk into the Green House [a township shebeen] and just like chill. And I don't feel out of place at any one. But at the same time I can't really say that I belong to this or I belong to that. I can't relate to the white folk, because they don't know where we're coming from...I

can't really relate to the black folk, because they don't know where I'm coming from. So we're stuck in the middle.

Twcu: All our folks were like growing up in the Apartheid years, like, and they wanted us to be better...out of the townships, out of the violence and stuff. So sending us to private school to try and better us, right. So we're getting away from that and in our education we're like the whites but when we go home, we're like distant from that culture. On the other side I know my rock [music], I can watch rugby. I can talk the white-talk basically, and I can walk the white-walk, but at the same time I can also do the black thing. So that's why I say we're like sort of pushed up in the middle; you know you belong, but you're not sure where you belong.

Siyanda: Ja, actually it's quite difficult sometimes, especially if you're going back home to the villages and stuff. You're almost treated like you're white...they try and treat you like you're a white person, they don't treat you like other kids who weren't in private schools. They actually try and speak English around you even though they can't speak English all that well. They will try to accommodate you even though you try and let them know that they can be free around you.

These African middle class students can relate more easily to the white students (and are thus less likely to feel that black and white students lead separate lives on campus).

Nevertheless, they still find themselves in limbo, nomadic subjects, caught between black traditionalism and white Western modernity.

The tension between African students from different class backgrounds also emerged in an interview with female ex-DET school students.

Machemo: People from Model C schools think they're bad. They talk different from us. Sometimes we refer to them as coconuts [black on the outside but white on the inside] (laughter).

Interviewer: Is there a tension amongst female Model C and DET students?

Machemo: It just depends on how you behave when you're from a Model C school. If you're from a Model C school and you still believe in yourself being black, we will talk with you and we will relate with you. But there are other people from Model C schools and they just think they're wonderful.

The fault lines do not always fall this neatly along lines of 'race' and class as this exchange between black middle class students indicates. As the next interview indicates, some African students believe that their ability to get on with white students depends on how much they are prepared to fit in with the white students' expectations.

Thando: Okay, about the whites and the blacks – I was shocked hey, they live totally separate lives...Actually, everyone is minding their own business. White people mind their own business and black people mind their own business – "...as long as you don't touch my circle of friends we're cool...I don't have any business with you".

Interviewer: How do you explain the fact that when I discussed this with white students some of them told me that they got on well with black students?

Lwazi: They don't want to face reality. It's always been like that. For them getting along is probably just saying "hi". That's getting along with black people.

Ann-Mary: I always find that I have to make the effort to say "hi" to them.

Lwazi: I think as long as you do what those guys actually enjoy and what they like, you will be good friends with them. For instance, there is this student from Zimbabwe and we were watching TV together. He had a video about racism and all the white guys were ridiculing that video and adding stupid comments. If it were maybe the *Titanic* or some other movie like that, they would be cool with it. Also with sports...when I watch football, like [Kaizer] Chiefs versus [Orlando] Pirates they will come and ridicule how we play [soccer in South Africa is largely seen as a 'black' sport both in terms of players and support, while rugby and cricket are seen as 'white' sports]. But they expect me to watch the Stormers playing the Hurricanes [South African and New Zealand rugby teams respectively, participating in the "Super Twelve series].

Ntsika: I have noticed that you get some black guys who are very good buddies with some white people. It's mostly because they try to fit in with the white people, they try to be accepted into the white people's circle.

Ann-Mary: Ja, you said my point. But I was going to say that you find that black people have to accommodate more of the white culture. The white people aren't moving to accommodate our culture. That's true, to fit in with the white people you have to change some of the things, sort of act white and stuff like that. But you hardly see a white person acting black to fit in with us. It's like we always have to move one step ahead.

Interviewer: What would be some of those things you would be expected to do to fit in?

Ann-Mary: This *Titanic* thing, movie things, music. There are a few white people that enjoy black music, but I find that I have to enjoy white music and not talk about racism.

Lwazi: They always avoid talking about those topics.

Ann-Mary: Or they will tell you, “All black people are like this, except you”...and they will talk about black people.

These sentiments are similar to those expressed by African students from Model C and private schools in Gaganakis's (1992: 51) study, who perceived their acceptance by whites as conditional upon the extent to which they were assimilated into the schools as 'white'. This one-sided view of acceptance goes some way to explaining why white students, as indicated in table 1, were less likely than black students to perceive social divisions on campus. My interviews indicated that white students were often unaware of how identities have been shaped by the historical divisions in South Africa. They saw problems between themselves and black students as individual, rather than a social issues. This was articulated by one white female respondent.

Jen: I think it's about the kind of level that you're on. If you're on the same kind of social level, if you as two individuals have things in common, you'll go with them, and you'll socialise. I mean within our class...my neighbour is a coloured girl and we'll socialise. We go to class together and we socialise after hours as well and I think nothing of it.

Those white students who did acknowledge differences between themselves and black students were generally unable to relate these differences to the very different social experiences black and white students have had growing up under apartheid (see Chapter 4).

Alison: When I lived in residence I did live next to black people but they would hardly ever speak to me. I was never invited to attend any of their parties or whatever. But if they had asked me, would I have gone? I don't know why...

Interviewer: Belinda, do you have any black friends?

Belinda: I do, yes. But socially, after hours, it seems like we don't mix.

The lack of sensitivity to 'black reality', pointed to by Ntsika, Lwazi, and Ann-Mary, is a result of the very different life experiences of black and white students. This is exacerbated by the fact that very few white students are drawn to local film and television productions which explore local black realities (see tables 5, 6, and 7 in Chapter 7). This is arguably one of the effects of the relative underexposure of white students to local media. As Earl, a white male interviewee put it:

I do believe that we [white students] have accepted American culture...just by watching these things we are actually saying we accept. We're not looking at all the local dramas that are available to us. We're probably more apt to look at American stuff. Just talking about 'soaps' ...There's *Isidingo*, there's *Generations*, but I'll probably rather watch something like *Sunset Beach* [an American soap opera].

The lack of sensitivity to the 'black reality' correlates with my survey findings that during a period of rapid social transformation in South Africa, only 26% of white students surveyed indicated any interest in politics (table 2).

Table 2
Response to the question "How interested would you say you are in politics?" analysed in terms of 'race'.

<u>"How interested would you say you are in politics?" (%)</u>				
<u>'Race'</u>	<u>Uninterested</u>	<u>Indifferent</u>	<u>Interested</u>	<u>N</u>
African	30,7	32,7	36,6	101
Coloured	31,6	31,6	36,8	19
Indian	43,8	35,4	20,8	48
White	45,5	28,5	26,0	243
Total	41,0	30,5	28,5	410
p-value: 0,1494				

The social divisions on campus also emerged in interviews with Asian students.

Interviewer: Do you have white friends?

Pranusna: Like one or two, but no-one who is very close to you.

Lukrisha: I feel the racial tension, especially on the sports field. When I first came I thought it couldn't be, it was probably just me being new and needing to integrate and accommodate and tolerate different cultures and people. But then you can sense that tension...that's when I first became aware of it. Then you can see it, it's very obvious sometimes.

On the other hand, Marshall, an African middle class student felt that he had a lot in common with white students on campus. This was primarily as a result of having been exposed to 'white' culture at the private school he attended.

I have been exposed to a culture. At a certain age I went to a certain kind of school...there was a sort of culture shock in my life. I sort of crossed to the other side.

Lebo, a female African student who had also been exposed to 'white' culture at school, expressed the difficulties she had experienced at Rhodes University in her relationship with African students who had attended DET schools.

I went to a Model C school. I just wanted to bungy jump and whitewater raft...and when I tell people, they are like, "oh, you're such a coconut, you know, you're trying to be white". But I just find it so exhilarating to be flying in the air, you know, suspending myself. It's not a matter of trying to be white, it's just something that I found so interesting. Most of the black people, when they see something basically done by white people, they call it a white thing.

The social divisions amongst students on campus are reflected in their media preferences and are evidenced in the survey results (Appendix 6). These survey results confirm that the diversity of media tastes is socially patterned (Moore, 1993: 30). There are

significant relationships between particular demographic factors and certain television genre preferences, music genre preferences, radio station preferences, and newspaper preferences. These cultural divisions between different sectors of South African youth make claims for a 'national culture' difficult to sustain (see Dolby, 1999).

Given the existing social divisions amongst the students surveyed, and the historical reality of cultural hybridity, I have to agree with Massey (1992: 11-15) that places should no longer be seen as internally homogeneously bounded areas. She writes that we should see places as 'spaces of interaction' where local identities are constructed out of material and symbolic resources which may not be local in their origins, but should still be considered 'authentic' (1992: 11-15). Similarly, Miller (1992: 164-165) writes that it is unproductive to think about cultural imperialism as a process in which a set of external or corrupting forces impinge on the pure sphere of the local, which must then be protected from their destructive influences. Rather, he believes, we should understand the ways in which people construct their identities from the symbolic resources at hand (including foreign media products), which are then subjected to a process of 'indigenisation'. It is more useful, he argues, to assess these cultural resources in terms of their *consequences*, not their *origins* (1992: 164-165). This insight informed Chapter 6 in where I examined the role played by global media in providing the symbolic means for students to distance themselves from their parental cultures and in the process, become modern subjects.

With these non-essentialist understandings of global and local national cultures, I would like to re-visit the issue of 'realism'. As I noted in Chapter 8, 'realism' was one of two dominant explanatory discourses drawn on by students in explaining their attraction to global or local media. In Chapter 8, I focussed primarily on 'empiricist realism', which, works at the level of denotative meaning. A text is experienced as realistic when there is a literal resemblance between the fictional world of the text and the 'real' world of the audience member. However, as Ang (1982: 45) points out, there is another level of realism that works not at the level of denotation, but at the level of connotation. This second level of realism enables us to deepen our understandings of the complexity of audience/text relationships in the age of globalisation.

4. Revisiting realism

4.1. Emotional realism

In her study of the pleasures Dutch women obtained from the American serial *Dallas*, Ang (1982: 45) found that while a number of viewers found the programme ‘unrealistic’ at a denotative level (empirical realism), many others found it ‘realistic’ at a connotative level. The connotative level, as Ang (1982: 42) defines it, relates to the associative meanings that can be attributed to elements of the text (see also T. O’Sullivan et al., 1983: 216). For the Dutch viewers, the realism of *Dallas* lay in the subjective experience it offered of the world (Ang, 1982: 45). The Dutch viewers recognised that both in their own lives and in the lives of the television characters, “...happiness can never last forever but, quite the contrary, is precarious” (Ang, 1982: 46).

The distinction between denotative and connotative levels of textual meaning reflects the two orders of signification identified by Barthes (T. O’Sullivan et al., 1983: 215). It is the ability of texts to provide meaning at the level of connotation that allows texts more than one preferred meaning and gives support to Fiske’s (1987b: 63) view that meaning-making is the result of the interaction between socially situated viewers and polysemic texts. In his study of television consumption, Fiske (1989a: 28) proposes the notion of an ‘active audience’:

Reading the television text is a process of negotiation between existing subject position and the one proposed by the text itself, and in this negotiation the balance of power lies with the reader. The meanings found in the text shift towards the subject position of the reader more than the reader’s subjectivity is subjected to the ideological power of the text. (1987b: 65-66)

Fiske (1987b: 66) maintains that to be popular, a television text has to be read and enjoyed by a diversity of social groups. Popular texts are thus polysemic in that the meanings they offer are capable of being inflected differently by different sectors of the television audience. Thus, while Ang (1982: 46) identified the ‘tragic structure of feeling’ as the dominant meaning obtained by her Dutch viewers from the *Dallas* text, it is

important to keep in mind that this was just one of many potential meanings and pleasures that this text offered to these particular viewers. An acknowledgement that *multiple* potential meanings and pleasures are provided by polysemic texts obviously undermines the claims for predictable ideological textual effects upon which the media imperialism thesis is premised. As the interviews with Zukile and Siphon in Chapter 6 and Mandela in Chapter 8 indicate, it is difficult, outside of ethnographic investigation, to predict precisely what meanings will be made at the point of textual engagement.

4.2. The contingent nature of meaning making

When we bring together the insights of textual polysemy with those of cultural hybridity and the fragmentation of national cultural identities, we can begin more fully to appreciate the contingent nature of meaning making that occurs when global texts meet local audiences. For, as I noted earlier, localities should be seen as ‘spaces of interaction’, in which local identities are constructed out of material and symbolic resources which may not be local in their origins, but should still be considered ‘authentic’ (Massey, 1992: 11-15). Take the case of Nicholas, a gay student. In his interview, he said that male musicians who are “handsome and well dressed” – such as Nsync, Boyzone, Backstreet Boys – have become icons and topics of conversation amongst the students in the gay community. Others, such as Village People, Queen, George Michael, and Elton John are also popular amongst the gay community because they sing about hardships faced by this community and, as such, “their problems are readily identifiable”. Thus, when it comes to music consumption, Nicholas’s identity as a gay male, which connects him to the international gay community, is stronger than his ‘local’ national identity. Foreign gay artists make music which is ‘authentic’ to Nicholas’s gay identity.

4.2.1. The Sopranos as a polysemic text

O’Sullivan et al. (1983: 215-6) point out that connotative meanings occur when the denotative meaning of the sign is made to stand for the value-system of the culture or the person using it. As they note, “It then produces associative, expressive, attitudinal or evaluative shades of meaning” (O’Sullivan et al., 1983: 216). This was clearly illustrated in the course essays in which I asked students to reflect on their media consumption

preferences. Two students, from vastly different, backgrounds wrote that the American series *The Sopranos* was their favourite programme. However, the connotative meanings they obtained from the programme were different, and derived from the *interplay* of their particular social situation and the meanings proposed by these polysemic texts. Stelena is a female, white, middle class student with immigrant Greek parents.

The programme I most easily relate to is *The Sopranos* – that is, in reference to the family life portrayed, not the mafia connection. The Italian Americans, as portrayed in film and on television, seem to have similar principles and values as most other European immigrants. In *The Sopranos*, the close-knit community that is portrayed, and their dependency on each other, reflects the Greek community in which I live. The family situation [in *The Sopranos*] of the father as breadwinner and mother as housewife is also reminiscent of my own household. While I can relate to this situation, it is not one I would like to pursue in my own life and while I can accept it in my current home and in such programmes, I myself would never take up the role of the stay-at-home wife and mother. As for the characters, that of Tony Soprano in particular, with his fierce pride and difficulty in expressing his emotions, is very much like my own father. Thus I relate to this programme and appreciate its authenticity.

While part of the pleasure she obtains comes from recognising the similarity between her family dynamics and that of the television family, this does not mean that she ‘buys into’ the patriarchal ideology the programme promotes. Her ability to obtain pleasure from a text, while at the same time maintaining a critical distance from some of its values, illustrates the complexity of trying to predict the effects that texts have on their audiences.

Andrew, a black Kenyan student now living in South Africa, also enjoyed *The Sopranos*. Andrew has lived in various parts of Africa including Kenya and Ethiopia, and his early university years were spent in England before his family moved to South Africa. In

discussing his attraction to the programme, Andrew described the Sopranos' family dynamics. As he wrote, the Sopranos are second generation self-made middle class Italian-Americans. The lead character is Tony Soprano. His elderly mother, Livia, and his uncle, Junior, are the only surviving members of the original émigrés. Livia often refers to the "good old country" (Italy) while Junior resents Tony's rise within the mafia family and yearns for the old days when the mafia elders were more respected. For Junior, one of the biggest threats to the mafia family comes from the younger Soprano 'family' members who are ignorant of their own history and no longer respect the old cultural traditions. The old rules no longer apply. Tony's children despise his involvement with the mafia. Even though the programme is set in New Jersey, United States, these themes resonated closely with Andrew's own life experience.

As a person who has lived as an immigrant/foreigner/visitor at various stages of my life, this dichotomy between tradition and the modern is something that I relate to in the programme. The older generation of my parents is always shocked at how little we, their children, know about our home country and its traditions. The Westernisation of the younger generation is seen as a constant worry. Even I, who can speak some of the local languages at home, often feel like an outsider when interacting with most of my fellow countrymen because we have so little in common.

As we can see from the above, for the two students, the realism of *The Sopranos* comes from the way the programme resonates with particular themes – quite different in each case – in their own lives.

4.2.1. Jean: Male action heroes in a feminist household

Jean is a 21 year-old white female student from a lower-middle class background. She wrote about the important role American television programmes, with male action heroes, played in her adolescent years. Jean is an only child and was raised by her feminist mother and her godmother. Her mother had conceived Jean by artificial insemination. Jean wrote:

I have been raised my whole life in a home of only women. Strong, self-sufficient, independent women at that. My mother gave me a lot of independence from an early age and I have always found my own way through life. I did not fit in with the schooling system, and have always radically rebelled against any form of authority.

The only men who were a regular part of her home-life were television characters: McGyver (*McGyver*), Michael Knight (*Knightrider*), BA-Baracus, Colonel Smith, Murdock and Face (*The A-Team*). Although she grew up in a feminist household, and these programmes upheld a patriarchal ideology, she was attracted to them. However, in contrast to the preferred meanings of the text – the ability of strong men to take charge and right wrongs – Jean identified these male traits with her mother. They reinforced her belief that “...women could take control of events, could be creative, strong and clever.” Her aberrant decoding of the programmes was dependent on their polysemy, and resulted in a reading which reinforced her belief in the strength of women.

4.2.2. Robert: the interplay of macro-social and individual-biographical factors in identity formation

The interview with Robert, a 21 year-old coloured student from East London in the Eastern Cape, further illustrates the theme of the contingency of textual meaning-making. The interview is also a reminder, that as Bausinger (1984: 349) observes, media behaviour cannot be reduced to the correlation between content and effect, or to usage inside a clearly defined field. As Bausinger writes, media consumption decisions “are constantly crossed through and influenced by non-media conditions and decisions” (Bausinger, 1984: 349).

Robert’s grandfather, on his father’s side, was Irish, while his mother had a French Phillipino father and Malaysian mother. His parents never discussed this coloured family background with him. Instead, as we will see, Robert’s identity was shaped by his feeling of difference from those with whom he lived in a designated working class coloured residential area in East London.

4.2.3. Identity-as-difference

As members of the petit-bourgeoisie – his father was a factory foreman and his mother a schoolteacher – his parents wished to shield him from the working class culture of the neighbourhood. One way of signifying their difference was through their refusal to speak Afrikaans, the language spoken by most of the people in his neighbourhood.

My parents protected us from that community as well. We weren't allowed to hang around...as you probably see on television, people hanging around on street corners and stuff like that. You've got these coloured gangs in Cape Town. They were in our community, but we were hidden from it. There was a fear that you'd end up like the rest of them. We'd play cricket in the yard...we weren't allowed to go and play out with the other kids.

Robert's grandmother had been a schoolteacher at a local coloured school, and the respect she was afforded by other community members fed into Robert's sense of social superiority and difference.

A lot of people in that community had been taught by my grandmother. She retired when she was 65 having taught for 40 years and was very, very respected...very, very respected. Whenever you were asked who your parents were - "who's your mum or who's your grandmother" - then they'd say "oh really, the Bryce-Pease family". Yeh, she was very well respected.

Their social difference from the rest of the community was materially evident.

The facts and the proof were there. We had a bigger house and we had cars. Other people didn't, they had to catch taxis. You would drive through the community; you wouldn't walk. Most people would walk.

Another way the family marked their social difference from the rest of the community was through the identification with the hegemonic European culture. For example, from an early age Robert took classical piano lessons.

From sub B (grade 2) I took lessons with a white music teacher in a white area and I would take part in white competitions...I would compete against white students. The late Ge Korsten (famous white Afrikaans opera singer)...I acted in a play with Ge, he was my father. In *South Pacific* I was a little French boy. So I had that part of my life as well.

4.2.4. *The English language as a marker of difference*

Robert recalls his family's desire to emulate white South Africans.

You'd always want to be like them, you'd always like to speak like them. You wouldn't want to speak...like generally coloureds have a heavy Afrikaans drone (laughs). We'd always try and speak better than they did. Elocution was very important...you would speak properly. You'd answer the phone and you'd start speaking very eloquently. "Is this Mrs Bryce-Pease? (laughs)...No, it's her son, actually" (laughs). With your voice not having broken you'd sound like your mother.

Robert was sent to a local coloured primary school. Again we see the role of the English language as a marker of social superiority.

It was the best primary school as far as we were concerned. We were very proud that we were the only English first-language coloured primary school in East London. It was also that people regarded English as superior to any other language. If you could speak English, then you were close to being white.

4.2.5. *Model C schools and upward mobility*

Robert's parents' sent him to Selborne College, a Model C high school, which accentuated his sense of difference from the rest of the coloured community. It was an overwhelmingly white school and Robert was one of only two 'non-white' students in his

year. He recalls: “I was in awe because of the facilities, just looking at the buildings...they were so much better than where I came from”. This contributed to his belief that he and his family were somehow special and different from the rest of the community.

What it did is elevate that perception of my family a little more...having gone to Selborne. You were better than them. Most children in that community went to the coloured high school marred by indiscipline, teachers going on strike...Our teacher never went on strike...That pushed down my perception of the people in my community...I thought less of them...the fact that they were so undisciplined.

As a result, Robert identified increasingly with whites – “All my friends were white”. It also pushed him to prove himself, which he did mainly through his academics.

There was also this notion that if you were coloured you were Afrikaans and I didn't like that at all. So I would drive myself to be better than them in English and (laughs) Afrikaans. Until they started counting me as one of them...borrowing my homework because I could do the work.

Robert's close identification with whites resulted in a degree of ostracism from the local coloured community.

On the odd occasion that you'd walk to someone's house (laughs), which wasn't very often, you'd get snide remarks. You'd ignore them, you wouldn't even speak to them, you wouldn't even lower yourself, you wouldn't look in their direction. You'd just see them as being jealous. I still don't like going to the café around the corner because you get these people who just lurk around there. People just sit aimlessly. They do nothing at all, they just watch the cars drive by or something like that. And I just don't relate to that at all...it's never been part of me.

Robert's desire to escape the confines of East London's coloured working class community was given further impetus by his parents' decision to subscribe to M-Net,

South Africa's pay television channel. The channel is primarily a conduit for American films and sitcoms.

You'd see these fancy cars, beautiful houses...you'd long to have what they had. I certainly knew it wasn't South African. I certainly thought I wanted to go there one day. Even today when I watch TV I'm very critical of South African presenters. I watch CNN and I worship their presenters because they're just so much more relaxed and at ease in front of the camera. Perhaps that stems back to having grown up seeing the American society as better than our own. It's certainly something I believe now.

4.2.6. Family dynamics shape media choice

Robert's desire to be different came not only from his relationship with the coloured community and his identification with whites, but also from his need to differentiate himself from his brother, the 'black sheep' of the family. This family dynamic affected Robert's choice of music.

My elder brother was very interested in 80s pop music, but I hated it. He would listen to the radio and play this music...George Michael, Rick Astley, Tina Turner. He was on the cutting edge of music all the time. But it didn't interest me at all. You see my brother was the black sheep of the family. My parents hated his music. Because they hated his music and because he was the black sheep of the family, I wouldn't like to be like him. So I would step back and not do that. It was a part of him so it couldn't be a part of me. We were on different planes completely. He was jealous that I got everything. Largely as a result of the mistakes he'd made, my parents were extra-careful with me. But then again, I saw it for myself and I didn't want to turn out like him. He also played the piano but couldn't handle it and he dropped out. That's why I continued till I finished school. He dropped out of school in standard 8. I would not do that because I'm *different* from my brother in all respects. He had friends in that community and he would hang out on street corners and stuff like that.

Much to the approval of his parents, instead of listening to global pop music, Robert listened primarily to Western classical music.

4.2.7. Robert comes to Rhodes

After completing school, Robert came to Rhodes University, where coloured students comprise only 4% of the Grahamstown campus population. However, given his class aspirations, Robert took easily to his new environment.

It was fine. I had a lot of my white friends from Selborne and because they fitted in perfectly, I fitted in as well. But there were people here who didn't know me so I had to build it up again. I had an horrific first year in residence perhaps because there were coloured people in residence who hated me... certain people could see that I was a cut above the rest and didn't like it.

At university Robert slowly immersed himself in the local youth culture. For example, he started listening to 5FM, the national youth-oriented radio station. Still, his major preference was for classical music, a taste he shared with his friends.

While he started watching more local television programmes, they did not compare favourably to “classy, slick American programs” which he preferred.

The American sitcoms show the rich, the prosperous, compared to the local sitcoms which just show people trying to get by. They have ‘shebeens’ (township drinking taverns) in their backyards. Although they were tapping into South African culture, it was the bad side of that culture. For me trying to elevate myself, to see something like that and comparing it to the American sitcoms, there was a clear vantage in going for the American sitcoms.

Even at Rhodes, Robert felt the need to keep himself apart from the youth culture which surrounded him.

I was still very conservative...you must look smart. I wouldn't wear something with a hole in it. I was always different from the others. I always felt myself to be better than the rest. I couldn't just throw that away now. The need to be better than others was still a big part of me.

The interview shows how Robert's identity was shaped by the interplay between macro-social and individual-biographical factors. His structural 'placement', as a coloured youth in an apartheid society, with upwardly mobile aspirations. His place in the family was as the 'favoured' son. While racist ideology portrayed coloureds as a 'mixed race', their 'European blood' made them hierarchically superior to the Africans (Marks and Trapido, 1987: 29). Prior to 1948, coloureds were exempted from many of the restrictions placed on Africans such as the carrying of passes, influx control and urban segregation (Marks and Trapido, 1987: 29). However, according to Goldin (1987: 169), the need by the National Party Government to retain the 'racial' purity of the white *volk* resulted in the introduction of legislation designed both to prevent whites from becoming part of the coloured society and to prevent coloureds becoming part of white society. For someone as personally ambitious as Robert, to become 'white' thus represented a step up the racially defined social hierarchy in South Africa. This was partly reflected in his media consumption choices, especially of 'respectable' white middle class musicians such as Frank Sinatra.

This interview demonstrates that media consumption *mediates*, rather than determines, cultural experience. Robert was aware of this. At the end of the interview I said to him that it seemed that compared to other aspects of his life – his family dynamics and growing up in a coloured community – the media had had relatively little impact on his sense of self. He replied: "I think you're right. In my developing years it was not important. The other stuff was more important".

This interview demonstrates Ang's emphasis on understanding the media's meanings for its audiences within "multidimensional intersubjective" networks in which the object is inserted and made to mean in "concrete contextual settings" (1996: 70). This is an

underlying principle of much ethnographic work on media consumption. The interview also demonstrates how identity construction is rooted in ‘difference’ – a theoretical principle first discussed in Chapter 7.

We also witness the role played by private and Model C schools in creating, as an exclusionary and elite group (see Gaganakis, 1992: 52). The transition for Robert from school to Rhodes University was relatively unproblematic. The interview also repeats the importance of the English language as a marker of social status. Finally, the interview demonstrates the role played by global media – in this case primarily American films and television programmes – in the process of symbolic distancing. For Robert, American ‘excellence’, as witnessed in these media, helped him to distance himself from the social ‘place’ designated to him by the apartheid state. Foreign media, particularly television, were more adequate to this task than were local media. Overall, Robert’s class identity assumed an importance which outweighed either his ‘racial’ identity or his national identity.

5. Quality

I wish to draw on the above discussion to reflect on the issue of textual ‘quality’. In Chapter 8, I noted that interviews revealed the complex reasons behind student preferences for global or local media, with two mediating discourses prominent – those of ‘quality’ and ‘realism’. I discussed the discourse of ‘quality’ primarily as it was applied to the technical aspects of production. However, there is another way of thinking about ‘quality’, which shifts attention away from formal textual properties, to how texts are received. ‘Quality’, according to this approach, is ultimately determined by the experience of the audience.

The context of a reception-based approach to ‘quality’ is the claim made by many culture critics that mass/popular culture, as opposed to high culture, lacks ‘quality’ (Ang, 1988: 82). In countering this claim a number of writers have argued that ‘quality’ should not be seen as an absolute concept that can be applied to any cultural product (Schroder, 1992;

Brunsdon, 1990; Corner, 1994; Mulgan, 1990). Rather it should be found in the audiences' reception of a text. As Schroder (1992: 211) points out,

Valid verdicts about cultural 'quality' must be based on audience experience, or reading, of the popular text, and we must be prepared to find, to accept, and to respect a variety of verdicts; from a taste perspective, 'quality' can no longer be seen as a concept with universal application, but always as quality *for someone*. (1992: 211).

Similarly, Ang (1998: 82), drawing on feminist studies of soap operas, writes:

The issue in this work is not, as has been mistakenly argued by some of its modernist critics, to suggest that soap operas are 'as good as', say, Shakespeare, but rather that the value of soaps should be looked at within the context of viewers' experiences and understandings of their lives, and how particular soaps...manage to articulate those experiences and understandings in particularly meaningful and astute ways. (1998: 82)

The reception-based approach to 'quality' is closely linked to the ethnographic strand in media and cultural studies discussed in Chapter 2. This approach argues that we need to understand people's media consumption choices within the context of their social experiences (understandings of their lives), and be sensitive to the ways particular programmes articulate these social experiences in meaningful ways. While texts have the power to propose or suggest particular readings, audiences are active decoders who will not necessarily accept the reading positions being offered. Texts are always read within a specific set of circumstances, and their final meaning, as Radway (1991: 480) and other cultural studies scholars point out, is a function of the way those circumstances constitute the reader as a social being. Meaning thus emerges out of the interplay between text, receiver, and the context of reception. In this chapter I have indicated how, depending on the context of reception, and the interplay between macro-social and personal biographical factors, texts assume relevance for particular viewers and readers. The 'quality' resides not in the formal properties of the text, but rather in its ability to articulate with the experiences and understandings of socially situated viewers.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued against the essentialism inherent to the media and cultural imperialism thesis. In doing so I have emphasised the hybridity of world cultures, a result of decades of interpenetration. Against the media and cultural imperialism claim that global media pose a threat to 'national cultures', I have argued that the decline and instability of the nation-state and the self-sufficiency of national economies has led to a fragmentation and erosion of collective social identity. With Massey (1992: 11-15), I have argued that places should no longer be seen as internally homogeneous bounded areas, but should rather be seen as 'spaces of interaction'. In such spaces local identities are constructed out of material and symbolic resources that may not be local in their origins, but should still be considered 'authentic'. People make their identities from the symbolic resources at hand (including foreign media products) but which are then subjected to a process of 'indigenisation' (Miller, 1992: 164-165). This takes place because media texts are polysemic. They do not only communicate denotative meanings, but also connotative meanings – meaning by association. These considerations affect the way we conceive of textual 'quality'.

Chapter 10

The hybridity of student identity

A recognition that all contemporary cultures are to some extent hybrid is required to understand the micro-politics of local/global interactions.
(Kraidy, 1999: 460)

1. Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued against the claim that local cultural purity is undermined by global culture. Indeed it is questionable whether local cultural purity exists anywhere. Relationships between different nations and local cultures, over long historical periods, have ensured the construction of locality as a hybrid space. As Kraidy observes:

The polarisation between the global and the local is based on the assumption that they are separate realms connected by the mass media. This alleged distinction glosses over years of osmosis between different national and cultural entities. For centuries immigration, trade relations, colonial expansion, political alliances, wars, and invasions have contributed to blending heterogeneous elements of different cultures.
(1999: 459)

As a result of this process of osmosis, Kraidy argues, "...we need to commit to the recognition that cultural hybridity is the rule rather than the exception in that what we commonly refer to as 'local' and 'global' have been long hybridised" (1999: 472). Because Kraidy's (1999: 457) research into the ways in which cultural identities are reconstructed by Christian Maronite youth in Lebanon, at the intersection of global and local discourses, has relevance for the discussion of my own research findings, I will briefly outline his argument.

2. The hybrid intersection of global and local

Kraidy (1999: 456-457) believes that is only by acknowledging the hybrid intersection of the local with the global that we can negotiate a way out of the impasse between the 'cultural imperialism' and 'active audience' theoretical positions. He writes:

"Rather than looking at how global media impact locality, I pose locality in its cultural complexity. I then ask how locality is best analysed and what importance communication practices may have in its constitution" (1999: 457). Thus: "The question therefore is not about whether identities are hybrid, but rather about the types of formations that recreate and flesh out these hybrid identities" (1999: 460).

In discussing the local 'cultural complexity' of the Maronite youth, Kraidy points out that Lebanese identity is highly contested by the different ethno-religious communities in the country: "At the heart of Lebanon's existence lies a fundamental identity dilemma: Is Lebanon a unique country with a diverse ascendance and Western affinities, distinct from its Arab environment? Or is Lebanon inseparable from the Arab world, sharing its values and identity?" (1999: 457). This uncertainty over cultural identity, according to Kraidy (1999: 457), is acutely experienced by the Maronites who are caught in a position between West and East, Christianity and Islam.

The question that Kraidy (1999) thus sets out to address pertains to the impact of global media on local youth living in and through this local cultural complexity. Kraidy's ethnographic research explores the way Maronite youth use the media, especially television, to articulate their identities at a juncture between the two competing discourses of 'modernity' and 'tradition': "Sweepingly identified as 'the West' and 'the Arabs', these two discourses functioned as dialogical counterpoints whereby meaning was created at their intersection. An overriding concern among my interlocutors was their inability and unwillingness to exclusively belong to one or the other of what they saw as two irreconcilable worldviews" (1999: 464). Identifying the Arab world with tradition and the West with modernity, "...young Maronites articulated both discourses with the

cultural matrices permeating their consumption of media and popular culture” (1999: 464).

For example, Kraidy (1999: 464-465) points out that Arab societies are traditional in their adherence to community and family, rather than the individual, as the prime social unit. His Maronite respondents identified with these community and family values and traditional Arab values of compassion and hospitality. But, they rejected other Arab values, such as authoritarianism, which they perceived as being socially and politically conservative. The young Maronites identified with the West’s commitment to personal freedom and civil liberties but also criticised Western individualism and sexual promiscuity. In other words, these youth live “on both sides of the symbolic faultline with allegiance to any” (Kraidy, 1999: 465).

The Maronite youths’ association of the West with modernity and individual freedom was articulated by the youth primarily through their response to American television programmes. For example, one respondent told Kraidy (1999: 466) how she “exploited” *The Cosby Show* to gain more freedom from her parents. She would discuss the relationship between parents and daughters on *The Cosby Show* pointing out that although the parents were conservative, they allowed their daughters to go out on dates because they trusted them. She strongly believed that the show helped her reduce her parents’ restrictions on her. However, many of the same respondents who associated the West with freedom, also criticised American movies and television programmes on moral grounds (Kraidy, 1999: 166).

The consumption of American television in the local cultural space of Christian Maronite youth, both reflected and helped these young people to construct hybrid identities – caught between ‘the West’ and ‘the Arabs’, modernity and tradition. Kraidy concludes: “In order to understand how young Maronites weave their hybrid identities, we need to articulate their media consumption with a variety of social, political, and cultural factors – local and global” (1999: 469-470). Such an approach is impossible within the cultural essentialism of the media and cultural imperialism thesis.

Kraidy (1999) believes that the researcher needs to first examine locality in its cultural complexity and only then examine what importance communication practices may have in its constitution. He also believes that hybridity (at the levels of production, dissemination, and reception) is the rule rather than the exception. One difference between Kraidy's (1999) research and mine is that he dealt with a homogeneous group of research respondents – Christian Maronites. Because there was a degree of uniformity in interviewees, he was able to make generalised statements on the nature of their hybrid identities.

My own research, in contrast, has drawn on a range of students whose identities reflect the deep structural fissures of a society historically divided along lines of 'race', class, and modernity/tradition – the full cultural complexity of the South African 'locality'. These structural differences, as we have seen, reflect a range of responses to global media. At the one extreme, we have mainly African students who, while they may adopt certain aspects of Western culture, are generally highly suspicious of global Western media and the values they convey. At the other, we find white students who strongly identify with Western European culture as experienced via the mass media. Then there are students of all 'race' groups who, as modern subjects, reject what they perceive to be the traditional values of their parent culture. The media they consume both reflects and helps construct their modern subjectivities.

There are also African, Indian, and coloured middle class students, many of who attended private or Model C schools, whose family traditions clash with the values they see being promoted by Western media. It is this latter group of students, whose identities most closely correspond with those of the 'hybrid' Christian Maronites, that I will first discuss.

3. Indian students as hybrid subjects

3.1. Entering the cultural space of Rhodes University

The process, discussed by Kraidy (1999: 464), of simultaneous identification with two very different cultural traditions was strongly evidenced in my interviews with Indian

students on campus. For many of these students, the student culture of Rhodes University was very different from their more traditional and conservative family values. They felt they had to continuously move back and forth between two very different sets of cultural expectation.

Amichad: I do go overboard when my parents are not here, but when I go back home, I'm back to being the mummy's boy that I am. Rhodes has got to me. Well talking about that, there was a gap because when I came here I had everything that I learnt at home and I embraced all my culture. On the first day that I came here I was faced with every single situation that went against everything that I believed in. But over the years I've learned to actually make a blend between what I believe in and what is here...I've made a negotiation. Everyone on campus...they try to enhance the Western style, but we try and keep some of the Eastern stuff. Basically, like I've said, we've drawn that line. We stick to our culture. So we do our ritual prayers in our room and we go to the temple on Sundays, fasting at the appropriate time...and come to fun days, we take a break from our work and we go for it.

'Going for it' includes drinking at the Victoria Hotel on a Friday night with other Indian students, something many of them would never do at home.

Kirti: It's something you just do here, it's not part of you. Because I know, like with me, when I go home it's fine to stay at home and not go out on a Friday night. It's not a major issue, but like when I am here I do go out and it's just a pastime.

The same theme of 'cultural negotiation' emerged in a number of interviews with Indian students. Depending on the dictates of their family cultures and religious traditions, students found it easier or more difficult to move between what they perceived to be as two irreconcilable sets of cultural expectations. An example of the latter was Amina, who comes from a strict Muslim family background, and has accepted the choice of marriage partner made for her by her parents.

Amina: I don't think the two can overlap at all. I mean, when I'm on the plane back home [to Zimbabwe] I have to totally psych myself mentally, because I mean if you do some things at home... Like here I will wear track suit pants and a shirt because I am cold, and that's fine, but if I did that at home both my parents would freak out totally.

But even being here at Rhodes... a lot of things like going out... I don't go out, I don't have boyfriends... things like that.

Other students found the transitions easier to deal with.

Kirti: You learn to adapt, to balance your life. Because like at home I don't usually go out but like here we do... my parents know about it and stuff, but at home I just wouldn't. It wouldn't be okay.

Khavitha: Because with your parents they don't expect you to do things ... like even though they know when you are away from home you do go out, but under their supervision. You won't go against them.

It is because their family cultures are so strong that they find themselves caught between the modern and the traditional.

Neeta: We've always been close to our parents and dependent on them as such.

Amina: That's the whole idea of keeping us close to them, so that their values are passed on to us. It's the way we were brought up. Like I was brought up in a very strict family so I've got very strong feelings of right and wrong... like with dressing I shouldn't wear trousers or tight clothing.

Lukrisha: I think it's important to remember your background and to at least follow in your parent's tradition. To just lose that would give us a sense of not belonging... you know, cultures being lost, which is very sad.

Prenesen: We're very close. I have a lot of respect for my family. I follow all the rules and I stay within the traditions.

Despite many of these students staying 'within the traditions' of their family cultures, many admitted to enjoying American teenage drama series, such as *Friends*. They said they enjoyed this programme because they were interested in the clothing the characters wore and the fact that it centred on the lives of young people – “we can identify more because it's a young crowd...the things they speak about are things that we as teenagers can identify with”.

3.2. *Multiple identities*

Indian students' simultaneous identification with traditional parental values and the Western youth values of youth-oriented American television dramas echoes Kraidy's (1999: 464) finding that Maronite youth displayed an inability and unwillingness to belong exclusively to one or other irreconcilable worldviews. Their experience reminds us that we are composed of multiple identities, that our subjectivities are 'nomadic'. As Fiske writes: “The necessity of negotiating the problems of everyday life within a complex, highly elaborated social structure has produced nomadic subjectivities who can move around this grid, realigning their social allegiances into different formations...according to the necessities of the moment” (1989a: 24). (On the issue of multiple identities, see Hall 1991b: 57.)

When I asked them why they were drawn to media that promoted values not condoned by their parental culture, their initial response was to dismiss the media as 'mere entertainment'.

Khavita: It's entertainment, I mean it's TV...it's not something you're going to live by.

Neeta: It's funny as well.

Amina: It's another world...you know I've never experienced it and I probably won't...it's entertainment...half an hour of it and it's over. I mean forget TV...even on campus, I mean, you see people with boyfriends and stuff like that and you know it's fine...it's not your upbringing and you know it.

However, when pressed, the students admitted that there were some values which they found attractive.

Neeta: I like the independence...like *Friends* you know...being away from home, working...you don't have to get married straight after you finish your education...things like that.

Khavitha: Freedom.

Seema: I think a lot of times it's freedom to be yourself and that's still ok, no matter what you are...because like so many American shows...like *Friends* they have six totally different characters yet everyone will probably identify with one person or have one particular favourite character or whatever.

Khavitha: Yeah, whereas in our culture it's a bad thing to be different you know. Like you shouldn't stand out in a crowd...like we come from such a conservative community that I think being different is a bit difficult for our parents to accept.

Lukrisha: In American programmes there's lots of focus on women's lib that I find very appealing. You don't really get that in South African TV shows but in America, women have a greater standpoint and they have more say...visually you can see it. I don't find this in local programmes. Maybe it's there, but it's very hidden (pauses)...actually no, I haven't seen it in local programmes.

Kirti: It's nice to look. Just see like them wearing the short skirts or not wearing anything...like just covering the bare necessities. It's just nice to see the different ideas people have...like I've been to a fashion show and it's just nice to see what ideas other people have...yeah, how ridiculous people can be.

3.3. The contradictory pulls of tradition and modernity

Kirti's statement indicates the difficulty students face in attempting to reconcile the pulls of tradition and modernity. On the one hand, she admits to being attracted to the different expressions of fashion, while on the other, she feels such displays are "ridiculous". Fiske's comments on this process of simultaneous attraction and rejection of Western values relating to Katz and Liebes's study of non-American ethnic groups viewing *Dallas*, are appropriate to my discussion:

Much of the pleasure of television viewing derives from [the] complex viewing position in which the viewer is simultaneously self-implicated in, and self-extricated from, the text. The viewer's choice of certain points of identification does not preclude the ability to achieve an actively critical distance from other points, and these dual relationships with the text can be engaged in simultaneously. (Fiske, 1987b: 175)

This process described by Fiske (1987b: 175) is demonstrated in this extract from the interview.

Seema: Sometimes you are tempted...if you like how she looks and that and you want to try it. But sometimes it's just not...you don't feel comfortable.

Khavitha: You won't feel comfortable. Like I won't feel comfortable wearing shorts or a short skirt or anything, it just wouldn't be right for me.

Seema: I don't like the language...the foul language and the violence.

Khavitha: But to us it's just a movie, its just entertainment...it doesn't affect our lifestyle. I mean you do get people that it does effect...I know people who like hip hop and they just walk like them and talk like them...but we are speaking for ourselves you know, it doesn't you know, for us...

Seema: Ok, I am aiding it, but for me it's not a strong part of my life, you know...like I don't have to listen to music, it's fine...I mean I don't let it control me, I don't let it take over me. Even me going out with my friends, I won't let that over-ride my underlying values. I still have my strong set of values and I will stick to them...and I mean even though I don't dress as I should...but when I do get older I will dress properly, appropriately.

Kirti: I know that it's wrong for me to do it because of the influence, but again, it's just a pastime.

3.4. Ambivalence towards American cultural values

While these students admitted to being 'entertained' by American media, and attracted to certain of the values espoused, they simultaneously remained critical of others.

Amina: They don't have a strong set of values you know, like we do. I know our values are like strong...right and wrong...you will do this and you won't do that. But there it's carefree...like once you're 18 your parents are nothing, you know – “thank you, see you later and maybe I will come and visit you in the old age home”.

Pranusha: No. To them marriage is a joke and they just think that money grows on trees...they spend it.

Jenny: People buy dresses for about \$10 000 whereas they could be doing so much more like helping the needy or something like that.

Lucrisha: It's just that in America they have less values, less ethics, less principles as compared to us. They've advanced further materially.

Prenesen: We really know that the average American is not like that. The average man is not that built up or has a good job. They have their flaws, they have their faults. Many American movies they're like too patriotic...it's American heroes, it's American this, it's American that. America has been plagued by aliens, by volcanoes, by earthquakes...it's all American.

Sumayya: Yeh, like America takes on the responsibility for saving the world.

Prenesen: Like in that respect I'm critical. Like they think that America is the centre of the world.

Sumayya: I think we all liked *Armagedon* because of the emotions that ran through it. But I saw through the whole thing of America taking on responsibility of saving the world and South Africa was nowhere (laughter). It's amusement, it's amusement...we laugh it off.

The same ambivalence towards American mass mediated popular culture emerged in another interview, also a group of Indian middle class students.

Shakti: Personally I don't really follow America's propaganda stories. If there's this guy and he spends R200 million on making that spaceship fly in a film, I'll think "ah, let's just watch it".

Ravi: In most cases, all I've learned from American culture is what not to do.

Prenesen: I think amongst all of us with our friends back home we're very critical of this "it's all about America" thing... amongst us Indians, especially. I mean I'll definitely go and watch an American film. I'll be the first one there. But this doesn't mean I'm so soaked up... it's just entertainment value, it's all entertainment at the end of the day.

Nirvana: Yes, yes.

Prenesen: When you go back home you're going back to your Indian culture.

Shakti: My heart and soul is in the East. You look to the West for just like minor recreation... but I will never embrace it because I have grown up with something... I won't embrace the family values that they portray sometimes. The sitcoms give Indians too many dirty ideas. The divorce stories...

Again, we see the simultaneous process of attraction and rejection of American media and the values they are seen to promote. Part of these students' attraction to American film and television is because of their perceived 'superior' production values (hence the reference to the R200 million spent on production). However, their home culture and parental family values continue to shape their identities. The perceived continuing relevance of parental values to the student population was not, however, limited to Indian students and is an issue I will now address.

4. The importance of family values

A constant theme that emerged in my research, both quantitative and qualitative, was the continuing relevance of family values for students. These findings support the claims for cultural hybridity argued by Kraidy (1999). Traditional or family values were perceived to provide a barrier against the wholesale adoption of Western values through the global media.

These findings contradict the claims made by a number of theorists (for example, Thompson, 1991: 75; Willis, 1990: 13; Reimer, 1995: 113; Nielsen, 1993: 2) that in late modern society, many of the traditional sources of identity – religion, the family primarily – have lost their legitimacy for young people. As a result, these writers contend, individuals fall back on their own resources for identity construction with ‘mediated symbolic materials’ playing a crucial role in this process (see, for example, Thompson, 1995: 211). The implications is that greater reliance on ‘mediated symbolic materials’ for identity construction means being more open to the influence of Western media.

I tested the importance of parental values in the survey with the following results.

Table 1
Responses to the statement “Regardless of what the qualities and faults of one’s parents are, one must always love and respect them” analysed in terms of ‘race’ and social class.

<u>“Regardless of what the qualities and faults of one’s parents are, one must always love and respect them” (%)</u>				
<u>‘Race’</u>	<u>Strongly disagree/ disagree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Strongly agree/ agree</u>	<u>N</u>
African	11,7	3,9	84,5	103
Coloured	14,3	9,5	76,2	21
Indian	18,2	2,1	79,2	48
White	43,3	5,0	51,7	240
Total	31,1	4,6	64,3	412
p-value: < 0,0001				
 <u>Social class</u>				
Working class/ peasant	14,0	4,7	81,3	128
Middle class	37,1	4,3	58,6	278
Total	29,8	4,4	65,8	406
p-value: < 0,0001				

An overwhelming majority of the students (an average of 64%) felt it important to love and respect their parents above all. While fewer middle class students agreed with the statement, even for them there was still just under 60% agreement. To related survey questions, 70% of students agreed with the statement, “Most values our parents hold onto

still have much relevance to today's youth", while 79% had "quite a lot/a good deal of confidence in my parents' generation" (Strelitz and Coetzee, 1998). While these findings are not conclusive, they do point to the continuing importance of family values in shaping the identities of Rhodes University students. The survey findings were confirmed in focus group interviews, as the following extracts illustrate.

Ravi (Indian, urban, middle class): I respect my parents. They pay for my education, and I'll always respect them. As for my Hindu religion and my culture, that's basically me. I've got my culture in me. I won't forget my background. The family is obviously always united. On weekends we all get together, mothers, fathers and huge families. Hindu families are huge, and when we have a get together we are 50 or 60 people in the backyard. When it comes to some kind of festival, the belief is there, the devotion is there. We will fast, we will not eat, we will go to a temple or we will pray in our room. We always believe that God is within us. We don't have to go to a temple to pray, we have Him in our heart, we lead by example and we lead by heart and that's how we live.

Shakti (Indian, rural, working class): In Indian families, offspring don't leave home at an early age, and they are inculcated with certain values which they carry on through life and one of those is certainly respect for one's elders as well as for one's religion. We are taught at a very young age that those are very important and it's very rare that someone rebels as such against those values and ethics.

Amichad (Indian, urban, middle class): The thing is, we're from KwaZulu Natal. Our great grandparents came from India as cane labourers. They all stuck together - our traditions, beliefs, morals and values kept us together, from my grandfather to my father to myself, and my future offspring. Hopefully those traditions will go through. And we try and keep that togetherness because that's what helped us through a lot of hard times. It kept us through insanity, through impoverished times, through times of

difficulty. We stuck together. We prayed, believed in God...It plays an important part in our life. It's from a very small age that we were taught these values. I remember my grandfather used to take me from 4 years every Sunday to the temple, every day at a certain time they make sure that all the children prayed. In our upbringing, there were certain codes that you had to go through.

Andrew (white, urban, middle class): I know for myself I pretty much act the same way as both my parents, you know, pretty well balanced between the two of them. Yeah, I think they have had a big influence on the way I act, but then I came from a very stable background, a big factor. I wasn't in boarding school, so ... you know, pretty much you are with them for 18 years and they basically are shaping you in what they do. I think you develop when you come to 'varsity' but you still have your basic morals and standings and what you believe in and actually what you grew up with.

Taryn (white, urban, middle class): Even though we're sort of left to our own devices [at Rhodes] and we can basically do what we want, you still see people generally have sense of respect for authority and know what is correct and what is not, even though they're not living at home or close to their families. People just understand what's right and good.

Tanya (white, urban, middle class): [When you come to University] yeah, you still hold on to your values, you don't go completely beserk.

Earl (coloured, urban, middle class): For myself I've seen that my parents have actually been an integral part of forming, perhaps, a better part of myself. You often hear saying 'charity begins at home' and I believe that the grounding that you get at home actually shows how you present yourself to other people.

Michael (coloured, rural, working class): I think the respect for your parents and authority is essential. Possibly in South Africa, because it's had a far less secular mindset than say America and Australia, that's why you see the importance of parents. And also I think American kids and Australian kids have far more attachment to the TV. With my mother and father, it's complete respect. I think possibly because they have been really good parents to me. They've got faults like all of us, but they've always been there for me, which I really respect, and which I've needed many times. I think it's important to respect authority even if sometimes they're in the wrong, because I think when the people go against authority and there's not clear justification, that's the start of the breakdown of society. And I think you actually have that need of authority.

Lester (African, urban, middle class): I also tend to think that, especially in South Africa, children from a young age are very attached to their parents. When they grow up, they get to see what their parents have done for them, and that's where they get the respect from. I think they tend to be more attached to their parents from a young age than other children.

Pearl (African, urban, middle class): I also think that your parents have done it before. They always seem so much more knowledgeable, and they can always help you out in a situation.

Marshall (African, urban, middle class): I think your parents instil values into you like at a young age. I was basically in boarding school at a young age, and time and time again I used what I got from them over and over again. I know that I am actually quite close to my mother.

Phila (African, rural, working class): I would say that we are pretty much what our parents are, but each generation that comes you always lose a

little bit. But I think we still have pretty much the same sort of family oriented values. But as we go on, we are going lose more and more especially when you consider that, I don't know, fifty odd years or so ago, people were still living in rural background kind of thing. Now it's more urban. So some of those things you will lose because you don't consider them important enough, or you just don't relate to the situation at the moment. But I think we are still more or less the same.

Thikhitiwi (African, rural, working class): For me too I find that I act more like my parents most of the time...talking like them...it's like why am I doing this...out of the blue it just happens.

Belinda (white, urban, middle class): Most of us come from a very good background. We do have respect for our parents and for most of what our parents have gone through to get us to the position where we are. I respect my parents for doing that and I will always appreciate them.

'Toast' (white, rural, middle class): I still follow the same old values. For example, when I go home I won't swear in front of my mother. But I swear fairly often here, which is not the way I was brought up. But that value stands when I go home...Those [parental] values are still in my head and they're part of what I am.

At the same time, students participate actively in youth culture. As one of the Indians students stated, when discussing her viewing of *Friends*, "we can identify more because it's a young crowd...the things they speak about are things that we as teenagers can identify with". This sentiment was supported by the survey below.

Table 2
**Responses to the statement “Youth have more in common with each other than with their parents”
 analysed in terms of ‘race’.**

<u>“Youth have more in common with each other than with their parents” (%)</u>				
<u>‘Race’</u>	<u>Strongly disagree/ disagree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Strongly agree/ agree</u>	<u>N</u>
African	7,8	2,0	90,2	102
Coloured	9,5	4,8	85,7	21
Indian	16,7	6,3	77,1	48
White	23,0	8,6	68,3	243
Total	17,9	6,5	75,6	414

p-value: 0,0026

These findings reflect Willis’s observation in his discussion of black youth identity in Britain. He argues that young people can never look wholly to the previous generation for clues about how to develop their own identities. For, as he points out, “The experiences of the two generations differ, and some cultural commonalities with white youth must arise from their shared conditions of life-common experiences in the same streets and schools mediated by many of the same cultural media (quoted in Dolby, 2000: 902).

Dolby (2000: 902) quotes Willis to support her claim that South African youth, while they live in a society still profoundly divided by race, do not merely replicate the previous generations antagonisms. Instead, she argues, their identities are “generative of the new terrain of racialised identities” (2000: 902). What is missing from Dolby’s (2000) analysis is the role that social class plays in the construction of these identities. As I have shown, amongst the African youth on campus there are deep divisions between those from working class/peasant backgrounds and those from middle class backgrounds. And while there might be a converging of black and white middle class student identities, historical divisions continue to be played out. After all, 71% of students agreed with the statement “On Rhodes campus black and white students lead separate lives”.

The ambivalence expressed towards American mass mediated popular culture by Indian students, was also reflected in my general survey findings. Most students stated that they connected more with American forms than with their local equivalents (see Chapter 7, tables 5, 6, and 7), but the majority also felt that the global spread of American culture

around the world was not a good thing (see Chapter 8, table 1). As the survey results indicated in that table, almost two-thirds of students disagreed with the statement with the highest indication amongst students from middle class or peasant backgrounds who had attended DET schools. How do we explain the seeming contradiction between the preference shown by students for American mass mediated global popular culture (table 5, 6, and 7 in Chapter 7), and their belief that the spread of American culture around the world is not a good thing (see table 1 in Chapter 8)? It seems that despite being critical of American values, students are nevertheless attracted by the perceived ‘superior quality’ and ‘entertainment value’ of their mass mediated popular cultural forms (see Chapter 8). Thus, for example, a number of students singled out *The Simpsons* as their favourite programme, and that the reason for this was its humour in satirising American society.

5. The uneven acceptance of Western cultural values

Westernisation (Western cultural influence, generally led by the United States) lies at the heart of the cultural imperialism thesis. However, as I noted in Chapter 6, Western culture does not constitute an indivisible package that is either adopted or rejected by local cultures. Rather aspects of this culture are adopted while others are found irrelevant and are resisted (Tomlinson, 1991: 74). This differentiation is a feature of both of hybrid cultures and hybrid identities, and it emerged in a number of interviews I conducted with African students.

For example, a recurrent theme in the interviews with African students was the lack of communication between parents and children (see also my interviews with Siphon and Zukhile in Chapter 6). These students said that Western values, as carried by Western media, provided an alternative, more attractive, model of the child/parent relationship. In a focus group interview, Marshall, an African urban middle class student, said that exposure to foreign television was partly responsible for African children having the confidence to verbally engage with their parents (“direct comeback”) in times of disagreement. In the following extract from a focus group interview two African middle class students discuss this issue.

Marshall: I find that black people, their relationship with their parents is very based on respect and obedience and knowing whom your elders are. Whereas I find with the white friends that I have, it's like they are more like friends with their parents. They talk to their parents a lot easier than we do. In a way I think sometimes there's a sort of slight fear of my parents...you know there's a gap. With white people it's more integrated.

Phila (African, urban, middle class): The white culture is more direct. There are certain things I couldn't dream of going to talk to my father about, no way.

Interviewer: Would you prefer that kind of relationship with your own parents?

Marshall: I actually would and I think with age I have acquired it.

Interviewer: For black students would that be one of the positive aspects of Westernisation?

Marshall and Phila: Yeah.

At the same time a number of African students believed that the unrestricted openness of Western culture was problematic. This theme also emerged in my interviews with the 'homeland' students in Chapter 7 and with some of the Indian students quoted above. This was clearly expressed in the following interview with African middle class students.

Lebo: For me in African culture, you know, where to draw the line, you don't say, "everything goes"; you have a limit.

Machemo: The thing I find when I watch *Ally McBeal* and stuff like that is the way there's no such thing as morality any more...you know what I

mean. Like if you've got morals like there's something wrong with you. In African culture there are strong morals and rather, if you don't agree with them, there is something wrong with you.

Lebo: I mean people do all sorts of things.

I pointed out to these students that this didn't stop them from watching, and enjoying, *Ally McBeal*. In explaining this seeming contradiction, these students, like the Indian students, made a distinction between the 'entertainment' offered by these programmes and the cultural values they espoused. They felt that their African culture provided a screen against unwanted Western cultural influence. Of course it could be argued that if entertainment programmes are not perceived as having ideological effects, this is one of their prime ideological effects.

Lebo: I think it's because we have somewhere to go back to. You watch the Western culture but you still have to compare it to African culture. If we were born in a Western culture we would have nothing else to compare it to.

Machemo: And also it's kind of like out there because it's on TV and you're thinking that when you see something on TV it's like a story...things like that don't really happen, you know what I mean...and everyday life is not like that so it's quite easy to relate to it.

Lebo: But I mean it's ok because it's on TV...but I mean in real life it's not ok. It's just how I feel.

Effie: I feel they are acting and that's fine. But if it was in real life I wouldn't find it that amusing, you know.

Lebo: It depends on you individually. Like are you easily influenced, you know. Like if you are that influenced then obviously you might do that but

if you know your ground and you know where you are coming from and where you're going, then nothing will really influence you that easily. So you are able to actually just watch it and go back to sleep or whatever afterwards.

Although these students claimed that their strong cultural values helped immunise them from the more problematic aspects of Western culture, some did admit to perceiving negative cultural influences on African culture.

Effie: I think we are buying into it much more than you realise because if you look at the models that walk down the ramp in New York, most of them are thin. Most South African girls are not like that, whether you are black or white or whatever. In most black cultures most girls they weren't thin and skinny. You accepted the fact that you were born like that. But now you look at all those Cindy Crawford, the Pamela Andersons and everyone else and think "gosh, I want to be like that"; and that's what's happening. We're like losing ourselves and going to the Western countries.

Machemo: Also like with music...people like to dress like those people. Before we never used to dress like them. You find guys with baggy pants and girls with short, short skirts. In a way somehow, somewhere we are buying into it, because we are dressing like them and we are talking like them and we are singing like them half the time.

Interviewer: Do you feel that there are important values in your own cultures that are being obliterated by American popular culture?

Machemo: When I was a kid I thought my culture was too strict. But now that I've grown up I realise I am going to bring up my kids the way I have been brought up. There are just some things I would never let my kids do.

Interviewer: Like what?

Machemo: The way people...I find this with whites as well...the way they relate to their parents, you know. If you have an argument with your parents you can slam the door in their face. You just can't do that...things like that are just not done in the African culture. I think a lot of blacks realise that. I mean, even though they know its done, they still see that it's wrong.

Effie: Disrespectful.

Lebo: My children, I think I will raise them the way I was raised at home. Yeah, they can go to Model C schools and all that, but then I will make sure they don't lose their identity.

Many of the issues discussed so far in this chapter emerged in the next interview. I asked for focus group volunteers from a group of third year commerce students. Of the five who signed up, only two arrived. They both happened to be Zimbabwean students. My initial thought was to discount them because they were not South African students, but the issues they raised were so pertinent to my study that I decided to include them.

6. Sharon and Remembrance: the difficulty of living a hybrid life

The views expressed in the interview that follows, contradicts the assertion by a number of South African interviewees that Zimbabwean students have uncritically and wholeheartedly adopted Western/American values (see Chapter 7). (Ironically, this is the same assumption that media imperialism theorists adopt when describing the impact of American popular cultural forms on youth around the world.) In line with Kraidy's (1999) findings discussed earlier, this interview demonstrates that individuals often occupy a place at the intersection of global and local culture, rejecting and accepting different aspects of each.

Sharon and Remembrance are both from middle class Shona families. They both attended racially mixed schools and from an early age they were exposed to Western media.

Sharon: I remember as we were growing up from a very young age that we were very much exposed to Western movies, music...there was like Black Western music things like Hip Hop, R&B, soul and rap. I mean we have been very much bombarded with the media all the time growing up...Most of us have gone through that stage where we try to speak in an American accent and American slang and we dress up the way they would dress up on TV and stuff like that. But fortunately for most of us, I mean, it wears off as we grow up, and then you actually start wanting to identify yourself with where you belong. So I could say that most of us have been through that phase where we are actually Americanised to the extent that you are too embarrassed to say that you have a rural homestead.

Remembrance: Back home when I attended school, I will tell you my parents were really for our own local music. They were very down to earth and very strong on traditional values. They are not old fashioned or anything, but they instilled in us this ability to identify that I am black, I am a Zimbabwean, I am a Shona and I have to be proud of it...that's what I am. But as I grew up, I learnt to identify myself with the thing which was basically the English songs and my interests shifted from the local drama to all the Western movies everyone at school was watching...I attended Western schools all my life...it was because I was surrounded by white kids at school. Also, as I learnt the English language, I developed an interest in more or less all the English things...English movies, English music...So you know I detached myself from my family. Basically that was the early stages of growing up.

As happened with the 'homeland' students, coming to Rhodes University brought into sharp focus for Remembrance his Shona identity – identity-as-difference.

Remembrance: Coming to university, that's when I realised we [need to] appreciate and accept more our own roots, our own culture. You will see, when I came here in my first year, I didn't have anything from home. I didn't have one tape of Shona music. Back home I would even switch off the channel that played Shona music. But then I began to miss the things back home, the things I didn't even care to look for when I was back home.

So I think it's about the phases through which we grow. I should say its a sudden change [coming to Rhodes University] which brings upon us a realisation that what we are doesn't really hurt. We begin to appreciate more of what we have because now we don't have it when we are here. I think as we get educated more and more we develop open-mindedness and we really see that not everything about the white culture is worth adopting...and really it's not only within the white music that we can derive a sense of emotion. You look back home and you actually realise that there are some things really worth listening to. Now our perceptions about things that happened back home are very different from what they were when we were growing up within that system.

Asked to name some of the local musicians he now listens to Remembrance named Oliver Mtukudzi.

Remembrance: Oliver sings about issues back home like economics, health...let's look at the AIDS pandemic. When I listen to those things, I really appreciate that this is one person back home who really sees the world in Zimbabwe as it is. He is highly informative to me. Let's compare this to some of the foreign songs that may talk about love, all in all about love...OK yes, I do appreciate that but I discovered that there's a lot of richness [in local music]...it's so informative, these local songs are highly informative.

Sharon also felt, on coming to Rhodes University, a need to reconnect with her Shona roots. For her this meant a rejection of certain aspects of Western culture.

Sharon: For me as a woman, I think this whole concept of feminism... I mean ok fine, I strongly feel that we must all be independent... you know we are all individuals, but this concept of feminism, to the extent that you must almost take the man's role into your own hands... like you become the man as well... I question it strongly, because as I was growing up and was totally into Western culture, I used to think ja, you all have to be the same, we are all equal. But for me, because of my background and the values that have been instilled in me, I realised that there is no way that we can ever be equal. We are equal by right, but there are some chores that a man has to perform in a house and a woman has to play a role. It is actually not about being unequal, but its about playing your pre-defined role so that you build not just a house, but a home. In the Western culture the conduct is highly informal... you can greet your boyfriend's dad by his name. In our culture it's a sign of disrespect as you are not respecting the values.

As was the case with the 'homeland' students discussed in Chapter 7, Sharon's rejection of what would generally be regarded as progressive views on gender relations, coincided with her rejection of Western media.

Watching Western television and film is now difficult for Sharon.

Sharon: It's terrible. I've noticed a trend in most movies now that there has to be a sex scene and to us this is unacceptable, really. Even music videos have sex, especially the black music. They have just become so naughty and people get naked by the minute... It's unacceptable in our culture.

For the second time Sharon had referred to her 'culture' in rather static terms. A desire to conserve one's culture at all costs is equally problematic in that it can help naturalise

unequal relationships of power and subordination. Remembrance, for example, cites traditional cultural values in his rejection of homosexuality.

Remembrance: I don't support homosexuality and I'm behind President Mugabe for the stand he took against it. Culturally it's not acceptable and even if you want to look at it biblically it's not acceptable. The majority, by far the majority of Zimbabweans are sure that Mugabe is right. You will realise that the Western media expose us to all of this. Even if homosexuality was going on in Zimbabwe, it was kept quiet. I want to believe that if there are people who did it they did it and nobody knew. But I believe through the media, through television, through newspapers, people read about it. Even people who didn't really have an affinity for the same sex learn from it. I believe that will influence the weak into experimenting and believing they've got the right.

He is also critical of the 'flexibility' of Western culture, which, as I noted earlier, is a concern that was expressed by a number of African interviewees.

Remembrance: At times the western culture is just too flexible. That sort of flexibility in the end might turn out to have a negative impact. You know one of the most valued elements of our culture is that of having no sex before marriage. To be honest with you, it's one thing when a guy sits back and thinks about it. I'm sure it's every man's dream to marry someone they really know to be decent. But it's another thing when you meet someone who has been around. I think it's such a good concept of this no sex before marriage. But we are never getting it these days, and you cannot blame it on the woman. You see it goes either way. But there is one thing I would appreciate, to know with my own lady, that from the onset it's been just the two of us.

Given his views, I was surprised to learn that Remembrance lives with his girlfriend. He put this down to needing to "fit in" in the cultural space of Rhodes University. At the same time he admitted that there were many other things that he does at the University

(like smoking and drinking) that he would never do in Zimbabwe, especially in front of his parents. Unlike the 'homeland' students discussed in Chapter 7, these two Zimbabwean students have tried to straddle the gulf between their tradition and the cultural space of Rhodes University.

Remembrance: We are being exposed to this 'bi-culture', this Western and the traditional local culture... Trust me, no matter how hard we try to see both sides of the story, conflict is bound to happen. There are some things you tend to overlook. Take, for example, you go home... there is definitely one thing you will overlook that someone is conscious of, be it in your conduct... You might walk in the place with your hat on, and that's offensive... one always has to compromise his behaviour to suit the situation. So when we are here there are a lot of traditional things that we leave behind in order to fit in.

There's one interesting thing that I've noticed that's becoming very common and that's living together. I would like to believe it's a Western thing. You go out with someone, you like each other, and you live together... I'm a particular example. But back home it's very unacceptable... it will be something out of this world, impossible. I would think the explanation to that is that people are held between their need to survive and the need to conserve. You know we need to adapt to changes in order to survive for today, and yet we will still want to be identified with our roots.

Like many other students from traditional homes, they do appreciate the relative openness of communication that takes place within the Western family structure.

Remembrance: It's quite interesting that in the Western culture you have an open communication in all sorts of relationships. I mean here we call each other by first names. When we were in school we called teachers Sir, Madam, Mr and Mrs but here there is a tendency to call them [lecturers] by their first names.

Sharon: It's that ability to communicate more openly...you will see, you realise when you get home, suddenly you are communicating more openly. I don't mean communication to the point of saying whatever you want in front of your parents or anything, but with them there wasn't that communication, there was always that barrier. Like traditionally, if you have any major issue you want to discuss with your father you do it through your mother. Then your mother would pass the word onto your father. Then your father will get back to your mother, and your mother will get back to you. During the last vacation there was a breakdown at home. There were so many issues that we had to deal with. These were major issues that my parents had to be involved in, but there was no way I could tell my mother and she would pass them on to my father. So there was a breakdown in communication. I also think it's so sad that most Zimbabwean men will not affectionately display their love for their children. Your fathers are supposed to be distant, you don't look them in the eye, you don't hug them and things like that. I guess that's saying that nothing's either black or white, it's shades of grey.

“Shades of grey” is one way of describing hybrid identity, neither totally in the modern or the traditional. An easier accommodation between opposing pulls of Western and traditional cultural values was evidenced in the next interview. In contrast to the difficulties expressed by many of the students in reconciling ‘local’ and ‘global’ cultural values, Bongani demonstrates that this does not have to be so.

7. Bongani: Xhosa culture meets hip-hop

Bongani was born in 1978 and comes from a lower middle-class Xhosa family. He grew up in Motherwell township, Port Elizabeth. Like most other township children, he watched mainly American television programmes – “My favourite programmes were *McGyver*, the *A-Team*, *Knightrider*, and programmes like that”. Their focus on action

made them popular amongst the youth and they were preferred to local Xhosa dramas which, according to Bongani, "...are more to do with talking and all that...quite boring".

Bonagni's parents decided to send him to private primary school in a white urban area. As the only black pupil in the class he found himself "...directed more to that kind of white culture and everything". He contrived to watch mainly mainstream American television, and he started listening to white rock music. Many township residents were critical of him for attending a private school and for his tendency to speak English, rather than Xhosa.

Sometimes I would be in the bus and everything...So they speak in Xhosa right in front of you, and they're gossiping about you right in front of you 'cause they think you can't speak Xhosa. I didn't like that type of thing.

Bongani's experience reflects Gaganakis's (1992: 46) findings concerning the experience of African pupils who attend private and Model C schools as a 'cultural minority'. The privileged position of these students alienates them from their home community and township peers, because of their perceived social status and educational advantages.

After primary school, Bongani's parents sent him to a Model C high school. Here he came into contact with other black pupils. As a result of these interactions, he found that his "...tastes and cultural ways kind of changed more towards township life".

At high school I started meeting Xhosa people like myself and like chatting and actually talking in Xhosa, which never happened at primary school. At high school we would talk in Xhosa: "Which township you're from? I'm from New Brighton. Oh, I'm from Motherwell. Oh, Motherwell. Do you know this place and this place...?" I just started to interact with them more and then I found that I identified...gradually I associated myself with them.

Again, Bongani's experiences accord with Gaganakis (1992) findings on the experience of African students attending Model C and private schools. She found that 'being black' emerged as the most salient social category by which these pupils located themselves. Her studies showed that few of these pupils manifest a 'loss of cultural identity' (1992: 49).

Bongani's gradual sense of alienation from white pupils and white popular culture at high school increased further with his growing political awareness and sense of black identity. This was reflected in changes in his media consumption. In the absence of local black media that could adequately speak to his newfound black middle class identity, he was drawn to black American equivalents. With his African friends at school, he started watching black American sitcoms and black American movies. For the first time he started listening to black American music.

According to Bongani, his immersion in black American culture co-existed with his rootedness in local Xhosa culture. His pleasure derived in part from relating the meanings derived from these foreign programmes to his own local lived reality. Bongani's media consumption was discussed in Chapter 8, when I noted that it is often foreign, rather than local media, which best speak to local lives.

Gaganakis (1992: 50) relates that African pupils in private and Model C schools said that the most crucial differences between being black and being white lay in the different worlds of experience associated with dominant and subordinate groups. 'Being black' was associated with a world of constraints and 'being white' with a world of possibilities. What she doesn't discuss, and what my interviews point to, is that besides the contrast between local African and white experiences, African students often perceive a similar contrast between the local African experience and that of the African-American, as witnessed via American media. As Bongani put it:

Yeh, there are a lot of differences. It was like more attractive. They were living in America, and America, being more wealthy and everything, they had more opportunities. They could speak English very well, they could

achieve so much. They had access to many things. The way we saw it, they weren't as poor as South African blacks. So we figured that it would be like nice to live in America.

Clothing and style were now becoming important to Bongani, reflecting his increasing immersion in black American 'hip hop' culture. He could relate this 'foreign' culture to experiences growing up in an African township.

At first I was listening to this very violent hip hop and everything. The township is also violent, you know, so you can identify...I think it's with many followers of hip hop from the township...you'll find many of the times you can find things you can identify with. But especially nowadays I think the townships have just got worse...there's even a lot more you can identify with that violence in rap music.

Bongani did not experience any clash between the hip hop values and his family culture.

I got into it insofar as my culture could allow me...(pauses)...I just wanted to be in America but then at the same time I had these cultural roots because my family are very cultural. There's no way you can ignore that cultural aspect. Even if you go to white schools, you get back to the township and you're still going to perform Xhosa rituals and things like that...respect your elders. Even with my friends who were into hip hop as well, they understood that.

His music listening was not restricted to American rap. He also listened to the local equivalent, Kwaito. He still felt strongly rooted in Xhosa culture.

Even though I'd see America and the culture there, there would always be that reminder that this is South Africa. It's like a black person in South Africa...we have quite a history, you know. I was young at the time, but I did experience that history. In a way that was more of a motivating factor of like sticking to your culture...once you've become part of that history...Like, this is my people...We just have something that is our

own. I was proud of that. And also being a Xhosa as well. Xhosa people are very cultural. We practice a lot of Xhosa rituals...circumcision is still carried on.

Since coming to Rhodes and 'going to the bush' (circumcision school), and while still at University, Bongani started consuming more South African media. However, he is still appreciative of what he has gained from American popular culture.

Even though I may think it's a bad thing for a person to snub their own culture...I'm not saying that's what we do...Without that type of exposure to American culture, I probably wouldn't have found a way to express myself in terms of hip hop that I have now. So I'm grateful that I experienced that...I quite enjoy that. But when it comes to snubbing your own culture, I think that's wrong. Yeh, it's like where you find something in another culture you can borrow. I have found things in American culture that I can borrow.

To the extent that the hip hop culture and media spoke to Bongani's local experiences in a way that locally available media could not, is a reminder, as Morley (1994: 145) points out, that the 'foreign' is a problematic category in that the issue of what is 'foreign' to whom needs to be posed as an experiential question.

8. Identification with Western cultural values

The parental values of many of the white students on campus are rooted in Western/European culture. These students identify closely with the values carried by global media, experiencing no conflict with their parental cultures. In Chapter 8 I quoted from essays written by two students, Jessamy and Loren. Jessamy who identified herself as a 'global' being, wrote that locally produced programmes tended not to cater for white, upper-class people such as herself but rather for African people, who are largely under-represented and addressed in foreign productions. She went on to discuss her attraction to youth-oriented American television productions.

Loren discussed the similarity between her life, as a white, middle class female, and the lives of the characters in the series *Ally McBeal*. She and these characters, she wrote, enjoy "...a First World lifestyle in a capitalist, consumer-driven society in which male and female colleagues enjoy the same legal status". She noted that she and her friends dress similarly to the characters in the series and aspire to be similarly successful in their careers. They use the same products and seek out the same forms of social entertainment. She wrote that the sexual tensions and sexual rivalry between the characters, reflected the dynamics that existed between her and her friends.

Not only white students identified easily with the values carried by global media. The next focus group interview with African middle class students, who had attended private schools, demonstrates a similar identification. These students did not show the same ambivalence towards traditional and Western culture as some of the other students discussed earlier in this chapter. However, they felt 'stuck in the middle', as they were not fully accepted and understood by the white middle class students (because of the 'racial' divide) or by the more traditional black students (because of the class divide). This would seem to confirm Gaganakis's (1992: 53) research findings, that one of the abiding effects of private schooling, whether intended or not, is to produce an exclusionary and elite group of youth. Unlike the students who had attended DET schools, these students made an unproblematic transition to Rhodes University.

Siyanda: I think, most of us we were in private schools and we were tended to be sheltered from everything, and what's happening now, is very much something I grew up with. So, I'm pretty much used to it, it's not a huge change, it's not like I have to get used to white people, sitting with white people, eating with them and that, you know. I've always been able to interact, as from young, like these guys.

This particular group of students felt that they had more in common with white students than with African students who had attended DET schools. As discussed in Chapter 9, these students felt caught between black and white culture. They stated that their

identities were now more strongly shaped by class than by ‘race’ and as such, felt distant from many aspects of traditional African culture.

Twcu: But there are some things that I just don’t do that normal [traditional African] people do, like pap and vleis [maize meal and meat].

Siyanda: We have KFC [Kentucky Fried Chicken].

Mxolisi: Something like maize meal. I don’t really like it. I really don’t, I’d actually go for rice any day. Just stupid things like that, which actually can be a big thing at the end of the day.

Siyanda: But I know, at the end of the day, I know I have to do a very traditional thing, you know, and pay *lobola* and stuff. I don’t know...ⁱ

Twcu: You just don’t relate to it.

Siyanda: Ja, just don’t quite understand it.

Twcu: I love going back home...but at the end of the day, herding cattle ain’t my thing.

These students watch both local and foreign television productions.

Mbuso: We tend to watch the best of South African TV and international. We don’t watch everything that’s local. In fact I tend to just watch the best productions, the rest is all international.

Mooketsi: There’s a range. I’d go for something like *Sex in the City*. Now and again *Generations* and *Isidingo*, I only watch at home. There’s this new thing *Yizo Yizo* which is also very good.

Interviewer: You relate more to the cultural values in *Sex in the City* than to some of the traditional customs...

Siyanda: Yeah.

Mooketsi: It's the lifestyles. I would say it's more like cosmopolitan...you know that type of thing going on.

Siyanda: It's different from the normal programming.

Twcu: Yeah, it's very truthful.

Tafadzqa: I mean they show a whole lifestyle, not just the sex thing, and certain topics a lot of programmes choose not to cover because of censorships or whatever. They tend to cover everything, regardless.

Siyanda: I think we relate more with that because personally, I can see myself doing that once I've started working. That's the way it's going to be.

Mooketsi: Just the whole lifestyle...

Siyanda: Everybody tries to find the perfect relationship, going out with a range of people.

Twcu: With my folks you meet a person, you stick with that person, you have kids, you die. With us it's more like...

Mooketsi: Like I say, it's the way of life around us. *Sex in the City* depicts what we are now.

Their music listening also reflects their identities as modern subjects.

Mbuso: I'd say we tend to listen to hip hop, r&b and stuff. But we're more accepting. We can listen to like pop, alternative rock and it's not like something foreign to our ears. We can accommodate it.

Siyanda: Some of it [hip hop] you can sit and learn more than from Kwaito.

Mooketsi: I just want to say that I definitely agree. I mean I can listen to some Kwaito songs and they sing about coming from basically like a location and stuff where the most contact I get with the location is visiting my relatives and stuff. I never had a house in the location... I mean like lived in the location. The Americans they talk about coming from the gutter and stuff. Obviously when they make more money they start talking about things that I'm more interested in like cars, like women and stuff. I tend to think personally that Kwaito sometimes tends to push me out, because they're calling you that Model C kid, you know... basically 'diss' [insult] you as well. Obviously I don't appreciate it.

Siyanda: Like with movies, it helps you notice that there other people like you out there.

Mbuso: With the Hip-Hop music, it just makes you see that, ah, there are people across the world who like that.

As this extract indicates, these students feel that global media help connect them with 'people like them' while local media, for example with Kwaito music, is often insulting to their class identity.

9. Conclusion

Kraidy (1999: 472) argues that we need to recognize that cultural hybridity is the rule rather than the exception, because what we commonly refer to as 'local' and 'global' have been long hybridised. This chapter has shown that there are degrees of hybridisation, loosely correlating with the student's structural place in the local socio-political context. Many African students adopt certain aspects of Western culture, are generally highly suspicious of global Western media and the values they convey. Most white students still strongly identify with Western culture experienced via the mass media. Many African middle class students, as modern subjects, reject the traditional values of their parent culture, using the media to both reflect and construct their modern subjectivities. Black middle class students who attended either private or Model C schools find that their family traditions clash with the values they see promoted by Western media. It is this latter group of students whose identities most closely reflect those of the 'hybrid' Christian Maronites discussed by Kraidy (1999: 464). The identities of these students have been formed at the juncture between the two competing discourses of 'modernity' and 'tradition'. They are unwilling to belong exclusively to one or the other of what they see as two irreconcilable worldviews.

ⁱ *Lobola* refers to bridewealth and is a key institution around which traditional African societies in Southern Africa are organised at the level of the family. As Ross explains: “A woman moved away from the family in which she was born to that of her new husband, where she would labour in the fields, cook, keep house and, hopefully, give birth to children. In return for this loss of labour and reproductive potential, her husband, aided by his family, would transfer cattle to his wife’s father and brothers, in part at once, in part only when she had demonstrated her fertility by having a child. From then on she was a member of her husband’s family, even if he died. In such circumstances, one of his brothers would take her over, but any children she had would nevertheless be considered the legal heirs of the dead man” (1999: 12-13).

Chapter 11

Conclusion

If you cannot – in the long run – tell everyone what you have been doing, your doing has been worthless. (Schrodinger quoted by Zukav, 1979: 27)

Qualitative research involves the production of knowledge, not its discovery. (Lindoloff, 1995: 24-5)

We need more nuanced ideas about how socio-cultural structures and forces on the one hand and individuals and their minds and choices on the other work in relation to each other in the reception of media texts. (Grisprud, 1995: 9)

1. Concluding the study

In this study I have explored how a sample of South African youth responds to transnational media texts. A recognition of the profound rootedness of media consumption in everyday life has resulted in two particular research focuses. Firstly, I have examined the complex ways that students, differentially embedded in the South African economic and ideological formation, use media texts as part of their ongoing attempts to make sense of their lives. Secondly, I have examined the attraction of different media texts for different social categories of readers. In contrast to the ‘either/or’ formulations that too often accompany competing structuralist and culturalist approaches, I have emphasised the interplay between agency and structure, between individual choice and the structuring of experience by wider social and historical factors. As a result, while I have taken seriously the interpretations of the media constructed by consumers in their everyday lives, I have also interrogated and situated these spoken accounts.

I have explored the interplay between the personal and the social using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Where my social survey provided me with an initial map of media consumption patterns amongst the students, the interviews gave insight into these preferences. As I noted in the Introduction to this study, the views expressed in these interviews led me to an appreciation of the complex individual and social reasons that lie behind media consumption choices, and the diverse (and socially patterned) reasons why local audiences are either attracted to, or reject, global media. These and other findings from my study highlight, I believe, the deficiencies of the media imperialism thesis with its definitive claims for cultural homogenisation, seen as the primary, or most politically significant, effect of the globalisation of media. As such, this study should be read as a dialogue with those schools of thought that take a more unequivocal point of view on the impact of globalised media culture.

While I have focussed on textual meaning-making and how this relates to specific contexts of reception, such an approach should not, however, lead us to conclude – as I have noted in this study – that the local consumption of global media does not have ideological consequences. I hope, rather, that I have drawn attention to the complexity of the ways in which cultural power is both exercised and resisted by particular audiences in particular social contexts. Media reception has to be analysed *in situ*, in relation to the patterns of power they either undermine or help to sustain.

Finally, I have not attempted to provide a comprehensive theory of the audience. Rather, I have acknowledged the partial and incomplete nature of my social theorising. Qualitative social analysis is ultimately a form of storytelling in which certain ‘facts’ are selectively related. I hope my study has offered a narrative, even if incomplete, of how particular South African youth have drawn on global media as part of their response to the changing conditions of their lives.

2. On a personal note

I would like to end as I began, with my personal experience. Like the students interviewed, I too am a hybrid subject. Raised as a white South African and a Jew, I am now a practicing Buddhist, married to a 'coloured' wife. The music I listen to most is American blues, which speaks to me with an emotional 'truth' I have not yet experienced in local music. I watch, selectively, the foreign (primarily American) films and television programmes which dominate the South African screens. This, however, does not exclude my enjoyment of 'local' forms of mass mediated popular culture.

Although I am immersed in global media, I remain primarily a Third World subject. I identify with other marginalized people who continue to be angered by the destabilising effects of the imperial ambitions of the United States. Thus, for example, like many in the Third World, I feel that the Twin Tower bombings of September 11 2001 have to be understood from the position of global marginality – the peripheries 'speaking back'. Despite these misgivings, I continue to appreciate the way in which America's films, music and literature have enriched my life.