Yizo Yizo:

Citizenship, Commodification and Popular Culture in South Africa

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Abstract

This article critically examines the development of an innovative approach to educational broadcasting in post-apartheid South Africa. Examining the policy background and the public debate sparked by the controversial drama series, *Yizo Yizo*, it is argued that the spatial restructuring of media markets re-articulates the sites and scales at which media practices and citizenship are connected. *Yizo Yizo* makes creative use of globalised media genres to address pressing social issues in ways that connect to national public policy debates. It does so by mainstreaming educational broadcasting, and by recognising children's complex media literacies and competencies. It is argued that the series is an example of a new rationality of media citizenship developed in the distinctive context of post-apartheid transition that has broader significance for understandings of the implications of media globalisation for citizenship, culture, and participation. *Yizo Yizo* is a practical example of mediated deliberation aimed at empowering citizens. It is indicative of subtle but important shifts in the dimensions of public culture in a highly divided society.

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Re-Articulating the Subjects and Scales of Media Citizenship

Modern understandings of the relationships between media and citizenship have developed in a specific context in which broadcasting was institutionalized as an assemblage of technologies, organizations, markets, and social practices that articulated two spatial scales of activity, the private domestic home with the nation-state. In the Global North, broadcasting was instrumental in the process whereby social life became focused around the private nuclear family at the same time as the real and imaginary horizons of domestic life were stretched over wider spatial scales (Moores 1993). There is an inherent ambivalence in the forms of power and control exercised through spatially distanciated mediums of electronic mass communications (Thompson 1995). This ambivalence has been dealt with by establishing national economic and cultural regulatory regimes that enabled national authorities to monitor their citizens' media consumption. Cultural regulation has combined a mixture of paternalism and protectionism, whereby national institutions determined the sorts of programmes that audiences should and should not have access to, in the effort to assure the cultivation of appropriate models of citizenship. Institutionally, this pattern of cultural regulation was embodied in principles of public service broadcasting that have become the norm against which the relationships between mass media and citizenship have been judged. 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 to legitimize media and communications policy decisions. This 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, as a passive subject in need of protection and guidance. In this way, media citizenship is often characterized by 'paedocratic' modes of address (Hartley 1999), in which the ascription of childlike attributes to audiences governs the cultural norms of broadcasting. In this light, focusing upon the changing place of children in popular media cultures provides a particularly good entry point for understanding the restructuring of modes of media citizenship and public culture (Oswell 1998).

In short, the economic, technological, and spatial articulation of broadcasting as a set of national systems of domestic cultural consumption has been premised upon and has in turn sustained a paternalistic conceptualization of media citizenship, reflected in the traditional principles of public service broadcasting. A strongly pessimistic strain of academic and policy analysis sees the increasing accessibility to new media forms made available through restructured media markets as indicative of the impossibility of national policy effectively regulating in the public interest (e.g. Price 1995, Tracey 1998, Williams 1996). The current international crisis of public service broadcasting is inextricably linked to the extension of commercialized media and an associated deepening of commodification in everyday life. This process is driven in no small part by the targeting of children as a market for commercial media products (Buckingham 2000). The commodification of children's media consumption is therefore part of a broader reorientation of the discourse linking media and citizenship associated with media globalization. Cultural technologies such as satellite television, video, the Internet, the Walkman, and mobile telephony have been institutionalized in a round of policy-making and corporate restructuring that has been motivated by an explicit aim to re-order the stable national regimes of policy and regulation that have historically shaped broadcast radio and television cultures. Champions of

'globalization' and the 'information revolution' deploy an understanding of citizenship that focuses primarily upon the expanded *choices* available to citizens as consumers of media commodities distributed through the market. Thus, media globalisation is associated with a re-ordering of the paradigmatic modes of governing citizens, in which norms of consumption take on a much greater significance in the rationalities of neo-liberal governmentality (Miller and Rose 1997).

Restructured media markets and new technologies mean that households have access to a wider range of media forms, and this in turn implies that the possibilities of national policy effectively regulating what gets into 'the home' are significantly attenuated. This does not imply that either economic or cultural regulation have ceased to exist. Regulatory regimes are being re-scaled as well as being re-ordered around market-friendly principles. Therefore, the re-articulation of the sites and scales of media culture and commodification does not mean that public policy supporting participatory media citizenship is at an end, but it does imply a rethinking of some of the cherished normative assumptions upon which previous paradigms depended.

Disputes concerning the implications of media globalization for practices of citizenship turn in part on different conceptualizations of the appropriate scales at which media, citizenship, and political power should be connected up. For example, Nicholas Garnham has provided the clearest application of general theories of the public sphere to the analysis of media globalization and its implications for cultural citizenship. Garnham's (1993) interpretation of globalization is premised on the assumption that the territorial scope of political power must be matched by the territorial scope of a singular universal media public. The public sphere concept, he argues, necessarily implies a strong concept of universality, understood in a procedural sense as a minimum set of shared discursive rules necessary for

democratic communication (Garnham 2000). On these grounds, globalization is interpreted as leading to a dis-empowering fragmentation of the public sphere. From the assumption that democratic citizenship requires a singular and universal public sphere coterminous with the territorial scale at which effective political power is exercised, Garnham deduces that "the process of cultural globalization is increasingly de-linking cultural production and consumption from a concrete polity and thus a realizable politics" (Garnham 1997, 70). Garnham's evaluative opposition, between the ideal of a universal and singular public sphere versus pluralistic fragmentation triggered by globalisation, depends upon an unquestioned assumption that political power is naturally territorialized. Rather than accepting this all or nothing choice of national or global scales, it is more productive to question whether power is necessarily best thought of as naturally territorialized at all (Low 1997). In contrast to the assumption that political power is always exercised within a territorialized power-container of one scale or another, Keane (1995, 8) argues that the conceptual relationships between media and democracy should be based on a networked conception of political power. From such a perspective, the key analytical question is not whether effective democratic media publics can be constituted at the same global level to match the 'jump of scale' by both capital and by administrative and regulatory authorities. Rather, it is whether and how actors embedded at different territorial scales are able to mobilise resources to act within their own arenas by drawing on spatially extensive networks of engagement (Cox 1998). If the scales at which social integration and cultural engagement are modulated have increasingly become distinct from the scales of national political participation, then this might open up new possibilities for political action, not least at the national scale itself (Staeheli 1999). In this paper, I want to consider the development of an innovative approach to educational broadcasting in South Africa that indicates that the continuing relevance of public service

broadcasting in supporting citizenship depends on approaches that acknowledge and draw upon the multiple and increasingly globalised cultural literacies of citizens. This example of media policy from the global South suggests that successfully using locally produced programming as a medium of media citizenship requires a less protectionist approach that starts by recognising the capacities of ordinary people to participate as active citizens in mediated deliberation over public issues. Craig Calhoun has argued that in large, complex modern societies, the possibilities of democracy depends on the establishment of critical public discourse that is neither ideally or practically contained within the limits of face-to-face interaction: "This means, in part, finding ways to make the space transcending mass media supportive of public life. It also means developing social arrangements in which local discussions are both possible and able to feed into larger discussions mediated both by technology and by gatherings of representatives" (Calhoun 1989, 68-69). I want to present the following analysis of a particular example of educational broadcasting, the South African series *Yizo Yizo*, as an illustration of one attempt to make these connections in a context of media globalisation, nation-building, and democratic transition. Yizo Yizo is, I will argue, indicative of new forms of trans-national publicness (Ong 1999: 158-161). Trans-national media organisations and markets regulate the circulation of representations of cultural diversity in important ways, and so in turn, they have become an important site for new, trans-national struggles for visibility. The re-scaling of spaces of cultural normativity means that processes of mediated subject-formation are increasingly articulated around cultural conventions that are not contained within national cultural infrastructures (*ibid.*). The evolution of South Africa media cultures illustrates these processes, but it also indicates that this does not imply that national-level public policy is rendered redundant. Rather, in

important ways, it indicates the continuing saliency of national level politics and policy in shaping the dimensions of trans-national publics.

Media, Education, and Democratization in South Africa

I. Rethinking Media Education and Educational Broadcasting

South African broadcasters, educationalists, and media activists have developed an innovative approach to educational broadcasting in the post-apartheid period. Educational broadcasting has become just one area in which radio and television have been deployed as mediums through which various political and institutional actors have attempted to re-order the patterns of identification and conduct of ordinary South African citizens (Barnett 2000). This example is of interest because the history of broadcasting in South Africa stands in stark contrast to the pattern of media development that has served as the norm for understandings of media citizenship in the global North. Radio and television were historically institutionalized as technologies of racial and ethnic separation, rather than national integration. The same was the case with educational systems. The transformation of education and broadcasting, understood as key cultural technologies for governing the conditions of democratic citizenship, has been a highly contentious process in the post apartheid period. In the case of educational broadcasting, where these two sets of institutional dynamics directly connect, policy change has been informed by a set of understandings that emerged from oppositional media activism during apartheid, a tradition which emphasized citizen participation in a broad range of media practices. These alternative media practices have informed the development of a new paradigm of educational broadcasting since the first non-racial democratic elections in 1994. This new paradigm

emphasizes the developmental potential of broadcasting in supporting the transformation of educational practices (Criticos 1999).

The key innovation of the new South African model is to broaden the definition of educational broadcasting beyond the narrow confines of formal educational contexts, and re-define the subjects of educational broadcasting beyond the narrow reference to children in school. Widening the scope of educational broadcasting follows from a reconceptualization of the conventional paradigm of critical media education (Prinsloo and Criticos 1991, Prinsloo 1999). Whereas the critical pedagogy paradigm is in the last analysis deeply suspicious of popular media cultures and the ordinary critical capacities of people (see Buckingham 1996), media educationalists in South Africa increasingly to acknowledged the existence of multiple media literacies amongst citizens, children and adults alike. The emphasis of policy has therefore shifted towards educational practices that contribute towards the empowerment of learners rather than presuming a model of changing consciousness. This is part of a broader shift away from purely oppositional models of progressive cultural practice in the context of the transition to formal democracy and the end of apartheid (Tomaselli and Shepperson 1996). This 'will to empower' (see Cruikshank 1999) is a rationality that is evident in many policy fields. It also clearly connects up the post-apartheid agendas of both education policy and of public service broadcasting policy.

The crystallisation of a democratic educational broadcasting policy has taken place in a wider 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 one that is increasingly dependent on commercial advertising revenue (Teer-Tomaselli 1998). Since 1996, the SABC has also faced increasing competition from the proliferation of commercialised radio stations and the licensing of a new free-to-air

television channel (Barnett 1999b). Facing further commercialisation and heightened competition, the SABC has also been ascribed specific public service remits, including the development of revised educational broadcasting programming. Since even before the first non-racial elections in 1994, the restructured SABC has shown a strong commitment to innovative and broadly conceived educational uses of its radio and television services. These include *Soul City*, a health education initiative, and the *Khululeka* voter education series, both of which combine elements of education and entertainment into an 'edutainment' format (Bulbulia 1998, Teer-Tomaselli 1995, 1996). These initiatives have illustrated the effectiveness of deploying locally produced mass media programming to support broader strategies of citizenship education.

Starting in 1996, the SABC and the national Ministry of Education have been developing a close partnership to promote constructive uses of broadcasting that support educational transformation and curriculum reform. Broadcasting has been identified as having an important role to play in changing public perceptions of the scope and purpose of education, and also as a medium to provide multi-media support to teachers and schools (Department of Education 1996). Using broadcasting to empower citizens rests on the assumption that the subjects of educational broadcasting are not just children, but include adults as well. This is mirrored in the broadened conception of education introduced in the fundamental overhaul of South African education signalled in 1997, with the launch of nation-wide COLTS campaign (Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service), aimed at addressing the problem of dysfunctional schools (Ministry of Education, 1999). The COLTS campaign is part of a broader transformation of education, centred on a new curriculum framework (Curriculum 2005) adopted as a radical break from the apartheid past. Since

1998, apartheid-era curricula based on racially determinism and religious conservatism have been replaced by outcomes-based national curriculum.

The convergence of the discourse of empowerment in education and broadcasting was sealed in 1998, with the publication of a strategic plan undertaken on behalf of the SABC in 1998 by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), in which the re-conceptualisation of educational broadcasting was finalised. Where previously educational broadcasting continued to focus primarily upon the use of broadcasting in schools and during school-hours, the 1998 plan distinguished between *school-based broadcasting services* and *school-educational broadcasting services* (SAIDE 1998). School-educational broadcasting refers to 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. Rather than considering educational broadcasting as a specific niche of programme schedules, it has been redefined as a basic element of general programming. This has been the distinctive impetus of recent South African educational broadcasting initiatives. This reorientation depended upon an acknowledgement of the increasingly complex, dense, and commercialised nature of South African media cultures resulting from the proliferation and opening up of media markets during the 1990s. The SAIDE plan therefore 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.

By locating school-educational broadcasting within the schedule of general entertainment programming, the aims and objectives of educational broadcasting are no

longer contained within the disciplinary matrix of the school, classroom, and teacher-pupil relationship, in which subject-formation is posited on relationships of spatial enclosure and contiguity. Educational broadcasting has been re-located within dispersed, anonymous publics constituted by electronic mass media (see Scannell 2000). However, while popular radio and television programming enable a large population to be reached, the success of this new model of educational broadcasting depends on the effective provision of non-broadcast resources to enable schools and teachers to re-integrate educational programming into classroom contexts. This has become one of the key objectives of the education department of the public broadcaster, beyond simply making programmes. In this process, the use of the SABC's own radio stations and national newspapers in support of television broadcasting has been key. One of the reasons for the importance of developing this multi-media strategy in support of educational broadcasting is that patterns of media consumption in South Africa are not uniformly based in the home. In particular, there is a significant amount of 'out-of-home' television viewing, not least in those township communities that have been the main target of recent educational transformation (Venter and Van Vuuren 2000). Radio-talk shows, magazines, and newspapers have been identified as important mediums through which a broad and dispersed public 'conversation' around topics aired on television can be stimulated and maintained.

In short, 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. This involves a revised understanding of the roles and relationships between the actors involved in educational broadcasting projects. The 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 tended to provide models

of appropriate *outcomes*. In the new paradigm, programmes model processes of *acting*, with the objective of empowering people to take charge of everyday decision-making. This is a key shift in the rationality of educational broadcasting. It indicates an understanding of the fact that electronic mass media are not simply a means of extending over large distances the forms of control characteristic of disciplinary institutions such as schools. The distanciation of radio and television as modes of communication involves a diminution of the intensity of influence that can be exercised through such mediums. In so far as the medium of this attempted regulation is popular culture, mediated democratic citizenship tends to flatten the cultural conditions of democratic participation (Ouellette 1999, Simons 2002). The attraction of governing populations through media technologies is therefore haunted by the persistent fear that media publics are essentially ungovernable. In turn, this implies that radio and television, when identified as potential instruments for realizing cultural policy objectives, can be understood as archetypal 'governmental' technologies, in so far as their deployment in this role rests on a set of procedures that aim to act on the capacities of other social actors to act (Barnett 1999a). The emphasis on using educational broadcasting as a means of empowering South African citizens is symptomatic of this shift in rationality. In this case, it has been informed by an academically grounded critique of understandings of media education and critical pedagogy that privilege a model of demystifying the consciousness of subjects by providing correct information and interpretations.

There is an unavoidable dilemma built into this empowerment paradigm of educational broadcasting, which follows on from the acknowledgement of the complex media ecologies into which any specific programming initiative must be inserted. The explicit deployment of popular media formats for educational purposes raises the question of what would count as an effective learning outcome for such an approach. Taking advantage of the

opportunity to address large audiences that popular broadcasting formats enable also means introducing an irreducible degree of uncertainty into the process of educational communication. The primary means used to negotiate the tensions between the ends-orientation of educational policy and the open-ended ambivalence of broadcasting cultures has been social science research. This has been used to monitor and evaluate programming, as well as a means of developing effective supporting materials. The centrality of research-knowledge in tying together the temporally and spatially dispersed moments of this mode of educational broadcasting might also be considered to indicate a distinctively governmental rationality. In order to further develop this line of argument, I want to consider in more detail the single most important product of the new paradigm of educational broadcasting developed in South Africa in the 1990s. This is the example of the 'COLTS drama' commissioned by the SABC in collaboration with the government, with the objective of addressing issues of teaching and learning environments in South African townships. The resulting series, *Yizo Yizo*, has become the single most controversial television event in post-apartheid media culture, as well as the single most watched programme on South African television. 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 the popular drama series, *Yizo Yizo*. *Yizo Yizo* was developed with the primary aim of generating wide public debate about educational issues, and of changing the attitudes and behaviour of students, teachers and principals, and parents. And one of the distinctive features of the series' short history has been the deployment of social science research in the production, legitimization, and revision of the series. Research knowledge has been crucial in evaluating the success of the series' explicit objectives of altering attitudes and conduct, and in defending the series against

the criticism that the graphic depiction of sex and violence is a glorification that encouraged copycat behaviour (Simpson 2001). In township vernacular, *tsotsitaal*, used extensively in the series, *Yizo Yizo* means 'this is it', 'the way it is'. As we will see, the status of *Yizo Yizo's* claim to realism is central to both the realization of its educational objectives and to the political controversy it has generated.

II. Talking About TV

Yizo Yizo has been produced at 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 form abroad" (Prinsloo 1999, 182). In this context, educational broadcasting and media education have been creatively deployed the conventions of popular media culture in the endeavour to cultivate new forms of public subjectivity. *Yizo Yizo* was first aired on the SABC's main channel, SABC1, in February 1999, and ran for 13, half hour episodes. 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. The show was broadcast at prime-time in the evenings, in order to ensure maximum audience penetration of both children and adults. The series provoked almost instant controversy, but also rapidly established a large audience, of between 1.2 to 2.1 million viewers per episode, making the most watched programme on South African TV. *Yizo Yizo* is the only drama series on South African television that shows township life, a topic otherwise reserved for news and documentary series. It focuses upon the lives of the children, teachers, and parents of a fictional township school, Supatsela High School. The series dramatizes the impact of socio-economic factors upon children's

experiences of formal schooling. Its storylines cover topics such as violence, sexual harassment and rape, and drug abuse. The narrative of the series has also dramatized the role of educational professionals in sustaining or undermining effective learning environments, as well as the role of communities in improving the performance of schools.

In addition to the episodes of *Yizo Yizo* itself, the SABC developed an extensive multi-media strategy that aimed both to foster public debate and to provide resources for students and teachers to engage with the issues raised by the series. This includes the distribution of a full-colour *Yizo Yizo* magazine, targeted at children and young people, which combines features on the actors in the series with discussions of the issues addressed in the series [**Figure One about here**]. The national radio station *MetroFM*, with the largest youth listenership in the country, broadcast a talk-show the day after each week's episode. A further feature of the multi-media profile for *Yizo Yizo* was the release of a soundtrack CD, which became one of the fastest selling music CD's in the country. Both the soundtrack CD and the *Yizo Yizo* magazine illustrate the explicit 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 important. It features local *kwaito* music, which 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 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). *Yizo Yizo* quickly became the focus of newspaper stories about youth crime and school indiscipline, triggering a public debate over whether or not the series was promoting copy-cat behaviour by encouraging school violence (Pons 1999). The key issue of contention in public debate about the programme has been the claim that *Yizo Yizo* 'shows it like it is'. This claim has depended on a combination of innovative aesthetic devices (pop music, fast-paced visuals) and the much publicized research undertaken in township schools by the production team prior to the making of the series (Motanyane 1999). So, in addition to its explicit goal of stimulating debate about educational issues, *Yizo Yizo* has also served as the occasion for 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 any attempt to deploy mass media in the effort to change conduct. 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), it has not been possible to deny that television does have some potential impact upon patterns of behavior. As the cultural theorist and educationalist Njabulo Ndebele observed during the debate around *Yizo Yizo* in 1999, "[i]f we assume that the dramatization 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.*). In order for the series to succeed as a

vehicle for stimulating debate about its subject matter, it has been necessary for the SABC, Ministry of Education, and the series' producers to engage in a public process of remedial media education. *Yizo Yizo* is premised on the assumption that children as well as adults have the ability to distinguish between representations of reality and reality itself. It is this distance that allows myriad dispersed conversations about personal experience to flourish.

Yizo Yizo can therefore 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; see also Tomaselli 1994). The notion of mediated deliberation connects with recent revisions of the Habermasian conceptualization of the public sphere. In particular, the notion of mediated deliberation relates to Nancy Fraser's analytical distinction between *weak* and *strong* public spheres. Weak publics refer to those activities "whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion-formation and does not encompass decision-making", while strong publics, more directly connected to institutionalized power, are those activities "discourse encompasses both opinion-formation and decision-making" (Fraser 1997, 90). The idea of popular media culture a 'weak' public sphere also has close affinities with McGuigan's (1998) notion of the 'cultural public sphere'. This concept acknowledges the irreducible cultural formation of democratic competencies in terms of a wide array of affective communicative and expressive practices of popular culture, in contrast to narrowly cognitive and rational understandings of deliberation. These conceptualizations provide a means of understanding the political significance of cultural practices without collapsing the cultural and the political into one another in over-inflated notions of cultural politics. They do so by pointing to an expanded notion of public sphere that is anticipated in Negt and Kluge's (1993) earlier critique of

Habermas, in which they defined the public sphere to include the practices and relationships that constituted the horizons of social experience (see also Barnett 2003). *Yizo Yizo* deploys an amalgam of local and global cultural forms to expand the horizons of normative debate in a cultural context in which discussion of sexual harassment, violent crime, abuse, and addiction have been either highly moralized or consigned to silence.

As already suggested, research knowledge 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" (*ibid.*, 188). However, this pattern of discussion was rather uneven. Most discussion took place between students themselves, and discussions between children and parents were skewed around certain topics. 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 quite 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. 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 three overlapping purposes. Firstly, it was used to confirm that the objectives of the series had been successfully achieved, 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 type of copy-cat behaviour the programmes were accused of encouraging. The deployment of research therefore provided an important element in the public legitimization of the partnership approach to educational broadcasting, enabling the SABC and Ministry 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). Secondly, research of this sort 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). And thirdly, the role of research was to inform the production of the second series of *Yizo Yizo* (*ibid.*, 254-256). 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 the introduction of hour-long episodes in the second series, which was first broadcast in February 2001. 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, as a result, informed by a stronger commitment to be clearer in modeling the relationships between actions, consequences, and solutions. There is, nonetheless, still an irreducible degree of uncertainty surrounding the learning outcomes of

popular 'edutainment' programming. *Yizo Yizo* uses a popular television format to build a large audience, but in 'leaving' the classroom and by deploying the aesthetics of popular culture it relinquishes a significant degree of control over the communication process in educational broadcasting. This is a feature inherent in any policy aimed governing the conduct of populations through the distanciated mediums of radio and television broadcasting. This accounts for the importance of providing effective support materials on this model of educational broadcasting. But even if these support strategies are effective, there is probably 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). The effective use of these conventions to establish the authenticity of the programme introduces a degree of distance between medium and message, a space within which discussion proliferates, but also inevitably means that the 'appropriate' messages might get lost in transmission.

Yizo Yizo 2 was, like the first series, accused of encouraging copy-cat violence (Mecoamere 2001). 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 by, amongst others, ANC Parliamentarians, 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 depended on an implicit, common sense model of strong media-effects, in which children are constructed as natural innocents who are easily influenced into becoming monsters. The ongoing public controversies about *Yizo Yizo* juxtapose different understandings of the relationships

between free expression, democratic participation, and cultural integrity in a context of a deeply divided society. The defense made of *Yizo Yizo* by broadcasters, educationalists, and government has not rested on appeals to libertarian rights of free speech or artistic freedom. Instead they point to an opening up of a participatory culture of discussion and criticism that stands in contrast to the censorious traditions both of old apartheid order and of certain traditions of left cultural criticism and political analysis.

Ambivalent Commodification and the Democratization of Taste

Yizo Yizo has succeeded in creating 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 (Smith 2001b). Its success in opening up the educational crisis in South Africa to broad public debate and inter-personal discussion rests on the acknowledgement of the existence of complex popular cultures 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* 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. By treating children as competent subjects with highly developed media literacies, South African educational broadcasting initiatives have, I would suggest, significantly recast the dimensions of media publics for all citizens, in so far as this ascription of competency to children is associated with the tentative emergence of a broader culture of empowerment and dialogue. One lesson of this case study, then, is

that media globalization opens up the possibility of using multi-media strategies to facilitate dialogical practices of educational broadcasting in which children themselves are ascribed agency as subjects of public discussion. The opening up of national media publics to diverse flows of popular media culture provides national programme makers with new generic forms for addressing audiences. As an example of this process, *Yizo Yizo* makes visible a range of issues, 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.

The achievements of *Yizo Yizo* are indicative of more subtle shifts in the contours of public culture in post-apartheid South Africa. Rather than presume that the judgement of media cultures turns on hunting down forms of 'resistance' to 'cultural hegemony', the explicit deployment of media technologies in pursuit of progressive objectives of democratic participation and reconciliation in the South African context suggests that the most appropriate terms of political evaluation are likely to be much less clear cut, turning as they do on highly ambivalent 'liberal' notions like empowerment and participation. The popularity of *Yizo Yizo* indicates the potential for commercial popular culture to serve as a medium for the democratization of taste (cf. Scannell 2001). It has served as a means through which the previously marginalised cultural tastes and popular knowledges of the majority of black South Africans have now been registered by powerful national cultural institutions (Smith 2002). At the same time, it is worth underlining the structural limits of this subterranean process of cultural democratization through commercialized popular media cultures. 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. While the success of the series demonstrates that citizenship and consumerism are not necessarily diametrically opposed principles, *Yizo Yizo* also illustrates the uneven way in which the institutional restructuring of post-apartheid mass media is contributing to the commodification of a 'black-youth market'. On the one hand, the use of *kwaito* music as the soundtrack drew upon an emerging commercial culture that is a testament to the impact 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. However, while the commodification of local music forms has been promoted in part by the massive success of *Yizo Yizo*, the series has consistently failed to attract adequate advertising revenue from commercial sources, despite its record-breaking viewing figures. 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 [**Figure Two about here**].

The case of *Yizo Yizo* 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 revenue for their continued operation and facing increased competition from other media. This is issue is exacerbated in the South African context because the local 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 in the future (Saturday Star 2001b). And it is important to emphasize that the material and symbolic resources required to participate in the sort of extended, mediated public debate stimulated by *Yizo Yizo* remain unevenly distributed according to race, class, and gender. The difficulty in attracting adequate advertising revenue is partly a function of entrenched socio-economic inequalities that indicate the limits of market-led cultural policies. The success of the series in meeting its educational objectives needs therefore to be placed in the wider context of the role of an increasingly commercialized South African broadcasting system in the commodification of black youth markets, a process that might itself contribute to the broader segmentation of social groups that will entrench inequalities of access to media technologies and cultural competencies.

Despite these critical limitations, *Yizo Yizo* is a clear illustration 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 first developed during the struggle against apartheid. 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 media policy are increasingly anachronistic. *Yizo Yizo* stands as an example of the creative possibilities of deploying the conventions of global media cultures in progressive ways, opening up more dialogic models of media-citizenship and shifting the terms of public culture in more inclusive directions. *Yizo Yizo* is, in short, television that helps make democracy work.

Acknowledgements

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Notes