



## Open Research Online

### Citation

Barnett, Clive (2002). 'More Than Just TV': Educational broadcasting and popular culture in South Africa. In: von Feilitzen, Cecilia and Carlsson, Ulla eds. Children, Young People, and Media Globalisation: Yearbook 2002. Yearbooks. Göteborg: Nordicom, pp. 95–110.

### URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/7166/>

### License

(CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0) Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

### Policy

This document has been downloaded from Open Research Online, The Open University's repository of research publications. This version is being made available in accordance with Open Research Online policies available from [Open Research Online \(ORO\) Policies](#)

### Versions

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding

# **“More Than Just TV”: Educational Broadcasting and Popular Culture in South Africa**

Clive Barnett

This chapter discusses an innovative approach to educational broadcasting developed in post-apartheid South Africa, in a broader context of media globalization, international policy transfer, and socio-economic and cultural transformation. I argue that the reorganization of the spatial scales at which media economies and regulatory regimes operate requires the rethinking of established understandings of the relationships between media, children, and citizenship. ‘Globalization’ does not spell the end of national-level public policy, but it does require an adjustment in the objectives of media policies. And in certain respects, contemporary developments open up opportunities for innovation.

I illustrate this argument through a case study of the controversial South African ‘edutainment’ drama series, *Yizo Yizo*. This series has succeeded in establishing and maintaining a large youth audience for educational television by using popular television formats to connect social issues to the everyday life-contexts of ordinary people. And I argue that *Yizo Yizo* embodies a distinctive approach to media citizenship that challenge the conceptualizations developed in the North.

## **Media-spaces and citizenship**

Academic and policy understandings of the relationships between media and citizenship in the North developed in a context where broadcasting emerged as a complex of technologies, organizations, and markets that articulated two spatial scales of social activity: that of the nation-state with that of private domestic, familial home. On the one hand, broadcasting tended to be organized as a set of national institutions, whether publicly owned as in Western Europe, or privately-owned as in the United States, overseen by national policy and regulatory regimes. On the other hand, radio and television were both commodified as domestic technologies. Broadcasting contributed to a process whereby social life became increasingly focussed upon the private nuclear family at the same time as the real and imaginary horizons of family life were ‘stretched’ over broader spatial scales through improvements in transport, communications, and mass media. In this context, public service broadcasting developed as the model for normative theories of mass media as vehicles for sustaining participatory forms of citizenship (Keane 1991).

This national and inter-national regulatory regime of broadcasting has in turn been associated with distinctive modes of cultural regulation. Because broadcasting was institutionalized as a domestic technology, media regulation has consistently been concerned with using radio and television to regulate social activities in the home (Silverstone 2000). Radio and television expand the spatial scale over which cultural forms can be circulated, but they also institute a structural separation between producers and consumers of culture. This implies a simultaneous centralization of cultural power in the hands of a relatively small number of institutions, corporations, and elites, and decentralization of the citizenry over which those actors might want to exercise influence. The spatial constitution of radio and television accounts for the fact that exercising power through these mediums is in fact rather difficult, in so far as producers and disseminators of information are not capable of enforcing the ways in which such information is actually consumed (Scannell 1995). There is, then, a fundamental degree of indeterminacy built into the relationships of power and influence characteristic of spatially extensive communications media.

The ambivalence of radio and television helps to account for the lure and repulsion felt by policy makers, elites, and politicians towards the media. Historically, the ambivalent power of the media has been resolved through the establishment of national economic and cultural regulatory regimes that enabled national authorities to 'oversee' their citizens' media practices. This has taken the form of a combination of paternalism and protectionism, whereby national institutions determined the sorts of programmes that audiences should and should not have access to, in order to assure the cultivation of appropriate models of citizenship. And given the private, domestic contexts with which broadcasting regulation has been traditionally concerned, there has been a long-standing tendency to invoke the figure of the innocent child in order to legitimize media and communications policy decisions. This feature of policy-making has important implications for how the relationship between media and citizenship is conceptualized. All citizens can easily come to be characterized in the same terms as the figure of the vulnerable child, primarily as a passive subject in need of protection and guidance (Hartley 1987, Oswell 1998).

In short, in the capitalist North, the economic, technological, and spatial articulation of broadcasting as a set of national systems of domestic cultural consumption has been premised upon and in turn sustained a rather paternalistic conceptualization of media citizenship embedded in the principles of traditional public service broadcasting. Established academic and policy understandings of the relationships between media, domestic space, territorial scale, commodification, and citizenship are, however, called into question by contemporary processes of so-called 'media globalization'.

## Globalizing media and the end of citizenship?

Globalization is best understood as a process of 're-scaling' through which the spatial congruence between culture, economy, and polity that has previously characterized broadcasting policy has been undermined. However, while economic and political power increasingly flow around and above as well as through nation-state, it is important not to exaggerate the extent of these processes. It is also essential to recognize the role that national policy plays in facilitating economic globalization (Mosco 1996). Populist accounts of globalization suggest that all boundaries have now collapsed and that distance has been finally abolished as a constraint on economic activity and social interaction. It might be more useful to think of 'globalization' as just the latest round in a process of 'creative destruction' of the spatial and temporal configurations of capitalism (Harvey 1982). According to this understanding, to enable certain patterns of mobility (whether the circulation of commodities or the movement of people), it is necessary to embed certain technologies and labor processes in fixed, material spatial configurations. The friction of distance is overcome only by laying in place a material infrastructure of roads, railways, transmitters, and cables that, in a subsequent round of restructuring, will themselves come to serve as impediments to continued accumulation. The maxim that 'the ability to overcome space is predicated upon the production of space' is therefore central to the understanding of contemporary restructuring of media and communications infrastructures (Leyschon 1995).

Media globalization refers to a complex set of related processes, including the restructuring of the ownership of corporations and control over markets leading to the emergence of 'global media players'; the development of new communications technologies, such as Internet and mobile telephony; the increasing convergence of computing, telecommunications, and media; and the reorganization of the scales at which regulatory and policy decisions are made. The dynamic behind this process is the drive to produce new material and institutional infrastructures for the extension of capital accumulation over larger spatial scales at accelerated pace (Harvey 1989). In terms of the analysis developed in the previous section, the globalization of media can be understood as a process that re-articulates the domestic space of the home with a variety of cultural flows operating at various spatial scales, from the local, regional, national, to the global. Satellite, video, and Internet technologies have emerged as cultural mediums that transgress the stable national regimes of policy and regulation that have historically characterized broadcast radio and television.

In both policy and academic debates, media globalization is often presented as a *fait accompli*, an unavoidable process to which governments, policy-makers, and social movements just have to adjust (Low and Barnett 2000). It is clear that national policy-makers are no longer able to regulate the flow of media commodities in the ways they once were. The possibilities of deploying traditional national cultural policies in support of citizenship is constrained by the

contemporary re-scaling of media economies and cultures (Shields and Muppidi 1996). Public service broadcasting has traditionally been the locus for the production of 'quality' educational radio and television for children. The international crisis of public service broadcasting is inextricably linked to the extension of commercialized media and an associated deepening of commodification in everyday life, a process that is driven in no small part by the targeting of children as a market for commercial media products (Buckingham 2000). Media globalization is in turn associated with a reorientation of the discourse linking media and citizenship. Champions of 'globalization' and the 'information revolution' tend to deploy an understanding of citizenship, which focuses upon the expanded *choices* available to citizens as consumers of media commodities distributed through the market.

The increasing accessibility that households, and not least children, have to new media technologies made available through restructured media markets means that the possibilities of national policy effectively regulating what gets into 'the home' is significantly curtailed. There are two points worth making at this point. Firstly, this does not imply that either economic or cultural regulation have ceased to exist. Rather, regulatory regimes are also increasingly re-scaled at levels above those of individual nation-states, as well as being re-ordered around market-friendly principles. For example, the European Union has developed a range of policies aimed at ensuring that legitimate social interests in protecting children from violent or sexually explicit material on the Internet are put in place. Similar trans-national policy initiatives addressing children's media rights have been developed elsewhere, stimulated not least by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The emergence of an international movement supporting media education and children's media rights can be "seen as a direct answer to media globalisation" (von Feilitzen 1999, 25).

Secondly, this spatial restructuring of the sites and scales of media culture and commodification does mean that the role of public policy in supporting participatory citizenship needs to be re-thought. Traditionally, children's access to media has been understood as potentially problematic, particularly in relation to violent and sexual images. Policy has focussed upon controlling access and protecting children from exposure to such material. However, new media technologies and globalized media markets render this policy paradigm highly problematic. While the agenda of children's media rights has gathered steam in recent years, there remains a tendency to reproduce a 'protectionist' paradigm of these rights that might be both increasingly ineffective and conceptually muddled (Buckingham 2000). However, the re-scaling of the spaces of media culture and policy regulation requires that children's competence to participate as citizens in media debates be taken more seriously. In the rest of this article, we evaluate the development of an innovative approach to educational broadcasting in South Africa that indicates the potential for public service broadcasters to re-conceptualize children as active participants in mediated deliberation over public issues.

# **Broadcasting, education, and mediated deliberation in South Africa**

## **I. Rethinking educational broadcasting**

The history of broadcasting in South Africa stands in contrast to the pattern of development that has served as the norm for the understandings of media citizenship developed in the North. Radio and television were institutionalized as technologies of racial and ethnic separation rather than national integration. The apartheid regime exercised considerable authority over mass media through a combination of state control and extensive censorship apparatuses. At the same time, opposition to apartheid generated a broad range of alternative media traditions, which emphasized citizen participation in a broad range of media practices. These traditions of alternative media practice have informed the new paradigm of educational broadcasting developed since the first non-racial democratic elections in 1994, one which emphasizes the developmental potential of broadcasting in supporting a transformation of educational practices (Criticos 1999). New broadcasting policies have aimed to foster national integration in an international context of increasing globalization of media markets, and in a domestic context of geographically and socially unequal access to media infrastructure.

The South African experience is of interest because it illustrates both the opportunities and limits that media globalization presents to national policy-makers in developing quality educational programming in support of democratic citizenship. The development of a democratic educational broadcasting policy needs to be placed in the broader context of the institutional and economic transformation of broadcasting. The South African Broadcasting Authority (SABC) has been restructured into an independent public service broadcaster, although increasingly dependent on commercial advertising revenue (Teer-Tomaselli 1995, 1998). The SABC's virtual monopoly over both radio and television has been broken since 1996, with the proliferation of commercialized radio stations and the licensing of a new free-to-air television channel. This liberalization of broadcasting has been overseen by a new independent regulatory agency, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) (Barnett 1999b).<sup>1</sup> In 1995, the IBA's policy review gave a clear mandate to the SABC to develop educational broadcasting programming as part of its new remit as national public broadcaster (IBA 1995).

While the restructuring of the broadcasting sector is one context for the development of a new educational broadcasting paradigm since 1994, the other relevant context is the fundamental overhaul of educational policy. Launched by President Mandela in February 1997, the COLTS campaign (Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service) has attempted to address the problem of dysfunctional schools, which is one of the most shameful legacies of the apartheid era. The campaign

urges community involvement in restoring a sense of professional responsibility among those educators who have lost their professional self-respect, in urging learners to make disciplined use of their opportunity to study, in combating crime and violence in schools, and in ensuring that officials in education departments exemplify the service ethic. (Ministry of Education, 1999)

The SABC and some national newspapers have been key partners in promoting the COLTS campaign.

Soon after the adoption of the COLTS programme a new curriculum framework (Curriculum 2005) was adopted as a radical break from the apartheid past. Apartheid curricula dominated by education theories of racial and religious determinism gave way in 1998 to a progressive outcomes-based national curriculum.

The *Yizo Yizo* television series has attempted to advance the COLTS campaign and show that dysfunctional schools can be rescued, that learners need not be victims and that Curriculum 2005 and outcomes-based education can be implemented in under-resourced schools.

A Soweto student quoted in a *Yizo Yizo* magazine sums up the challenge of the series:

We have to blame ourselves for a lot of our problems. Students always find something to complain about but they don't help each other. They don't study. They sit around and make noise so others can't study. We play tennis in the classrooms. We steal fuses. We break taps, the lights and the windows. Then we suffer in winter. (SABC Education, 1999c)

A distinctive feature of both broadcasting and educational policy-formulation in the 1990s has been a process of international policy transfer, as South African academic, research, and policy institutions have been re-integrated into international networks. The emergence of a broad-based conceptualization of educational broadcasting should also be placed in the context of the changing paradigms of media education developed in South Africa during the course of political transition (Prinsloo and Criticos 1991, Prinsloo 1999). This paradigm-shift acknowledges the multiple media literacies of children, and emphasizes the development of educational practices that will contribute towards the empowerment of learners. Since before the 1994 elections, the restructured SABC has shown a strong commitment to innovative and broadly conceived educational uses of its radio and television services. These have included *Soul City*, a health education initiative, and the *Khululeka* voter education series, both of which combine elements of education and entertainment in an 'edutainment' format (Bulbulia 1998, Teer-Tomaselli 1996). These initiatives illustrate a commitment to using locally produced mass media programming as one element of a broad strategy of education for citizenship.

In 1996, the SABC and the national Department of Education committed themselves to a partnership to promote constructive uses of broadcasting to support the general objectives of educational and curriculum reform. An Educational Broadcasting Plan conceptualized broadcasting as having an important role to play in changing public perceptions of the scope and purpose of education, and also as a resource to provide multi-media resource support to teachers and schools. Educational broadcasting was defined in a broad way to include:

programming supporting structured educational provision and the curriculum;  
programming which in a systematic and structured way seeks to support audiences in their efforts to acquire life and survival skills in order to improve their circumstances;  
programming which in a systematic way empower South Africans to understand and better interact with the world, environmental, natural, social, cultural, political, economic, scientific, and technological processes around them (Department of Education 1996).

It is important to emphasize that the subjects of this mode of educational broadcasting are not restricted to children, but include adults as well.

The key to re-conceptualizing educational broadcasting was a strategic plan undertaken on behalf of the SABC in 1998 by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE). In contrast to the 1996 Educational Broadcasting Plan, which focussed primarily upon the role of broadcasting in schools and during school-hours, the 1998 plan distinguished between *school-based broadcasting services* and *school-educational broadcasting services* (SAIDE 1998). This latter concept encompasses the full range of broadcast and non-broadcast media services that might support educational objectives regardless of when and where they are offered and accessed.

This emphasis upon not educational broadcasting to a niche has been a distinctive impetus of recent South African educational broadcasting initiatives. The broadly conceived re-definition of school-educational broadcasting depended upon drawing lessons from an evaluation of international trends in educational broadcasting. This reorientation also depended upon an acknowledgement of the increasingly complex, dense, and commercialized nature of South African media cultures resulting from the proliferation and opening up of media markets during the 1990s (ibid., 114). The plan strongly recommended that educational broadcasting should “move away from overtly pedagogical programming to allow for more active learning and learner-centred approaches” (ibid., 60). This dovetails with the recommendation that popular programming formats and genres, including documentary, soap-operas, talk-shows, and drama series, should be used as vehicles for educational broadcasting in order to attract large, general audiences (ibid., 118-121).

By defining school-educational broadcasting as part of the general broadcasting environment, the aims and objectives of educational broadcasting no longer focus solely upon the disciplinary matrix of the school, classroom, and teacher-pupil relationship. In turn, this implies that the priorities of the education departments of public broadcasters be focussed on ensuring the effective provision of non-broadcast resources to enable schools and teachers to re-integrate educational programming into classroom contexts. In short, then, the approach developed in South Africa during the late 1990s rests upon a re-conceptualization of the spaces in which education and broadcasting are articulated together, and upon a revised understanding of the roles and relationships between the actors involved in educational broadcasting projects. This mainstreaming of educational broadcasting in terms of scheduling is associated with a fundamental shift in the style of programming, eschewing traditional top-down didacticism which models appropriate outcomes. In the new paradigm, programmes model processes of acting, with the objective of empowering people to take charge of everyday decision-making.

Importantly, this diffuse notion of educational broadcasting introduces an important element of ambiguity into educational broadcasting. The use of popular formats for educational purposes raises the question of what counts as effective learning outcomes in this paradigm. This is an unavoidable dilemma, given the acknowledgement of the existence of a complex media ecology into which educational broadcasting must be inserted. The policy response to this issue is to emphasize the heightened importance of establishing effective research capacities, both to evaluate programming and to develop effective support material. The importance ascribed to research in ensuring effective learning outcomes is illustrated by the SABC's commissioning of a 'COLTS drama' which would address issues of teaching and learning environments in South African townships. The production of the series only proceeded after extensive qualitative and quantitative research into conditions in South Africa schools (SABC Education 1999b).

This research served as the basis for the development of the scripts for *Yizo Yizo*. *Yizo Yizo* has been developed with the explicit objective of generating public debate about educational issues, and of changing the attitudes and behaviour of students, teachers and principals, and parents. Research has been central to the production, legitimization, and revision of the series; in evaluating the success of the series' explicit objective of altering attitudes and conduct; and also in defending it against the criticism that the graphic depiction of sex and violence was a glorification that encouraged copy-cat behaviour (Simpson 2001).

## **II. Reality hits the screens: *Yizo Yizo***

*Yizo Yizo*<sup>2</sup> was first aired on the SABC's main channel, SABC1, in February 1999, and ran for 13 half-hour episodes. The show was broadcast at prime time in the evenings, in order to ensure maximum audience penetration of both

children and adults. The show provoked instant controversy, but also rapidly established a large audience, of between 1.2 to 2.1 million viewers per episode, making it the most watched programme on South African TV. *Yizo Yizo* is the only drama series on that shows the lives of ordinary Black South Africans living in townships, a topic otherwise reserved for news and documentary series. The show focuses upon the lives of the children, teachers, and parents of a fictional township school, Supatsela High School. The series deals with the impact of socio-economic factors upon children's experiences of formal schooling, including violence, sexual harassment and rape, and drug abuse; the role of educational professionals in sustaining or undermining effective learning environments; and the role of communities in improving the performance of schools. The programmes were intended to reveal the depth and complexity of the crisis facing South African schools, to model a process of action to create and sustain a culture of learning and teaching, and to stimulate discussion of key educational issues.

In addition to the episodes of *Yizo Yizo* itself, the SABC developed an extensive multi-media strategy, which aimed both to foster public debate and to provide resources for students and teachers to engage with the issues raised by the series. Thus, as the marketing slogan for the series declares, *Yizo Yizo* really is 'More Than Just TV'. This strategy includes the distribution of a full-colour *Yizo Yizo* magazine, targeted at children and young people, combining features on the actors in the series with discussions of the issues addressed in the series. A talk show accompanying the TV series was also broadcast the day after each week's episode, on the national radio station MetroFM, which has the largest youth listenership in the country. A further feature of this multi-media profile for *Yizo Yizo* was the release of a soundtrack CD, which became one of the fastest selling music CDs in the country. Both the soundtrack CD and the *Yizo Yizo* magazine illustrate the use of popular commercial media formats to support the primary objective of stimulating discussion of the television series. The music soundtrack from *Yizo Yizo* is particularly notable, featuring as it does local *kwaito* artists. *Kwaito* is a distinctively South African hybrid form of pop music, mixing elements of imported house, hip-hop, and rap with homegrown traditional and pop music styles (Stephens 2000).

The use of township dance music in the television series was an integral element of the 'reality-effect' created around the programme, and thus a key element in both building a large youth audience and in realizing the objective of stimulating discussion about real-world social and policy issues (Smith 2001a, 31-32). *Yizo Yizo*'s authoritative claim to be 'showing it like it is' depended on a combination of both innovative aesthetic devices (pop music, fast-paced visuals) and the extensive research in contemporary township schools conducted by the production team prior to the making of the series (Motanyane 1999). The contradictory implications of the series' 'realism' illustrates the difficulties faced by forms of educational broadcasting that use many of the stylistic and generic features of popular media culture. In order for the series to succeed as a vehicle

for stimulating debate about its subject matter, it has also been necessary for the SABC, Department of Education, and the series' producers to engage in a public process of remedial media education. *Yizo Yizo* became the hook upon which newspaper stories about youth crime and school indiscipline were hung, giving rise to a debate over whether or not the series was promoting copy-cat behaviour by encouraging school violence (Pons 1999).

Thus, as well as opening up debate about educational issues, *Yizo Yizo* has also served as a means by which a public debate about the relationships between media representations and everyday life should be understood. Defenders of *Yizo Yizo* have had to openly acknowledge the ambivalence at the heart of 'media influence', given that the series was explicitly conceived as a means of "using television to stimulate discussion as a precursor to pro-social action" (SABC Education 1999a, 213). As the cultural theorist and educationalist Njabulo Ndebele observed during the debate around *Yizo Yizo* in 1999, "[i]f we assume that the dramatisation of violence is intended to provoke a social reaction against it, then one must accept that some unintended consequences may result" (Ndebele 1999). Acknowledging this possibility is not a reason to 'censor' graphic representations of violence or sex, but might instead be read as an index of the "serious gaps in the manner in which art and its relationship to life is actually taught, discussed and understood in the classroom" (ibid.). *Yizo Yizo* is premised on the assumption that children have the ability to distinguish between representations of reality and reality itself, since this is the principle that allows a space to be opened up in which the programme can become an occasion for discussion about individual experiences. Any 'effects' the series is meant to have are not direct, but are mediated by the provision of a broad multi-media strategy which facilitates children acting as speaking-subjects in their own right.

*Yizo Yizo* certainly succeeded in creating an unprecedented level of public debate, both about the state of education in South Africa and about the role of television representations of social issues. Much of this debate was sparked by criticism that the series glamourised violence and gangsterism, presented black communities in a negative light, and used unacceptably graphic representations of sex and bad language (Garson 1999). However, this negative response from some quarters only succeeded in enabling the broader purpose of the series to be more widely disseminated, and thus contributed to getting more people to watch and discuss the series. The series created new knowledge, especially for adults, concerning the conditions of the country's school system, opening up sensitive issues such as sexual harassment, gangsterism, and drug abuse to debate. Thus, *Yizo Yizo* can be characterized as part of a strategy to generate a public sphere based of *mediated deliberation*, in which various forms of mass media have been used to distribute symbolic resources with the intention of generating innumerable, dispersed dialogues about issues of broad public concern (Thompson 1995).

As already suggested, research is crucial to the form of educational broadcasting of which *Yizo Yizo* is an example. The SABC's own evaluation of the first series of *Yizo Yizo*, undertaken in the second half of 1999, focussed upon the effectiveness of the series in stimulating these inter-personal discussions at home and at school (SABC Education 1999a). This research found that the series

was phenomenally successful in its attraction and consolidation of a youth audience. It spoke to this audience in a visually new and exciting way that compelled viewers to watch the series, week after week" (SABC Education 1999a, 81).

Furthermore, survey research confirmed that the series

stimulated a phenomenal amount of discussion among its audiences: 77% of learners, 79% of teachers, 72% of principals and 56% of parents said they discussed some aspect of *Yizo Yizo* (ibid., 188).

However, this pattern of discussion was somewhat uneven, with most discussion taking place between students themselves, and discussions between children and parents being skewed around certain topics (ibid., 88). The multi-media support strategy was also identified as being "uneven in the support it provided the process of discussion" (ibid., 9). In particular, the series was found to be significantly less successful in stimulating discussion around issues of rape and sexual harassment. Discussions between children and their parents around this set of issues was found to be limited, and tended instead to focus upon the educational issues raised by the series (ibid., 33). Nor was there much evidence that the attitudes and behaviour of male students had been altered by the series.<sup>3</sup> In important respects, representations of gender roles and relations in the series might have undermined the intended message concerning sexual violence (Smith 2001a).

The research evaluation undertaken by the SABC served a variety of purposes. It confirmed that the objectives of the series had been successfully achieved, in providing a platform for public discussion by exposing a set of hidden realities about township schools to public view. The evaluation also found little evidence for the much-hyped copy-cat behaviour the series was said by some to encourage. Thus, the research provided an important element in the public legitimization of the partnership approach to educational broadcasting, enabling the SABC and Department of Education to reiterate the aims of the series and to claim a high degree of success in attaining these objectives (Pretorius 1999, *The Star* 1999). Furthermore, research of this form is an important means by which the opinions of children themselves enter into media debates which are otherwise often monopolized by adults (SABC Education 1999a, 218).

The other purpose of the research was to inform the production of the second series of *Yizo Yizo* (ibid., 254-256). A significant change in the second series,

which was first broadcast in February 2001, was the production of hour-long episodes. This reflected research findings that many viewers felt that the half-hour format of the first series did not provide adequate time to wrap-up and resolve different strands of the story line. The second series was accordingly informed by a strong commitment to be clearer in modeling the relationships between actions, consequences, and solutions. The second series was also supported by a revised multi-media support strategy, including material targeted at parents.

A further difference between the first and second series has been the much more visible public support provided by the Department of Education. In 1999, the Department tended not to involve itself in the public media debate around the series, missing an opportunity to use the publicity generated around the series to “put more information before the public on what needs to be done to address the systematic problems in township secondary schools” (SABC Education 1999a, 230). Once again, *Yizo Yizo* was accused of encouraging copy-cat violence (Mecoamere 2001). In 2001, the Department of Education has provided much stronger support for *Yizo Yizo*. Shortly after the beginning of the second series, renewed controversy broke out following an episode in which two male prisoners were shown having sex. This ‘rape’ scene was denounced in the National Assembly by an ANC (African National Congress) Member of Parliament, who charged that the series undermined the “norms, values, culture, religion and beliefs of the majority of our people” (Mhlanga 2001). It is significant that these critical attacks on the series depend on an implicit, common sense model of strong media effects, in which children are constructed simultaneously as innocents who are easily influenced into becoming monsters. In response to this controversy, the Education Minister made a clear and unequivocal statement in support of *Yizo Yizo* (Ramsamy 2001). The more visible participation by the Department of Education shifted the terms of the public media debate away from the issue of media effects onto the need to openly debate the issues raised by the series, a position supported by the broadcasting of a live-debate amongst various stakeholders on SABC television following the next week’s episode of *Yizo Yizo* (Cape Argus 2001). Once again, in this reorientation of public debate, the extensive research undertaken in producing *Yizo Yizo* was invoked to argue that what was shown in the series was in fact a ‘mirror of reality’.

## **Is this it? Lessons from South Africa**

*Yizo Yizo* has been highly successful in its main objective of opening up the educational crisis in South Africa to broad public debate and inter-personal discussion (Smith 2001b). The success of *Yizo Yizo* rests on the acknowledgement of the reality of a complex popular culture in South Africa, and of the existence of youth audiences who have sophisticated cultural literacies. The basic premise of the series is that children are neither passive dupes, copy-cats, nor innocents-to-be-corrupted, but rather subjects capable of assessing,

evaluating, and discussing complex public issues. *Yizo Yizo* illustrates that processes of media globalization do not necessarily eradicate the ability of public institutions to deploy cultural policies for progressive democratic ends. Rather, this example suggests that principles of educational broadcasting need to be adjusted, not least to take advantage of new forms of addressing audiences that the development of complex media cultures make available. Media globalization might well problematise 'protectionist' models of children's media rights, ones in which children are not usually constructed as the agents of their own rights (Buckingham 2000, 198-199). But it also opens up the possibility of using multi-media strategies to facilitate a dialogical model of educational broadcasting in which children themselves are ascribed agency as subjects of public discussion.

*Yizo Yizo* makes visible a range of issues, so enabling children, teachers, and parents to become informed participants in a public debate around a shared set of reference points. In this way, it illustrates the potential for broadcasting to link up the everyday experiences of ordinary people with broader political debates, by facilitating a set of mediated discussions in homes, classrooms, playgrounds, as well as on radio, television, and in newspapers. Patterns of media consumption in South Africa are not uniformly based in the home, since there is a significant amount of 'out-of-home' viewing, not least in those township communities upon which *Yizo Yizo* is modeled (Venter and Van Vuuren 2000). *Yizo Yizo* uses a variety of mass media platforms and aspects of contemporary popular culture to cultivate inclusive forms of talking-subjectivity. In so doing, *Yizo Yizo* treats children as citizens, that is, as competent participants in mass-mediated public discourse around issues that directly affect them.

However, while *Yizo Yizo* uses a popular television format to build a large audience, in 'leaving' the classroom and by deploying the aesthetics of popular culture it relinquishes a significant degree of control over the messages that can be hoped to be instilled through educational broadcasting. This is a feature inherent in any policy aiming to govern the conduct of populations through the *distanciated* mediums of radio and television broadcasting (Barnett 1999a). This accounts for the importance of providing effective support materials on this model of educational broadcasting. But even if these support strategies are effective, the formal features of 'edutainment' introduce an inherent ambiguity into the process of communication. The primary finding of the SABC's evaluation of the first series of *Yizo Yizo* was that the series had been successful in raising issues, but less successful in providing "practical and actionable solutions" (SABC Education 1999a, 143). This led to some practical revisions, such as the introduction of hour-long episodes. However, it might also be the case that there is an unavoidable trade-off between broadening access to audiences that popular format programming allows, and the 'didactic' content in terms of 'practicable solutions' that this sort of programming can hope to deliver. The 'reality' revealed by *Yizo Yizo* is, after all, dependent upon the highly sophisticated manipulation of conventional codes of genre and format (Smith 2001a, 12). The effective deployment of these conventions to establish the

'authenticity' of the programme introduces a degree of distance between medium and message, a space that allows debate to proceed, but also inevitably means that the 'appropriate' messages might get lost in transmission.

The uncertainty surrounding the learning outcomes of popular 'edutainment' programming is connected to a further limitation on presenting *Yizo Yizo* as an unproblematic model for educational broadcasting. *Yizo Yizo* has been produced in a particular moment in South African popular culture:

The continual expansion of the mass media coupled with the removal of the cultural boycotts mean that young South Africans now can receive any amount of media programming from abroad (Prinsloo 1999, 182).

As already suggested, *Yizo Yizo's* success depends in no small part on its conscious use of aesthetic features of an increasingly internationalized and commercialized popular culture in South Africa. This is exemplified by the role of music in the series. The use of *kwaito* music as the soundtrack drew upon an emerging commercial culture, which is a testament to the influence of international markets for cultural commodities upon South African popular culture. In turn, the series gave a significant boost to the further commercial profitability of this genre, raising the profile of artists and boosting sales. The series fits into the pattern whereby the

[t]he media have responded to the changing consumer base by targeting an increasingly black audience and in doing so they propose identities that mark success with a consumer lifestyle and matching gendered subjectivities (ibid., 182).

*Yizo Yizo* in fact illustrates the uneven process through which the institutional restructuring of post-apartheid mass media is contributing to the construction of a 'black-youth market' for commodified popular culture. The week after the controversy over the 'male rape' scene controversy in *Yizo Yizo 2*, in March 2001, the SABC's marketing department ran a full page advertisement in the business pages of national newspapers in South Africa, using the publicity generated around *Yizo Yizo* to encourage potential advertisers that the show illustrated the potential of locally produced television content to reach a broad audience of youth, black, and male viewers with disposable income. This campaign reflected the difficulty in attracting advertising for the series, despite its record-breaking viewing figures. The South African advertising industry has been slow to target the growing black middle class as a key market segment (*Saturday Star* 2001a). This raises serious problems for the SABC, which is heavily dependent on commercial advertising revenue, in continuing to finance the series (*Saturday Star* 2001b).

The case of *Yizo Yizo* thus illustrates the contradictions of producing public service broadcasting with universal social objectives, in a context in which public service broadcasters are increasingly dependent upon advertising for their

continued operation. The ability to participate in the sort of extended, mediated public debate stimulated by *Yizo Yizo* remains socially uneven, shaped as it is by access to social and material resources which are the conditions of participation in informed debates about public policy and popular culture. While, on the one hand, the success of *Yizo Yizo* demonstrates that citizenship and consumerism are not necessarily diametrically opposed principles, the difficulty in attracting adequate advertising expenditure is partly a function of entrenched socio-economic inequalities which indicate that the complicity of an increasingly commercialized South African broadcasting system with the commodification of 'black youth markets' might contribute to the broader segmentation of social groups that will entrench inequalities of access to media technologies and cultural competencies.

In conclusion, *Yizo Yizo* serves as an example of the continuing relevance of public policies that endeavour to support and sustain citizenship participation using locally produced mass media programming. South African broadcasting in the 1990s has emerged from a history of division and fragmentation to pursue innovative nation-building media projects that take advantage of the opportunities opened up by processes of media globalization to realize the principles of active media-citizenship rooted in the struggle against apartheid. What this example illustrates is that in an era of media abundance, in which traditional forms of media regulation have been rendered problematic by the spatial restructuring of media markets and technologies, paternalist and protectionist models of children and media policy are likely to be increasingly anachronistic. Media globalization makes more dialogic models of children's media-citizenship both more viable and all the more imperative.

## Notes

1. The IBA was superseded by the Independent Communications Authority (ICASA) in 2000, responsible for both broadcasting and telecommunications regulation.
2. *Yizo Yizo* means 'the way it is', 'this is it' (Smith 2001a, 6).
3. It should be acknowledged that the extent of sexual harassment and sexual violence against female students is a much deeper issue than one that can be solved by a single television series (Human Rights Watch 2001).

## References

- Barnett, Clive (1999a) "Culture, government, and spatiality" *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, 369-397.
- Barnett, Clive (1999b) "The limits of media democratisation in South Africa: politics, privatisation, and regulation" *Media, Culture and Society* 21, 649-671.

Buckingham, David (2000) *After the Death of Childhood: growing up in the age of electronic media*. Polity, Cambridge.

Bulbulia, Nadia (1998) "An Overview of Children's Broadcasting in South Africa", in *Children and Media Violence*, U. Carlsson and C. von Feilitzen (eds.). The UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen at Nordicom, Göteborg, pp. 231-237.

*Cape Argus* (2001) "Viewers urged to debate issues in Yizo Yizo" March 20<sup>th</sup>.

Criticos, Costas (1999) "Media Education: engagement with democracy" Paper presented at the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress El Diario Eula Escuela, iADIRA.

Department of Education (1996) *Educational Broadcasting Plan: Proposal for a partnership between the Department of Education and the SABC*. Department of Education, Pretoria.

von Feilitzen, Cecilia (1999) "Media Education, Children's Participation and Democracy", in *Children and Media: Image, Education, and Participation*, C. von Feilitzen and U. Carlsson (eds.). The UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen at Nordicom, Göteborg, pp. 15-29.

Garson, Phillipa (1999) "Truth hurts, but it helps" *Mail and Guardian*, February 10<sup>th</sup>.

Independent Broadcasting Authority (1995) *Triple Inquiry Report*. IBA, Johannesburg.

Hartley, John (1987) "Invisible Fictions: television audiences, paedocracy and pleasure" *Textual Practice* 1, 121-138.

Harvey, David (1982) *Limits to Capital*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Harvey, David (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Human Rights Watch (2001) *Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools*. Human Rights Watch, Washington D.C.

Keane, John (1991) *Media and Democracy*. Polity Press, Cambridge.

Leyshon, Andrew (1995) "Annihilating space? The speed-up of communications" in *A Shrinking World*, J. Allen and C. Hamnett (eds.). Sage, London.

Low, Murray and Barnett, Clive (2000) "After globalization" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18, 53-62.

Mecoamere, Victor (2001) "Yizo Yizo could mislead our children" *The Sowetan*, March 19<sup>th</sup>.

Mhlanga, Elijah (2001) "Calls to ban 'damaging' show" *Natal Mercury*, March 16<sup>th</sup>.

Ministry of Education (1999) *Status Report for the Minister of Education*, Pretoria, June, 1999. Online archive - <http://education.pwv.gov.za/Archives/StatusReport.htm>

Mosco, Vincent (1996) *The Political Economy of Communication*. Sage, London.

Motanyane, Palesa (1999) "Some shocking realities" *The Teacher*, February.

Ndebele, Njabulo (1999) "Yizo Yizo... Pushing Beyond the Limits" *Mail and Guardian* March 19<sup>th</sup>.

Oswell, David (1998) "The place of 'childhood' in Internet content regulation" *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 1, 271-291.

Pons, Sophie (1999) "The 'Yizo Yizo' effect on gang-hit schools" *The Teacher*, April.

Pretorius, Cornia (1999) "Yizo Yizo gets gold stars and black marks" *Sunday Times*, November 14<sup>th</sup>.

Prinsloo, Jeanne (1999) "South African Media Education in the Late Twentieth Century: Rising Phoenix or Dying Swan", in *Children and Media: Image, Education, and Participation*, C. von Feilitzen and U. Carlsson (eds.). The UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen at Nordicom, Göteborg, pp. 163-188.

Prinsloo, Jeanne & Criticos, Costas (1991) *Media Matters in South Africa*. Media Resource Centre, University of Natal, Durban.

Ramsamy, Prevasni (2001) "Asmal stands by Yizo Yizo 2" *Independent on Saturday*, March 17<sup>th</sup>.

SABC Education (1999a) *An Evaluation of Yizo Yizo*. SABC, Johannesburg.

SABC Education (1999b) *Understanding South African Schools in Crisis*. SABC, Johannesburg.

SABC Education (1999c) *Yizo Yizo: A COLTS learning resource based on the TV series*, Johannesburg: SABC & Department of Education.

*Saturday Star* (2001a) "White females blamed for lack of ads on Yizo" April 20<sup>th</sup>.

*Saturday Star* (2001b) "Yizo Yizo breaks records, but advertisers shy" April 27<sup>th</sup>.

Scannell, Paddy (1995) *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. Blackwells, Oxford.

Shields, Peter & Muppidi, Sundeep (1996) "Integration, the Indian State and Star TV: Policy and Theory Issues" *Gazette* 58(1), 1-24.

Silverstone, Roger (2000) *Why Study the Media?* Sage, London.

South African Institute for Distance Education (1998) *A School-Based Educational Broadcasting Service for South Africa*. SAIDE, Johannesburg.

Simpson, Graeme (2001) "Yes, but is Yizo Yizo effective education?" *Sunday Independent*, April 1<sup>st</sup>.

Smith, René (2001a) *Yizo Yizo: This is it? Representations and Receptions of Violence and Gender Relations*. MA Dissertation, University of Natal. Available at <http://www.und.ac.za/und/ccms>

Smith, René (2001b) "Yizo Yizo promotes a long-overdue debate" *Sunday Independent*, March 25<sup>th</sup>.

Stephens, Simon (2000) "Kwaito", in *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*, S. Nuttall and C.-A. Michael (eds). Oxford University Press, Cape Town, pp. 256-273.

Teer-Tomaselli, Ruth (1995) "Moving towards democracy: the SABC and the 1994 election" *Media, Culture and Society* 17, 577-601.

Teer-Tomaselli, Ruth (1996) "DEBI Does Democracy: Recollecting Democratic Voter Education in the Electronic Media Prior to the South African Elections", in *Connections: engagements with media*, G. Marcus (ed). University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Teer-Tomaselli, Ruth (1998) "Nation-building, social identity and television in a changing media landscape", in *Cultural Change and Development in South Africa*, A. Zegeye and R. Krieger (eds.). Institute for International Relations, Zagreb, pp. 85-106.

*The Star* (1999) "Yizo Yizo: teaching the children well" November 24<sup>th</sup>.

Thompson, John B. (1995) *The Media and Modernity*. Polity, Cambridge.

Venter, Linda & Van Vuuren, Daan (2000) "Out-of-home television viewing: a cross-cultural comparative study" *Ecquid Novi* 21(1), 98-119.