

# Health Communication In Southern Africa ~ Edutainment Television Programmes: Tackling HIV/AIDS On The South African Broadcasting Corporation



## *Abstract*

The last couple of decades have seen an increase in the use of edutainment to intervene in the socio-political problems faced by people in the developing world. Drama, soap operas and even children's programmes are used to educate citizens about issues ranging from sanitation to safe sex. In South Africa today, edutainment is especially utilised to intervene in the country's ongoing battle with HIV/AIDS. While many studies laud the success of these programmes, this article argues that the programmes are not without flaws. Though great strides have been made in terms of de-stigmatizing the disease in certain communities by encouraging open discussion and in some cases even nationwide policy changes, the often racialised, gendered and classist portrayal of people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS remains problematic. To some extent, much of these portrayals are a manifestation of the increasing pressure on South Africa's public service broadcaster (SABC 1 & 2) to commercialise. This article explores the representation of HIV/AIDS on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (the SABC) in the context of the SABC's increasing dependence upon advertising revenue.

## *Introduction*

This chapter evaluates the role of the SABC in South Africa's fight against HIV/AIDS through an ideological analysis of television texts and qualitative interviews. It asks what happens to HIV/AIDS when it is mediated through a public service broadcaster in a highly politicised country. In this respect, the chapter explores the extent to which the SABC functions as an empowering public sphere, with regard to HIV/AIDS intervention in South Africa. Can the SABC play

an advocacy role in the fight against HIV/AIDS that would be true to its public service mandate without marginalizing certain groups or stigmatizing others? The chapter argues that the SABC's role in the fight against HIV/AIDS is strained by the difficulty to develop focused messages for specific groups as the country's history of segregation makes it difficult to distinguish and define risk groups and other addressees in ways that would avoid old apartheid divisions of issues, groups and people. This chapter therefore concentrates on the SABC's constitution of audiences for development communication and the implications thereof for edutainment.

The constitution of audiences figures programmatically in the programmes and frameworks of development communication on the one hand, and it also occupies a prominent position in the SABC and their policies. It figures pragmatically in the actual conduct of programmes and media operations and it figures representationally in the edutainment genre supported by the SABC. Because representation does not happen devoid of context, one should also focus on the relationships and processes through which representations are produced, valued, viewed and exchanged. Thus, this chapter strives to bring together theories of the public sphere and public service broadcasting with theories of health communication (specifically edutainment) to contextualise the analysis of the SABC's HIV/AIDS-centred edutainment programmes. To this end, three general purposes emerge:

1. First, to explicate the theories of the public sphere as it concerns public service broadcasting. In this respect, the extent to which the post-apartheid SABC revised its audience segmentation strategies will come under scrutiny. It will be argued that the SABC's revised segregation policies, and especially its increasing reliance upon advertising revenue and the resultant focus on lucrative audiences can potentially lead to a stereotyping, caricaturing and even marginalisation of issues of importance to the poor.
2. Secondly, an exploration of the theories and practice of edutainment will follow. This explication will pay attention to stages of change-theory's usefulness for edutainment and will also explicate post-colonial theory's concern with the power-relations of development communication. It will then be argued that the commercialisation of the SABC has had a dire impact upon the broadcaster's interpretation of the place and focus of edutainment.

3. Finally the chapter will strive to illustrate the arguments advanced in the first two sections by providing an ideological analysis of Gazlam and Tsha Tsha drawing on theory from edutainment and identity politics. The analysis will focus on an explication of the ways in which the SABC's audience segmentation policies and commercialisation initiatives shapes the broadcaster's representation of HIV/AIDS.

#### *Literature review*

This section discusses theories of the public sphere in relation to Public Broadcasting Services (PBS, specifically the SABC) and health communication. The discussion will open with an overview of theories linking the public sphere to public service broadcasting. This will be followed by a discussion of the SABC, focussing specifically on the broadcaster's history as a divisive institution and its current segregation policies. To conclude, an overview of theories of edutainment will be presented, highlighting the possibilities that this genre holds for the SABC to act as an empowering public sphere.

#### *The SABC*

The SABC can be seen as a metaphor for the South African society: it is unsettled, it is in transition and is in many ways not unlike the society it represents and reflect on. It is therefore important to examine the impact that the changing local (and global) environment has on the SABC's construction of its audience. These constructions are of crucial importance if the broadcaster wishes to become a bona fide public service broadcaster, operating as a public sphere that adheres to the principles stipulated above. The broadcaster's construction of its audiences is also pertinent for its activism policies as it pertains to HIV/AIDS in South Africa. South Africa's socio-political and economic content is an important subtext to understanding the way meaning is constructed through the processes of production and consumption (interpretation). Thus, it is necessary that the structure of the SABC be studied within the context of a changing South African society.

*[Before 1994], in line with the apartheid philosophy, [the SABC's] service provision was meant to favour the advantaged according to the criteria of colour, class, geographic location and language. Apart from disseminating racial stereotypes and fragmenting the South African population on racial lines under the apartheid policy of 'divide and rule', content provided by the system was often political, particularly, the coverage of news and political events. The hallmarks of*

*this broadcasting system were political censorship and the dissemination of the White Minority regime's propaganda on all services (Mtimde, 2003, p.3).*

The SABC's apartheid-history has been adequately dealt with in other publications (Duncan, 2000; Nixon, 1994; Steenveld & Strelitz, 1994; Theunissen et al., 1996), therefore I will suffice with the acknowledgement that for decades the South African broadcasting system was one of the most politicised broadcasting systems in the world. For this discussion, it is more important to focus on how current changes in the SABC's audience segmentation policies impact upon its ability to intervene in South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis.

Following the first democratic elections in 1994, SABC television transformed into a national public broadcaster funded through TV license fees, advertising and sponsorship revenue, and other business services. It is under the control of a board, which is selected through public hearings (of Parliament) and appointed by the country's president. Under a new law, the Broadcasting Act of 1999, the SABC became a limited liability company with the state as 100 shareholder, and was restructured into two arms: commercial service (SABC 3) and public services (SABC 1 and SABC 2). As is the case in broadcasting elsewhere, the new Government's move to downscale direct state support in the form of subsidies to the public broadcaster led to a greater reliance on programme funding through advertising. In television, the results have been major cuts in programming, and its replacement with infomercials, rebroadcasts of cheap imported programmes, and a re-racializing of the audience into 'market' segments which coincide with the racial divide and the emerging class divisions within the majority black population (Jacobs, 2004).

Thus, at the same time as South Africa witnessed the separation of state and broadcasting, reduction in state subsidies have meant just as television held the promise of greater access for the black majority, it would be governed more indirectly by the market. Its programme choices and audiences are increasingly being dictated by market decisions as its management and board scrambles and competes for revenue from advertisers (Jacobs, 2004). Given that the SABC has identified "talking, listening and hearing" as part of its core values, this increasing reliance on advertising revenue has led to a crisis of accountability for this public service broadcaster (Tleane & Duncan, 2004). As argued above, public (service) broadcasting should play a critical role in shaping the ability of individuals to participate effectively in the normal life of a society - i.e., create

publics, not audiences for advertisers. When a public (service) broadcaster is faced with the contradiction of delivering service to the public mainly on a commercial funding base however, it could lead to a marginalisation, caricaturing and stereotyping of those groups and issues not deemed saleable to advertisers (Tleane & Duncan, 2004; Jacobs, 2004). This claim is substantiated by the Freedom of Expression Institute's (hereafter the FXI's) response to the SABC's application for the amendment of its licence. Focusing mainly on PBS radio, their research noted several trends flowing from the SABC's reliance on revenue income. Some of these trends are equally applicable to the SABC's public service television channels:

- \* The drive towards self-sufficiency have led to a commercialisation of stations;
- \* Commercial imperatives have forced a bias towards the educated class;
- \* Commercial imperatives have forced an urban bias on stations;
- \* Commercialisation has led to a bias towards English;
- \* Commercial imperatives had led to changes in uneconomic formats; and
- \* Dropping of uneconomic programmes.

The research further showed that despite the fact that it claims to be catering for all sectors of the society, those within the broadcaster agreed that the SABC is geared at catering for the higher LSM listeners and viewers. In South Africa, targeting of audiences for adspend takes place by putting together programming mixes that will target the most lucrative audiences using a marketing research tool called the Living Standards Measure (LSM). The LSM is used in South Africa as an audience ratings measure that values level of income above racial categorisation, using criteria such as salary levels, degree of urbanisation and ownership of cars and major appliances. The LSM supposedly replaces the racially divisive segmentation policy of the past.

However, given South Africa's troubled history of disenfranchising citizens of colour, race intersects with the market in interesting ways. This means that the most affluent viewers remain white and thus more attractive to advertisers, while the least affluent viewers remain black and a poor market for advertisers. Tleane & Duncan (2004) note in this regard that the lack of ongoing government funding for the SABC has forced it to continue a process of commercialisation carried over from the apartheid years. While the ultimate objective of this drive is to achieve financial self-sufficiency, it has in turn led to the SABC's programming being increasingly unable to address the needs of the majority of South Africa's people.

For example, as will be illustrated later, while the SABC do indeed address the issue of HIV/AIDS - which affects the poor more than the rich, their representation of the disease and those affected by it draws on gross stereotypes of certain groups in South African society.

### *Unity in diversity*

While it could be argued that audience segmentation is not a new idea, the problem of HIV/AIDS seen within the context of the particular socio-political circumstances of South Africa, presents the SABC with numerous challenges. Like media in other postcolonial states, the SABC is under constant pressure to adapt its depiction of the colonised. However in a truly democratic South Africa this task is complicated by the hybridity of identities caused by South Africans' constant negotiation between the racial, ethnic, gender, class, and geographic identities of the apartheid era and a post-apartheid rainbowism that celebrate South Africa's diversity (see also Zegeye & Harris, 2003). Of course, the concept of unity is difficult to come by in the media, which segregates its audiences according to taste, income, age, and in the old South Africa, by race. In fact, development communication usually assumes that there is no homogenous audience and that messages therefore have to be tailored for specific constituencies. Where the SABC of the past had specific channels for different racial groups, the new SABC employs the supposedly colour-blind LSM to structure its audiences. To this end the SABC divided into two legs: public services (catered for by SABC1 & SABC2) and commercial services (catered for by SABC3). It is however precisely in this binary division, that the SABC's segmentation policies hark back to the past. In line with its slogan, *Ya Mampela* (meaning the real thing), SABC 1 provides "aspirant" and youthful" broadcasting in Nguni and English, addressing the young, black audience. SABC 2's slogan, "Feel at home", fits the channel's family focus.

Broadcasts on this channel are in Sotho, Afrikaans and English. The commercially-driven SABC 3 strives to be "much better", "spirited" and "cosmopolitan" in its appeal to more up-market English-speaking audiences. It could be argued that the SABC, even in the process of nation-building, held fast to a formula of diverse channels. And even though these channels do not wear their racial/ethnic affiliations on their sleeve, as was the case before 1992, the programming and scheduling for the different languages and programmes on current SABC television make this clear. The SABC's *Gloria Britain* for example

states that SABC1, the television channel that airs the majority of the SABC's edutainment interventions for HIV/AIDS, is called a "black station". This observation was not lost on the respondents in my original study. Black respondents unanimously listed their channels of preference as SABC1, 3 or e-tv, because they understood the language and because SABC2 is seen as mostly Afrikaans or "for Afrikaners", in the words of a black male respondent from rural Gauteng. The majority of white and coloured viewers who watch SABC regularly pointed out that they watch SABC2, because they could at least hear "some Afrikaans and see some remnants from the past" on this channel (quote from a white male's response to the new SABC). These issues highlight the contradictions underlying the SABC's transformation. Contrary to their SABC's assertions about nation-building and unity, current transformations of the SABC imply further divisions, perhaps even argue a return to/continuation of apartheid divisions (Orgeret, 2004). Until 2002, SABC 1's slogan was "Simunye, we are one", however the different channels are increasingly structured after distinctive social groups, following a logic that may conspire against the implied idea of a unified nation (Orgeret, 2004, p. 156).

In theory and on paper, it would seem as if the broadcaster has indeed succeeded in becoming a sphere with which all South Africans can identify, but research indicates that though much has changed in terms of who gets represented and what gets reflected on, the broadcaster still appears to hold on to its divisive class and racial practices (Orgoret, 2004; Duncan, 2000). In terms of the SABC's mandate towards nationbuilding this leaves us with one important question, i.e. who is the nation that the SABC is envisioning? With regard to the SABC's desire to fulfill an advocacy role in the fight against HIV/AIDS, the question becomes even more complicated, i.e. who is or should be the face of HIV/AIDS on South Africa's public (service) broadcaster? Raboy (1996, p. 4) states that "identity today is increasingly multifaceted, and national identity is a particularly contested issue in many countries, even among some of the politically stable". As a result there is pressure on public service broadcasting to keep up with fragmented identities, forcing it to rethink its approach to one of its most cherished objectives, i.e. "nation-building" if it is to speak to the real concerns of its public. Is it possible for South Africa's public service broadcaster to craft a space wherein a shared culture as advocated by the proponents of the revised public sphere, can begin to take meaning? This is an important question to answer if the SABC is to function as a space for HIV/AIDS intervention, not only because the

media seems to be the main arena where the AIDS fight is being formulated and played out, but also because AIDS is still such a politicised issue in South Africa. If the SABC is going to intervene in the pandemic and fulfil its nation-building mandate at the same time, it has its work cut out. That is not to say that it cannot be done.

### *Finding a genre for HIV/AIDS intervention*

Fighting HIV/AIDS on the public broadcaster would have been challenging regardless of the broadcaster's segmentation policies. People watch television to escape from the realities of life and are not always in the mood to confront unpleasant issues like disease when they sit down in front of their television-sets. Thus, just getting the audience to sit down and watch requires careful planning and creativity. Singhal and Rogers (2002) argues in this regard that when the "first law of mass entertainment" is observed and people are confronted with a choice between deriving pleasure from serious non-entertainment fare or from non-serious entertainment fare, they will choose the latter. In response to this, it was necessary for the SABC to find a format that combined education content with entertainment appeal. That format also had to be able to support the empowerment of people by allowing them to distinguish "positive" from "negative" identification, so that viewers could recognise contradictory messages and make informed choices. To this end, the SABC embraced the format of edutainment as a viable solution for intervening in the HIV/AIDS crisis, without losing commercial appeal; and by all appearances it seems to be working well. The SABC (2004) argues that although most audiences prefer entertainment to educational material, the broadcaster has made a great deal of headway in cultivating a taste among South Africans for local content in "providing very powerful infotainment such as *Yizo Yizo* and *Tsha Tsha*, "which have attracted significant audiences". Infotainment is used by the SABC to refer to the academic concept of edutainment (entertainment- education). To accommodate different tastes and age groups, and to attract audiences of LSM 4+, the HIV/AIDS interventions are spread across genres, with educational content inserted into entertainment-formats to varying degrees (SABC, 2004). Because edutainment programmes differ in their scope, size, reach, intensity and other attributes, it is necessary to point out that the programmes chosen for the present study, were designed specifically for the purpose of intervening in the HIV/AIDS (and other social) problem(s) over a long period of time.



## *Edutainment*

Edutainment, defined as the intentional placement of educational content in entertainment messages, has received increasing attention from communication scholars in recent decades (Singhal & Rogers, 2002). The format has its most current roots in the work of Miguel Sabido. In the 1970's and 1980's Miguel Sabido, created six telenovelas with educational-developmental messages (Brown, 1992). Today, these programmes are also referred to as either "prodevelopment soap operas" or "entertainment-education soap operas". The last term is used especially in academic circles to refer to the growing corpus of works that the entertainmentmedia uses for educational purposes.

An entertainment-education soap opera is described as "... a melodramatic serial that is broadcast in order to both entertain and convey subtly an educational theme to promote some aspect of development" (Nariman, 1993, p. 2). These soap operas are unique in the sense that - without sacrificing commercial appeal - they are designed according to specific elements of communication and behavioural theories to reinforce specific values, attitudes and behaviour that viewers can use to their own advantage. Sabido created the programmes to work in concert with other public information campaigns to promote certain socially desirable behaviours. These behaviours (for example family planning, adult literacy, etc.) enable citizens to take an increased degree of control over the quality of their lives and contribute to the national development goals in Third World countries. Development as it is used here, refers to "...a widely participatory process of directed social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment" (Nariman 1993, p. 2). It is clear from Sabido's definition of development that he envisioned the edutainment-format employing a variety of strategies from both the diffusion model and the participatory model of development (communication). For example, he did not intend for the format to be a stand-alone solution, but rather saw it as part of other development interventions that are geared towards behavioural change and ultimately empowerment. Singhal and Rogers (2002), echoes this sentiment, suggesting that, "in the future, E-E (edutainment) interventions are likely to see more integration with participatory communication". Similarly, in her survey of the field of development communication, Morris (2003) found that even though the edutainment format rely heavily on the mass media as the agent of message

diffusion, study after study also cites the importance of interpersonal communication to supplement the media-messages. According to her a salient factor in many people's decision-making is informal interpersonal communication with friends, family, peers and other potential opinion leaders. Morris (2003) sees the academic divide between mass communication and interpersonal communication as a false dichotomy, as the studies in her review shows that mass communication can trigger interpersonal communication.

The implications of erasing the aforementioned divide for edutainment has been discussed by several scholars, including Slater (1999), Vaughan and Rogers (2000), Singhal and Rogers (2002), Kincaid (2002), and Slater and Router (2002). These authors all advocate a prolific interaction between diffusion and participatory strategies, with Kincaid (2002) and Slater & Router (2002) focusing specifically on implications for narrative-building while the rest address in various ways the usefulness of the "stages-of-change" (hereafter SOC) framework as a vehicle for facilitating such interaction. Slater (1999, p. 335) argues that "the major theories of persuasion and behaviour change are complimentary and not competing... because their foci and boundary conditions make them useful in solving different types of communication problems". He posits that SOC has become increasingly influential in the health communication field as "it can be used to describe the kinds of behaviour change, campaign problems, and audiences for which each theory (of persuasion and behaviour change) is most appropriately applied" (Slater, 1999, pp. 336-337).

The SOC approach evolved primarily to better understand the process of behaviour change, particularly change in addictive behaviours (Slater, 1999). Slater (1999) identifies five major stages as outlined by the approach: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. To these stages, Vaughan & Rogers (2000) add another category between preparation and action, which they call "validation". A detailed discussion of these falls outside the purview of the present study. This chapter is more interested in the implications of SOC for edutainment.

A glance at the extended SOC model as presented by Vaughan & Rogers (2000) shows that it makes provision for both cognitive and affective processes in the internal state of the individual (primarily the first three stages of the model), and interpersonal communication processes in the external environment of the individual (primarily the last three stages of the model). The authors point out

that exposure to a mass media message is a prerequisite for media effects and argues that with such a message exposure would function differently at the various stages of the extended SOC model. Exposure might promote cognitive, affective, role-modeling or interpersonal communication processes by audience individuals (Vaughan & Rogers, 2000). To illustrate their point, Vaughan & Rogers (2000) uses the example of a Tanzanian radio edutainment soap opera to discuss how the SOC model can be applied to the edutainment format. A brief summary of their key assertions follows.

In the precontemplation stage, the aim is to stimulate both cognitive and affective processes. For knowledge change to take place, the uninitiated audience members (or the non-believers) must in the first place be enticed by the rational argument of the message content so that they will be able to recognise and understand the educational content. Through identification (a key element of Sabido's vision for edutainment), the audience members should then be able to recognise themselves and/or their situations in the characters/storyline which might lead to empathy for these characters. Identification is the process through which an individual sees himself or herself in the role of another person and empathises with the circumstances of that person (Vaughan & Rogers 2000, p. 209). Identification would make it possible for the audience to perceive that the message is relevant to people like them (Kincaid, 2002; Slater & Rouner, 2002). The edutainment programme would thus have to come up with highly realistic characters and storylines to help make the message relevant to an audience.

In the contemplation, preparation and validation stage the media's role is to persuade those who believe the relevancy of the educational message to their situation, but lack the willingness or self-efficacy required to engage in the suggested behaviour. Edutainment messages that feature rewards for prosocial behaviour by positive characters and punishment for antisocial behaviour by negative characters provide vicarious reinforcement of the trustworthiness of the educational message and the consequences of various behavioural alternatives. Through identification with positive characters the audience members can come to believe that others who are similar to them have adopted the innovation successfully, thus increasing audience members' self-efficacy with respect to the innovation and belief in the social/cultural acceptability of the modeled behaviour. In the contemplation stage individuals frequently seek the judgments of their peers or opinion leaders to reduce their uncertainty about an innovation, to

reinforce the merits of the innovation and to demonstrate the cultural acceptability of the innovation. Edutainment programmes can stimulate interpersonal communication through role modelling, increasing individual self-efficacy to discuss the innovation with others and setting the agenda of topics to be discussed interpersonally. In this phase, the edutainment format fulfills a reinforcement role as it continues with its agenda-setting function and reinforces character likeability to enhance audience identification and ultimately role modelling of positive characters.

The agendasetting function includes information about service providers and their locations. This role extends to the preparation, validation and action stages as audience members in these three stages become increasingly ready to adopt the innovation and thus draws from positive characters to model their negotiation skills and weigh the pro's and con's of different service providers for their situations. To ensure that audience members reach the maintenance stage and consistently use the new idea advocated by the media messages because they recognise the benefit of such action in their own lives, the edutainment should provide role models of satisfied adopters of the new idea for audience members to observe and emulate. Edutainment assumes that the media have the power to intervene (or be used as a tool for intervention) on issues of social importance. For Livingstone and Lunt (2000, p. 10) it is precisely herein that the ambivalence felt by many towards the mass media (read television) can be discerned - the feeling that here is a great power, but can it be harnessed for the public good? They argue that

*... pessimistic answers tend to underestimate the complex and fragmentary nature of the contemporary mass media which opens the way for some escape from institutional control, while more optimistic positions often set too high ideals for the public sphere. Those alternative formulations of the public sphere which recognise and build on the complex and fragmentary nature of the media suggests more positively that the media could facilitate and legitimise the public negotiation - through compromise rather than consensus - of meanings among oppositional and marginalized groups.*

The extent to which the SABC's edutainment programmes succeed in creating a public sphere as outlined here is explored in the next sections.

*Method*

Hall (2001, p. 224) argues with regard to representation that "...how things are represented and the 'machineries' and regimes of representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after the event role". It would therefore make good methodological sense to explore these representations through qualitative approaches. The explication that follows thus uses ideological analysis to uncover the impact of the SABC's audience construction policies on the broadcaster's interpretation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic as reflected in its edutainment programmes. The analysis that follows focuses mainly on two edutainment dramas, - namely *Gazlam* and *Tsha Tsha*, however where applicable, I may also refer to other edutainment interventions, such as *Siyayinqoba Beat It!*, *Soul City* and *Soul Buddyz*.

*Methodologically, ideological analysis enables the analyst to capture attributes of the text that cannot be reduced to ordinal or even categorical variables. It also offers theoretical linkages between the institutional realities of producing media content and the type of content that is produced* (Davidson, 2004).

According to Stokes (2003), there isn't a method called "ideological analysis", but any method can be used as part of an ideological project. It would thus be fair to say that ideological analysis draws on the insights and methods of different approaches to textual analysis - in the present case, these would include semiotics, genre study, and narrative analysis - to discern what meanings are made available through the medium and its programmes.

To explore the ways in which the SABC represents HIV/AIDS, a textual-visual analysis was undertaken to discover recurring discourses and themes/images and to identify frameworks of ideas and beliefs that the SABC's edutainment programmes produce about HIV/AIDS and those infected/affected by it. The choice of programmes was informed by their health focus and their status as "best practice" projects. To gain a perspective on what is being offered; I watched one season of each programme and identified different storylines that deal with HIV/AIDS, sex, love and relationships. To explore the ways in which the SABC represents HIV/AIDS, I followed a two-tiered approach. This approach reflects the diverse responses to the interventions in terms of their "value" for the South African society: on the one hand they do indeed lead to more open discussion of HIV/AIDS, on the other hand they tend to broaden divisions between different social groups even more. Thus, following the example set by other studies (Bouman, 2004; SOUL CITY, CADRE), the different storylines were analyzed first

by using a code scheme based on health behaviour theories. Textual analysis is however an approach that also allows for the interpretation of texts in relation to the cultural contexts in which they operate (Fair, 1996). I could therefore broaden the scope of my analysis by taking the critical-analytical position of ideological textual analysis, to move the discussion from the “intended messaging” to the unintended “othering” of the HIV+- person. The intersection of this discourse with the socio-political context of contemporary South Africa is also explored. To ensure that the discussion does not reflect only my opinion, I interviewed different stakeholders positioned in various spheres in relation to the SABC and HIV/AIDS. These included representatives from the SABC (particularly Gloria Britain), NGO content producers, and a forprofit media production company: Ochre Media’s Indra de Lanerolle (producers of Gazlam), Warren Parker from CADRE (Tsha Tsha’s producers) and SOUL CITY’s Tuli Shongwe (producers of Soul City and Soul Buddyz). I also looked at selfdisclosures on the programmes’ websites, and interviewed Gauteng television viewers.

### *Fighting HIV/AIDS on the SABC*

To contextualise this discussion, it is necessary to provide a brief introduction of the plot structure for at least Gazlam and Tsha Tsha. Producers for these programmes operate from the premise that HIV/AIDS cannot be treated in isolation, but should be situated in the context of people’s real life experiences. Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings for edutainment dramas proposed by amongst others Sabido (in Nariman 1993) and Vaughn and Rogers (2000), the programmes employ a three-step process of reinforcing prosocial values by:

- Depicting social problems and value conflicts associated with such problems,
- Motivating the audience toward prosocial values and depicting the positive consequences associated with such values and beliefs, and
- Creating role models through soap opera characters who symbolically represented specific value orientations (Nariman,1993).

In line with edutainment-practices elsewhere, the stories follow a typical narrative structure that mirrors their more entertainment-oriented counterparts: they are characterised by an ongoing story line with several concurrent plots linked together by the characters’ personal relationships. Each episode ends with a hook, or cliffhanger, that creates interest in the next episode. Unsurprisingly then, the programmes tackle the same main themes and in almost similar ways: they focus on sex, love and relationships, and the impact of poverty, urbanisation

and HIV/AIDS on these. Where they differ slightly from their international counterparts is that most of them – including the seasons of *Gazlam* and *Tsha Tsha* analyzed here – do not include an epilogue that poses rhetorical questions, neither do they necessarily always provide information such as the number of a telephone hot line (Vaughn and Rogers, 2000).

Most of the interventions follow Bouman's (1998) suggestions for successful edutainment interventions. They are purposely designed, with the potential of entertaining and educating people in order to enhance and facilitate different stages of prosocial behavior (my emphasis of Bouman, 1998, p. 25). Some, like *Tsha Tsha* and *Soul City* even have a strong evaluation component (comprising of both formative and summative evaluation) as informed by the theory and practise of edutainment advocated by Sabido and others. On the surface, they therefore appear to be exemplary examples of the edutainment genre. Many of the storylines provide representations of how the issue of HIV/AIDS can be treated in "real" life situations.

These include storylines focussing on how characters deal with HIV/AIDS when they are in relationships – especially focussing on how sex is negotiated in certain neighbourhoods and also when one partner discovers he/she is HIV+. The issue of peer pressure and choice with regard to sexual relationships also form a main point of focus for most of the interventions and as such it is not strange to find storylines dealing with rape or abuse, alongside storylines detailing happily married couples or couples in committed relationships and people engaging in promiscuous sexual relationships. Another important focus of the programmes deals with the support and understanding that one can expect from your community and the government, usually highlighting both negative and positive responses. However, when one probes a little deeper, it would appear that, for some at least, the dramatic nature of the dramas overshadows their educational potential. Space does not allow for a detailed scrutiny of all the aforementioned. I would thus like to offer an ideological analysis of one of the main themes that runs through all of the interventions, i.e. their treatment of sex, love and relationships, against the backdrop of HIV/AIDS.

### *Love in the time of HIV/AIDS*

The programmes deal with the theme of sex, love and relationships and the impact of HIV/AIDS on these. The theme is highlighted in the edutainment dramas by emphasizing the entertainment component, and leaving the viewer to infer

meanings from the context of the texts and from comments made by secondary characters. In Tsha Tsha for example, Andile's alcohol-induced sex-capades with Mimi often leads to morning-after remorse and reprimands from his friends. The issues of violence within the family and love relationships are also addressed, but again, here the viewer is to infer "best practice" by following the lead of positive role models. One particularly tricky issue that is dealt with in both Tsha Tsha and Gazlam, is the issue of sex after HIV. This issue is raised continuously towards the end of Gaz'lam's first season and even more so in subsequent seasons of this intervention. The consensus in all the representations appears to be that certain kinds of sex is still possible - as long as people act responsible, use a condom and avoid "dangerous" sexual activity. Emphasis is placed on nursing the relationship in terms of becoming closer to one another, being there for one another, supporting the efforts of each other and validating the humanity of one another. The message appears to be that while sex might be important in a relationship, it is the closeness of mind and spirit that will carry couples through difficult times. There is however also another side to the discourses surrounding sex and HIV/AIDS, i.e. the message of destruction and devastation that follows irresponsible sexual conduct.

Gaz'lam especially, focuses on the destruction that sex can cause to relationships - not only between couples, but also between friends - when dealt with irresponsibly. However, even though at a first glance it appears that sex becomes the scapegoat for everything wrong and bad, the programmes highlight the fact that it is not wrong to be quirky and have fun with sex, as long as you act responsibly. In other words, avoid drinking and then jumping into bed with someone, always use a condom and to a lesser extent be faithful to your partner.

However, it would seem that in their attempts to appeal to the largest common denominator (with money) sex scenes are sometimes overplayed to such an extent that the positive message gets lost. A case in point would be episodes three and eight in Gaz'lam. Episode three features Portia's return from celibacy (Portia is the first character in Gaz'lam to disclose her HIV status). Here viewers are subjected to her backseat-of-a-car sex adventure. Of course, three episodes later, in episode seven, we find out that the character is now HIV+, presumably following her one-night stand in episode three. However, the very next episode, number eight, opens with a rather raunchy sex scene where viewers are greeted by screams of supposed ecstasy, while the camera moves between the intertwined



bodies of the lovers and the other occupants in the building who cannot sleep due to the volume of the lovemaking.

Later in that same episode, viewers are faced with a lingerie party where the main attraction is an oversized vibrating, black dildo that the host sticks into a cream cake to demonstrate its flexibility, before she passes it around amongst the ladies to touch and observe. Not only does this specific scene appear strangely out of place with the black cast, but the fact that all of this happens during the pre-watershed period before 21:00, makes it even more risqué.

Though this is by far the most graphic sexual scenes encountered in the media scan, viewers in my original study also expressed discomfort with the sex scenes between Andile and Mimi in *Tsha Tsha*. In response to a remark from one viewer about the necessity of showing the condom during a specific sexual encounter between Andile and Mimi for example, one of the older participants pointed out that doing so is in “bad taste”, especially since “they felt the need to show her bare breasts”. In fact, it is my contention that the message about the devastation and destruction caused by all the sex is almost overshadowed by the shockingly graphic nature of some of the sex scenes and the sometimes vulgar language. This concurs with Smith’s (2001) analysis of *Yizo Yizo*. Smith (2001) asked if the series succeeded to educate kids or if it merely entertained them and eventually concludes that the latter is true. Smith contends that the reason why the critical reflections about *Yizo Yizo* failed to deal with the real issue of violence in schools (which was the focus of the series), results from the contradictions of representations of violence in the series, where violence is commodified in the process of representing the “real”. The same argument holds true for the impact of graphic sexual content on perceptions of the HIV/AIDS edutainment programmes.

*A little bit of Monica in my life, a little bit of Erica by my side...*

Being able to trust your partner forms an undercurrent in all relationships, especially where sex is involved. Indra de Lanerolle notes that sexual negotiations are about personalities, human relationships and trust. HIV/AIDS has the potential to create an environment of mistrust if a language of risk and terror is used. It is thus no easy task to create a storyline that can deal with issues of sex, love and relationships – that is basically founded on the concept of trust – while at the same time advocating caution in your dealings with people. It is perhaps easier to have a storyline where a one-night stand leads to HIV, as the issue of

trust does not come into play as much. However, in married or other committed relationships, one needs to be able to trust that your partner will be faithful to you if the relationship is to stay healthy (personal interview with Indra de Lanerolle).

The “faithfulness” storylines in the scrutinised texts however tend to fall victim to the same problem of an overload of entertainment at the expense of educational content. Since this is entertainment television, faithfulness storylines run at the same time as storylines depicting couples happily cheating on each other. Again, due to the dramatic format of edutainment, you cannot abruptly end a storyline when the episode ends – storylines usually run over several episodes. So, even though the faithfulness message is pushed, it sometimes takes a while for the consequences of not being faithful to be seen, and by that time you might have lost some viewers or others might already be identifying with what seems to be “fun and spontaneous”, rather than with the predictable and boring. This especially happens when viewers of the edutainment format are also staunch supporters of soap operas such as *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Days of our Lives* where the sanctity of relationships are often discarded for more sensational, scandalous extra-marital affairs, and cheating on your boyfriend or girlfriend. Gazlam’s Indra de Lanerolle noticed in this regard that one cannot look at the SABC in isolation, but has to view it as part of a broader media landscape. Although his caution was meant to suggest that there is a host of media-interventions into the HIV/AIDS crisis and that that is a positive thing, it is also possible that the plethora of messages can become confusing if interventions and entertainment fair are not streamlined. If every intervention carries its own message and they’re all out there in the public’s face, just how exactly are we to know which message/lesson to follow? For example, close scrutiny of the various edutainment programmes reveal that their message about sex, at once advises viewers to “abstain”, to enjoy sex, but be wary of AIDS, but also “not worry if you contract HIV, as you can live positive(ly)”. Little wonder then that one of the viewers in my original study exclaimed, “hell, I’m confused” when trying to explain to me what he thought the main message of the various edutainment programmes about HIV/AIDS might be. Tomaselli and Shepperson’s (1996) suggestion that media interventions abide by the slogan “one message, many media” thus seem especially apt here.

Confounding the issue of streamlining messages is the fact that confusion does not only reside in the actual conduct of the interventions, but that media

interventions also compete with a host of other messages that has nothing at all to do with HIV/AIDS prevention. In this respect it is important to note that the media do not only consist of programmes geared towards development, but that the majority of the media's messages actually have nothing at all to do with development, and these more often than not stand in direct contradiction to the messages portrayed in development campaigns. If one for example considers that, according to Audience Ratings, the American soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful* was amongst the top ten programmes for South African kids aged 10-15 (SAARF, 2004), one has to wonder how these children deal with the total contradiction in terms of family and personal values in these programmes as opposed to something like *Soul Buddyz*. *The Bold and the Beautiful* has storylines about a mother sleeping with her daughter's husband, a woman who sleeps with a father and both his sons and women getting pregnant without knowing who the father of their baby is. How do you reconcile the absolute abundance of sexual immorality (there is never any mention of condoms in *The Bold and the Beautiful*) with messages of trust, faithfulness and sexual caution in HIV/AIDS edutainment programmes? Again, it would seem that media moguls err on the side of entertainment (read ratings), rather than education. Of course, it could be argued that it is not television's main job to act as a social teacher, but in this case, you have a broadcaster that actually states its intent to do just that. One could further argue that viewers should be trusted to make the right moral choices as it pertains to their own lives as we have moved beyond the hypodermic needle school of thinking to a point where researchers agree that viewers generally make up their own minds about issues of importance. However, such claims would run counter to the edutainment claim that exposure to media can positively influence viewers towards prosocial change. If we accept that the media can affect positive change, than it stands to reason that the media could similarly encourage negative role-modeling. Thus, in a situation where viewer participation in broadcasting is still a relative novelty, it would make a lot more sense for the public service broadcaster to err on the side of safety rather than ratings. Where edutainment content might eventually point out the disastrous consequences of such "immoral" behaviour, these "regular" soap operas tend to either "reward" characters by letting them get away with the same kind of behaviour over and over again, or it is represented as a byproduct of success. If these soap operas thus keep touting messages contrary to the message that the edutainment programmes are trying to get across, it could counteract the desired behaviour change strived for by edutainment television.

### *The face of HIV/AIDS*

A final comment about the representations of HIV/AIDS concerns the face of HIV/AIDS on the SABC. Added to the graphic nature of the sex scenes as well as the difficulty to streamlining messages in the scrutinised interventions, a further problem arises when one consider that all the HIV+ characters and those represented in the sex scenes, are black. These representations would have been problematic regardless of who is represented under these circumstances, given that the programmes aired before the 9 pm watershed period. But considering South Africa's troubled racial history and the racialised nature of the HIV/AIDS discourse in the country, the fact that all these programmes feature predominantly black casts immediately adds another dimension to the problem. One of the black viewers in my original study for example noted about the representations of sexual relations that "these are not romanticised portrayals of sex, but rather an in your face, raw display of the realities of shagging". He argued that he does not necessarily have a problem with the graphic displays ("that's how its done in real life my man!") however he does feel that the portrayals perpetuate stereotypes about deviant sexuality in blackpeople. Given that these shows are flighted on SABC1, the Nguni-language channel that professes an ebonics-style "realness", representations often functions on the level iconicity rather than indexicality. By this I mean, viewers are encouraged to read the representations as "the real thing", telling (showing) it like it is. Thus, in response to a black discussant's comment that these sexualised portrayals are "the real thing", one of the female black discussants responded with "in whose world?", indicating a clear desire to distance herself from this type of representation. This distancing has to do with a specific desire not to be seen as "like that" - the other females in the group and one of the males affirmed this distancing, proclaiming that "it is disgusting portrayals such as these, that's holding us (and I read that to mean a collective, black us) back in life". While efforts are being made to break the class-barrier in HIV/AIDS representations, the racialised portrayals remain. The majority of the characters portrayed as HIV+ are black. The programmes with documentary inserts tend to break this rule more often than the others, while *Soul City*, and *Siyayinqoba Beat It!* introduced non-black HIV+ characters as part of the cast.

Another factor that apparently dictates who becomes the face of HIV/AIDS in the analyzed programmes, is the fact that they are all predominantly in African languages with English subtitles. Furthermore, the music scores for the

programmes feature music-genres popular amongst urban black youth (such as “kwaito” and “house”) and uses mainly black music artists to develop and perform the music. It is possible to derive from these that the target audience for these programmes is urban, young, black South Africans, and therefore the face of the HIV-affected/infected people is also predominantly black. However, before judgment is passed, one has to consider that regulations regarding local content stipulated by Independent Communication Association of South Africa (ICASA) was meant specifically to ensure that previously marginalised communities and groups get access to the airwaves and are given a voice. Furthermore, if a purely statistical logic is followed, it makes a lot of sense to focus on the communities most affected by the disease.

Why then do I feel the need to highlight this as a separate issue? Though only two of the programmes make explicit claims towards dealing with issues of race and class (Soul City/Soul Buddyz and Isidingo), it is clear from my observations that both issues are important subtexts to understanding of the programmes. Whether intentionally or not, the kind of behaviour these interventions seek to address is that which is allegedly found predominantly in resource poor settings- adding classist (and inevitably also a racial) agenda to the interventions. I have written (Milton, 2004, 2006) and spoken (Annual Cultural Studies Conference, 2003) before about the racialised portrayal of HIV/AIDS in South African and international news reports about the disease. In both the article and the presentation, I have noted that when I complain to people about the racialised portrayal of HIV/AIDS in the news media covering Africa, the most common response is, well, HIV/AIDS is the highest amongst the black population - what is your problem? Certainly it is true that seropositivity is the highest in the black community. The problem however is that portraying the disease as exclusively black obscures the fact that HIV/AIDS also affect people from other communities (i.e. white, coloured and Indian communities) in South Africa. A 2002 study conducted by the Human Science Research Council in South Africa for example points out that seropositivity for whites in South Africa is six times the number for Europe and the United States, while both regions have much larger white populations (Shishana & Simbayi, 2002).

When the SABC interventions therefore conform to the majority portrayal of HIV/AIDS as “black”, one could argue that a double function is served: first, HIV/AIDS is framed as a ‘black’ disease. Hawk (1992) discusses the ideological

positioning of hierarchies being invoked by such portrayals – an uncivilised “they” who cannot even take care of themselves, the ‘that’s just the way they are’ factor. Secondly, such portrayals, as have been argued by Parameswaran (1996) & Hawk (1992) serve to subject those portrayed to an inferior positioning, by normalizing the culture and rituals of the creators (and those like them) as both “normal” and “better”. Taylor (1992) argues in this regard that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others. Therefore, it is argued, a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror a confining or contemptible picture of themselves.

### *Nonrecognition or misrecognition*

can inflict harm; it can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being. In the fight against HIV/AIDS as portrayed by the SABC’s edutainment programmes, widely circulated images tended more towards misrecognition in that they reinforce hierarchies and mirror back to black South Africans a distorted and in some instances contemptible picture of themselves. Whether intentionally or not, processes of othering serve to feed sensationalism and tend to obscure critical issues that need to be highlighted. I have mentioned earlier that the problem with these portrayals is that they obscure the fact that AIDS affects South Africans regardless of their racial (or class) affiliations. At the same time these portrayals also serve to pit black against white. By framing the disease as black and resultant of ‘the nature of the black’ the media not only serve to homogenise the group into oneness it also perpetuates a universal discourse in which the black African is seen as ‘deviant and so different’ that any chance to redeem ‘them’ is doomed to failure. Black students pointed out that it is erroneous to assume that SABC1 caters for “black” South Africans (personal communication), since those black South Africans who speak minority languages and who are from rural areas are often also excluded from the channels’ scheduling. These black South Africans have to read the subtitles with the rest of us non-Nguni language speakers and that the so-called “reality” that the channel so proudly proclaim to portray is one that they are not familiar with.

### *Conclusion*

*Why do all the black people mostly have to have AIDS? They always show black people with AIDS, they never show the white people, they [television] always*

*show the black people (9-year-old coloured male).*

*I don't think AIDS is such a reality in our communities as it is in black communities. There is less risk in white encounters than there would be in black [encounters] (22-year-old white female).*

The quotes cited here are taken from interviews I conducted in 2004 with television viewers about the South African Broadcasting Corporation's HIV/AIDS intervention programmes. The sentiments expressed in these quotes were echoed at the 2004 Entertainment-Education conference held in Cape Town, South Africa, where more than one black participant got up and asked the same question: why are all the HIV/AIDS characters (we see in our media) black and why are most of the people developing the programmes/managing the Centres where the programmes are developed, white?

These quotes and questions have several characteristics that are pertinent to this study. They illustrate that HIV/AIDS exist also through the practices that conceptualise it, represent it and respond to it. They suggest that stories told by the media can be particularly powerful as tools of identification. In addition, they point to the difficulties faced in representing HIV/AIDS in complex, heterogeneous communities via mediums that, by design, have to segment their audiences. The multi-ethnic, multi-racial, post-apartheid character of today's South Africa complicates the notion of a public sphere. The strict racial categories enforced by the policy of apartheid assured not only separate living conditions for the four major racial groups (black, white, Indian and coloured), but also the development of very distinct worldviews. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, even the country's national media developed along divisive racial lines and this tendency is visible in the public service broadcaster of today. This is important, because it has implications for how specific programmes should target an audience, who the programmes should target and for how such targeting might be interpreted. It also has implications for who will be allowed to facilitate programmes in particular communities and parts of the country.

Because of the way the SABC's segmentation policies position the audience, and within South Africa's fragmented society, edutainment programmes commissioned by the SABC have created the perception that they are only meant for certain communities. This might create the perception that development problems do not concern everyone and actually are the fault of certain

communities. Not only could this result in stigmatisation and discrimination against members of these communities, it can also weaken the impact of messages on those who neither see themselves as part of the problem nor as part of the solution.

How then can an SABC-advocacy strategy eradicate the hierarchy of blame, and give a voice to the marginalised without alienating viewers? It seems that the key would be for the SABC to embrace its own policy of “unity in diversity”. The broadcaster must be more pro-active where its HIV/AIDS programmes are concerned. It has to push the boundaries of representation until South Africans from all races, classes and groups can have a voice in the HIV/AIDS-battle - and it must do so without desensitizing viewers. In fact, it must entice viewers to debate HIV/AIDS in terms of its socio-political implications. In this respect, Bardhan’s (2002) argument that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a phenomenon that is as socially, symbolically and communicatively constructed, as it is a biomedical “reality” is especially apropos. Bardhan (2002) posits that the meanings attributed to HIV/AIDS are culturally diverse and emanate from the lived as well as mediated experiences of those directly and indirectly involved in its discursive and retroviral folds (my emphasis). It is however the views, values and perspectives that are privileged and endorsed at larger societal levels that rhetorically and politically shape the future courses of action, policy and signification.

Through the holistic approach that the broadcaster adopted with relative success (for some communities at least), viewers will be encouraged to debate other issues of importance regarding the disease, particularly as it relates to broadcasting responsibility. The public media is an integral thread of the democratic fabric of society and as such, should be the subject of much critical reflection.

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