

7. '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.

J. B. Thompson¹

Introduction

Although the 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.² 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'.³ This was an issue investigated in my 1998 survey into media consumption patterns of students at Rhodes University, as well as the follow-up interviews conducted in 1999, 2000 and 2001.

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'

'Race'	Research sample (%)		Rhodes University %	
	sample (%)	N	University %	N
African	24,9	103	29,5	1 251
Coloured	5,1	21	4,0	168
Indian	11,4	47	11,2	474
White	58,6	242	55,4	2 338
Total		413		4 231

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'

'Race'	Place of origin (%)			
	City	Town	Rural area	N
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'

'Race'	Social class (%)			N
	Working class	Peasant class	Middle class	
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 reported in Table 3 are 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 were equally divided between middle-class and working-class backgrounds.
- The majority of white, Indian and coloured students had attended either private or Model C schools.
- Most African students had attended educationally inferior township schools that fell under the 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 DET. (These findings are consistent with the overall South African trends discussed in Chapter 4.)

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.

The survey findings indicate that at the time of the survey the students had an overwhelming preference for global media.⁴ However, the figures also

show that white and Indian middle-class, urban students were the most receptive to global media, while African working-class/peasant, rural students were the most resistant. This was not surprising given the correlation between the 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, in his examination of media consumption in Latin America, has coined the term *cultural proximity* to describe the desire of the 'lower classes' to consume local media. This forms the basis of his critique of claims of 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 . . . The 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.⁵

Straubhaar does not clarify what constitutes 'cultural proximity'; for local audiences it could refer to the use of language, the narrative construction or the thematic concerns of the text. Nevertheless the concept is useful for the understanding of 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. Two radio stations, 5 FM and Ukhozi FM, are cases in point. Fifty-nine per cent of 5 FM's listeners are white, while 99 per cent of Ukhozi FM's listeners are black. According to the SABC's 2003 annual report, 23 per cent of the music played on 5 FM was local in contrast to the 80 per cent of the music played on Ukhozi FM.

The SAARF has divided the South African population into ten different living standard measures (LSMs). LSM group 10 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 per cent 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 one examines the LSMs of the male audiences of the two radio stations for 2002, one finds that over 71 per cent of 5 FM's listeners fall into LSMs 7 to 10. By contrast, 96 per cent of Ukhozi FM's listeners fall into LSMs 1 to 6. Similarly, 70 per cent of 5 FM's listeners earn R4 000 or more a month compared with 10 per cent of Ukhozi FM's listeners. In fact, over a third of Ukhozi FM's listeners earn less than R500 a month. Of 5 FM's listeners, 50 per cent list English as their home language while 1,6 per cent of Ukhozi FM's listeners are English home-language speakers, the remaining listing Nguni. Of 5 FM's listeners, 63 per cent have a Standard 10 or further qualification, while the corresponding figure for Ukhozi FM is 22 per cent. Of Ukhozi FM's listeners, 27 per cent have either no schooling or only some primary schooling. While there are no specific figures for an urban/rural split in listenership, we can get some indication of this if we take into account that 81 per cent of 5 FM listeners live in communities of 40 000 or more, while the corresponding figure for Ukhozi FM is 39 per cent. In fact, over half (53%) of Ukhozi FM's listeners live in communities of less than 500 people. 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.⁶

Similarly, television viewing shows a preference by the low LSM groups for local content and a lower preference for local content among the high LSM groups. For example, 48 per cent of the prime time programming on the SABC's SABC 1 station is locally produced. For the SABC 2 station, the figure is 69 per cent and for SABC 3 it falls to 36 per cent. Just 19 per cent of SABC 1's viewers fall into the LSM groups 7 to 10. SABC 2 has 27 per cent of viewers in these groups while SABC 3 has 45 per cent.⁷

What these statistics indicate is that the penetration of foreign cultural forms into local cultures is a far more complex process than the media-cultural imperialism thesis would predict. In some sectors of society, the global media resonate with local audiences (although this still begs the question of the meanings these audiences attribute to these media) while in other sectors of society the global media are less popular than local forms. These considerations have led Mattelart to state: 'The 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 favours [or hinders] this penetration'.⁸

In response to Mattelart's 'demand', the remainder of this chapter examines why a particular group of students at Rhodes University prefer local to foreign media, especially television.

'Re-mooring' of tradition

Thompson writes that one of the most powerful legacies of classical social thought – especially deriving from 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.⁹

In critiquing this idea, Thompson argues that the theories of modernisation are 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 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.¹⁰

The reason for this, according to Thompson, 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.¹¹

Thompson points to the value of the 'identity forming aspect of tradition', which, he believes, has not been eliminated by the development of modern societies. For example, traditional beliefs may be retained because they provide individuals with a sense of belonging to a community, giving them 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'.¹² If we agree with Thompson, 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 also points out that as people move from one part of the world to another, they often carry with them the beliefs and values of their traditions. The quest for roots, he writes, is a strong but ambivalent theme for

migrant populations. Its appeal is the possibility of recovering and, indeed, inventing traditions that reconnect individuals to real or imaginary places of origin.¹³

Finally, Thompson notes that contact between the modern and the 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.¹⁴

A number of these themes run through the interviews discussed below. Thompson's argument dovetails with the insights into 'cultural proximity' put forward by Straubhaar. Both critique the homogenising assumption impact of global culture put forward by media/cultural imperialism theorists. This critique can be taken further by examining the relationship between media consumption and identity formation.

Media consumption and identity formation

The centrality of consumption in general to identity formation has been argued by a number of writers.¹⁵ Whereas a century ago the identity of individuals was rooted in production – as workers or owners – today it is consumption that confers identity because consumption is the one domain over which individuals feel they still have some power.¹⁶

For some writers it is media consumption in particular that lies at the heart of the identity formation process.¹⁷ They argue that this is because in late modern society many of the traditional sources of identity – religion, the family in particular – 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' playing a crucial role in this process.¹⁸

Dolby, for example, writes that popular culture at the end of the twentieth 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'. In her study of popular culture consumption among 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'.¹⁹

Dolby stresses the importance of understanding 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'.²⁰

Similarly, Martin-Barbero quotes 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'. 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'.²¹

Another example of the privileging of the media and popular culture in the process of identity formation is provided by Kellner, who believes 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'. 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.²²

In Kellner, we see the necessary link between the thesis of media imperialism and the spread of a global culture, usually American in origin, and the notion of media powerful enough to shape our self-identities and our views of the world. 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.

Such claims have not gone unchallenged. Tomlinson cautions against the 'media-centeredness' of media theory, namely 'the tendency of people working in this area to assume the cultural and ideological processes they

study are at the centre of social reality'.²³ As he reminds us, media messages are themselves mediated by other modes of cultural experience. In contrast to Kellner, who does not distinguish between 'media' and 'culture', Tomlinson urges us to view their relationship as a 'subtle interplay of mediations'. 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 which may include the discursive interaction of families, friends, peers, and so on. As Tomlinson notes, the relationship implied in this is the constant mediation of one aspect of cultural experience by another: what we make of a media text is influenced and shaped by what else is going on in our lives. Equally, he continues, our lives are lived as representations to ourselves in terms of the representations present in our culture. In other words, our biographies are partly 'intertextual'. Tomlinson believes that overly strong claims for media power arise when media theorists see the media as *determining*, rather than *mediating*, cultural experience.

Similarly, Warde writes that more consideration should be given to other sources of cultural experience, for example, identification with national, ethnic, occupational and kin groups. According to Warde, overly strong claims for the centrality of media 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.²⁴

Finally, the research findings of Gaganakis, 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.²⁵

The 'homeland'

In the course of this research, 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 of the signs 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 drama set on a gold mine. At 19:00 they disperse for supper in the residences, returning at 19:30 for the African language news. At 20:00 they view another local 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 negative, oppressive meaning in South African history. Interestingly, the choice of name also resonates strongly with Thompson's reference to the symbolic significance of a 'homeland'.

As was discussed earlier, 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 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 geophysical units. These 'national states' were the only places where Africans were allowed to exercise political and economic 'rights'. 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.²⁶ However, since the first national democratic elections in 1994, the ANC-led government has promoted the idea of a unified South African national identity.²⁷ 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 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. Migrant populations – these students have 'migrated' to Rhodes University – often display a strong quest for roots as a way of recovering and, indeed, inventing traditions that reconnect individuals to (real or imaginary) places of origin.²⁸

'Homeland' viewers

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 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.

The 'homeland' viewers also feel estranged from the dominant student culture at Rhodes University. The majority of them were initiated traditionally into manhood (they had 'been to the bush')²⁹ and accordingly 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:

Thabo: 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.

Simon: 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 deride them as 'coconuts': black on the outside but white on the inside. To the 'homeland' group, one of the most obvious signs of middle-class African students is their preference for the English language:

Thabo: 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 perception extends to many black Zimbabwean students:

Jacob: 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.³⁰

The relative poverty of the 'homeland' students, often reflected in their dress, also affects how they experience the university institution:

Simon: 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 their courses is also a source of much frustration for these students:

Jacob: 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.

'Homeland' viewing room as a comforting space

I spent a number of viewing sessions with the 'homeland' 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 psychotherapist:

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

Simon: 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 among the 'homeland' viewers:

Thabo: 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*:

During 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.³¹

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 means that compared with students who have attended Model C and private schools, the English language skills of the 'homeland' students are relatively weak.) As Thabo noted, 'We don't like English because of its restrictions to us'.

The 'homeland' represents a space within which these students can live out their feelings of difference: 'it's comforting' notes Simon. In the 'homeland', only Xhosa is spoken, which allows these students to interact with each other confidently, free from the ridicule of the better-educated, more urbane, middle-class students:

Thabo: 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 people who we share the same perception of things.

Simon: 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.

'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:

Simon: 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.

Thabo: 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 every time 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.

Simon: It's a true reflection of what is going on in South Africa. In [American] soaps, 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.

Simon'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*.

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:

Thabo: 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-Net³² 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.

Eric: 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.

Thabo: Also the content of the news 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.

Simon: 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.

Eric: 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 some writers that young people in the US are no

longer interested in conventional news media.³³ Katz notes, 'What is significant is that younger viewers and readers find conventional journalism of no particular use in their daily lives'. 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'. 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'.³⁴

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'.³⁵

My survey results show that there is high interest in 'conventional' news among South African youth, typically through newspapers and television news, and documentary and current affairs programmes. While this interest was lowest among white, middle-class students (confirming the claims made by the 'homeland' students in this regard), it was higher overall than the findings by Katz and Buckingham would suggest.

The survey showed that 9,74 per cent of the students agreed that it was important to have access to 'hard' news and to be up to date with current affairs. This was most important to African and Indian students and least important to white students. In response to the question, 'Do you read newspapers in your leisure time?', 50,5 per cent of the African students answered yes, compared with 52,4 per cent of the coloured students, 36,2 per cent of the Indian students and 32,6 per cent of the white students.

Similarly, African students from a working or peasant-class background were found to be those who most enjoyed 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.

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:

Thabo: 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'.

Simon: 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 you have to take her out, buy a rose and things like that. That's what I don't understand.

Identities are also constructed through difference. From this perspective, traditional African culture is constituted 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 entry into the cultural space of the campus, and that they have reaffirmed their identity by separating from other students on campus, gathering nightly in the shared space they have named the 'homeland', and rejecting foreign television programmes. For Thabo, 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'. But before coming to Rhodes University, Thabo 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.

Thabo's life story

Thabo 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 dependent on money sent by her husband, a truck driver in the city of East London.³⁶ Payments were irregular, and this led to Thabo's first visit to 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 Thabo:

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, Thabo 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 recognised 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 blacks, and in particular in my family. 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 with 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 Thabo, 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, 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 Thabo 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 had 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.

American television was thus instrumental in bringing about Thabo's 'mental modernisation'.³⁷ 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'.³⁸ However, it is the very openness of this experience that creates existential dilemmas for the modern subject. For Fromm, freedom from premodern certainties brings 'complete aloneness and doubt', while for Berman 'it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish'.³⁹ It is this tension between the promise and the dangers of modernity that Berman 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.⁴⁰

Despite these threats to premodern certainties, there is the belief among certain writers that, with the growth of the global capitalist market, cultures are 'condemned to modernity'.⁴¹ This may be so. But the 'homeland' interviews demonstrate the unevenness of this transition. The adoption of 'modern' values is always context bound. For Thabo, living an impoverished rural existence in 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 could not speak

the dominant English language as well as they could, he came from an impoverished background and his education at a rural DET school was inferior. He recognised more clearly 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 Simon put it, the feeling 'that you have to be flexible, just take everything'. This is the 'moral deficit' of secular humanism noted earlier in this chapter. In the face of the uncertainty and doubt underlying the modern experience, the 'homeland' students find security in what Eric referred to as the 'comfort of the homeland'.

Importantly, their nightly ritual of television viewing not only reflects traditional identities; it also helps to produce them. As Frith observes: 'Social 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'.⁴²

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

Politics of media consumption

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:

Simon: 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 first names even though in our culture it's not right to do that.

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:

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

Thabo: 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.

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 premodern culture. An example is their attitude towards an unemployed male character in *Isidingo*. Even 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 expected (and they would have expected) as the male head of the household. The televisual portrayal of Matabane's strong wife who takes charge of the family reinforces, rather than challenges, their traditional patriarchal beliefs:

Thabo: 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.

Eric: 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.

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

Thabo: 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.

Eric: 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:

Eric: 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.

Thabo: Equality shouldn't downgrade the man.

Simon: 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 survey showed that 15,6 per cent 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. By contrast, only 4,9 per cent of those who had attended Model C schools felt this way. Similarly, twice as many students from DET schools (26,5%) felt that 'all women should have children in order to be fulfilled' compared with respondents from Model C or private schools (12,5%).

Finally, as one might expect, 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.

Conclusion

A call has been made for a 'radical contextualism' in audience studies: the need to understand meanings for audiences within the context of the 'multidimensional intersubjective networks in which the object is inserted and made to mean in concrete contextual settings'.⁴³ This approach requires 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. The results refute those theoretical approaches which, when it comes to questions of identity formation, over-exaggerate the role played by media consumption in the process.

8. Cultural authenticity, realism and polysemic texts

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 'McDonaldization' 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?

D. Lemish et al.¹

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.

M. M. Kraidy²

'Authenticity' in local and global cultures

An assumption that runs consistently through the media imperialism thesis is that before the US-led media/cultural invasion, Third World cultures were largely untouched by outside influences.³ This bipolar vision pits a culturally destructive and damaging 'global' against the 'local', with the latter seen as a site of 'pristine cultural authenticity'.⁴ 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'.⁵

However, as Morley reminds us, 'every culture has ingested foreign elements from exogenous sources with the various elements becoming "naturalised" within it'.⁶ Similarly, Hannerz, Kraidy and Thompson point to 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. Encounters between Third World societies and globalised forms of electronic media represent only the latest such cultural encounter.⁷

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’. As the authors explain, ‘[s]uch studies broadly echoed the logic of a generalized anti-apartheid movement that strategically emphasized enforced separation over the cultural fusions, intimacies and creolisations of which South Africa also spoke’. Similarly, studies examining workers and working-class life in South Africa have focused on distinctiveness and difference among people, ignoring the cultural dimensions of continental mixing that has shaped identity. However, as the authors point out, critics and writers are starting now to appreciate the hybrid history of South Africa.⁸

For example, Martin, writing on the creolisation of South African culture in the latter half of the nineteenth century, 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’.⁹

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.¹⁰

In her discussion of the postmodern condition, Massey also questions assumptions of local 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’ 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, she observes, is the ‘reverse invasion’, partly as a result of patterns of immigration whereby ‘the periphery has infiltrated the colonial core’.¹¹

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 we must consider the extent to which the peripheries ‘talk back’ to the centres.¹² 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'.¹³ 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. As Hall observes, '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'.¹⁴ Furthermore, not only is creolisation increasingly a cultural reality but, in contrast to the pessimistic claims made by the media and cultural imperialism theorists, others believe that this trend is something to celebrate. Thus, Hannerz writes that 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'.¹⁵

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*".'¹⁶

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'.¹⁷

The result of this mix is, according to yet another study of Ibrahim (by Swenson), a sound that has had a 'subtle but profound influence on modern music'. 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'.¹⁸ Thus, the periphery talks back to the centre.

Ballantine, writing on the development of an authentic South African jazz, points out that Black American culture provided the main source of influence on this music. At the same time, he notes, this development also depended on the use of local styles and elements, the most obvious of these being the various types of traditional music. Ballantine observes that the appropriation of dance music from abroad and American jazz allowed local music in the slums and ghettos since at least the First World War to develop 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.¹⁹

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:

If you listen to Miles Davis, or if you listen to John Coltrane, or any of those guys who were in the vanguard of revolutionising jazz . . . It'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, Linda, another African student, pointed to what she perceived to be the African roots of the American hip hop culture. Again, this goes some way to explaining her attraction to this particular culture:

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. 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.

National cultures and national identity

Threat posed to national cultures by global media

The belief that contemporary forms of global media pose a major threat to national cultures is so widespread that over the years it has profoundly influenced national media policies in a number of countries.²⁰ South Africa has not been exempt. The 1994 report of the South African Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) on the need for local content quotas in South African media was premised on the need to preserve South Africa's national cultural identity. Similar sentiments are expressed in the 2002 ICASA position paper on local content.

But, as Tomlinson argues, it is not easy to define national cultures and relate these in any unproblematic way to the nation state because, as he notes,

'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"'.²¹ For Ang, the concept of national identity is also problematic: 'It 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 and politics) to the hegemonic and seemingly natural one of *nationality*'. National identity therefore needs to be viewed as a highly mediated sense of belonging that coexists with other forms of cultural identity.²²

This has implications for how we view the claims made by the media imperialism theorists. Tomlinson believes that before we begin 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 that makes sense only where we can speak of a unified national culture in the 'invaded' country. Otherwise, claims to an erosion of national culture 'might mean imputing a cultural unity where none exists.'²³ He writes: '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?'²⁴

Thus, for example, Berger 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 within the US 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'.²⁵

What is a South African national identity?

In South Africa, given the deep social 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.²⁶ Another is the imposition of a primordial ethnic identity promoted by segregationist and apartheid ideologies and social policies that created a divided society.²⁷ The discourse on 'nation building', much in evidence since the first democratically held elections in 1994, reflects the desire among politicians and social theorists to create a national identity. Such an identity, it is felt, would help South Africa transcend its deep social divisions and the ongoing internal conflict.²⁸

An example of an 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 familiar phrase of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a 'rainbow nation'.²⁹ As former President Mandela said at the official banquet concluding the tournament, 'When 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* of 24–30 May 1996 reported:

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.

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.

Divided campus

That these social divisions are 'lived' by youth in South Africa was confirmed by the random sample survey of Rhodes University students. An average of 72 per cent of the students agreed with the statement that 'On Rhodes campus black and white students lead separate lives'.³⁰ Furthermore, as the

interviews with the 'homeland' students indicated in Chapter 7, in South Africa these divisions also have a class dimension to them.

It is these existing social divisions, together with the historical reality of cultural hybridity in South Africa, which give credence to Massey's claim that geographical 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 that may not be local in their origins but should still be considered 'authentic'.³¹

Similarly, Miller 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*.³²

Take the case of Zondile, who 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 ANC. When I interviewed him, he discussed 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 47s. 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.

Vuyo, a middle-class African 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.

Vuyo was attracted to black American hip hop culture, which he could relate to his experience of growing up in a 'local' 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.

Realism

Empirical realism

What the examples of Stanley and Vuyo indicate is how foreign media can, in certain instances, accurately reflect local lived conditions. 'Foreign' is a problematic category, and one needs to ask, 'what is foreign to whom?' Sometimes 'foreign' productions may well have a local relevance that renders them empirically real.³³ We can recall that 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.

An important consideration in deciding the popularity of a programme is the degree to which audiences find it 'realistic'. Ellis writes: 'Notions of realism are some of the most enduring means of judgement of film and TV creations'.³⁴ Similarly, Ang, 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.³⁵

Both Ellis and Ang emphasise the multi-accentuality of the term *realism*, that is, what constitutes the 'reality' of a programme differs for different viewers. While there are differences in emphasis, what unites various understandings of realism is that a comparison is made between the realities 'in' a text and 'outside' it.³⁶ We can refer to this approach to realism as

empiricist realism.³⁷ It is cognitively based and works primarily at the level of denotative meaning, where a literal resemblance is sought between the fictional world of the text and the 'real' world as experienced by the viewer. It should conform to notions of what we expect to happen; it should explain itself adequately; it should conform to expected notions of psychology and character motivation. Judgements are made accordingly, and a text that can be seen as an 'unrealistic' rendering of social reality (however that is defined) is judged as 'bad'.³⁸

In my research, focus group interviews revealed that many students relied on an empiricist understanding of 'realism' in judging the worth of media and justifying their consumption choices. For example, as noted in my discussion of the 'homeland' students, African students from a rural, working-class or peasant background tended to reject foreign television productions as 'unrealistic' – they were judged not to reflect, at a denotative level, these viewers' known, lived reality. Their antipathy towards foreign television and film productions, a result of the productions' lack of empirical realism, is evidenced in the following extracts from focus group interviews with students from these backgrounds, including some of the 'homeland' group:

Simon: 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.

Thabo: 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.

Sonwabo: [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, things that don'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.

These sentiments were not solely class based. In the next interview, a group of Indian female middle-class students discuss the relative merits of local and foreign soap operas. Again, 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: Yah, some American soaps I don't like because they're not good.

Preisen: 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.

Preisen: 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.

Preisen: 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 interracial relationship quite important for you to see?

Preisen: Yah, yah.

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 discussed earlier, 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 local media

reflect, better than American media, a non-racialism that is alien to the culture of these students' parents.

White middle-class students also referred to the greater realism of local television and film productions:

Jennifer: I watch South African and American soaps, 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 . . .

Candice: 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.

The preference shown by these students for local media (in this case, television) tally with some of the findings of Lemish et al. in their study of global media consumption amongst the youth in Israel, France and Denmark. They write, '[w]hen 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'.³⁹

For many white students, on the other hand, their identification with Western culture means that it is foreign, rather than local, productions that are experienced as being more 'realistic'. Anthea, who comes from a white, middle-class family wrote in her course assignment about her favourite television programme, the American series *Ally McBeal*:

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 Anthea 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, Carol, 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 as being inappropriate to her identity as a 'global being':

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. On this note I identify more with the 'cliquey' and humorous bunch of 'twenty-somethings' of *Friends*, with their smooth American accents, than with, what seems to me, the comparatively primitive actors and actresses in local productions such as *Isidingo*.

Emotional realism

In her study of the enjoyment Dutch women derived from the American serial *Dallas*, Ang 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 defines it, relates to the associative meanings that can be attributed to elements of the text. For the Dutch viewers, the realism of *Dallas* lay in the subjective experience it offered of the world. 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'.⁴⁰

The distinction between denotative and connotative levels of textual meaning reflects the two orders of signification identified by Barthes.⁴¹ 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 view that meaning making results from the interaction between socially situated viewers and polysemic texts.⁴² In his study of television consumption, Fiske proposes the notion of an 'active audience': 'Reading the television text is a process of negotiation between the 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'.⁴³

Fiske 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.⁴⁴ Thus, while Ang 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 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 many of the interviews discussed so far in this book indicate, it is difficult, outside of ethnographic investigation, to

predict precisely what meanings will be made at the point of textual engagement.

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. As I noted earlier, localities should be seen as 'spaces of interaction' where local identities are constructed out of material and symbolic resources that may not be local in their origins but could still be considered 'authentic'. Take the case of Nicholas, a gay male student. In his interview, he said that male musicians who are 'handsome and well dressed' such as Nsync, Boyzone and Backstreet Boys have become icons and topics of conversation among the gay student 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 that is 'authentic' to Nicholas's gay identity.

Jean is a 21-year-old white female student from a lower middle-class background. Her essay dealt with the important role that 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. She 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 Jean's home life in her early adolescence were television characters: McGyver (*McGyver*), Michael Knight (*Knight Rider*), 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 that reinforced her belief in the strength of women.

The experience of these students points to the mediation of media messages by other modes of cultural experience as was discussed in Chapter 7. This is apparent in the next interview with Robert, a 21-year-old coloured student from East London in the Eastern Cape.

Robert: The interplay of macrosocial and individual-biographical factors in identity formation

Robert's grandfather, on his father's side, was Irish, while his mother had a French Filipino father and Malaysian mother. His parents never discussed this family background with him. The family lived in a designated coloured working-class residential area in East London.

As members of the *petit bourgeoisie* (his father was a factory foreman and his mother a schoolteacher) his parents tried to shield Robert 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 neighbourhood:

My parents protected us from that community. We weren't allowed to hang around on street corners and stuff like that. They [gang members] were in our community, but we were hidden from it. There was a fear that we'd end up like the rest of them.

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. Their social difference from the rest of the community was also materially evident:

We had a bigger house and we had cars. Other people didn't, they had to catch taxis. We would drive through the community; we 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 European culture. For example, from an early age Robert took classical piano lessons. It was significant that his music teacher was white and he would take part in white music competitions. This was part of 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.

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 teachers 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 academic studies 'until they started counting me as one of them'.

Robert's close identification with whites resulted in a degree of ostracism from his local coloured community. He learnt to put up with their 'snide remarks'. He believed that they were just jealous and to respond would be to 'lower yourself'. He remains critical of the people who just 'sat around aimlessly' at the corner café: 'They did nothing at all, they'd just watch the cars drive by. And I just didn'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. He longed for the 'fancy cars' and 'beautiful houses' he saw in these programmes and which he'd never experienced in his own community. As a result of these representations, he grew up 'seeing the American society as better than our own', something he still believes.

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 elder brother. Robert's parents hated the contemporary pop music listened to by his brother. So did Robert:

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.

So, much to the approval of his parents, instead of listening to global pop music, Robert gravitated primarily to Western classical music.

After completing school, Robert came to Rhodes University, where coloured students constitute only four per cent 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 [his high school] 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.

Even at Rhodes, Robert felt the need to keep himself apart from the youth culture that surrounded him. He felt that he was 'different from the others better than the rest' and that this needed to be signified through the clothing he wore and his rejection of Western pop music.

What is clear is that Robert's identity was shaped by the interplay between macrosocial and individual-biographical factors. His structural 'placement' was as a coloured youth in an apartheid society, with upwardly mobile aspirations. His place in the family was as the 'favoured' son. As was discussed in Chapter 4, while racist ideology portrayed coloureds as a 'mixed race', their 'European blood' made them hierarchically superior to the Africans. 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.

Robert's story is a reminder of Bausinger's observation that 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'.⁴⁵ Robert's story is also a reminder that, as was discussed earlier, one needs to understand the media's meanings for their audiences within 'multidimensional intersubjective' networks where the object is inserted and made to mean in 'concrete contextual settings'.⁴⁶ It also demonstrates how identity construction is rooted in 'difference' – Robert's difference from the rest of the coloured community and from his older brother. Finally, the interview points to the role played by global media, in this case primarily American films and television programmes in the process of 'symbolic distancing' (discussed in Chapter 6). 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 that outweighed either his 'racial' identity or his national identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued against the essentialism inherent in the media and cultural imperialism thesis. With Massey, I have argued that places should no longer be seen as internally homogeneous bounded areas, but should rather be seen as 'spaces of interaction' where 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'. This takes place because media texts are polysemic. They not only communicate denotative meanings, but also connotative meanings – meaning by association. Finally, with Tomlinson, Bausinger and Ang, I have argued that our media consumption decisions and the meanings we take from texts are influenced by the contextual setting of consumption and other sources of cultural experience.

2. Conclusion

Concluding the study

Cultural and social analysis is ultimately a form of storytelling in which culture 'talks' and identity listens. My study offers a preliminary, but if illustrative, of how some South African youth have drawn on global media as part of their response to the changing 'realities' of their world. I have explained how these youth respond to media texts – mainly television news programmes – because, first, I have examined the processes by which students differentially responded to the South African situation and ideological discourse, and second, because of their complex attempts to make sense of their own responses. I have explained the structure of different media texts for different social groups of students. In contrast to the 'nationalist' perspective, how the class, race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality and religious approaches, I have found that there is an interplay between social and structural, between individual choice and the structuring of experience by wider social and historical forces.

The interplay between the personal and the social has been particularly evident in the case of youth who are 'middle class' and 'middle class' students. It would seem, therefore, as with an earlier generation of students, that the 'middle class' students are the ones who are most likely to be 'middle class' students. The ways employed in the interviews led me to see how the individual and social process that he treated media consumption decisions and the ways that socially constructed norms and values are being attacked by or used, through youth. These findings highlight the differences of the youth experience of news and its different ways of cultural consumption as the most particularly significant effect of the globalisation of media.

This does not mean that the local consumption of global media does not have ideological consequences. Cultural power is both exercised and resisted by particular groups in particular ways, which may or may not be captured in the responses to the surveys. I would like to see a further study on this topic.