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**Crime and punishment on the box: a
contextual/discursive/semiotic analysis of SABC documentaries
in the global era**

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ABSTRACT

The SABC has embraced a mandate that advocates the promotion of cultural diversity within the broader ambit of national identity. Although SABC3 constitutes the commercial wing of the station, it too is required to produce programmes in accordance with the spirit of this mandate. With tight budgets, pressure for audience ratings and an assortment of individual producers with individual production agendas, it may be naïve to presume that the SABC could consistently give priority to this mandate. Nonetheless, this is what it has undertaken. Considering this unifying and optimistic mandate, how then are frightening, troubling or disillusioning social phenomena depicted? The representation of one such phenomenon, crime, has been selected here for examination as it appears in *Special Assignment* and *Expressions* programmes. The way in which the SABC tackles essentially negative material and puts it in documentary form for national consumption sends out a message to South African viewers. The nature of this message – and its relation to the broadcaster's mandate - forms the basis for this dissertation.

Each of nine selected documentaries is analysed using a mixture of semiotic, discursive and contextual principles. The programmes are examined in terms of four sections. The first is global trends and theories. Criminological, documentary and other theories that are global in scope have been adapted to powerfully, but subtly, underscore all of the documentaries, with implications for the representation of national identity. Secondly, a sociological examination of the way in which the local has been depicted (and whether it is given much attention at all) has implications for the fulfilment of the part of the mandate relating to cultural diversity. Thirdly and fourthly, the overall portrait of national identity in the documentaries is largely dependent on the combined representation of national culture - including values, symbols, rituals and beliefs - and the nation-state. Both of these should be construed in an optimistic light, taking into account, nonetheless, the critical watchdog function of the media.

The evaluation remains strictly textual and preferred meaning is determined through theoretically supported analysis rather than via audience research. Issues such as global neoliberalism and its impact on the SABC and newsroom values are touched on and acknowledged, but ultimately, their effect on the fulfilment of the mandate is not examined in this dissertation. The central thrust of the dissertation is thus, strictly, the way in which the levels of the global, national and local, as they are represented in the documentaries, constitute interlocking factors, which impinge on the manner in which the SABC complies with its mandate.

The findings of the dissertation were unsurprising in many respects. Overall, there appeared to be no consistent pattern to which documentaries were produced. The immediacies of production pressures and deadlines appear to outdo the broadcaster's mandate in terms of priority. Having said this, however, certain features do recur, such as the prevalence of sensationalism or, on the positive side, the humanising of criminals in a way that offers hope. Consequently, the study isolates approaches that foster national identity and those that do not, noting the frequency with which they occur and thereby implicitly offering a roadmap for future productions.

ABBREVIATIONS

GPO – General Post Office

IBA – Independent Broadcasting Authority

SABC – South African Broadcasting Corporation

SACOD – South African Communications for Development

SANDF – South African National Defence Force

WORKING DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS

Anomie

This theory suggests that, through an inability to achieve goals of status and material acquisition through their disadvantaged positions in society, potential offenders become actual offenders by pursuing these goals through illegitimate avenues.

Culture

Everyday practices, symbols and representations that define a way of life.

Criminology

Criminology covers three social arenas: academia, the government and culture. It can be considered a 'rendevous subject' for its ability to cross a variety of theoretical fields (Garland and Sparks, 2000: 192, 193).

Globalisation

Cultural, technological and economic flows, characteristic of modern societies, which alter the way in which we think about ourselves and have actual effects in the world around us. Culturally, the tendency to homogenise is met with fragmentation, local resistance and hybridisation. Consequently, the dialectic between the global and the local is a vital component in defining globalisation.

Identity

A constantly shifting discursive construction of social and cultural norms.

Local culture

An idea of place, rather than necessarily being an actual space, that shapes identity.

Left realism

This is a branch of criminology that sprung from the moderation of radical criminology. It retains a concern with class, structure, and the administration of crime, but also incorporates useful elements from positivist criminology.

Moral panic

A panic is created when the media and public fuel the perception of a group or event as a threat so that stereotypes are created or vindicated and hysteria around the issue escalates.

National identity

A sense of common history, tradition and culture felt by an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). This dissertation takes the view that the sense of the nation is often fluidly connected to an allegiance to the nation-state.

Normative morality

The delimitation of moral boundaries such that value judgments become prescriptive norms constricting social behaviour.

Positivist criminology

This refers to a strong tradition in western criminology where scientific empiricism is seen as the route to finding 'truth' in the causes of crime. There is an absolute belief in objectivity in criminological research.

Postmodern criminology

It is difficult to pin down postmodern criminology with a simple definition. However, like much in the postmodern enterprise it is characterised by disillusionment, in this case with prevailing methods of crime control. Its denial of truth means that explanations for crime are not accorded much value and that crime prevention and punishment are seen as the primary ways of dealing with crime, rather than solving the problems that cause crime.

Preferred meaning

This is created when a text promotes one cultural interpretation over another in a way that is seemingly natural and uncontrived.

Public service broadcasting

Broadcasting for national interest, including the promotion of national identity, under the guidance of the state and without commercial imperatives.

Radical criminology

This leftist view of crime sees criminal as normal and crime as a result of economic inequality.

Semiotics

The study of the way signs and symbols construct meaning in a text.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Since transformation in the South African Broadcasting Corporation (hereafter SABC) began in the early 1990s, the public broadcaster has undergone a series of massive structural and ideological changes in the quest to produce both a competitive and representative service. These changes have functioned in tandem to produce a mandate that conforms to the public service ideals of promoting national identity and diversity while operating in an increasingly commercial environment. From the introduction of local content quotas to the dissolution of the different-channels-for-different-races policy of the apartheid era, national unity and national identity have been emphasised over and over again. The Independent Broadcasting Authority's entrenchment of nation-building as a vital public service objective in the early 1990s was followed by a 1997 Green paper, a White Paper in 1998 and the Broadcasting Act of 1998, all of which contained a similar emphasis (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 117). Through all of this, it is unfortunate that the exact meaning of national identity remains conveniently vague, shrouded instead in patriotic sounding obfuscations. So too is its application problematic in the South African context where inequality and division reign supreme (Duncan, 2000). The contemporary global context further complicates any simplistic definition of the nation, where multifarious, ethnically diverse countries are the norm more than ever before, where nationhood based on the nation-state is in dispute and where bounded concepts around the nation – including simplistic characterisations of 'imagined communities' - are increasingly rejected (Anderson, 1983). The notion of diversity, as contained in the mandate, is a little better explained – although still somewhat vague - referring to the reflection on the silver screen of a content rich in cultural and geographical variety (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I), 1998: 15).

Nine documentaries broadcast on SABC3 have been randomly selected, working on the assumption that, although SABC3 is the commercial wing of the broadcaster, it is

nonetheless expected to operate in the spirit of the mandate and “comply with the values of the PBS” (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I), 1998: 24). My research question consists of determining the way in which the amorphous notions of national identity/unity and cultural diversity manifest themselves in documentary programmes on crime and punishment in the global era. In so doing, this project aims to further an understanding of the way that television operates in South Africa, separating it out from the everydayness that makes its dissection so difficult and contributing to mass communication knowledge that often remains statistically based and is left wanting in textual analysis. (Allen, 1992a: 3, 13, 15).

The subject matter of the programmes included in this study is both fascinating and varied: a secret video made by prisoners of warder corruption at Grootvlei prison (*It's nice to have a friend*)¹; South African drug smugglers jailed in Peruvian prisons (*The Lima connection I & II*)²; the reintegration of Pollsmoor Prison gangsters into society (*The cage unlocked*)³; controlling and preventing crime through architecture in Johannesburg (*Architecture of fear*)⁴; child abuse in Atlantis (*Atlantis lost*)⁵; farm murders (*A bitter harvest I & II*)⁶; the lives of young gangsters in Orange Farm (*Very fast guys*)⁷; the Sizzlers gay massage parlour massacre in Cape Town (*The day the gangs came to the other side of town*)⁸; the selling of human body parts for muti (*Strong medicine*)⁹.

One of the reasons for choosing crime as a focal point for my study is that, as a global phenomenon, it has the ability to be viewed through a variety of international theoretical lenses, where “As an ‘expert system’, criminology has always been global in its orientation” (Chan, 2000: 121). These theoretical lenses situate the SABC’s programming

¹ Hereafter cited as video1 and referred to occasionally in abbreviated form as *It's Nice*.

² Hereafter cited as video2.

³ Hereafter cited as video3.

⁴ Hereafter cited as video4.

⁵ Hereafter cited as video5

⁶ Hereafter cited as video6.

⁷ Hereafter cited as video7.

⁸ Hereafter cited as video8 and referred to occasionally in abbreviated form as *The Day*.

⁹ Hereafter cited as video9.

in a global context, which, in turn, has implications for a broadcaster trying to promote national identity. Firstly, the non-reflexive incorporation of pessimistic postmodern penological and crime control undercurrents in documentaries results in an essentially negative portrayal of the nation.¹⁰ In the video *Architecture of Fear*, for example, postmodern preoccupations with risk, danger and gated communities that barricade and exclude are reflected in the video. Secondly, both positivist and radical criminological underpinnings in the documentaries seem to offer an uplifting and hopeful sense of the nation – going some way to fulfilling the SABC’s mandate. In *The cage unlocked*, for example, the focus on the cause and treatment of criminality through rehabilitation offers an inspiring message of hope.

Thirdly, in many of the documentaries under examination here, local conditions of crime and punishment, which are specific in their “individual socio-cultural influences”, articulate with understandings and interpretations that are global in scope (Findlay, 1999: 3). Indeed, my approach is one that believes it is crucial to link “global developments to local expressions” of crime and punishment (Hughes, 1998: 149). Not only does this illuminate globalisation as a context for understanding crime, but more importantly for my purposes, it has a bearing on how diversity is depicted through local environments. In *Very fast guys*, Orange Farm¹¹ and the gangsters that live there constitute the sense of the local that articulates with a documentary interpretation framed around the global theories of anomie, relative deprivation and so on. In *The Lima connection*, the local level of Lurigancho prison is evidence of global theorising around the postmodern prison, exemplified by commodification and the failure of the panopticon.

Finally, crime as a global phenomenon offers enormous potential for comparative material in the documentaries, where views of the deleterious state of crime in South Africa could be mitigated through comparisons with other countries, which are facing the same or worse. Through this, an acceptable image of the nation could be promoted,

¹⁰ It is important to note the distinction between postmodern criminology in its affirmative form, which is deconstructive and optimistic and postmodern theories of crime control and penology, which are pessimistic – in line with a general pessimism offered by postmodernism.

¹¹ Orange Farm is an informal settlement on the outskirts of Johannesburg.

despite the essentially negative subject matter of crime and punishment. A wealth of readily accessible comparative criminological material could facilitate this approach (Barak, 2000: xi). Whether South African documentary-makers will ever incorporate this in a systematic fashion remains to be seen.

2. THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Choosing documentaries on crime as the basis of my analysis guaranteed me sufficient material even before I began collecting it, since “both crime and crime control are growing and expanding enterprises worldwide” (Barak, 2000: xx). Indeed, since the 1980s, economic and existential insecurities appear to have encouraged a popular belief that crime is becoming rampant (Fattah, 1999: 12). Along with industrialisation, modernisation and, ironically, an increase in living standards across the world, “crime has moved from the rare, the abnormal, the offence of the marginal and the stranger to a commonplace part of the texture of everyday life” (Young, 1998: 260). This phenomenon seems particularly acute in countries undergoing periods of social upheaval or transition, such as those in Eastern Europe and South Africa (Fattah, 1997: 260). Theoretically too, preoccupations with risk analysis and dangerousness (as opposed to ameliorative or psychological approaches to the criminal) in criminological writing appear to offer indisputable testimony to the trend of increasing crime (Pratt, 2000: 36; Broadhurst, 2000: 112; Christie, 2000: 181, 189). Crime as a dire, rapidly multiplying social problem across the globe is not, however, the only interpretation of our contemporary environment, with some criminologists believing an increase in crime to be mythical - connected to perception rather than reality (Fattah, 1997: 11). Yet in South Africa the former belief seems to prevail and the nation often appears in the grips of crime obsession, reflected in the abundance of material on crime on the SABC.

The media has a fraught relationship with crime – yet another factor informing my choice of subject matter and laying the foundation for an analysis of the nation-building values - or lack thereof - in SABC3 documentaries. While on the positive side, some believe that the media encourages comparisons of risk across diverse localities (Chan, 2000: 124), on

the negative side is a plethora of problematic media traditions, from stereotyping the criminal to sensationalising the crime (Brown, 2003: 23). Where does this leave the image of the nation? What are the implications for the broadcaster's mandate? Here too, the impact of globalisation comes into play, where media trends across the world suggest the construction of discourses on crime in ways that pander to commercial and other strategic objectives, rather than altruistic nation-building agendas (Ericson, 1995: xi). Even analytical approaches that would provide the basis for useful insights – albeit *sans* rose-tinted views of the nation – are often sidelined in crime documentaries. Selectivity, pejorative views of the 'other' and a focus on the grisly details of street crime often prevail in media accounts of crime (Sacco, 1995: 153, 226; Barak, 1994: 35). Add to this a trend of viewing crime as an individual rather than a social problem and it is easy to see how the media is able to effortlessly create the idea that we are a nation of criminal degenerates, committing only heinous crimes without understandable motives. The extent to which the selected documentaries on SABC3 reflect this general, global inclination in media representation is a vital component of this dissertation. In this regard, my analysis takes, as its departure point, the notion of the moral panic.¹²

Not only do global media trends in general indicate a possible negative trend in the representation of crime on television, but in the case of documentaries specifically, there is potentially a 'double whammy', where documentary strategies often compound the situation. In some cases, the necessity of creating riveting viewing, increasing audience share and making this threatened genre more commercially viable, results in an already tenuous relationship with 'truth', being stretched even further. This is because analysis is ditched in favour of sensationalism and a related selectivity, which strategically chooses to overlook the boring bits. *The day the gangs came to the other side of town* is a prime example. In examining the Sizzlers massacre, the intriguing, sexy underworld of gangs and drugs was selected as informing the motive for the massacre. The focus on gruesome

¹² Reporting on 'social threats' in the media has been famously theorised by Stanley Cohen in his examination of the Mods and the Rockers in *Folk Devils and Moral Panic* (Thompson, 1998: 7). Followed by the more famous study of mugging in Britain by Stuart Hall et al, a media phenomenon sensationalising crime and creating moral panics in the process was exposed (Hall et al, 1978). The extent to which this pervasive trend continues today in documentaries on the SABC is the original basis of the link between crime and media representation in this study.

details and the misery of the victims serves the same function: melodrama in the name of audience-pulling. In a similar vein, is the fly-on-the-wall turned reality TV approach in *It's nice to have a friend*, where warder corruption is caught on 'hidden camera' by inmates at Grootvlei prison. Other problems associated with documentary trends include the creation of preferred meaning to fit the (often stereotypical) cultural expectations of audiences, the tendency to focus on human interest at the expense of analysis and the formulaic realism that detracts from creative interpretation. Undoubtedly, neoliberalism features as a primary cause for these trends and, as broadcasters opt increasingly for the publisher-broadcaster (as opposed to producer-broadcaster) approach, it is likely that the tendency of favouring commerciality over quality, sensationalism over analysis and formulas over creativity will continue. In terms of this dissertation, it is impossible to imagine how a constructive image of the nation could be produced in such an environment. At the same time, however, my analysis has not found that the SABC inevitably and consistently falls under the spell of global documentary trends to its detriment. Indeed, in *Very fast guys*, the observational technique serves an important function of humanising the gangsters in Orange Farm and in *The cage unlocked* the omniscient voice-over guides the viewer to optimistic conclusions about prisoner rehabilitation. Whatever the ultimate conclusion about the way in which documentary techniques fashion meaning in my selected programmes, what is certain is that there is a definite ideological element at work – one that influences the way in which the viewer will perceive the nation. Consequently, some of the important issues I address are encapsulated in the following questions posed by Rosalind Brunt:

First, how do ideologies work as 'configurations' of meaning: how do they hang together and crystallize as particular systems of belief? Secondly, who believes them? How are they interpreted as 'collective representations' of particular social groups? Finally, how are they located? What are the historical circumstances that gave rise to these sets of ideas or 'world views', and what are the continuing material conditions, the political, economic, and institutional orders that support their existence? (Brunt, 1990: 60).

Importantly, as the above discussion about global trends and theories indicates, globalisation informs the dissertation at every turn – despite the fact that it is not a project that is explicitly *about* globalisation. Firstly, global neoliberalism has impacted on the

political economy of the SABC, as with other broadcasters, in a way that has altered its approach to programming. Staying competitive in a multi-channel environment, for example, can mean the ‘dumbing down’ of content (Scannell, 1997: 64). Secondly, global criminological trends link to the treatment of crime in my selection of programmes. Thirdly, global inclinations in the depiction of crime on television are manifest. Fourthly, global documentary techniques and tendencies are palpable. All of these factors indicate that globalisation has inescapably permeated the SABC – and this, in turn, has fundamental consequences for the way in which both the local and the national are represented. The situation is further complicated by the fact that, not only is the depiction of the local and national altered by external global factors, but the concepts themselves, and their manifestation in reality, are contested and ever-changing due to pressures of globalisation. As a result, the SABC, as with other public broadcasters, faces some difficult questions: what is the national? How should a sense of national unity be conveyed? Is it even possible to create national unity through representation at all? Due to the intricacies of this, my analysis aims to view the selected documentaries through a lens of globalisation and to consequently understand their relationship to the national “within a complex web of local cultural understandings and at the same time avoid seeing that action only in local terms’ (1995: 52)” (Feierman cited in Noyes, 2000: 51). Indeed, understanding the local and national is only possible through the contextualisation of these concepts in a global landscape that alters their nature and deepens their complexity.

Somewhat surprisingly, in the global era, national and cultural identity have become more, rather than less, important and “Far from the ‘loss of the subject’, identity seems to lie at the heart of politics in the late twentieth century” (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 177). Yet despite the strong emotive issues around identity politics, identity remains shifting, contingent, discursively constructed from fluctuating elements and, consequently, continuously reconstructed (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 159). Gender, class, race and nation are commonly associated with identity, but in our contemporary environment, these are neither necessarily its mainstay nor necessarily stable yardsticks with which to analyse its constitution (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke,

1996: 159). Even if we assume that identity is based on exclusionary measures, the ‘other’ cannot be isolated if we do not understand and cannot quantify the self. In terms of contemporary identity, its mutability, multiplicity and contested nature is amusingly captured by Raymond Williams in the following:

‘There once was an Englishman who worked in the London office of a multinational corporation based in the United States. He drove home one evening in his Japanese car. His wife, who worked in a firm which imported German kitchen equipment, was already at home. Her small Italian car was often quicker through the traffic. After a meal which included New Zealand lamb, Californian carrots, Mexican honey, French cheese and Spanish wine they settled down to watch a programme on their television set, which had been made in Finland. The programme was a retrospective celebration of the war to recapture the Falkland Islands. As they watched it they felt warmly patriotic, and very proud to be British. (Williams 1983: 177)’ (Tomlinson, 1999: 113).

Although it is emphasised strongly in the SABC’s mandate, there is (some would say inevitable) definitional haziness around identity. Indeed, there is a pronounced avoidance about what the notions of culture, nation, national unity, nation-building, diversity and locality actually mean. For both the mandate and other spheres of life, it is unlikely that there will ever be either a succinct definition, or a consensus and, consequently, this dissertation approaches the issue with flexibility and inclusiveness. At the same time, however, theoretical guidelines and conceptual categories (such as race, class and so on) *are* accepted as having a veracity that adds value to the analysis and a functional role of providing structure for the thesis. An exploration of these is vital in producing a map of identity against which to plot the fulfilment of the SABC’s mandate. While most of this is covered in the following chapter, an overview of the direction taken by this dissertation will suffice here.

It is my understanding that the manner in which the local and a variety of localities are depicted on television, is important for determining how a sense of diversity is constructed by the SABC.¹³ Yet what constitutes the local? What does the local mean? Defining the local presents the first challenge on the road to understanding the local – and

¹³ Indeed, the connection between the local and diversity can perhaps be made by viewing the nostalgia for the local felt in an era of globalisation (and the concomitant existential insecurity) in juxtaposition with the SABC’s emphasis on diversity.

understanding its depiction on television.¹⁴ Most useful, perhaps, is the idea that the “sense of belonging, the common sedimented experiences and cultural forms which are associated with a place, is crucial to the concept of a local culture” (Featherstone, 1993: 176). Being associated with place is not to suggest that local culture is place-bound. In fact, place no longer supports local cultural identity in the way that it did before (Morley & Robins, 1993: 5; Carter et al, 1993: vii). Rather, it is the *idea* of place – with its “symbolic and psychical dimensions” – that is crucial (Carter et al, 1993: xii). For the purposes of this dissertation, the way in which these *ideas* are constructed in documentary is fundamental for the depiction of local culture. From Atlantis, to Pollsmoor Prison, to Orange Farm, the manner in which place is evoked as representing the local in terms of both identity for the individual and a “constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus” is vital (Massey, 1993: 64). So too is the way in which spatial metaphors of place and the local invoke questions about power relations in society (Smith, 1993: 97). Representation of local place, identity and culture brings the broadcaster’s mandate into sharp relief.

As far as the construction of culture in documentary is concerned, my primary focus is on the way that ‘everydayness’ or the ‘whole way of life’ is represented through a variety of taken-for-granted symbols and practices (Williams, 1981 cited in Barker, 1999: 11). In reproducing unquestioned customs and modes, meaning is created in a way that fosters and perpetuates often already established norms and shared understandings for viewers (Tomlinson, 1999; Barker, 1999). Through this, the depiction of the ‘ordinary’, which many viewers would undoubtedly fail to question, becomes vested with ideology (Tomlinson, 1999: 18).

Woven almost invisibly into some of the stories, the handling of race, for example, often carries particular cultural messages. Aside from race, the way in which language is used

¹⁴ Territorial definitions of the local are perhaps less successful than cultural ones – after all, regional and national scales can surely be understood as local in some conceptions (Smith, 1993: 108). Even the suggestion that it is community-based, or the “site of social reproduction”, or the space where face-to-face encounters take place is limited and obfuscatory (Smith, 1993: 105; Featherstone, 1993: 175). Essential notions of one-dimensional, uncomplicated places (as in Heidegger’s understanding) are equally unworkable (Massey, 1993: 64).

is another example of how viewers are pressed into accepting cultural standards or assumptions. Discussed in detail in the chapters that follow is the variety of ways in which culture, as constituted by everyday, commonplace issues, is projected in the videos – from presumptive normative morality implicitly included in *It's nice to have a friend* to the overt cultural statement about danger, fear, crime and life in South Africa in *Architecture of fear*.

Whether or not my interpretation of culture in the videos coincides in some way with the SABC's indistinct references to culture is open to debate. While I largely subscribe to the notion that culture is constituted in the practices of everyday life, an alternative analytical emphasis, which assumes the SABC's mandate to mean something different, yields an entirely different result. For example, culture as viewed through the lens of globalisation might focus on the

multiplicity of resources for the construction of identity, and the *ubiquity* of cultural resources, resulting in both a homogenizing tendency through cultural globalization, and a fracturing tendency, as the traditional world of the meta-narrative disintegrates under the plethora of possible, available selves which are not necessarily anchored to time and place (Brown, 2003: 13).

Where possible, I have included some aspects of this global understanding of culture.

Examining my selection of documentaries according to this view of culture questions how the SABC's programmes situate South African culture in terms of a homogenous global landscape and whether South African culture is viewed as static, hybrid or place-bound. Accordingly, doing justice to South African culture, as contained in the SABC's mandate, might be taken to mean an acknowledgment of the "fluidity and permeability of cultural sets" (Morley & Robins, 1993: 5) and the related breakdown of boundaries between categories of people through contact with a variety of cultural flows across time and space (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996:173).

If culture comprises one element of national identity, this dissertation chooses to view association with the nation-state as another. Once again, a variety of complex views on the nature of the 'nation' render the SABC's possible meaning and intention in this regard problematic. In terms of the origins of public service broadcasting, the basis of fostering national identity was seen as unifying the nation across class divides as well as

the addressing of a 'general public' and the promotion of national pride (Scannell, 1990: 14, 16, 23; Simons, 1998: 5). To some degree, these facets still obtain today in the public service broadcasting ethos and yet the altered circumstances created by rapidly advancing modernity, globalisation and new theoretical directions, ensure that the meaning of national identity has changed. What national identity might mean for broadcasters now is undoubtedly contested. As a result, my approach to national identity is as inclusive as possible, making use of both a cultural interpretation and a geopolitical one, while also remaining cognisant of shifting external influences - such as globalisation - that would impact on the nature of both. In terms of culture, nations rely on a common history (often 'ethno-history') to create the collective identity, which allows particular symbols, traditions and so on to be vested with meaning and to become part of the 'everydayness' discussed above (Smith, 1990: 179 cited in Tomlinson, 1999: 101). Here, national identity, as far as affiliation with a nation is concerned, can be defined as "*cultural communes constructed in peoples' minds and collective memory*" (Castells, 1997: 29). Yet, it certainly must be true that shared history can also be created through the strategies of nation-states to impose uniformity and to foster allegiance. Hence, it is possible that the artificial construction of the nation-state, through its unifying policies, can indeed create national identity. Its bureaucratic structures attempt to suppress difference for this purpose as 'imagined communities' are created (Stratton & Ang, 1994: 124; Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 160). How then does the SABC attempt to create unity through the depiction of the nation-state? How too, does it deal with national identity in an environment where many argue that the local/global dialectic drives the nation-state into obsolescence? Does it reflect a global trend of denigrating the nation-state in spite of its mandate to promote national identity? Or rather, can criticism of the nation-state, in fact, be taken to be *part* of the mandate's vision to provide "open to honest, thoughtful scrutiny in programmes like documentaries (SABC, 1996b: 10)"? (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001: 137; Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 125). More on national identity, its various contested components, its nature in an age of globalisation and its relevance for the SABC and the dissertation as a whole, will follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE AND THEORY OVERVIEW

1. GLOBALISATION, MEDIA AND IDENTITY

Cynicism drives the belief that globalisation has become “A fad word fast turning into a shibboleth” (Bauman, 1998: 1). Despite the fact that some believe globalisation to be nothing new and others are sceptical about attaching meaning to the overused term, the cultural, economic and political effects of the phenomena comprising globalisation are, indeed, very real (Chan, 2000: 120; Ang, 1994: 325). The documentaries under discussion in this dissertation were produced in a global environment of ever-evolving, controversial and contested meanings about national and cultural identity. The conflicts and convergences between global understandings of identity and those contained in the SABC’s mandate, in addition to the manifestation of global trends and theories in the documentaries make an overview of globalisation fundamental for the contextualisation of this project.

I. WHAT IS GLOBALISATION?

Unsurprisingly, consensus about the origins and nature of globalisation is lacking in the theorisation of it (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996:1). As a starting point, however, many believe globalisation and its effects to be closely linked to modernity and that the “central tendencies of modern societies have a pronounced global reach” (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 3, 4). Many features that explicitly characterise modernity create ripple effects with global proclivities, including the rise of the nation-state, the development of military blocs, world-wide capitalist enterprises and large-scale communication networks (Giddens, 1990: 63). Accompanying this, believes Anthony Giddens, is a reflexivity in the modern make-up that induces the questioning of established institutions and which contributes to the shifting and insecure global environment (Giddens, 1990: 38). In the ‘modernity perspective’, all of the attributes of globalisation, both institutional and cultural, are seen not to not have existed before – and not to simply coincide with

modernity and modern social life, but to *characterise* it in a fundamental way (Tomlinson, 1999: 2, 33). While this seems to be a popular perspective, others link globalisation to postmodernity, arguing “that it is the dynamics of postindustrialism and postmodernity that have brought global issues to the fore, and thus it is impossible to resurrect the project of modernity at the moment of its demise” (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 13). In yet another perspective, globalisation is simply mislabelled internationalism (Negus, 1996: 179). In this view, features attributed to globalisation are really not anything new, with the nation-states of old functioning according to the same international principles and practices that are now cited as ‘global’ (Hall, 1997: 8). This outlook seems to stifle an understanding of the dynamism of the global phenomenon somewhat. It underplays the uncertainties, the cultural fracturing, the inconclusive directions, the multiple meanings that appear so prevalent (Ang, 1994: 325; Waterman, 1996: 50).

If contextual and definitional understandings of globalisation are varied and complex, so are understandings of the elements or ‘modalities’ involved in its expression (Tomlinson, 1999: 2). The scope of globalisation can be broadly understood as cultural, economic and technological in nature with erratic, unpredictable flows of “ethnic groups, technology, financial transactions, media images and ideological conflicts” (Barker, 1999: 35, 40. See also Tomlinson, 1999: 2). Culturally, the emphasis is often on polyethnicity, multiculturalism and the development of a global civil society (Braman, 1996: 24). Economically, the emphasis is often on transnational corporations that “dominate global networks of production and consumption” (Barker, 1999: 35). Technology overlaps with both of these, manifesting itself in information and communication networks (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 1). This is just a snapshot of some of the concerns of global theorists and the scope of the globalisation phenomenon. Perhaps most useful, as a summary of the spheres of globalisation, is the framework provided Arjun Appadurai, who suggests that globalisation comprises “(a) ethnoscapes; (b) mediascapes (c) technoscapes; (d) finanscapes; and (e) ideoscapes” (Appadurai, 1990: 296; See also Featherstone 1993: 173, 174).

Deterritorialisation, time-space distancing and disembedding are some of the terms frequently used in getting to grips with the cultural manifestations of globalisation. ‘Deterritorialisation’, for example, encompasses the way in which culture is no longer strongly attached to place (Barker, 1999: 36; Chan, 2000: 124). The generation of meaning for local lives across large distances can happen in either linear or uneven, fragmented ways; it can be embraced or resisted. (Chan, 2000: 124). Facilitating this phenomenon is time-space distancing, a concept defined by Giddens as the “‘stretching’ of the relations between local and distant events and processes” (Tomlinson, 1996: 64).¹⁵ In summary, time-space distancing creates the disembedding and reembedding that characterise deterritorialisation. This phenomenon is entrenched in modern social life and has a number of fundamental consequences for culture (Tomlinson, 1996: 66). It creates a bizarre dialectic between ‘estrangement’ and ‘familiarity’ (Tomlinson, 1996: 64); local environments become ‘phantasmagoric’ (Tomlinson, 1999: 52); the pre-modern type of community is eroded. Ultimately, in spite of the fact that we continue to lead local lives and in spite of the constant re-assertions of local meaning to which we are subject, our experiences are heavily shaped “by distant events, relations and processes” (Tomlinson, 1999: 59). The idea of time-space distancing and its consequences is just one of the many lenses through which globalisation can be understood – it is by no means a definitive ‘truth’. Indeed, Giddens’s account has been subject to an array of criticisms.¹⁶

Perhaps a less enduring or valid way in which to view globalisation is the highly contested cultural imperialism thesis – yet it too has its proponents. Particularly popular in preceding decades, cultural imperialism theorists focus on the way in which flows of cultural products from the west, notably North America, impact negatively on the rest of

¹⁵ The relationship between space and place is reconfigured, creating a complexity in the way that local experiences articulate and interact with distant ones – how presence relates to absence (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 6). Time-space distancing, and the ‘emptying’ of time and space that it brings, allows for the disembedding and re-embedding – “the ‘lifting out’ of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space” (Giddens, 1990: 21 cited in Tomlinson, 1996: 67. See also Negus, 1996: 181).

¹⁶ Firstly, for example, the assumption seems to be that the power balance in the time-space dialectic always lies on the side of global forces (Tomlinson, 1999: 62). Secondly, it is a very abstract thesis that Giddens presents, with little empirical evidence and no human faces (Negus, 1996: 187). Having said this, the persistence of his ideas in the literature is a testimony to their strength and explanatory power.

the world by homogenising culture. In this way, global flows destroy local cultures, often replacing them with ‘capitalist consumerism’ (Braman, 1996: 26; Barker, 1999: 37; Waterman, 1996: 52; Featherstone, 1993: 170) More recently, those citing cultural imperialism temper their explanations through an acknowledgment of the ways in which cultural flows interpenetrate, hybridise and adapt (Waterman, 1996: 52). Indeed, the flow of cultural products does not automatically result in the acceptance of these products at their end destination (Cunningham & Jacka, 1996: 6).¹⁷ Cultural flows on a global scale are undeniably characterised by complexity, where the countries comprising ‘the rest’ are able to resist, adapt and contribute (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 6).

While this may be true, the unequal balance of power in the world is still a necessary concern of studies on globalisation. Whatever the focus – economic, cultural, technological, ideological – globalisation is not experienced with the same degree of benefit by everyone. In homing in on this issue, Doreen Massey’s concept of ‘power geometries’ is often cited, where it is acknowledged that some people are more in control of global flows than others, that some people are more in a position to initiate global flows than others, that some people are imprisoned by globalisation, that some people are the ‘losers’ (Massey, 1993: 61-63; Tomlinson, 1999: 13; Barker, 1999: 43; Carter et al, 1993: viii).¹⁸

If there are ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in the globalisation stakes, some suggest that there are also non-participants, compromising the notion that globalisation is truly global. Arguably, globalisation and modernity affect only certain developed sectors of the world (Tomlinson, 1996: 65, 10). While this may seemingly be true as far as the overt consequences and activities that comprise globalisation are concerned, it is perhaps too presumptuous to assume that the underdeveloped world does not also experience ripple

¹⁷ Where they are accepted, it is seldom *in toto*. Cultural codes fragment and hybridise. They are borrowed or copied imperfectly, assuming a character of their own at the behest of the local environment (Bar-Haim, 1996: 148; Barker, 1999: 38). Additionally, the local environment fights back with its own cultural arsenal so that “global flows of cultural discourse are [no] longer constituted as one-way traffic from the ‘west-to-the-rest’” (Barker, 1999: 38).

¹⁸ In perpetuating uneven ‘power geometries’ through globalisation, transnational corporations are often fingered as one of the primary culprits (Negus, 1996: 184).

effects from global forces. Indeed, local environments articulate with global forces on a variety of levels, constituting the ‘complex connectivity’ that is so crucial to understanding globalisation. In addressing this, the dialectic between the local and the global has become a common focus in the quest to establish a true understanding of globalisation and a way of “avoiding the construction of globalization as yet another evolutionary and teleological narrative” (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 6).

We surely cannot overlook or underestimate the importance of the local. It is undoubtedly the primary level from which people create meaning and coherence for their lives (Braman, 1996: 29). Local issues and the immediate demands of work, home and family define us profoundly so that our experience and lifestyle is strongly local (Tomlinson, 1996: 75; See also pp. 75, 76 and Chan 2000: 123). Global issues, on the other hand, do not necessarily shape identity to the same degree as our local environment (Tomlinson, 1996: 69).¹⁹ Although the ‘local’ is no longer necessarily a physical place, but perhaps a ‘willed construct’, what is unavoidable is that understanding globalisation means understanding localisation (Braman, 1996: 21, 29, 30).

In theorising the dialectic between the local and the global, both the notion of ‘glocalisation’ and ‘interpenetrated globalisation’ are useful. In terms of the former, Roland Robertson’s concept describes the way in which global forces not only impact only the local, but help to invent or construct the local (Chan, 2000: 124). In terms of the latter, “the concept of interpenetration draws attention to the fact that the global never exists except in the local – and today there is no local that is not infected by the global” (Braman, 1996: 22). For my purposes, the media’s interpretation of the local through global lenses of understanding and theorising is fundamental to getting to grips with how South African culture is depicted on the silver screen. It certainly seems that the media have become fundamental in using the local as an “interpretative frame of reference” for global ideas and trends in a manner that reflects the complexity of the global phenomenon (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 18).

¹⁹ Of course, the question of what exactly the local consists of remains open and contested as people identify with a large variety of local levels (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 18).

II. NATIONALISM, CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN AN ERA OF GLOBALISATION

In the global era, questions of identity proliferate; cultural and national identities are constantly evolving, as are our understandings of them. Mapping the identities shown in my documentary selection in relation to the broadcaster's nation-building mandate only becomes possible with an exploration of what identity means and its contextualisation in an ever-changing global environment.

There are a variety of different perspectives on the nature of identity, from essentialist to anti-essentialist, from postmodern to Marxist, from enlightenment to psychoanalytical. Although these cannot all be addressed here, the issue of identity has become a central theme in Cultural Studies, driven by multiculturalist, feminist and other imperatives (Barker, 1999: 2). Most commonly, identity is viewed as a discursive construction, using "building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations" (Castells, 1997: 7). Discursive elements are organised by social and cultural norms in a way that is meaningful for particular individuals or groups, prompting them to engage and respond to it so that it becomes part of the 'psychical geography'. (Carter, et al 1993: xi; Castells, 1997: 7; Hall, 1997b: 219 cited in Barker, 1999: 74). This is not to say that, once constructed, identity becomes fixed. Instead, it is constantly shifting, defined by a plurality that combines elements of race, gender, class and so on, in an endless number of ways (Barker, 1999: 28).

Ultimately, identity is far from stable, causing "stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action" (Castells, 1997: 6; See also Barker, 1999: 2). Some of this stress and contradiction certainly arises from the exclusionary nature of identity, where identity boundaries shut out the 'other' and are constantly reconfigured in a bid for self-definition (Morley & Robins, 1993: 19).

Culture, as a 'whole way of life' and seen as residing in the 'ordinary', is fundamental in the creation of identity (Barker, 1999: 11). Cultural identity refers to shared interpretations, created through processes of acculturation, which occur as symbolic

representation produces meaning (Tomlinson, 1999: 18; Barker, 1999: 11; Hall, 1992a: 275 cited in Barker, 1999: 14). While our actions in everyday life may be seen to encompass a certain common sense logic, they are, in reality, defined by broad cultural understandings (Tomlinson, 1999: 24). In simple terms, this cultural understanding is constituted from “the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society. (Hall 1996c: 439)” (Barker, 1999: 11). Language, in particular, is fundamental to cultural identity, being the primary medium through which culture is created, learnt and internalised (Barker, 1999: 11). Added to this, social practices and relationships ensure that we are ‘sociological subjects’ all the way down (Barker, 1999: 14; 30).

Globalisation fundamentally alters the way in which culture is created, understood and experienced, potentially creating obstacles or new possibilities for the depiction of culture on television documentaries. In some conceptions, in the global era, classical cultural divisions, based on national, class, racial or sociodemographic traditions are no longer as relevant as they once were (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 172). Instead, many argue, there is a cultural homogenisation in operation.²⁰ Of course, others argue that there is no such thing as a ‘global culture’ – that these homogenising tendencies are too shallowly rooted in memory and history to have any significant impact, that ‘deep’ cultures cannot simply be replaced by ‘flat’ cultures (Smith, 1995: 24; Tomlinson, 1999: 101, 102).

If homogenising cultures form one side of the globalisation coin, fracturing tendencies form the other. Unlike Raymond Williams’ conception, culture is no longer viewed as place-bound, time-bound, continuous, fixed or unitary (Morley & Robins, 1993: 5;

²⁰ This cultural homogenisation is seen to be based on the consumerist values aggressively marketed by transnational companies (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 172). Alternatively, those arguing the cultural homogenisation case might see it as a more complex process whereby networks of culture zig-zag across the globe via communications technologies that are no longer attached to place (Tomlinson, 1999: 71). The ‘cultural synchronisation’ that results might be said to ensure that “national identities and cultures become increasingly mutually accepted variations of each other” (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 174).

Barker, 1999: 33).²¹ Fragmentation, ‘multidirectional cultural flows’, plurality and fluidity of cultural identities and the availability of a vast array of cultural resources all mean that the notion of cultural meta-narratives is passé, replaced by the idea of cultural contingency – if one version of identity is no longer suitable, another one can be tried on, modified if necessary or tossed away (Barker, 1999: 33; Brown, 2003: 13; Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 173). Related to the fragmentation of culture, is the hybridisation of culture, where, due to the separation of place and culture, unlimited cultural intermingling theoretically can take place (Tomlinson, 1999: 147).²² Of course, this is not to assume that cultures of a previous era were pristine in any way, rather that globalisation accelerates the processes of hybridisation that already existed (Tomlinson, 1999: 144).

The concept of hybridisation also brings with it problems, such as the power relations that inevitably impact on any cultural mix and may contribute to the extension of hegemony (Tomlinson, 1999: 145, 147). Perhaps this is why a consequence of cultural globalisation is the setting up of defensive cultural barriers in retaliation to both the forces of homogenisation and fragmentation that come packaged in global effects (Hall, 1997a: 10).²³

It is particularly the level of the local that is guarded aggressively against incoming global contamination and the belief exists that “cross-fertilisation of cultures, through transnational media can affect the cultural identities of indigenous people” (Goonasekera, 1996: 47). While indigenisation of foreign influences can be a positive, strengthening force for local culture, the perception persists that information and communication flows

²¹ Indeed, “cultures are no longer bounded by specific places but, through the migration of persons and the electronic transfer of ideas and images, transgress established boundaries” (Barker, 1999: 33).

²² This means that, as high volumes of cultural traffic criss-cross the globe, there is a mixing of diverse practices, understandings and experiences within national territories, “producing new complex hybrid forms of culture” (Tomlinson, 1999: 141; See also Cunningham & Jacka, 1996: 14).

²³ Aside from power inequalities resulting in attempts at ‘closure’ against globalisation, there is a general dislocation and social upheaval, so that “cultural landscapes which were once known, recognisable and legible are now seen as illegible and disturbingly unfamiliar” (Allon, 2000: 275). This too can have the effect of attempted ‘closure’ against global forces.

obliterate senses of collective memory and tradition (Featherstone, 1993: 177. For more on indigenisation see Morley, 1997: 377).

The nature of local culture and community in a context of globalisation is fundamental to this dissertation. It is the level of the local that provides the nexus for examining the ways in which diversity, according to the SABC's mandate, is successfully or unsuccessfully treated in my documentary selection. As discussed in the introduction, it is the *idea* of the local that is crucial to identity, rather than its existence as a verifiable reality. In terms of the broadcaster's mandate, the way that the local is represented in the selected documentaries has a bearing on how diversity is handled in a global era where understandings of culture are uncertain and contingent.

Perhaps the emphasis on diversity in the SABC's mandate is at least partly a recognition of the way local cultures are proliferating in the global age and how people are responding to the increasing pressures of globalisation with an increasing attachment to the local.²⁴ While there is no definitive marker for the beginning of this nostalgia for the local, by the 70s and 80s it was beginning to find expression through urban movements, which were reacting to exploitation and oppression (Castells, 1997: 61). Defined by a 'homesickness', the nostalgia for the local points "to a more general loss of a sense of wholeness, moral certainty, genuine social relationship, spontaneity and expressiveness (Turner 1987)" (Featherstone, 1993: 177).²⁵ As the era of globalisation progresses, we consequently see people becoming more attached to community and locale (Hughes, 1998: 147). They retreat to the small-scale – the local and the regional as the locality,

²⁴ Indeed, the attachment to local place is met by the proliferation of local identities and cultures (Brown, 2003: 12). The postmodern emphasis on local cultures, the vernacular and multiculturalism is accompanied by the development of new associations that are not necessarily constricted by class, geography or old allegiances, but rather are brought into existence by new global flows and contacts that subvert the notion of place-bound local communities. In this, firstly, "we see the development of new communities of interest and belief" (Carter et al, 1993: ix). Secondly, we see the reconfiguration of old identities as they "intersect with other sources of meaning and social recognition, in a highly diversified pattern that allows for alternative interpretations" (Castells, 1997: 60).

²⁵ 'Cultural communes', for example, are created in reaction to globalisation, networking and flexibility, the crisis of the patriarchal family, fragmentation of culture and disruptions to our sense of space and place (Castells, 1997: 65; Massey, 1994: 146-147 cited in Duraz, 2000: 290).

community and vernacular are reinvested with significance (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996:174; Robins, 1993: 310).²⁶

Issues of cultural identity and locality are not the only relevant categories of analysis when measuring documentary against the yardstick of the broadcaster's mandate. National identity also has its place. Once again, the issue of what national identity means, is contested and ever-evolving. Perhaps one of the most familiar terms used to express the constructed coherence invested in the political sovereignty of a nation is Benedict Anderson's term 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983; Stratton & Ang, 1994: 30; Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 125). Even this, however, is inadequate in capturing the multifarious and extraordinarily complex nature of the nation. Indeed, the 'nation' is variously associated with nationalism, the nation-state and a cultural coalescence of symbols, traditions and histories (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 126). Many would argue that nations are different from nation-states and that nationalism is an entirely different phenomenon altogether (Castells, 1997: 29). National identity, then, can be seen, in one view, as allied to the nation-state, in another as connected to the nation and in a third as fluidly connected to both (a view espoused by this project).²⁷

²⁶ The notion of 'home' becomes fundamental to identity and "is drenched in the longing for wholeness, unity, integrity. It is about community centred on shared traditions and memories" (Morley & Robins, 1993: 7).

²⁷ In terms of nation-states, the seed of national identity can be seen to have been planted by ethnic allegiance, but to have thrived through either the mobilisation of language or 'bureaucratic incorporation' – including the codification of law, state-sponsored education, taxation systems, communications, administration and so on (Smith, 1995: 86, 88, 89). The nation-state is now primarily territorial, rather than kinship-based and has become a key engine of modernity, as emphasised by Giddens (Arnason, 1990: 209; Smith, 1993: 110). Uniformity and centralisation are primary goals of nation-states as they attempt to standardise language and culture and create collective identities appropriate to their nation-building objectives (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 170). In one cynical view, nation-states 'museumise' local cultures, denigrating them and consuming their 'moral resources' in an effort to centralise and control (Appadurai, 1990: 304).

National identity is most often seen as "analytically separable" from the nation-state, despite the fact that 'nation' and 'nation-state' are often terms that are used interchangeably (Smith, 1995: 89). In this kind of conception, "What is essential is the historical distinction between nations and states" (Castells, 1997: 51). The state is seen purely in terms of structure and, consequently, identification is kept to a minimum. People identify instead with the nation (Stratton & Ang, 1994:129). Having said this, it must be recognised that civic conceptions of the nation (the nation-state) and ethnic ones do sometimes overlap – and even coincide (Barker, 1999: 67). More often, however, the supposed unity and uniformity of the nation, as promoted by the nation-state, is inauthentic in the face of national differences, racial differences, class differences and so on, that exist within a single political entity. Consequently, it is usual to conclude that, "cultures and national cultural identities are not coterminous with states" (Barker, 1999: 67).

In continually engendering the ‘we-feeling’ so critical for the creation of national identity (Morley, 1997: 379), nation-building projects do not simply rely on established national myths and symbols, but “also involve definite sets of objective ‘activity’: the authentication, cultivation, selection, designation, preservation and inculcation of values, symbols, memories and the like” (Smith, 1995: 90). The extent to which this active process is evident on the SABC through its documentaries is an important question that this dissertation attempts to answer. Both the spheres of the nation and the nation-state are examined in the understanding that they are both important constituents of national identity and are potentially fundamental for nation-building.

National identity and nation-building projects are fundamentally altered by globalisation and this, in turn, potentially impacts on the way the nation is projected by the SABC. Is the depiction of national identity in documentary reflective of the declining influence of the nation-state? Are national identities affirmed with a fervour indicative of a defensive backlash against globalising trends? Can the trend of recognising multiple nations, with multiple fragmentary ‘micro-identities’ be found on the SABC? In answering the many questions posed by situating national identity in a context of globalisation, the general impact of globalisation on the nation-state and national identity should firstly be established.

Like nation-states, nations also often suppress difference, favouring the notion of an ‘imagined community’ in spite of inequalities that may exist (Stratton & Ang, 1994: 124; Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 160). Yet, generally, nations have more of an established cultural arsenal with which to work than do nation-states in the fulfilment of a nation-building agenda. Nations depend for their coherence on a sense of collective identity that is entrenched through memory - a sense of shared destiny that is rooted in a perception of a common ‘ethno-history’ (Smith, 1990: 179 cited in Tomlinson, 1999: 101). Culture and cultural identity are thus mobilised through symbols, rituals and tradition and are “continually reproduced through discursive action” (Barker, 1999: 64, 65; See also Stratton & Ang, 1994: 29). In this way, individuals develop psychological attachments to nations as they imagine themselves as *belonging* to the nation (Arnason, 1990: 210; Hall, 1997: 13). Reinforcing any ethnic or religious sense of nationhood is the shared experience of “history and political projects” (Castells, 1997: 29, 51). Despite ethnic heterogeneity in America, for example, there is a strong sense of the nation, which can be attributed to this kind of shared experience (Castells, 1997: 29). Language too, is fundamental for any national identity based on affiliation to a nation. Language is not only important in itself as far as the “mobilization of ethnic feelings and longings” is concerned, but also as the “carrier of so many other symbols of nationhood” (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 160, 161).

Most critically, globalisation has resulted in serious questioning about the future of the nation-state – even as South Africa goes about constructing a new and legitimate one. Theoretical emphasis on the local, the global and the national, including the relationship between them, has produced a serious interrogation of what the role of the nation-state is and should be (Fernandes, 2000: 611). Globalisation, it seems, has meant that, “the nation-state is called into question” (Castells, 1997: 2). Some researchers have focused on the decline and failures of the nation-state, while others have more cautiously suggested that the reconfiguration of relations produced by globalisation has altered nation-building and the nation-state, but not necessarily rendered them pointless (Hall, 1997a: 8; Fernandes, 2000: 611). What *is* certain is that the nation-state of today is no longer the same as the nation-state of early modernity and “Therefore it is a player, but it is not a player in the same way as it has been before” (Hall, 1997a: 9).²⁸

The extent to which the SABC reflects the contention that the nation-state is in decline, is vital in understanding the way it projects national identity and how it is going about achieving its nation-building objectives in a context of globalisation. The suggestion of decline is, of course, not the only interpretation of the nation-state in a global era and, consequently, is not necessarily the most likely representation chosen by the SABC.

²⁸ Challenges of authority confront the nation-state in a variety of forms, including trans-national flows of people, technology, finance, communication and ideology, over which the nation-state has only limited control and which compromises its management of space and time (Appadurai 1990: 296 cited in Cunningham & Jacka, 1996: 14; Castells, 1997: 243). The economy is an arena that has received much attention due, firstly, to the proliferation of multi-national companies, where global economic flows spite national attempts at regulation (Duncan, 2000: 35; Cunningham & Jacka, 1996: 14). Secondly, global neoliberal and policy pressures make it difficult for nation-states to act individually in regulating economic activity (Castells, 1997: 245). The notion that globalisation has undermined the regulatory ability of the state is a popular one and a variety of organisations develop strategies based on this assumption (Duncan, 2000: 37). Media and communication researchers also seem to largely share this view. While in the past, control of the media has been fundamental to many governments in terms of projecting national ideologies and promoting nation-building, both this kind of control and this kind of agenda seem increasingly obsolete in a context of “globalization and interlocking of ownership; flexibility and pervasiveness of technology; autonomy and diversity of the media” (Castells, 1997: 254; See also Duncan, 2000: 35; Cunningham & Jacka, 1996: 14). Global crime that transcends national borders, nationalist resurgences, multilateralism that constrains individual action by nation-states and increasing power transfers to regional governments all cast a shadow on the nation-state’s efficacy (Castells, 1997: 27, 259, 261, 275). Networks of power challenge the nation-state from both above (as in capital, crime, international organisations) and below (as in gangs, cults, communities) so that “while nation-states do continue to exist, and they will continue to do so in the foreseeable future, they are, and they will increasingly be, *nodes of a broader network of power*” (Castells, 1997: 304).

Many continue to argue for the nation-state's relevance (Duncan, 2000: 42). Global market flows, for example, cannot exist without the infrastructure and assistance of the nation-state (Duncan, 2000: 42, 49). Legally, administratively, financially, militarily and so on, nation-states are fundamental agents of structure, power and regulation (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 200). Whatever one chooses to believe, it is undeniable that in a world of international politics and global pressures, "To play the big game, everybody has got to become a nation" (Hall, 1997: 8).

If the nation-state is under the spotlight in the era of globalisation, so are the cultural components of national identity, making crucial the question "What is the nature of the national culture and the national identities we are now struggling to build in an era of intensified global relationship?" (Hall, 1997a: 9). Nations, as distinct from nation-states, are undergoing processes of transformation and are facing new and complex challenges. Among these is the disintegration of nations – or at least the idea of homogenous nations - as conflict, ethnic fracturing and hybridisation multiply (Smith, 1995: 2; Featherstone & Lash, 1999: 1). Stability of national identity is further challenged by deterritorialisation, where our local lives become intertwined with global events, influences and forces (Tomlinson, 1999: 113). The extent to which the SABC can overcome the sorts of difficulties presented by the global era and mobilise national identity in the spirit of nation-building (and its mandate) is addressed by this dissertation.

If national identity, the nation and the nation-state are generally confronted with turbulent changes and challenges in the global era, in South Africa the already complex situation is further complicated by the cultural specificities of our national environment. Individual chapters will address this with reference to specific histories, cultures and localities where relevant. Here, however, a brief overview of South African cultural and national identity, both in terms of history and contemporary struggles for meaning, will provide the context for later discussions.

It seems limited – even trite - to say that the apartheid government shaped identity in terms of race and ethnicity. Yet this is, perhaps, one of its most enduring legacies

(Zegeye, 2001a: 3, 4). While identity is shaped on a variety of levels, and agency exists in every individual to resist, conform or innovate when it comes to identity formation, it is nonetheless indisputable that “the apartheid government, in particular, was a powerful allocator of identity (Singh, 1997)” (Zegeye, 2001a: 3). The SABC, largely a propaganda mouthpiece in South Africa, contributed to shaping the identity politics of many, and through it, apartheid infiltrated into the most local and intimate spheres of everyday life (Burman et al, 1997: 3; Starfield & Gardiner, 200: 61). It produced and reproduced certain assumptions about race, ethnicity and the nation.

Many Afrikaner intellectuals in the 1930s were educated in Germany, and were exposed to ideas on nationality that prompted the belief that the Afrikaner ‘nation’ needed to develop culturally in terms of a ‘grand plan’ (Duncan, 2000: 76). According to this view, other ‘nations’ in South Africa needed similar treatment. It was this kind of rationale that saw the construction of ethnicity as a fundamental marker of identity in spite of the fact that essential ethnicities, as revealed by revisionist scholarship, are more myth and construction than reality (Duncan, 2000: 75). The result was a number of divisive strategies that linked race, culture and language in inflexible configurations that produced “the absurd idea that in South Africa [today], there are some twelve nations as well as two nations-to-be” (Alexander, 1989: 10). Even anti-apartheid organisations often assumed the validity of ethnic divisions, just as liberals accepted, often unquestioningly, the categories of White, Coloured, Indian and African (Duncan, 2000: 76; Zegeye, 2001a: 4). In South Africa, dividing identity in this way – and in terms of race more generally - has been linked to economic exploitation, political oppression and pervasive inequality, which can now only be rectified through a serious addressing of the ‘national question’ (Duncan, 2000: 3).

One of the most conspicuous and hard-hitting manners in which the division of the nation took place, was through segregation since “space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (Foucault, 1984: 252 cited in Robinson, 1996: 20).²⁹ The homeland policy, which

²⁹ Even before 1948, the foundations for this had been firmly laid by the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act, which asserted certain segregationist principles, including that ‘natives’ did not have permanent residential

followed segregation and apartheid's Group Areas Act, was more self-consciously ethnic (as opposed to racial) in nature, as it created "ethno-regional identities" (Zegeye, 2001a: 5). While the logic that justified this policy was based on the notion of a number of equal nations, in practice, the result was severe economic inequality and racial and ethnic discrimination. Not only were whites seen as superior and blacks as inferior in the hegemonic ideology, but "South Africa belonged to the Afrikaner; the Afrikaner had a special relationship with God" (Zegeye, 2001a: 7). African languages were underdeveloped while Afrikaans was privileged (Alexander & Heugh, 2001: 20).

This legacy has posed a number of challenges in the fostering of a South African national identity today. The past has been difficult to shake off; new perspectives on nationhood have been difficult to develop (Nuttall & Michaels, 2000: 6). Most South Africans still use ethnic and racial terms to describe themselves (Zegeye, 2001a: 14). Where race has been de-prioritised, ethnic revivals abound – ironically in a fashion that would have been embraced by apartheid ideologues (Mngadi et al, 2000: 114). Although, in law, segregation is gone, *de facto* segregation still exists on a large scale, with black middle and lower income families being unable to move out of the townships due to financial constraints. Consequently, "although the Group Areas Act was repealed in 1991, the component elements of Apartheid planning have been indelibly etched into the urban fabric of our cities" (Frescura, 2001: 122, 124). In terms of language too, the privileging of English by the anti-apartheid movements has carried through to today and African languages continue to be marginalised (Alexander & Heugh, 2001: 16; Zegeye & Kriger, 2001: 6). Most starkly, economic inequality, which is contoured along racial lines, is ever-present (Frescura, 2001: 100). In South Africa, it certainly seems true to say that "ethnic, cultural, racial and religious differences often coincide with class differences" (Zegeye, 2001a: 2). The result is that South Africa, like Brazil, is one of the most unequal countries in the world in terms of the distribution of wealth. The implications for the

rights in urban areas (Frescura, 2001: 99). Pre-apartheid cities were thus largely segregated and meant that there was very little inter-racial interaction, as people lived entirely separate lives (Lemon, 1991: 8; Zegeye, 2001a: 10). The Group Areas Act of 1950 represented the zenith of segregation, brought into existence by a range of economic and ideological motives (Festenstein & Pickard-Cambridge, 1987: 6). The act was seen as a means of dealing with the differing rates of development among the races and consequently was publicly advocated as a means by which racial conflict could be avoided (Lemon, 1991: 8).

creation of a coherent, unified national identity are severe (Duncan, 2000: 5).³⁰ Added to these difficulties are the challenges posed by globalisation – after all South Africa is not only caught up in its own historically induced transformations of identity, but is also caught in the currents of global tensions, conflicts and proliferations, where identity is constantly being remade (Chapman, 1997: 21).

III. THE MEDIA AND GLOBALISATION

It is certainly true that national identity and the nation-state in an era of globalisation present challenges for South African documentary production in terms of how the nation is presented. Yet this is not the only way in which globalisation potentially impacts on the production of media images. In general, globalisation has had a fundamental transformative effect on the media environment insofar as culture and political economy are concerned. It is this broad environment in which the SABC produces and transmits its documentaries.

The global media consists of a number of elements, including global media events, global service delivery, global media firms, and the global distribution of media (Cunningham & Jacka, 1996: 8). Although the level of the national remains important in terms of control, regulation and policy-making, it is increasingly being bypassed as a significant factor in the shaping of the media environment (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 17).

30 After its election victory, the ANC's approach to national identity was one that attempted to resolve historical - and possibly global – trends towards differences and fragmentation by focusing on national unity and reconciliation. Race and ethnicity were rejected as building blocks for the nation as emphasis was placed on decreasing the barriers between people and on the creation of “a civic nation based on equal individual rights, regardless of origin and equal recognition of all cultural traditions in the public sphere” (Zegeye, 2001b: 337). At the same time, cultural difference within national unity was to be defended (Turner, 1993: 10). While this may sound simple, in practice deep-seated divisions of culture, class and race have compromised the unity-in-diversity approach. Just as ethnic, racial and class inequalities plague efforts of unity in practice, academic problems surrounding the policy of nation-building as espoused by the ANC also exist. The multiculturalist strategy advocated by the government firstly ends up delimiting the conditions and boundaries within which difference can exist and secondly “provides the conceptual basis for concepts like ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ to develop lives of their own as social and economic categories” (Duncan, 2000: 99, 100; Robins, 2000: 410). The concept of national unity glosses over the very real divisions between people that prevent unity and allows inequality to continue unaddressed (Duncan, 2000: 73, 86, 99; Kadalie cited in Mngadi et al, 2000: 114).

Particularly for developing countries, global flows of cultural products are seen as dangerous and on a cultural level, the debate on imported programming has centred on the consumption of foreign products and the impact on local identity.³¹ One response to this – in Brazil, India and Iran, for example - has been the introduction of limitations on the amount of foreign programming allowed (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 187). The SABC too has placed a strong emphasis on local content provision, and one of the reasons for this is as a countermeasure to foreign programming.

Yet the globalisation of the media continues in a variety of ways – not simply in terms of foreign programming. Through a ‘mediated worldliness’, we become more aware of our place in the global system and the possibilities and phenomena that are beyond the realm of our personal experience (Brown, 2003: 16). Most importantly, however, is the recognition that the globalisation of the media has a fundamental impact on identity – whether one believes this to be complete, as in the Frankfurt School, or incomplete, as in postmodern thought. Our actions, language and behaviour are governed to some extent by globalising media influences as we are exposed to an ever-increasing proliferation of cultural resources through which ‘complex and contradictory’ identities are constructed (Brown, 2003: 22; Barker, 1999: 7, 33, 84). In sum, “That is why the question of the media is so crucial. It’s not just crucial depending on the literal documentary information it gives us. It’s crucial because it trades in images of us. It trades in possible identification” (Hall, 1997a: 13). Particularly in developing countries attempting to define national identities, the role of the media is fundamental as it reflects, develops and refines the “self-image of a society” (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001: 140).³²

³¹ Foreign, imported, cheap material is introduced into developing nations in large quantities, while their export of cultural products is comparatively minimal (Goonasekera, 1996: 47; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 186). A major concern is the ‘Americanisation’ of television that has resulted from this scenario, where American producers can afford to export their programmes at a minimal cost, having made their profits from domestic screenings (Allen, 1992a: 22).

³² Commercialism, inextricably linked to globalisation, also becomes a crucial issue if we are to accept that the media defines the ‘self-image of a society’. It affects the nature of programmes that are broadcast and thus the nature of the material that is open for viewers to ‘graze’ from, in the potential construction of identity. In the political economy of the media world, audiences become commodities that are sold to advertisers and the market guides the texts that are broadcast (Allen, 1992a: 19, 25; Cunningham & Jacka, 1996: 29).

2. PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING AND THE TRANSITION TO A GLOBAL WORLD

I. HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS

Public service broadcasting has a history that is linked to the welfare state – a Keynesianism that promoted state intervention as a means of safeguarding ‘public interest’ (Raboy, 2001: 293; Duncan, 2000: 55). In Britain, the original home of the public service ethos, it was the state that developed an initial mandate for broadcasting, which would be “guided by considerations of a national service and the public interest” (Scannell, 1990: 13). John Reith, who became the first managing director of the British Broadcasting Company in the 1920s, and was later the first Director-General of the BBC, is most commonly associated with the development and implementation of the early concepts around public service broadcasting – concepts that were to characterise broadcasting systems world-wide for decades to come (Scannell, 1990: 13).

In terms of the *practice* of public service broadcasting, a number of elements were definitive – the exclusion of commercial imperatives, universal access to programming, cohesion in the control of broadcasting and the maintenance of high standards in broadcasting. The programmes themselves were required to show, among other things, objectivity and geographical balance (Tomaselli, 1994: 127). In general, the *purpose* of public service broadcasting was to ‘educate, inform and entertain’ (Tomaselli, 1994: 127). Notions of both ‘cultural development’ and democratisation were fundamental to beliefs of what public service broadcasting could achieve. (Raboy, 1996: 11). Unifying the population across classes was a further fundamental tenet of public service broadcasting developed in Reith’s time, so that ‘particular publics’ would be superseded by a ‘general public’ (Scannell, 1990: 14, 16; Simons, 1998: 5). The social unity that would develop would also, in theory be accompanied by national pride (Scannell, 1990: 23).

The project of national unity and the promotion of national identity (whatever that may mean) through public service broadcasting has been an enduring concept that, in many ways, still defines the BBC – and broadcasters across the world (Scannell, 1990: 23). In Western European countries, for example, the idea of promoting national identity through television is important and identification with ‘imagined communities’, constituted from ‘ordinary families’ is actively encouraged (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 164). Culture, as part of national identity, becomes a vital part of what is seen as the public service broadcasting package and “From its inception, politically and commercially powerful sectors of society expected public service broadcasting to accomplish an important democratic and cultural mission” (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 121).

In fulfilling national and cultural ends, the idea of public service broadcasting as constituting a public sphere has become important (Scannell, 1997: 62). In this way, public service broadcasting can be seen as “rooted in the enlightenment notion of the public and of a public space in which social and political life democratically unfolds (Habermas 1989)” (Raboy, 1996: 6). The public is viewed as being comprised of actively involved individuals able to partake “fully and equitably” in a democratic forum provided by television (Raboy, 1998: 173).³³

II. PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING UNDER PRESSURE

In general, the media environment has faced fundamental change and pressure in the last few decades, which has ultimately filtered down to the public service broadcasting ethos and practice. Firstly, since the 1980s – and due to advances in technology - the number of media channels has increased enormously, resulting in both competition for audiences and the fragmentation of audiences (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1996; Raboy, 1995: 2, 3; Raboy, 1998: 169). Secondly, for example, many countries have been subject to market pressures and “there has been the introduction of mixed systems in countries that formerly had PSB monopolies” (Raboy, 1995: 2, 3; See also Blumler & Gurevitch, 1996).

³³ Having said this, there are nonetheless problems with conceptualising public service broadcasting as a public sphere. For example, it ignores the mediation involved in the delivery of messages on television and thus overlooks “the role of knowledge-brokers within the system” (Garnham, 1995: 248).

If the media environment in general faces challenges posed by technological advances and marketisation, public service broadcasting additionally experiences specific pressures related to its mandate. Autonomy from the government is one of the most important elements of public service broadcasting.³⁴ Yet even in an age of globalisation, where the nation-state is often thought to be losing power, state pressure is still an overriding concern (Tomaselli, 1994: 124, 128). In many countries, national and public interest is equated with “the particular interests of the national state” (Raboy, 1996: 2). Many African countries are struggling to transform state broadcasters into public broadcasters and even countries with established public service broadcasting histories face similar state-related dilemmas (Duncan, 2000: 67).³⁵

If involvement with the state is one of the perennial thorny issues that public service broadcasters must confront, others have been created specifically by globalisation. The blurring of boundaries, so characteristic of the global era is apparent in broadcasting too, where “it is going to be increasingly difficult to distinguish clearly between the conventional categories of ‘public’ and ‘private’ broadcasters” (Raboy, 1998: 171). National systems of broadcasting may well become obsolete with a prevalence of transnationalism, as well as tendencies towards regional and local consumption needs (Raboy, 1998: 167, 170, 172).

Both tendencies – the pull towards the global and the pull towards the local – present difficulties for public service broadcasters wishing to promote national unity. Further problems around national unity are also accentuated by globalisation. Firstly, national identity has increasingly become a site of contestation and ambiguity, bringing into sharp

³⁴ The credibility of any broadcaster as a promoter of citizenship is dependent on transparency and autonomy from the state (Raboy, 1996: 7; Curran, 1996: 88). Pressure from the government can come in a number of forms – financial ‘blackmail’, encouragement of self-censorship, intimidation through threats of legislative overhaul, the generation of public dissent over broadcasting strategies and so on (Curran, 1996: 89).

³⁵ In Britain, for example, Rupert Murdoch argued that “public service broadcasters in this country [Britain] have paid a price for their state sponsored privileges. That price has been their freedom.” (Murdoch, 1989: 9 cited in Curran, 1996).

relief the question of what exactly a public broadcaster might be trying to promote when it talks of fostering national unity (Raboy, 1996: 4; Raboy, 1995: 4; Barker, 1999: 6). Secondly, the growing complexity and multiplicity of national identity means that it is impossible for a public broadcaster to really be representative of ethnic, religious, political and other diversity – and this, in turn, brings the broadcaster's ideals of equality, objectivity and balance under fire (Keane, 1995: 263; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 189). For these reasons, it may be pertinent to rethink the traditional public broadcasting function in this regard, especially because “The idea of public broadcasting is not intrinsically tied to that of nationhood, but rather to that of the public” (Raboy, 1998: 172; See also Raboy, 1996: 5). Indeed, both globalisation and the related trend of fragmentation suggest that the local and the global may be more relevant conceptual categories within which to situate the mandate of public service broadcasters. The public culture that is encouraged through the broadcaster should be global in its reach, but local in the way that it is experienced and understood (Raboy, 1995: 5; Raboy, 1996: 5; Raboy, 1998: 172).

Staying competitive has become one of the primary challenges for public broadcasters as they face “multiple-channel options provided by cable and satellite services owned by media entrepreneurs and conglomerates” (Scannell, 1997: 64). Keeping up with the technological advances of commercial channels has proved to be one source of difficulty for many public service broadcasters in this multi-channel environment, with another being the fragmentation of audiences into ‘niche’ markets, which runs counter to the democratic public service ethos (Duncan, 2000: 116; Murdock, 1997: 54).

In many instances, market-related pressures extend beyond external factors to the heart of the public service broadcasting system, where government finance is being cut back as administrations adopt neoliberal principles (Duncan, 2000: 56). Beginning in the 1980s, this trend was accelerated by conservative governments espousing a market logic over a welfare one as the most efficient manner of promoting the democratic florescence of culture and consumer choice (Golding & Murdock, 1996: 22). Broadcasters are encouraged to become competitive, self-sufficient and to attract advertising revenue in a

fashion that is closer to private than public service broadcasting (Duncan, 2000: 56, 57). While some believe that public broadcasters can successfully combine both public service principles and commercial principles through cross-subsidisation from the commercial to non-commercial sector of the broadcaster, others believe that the commercial pressures facing national broadcasters create a tension and “competition between the identities of consumer and citizen” (Murdock, 1997: 53; See also Raboy 1996: 8 for cross-subsidisation within the public service broadcaster).

The consequences of pressures to commercialise are particularly dire in Africa. Despite the dubious success of cost-cutting measures in the North, similar measures are employed in many African countries as a solution to financial pressure (Duncan, 2000: 67). Change management consultants espouse a variety of restructuring strategies based on “commercial management principles” that supposedly offer an answer to the challenges posed by the global trend of neoliberalism (Duncan, 2000: 70, 116). For example, public broadcasters are encouraged to become publisher broadcasters, which means relinquishing their role in producing programmes and commissioning private production companies to do the job instead (Duncan, 2000: 56). Although the benefits of this approach appear considerable, in practice, the drawbacks seem to outweigh the advantages (Duncan, 2000: 117).³⁶

Restructuring in the name of global neoliberalism is consequently of dubious value for public service broadcasting. The content – what is ultimately beamed out to audiences - is fundamentally compromised. Not only does catering to commercialism in a competitive environment often result in a ‘dumbing down’ of content as broadcasters cater to popular tastes that attract advertisers, but the production of quality programming is compromised by financial pressures too. Perhaps the most detrimental consequence of this is the

³⁶ Firstly, it means a substantial loss of control over content for the broadcaster, with the associated implications for the quality of service provided (Duncan, 2000: 56). Secondly, the promised diversity in programming is seldom achieved as a handful of commercially successful production houses dominate. Thirdly, these production houses may tend to exercise self-censorship in a bid to ensure that their production tenders are successful (Duncan, 2000: 117). Fourthly, it compromises the public service mandate as there is a “convergence of public and private production styles leading to public programming being indistinguishable from the private variety” (Duncan, 2000: 117).

public's loss of faith in national broadcasters and the lack of 'political will' to remedy the situation (Raboy, 1996: 2). At the same time, however, this is not to say that the global environment has rendered public broadcasting obsolete. It is, perhaps, more important than ever that the role of public service broadcasters prevails since, "in light of the growing commercialisation of all media, public broadcasting continues to designate a strong value of social worth, the 'last best hope' for socially purposeful media acting in the public interest" (Raboy, 1998: 167).

3. THE SABC

Just as public service broadcasting in general has been faced with the challenges wrought by globalisation, so too has the SABC. That this has occurred in a politically transformative environment of already considerable pressure and turmoil, complicates an already complex political economy.

While textual analysis defines this dissertation, understanding the political economy/institutional mores of the SABC is vital for explaining the type of questions I ask about the documentaries and how I view them: namely through the lens of nationalism, culture and globalisation. It is fundamental for my argument to understand what global resonance these documentaries have, the implications this has for the SABC as part of a global environment, how this impacts on the fulfilment of a nation-building mandate and whether culture and cultural diversity are accorded as much emphasis in the programmes as in the rhetoric. Consequently, it seems true that "an adequate textual analysis of any television programme should first be related to some account of its *political economy*" and "institutional parameters" (Brunt, 1990: 61, 62). Understanding the SABC as an institution must surely begin with its contextualisation as part of South Africa's history.

I. THE HISTORY OF THE BROADCASTER

The origins of the public service broadcaster in South Africa can be traced to the 1930s when Reith, pioneer of British public service broadcasting, was asked to create a charter for the same in South Africa (Simons, 1998: 14). Undoubtedly due to Reith's

involvement, and the fact that South Africa was a British colony, broadcasting initially resembled its British counterpart closely in many respects – including an erroneous assumption of a homogenous audience (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989a: 9; Simons, 1998: 14). The image of the audience was cast in an English mould and served elite English interests reflecting the relative political and economic power inequalities between the English and Afrikaners – as well as the urban/rural divide (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 28, 29).

By 1936, the African Broadcasting Company (ABC), as it was known, was replaced by the SABC as the Broadcasting Act of 1936 came into effect (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 31). Despite the ideological and political chasms between English and Afrikaans, the SABC continued along the lines of the ABC by assuming cultural homogeneity and harmony in the audience – which often meant a privileging of English perspectives (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 31). It soon became evident, however, that this approach could not be sustained and the equality clause in the Broadcasting Act gave Afrikaners the justification for expanding “the transmitter network and the Afrikaans programme service”.³⁷ The Nationalist appointed SABC Board of 1948 gave them the means (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 37).

If the cultural debates in these early years seem limited, it is because they were – confined almost entirely to the realm of white South Africa. There was some evidence, however, of the English attempts to garner black support through the SABC, firstly, by broadcasting a programme three days a week in Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho and, secondly, by establishing “a service to compounds, hostels and ‘institutions’ in all the cities and major towns” (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 39). This continued until 1945 when the Department of Native Affairs withdrew its support and the ensuing period saw a

³⁷ Tensions over the English/Afrikaans issues had become more and more overt – particularly during the Second World War, when the SABC’s pro-war coverage sat uneasily with Afrikaans reporters and as political speeches by British politicians were broadcast in spite of the ‘no political broadcasts’ policy (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 37, 38). Broadcasting neutrality during the war was a myth (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 40).

continued marginalisation of black interests in broadcasting (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 51).

If the Nationalist election victory of 1948 signalled a continuation in many respects as far as black audiences were concerned, it also added a 'divide and rule' strategy to the approach and additionally proved to be a turning point in the struggle between English and Afrikaans over broadcasting (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 49). While conspiratorial assessments of the SABC's operations should be avoided, it is nonetheless indisputable that Afrikaner ideology found close association with the SABC (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 24).

By 1959, Piet Meyer, Chairman of the SABC Board, favoured glossing over English/Afrikaans divisions and projecting a united front of white supremacy and allied 'national interest' in the broadcasting environment (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 59). News and current affairs generally began to reflect this sentiment, where black middle classes were divided from white middle classes, where ethnic identities were emphasised and where the white 'hegemonic alliance' between English and Afrikaans was embraced (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989: 59, 63).

The introduction of television in 1976 added another dimension to the ideological struggles around broadcasting. Conservative Afrikaners had previously regarded it with much suspicion, such that "Verwoerd demonized American TV as a foreign pestilence on a par with poison gas and the atom bomb" (Nixon, 1994: 3). Yet as satellite television looked set to become a reality, the value of using television as a means of projecting a white South African 'way of life', in opposition to foreign perspectives, seemed more and more self-evident (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989: 85). Television broadcasting began slowly, with only one channel in operation for five hours a day, broadcasting in English and Afrikaans. Only in 1982 was a channel targeting black audiences made available (Simons, 1998: 15; Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989: 110).

The way in which television became a useful tool for the projection of certain political, ideological and cultural positions is evident through a variety of examples. The coverage of the Soweto Riots, just after the introduction of television, for example, was clearly designed to be “‘sober and unemotional’ so as not to create unnecessary ‘excitement and unrest’ (Hachten & Giffard, 1984: 214)” (De Beer & Steyn, 1993: 212). By the early 1980s, support for state military efforts was being encouraged through consistent pro-SADF programmes (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989: 133, 134). The political turmoil of the mid-1980s fared no better (De Beer & Steyn, 1993: 214).

Consequently, the SABC, it seems, was undeniably close to the government, supporting its ‘total strategy’ approach in the 1980s through ideological complicity in the construction and selection of news, current affairs, documentary and so on (Simons, 1998: 16). In spite of the fact that there was no written policy on ideological approach and in spite of the fact that the then Director-General of the SABC, Jan Swanepoel, vociferously touted the institution as independent, kow-towing to government was regarded as self-evident in many quarters (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989: 110).³⁸ In light of this, it is not surprising that SABC credibility amongst the black population was especially dismal by the mid-1980s (De Beer & Steyn, 1993: 214). As far as the divisions between English and Afrikaans were concerned, the perception that the SABC sidelined English speakers significantly is perhaps an overreaction (De Beer and Steyn, 1993: 213).

By the 1990s, it was clear that political transformation necessitated the transformation of the SABC too – precisely because of its *general* historical role in supporting apartheid (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 117). As national values began to change in South Africa, the news values, which are so closely linked to them, also began to change (Raubenheimer, 1993: 132). Trade union spokespeople, representatives of banned organisations, black interviewers all began to appear on television, as black decision-makers were introduced behind the scenes (De Beer & Steyn, 1993: 215; Louw, 1993a: 21). Accusations of bias

³⁸ Although the SABC was largely a mouthpiece for the government, it should not be forgotten that “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1988: 96). Within the SABC, positions of resistance dispute the idea of an ideological monolith and, in opposition to the apartheid mentality, “There were also a number of producers who did not share the same ideology” (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989: 114).

still remained, however, and it was clear that major restructuring was needed before the SABC could be said to have been successfully exorcised of its past. At the beginning of 1991, “a process of restructuring” began, “in which pragmatism, rather than propaganda, became the dominant ethos” (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 117).

The government-appointed Viljoen Task Group on Broadcasting, the ANC’s Media Charter and the Rhodes Media Policy Workshop are all examples of the forums through which the debates on transformation were generated (Louw, 1993a: 17; Simons, 1998: 16, 17; Duncan, 2000: 121). Broadly, there were two factions of media activists at the onset of transformation – those with a Nationalist orientation, and those with an ANC orientation (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001: 125).³⁹

The first tangible step in the formal transformation of the SABC was the appointment of a new Board of Directors, following public nominations and hearings. This took place in May 1993 and “can be seen as the point heralding the ‘new’ broadcast environment” (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 117). A huge task of transformation still lay ahead, however, as the SABC had yet to be restructured in any significant way. It remained, at that point, an apartheid edifice (Duncan, 2000: 122). The next momentous step was the establishment of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) through the IBA Act of 1993, which situated the SABC firmly within the realm of public service broadcasting (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 117; Simons, 1998: 1). Since then, much progress has been made to translate the rhetoric on public service broadcasting into reality.

³⁹ Rather than advocating a complete overhaul of the broadcasting system, the Nationalists wanted to reform, ‘disaggregate’ and ‘privatise’ it in a way that would sever the SABC from close government ties - a position supported by the Viljoen Task Group (Louw, 1993a: 12). This was a controversial stance because it effectively meant the dissolution of the SABC in such a way that any new government would “inherit a greatly-reduced propaganda machine” (Duncan, 2000: 121. See also Louw, 1993a: 20). The power and reach of the SABC would consequently be greatly reduced for an ANC government. Yet this plan was never to come to fruition, prevented from doing so by the terms of the Convention for Democratic South Africa - a negotiating forum for transformation begun in 1991 (Duncan, 2000: 122). The ANC-aligned camp for media transformation wanted a dramatically reconditioned, entirely ‘new’ SABC, rather than simply conceding to reform from within (Louw, 1993a:12). It was a position that saw some form of state intervention in the overhaul as inevitable. Nation-building and the quashing of the destructive divisions perpetuated by apartheid was another important element of the ANC vision (Louw, 1993c: 258).

II. NATION-BUILDING ON THE SABC IN AN AGE OF GLOBALISATION

One of the persistent agendas of the SABC since transformation began has been the promotion of nation-building objectives through programming. This focus on nation-building is unsurprising when viewed in light of general trends where social change correlates with a desire for self-definition and even ‘ethnic revival’ (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 125; Jakubowicz, 1999: 9). Insecurities around identity that are inevitably created by transformation can be - and often are - both covered and addressed through the mass media, so that “newspapers, magazines, television and radio are both the *sites* and the *instruments* of transformation” (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001: 123).

Creating national identity through the media is both a constructive process of defining the collectivity and a defensive process of reinforcing cultural boundaries and ‘othering’ those who do not belong (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001: 123; Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1998: 224). Just one of the complexities in the notion of national identity for South Africa is the diversity of cultures where “minorities are in the majority” (Cunningham & Jacka, 1996: 15). In essence, these kinds of cultural divisions, which were encouraged and even fabricated by apartheid, potentially defy attempts to unify. Clear acknowledgements of multiculturalism and the depiction of a wide range of perspectives in the media are consequently a necessary inclusion within the broader ambit of national identity - if any attempts at nation-building are to succeed (Jakubowicz, 1999: 10).⁴⁰

In spite of the many difficulties, the project of nation-building has persisted after its initial entrenchment as an objective by the IBA in the early 1990s. The IBA Act of 1993 stipulated that broadcasting “should ‘develop and protect a national and regional identity, culture and character’ (IBA Act, October 1993, Section 2(c))” (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 117). Although the parameters and definitions of national and regional identity and culture remain open to interpretation, the orientation of the new SABC was clear.

⁴⁰ Further hurdles that the project of nation-building through the media must overcome are, firstly, avoiding prejudicial political interference and secondly, avoiding an over-reliance on imported programming.

Following this initial commitment, the IBA Triple Enquiry Report of 1995 expressed a concern that not enough was being done to fulfil the objectives laid down in the Act (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 129). The report consequently ensured that there was a tangible, direct roadmap for how the aims were to be achieved: through the laying down of local content quotas which could be fulfilled through music, entertainment, education, information – almost any type of programming (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 128; Simons, 1998: 2). Not only was this seen as a method of ensuring the transmission and fostering of national culture, but also of developing the South African production industry (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 128). The granting of broadcasting licences became attached to conditions about local content and local content quotas. For the SABC, the quota was set at 50% to be achieved in three years time (Simons, 1998: 31; Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 129).⁴¹

Further plans to transform the SABC in line with nation-building objectives were to follow the IBA's pioneering steps and, in February 1996, the SABC re-launched its television channels with the aim of dissolving the different channels for different races approach of the apartheid era (Duncan, 2000: 126).⁴² Overall, according to the policy statement of the re-launch, the approach signified “a commitment to deliver full-spectrum services to all South Africans, in all parts of the country, and in each of the eleven official languages.” (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 118; Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001: 125). The ultimate aim of this was to allow a diversity of voices, through language heterogeneity, within a firm national unity, epitomised by the slogan ‘Simunye, We Are One’ (Duncan, 2000: 126). More concretely, the notion of national unity was embodied in the SABC's ‘Vision and Values’ framework, which emphasised that programme

⁴¹ Quotas tailored for specific genres were also established: current affairs stood at 80% and documentary at 40%. Subsequently proving over-optimistic, the 50% quota over three years was later reduced to 30% over five years – a far more realistic goal (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 129).

⁴² SABC1 was to broadcast in Zulu, Xhosa and English, SABC2 would concentrate on Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana and Afrikaans, while SABC3 would be the commercial branch, primarily using English and cross-subsidising the other channels (Duncan, 2000: 126). Although the dominance of English might be seen as problematic, the policy was initiated on the basis of practicality: not only do a large number of South Africans use English as their second language, but imported programmes are predominantly in English (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 118).

content was vital for fostering South African perspectives and culture (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001: 125).

Importantly for the purposes of this dissertation is the manner in which the notions of diversity and unity were outlined in the SABC's Guidelines for Programme Content, developed as part of the re-launch. Diversity should be, the guidelines note, depicted *positively* - in a way that does not denigrate particular groups or behaviours. Many of the documentaries under examination here do not adhere to this principle, instead seemingly using the potential loophole where, "the news and beliefs of different groups are obviously open to honest, thoughtful scrutiny in programmes like documentaries (SABC, 1996b: 10)." (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001: 137; Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 125). Perhaps the nation-building agenda of the SABC is fluid to the point of obsolescence. As will be indicated in the ensuing chapters, there is no discernable pattern to the depiction of the nation – some of it is positive and some of it is negative, some limited in diversity and some overflowing with diversity. The guidelines were, perhaps, not enough of a guide after all.

Nonetheless, the SABC forged ahead with its nation-building agenda, attempting a more definitive strategy for the promotion of its new values with the release of a Green Paper on broadcasting in 1997 (Duncan, 2000: 103). Following the Green Paper came the White Paper on Broadcasting Policy, which encompassed a heavy emphasis on national identity after public feedback on the Green Paper indicated that this was what the public wanted (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I), 1998: 14).

In sum, the White Paper's concerns revolve around a few key issues, which recur throughout the document. Early on in the document these are identified as "universal access, diversity within a framework of national unity, democratisation of the airwaves, national building, education and strengthening the moral fibre of society" (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I), 1998: 7. See also Duncan, 2000: 105). Nation-building and national identity persistently crop up (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I),

1998: 16; Duncan, 2000: 107). At the same time, however, the notion of cultural diversity within this national unity is equally emphasised (Duncan, 2000: 107).

In defining diversity, the White Paper does not offer any profound insights, continuing with much of the vagueness of the nation-building imagery. It does, however, manage to provide more direction than previous treatises on the matter and suggests that diversity involves the representation of different groups, the depiction of a variety of cultural practices and histories and the promotion of a multicultural ethos (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I), 1998: 14, 15, 20, 21). Along somewhat different lines, the concept of diversity is also seen to include diversity in content and geography (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I), 1998: 15). Further still, the concept is extended to “diversity of choice”, including “access to a diverse range of language, cultural, religious and regional programming” (Duncan, 2000: 106). The manner in which diversity, according to these interpretations, is depicted or overlooked in the documentary programmes under examination here forms an important component of the dissertation.

While the Broadcasting Act was a fundamental step in entrenching the idea of nation-building into the fabric of broadcasting in South Africa, it is an idea that does not come without ideological questions and problems. The ‘unity in diversity’ approach incorporates “idealist assumptions about nationality, namely that it can be ‘programmed’ into being, and that it is to be constructed from already-existing ‘racial’ or ‘ethnic’ identities” (Duncan, 2000: 109). In other words, there is, firstly, an erroneous assumption, as Guy Berger pointed out, that it is possible to intravenously feed viewers perspectives on the nation that will unquestioningly be digested and naturalised (Duncan, 2000: 109). Secondly, nation-building on the foundations of apartheid-inspired ‘cultural diversity’, which encompasses in-built inequalities in power, is surely problematic and has not been adequately addressed by the SABC (Duncan, 2000: 109). Finally, there is the issue of the actual inequality in South Africa, which is overlooked by broadcasters as they attempt to construct a somewhat artificial equality on television. What this means is that neoliberal broadcasting agendas can be pursued ‘guilt-free’ in a context of extreme actual disparity (Duncan, 2000: 109).

Issues of neoliberalism (commercialism and deregulation) and globalisation cannot be avoided in any contemporary discussion of broadcasting. As discussed previously, financial and commercial pressures have impacted adversely on public service broadcasting the world over. The SABC is no exception and, in this case, the tensions between global trends and nation-building objectives have an unavoidable impact on the latter, so that, for example, cultural, unifying messages are compromised in favour of commercial, popular ones. The implications of neoliberalism for the documentaries examined here may be severe. While it is hard to extract and attribute various nation-building perspectives (or the lack of them) in the programmes to neoliberalism, Jane Duncan's perspective should surely be kept in mind. She says, "More specifically I argue that there is an irreconcilable tension between the country's nation-building objectives with respect to broadcasting and its increasing thrust towards globalisation" (Duncan, 2000: 9).

In South Africa in general, there are tremendous pressures to conform to a global environment of neoliberalism – a particularly tricky undertaking when faced with a transforming political environment where at least some state intervention to rectify past imbalances appears necessary (Duncan, 2000: 4). Unavoidably, the SABC has become embroiled in these pressures, exacerbated by funding exigencies, which constitute a consistent, looming dark cloud. The SABC cannot depend on licence revenue to sustain it and must look to advertisers for most of its income (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1998: 222). The struggle for money also means that, "Culturally valuable forms, such as the single play and innovative and investigative documentaries, are allocated fewer and fewer resources" (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1998: 223). So too has rationalisation meant fewer resources and manpower in the production of documentaries in a way that is exclusively quality-driven (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1998: 222). All this paints a dismal picture and suggests that, at least to some degree, programmes are more influenced by commercial considerations and financial restrictions than by any nation-building agenda. Indeed, management in the SABC and government have scaled their

ambitions for the broadcaster to fit the limitations imposed by neoliberalism (Duncan, 2000: 115).

The McKinsey report released in 1997 recommended a variety of cost-cutting measures for the SABC. Many of these compromised the achievement of the SABC's nation-building mandate, but were considered necessary for survival – particularly in an environment where government financial support could not be guaranteed in perpetuity. The employees of the SABC were reduced by a third due to retirements, resignations and retrenchments and this resulted in huge savings for the broadcaster (Duncan, 2000: 130). The report also advocated measures that impacted on programming more directly. For example, it recommended that,

the SABC stop being a programme-producer (except for news), and instead become a publisher-broadcaster. As a result, staff and activities falling outside this core mandate would be subject to (ostensibly) cost-saving cuts. Other programming would either be outsourced or cut back (Duncan, 2000: 128).⁴³

Other recommendations included a more profitable mix of programmes, an increase in English-language programmes, dispensing with regional programming and a reduction in local content- even for the public broadcasting flagship channel, SABC2 (Duncan, 2000: 129). All these compromised the public service function of the SABC and the fulfilment of any nation-building mandate, particularly the local content issue.⁴⁴ The only positive to come from the McKinsey Report was, perhaps, the encouragement of a greater amount of news and current affairs – seen to be a way of staying with the local at a low cost (Duncan, 2000: 129).⁴⁵

It was ironic that, after the neoliberalism embodied in the McKinsey Report, the White Paper on Broadcasting Policy, with its ideological idealism, should be released. Yet despite its persistent focus on nation-building, diversity, development and local content, it

⁴³ This has been discussed in general terms on page 44, in my section 'Public service broadcasting under pressure'.

⁴⁴ Research undertaken by the SABC Broadcasting Research Unit suggested that local content fell from 40% to 25% after the release of the McKinsey Report (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 130). The IBA was forced to rethink its local content quotas for the SABC (Duncan, 2000:130, 131).

⁴⁵ Nonetheless, this too had its down side. The McKinsey recommendations resulted in the adoption of a bi-media approach to news and current affairs, which included a centralisation of editorial control. Regional autonomy in editorial decisions and flexibility and creativity in general were compromised. The potential for conflict over editorial policy was established and soon realised (Duncan, 2000: 136-140).

too included commercial considerations in its concerns. The ‘mixed economy’ approach of combining commercialism with public service broadcasting was given shape in the White Paper and it was advocated that, “The commercial arm of the SABC will be expected to conduct itself in a fully commercial fashion” (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I), 1998: 23. See also Duncan, 2000: 149). The commercial arm of the SABC looked set to be regulated in the same way as private broadcasters (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I), 1998: 23). The Broadcasting Bill and Act that followed included this vision of two separate roles being played out within the SABC (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 119). The corporatisation of the SABC in line with international inclinations towards deregulation was finally formally entrenched (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 120). As far as funding was concerned, the commercial arm was to be financed through advertising and sponsorship, as with private broadcasters (Duncan, 2000: 150). The public service arm, on the other hand would sustain itself through licence fees, advertising (not extensive advertising), grants, sponsorship, government contributions and money from the commercial arm (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 120; Duncan, 2000: 150). The issue of cross-subsidisation from the public service arm to the commercial arm was an important one and was seen as a means of rendering public service broadcasting viable in an increasingly neoliberal environment (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 120; Duncan, 2000: 149).

While this may seem a very pragmatic solution, and while some might argue that competition in broadcasting actually *fosters* nation-building, market-driven policies are likely only to benefit those who have always been privileged in the South African environment – the middle and upper classes (Duncan, 2000: 8, 9). Advertisers target this group and consequently programmes must appeal to this group (Duncan, 2000: 6). The resulting gender, race and class discrimination is testimony to the logic of a true public service ethos, where advertising is forbidden in order to avoid tensions between the mandate of universality and the advertising demand to cater for a select, wealthy few in

terms of programming (Duncan, 2000: 114). The SABC has not managed to avoid this tension even in its expressly public service channel.⁴⁶

In terms of the way in which commercialism hampers the pro-social goals of public service broadcasting, there is perhaps one solution for the SABC if it is to be a public service broadcaster in a true sense: “its services need to be de-commodified and socialised” (Duncan, 2000: 115). At the moment, however, it seems that the SABC’s period of transformation has been characterised more by a continuation of the commercialisation begun during apartheid than by a break with the past (Duncan, 2000: 113). In terms of the documentaries under examination in this dissertation, the tension between nation-building objectives and the need for sensationalised or limited ‘human interest’ stories that sell, seems to often be at issue. Although all the documentaries in my selection were broadcast on the commercial channel, SABC3, even the commercial arm has “obligations to comply with the values of the PBS in the provision of programs and services” (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy (Part I), 1998: 24). In other words the question of fostering national unity and depicting diversity is ever-relevant for SABC 3 – even more so when one begins to consider the overall picture of the SABC channels, where one must question whether the success of nation-building programmes on SABC1 and 2 is compromised by what is shown on 3.

III. INSIDE THE NEWSROOM

The political economy and institutional objectives of the SABC are vital factors by which to analyse and judge what is shown on the various channels. For my purposes, understanding these is a critical precursor to the approach in this dissertation. It provides the basis for assessing the extent to which the nation-building agenda is achieved in documentary, how globalised themes and discourses, illustrative of the broadcaster’s embeddedness in a global world, are utilised and how diversity of location and culture are depicted. At the same time, however, it must be acknowledged that, while the ‘broader picture’ can be used as a yardstick to measure successes and failures in the SABC, it does

⁴⁶ Beginning in the apartheid era, advertising accounted for more than half of the SABC’s income (Duncan, 2000: 114). Rather than reversing this trend, the transformation period has seen it exacerbated. With the approach of the millennium, approximately 80% of income came from advertising (Duncan, 2000: 114).

not offer a complete report. The intimate goings-on of the everyday work environment can offer as many clues to the end result that audiences see on television.

The level of programming and channels offer added ideological layers to any broadcasting environment in addition to those created by the institution, legislation and technology (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989a: 4). For example, a seemingly simple and transparent function like scheduling can have fundamental ideological implications (Kozloff, 1992: 69). Dictation by 'negative' news values can equally determine the outcome of any programme (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1998: 231). For the SABC, these 'minor' workaday considerations have a direct impact on the fulfilment of the larger objectives of broadcasting. In a context where "second tier in-depth programmes" are almost as popular as the news, the context in which current affairs and documentary programmes are produced is vital (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1998: 233).

There are many structures and practices in place to ensure that there is freedom of expression in the newsroom including the existence of norms of ethical journalism and an "ethical taboo preventing the publisher from commanding subordinates to follow policy" (Breed, 1997: 107). Things are not always this simple, however, and some may argue that every journalist is 'socialised' to conform to certain news values, which support the status quo (Breed, 1997: 110-113). Additionally, employees may conform because of a desire to submit to the values of the media institution they are working for, a desire to avoid conflict in the workplace, a desire to work towards a promotion that might be aided by conforming and because of respect for (Breed, 1997: 110-113). Put in a different way, it could be argued that journalists operate according to a code of 'professionalism' which conforms to hegemonic cultural values (Barker, 1999: 161). This shaping of a story in terms of certain values could be called internal gatekeeping. Boundary-role gatekeeping is another means by which the news is shaped through the selection of the news story and the final shaping of it (Shoemaker, 1997: 62). Having said this, it is also true, at least to some extent, that individual producers and writers leave 'marks' on their work and that these 'marks' may sometimes be characterised by divergence from organisational norms (Allen, 1992a: 9).

The notion of institutional self-censorship is one that explains how and why ostensibly independent newsrooms comply with policies and produce programmes that protect the status quo (Schudson, 1996: 149). Alternative values are suppressed and conformity is taken for granted. Beyond individual journalists, editors “practice ‘self-censorship’ in sensitive areas” in order to appease the government – even if autonomy from government pressure is guaranteed (Hartley, 1990: 52).

The eruption of controversy and conflict over a *Special Assignment* broadcast is evidence of the way in which individual personalities and tensions within the ‘micro’ environment of broadcasting are just as significant in determining what is shown as the ‘macro’ level political economy. With the restructuring of the SABC following the McKinsey Report of 1997, Themba Mthembu, new head of news and current affairs was given the power of “direct editorial intervention in the programmes ‘when necessary’” (Duncan, 2000: 140). Executive Producer of *Special Assignment*, Max du Preez and Mthembu soon began to clash, with du Preez objecting to outside editorial intervention, claiming that it flew in the face of well-established international norms. In March 1999, the situation exploded. A programme on witchcraft in the Northern Province was pulled off air at the last minute by Mthembu, leading to acrimony and, arguably, to the non-renewal of du Preez’s contract. Du Preez later claimed that “he was axed because he would not accept the erosion of *Special Assignment*’s editorial independence” (Duncan, 2000: 140).

Although the issue of micro-politics in the newsroom does not form a part of my analysis, which instead focuses on the texts and institutional implications of their ‘preferred meanings’, it is nonetheless vital to keep in mind the conditions under which documentary and current affairs programmes are produced. Ultimately these conditions affect meaning in a profound way – as do the conventions of documentary production, which will be discussed below.

4. DOCUMENTARY

In dealing with documentary and current affairs, this dissertation has been written with an awareness of history, context and current trends, many aspects of which have been highlighted with reference to specific videos. In these instances, the peculiarities of documentary form have impacted directly on the meaning insofar it concerns nation-building, global relevance and culture. Exactly what constitutes documentary's form and nature is, of course, up for debate.

From the 1930s, documentary has been associated with 'sensory evidence' upon which its iconicity is based and which allows it to make claims to represent the 'real' in spite of the "other discourses of documentary – commentative, investigative, evaluative" (Corner, 1995: 78). Many documentary-makers suggest that the 'facts' they show in their films are significantly reflective of 'reality', a perspective endorsed by some theorists (Fetveit, 2002: 34). Bill Nichols, for example, suggests that documentary has a strong "resemblance to reality", that its indexicality is one of its fundamental characteristics (Gaines, 1999: 5, 6). In a similar vein is the idea that "The plausibility of a documentary film lies in its naturalisation, in its internal coherence and in its matching of its own reality to a reality which 'everyone knows'" (Silverstone, 1985: 178). Yet others propose that the discourses surrounding documentary content are more significant than the content itself – a perspective that is surely germane in explaining the importance of the global and national discourses that envelop the documentaries in my selection (Gaines, 1999: 6).

If claims to the real and suggestions of indexicality form the basis of some definitions of documentary, others are more interested in styles and formats that typically manifest themselves in documentaries. Rather than the reflection of 'reality' being important as a criterion of documentary, according to one perspective, documentary is most basically defined by the way it is catalogued in video stores (Fetveit, 2002: 36). This kind of approach is predicated on the notion that documentary is associated with a particular

style, where “it no longer constitutes a mode of production or an attitude toward life, but proves to be only an element of aesthetics (or anti-aesthetics)” (Minh-ha, 1993: 99). Evergreen formats impose a predictability that allows viewers a sense of definitional security in what they are viewing – and often a host or presenter will confirm for the audience that they are watching a documentary or current affairs programme (Hughes, 1996: 52).

While conventional definitions of documentary may vary, in our postmodern environment, there is an increasing tendency to view definitions as impossible and pointless (Eitzen, 1995: 82 cited in Fetveit, 2002: 37). Indeed, the proliferation of different genres and hybrids has made the project of defining documentary appear futile in an ever-evolving ‘post-documentary’ culture (Brunsdon et al, 2001: 30). Whether something is a documentary increasingly is seen to be the decision of the individual viewer, who might even perceive fictional films as documentaries, where ‘truth’ is impossible, regardless of type of representation (Fetveit, 2002: 34).

I. DOCUMENTING THE HISTORY

If defining documentary is problematic, certain historical junctures nonetheless commonly are attributed to the genre. Beyond this, historical issues and developments continue to have a bearing on documentaries that are produced today – even those on television and even those on *Special Assignment*. Where relevant, these have been highlighted in my discussions of individual programmes. In some cases, even the early Griersonian approach, as discussed below, has resonance with SABC3’s documentaries on crime and punishment.

Before the 1920s, the concept of documentary had not yet crystallised in a recognisable form – even though factual filmmaking had been in existence for some time (Fetveit, 2002: 11). It is John Grierson and his associates at the Empire Marketing Board, the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit and the Crown Film Unit in 1930s Britain who are customarily associated with early documentary and with establishing documentary as a genre (Corner, 1995: 81). Their powerful experimental influence is most often described

as one where the ‘creative treatment of actuality’ rather than dry journalistic norms prevailed (Winston, 2000: 20; Fetveit, 2002: 13). Documentary was art, not recording ‘reality’. It allowed manipulations, interventions, dramatisations and reconstructions in order to achieve its propagandistic, educational and creative ends (O’Sullivan et al, 1994: 117; Rosen, 1993: 65; Winston, 2000: 20; Corner, 1995: 82). It was not, however, a simple case of consensus among early documentarists. Viewing documentary as ‘art’ or documentary as ‘documentation’ resulted in multiple tensions so that “The play-off between form-led aesthetic experimentation and a topical-led concern to address social reality and social problems...was a major factor in determining differences of directorial practice” (Corner, 1995: 83).

Creative documentary-making was not to persist as an unbroken fashion until today. The Griersonian approach of reconstruction and dramatisation fell into disfavour after World War Two, with arguments for ‘authenticity’, for the desire to show ‘truth’ (Nichols, 1988: 48; Fetveit, 2002: 15). Journalistic norms infiltrated documentary practice – reporters or presenters were used and lightweight synch sound cameras and other technological developments allowed for more impromptu ‘journalistic’ filming and supposedly discrete observation (Corner, 2000: 144; Winston, 2000: 22). Indeed, observation became the hallmark of this approach, where the aim was as little intervention by the film crew as possible as it tapped into ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ as it happened (O’Sullivan et al, 1994: 117). The fly-on-the-wall, direct cinema style was born, lacking in contextualisation, history, refinement, orchestration of action, reconstruction and elaborate editing – but supposedly valuable in capturing the unmediated essence of events (Nichols, 1988: 49; O’Sullivan et al, 1994: 118; Winston, 2000: 23).⁴⁷

While Direct, fly-on-the-wall observation became known as *vérité* in Britain, *Cinéma Vérité* largely is understood as a French approach, which responded in an oppositional fashion to Direct Cinema’s claims to be able to show truth (Winston, 1988b: 24, 25). As a

⁴⁷ The slide towards positivism that this epitomised was embraced optimistically as a “celebration of the camera’s ability to capture real life as it was lived” (Fetveit, 2002: 15). On the other hand, however, the approach has been criticised for allowing careless, ill-conceptualised projects to be passed off as treasures of observation (Winston, 1988b: 25).

manner of acknowledging the inescapability of intervention and the artifice of representation, self-reflexive *Cinéma Vérité* saw the inclusion of the filming process in the end-result as a partial corrective, which would allow audiences an awareness of construction and provide an opening for their assessments of how real the images and sounds were. Consequently, this approach allows the viewer a complicity in the filmmaking process (Corner, 1995: 85). Indeed, in the 60s and 70s, the notion of depicting the real as it happened was criticised – and critics of André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer highlighted the constructedness of representation (Gaines, 1999:2, 4).

In the postmodern milieu, the notion of the constructedness of representation, as initiated by self-reflexive *Cinéma Vérité*, continues to be important (Fetveit, 2002: 2, 18). With this recognition, is the theoretical breaking down of ‘artificial’ barriers between factual and fictional representation so that the two are seen to inevitably melt together, where “it might be said that the two domains *inhabit* one another” - and in practical terms, this means more scope for play, experimentation with form and ‘borrowing’ from fiction (Renov, 1993a: 3; Brown, 2003: 52; Fetveit, 2002: 18, 25). Perhaps documentary trends have turned a full circle and are back in the realm of the reconstruction, aesthetics and manipulation characteristic of Grierson’s time.

Postmodernism, and its relationship to documentary, is still evolving, ever-dependent on historical fortunes and ideological tides (Gaines, 1999: 2; Renov, 1993b: 19). At the same time too, documentary is not by any means rid of the legacy of Direct Cinema with its journalistic precepts and claims to depict actuality (Winston, 2000: 2). Particularly for television, and in spite of some factual/fictional crossover, institutional pressures ensure that certain formulas are followed in the quest to show unmediated ‘truth’ to the viewing public (Winston, 2000: 2; Brown, 2003: 52).

II. POSITIVISM AND THE FALLACY OF ‘TRUTH’

The synopsis above would suggest that, historically and academically, the issue of truth and documentary has been prominent. Claims to be able to represent accurately in a way that reflects the real is undoubtedly part of a broader twentieth century rise in positivism,

realism and naturalism (Fetveit, 2002: 53). Specifically for documentary - thanks to “Direct Cinema’s journalistic rhetoric of non-intervention” and in spite of refutations and challenges to positivistic assumptions - there is a persistent, widespread belief that documentaries show the truth (Winston, 2000: 22). Audiences in particular, tend to view documentary and news as authentic, credible and certainly more genuine than fiction and will probably will continue to do so (Rosenthal, 1988: 18; O’ Sullivan et al, 1994: 117). The label ‘documentary’ itself is enough to do this for many programmes (Silverstone, 1985: 179). Documentary-makers themselves often do little to dispel the myths surrounding their trade, maintaining the façade of actuality and rarely admitting the extent of artifice that goes into a production (Nichols, 1988: 50).

The chapters that follow are underlined in every instance by an awareness that absolute truth is not possible in representation, that the commentaries on the nation, the use of global trends and ideologies, the conclusions about culture – whether explicit or implicit, overt or covert, intentional or unintentional – are part of a construction. At a basic level, the notion of constructedness is what structuralism and semiology have shown us (Rosenthal, 1988: 12). No system of symbols can portray reality directly. Instead, signs and symbols *create* reality, meaning that mediation inevitably shapes and even distorts our knowledge of the world (Allen, 1992a: 10; Seiter, 1992: 38, 39).⁴⁸ If even the simplest communication is governed by the principles of signification, the complexities of documentary production mean that many more layers of construction are also unavoidable.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ In postmodern thought, Baudrillard has announced the end of epistemology precisely because of the impossibility of knowing reality, where a proliferation of simulations and signs prevents any actual contact with or understanding of the real (Rosen, 1993: 82, 83).

⁴⁹ Fitting the observable world into a documentary format means to structure and manipulate according to subjective choice, individual interpretation and selective ‘common sense’ (Rosenthal, 1988: 13; Winston, 1988b: 21; Hall, 1988: 361; Kuehl, 1988: 104). The addition of music, commentary, subtitles, sound, climaxes and drama, for example, shapes the end-product according to cultural expectation rather than truth (Winston, 1988b: 22). Even attempts to show balance are ultimately biased, considering that balance is an artificial edifice, not reflective of the imbalances in any actual scenario that actually exist (Hall, 1988: 360). Finally, as exposition is settled by editing together disparate nuggets of footage, the transition from reality to product is complete (Hall, 1988: 361). As with news, documentary is undeniably a process of manufacture (Schudson, 141: 1996).

In contemporary times, Grierson's 'creative treatment of actuality' never seems far from the minds of many (Winston, 2000: 19). Indeed, because of an awareness that truth is never possible, the reasonable manipulation of documentary material is not seen as problematic. Some even believe "that documentary filmmakers have a social obligation to *not* be objective" (Ruby, 1988b: 75). Still others consider suspicious those documentary-makers who persist in making truth claims (Corner, 2000: 19). In terms of commercial imperatives, it is audiences who demand a refined product, a "rich and supplemented real" characterised by heavy intervention (Gaines, 1999: 7). It is the process of intervention that creates what has become known as 'preferred meaning' in documentary – an acknowledgment that 'truth' must be created for the viewer in process of creating exposition.

III. PREFERRED MEANING

The documentaries in my selection, like all other documentaries the world over, do not show the truth and instead are imputed with the creation of preferred meanings for their viewers. Whether it be through messages of optimism about the nation, dismal commentary about state law enforcement or assumptions about the causes of crime, the documentaries are designed for an 'implied audience', which would be able to ingest and understand the favoured perspectives (Schudson, 1996: 152). This audience is 'interpellated' (Althusser's term) by discourses that define it in certain culturally accepted terms (Fiske, 1987: 53). Encoding documentary messages according to 'cultural proximity' ensures that viewers are likely to make sense of them in a certain way during the decoding process (Galtung & Ruge, 1973: 54; Fiske, 1987: 4, 5). It all seems entirely natural and it is only "when we watch another culture's television operating from a different set of conventions that we become aware of just how constructed and unnatural the world of television really is" (Allen, 1992a: 7). The boundaries of the preferred meaning thus created are debatable: some would argue that preferred meaning consists of a general arena of significance from which a viewer can pick and choose, while others would suggest it works in a more circumscribed fashion (Fiske, 1992: 303). Whatever one's take on the matter, the implication is clear:

In order to effect ideological closure, the event is put together with signs that indicate how it should be understood – what it ‘means’. There is, in other words, a ‘preferred reading’ (Hall 1977, pp.341 ff.) encoded into the way a story is told. (Hartley, 1993: 63).

Consequently, the media informs us *what* is significant in terms of news and *how* it should be understood (Hall et al, 1978: 57).

The creation of preferred meaning is imbued with varying degrees of deliberateness. Politically active filmmakers, for example, might actively seek to promote their cause through their projects (Ruby, 1988a: 316). Whether intentional or unintentional, the ultimate outcome is significant: preferred meaning generally supports the status quo and “performs the work of the dominant ideology” (Fiske, 1987: 1). What we see, and what has been well theorised by Stuart Hall in particular, is the privileging of themes and explanations that only have meaning within dominant frameworks (Brunt, 1990: 68). The well-trodden frameworks, formulae or ‘maps of meaning’ that are used to enclose ‘new stories’ become so naturalised as to be accepted unquestioningly as common sense – and viewers are effectively entrapped in cultural norms (Bird & Dardenne, 1997: 346). In this way, “television tacitly maintains the prevailing definition of the political order” (Hall, 1988: 359). The importance for my analysis then, is that the texts should be examined in their social and cultural contexts in order to determine what ideology they are promoting and how the creation of preferred meaning is being executed (Dahlgren, 1999: 190).

The cultural implications of creating preferred meaning under the sanction of dominant ideology are immense. Just one of the results is that “Distortions abound with the portrayals of issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, and class in the news media” (Barak, 1994: 10). The ‘other’ is stereotyped in line with both “commercial and ideological expectations” (Bar-Haim, 1996: 145. See also Schudson, 1996: 151). Women in high-profile positions, for example, are under-reported, while negative portrayals of degraded or ‘fallen’ women abound (Barak, 1994:10). In a context where the public often associates the media with authenticity, this kind of stereotype is dangerous, both in terms of pejorative labelling and in terms of supporting unquestioned viewer identification with the dominant ideology.

This is not to suggest, however, that documentaries and other programmes never include oppositional voices. The documentaries in my selection often display ambivalences or contradictions that challenge the smooth operation of hegemony. They are, however, largely controlled in a move that could be described as ‘inoculation’, where radical voices are defused through their containment within the overall dominant ‘voice’ of the documentary (Fiske, 1987: 291). In other words, dissent takes place within a broader framework of consensus and must ultimately be reconciled within this consensus (Hall et al, 1978: 55, 56). Including oppositional voices in this way strengthens rather than weakens prevailing power structures by suggesting that they are “open to conflict and to alternative points of view. It is this last twist which keeps the structure flexible and credible” (Hall, 1988: 359).⁵⁰ The documentaries in my selection display this tendency. Where conflict is evident, it is largely contained within the safety of cultural norms, fitting “the expectations of the general public’s discourse as well as those of advertisers, politicians, lobbying groups and social movements” (Bar-Haim, 1996: 145).⁵¹

⁵⁰ As with the theorising behind the ideological agenda of preferred meaning, the notion of inoculation may seem somewhat conspiratorial. Indeed, news organisations and documentary-makers have a variety of motivations and agendas, some of them contradictory, that would suggest they do not always work in concert to reproduce the consensus (Barak, 1994: 16). Rather, a significant proportion work towards actively altering the status quo in a manner not necessarily framed within the broader hegemony (Barak, 1994: 15).

⁵¹ While preferred meaning may be a noteworthy lens through which to view documentary production, it is not the end of the road. Indeed, meaning is only *preferred*, rather than definitively established. The “unruliness of the real and the semiotic excess of television” mean that ideological closure is never wholly effected (Fiske, 1987: 302). Every text is polysemic to some extent, potentially transmitting a variety of meanings (Fiske, 1987: 15, 64, 85). Successful television texts, it may be argued, are those with a high degree of polysemy, where a variety of culturally disparate audiences can find meanings to suit their outlook (Fiske, 1992: 298).

Ultimately, it is the audience that actualises the potential multiple meanings in a text and “differently constituted audiences will work with different textual meanings” (Barker, 1999: 110). While preferred meaning may be dutifully doled out, it is increasingly being recognised that this may not offer predictable, one-dimensional viewing activities. Cultural Studies has acknowledged this, moved away from its heavy focus on political economy and included the study of audiences as a significant feature in understanding the media (Cunningham, 1993: 132). It is now accepted that the social context of the viewer conditions interpretation, as he uses his own discourses to understand the text (Fiske, 1987: 14, 15, 16). Meaning is created through the act of reading, rather than being inherent in the text itself. Consequently, the identification of preferred meanings in my analyses of SABC documentary programmes is conditioned by an awareness that these are not ultimately definitive, but embody a probability of interpretation.

IV. SELECTIVITY

While the extent to which explicit preferred meanings are accepted by audiences is debatable, less ambiguous is the issue of the selectivity which governs the production of all documentary programmes and which recurs frequently in my analyses. Selection is inevitable (Corner, 1995: 55). It is also highly significant and “The *omissions* and *silences* of a message may be as significant in constructing a ‘preferred meaning’ as its overt content” (Brunt, 1990: 70). Meaning, consequently, resides unavoidably in the absences (Hartley, 1990: 117). In the process of structuring, containing and shaping the real for representation on television, the absences and repressions are many and are determined by culturally accepted news-making codes (Fiske, 1987: 283).⁵² What is newsworthy is not natural, but “the end-product of a complex process” (Hall et al, 1978: 53. See also Corner, 1995: 55). If selection is perhaps an understated way in which preferred meaning is created in documentary, it is nonetheless one of the most important. It is at least *as* significant as the variety of overt mechanisms used to shape meaning in documentary – some of which are discussed below.

V. THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING IN DOCUMENTARY

The conscious and unconscious use of conventions – aesthetic, technical, cultural – all determine the outcome of a documentary programme, as do the editorial, political and production relationships that determine how a programme is made (Silverstone, 1985: 64, 101). In considering the way in which meaning is constructed, important factors range from scheduling techniques and publicity for a programme (Hughes, 1996: 53), to gate-keeping. (Shoemaker, 1997: 57). In making meaning, the project is one that attempts to mould the confusion and chaos of reality into a ‘uni-accentual’ message for the audience – a project that we know is ultimately impossible (Hartley, 1990: 63). Nonetheless it is important to acknowledge the ways in which documentary attempts to make its subject matter available to an audience in terms that are comprehensible by that audience and

⁵² American political scientist, Bernard Cohen has commented that, “The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” (Jakubowicz, 1999: 18). Locally, Peter Cillie said, “newspapers sin more through what they don’t say than through what they do say’ (in Roelofse, 1982: 37)” (Louw, 1984: 35).

desirable for hegemony (Hall et al, 1978: 54). Only some of the techniques will be covered below, with further explorations of this issue appearing throughout the dissertation.

The conventions that govern documentary production are often invisible or taken for granted – despite the ideological significance that they contain (Allen, 1992a: 7). Formats that encourage us to view content in a particular way is just one such convention (Bondebjerg, 2000: 7). In spite of original content, the codes or styles or formats in which it is conveyed are familiar to the viewer, facilitating the decoding process and according with pre-established cultural expectations (Silverstone, 1985: 177; Hartley, 1990: 32). These formats offer such security in the viewing process that audiences may even feel cheated if they are not strictly adhered to (Vaughan, 1988: 36). The result is that many programmes, including documentaries, are rigid and restricted, presenting familiar formats as a way of enhancing believability (Vaughan, 1988: 36; Cowie, 1999: 30). Even novel subject matter may be overridden by conventionality of form (Dahlgren, 1999: 204).

Related to the operation of format, is the way that narrative in documentary contributes “to the generation of meaning” (Dahlgren, 1999:193). Far from being confined to fiction, narratives infuse documentaries with unnatural cultural and ideological structures to which audiences respond (Bird & Dardenne, 1997: 335, 336, 342, 343; Renov, 1993a: 2). They create artificial closure, ordering and coherence in a manner that influences preferred meaning and curtails textual possibility. Inevitably fear, fantasy and morality enter into the narrative as part of its structure and ideological function (Corner, 1995: 57; Dahlgren, 1999: 193). Narrative, it seems, can never be value-free. If narrative is an integral part of documentary – including the documentaries in my selection, so is exposition and “persuasion is the dominant trope for non-fiction films in the tradition of John Grierson” (Renov, 1993b: 29). It functions to complicate the narrative with arguments that further cement the cultural-ideological character of the text (Corner, 1995: 58). Finally, myth works in tandem with other strategies, residing in documentary format as a “model for culture”, a framework in which deviance and normality are prescribed

(Bird & Dardenne, 1997: 336, 338). As news and documentary stories are filtered through the same myths of good and evil over and over again, we see how “the mythic domain legitimates and celebrates the basic structures, functions, and leadership of the social order. One can see TV news programs as recurring advertisements for the existing social order” (Dahlgren, 1999: 211).

If format, narrative, exposition and myth are some of the broad ways in which meaning is constructed in documentary, more tangible perhaps are the visual and verbal strategies that work to execute their function. Visuals are particularly powerful and “provide[s] strong clues for ‘preferred’ meanings in the news stories” (Dahlgren, 1999: 199).

Aesthetic decisions about lighting, camera angles, position, the number and nature of shots and so on, all create meaning and ensure the artificiality of representation (Corner, 1995: 80; Dahlgren, 1999: 201). Close-ups, for example, tend to elicit emotion and encourage viewer identification – and have been criticised as a particular vehicle for bias because they exclude context in a way that a wide angle would not (Cowie, 1999: 31; Minh-ha, 1993: 95; Dahlgren, 1999: 201). Medium shots suggest ‘conversational distance’, long shots objectify, bird’s-eye-views suggest omniscience (Dahlgren, 1999: 201). The angle at which the speaking person is shot distinguishes the presenter from the interviewee from the peripheral participant (Vaughan, 1988: 37). Often, the number of times a particular setting or sequence is shot, is suggestive of a premeditation to visuality in documentary, which is not always acknowledged (Corner, 1995: 80). Consequently, in spite of the “naturalism and realism” of visual accounts, they are inevitably part of the “ideological manipulation” of filmmaking, where the techniques used to create fiction are just as active in non-fiction as a means to connote (Dahlgren, 1999: 203; Corner, 1995: 59; Renov, 1993a: 3).

The visual alone, although influential, is also limited by its inability to single-handedly create exposition. It is the verbal that carries “the burden of naming and description, of interpretation and evaluation” (Corner, 1995: 61, 62). The verbal ties down the meaning of the images, and in so doing, ‘anchors’ the meaning of the text, limiting the variety of interpretations a viewer is able to place on the visual (Seiter, 1992: 44; Corner, 1995: 63).

In an alternative perspective, rather than shutting down avenues of explanation, the verbal adds to the layered complexity of a text (Fetveit, 2002: 7). Whatever one's perspective, the verbal is unavoidably used by documentaries in the construction of meaning. Commentary, interviews and the use of a presenter/narrator/host are examples of how programmes harness the power of the verbal.

In terms of the presenter, Anneliese Burgess in *Special Assignment* stands as the beacon of morality for the programme, outlining and constraining expectations for the viewer, directing audiences towards desirable interpretations and lending the documentary a stability and coherence (Hughes, 1996: 53). Her personality is eclipsed by the formulaic reliability and confidence of the presentation technique, such that believability and trust in the content of what she is saying is heightened (Vaughan, 1988: 37). Interviews too, are "openly interventionist" in nature and shape the meaning of documentaries (Corner, 1995: 89). By privileging certain perspectives through interviews, audiences are encouraged to identify with interviewees – to believe them and to empathise with them (Cowie, 1999: 31). The believability of interview material is perhaps magnified where 'expert' interviewees are part of the exposition and

The wheeling out of carriers of expert knowledge is endlessly used...Currently fashionable are geneticists, forensic scientists, environmental scientists, psychologists, psychiatrists, crime profilers, and even criminologists. To the media, never has the mantle of science been sexier (Brown, 2003: 40).

The constructedness of interviews is often concealed by the absence of questions used to elicit responses and belies the fact that the interview as it happened is very different from the end-product (Corner, 1995: 89). Commentary, while sometimes crude and explicitly ideological, can also perform a vital role in the construction of documentary meaning and has regained some of its lost popularity in recent years (Vaughan, 1988: 35). In South African documentaries it appears to be a significant means by which to knit together disparate elements of edited footage.

If the use of commentary, presenters and interviews is not always inevitable in documentary, editing is. It is, perhaps, the most significant meaning-making technique employed by documentary-makers to mould the chaos of reality into an understandable

story. Even *Cinéma Vérité*, with its claims to be less duplicitous than other forms of documentary, is ultimately a product of editing and the concomitant manipulation of ‘authenticity’ (O’Sullivan et al, 1994: 118). The distance between ‘reality’ and the final documentary product can be immense since overriding concerns are more immediately with the creation of an argument, the pace of the narrative, intelligibility, introductions and conclusions than with rendering truth (Silverstone, 1985: 110; Corner, 1995: 80).

In addition to various techniques and broad conventions that determine preferred meaning for documentaries, trends to do with content and approach can equally affect what audiences see and understand. One of the most persistent, for example, are the negative news values, which appear to dominate documentary in South Africa in spite of the fact that positive – and equally captivating – stories do exist (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1998: 234). Another, is the prevalence of a ‘softer’ human-interest approach, evidenced in much of the documentary on the BBC, where investigative journalism has been sidelined in order to make way for more emotive stories (Brunsdon et al, 2001: 41). Humanisation can “turn a statistic into an unemployed miner or a bereaved parent” (Bird & Dardenne, 1997: 343). It is a necessary strategy for dramatisation and in order to create a magnetic emotiveness to attract audiences (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1998: 234). A third trend is one that is certainly detrimental to the creation of nuance and complexity in documentary – and one which is unfortunately evident in many of the documentaries under examination in this dissertation - the privileging of event over process and individual over social force. Events are simply easier to show on screen than longer-term processes and have the additional advantage of being more interesting. “Processes”, it seems, “lack the dramatic impact of an event” (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1998: 232). This trend is also encouraged by the fact that individual, episodic stories are easier to depict than invisible structures (Galtung & Ruge, 1973: 57). Additionally, a tradition of individualism makes it appropriate to view events as the outcome of ‘free will’ rather than social conditions (Schudson, 1996: 152).

Creating preferred meaning in documentary is a complex process by which the ‘voice’ of the documentary transmits certain ideologies through the use of a variety of techniques

and conventions. The idea of an overall voice for any programme is a useful one, referring as it does to the “intangible, moirélike pattern formed by the unique interaction of all the film’s codes” (Nichols, 1988: 50). Significantly, “it applies to all modes of documentary” and this surely includes documentary that is specifically designed for television audiences (Nichols, 1988: 50). The medium of television itself alters the meaning and function of documentary – and since the documentaries covered in this dissertation are all of the television type, a brief introduction is in order.

Television tries to both ‘ingest’ and ‘project’ culture, with important ideological consequences that make the examination of the form and content of programmes, including documentary programmes, significant (Corner, 1995: 4, 5). This significance is even more pronounced considering the mass media effect of which television is effortlessly capable, reaching a wide audience with its influence (Hughes, 1996: 48). Television documentary has been accused of compromising on ‘moral authority’ through the hybridisations and adaptations demanded by the medium (Hughes, 1996: 48). Whatever one’s take on the matter, by the 1960s in most countries across the world, television documentary, with its project of showing actuality, predominated over documentary film and

the genre was typified by the use of an authoritative presenter and/or voice-over, recorded interviews with experts and ordinary people, and visual ‘evidence’ via location shots, archive film, photographs, etc. The seamless editing and smooth narrative flow of such documentaries, which are still prevalent in today’s television, contribute to creating a sense of irrefutable truth and authenticity which disguises the editorial values and choices (O’ Sullivan et al, 1994: 117).

It was only really in the 1990s that documentaries became a source of fascination for the masses, having been livened up through neoliberal pressures for commercial appeal (Winston, 2000: 40, 44). Indeed, some might argue that hybrid genres like docusoaps and docuglitz have ensured the survival and popularity of documentary (Winston, 2000: 55). Linked to these commercial pressures and also important for documentary popularity, are appropriate scheduling, the skill with which the documentaries are made, the publicity and promotional efforts behind them and so on (Kuehl, 1988: 105). While these may seem positive, it is nonetheless true that the threat to documentary imposed by

commercial exigencies has often had three less than desirable outcomes: sensationalism, the shrinking of documentary creativity in favour of audience-pulling formulae and the following of limited journalistic norms (Winston, 2000: 56; Hughes, 1996: 50; Vaughan, 1988: 46).

Television, it seems, has resulted in mixed fortunes for documentary, encouraging a dynamism and potentially innovative hybridisation on the one hand, but often stifling creativity and imposing drastic limitations on the other. These are relatively recent issues confronting documentary – ones not faced by the documentary film of earlier years.

5. CRIME

I. THE MORAL PANIC

Perceptions of crime, some argue, are as important as crime itself, potentially breeding a loss of faith in institutions of modernity or, worse still, prompting a challenge to the systems of democracy. Isolated moral panics about specific types of crime can coalesce into a general ‘law and order’ panic, fuelled by the media and detrimental to the image of the nation. In an era of heightened awareness of risk, moral panics seem to abound on a global scale. South Africa’s continuing political and social transitions make our environment additionally ripe for panics induced by fears of change and beliefs in social disintegration. The extent to which the SABC fuels moral panics about crime or subverts them is an important factor in the dissertation – and one that is informed by an awareness of some of the historical roots of the theory, its empirical strengths, and its implications for contemporary documentary renderings.

In 1971, Jock Young first referred to a moral panic when writing about statistics on increasing drug abuse (Young, 1971; Thompson, 1998: 7). Yet it was Cohen’s definitive study on the British 1960s disturbances by the ‘Mods and Rockers’ in *Folk Devils and Moral Panic* that cemented the concept and set the scene for further analyses (Cohen, 1972; Thompson, 1998: 7). In this, Cohen examines the way in which an event or group becomes identified as a threat to social mores by the public, the media and agents of

social control so that stereotypes appear vindicated. The implications, according to Cohen, can either be brief or long-term. The moral panic may dissipate or it may prompt changes in law, social organisation or even cultural identity (Hall et al, 1978: 16, 17).

Following in Cohen's pioneering footsteps, were Hall et al, who undertook a study on the moral panic surrounding mugging in the 1970s in Britain. Rather than accepting a functionalist perspective that views the reaction to mugging as a consequence of real conditions, Hall et al take a radical stance by questioning the ideological underpinnings in the construction of mugging as a problem. They ask why the British public reacted to mugging in the 1970s in the way that it did, and why there was a general increase in the fear of crime since the 1960s. Rather than being a new phenomenon, they suggest that, "Little more than 100 years ago there occurred in the streets of London an outcrop of robbery with violence. It was called 'garrotting', which was an attempt to choke or strangle the victim of a robbery. (Mugging differs from garrotting only in its use of offensive weapons)" (Hall et al, 1978: 4). They concluded that it was the reaction to mugging and the label 'mugging' that was new, rather than the phenomenon itself (Hall et al, 1978: 6). They attribute the panic that grew up around mugging to growing anxieties around social change in Britain, with a perception of decline being associated with increased crime, which, in turn, became associated with immigration, the indiscipline of the youth, the erosion of the Protestant work ethic, urban re-development, a post-war growth in Hedonism and the breakdown in family values (Hall et al, 1978: vii, viii, 157).⁵³

Many further studies of moral panics have taken place, with the result that the term 'moral panic' has become part and parcel of the criminological lexicon - particularly for studies on the media and crime. While there are many different approaches in analysing the moral panic, some of its accepted features remain consistent.⁵⁴ An enduring element

⁵³ A further example of an early study on the creation of 'crime waves' by the media is that of Fishman in 1978. He showed how, in 1976, the media constructed a crime wave against the elderly in New York (Fattah, 1997: 15).

⁵⁴ Firstly, is defining public concern about a certain issue that is seen as a threat to the social order (Thompson, 1998: 9). Secondly, the cause of this escalating anxiety is seen to reside in the stresses of societies in transition or undergoing some sort of crisis (Thompson, 1998: 8). These stresses or crises

of the moral panic – and one that has direct relevance for this thesis – is the role of the media in promoting panics in an escalatory manner that could be termed the “spiral effect” (Thompson, 1998: 7). Indeed, the media mobilises, fuels and legitimates moral panics in an unproductive manner. Not only does it tend to leave “the real causes of social breakdown unaddressed”, but it works in conjunction with a sense of loss and decline to undermine positive images of the nation (Thompson, 1998: 3).

In the global era, characterised by a risk society and ever-pervasive mass media, moral panics abound. Rather than being concerned, as in early modernisation, with the accumulation of wealth, societies are characterised by a hyper-awareness of risk, including criminal risk (Thompson, 1998: 22, 23). As a consequence, moral panics have increased in their frequency and scope. Not only is the succession of moral panics evermore rapid, but the foci of the panics have become so pervasive as to encompass almost every aspect of our reality – from disease to crime to ecological disaster (Thompson, 1998: 1, 2). The media seize opportunities to exploit the climate of risk through sensationalised stories that attract audiences and documentary is no exception (Thompson, 1998: 1). Certainly, this global media preoccupation and the fostering of moral panics have impacted on the SABC and can be seen in at least some of its documentary exploits. Many other elements of the media representation of crime are global in their reach and can be seen in the analyses that follow. Indeed, an understanding of the general myopia and analytical droughts that often characterise the approach to crime stories worldwide, has informed many of my explorations.

become translated into more tangible concerns - about respectability, the family, the breakdown of the city or the disintegration of the nation and so on (Hall et al, 1978: 144). Thirdly, anxieties are projected onto a scapegoat, “into which *all* the disturbing experiences are condensed and then symbolically rejected or ‘cast out’. These scapegoats have attributed to them the role of *causing* the various elements of disorganisation and dislocation which have produced social anxiety in the first place” (Hall et al, 1978: 157). As a result, the scapegoat group experiences a significant rise in hostility (Thompson, 1998: 9). Fourthly, where the moral panic manifests in a fear of crime, it has the effect of promoting control strategies. The use of increasingly coercive measures is legitimated by the perceived extent of crime and loss of order (Hall et al, 1978: 221).

II. CRIME AND THE MEDIA

The importance of the intersection of crime and the media cannot be underestimated. Rather than simply reflecting an external criminal reality, the media “creates and defines a broad public reality of crime” (Surette, 1997: 212). It sets the agenda on what the public sphere should be concerned about while also constructing the end beliefs about that agenda (Surette, 1997: 1, 201). Indeed, there is much evidence to suggest that the media is becoming more embroiled in the discourse on crime as people rely less on localised sources for risk assessments and more on mediated discourses, which come to define their reality (Pratt, 2000: 45). This reality often is one where there is nostalgia for a “lost past of tranquillity and tradition” in contrast to the present social decay (Ericson, 1995: xx). Additionally, the reality is one where fear of crime dominates.

It seems clear that public perceptions of crime do not accord with actual crime rates or the nature of crimes committed (Fattah, 1997: 13). The media is often blamed and some studies correlate public perceptions with media treatment of crime (Thompson, 1998: 23, 24). Notions of who the victims and offenders are, feelings of vulnerability and fear, the impact on quality of life produced by that fear and the adoption of defensive strategies by the public are all pinned on media representations of crime and punishment (Barak, 1994: 22; Findlay, 1999: 11). South Africa has not escaped this kind of interpretation. Accusations of media culpability in the fuelling of perceptions about crime and fear of crime, are gaining ground (Naudé, 1998b: 23). Yet for every thesis that links fear of crime to the media, there seems to be a counter-thesis that suggests reality, including a fear of crime, is not, in fact, constructed by the media at all. According to this view, “the research indicates that the effects of media exposure on fear of crime are less significant than any naïve hypothesis would suggest” (Sacco, 1995: 151).

Whether or not one wholly believes in the ‘social construction of reality’ perspective, what is clear is that the media are firmly part of the discourse on crime and punishment rather than simply being the communicator of it (Ericson, 1995: xi). The extent of the media’s role can perhaps be glimpsed by the increasing demand for crime programmes.

The end of the 1990s, for example, has witnessed a demand for programmes falling within the ‘real crime’ genre (Brunsdon et al, 2001: 46).⁵⁵

As the demand for programmes on crime and punishment grows, their quality often declines. In an era where “Moments of production and consumption are increasingly the same”, simplified explanations are frequently enveloped by a reliance on sensationalism and drama (Brown, 2003: 23). It seems true that, in terms of our crime education from the media, “we gain our knowledge of life in catastrophic forms” (Brecht cited in Sparks, 2000: 132). Firstly, ordinary crimes are ignored in favour of the bizarre or unusual (Thompson, 1998: 23). Secondly, deeper analyses are eclipsed as the lurid features of crime news are overplayed and - ‘newsworthy’ stories come packaged as entertainment (Fattah, 13-15; Brown, 2003: 31, 123). In particular, there is a prevalence of stories on sexual or violent crime (Barak, 1994: 11). In contemporary times, such stories not only serve as a moral tale, but also cater to the demands of commercialism by becoming evermore spectacular according to the requirements of entertainment and the dictates of audience ratings. The process of commodification does not reveal nodes of institutional power in any simple way, yet on a general level, it indicates that concerns with ‘objectivity’ and ‘accuracy’ have taken a backseat to the market (Brown, 2003: 23; Barak, 1994: 12). This is the global context of crime documentary into which programmes such as *Special Assignment* are thrust. If the sensationalised drama of ‘villains and victims’ is one general negative trend of crime stories in the media (Sacco, 1995: 144), the selectivity that relates to this – and which is fuelled by a variety of other agendas – is undoubtedly another.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ In the United Kingdom in the twenty years to 1998, current affairs drifted away from foreign affairs and more towards crime and consumer news (Winston: 2000: 44).

⁵⁶ Inevitable selectivity is made detrimentally negative by the recurring patterns that determine its nature. The manner in which the filtering process is undertaken consistently favours certain types of crime over others (Surette, 1997: 66) - in a way that often contributes to ‘deviance amplification’ and sensationalism, while excluding causal explanations. Another common feature of crime news/documentary selectivity is the reliance on law-and-order sources that give predictable content and ensure that public understandings of crime and punishment develop in a way that upholds the status quo (Roshier, 1973: 40; Surette, 1997: 67).

The problems of selectivity are many, but one of the major social outcomes of both selectivity and the related feature of sensationalism is that predatory criminals are demonised in a way that perpetuates stereotypes about the ‘other’. Far from being objective, news and documentary frequently rely on these simplistic, one-dimensional constructs to serve drama rather than analysis (Barak, 1994: 35; Surette, 1997: 226). Dichotomies of similarity/otherness and inclusion/exclusion reign supreme, with already disempowered groups on the losing end (Brown, 2003: 45). The “poor and powerless” bear the brunt of pejorative ‘othering’ and the street criminal is conventionally seen as young, black and unemployed (Barak, 1994: 11; Surette, 1997: 69). White-collar crime is often sidelined, and where it does garner media attention, is seen as a product of social circumstances (Surette, 1997: 68; Ericson, 1995: xviii). The violent, black criminal on the other hand is demonised on a strictly individual level (Ericson, 1995: xviii).

Selectivity, sensationalism and ‘othering’ are detrimental for the creation of explanation and understanding in documentary. Indeed, explanation and analysis are often relegated to the backburner in favour of an individualistic focus that creates drama by sidestepping ‘difficult’ causality (Sacco, 1995: 153). The focus on the individual ensures that “crime and deviance enter public communication in episodic, personal, dramatised and scandalous ways” (Sparks, 2000: 139. See also Sparks, 2000: 132).

Where structure is ignored, causal understanding is not advanced and this has fundamental implications for nation-building on the silver-screen (Barak, 1994: 33, 34). How can there be investment in the idea of a nation, where there is no understanding of macro-level structures in society? How do we perceive the nation if crime is seen as the product of individual predators? In its extreme form, the focus on the individual does not even extend to a focus on the individual perpetrator, his personality or motivations, but is instead preoccupied with the details of individual crimes (Surette, 1997: 68). This is all part of the way ‘negative *events*’ are privileged over ‘positive *processes*’ in the news – and often in documentary too (Galtung & Ruge, 1973: 58). Politically, the lack of causal explanation “allows the social system to escape interrogation” (Fiske, 1987: 168). It is ‘pro-establishment’, it supports the status quo and sees no need for political and structural

change in the fight against crime (Ericson, 1995: xi; Barak, 1994: 12). It is through the reproduction of dominant discourses, which avoid the suggestion of fundamental change, that viewers are able to reinforce their beliefs and relax in the knowledge that their interpretation of the world remains unchallenged (Ericson, 1995: xvi). Familiar arguments in familiar formats consequently appear to fulfil a conservative ideological function.

Delimiting normative moral boundaries in documentary undoubtedly is predicated on selectivity of the worst kind, where cause is submerged by sensationalism in the quest to show a narrow view of 'our values'. At the same time, however, it should also be noted that the subscription to normative morality can play a pivotal role in 'gluing' communities together in their unified belief in right and wrong. Potentially this could be fruitful for nation-building. Often it is not. Ultimately it depends on the individual production. What is certain, however, is that the assertion of a normative morality in documentary is a trend that is global in scope and one that provides an important marker for my analysis of documentaries on SABC3. If it is true, as some contend, that viewers seldom remember the details of crime stories, we must surely look to the delimitation of normative morality as the crux of signification. In this view, crime news and documentary is symbolic – creating parameters for society based on myths of good and evil, devils and heroes where narratives codes provide clues to viewers for particular 'correct' interpretations of what they see (Bird & Dardenne, 1997: 337). We desire our programmes to function as 'ritual moral exercises', as ways that we can vicariously experience the struggle between good and evil (Fattah, 1997: 13; Barak, 1994: 5). In the 'morality plays' that we see on television, our imaginations become fused with our lived realities, "weaving together the themes of enigma and revelation, fear and loathing, justice and injustice, the morally culpable and the moral resolution, for our voyeuristic longing" (Brown, 2003: 40).

The creation of normative morality is a consistent feature of documentaries on crime and punishment, as are sensationalism, 'othering', selectivity and so on. Many of these techniques and features of documentary production are, unfortunately, negative for the

production of an uplifting image of the nation. Two further examples of negative global trends are, firstly, the sidelining of the victim, and, secondly, the privileging of control discourses.

In terms of the victim or potential victim, documentaries are often seen as fulfilling a vital informative function by “making potential victims more cautious, and providing crime surveillance and avoidance information to citizens” (Surette, 1997: 67). Yet in the substance of the documentaries themselves, the victim is often notably absent. This points to the value of including criminological insights (such as those informed by left realism) in documentary-making, so that the victim, the offender, the social context, public involvement and state responses are all considered in the production phases. Presently, however, where victimhood is addressed, it usually follows unproductive, stereotypical patterns. Victimhood is usually seen as random, ignoring “the social distributional character of victimization” (Sacco, 1995: 149). Victim voyeurism is another feature of documentary production that detracts from explanation. This tends to limit the understanding of crime produced in these documentaries.

Limitations also appear in the types of solutions implicitly offered to the crime problem by documentaries. Although the criminal justice system is seldom the focus of stories on crime and punishment (itself a parochialism), it is clear how the overall function and direction of criminal justice is seen (Surette, 1997: 69, 70). The overall, converging conclusions about the criminal justice system in the media often originate from contradictory opinions about the performance of the police, corrections and so on. Some academics claim that the police are seen on television as more effective than they are in reality (Sacco, 1995: 143). On the other hand, some insist that the criminal justice system and its agents are seen as ineffective and incompetent in news and documentary (Barak, 1994: 11). Whatever the stance, the concluding note of both perspectives is that increased criminal justice control is the supreme solution to crime (Surette, 1997: 21). Also known as the ‘retributive justice perspective’, we see this approach reflected in calls for the death penalty and harsher punishments (Barak, 1994: 21).

Uncovering the recurring facets of crime documentary production in a manner that has global relevance, such as the above observation about punitive advocacy in news, is an increasingly important sphere of academic investigation – and one that denies the ability to separate criminology from media studies (Garland & Sparks, 2000: 189, 200). For my purposes, exploring how documentaries treat crime, including whether they create moral panics, sensational accounts, stereotypical views - and how the nation is imagined as a result - is pivotal in understanding the direction of the SABC. Because of the intersection of crime and the media in my study, it should be acknowledged that criminology has been making great strides in the arena of media studies in a way that has both informed my research and created a niche for it.

Perhaps critical criminology can be said to have pioneered the criminological concern with media representation. This theoretical enclave began investigating the way in which media depictions of crime perpetuate stereotypes about groups of people by labelling them as ‘criminal’, with a particular focus on “young people, black people, and ‘militant’ sections of trades union movements” (Brown, 2003: 30). Street crime, violent crime and those marked as the perpetrators, are seen as being over-represented in the media in a fashion that is conducive to the moral panics discussed above. These concerns, identified by critical criminologists in the 1970s, illustrate how “for close to thirty years it has been a standard and central theme of criminology that the public’s attitude toward crime is shaped by the media” (Schwartz & Friedrichs, 1998: 434). Many of the early ideas still have resounding significance in today’s analyses and have been followed, most notably, by postmodern approaches that similarly addresses media issues (Naudé, 1998b: 23).

So-called newsmaking criminology is highly influenced by postmodernism, encouraging the deconstruction of media discourses to reveal their underlying cultural and political ideological function, including an explication of sensationalism, their construction of negative imagery, their promotion of punitive control measures, their obfuscations with regard to the causes of crime and so on (Naudé, 1998b: 23; Barak, 1994: 21). The media, in this view, consistently defines crime in ways that reinforce particular cultural perspectives while ignoring the role that the media itself plays in creating official and

unofficial approaches to crime and views on crime in general (Barak, 1994: 20).⁵⁷ In a nutshell, postmodern newsmaking criminology aims to demystify the crime content of media discourses in a way that opens paths for more productive future representations. My approach in this dissertation has much in common with this. Yet it is not only informed by postmodern criminology's concern with the media. It is largely preoccupied with a variety of criminologies and the way that their global reach has (often implicitly) informed the crime perspectives of documentaries on the SABC. These criminologies are discussed below in broad terms and will be further probed in the body of the dissertation.

III. CRIMINOLOGY

Transitional moments in society are reflected in criminological trends and therefore representations in the media that attempt to reflect 'reality' are likely to create preferred meanings that reflect both broad societal disjunctures as well as theoretical and empirical criminological developments (Garland & Sparks, 2000: 189).

Presently, we are in a moment of postmodern criminology, the chronological successor to positivist criminology, radical criminology and left realism – all of which fall under the broad ambit of modernist criminology. Positivism, with both its progressive and regressive elements, undoubtedly set the tone for criminology in the twentieth century and remains one of the strongest explanatory paradigms in the investigation of crime (Voigt et al, 1994: 147). Relying on scientific methods of empirical investigation and a belief in objectivity, it focuses, above all else, on cause and, as a consequence, often points to solutions (Voigt et al, 1994: 140, 147; Howe, 2000: 224; Young & Matthews, 1992: 2). It embodies an inherently optimistic ethos, dominated by the notion that humankind is moving in a progressive direction, in which criminology has a role to play.

⁵⁷ Newsmaking criminology has much in common with the more self-consciously postmodern constitutive criminology and both begin with deconstruction, with a view to ultimate reconstruction (Barak, 1994: 20). After “‘overthrow[ing]’ mainstream discourses”, replacement discourses are meant to encourage the media's exploration of more comprehensive views on crime as well as alternative views on crime (Barak, 1994: 21. See also Bak, 1999: 32). In terms of the latter, for example, viewing crime through a lens of peacemaking criminology is seen as potentially productive, where peacemaking criminology “refers to those proposals and programs that foster mediation, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and community” (Barak, 1994: 21).

Both biological and psychological positivism have their roots in the nineteenth century and focus on individual defects rather than social organisation (Voigt et al, 1994: 141). Crime is seen as the product either of biological determinism or of poor socialisation, where the criminal is believed to have been created from deeply embedded and distant childhood traumas. The growth of psychology and psychiatry around the turn of the twentieth century provided ample foundation for the latter perspective to flourish (Voigt et al, 1994: 142). Arguably more valuable than the biological or psychological perspective, is sociological positivism, which offers a broader view of criminality as it investigates how specific cultural contexts and social settings are conducive to the development of criminality (Voigt et al, 1994: 146). With the potential to link to broad structural questions, it offers important insights into the workings of society on a more macro-level, while still being able to articulate with more micro-level theories on human behaviour and the immediate social environment. Its theoretical strength can be seen in the fact that it is the leading criminological approach in the United States (Voigt et al, 1994: 147).⁵⁸

Anomie or Strain plays an important role in my analysis of *Very fast guys*, a documentary examining the lives of young gangsters. Moulded by both Durkheim and Merton and (depending on the theorist) including structural, cultural and even psychological elements, this has become one of the most fundamental cornerstones of the sociological positivism stable (Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 175, 176). Briefly, it suggests that, through an inability to achieve goals of status and material acquisition through their disadvantaged positions in society, potential offenders become actual offenders by pursuing these goals through illegitimate avenues. The focus of the theory is often on the individual context, while alluding to larger structures and classes of people (Agnew, 1998: 177; Hagan, 1994: 32). It is closely linked to subcultural perspectives that explore gang formation and directly attribute it to the experience of Anomie (Hagan, 1994: 33). The underlying assumptions of this positivist theory, and the extent to which it informs programmes on crime and punishment on SABC3, is vital in my analyses. The theory of

⁵⁸ Some of the most prominent theories that fall within the scope of sociological positivism – all of which have valuable explanatory power – are Strain or Anomie, subcultural theory, social learning/differential association and social control (Agnew, 1998: 178).

Anomie is not, however, the only theory of fundamental significance in the positivist paradigm.

Social learning or differential association is a micro-level theory that aims to create a “social psychological understanding of individual deviation and criminal behaviour” (Voigt et al, 1994: 226). Gabriel Tarde, a contemporary of Durkheim, attempted to explain criminality by looking to the way in which criminal behaviour is learned through entirely normal processes of socialisation and hence through “*positive relationships with deviant others*” (Agnew, 1998: 178. See also Voigt et al, 1994: 146). In many ways the opposite theory of social learning, social control examines how individual relationships in society function to prohibit or constrain criminal behaviour, suggesting that people have a predisposition to criminality unless they are otherwise socialised (Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 246).

If these theories form the cornerstone of positivist thinking in many ways, their theoretical depth is matched by the practical strategies to which they are closely linked. In particular, psychological and sociological positivism engage with the causes of criminality in a way that points to large-scale social upliftment. Rehabilitation is the logical corrective procedure in an environment where there is a strong belief that “Individuals became delinquent because they were deprived of proper education, or family socialization, or job opportunities, or proper treatment for their social and psychological problems” (Garland & Sparks, 2000: 194, 195). The era of welfarist intervention provided ample opportunity for positivism and its solutions to gain credibility. Rehabilitation and treatment of the individual was seen as the route to society’s salvation and the way to achieve this, through the consolidation of the welfare state, which would provide ‘top-down’ solutions.

Although rehabilitation gained firm ground, the positivism that underlay much of its rationale was increasingly criticised for its “simplistic view of causation and its naïveté with regard to the problems of service delivery” (Young & Matthews, 1992: 4). Radical critics slated the way in which it ignored the culpability of the criminal justice system in

perpetuating crime and, on a more general level, the way in which structural issues were often sidelined in favour of an increasingly parochial focus on the individual (Young & Matthews, 1992: 2, 4). Indeed, in much positivist thinking, class, race, groups and neighbourhoods are all relegated to the backburner, in ironic contradistinction to the aims and understandings of many early positivist theorists (Hagan, 1994: 38).⁵⁹

In spite of many criticisms, the enduring explanatory power of much positivist thinking is testimony to its strength – and, where it informs documentary, its focus on cause and understanding is undoubtedly constructive in the project of nation-building – as is its practical consort of rehabilitation. Nonetheless, as the welfare state, with its rehabilitative objectives, went into decline, so positivist criminological enterprises went into crisis (Lea, 1998: 176). Perhaps the starting point of this crisis was the direct challenge posed by the growth of critical criminology in the 1970s.

The condemnation of preceding criminological theories became a defining feature in the 1970s evolution of critical perspectives. Within the broad ambit of the critical tradition, as divorced from positivism, a wide variety of theoretical stances were to develop and these have “been associated with numerous titles: critical criminology; conflict criminology; radical criminology; the new criminology; materialistic criminology, to name a few” (Voigt et al, 1994: 160).

⁵⁹ Other broad criticisms of positivism include, firstly, the way in which it assumes a societal value consensus and upholds the political, economic and legal status quo through a lack of interrogation (Voigt et al, 1994: 222). Secondly, positivistic theories are held to “overpredict crime since many who are in so-called criminogenic environments do not commit criminal offenses” (Reed & Yeager, 1998: 294). Thirdly, there is a lack of acknowledgement of individual culpability based on free choice – people are seen to be blameless by virtue of a belief in the environmental and psychological compulsions that drive them to commit crime (Reed & Yeager, 1998: 294). This notion of human agency is one of the primary criticisms of Anomie or Strain theory (Henry & Emswiler, 1998: 176). Anomie has been criticised on a variety of other levels too – for ignoring goals other than financial success that drive ambition, for ignoring factors other than class that could inhibit the achievement of goals, for not explaining why only a limited number of ‘strained individuals’ become crime-prone and for its inability to explain why middle-class delinquency exists in spite of the absence of Strain (Agnew, 1998: 180; Henry & Emswiler, 1998: 176). Subcultural theory, in its original form, has been criticised for similar reasons, including its almost exclusive focus on strained lower-class youths and their gang formation, while ignoring its manifestation in middle-class youths (Voigt et al, 1994: 248). The extensive criticism of Anomie, beginning in the 1970s, has meant that social learning and social control have dominated the positivistic outlook in the last few years – although these too have not remained criticism-free (Agnew, 1998: 177). Social learning, for example, has been censured for its assumption that socialisation is always entirely effective and because it “means that *individuals* can’t be deviant, only *cultures* can be deviant” (Akers, 1998: 230).

In one way or another, the focus of critical criminology always boils down to an examination of the power struggles in society, where systems of domination and definition result in conflicts that find expression in the criminal justice system (Voigt et al, 1994: 158). In looking at hierarchies, radical criminology tackles the way in which the legal system and agents of crime control operate in the interests of the elite and to maintain a capitalistic status quo (Voigt et al, 1994: 159, 251). The state, it is argued, consistently represents the interests of the economically powerful (Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 332). Conflict criminology embodies a critical offshoot that sees conflict as inevitable in all societies, but, unlike radical criminology, does not necessarily see this conflict stemming from an unjust economic system (Voigt et al, 1994: 262). Ultimately, it “assumes that there is more division in society than consensus and that through struggle and alliances, some groups gain more power than others” (Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 331). In common with radical perspectives, conflict theory believes that the groups with more power manipulate the criminal justice system to their advantage (Belknap, 1996: 52). Overall, the critical perspective, that incorporates both conflict and radical positions, embodies a definitive step away from positivism in many ways, moving away from a pre-occupation with cause and “a world of pathologies, deviances and otherness” (Muncie, 1998: 221). This is not to say, however, that critical perspectives are always irreconcilable with positivism (Voigt et al, 1994: 159). Although challenging many of positivism’s deterministic and functionalist attributes, both paradigms aim to explain the existence of crime and to point, either explicitly or implicitly, to solutions that must be sought.

As with positivism too, radical criminology in particular has been subject to much criticism. One of the most fundamental is that it is a reactive criminology – focusing its attentions largely on the inadequacies of mainstream criminology and the status quo while not really producing useful, forward-looking investigations of crime or suggestions of solutions (Muncie, 1998: 223; Matthews & Young, 1992: 7, 8). While I would argue that it *does* implicitly point to broad solutions, it is certainly true that it does not offer a ‘how-to guide’ to accompany them and thus never pinpoints tangible answers in the form

of rehabilitation, for example. This shortcoming can perhaps be attributed to its pervasive 'macro-focus'. Concentrating on structure does not allow useful insights into individual behaviour and the step-by-step corrective procedures that this would promote (Voigt et al, 1994: 160). Its routine condemnation of the state also comes under fire. Many radicals themselves realised that the state's protective functions were necessary – particularly since those on the right of the political spectrum attempted to dismantle the ameliorative aspects of the state apparatus in late 1970s Britain (Matthews & Young, 1992: 7, 8).

The right's desire to dismantle the 'welfare' elements of the welfare state is indicative of one of the ironies of this period in the 1970s - that radical criminology was accompanied by a conservative backlash arguably created by the turmoil of post-war identity. In Britain, this was exacerbated by large-scale immigration and 'moral panics' about homosexuality, the youth and race. The result of this was that the fervour of radical criminology was doused and leftist criminologists shifted more towards the centre of the political spectrum. The left realism that sprang from this moderation has had an enormous impact on criminology, offering temperate views with explanatory power and a comprehensive outlook. Documentaries that appear to be informed by left realist views are illuminating, although their criticism of the state renders their outlook less positive than that offered by a strictly positivistic perspective. This will be discussed further in Chapter Four, particularly with regard to *Atlantis lost*.

Left realism does not lose radical criminology's concern with class, structure, and the administration of crime, but includes, among other things, elements of positivism as contributing to the understanding of cause (Hudson, 2000: 173, 174; Young & Matthews, 1992: 2). In this way, "It is true that realism does not reject out of hand the traditions of sociological criminology" (Young & Matthews, 1992: 1). Anomie and relative deprivation are fundamental to left realist thinking, as is subcultural theory, which provides a platform to link macro- and micro-level issues (Hudson, 2000: 174; Young & Matthews, 1992: 3, 9). This is not to suggest that left realism is simply reconstituted positivism. Unlike positivism, it sees the individual as culpable in his act of crime, developing an individual assessment of deprivation and consciously deciding to offend

(Young & Matthews, 1992:3, 7, 8, 9). Consequently, rather than viewing the criminal as being the victim of circumstance, left realism adopts the view that “human action involves choice with determinant circumstances” (Young & Matthews, 1992: 7). Also disputing the relapse into positivism is the emphasis that left realism places on the definition of crime, with the belief that “there is nothing intrinsic in the ‘act’ itself, which defines it as a crime” (Young & Matthews, 1992: 10). Selectively incorporating elements from both positivism and radical criminology is not where left realism ends. Notably, it concentrates on the fear of crime and victimisation in an innovative manner and introduces gender as a significant structural component, highlighting the shortcomings of both positivism and radical criminology in this regard (Young & Matthews, 1992: 11). From simple victimisation statistics, the concentration on this aspect of crime has grown in scope and complexity and

The ‘second generation’ survey includes, as we have seen, a wider range of victim questions, but it goes far beyond this area. It includes self-report data on offences committed, public evaluation of police and other agency service delivery and level of legitimacy, police-public encounters, public attitudes to the punishment appropriate to various crimes, avoidance behaviour with regard to spatial characteristics of the area, etc (Young & Matthews, 1992: 14).

Importantly, it legitimates fear of crime and crime as a very real phenomenon in a way that radical criminology does not (Hudson, 2000: 173).⁶⁰

In spite of the useful contributions by left realist theory, it did not help to curb the growing conservatism of the early 1980s and the concomitant development of right realism. The right realist focus was essentially on the ‘underclass’ and the way in which its constituents were intrinsically different from the rest of society, whether by virtue of genetics, psychology or culture (Hudson, 2000: 171, 173; Matthews & Young, 1992: 5, 6). Concentrating on individual blame for crime - in a conservative, neoclassical, voluntaristic manner - meant that crime was seen as “a course of action willingly chosen

⁶⁰ The fear of crime and victimisation form one corner of left realism’s ‘square of crime’ – a shorthand for explaining the comprehensive areas that must be investigated in order to understand and control crime. Comprising the four corners of the square are the victims, the offenders, the role of the state and public involvement. Intervention to control crime, it is argued, should occur at all four points of the square (Young & Matthews, 1992: 3). The concern with controlling crime through the implied structural adjustments, administrative overhaul and social upliftment, illustrates that left realism is decidedly solution-oriented – with some arguing that its corrective approach is one of rehabilitation (Hudson, 2000: 176; Young & Matthews, 1992: 4, 6).

by pathological individuals with no self-control and with a potential for universal contamination and moral degeneracy” (Muncie, 1998: 22. See also Lilly et al, 1995: 207). Sidelining socio-economic causes in favour of this paradigm had important implications for policy – implications that were felt in many locales around the world as they worked with the more general political conservatism of the time. Rather than ameliorating the social environment, policy became anti-welfare, oriented towards punishing the wicked and controlling aberrant individuals such that their deviance would not sully the rest of law-abiding, ‘normal’ society (Morrison, 1995: 211; Matthews & Young, 1992: 6). Consequently, the 1980s saw “the extension of police powers, the erosion of civil liberties and the expansion of imprisonment” (Muncie, 1998: 225).⁶¹

In many ways, postmodern discourse is an extension of this conservatism (Matthews & Young, 1992: 13). With its disillusionment in the modernist enterprise, it does not see solutions residing in social upliftment or rehabilitation, the prevailing sentiment being one of pessimism, characterised by “worn out ideas of scientific and human progress” and “disenchantment with the grand narratives of the Enlightenment itself” (Lea, 1998: 163). Its denial of truth means that crime prevention and punishment are seen as the only limited options available, where seeking out the cause of crime in the name of progress is futile (Young & Matthews, 1992: 12). Consequently, situational strategies to combat crime are privileged over those that seek to root out cause. Focusing on the opportunities available to offenders, it examines ways in which to protect potential victims by looking to the immediate criminogenic environment. In this way, peril is assessed in a manner that reflects a growing trend in self-definition through categories of risk and its administration in terms of risk management, where fear, victimhood and opportunity coalesce.⁶²

⁶¹ In the 1990s, this conservatism could be seen in the ‘three strikes’ and ‘zero tolerance’ approaches in America (Hudson, 2000: 171). Radical criminology had all but disappeared, it seemed and “Within a few years, political and academic discourse was purged of references to social class, poverty and inequality” (Pitts, 1993: 101).

⁶² The risk society is characterised by two major, linked features: firstly, by nostalgia for a perceived more secure past, and secondly, by a focus on discipline, surveillance, prevention and incapacitation, which has much in common with the conservative sentiments and policies of the 1980s (Schwartz & Friedrichs, 1998: 428, 429; O’Malley, 2000: 157). In terms of the former, conservative political currents combine perceptions of crime, family breakdown and moral decay with arguments about returning to an idyllic imagined era of times gone by (Garland & Sparks, 2000: 200). It is here that we see nostalgic arguments

The neo-liberal ethos, which fuels postmodern strategies of crime control, ensures that the agenda of the welfare state is put to rest and cost-effective community crime prevention is emphasised while state involvement is snubbed (O'Malley, 2000: 159, 160; Muncie, 1998: 225). Indeed, from the criminal justice state and the focus on rehabilitation in the 1970s, there was a shift to commercial policing, private security and their control of criminals.

The implication of this for documentaries on crime and punishment is the representation of an ineffectual, possibly even impotent state, the crime-prevention functions of which have either been taken over by private security companies or abandoned to chaos. In terms of presenting an optimistic impression of the nation and fulfilling the broadcaster's mandate, it becomes clear that if the nation is not to be seen as crumbling, it must be defined in terms of civil society that is divorced from the nation-state. The extent to which SABC3 documentaries reflect this postmodern circumvention of the state will be addressed in the chapters that follow, indicating the way in which they slot into global trends and how they adapt global theories to local conditions.

One entire chapter of the dissertation focuses on punishment, including an assessment of the presence of postmodern penology in documentary programmes. As suggested above, postmodern crime control strategies, including punishment, tend towards the immediate and the purely punitive. Imprisonment for the purposes of punishment rather than rehabilitation remains an important feature of contemporary life and the "forcible eviction [of criminals] from social intercourse through imprisonment is seen as an effective method to neutralize the threat, or at least to calm the public anxiety which that threat evokes" (Bauman, 2000: 213).⁶³

coalesce with the latter - a return to more punitive crime control methods, so characteristic of "the postmodern in criminal justice" (O'Malley, 2000: 154; See also Mathiesen, 1990: 13). The desire to return to the chain gang is one example of this nostalgia, as is the promotion of the idea of a curfew law and calls for the death penalty. Although these extreme measures may often not be sustainable in reality, many private preventative and surveillance initiatives are (Miller, 2001: 170). Used to control risky populations, they signify the prevailing postmodern mood in crime control and the related withdrawal of the state.

⁶³ It was not always the case that imprisonment was associated exclusively with punishment. Although the 19th century panopticon roots of the contemporary prison system have been famously theorised by Michel

Postmodern strategies of penology form a vital component of postmodern criminology. What the more practical strategies of penology have in common with postmodern theoretical concerns is a complete disavowal of utopian solutions to crime (Morrison, 1995: 19). Related to this is a critique of modernity's assumption that progress is possible. Postmodernists deny the path to progress and truth and dispute the metanarratives that claim to enable this (Schwartz & Friedrichs, 1998: 421; Morrison, 1995: 33; Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 417). 'Totalizing truths' about violence and bureaucratic solutions to crime are seen as worsening rather than ameliorating crime (Schwartz & Friedrichs, 1998: 421). In refusing to address the 'big picture' of crime, in suggesting the impossibility of really understanding criminal behaviour, a tendency towards conservatism is fostered, where containment and management of crime is privileged over long-term structural, psychological or social solutions (Morrison, 1995: 19; Schwartz & Friedrichs, 1998: 433).⁶⁴

While criticisms of postmodern thinking undoubtedly are valid, there are also many productive contributions from postmodernism, including in the sphere of criminology. The critical and reflexive perspectives that challenge "all traditional assumptions in social science in general and criminology in particular" are certainly useful on some level (Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 417). More useful, perhaps, in terms of criminology, is the

Foucault and others in terms of power relations, the negativity associated with this must surely be offset by some of the ameliorative intentions of early prison ideology. Jeremy Bentham pioneered the panopticon as the basis for modern penology and, in addition to surveillance, for the first time, punishment centred on detention and rehabilitation, rather than execution or transportation. Although sometimes harsh, the notion of the panopticon is optimistic in the sense that the focus on rehabilitation suggests that it is *possible* to rehabilitate offenders. In contemporary times, the offender is 'disappeared' as a paradigm of exclusion and mass incarceration replaces the paradigm of rehabilitation. The focus on exclusion rather than rehabilitation is accompanied and related to a disillusionment with the effectiveness of the prison.

⁶⁴ The limitations of postmodern criminology are numerous. If deconstruction usefully exposes the artifice of our modernist 'truths' and illustrates how they are socially constructed (Henry & Milovanovic, 1999: 5), it does little more. A second limitation, related to the refusal to look at the 'big picture', is the persistent focus on subjectivist accounts without imbuing them with a broader significance (Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 417). In trying to look at the 'local' experience of crime, as opposed to slotting it into pre-existing categories of explanation, the postmodernist perspective ignores background factors and structural explanations (Schwartz & Friedrichs, 1998: 432; 433. See Henry & Milovanovic, 1999: 5, for a positive appraisal of this feature of postmodernism). Finally, postmodernism is limited by its political abdication. Rather than being seen as a very real problem violence is regarded as a form of representation, as "a product of discourse" (Schwartz & Friedrichs, 1998: 421, 422).

constitutive or affirmative criminology, which aims not only to deconstruct, but to create replacement discourses. Replacement discourse encompasses a variety of features, including the recognition of human agency, of structural and cultural contexts and marginal experiences of crime and crime control (Barak, 1994: 20; Henry & Milovanovic, 1999: 7). Most notably, it includes newsmaking criminology where the media's relationship to crime falls under the spotlight (Henry & Milovanovic, 1999: 9).

On a practical level, postmodern thinking has promoted victim empowerment, allowing victims a chance to define the violence they have incurred on their own terms (Schwartz & Friedrichs, 1998: 433). So too has it yielded re-integrative shaming as a positive community-oriented practice that focuses on the public shaming of the offender before he is accepted back into his local environment. While this is a constructive development, it has "no more than a toehold in practice" (O'Malley, 2000: 155). Indeed, modernist strategies of crime control continue to dominate popular, political and often theoretical thinking (O'Malley, 2000: 155).

Criminology and gender

In the 1990s, criminology faced a lack of direction, questions of relevance and a crisis of identity (Chan, 2000: 118; Matthews and Young, 1992: 3). An important component of this predicament was the androcentrism of many criminological theories, the validity of which has been seriously challenged by feminist analysis (Matthews & Young, 1992: 3). It is this androcentric orientation, encouraged by the fact that "criminology is still a discipline dominated by men", that results in women being largely ignored or stereotyped, both as victims and as criminals (Naffine, 1997: 1). Due to the fact that men commit most crime, criminologists feel justified in this marginalisation, instead charting the 'reality' of male criminality - and further stepping away from gender issues by refusing to acknowledge 'maleness' as a fundamental factor in male criminality (Hahn Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995: 4). Where women as criminals *are* addressed, positivistic approaches favouring psychology and biology over structure seem to predominate (Belknap, 1996: 39). So too are stereotypes prevalent, "reducing women's lives to sociological and anthropological clichés" (Maher, 1995: 161). Men, on the other hand,

are often seen as victims of their poverty-ridden economic circumstances and deprived social conditions, as in Strain theory. Why, it must be asked, is this type of structural explanation accorded so much gravity when women, as the poorest, most socially marginalised group globally, commit far fewer crimes? (Belknap, 1996: 40). Indeed, it is not only women who are ignored in criminological analyses, but *gender* as a fundamental factor in understanding criminal behaviour.

As a corrective, feminist scholarship aims to infuse criminology with an awareness of and sensitivity to both women and gender. Beginning in the 1970s, and focusing largely on women as victims, feminist scholarship has burgeoned – although it still remains on the margins of the criminological enterprise (Dobash et al, 1995: 1). Nonetheless, feminists “have challenged conventional criminology on every level – theory, strategy, method and politics” (Matthews & Young, 1992: 14). New methodologies replace the old, positivism is challenged and epistemological concerns are foregrounded (Hahn Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995: 8). Substantial empirical studies are continuously conducted in arenas such as domestic violence, fear of crime, child abuse and rape (Hahn Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995: 8).

While considerable strides have been made concerning the progressive acknowledgement of gender issues, whether this has filtered down into popular consciousness is highly debatable. Media representations of crime and punishment largely avoid a mature assessment of gender issues. At the same time, there is an implicit code that governs the way that female victims and offenders generally are depicted. Negative stereotypes are the order of the day (Barak, 1994: 28). Explanatory frameworks of female criminality are often grounded in the following images of women and crime:

1. Madonna/whore
 2. Sexual passion/love as an ‘excuse’ for crime
 3. Reproduction and madness
 4. The figure of evil – the witch – the monster
 5. The criminal woman as ‘not-woman’
 6. The female as devious and manipulative”
- (Naylor, 1995: 81).

On the whole, the documentaries in my selection epitomise the trend of ignoring women and women’s issues – with the exception of *Atlantis lost* and *Architecture of fear*. Even more notably, *all* the documentaries, including these two, avoid a significant, meaningful

analysis of gender issues in a way that could further an understanding of crime and address the marginalisation of gender. It seems that the manner in which the criminological enterprise sidesteps gender is mirrored in the media – including in South African documentary programmes on crime.

South African criminology

As with international criminological trends, women have been marginalised in South African criminological practice. It certainly seems to be a perfidious global inclination which has manifested itself in this country through the sidestepping of women as subjects of research, their invisibility in the criminal justice system and their only acknowledged presence being as victims of crime (Hansson, 1995: 44).

If global criminological trends in terms of gender can be seen in South Africa, it would appear that the documentaries that reflect them are truly evidence of how the global articulates with the local. Indeed, South African criminology and the infusion of this criminology into documentaries can be said to be comprised of both a global and a local flavour – to the chagrin of some who believe that criminologies of the South should be independent of the largely irrelevant “theoretical presumptions of western criminology” (Cain, 2000: 239).

While sticking broadly to mainstream and radical criminological theory (Naudé, 1998: 19), context specific criminological trends in South Africa have been described historically by Dirk Van Zyl as residing in three criminological categories. The first is Afrikaner Nationalist criminology, which smacked of Nazism as it relegated blacks to ‘their areas’ in a bid to solve urban crime (Van Zyl Smit, 1999: 199). Legal reformist criminology, also prevalent during apartheid, sought to create a more equal criminal justice system without significantly altering the status quo. After 1990, and as South Africa’s transitional period accelerated, this approach underwent an overhaul and examined ways in which the legal system needed to be completely re-worked (Van Zyl Smit, 1999: 200, 201). Finally, critical criminology, as with its global counterpart, stood on the left of the political spectrum, both during apartheid and beyond. It criticised abuses

by the South African state, rather than focusing on the individual pathology of the criminal and the treatment of juveniles in detention became one of its major foci (Van Zyl Smit, 1999: 203, 204).

While South African criminology has much resonance with criminological theories across the world, it is interesting to note that postmodern developments have not taken root in any significant way (Van der Westhuizen & Van der Westhuizen, 1997: 81; Naudé, 1998: 19). Nonetheless, it will be clear from the analyses that follow, that this does not mean that documentaries in South Africa reflect postmodern developments any less. Indeed, for the most part the documentaries remain rooted in local contexts while implicitly simplifying and re-working global theories for the silver screen – including postmodern theories, which have become threaded through our vision of the world.

6. CONCLUSION

The amount of literature referred to throughout the dissertation is vast and disparate. Pulling the various strands of argument together in a way that usefully informs my analysis has been a mammoth task. Marrying themes from globalisation to crime to documentary has not been a simple exercise. Complicating the matter further is that the methodology used in the investigation has been neither straightforward nor one-dimensional. It too has been knitted together from a variety of models – contextual, discursive and semiotic - which together can be said to constitute a useful analytical model. The following chapter describes the approach taken by the research project.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

1. GLOBALISATION, MEDIA AND IDENTITY

Initially the project was conceived as a comparative study of documentary programmes to do with crime and punishment transmitted on public service channels in three countries: South Africa, the United Kingdom and Australia. Logistical problems, combined with a realisation that the project was growing far too large, resulted in my decision to focus on South Africa alone. A collection of entirely random documentary/current affairs programmes broadcast on the SABC and to do with crime and punishment ensued. From my starting point in 2001⁶⁵, I collected every *Special Assignment* or *Expressions* programme that had to do with crime and, without prejudice, selected the ones that I was to use by picking their titles out of a bag. While this may have ensured an entirely random selection, the result was, unfortunately, that some of the programmes were vastly different from the others, even though they all fell very broadly into the ‘crime or prison documentary’ category. I did consider narrowing my focus to programmes to do only with gangsters or drugs, for example. However, I knew that I would never have been able to collect enough material in the given time period. Consequently, the selection was not ideal and it made my task of comparing the programmes extremely challenging. It has also meant that the grouping of programmes into chapters has not been straightforward and that the end result is sometimes an awkward fit, although I have endeavoured to find the three most appropriate matches for each chapter. In spite of this, the differences between the programmes have ultimately been beneficial to the dissertation in the sense that I did not end up repeating the same analysis nine times.

The result was a selection of nine programmes – all broadcast on SABC3 from 2001 to 2003. In spite of their similarity in subject matter, they diverge considerably in other ways. Some, for example, were produced by independent producers, while others were

⁶⁵ The broadcast dates for each programme can be found in the bibliography.

in-house projects. They range in length from half an hour to an hour, with one documentary, *A bitter harvest*, being split into two and broadcast over two weeks. They were all broadcast either in the *Special Assignment* or *Expressions* slots and vary in nature from a more current affairs structure to a more conventional documentary form. All were intended for a South African audience, bar one. Although broadcast in the *Special Assignment* slot in South Africa, *The cage unlocked* was produced for the BBC. All the documentaries were intended for audiences that are able to understand English and some, with subtitles, required a literate audience. The range in subject matter between the programmes is considerable, but in order to create structure for the dissertation, I have organised them roughly into three sets of three programmes, which correspond with my three main chapters. The categories are as follows: prisons, societies affected by crime and the criminals. Naturally, overlapping across the categories was inevitable. While I would have liked to include programmes on white-collar crime, there was simply not sufficient material available during the period under review, seemingly supporting the notion that, prejudicially, street crime receives more attention than crimes perpetrated by the elite.⁶⁶

If collecting the programmes was the first step, transcription was the second. All the programmes have been transcribed in their entirety, with detailed attention being paid to the verbal component, visual component, sound, subtitles/captions and time sequence. These transcriptions were largely used as the basis for the analysis that follows, providing a useful reference tool when isolating and identifying significant semiotic elements in the text.

From there, adding context and theory to the textual analysis was vital. The dissertation has been heavily informed by relevant secondary material from a variety of disciplines. In particular, sources from two disciplinary spectra converge in the dissertation: that of cultural and media studies and that of criminology. Additionally, historical and sociological material relating specifically to the South African national, cultural and

⁶⁶ Subsequently, however, it should be noted that more recently the Shabir Shaik trial has garnered an enormous amount of media attention.

criminal justice environment has been explored, firstly with a view to juxtaposing ‘reality’ with the representations found in the documentaries and, secondly, with the aim of situating them contextually.

The analysis essentially consists of an analytical model comprised of three related strategies. Firstly, there is an examination of the texts themselves, secondly, there is an exploration of the global, national, local *theoretical* and *actual* contexts in which the programmes are produced and thirdly, the implications of the convergence of the two for the creation of preferred meaning and the fulfilment of the broadcaster’s mandate.

Fundamental to the project is meaning in a semiotic sense and its effects and consequences in a discursive, ‘political’ sense. In other words, the dissertation attempts to combine a broad semiotic approach focusing on the *how* of meaning creation (how have the texts been infused with meaning? How do they draw on global theories and trends? How do they articulate with national treatises and local knowledges?) with a discursive approach that focuses on the *why* and beyond (why have the texts been produced in this way? What is the implication for the broadcaster’s mandate?).

In the study of television, semiotics has proved one of the most frequently used methodologies. It aims to unravel the processes where

One of the prime effects of television is to gather up the familiar, the strange, the identifiable and the incomprehensible, the gobbets of common sense and the sustained ideological positions, and to weave these into an acceptable whole for the consumption of the audience, to ‘make sense’ for them of the world around them (Tomaselli, 1996: 71).

Semiotics seeks to expose the artifice of our relationship with television by revealing how meaning is constructed through the vigorous, sometimes purposive, production of signs (Allen, 1992a: 7; Seiter, 1992: 31, 38). This arena of academia has developed its own vocabulary to explain how symbolic systems work, how they relate to each other and how they provide for us, a means of making sense of the world and, relevant to this dissertation, representations of the world (Allen, 1992a: 6). Understanding representation, semioticians argue, can only be achieved through detailed textual analysis of “the actual signs, symbols, figures, images, narratives, words and sounds – the material forms – in which symbolic meaning is circulated” (Hall, 1997b: 9). Indeed, Cultural Studies

embraced this linguistically derived approach, which became “the greatest shaper of academic television analysis” (Corner, 1995: 2). Adding depth to the strictly semiotic, have been a variety of other approaches. Ethnographic audience research, for example, focuses on reception of the text as the nucleus of meaning, rather than the text alone. Structuralist methods seek to situate detailed technical analyses within whole systems of cultural meaning, showing how these systems produce signs (Seiter, 1992: 50). This represents a recognition of the importance of looking beyond the text, examining how the broader meanings to which the signifieds allude, exist “extratextually, in the myths, countermyths, and ideology of their culture” (Nightingale, 1993: 64).

In terms of semiotics, rather than looking at the denotative aspects of documentary construction, my thesis examines the connotative aspects based on themes and conventions that are used in the programmes to connote meaning. From there, in terms of the second order of signification, the ways in which the texts then construct myths around national identity or local identity is a vital step towards exploring the third order – how they coalesce ideologically. This, in turn, provides a necessary canvas for the exploration of further issues: the implications of these invocations, the discourses produced and perpetuated by them, the potential consequences for the broadcaster’s mandate and whether *patterns* of ideology exist in the SABC’s documentaries.

Consequently, connotation and myth are perhaps two of the most useful semiotic concepts that inform the methodology of this dissertation. They really consolidate the notion that codes and conventions are entrenched in culture and reinforce cultural identification (Fiske, 1982: 82, 87). Additionally, they are vitally important for television studies such as this one, exposing the way in which “much of what appears naturally meaningful on TV is actually historical, changeable, and culturally specific” (Seiter, 1992: 41). The mass media make constant use of connotation as a means of delivering their value-laden messages and the images that we see “reflect not lived experience (actuality, the referent) but the dominant codes through which a culture ‘apprehends reality’” (Kaplan, 1988: 83. See also Seiter, 1992: 41). Unlike denotation, which refers to the apparent meaning of the sign, connotation is far more ideological and subjective in

nature, being attached to the worldviews, feelings, emotions and values of the user and specific to his/her culture (Seiter, 1992: 39; Fiske, 1982: 91, 92). Roland Barthes is attributed with the recognition of this order of signification, adding to Saussure's technician, textually based ideas with an emphasis on the dialectical relationship between signs and their culturally situated users (Fiske, 1982: 90). Not only were theories of language relevant to language, in his view, but to cultural systems generally.

Closely related to connotation and produced by connotation, "myth refers to recurring themes, icons and stereotypes which claim common recognition within a cultural group with a shared ideology" (Tomaselli, 1996: 66). Also working in the second order, myth is the broader matrix where connotations converge. In my dissertation this would refer to the general myths surrounding national identity, the local community and so on that are indicated through the relationship between the text and culture and which are made ordinary, seemingly being given "a natural and eternal justification" (Barthes, 1972: 156). Consequently, using the workings of myth has allowed the various chapters to develop insights into the conceptualisation of identity and culture in SABC documentaries, going some way to illustrating how we understand ourselves and how we represent it. This is not to suggest that counter-myths never present themselves – in reality or on television – only that "The factual side of television, news, current affairs, documentaries, tends to show more of the dominant than of the counter-myth" (Fiske, 1982: 94).

If myths are connotations that have become dominant, myths are also

subservient to ideology, a third order sign operating within the realm of the symbolic. Signification at the level of myths symbiotically interacts with the ideological grid of significations – it slides between the second and third orders. This happens when dominant groups are able to influence the formation of mythic world views, through control over institutions such as education, religion and the media so that exploitative social relations appear to be the natural, irrevocable course of history (Tomaselli, 1996: 67).

Since the SABC is one of these institutions able to influence the entrenchment of 'mythic world views' - perpetuating certain notions of the nation and of culture - it undoubtedly has some kind of ideological purview. In terms of this dissertation, for example, the naturalisation, in certain instances, of particular perspectives on class, race and crime,

serves to uphold and legitimate the social, economic and political status quo. As with connotation and myth, the ideological third order is thus productive in exposing pejorative constructions that have been naturalised for television. It harks back to the useful elements of ideological analysis, where Marxist scholars examined the ways in which television, as a capitalistic industry, supported the knowledges and values of the dominant classes (White, 1992: 163-165). While it may be limiting to view a direct relationship between the class/economic standing of the television industry and the ideological slant of its programmes, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge how “Access to social control, both in terms of political power and control by the mass media ensures that the ruling classes are in a position to propagate myths about other classes and groups which become the official myths” (Tomaselli, 1996: 73). This is how ideology works and its importance for this dissertation lies in the way in which myths are mobilised on a large scale and tied together seamlessly for the purpose of propagating politically and socially convenient perspectives.

As indicated in the preceding discussion, the semiotic approach is extremely useful in indicating how texts are constructed and how meaning is created through the textual interaction with culture. Yet, in some applications – particularly those pursued in the 1980s - this methodology can be said to be limited. According to one view, semiotics is open to the criticism that it makes assumptions about how meaning is formed, about language and its operation, about how signs work, about how signs relate to users and so on (Corner, 1995: 3). In another view, it is seen as “too theoretical and speculative”, an issue that surely also relates to its lack of historical contextualisation (Fiske, 1982: 118; Seiter, 1992: 59). Its validity is further challenged by its selectivity, where “some elements are picked out for significance and others are excluded, repressed” - a problem addressed by post-structuralists (Seiter, 1992: 61). The frequent omission of viewers or readers from analyses is a further problem limiting the efficacy of the theory (Seiter, 1992: 60). Overall, it seems, semiotics has failed to live up to many of its promises, going around in circles rather than moving forward (Corner, 1995: 3).

In an attempt to circumvent some of these problems, I have followed the example of forward-thinking researchers in looking further than the text and towards context, so that connotations, myths and ideologies are situated in broader histories, which reveal the political, economic, and social configurations that inform them (Tomaselli, 1996: 29, 34). This approach is based on the recognition that codes used in television are firmly rooted in history and culture – even as the dominant forces in society legitimise them as apparent and timeless (Tomaselli, 1996: 44). The inclusion of context addresses, to some degree, a few of the criticisms that have been levelled at semiotics. The notion that the methodology is approached in a manner that is too theoretical, too “formalist, technical” and text-obsessed is ameliorated through an inclusion of context, which situates the text in a concrete setting and allows an exploration of the related social and historical environment (Tomaselli, 1996: 29). Accusations of historical inadequacy are similarly addressed through the inclusion of context. Accusations of selectivity and the insufficient illustration of how meaning is formed are also somewhat addressed through context, which provides an additional level of proof or justification for arguments made. The dissertation makes use of context in a variety of ways that add to the efficacy of the arguments made. Textually based observations and their link to myths, ideologies and meaning are facilitated and justified through an inclusion of context – sometimes historical context, sometimes global context, sometimes contexts of national and local cultural import.

The final element of the analysis employed in this dissertation is a discursive approach, if this is taken to mean an exploration of how the media interacts with the text and context in terms of reproducing or, alternatively, reconfiguring, power relations (Tomaselli, 1996: 40; Hall, 1997b: 6). In looking at the discourses surrounding the texts and contexts - in this case those of public service broadcasting and the SABC’s mandate - insights can be provided into the longer-term function of representation or the ‘why’ of representation. In cases where the SABC documentaries perpetuate old power relations, why do they do this? More importantly, perhaps is that the discursive approach examines the “*effects and consequences* of representation – its ‘politics’” (Hall, 1997b: 6). For example, fundamental to this dissertation is the following question: what are the implications of the

representations on the SABC for the nation-building mandate at this particular historical juncture?

Together, semiotic, contextual and discursive strategies form the core approach of this dissertation, as will become evident in the chapters to come. This approach can be deemed an inclusive analytical model. For the present moment, a brief, point-driven summary follows, in order to provide a cursory illustration of how the individual chapters tend to encompass the elements of a discursive/contextual/semiotic analysis:

- 1) Criminological theories and trends, which are global in scope, dominate to a large extent. Backed by extensive textual support, the analysis firstly shows the way in which they inform the documentary programmes and secondly explores the implications of this for the broadcaster's *nation*-oriented mandate, which complexly exists in a *global* era. These theories and trends form the historical (we are living in an age of globalisation), theoretical and often cultural context for the production of meaning in the documentaries.
- 2) Where relevant, the impact of global documentary trends on the programmes has been included, firstly looking at *how* they manifest themselves in the contours and methodologies of the text and secondly what this means in terms of the external influences that contribute to textual meaning and are influential in SABC documentary production. From there, the ideological and political implications of these trends for the fulfilment of the broadcaster's mandate are explored.
- 3) Signifiers that have to do with globalisation more generally, which are found in some of the texts, are isolated and explained in terms of their ideological bearing: how they both situate the programme – and South Africa – as part of the global landscape and what this means.
- 4) The construction of local identities is examined, showing *how* the depiction of place and community is achieved – the *how* of the semiotic approach. It should be noted that on a general level, places and communities in the programmes are rooted - in a way that ties into the rooted notions of diversity that are described in the SABC's mandate, rather than globalised notions of localities unhindered by time and space. From there, the textual extrusions about local identity are backed

up by contextual ones that, in some cases, explain why local identities are represented in certain ways historically, how this links to their representation on television, and what the implications are in terms of the presentation of the nation, the broadcaster's mandate and ideology. In other instances, the textual presentation of local identity is contextualised more convincingly by examining the global reference points and networks to which these representations allude and with which they articulate in a local-global dialectic. In others still, it is the contemporary social context, which situates, informs and justifies the textual analysis. It is a context informed by both academic research and lay perceptions. Together the meaning produced by the text and context about local identity governs the ultimate effects and consequences of the representation and the value-laden ideological conclusions we can draw about the programme. Again, it is the broader discursive realm in which the textual representation operates that provides a more complete picture of meaning than would a textual analysis alone.

- 5) The approach regarding the construction of national identity, in its cultural terms, is similar to the approach as far as local identity is concerned. Signifiers from the text are used as the basis for exploring the connotations and myths that they produce and the discourses and ideologies that they are produced by, both of which have real-life consequences as far as the creation of preferred meaning is concerned. Historical discourses of race, apartheid, language, normative morality, tradition and so on, provide context and support for the textual analysis.
- 6) Finally, textual evidence for the value-judgements associated with the nation-state is sought in an effort to determine the kinds of nation-building and national identity that is being constructed through documentary. The way in which textual evidence articulates with discourses of power around the nation-state and contexts of historical understanding about the nation-state are seen to produce meaning for the documentary, from which point the broader implications of this meaning for the mandate can be examined.

While the active methodology of the dissertation, as described above, is undoubtedly important, also important are the implicit acknowledgments that govern this undertaking.

The most significant, perhaps, is that the interpretations provided constitute merely one avenue of understanding that a reader might negotiate with the text, an understanding that is governed by my own place in the social structure and the social forces to which I am subject (Fiske, 1982: 115). Oppositional readings of texts or aberrant decodings by disempowered groups resisting the hegemonic textual messages are not uncommon (White, 1992: 191; Fiske, 1982: 83). It is the readers who choose what is relevant as corresponding to ‘reality’ in any representation and they “appropriate the meanings which best fit their imaginary solutions as interpreted by their individual, cultural and class experiences” (Tomaselli, 1996: 45). Beyond reader-specific variation, the meaning of texts, and the signs from which they are constituted, are not fixed in time and space, changing according to context and historical circumstances in what might be described as indeterminacy (Tomaselli, 1996: 35; Hall, 1997b: 9; Fiske, 1982: 95). This is precisely why it is dangerous to think of meanings in terms of ‘truth’ (Hall, 1997b: 11).

Other possibilities for meaning in the documentaries under examination may certainly have been revealed by audience research, but this would have rendered the project too large and entirely unmanageable. Consequently, although meaning is ultimately produced in the relationships between the text and the audience in a dialogic relationship (Fiske, 1982: 143; Hall, 1997b: 10), this project has chosen to focus on the text, with my approach governed by the belief that,

The best way to ‘settle’ [such] contested readings is to look again at the concrete example and to try to justify one’s ‘reading’ in detail in relation to the actual practices and forms of signification used, and what meanings they seem to you to be producing (Hall, 1997b: 9).

Finally, my approach has been informed by the belief that, while it is certainly true that meaning is flexible, there are limitations on the meaning that can be inferred from any representation. Certain genres, for example, provide ‘semiotic instructions’ for viewers, which tend to be followed in a general way (Tomaselli, 1996: 33). Consequently, meaning is flexible within certain circumscribed boundaries. It is not possible for television messages to mean anything and instead, they offer contradictions and ambivalence only within, “a regulated latitude of ideological positions” (White,

1992:190). The notion of preferred meaning is also important in this regard, where a hierarchy of viewpoints in any message ensures that some are favoured over others in a manner that serves an ideological function by constituting the reader in a certain way (Fiske, 1982: 113, 144; White, 1992: 184). Consequently, the interpretations espoused by my project are based on the identification of preferred meaning, exploring the way in which meaning is controlled and circumscribed in the selected texts.

Documentaries are often entrancing for viewers as they “seek to entertain, to seduce by the beauty of their images, by their management of suspense, hope and tragedy, by the wit and elegance of their narration, by the power of their voice” (Silverstone, 1985: 170). Yet, as Cultural Studies has extensively shown, they also perform an important ideological function, encoding the values of producers, sponsors and target audiences (Bondebjerg, 2000: 3; Tomaselli, 1996: 52). In South Africa, where television has a penetration of 69.6%, where the country remains in the throes of transformation and where the promotion of national identity is a key component of the broadcaster’s mandate, the construction of ideology through documentary is a fundamentally important issue (Duncan, 2000: 1). Depicting crime through documentary offers an important insight into this - especially considering its essentially negative nature and the media trend of viewing it in terms of ‘semilogies of catastrophe’ (O’Malley, 2000: 153).⁶⁷ How then can national identity be construed positively? In selecting documentary programmes according to the theme ‘crime and punishment’, I attempt to address this and other questions posed by the intersection of the broadcaster’s mandate with global trends in criminology, global trends in documentary and various understandings of national and local identity. Here I place a ‘micro-analysis’ of the text against a larger social setting so that, in my analysis, the televised product interpenetrates with broader cultural structures (Corner, 1995: 1). The result is that I question “the kinds of hierarchy of social knowledge upon which programmes draw in constructing their inquiries and in moving to a judgement” (Corner, 2000: 146). Pre-eminent are the social knowledges cohering around globalisation, which inform everything that falls beneath them in the hierarchy. Globalisation alters, conditions and intersects with both the local and the national.

⁶⁷ This term was originally used by O’ Malley to describe a trend in social science research.

Furthermore, law, crime and punishment, are “both the most local and the most universal or globalized of cultural phenomena” (Nelken, 1997: 251 cited in Chan, 2000: 124). For this reason, it is a primary contention of this dissertation that the SABC’s policies, including their mandate, be couched in an awareness of globalisation and the way in which it alters the depiction of the local and national at every turn.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The first chapter focuses on three documentaries that in some way have to do with prison. *It's Nice to Have a Friend* examines warder corruption at Grootvlei prison, *The Lima Connection* goes to Peru where South African drug smugglers are being kept in prison and *The Cage Unlocked* maps the transition from Pollsmoor Prison back into society for two hardened gangsters. Contextualising this chapter is a brief history of the prison system in South Africa and its defining features since 1994. Much of the literature focuses on the difficulties Correctional Services faces in meeting its objectives of ensuring safe custody, ‘normalisation’ and rehabilitation (Dissel, 1995a: 4; Dissel & Ellis, 2002: 4). Overcrowding, poor prison conditions and violence are just some of the issues focused on. Additionally, these conditions exist in an era where the modernist approach of Correctional Services, which focuses on a positive rehabilitation, is constantly challenged by the practical and theoretical postmodern pressures towards ‘human containment’. Considering this, an overriding concern for the chapter was how negative subject matter in general, its negative manifestation in a South African context of inadequate prisons and its existence in the negative postmodern milieu could be translated into a representation that offered a hopeful outlook on national identity – and whether any of the documentaries on offer were able to achieve this.

The first video under discussion in Chapter 3 – *It's nice to have a friend* – offers a variety of preferred meanings, constructed by many different strategies and discourses, including documentary techniques and criminological theory. In terms of the former, the programme draws on reality television, using a ‘spy camera’ approach to exploit the voyeuristic inclinations of viewers as it creates a spectacle, as opposed to in-depth exposition. Also sidelining analysis, is the strategy of using simplistic binary narrative

codes of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ to tell the story of warder corruption. What this means for the broadcaster’s mandate is discussed in detail in the chapter, before moving on to the implications of the theoretical underpinnings in the programme. Here the postmodern preoccupation with rising crime, social decline and the inadequacy of state structures to deal with these issues is felt in the way that the video deals with its subject matter. The local environment of Grootvlei prison articulates with these global, postmodern understandings in a manner that produces an all-important commentary on the state of the nation. That this local environment is also seen to include a prison economy of sex and drugs, which is portrayed without adequate explanation or contextualisation, is another defining feature for the video. The production of national culture in *It’s nice to have a friend* is achieved through the video’s handling of race (we see racial solidarity between the prisoners), morality (normative morality is constructed through value judgments) and language (we hear indigenous languages, but read English subtitles). In addition to national culture, commentary on the nation-state, as a component of national identity, is constructed through the following observations: the fact that corrupt warders are still on duty, the inability of Correctional Services to combat corruption, the inability of Correctional Services to ensure safe custody for prisoners and the fact that prisoners rather than Correctional Services employees effectively run the prison. Finally, this analysis examines some important absences in the documentary that detrimentally influence its outcome in terms of projecting a positive national identity. These include the absence of comparative prison material from other countries that would counter the notion of exclusive corruption and decline in our prisons, the absence of examples of law-abiding Correctional Services employees and the absence of adequate contextualisation and explanation in the programme.

In its examination of South African drug mules being kept in Peruvian prisons, *The Lima Connection* is the only programme in the chapter – and indeed the entire dissertation – to self-consciously situate South Africans in a global landscape. Unsurprisingly, then, the programme seems to contain a variety of global indicators, the most obvious of which is the global criminal economy, where drug trafficking networks criss-cross the globe. Postmodern penology, with its concerns around loss of control in prisons and offender

subsidisation, is the global theoretical direction that manifests tangibly in the programme through the local level of Lurigancho prison in Peru. Documentary conventions, followed in a variety of countries, are another feature that potentially links the programmes under discussion to a global landscape – with implications for the depiction of the nation. Here the documentary tradition of showing the lower classes as both deviant and as victims finds a space. What this means for national identity is discussed in detail. The manner in which the nation-state is dealt with similarly has a bearing on the national identity produced by the video.

The concluding documentary discussed in this chapter offers an approach that is worlds apart from the first two. *The Cage Unlocked*, produced for the BBC but broadcast on SABC3, is rooted in a criminological tradition of individual and social positivism that views crime as a product of psychological and environmental factors. Addressing this is the beginning of creating an inherently optimistic argument for rehabilitation. In this way, viewers are introduced to the personal histories of hardened gangsters from Pollsmoor prison and witness their attempts to reintegrate into society and mend their family relationships. Clearly, here too, the global theoretical direction of positivism, which informs the programme, has a fundamental bearing on the ultimate conclusions that viewers are able to draw - firstly about prisoners as representatives of the nation, secondly about rehabilitation as a national policy and thirdly about hope and optimism as cornerstones of national culture. It is the local level of both Pollsmoor prison and the neighbourhoods of the gangsters that articulate with the global theoretical stance of the programme. In Pollsmoor, the focus is on rehabilitation rather than punishment. In the neighbourhoods, the focus is on the way in which poverty causes crime, fulfilling the aetiological function of positivism. The conservative documentary style in the programme, which incorporates a strong use of voice-over and interview material, further buttresses the optimistic message of the programme, as does the way in which the nation-state is viewed – as proactively advocating rehabilitation. In the realm of national culture, however, the message is somewhat different and the chapter examines this with regard to prison gang culture and the use of language in the documentary.

Chapter Four begins by examining what crime means for us in the global era where ontological insecurity, moral panics about decline and risk management reign supreme. The implications of this in the South African context, where concerns around crime are exacerbated by anxieties around the period of transformation, are then discussed as a prelude to the analysis of three documentaries. All these documentaries in one way or another feed into these anxieties by focusing on ‘society under siege’.

In particular, the ‘society under siege’ theme is exemplified by the first documentary under discussion – *The architecture of fear*. It is informed by postmodern strategies of crime control and postmodern perspectives on crime that feed moral panics and undermine optimism as far as crime in the South African context is concerned. In the video, contemporary theories of risk management through situational crime prevention find an outlet in the form of gated communities in Johannesburg. Here, modernist approaches focusing on the offender and on social, environmental and psychological factors in causing crime are sidelined. As they disappear, with them goes the explanatory power of positivism, left realism and radical criminology. Instead, the postmodern approach offers a two-dimensional, pessimistic view of the ‘fortress city’, where the nation is divided as people are excluded. Perhaps the only productive theoretical stance through which the subject matter of the programme is distilled is that of class. As another globally accessed framework of understanding, class offers the programme a structural interpretation of both crime (showing the poor as especially vulnerable) and crime prevention (showing certain classes being excluded from the gated communities). This, firstly, creates the exposition that is so central to documentary practice and, secondly, points implicitly towards solutions that are so fundamental to the construction of a useful national identity on television. Nonetheless, it is the postmodern sentiments that prevail in the programme with the local levels of Johannesburg, Diepsloot and Soweto providing the empirical basis for their expression. In terms of documentary practice, interviews, pace and music help reinforce the postmodern theme of danger. The depiction of national culture is also an avenue in which the documentary continues its unrelenting message of pessimism. Here, the somewhat limited historical contextualisation is overshadowed by impressions of a ‘dangerised’ society where fear of crime prevails. Finally, the video

contains a strong, unequivocal message about the nation-state. It is a message of inadequacy. Firstly, the proliferation of private security indicates that the national police force is inadequate. Secondly, the police are not living up to their obligation as far as community policing is concerned. Thirdly, the growth of vigilantism illustrates public frustration with the police and the inability of the police to curtail illegal measures used to tackle crime.

Atlantis lost is the second programme in the chapter dealing with ‘Society under siege’. In this instance, the focus is on the proliferation of child sexual abuse in the Western Cape community of Atlantis. It offers a left realist approach, incorporating the positivist ideal of looking for cause with a radical approach that blames structural inequality for creating conditions conducive to crime. Not quite as rosy as a strictly positivist account would be, it nonetheless presents a more optimistic picture than that projected by the postmodern theories of crime control in *The architecture of fear*. At the same time, it should be mentioned that it does not conform to a left realist interpretation entirely – to the detriment of the documentary. This is because it sidelines both the victim and the offender in its analysis. While the offender is left out, the victim becomes the object of a voyeuristic spectacle. The lack of a proper exploration of the nature of victimhood feeds into a global documentary trend where sensationalism is increasingly a defining feature. The failure to see the programme through a lens of gender is a further shortcoming, which detracts from the documentary’s useful left realist elements. Echoing the mainstream criminological oversight of gender in *Atlantis lost* has at least one major consequence for national identity. By avoiding explanation, it encourages the belief that we are a nation of sexual fiends, rather than part of a global community where the construction of masculinity plays a fundamental role in sexual crimes. Here the scene is set for a moral panic around sexual abuse based on the notion of a nation in decline. Criminological and documentary trends aside, there are further links to the level of the global, which are evident in *Atlantis Lost*. One is an international normative morality condemning child abuse. Another is the growth of communitarianism, which harks back to interventions of nation-states in the welfare era. A further global trend, which *Atlantis Lost* usefully avoids, is that of the ‘child abuse horror story’, which focuses on individual

acts of extreme abuse. On the level of the local, Atlantis, as one of South Africa's diverse communities, is the exclusive focus for the programme. Here, social and structural reasons – linking up to positivism and radical criminology – form the basis of the explanations for child abuse. Included are references to the apartheid history of Atlantis, which, in turn, invoke a national history of apartheid and the cultural legacy left behind. The implications of this for the projection of national identity are discussed in the chapter itself. Value judgements about the nation-state, made through the representation of the Child Protection Unit, constitute the final way in which the video makes a statement on national identity. Here, the Child Protection Unit is seen as incompetent, but at the same time necessary – unlike the police force in *The architecture of fear*, which is seemingly efficiently being eclipsed by private security.

Tackling the emotive issue of farm murders in South Africa, *A bitter harvest* is the final video under discussion in Chapter 2. As with *Atlantis Lost*, it incorporates some useful elements of left realism in order to make its arguments. The notion of a motivated offender is usually cited as a postmodern one and stands opposed to an offender who commits crime due to circumstances/psychology. In *A bitter harvest*, however, the motivated offender is married to a distinctly modernist outlook: the motive of money in farm murders is rooted in an aetiology of poverty, lack of education, abuse of labourers, and migration to the cities in a South African context of historical inequality. Structural and sociological explanations for crime are the order of the day. While these may not, at first glance, seem particularly positive, they do point to solutions (through the identification of problems) and defuse hysteria (by encouraging analysis over sensationalism). Precisely because the documentary seeks explanations for farm murders, it is additionally able to challenge moral panics and conspiracy theories, which centre on organised political orchestration of the farm murders. As far as documentary convention is concerned, the video, unfortunately, does not extend its constructive approach. The families of farm murder victims are not viewed in a productive light of victim empowerment, but instead are used to fashion a gruesome spectacle around farm murders that runs counter to the useful criminological stance of the video and pointing to a documentary tradition of voyeuristic victim exploitation. Also detracting from the overall

usefulness of the video, in terms of the broadcaster's mandate, is the way that local diversity and regional differences in the pattern and nature of farm murders are not accounted for. National culture, on the other hand, offers a more optimistic view of South African national identity, working in sync with the analytical strength provided by the left realist elements in the video. Here, race and racial discrimination, as causative factors for farm murders, are not foregrounded, contrary to the empirical evidence in reality that suggests otherwise. Instead, race is dealt with more indirectly – alluded to as a factor, but not dwelt on excessively in a manner that would further perpetuate division. Furthermore, in constructing a culture of national unity, racial division in the video is overcome through cross-racial alliances between farmers. Through this, a message of community solidarity and hope is instilled in the video. Not only does the depiction of national culture offer a fruitful platform for the construction of national identity, but so too does the handling of the nation-state. The positivist elements of *A Bitter Harvest* (which are part of its overall left realist perspective) ensure that the nation-state is seen in a valuable light. Both the voice-over and expert witnesses from the SANDF and the police ensure that the criminal justice system is seen as triumphing.

The final chapter focuses largely on the offenders and includes a brief overview of some of the media traditions regarding their depiction: the demonisation of the underclass, the focus on heinous individual acts of crime and the slide into sensationalism. While this appear to bode ill for documentaries that deal with this subject matter, *Very Fast Guys* - the first programme discussed in the chapter - manages to successfully avoid these pitfalls. The explanations contained in the programme are rooted implicitly in theories of anomie, relative deprivation and under-socialisation, all of which are very useful for the depiction of offenders in a way that is not unduly negative. Anomie, for example, ensures that, in the pursuit of material success, the gangsters in Orange Farm are seen as rational and motivated, rather than simply evil. All three theories create an understanding that crime is rooted in unequal social structures and poor social organisation – and that these need to change before crime improves. At the same time, the stance adopted extends to humanising the gangsters, including seeing them on an individual level as normal human beings who are therefore capable of change (radical criminology in general underscores

this approach). If global theoretical roots characterise the documentary in fundamental ways, so too do global documentary trends. Here observational techniques are the primary feature of *Very Fast Guys*. It is proactive, rather than purist observation (using editing and voice-overs), which allows a strong preferred meaning to cohere around the humanity of the gangsters. Scenes of domestic normality, for example, function in tandem with the humanisation approach of radical criminology in delivering a favourable impression of the ‘guys’. As far as doing justice to local diversity is concerned, *Very Fast Guys* provides a strong sense of Orange Farm. The tangible gang subculture in Orange Farm links up to global theories of Anomie and relative deprivation. While gang life may be viewed as a negative exploration of the local, it ultimately has a positive message in the video – gang culture is seen to be in decline. Its unfavourable elements are also offset by a positive focus on the family. In terms of fostering national culture on television, language is used beneficially through the retention of the original verbalisations of the gangsters – supplemented by English subtitles, but by no means obliterated by them. Race is also handled diplomatically. While much evidence suggests that, in reality, race hatred plays a role in gangster philosophy, in *Very Fast Guys* there is a distinct absence of racial references. This opens the way for the development of a reconciliatory national culture.

The day the gangs came to the other side of town, which examines the Sizzlers massacre in Seapoint, offers a particularly interesting insight into the construction of pejorative stereotypes on television. These stereotypes cohere around gang killings and gang life and conform, firstly, to a media trend of demonising the underclass and, secondly, to a media trend that seeks culturally convenient explanations that fulfil middle class expectations. My analysis certainly seemed vindicated when it emerged that the offenders, acting alone, were motivated by robbery, rather than committing a gang ‘hit’, as suggested by the programme. Interviews with ‘gang experts’ in the programme are used to buttress the notion of gang responsibility and this contributes to the fostering of stereotypes. Indeed, *The Day* does not make use of any documentary conventions that might redeem the programme. Instead it follows in the slipstream of increasingly sensationalistic documentary practice through its focus on random, unpredictable

violence. It exploits sex and violence in a manner that has little to do with the issues at hand. As with *Atlantis lost* and *A bitter harvest*, the nature of victimhood is explored in neither a sensitive nor a thorough manner, instead fulfilling a function of documentary voyeurism. The exploration of gangs on a local level conjoins to the global theoretical level through its demonisation of gang subculture, which is intended to work with audience expectation. Notably absent is any historical contextualisation of gang formation. Useful social and structural explanations, as offered by left realism, are also nowhere to be found. The depiction of the local level is further damaged through the portrayal of ‘seedy Seapoint’ where an undercurrent of decline links to global moral panics around the death of the community and a simultaneous nostalgia for that community. National culture is equally dismal. In *The Cage Unlocked*, violent, drug-ridden gang culture was seen as part of national culture – to its detriment. So too is gang life part of national culture in *The Day*. While condemning, rather than simply showing, gang culture may be a constructive move for the creation of a normative morality in the documentary, it is the gangsters themselves and not simply their actions that are ‘othered’. Normative morality is thus based on a cultural grammar of exclusion. Even the nation-state in the video does not fare well, making this documentary one of the most consistently inadequate in the construction of a positive national identity. Here, the police, as representative of the nation-state, are conspicuous in their absence. As the programme progresses, it becomes clear that the *Special Assignment* team has usurped their investigative role.

The final programme under discussion the chapter – and in the dissertation – is *Strong Medicine*. Particularly interesting is the way it negotiates the potentially explosive cultural minefield of using human body parts in *muti*. Unfortunately, its approach is one that does not really yield any definitive verdict on the matter –and is thus inconclusive in its message. The video vacillates between challenging the condemnation by western criminal justice of the harvesting of body parts (as would be the approach of labelling theory, conflict criminology and postmodern deconstruction) and accepting it. There is, consequently, no consolidated position on what the harvesting of body parts means for national identity. Sometimes it seems to hint at deconstruction and then veers away from

it again by avoiding the issue of *harvesting* body parts and instead focusing on the *selling*. In focusing on selling, the criminal justice status quo criminalizing the activity is upheld and the documentary becomes a ‘ritual moral exercise’, offering no new insights (Fattah, 1997: 13). As in *The day*, focusing on individual cases is to the detriment of cause and socio-economic explanations, while also lending itself to sensationalism through a concentration on grisly details. If this is one oft-used documentary convention, the use of reconstruction is another. Becoming fashionable once again, reconstructions are used with dramatic effect and serve to draw attention away from analysis. Similarly, the use of ‘spy cameras’ to capture those involved in the body part trade, results in a voyeuristic spectacle not entirely unlike that found in *It’s nice to have a friend*. If global documentary tradition and the lack of an orchestrated global criminological underpinning for the video detract from its value, so does the absence of global comparisons with the body part trade around the world. On the more positive side, the level of the local works productively in the video. Texture is given to a diverse variety of urban and rural locales, from Eloff Street in Johannesburg to a small village near Potgietersrus. Having said this, however, it is also true that there is a romanticisation of localities such that timeless, essential Africa is constructed. Debate around the use of body parts and the evolution/corruption of culture whereby the selling of body parts became prevalent, similarly contributes to the limited perspective on local and national culture in a manner that is ultimately disadvantageous to the construction of national identity on television.

Documentaries are often entrancing for viewers as they “seek to entertain, to seduce by the beauty of their images, by their management of suspense, hope and tragedy, by the wit and elegance of their narration, by the power of their voice.” (Silverstone, 1985: 170). Yet, as Cultural Studies has extensively shown, they also perform an important ideological function, encoding the values of producers, sponsors and target audiences (Bondebjerg, 2000: 3; Tomaselli, 1996: 52). In South Africa, where television has a penetration of 69.6%, where the country remains in the throes of transformation and where the promotion of national identity is a key component of the broadcaster’s mandate, the construction of ideology through documentary is a fundamentally important issue (Duncan, 2000: 1). Depicting crime through documentary offers an important

insight into this - especially considering its essentially negative nature and the media trend of viewing it in terms of 'semiologies of catastrophe' (O'Malley, 2000: 153).⁶⁸ How then can national identity be construed positively? In selecting documentary programmes according to the theme 'crime and punishment', I attempt to address this and other questions posed by the intersection of the broadcaster's mandate with global trends in criminology, global trends in documentary and various understandings of national and local identity. Here I place a 'micro-analysis' of the text against a larger social setting so that, in my analysis, the televised product interpenetrates with broader cultural structures (Corner, 1995: 1). The result is that I question "the kinds of hierarchy of social knowledge upon which programmes draw in constructing their inquiries and in moving to a judgement." (Corner, 2000: 146). Pre-eminent are the social knowledges cohering around globalisation, which inform everything that falls beneath them in the hierarchy. Globalisation alters, conditions and intersects with both the local and the national. Furthermore, law, crime and punishment, are "both the most local and the most universal or globalized of cultural phenomena" (Nelken, 1997: 251 cited in Chan, 2000: 124). For this reason, it is a primary contention of this dissertation that the SABC's policies, including their mandate, be couched in an awareness of globalisation and the way in which it alters the depiction of the local and national at every turn.

⁶⁸ This term was originally used by O' Malley to describe a trend in social science research.

CHAPTER 4: PRISONS AND DOCUMENTARY

1. INTRODUCTION

Prisons are prisons. They are the same. Everywhere. All of them. Just prisons. The proponents of the prison system allege that prisons are for rehabilitation of social miscreants. Rubbish! They are seedbeds for social miscreants. Engines of deviant behaviour. Prisons are a disgrace to society. Human society will never be civilised until it rids itself of this scandalous institution in its present form. Never. Prisons denature, dehumanise, depersonalise, decivilise and de-everything their victims (Dingake cited in Schalkwyk, 2000: 278).

Prisons are seldom, if ever, associated with giddy joy. Generous images of their occupants are hard to come by in popular media and documentary, including SABC3's *Special Assignment*. In a context of this difficult subject matter, the taxing project of nation-building through the SABC is further complicated. Additional pressures appear in the form of neoliberalism, globalisation and commercial objectives, which pander to middle-class audience tastes instead of the majority (Duncan, 2000: 9). What does this mean for national identity? Confusion? Confusion and contradiction? Contradiction seems apparent where positive efforts at nation-building are potentially pummelled by negative 'news values' and watchdog documentaries that expose, criticise and dish dirt. So too, where the commercial arm's obligation to "comply with the values of the PBS" (Department of Communications, 1998: 24) could be obliterated by its licence to pursue "thoughtful scrutiny in programmes like documentaries." (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001: 125). Thoughtful scrutiny is open to interpretation, of course.

Nonetheless, constructing a positive national identity, where cultural diversity is acknowledged, remains a priority for the broadcaster (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001:125). In light of this, the chapter examines a sample of three programmes on prison and prison inmates that were broadcast on SABC3 during the *Special Assignment* slot between 2001 and 2002 with the ultimate aim of determining how they project images of the nation-state and national culture in a context of globalisation, using global theories and conforming to global trends. The programmes analysed are *It's nice to have a friend*, *The*

Lima connection and *The cage unlocked*. In comparing the programmes, it is interesting to note here that there were many similarities between *It's nice* and *The Lima Connection*. In terms of their relationship with global ideas on penology, both evince elements of pessimistic postmodern penology in their content, which has a negative impact as far as promoting an optimistic national identity is concerned. The documentary techniques and traditions used also do not bode well for the outcome of the documentaries. It is only in the realm of national culture that the two videos are really useful, yet here too the optimism is limited. *The cage unlocked* is arguably the most positive of the three videos discussed in this chapter with a theme of rehabilitation offering a strong message of hope. However, ironically, just as the other two videos make strides in the right direction with regard to national culture, *The cage unlocked* is let down by its depictions of stereotypical gang life.

2. THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRISON SYSTEM

I. A BRIEF HISTORY

Prior to the twentieth century in South Africa, there was no systematised prison structure that governed the entire country for any length of time. Punishment ranged from random acts of cruelty to the inclusion of cutting-edge theories of rehabilitation. Yet the mottled history of incarceration saw one consistent feature: penology was closely connected to industrialisation and the criminalisation of the black population through pass laws (Human Rights Watch, 1994: ix, x).⁶⁹ Later, during apartheid, the 1959 Prisons Act played a pivotal role in apartheid penology. It extended segregation in prisons and instituted restrictions on reporting on prison conditions, including an exclusion of

⁶⁹ It was only after Union in 1910 that the Prisons Service was consolidated with the 1911 Prisons and Reformatories Act, which proved to be a defining moment in South African penal history, extending the racial segregation of gaols that had begun with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and promoting solitary confinement, corporal punishment and dietary punishment. Despite some regressive provisions, its author Jacob Roos saw it as containing ““some of the most modern principles of modern penology”” (Van Zyl Smit, 1992: 23). By the 1940s, calls for the reform of the prison system saw the establishment of the progressive Landsdown Commission, which criticised, among other things, the criminalisation of a large proportion of the black population through the application of the pass laws. Yet the promise of the Landsdown initiative was thwarted with the National Party victory in 1948, which saw the tightening up of the prison administration and the militarisation of the prison system. (Van Zyl Smit, 1992: 30).

external prison inspectorates. (Van Zyl Smit, 1992: 31; Human Rights Watch, 1994: ix, x) Contradictorily, at the same time there was “a conscious attempt to (re-)legitimize the system by appealing to international concepts and standards” (Van Zyl Smit, 1992: 31; Human Rights Watch, 1994: x). In 1955, South Africa adopted the United Nations’ Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, even though these rules were not entirely adhered to in practice (Bruyn, 1993: 276).

In the late 1980s, in consonance with the gradual transformation that was beginning to take place in South Africa, racial segregation in prisons was reversed, so that black and white prisoners would no longer have to be separated, and many prison regulations were de-racialised (Van Zyl Smit, 1992: 39; Human Rights Watch, 1994: xi). Further dramatic changes followed in the 1990s.⁷⁰ The rights of prisoners, and particularly juveniles, have garnered the spotlight since transformation began (Van Zyl Smit, 1999: 204; Human Rights Watch, 1994: xv; Dissel & Ellis, 2002: 3). Three primary features have emerged to define the post-apartheid approach to prisoners and prisoner rights. The first is the principle of safe custody, the second the ‘normalisation’ principle and the third, the rehabilitative ideal.

The principle of safe custody, laid down in the Correctional Services Act of 1998, requires that the state ensure that no harm comes to prisoners during their incarceration. Closely related to this is ‘normalisation’, which argues that prisoners retain all their civil rights during their incarceration: their punishment is exclusively the removal of their liberty and, consequently, conditions in prison should mimic those on the outside as closely as possible (Dissel, 1995b: 4). Finally, the ethos of rehabilitation is theoretically the guiding light of Correctional Services policy and has been prescribed legislatively in the 1998 Correctional Services Act (Dissel & Ellis, 2002: 4). Prisoners, supposedly, are ingrained with social responsibility and developed in a way that will enable them to

⁷⁰ These included progressive amendments to the Prisons Act, its renaming as the Correctional Services Act in 1991 and the renaming of the Prisons Service as the Department of Correctional Services, which would, from that point, supposedly be “managed ‘according to business principles’, thus linking with the policy of privatisation in the broader field of State activities. (Van Zyl Smit, 1992: 41).

reintegrate into society once their period of imprisonment is over (Dissel & Ellis, 2002: 2).

II. INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES

The ability of Correctional Services to meet its objectives has been hampered both by internal difficulties and external pressures. Within the prison system, efforts at ensuring safe custody, 'normalisation' and rehabilitation have been largely thwarted by cycles of inefficiency, lack of transformation and appalling prison conditions. Overcrowding and a lack of resources were cited as primary concerns in the 1994 White Paper on Correctional Services, yet prison researcher Amanda Dissel suggests that further problems consist of violence, the absence of rehabilitation programmes, the lack of administrative accountability and poor prison conditions (Dissel, 1995a: 19). To this can be added racial discrimination, the gang system, unskilled warders and arbitrary control over prisoner privileges (Kollapen, 1993: 1, 2).

III. EXTERNAL PRESSURES: SA PRISONS MEET POSTMODERNISM

Contemporary prison thought has its foundations in the European Enlightenment, during which progressive philosophers such as Cesare Beccaria argued for prompt and certain penalties in contrast to the prevailing inconsistent punishment (Van Zyl Smit, 1992: 3). By the 19th century, prisons had become far more rigorous institutions of surveillance and discipline, attempting to reform prisoners by focusing on their minds rather than on physical punishment (Van Zyl Smit, 1992: 4). The notion of reform, which focused on how a prisoner could become a 'new person' through education, asceticism, work and so on, was gradually replaced by a discourse of rehabilitation, which was premised on enabling the deviant to function 'normally' in society, rather than curing him of his criminality (Adler & Longhurst, 1994: 35). Psychological treatises formed the cornerstone of this new development, which became ever more popular as a penal

strategy of the modern welfare state with the progression of the twentieth century (Adler & Longhurst, 1994: 36).

In the 1960s and 70s, in Europe and America, the confidence in rehabilitative ideals began to dissipate as evidence accumulated which brought its efficacy into question (Adler & Longhurst, 1994: 37). This was accompanied by other challenges to the social fabric on these two continents, which, by the 1970s, had coalesced into a fear of rising crime rates, fuelled by the media and associated with the 'non-white' immigrant population (Hall et al, 1978: 157). In terms of penology, a shifting focus from rehabilitation to 'human containment' exemplified the concern with the safety of society rather than the betterment of prisoners (Adler & Longhurst, 1994: 39). Consequently, the shift from modernist to postmodernist thinking has seen a turn towards control discourse and

Control discourse tends to stress conformity. It is not concerned with the rehabilitation or reform of the individual... Rather, it maintains that the individual should conform to whatever measures are deemed to be necessary for the maintenance of order and discipline in the prison (Adler & Longhurst, 1994: 40). It is almost like a return to the panopticon. Discipline and regulation of prisoners is requisite, the security of prisons is paramount, focus is on the protection of society, rather than correction (Maghan, 1998: 85).⁷¹

Although postmodern penology is here to stay, South Africa's Correctional Services is caught in a modernist time warp. Transformation called for the liberalisation of the prison system and, consequently, the emphasis has been on rehabilitation, in direct contrast to the control and discipline of apartheid penology. Simultaneously, however, the government ministry has been subjected to external, postmodern pressures that emphasise precisely the kind of control and discipline that Correctional Services aims to shake off. Globally, steps such as building new prisons, tightening up legislation and lengthening

⁷¹ In spite of much evidence and extensive, convincing arguments by well-established researchers, some criminologists contend that postmodern penology is an illusion and the identification of a series of new trends is simply a recycling of penal modernism, with a few additions (Lucken, 1998: 108). Yet the argument of this thesis maintains that it is indisputable that the postmodern approach to penology includes a number of features theoretically and a number of manifestations in reality which constitute a break from the past and all of which are related in some way to the ethos of control.

prison sentences increase political popularity by showing that the government is ‘doing something’ in a “highly dramatic, tangible and visible, and so convincing, fashion” (Bauman, 2000: 215). In Britain, public debate and political points scoring has often centred on the ability of the justice system to protect the public (Sparks, 2000: 128). South Africa is no different and public opinion suggests that,

Subjection to inhumane jail conditions is viewed by some citizens as a necessary component of the punishment, where prisons are seen as mere dumping grounds for society’s wayward members. More and more the prison and harsher penalties...are coming to be seen as the answer to South Africa’s crime problem (Ballington, 1998: 2).

In response, some ANC ministers have suggested that unrepentant criminals be lobbed down mine shafts or stowed on prison ships or isolated in high security C-MAX prisons for twenty three hours a day (Schalkwyk, 2000: 287). A more astounding contradiction to Correctional Services policy would be hard to come by.

3. WHERE DOES THE DOCUMENTARY STAND?

Many argue that the category of the nation-state is becoming increasingly insignificant and the phenomenon of a nation has been obliterated, with the fragmentation of national collectivities into smaller nationalisms, localities or communities. Whether or not the national is still relevant as a site for policy-making in an era of globalisation is up for debate. Yet as far as the SABC is concerned, it is obligated to broadcast programmes that foster a positive sense of national identity and culture through a unity-in-diversity approach. Undoubtedly, *any* documentary appearing on the SABC, which has to do with South Africa, consciously or unconsciously presents an impression of the nation or of national culture. Documentaries on prisons are no different, especially since prisons, unfortunately, constitute a large portion of “what we might call the ‘culture’ of the country” (Schalkwyk, 2000: 278). Indeed, on some level they can be taken as symbolic of the national and “although prisons do not form a perfect microcosm of the wider society...they do reflect conditions in society at large in a variety of ways” (Dissel & Ellis, 2002: 3).

In terms of this dissertation, the fundamental question is how our position as global subjects is interpreted by documentarists who focus on incarceration and how this is

transposed onto film. Two possibilities immediately come to mind. The first consists of perceiving our global sense of alienation and insecurity with nostalgia for the modernist past where communities and families were supposedly intact and 'traditional' mores prevailed. The penal element of this nostalgia would be a desire to return to characteristically modern rehabilitative ideals. In terms of representing the nation, depicting rehabilitation would offer an uplifting, positive sense of hope and rejuvenation, very much in line with SABC objectives. The alternative would be interpreting our global insecurities in terms of menace and 'moral panic', weaving stories of 'folk-devils' and hapless victims, consonant with the postmodern approach where,

there are some new and large sections of the population targeted for one reason or another as the threat to social order, and [that] their forcible eviction from social intercourse through imprisonment is seen as an effective method to neutralize the threat, or at least to calm the public anxiety which that threat evokes (Bauman, 2000: 213).

Normative moral contours for society would be established in these documentaries through deviance amplification and propagandising the need for deviance supervision, restraint and regulation to restore moral order to the rest of society. Alarmist images of the degeneration of decency would be accompanied by strong arguments about the present inefficacy of the state in controlling deviance and providing a tightly controlled prison system. Consequently, the postmodern approach certainly has the potential to fuel extremely negative interpretations both of the nation and the nation-state.

Both approaches, the modern and the postmodern, are linked to globalisation in a very general sense, not least because they represent both theoretical trends and actual changes that have been felt the world over (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996:2). While all the documentaries examined in my project implicitly acknowledge these global trends, in most cases explicit empirical examples that locate South African developments in a community of global phenomena are ignored.⁷² Empirical examples showing

⁷² Although South Africa undoubtedly faces a multitude of very specific problems, for almost every pessimistic observation about incarceration, there is a comparable example elsewhere in the world. This is largely because of a general worldwide trend of increasing prison populations – even in the 'most developed' countries (Bauman, 2000: 212, 213). American correctional journal *Overcrowded Times* is testimony to some of the problems encountered in American prisons (Maghan, 1998: 86). In Russia, hunger, overcrowding and the spread of contagious diseases characterise the prison system (Christie, 2000:

international prison crises of varying proportions could moderate parochial moral panics about the South African situation, especially because the causes of prison problems are often the same across countries and “in all probability, these causes are more than contingently related to the broad spectre of transformations subsumed under the name of globalization” (Bauman, 2000: 213). These countries’ prisons therefore have an affinity with the South African ones on more than simply a symptomatic level. Ignoring these potential comparisons in documentary means that the SABC compromises the fulfilment of its mandate: using postmodern interpretations of our prison system in only a domestic context suggests that our problems are uniquely disastrous. In addition, documentaries that slot South African prison conditions into a domestic context make a category mistake of naming global phenomena as being national or local. Ideally, for the purposes of projecting a constructive concept of the nation, documentaries dealing with incarceration should adopt a modernist approach situated in a context of global empirical examples.

I. GLOBALISATION, THE NATION AND REPRESENTATION

According to Benedict Anderson’s (1983) famous interpretation, the nation should be understood as an ‘imagined community’ and many other interpretations encourage us to view “national identity as a construction assembled through symbols and rituals in relation to territorial and administrative categories” (Barker, 1999: 65). Yet in today’s global environment, a veneer of the global has modified the hue of Anderson’s self-contained national, so that its processes and structures cannot be understood independently of larger contextual forces. (Waterman, 1996: 41). In line with this, it is the argument of this dissertation that representing the nation in South African documentary unavoidably is embroiled in global theoretical paradigms, such as those belonging to the criminological realm.⁷³

181). Between 1985 and 1990, the Scottish prison system was in crisis (Cavadino & Dignan, 1992 cited in Adler & Longhurst, 1994: xvii).

⁷³ In order to produce a composite and progressive image of the nation, references to global relationships, theories and examples must be selected with circumspection and foresight.

In light of this, I will not only attempt to identify and analyse that which specifically relates to penology, as discussed in the previous section, but also general signifiers in the programmes that have to do with globalisation. Because of the interpenetration of the global and the local where “the global never exists except in the local – and today there is no local that is not infected by the global” (Braman, 1996: 22), the levels of the local and national will be examined as also being inextricable from the global. All three levels are pivotal to understanding the nature of images of the country that are beamed out to audiences. There are many questions begged by this route: is South Africa represented as part of the global landscape? Are local communities given attention? What evidence is there of conscious efforts to build arguments about the nation? How is the nation-state portrayed? Finally, what does this all mean for the fulfilment of the public service broadcasting mandate?

4. WHISTLEBLOWING WHILE YOU WORK: IT'S NICE TO HAVE A FRIEND

I. SYNOPSIS

A secret, amateur video recording of prison warder corruption taken from inside the maximum security section of Grootvlei prison in Bloemfontein by prison inmates forms the basis of this programme. After the director of Grootvlei Prison gave permission, four prisoners secretly filmed corrupt prison officials accepting bribes or turning a blind eye to illegal activities inside the prison. Samuel Grobbelaar, Gayton McKenzie, Petrus Sekutoane and Moosa Miya recorded over two and a half hours of footage and this 'home video' later was presented to the Jali Commission of Inquiry into prison corruption⁷⁴. Included in the video are prisoners selling chickens from the kitchen to prison warders, prisoners providing brandy for the warders, warders facilitating and being paid for drug smuggling in the prison, warders providing drugs for the inmates, a warder selling a loaded firearm to a prisoner for the purposes of escape and a warder 'selling' a juvenile prisoner to an adult prisoner for sex. The edited video footage constituted part of the hour long *Special Assignment* programme and was followed by a panel discussion with the National Commissioner of Correctional Services, Linda Mti, the General Secretary of the Police and Prison Civil Rights Union, Abbey Witbooi and the President of the South African Prisoners' Organisation for Human Rights, Miles Bhudu.

II. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

Reality television

It seems that prisons commissioner Linda Mti was not happy with Grootvlei prison chief Tatalo Setlai using the prison as the set for a "big brother" video on warder corruption (Thomson, 2002).

⁷⁴ The Jali Commission was established in September 2001 to investigate corruption and maladministration in South Africa's prisons (<http://www.sabcnews.com/features/jali/fact.html>).

Responding in annoyance to the *Special Assignment* interview questions, National Commissioner of Correctional Services, Linda Mti says, “We are not in the business of producing films. We are not in film production” (video1). Yet catching corrupt prison warders unawares is a reflection of a global trend of using the ‘spy camera’ approach and incorporating elements of the reality television explosion in the last few years.⁷⁵ The global trend of which the video partakes could be said to have its earliest roots in photography with the popularity of the so-called detective camera (Gunning, 1999: 46). Subsequently, the advent of cinema saw cinema cameras being used to capture ‘private indiscretions’ or evidence of criminal acts (Gunning, 1999: 46). In these early origins, the strong referentiality of the ‘spy camera’ established a public palate for voyeurism on the screen. While an unbroken thread cannot be traced from the 19th century, it certainly seems that these inclinations were reconstituted subtly with the advent of *Cinéma Vérité*, and more assertively with its hybridisation into reality television in the 1990s (Bell, 2001: 107). Bridging the gap between public and private saw the evolution of reality shows based on emergency services in the early 1990s (Roscoe, 1999: 10). ‘Candid camera’ exposés of controversial issues also became in vogue (Corner, 1995: 100).

It is specifically this kind of documentary innovation, known as ‘popular factual entertainment’ in Britain, from which *It’s nice to have a friend* draws (Corner, 2000: 144). The ‘spy camera’ conveys an impression of reality that is even stronger than *Vérité* largely because of the unpolished sound and visuals, which emphasise the rawness and the lack of interference with which the video was made. Poor light makes the prison cells and their inhabitants grey and the lack of camera focus makes them grainy. The sound quality is fuzzy, indicating the ‘authenticity’ of an amateur video. People move clumsily in and out of shots, voices emanate from absent people, frames are crooked, the heads of the main characters are sometimes cut off, action is clearly uncoordinated. The lack of stylised orchestration emphasises the ‘furtive’ observational character of the video; its legitimacy is attested to by the correspondence between what would have happened *sans*

⁷⁵ Notably, although “it is important to remain vigilant regarding the specificities of each national context, it is also crucial to recognise such formats as part of an international trend in factual programming” (Roscoe, 2001: 10).

camera (the putative or level of enunciation) and what happened when recording (the profilmic or level of recording) (Vaughan, 1988: 44; Fetveit, 2002: 79).

Through the strategy of the 'spy camera', pleasure is created through secret observation for the voyeuristic documentary fan, so that s/he can see 'reality' from a 'safe position' (Corner, 1995: 87). Voyeurism is arguably a fantasy of mastery, a desire to satisfy curiosity by engaging with the forbidden from a distance. The inaccessible becomes accessible (Cowie, 1999: 28). Popular documentary, argues John Corner, has catered for this kind of pleasure either through dramatisation, or through fly-on-the-wall filming (Corner, 2000: 144). It is the latter that the prison video uses and the voice-over hints at the voyeuristic quality of the programme by using the word 'secret' twice in one short sentence, "he's been secretly filmed on a spy camera hidden in a secret shoe box" (video1).

In this way, the quest for knowledge, so often associated with documentary, is supplemented by a desire for spectacle (Cowie, 1999: 19). A variety of popular forms, such as circus acts and magic shows, are testimony to the persistence of spectacle in many western cultures, which has now been transposed onto television (Cowie, 1999: 27). Searching for fact, answers, proof, evidence, science, intellectualism is altered by the shock-value of scandalous revelations, whereby the ordinary "becomes the object of spectatorial incredulity" (Gaines, 1999: 9). In the programme, the connection between voyeuristic observation and sensationalism is made explicit by two consecutive sentences, "The four prisoners got hold of a digital camera, set it up in their cell and started filming the warders. The results are astounding" (video1).

Producing documentary spectacles in the fashion of global television trends, surely has repercussions for the image of the nation that is produced, highlighting the pertinence of Hall's question, "what is the nature of the national culture and the national identities we are now struggling to build in an era of intensified global relationship?" (Hall, 1997a: 9). Indeed, where sensationalism is often premised on shock-tactics and opprobrious revelations, it becomes difficult to imagine how a positive image of the nation could be

produced. The programme becomes a record of ‘social manners’ and behaviour (Bell, 2001: 106). The viewer becomes witness and moral judge (Gunning, 1999: 46). The result, including in the case of *It’s nice*, is that scandal, spectacle and sensationalism become the basis for a moral panic that is legitimated by the evidentiary mode of documentary reporting. The warders in the video are seen without context or motivation in simplistic, melodramatic terms.⁷⁶ The danger of the global trend of ‘reality TV’ for the image of the nation is clear and it seems to be magnified in this instance by the fact that it is infused seamlessly into the documentary, remaining unacknowledged and therefore unquestioned. This is not the only global trend exemplified in the video, however, and the ‘folk devil’ of the moral panic is transplanted into a classical narrative structure where binaries of good and evil exemplify a universal theme in storytelling.

The narrative, ‘folk heroes’ and ‘folk devils’

In terms of narrative codes, “The *symbolic code* organizes the fundamental binary oppositions that are important in a particular culture. These include masculine: feminine, good: evil, nature: culture, and so on” (Fiske, 1987: 142). In place of complexities of context, history and circumstances, the representation of Grootvlei prison makes extensive use of the universal formula of the struggle between good (the whistle-blowers) and evil (the warders).

The prisoners’ motivations, their circumstances, their incarceration and, most importantly, their decision to blow the whistle on corrupt warders are completely sidelined in the programme. All that Gayton McKenzie, one of the prisoners, says is, “This is our effort in trying to uncover corruption. Most of the corruption involves members” (video 1). Instead of depth and explanation, the video turns the prisoners into simple signifiers of hope and, ironically, justice. It even goes as far as implying that they are heroes, as suggested by this prisoner’s comment,

⁷⁶ They exemplify “‘A condition, episode, person or group of persons [that] emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereo-typical fashion by the mass media;’” (Cohen cited in Hall et al, 1978: 16, 17).

We all played a major part in the making of this. And these gentlemen – I'll respect them until I die because it was bravery, it was risky. As you know, prison is gangland. It was risky to do such a thing and involve yourself in this project (Gayton McKenzie, video1).

The route to heroism is coloured by the classic theme of redemption, with the prisoners having recanted from their criminal ways. It is redemption, rather than rehabilitation because it lacks a description of process and instead is indicated symbolically through mentioning the prisoners' misdemeanours in a 'past life', "Two of the men are inside for murder. One is a bank robber and the fourth a fraudster and thief" (video1). The prisoners' complicity in the corruption is effectively ignored, their own participation overshadowed by commentary about the warders. Even when Petrus Sekutoane 'buys' a juvenile prisoner for sex, it is the warders' acceptance of the bribe that remains heavily in focus.

If the prisoners are the folk heroes in the story, the warders are the folk devils. At the beginning of the programme, the voice-over takes great care in pointing out the many offences of which the warders are accused, "Some warders are part of a drug syndicate. Others are implicated in a sex ring in which juvenile prisoners are sold to older inmates. And the camera shows, it's even possible for convicted murderers to buy a loaded gun with which to escape" (video1). The viewers are not offered any insight into the warders' motivations for corruption, the conditions under which they work or their general circumstances. Consequently, neither the warders nor the prisoners can really represent the nation in a meaningful way because we know so little about them. All we can glean symbolically is that the nation is in conflict. It is the universality of the struggle between good and evil that has obliterated the need for specificity in a situation where, "Television can be said to be global in its circulation of similar narrative forms around the world" (Barker, 1999: 54). Perhaps it is a global reliance on the hero/devil binary in television narratives that has prompted this South African documentary to eclipse analysis of the local and national with the familiar vagueness of general narrative codes that are used the world over.

Some might argue that the binary creates an image of the nation through the exclusion of the evil 'other' (Salecl, 1993:102). Yet in the video, the nature of 'our kind', of exactly

who comprises the nation, is too thin to really provide a valid basis for this argument. The nation remains undeniably underrepresented.

Postmodern penology

Just as global elements of the narrative and global trends in reality television are threaded implicitly through the discourse of the documentary, so too are global theories of postmodern penology. These inhibit the fulfilment of the SABC's mandate precisely because they remain unacknowledged in the documentary structure even as they present a negative, or at best, noncommittal image of the nation. In a fashion, this could be likened to Barthes' (1973) self-disguising process of exnomination where, "Exnomination masks the political origin of discourse... It establishes *its* sense of the real as the *common* sense" (Fiske, 1987: 43).

The common-sense approach of postmodern penalty is comprised of two strands. Firstly, that there is a loss of control, an increasing crime rate and ineffective punishment all of which contribute to increasing social anxiety and impending moral panics, where the last twenty years constitute "a history of increase, of overcrowding, of a widespread public recognition of futility" (Young, 1998: 260). In the video, the overall themes of rampant corruption, lack of state efficiency in curbing it, almost non-existent security in the prison, and a general absence of law and order serve to exemplify this. The situation is depicted as being one of crisis by the voice-over, which uses descriptions such as, "how rife and widespread corruption among warders is" (video 1) and by including footage where a prisoner suggests that, "I can safely say that fifty percent of the warders are corrupt" (video 1).

The second strand of postmodern penology relates to the desirable countermeasure to this kind of corruption: increased security, increased punitive measures, increased authority, increased discipline. *It's nice* contains a general advocacy of punishment, firmer controls, increased vigilance and the rooting out of corruption. In conforming to this strand of postmodern penology, the video projects a harsh, pessimistic unyielding image of 'last resort' measures to restore functionality to a currently dysfunctional national system. This

is particularly evident in the current affairs section of the video where interviewer, Khadija Magardie, a journalist working for *Special Assignment*, seems to assume that, rather than being rehabilitative, prison should be unpleasant and punitive as part of the deterrence factor.⁷⁷ Although mentioning rehabilitation, Jerome Brauns, Chief Investigator for the Jali Commission and interviewee in this scenario, seems to concur with Magardie's interpretation of prison life. Not only does he imply that the disagreeable nature of prison should serve as a deterrent, but that contemporary South Africa is failing to ensure that this is the case,

It is much easier for them to earn a living in prison as opposed to on the outside and when he goes out into the larger society after having served his sentence, he would reflect on his life in prison and realise that prison life was, in fact, quite enjoyable and to that extent having sent him to prison was, in fact, not a deterrent at all. It in fact encourages criminality because he would say at the end of the day, 'If I commit a crime, so what? Life in prison is just as good' (video1).

His argument, therefore, alludes to a concern with lack of control and effective punishment, which is characteristic of the postmodern condition and forms the basis of a particular social anxiety. In South Africa, it certainly seems that social anxiety about corruption shaped the nature of the video. Consequently, South African documentary seems entangled in the global theoretical trend of postmodern penology, indicative of the way that "people are increasingly involved in networks which extend well beyond their physical locations" (Barker, 1999: 36). The nature of this theoretical trend is such that the image of the nation is adversely affected by its uncritical, 'common-sense' inclusion in this prison documentary.

III. THE LOCAL

The very specific local setting for the video is established at the outset as the voice-over says, "Welcome to a cell in the medium security section of Bloemfontein's Grootvlei prison" (video1). Although there are arguably many different 'levels of localness' (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 18), it is the level of Grootvlei prison, rather than the

⁷⁷ . She suggests that, "The contents of the tape may lead certain people to conclude that crime does pay for certain members of society and that a prison life is preferable to a life outside and it is much more lucrative and much more comfortable" (video1). In other words, by implication, prison should be uncomfortable and unpleasant, in consonance with theories of postmodern penology that emphasise punishment over rehabilitation.

community or the city, which dominates the video. The lack of contextual setting has implications for the SABC objective of depicting diversity, which suggests that a variety of communities should be represented on television as a way of indicating the rich patchwork that comprises the nation. Beyond this, however, the exclusive use of the Grootvlei locality compromises the image of the nation in other ways.

We arguably exist in a context of interpenetrated globalisation, (Braman, 1996: 22). Describing it in similar terms, Robertson labels this mutually constitutive relationship as ‘glocalization’ (Barker, 1999: 42). In the video, Grootvlei becomes the symbol of the local that articulates with the global ideas of penology that are woven implicitly through the narrative. Global examples of prison corruption in other countries, which would balance and mitigate Grootvlei, are notably absent from this global-local articulation. Instead, the story of corruption within the prison walls operates synergistically with postmodern penology to produce a ‘double whammy’ of pessimism and chaos. In this mutually reinforcing relationship, the local comprises the ‘interpretative frame’ through which the global theory must pass (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996:18).

While this undoubtedly has a pernicious influence on the image of the nation, the extent of the damage is potentially debatable. After all, how can we assume that the level of the local is an exemplar of the national? Yet the video itself draws the viewer towards this assumption. The programme begins by referring specifically to Grootvlei, but by the end of the video, Grootvlei seems to be taken to represent the whole prison system in South Africa. In this way, the level of the local appears to facilitate negative conclusions about both the nation and the nation-state in a metonymic manner.

It is the current affairs section of the video that establishes this categorically. While the nature of the ‘live’ broadcast meant that the answers were unpredictable, significant insinuations were made in the questions and comments. In a generalised statement, Anneliese Burgess says, “Well clearer proof of prison corruption we can surely not have” (video1). The exclusion of specific reference to Grootvlei leaves the possibility wide open that the reference to prison corruption is a reflection of a national malaise. Even

more explicit is a question directed at one of the panel members, where she asks, “What we saw tonight, is that a real representation of what is going on in prisons?” (video1). She again introduces the idea that Grootvlei is representative of all prisons by asking Linda Mti, National Commissioner of Correctional Services, “Do you expect this level of corruption at all our prisons in South Africa, Mr Commissioner?” Finally, a pre-recorded interview by Khadija Magardie with chief investigator for the Jali Commission, Jerome Brauns, is similarly revealing as she alludes to the typicality of Grootvlei, “What do the contents of this tape actually say about the state of our prisons in South Africa?” (video1). In this case an unsatisfactory answer could have been edited out of the programme, yet his agreement with Magardie is included as he replies, “A darker side of prison life to the extent that you see how easy it is for prisoners and warders to work in concert in committing crime” (video1). This ‘expert witness’ attests to the state of South Africa and the nation becomes synonymous with degeneration. In this way, the local level of Grootvlei shows how “a careful selection of people and incidents [can] stand for a more complex and fuller version of reality” (Fiske, 1987: 291).

The local prison economy

It is the local prison economy, comprised of sex, drugs and alcohol that is the most explicit link to global notions of flagging morality and lax prison security. This local economy is the engine that drives corruption and is centred on a globally accepted ‘symbolic token’ – money.⁷⁸

The video contains a constant visible exchange of money and drug deals that form a large part of the footage. The commentary tracks these exchanges, guiding the viewer, as if on a tour of prison vice, “Back in their cell, warder R.J. Sephaka...sells them dagga and mandrax” (video1). In a similar fashion, the voice-over notes that, “Jomo Masitsa enters their cell again and sells mandrax tablets and dagga to them” (video1). Specific references to money abound with Gayton McKenzie, for example, explaining that, “This is a mandrax pill. It costs R50. Up to R100 here in prison” (video1). It becomes clear that

⁷⁸ According to Giddens, “‘Symbolic tokens’ are ‘media of exchange which have standard value, and thus are interchangeable across a plurality of contexts’ (1991: 18)” (Giddens cited in Tomlinson, 1999: 55).

exchange value on the inside is governed by a very specific set of rules, where a gun costs R6000 and sex with a juvenile costs food, cigarettes and R35 (video1). The following conversation indicates how the inmates negotiate the contours of the local prison economy:

Petrus Sekutoane to warder Eric Motai: Take this and buy the boy something. You're going to the shop?

Eric Motai: Yes.

Petrus Sekutoane: Take R25 for yourself. Buy him something and bring back the change.

[....]

Petrus Sekutoane to the juvenile prisoner: I gave the policeman money so that we have enough time. I gave him R50. You're my witness. I gave him R50 and told him to buy you something nice...and take R25 for himself. I'll also give you R10. Here's the two boxes I promised you. In prison you don't have a choice. You have to pay. Sit down! I pay for sex, but what can I do?"

[...]

Petrus Sekutoane: You were gone for long. Where is my change?

Eric Motai: Here's your change.

Petrus Sekutoane: How much did you use?

Eric Motai: I haven't taken my money yet. With the R30 I bought smokes and food for R17.

Petrus Sekutoane: Here's your R10 (video1).

The image projected by this local economy is decidedly negative. It is not, for example, explained by broader contexts of the history of homosexual sex in mine compounds and prisons and the process of its commodification. Also absent are global comparisons to the economies of other prisons, including the drugs economy for example. In this way, the local-global nexus consists of the locality of Grootvlei articulating with postmodern penology and, in the process, creating a pessimistic outlook for the nation.

IV. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL CULTURE

As far as the SABC's mandate is concerned, examining the explicit construction of the national in the video is fundamental. Two perspectives on national identity complicate the analysis by producing divergent interpretations of national identity: one involving culture and the other involving civic identification with the nation-state (Smith, 1995; Barker, 1999: 64, 65). While concurring with the idea that national identity can criss-

cross cultural and political lines, for the convenience of analysis, ideas and practices that exemplify the cultural element will be examined exclusively in the next section. Forming the basis for this are morality, race and language. The subsequent section will address the representation of the nation-state in the video and the implications that this has for the image of the nation and the nature of the national identity being projected.

Race, language, morality

South Africa's racialised history wrapped its tentacles around every facet of the prison system, impacting on both prisoners and prison staff as segregation underlined each and every policy of the Prisons Service. Even after the acceleration of transformation in the early 1990s, evidence of discrimination continued.⁷⁹ Rebuffing these kinds of dregs of apartheid policy was one of the SABC's objectives in fostering a unified sense of national identity. In *Its Nice*, the racial cross-section of prisoners (white, black, coloured, Indian) makes it a representative group and a shot of the prisoners sitting in a row near the beginning of the video seems to purposefully establish this. While this appears to be a constructive way of projecting a unified image of the nation, ironically, the prisoners were self-selected rather than being a conscious *Special Assignment* selection. Nonetheless, the interaction between the prisoners in the edited footage certainly suggests the depth of their bond. It appears completely natural and uncontrived, for example, that Samuel Grobbelaar says to Moosa Miya "I'm happy. This thing is for you. I'm going home. I'm helping you, my brother" (video1).

In terms of the vestiges of apartheid, it would be unsurprising for the 'folk devils' in the programme to be subtly racialised. This would also be in line with international examples where, "modern representations of race in television continue to associate black people, specifically young men, with crime and social problems" (Barker, 1999: 79). Yet, just as the prisoners comprise a racial diversity, the warders in the video range from Eric Motai to L.B.R. Visagie and provide an adequate racial cross-section. Consequently, race is not

⁷⁹ For example, "Many black or 'colored' prison guards, speaking to us outside the prisons where they worked, said that promotion was routinely given to white warders over their colleagues, purely on racial grounds" (Human Rights Watch, 1994: 21).

foregrounded and any image of the nation that we take away, even if rotten to the core, will at least project interracial solidarities.

While this may seem like a positive development in the way that the SABC chooses to project its people, the notion of diversity and the preservation of cultural integrity is missing in this 'unity'. In terms of cultural values, symbols, beliefs and so on, the characters in the video are flat, bland and two-dimensional. The growing international trend of multiculturalism (Braman, 1996; Harvey, 1993), to which the SABC seems to subscribe, is absent from the video. We receive no additional information about either the prisoners or warders that could supplement our wafer-thin impression of them as people. Consequently, as far as depicting a national identity in terms of the broadcaster's mandate is concerned, the video suggests that SABC efforts are incomplete.

Identity is generated through signs. Race is one and language is another, which has great significance in multicultural societies,

Language is taken to be at the heart of culture and identity for two central and related reasons: first, language is the privileged medium in which cultural meanings are formed and communicated. Second, language is the means and medium through which we form knowledge about ourselves and the social world (Barker, 1999: 11).

Both race and language are indisputably governed by power dynamics. Language in South Africa has been at the centre of a variety of debates most notably to do with education and broadcasting. In a context where African languages have been marginalised historically, great efforts have been made in the policy-making arena to rectify imbalances. Consequently, we now exist in an environment of multiple official languages. Yet controversy has abounded about the apparent difference in policy and practice, where English continues to be privileged. Being the commercial arm of the SABC, SABC3 broadcasts predominantly in English and *Special Assignment* follows this lead. At the same time, however, in showing 'reality', *It's nice* includes a range of languages as they have been recorded. It includes Afrikaans and other African languages in addition to English.⁸⁰ As far as showing unity in diversity is concerned, it seems that

⁸⁰ The progressiveness of this is, however, lessened by attempts to box these languages into English frames where possible. Not only is the voice-over exclusively in English, but the inaudible snippets of other

Special Assignment here is at least beginning to move in the right direction for the construction of national identity.⁸¹

Just as verbal language comprises one element in the construction of national identity in the video, body language hints at another: that of morality. In one sequence of the video, warder Tladi paces anxiously back and forth, agitated as he witnesses corruption. When Moosa Miya tries to bribe him, he flings his arms up as if to ward off Miya, and backs away. When Miya says, “Tladi, here’s your R10”, Tladi replies “I don’t want shit from you” (video1). Although Tladi does not actively intervene to thwart the corruption, his presence in the video does confirm a normative moral structure, where corruption is abhorrent precisely in relation to society’s values. This accords with John Fiske’s theory of clawback, which he describes as “the process by which potentially disruptive events are mediated into the dominant value system without losing their authenticity” (Fiske, 1987: 289).

At the very beginning of the programme, moral boundaries are circumscribed as a basis for representing their antithesis - the chaos, disorder and inefficiency, which constitute a veritable compulsion for a moral panic. In general, the media has a tendency to use ‘deviance and incompetence’ to say something about order (Ericson et al, 1991 cited in Sparks, 2000: 132). In the video, the voice-over announces, that it is expected that warders might enter a cell to “search for illegal substances or articles” (video1). This would be the normal function of the prison. Yet here, they “drink brandy and coke with the inmates and [to] eat stolen food from the prison kitchen” (video1). Because this contravenes moral boundaries, the observation is made that “This is highly illegal and it could lead to his suspension and eventual dismissal” (video1). Even though the practices of Correctional Services may be haywire, their principles are upheld in the programme. In commenting disparagingly about a corrupt warder, Moosa Miya suggests that the

languages are accompanied by subtitles in English. This may, however, arguably be one of the few practical solutions to otherwise having a ‘tower of Babel’ in documentary.

⁸¹ Commendably, the prisoners even get to explain ‘prison language’ in their own terms, rather than using a voice-over, and this further adds to the impression of authentic diversity. For example, when discussing a drug deal, Petrus Sekutoane explains, “This is the dagga we bought from Mr Sephaka and these pills called Golfstix. It’s mandrax they sell here in prison” (video1).

correct path is “respect for the law or the policy of Correctional Services” (video1).

Where conditions of inverted morality exist in the prison, the video carefully points this out as a means of reinforcing normative values. For example,

Not a single warder in the video has been suspended. They all remain on duty. The head of Grootvlei prison, director Tatolo Setlai has, however, been threatened with suspension because he allowed the four prisoners to make the video in order to expose corruption (video1).

Although at times ambiguous and incomplete, the way that this documentary actively creates an image of national identity in terms of cultural constructs seems promising and certainly exemplifies a far more constructive approach than its use of global trends, theories and examples. This is only part of the understanding of national identity, however, and the way that the nation-state is perceived has equally vital implications for the projection of national identity.

V. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATION-STATE

In depicting the nation-state, the documentary in South Africa faces a dilemma. On the one hand, the broadcaster is charged with transmitting a positive image of the nation, and clearly this would at least partly include the political unit of the nation-state, which is glued together by the government and its ministries. On the other hand, one of the traditional functions of the media is that of watchdog, with particular focus on abuses and neglect by the state. Further complicating the issue is that the Broadcasting Act in South Africa allows for documentary and news to be critical. Yet it does so without explaining what constitutes critical and what constitutes gratuitous mudslinging. Finally, the task of projecting a positive image of the nation in a context of representing prisons is a daunting challenge, especially where “special administrative systems as prisons almost *only* come to public notice under conditions of scandal” (Sparks, 2000: 133). *It's nice* exemplifies the kind of documentary, which ultimately is not in the general spirit of the broadcasting mandate, where the nation-state is concerned, instead simply serving its own narrow end of sensationalism, fuelling the moral panic and contributing to a reigning sense of pessimism.

Corruption and lack of state control

In combating moral panics about crime and corruption, it is important that the nation-state be seen as ‘doing something’ (Bauman, 2000: 216). *It’s nice*, however, shows the exact opposite of this, ensuring that the state is seen as entirely incompetent in almost every possible way. A first indication of this is the astounding number of times that the video reiterates the fact that the corrupt warders are still on duty in the prison. In introducing the subject of the programme, Anneliese Burgess says of the corrupt warders, “All of them are still on duty at Grootvlei prison” (video1). She repeats this sentiment in the current affairs section, drawing attention to the fact that, “These warders that we saw in the video are still on duty at prison” (video1). The implication about the efficiency and commitment of the nation-state is clear: the lack of discipline in Correctional Services means the inclination to sort out corruption is absent. Alternatively, the bloated bureaucracy cannot deal with it or perhaps the department simply could not be bothered. There are many options and none of them are positive.

The voice-over also offers lengthy indictments of the system for failing to take action against corrupt warders.⁸² It notes, for example, that, “The warder has also previously been arrested for smuggling dagga and was found guilty. He was reprimanded and is still on duty” (video1). Another instance refers to a warder who ‘sold’ juveniles to older prisoners, “The warder in this video, Eric Motai, remains on duty” (video1). Finally, rather than focusing on Jomo Masitsa as an individual who is deeply involved in corruption, the video chooses to focus, at length, on the state’s inability to control him,

Masitsa has been arrested three times previously for allegedly smuggling dagga to prisoners. He has been criminally charged but the cases are still pending. Only last month, he was caught allegedly smuggling brandy to prisoners. This departmental case has not been concluded either. Despite further evidence that he smuggles drugs and sold a gun to a convicted murderer, he remains a warder at Grootvlei (video1).

⁸² Since the verbal rather than the visual is able to build the most direct, clear and emphatic argument (Corner, 1995: 61), the voice-over in the video tenaciously drives home the contention that the nation-state is feeble and inefficient. Preferred meaning is consequently created around a decidedly negative impression of national identity.

While the existence of the Jali Commission could be taken as evidence of a proactive stance by the state, it is mentioned only in passing and, ironically, in a context where the state is once again being lambasted for its lackadaisical attitude,

The Jali Commission will later hear evidence that warder Sephaka had previously been arrested for allegedly being in possession of dagga. The departmental and criminal cases against him are still pending. He has not been suspended and is still on duty at Grootvlei (video1).

While the fact that Correctional Services does not take decisive action against corrupt warders may indicate a variety of maladies, from inefficiency to incompetence, there are also specific suggestions in the video that the department simply cannot cope. The implication is one of under-funding and a lack of resources, contributing to the notion that in an increasingly global world, the nation-state is losing its primacy (Waterman, 1996: 39). Sentiments of impotence can be evidenced in prisoner Petrus Sekutoane's observation that, "We must help management to stop corruption. They can't do it" (video1). Commentary about a lack of resources is offered in the interview with Abbey Witbooi, General Secretary of POPCRU, as he suggests that critics of corruption must be vigilant about the parlous conditions under which Correctional Services employees work. This would seem to suggest that the nation-state cannot even look after its own representatives (video1). The implications for looking after its prisoners, in a country where the law requires safe custody for inmates, are perhaps even more severe.

Indeed, *It's nice* picks up on the theme of safe custody, carefully noting that,

On Monday last week, one of the four prisoners, Samuel Grobbelaar, had to be taken to hospital after he was assaulted. On the same day a fellow prisoner admitted to having in his possession a deadly poison. He confessed that he had been instructed to kill Grobbelaar by a warder implicated in the video (video1). Although the current affairs section contains live, unedited answers, Anneliese Burgess guides the discussion in the desired direction here too, ensuring that the image of the nation-state in the sphere of protecting prisoners is one of impotence. This is indicated by the following exchange, where she rebuffs Linda Mti's positive outlook, prompting him to concede a lack of state control. It seems that then, she has achieved her objective:

Linda Mti: I think as a department we've taken efforts in ensuring that juveniles are separated from the prisoners of more than twenty-one years. That is a standard

rule that we've established even in the face of accounting. Juveniles are kept alone.

Anneliese Burgess: But they get fetched in the video.

Linda Mti: This is what I'm saying – we need to tighten the management because you can't have just a juvenile being taken from one part into another section if the system fails. I really can't blame one individual or another. It means the system is failing (video1).

The requirements of debate and particularly the nature of a panel discussion, where participants should be challenged, make it difficult to attribute this type of exchange exclusively to the desire for a negative projection of the nation-state. Just as the watchdog role of documentary complicates delivery of the SABC's pro-nation mandate, so too does the debate format of current affairs, with Anneliese Burgess surely being *required* to ask questions like, "I mean these prisoners have told us their lives are in danger in Grootvlei now. Do you think that is possible?" (video1). In many ways, it is the combination of three different types of negativity that delivers the composite image of degeneracy evident in the video. Firstly, the generally gloomy subject matter of prison, secondly the format of current affairs/documentary (which now seems to include a requisite exposé of scandal) and only thirdly the conscious or unconscious construction of the image of the nation.

While the state's lack of control may be exemplified by the inability of Correctional Services to discipline its employees and ensure safe custody for its prisoners, a secondary indication of this, which is threaded more subtly through the text, is the operation of 'micro-physics' of power in the prison.⁸³ *It's nice* demonstrates the 'micro-physics' of power by showing prisoners rather than the nation-state in control. In one instance, where the prisoners are smuggling drugs, a warder threatens to arrest Moos Miya. Miya replies, "You can try and catch me. You are fuck all" (video1). The voice-over accompanying such exchanges serves only to reinforce them, "Even warders who don't smuggle drugs seem to be powerless to act against the prisoners" (video1). Often it is the prisoners who

⁸³ Based on the notion that 'total systems' of power in prisons are non-existent, this theory draws on "Foucault's somewhat apocalyptic account of prison history [where] power works through what he calls the 'micro-physics' of its exercise, rather than being monopolized by a single institutional authority" (Van Zyl Smit, 1992: 46).

are in control of negotiations with corrupt warders.⁸⁴ Evidence of top-down state control is non-existent in the video, which exploits these ‘micro-physics’ of power to the full. The pre-recorded interview with Jerome Brauns has undoubtedly been carefully edited to include his dark comment about, “how prisoners could easily manipulate warders and actually take control of the prisons to the extent that one begins to think of the Orwellian adage that lunatics might someday be in control of the asylum” (video1). The visuals in the video supplement these kinds of comments by showing the prisoners moving freely around the prisons, drinking and smoking with impunity.

While the lack of state control in prisons is indicated in a variety of ways, perhaps the most telling is the way that the prisoners have appointed themselves to do the job of Correctional Services in rooting out warder corruption. A certain formality and procedure governs the way that the prisoners approach their task, so that each act of corruption caught on camera is followed up with a corroboratory presentation of the evidence to the camera. In one shot, after he has received money from a warder, Petrus Sekutoane walks up to the camera and holds up a R10 note in an extreme close-up. He turns it over to show both the back and the front before walking off (video1). Drugs are also presented to the camera in extreme close-ups as ‘evidence’, indicating the conscious formality that governs the prisoners’ code of professionalism,

Moosa Miya: Open them, all of them.

Petrus Sekutoane: Must I open them all?

Moosa Miya: Yes, they might say there was no dagga in the packets. Show the camera the dagga you’ve bought.

Petrus Sekutoane: And the pills too?

Moosa Miya: And the pills too (video1).

After purchasing the gun, Samuel Grobbelaar carefully reads out the serial number, shows the camera the magazine and explains that the gun will shortly be handed to the head of the prison. These and other examples serve, once again, simply to highlight the nation-state’s lack – its lack of efficiency, competence and discipline.

⁸⁴ They regulate, for example, the stealing of rations from the prison kitchen and the selling of them to warders. A frozen chicken goes for R10.

Mitigating factors?

As mentioned previously, the absence of context and circumstances, which might explain the warders' actions serves only to intensify the likelihood of viewers' abhorrence of them. Additionally, the difficulties faced by Correctional Services in general during its transition phases have been drastically underplayed; the problems of restructuring, the incorporation of the homeland prison systems and dealing with legislative reform and its failures (Van Zyl Smit, 1999: 206, 208). Behind the plummeting of employee morale and prevalence of corruption lies a far more complex story than the video lets on. Although this may partly be due to the difficulties of creating exposition around social structures (Galtung & Ruge, 1973: 57), it is nonetheless true that the complete absence of context, as a mitigating factor, is a problem in the video as far as creating a more positive image of the nation-state is concerned.

Another mitigating factor is the notion that employees of Correctional Services, as representatives of the nation-state, are generally doing their jobs. The truth of this may be debatable, but documentary is not a representation of truth anyway. What is important, is that there are apparently people who are willing to testify to this positive indicator on camera. Perhaps more of these people could have been included in the programme. The sole example is Abbey Witbooi in the current affairs section, who says, "there are honourable men and women who continue to hold fort under difficult conditions" (video1). Excluding positive commentary seems evidence of the fact that "The *omissions* and *silences* of a message may be as significant in constructing a 'preferred meaning' as its overt content" (Brunt, 1990: 70).

Finally, palliating the video's cynicism could have been achieved by mobilising international examples of prison corruption, which would have had the added benefit of diffusing localised moral panics. In a general comment, undoubtedly applicable to a number of different countries, British criminologist Jock Young notes, "At times it [crime] seems as frequent in the agencies set up to control crime as it does within the

criminal fraternity itself' (Young 1998: 260). Clearly South Africa is not the only country in which rampant corruption occurs, yet the video contains no evidence to the contrary.⁸⁵

Although the discussion here has centred on the representation of the nation-state, many of the observations can be linked once again to the global theories of postmodern penology, moral panics and the reduction in the role of the nation-state. In a variety of ways, we are witnessing that,

the primacy of the nation-state as against more local and more particular, or more general and non-territorial, identities, communities, and values (e.g., democracy and pluralism) has always been tenuous and is increasingly in question (Waterman, 1996: 39).

This global trend is represented in *It's nice* through the scarcity of positive attributes associated with the nation-state from which viewers could formulate a national identity. The images of chaos and uncertainty accompanying the decline of the nation-state are closely linked to images showing the 'crisis' of its justice system, which reflects the concerns of postmodern penology.

Grootvlei, as a signifier of the local in the programme, significantly, serves as a microcosm of a larger, nation-wide malaise, in which the ideas of postmodern penology are brought to bear. In this way, the level of the global is threaded through the local and the national in an insidious 'common-sense' manner, where it remains unacknowledged. The result is a poor image of the nation - and any national identity based on it. Optimism is, however, present in the form of the video's representation of national culture where progress is beginning to be made in terms of racial solidarity, language and a normative sense of morality for the nation. Of course, the absence of any indication of real diversity does diminish this optimism somewhat. Nonetheless, the outlook is promising, provided that SABC adopts a more self-conscious approach to the way in which theories and

⁸⁵ Malawi, for example, has problems very similar to those in South Africa as far as 'selling' juveniles to older inmates for sex is concerned (Gear, 2001: 11). This kind of 'survival sex' is necessary to get by in Malawian prisons and "These juveniles agreed to have sex with these men because they had no clothes and no blanket and they were hungry..." (prisoner cited in Jolofani & DeGabriele: 10)" (Gear, 2001: 6). In *It's nice*, Petrus Sekutoane tells the warden to buy food for the juvenile prisoner and he also gives the juvenile money. The similarities are striking.

trends are unconsciously assumed in the treatment of what is, essentially, a complex and difficult subject.

5. MULES, MONEY, MISFORTUNE: *THE LIMA CONNECTION*

I. SYNOPSIS

This is a set of two *Special Assignment* programmes that were aired in 2001 on SABC3. *The Special Assignment* team met up with a female evangelist called Shona Ali from Mitchell's Plain in Cape Town, who preached for the Pollsmoor Prison prison ministry. After confronting her own mandrax addiction, she decided to embrace religion and bring meaning to the lives of prisoners. *Special Assignment* met her at an important juncture in her work: she was preparing to travel to Peru to counsel a number of South African drug mules being kept in jail in the capital, Lima. The programme tracks Shona Ali's path to Peru where she makes contact with a number of white, male, Afrikaans prisoners being held in Lurigancho – Lima's largest prison for men. Interviews reveal the psychological and material conditions of the prisoners, where the local prison economy has left them without any control over or order in their lives. After filming extensive interviews with the prisoners about the difficult conditions they face in Lurigancho, *Special Assignment* moves to another male prison called Callao – also in Lima. Here more prisoners are interviewed, as are their interactions with Shona Ali. The programme concludes with an interview, in Lima, with an ex-convict who experienced Lima's prison system. Part of the programme also addresses the measures taken by the Peruvian nation-state to counteract the drug traffic. This brings up interesting questions about the continuing power of the nation-state in a context of globalisation and specifically, in a context of the astounding reach of the global criminal economy.

II. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

The opening few sentences of the programme immediately state that the programme will be travelling to Lima, Peru, setting up the global context for the programme from the outset. This is probably one of the most interesting programmes in the entire set

examined precisely because it is the only one that places the South African experience in a different country, acknowledging that globalisation affects everyone and that “central tendencies of modern societies have a pronounced global reach” (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 3, 4).

The commendable positioning of South Africa and South Africans in a global context certainly lays the foundation for a variety of comparisons that could see nation projected in a positive light. Yet many of the opportunities for this remain unrealised in the programme, with South Africa being under-discussed and connections seldom being made. Peru is also projected as the ‘other’ in a way that precludes active comparisons and supports the notion that, “the media facilitate neither unbiased encounters between cultures nor critical debate about such encounters, but rather provide mediated and biased exposure that contributes to the generation of stereotypes and vulgar simplifications” (Bar-Haim, 1996: 144).

The only antidote to the lack of comparative material produced by this shortsighted ‘othering’ would be intertextual readings or indexical associations by the viewer, so that they create their own comparisons. But the existence of these is, at this point, in the realm of speculation. The image of self-contained national and local cultures in Peru and South Africa, unfortunately has the consequence of perpetuating “The notion of South Africa as a closed space” (Nuttall & Michaels, 2000: 2).

Postmodern penology

The potential for global comparisons aside, it seems that gloomy global theoretical trends have been mobilised here again and, while not bearing directly on South Africa, do tend to promote an extremely pessimistic outlook on prison in general.

Popular mobilisation of panopticon-type control in postmodern penology is linked to the return to Victorian ideas of regulation and surveillance.⁸⁶ Yet part of this process of

⁸⁶ The ‘super-max’ Pelican Bay prison in California is an example of how these ideas have been seized by policy-makers and implemented in reality. The cells have no windows, automation means that prisoners are

reconstituting the panopticon model in postmodern penology has been a shift in emphasis from work discipline to simple surveillance. Originally, the panopticon was heavily associated with fostering a work ethic as a means to rehabilitation (Bauman, 2000: 209). The notion of rehabilitation through ‘factories of disciplined labour’ (Bauman, 2000: 210) has largely been eclipsed by the focus on immobilising the criminal. However, the idea of a work ethic has not been lost entirely. It has been reassembled in another form – the postmodern idea of offender subsidisation - that a prisoner must literally pay for his own incarceration, either through work or money (Lucken, 1998: 114). *The Lima connection* exhibits this trend, where, in Lurigancho Prison “everything from cells to food comes at a price” (video2). Each postmodern inclination here links to another. The idea of ‘paying’ is undoubtedly connected to cost-effectiveness, the drive to privatise prisons and the withdrawal of the nation-state.

In a neoliberal environment, finance has become pivotal and this sentiment has imprinted itself on contemporary penology. Good penal practice has been sidelined as “cost effectiveness has even begun to displace recidivism as a key indicator of penal success, and accordingly, it is becoming a key element in shaping prison regimes and sentencing dispositions (Feely and Simon 1994)” (O’Malley, 2000: 27). Cost-effectiveness in the penal system is often associated with privatisation, business-orientation, managerialism and efficiency in all spheres of the organisation (Lucken, 1998: 113). Yet in *The Lima connection*, cost-saving mechanisms come in the form of the withdrawal of state officials and the running of the prison by prisoners instead. As the voice-over in the video notes,

Basically the prisoners run the prison themselves. Each so-called pavilion or section of the prison is run by a committee of prisoners called a ‘delegado’. They are responsible for everything from dishing out discipline to dishing up food (video2).

Trimming costs, by handing over control to prisoner committees, can have the unintended consequence of giving them large amounts of power, as is apparently the case in Peru. The video notes that, “Survival depends on money and the only money to be made is from jobs handed out by these delegados” (video2). This form of ‘privatisation’, while growing from a postmodern imperative, ironically results in the lack of control and

individuated and allowed little contact with guards or other prisoners, there is no recreation and guards work through control booths that obviate the need for face-to-face contact. (Bauman, 2000: 209).

discipline that the postmodern approach sets out to thwart. In the programme, it is ultimately the chaos in tandem with the absence of official control that fuel postmodern penology and form the basis for general pessimism and public anxieties around a loss of control, whether in Peru or in South Africa.

The global criminal economy

Crime is as old as humankind. But global crime, the networking of powerful criminal organizations, and their associates, in shared activities throughout the planet, is a new phenomenon that profoundly affects international and national economies, politics, security, and, ultimately, societies at large (Castells, 1998: 166).

It is the supra-national drug trafficking in the video, which powerfully invests it with a global flavour and suggests that South African national identity is ultimately circumscribed by larger forces, whether to do with drug smuggling or diamond smuggling (to which the video also refers).

Drug mules, who comprise one of the cornerstones of this illicit trade, are referred to in the introductory sentences of the programme, “They come as tourists and leave with drugs strapped to their bodies, hidden in their luggage or swallowed as pellets” (video2). The assumption here is that the viewer is familiar with global criminal networks and also with the way in which they make use of communication and transportation technologies (Castells, 1998: 192). In the global era, the variety of approaches of these organisations, and sometimes even the contradictions inherent in them, is their strength. The pervasiveness and influence of these networks is indicated by their fundamental connection to the national economies of many countries. Perhaps too, it is indicated through their popularisation by television and Hollywood, where their characteristics are at once simplified and exaggerated: the ruthless violence, the kidnapping, the extortion, the bribing of justice officials and police (Castells, 1998: 179). Popularisation and familiarity eliminate the need for the *Lima connection* to explicitly refer to and explain this global economy. It is implied, with the assumption that the audience is fully aware of it. This creates an unquestioning, ‘common-sense’ backdrop for the video in a similar way that postmodern penology did in *Its Nice*. Globalisation here is a fact of life.

Just as the existence of the global criminal economy remains an understated, but ever-present theme in the programme, so does the related phenomenon of the decline of the nation-state, where “The globalization of crime further subverts the nation-state” (Castells, 1997: 259). Global criminal networks compete with the nation-state for power, as do networks of capital and communication, for example (Castells, 1997: 304). No longer does the nation-state have the monopoly over violence, no longer can it rely on its justice officials to resist bribery and extortion and no longer can its inflexible, outdated controls monitor and defeat criminal networks (Castells, 1997: 302; Castells, 1998: 173, 200, 203). The implied lack of control of the nation-state is one that is carefully, if subtly, contained in the video. Although not always specifically directed at the South African nation-state, its general message could be taken by the viewer as one, which includes domestic conditions. The portrait of the nation that is produced as a result will be discussed with reference to specific examples in the section ‘national identity, nation-state’.

Religion

Rather than exemplifying a global trend that is felt the world over, religion in *The Lima connection* could, perhaps be better described as reflecting an unchallenged universalism. Although different from globalisation in many ways, the manner in which religious universalism assumes global reach and predominance is somewhat similar. It functions to pass off western Christianity and Enlightenment values as applying to all societies (Tomlinson, 1999: 67). Just as globalisation does not affect developing and developed countries in a generic way, so too is religious universalism erroneous. It embodies the particular masquerading as the universal (Tomlinson, 1999: 67). Assuming the relevance of Christianity for all South Africans is one of the ways in which *The Lima connection* produces an image of the nation that lacks precisely the cultural diversity that the SABC intends producing. Instead of ‘unity in diversity’, we receive an image of the nation that, although unified, is two-dimensional and simplistic. In this way, the use of universalism should be criticised as being in “opposition to ‘culture’ itself – which is understood here as centred on *difference*” (Tomlinson, 1999: 68).

Our first encounter with Shona Ali and her Christian prison ministry is at Cape Town's Pollsmoor prison. Christianity is depicted hegemonically in the programme in spite of the fact that the large Muslim population in Pollsmoor would not respond to "a main boss called Jesus" (video2). Using Christianity as a paradigmatic signifier, rather than, say, Islam, reveals the preferred meaning where South African identity is linked to Christianity. In this, there is the connotation of a global connection in which the localised Christian community is subsumed within a universalism. Images and references to Christianity dominate the video entirely. Shona Ali's messages of "Christian love" are given foundation and significance early in the programme with a caption identifying the 'Seventh Day Adventist Church', together with the singing of a hymn and shots of the inside of a church. Her sermon, which follows, further adds substance to this. Images of the bible are interspersed with shots of the congregation and of Ali preaching. Her sermon, interpreted from Afrikaans, is recorded at length, for almost an entire minute of the programme:

Shona Ali: May the Lord bless you. I ask that you remember me in your prayers. I'm no-one special – I'm just Shona Ali. I want to share something from the word with you this morning. From Matthew 25, verse 35 to 40. Herein Jesus says that we should not forget those in prison. Jesus gave us a beautiful example. You know, we can easily point a finger. Jesus says, 'do not judge or you will be judged' (video2).

And so the sermon continues. Despite their probable cultural differences, Ghita Lotkins (mother of one of the prisoners in Peru) and Shona Ali are united in their common Christian bond, with Lotkins saying, "It's in the hand of God" (video2). Not only does the religious universalism extend to Peru, but to the South African prisoners there. Charles West, for example, is interviewed as he sits on a step in the prison chapel with religious statuettes in the background. Darryl Lotkins is interviewed in the chapel. At a later stage, two of the South Africans walk towards a statue of Jesus in the prison garden. Promoting an image of national identity and national cohesion that coalesces around Christianity in this way denies the complexity of cultures and religion in South Africa.

Class

Analysis of social phenomena in terms of class has been a way in which academics and, increasingly throughout the twentieth century, lay people have understood the world. If anything, in the age of globalisation, viewing society through this lens has become more pronounced. Globalisation and the decline of the welfare state have increased the discrepancy between rich and poor and the number of the socially excluded is growing.

The Lima connection makes explicit connections with this phenomenon, ensuring that South Africa and South Africans are seen very much on the lower end of the class scale, unable to cope and sinking fast. Almost all the prisoners allude to this. Some hint at a lust for money and Stefanus Burgers says dejectedly, “These big promises – these promises of a lot of money”(video2). Most refer specifically to their desperation. Charles West says, “I was in dire financial problems in South Africa” (video2). Christopher Allen claims to have had a ‘problem’ with his eyes, for which he needed money to have an operation. Steven Wright says, “we lost the house, lost the car. I landed up on the street. I was offered the job – it was money” (video2). It certainly seems that “The borderline between social exclusion and daily survival is increasingly blurred for a growing number of people in all societies” (Castells, 1998: 345).

Forthright references to financial difficulties, as a signifier of class discrepancies, are accompanied by more subtle connotations of class. These are sometimes visual, “where bodily style is also a class question” (Smith, 1993: 103). The lank, untidy hair, the threadbare clothes, the weather-beaten look of their skin, the neglected teeth. Admittedly, these features may have been accelerated by the prison environment, but in concert with other signifiers, most notably language, seem to point in an unmistakable direction.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Linking class with language is controversial and political (Fiske, 1982: 75). Not only does it imply something about the educational system, it inevitably brands individuals in a disadvantageous manner. Pioneered by Basil Bernstein, this approach has fallen into disfavour. Yet in the context of *The Lima connection*, much of what he had to say rings true. In this theory, a distinction can be made between an elaborated code and a restricted code. The latter is used by the working class, while the middle class can use both. These self-explanatory terms refer to the complexity of the language used where, “The restricted code is simpler, less complex than the elaborated. It has a smaller vocabulary and simpler syntax” (Fiske, 1982: 75). Just one example is Steven Wright’s inability to explain himself, other than by saying he feels

Global understandings of and theories about class in the programme are given further significance by the fact that these draw on a long documentary tradition of depicting the lower-class victim in both an ethnographic and a condescending manner (Corner, 1995: 82). Early documentary saw Grierson interested in showing the ‘working man’ on the screen and this was steered towards negativity and victimology by Flaherty. Edgar Anstey, who was part of the Grierson group, inflamed the imperative of showing the subject as victim (Winston, 1988c: 274).

This problem-oriented tradition, stemming from the mid-thirties, has arguably retained a great deal of popularity, even in contemporary times. In the case of *The Lima connection*, it has fuelled negative impressions of the South Africans in the video as problems and victims, providing a fascinating platform for the middle class to ogle the lower classes. (Rosenthal, 1988: 247). The result is a landscape of deviance and victimology. Although these South Africans are not actively demonised as criminals, they are construed as powerless, pathetic and poor. What can we conclude about our nation?

Family and home

The era of globalisation is witness to tensions and contradictions that pull us in different directions at once. The disintegration of the nuclear family is simultaneously accompanied by a longing for the security it offers. The collapse of spatial boundaries is accompanied by a desire for community and place-bound stability. The way that *The Lima connection* deals with these two phenomena is mixed, and each will be discussed below.

From the 1980s, we have begun to witness a crisis in the patriarchal family indicated by, “divorce, separation, violence in the family, children born out of wedlock, delayed

‘lost’. He says, “like, you’re lost. No-one helps you out. You see they all get visits, you know, walk around with big hamburgers and cold drinks, you know – just makes you mad. Lost” (video2). Later he again says, “Like I said, you’re lost” Finally he says despondently, “I’m lost” (video2). While not all the prisoners evince this, for the most part it holds firm and is accompanied by a further signifier of class: predictable messages that have a largely emotional, rather than analytical content.

marriages, shrinking motherhood, single lifestyles, gay and lesbian couples, and widespread rejection of patriarchal authority” (Castells, 1997: 26). *The Lima connection*, in consonance with the global mood of insecurity, exploits these uncertainties by suggesting that the family is, indeed, on the decline. The voice-over comments that Eric Bester, one of the prisoners, “doesn’t even know what happened to his only son” (video2). Steven Wright concedes, “I don’t have a family back home” (video2). Perhaps the saddest, most poignant comment is that of Christopher Allen, who says, “I miss home very much, yes. I’ve got a family. Well, I had a family” (video2).

Not only is the absence of family relationships a symptom of decline, so is the existence of substitute relationships, which create networks of support that would otherwise have come from the nuclear family (Castells, 1998: 348). Suggesting this from the outset in the video is the community atmosphere of Pollmoor prison. Here, in this ‘family-like’ environment, references to Shona Ali being a mother figure in the juvenile section of the prison abound. She is “Die ma van die tronk [the mother of the jail]” and says, “ek is baie lief vir my kinders [I love my children very much]” (video2). Showing the hands of a youth in prison, which are covered in tattoos, is perhaps further indicative of substitute family relationships – in this case, gang relationships. Notably, the video that Shona Ali brings for Markus Waring is from a friend, rather than family.

In spite of this, for the most part, *The Lima connection* crucially rejects the global, postmodern notion of the disintegrating the family. Instead, it asserts that a positive family structure prevails and this is contained in one of the primary themes of the programmes – Ghita Lotkins’ relationship with her son who is incarcerated in Lurigancho Prison. Although not under the aegis of the patriarchal family (the father is absent from the video), the nuclear family is steadfast and dependable. In providing material support, Ghita “works two jobs to earn the dollars needed to support her son in a foreign jail” (video2). Of Darryl, she says, “He is my son and I just say to every parent out there – if you can, just try and help your family”(video2). The video that she sends for Darryl contains the following message, “We miss you very, very much here. All I can say my darling – we love you, from Mommy, Daddy...love you, my boy” (video2). Beyond this,

distinctions between Shona Ali and Ghita Lotkins are offset by their identification with each other 'as mothers'. This firmly embeds identity in family relations and is suggestive that the point of convergence across different cultures and localities is family. In Lurigancho Prison, the mutuality of family bonds is captured by Darryl Lotkins' observation that, "But it's...one only realises when one is in a situation like this, in a crisis like this, how important one's family is to you and one actually realises that blood is thicker than water" (video). Additionally, some of the other prisoners also suggest the importance of family. While Eric Bester says that he misses his wife, Charles West comments that, "The thing that I miss the most is my family" (video2). Christiaan Meyer keeps a photo of his wife and children on his wall.

Linked to the idea of family, is that of home. The multitude of references to the former in the programme is accompanied by at least an equal number to the latter. In the global era, where boundaries are shattered and time-space distancing dominates our interactions, a place-bound 'home' is no longer a given. Yet it is nonetheless hankered after as a means of ordering and bringing coherence to our lives (Braman, 1996: 29; Massey, 1993: 63). While it would be easy for *The Lima connection* to be swept along in the tide of pessimism that suggests that the securities of 'home' have been obliterated, the video often alludes to their continued, concrete, reliable existence in reality. Markus Waring talks about his family 'back home' and later sees it as a site of comfort and refuge when he is "standing behind bars, thinking about home" (video2). Steven Wright talks about 'back home' and 'going home'. Some truth, it appears, can be assigned to the notion that, "Place...is the locale of the truth of Being" (Heidegger cited in Harvey, 1993: 9). The shots of the men talking about home are mostly in close-ups, co-opting the viewer into identifying with them and their yearning for home. So too, does it validate the idea that 'home', including all its positive associations, remains a tangible feature of the global era.

The overall way in which the programme deals with both the family and the home could be said to lean more towards the positive than the negative, projecting an image of South Africa and South Africans that is infused with family values. Suffice to note that it is the first and only significantly positive way in which the programme has negotiated both

theories of globalisation and its actual effects. Whether it is enough to counter the overwhelming negativity governing the rest of the programme, is debatable. The millstone of sombre global indicators weigh heavily on the programme: postmodern penology, the global criminal economy and the paradigm of class. This negativity, and the embroilment of South Africans in it, cannot possibly bode well for the way in which viewers perceive the nation. Rather than nation-building, the realm of the global, as used in *The Lima connection* might be said to have had the opposite effect.

III. THE LOCAL

The prison

Meaning and identity for both individuals and communities often evolves most significantly at the level of the local (Braman, 1996: 27). Although the scope of ‘the local’ comprises overlapping or contested sites, communities or collectivities, in *The Lima connection*, there is no ambiguity about the validity of the prison locale.

Callao prison is not named in the video and is devoid of context, except for saying that it is shrouded in smoke from a chicken abattoir. This creates a real image of repulsion attached to the prison and it very much coincides with the images of disorder, chaos and ‘otherness’ associated with Lurigancho Prison. It becomes, essentially, an extension of Lurigancho, which is the main focus of the video. “Lurigancho”, the video announces at the beginning, “is Lima’s largest prison for men” (video2). The size of the prison, with its twenty pavilions, is matched by the number of occupants. The voice-over in the video notes that, “Almost 6500 prisoners are crowded into a prison intended for only 1500 people” (video2).

This overcrowding is undoubtedly linked to cost - whether it be the inability of the nation-state to provide adequate resources, or its attempts at cost-effectiveness. Whatever the case may be, the video fixates on how the prison has become commodified in a somewhat modified drive towards postmodern offender subsidisation. That this is seen to

occur in a disorganised, unsystematic fashion further indicates postmodern penal trends, including the stepping back of the nation-state. At every opportunity, *The Lima connection* shows how prisoners in Lurigancho have to pay for their own incarceration. One of the prisoners, Craig Blumenthal says, “This place consists of money and money is everything in this prison” (video2). He earns money to pay for necessities by doing electrical work for the other prisoners (video2). Another, Eric Le Roux, says, “Here you can’t live without any money ‘cos everything costs you money here” (video2).

The video carefully explains how food must be bought with a meal ticket, showing vats of rice, tickets exchanging hands and a queue of men waiting for food. Even the purchasing of cells is carefully explained by the voice-over, where ‘quaddros’ are cells divided into four by plastic sheets and “Those who can’t afford a cell share these rooms” (video2). Christopher Mans and another prisoner called Norman rent their space for 20 Soles a week. Being behind on payments means having to move out and Craig Blumenthal says, “Because I don’t have money, I sleep on the floor” (video2). Adding texture and depth to this comment, is the visual element, which consists of the camera going on a tour of the sub-divided cell.

In the video, the commodification of the prison is not only seen through this ‘offender subsidisation’ but also through a form of ‘privatisation’. Instead of civil servant warders being in charge of regulating the prison, responsibility has fallen to the ‘delegados’ or prison committees, which control the running of the prison entirely. While *It’s nice* saw prisoners embodying only ‘micro-physics’ of power, here they dominate completely. Unlike conventional privatisation, with the ‘delegados’, control diminishes rather than increases. Exemplifying this dissipation of control, *The Lima connection* shows how entrepreneurship flourishes in Lurigancho as part of the “commodification of ever more realms of life” (Ang, 1994: 324). The alternative to meal tickets, for example, is one of the unofficial restaurants, where food is prepared in the cells. The words ‘hotel’ and ‘restaurant’ are used to indicate private enterprise, along with other commentary suggesting a self-sustaining capitalist ecosystem, “there are little restaurants where food is prepared and sold. We also saw some cells that looked like hotel rooms with electrical

appliances and fancy furniture” (video2). The visuals reinforce this, showing how the inside of the prison has become very much like a market place, with people walking around, people leaning over railings, a make-shift kitchen, washing hanging from corridors and a table from which food is being sold. Eric Le Roux’s cramped cell has been turned into a kitchen, with food cooking in pots and pans. Using evidence for prison system ‘privatisation’ in tandem with the normally antagonistic phenomenon of decreasing control over prisoners, simply serves to doubly illustrate the stepping back or disengagement of the nation-state.

The existence of illegal activities within the prison walls further suggests that the video contests the efficacy of the nation-state. Craig Blumenthal says, for example, “This place is ugly and they steal your things regularly”. The voice-over notes that almost anything can be bought inside the prison, including prostitutes, drugs and cell phones. Darryl Lotkin explains, almost with disbelief, that credit will be extended to a prisoner for a gram of cocaine, but not for a plate of food and that the former is also cheaper than the latter. “Drugs,” the voice-over notes, “seem to be as much part of life on the inside as they are on the outside. It seems to be a crucial part of prison currency” (video2).

Chaos in Lurigancho is not only demonstrated through commentary by the voice-over and snippets from the prisoners. Visually, the viewers are encouraged to believe that they are watching an *au naturale*, authentic account of prison life – observation style.⁸⁸ In the last couple of decades, strict fly-on-the-wall observation in documentary, has been accompanied by interview material and *The Lima connection* displays this trend (Nichols, 1988: 49). What this does, is it creates a stronger case for the preferred meaning of prevailing chaos, where the verbal is accompanied by ‘authentic’ visual support. We are treated to the bumpy legitimacy of a tour through the prison, moving inconspicuously at waist height through the throngs of prisoners and activity.

⁸⁸ This stems from the Direct Cinema developments of the 1960s with their “journalistic ethic of non-intervention and strict observation”(Winston, 2000: 22).

The disorder at the level of the local, suggests a decline in the nation-state. Exacerbating this is the evidence of cost-effective 'privatisation', offender subsidisation and private enterprise in the video, where the 'delegados' are in charge, prisoners must pay and the prison economy thrives. Global penal trends provide an exact match with these themes, and the local-global levels clearly articulate. Although this local-global articulation reflects on the Peruvian nation-state specifically, because many supra-national patterns of similarity can be assumed in an era of globalisation, viewers may well transplant the general negativity associated with Lurigancho onto the South African prison system. Without concrete, empirical comparative examples that might counteract this, the eventuality becomes a likelihood.

The city

Although Massey argues that the place should refer to "articulated moments in networks of social relations" (Massey, 1994: 154), Ien Ang disputes this by suggesting that place and the local has a material and geographical importance as a site of cultural and social experience (Ang, 1998: 26). It is the city that provides the most salient level of the local (Braman, 1996: 31). The idea of Cape Town and Lima as local indicators is thus vindicated. In this regard, local references commence in *The Lima connection* with, "Our journey begins in Cape Town" (video2). Cape Town is not, however, given much attention in the video. Most of our association with the city is in terms of travelling along freeways, streetlights, cars and the airport. In Mitchell's Plain, we only see Shona Ali's house - that is all. Lima, on the other hand, is given a huge amount of coverage. While Peru is generally essentialised in a romantic- timeless manner in the video, Lima is presented as the embodiment of disorder, dovetailing conveniently with the images of Lurigancho prison.⁸⁹ The chaos of the urban streets, the lack of any discernable order, a

⁸⁹ Visually, we see an almost carnival atmosphere outside the prison in Lima, where, "A huge market springs up" (video2). There are exchanges of food and money, a man blowing on a musical pipe, a wagon of fruit, a table with cold drinks and a makeshift barbecue with kebabs cooking. Here, apparently, "Hawkers sell everything from food and ice-cream to toothpaste and shoes" (video2). The riotous atmosphere ties in with earlier images of Shona's arrival in the city, which included a small 'rickshaw' type vehicle, the bumpy, untarred road, a rusted old car lying next to a wall, the box-like, higgledy-piggledy, dusty brown houses and flats in the background. In yet another scene, we are bombarded with busy streets and major traffic congestion.

car trying to overtake on the pavement, the shanty town on the hillside, the people cooking on the street all contribute to the image of modernity gone wrong.

Far from positive, it seems that, “The denigration of others’ places provides a way to assert the viability and incipient power of one’s own place” (Harvey, 1993: 23). Yet the absence of anything of substance on ‘our own places’ in South Africa, leaves this potential somewhat limp and unrealised. Certainly, the viewer may draw his/her own comparisons with South Africa. Yet, without an explicit elevation of Cape Town or Mitchell’s Plain it seems that ‘othering’ Lima was simply a case of ‘othering’, rather than a case of circuitously promoting the ‘self’ as it exists in the diverse localities comprising the nation.

IV. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL CULTURE

Although important, ethnicity, religion and language alone do not create a sense of nationalism. Instead, “Shared experience does” (Castells, 1997: 29). The amount of shared history that a group of people must experience before a sense of nationhood is engendered is variable (Castells, 1997: 51). What is certain is that,

A nation is best understood, then, as an imagined community, conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 160).

In a similar vein, Hall offers that, “The nation itself, and most collectivities of that kind, depend on material conditions, personal and social relationships. But they also depend on how we imagine ourselves” (Hall, 1997a:13).

South African national identity

In reality, almost 40% of South Africans describe themselves according to general racial categories. Many more consider themselves first and foremost part of an ethnic group or racial sub-group (Zegeye, 2001: 14). *The Lima connection* subverts these apartheid racial categories by including no specific references to race that may or may not have been offered by the interviewees. Instead, identification based on South African-ness is

specified. That the viewers are subjected to identities on the silver screen that are not divided on the basis of race is critical. Implying a homogenous national identity, Christopher Allen explains how South Africans diverge from Peruvians, “It’s difficult because you are mixed with different people, you know. They come from a different society from South Africa” (video2). Internal differences in identification are again suppressed with his further suggestion that “They come from a different society from South Africa. These people are differently brought up” (video2). Allen’s comment is accorded legitimacy through his visual representation in a close-up, prompting viewer empathy and identification. ‘Othering’ the Peruvians also creates an ‘us’/ ‘them’ dichotomy, where the ‘us’ is based on South African national identity. It is significant to note that only white prisoners are interviewed – and only men. Yet this is offset by the presence of a coloured woman bringing them relief and hope. The clear affinity between the prisoners and Shona Ali, alludes to a national unity that defies racial categories, albeit indirectly.

The national unity, and the potential for nation-building that *The Lima connection* offers, works harmoniously with two indicators of diversity in the programme: language and food. Language is one of the most fundamental ways in which national identity is fostered (Castells, 1997: 52; Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996:160, 161). History is peppered with examples of the way in which language is used proudly as a signifier of ethnicity or nationality. In South Africa, Afrikaner nationalism was/is fuelled by the Afrikaans language (Zegeye, 2001: 7).

In the video, both Shona Ali and the prisoners use Afrikaans at various points. For the most part, it is subtitled or translated into English, but there are a couple of examples where it is not. Shona Ali says, for example, “Ek is net dankbar dat ek hulp gekry het om vir hulle iets oor te neem [I am just happy that I got help so that I was able to take something over for them]” (video2). Another brief scene shows two of the men eating and commenting on the food in Afrikaans. Significantly, and unlike, *It’s nice*, the indigenous language is, for the most part audible, in spite of the fact that, for the producers, the use of subtitles could have made this seem unnecessary.

If diversity is indicated through the inclusion of Afrikaans, instead of its obliteration in the face of the more universal English, so too is it indicated through food. While the idea of a 'national food' may be inscrutable, due to its constant hybridisation through exchange and colonialism (Tomlinson, 1999: 123), in reality, this does not prevent people from making these sorts of mythical cultural associations. These associations are surely not expunged with the growth of 'global food culture', where "the whole world's cuisine is now assembled in one place" (Harvey cited in Tomlinson, 1999: 120). In South Africa, it is often hybridised foods that have themselves become associated with national identity and "The boboties, koeksisters, curries and biryanis, and of course the ubiquitous samoosa are examples of dishes that are appropriated by more than just a single community" (Martin, 2001: 259). It is the biryani that becomes a motif in *The Lima connection*, indicating national identity and a variety of cultural origins at the same time. In Pollsmoor prison, we first see Shona Ali's biryani being doled out to prisoners and, later, in Lurigancho, this is repeated, with the voice-over noting, "today she arrives for her first visit with biryani and rice" (video2). In Peru, the biryani surely functions as a reminder of home, "as particular food practices [are] associated with particular places ([Mintz] 1996, pp. 97-98, 104)" (Duraz, 2000: 299). It contrasts directly with the 'paella time' in Lurigancho, while simultaneously embodying the diversity of cultures in South Africa.

Here again, as with *It's nice*, it seems that the most successful efforts at projecting a unified national identity (and, in *The Lima connection*, diversity), are in the realm of a cultural national identity. Once again, this contrasts strongly with how the use of global trends and theories in the programme impact on nation-building.

A note on Peruvian national identity

The first scene that the viewer gets of Peru introduces the idea of the essential 'other', which is perhaps prehistoric, definitely premodern, romanticised and static – the mountains, the lakes, the llamas, the dirt road, the gushing river, the women hand-washing in the lake. Just as the viewers are introduced to Peru with visions of a rural,

unchanging landscape, the programme ends with signifiers of ‘traditional culture’ – a ‘typical’ wedding and a man in an Incan type of dress.⁹⁰ In light of these depictions of Peru, it certainly seems that “the shifting global ethnoscape brings about new discourses, both of self-identification and of prejudice” (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 8). The exact purpose of this in the video is not entirely clear. In a way, it almost seems as if the ethnic exclusivities of apartheid South Africa have been transposed onto the global stage as a means of trying to bolster the image of *our* nation. The success of this is debatable. Although, “Every identity is an exclusion” (Hall, 1997a: 14), excluding Peru from the realm of the ‘civilised world’ seems to damage Peru far more than it builds our own identity.

The Nigerians?

It appears that just as ‘othering’ Peru is intended to make South African national identity appear favourable, so is the case with Nigeria. Rather than saddling the South Africans with culpability for their actions, blame is transferred to Nigerian criminal networks. Theoretically, South African morality remains intact. This works synergistically with class-bound ‘victimologies’ to extricate South Africans from the ‘blame-game’. While it is indisputable that Nigerian criminal networks are sophisticated and pervasive (Castells, 1998: 174), they seem to be given extra attention in *The Lima connection*. The voice-over notes that, “almost all of them say they were approached by Nigerian syndicates in South Africa” (video2). Christopher Allen says, “I was approached by Nigerian people in South Africa” (video2). Craig Blumenthal says, “‘cos don’t believe the Nigerians. They are definitely not going to help you. So stay away from Peru” (video2). Demonising Nigeria, almost certainly contributes only to prevailing xenophobic sentiments (Nuttall & Michaels, 2000: 3), rather than creating a positive image of South African morality and culture.

⁹⁰ Anthropologist, Deborah Poole, writes about how the depiction of the ‘other’ in Peru has a history in early photography and that this could be described as a kind of ‘visual economy’ (Poole, 1997: 4).

V. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATION-STATE

Testimony to the continuing influence of the nation-state is tangible through the many references to countries that dominate the video. This is not to suggest that they are seen to wield substantial power, as indicated by the above discussion on global trends and theories. Yet, despite their declining power, their presence persists. We are told that, “At the moment there are 27 South Africans locked up in Peruvian jails” and this sets up a dichotomy between ‘South African’ and ‘Peruvian’ that is sustained throughout the programme. A ‘New Zealander’ makes an appearance, Columbia and Bolivia are referred to, Stefanus Burgers refers to Peru as “another country” (video2) and the aeroplane flying Shona Ali has ‘South African’ printed boldly on its side, along with a very visible South African flag.

With all these abundant references to nation-states, the absence of the South African state as a social and political actor is remarkable. Since silences and omissions are loaded with significance, so too is the invisibility of the South African nation-state. Dominating this invisibility is the theme of abandonment, which underlines the entire message of the video, extracting yet more empathy for these pitiful ‘victims’, who have been forgotten by their country. Where the nation-state *is* mentioned, the theme of abandonment continues, with the voice-over seemingly snubbing the “occasional appearance of embassy staff” (video2). While this is possibly the most notable theme in the video, there are other occasions where the negative associations with the nation-state are reinforced. Tacked on to the very end of the programme is a parting titbit for the viewers to mull over. Anneliese Burgess comments that,

It was interesting for me that when I asked the South Africans if they would rather be in a prison back home, all but one of them said they preferred being in a Peruvian prison. They said one of the reasons is that there is less of a threat of sexual violence in Peruvian prisons (video2).

Not only does it appear that the nation-state is unable to provide for safe custody in prison, but, in an earlier comment, the video seems to hint that Correctional Services is not fulfilling its legally prescribed obligation of rehabilitation. Religion plays a vital role in rehabilitation and the video notes carefully that Shona Ali works as an unpaid

volunteer, saying, “She doesn’t get paid for her work and depends on donations” (video2). At another point in the programme, Steven Wright says, “‘cos it’s hard to get a job in South Africa” (video2). Once again, this is an indication of the diminished role of the state, which can be attributed to the forces of globalisation and perhaps, the related decline of the welfare state. The South African nation-state, while being a marker for identity, is depicted as utterly powerless.⁹¹

Comparisons between the South African and Peruvian nation-states are begging to be made. Not only would this approach mitigate the ‘othering’ of Peru, it would benefit South Africa, by highlighting South African problems in a context of global difficulties.⁹² Conditions in Peru and South Africa are conducive to comparison. Like South Africa, Peru is a country in transition.⁹³ It seems that many of the transitional challenges confronting the nation-state’s penal system are also comparable to South Africa. Corruption is widespread and prison staff members are involved in drugs, blackmail, arranging escapes and so on.⁹⁴ Overcrowding is also a problem.⁹⁵ This is strikingly similar to South Africa (Dissel, 1995a: 16). I am not suggesting that documentary can transplant these actual conditions onto tape in any simple way. After all, it is now commonly accepted that documentary cannot represent reality. Yet the existence of common conditions in both countries certainly facilitates the development of televisual comparisons, which could potentially mitigate moral panics to do with the efficacy of the South African nation-state.

⁹¹ Although it should be conceded that two positive references to the nation-state *are* present in the video, as with *It’s nice*, constructive comments are in short supply. Firstly, Steven Wright says that, “in South Africa at least I would have been sentenced already, you know. Here you wait and you wait and you wait and nothing happens” (video2). Secondly, Christopher Allen says, “where back home, in South Africa, you got a proper system where you don’t pay your way through” (video2). These two brief comments, in the face of overall abandonment, seem rather ineffectual, however.

⁹² Admittedly, viewers may make these comparisons anyway, without being explicitly guided, but fleshing them out in an overt way would indicate a conscious effort on the part of the SABC to make a statement about the nation.

⁹³ It has, for example, recently started its own truth commission and a newspaper article asks, “Sound familiar? My own sense of nostalgia was acute. Peru, albeit without quite the same sense of romantic adventure or global attention and scale of technical support, is replicating the South African experience of 1995-1996” (M&G, 9 May 2002, “Our democracy cannot falter”).

⁹⁴ <http://bmj.com/cgi/content/full/320/7228/173>; http://www.freelori.org/gov/statedept/95_perureport.html.

⁹⁵ <http://www.usis.usemb.se/human/human97/peru.html>.

Overall, most significant for the programmes and for the broadcaster's mandate, is the scope and variety of ways in which indicators of the global have been seamlessly woven through the text – with largely negative consequences, akin to *It's nice*. From class to postmodern penology to religion to the global criminal economy, the composite picture is one of pessimism. Salvation only comes in the form of representing the family and home. Further similarities with *It's nice* exist, firstly, in the seemingly conscious way in which the programme constructs cultural identity. Productive strides are being made. Secondly, the unremitting criticism of the nation-state appears to be constant across both programmes. It seems pertinent at this point to consider that this might be the beginning of a pattern in SABC documentary screenings.

6. THUGS, DRUGS AND HUGS: REHABILITATION AND THE CAGE UNLOCKED

I. SYNOPSIS

This hour-long special was produced for the BBC, but shown as a *Special Assignment* episode on SABC3 on the 22nd of January 2002. Filmed in Cape Town, the programme focuses on the efforts to rehabilitate two long-term prisoners who were released from Pollsmoor Prison. Mogamat Benjamin and Erefaan Jacobs were both high-ranking members of a prison gang. Inside prison, gang allegiance became their primary indicator of identity. Drugs (mandrax), sex and violence formed the basis of their everyday existence in the prison. Now they were faced with the challenges of trying to re-integrate with their estranged families and society, avoiding the temptations offered by their old, crime-ridden neighbourhoods and coping with drug addiction. The video tracks Mogamat Benjamin as he reintroduces himself to his wife, who had ‘fallen in love with him’ after he raped her when she was twelve, and his terrified step-daughters, one of whom he had also raped. Only one member of the family is employed. Erefaan Jacobs’ mother takes him back into her home, despite his earlier death threats against her and the tattoos on his face saying, “I hate you mum”. Joanna Thomas becomes part of the gangsters’ efforts to rehabilitate and re-enter society. She works for the Centre for Conflict Resolution and ran workshops with the gangsters in prison. She focused all her energies on ensuring their successful rehabilitation and reintegration into their communities. By the end of the documentary, it appears that she has achieved some success with both men. Mogamat Benjamin, through her intervention, has effected a fragile reconciliation with his family. He has not managed to wean himself off mandrax. Erefaan Jacobs’ rehabilitation seems far more successful. He has become part of his family once again and has had the tattoos removed from his face. The video ends on an optimistic note.

II. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

The cage unlocked suggests that the SABC employs videos that are optimistic without diving wholeheartedly behind rose-tinted spectacles. It categorically shows that the SABC has not consciously adopted a formula of negativity in its broadcasts. It must be noted, however, that, although broadcast on the SABC, it is surely significant that *The cage unlocked* was commissioned specifically for the BBC. The SABC itself, especially in the form of *Special Assignment*, seems not to commit itself to similarly uplifting crime and punishment programmes on a regular basis.

Modernist versus postmodernist penology

Examining the aetiology of crime, a strong trend in modernist criminology, is viewed with some scepticism in postmodern thinking. Aetiology has largely viewed criminals as the victims of childhood trauma or unfortunate socio-economic circumstances – forces beyond the control of any individual. The desire to find causes, or the root of criminal activity is strongly linked to a positivism, which attempts to explain non-conformity or deviance (Young, 1998: 267).⁹⁶

In general, postmodernism has swept aside aetiology and with it much of modernist criminology, including positivism. Finding the underlying causes for criminal behaviour has been replaced by finding suitable redress for victims of crime. Locking-up-and-throwing-away-the-key would be a suitable way of describing contemporary theorisations about criminals. Rehabilitation has taken a back seat in favour of a paradigm of exclusion

⁹⁶ The initial popularity of social positivism, which focused on poor social conditions as the cause of crime, was replaced by individual positivism, which focused on deviance in individual families or groups of families. The shift can be attributed to rising crime rates from 1960 to 1975 that were contradictorily accompanied by dramatic increases in the standard of living and employment rates in many counties across the world (Young, 1998: 268). Social positivism evidently did not work. Under-socialised women, most of whom did not turn to crime, further challenged the validity of social positivism (Young, 1998: 276). Although this theory was re-hashed in the 1980s, individual positivism largely replaced it. In terms of aetiological focus, individual positivism still seems popular, focusing as it does on the family and community (Young, 1998: 268, 269).

(Bauman, 2000: 205).⁹⁷ Now too, criminals are being held personally responsible for their ‘sorry fates’ and are seen as entirely capable of resisting the blights that impinge on their lives (Bauman, 2000: 207).⁹⁸ At the end of *The cage unlocked*, the voice-over says of Joanna Thomas’s approach, “It demands that violent men take personal responsibility – take charge of their own lives” (video3). Despite this caution, the message of the video seems to sit firmly within both the individual and social positivist schools of modernist criminology.

One of the most important elements of looking for causes is a psychological focus, which, in the vein of individual positivism, looks to the family for answers. Personality and emotional problems are seen to directly descend from parental abuse, neglect or indifference – and particularly ‘maternal deprivation’ (Fattah, 1997: 133). *The cage unlocked* makes great use of this, with emotive forays into Mogamat Benjamin’s traumatised childhood. To begin, the voice-over notes that, “Joanna has encouraged Mogamat to examine his addiction to violence by tracing it to its source – to dig deep into his past. For the first time in his life, he confronts his own childhood” (video3). The programme goes on to examine Mogamat’s ‘unusual’ family background, abdicating the individual of responsibility and looking for the causes for crime, rather than motivations (Fattah, 1997: 275). Mogamat says, “I saw a lot of brutality. I saw a lot of people hurting other people and as the years passed by, I became involved in the struggle – like a circle. Everybody here gets involved. It wasn’t a nice place for me to grow up” (video3). Adding to this, the voice-over notes that Mogamat’s mother died of tuberculosis when he was nine. The visuals show a black and white portrait photograph of her – the serenity and gentleness of her image compounding the impact of her absence in Mogamat’s life. Mogamat describes the difficulties that followed her death, including the fact that his father was an alcoholic and drug addict. He explains how he resented his father’s subsequent girlfriends, how he cut up their underwear and we are told that, as a result, he

⁹⁷ In a nutshell, this modernist/postmodernist shift is well captured in the following observation that “The prospect of reintegrating the offender is more and more viewed as unrealistic and, over time, comes to seem less morally compelling” (Garland & Sparks, 2000: 200).

⁹⁸ America could, perhaps, be said to be the originator and perpetuator of these trends and notably, “The American public consistently has been exposed to messages suggesting that the main cause of crime is an inability for some people to ‘just say no’ when criminal opportunities present themselves” (Bursik, 2000: 87).

was punished by being made to wear a dress made from a grain sack. In a final psychological catharsis, Mogamat says,

I kept getting hatred in me. I filled myself with hatred, you see. So my child life I never expressed feelings. That day at Pollsmoor was the first time in my life I cried – I cried in front of people. My first time at the age of forty-eight. For the first time I cried in front of people since my father put me in that skirt. All those things I kept inside of me. Nobody knows what's inside of me. I protect all that stuff (video3).

The relevance of this psychological delving in the video is that, in spite of its shortcomings, it provides the foundation for a therapeutic, rehabilitative argument, which, in turn, is the cornerstone of the video's optimism.

The notion of rehabilitation focuses specifically on the 'socially maladjusted', 'deviant individual' identified by psychological analyses (Adler & Longhurst, 1994: 37).

Treatment and correction in prison are deemed to be the path to reintegration into society (Fattah, 1997: 178).⁹⁹ For Mogamat in particular, rehabilitation in the video aims to treat his dysfunctional background while facilitating a smooth transition from prison back into society. We see so-called 'group therapy' in action. One scene shows a group of men and a close-up of a man looking remorseful with his hands clasped over part of his face.

Other men in the group are sitting and look thoughtful. Yet another is bowed over as he sits, resting his head on a fist. We see Erefaan and Mogamat as part of the process too.

While Erefaan looks tearful, Mogamat sits with his one hand over his face. Into the shot comes Joanna Thomas. She puts her arm around him, bends down and speaks into his ear.

He nods. Mogamat says, "I never had remorse in the past, but after all these things Joanna learned me, I felt remorse so big. At first I understand what's the meaning of empathy" (video3).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ While the prison systems in most countries are ostensibly saddled with the responsibility for rehabilitation, it is often supposed that prison itself creates the need for rehabilitation. Faced with trying to reintegrate into society, offenders are confronted with stigma, disorientation and unemployment (affecting survival on the outside as well as self-esteem). The offender finds that, "Life has moved on and he has been left behind. Many individuals find themselves *isolated* as interpersonal relationships have disintegrated. Due to the socialisation process within a prison most individuals find that their general and *social skills have deteriorated*" (Stevens, 1991: 5).

¹⁰⁰ Further evidence of group therapy is available later in the video where, at Pollsmoor, we see a shot of men in a room, standing in a circle, clapping their hands. Their feet stomp together in unison (video3). A

The cage unlocked commits the viewer to witnessing each stage of rehabilitation. Not only do we see it as a process within the prison walls, but also in the form of changing attitudes and tangible outcomes after Mogamat and Erefaan are released. We see the way in which Erefaan becomes a mentor for his young brothers, encouraging them to avoid a life of crime. According to the video, he is also successfully kicking his drug habit. At one point he says to Joanna, “I feel great man. I feel good” (video3). At another point, he triumphantly asserts, “I’m into it now. I’m again in my life. I’m gonna live with it” (video3). A third confirmation follows, and Erefaan effuses, “It’s all positive and I like it. It takes me forward” (video3). Both Mogamat and Erefaan attempt to engage with the community in a way that is therapeutic for them: they visit schools, talk to children and discourage them from a life of crime. They have miraculously been transformed into role models. The heart-warming letters that Erefaan receives from the learners spur him further to stick to the straight and narrow. It certainly seems that Joanna Thomas’s prison project fulfils all the requirements for a successful rehabilitation programme. The video suggests that it encourages self-sufficiency and builds confidence in the offender, allowing him to “regain his confidence legitimately, not a false or imagined self confidence typified by unrealistic expectations about his ability and his future’ (1973: 98)” (Stevens, 1991: 9).

The final stage of rehabilitation, and one which Correctional Services ideally aims to facilitate, is to reintroduce the offender to his family and community, easing him back into long-forgotten patterns of existence and, hopefully, reawakening normality. As far as Mogamat’s tempestuous household is concerned, we are told that, “Joanna has agreed to run a workshop for the whole family. She wants them to try to talk to one another about why life at home has become unbearable” (video3). Once again, the viewers are treated to a journey showing the progress that rehabilitative efforts can foster. The family begins to relate to each other, they talk, they do ‘team-building’ exercises. By lunchtime, we witness a breakthrough that is unprecedented in the Benjamin household – they sit and

different session shows Mogamat and Erefan listening intently to Joanna Thomas as she counsels and writes on a whiteboard.

eat around the same table (video3). ‘Astonishing’ is how the voice-over maps it. For Erefaan, his revoking of gangster life is symbolically marked by the removal of his gangland tattoos and his reintegration with his family. Mogamat, on a final uplifting note for the programme, similarly expresses his commitment to change. “I’m not an angel,” he says,

I’m at a period – I’m struggling and I believe I can become clean but it won’t happen overnight. But I’m in the first step – saying ‘no’ to crime. I’m in the first step. I made a choice not to go back to prison again. I’m going to get it right (video3).

Through the inclusion of these sorts of declarations in the edited footage, the programme seems to adhere steadfastly to the notion that, “The aim of the prison as a state agency [is] to socialise the individual back into society” (Adler & Longhurst, 1994: 37). While lauding the benefits of rehabilitation, the programme also attempts to project a ‘balanced’ view of the process, by cataloguing the difficulties faced by Mogamat in particular. We learn about how he has dropped out of a drug addiction programme, how he has refused an offer of work, how his family fears and mistrusts him and how, “Mogamat has to struggle perpetually to keep his old instincts at bay” (video3).¹⁰¹ Despite this and *in spite of* this, the message in the programme still seems to be one of optimism and hope. It is precisely the theme of rehabilitation, entrenched in its modernist discourses, that allows this sense of hope to prevail.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ This seems to point to worldwide trends where rehabilitation does not have very solid outcomes and recidivist rates continue to stand at between 60 and 80% (Stevens, 1991: 4). Indeed, “In the thoroughly considered, closely argued and backed with comprehensive research opinion of Thomas Mathiesen – ‘throughout its history, the prison has actually never rehabilitated people in practice. It has never led to the people’s ‘return to “competence”’ (Mathiesen 1990)” (Bauman, 2000: 210).

¹⁰² Perhaps the only real hint at postmodern criminology in the video, is that of risk management. This is related to how criminals behave after they have been released, assessing their risk of re-offending and managing that risk (Brown, 2000: 94). The video exemplifies this by attempting to gauge how the violent, poverty-stricken environments of Mogamat and Erefaan will impact on their likelihood of re-offending. There are a variety of different strategies used to assess risk – actuarial methods, clinical methods and the method that is implicitly contained in the video where, “Anamnestic assessments of risk...focus upon the identification of situational determinants of offending behaviour and an assessment of the extent to which these can be expected to reoccur in the future” (Brown, 2000: 97). Dynamic risk factors also play a role. Unlike the more fixed determinants of age and sex, for example, dynamic factors include “alcohol and drug abuse, the presence of antisocial friends, quality of marital or family relationships, attitude to offending and financial management skills” (Broadhurst, 2000: 118). *The cage unlocked* takes account of these dynamic variables in such a way that *does* tend towards negative by identifying the potential pitfalls in the environment that could cause Erefaan and Mogamat to regress. Nonetheless, risk identification and risk

The family

In news stories, as with documentary, viewers are encouraged to identify with the characters they see in order that the narrative becomes compelling. Hence, stories are ‘personified’, woven around people rather than complex invisible structures (Schudson, 1996: 152). In *The cage unlocked*, we are treated to the personal journeys of Mogamat and Erefaan and we become embroiled with and fascinated by their families along the way. The global phenomenon of the decline of the family unit, as evident in *The Lima connection*, was met in that programme by countermeasures emphasising the strength of the South African family unit. Undoubtedly, the result was a positive impression of the nation’s fabric. In *The cage unlocked*, we witness a similar ‘journey of hope’ where familial dysfunction is offset by gradual steps towards fulfilling a global nostalgia for security through the restitution of the family.

We witness an entire history of dysfunction as Mogamat explains how he met his wife Ragmat – by grabbing her around the neck and then raping her. We hear how he raped his step-daughter, Fuzlin, at knifepoint when she was thirteen and Mogamat remarks that, “I saw that this child isn’t willing. She’s not prepared to do this. So I began to force, force” (video3). Mogamat’s violence is worsened by his drug addiction and once, we are told, he attempted to burn the house down when deprived of his ‘fix’. Because of his extreme violence, the voice-over tells us, that with Mogamat’s release, his family is scared. Shafieka says, “When I see him, I’m terrified. A thug is a thug and you never know when he’ll get you. He’ll laugh with you, but seconds later, you could be dead” (video3). Fuzlin says she refuses to go into the backyard when he is alone there. Mogamat himself comments with sadness on how the family is disconnected, “It’s with everyone decides when and how they want to eat. Never it’s a roundtable with the whole family. I’d really like that. To feel the love of a family around a table. But here, the love ain’t there” (video3).

management tend to be secondary in the video to the discourse of rehabilitation. Modernist penology seems to be leaps and bounds ahead in the video and goes a long way to depicting optimism in the video.

Aside from violence and estrangement, the Benjamin example shows us how the nuclear family is disorganised: Shafieka, one of Mogamat's step-daughters is an unmarried mother of two and Fuzlin is sixteen, separated from her husband and four months pregnant. It is not only Mogamat and his family who provides us with evidence of dysfunctional family relationships. Erefaan had a long-standing, severe, feud with his mother and he says,

The day I came to prison I had a grudge against my mother, so I stuck these words on my face (...steek ek die woorde 'I hate you mum' en 'spit on my grave'. As sy gekom het...) If she came to visit, I chased her away and told her, 'I don't want you to visit me'. I even told her I'd kill her the day I came out of prison (video3). From this it certainly does seem that the video accords with a global phenomenon where, "The future of the family is uncertain". (Castells, 1998: 348).¹⁰³

The negative depiction of the family seems to bode ill for the image of the nation, worsened by the naturalisation of gender violence in the video. We hear about a variety of ways in which Mogamat threatens or attacks the women in his family.¹⁰⁴ These violent outbursts are seen simply as violence and are not problematised as being violence that is directed specifically at women. Consequently, in the video, "That women are most likely to be assaulted or killed by known men is still explained as a *natural* course disaster of some intimate relationships" (Stanko, 2000: 151). The result is an image where violence against women is not only etched into the everyday experience, but is normalised to the extent that we accept that this state of affairs is quite natural in the South African context.

¹⁰³ Along with the decline of the family, and closely related to it, is the formation of alternative collective and communal identities. Calling into question the familial security of modernity, "Networks of people...increasingly substitute for nuclear families as primary forms of emotional and material support" (Castells, 1998: 348). The programme underlines this phenomenon a considerable number of times, saying, for example, "The gang becomes a surrogate family" (video3). Of gang relationships in prison, Mogamat says, "Here we're deeply committed to one another" (video3) and he contrasts this with the family relationships on the 'outside'. The voice-over buttresses the contrast between gang and family, saying "Mogamat commanded respect as a gangleader in prison. Unable even to provide for his family, he is held in contemptuous disregard here" (video3). Erefaan too appears to have substituted the family with an alternative means of collective identification and says, "I believe only in the gang. I listen only to my brothers" (video3). Once Mogamat is home, it seems that Mogamat reconnects with members of his old street gang and prison gang, rather than with his family. The voice-over tells us that it is with these 'old friends' that he appears relaxed and self-assured.

¹⁰⁴ Ragmat says, "One night he started again and I ran to hospital – almost a nervous breakdown. He wanted to hit me over the head with a piece of iron" (video3). To this, Shafieka adds, "He wanted to stab my mother. That was the first time. With two knives in his hands. For nothing" (video3).

Perhaps it is offered to us in the video as an unquestioned part of our national character or identity.

However, in spite of the negative image of dysfunctional family relationships and the gender violence that inhabits them, it also appears that there is nostalgia for the stable family unit. On an optimistic note, this indicates a normative guideline for the nation based on positive family values. Added to this, some morsels of hope for Erefaan and Mogamat's families suggest that redemption and the reconstitution of the family are realisable goals.

In terms of nostalgia, at one point in the programme, images of Erefaan talking are interrupted by a shot of an idyllic family picture. Serenity and contentment seem to characterise it. We are then treated to a close-up of Erefaan and his mother in the picture, with both looking very happy. So too could the picture of Mogamat's mother indicate a hankering for a loving family environment.

Particularly in Erefaan's case, the nostalgia is translated into hope in the video. In spite of having the words 'I hate you mum' tattooed onto his face, after he is released from jail, he says, "From now on I'm going forwards, not backwards. I'm going to my mother's house" (video3). His mother takes him back without question and there is an emotional return to family values as a reconciliation between the two takes place. In one scene, Erefaan reaches out to his mother, who is on the verge of tears, and hugs her. Accompanying this are signifiers of comforting domesticity and familial reassurance – the 'traditional', old-fashioned mother in front of the stove cooking in the kitchen.¹⁰⁵ Erefaan also becomes transformed into an attentive role model for his younger brothers. We hear this from the voice-over and also see Erefaan interacting tenderly with one of the boys.

¹⁰⁵ As we see a close-up shot of a pot on a stove and Erefaan's mother cutting onions, it seems clear that the programme is in the grips of "Nostalgic returns to traditional images of home cooking and slow food" (Duraz, 2000: 289).

While the theme of hope, redemption and family values is stronger in the story of Erefaan, we also clearly see it in Mogamat's commitment to improve his home life. During Joanna Thomas's sessions, we see the family communicating, we see Mogamat gently holding Shafieka's baby and we hear Mogamat's plea to his family for change and his hope for a stable, loving family environment,

I know it's hard for you to love me for the things I've done in the past. But pray for me. I don't do such things anymore, in the future and I will pray for your love. That's all I want from you – is your love (video3).

The global erosion of the family, including the substitution of family relationships with other group identifications clearly impacts on *The cage unlocked*. Yet, as with *The Lima connection*, acknowledgment of these global trends does not mean an uncritical acceptance of them. Rather than embracing them and their unhappy message of decline, this programme chooses to thwart them with a message of hope and restitution. Undoubtedly, this reawakening of constructive family values is intended to leave the viewer with a sense of upliftment, which, in turn, could constitute a useful step in the direction of positive nation-building.

Documentary style

The most remarkable aspect of the video's documentary style is that it is entirely unremarkable. Rather than imitating global television innovation as, for example, *It's nice to have a friend*, it employs a very conventional sense of style. Perhaps conservative would be a more appropriate term than conventional, reflecting a somewhat staid middle class BBC tradition.

The cage unlocked fits the bill of moderate 'expository mode', where a voice-over is used to make an argument and additional visual and verbal footage is used as substantiation (Fetveit, 2002: 32). It is neither cutting edge, nor unconventional. Instead it smacks of a very particular global format of documentary conservatism, which has regained popularity since the late 1980s (Vaughan, 1988: 35).

While the postmodern paradigm avoids the 'voice of God' approach, in the distinctly modernist *Cage Unlocked*, the voice-over plays an integral, defining role. The viewer is

encouraged to align him or herself with the omniscient voice-over through the attractiveness of identifying with “the ‘other’ of knowledge, a position of mastery” (Cowie, 1999: 29). The point is not only to fill gaps in the narrative, but to project a particular position in a way that appears unquestionable. Ultimately, “The result is that prevailing maps of meaning have come to be perceived as ‘natural’ and ‘common sense’, blinding us to the fact that even common sense is culturally derived (Geertz, 1983)” (Bird & Dardenne, 1997: 346). In the game of creating preferred meaning, a further means of hiding the text’s constructedness is through the use of interview fragments. *The cage unlocked* does this too, giving “no indication of the kind of questions used to prompt such talk and little sense of the context in which the talk was produced” (Corner, 1995: 89). These traditional documentary techniques are very much at odds with ‘sexy’, socially responsible self-reflexive approaches, but they nonetheless can fulfil a useful purpose. The voice-over and interview material, together with other substantiating visuals and comments create a voice for the documentary that, in this case, is productive for the image of the nation. The voice, which “conveys to us a sense of a text’s social point of view”, is one of hope and optimism (Nichols, 1988: 50). In this way the modernist techniques of documentary dovetails with modernist imperatives of rehabilitation to produce an extremely strong, unquestioned message of rejuvenation.

Perhaps the only detraction from this positive depiction is the tendency in some parts of the video to include details that apparently serve the ends of sensationalism. Although generally perceived as serious, “for all its seriousness, the documentary film nevertheless also involves more disreputable features of cinema usually associated with the entertainment film, namely, the pleasures and fascination of film as spectacle” (Cowie, 1999: 19). We are told, for example, that Mogamat “has killed more people than he can remember. He says he beheaded one prisoner and ate the heart of another” (video3). Shafieka underscores this by saying, “He told us he once ate a man’s heart. If you can eat a person’s heart, you can’t feel mercy for anyone” (video3). While these kinds of details may serve as a basis for illustrating the dramatic turnaround prompted by rehabilitation, it nonetheless seems that their inclusion may tend towards the gratuitous. In spite of this, however, the sensationalist snatches do not counter the inherently positive offering that

modernist documentary has in this setting. It seems that global techniques of documentary certainly have the capacity to build the nation in certain circumstances.

III. THE LOCAL

Pollsmoor Prison

In *The cage unlocked*, images of Pollsmoor Prison are cluttered with signifiers of the desire to control and discipline prisoners. This is in spite of a reality where lack of efficiency reigns and where a Human Rights Watch study showed how prisoners were,

housed in cells that held twice the number of prisoners they were designed to house, and made to sleep on sleeping mats laid out on the floor, with two lice-infested blankets as bedding. Cells were dirty, damp, poorly lit, badly ventilated and with insufficient ablution facilities (Human Rights Watch, 1994: 20).

It would seem that Pollsmoor Prison could easily be cast as the local exemplar of global, postmodern trends that tout increased prison security as a penal solution, even as there is often a decline in the actual control that authorities have in prisons. Yet unlike *It's nice* and *The Lima connection*, the local level of Pollsmoor prison does not articulate with global postmodern trends at all.

There is only one verbal reference in the video to the control element of Pollsmoor, which consists of mentioning the 'razor-wire'. All of the other possible connections to postmodern penology are made visually. We see shots taken through metal bars, where the shadows of the bars are cast on the wall behind the prisoners. A later shot has the camera panning across the blackness of a cell. Through the cell bars, barbed wire is visible outside. A long-shot of the outside of Pollsmoor illustrates for the viewer how the prison building is surrounded by a high fence. There is a guard tower in the view too. From there, we cut to a shot, taken from a low angle, looking upwards at a tangle of barbed wire as the sun glints through fiercely. While there are a multitude of visual signifiers showing incarceration and control, the visual does not really construct the argument, but provides a foundation on which the meanings of other components can be placed. In other words,

In doing such work, the visualisations act as reinforcing marker points around which other components of the news discourse are organised, ‘levels’ over which exposition can be laid and ‘surfaces’ upon which the meanings of these other components (voice-over, interviews) are condensed and construed by the viewer (Corner, 1995: 61).

Consequently, it seems that the ‘level’ of control and discipline is meant to provide an unattractive impression of incarceration that opens the way to a positive reception of rehabilitation. Indeed, the harsh images of barbed wire and bars do not really seem themselves to make a concerted statement about the prison system, the nation-state or anything in particular. Perhaps further evidence that images of incarceration are there to facilitate positive images of rehabilitation are the way that the two are juxtaposed. In one instance, shots of barbed wire and bars are followed by scenes of team-working, rehabilitative strategies. What does this contrast show? The visual emphasis on punitive measures and control seems to function to set the stage for the rehabilitation strategy, rather than having any self-contained message. Consequently, the local level of Pollsmoor prison works to boost the positive, modernist discourse associated with the nation, rather than helping to project a dismal outlook, based on postmodern penology, as the prisons in the other videos do.

The neighbourhoods

The neighbourhoods in *The cage unlocked* are shown to be violence-ridden and poor, making a similar link between class and crime as in *The Lima connection*. In *The cage unlocked* this serves the documentary purpose of “social inquiry set against a recognised (and visualised) context of economic inequality, social class difference and social change, together with the consequent ‘problems’ thus produced” (Corner, 1995: 77). There are two immediately obvious negative consequences of this. Firstly, in doing so, it links up directly with theories of risk management, which look at conditions that might cause an offender to re-offend, such as poverty and drugs. Assessing risk in a postmodernist fashion, as evidenced here serves a dubiously admirable end in terms of the SABC’s mandate – to show the degraded conditions of local communities. Secondly, the link between poverty and crime shown by the video, can contribute to the demonisation of the underclasses by investing them with criminal characteristics.

The focus on poverty can, however, also be seen to include a positive slant: by looking at the relationship between poverty and crime, the documentary points implicitly towards structural solutions that must be sought before crime can improve. The link between poverty and violence is clearly made in the following comment by the voice-over,

This is the community to which Mogamat and Erefaan will return. Will they be able to resist the call of violence here? Three quarters of the men are without work. The police can only enter some neighbourhoods with military support. On average there are nine murders and thirty-one violent robberies every day (video3).

After initially establishing this relationship, a variety of verbal signifiers are dropped into the programme to reinforce it, with Joanna Thomas saying, for example, “They are living in a very impoverished community and in a very impoverished home on many levels. Impoverished materially, spiritually and emotionally. I was shocked by the tiny house that they lived in” (video3). Poverty as the root of all evil comes through very strongly as a theme.

Many visual signifiers back up the case being made by the voice-over and interview fragments. While the visual alone does not construct exposition, it can form a powerful element of argument and consequently has been “criticised as a key means of ideological manipulation” (Corner, 1995: 59). Particularly in Mogamat’s case, we see many indicators of poverty, beginning with the run-down exterior of his house.¹⁰⁶ The very specific images of poverty and neglect associated with the Benjamin household mushroom out to include the community, where images of the neighbourhood show clearly that there is not much money to go around, making survival difficult.¹⁰⁷ It is for this kind of reason that “most criminologists assume that it is impossible to fully understand the dynamics of illegal behavior without an appreciation of the group contexts within which those processes unfold” (Bursik, 2000: 87). Even more importantly,

¹⁰⁶ In one scene, a long-shot shows a broken, make-shift residential fence and the camera then pans across the garden where rusted metal debris lies. The house itself has a tin roof and in front of it on one side is a tin shed. Further shots show the sandy ground strewn with pieces of rubbish, a falling down washing-line, a sink surrounded by a dirty, unpainted wall and a rusty old refrigerator.

¹⁰⁷ A long-shot includes both the Benjamin garden and some of the neighbouring yards, which look terribly run-down. A shot of a street corner shows a ramshackle shop, with telling, ominous black clouds in the background. A miserable looking dog runs along the pavement. Another shot shows some of the ‘cardboard houses’ of the community.

“certain neighbourhood features make criminal behavior more or less likely” (Bursik, 2000: 87).

Ultimately, using specific references to the link between poverty and crime, the programme reinforces the way that this poverty, as a factor of risk, can induce criminality – pointing towards large-scale social engineering that must be effected before an improvement in crime can be found. Mogamat says about the origins of his deviance, “Today I think it was the poverty. Nobody had nothing and everybody want something. So now we’re going to fight over it”(video3). The voice-over adds that Joanna Thomas’s approach, “sees the connection between crime and poverty” (video3). This tends to modernist social positivism, seeking the cause of crime in socio-economic circumstances. The optimism here centres on the implicit solution-oriented message that it offers, on which a useful national identity can be built.

Beyond this, and in spite of the disillusioning aspects of the focus on poverty, the programme, commendably, does not focus excessively on the negative, and also includes uplifting visuals of community life. Consequently, the pessimistic elements are not detrimental for the image of the local. Perhaps even more significant than the quality of the depiction, is the way that the neighbourhoods signify diversity in the national context, not only valuable for the public service broadcasting mandate, but as a way of articulating positively with globalisation and showing how,

the local has reasserted itself as the source of meaning for individuals and communities. For the individual, the local – beginning with the home and then extending outward through the community – provides the coherence that makes sense out of the world and permits the story of daily life to unfold (Braman, 1996: 29).

In the programmes examined thus far, it is the only one that attempts to illustrate local community conditions.

Some of the most poignant visuals of the programme intersperse images of community decay and violence with those embodying hope and rejuvenation. It certainly seems apt that “The diagnosis of decline and deficit is followed, perhaps inevitably, with the prescription of *nostalgia*” (Young, 1998: 282).

In one scene, the viewer sees the Cape Flats from a distance. It looks very serene, with the mountain in the background and a higgledy-piggledy row of houses. Yet in spite of this tranquillity, the next thing we see is a man holding a gun and then a building, clearly claimed by a gang, with a large sign saying ‘West Side’ on the front. Another identical building has ‘Thug Life’ painted on it. Later on, an army Casspir drives into the shot. Soldiers climb out of it, holding large guns. Three policemen move through parts of the outside of a building. More scenes of police and army activity follow. Suddenly, however, touching images of an ideal community interrupt the impression of violence and coercion. A middle-aged man and a young man sit together on the road with a small child standing in front of them. We then see a long-shot of the street, with the beauty of the mountain in the background. Children run across the road and people walk about in a carefree atmosphere. It is late afternoon and the sun has cast a golden glow on the building – it all looks quite peaceful.

One of the functions of the visual is to “Establish locale and typify the scene and its atmosphere” (Dahlgren, 1999: 203). Parts of *The cage unlocked* do this very well. The preceding paragraph details one instance of this and there is at least one other example where the community is made strongly tangible through contrasting images of decay and harmony.¹⁰⁸

As the video proceeds, in Erefaan’s community at least, the positive images overwhelm the negative ones. The signs of drug taking are gone and, in one particularly gratifying scene, Erefaan sits on stairs, talking with two boys, smiling. The scene ends as he walks along the peaceful street, talking to his younger brother and then putting his arm around the little boy’s shoulders. It almost seems to purposefully dispute the idea that,

¹⁰⁸ In a scene involving Erefaan’s neighbourhood, we see curtains inside a home blowing gently in the wind. The sun shines through the window in spite of the dark clouds in the distance. We then see the outside of the building against the statuesque background of the blue mountain. Colourful clothes hang on a washing line in the foreground. The peaceful picture of community and domesticity is then suddenly sliced with an image of smoke bubbling through a liquid-filled glass bottle. A close-up view of a man shows his lips to a pipe.

The solidarity of the working-class community and family, which saw the people through the 1930s, has given way to fragmentation. In the place of collective values there is every person for themselves (Young, 1998: 282).

Ultimately, the impression of the local community that is delivered is mixed. Firstly, there is a negative message of increased risk of re-offending associated with poverty, which does not offer much hope for Mogamat and Erefaan's rehabilitation. Secondly, there is the demonisation of the underclass through its association with criminality. On the other hand, however, the focus on poverty offers structural insights, which are solution-oriented. Most importantly, perhaps, is the way in which uplifting visuals of community life create a positive sense of diversity.

IV. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL CULTURE

In spite of the pitiful drug smugglers in *The Lima connection* and the rotten warders in *It's nice*, and in spite of their immersion in postmodern penology, these two videos nonetheless appear to make some effort towards producing a constructive image of national culture. It is ironic then, that *The cage unlocked*, with the most positive message of the three videos, does not provide a better outlook in this regard.

Great emphasis is placed on the prison gang system, despite the fact that the programme is not about this at all. We hear at the beginning how

For a hundred years, South Africa's overcrowded prisons have been in the grip of a system of violence that sustains the power of the gangs. They have military-style ranks with strictly enforced codes of discipline for punishment and reward (video3).

Notably, the video carefully specifies that it is *South Africa's* prison system, which is plagued by the gang system, rather than simply Pollsmoor. Clearly it is meant to be seen as part of our culture.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ In doing so, *The cage unlocked* draws on the history of Nongeloza or Jan Note, who could be said to be the originator of the gang prison system. By the late 1800s, he was known as 'King of Ninevah', after regimenting and militarising a group of riff-raff criminals just outside of Johannesburg. Weakened by venereal disease, as the group was, Note outlawed contact with women and "Instead, the older men of marriageable status within the regiment – *ikhela* – were to take the younger male initiates in the gang – the *abafana* – and keep them as *izinkotshane*, 'boy-wives'" (Van Onselen, 1984: 15). After being caught and imprisoned, Note's influence continued because of the large numbers of pass offenders that moved through

The story of South African prison gangs includes the existence of the 28s gang, descended directly from the original Ninevites (Van Onselen, 1984: 53). In the video, we are urged to take note of the 28s as Mogamat is cited as “a so-called general in the feared 28s gang in Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town”(video3). An entire history of the gang system is alluded to and perhaps viewers would be able to draw intertextual connections between the acknowledgement of the 28s and the widely known reality of prison gangs in South Africa. The most famous gangs are the well known numbers gangs, where,

The gangs themselves are distinguished according to their aims and activities: the 28s are regarded as the senior gang, and are distinguished primarily by their organised system of ‘*wyflies*’ or coerced homosexual partners; the 26s are associated with cunning, obtaining money and other goods by means of fraud and theft; the 27s protect and enforce the codes of the 28s and 26s and are symbolized by blood (Human Rights Watch, 1994: 44).

As with other prison gangs, the 28s have a highly disciplined, quasi-military structure, with ranks and hierarchies. Right across South Africa, any prisoner transferred to a new prison, would keep his gang membership and rank (Human Rights Watch, 1994: 43). Notably, promotion to the higher ranks is garnered through violence towards non-gang-members. In line with this, we are told that “Mogamat Benjamin has been in and out of prison for thirty-four years. He’s risen to the rank of general. He has killed more people than he can remember. He says he beheaded one prisoner and ate the heart of another” (video3).

The prison gang culture is marked in the video by “tattoos, symbols and ‘uniforms’ recognizable by all prisoners” (Human Rights Watch, 1994: 44). Erefaan’s tattoos, as part of his gang affiliation, are emphasised. The voice-over says, “His allegiance to the gang is literally indelible. It is etched onto his skin and into his mind” (video3). Visually, we see a close-up shot of part of Erefaan’s chest. There is a tattoo of a gun with the words ‘The fastest live the longest’. We also see one of Erefaan’s arms, where he has tattooed, ‘The good looking boy with the bad ideas’ (video3).

the prison system. If anything, his reputation grew, fuelled by his rebelliousness towards the authorities. The numbers of Ninevites inside and outside prison did too. Nongeloza’s criminal gang empire “embraced prison, compound and township alike” (Van Onselen, 1984: 35). Perhaps *The cage unlocked* links intertextually with this history for a small minority of viewers.

Prison sex is also given attention in the video, where the combination of sex and violence forms a vital component of prison life (Schalkwyk, 2000: 281). The 28s gang, to which Mogamat and Erefaan belonged, institutionalises and regulates ‘wyfies’ or ‘wives’ either through consent or coercion (Gear, 2001: 2). Members of the 28s are organised into the Blood-Line or the Private Line. While the Blood-Line is associated with violence, “the Private Line positions are distinctly feminised” (Gear, 2001: 3). In tracking prison sexuality, the video notes that, “The bond of gang-membership are intense and intimate. A regular sexual partner becomes known as a ‘wife’. An intricate protocol determines which gang leader will sleep with which new recruit” (video3). Intimacy is indicated visually through the men showering together and later when one gives another a massage in the cell. Yet violence is often part of the intimacy in prison and ‘wyfies’ are often recruited through rape and *reduced* to wives. Upon becoming wives, these men perform sexual and domestic duties and “are considered the possessions of their soldier husbands” (Gear, 2001: 4). Mogamat indicates the element of coercion by saying, “If I don’t do them my heart isn’t strong enough and it will be done to me” (video3). Beyond the coercive element, that prison rape is perpetrated by men who consider themselves heterosexual, is both a feature of prison culture and an element that is captured on the video. Mogamat says, “I’m not a homosexual, but the sexual acts are necessary because I’m a man of blood” (video3). In the act of penetration, masculinity is retained, while the one submitting assumes a passive role. Through this distinction, Mogamat clearly believes he is able to retain his heterosexual ‘manhood’ (Gear, 2001: 7).

The gang system, the tattoos, the coercive sex are surely seen in at least some way to comprise an element of South African national culture. As with the other two videos, the existence of similar negative conditions elsewhere in the world is not included in the video as a mitigating factor. It is perhaps the case of American prisons that could have provided the most easily accessible, well-documented accounts of prison gangs. Malawi too offers useful comparisons, as do many other African countries.¹¹⁰ Perhaps there was

¹¹⁰ In America, “Gangs flourish in prisons for protection purposes, just as gangs flourish in the street for social reasons such as protection of turf. Just as gang leaders may ‘police’ the neighborhood turf these

no space in the video. Perhaps, it would have interrupted the flow of the narrative. Or perhaps, in this case, it was deemed unnecessary in a BBC commissioned video. It seems a pity that these potential comparisons were sidelined in the making of the video, instead favouring a depiction of the brutal prison gang system in exclusively South African terms.

The neighbourhoods discussed in the previous section also provide an indicator of national culture. If the coloured communities shown in the video present the viewer with an idea of what a microcosm of the nation looks like, it seems that South African culture may not be perceived in a very positive light. Regardless of the ‘truth’ of many of the images of the Cape Flats, where communities are plagued by problems of drug abuse, violence and alcoholism, the images are nonetheless also selective (Martin, 2001: 251). Poverty in coloured communities is offset by the existence of a middle class and intellectuals, but we do not see this (Martin, 2001: 249). While it seems that Erefaan’s surroundings are more prosperous (tending towards the middle class) than Mogamat’s, we are not offered elaborations in this regard. Yet we are repeatedly told of Mogamat’s poverty. At the same time, the images of violence suggested by the heavy police and army presence show how, “This violence has over the past few decades become naturalized and normalized through essentialist discourses on a purported coloured predisposition towards violence and gangsterism” (Robins, 2000: 413).

If the depiction of the prison gangs and the neighbourhoods is decidedly negative, the way language is used simply seems non-committal. Language is, of course, an important indicator of identity and “often constitutes the most important embodiment of ethnicity, and the means for distinguishing ‘us’ from ‘them’” (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996:

strategies often erupt in assassinations. Inmates and staff are murdered and mutilated on ‘orders’ from prison gang leaders” (Maghan, 1998: 89). Admittedly, there are many differences between gangs in South Africa and America. For example, in America there is no national organisation of prison gangs and the gangs follow ethnic and racial divides (Maghan, 1998: 89). Yet the fierce gang loyalty is the same, as is much of the sexual practice. The prisons there are ruled by ‘men’, who consider themselves heterosexual and are sexual penetrators only. The ‘catchers’, as with the ‘wyfies’ are those in receptive roles and “are there to service the ‘men’. They are often initiated into this role or ‘turned out’, as it is termed, by rape, gang rape, convincing threat of rape or intimidation” (Gear, 2001: 8). Closer to home, “In Malawian prisons, like in South Africa, relationships between prisoners frequently take this form, with the junior partner referred to as a ‘wife’ (Jolofani & DeGabriele)” (Gear, 2001: 13).

161). The Afrikaans that Erefaan and Mogamat speak could be a vital way of showing diversity in a South African context. Unsurprisingly, however, in a documentary made for the BBC, this does not appear to have been a priority. The result is that instead of being able to hear the authentic sound of Afrikaans being spoken, perhaps being accompanied by subtitles, the voices of the characters are largely obliterated by the interpreter's English.

It is perhaps only in the sphere of religion that viewers are exposed to a snippet of the diversity that constitutes South African national culture, and which the SABC desires to be projected on the silver screen. The references to religion include a mixture of Christianity and Islam. In the video, Erefaan says, "Everyday I ask Allah to help me" (video3). His mother later remarks, "May Allah grant that you're on the right path now" (video3). Mogamat, on his path to rehabilitation says a prayer, concluding with, "Lord, everything I'm asking, I'm not asking because I'm deserving but I'm asking it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen" (video3). While being potentially positive in the sphere of projecting national culture, it is a pity that this kind of depiction of diversity receives so little attention in the video. Indeed, these few, easily missed sentences are all that feature in the realm of religious diversity – and are almost all we see of diversity in general.

V. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATION-STATE

In postmodern times, many theorists are using Foucault to look at how power/knowledge networks to do with crime, do not simply reside in the state, but in other institutions, like social work bodies (Muncie, 1998: 227). According to Foucault, this dispersion of power is called 'governmentality' and is closely linked with forms of regulation and even techniques like confession (Hogg, 1998: 143, 149). Although Mogamat often 'confesses' to Joanna, *The cage unlocked*, and its notions of rehabilitation and social work, reside in a far more modernist paradigm. Indeed, the traditional association of prison rehabilitation with the state is often threaded implicitly through the video.

For the most part, rehabilitation is associated closely with the nation-state's prison system, and it is a process described in very positive terms as 'life-changing' (video3). The viewers are also told that, "Six months ago we came here to film a remarkable experiment" (video3). Correctional Services are on the cutting-edge of new developments it would seem.¹¹¹ At the end of the video, a strong message is sent to viewers about the way in which Correctional Services is making significant strides in the rehabilitation of its prisoners. It does this in the captions at the end of the programme, which note that,

The Department of Correctional Services is trying to strengthen the rehabilitation programme to make a more effective contribution to the integration of prisoners in society. Correctional Services urges the communities to which prisoners return to give these men a chance to prove that they have, in fact, changed (video3).

Correctional Services seems proactive, hands-on, organised, efficient. It appears in the video to be fulfilling its policy objectives to the letter. These objectives are firmly focused on rehabilitation.¹¹² In itself, the correspondence between the theme of *The cage unlocked* and Correctional Services Policy is unremarkable. What is remarkable is that the programme has such a positive message in the face of overwhelming evidence that Correctional Services *is not* fulfilling its mandate in practice.¹¹³ It would appear that, rather than hounding after 'the truth' in this regard, *The cage unlocked* is chasing an ideal

¹¹¹ At the same time, however, further references are perhaps more ambiguous or at least implicit in admiringly associating Correctional Services with innovative rehabilitation. For example, the voice-over says, "Joanna Thomas was brought into Pollsmoor to try to break the culture of violence" (video3). Notably, it does not say who brought her in (Correctional Services?), instead utilising the imprecision of the passive voice. As we are introduced to Joanna Thomas, it is also made clear that Joanna Thomas is not part of the prison personnel through the captions, which read, "Joanna Thomas. Centre for Conflict Resolution" (video3). Nonetheless, the end of the video makes it clear that these are mere hiccups in the overall approving stance of the video

¹¹² A 1994 government White Paper emphasised the ability of an offender to be rehabilitated and the necessity of doing this. Following this, in 1998, the Correctional Services Act similarly recognised that rehabilitation is fundamental for fostering in prisoners 'social responsibility' and 'human development' (Dissel & Ellis, 2002: 5). The emphasis on rehabilitation continues in Correctional Services policies, meetings and documents.

¹¹³ Indeed, rehabilitation does not seem to be happening in any effective way. In spite of the progressive Correctional Services Act, the Department is constrained by a lack of resources, including social workers and psychologists (Dissel & Ellis, 2002: 5). Prison researcher, Amanda Dissel, commented on Leeuwkop Maximum Prison, saying that it appeared to be a warehouse for storing people, rather than an institution for the betterment of prisoners. In fact, she says, there was no visible support for rehabilitation at all (Dissel, 1996b: 1). Prisoners themselves appeared frustrated, with one commenting, that, "'The authorities are not in support of rehabilitation. We have asked for a school section and they don't give us one. They are not interested in rehabilitating us. If you want to rehabilitate it depends on your own willpower.'" (Amros: Leeuwkop)" (Dissel, 1996b: 5). It certainly seems that *The cage unlocked*, with its modernist optimism, is projecting an image of the nation-state that is contrary to actual conditions.

and projecting it on film. This is certainly to the advantage of the nation-state and for efforts depicting national identity.

It is also surely important, that in the images of the crime-ridden, violent neighbourhoods of the Cape Flats, we receive an impression of state intervention. The Casspirs, army and police personnel appear to signify that the nation-state is wholeheartedly attempting to remedy the situation in a context where

those who live in South Africa's urban ghettos find themselves socially and spatially imprisoned in repressive and bloody war zones where their security and safety can no longer be guaranteed by a state financially hamstrung by cutbacks brought about by neo-liberal fiscal austerity measures (Robins, 2000: 414).

Ultimately, the overall message of the video seems to be one of optimism, secured predominantly by an underlying commitment to modernist penology, where there is hope for the offender's reintegration into society. That this rehabilitation is closely tied to the nation-state, gives a rosy impression of both the nation-state and the future of the nation. This impression is given added authenticity by the documentary format, which is authoritative and omniscient.

Admittedly, there does exist a strain of the postmodern in *The cage unlocked*, and the global theory of risk management links up with the level of the local in the video. As a result the Cape Flats are seen as a 'risk factor', potentially retarding rehabilitative efforts, rather than representing a constructive diversity as they could do. Here too, however, hope prevails through the balancing of images of decline with images of hope – as is the case with the depiction of the family. Also constructive on the level of the local is the way in which the link between poverty and crime ultimately points towards macro-solutions for society in the fight against crime: for crime to decrease, poverty must be addressed and this insight potentially provides the basis for an optimistic nation-building agenda.

It is really only in the sphere of national culture that there appears to be a concerted unenthusiastic representation. The story of gangs and cultural stereotypes are

supplemented only by a non-committal attitude towards language and an almost negligible image of diversity in religion.

7. CONCLUSION

The cage unlocked seems in many ways to be the antithesis of the other videos examined in this chapter. Both *It's nice to Have a Friend* and *The Lima connection* are embroiled in postmodern penology. The former desired stronger prison security and discipline in the face of spiralling corruption. The latter showed how Peruvian prisons epitomised crumbling control. Both, as part of their postmodern treatises, regarded the nation-state as failing and chaos as prevailing. In both cases too, the local levels of Grootvlei Prison and Lurigancho prison linked up explicitly to this postmodern penology. Other global theories and trends in these two programmes also do not bode well for the image of the nation produced. Documentary techniques in *It's nice* draw on the sensationalist associations with reality television, while the standard narrative devices of 'goodie' versus 'baddie' precluded real meaning from being attached to warders and prisoners alike. Meanwhile, in *The Lima connection*, the programme draws on a history of documentary that looks at lower class 'victims'. While perhaps *The cage unlocked* does this to a certain extent too, the way it uses documentary techniques, as discussed above, is far more constructive.

A variety of other global trends and theories in the former programmes are similarly negative and often underline the extreme negativity with which the nation-state is viewed, being neither balanced nor mitigated by broader global comparisons that would put the South African situation into perspective. It is interesting that both programmes evince this approach. The similarity between *It's nice* and *The Lima connection* continues into the realm of the depiction of national culture too. *It's nice* presents an incomplete, yet promising, look at race, language and morality in the South African context. *The Lima connection* does not follow perhaps quite as well, but also points towards positive diversity in its portrayal of language and food. This optimism contrasts starkly with the images of gangs and stereotypical coloured neighbourhoods in *The cage unlocked*.

The divergence between the first two programmes and the last seems clear. The former use global theories and trends in a disadvantageous manner when it comes to representing the nation. This is accompanied by a strongly negative image of the nation-state.

Encouraging representations are, however, offered in the sphere of national culture. *The cage unlocked* does the opposite, using global theories of rehabilitation to project an uplifting image of the nation and a positive association with the nation-state, which is seen as 'doing something'. National culture is seen in a somewhat less optimistic light.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIETY AND CRIME IN DOCUMENTARY

1. INTRODUCTION

The period of late modernity is characterised by an ontological insecurity where risk is growing as trust is obliterated (Giddens, 1990, 1991 cited in Hughes, 1998: 131). The decline of local communities is related to this, as is the erosion of families, religion, moral consensus and a “discomfort with growing social and ethnic diversity” (Freiberg, 2000: 66). This phenomenon could well be called a general crisis in *sicherheit* (a German word meaning safety, certainty and security) (Bauman, 2000: 214). It is the safety aspect, which often comes under the spotlight in media reports, implicitly representing the spectrum of insecurities that characterises the global era. It seems that we are “living through an era when our fears of a particular kind of criminality – unprovoked, randomised, sexual and/or violent attack – seem to be constantly escalating” (Brown & Pratt, 2000: 1).

Moral panics are ignited and fuelled by the suggestion of escalation – by the suggestion that the scope and intensity of crime is a new and insidious malaise. Indisputably, crime *has* risen in a worldwide trend since the 1970s and 80s, but it can hardly be described as a new phenomenon (Shaw, 1995b: 14). Brutality of crime and pervasiveness of serious crime are not simply unwanted features of *contemporary* society (Fattah, 1997: 8). Yet surely this is how we often feel? Postmodern criminology acknowledges that, “A high level of ‘crime consciousness’ comes to be embedded in everyday social life and institutionalised in the media, in popular culture and in the built environment” (Garland & Sparks, 2000: 200). The growth of a ‘crime complex’ sees society suffering the adverse effects of a psychology of fear and anxiety. People adopt ‘victim’ postures characterised either by frustration and agitation or by stoicism (Garland & Sparks, 2000: 200). Exacerbating the moral panic status quo is the phraseology used in reports by public officials and the media where, “Expressions such as ‘declaring war on crime’,

‘waging a battle against crime’, or ‘intensifying the fight against crime’ are bound to create an impression of a state of siege” (Fattah, 1997: 10). The moral panic around crime is thus perpetuated.

In this chapter, the programmes are all primarily concerned with themes that suggest society is under siege – in line with the era of the moral panic that we are living in. While it should be acknowledged that aspects in each of these programmes have similarities with the other documentaries in the dissertation, for convenience of analysis they have been grouped together in this way. The first programme, *Architecture of fear*, suggests that society has been engulfed by a crime wave. *Atlantis lost* suggests that we are being overwhelmed by abuse within the home, particularly child abuse. *A bitter harvest* looks at the way the farming community is under siege from crime.

Architecture of fear is the most pessimistic of the programmes, evincing a disillusionment with modernist solutions to crime and showing how containment rather than curative approaches to crime have become popular in the postmodern environment. Essentially it offers a negative message about the nation, although some of the depictions of local culture are promising. *Atlantis lost* offers a middle ground that acknowledges the seriousness of the problem of abuse but at the same time does not create a ‘moral panic’ around it. It offers a left realist approach to crime including a thoughtful sociological analysis of the reasons for crime, which is positive for the national culture projected. It suggests the buttressing of crime control institutions as just one of many possible solutions. Although *A bitter harvest* deals with farm murders, its ultimate message about national culture and the nation-state is positive and, at times, even uplifting. The overall success of the documentary in terms of fulfilling the broadcaster’s mandate is mitigated by its lack of cultural and geographical diversity and the reliance on sensationalism.

2. CRIME IN SOUTH AFRICA

I. MORAL PANICS, SOUTH AFRICAN STYLE

On a stage of worldwide insecurity and fear of crime escalation, South Africa could surely be described as the star of the show. Since the advent of written records in the country, South Africans have exhibited anxieties about crime waves (Steinberg, 2001: 2). In contemporary times, popular notions about South Africa's title as 'the worst' when it comes to crime, seem to dominate, exacerbated by the focus on violent crime in the media (Naudé, 1998a: 4). While the crime rate is undoubtedly cause for concern, in true moral panic style, perspective seems to have been lost. Many may think South Africa is exceptional, yet the truth is that many countries in transition to democracy from authoritarian rule experience what could be described as a crime wave. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia began transformation in 1990 and are still suffering high crime rates and weak criminal justice systems (Schärf, Saban & Hauck, 2001: 66). Bearing this in mind, it is perhaps even more interesting to note that crime in Johannesburg is not as markedly different from other urban centres as might be assumed. Rates of property crime and violent crime are lower in South Africa than in countries in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe and Africa (Louw et al, 1998: 18). Even in England and Wales, the picture is not so rosy, where the "experience of crime is a normal rather than an exceptional event in people's lives" (Young, 1998: 270). An extensive comparative study of different crime types in Uganda, Zimbabwe and South Africa, shows that, although some types of crime are more prevalent in South Africa and others are more prevalent in the other two countries, South Africa is by no means the worst overall (Naudé, 1998a: 2 - 4). Perhaps most interesting in this study is that South Africans had by far the highest incidence (39.5%) of feeling unsafe after dark (Naudé, 1998a: 4). This fear suggests that, "the epidemiological vacuum of violence in South Africa is filled with social fantasies that serve as surrogate realities to which the public, the police and politicians alike respond" (Butchart, Terre Blanche et al, 2000: 29).

II. THE REAL DEAL

Moral panics suggest inflated fear. Comparisons with other countries suggest that South Africa is not unique in its crime problems. It is nonetheless true that “South Africa has an extremely high rate of violent crime” (Human Rights Watch, 1994: xiii). Academic writing on the matter repeatedly emphasises the seriousness of the crime situation, where “The problem of crime and crime control has reached endemic proportions in South Africa” (Stavrou, 1992: 57. See also Louw & Schönteich, 2001: 42; Shubane, 2001: 186, 187; Glanz, 1995a: 9).

Unsurprisingly, the reasons for South Africa’s high crime rate are cemented in a history where poverty and racial injustice are oft-cited catalysts for crime (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 1999: 24). Beyond this, apartheid created a society that was shattered by violence (Steinberg, 2001: 2). Violent crime in South Africa is consequently not simply a function of poverty or ‘relative deprivation’ but of a society that has been brutalised (Shaw, 1995b: 14). Perhaps too, political repression simply kept crime rates under control during apartheid and that its absence has meant more crime and a weak criminal justice system (Schärf, Saban & Hauck, 2001: 66). A further view proposes that the community solidarity fortified under apartheid has disintegrated, creating conditions conducive for criminal opportunists to ply their trade (Schärf, Saban & Hauck, 2001: 68). Possibly, however, it is simply the case that the high crime rates in the townships during apartheid were never accorded much significance. Now, with the breakdown of segregation and the movement of crime to the suburbs, it is being recorded with efficiency, and subjected to a previously absent scrutiny (Louw & Shaw, 1997: 9).

A more controversial view of crime is that the line between political activism during apartheid and contemporary criminal activity is a fine one. According to this perspective, sometimes anarchic, sometimes violent political activity is now being translated into violent crime by the very same group of people. It seems that, “there is substantial evidence to indicate that former combatants are prolifically involved in criminal and

domestic violence” (Simpson, 2001: 115). This group is cited as comprising of young, black males.

Young black males constitute a further important source of crime in South Africa: gang subcultures. Decimated family structures resulted in a crisis relationship between the youth and their parents and ensuing rebellion easily culminated in gang formation and membership (Steinberg, 2001: 4, 5). Difficult family circumstances were exacerbated by the ‘re-marginalisation’ of the youth after 1994, where these young men were *sans* many of the expected benefits of liberation. Disillusionment often resulted in cohesion around gang identities (Simpson, 2001: 124). While intimately linked with the history of dispossession and marginalisation, the gang role is one that has also created its own momentum and driving logic. It is a logic that is not solely linked to an appreciation of past injustice, but rather to the glamour of consumer culture and the power of machismo (Steinberg, 2001: 4).¹¹⁴

Exacerbating the crime situation is undoubtedly the potholed infrastructure inherited from the apartheid state (Shubane, 2001: 188). Its laager-like, regressive bureaucracies encouraged corruption and parochialism and the criminal justice system is consequently now failing dismally (Steinberg, 2001: 12). The police force has come under particular fire since 1994, facing crises of low morale, corruption, possible obsolescence due to community and private policing and weakness in investigating crime and bringing suspects to court (Shubane, 2001: 190; Steinberg, 2001: 9, 10).

¹¹⁴ Contrary to expectation, a series of in-depth interviews revealed that poverty and broken homes are not always the primary motivators for gang affiliations. Instead, ‘proving manhood’ and peer pressure were cited by some young criminals, the ‘amagents’, as reasons for joining the gangs (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 1999: 24). Well-educated, middle-class youth are also part of gangland, again suggesting that it is about lifestyle as much as poverty (Steinberg, 2001: 4). It is a lifestyle that is characterised by violence and bravado, “animated by the virtues of bravery, fearlessness, and strength. That crime is dangerous, that you may be caught or even killed, is the very core of the allure” (Steinberg, 2001: 6).

3. A WORLD GONE MAD: *ARCHITECTURE OF FEAR*

I. SYNOPSIS

Independently produced for the SABC, this hour-long documentary focuses on Johannesburg, examining the way that the architecture has come to reflect the growing moral panic about crime and the postmodern condition of ‘risk societies’. Gated communities and high walls have been designed to keep the criminals out, and yet the fear of crime continues to spread. Travelling from place to place, the documentary looks at the way people from different walks of life perceive crime and how they react to the threat it poses to personal safety (rather than property). From middle-class areas, to upmarket Sandton, to the township of Soweto and to the informal settlement of Diepsloot, crime is seen as a problem, which is exacerbated by police inefficiency or corruption. The high walls and anti-hijacking courses are strategies in wealthy suburbs, but in poorer suburbs like Diepsloot, the people have the community policing forum and Mapogo Mathamaca, a vigilante group. Government role players and ‘experts’ on crime are consulted extensively in the documentary.

II. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

What makes *Architecture of fear* such a captivating and fascinating programme for this analysis is the way in which it conforms in almost every possible way to postmodern perspectives on crime control. And the conviction of the programme’s message is acutely tangible in the sheer quantity and density of its images and interviews, all of which have been meticulously juxtaposed in a racy maelstrom of exposition. The result is a pulse-racing journey through a Johannesburg of fear and horror. Journalist Matthew Krouse’s description encapsulates this: “Johannesburg comes under fire in *The Architecture of Fear*, a frightening documentary expounding every city-dweller’s worst fears. Unwittingly, it’s a dark comedy of paranoia” (Krouse, 2001). Producer, Nicky Newman, acknowledges that the documentary does not offer a hopeful outlook. Instead, she says,

“We thought for this project that the relentlessness was the point. The positive things didn’t necessarily find a space in the film” (Krouse, 2001).

Risk management

There is neither a human interest story in the video nor a continuous narrative from beginning to end. The various rapid segments are, however, underlined by continuous postmodern themes. One of the most prominent, is that of risk and risk management.

The risk society is seen as dating from the 1950s and 60s but could be argued as having its roots as far back as the 18th century as a characteristic of modern liberal and capitalist societies. Citizens, as ‘free subjects’ were encouraged to look to and plan for the future in an early form of risk consciousness (O’Malley, 2000: 17,19, 20). It is the recent past and current era that really exemplify risk management, however. The welfare or ‘insurance’ state attempted to minimise risks for its citizens, offering them certain assurances and creating expectations (O’Malley, 2000: 18; Pratt, 2000: 38). With its decline, the emphasis has shifted to individual risk minimisation and management (O’Malley, 2000: 27). In many different ways for contemporary society, it is all about “risk identification; risk reduction; and risk spreading” (O’ Malley, 2000: 17).

In *Architecture of fear*, risk assessment and management is linked to the world of crime. Fear of crime and expectation of victimisation leads to strategies of control and containment, characteristic of postmodern crime control. Offender-orientated approaches of criminogenesis, with the associated socio-cultural investigations, and rehabilitation are nowhere to be found (Lianos with Douglas, 2000: 261). Who and what the offender is, how he came to be a criminal and what could be done for him are absent. While previous criminological trends focused on ‘deviance’, it is now the case that “Risk, not crime, has become the central culture register of social interaction” (Lianos with Douglas, 2000: 261).

Dealing with risk in the realm of crime has introduced a variety of technological (such as surveillance) and punitive solutions (Brown & Pratt, 2000: 3). Four main areas of control

and regulation stand out. These are ‘defensive strategies’, ‘guardianship and monitoring’, ‘the creation of new forms of social order’ and ‘criminality prevention’ (Hughes, 1998: 136). As far as defensive strategies are concerned, there is a tendency to create locales of security, which are fortified by abstract systems, against outside dangers (Hughes, 1998: 136). Situational crime prevention thus plays an important role in the management of risk.

Situational crime prevention

Opportunity reduction in the environment is the primary objective of situational crime prevention, focusing specifically on the vulnerability of potential victims in their homes and communities (Hughes, 1998: 20). There are a number of defining features of the built environment that are important in situational crime prevention and include, “the amount of defensible space, the presence or absence of barriers that channel people’s movement through space, and the physical appearance of a neighbourhood or community” (Butchart & Emmett, 2000: 14). While many may believe that the key to successful crime prevention is marrying offender-based and situational approaches, in the postmodern era, the latter appears to be taking precedence (Ekblom & Tilley, 2000: 378).¹¹⁵

The video contains examples of both proponents and opponents of situational crime prevention, ostensibly creating ‘balance’ in the use of postmodern crime control techniques in the built environment. Yet the ultimate message in the video, what the ‘voice’ of the documentary seems to be telling us, is that environmental prevention is a necessary evil that creates prisoners of citizens, who become trapped in their fortress

¹¹⁵ In spite of the fact that the importance of situational criminology was identified as early as 1947, it is not without its critics (Fattah, 1997: 278). The target hardening that comes with situational crime prevention creates a spiral of more violent criminal methods and, in turn, harsher counteractive measures (Butchart, Terre Blanche et al, 2000: 30; Ekblom & Tilley, 2000: 390, 391). In *Architecture of fear*, we see a security show evincing more sophisticated – and often more brutal - technology in the name of crime prevention. Fire-breathing anti-hijack devices are attached to cars so that potential offenders will literally go up in flames. A further criticism of situational crime prevention is that, “Crime merely gets shunted around a little, from place to place and from target to target” (Ekblom & Tilley, 2000: 390). We hear of this in the video too. An unidentified interviewee says, “You put up gates around, you put up booms, you put up controls, you put guards there – whatever – and you all sit around going ‘We’re a community and as a community we’re fighting crime.’ You’re not. You’re just actually making crime worse somewhere else. You’re not stopping it” (video4).

homes, in a fortress city. This, in turn, suggests a spiralling crime rate, a desperate citizenry and the seed for a moral panic is consequently planted.

The fortress city

The notion of a fortress city fuels fear as it excludes populations, such that any message about the nation that one might take away, is far from positive and far from an embodiment of how the public service broadcaster should be fulfilling its mandate. The fortress city in *Architecture of fear*, is situational criminology gone haywire. In the documentary, we hear filmmaker, Bev Palesa Ditsie saying,

We're living in cages. Almost everybody in Jo'burg is living in cages now. You have to make sure that you're tight, you're locked everywhere, you know. It's like there's no freedom of the spirit, you can't... you can't...be free (video4).

Architect, Gandhi Maseko backs this up in the video by using the description of 'fortresses' and photographer, David Goldblatt describes our architecture as 'horrificing' (video4).

The images of fortress-like cages abound and they seem to define our landscape and national character: we see electric gates with a 'no entry' sign on the front, a security guard lifting up a boom gate with a stop sign on it (video4). Another sign says, 'Warning. Now entering a 24 hr Protected Area.'(video4). A further a sign on a lamppost notes, 'Gates closed 19H00. Open 07H00 (video4). Shots of walls and gates proliferate in the video. We hear how security and fortifying homes and communities has become an obsession. Much attention is given to road closures and controlled access, both visually and verbally, by the voice-over and by interviewees. David Goldblatt says despondently,

To the north of Johannesburg now, you don't simply buy a house, you buy into an estate and this estate is a complete system of security. It guarantees you 24 hour protection. There are electrified walls surrounding the whole area, often many kilometres long. And these walls are patrolled. There is a gatehouse with high security and no-one passes who is not authorised or has not been approved by either the guards or a resident (video4).

Fearful obsessions dominate the lives of besieged citizens in true postmodern style in *Architecture of fear*. This obsessiveness may well have become a zeitgeist in reality (Hughes, 1998: 139), but its depiction on television surely serves only to fuel the

obsession further. Even where the building of fortresses is seen in a positive light, the ultimate message is somewhat less cheerful. Mike Lipkin says,

We love this area. We've been here for ten years. There's a nice mix of people here. But we are just two blocks down from Louis Botha. They had a number of crimes happening here – hijackings, break-ins, people being threatened at gunpoint. Rather than leave, what we wanted to do was stay here but protect ourselves as best we could. We thought closing off the neighbourhood would be the most preferable alternative. And it's worked incredibly well (video4).

His optimism about gated communities is underlined with a security-obsession that speaks of a nation where crime is out of control. His mentioning of hijacking and robbery serves to highlight the point.

Where the focus is not on the victims or potential victims of crime, there is largely a theme of undemocratic exclusion caused by the fortress city (Garland & Sparks, 2000:200). This exclusion could be described as a neo-feudalism (Braithwaite, 2000: 230). Perhaps Johannesburg has become a medieval walled city, shutting out potential offenders (Butchart, Terre Blanche et al, 2000: 30). *Architecture of fear* exploits this possibility to the full, and, where we are not the victims of crime or the prisoners of our crime obsessions, we are excluded from civil society by crime prevention strategies. David Goldblatt, the photographer interviewed in *Architecture of fear*, suggests that the walls in Johannesburg “divide us in very sharp and definite ways” (video4). Another nameless interviewee compares the status quo to apartheid and proposes that the booms are simply laagers that protect the white community (video4).¹¹⁶ If exclusion reigns in the video, other criminogenic conditions, such as poverty and unemployment, are ignored (Miller, 2001: 171). Not only is the complexity of society sidelined in this approach, but the unity and optimism of the nation is too.

The nation-state is, by implication, also projected in a negative light in the video. Fortress city imagery, where citizens assume responsibility for their safety, work together in the

¹¹⁶ Indeed, this observation has been made in academic circles too: that the so-called non-discriminatory mechanisms of private property and the organisation of space has resulted in another form of apartheid where the ‘ghetto’ is segregated from the white suburb (Lea, 1998: 182).

video with examples of private and community policing, suggesting the inability or unwillingness of the state to tackle crime.¹¹⁷

In reality, the fortress city phenomenon is not unique to South Africa, but is found in countries such as Brazil, Israel, Indonesia, India and the USA (Hughes, 1998: 141). It could be seen as a general feature of many post-liberal cities (Hughes, 1998: 139). Yet we do not get a taste of the scope of this trend in *Architecture of fear*. Instead, the parochial view of a crime-ridden society, while representing global postmodern trends, ignores the global context in which these theories manifest themselves in actuality. As the videos on prison in the previous chapter suggest, the absence of mitigating comparative material suggests firstly that the South African situation is unique and secondly, that it is therefore cause for alarm, panic and anxiety as we are swept away in a tide of our own abnormality.¹¹⁸

Although the National Crime Prevention Strategy in South Africa detailed the necessity of urban design and environmental opportunity reduction as a means of crime prevention, the suggestion in *Architecture of fear* is that situational crime prevention has undergone a disturbing mutation, prompted by spiralling fear of crime (Simpson & Rauch, 1999: 297). The growth of both situational crime prevention and its extreme manifestation in the fortress city is a trend that is specifically postmodern. While postmodern criminology is deconstructive and optimistic in its affirmative form (including a focus on communitarianism and victim subjectivity), postmodern penology and postmodern theories of crime control are not. These two approaches fall in line with a general defeatist, nihilistic postmodernism that eschews the existence of truth or modernist progress – hence the focus on control rather than rehabilitation or aetiology (how can one understand cause when there is no ultimate truth?). This postmodernism provides an interesting backdrop for a documentary aired by the public service broadcaster. Once

¹¹⁷ In this way, the viewer is directed to believe that “In a postmodern world, such decentralised privatised forms of crime control are decreasingly ancillary to and increasingly a replacement for the system of formal controls” (Lea, 1998: 181).

¹¹⁸ In this case, the American example would have provided the most accessible comparison. Mike Davis’s book *City of Quartz* (1990) details the defensive fortress city that Los Angeles has become, excluding ‘risky populations’ through physical barriers in the built environment (Hughes, 1998: 138). Architecture merges with security obsession to create cities comprised of restriction and exclusion (Hughes, 1998: 139).

again, the result is not particularly positive and four major implications for the nation and nation-state result. Firstly, citizens are seen as living in prisons, or ‘cages’. Secondly, there is an underlying theme of exclusion, where apartheid is replicated through criminalizing and restricting segments of the population. Thirdly, even where fortress city tactics are viewed positively, the underlying message is that crime is out of control. Related to this, and fourthly, the notion of an ineffective, incompetent state is ever-present, as responsibility for safety rests on individuals. The potential for alarm and even a moral panic presented by such representations is made even more likely through the omission of comparative data that would provide the ultimate ‘balance’ for this documentary.

Class

Although the detailed class-based assessments of radical criminology are absent in *Architecture of fear*, class presents itself in another form, partly as an extension of the fortress city observations. Here, postmodernism meets modernism in globally accessed theoretical frameworks. If postmodernism results in negative insinuations about the nation, invocations of class are more ambiguous.

Notions of class, it is argued by some, have become redundant in the era of risk assessment, where democracy prevails and “risk categorizations overcome class categorizations” (Chan & Rigakos, 2002: 746). This, however, seems a rather simplistic assessment, where ‘risky populations’ are so often identified by criminalizing the poor. The fortress city is an exemplary case of how risk minimisation segregates the wealthy from the working class, and surely can be traced back to an inheritance where the ‘dangerous classes’ were seen as a threat to modernity (Pratt, 2000: 36). Contemporary efforts at exclusion could be compared to earlier efforts at turning these dangerous classes into ‘docile bodies’ (O’Malley, 2000: 21). Both are strategies of containment. The ‘fortress city’ is “brutally divided between the ‘fortified cells’ of affluent society and places of terror where the police battle the criminalized poor” (Hughes, 1998: 140). It is all about “the zoning of neighbourhoods the segregation of rich and poor populations and so on” (Lea, 1998: 181). *Architecture of fear* is acutely aware of this divide and

emphasises class divisions from the beginning of the programme, with the voice-over saying, “Dazzling abundance is offset by extreme poverty. Glass and steel skyscrapers form a backdrop to squalor and shanty towns as the gap between rich and poor widens” (video4). An interview in the video with Karin Landman, researcher for CSIR, for example, indicates the way that ‘security villages’ for the wealthy are sliced off from the rest of the population,

This is a typical environment in South Africa. It is part of Centurion. It is a area where we get a shopping complex and then a huge piece of vacant, undeveloped land in the middle that are quite run down with a lot of litter lying around and right next to that we’ve got an exclusive security village with a golf course inside, a lot of other facilities and all these nice houses in a protective environment (video4).

Not only are the poor an excluded population, according to the video, but they are also more vulnerable to crime than the rich, vindicating the notion that, “By increasing the effort required to attack their property interests, the ruling class effectively channels the force of crime back onto the poor” (Mead, 2000: 13). This accords with much research done on the subject (Shaw, 1995b; Louw & Shaw, 1997; Butchart, Terre Blanche et al, 2000). In the video, we are told that, when it comes to crime, “The poor must fend for themselves” (video4). Not only does this result in an impression of class injustice for the viewer, but also an impression of continued racial injustice: the poor that we see in *Architecture of fear* are all black, particularly acute in the images of Diepsloot.

The manner in which this is depicted in *Architecture of fear* – without hope, with no mitigating factors and permeated with fear – seemingly does not offer much for the image of the nation. Together with images of the way that class excludes ‘risky populations’, South Africa (and Johannesburg in particular) does not seem to be a very positive place in which to live. Yet at the same time, acknowledgement of the structural relationships that impact on crime and influence crime control *does* have a positive spin in that macro-solutions can be teased out from an examination of social inequality. The focus on structure, the notion that power relationships control the labelling of certain populations groups as criminal, is more a left realist/radical stance than a postmodernist one. In this respect, *Architecture of fear* is not pristinely postmodern and postmodernism’s pessimism

is offset here by the conditional optimism of left realism. This contrasts with the postmodern patchwork of immediate solutions to crime, which neither address cause nor encourage understanding and so do not illuminate any potential path to progress. Unfortunately in *Architecture of fear*, the ray of hope offered by the class analysis is overwhelmed by the representation of postmodern crime control techniques and the moral panic that they encourage.

Interviews, pace and music

Architecture of fear uses a variety of commonly accepted documentary techniques, the most prominent of which in the video is the string-of-interviews. Although edited interviews can be used in their full form in documentaries, it is not unusual for them to be cut down “to one-phrase units, placed at different points according to the logic of exposition being followed” (Corner, 1995: 91). This is exactly what *Architecture of fear* often does: it slashes the interviews right down into bite-sized chunks that function synergistically with the racy pace of the programme.

The increasingly popular string-of interviews technique is commonly used as a way of maintaining direct address, but in a less overbearing manner than a commentary or voice-over. It organises exposition without “authoritative omniscience or didactic reductionism” (Nichols, 1988: 54, 55). The more flexible arguments strung together by interviews generally ensure that meaning is not closed off in the same way that it often is with the use of voice-overs (Corner, 1995: 99). According to this view, the interview voices of the documentary do not automatically comprise the voice of the film (Nichols, 1988: 55).

While it may be true for most documentary films that interviews leave meaning open rather than closed, in many ways the opposite seems to be true for *Architecture of fear*. The strength and single-mindedness of the exposition is specifically centred on the use of interview material. Indeed, the ‘voice’ of the documentary is made definitive through the interviews. Layers of interview fragments achieve this, where points are often driven home, and made concrete and non-negotiable, through their reiteration in a variety of

different ways by a variety of different interviewees. To illustrate this, for example, below is a sequence concerning individualised strategies of dealing with risk in a crime-ridden society:

Exnominated voice # 5: Well if I drive home I make sure that nobody's following me.

Exnominated voice # 6: You don't drive around with your windows open. If you do, you're stupid.

Exnominated voice # 7: Ja, I lock my door – the door of my car.

Exnominated voice # 8: I don't drink and drive because that's when most of the time they catch you.

Exnominated voice # 9: If somebody comes up to the car...go!

Exnominated voice # 10: I certainly wouldn't stop at red traffic lights if it was a quiet road.

Exnominated voice # 11: No I think before you open your gates just have a look who's in your street, you know – left, right.

Exnominated voice # 12: If I see people walking in the road that I don't know, I also carry on driving and come back to the property once that I know they've gone past (video4).

That we are living in a society, governed by fear, where the risk of criminal attack is ever-present and where anxieties escalate into moral panics is a message that is easily achieved through this layering of interviews. Each negative point that is made about the nation or Johannesburg is compounded with every additional comment. The state of crime – and our fear of it – has become the proverbial bogeyman.

The fact that the interviews used have been edited down to mere snippets contributes to the meaning of the documentary in another way too. It adds to the choppy, racy pace of the story, suggesting danger, adrenaline, living on the edge, moments of panic and threat. Interview fragments match the image fragments that abound; all put together in a rush, all tumbling one on top of another. For example, an image of razor wire against the blue sky, is followed by rapidly moving shots of a neighbourhood. A Claw security van whizzes past. This turns into an image of an electric gate, with spikes on top of it, slowly closing. Two dogs bark viciously up against a security gate. As with this series of images, many others help build a picture of uncontrollable crime and fear, linking explicitly to and encouraging a moral panic through both content and through the fast-paced, dangerous rhythm. Another example is where the screen is divided into two segments. The one half has Antionette Louw's face talking and the other half is a blank beige background.

Across both segments run fragmented, semi-transparent words from newspapers: ‘shocking’, ‘kill’, ‘increase’, ‘hijack’, ‘rape’. This cuts to a headline board of a newspaper, which says ‘Woman MP fights off attackers.’ The viewers are being bombarded with images and the exhilarating tempo serves only to entrench the ‘dangerised’, risk-obsessed message of the documentary.

Further supporting the racy pace that intimates danger, is the music in the video. In the very first scene of the programme the voice-over is accompanied by shrill, ‘on edge’, anxious music, which becomes infused with heavy, almost primal drum beats. The drum beats could be taken as mimicking a loud, adrenalised heart beat, creating a background awareness of the body’s response to danger. This music is used repeatedly throughout the video, adding to meaning and indicating the importance of examining music in media analysis (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 17). Further atmosphere is created by other styles of music too. At various points, deep, ominous strains of monotonous music well up in the background. Sometimes, the ominous music is accompanied by almost ‘tinny’, vibrating reverberations adding to the anxious ambience of this video, and working together with the visual and verbal indicators. For example, this kind of music provides the backdrop to the voice-over saying, “As night falls, the city becomes a fearful place” (video4). At strategic instances, wistful music seems to indicate a nostalgia for a better past, and in the process, alludes to the notion of decline and decay that accompanies increasing concern about crime. Haunting music also often is supplemented by the ‘heartbeat’, as pulsating drums seems to indicate a heightened consciousness of danger. In one scene, this music accompanies Bev Palesa Ditsie’s discussion about how she goes on the defensive when walking on the streets.

Architecture of fear uses a variety of meticulously prepared mechanisms to create exposition and is remarkable for the precision and effectiveness of the result. Clearly, the making of this video consumed much time, energy, thought and skill. While strategies such as voice-over are included, the most striking and compelling techniques are the string-of-interviews, the choppy editing and the music. Unlike the use of postmodern crime control theories, these techniques alone cannot make the message of the video

negative. Yet here, in tandem with the content, the result is a highly convincing argument about the state of crime and the fear of crime in Johannesburg. It is the efficacy of these techniques, and the way that they undoubtedly drag viewers into the perspective of the exposition, that makes it dangerous for the broadcaster's mandate, where the intention of the filmmaker is a pessimistic portrayal. In this case, the result is an unquestioned and relentless negativity about Johannesburg, which does not reflect well on the state of the nation. Together with the actualisation and perpetuation of postmodern crime control trends, globally utilised documentary techniques serve to sustain unproductive images of the nation.

III. THE LOCAL: JOHANNESBURG, SOWETO, AND DIEPSLOOT

At the beginning of the programme, we are told in melancholic tones by the voice-over, Jo'burg has the reputation of being the most dangerous city on earth and fear is everywhere. In the well-to-do suburbs, high walls, panic buttons, razor wire, electric fences and armed response units have become standard features (video4). Shutting down debate on the question, the omniscient voice-over states this definitively. Johannesburg is succinctly characterised. From the outset, the sense of identity attached to the local is given an extremely strong emphasis in *Architecture of fear* and the viewers are unquestionably located in Johannesburg, Soweto and Diepsloot. Multiple physical landmarks of Johannesburg that are on offer visually work together with historical tidbits included by the voice-over to create an undeniably rich and rooted local context. We see, for example, the Brixton radio tower, Ponty, a freeway sign saying 'Johannesburg' on it and an aerial shot of Johannesburg. Later in the video, there is black and white archival footage of some kind of carnival taking place in the city centre. Accompanying many of the visual markers are verbal anchors. The viewers hear about the growth of Johannesburg as a gold-mining centre, how business fled to the suburbs in the 1980s as apartheid crumbled and how, "The city's architecture reflects a century of racially driven social engineering resulting in extraordinary contrasts" (video4). Alluding to a national history of apartheid is certainly fundamental in creating a specifically South African-

flavoured context – one that was so starkly absent in *It's nice to have a friend*. Whether this context is ultimately beneficial is the question that remains.

In reality, Johannesburg is often described as the ‘crime capital’ of South Africa (Louw & Shaw, 1997: 13). The impression appears to be one that *Architecture of fear* maintains. Despite the indisputable value of the historical and physical context on offer, its contribution as a positive factor is mitigated by the negative information that accompanies it. For example, when describing the movement of business out of town, we are told that, “for many the crime and grime mean that it’s virtually a no-go zone – a perception that persists, despite attempts to change it” (video4). In addition, our views of the landmarks of Johannesburg are often interspersed with images of crime. The Brixton radio tower, Ponty and the sign saying ‘Johannesburg’ directly precede an image taken from a street surveillance camera. It says ‘Jeppe/Fraser’ in the top left hand corner and in the picture are about five youthful criminals towering over their victim on the pavement. A further image of the attack offers a close-up view. The youths walk off leaving the victim cowering on the pavement.

The interview snippets project an equally harsh understanding of the city. For example, one interviewee says, “People in Johannesburg party like there’s no tomorrow because there’s a real sense that there may not be any tomorrow” (video4). Later, he adds, “You know what happens to you when you arrive in Johannesburg as an outsider is everyone gives you the survival tips” (video4). A final example of an explicit reference to Johannesburg is where we see a newspaper headline for *The Star*, July 26 1997. The camera pans down the page of the newspaper and there is a picture of a scene in Johannesburg and the headline reads ‘Muggers’ paradise’ (video4). These kinds of references work together with other fragments that do not specifically name Johannesburg, but certainly imply it.

In an attempt to ‘balance’ the images of Johannesburg, perhaps as a contrast to the showing of the ‘white’ areas of Johannesburg, and undoubtedly in an attempt to show ‘diversity’, Soweto is included. In its description, the voice-over specifically notes that

the place has a reputation for violence, and is otherwise noncommittal about the township. Visually, the images seem to range from the neutral to the negative to, surprisingly, the positive. To begin, we get a view, from a car on a freeway, which focuses on a sign saying, 'M60 Soweto, N12 Kimberley, N11 Bloemfontein'. This fades into another freeway sign, which also contains the name 'Soweto'. After viewing a landscape of power-lines and small houses from the freeway, we then see a scene of uplifting normality as a school girl crosses the road next to a small school boy carrying an umbrella. Yet this seems to turn sour. The shot divides into two and both segments are different perspectives of some sort of checkpoint with policeman. Other scenes of the township culminate in a happy scene of two children playing in the street with one child spraying the other with water from a bottle and then running away.

The meaning of the mixture of different images seems to be one of contradiction. Yet this contradiction is somewhat resolved in the subsequent scenes, where viewers are clearly encouraged to believe in the ultimate triumph of evil over good in the township. With the Sowetan context firmly established, its inhabitants speak out. A series of interviews with middle-aged and elderly women create a picture of crime, which is out of control. One interviewee laments, "...because you can't even send a child – your own child – to the shops. You can't even send that child to the shops" (video4). Another adds, "At night you are exposed to all sorts of dangers – rape, kidnapping – all big things" (video4). Yet a third says, "People are being robbed, hijacked, their cars with guns and everything" (video4).

Diepsloot is the final locality that is given specific attention in the video, as the voice-over notes that,

A dumping ground for people moved in from crowded areas elsewhere, there are almost no services for an estimated 140 000 people. The nearest police station is 50 kilometres away. Residents have to rely on their Community Police Forum, which operates out of a caravan (video4).

From this, it appears that the focus here is specifically directed at poverty in Diepsloot and the way that this impacts on the community's crime-fighting resources. In this context of deprivation, the Community Police Forum and vigilante group Mapogo

Mathamaca are discussed in detail as the only options open to a poor community defending itself against crime. The contrast with the private security available in the upmarket suburbs of Johannesburg is stark. It is a pity that this focus on Diepsloot in the programme is not more extensive, since it would help to do justice to the element of diversity contained in the broadcaster's mandate.

If the local is interpenetrated with the global, once again, the local contexts create the depth and flesh for globally fashionable postmodern theories of crime and those focusing on class. In the case of Diepsloot in particular, and to some extent Soweto, the images and arguments we receive link up to the larger debates about the relationship of crime prevention to poverty, where the fortress city excludes the poor, who are left to fend for themselves. Furthermore, by naming and examining Diepsloot specifically, a conscious contrast is drawn between this area and the rest of Johannesburg, again highlighting the divide between wealthy and poor in a typical fortress city. The focus on poverty is not necessarily negative in that it valuably identifies structural inequality, which needs to be addressed if the poor are going to alleviate their crime-ridden lives. Yet, if the inclusion of Diepsloot alludes to a potentially valuable understanding of class, the focus on Johannesburg and Soweto link up to a variety of postmodern themes in the programme, including the notion of risk, risk management, a belief in spiralling crime rates and the global phenomenon of a crisis in *sicherheit* as moral panics abound. To a large extent, the focus on Johannesburg and Soweto overshadows the more nuanced portrayal of Diepsloot and obliterates its potential to point towards societal solutions.

What does the essentially negative shadow that this casts on the city of Johannesburg say about the nation? In academic circles at least, it is accepted that national conclusions about crime cannot be drawn from local evidence, since "The picture varies considerably from region to region, from city to city and from rural to urban area" (Glanz, 1995b: 17). Urban areas, for example, have a variety of conditions that are conducive to crime, which are absent in rural areas.¹¹⁹ The implication, then, is that any programme dealing with the

¹¹⁹ These include overcrowding, unemployment, gangsterism, an abundance of firearms and a large youthful population (since it is more often the youth, rather than older people who commit crime) (Glanz,

Johannesburg metropolitan area could and should not make any larger claims about the state of crime in South Africa. *Architecture of fear*, however, seems to do just that.

Although ostensibly about the city of Johannesburg, and although the video sets this up explicitly at the beginning of the programme, references to South Africa also flourish, intimating that the two can be used interchangeably. Two of the unnamed interviewees talk about South Africa, with the one, for example, commenting that, “I’ve always thought South Africans were paranoid. I felt...now I know why they’re paranoid” (video4). Expert witness, Antionette Louw, makes two references to South Africa and one to South African women. Her interview material very clearly draws specific conclusions about South Africa, rather than simply mentioning the nation by chance. She says,

Whether it’s about political transition, income inequality, rich and poor living side by side, single parent families, kids coming back from school, nobody at home, these are all the ingredients that people will write down on their list of causes for violence and for crime. If you put the whole list down, South Africa has all of those things (video4).

Photographer David Goldblatt similarly makes a very conscious reference to South Africa and even goes as far as suggesting Johannesburg is an exemplar for South Africa, “I think in South Africa now, and in particular in Johannesburg, Gauteng, walls are very much a defence against what we all fear” (video4). Further references include Gandhi Maseko talking about South African architecture, Karin Landman about ‘typical environments’ in South Africa and Peter Makurube about ‘our country’, among many more. From this, it certainly seems that a less localised, more general argument is being made. If this is the case, the negativity of Johannesburg has been very easily and seamlessly transposed onto the general South African context. The implication for the image of the nation is clear.

Decline

Descriptions of decline add to the efficacy of straightforwardly negative aspersions about the local. In a context where the local and national are referred to interchangeably, these

1995b: 17). In other words, “the impact of crime on the country is not uniform and increases in crime appear to affect different parts of South African society in different ways” (Louw & Shaw, 1997: 10).

too can be taken as casting a dim glow on the state of the nation. Localities are identified in terms of loss. As far as Johannesburg is concerned, one interviewee laments that "...town has lost its meaning" (video4). Another says pitifully, "This used to be one of the best places in Johannesburg to stay. My grandson...can't come and visit me here anymore" (video4). Even the voice-over reinforces this, suggesting that the creeping urban decay in Johannesburg has meant depreciating property value and the necessity of fortifying one's home. Soweto too, is seen to be a victim of decline. The perspective of an elderly resident, Sophie Makebe, is included in the video. She says,

I am Sophie Makebe, living in Orlando West extension. As from 1960, I've been staying in this house. Things have changed in this area because at first they said this was the most sweetest suburb that you could get in Soweto (video4).

The level of the local in the programme, consequently, is not a productive site in terms of fulfilling the public service broadcaster's mandate. Although the image of Diepsloot meshes with global theories of class in a potentially productive way, this is overshadowed by the focus on Johannesburg and Soweto, which has distinctly negative postmodern overtones. Secondly, these negative local representations articulate with references and comments about the nation, decisively thwarting uplifting national images and undoubtedly hampering potential nation-building through the programme. Thirdly, descriptions of decline add to the efficacy and conviction of the negative images of the local. Fourthly, while *Architecture of fear* may superficially appear to fulfil the important criterion of showing diversity, through its depiction of Johannesburg, Soweto and Diepsloot, this is a red herring. The documentary remains firmly entrenched in the metropolitan area, and in South Africa's largest city. We receive no information about the ways in which crime is dealt with in other parts of South Africa, or how the crime rates vary. Perhaps, only two avenues of the local offers any optimism: firstly, the historical information the viewers receive roots them in a sense of national culture and secondly, the analysis of class introduces the possibility of structural solutions to crime and discriminatory crime control practices. Yet this remains a miniscule portion of the documentary, insufficient to compensate for the overwhelming pessimism delivered by the convincing images and words constituting the local.

IV. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL CULTURE

On a broader level than the history of Johannesburg, part of the historical perspective viewers receive has to do with the link between apartheid and crime. In an interview with Brandon Hamber, a psychologist at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, he says,

And if we look at apartheid and the violence that came with apartheid, that was about brutalising everyday life. Where you went to the toilet, which bus you went on. And I think that sort of level of continuing brutalisation in everyday aspects of life has continued – in the way we live in our homes and the fears we have on the streets (video4).

Minister of Housing, Sankie Mthembu-Mahanyele, echoes this, discussing how fear permeated apartheid society and is therefore not something new. Most interesting, perhaps, is a series of rapid images of the nationally broadcast ‘Yizo Yizo’ programme, which deals with social ills such as crime, dramatically intercut with the famous Hector Peterson photograph. It is a skilfully edited, imaginatively put together suggestion that the social problems of today can be traced back to the violence of apartheid. Although in itself looking at brutalisation is certainly not inherently positive, the strength of the historically based approach is that it is suggestive of a complexity that suffocates moral panics and invokes problem identification and solving rather than alarm. It is this that potentially sets national culture in an optimistic light.

Unfortunately, historical nuance is not sustained throughout the programme and simplistic, uncontextualised statements about the nature and extent of crime in South Africa prevail. The result is that *Architecture of fear* propagates the notion of an inexplicably abnormal society, where solutions reside in the exclusion of deviant elements and the average citizen is under siege. We receive many interview and news snippets of de-contextualised crime.¹²⁰ In this context of non-explanation, it could be

¹²⁰ For example, part of a news bulletin where the newsreader says, “Three men have been charged with murder after a hidden camera filmed them fatally shooting a man” (video4). This is followed by a reporter’s voice saying, “The confusing sequence follows and ends with one of the men firing several shots. The victim died in the street as the perpetrators of the murder strolled casually towards a nightclub” (video4). No further explanation is offered. An interview with Sophie Makebe, one of the women in Soweto, also begs further explanation, which is denied. She says, “My son was murdered in that empty

anticipated that an atmosphere of hyper-fear and rampant crime would be projected. If out-of-control crime is part of the national culture in *Architecture of fear*, so is a 'dangerised society'.

Dangerising society

In *Architecture of fear*, humour by a stand up comedian suggests crime has infiltrated everywhere, "Why do people seek artificial terror when it's part of our daily experience? I mean you never hear somebody say, 'I had these four ous in my house last night. They wanted to kill my family ...What a rush'" (video4).

This is just one example of how the documentary perpetuates the notion of a 'dangerised society', where 'dangerisation' is

the tendency to perceive and analyse the world through categories of menace. It leads to continuous detection of threats and assessment of adverse probabilities, to the prevalence of defensive perceptions over optimistic ones and to the dominance of fear and anxiety over ambition and desire (Lianos with Douglas, 2000: 267).

Any irregularities in the environment are seen as threatening (Lianos with Douglas, 2000: 273). Danger is seen everywhere, telling us more about ourselves, our values, our fears, our crime-fighting strategies, than the reality of crime (Brown & Pratt, 2000: 4). In other words, it is a notion that is specifically linked to culture (Lianos with Douglas, 2000: 261). In the case of *Architecture of fear*, it is a vital indicator of national culture. The postmodern phenomenon of 'dangerisation' therefore links global theory to national culture and is simply another way in which this documentary is immersed in postmodern pessimism. Once again, examples of risk, strategies of containment and envisioning the world in terms of menace abound. A string-of-interviews expounds danger without explanation,

Exnominated voice # 30: It's not the township alone. It's everywhere.

Institutional voice: But do you feel that it's increased in the township?

Exnominated voice # 30: It is increasing – day by day.

Exnominated voice # 31: People are being robbed, hijacked, their cars with guns and everything (video4).

space there. The one you passed in coming this way...and then demanded money from me. It's what they do" (video4).

The Deputy Head of Orlando High says that crime has invaded the schools, where teachers are murdered (video4). In one way or another, these examples show how citizens perceive society in terms of danger and consequently, how the 'voice' of the documentary characterises our culture. Closely related to the theme of danger is the fear of crime, so prevalent in *Architecture of fear* that it is stifling.

Fear of crime

In many countries around the world, the fear of crime has been an issue that has garnered much political attention. In Britain, for example, crime has reached the top of the list as far as public concerns go (Pantazis, 2000: 414). In South Africa, the National Crime Prevention Strategy has recognised the importance of the fear of crime, in a context where it affects at least a third of South Africans (Glanz 1994 in Shaw, 1995b: 15).

Studies on crime indicate a criminological trend that in the last twenty years has increasingly chosen to focus on the fear of crime (Pantazis, 2000: 414). The victim surveys, which constitute a vital element of this, began in the 1960s and have accelerated in scope and popularity since then (Stanko, 2000: 151, 152). As an element of the postmodern condition, fear of crime is now one of the most researched phenomena in this academic arena (Farrall et al, 2000: 399). Undoubtedly, it is linked to the increase in risk all areas of life, as posited by Giddens, and to a global growth in insecurity due, not least, to cultural change (Pantazis, 2000: 417).

The large amount of attention stockpiled by fear of crime in both academic circles and society is reflected throughout *Architecture of fear*, perhaps as its most prominent theme. Firstly, this once again indicates the close link to postmodern understandings of reality and secondly, also provides a model of South African society grounded in a culture of anxiety and fear and founded on the implication that, in most cases, this fear is well justified. The voice-over, for example, announces near the beginning of the programme that "Everyone has a story to tell" about crime and victimisation in South Africa (video4). Not only does it therefore *depict* a moral panic underway, but it simultaneously *perpetuates* it.

The fear-of-crime theme is threaded seamlessly throughout the documentary with interview snippets that have a snowballing effect of buttressing the argument of an anxiety-riddled South African society. Specifically referring to South Africa, an anonymous interviewee suggests firstly that the ‘paranoia’ felt by South Africans is justified and secondly that having a gun pointed at one is a ‘hectic feeling’ (video4). Another interviewee suggests that feeling safe is practically impossible,

Exnominated voice # 15: My house has got a double roof on. I’ve got bloody double bars there on my windows. I’ve got an alarm system inside.

Institutional voice: Do you feel safe with all of this?

Exnominated voice # 15: No (video4).

Various other interviewees also contribute along these lines. One says he locks his front door at night, puts his alarm on and locks his bedroom door. Another middle-class housewife has a similar story of locking inter-leading doors and arming the alarm. A third sleeps with his gun, yet the fear persists (video4).

It is not simply the case that evidence of fear abounds – so do specific references to that fear, explicitly underlining the connection between national culture and what is theorised as the postmodern condition. Architect Gandhi Maseko talks about the link between ‘our society’, fear and the national history of apartheid (video4). Expert witness, Antionette Louw, also refers to the issue of fear itself, saying, “When we talk about fear and perception, it’s never one thing, it’s never one group of people and it’s never one thing that they might fear. It’s a very complex and varied thing” (video4). Motivational speaker, Mike Lipkin adds to this, distinguishing between what he calls ‘necessary fear’ and ‘toxic fear’ (video4). Finally, an anonymous man says philosophically, “I think we’ve lost track of what fear really is. I don’t think we know what it is” (video4). Clearly, the preferred meaning created by this is a society preoccupied with both their own fear and what the issue of fear itself means. The pervasiveness of fear imagery from a wide variety of sources subtly, but firmly, makes the connection between fear and national culture.

Gender, as a primary factor influencing fear of crime, is also foregrounded. This indicates, in very specific ways, how fear controls the female sector of the population, tying in with the more general evidence for a national culture of fear.¹²¹ Rather than reflecting the actual situation, where women are less likely to be victims of crime than men (Chan & Rigakos, 2002: 750; Stanko, 2000: 152), *Architecture of fear* focuses instead on subjective fears and perceptions, in true postmodern style. That this fear may be exaggerated in the minds of these women remains unacknowledged, further fuelling the moral panic that the fear theme propagates. Antoinette Louw discusses in the documentary how loss of possessions does not worry her nearly as much as rape – especially with the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. In terms of a national culture of gendered fear, she says, “And that is, I think, what South African women fear” (video4). Bev Palesa Ditsie expresses a fear of being attacked on the street:

If I’m going to be in the street and I’m not in a car and not in a group, then I’m wearing big, baggy jeans, you know, and my whole attitude kind of takes on shape too. My whole look says touch me and die (video4).

Overall, the viewer is pummelled with images and words that suggest everyone is afraid. Although fear of crime is, at times seen to be propelling frantically out of control, it is predominantly seen to be based on real threats, perpetuating any moral panic that might be on the horizon. Both socio-demographic and psychological models of fear of crime are used implicitly and explicitly. Particularly with the socio-demographic model¹²², we see how different sectors of society – the poor, women – are fearful, building a composite picture of a national culture of unease. The only positive element of this postmodern approach is the manner in which it examines gender, contrary to mainstream criminology, which often overlooks it.

¹²¹ Studies across the world illustrate the extent of women’s fear. While acknowledging that generalisations cannot always be made, much of this research nonetheless draw broad conclusions about both rich and poor women’s feelings of vulnerability (Pantazis, 2000: 420).

¹²² The socio-demographic model maps the fear of crime according to social variables such as race, gender, education, neighbourhood composition and age (Farrall et al, 2000: 401).

Race

In South Africa, the connection between class and race is an intimate one. Particularly in terms of risk and dangerisation, the global issues of class discussed above closely link up to race-based observations in *Architecture of fear*. In both cases, although categories of risk are said to destroy discrimination, in reality they ‘other’ and exclude so that, “Race, age, gender and poverty are being recast in the mould of dangerousness, which now becomes the emerging category for legitimizing social exclusion” (Lianos with Douglas, 2000: 272). According to the video, race remains a determinant of this exclusion and the segregation implied by this is so starkly reminiscent of the history of apartheid that it implies a continuation from a previous era. It seems that, according to the video, the history of racial discrimination continues to play an important role in defining national culture. Although this is hardly reason for celebration, its depiction on television does point towards ways in which the intersection of crime and race in popular consciousness must be addressed in order to foster a constructive national identity.

At one instance in the video, Peter Makurube states,

So it’s prejudice. If every black person assumed every white person is a racist, it would not be okay. So why assume every black person is a criminal? It happens everywhere (video4).

He relates how, as a black man standing on the side of the road in a suburb, his presence resulted in a white man hurrying to close his gate because of the ‘perceived probability’ that Peter was waiting for a criminal opportunity to arise (Lianos with Douglas, 2000: 263). Hugh Masebenza, a young black actor interviewed for the documentary talks about how white people react to black people, “They look at you sometimes with an absolute look of - a shriek of panic, you know. Lock that door and lock that door. It’s the Macarena, you know” (video4). The manner in which both race and class are examined in *Architecture of fear* is not at the apex of optimism – it does not offer direct solutions and reconciliatory strategies. Yet, it does implicitly point in this direction through the identification and problematisation of structural inequality, which works well with the productive (although minimal) historical context in the video. Had *Architecture of fear*

made more of these modernist titbits in the video, the outcome would surely not have been one where postmodern pessimism reigns supreme.

It is not only the level of the local that overwhelmingly links up to postmodern attitudes towards crime in *Architecture of fear*, but the level of national culture too. South African society is seen both as a society under siege and as a society gripped by fear. Together, fear and dangerisation override the potentially positive contributions of structural analyses in the programme and present an image of the country's culture that is far from positive. Without a doubt, this does not fulfil any of the optimistic, nation-building objectives contained in the SABC's mandate.

V. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATION-STATE

In a postmodern context, where confidence in the criminal justice state is declining and there is a perceived increase in the amount of crime, questions of trust are paramount. If trust is absent, there are not only important implications for democracy, but also for state institutions and the efficacy of the state. In turn, if signifiers of lack of trust are projected on the silver screen, the notion of a stable, content nation, broadly based on the security of the modernist state, is undermined. In terms of crime,

People could lose faith and confidence in the mechanisms of containing crime, of establishing and maintaining 'law and order'; they could mobilize private security services or resort to 'self-help' – even taking such extreme forms as lynching (Ohlemacher, 2002: 61).

Private security, community policing and vigilantism are all evident in *Architecture of fear* as a product of a loss of trust.

In South Africa, and not just the video, there is a prevalent loss of faith in the state's ability to protect its citizens such that, "The risks posed by dangerous offenders not only seem to grow, but seem to be beyond the capabilities of the modern state to manage" (Pratt, 2000: 47). One of the most important elements of this, is a belief in the inefficacy of the police and a wastage of taxpayers' money on a criminal justice system that does not work (Schönteich, 1999: 12, 15). Accusations of police prejudice, brutality and general impropriety, including the abuse of authority and power, are rife and impact

detrimentally on public relations, (Du Preez, 1993: 92, 97). In some instances, a ‘mafia-logic’ prevails in police stations, where members of the police force walk in the corrupt footsteps of the previous regime (Steinberg, 2001: 8). The South African context is one where only about 23% of offenders are caught and where suspicion of the police is pronounced (Schönteich, 1999: 16).

Architecture of fear brings this loss of faith in the police into sharp relief. On trusting the police, a young male, says “Not very much. They are also involved in crime” (video4). Sophie Makebe, one of the elderly interviewees in Soweto says simply and abruptly, “I don’t trust the police” (video4). *Architecture of fear* also follows a thread of police corruption. Initially in the programme, Superintendent Richard Luvhengo of the Soweto police is interviewed - but his contribution is de-legitimated with the voice-over noting that, “In March this year, Superintendent Richard Luvhengo was arrested along with six of his colleagues on charges related to fraud and corruption. He was suspended from the force” (video4). Perhaps one of the biggest indictments of the police in the video is the way we are shown the proliferation of private policing. It suggests both the withdrawal of the nation-state and its inability to ensure the safety of its citizens, with a detrimental impact on the image of the nation as it coheres around the nation-state.

Private policing

The South African Police originated in 1913, with a force of 5882 policeman operating predominantly in the urban areas (Schönteich, 1999: 14). In these early days, private security was not unusual, with farmers and rural inhabitants having to look after themselves. With the growth of the scope and influence of the police, however, the state slowly came to be seen as responsible for the safety of its citizens. Only in the last twenty years or so, has there been a re-growth in private security, which is suggestive of the diminished role of the state in the global era (Schönteich, 1999: 14).

Presently in South Africa, the situation is one where “Private security permeates the lives of most South Africans far more than the public police” (Shaw, 1995a: 3). At sporting events, in blocks of flats, in gated communities, restaurants, shopping centres and

nightclubs, private security prevails (Braithwaite, 2000: 226). It is an enormous growth industry where there are approximately three private security personnel for every policeman (Schönsteich, 1999: 1). The huge profits generated by the private security industry are supplemented by similarly large benefits in terms of the gadgets industry and the training industry (Fattah, 1997: 24).

Architecture of fear shows all of these things: the gadgets industry is represented by the Securex show, which we are told is “a showcase for the security industry’s products and innovations”, the personal safety training is indicated by the anti-hijack course undertaken by middle-class mother Karin and the private security industry is shown in a plethora of ways (video4). One nervous and disillusioned interviewee says, “The only way I can go out is to have a guard. An armed reaction. We pay for private security” (video4). Jenny Irish, security industry consultant comments on the spectacular growth of the industry and, according to her, there are five thousand security companies and multiple security guards compared to policemen (video4). Viewers hear an interview with a security guard, and with Clive Zulberg the owner of Stallion Security, a private security company (video4). Visually, we see some of the inner workings of Stallion Security, with the regimented early morning roll call. More interestingly, however, we see a re-enacted scene where a small girl inside a house presses the panic button, summoning private security guards to the rescue. Extensive images of the resultant security process ensue with the private security guards being shown as efficient and the clients being shown as satisfied.

In spite of this, *Architecture of fear* certainly also offers a critical rebuttal to the growth of the private security industry. Not only is the Minister of Housing, Sankie Mthembu-Mahanyele, disapproving of road closures and the minority who can afford “expensive security systems”, so is Dr Reuben Richards, Deputy Director General of the Scorpions. He says, “The role of the police in any democracy is to ensure that the democracy is upheld. We cannot afford a country run by private armies” (video4.) To some extent, the debate on the value of private security deflects attention away from the essential issue of the incompetence of the state as a reason for the industry’s growth. Yet this nonetheless

remains an underlying theme, with the suspicion with which the police are regarded, and the general inadequacy of the police force, forming a significant component of the programme. For example, Mike Lipkin adds that, “The government’s not doing anything. The police...they are trying their best, but truly they are swimming upstream. So they can do very little. So people have to help themselves” (video4).

Architecture of fear not only maps the unresponsive criminal justice system by looking at the incompetence of the police and the growth of private security companies, but through examining initiatives such as those inaugurated by Business Against Crime – once again a private source of crime-fighting.¹²³ In the video, there is no ambiguity about the private nature of this involvement in a traditionally government controlled sphere and the voice-over tells us that, “Business against crime has launched a 58 camera surveillance system in the city centre with ambitions to expand the system to 350 cameras. The scheme has brought the crime rate down by about 40%” (video4). The contrast with the corrupt and inefficient police force depicted in the video is stark and an interview in the video with John Penberthy, a representative for Business Against Crime, further illustrates the efficacy of the private initiative,

We can patrol with cameras in seconds what it would take minutes if not hours to patrol on the ground. With a few people well placed, we are aiming at a response time from the time of the incident being reported to actual arrival on the scene of approximately 60 seconds (video4).

Private ventures to thwart rising crime rates, and the growth in private security, are not phenomena that are exclusive to South Africa. As with the growth of the fortress city, America has played a flagship role (Schönteich, 1999: 18). In that country, expansion took place in the 1960s with Canada, Europe and the United Kingdom following suit in the 1970s (Shaw, 1995a: 4). It is indisputable that the increase in private security has been swift, dramatic and remarkable (Fattah, 1997: 24). In the United Kingdom, America and Australia, private security personnel now outnumber police officers - but the growth

¹²³ In the United Kingdom, investment in CCTV has not only been through private sources, but through central and local government, which is said to have invested over £100 million between 1994 and 1997 (Ditton, 2000: 692). The result is that CCTV is found in a variety of places from freeways to shopping malls to car parks (Hughes, 1998: 13). In South Africa, the Business Against Crime venture could be interpreted as the private sector providing a crutch for the government (Fourie & Mhangwana, 1996: 6).

trend is not one that is predominantly confined to the developed world (Schönteich, 1999: 14). As with South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Uganda all have growing private security industries, with Luanda purportedly having 150 security companies (Schönteich, 1999: 25). As with many of the other videos under examination here, the lack of acknowledgement of a global trend in operation makes South Africa's problems, in this case a sidelined nation-state, seem unique. With this uniqueness, any turpitude or inadequacy is seen to reflect *specifically on our nation*. It is ironic then, that in one way or another, these private security trends indicate a less significant role of the state across the globe, rather than just in South Africa. They are confirmation of the relevance of a global postmodernism where the modernist state is seen as largely irrelevant. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of postmodernism is a disillusionment with the shortcomings of the criminal justice state and the shifting of the state's responsibility as neoliberalism grows and its welfarist characteristics decline (Garland & Sparks, 2000: 200). In this context, it is unsurprising that, having adopted a postmodern stance, *Architecture of fear* would be far from positive about the nation-state. Just as the advance of private policing is one element that strongly implies state withdrawal or inefficacy, the way that community policing is used in *Architecture of fear* has a similar effect.

Community policing

New forms of 'social order' accompany the decline of the nation-state (Hughes, 1998: 137). Community crime prevention networks are just one of these, as citizens assume responsibility for crime-prevention, leaving the nation-state's criminal justice system behind in the process (Stanko, 2000: 156).¹²⁴

¹²⁴ As an early originator of community policing in South Africa, the 1980s saw the development of partnership policing between the police and public which "conforms to the ideal of a multi-agency approach whereby the police, the public, elected officials, government and other agencies together address crime" (Oppler, 1997: 16). Since the 1990s, these efforts have expanded in definition to include seawatches, neighbourhood watches, anti-crime forums, street committees and community policing forums, amongst others (Schärf, Saban & Hauck, 2001: 65, 66). After the 1994 elections, the increase in crime and the subsequent popular perception of a continuing rise in crime meant that these initiatives have been given "new urgency and greater resolve" (Schärf, Saban & Hauck, 2001: 66). Undoubtedly, they are also fuelled by a belief in the inability of the state to protect its citizens.

Architecture of fear seems critical of the nation-state's crime prevention efforts, not only through the disdain with which it regards the police, but implicitly through the inclusion of community policing. While postmodern communitarianism certainly has the potential to be seen in a positive light, when the focus is on the inadequacy of the state rather than positive community involvement, this is not the case. Notably, in *Architecture of fear*, community policing is not seen as a partnership between police and public. Rather, the video chooses to focus on the extreme negative, seeing it as a situation where communities are being left to fend for themselves.¹²⁵

The Diepsloot Forum itself seems a derisive indictment of the nation-state, where the absence of any form of government assistance or provision is duly noted. Not only does the voice-over tell us that there is a general lack of services in Diepsloot, but that the nearest police station is over fifty kilometres away. Far from receiving assistance from the nation-state, the Community Policing Forum, we are told, operates from a caravan (video4). Yet despite its lack of resources, it is depicted as outdoing the police and Rick Munyai, the Diepsloot Community Policing Forum representative says, "Sometimes you find the police have arrested the wrong person and then we have to release that person and give them the right person because we have got the right information" (video4). Overall, the lack of police involvement does not offer a very gratifying insight into a national identity that may be partially based on affiliation with the nation-state.

Vigilantism

The proliferation of vigilantism, as shown in *Architecture of fear*, not only implies the inefficacy of the police in a similar manner as with private policing and Community Policing Forums, but also their further incompetence in curtailing the illegal activities of the vigilantes. As far as this is concerned, vigilantism in the video is clearly "an

¹²⁵ In terms of the South African situation, the government's pivotal role in initiating community policing is not even remotely acknowledged. Indeed, in attempting to involve communities in policing matters, the 1995 South African Police Services Act provided for the establishment of police community forums at all police stations. (Van Zyl Smit, 1999: 206). The National Crime Prevention Strategy of 1996 further emphasised community involvement (Van Zyl Smit, 1999: 211). The success of the Community Policing Forums is, however, debatable with waning public interest in some cases, a lack of government commitment in others and difficulties in ensuring smooth functioning (Oppler, 1997: 19).

expression of anger and frustration but also of fear, which is symptomatic of a breakdown in the criminal justice system and of effective policing” (Minnaar, 1995: 10). The inability to halt vigilantism seems to suggest a nation that is governed by lawlessness on all fronts, where national identity is constituted by criminality, fear and the inadequacy of the nation-state, all in an atmosphere of burgeoning risk.

If vigilantism indicates lawlessness in *Architecture of fear*, the negativity that this implies for the nation is compounded by a lack of context that would at least provide a historically grounded explanation for such activities. Instead, the violence might seem gratuitous and illogical to the viewer, perpetrated by a nation of madmen. In reality, however, vigilantism has a history that is grounded in apartheid, with perfectly rational causal explanations.¹²⁶

One of the most famous South African vigilante organisations, and one which is depicted in *Architecture of fear*, is Mapogo a Mathamaga. Initially the organisation, which was started in 1996 by businessmen in the Northern Province, handed suspects over to police. Subsequently, it meted out its own justice with severe beatings (Emmett et al, 2000: 251). The growth of this organisation has been dramatic, perpetuating the cycle of violence in many communities and defying state attempts at law and order (Schärf, Saban & Hauck, 2001: 68).

In *Architecture of fear*, we are told that, in Diepsloot, private security means Mapogo and it is specifically named as a vigilante group (video4). Mentioning both private security and vigilantism in the same description insinuates firstly the inadequacy of the nation-state’s ‘public security’ and secondly, its lack of control as violent vigilante action reigns in the informal settlement. Indeed, further evidence about the uncensored action of Mapogo is on offer in the video and one young girl comments

Mapogo Mathamaca help people; like maybe a young girls like me did something wrong then if your parents go to them, I think, they’ll beat you – they’ll beat you to death. They are very dangerous (video4).

¹²⁶ In fact, it “may be said to be part and parcel of our history” (Bruce & Kimane, 1999: 41). See also Minnaar, 1995: 9, 11; Haysom, 1990: 67).

The leaders of Mapogo themselves defiantly and unabashedly flaunt their violent tactics in the video and one says, “Sometimes they don’t want to tell the truth, so we beat them until they tell the truth – like ‘yes, I did this and this and this’” (video4). Clearly, the absence of the nation-state, and its lack of a monopoly over the means of violence, is a telling indictment. The voice-over underlines the inefficacy of the state in curtailing vigilante action by adding, “Authorities mostly turn a blind eye to the often illegal activities of these self-styled crime fighters” (video4).

In *Architecture of fear*, vigilantism in the poorer areas supplements security systems in suburbia to depict both a nation under siege, and one that is without the protection of the state. Even community policing, which was initiated by the South African nation-state as a partnership between formal institutions and community crime busters, is envisaged as being purely private. While the growth of private security may be a world-wide phenomenon, linked closely to globalisation and a pervasive postmodern ethos, its depiction in the video ignores the pervasiveness of the trend. Instead, the South African situation is shown to be an undeniably domestic crisis in control. If national identity is linked to the way we perceive the nation-state, this kind of negativity undoubtedly suggests that inadequacy is the prevailing theme.

This kind of inadequacy is perpetuated in the realm of national culture in the video, where the nation is seen both as being in the grips of a crime wave and in the throes of a postmodern panic about crime. Society is ‘dangerised’ in the video so that we seem to only perceive society through categories of peril. In a fearful, racist society, the level of the local adds further flavour to the postmodern orgy of negativity, linking the local to the national to the global, where images of pervasive crime and risk-obsessiveness mesh with national reference points and global theories about risk management and the fortress city. Adding to the effectiveness of this unmitigated pessimism is a documentary structure where interviews, pace and music create a strong preferred meaning. Perhaps the only saving grace for the documentary is the way in which it includes structural categories in the form of class and race to explain the exclusionary practices of a risk society and the prevalence of crime among the poor. While this analysis to some degree challenges mere

description in the video, and points to structural solutions in the process, its positive contribution in this regard does not prevail. Class and race are framed within the overall national culture of 'dangerisation' and fear. Global understandings of race and class, and their local manifestations are overwhelmed by postmodern nihilism, where strategies of containment are privileged over the long-term solutions that structural analyses point towards. A similar outcome is evident with regard to gender in *Architecture of fear*. While its gender analysis potentially offers an antidote to gender-blind mainstream criminology and its reflection in documentary, ultimately it does not empower women. Instead, the depiction of women centres on their embeddedness in a national culture of fear, which is heightened because of their sex.

4. CRIMINALS FOUND IN ATLANTIS LOST

I. SYNOPSIS

On March 12, 2002, SABC3 broadcast a documentary called *Atlantis lost* under the auspices of *Special Assignment*. It constituted an exposé of one of South Africa's foremost social ills – sexual abuse, and primarily the abuse of children. Focusing on the community of Atlantis in the Western Cape, the story follows the efforts of former gangster, Barbara Rass, and her daughters in their attempts to assist abuse victims and create awareness of the problem. Many of the discussions in the documentary centre on the frustrations with both the Goodwood Child Protection Unit and the criminal justice system, as well as with the causes of abuse in this impoverished community. Also included are testimonies from victims of abuse and their families and interviews with local community members.

II. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

Left realism

Atlantis lost, probably more than any other of the documentaries examined here, comes closest to following a left realist map of criminology, straddling both positivism and radical criminology in its compromise stance of conditional modernism. The value of this approach is undeniably in its comprehensive nature, which includes examining the victim, the offender, the state and public, which together comprise the four 'corners' of the 'square' of crime, as described by left realists (Young & Matthews, 1992: 3). While it incorporates the sociological aetiology of social positivism, it is the structural causes of crime that are foregrounded. Consequently, solutions to the crime problem are seen as

residing first and foremost in the fundamental alteration of the macro-level discrimination in the social structure (Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 331).¹²⁷

For the purposes of documentary, underscoring content with left realism offers a valuably inclusive approach. The inclusion of victim and offender means that radical criminology's shortcoming of exclusive structural focus is overcome (Voigt et al, 1994: 160). Similarly, social positivism's unquestioning acceptance of state-inspired definitions of crime and state-led solutions to crime are challenged in left realism. Additionally, social positivism's obsession with the individual offender at the expense of structure and victimology is addressed - without discarding positivism's many valuable contributions to criminology (Young & Matthews, 1992: 1). The explanatory power of left realism for the silver screen surely is indisputable. This is not to say it offers the *most* rosy, positive lens through which to view crime and punishment. Indeed, the criticism of the nation-state that inevitably accompanies a left realist approach - as with the postmodernist approach - does not provide a viable boost in the fostering of national identity. In a hierarchy of optimism, left realism is undoubtedly outranked by the 'certainties' of positivism, as evidenced in *The cage unlocked*, for example. However, falling within the modernist umbrella - and hence believing in the triumph of progress - it nonetheless is more optimistic than nihilistic postmodernism and postmodern solutions to crime control in *Architecture of fear*.

Atlantis lost includes three of the four 'corners' of the 'square' of crime. The documentary surely was not informed by a conscious decision to underpin its arguments with left realism - it would certainly then have included the fourth 'corner', which in this case is the individual offender. Yet, as it stands, it comes closer than the other documentaries in this selection to using this productive stance, incorporating both positivism and radical criminological thought where necessary (but unfortunately excluding gender analysis and performing poorly in terms of depicting the victim). While

¹²⁷ Ironically, however, it should be noted that this macro-level discrimination is not often seen to include a gender element, although left realists are increasingly acknowledging this as a problem. In mitigation, they do tout a strong identification with the empirical school of feminist criminology and this seems to be a first corrective step to the gender blindness of mainstream criminology.

being one of the most valuable documentaries in terms of analytical depth, it is neither the most optimistic (which would require a positivist underpinning), nor the most pessimistic (which would consist of a postmodernist offering).

Deconstruction/radical labelling and normative morality

One of the characteristics of left realism is often a healthy dose of scepticism about state-inspired definitions of crime. What are the power relations involved in criminalising some activities and not others? Is there any innate characteristic of an action that makes it criminal? Radical criminologists have been at the forefront of projects to ‘expose’ the constructed nature of criminality, accompanied now by postmodern deconstructionists who do the same.

Despite the commitment of *Atlantis lost* to a criticism of power relations in society, its approach does not extend to this kind of radicalism. Prudently, *Atlantis lost* does not question whether child abuse is really abuse. Insofar as definitions of child abuse are concerned, the manner in which *Atlantis lost* leans towards positivism is fundamental in the reinforcement of normative moral boundaries for the nation. It accepts that what we believe to be child abuse *is* child abuse, in spite of its indisputably constructed nature. Indeed, “Child battering, child abuse, and child neglect (now commonly subsumed under the term *child maltreatment*) are relatively new terms, even though injuries and fatalities to children are as old as recorded history” (Johnson, 1995: 18).¹²⁸ Similarly, child sexual abuse was ‘invented’ after World War Two and only began to draw particular attention in

¹²⁸ The 1930s ushered in a period of concern with ‘the child’ in western society, as evidenced, for example by the English Children and Young Persons Act of 1933, which sought to protect the child in court proceedings (Pratt, 2000: 44). Arguably, the prevalence of smaller families in which children were valued as individuals, as well as growing concerns about the risks to children in industrialised society, encouraged this atmosphere of concern (Pratt, 2000: 44). A turning point in terms of definition came about thirty years later when notions around physical injury to children coalesced in the category ‘child abuse’, inspired in particular by a 1962 article called ‘The Battered-Child Syndrome’ by Kempe et al (Johnson, 1995: 19). Social movements around the issue were propelled into action as the mass media latched onto this idea. (Johnson, 1995: 19). Additionally, with its ‘discovery’, investment in research into the causes of abuse became extensive, in spite of the fact that, “The causes of child beating or child abuse may well be the same now as they were 50 or 100 years ago when such a behaviour was considered perfectly normal and desirable (‘spare the rod and spoil the child’)” (Fattah, 1997: 255).

the 1980s (Pratt, 2000: 44, 46; Belknap, 1996: 235, 237). In the case of this kind of abuse too, *Atlantis lost* adopts a positivist stance. Ultimately, the documentary assumes that,

adult-child sexual activity is almost always non-consensual, in that child participants are precluded from offering informed consent to such activity, and secondly, that adult-child sex is a species of non-consensual activity which cannot be justified by reference to the needs of children, and is therefore ethically indefensible (Liddle, 1995: 315).

Working together with, rather than in opposition to commonly accepted definitions of abuse is useful for binding the nation together on the basis of a normative cultural code. Thus, through *Atlantis lost*, the SABC fosters national unity.

Postmodern communitarianism/welfarist intervention?

In *Atlantis lost*, the positivist stance with regard to definition of crime, which has optimistic implications for national identity, is supplemented by an equally optimistic approach in terms of depicting *informal* interventions in the realm of child abuse. The communitarian approach, evermore popular in a postmodern, neo-liberal world that eschews the welfare state, became popular in the 1980s and 1990s in both the United Kingdom and America as part of a ‘responsibilisation’ strategy for individuals and a ‘regeneration’ strategy for communities (Hughes, 1998: 105; Stanko, 2000: 155). This approach, with its roots in “philosophical and sociological tradition”, looked beyond the government and towards community empowerment as far as addressing social order and crime and its consequences was concerned (Hughes, 1998: 8). In time,

The ensuing ‘liberal-communitarian’ debate...was popularised by the media which saw in the renewed interest given to community the potential for new angles on stories about crime and delinquency, and more generally about morality, the relationship between family and state and ‘the condition of the nation’ (Hughes, 1998: 105).

The notion of civic movements to address crime has swept through South African criminological thought too. Victim service programmes have taken off – particularly for rape and child abuse victims (Nomoyi & Pretorius, 1998: 95). Indeed, while calls for increased policing are still prevalent in the realm of crime in South Africa, appeals to the community for ‘protection and prevention’ are also gaining currency (Emmett et al, 2000: 229).

While characteristic of a postmodern, neo-liberal environment, the communitarian approach has its roots in welfarist practices and theory. It may be directed from a community rather than state source, but many of the interventions are similar in nature to those of a previous era (O'Malley, 2000: 161). The 'fanfare' welcoming these interventions as new, is therefore somewhat unwarranted (O'Malley, 2000: 161). The view adopted by this chapter is that in its concern with both victim empowerment and public involvement in crime, communitarianism may be said to employ undercurrents of distinctly modernist left realism, while nonetheless existing in reality in what might be described as a postmodern environment. In *Atlantis lost*, the argument for understanding communitarianism in a context of left realism, rather than postmodernist theory, is justified by an emphasis in the programme on the *content* of the informal interventions (welfarist, victim-oriented) rather than the *vehicle*, which is civic and distinctly divorced from the state. Furthermore, in the video, communitarianism is not posited as a solution or a viable alternative to the nation-state. Its existence is described as one of necessity due to the nation-state's failings, not as an alternative to nation-state intervention, which might constitute a more postmodern approach.

The public involvement with victims in *Atlantis lost* is held in an extremely positive light as modernist welfare imperatives are embarked upon in an effort to uplift the community. The voice-over tells us that, "Barbara Rass has devoted her life to trying to restore dignity to this community. Her daughters work with her at a sanctuary they've set up in the town" (video5). Shots of the sanctuary underline Barbara Rass's efforts. A yellow banner and its empowering motto dominate the interior of the building, saying, 'United Sanctuary Against Abuse. Building the social fabric of our community and our country' (video5). The camera rapidly pans down one of the many posters on the wall. The words say 'Break the silence, condemn the violence. United we stand'. Accompanying this, the image on the poster shows a child and two people looking up at a flame burning on a torch. Many sequences in the programme include Rass and her daughters in the sanctuary dealing with the consequences of abuse. The very first scene of the documentary shows Rass comforting a woman who is crying bitterly about the tragic spiral of violence in her family.

In her bid to provide victim support, Rass's campaign extends to involvement with a community radio station (video5). A weekly slot attempts to create awareness around the issue and to provide advice for callers. In a further indication of her public involvement in community issues, Rass assists at the local police station with abuse victims (video5).

The global trend of communitarianism, underscored by theorisation variously in postmodern, left realist and welfarist discourse, is strongly felt throughout *Atlantis lost*. While I would choose to see its depiction in the documentary as most strongly reflecting left realist and welfarist imperatives, the ambiguity of interpretation remains. What is certain, however, is that the inclusion of a proactive community element in the programme serves the positive function of reflecting empowerment potential for abuse victims. Consequently, when a documentary is informed by globally understood trends, which are closely linked to modernist ideas, it undoubtedly contains the possibility of depicting the nation and its components in an optimistic light.

Positivism and the search for cause

If the definition accepted by *Atlantis lost* of child abuse is positivist and if depicting the public involvement of Barbara Rass can be seen as fulfilling a requirement of left realism in understanding crime, it would seem that *Atlantis lost* tends towards a distinctly modernist representation. Further indicating this, is the manner in which it looks to the *causes* of child abuse as fundamental in *understanding* child abuse. It is positivism that is most commonly credited with looking to aetiology in its "preoccupation with the background causes of criminality" (Howe, 2000: 224). While positivism frequently looks at biological causes or psychology or the sociology of the individual, this is not the only option when looking to understand cause.

Indeed, left realism supplements positivistic sociological and psychological theories with an approach that simultaneously views criminogenesis in structural terms. The focus on structure is its inheritance from radical criminology. In *Atlantis lost*, the structural causes of crime are given a large amount of attention and the introduction to the documentary

hints at this from the outset by mentioning poverty as a defining factor in the story of Atlantis. Anneliese Burgess says, “But incidents of abuse happen all the time – especially in impoverished communities, where they often pass by unnoticed” (video5). Although generally difficult to depict in television formats, in *Atlantis lost*, structure is given substance through concrete local examples and references. Through this, the global theory of left realism is brought to life in a local context, providing evidence of the way in which the global and local articulate in our contemporary environment. Further discussion of this is included below, where the depiction of the local community of *Atlantis* is examined in more detail. Suffice to say here, however, that whether or not the *Atlantis lost* producers consciously used the label of left realism as a departure point for their analysis, the result is one that exemplifies it. Indeed, left realism, with its focus on structural causation becomes a productive lens through which to view society in *Atlantis lost*. This, in turn, imbues the viewer with understanding instead of simple judgement and the creation of understanding is, perhaps, the first step in any nation-building project. The importance of this for the SABC in its mandate to foster national identity is self-evident.

Quo vadis gender?

If left realism has inherited from positivism a valuable focus on aetiology, it perhaps has also inherited one of its oversights – that of ignoring gender. While purporting to include gender in its analyses of structural inequality, the extent to which left realism significantly contributes to a gender-sensitive criminology may well be debated. As a result,

The neglect of women in much mainstream criminology has...skewed criminological thinking in a quite particular way. It has stopped criminologists seeing the sex of their subjects, precisely because men have occupied and colonized all of the terrain (Naffine, 1997: 8).

Notably, not only have *women* been sidelined in terms of this gender-bias, but mainstream criminology does not address the masculinity of its criminal subjects, choosing instead to view them as members of the underclass, as maladjusted individuals or as victims of circumstances rather than as *men* (Hudson, 2000: 175). Similar to mainstream criminology, South Africa’s criminological history has been characterised by

myopia when it comes to gender.¹²⁹ This is surely due to oversights and bias similar to that in international criminology, including a continued refusal to acknowledge the intersection of masculinity and crime (Hansson, 1995: 52).

Most of the documentaries in my selection ignore gender. The result is, for example, that positivist analyses of the causes of crime often focus on poverty, ignoring the fact that women are consistently the most poverty-stricken, marginalised group in most societies and, at the same time, are the least criminal (Belknap, 1996: 40). Why I am choosing *Atlantis lost* as a platform to criticise this general gender bias is because of the issues that are addressed in the programme: child abuse and domestic violence are possibly the most obvious forms of crime that lend themselves to gender-sensitive analyses.¹³⁰ The sidelining of gender issues is an established tradition in media reporting, despite the fact that it represents a serious oversight and despite the fact that alternatives are on offer. The *London Daily News*, for example, was a trailblazer when it came to publishing feminist-informed articles, including a story with much the same theme as *Atlantis lost* entitled ‘The Sins of the Father’. Incongruent with the approach in *Atlantis lost*, this article “argues that ‘sexual abuse is the consequence of the way [boys] have learnt to “be men”’ (Rutherford, 26.6.87)” (Nava, 1995: 234).

¹²⁹ Indeed, “Before the 1980s, patriarchal force or sexual crime/violence, as the subject was then defined, was not a particularly active or significant research arena in any academic discipline in South Africa” (Hansson, 1995: 49). Subsequently, however, feminist scholarship burgeoned, with academic pieces addressing ‘battery’ in 1981 being followed by analyses of patriarchy and then child sexual abuse (Hansson, 1995: 50). Sexual harassment became a focus from 1987 and subsequent interest has included debates on pornography (Hansson, 1995: 49). The transitional period in South Africa saw “the establishment of a specifically feminist element in progressive criminological discourse” (Van Zyl Smit, 1999: 205). In spite of these developments, criminology in South Africa is not always infused with gender awareness.

¹³⁰ This is firstly because of the substantial body of feminist work on child sexual abuse (Nava, 1995: 245). Indeed, “feminists have developed a new criminological agenda that includes child abuse, domestic violence, sex and gender offences” (Hahn Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995: 8). Secondly, there is a global political tradition of feminist activism that has seen the establishment of refuges, havens, self-help groups for women and their children under siege from abuse (Stanko, 2000: 148). The work of Barbara Rass and her daughters clearly feeds into this tradition, but *Atlantis lost* chooses to ignore this. Finally, and most significantly, in terms of the aetiological approach that is adopted by the documentary, is the way in which the issue of sexual abuse is so self-evidently to do with masculinity in a way that burglary, for example, is not. The societal construction of the gendered man is once again overlooked as an important factor in cause and effect (Hahn Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995: 5).

Perpetuating the notion of dehumanised sexual fiends, rather than socially constructed *men*, is detrimental for the image of the nation. Although examining poverty as a factor in the exacerbation of perversion is a positive step, ignoring gender issues is a step back. This is exactly what *Atlantis lost* does and, in the process, it also overlooks the way in which masculinity is a worldwide problem. South Africa's experiences are not unique in a global context where "Domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape – these issues cut across national boundaries" (Hahn Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995: 8). Yet by sidelining a general gender analysis, complexity is elided, the project of understanding cause is unfulfilled and the context suggests that child abuse in Atlantis is inscribed with exclusively South African characteristics.

The victim

In the past few decades, most theoretical perspectives have explicitly begun to take note of the victim. Pioneered by the feminist movement, victims of rape, sexual abuse and physical abuse took centre stage in feminist academic analyses (Dobash, Dobash & Noakes, 1995: 1). Although this newly developing stance was accompanied by a focus on women as offenders, it is the contribution of victimology that has arguably had a bigger impact on criminology (Hahn Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995: 7). Its insights have been undeniably valuable (Young, 1998: 264). Left realism too, has taken up the challenge of theorising victimisation and the victim has become part of left realism's 'square' of crime. Even the postmodern perspective, while undoubtedly challenging the socially constructed nature of victimhood, has foregrounded the victim in its analyses (Fattah, 1997: 60). The prioritising of subjectivity over meta-narratives is surely of the reasons for this. Born out of precisely this concern with individual and marginal experiences, one of the most positive strands of postmodern criminological practice is to "promote the empowerment of victims, enabling them to engage more fully in a process of reconstituting the meaning of violence" (Schwartz & Friedrichs, 1998: 433).

Victims and their stories litter the landscape of *Atlantis lost*. At the very beginning of the programme, the voice-over tells us about a particular case where a family has been torn apart by sexual abuse and violence,

This story is an all too familiar one – a son in jail for killing his father who raped him. A daughter forced to have sex with her step-father from the age of eight and who, as a teenager, had his child. Now she's in jail for stabbing the step-father.

The mother, an alleged accomplice, needs legal aid (video5).

Visually, an inconsolable woman sobs as she talks to Barbara Rass. As Rass tries to comfort both the woman and her child, a further eruption of crying sees the woman burying her face in Rass's chest (video5). In another case, the voice-over tells us about the sexual abuse of an eight-year old girl who, after spending the day at the beach with family friends, slept over at their house. A translator for the mother of the girl explains what happened next,

I fetched her the following morning and on the way home she told me what had happened. She told me what this man, very well known to me, had done to her the previous night while she was there. How he fiddled with her and felt her all over. He took her into the bedroom while his wife was busy in the kitchen. He touched certain parts of her body and stuck his finger in her (video5).

Finally, a young victim explains how she was raped,

We fell asleep. After a while he started pulling my hand. He said I owed him something. I didn't answer. I tried to pull my hand away. It went on like that almost all night. When I tried to get up, he took the key out of the door. Then he said I must go sleep. I went to sleep. After a while he said 'come on' and then he lay on top of me and raped me (video5).

Focusing on the victims could potentially be productive, however these 'vox pops' offer mere snatches of victimhood. While superficially adhering to left realism's requirement of including the victim in the 'square' of crime, true insight into victim experience is nowhere to be found. Victim attitude to punishment, their evaluation of the police, and their strategies of coping and avoidance, which have become integral to left realism's approach to victims, are all absent (Young & Matthews, 1992: 14). Similarly, rather than including perspectives on victim empowerment in postmodernist fashion, all we are offered are voyeuristic clips of the lives of abuse victims. In this respect, *Atlantis lost* seems characteristic of media's search for spectacle in a bid to attract viewers. Similar in this respect to *It's nice to have a friend*, the documentary seems to be proof that "Stories about individual crimes – with their characteristic portrayals of villains and victims – also have dramatic value" (Sacco, 1995: 144). Additionally, focusing on the gory details serves the 'human interest' element of news production, which, in turn, functions to

attract a large variety of viewers, thereby fulfilling the organisational interest of the SABC (Johnson, 1995: 28).

Left realism's global offering in terms of understanding the victim does not reach its full potential in *Atlantis lost*. Shadows of it are present in the brief 'victimologies', yet these are overwhelmed by the quest for spectacle. Global documentary conventions promoting sensationalism, triumph over a productive underscoring by criminological theory.

Because *Atlantis lost* is the poorer for it, so is the image of the nation. Promoting national identification with a humanised, complex, empowered victim population is sidelined by a pre-occupation with lurid, sensationalistic details.

The 'child abuse horror story' and the value of social positivism

Although *Atlantis lost* fares dismally both in terms of depicting the victim and in terms of gender analysis, for the most part it compares favourably with global trends in representing this social problem, where the 'child abuse horror story' dominates (Wilczynski & Sinclair, 2000: 268). While most of the studies on the 'child abuse horror story' are concerned with the print media, the broadcast environment is just as likely to exhibit these tendencies, working as it does with media that are not conducive to structural analyses.

The horror story consists of particularly gruesome individual cases of abuse, which are taken to represent a larger reality, with 'experts' being brought in to confirm the existence of a societal scourge (Sacco, 1995: 147). The 'facts' are seen as speaking for themselves, and yet they represent a selectivity of the most extreme kind (Johnson, 1995: 23). Severe cases of abuse garner the most attention, with 'mundane' cases, such as those to do with emotional abuse or neglect, being underreported (Wilczynski & Sinclair, 2000: 269).

The consequences of this kind of approach are multiple. All are negative. Firstly, there is a stereotypical demonisation of the offender "which enforces social norms by labelling abusers as defective and in some cases dangerous individuals to be cast out of society"

(Wilczynski & Sinclair, 2000: 279). These individuals are seen as evil, psychologically impaired or inadequate (Wilczynski & Sinclair, 2000: 276). While stressing individual motivation and pathology is undoubtedly fundamental in understanding the broader picture of criminality, ignoring social pressures like unemployment, alcoholism and poor education is detrimental to the assessment of cause (Johnson, 1995: 27). The result is superficial, stereotypical and sensational where “News reports rip child abuse situations out of their social context” (Johnson, 1995: 24). Secondly, without understanding cause and social context on a broad scale, the immediate circumstances or ‘interactional sequences’ leading up to the abuse are also sidelined, again demonising the offender and emphasising that the abuse is “irrational and incomprehensible” (Johnson, 1995: 23). Thirdly, without a substantial survey of cause, the issue of prevention is unlikely to receive much attention. If the offender is seen as an isolated, predatory nutcase, there is surely not much point in addressing how society can be redeemed.

Atlantis lost successfully manages to avoid the pitfalls of ignoring cause by mobilising both the strength of social positivism in its quest for cultural and sociological explanations, and the analytical depth of radical criminology’s search for structural answers. Both of these coalesce in left realism’s comprehensive approach and manifest themselves in an examination of poverty in the community of Atlantis. Of course, without a gender analysis, the search for cause is not as strong as it could be, but it certainly appears to be a strong move away from the biological positivism of the global trends in abuse reporting.

The most significant result of this approach in *Atlantis lost* is that it circumvents the magnetism of the moral panic. ‘Anti-crime’ crusades centring on ‘folk devils’ in the media have variously sprung up around the treatment of the aged, street crime, drug abuse and so on – all politically safe themes that reinforce accepted normative morality (Surette, 1997: 66). In South Africa, the recent moral panic around the issue of baby rape has gained momentum. Yet by contextualising its report, *Atlantis lost* successfully manages to avoid jumping on the moral panic bandwagon. The resultant message for

viewers is one that is markedly more positive for national identity than one that follows the global trend of the child abuse horror story.

III. THE LOCAL

Visually, Atlantis is established as the local context for the documentary from the very beginning of the programme, providing a tangible anchor for the human interest element, a hook from which to hang both global theories and national identity as well as a slice of diversity within the broader South African context. The relation of Atlantis to Cape Town and its position in the Western Cape is alluded to via a series of scenes near the beginning of the documentary. These situate it geographically and include shots of the community from a distance and scenes of the community from within.¹³¹

At the same time, Atlantis is described in unequivocal terms as a troubled community. Barbara Rass's daughter, Lisa McBride describes child abuse in the community and highlights its specificity with numerous references to Atlantis. She says,

You find a child dead in the bushes, the body burned or you find decapitated bodies in Atlantis or you find kids in shallow graves. This is Atlantis. Ask most people in Atlantis here. Knock on doors and then ask them, 'Do you know of someone who has molested a child?' And you'll find either someone in their family has been either raped or molested or they know of someone in their families or related to them that has done it. That's how endemic it is here in Atlantis, in our community – and it's probably in others (video5).

She later again refers to 'this community' when describing the secrecy surrounding abuse and the ostracism faced by those who speak up (video5). Barbara Rass similarly discusses rape and sodomy with specific reference to Atlantis, noting how, "In Atlantis currently it's the 'in' thing" (video5). Businessman, Noel Williams, adds that, "The fact is, you know, that the people of Atlantis have become immune to it. Everyday you hear about

¹³¹ Here, green trees litter a landscape of yellow sand dunes as the blue outline of Table Mountain defines the background. The camera slowly pans across to a large road sign. On the top half it says 'R307 (R27) Cape Town' and at the bottom it says 'Atlantis' with an arrow indicating to turn left. A far long-shot then introduces us to Atlantis proper. More sand dunes. A large, dense cluster of houses appears in the distance. The workings of a timber factory characterise Atlantis as industrial (video5). In other scenes we see a more humanised community atmosphere, where the shops and pedestrians invigorate the local shopping district. In a fish market, busy hands gut the day's catch as Barbara Rass looks on (video5).

rapes and murders and robberies and break-ins into peoples' homes and nobody cares anymore" (video5).

Analysing Atlantis

The domino effect from inequality in the social structure, to social maladjustment, to crime bridges both the positivist search for cause in culture and the radical search for cause in unequal power relations. This is how *Atlantis lost* deals with its subject matter. First and foremost, poverty is seen as a fundamental catalyst in the creation of abusive relationships.

The voice-over says, "People in Atlantis are poor. Large families have to share bedrooms and beds. From an early age, children hear or see family members having sex" (video5). This is reinforced by the testimony of social analyst Leonard Gentle, who suggests that cramped living conditions where families share small sleeping spaces are conducive to incest. He concludes by commenting that, "It's a likely product of those kinds of conditions of poverty, so we shouldn't be surprised" (video5). Underscoring this observation is a visually arresting shot of the crowded 'matchbox' houses of Atlantis and then a shadowy 'intrusion' into a bedroom where two legs are intertwined – one pair is old and the other is young. Further 'evidence' of the way poverty-induced congestion in the home is potentially dangerous, is offered by the voice-over. We are told about a twelve year-old girl who was raped by her mother's live-in boyfriend and how "They were sharing the only bed. Her mother was working nightshift" (video5).¹³²

¹³² While left realism looks to structure (in this case poverty) as important, it sees positivism's sociological contribution as equally so. Not only does *Atlantis lost* bridge the two, as illustrated above, but it also looks at a variety of specifically *social* problems in some detail. The most predominant of these is the prevalence of alcohol abuse and prostitution in Atlantis, but the video also makes reference to cycles of family violence where society is detrimentally affected by parents passing on their own legacies of abuse to their children. Lisa McBride says, "We have a case here where someone says 'My child is in jail for rape. He was raped as a child'. You see we're not talking off the cuff. We see, we experience it. The people that come in here give us this information. This isn't stats that were read out of some varsity research document that was compiled. These are things that we hear from the people's mouths – their own experiences. We hear how the victims became the perpetrators and how that vicious cycle continues over and over and over again" (video5).

While there is undoubtedly huge value in pointing to poverty as a factor in the prevalence of child abuse, one of the pitfalls of this approach is that it may demonise the underclass in an unintentional way. Many of the documentaries under examination here either implicitly or explicitly allude to inequality, poor living conditions, low levels of education, unemployment and so on as exclusive *reasons* for, rather than factors influencing the onset of criminality. The relationship between the poverty-stricken underclass and crime is then taken as a linear one, discriminating against the underclass in the process and ignoring the fact that “The revelation of widespread violence and sexual attacks occurring throughout the class structure creates problems for the conventional location of the causes of crime within the lower class and on the margins of society” (Young, 1998: 271). There should at least be an acknowledgment that child abuse, as with domestic violence, does not take place exclusively in the lower-class echelons of society (Stanko, 2000: 157). While the demonisation trend may be offset through techniques of humanising the offenders, as seen in *Very fast guys* (discussed later in the following chapter), *Atlantis lost* does not do this.

Despite this shortcoming, the positivist focus on cause in *Atlantis lost* is undeniably productive. The circular relationship between structure and culture, which is so sophisticatedly conveyed, serves to thrust the documentary into a dialectical relationship with the global realm of both left realism and positivism, while retaining a distinctly local flavour. Not only is the local character valuable in terms of indicating the diversity of South Africa’s communities, but the global underpinnings ensure an analytical depth. This analytical complexity is itself a positive development in the field of documentary production in South Africa, but offers a double bonus in terms of the conditional optimism it offers. While the subject matter of child abuse is undeniably gloomy, the left realist examination of cause avoids moral panics while implicitly pointing to solutions on which national identity can be based. Perhaps the only improvements in this regard would be, firstly, the inclusion of a local examination of gender informed by global theory and, secondly, the utilisation of an additional left realist prerogative, namely the conscious non-demonisation of the underclass.

IV. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL CULTURE

Apartheid and the coloured community

In *Atlantis lost*, the reference to the community of Atlantis as a constructed entity directly invokes the powerful national history of the Group Areas Act of 1950.¹³³ The story of Atlantis is thereby elevated to that of South Africa in a metonymic manner. It is a story where designated areas for specific races were proclaimed and the implication for many of the coloured communities of the Western Cape was relocation. As early as the 1940s, the process that saw the creation of Atlantis was already underway as “Troublesome elements – workers with brown skins – were to be issued out of town, beyond the white frontier to the new factory-estates on the Cape Flats” (Pinnock, 1984: 32). By the 1960s, large areas of Cape Town were delimited as ‘whites only’ areas and, by the 1970s in South Africa, at least 208 new areas were declared for coloured occupants and about 78 for Asian occupants, most of which were established on the outskirts of the cities – or even further afield, as in the case of Atlantis (Pinnock, 1984: 30, 48).¹³⁴

While *Atlantis lost* does not foreground the issue of race in any simplistic way, the intertextual allusions to South African history combined with a survey of present-day conditions in Atlantis invoke an inescapable sense of apartheid’s racially discriminatory programmes. Indeed, many of the social problems evident in *Atlantis lost* can be taken to have their roots in the upheaval of the Group Areas Act and this will undoubtedly have been tangibly felt by many of the viewers. As the working-class culture disintegrated with Cape Town’s forced removals, “a social disaster was inevitable” (Pinnock, 1984: 55). The safety net of the extended family suddenly often was absent, with dire

¹³³ The voice-over tells us that, “Once upon a time the town of Atlantis was an important apartheid experiment. It came to be in the seventies as a sort of coloured homeland. People were moved here from Cape Town to get them out of the city and to provide cheap labour for an industrial area. Relocation and transport costs and even wages, were paid by the state. Factories and other businesses sprang up – enticed by the generous subsidies” (video5).

¹³⁴ The Group Areas Act has had a profound effect on the landscape of South Africa, with many people continuing to live in the townships that were legislatively created for them in the apartheid era. This is true for the coloured population as it is for others, and they “continue to live in areas where they were once forced to dwell, and live there in a way they consider their own” (Martin, 2001: 251).

implications for social and family structures as “working mothers were faced with the choice of giving up work or abandoning their children to neighbours, older children or the streets” (Pinnock, 1984: 37). The implication of social disintegration for the newly developed communities was severe. The overcrowded yet isolated existence felt by many exacerbated their political and economic struggles and certainly contributed to burgeoning violence and other social ills (Butchart & Emmett, 2000: 13).

Certainly, this appears to suggest, in a pessimistic fashion, that South Africa consists of a historically brutalised, psychologically affected nation of abusers. In *Atlantis lost*, the voice-over laments that “And so we’ve become known as a nation in which rape, incest and child abuse are just part of life” (video5). While this sentiment may be indeed be reflected in *Atlantis lost* on a superficial level, the vast amount of contextualisation, the concentration on cause and the building of a sense of national identity through history all serve to dilute this one-dimensional interpretation, expressed only in a single sentence in *Atlantis lost*.

Indeed, although the history of apartheid and apartheid-induced social problems is certainly not cause for celebration, by making intertextual connections with a national history through *Atlantis lost*, viewers are inadvertently subscribing to the notion of a tangible national identity that is not attached solely to abuse in any simple way. It is this national identity that has the potential to foster unity in a manner that is positive for both South Africa and in terms of the broadcaster’s mandate. At the same time, the focus on the locality of Atlantis in the documentary promotes the notion of cultural diversity by visually alluding to and verbally noting the existence of a coloured identity, albeit largely engineered by social and residential segregation, which forged it “from heterogenous elements” (Zegeye, 2001a: 8). Similarly, the use of Afrikaans by the coloured community in *Atlantis lost* reinforces the notion of a rich multiplicity of hybridised identities in South Africa, since,

It can even be argued that it is impossible to apprehend a ‘coloured culture’ which is not South African, or a ‘South African culture’ which is not mixed and therefore has not been fertilised by creations originating in the various

communities forming the South African population. The Afrikaans language is the first and most profound example of this (Martin, 2001: 252). Acknowledging cultural identities within a broader national identity, as implied by much of the subtext in *Atlantis lost*, is both symbolic and functional, fulfilling a fundamental ANC objective of promoting “‘multiple identities’ in ‘the melting pot of broad South Africanism’ and the importance of ‘an overarching identity of being South African’ (cited in Filatova, 1997, p. 55)” (Zegeye, 2001b: 340). The value of this for the broadcaster’s mandate lies in the promotion of diversity within the ambit of a larger national identity, which *Atlantis Lost* does both explicitly and implicitly.

V. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATION-STATE

There is a substantial and growing body of criticism on the way in which criminal justice systems across the world deal with both child and adult victims of sexual abuse. Some of these criticisms point to the way that women, and particularly poor or black women, are discriminated against as victims (Belknap, 1996: 4). In this regard, both the responses of society and officialdom can compound the already severe trauma of violence and,

Women who have experienced male violence have long complained about the unsympathetic, disbelieving and inappropriate responses, or secondary victimisation, experienced at the hands of society in general and at each stage of the criminal justice process. This exacerbates the effects of the sexual assault (Stanton & Lochrenberg, 1995: 13).¹³⁵

Atlantis lost appears at first glance to be enveloped in the postmodern pessimism associated with the criticism of criminal justice institutions. In terms of this,

Postmodern theory does centrally have things to say about the contemporary relationship of state institutions and public. It suggests that people are increasingly disengaged from established institutions, accord less legitimacy to the state, and are more apt to question the established order (Fielding, 2002: 150). Barbara Rass and her daughters continually challenge the state’s institutions in *Atlantis lost*, expressing a disillusionment that borders on hopelessness. Lisa McBride, Rass’s daughter becomes particularly emotional when discussing the extent of the state’s

¹³⁵ Many might claim that this is indeed the case in South Africa, although at the same time, a variety of state-led efforts must surely be applauded. Perhaps the most significant of these in the realm of sexual abuse, was the opening of the world’s first fulltime Sexual Offences Court in Wynberg, Cape Town, which “deals exclusively with sexual offence cases reported by children and adults to the 20 police stations in its jurisdiction” (Stanton & Lochrenberg, 1995: 14).

negligence in preventing abuse. She says, “I’m not surprised because our system allows it. Our system allows it” (video5). She goes on to lament the fact that the poor and disempowered receive little in the way of prompt justice, with court cases dragging on for years. “Why?” she asks, “Why does it take so long?” (video5). Barbara Rass specifically chooses to focus on the Child Protection Unit in much of her criticism and says,

Listen to the name ‘Child Protection Unit’ currently in Atlantis. Children is not being protected by that unit and yes, I’m challenging the people to challenge me on that because we have cases where children has been reported raped. Nothing happened afterwards (video5).

In a similar vein, she later adds,

We also dealt with a lot of cases where bodies were found amongst these bushes that you saw that grows here. You know, we asked the Child Protection Unit – that protection thing. I mean protection is a big word. But who’s protecting you? Children are not being protected (video5).

While it is Rass and her daughter who spearhead the attack on official institutions in *Atlantis lost*, their arguments are reinforced by independent voices in the documentary. A caller to Radio Atlantis complains about official inaction, saying that a certain case of molestation was reported to the Child Protection Unit, but nothing was done. A woman interviewed early in the programme likewise expresses frustration, “I laid a charge in the first place because they said you should break the silence. But now that I’m talking, no help is coming” (video5). Further references to the inadequacy of state agencies, and the Child Protection Unit proliferate in the video, and the conclusion seems to be akin to an observation made in the video - that children are simply continuing to be victims (video5).

Part of the postmodern disillusionment with state institutions manifests itself in the belief that the decline of crime control agencies has seen a shift in responsibility for this mandate to the community – that the two phenomena are inextricably linked. The phenomenon of communitarianism has already been discussed in its positive terms above. The other side of the communitarian coin concerns the negative implications for the nation-state. This approach believes that the increasingly directionless meanderings of state bodies, “with no larger narrative of purpose” characterise a contemporary condition where

the state recognizes its inability to alter crime rates significantly [and] it relinquishes some responsibility for crime control to these [community] groups, thus relieving pressure on the state to 'solve' the crime problem (Miller, 2001: 171).

The coverage of Barbara Rass's organisation in *Atlantis lost* seems to work in tandem with the arguments about state inefficacy to produce just this kind of conclusion, as does the commentary concerning the voluntary work she does in the Atlantis Police Station (video5). The positive response of Jan Swart of the Goodwood Child Protection Unit to this work, "But we actually need more people like Barbara Rass" (video5), similarly suggests that crime control in the video is no longer understood as a purely state-controlled arena, with the state instead engaging in a postmodern 'passing the buck'.

Criticism of the state is something that the postmodern perspective has in common with left realism. Unlike postmodernism, however, left realism's criticism often centres on the admonishment of administrative and legal practices that tread on the underdog, rather than focusing on state incompetence in general. Added to this is an interrogation of the power relations in society that lead to definitions of criminality. Although earlier versions of this approach saw radical criminologists lobbying for the disbanding of the state, left realism recognises the necessity of preserving and extending the protective elements it offers (Matthews & Young, 1992: 7). Rather than doing away with the social control embodied in the state, "the problem increasingly became one of trying to make control more social" (Matthews & Young, 1992: 7). Consequently, while the postmodernist approach exemplifies a defeatist loss of faith in the institutions of modernism, left realism considers itself to be conditionally based on modernism, and conditionally optimistic about the potential solutions residing in institutions of the state (Matthews & Young, 1992: 21).

While the details of the criticism of the state in *Atlantis lost* are more characteristic of the postmodern than left realist approach in many ways, the overall message is not. Indeed, the general conclusion in the documentary could perhaps be said to smack more of left realism, directed as it is towards overhauling the state apparatus, rather than shunning it completely (which would be a postmodern solution). Compare the representation of the

state in *Architecture of fear* and *Atlantis lost*. Both are extremely critical of the way in which the state deals with crime. *Architecture of fear*, however, excludes official perspectives completely, implicitly denying the validity of the state enterprise in its entirety. *Atlantis lost*, on the other hand, includes extensive interviews with the head of the Goodwood Child Protection Unit, sanctioning its existence while nonetheless criticising its performance.

The Child Protection Unit is seen as inadequate in *Atlantis lost* because of its lack of resources rather than its intrinsic nature. We are told by the voice-over how overtaxed investigators are burdened with a jurisdiction reaching from Atlantis to Somerset West (video5). The piles of papers and folders we see in the offices underscore this point. A high staff turnover and the fact that investigators must deal with both the victim and the perpetrator are further problems identified in the video. Jan Swart from the Goodwood Child Protection Unit spells out some of the challenges, but nonetheless ends on a note of optimism by suggesting that they are coping. He remarks,

This unit, as a unit, on an average, work between 500 to 900 hours unpaid overtime per month in order to do the work. These crimes normally take place after hours as can be expected, and over weekends when we have one or two people on standby. But we are coping (video5).

He is also critical of the court system and encapsulates the difficulties in terms of his frustrations, “So the system is not ideal, but this is the framework within which we unfortunately have to work and if they are frustrated, imagine the frustration here” (video5).

Ultimately, despite the criticism of the Child Protection Unit, there is no proposition that it be done away with and the presence of Jan Swart in the interview material reinforces this. This institution of the state is validated by its presence in the video and by comments such as that of interviewee, Noel Williams, who suggests that state involvement in social problems be enhanced, rather than minimised, “And I believe, and this is my own personal view, that we need some state intervention here. And I premise this on the fact that, you know, the apartheid government has created this and I don’t think the present government can walk away from this disaster” (video5). This is in line with media trends

around the world, which often stay away from brazen postmodern assessments that imply the state is best laid to rest,

Despite the presentation and perception of the criminal justice system as ineffective, the news media implicitly suggest that improving it, at least as a law enforcement and punitive system, is the best hope against the many violent crimes and predatory criminals that are portrayed (Surette, 1997: 79).

While the result may be that *Atlantis lost* is not a trailblazer in terms of innovation, the position it offers is one that subtly reaffirms the project of modernism. At the same time, it must be noted that the content of the criticism of the nation-state is characteristic of postmodernism in many ways: the disillusionment, the focus on state incompetence, the promotion of Rass's alternative, community-based solutions to crime. Yet it is strongly framed within a larger left realist ethos that includes the nation-state as part of the solution to social problems. A qualified optimism is the outcome in terms of both the nation-state and national identity. It may not be nearly as favourable as a more conventional, exclusively positivist approach, but it is also not as negative as a wholly postmodernist interpretation. Left realism offers a valuable middle-of-the-road kind of analysis, which is neither gratuitously critical, nor one-sidedly optimistic and the manner in which it underpins *Atlantis lost* has satisfactory results in terms of national identity: the nation-state is seen as struggling, but not dispensable.

5. A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW IN A BITTER HARVEST I & II

I. SYNOPSIS

A bitter harvest I & and *A bitter harvest II* comprise a two-part *Special Assignment* programme focusing on a much publicised and emotive crime issue in South Africa – that of farm murders. Beginning in the Magaliesburg, *Special Assignment* follows the story of a woman whose husband and brother (both farmers) were murdered. The focus here is on the perspectives of the farming community under siege, including the farm workers who suffer loss of employment as a result of farm murders. The video moves from the emotional losses experienced by individuals to the organisations trying to prevent farm murders. The central debate is the following: Are farm murders reflective of poverty, racial tension and individual pathology or are they part of a well-orchestrated plan by the ANC government and others to scare white farmers off their land in order to implement land redistribution policies with ease?

Expert witnesses offer a voice of reason and situate the murders within a larger context of crime in South Africa. The family of a convicted farm murderer is also included and the broader socio-economic context for the murders is constructed. The second part of the two-part programme begins by outlining a murder that took place in the Northern Province, reconstructing the murder and talking to those left behind. Local residents explain the motives of the farm murderers and the causes of farm murders. There are discussions of loss and the issue of black/white tensions, with a prominent black farmer disputing a racial motive and indicating that the farm workers are also often the victims of crime. The official police response to farm murders is included and the programme moves to different provinces, addressing different cases in the building of its arguments.

II. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

A flood of crime

In line with global insecurities and postmodern theorising about out-of-control crime, the issue of farm murders in South Africa has often seized the media spotlight with debates about their proliferation and brutality taking centre stage.¹³⁶ Although the seriousness of the crime rate is acknowledged in the video, significantly, *A bitter harvest* does not take this observation to the hysterical extremes of *Architecture of fear*. In fact, the remarks are notably temperate, in a move that could be construed as constructive where representing crime and imagining the nation are concerned. Because observations about out-of-control crime are so often accompanied by moral panic material in documentaries, it is unsurprising that *A bitter harvest*'s more cautious approach to crime predominantly lends itself to the defusion rather than the perpetuation of these moral panics.

Moral panics and conspiracies

In South Africa, the climate for moral panics about farm attacks was ripe in the post-1994 period with rising murders and the common belief that, "white farmers were not killed under apartheid. Not like this, at any rate. They were killed by jealous spouses, by disturbed neighbours and by crazed children. But never like this" (Steinberg, 2002: 5). The transitional nature of South Africa at that juncture was conducive to moral panics in a similar way as an evolving post World War Two Britain, where the changing ethnic and class make-up of the urban areas, the changing nature of community, the influx into

¹³⁶ Undoubtedly the situation is serious, where "The criminal nature of these attacks, as well as the geographical distribution thereof reinforces the perception among members of the general public that crime in South Africa is out of control" (Haefele, 1998: 9). Reviews on the number of farm attacks vary, yet all point to an unacceptable increase, with one researcher suggesting that numbers have risen dramatically since 1994 and another citing 1998 as the turning point (Shaw, 1999: 5; Haefele, 1998: 9). The brutality of farm attacks is something that is noted by all, and, "In some instances the attackers execute the farmer and then attack the wife and children. A disturbing tendency is the brutality during the attacks. Some of the victims had been tortured and mutilated to such an extent that identification was almost impossible" (Haefele, 1998: 11). Further suggesting increased brutality is the fact that the ratio of murders to attacks is on the rise and that some murders are not committed during the act of robbery, but are committed simply for murder's sake. Indeed, hatred or perhaps revenge are motives in these cases (Haefele, 1998: 12).

suburbia and ‘outflux’ from urban areas all culminated in a belief in degeneration and anxiety around becoming a victim of crime (Hall et al, 1978: 20, 21). In South Africa, the existence of a moral panic around farm murders is suggested by the peculiar eagle-eye scrutiny with which farm murders have been dissected in the face of mounting anxiety, *in spite of the fact* that this focus is disproportionate to their existence within the bigger picture of crime in South Africa.¹³⁷

Flouting much documentary convention, where news and documentary use categories such as ‘farm murders’ to build composite pictures of a ‘dangerised’ society, *A bitter harvest* generally works with the notion that farm murders should be kept calmly in a broader perspective (Bird & Dardenne, 1997: 338). In fact, the video challenges the category of farm attacks as the basis for a unique hyper-anxiety about this kind of crime. Martin Schönreich, interviewed in the video as a representative of the Institute for Security Studies, suggests that many of the property crimes cited as farm attacks, including hijacking and theft, are found throughout South Africa (video6). Later on, he adds that farmers are not targeted *as farmers*, but rather as a vulnerable part of the population and because crime is generally high in South Africa. Assistant Commissioner for the SAPS, Johan Burger, similarly refutes the notion that farm attacks are ‘special’ in a way that would warrant increased and particular anxiety, “Our experience is that the type of attacks that you see on farms is on the increase also in our more urban areas” (video6). As with the moral panic around mugging in Britain in the 1970s, it is the label of farm murders, with all its anxiety-ridden connotations, that becomes as significant as the phenomenon itself.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Indeed, it is the cities, rather than the rural areas that evidence the most alarming crime rates, not least because the opportunity for crime is so much greater in urban areas (Glanz, 1995b: 17). In addition, much of the crime committed in cities is not all that different qualitatively from that committed in rural areas and “Despite the need to record various incidents of attacks on farms and smallholdings separately, the causes for such attacks cannot be easily separated from the causes of crime in the country more generally” (Shaw, 1999: 7). In other words, it is the category of farm murders itself that perpetuates the possibility of a moral panic by virtue of being a speciality concern.

¹³⁸ Indeed, “Labels are important, especially when applied to dramatic public events. They not only place and identify those events; they assign events to a context. Thereafter the use of the label is likely to mobilise *this whole referential context*, with all its associated meanings and connotations” (Hall et al, 1978: 19).

Further evidence abounds of the way that *A bitter harvest* attempts to defuse moral panics about farm attacks. Barry Schoeman from the SANDF suggests the viewer be wary of unfounded ‘myths’ about farm attacks. He intimates that the emotion connected to farm attacks obscures logic and fact so that outsiders have but a ‘grey area’ or a ‘mist’ through which they analyse the situation (video6).

On the other hand, in the video, Kiewiet Ferreira from Agri SA, suggests that farmers are the most victimised group in South Africa and this is backed up in the video by the testimony of Werner Weber, from Action Stop Farm Attacks, who suggests that, percentage-wise, farmers are attacked more often than other communities in South Africa. While this may seem to be excellent fodder for a moral panic, the video defuses it immediately with interview material from two experts. Johan Burger, Assistant Commissioner for the SAPS says,

I find it difficult to accept that statement unless they can convince me of the number of farmers and how they arrived at that number in South Africa. And I haven’t until now received from anyone any clear indication of the exact number of farmers in South Africa (video6).

The SANDF’s Barry Schoeman adds,

Unfortunately there are people that are using the statistics for own political gain and I do mention political gain because there are people that do have political objectives on farm attacks – own political objectives – and unfortunately they is pulling the whole picture skew and taking a lot of people on the wrong track (video6).

On a basic level, therefore, the nature and extent of farm attacks are refuted by expert testimony. Yet *A bitter harvest* engages with this issue on a deeper level too. The question of conspiracy by political interest groups behind the murders is one that fuels anxiety and panic in the farming community. In some cases, the extent of the fear could be put down to the fact that the supposed groups are shadowy, vague, unknown quantities. In other cases, fear multiplies as the all-powerful ruling party is seen to be involved. The notion of either dealing with omnipotent or invisible enemies is surely one of the most potent sources of fear that could capture the farming community’s imagination.

In *A bitter harvest*, some of the interview material reflects this fear. Lita Fourie, whose parents were murdered on their farm, makes the most direct accusation against the ANC. The translator for her interview says,

According to all the police reports it was crime. People want to hear that it's crime. I can't link it to crime. It comes from above. They have orders. It's not always the local black people. They are told to do this from above. They move onto your farm and tell them to do it. I can only see hatred for white people. I believe this entire thing is planned from above. If I can go that far, I'll say it's an order from the ANC. I believe it. Whites are a threat to them. They want our land. They don't want us in the country (video6).

Werner Weber from Action Stop Farm Attacks has a similar perspective, although he does not finger the ANC specifically, instead saying that it is broadly political and consists of a carefully constructed plan to get white farmers off their farms or to make them share their land (video6). Anthony Scott-Dawkins from the Transvaal Agricultural Union also alludes to the terror of the invisible enemy by suggesting that "something is going on" (video6). Although the voice-over adds a warning that the PAC and AZAPO have been critical of land reform and have threatened a return to the armed struggle, the 'voice' of the documentary primarily refutes the notion of a political connection.

The voice-over tells us that the family of one of the murderers, Michael Matlamele, says that he has never been interested in politics (video6). Experts are also once again drawn into the fray to defuse any moral panic around conspiracies. Barry Schoeman from the SANDF says,

In close to three and a half thousand cases, we could not find a single one where any political organisation could have any political gain from that specific issue. So, according to my mind, in our research, there was not a single case that we can say there was any political gain to it (video6).¹³⁹

Consequently, it appears that in terms of adhering to fashionable global panics about crime, *A bitter harvest* exemplifies a more level-headed approach than many of the other videos. The result is a moderate projection of farm murders and a vision of South Africa, which is not unduly negative, considering the nature of the subject matter. It is interesting

¹³⁹ He later adds again that there is no evidence for a political connection in farm murders. Even an 'insider' is interviewed as a means of underlining the point and Kiewiet Ferreira, from Agri SA, emphasises that there is no evidence for a political plot against farmers (video6).

here, that complementing the argument about a lack of political motive in farm murders, are arguments that identify money and greed instead. While these assist in defusing any moral panic around conspiracy, they also seemingly adhere to postmodern conceptions of a rational, motivated offender.

The motivated offender

Rather than looking to the deep-rooted cause of criminal behaviour, as modernist criminology would require as the first step to rehabilitation, postmodern criminology chooses to view the offender instead as motivated by immediate needs and situational opportunity. Where modernist criminology is often accused derisively of abdicating the offender from his/her responsibility by looking at *cause*, postmodern criminology triumphs by looking at *motive*. Here, the criminal is a faceless, rational, reasoning, sometimes opportunistic, sometimes premeditated being.

A bitter harvest sees farm murderers as being motivated by money, in line with much academic work on the subject, where farm murders are categorised as ‘impersonal crimes’ and where 82% of cases record a financial motivation (Shaw, 1999: 7).¹⁴⁰ In the video, the investigating officer for Stapelberg and Uys’s murder, Anton Van der Merwe, cites greed for money and firearms as the reason behind the murders (video6). Another police expert, Captain James Espach says through his translator, that criminal motives are the only motives they have found and this is echoed by Inspector Trevor Vorster. He hypothesizes, “It’s about money. Farmers are soft targets. Many people in the villages think the farmer keeps a pile of money under his mattress. They think there are lots of guns lying around” (video6). Barry Schoeman and Johan Burger, who are frequently wheeled out in the documentary as a means of furthering exposition, are also included. Burger quotes an 80% statistic for criminal motivation, later adding that greed and robbery play a fundamental role, and Schoeman says very simply, “Farm attacks are about financial gain” (video6).

¹⁴⁰ Procuring firearms and vehicles also appear to be important as motives (Haefele, 1998: 12).

Although postmodern criminology would seemingly extricate motive from cause, it is often not so clear-cut, with the motive in many cases being informed and agitated by the cause. This seems particularly to be the case in South Africa, where

The meaning of this violence has never been clear. On the one hand, the motive for the vast majority of attacks appears to be robbery; the perpetrators flee the scene of the crime with guns, cars and money. And yet, so many attacks are accompanied by seemingly gratuitous violence, the violence itself performed with such ceremony and drama, that the infliction of painful death appears to be the primary motive. 'Farm murders', as South Africans have come to call them, occupy a strange and ambiguous space; they tamper with the boundary between acquisitive crime and racial hatred (Steinberg, 2002: vii).

With its nuanced arguments, *A bitter harvest* seems to note this. Indeed the motive of financial gain is set in the historical context of race-based class discrimination so that the boundary between motive and cause is blurred. Consequently, despite its apparent postmodern connections, motive is nestled in a bed of modernist criminology, guided delicately towards aetiology. Not only is the function of the money motive, therefore, to defuse moral panics about conspiracy, but to complicate the divide between root-cause and opportunity in such a way that South Africa's complex past is both hinted at and directly evoked. The result is undoubtedly positive for building an understanding of a national past and, in doing so, inducing a national identity based on solutions.

Criminogenesis

At the beginning of the second part of *A bitter harvest*, presenter, Anneliese Burgess, says "Last week we looked at the motives behind the crime. This week we profile the criminals. We also try and look at some solutions" (video6). The 'profiling' in the documentary probes deep-rooted causes and in doing so, slips into the inherently positive shadow of modernist criminology. This is in spite of the current postmodern trend, as exemplified by *Architecture of fear*, to sideswipe both aetiology and the focus on the offender. The decision to follow a route that is somewhat old-fashioned, but nonetheless powerful is particularly interesting in *A bitter harvest*. This is not, of course, to say that the filmmakers consciously aligned themselves with modernist criminology, but rather that in trying to make a less gloomy programme about crime, there is always a tendency to situate the documentary in a globally understood modernist paradigm. Indeed, in the

cases of both *A bitter harvest* and *The cage unlocked*, the conditional optimism sometimes evident in the programmes is predicated on a reliance on modernist criminology, including both structural and sociological elements, which coalesce in a left realist perspective.

Although poverty is never an uplifting feature of society, in a context of explaining the cause of crime, it indirectly points to an avenue of solution. At the very least, it tries to explain what may otherwise spiral into mythical hysteria about the degeneration of morality. In a documentary, it binds the viewer to understanding and empathising with the social problems of the nation. The approach of *A bitter harvest* is commendable in this respect.

Particularly in the second part of *A bitter harvest*, we see the way in which poverty defines the environment from which one convicted farm murderer comes. Discussing the murder of farmer Bill Voller, the voice-over says, “Huveni village near the Voller farm in the [inaudible] area. It was here that three of Bill Voller’s attackers grew up and lived. It is a desperately poor community dependent on jobs provided by farmers” (video6). Visually, much evidence of poverty is on offer in the village. In the foreground, dusty, bare ground provides the setting for a shack and an old car in the background. A mangy dog lopes through the shot before we see a close-up of a pair of hands doing washing in an old, metal container. A further shot shows a woman bending over the metal container, and scrubbing and washing. Next to her, a small fire burns and plastic water containers piled up against a far brick wall seem to indicate a lack of running water. She appears to be inside the semi-complete shell of a house. In a final statement of poverty in this series of shots, viewers are treated to a close-up of a rusty, misshapen, blackened metal teapot sitting on top of a fire with a makeshift grid.

Historically induced poverty is linked in the video to a variety of social maladies that are also claimed to cause crime. A lack of education is one such malady and Joseph Shiluvana, who is the headmaster of the secondary school in Huveni is interviewed with a view to establishing the impact of a lack of educational opportunity. He directly connects

the murder of Bill Voller to the murderers' lack of education, saying that they never finished primary school, are 'unchallenged' and therefore tempted to join criminal gangs (video6). From this, the voice-over notes that the lack of education in the area is directly related to poverty, where parents cannot afford school fees and children end up migrating to the cities.

It is the issue of migration to the cities and the loss of parental control that takes centre stage in the video at some points. While Matome Maila tells how his son tried to 'box' him when being warned about criminality, more prominent in the preferred meaning of the video, is the way in which the cities provide fertile ground for offenders to learn the criminal techniques, which become their resources for farm murders. Shiluvana suggests that,

Whenever they go to Johannesburg [or] whatsoever urban area, they go there with the hope that they will get jobs or employment opportunities, only to find when they arrive at that end they really do not get those jobs as I indicated before. Then they resort much to these criminal activities. They cannot do these criminal activities in Johannesburg because they are not masterminds – they are afraid to be killed. Then they learnt these tricks and come back here and exercise those tricks here (video6).

The causal chain is also indicated by other interviewees. Nabod Leketi, a prominent farmer in the Madikwe district comments on how youths link up with criminal elements in Soweto and other areas when they leave school, while Martin Schönreich briefly points to the way in which these criminal techniques are exported back to the rural areas (video6).

Abuse of labour by farmers is frequently addressed by the media and revenge attacks are sometimes theorised as a reason for farm murders. Poor labour practice, evictions from property or even the hiring of illegal immigrants with subsequent non-payment of wages are cited as possible reasons for attacks (Haefele, 1998: 13). Although this issue is not foregrounded in *A bitter harvest*, it is nonetheless mentioned as an important factor. The voice-over notes that employees are often treated badly and that criminals could use this to their advantage (video6).

The issues of poverty, lack of education, labour abuse and migration to the cities all coalesce in the video around commentary about South African history and, consequently, the role of apartheid. A lengthy monologue by expert, Martin Schönteich, is worth quoting in full as an indicator of the way that cause, rather than only motive falls under the spotlight in the video,

South Africa's history could play a role in motivating some of the people in engaging in criminal behaviour and in attacking farms because what happened in 1994 is one had a very large group of young South Africans, especially black South Africans, who had tremendous hopes and expectations – expectations about themselves – that they would get fixed employment, that they would have a better way of life and for many of these people this hasn't occurred and it's possible that these expectations now have been translated into disappointment and possibly anger against society generally but maybe more specifically against segments of society who they perceive to be more affluent and it's possible that some of this anger is also directed at farmers. I don't think it's directed specifically at farmers only, but generally at people who they perceive to have wealth (video6).

In addressing historical causality, the video creates a sense of *national* interest and *national* responsibility based on the *national* history of apartheid. It is constructive, firstly, in the sense of building identity based on a common history and, secondly, in the sense of providing explanations that point both implicitly and explicitly towards solutions and, hence, optimism.

The concluding note of *A bitter harvest* indeed points to the way forward. Some of the expert interviewees featured throughout the video make a final poignant appearance. Martin Schönteich says that, in addition to more police, it is essential that longer term solutions are sought, and that this means addressing the root causes of violence in South African society (video6). In doing so, he suggests that both the problems and answers are specific to South Africa and that there is a way of *curing* the violence, rather than simply warding off crime, as many contemporary strategies, including those shown in *Architecture of fear*, would do. In addition to his observation and along similar lines, Barry Schoeman says, “You need to address the culture of violence” (video6). Johan Burger concurs that in order to improve the situation, it is necessary to deal with underlying causes of crime (video6). In a final evocative sentiment alluding to history and cause, the voice-over says, “South Africa's violent past still haunts its youth, even those who were born after the struggle for freedom” (video6). Embedded in the positive,

problem-solving, explanatory frameworks of left realism and positivism, *A bitter harvest* certainly provides the viewer with an optimism that buttresses its non-alarmist approach to crime and its dousing of moral panics.

The criminological victim vs. the documentary victim

In the South African Criminal Justice System of the past, the victim of crime has certainly been sidelined, with some arguing that he/she has been “totally marginalized” (Moolman, 1997: 67).¹⁴¹ This is slowly changing, however and criminal justice policies often appear to be tracking contemporary developments, where the focus on the victim is integral, both in postmodern and critical criminology. In what could possibly be viewed as the most positive aspect of contemporary criminology, victim empowerment programmes have sprung up, and these still experimental approaches include re-integrative shaming and restorative justice.¹⁴² In addition to these, South Africa has seen other victim service programmes burgeoning in the 1990s, with productive results in the areas of rape and child abuse in particular (Schurink et al, 1992: 473 cited in Nomoyi & Pretorius, 1998: 95). The South African state has acknowledged these developments and even jumped on the bandwagon with the National Crime Prevention Strategy of 1996 suggesting that the traditional focus on prevention of crime and on the offender needs to be extended to include the victim (Simpson & Rauch, 1999: 298).

A bitter harvest focuses on a variety of victims, none of which are seen in the positive light of victim empowerment. Consequently, it seems that this positive element of contemporary criminology, which might work well with the modernist sentiments in much of the documentary, has been inexplicably pushed aside. Julie Stapelberg, wife and sister to two murdered farmers, is interviewed about her experience. Far from emanating hope, her words usher in a trail of despair. She discusses the way in which the murder of

¹⁴¹ Similar patterns can be evidenced overseas where “Millions of Rands are readily spent on victims of natural disasters, but not on victims of violent crime (Reiff 1979: 19)” (Nomoyi & Pretorius, 1998: 95).

¹⁴² Based on leftist notions of community, criminologists believe that it is possible to restore functionality to communities by reintroducing criminals to their communities at forums where the victim is included. This is critical criminology in operation and, in South Africa, is an attempt to adopt the “communitarian and progressive approach to social ordering amongst groups such as the Maori people in New Zealand and the First Nations in Canada” (Van Zyl Smit, 1999: 205).

her husband and brother has left her feel helpless and able to do “Absolutely nothing” (video6). Additionally, the viewer hears of Julie Stapelberg’s hardships as she tries to keep the farm together, cope emotionally and give support to her four children.

Julie Stapelerg’s sister-in-law, Ampie Uys is also interviewed about the murder of her family. Equally emotional images of struggle and loss abound. She is seen as trapped economically, unable to sell the farm until her husband’s estate is settled and devastated emotionally by the task of explaining her husband’s death to her small children. Evocatively, we are told that, “They now face a future without ever really getting to know their father” (video6). Further descriptions of how she cries and misses her husband punctuate the documentary.

The second part of *A bitter harvest* also includes the story of a family left behind after a farm murder. It is similarly stirring, yet here, it is the story of the parents, after both sons were killed in separate farm attack incidents. Kobus Potgieter, we are told, was killed while selling vegetables and the video carefully notes that his brother Piet was shot in front of his wife. The voice-over adds that as far as the parents are concerned, “All the dreams they had for their sons are lost” (video6). At the same time, happy images of a community fête dissolve into a scene in a graveyard, where the mother, Hettie Potgieter, walks towards her sons’ graves. The father, Piet Potgieter, we are told, has scaled down his farming and his interview material reflects the perspective of a bitter victim,

I tried to help my children. I didn’t want them to suffer the way I did. I wanted them to have a better life. That was all taken away. Why carry on? We just take care of ourselves and live from day to day. I’m not interested anymore. I tell you, you can’t explain to anyone how you feel. But I do carry a lot of hatred inside me. I can’t deny that. It’s also true that I have no trust left. I’m suspicious of everybody. It’s a pity. But I don’t think anyone can blame me (video6).

Although the focus on the victim is a fairly recent criminological development, in *A bitter harvest*, the nature of the reflection has more in common with documentary convention, which “found its subject in the first decade of sound, and by the late thirties the now familiar parade of those of the disadvantaged” (Winston, 1988c: 269) The result was the exploitation of society’s victims in the media (Winston, 1988c: 269). *It’s nice to have a*

friend made a voyeuristic spectacle of Grootvlei prison, *Atlantis lost* gave us sensationalistic peeks into the trauma of abuse victims and *The Lima connection* viewed the inmates of Peruvian prisons as the sorry victims of their working class circumstances. The tradition of the victim, stemming from the blending of Grierson and Flaherty's approaches, has already been discussed in the previous chapter (Winston, 1988c: 271, 272). Suffice to say here, that in terms of storytelling, this tradition provides an excellent platform for developing a narrative by using tangible people rather than invisible structures and in so doing, enabling viewer identification (Schudson, 1996: 152; Galtung & Ruge, 1973: 57). With this kind of identification, it is imperative that "The people in the documentary must appear properly deserving, to be properly victims and also innocent victims insofar as their poverty or starvation is not caused by themselves" (Cowie, 1999: 32). *A bitter harvest* utilises this convention to the full: empathy in the documentary certainly lies with the farmers, seen as the unfortunate recipients of a nasty blow from fate.

In portraying victims, the documentary does not offer a positive outlook. Not only do the individuals involved appear broken and helpless, but the cumulative atmosphere is one of despondency. At times the decision to focus on victimisation becomes so intense that it slides towards using gratuitous spectacle to make its argument. In this way, *A bitter harvest* has something in common with *It's nice to have a friend* – and the result in both cases is decidedly negative. The following interview material of Captain James Espach and Lita Fourie describes the way in which Fourie's parents were killed:

Translator for James Espach: They had already taken his weapons. They fired two shots at him and he was wounded. He tried to hide in the toilet where they caught him and dragged him to the bedroom (...bo slaapkamer geneem het...).

Translator for Lita Fourie: (Hulle het hom gegooi...) They threw him into the bath.

Translator for James Espach: (...gewurg...) There they tried to strangle him with neckties. Then they saw they couldn't kill him like that.

Translator for Lita Fourie: (En...) And then they took the shower pipe and put it in his mouth (...in sy mond gesit...).

Translator for James Espach: They tried to drown him by forcing the pipe down his throat. This didn't work so they took a firearm and shot him in the bath.

Translator for Lita Fourie: (Dit het 'n ontploffing...) and it caused an explosion in his head. That's why half his head was blown off (video6).

With Lita Fourie's final comment, we see black and white photographs of the crime scene. Although much in the scene is unidentifiable, the second black and white shot of the murder scene shows the legs of an old lady. The legs are lying on the floor, covered in spatters of blood. The camera zooms in.

Through this kind of portrayal, not only is the perception of victimisation intensified, but the explanations offered by history and socio-economic conditions are blunted. With the immediacy and graphic description of brutality, the perpetrators become monsters and the potential for a moral panic is somewhat resuscitated. Considering this, it seems that the positive message in the video is challenged by documentary convention far more than by the criminological perspective, unlike some of the other videos examined – *Architecture of fear*, for example. Indeed, the contrasting approaches of documentary and criminology in the message of *A bitter harvest* undoubtedly are disconcerting for the viewer. It remains to be seen whether the impressions of the local, national culture and the nation-state work with the modernist causality of the video or with the sensationalistic documentary convention to produce a final overall 'voice' for *A bitter harvest*.

III. THE LOCAL

As with *Architecture of fear*, the level of the local is subsumed within the national, ignoring the fact that "the pattern of crime varies considerably between regions and between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas within regions" (Glanz, 1995b: 18). Indeed, the nature of and motive for farm murders are not interrogated for regional difference at all in *A bitter harvest*. This is in spite of the fact that a variety of different areas are mentioned and the potential for showing diversity abounds.

To begin, at the outset, we see a road sign saying 'Syferbult' and 'Vlakfontein'. Johan Stapelberg, one of the murdered farmers, comes from Magaliesburg, while his brother-in-law, murdered at the same time, comes from North-West Province. Lita Fourie's parents, we are told, were murdered in the Northern Province lowveld, with the perpetrators coming from nearby Huveni Village. Bill Voller, the mango farmer who was brutally attacked and killed in his home, also came from the Northern Province, near Tzaneen and

also near Huveni Village. The Potgieters, whose two sons were murdered, are from Swartruggens in North-West Province. While consistently mentioning the different locations, it is the similarity of the murders, with the motive of money that prevails in the exposition, rather than differences based on regional diversity.

It seems that the lack of acknowledging diversity is a trend in many of the SABC documentaries and here particularly, the potential for explanation and exploration, which would work so well with the modernist causality in *A bitter harvest*, effectively is thwarted.

IV. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL CULTURE

None of the documentaries examined thus far foreground the issue of race. Racial solidarity was implicit in the case of the prisoners in *It's nice to have a friend*, ignored in *The cage unlocked* and mentioned only briefly in *Architecture of fear*. While part of the reason for this may be the prioritisation of themes in the programme, it is nonetheless remarkable considering South Africa's racialised history.

In terms of criminology, looking at race is important, firstly, in terms of debunking criminal stereotypes about race and, secondly, in terms of understanding the origins of some criminal activity, including farm murders, where race may play a role. Yet, with the move to postmodern criminology, the lack of empirical evidence, theoretical uncertainty, the move away from class analysis and the lack of attention to aetiology have been detrimental to the investigation of race and crime. Consequently, "most criminological studies in this area tend either to ignore the question of young black people in crime or to utilise strategies which create historical or geographical distance, addressing the 'there' and 'then' rather than the here and now" (Pitts, 1993: 106). In some cases, cause is sidelined in the process of ignoring race, and, as with gender, this results in a fundamental gap in explanation.

In South Africa, farm murders have an emotional reckoning that is often deeply embroiled in a history of land dispossession, poverty and racial discrimination. Race and

racial discrimination are often seen as the cause for farm murders. In the Natal Midlands, specifically in the district of 'Sarahdale', it appears that many of the white occupants have forgotten about the history of coercive dispossession. Yet every black person in the area, comments Steinberg, has "memories of dispossession seared onto his consciousness" (Steinberg, 2002: 63).

Somewhat surprisingly, *A bitter harvest* does *not* acknowledge this kind of racial animosity as a cause for farm murders, instead privileging poverty and education in terms of aetiology, and money in terms of motive.¹⁴³ This lack may partially be due to the fact that no access to convicted murderers was evidenced in the video. Such access may have yielded productive interview material.

Perhaps the approach that *A bitter harvest* uses is, in fact, more valuable than one that looks at criminogenesis in strictly racial terms, but which works well with the notion of understanding the origins and progression of crime nonetheless. While the programme both implicitly and explicitly acknowledges the connection between poverty, crime, race and history, it does not dwell unduly on the negativity produced by the past. Instead, racial animosity is neutralised through the development of new identities based on alliances that cross-racial boundaries in the video. The importance of fostering new identities, which discard old discriminations is well argued at a variety of academic forums and

The policies that have emerged from the 'rainbow nation' philosophy must have taken cognisance of this fluidity [in identity] as they embrace the multiplicity and dynamism of groups and discard the notion of the 'natural', static and unchanging 'group' or groups as expounded by apartheid (Zegeye, 2001a: 1).

¹⁴³ Although *A bitter harvest* does not look at race to the extent that it might have, race is still an underlying theme in the programme, clearly indicating a tension that has historical roots. Piet Potgieter's murder ignited racial tension, the voice-over tells us, as "White farmers were threatening to take the law into their own hands"(video6). Other interview material with Hettie Potgieter possibly points towards some of the simmering racial assumptions in the community, "But we hate the criminals, not the black people" (video6). Snippets such as this indicate a racial dichotomy in the farming community, which, in turn, refers implicitly to the history of farming in South Africa. In this history, racial division equalled spatial division and was evidence of the way in which "Racist ideologies typically seek to naturalize racist geographies" (Dixon, 1997: 18). While hinting at this history, *A bitter harvest* neither foregrounds arguments specifically about race and crime nor arguments that might perpetuate racial division.

In the video, not only are we told that, Bill Voller was very involved on a community level, but that “his death angered both white and black” (video6). The coalescence of identity around community-building and the upholding of law, rather than race, is emphasised visually by the variety of demonstrators outside the courtroom where Voller’s murderers stand trial. Placards are not only in Afrikaans, but in African languages too. The interracial solidarity based on the creation of new identities brings hope to the programme and at the documentary’s conclusion, the voice-over says,

After Piet Potgieter’s murder, racial violence threatened to disrupt the Swartruggens community, but black and white came together to tackle some of the causes of crime and farm attacks head on. The local farmers have formed a single development forum. The aim is to market their produce, make money and create jobs and in the long run, reduce violence (video6).

Examples of black farmers who have also been the victim of attacks challenge the notion of farm murders as a racially based crime and suggest that the farming community is allied against criminals no matter what the racial composition on each side (video6). The story of Elifas Tshinangwe and how he has been attacked twice on his farm, with his grandchildren being taken hostage, is complemented by Barry Schoeman’s observation that, “The farm attacks are more and more focused on the black environment of the farmers – on the coloured farmers and I’m not 100% sure why. The perception that farm attacks are actually focused on white farmers are a little bit thrown aside and turned around” (video6). It is farmers that constitute the ‘new ethnicity’ here, with their identity based on their livelihood, rather than race.

It may seem that the observations in the video foster cross-racial alliances without necessarily dispensing with age-old apartheid categorisations. Indeed, the question remains: how can past inequalities be addressed without perpetuating apartheid’s static ‘boxes’ – especially in a context where South Africa remains deeply divided by culture, race, historical background, language and religion? (Zegeye, 2001a: 2). Yet *A bitter harvest* is able to use apartheid categorisations in a way that is not self-perpetuating, precisely by suggesting that cross-racial alliances will result in new identities where race is not a factor. In so doing, it posits a national culture of hope, where constituents of identity move into the positive realm of community solidarity. In turn, the acknowledgement of race provides the basis for an articulation with the criminogenic

elements identified in the video: poverty and education. Although race is not explicitly *part* of the criminogenesis (although it may implicitly be so), the two work together because of their tendency to contextualise, because of the optimism they offer and because of their modernist roots.

V. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATION-STATE

The continued relevance of the nation-state firstly as a tangible force in the world and secondly as a category of analysis is up for debate in the era of globalisation. The larger picture of Cultural Studies no longer privileges it and yet, particularly outside the First World, the nation-state remains a vital arena for examination (Cunningham, 1993: 136).

A bitter harvest, as with the other documentaries, sends out a message about the nation-state, which ties up with its use of criminological paradigm. The more postmodern the approach, the more searing the criticism. It is the positivist paradigm that seems to work most frequently in tandem with a positive portrayal of the nation-state and *A bitter harvest* is no exception. In this way, the left realist elements of showing structural causality in crime are overwhelmed by positivist imperatives that also focus on cause, but additionally see the nation-state in a favourable light.¹⁴⁴

Inadequacy

The state has come under fire from a variety of sources for not addressing farm attacks adequately. Until recently, the high rate of farm attacks did not receive the attention from government that farmers wanted. Calls to the National Intelligence Agency went unheeded, despite repeated appeals (Haefele, 1998: 9). In the Natal Midlands, farmers complained that the security force presence was almost non-existent and that farmers were forced to rely on their own private security, in this case, the Farm Watch organisation, to supply their security needs (Steinberg, 2002: 11).

¹⁴⁴ However, undoubtedly in the mission to show 'balance', in *A bitter harvest*, a few indicators of state inadequacy do make an appearance and should be acknowledged.

There are a few instances in *A bitter harvest* where the video seems to echo these sentiments. At an Agri SA Congress in Nelspruit, for example, the translator for one of the speakers says,

The senseless slaughter of farmers and others on our farms and high levels of crime not only cause deep sadness and suffering but also undermine many people's faith in the government's will and capacity to protect their interests and maintain law and order. It's sad, while we are busy with positive things that we have to tell the government, 'You are failing miserably in your most important task – to guarantee the safety and lives of your subjects' (video6).

For the most part, however, the documentary upholds the integrity of the nation-state by defending the government, which represents it. Modernity's nation-state remains intact.

Defending the government: voice-over and expert witnesses

By the 1960s, documentary on television used a variety of techniques to project an image of uncontested validity to audiences. Voice-overs, visual evidence and expert testimony were among the methods used to create an aura of believability and to entrench preferred meaning in the programme. This approach is still used in contemporary television, contributing "to creating a sense of irrefutable truth and authenticity which disguises the editorial values and choices" (O'Sullivan, Dutton & Rayner, 1994: 117). *A bitter harvest* makes use of all of these, but particularly prominent is the recurring reliance on experts that buffer the reputation of the nation-state. Indeed, as representatives of the police and the army, it would be somewhat disconcerting if they did not do so.

Viewers hear from Barry Schoeman, from the SANDF how "Farm attacks are more and more politicised by means of certain people that try to attack the current government" (video6). Not only does this have an implication for the meaning of farm attacks, but it suggests that critics of the government in this regard are unjustified. If defending the government is one element of projecting the nation-state positively, depicting a proactive government is another. The voice-over explains how Barry Schoeman, as a representative of the SANDF (and hence the state) is doing all he can to get to the bottom of farm murders and share his findings with the farming community, "The SANDF's Colonel Barry Schoeman has been researching farm attacks for over eight years. He's considered

to have one of the best databases on the crime. Schoeman tries to get to all the remote places to share his finding in workshops like those” (video6).

The visual companion to this shows the professionalism of one of Schoeman’s workshops. The visual backs up the message in the verbal, supporting David Morley’s sentiment that television is primarily an aural medium – radio with pictures - where the images play an illustrative role (Morley, 1995 cited in Nuttall & Michaels, 2000: 19). What we see of Schoeman’s workshop is a considerable audience occupying a large hall and taking heed of his expert advice. The presentation is accompanied by a large chart and a Powerpoint presentation. A close-up shot of the Powerpoint images show a heading, which reads, ‘Farm attacks incidents 2001’ and below that is a bar graph. Arrows and other indicators appear on the graph, and the entire presentation suggests that much thought and analysis of the figures has been done. The value of this for the state is clear, particularly with Schoeman visible at the front of the hall wearing his army uniform and thereby signifying his allegiance to the nation-state. The nation-state, the video advocates, is tackling the issue of farm murders head-on.

A second authoritative expert, Johan Burger, who features throughout much of the documentary, makes a convincing argument about the efficacy of police efforts,

With the assistance of the commanders and local farmers themselves, I think we’ve been highly successful. I think these are one of the biggest success stories in terms of operational activities. In some areas, the figure is as high as between 80 and 90 percent of the cases that the attackers are caught, or one or more of the attackers are caught (video6).

If the use of experts is one technique used to create preferred meaning in modernist documentaries, the voice-over is another.¹⁴⁵ *A bitter harvest* uses the voice-over to make very specific points in defence of the nation-state, rather than simply using it as a linking

¹⁴⁵ By resolving ambiguities in meaning, an omniscient voice-of-God approach contrasts with other documentary techniques, such as observational cinema, where the viewer is often encouraged to be critical about what appears on the screen. Although the extensive use of voice-over was popular in documentary since the 1930s, it has recently been used somewhat less and is often scathingly perceived as a way of shutting down meaning and closing off visual possibilities for a film (Corner, 1995: 97, 98). There is wide acknowledgement, however, of the usefulness of using the voice-over, in some cases, to make vital connections in the exposition and for background information (Corner, 1995: 97, 98).

device or in any other strictly functional way. In discussing Bill Voller's murder, the police are depicted as swift and efficient, with the voice-over noting how the police were able to apprehend the suspects within 72 hours, despite the fact that they had taken flight to a squatter camp on the East Rand in Gauteng. The police are described as having launched "a massive manhunt" (video6). As with much voice-over use, the visual is used in close conjunction with the verbal to support omniscient observations. The reconstruction of the 'manhunt', done in an authentic-seeming 'archival' black and white, is no exception.¹⁴⁶

At another point in the video, the voice-over also acts as an advert for the efforts of the police. Although recognising the scarcity of resources faced by the police, the voice-over adds that rural safety is a police priority and that they have recently launched a new operation, the aim of which "is to provide a visible security force presence. The rural safety plan, which was launched a few years ago, now falls under this operation" (video6). While acknowledging the extent of the challenge, the most forthright blurb for the police stems from another contribution by the voice-over,

The police plan to recruit an additional 30 000 reservists, many of whom will be deployed in rural areas. They may not have to meet the strict requirements of ordinary reservists. The aim is to involve as many people as possible in securing the safety of South Africa's platteland. This will increase the intelligence gathering capabilities of the security forces, but even this may not be enough (video6).

Powerful interview material provides the final supplement to the pro-nation-state crusade, which sometimes seems so transparent in *A bitter harvest*. Vera Voller, wife of murdered farmer Bill Voller adds a personal touch, describing the police in terms of her own experiences and marrying their efficiency to their personal kindness in the process,

Death has a finality about it. It was more important for me to come to terms with the death than revenge of any kind. I left that up to the most amazing police force that took over the case, who were clever enough to find the perpetrators in incredibly short order, who were consistent and careful beyond imagining in putting together their evidence, who were kind beyond imagining as well – caring

¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, it uses images of the army instead of the police, as if the two fused institutions work in tandem in representing the state and combating farm attacks. We see strong images of the army in control as an extreme close-up shows an army boot stepping onto the ground. Further images of the army patrolling in their uniforms, along with their guns, proliferate.

– who still are very supportive. We are really very lucky to have policemen like we do have in this area (video6).

Accompanying this, we see the criminal justice system finally triumphing over the criminal, as a policeman opens the back of a police van and takes out a suspect, presumably on his way to court. Similarly, we also see how the murderers of Lita Fourie's elderly parents face justice. Shots of two young, handcuffed men are accompanied by two policemen. They appear to be facing an appearance in court. What appear to be police detectives in civilian clothes are also present outside the court building. The impression of the criminal justice system is one of well-oiled efficiency, which contrasts with many media reports and much academic material on the issue. It might have been easier to show the institutions of the South African nation-state in the throes of failure and yet *A bitter harvest* does the opposite, working well with its modernist optimism of examining aetiology with a view to finding solutions.

As with the other videos examined here, an element of *A bitter harvest's* intersection with globalisation is its conscious or unconscious utilisation of criminological paradigms. While *A Cage Unlocked* focuses on the rehabilitative side of positivist criminology, *A bitter harvest* concentrates on aetiology, sometimes leaning towards left realism in its focus on structure. What these two documentaries have in common is their positive, forward-looking, solution-oriented approaches, so unlike the pessimism of the fear-ridden fortress city depicted in *Architecture of fear*. Not only does *A bitter harvest* make use of notions of criminogenesis, but it also defuses moral panics. These moral panics are experienced worldwide as alarm with rising crime rates and manifest locally as fear of conspiracy in farm attacks and of the nature and extent of farm attacks. As these notions are debunked in the video, global trends of fear and insecurity are deflated. Also deflating these is the comparative global element of Zimbabwe, which also is mentioned at various points in the video, along with the suggestion that that country's land expropriation there is unnecessarily exacerbating fears in South Africa (video6). This realistic cross-country perspective defuses panic in South Africa by explaining what its origins may be and by refusing to support this argument as a valid reason for farmers' fear.

Unsurprisingly, the positive portrayal of the nation-state links up with the optimism of positivist criminology, just as postmodernism and its concentration on global insecurities and rising crime connects with a negative perception of the nation-state. Indeed, one of the criticisms of positivism is that it does not see the state as responsible in any way for high crime rates and this is reflected in the rosy picture of the state in *A bitter harvest* (Young & Matthews, 1992: 2).

If the element of national identity represented by the nation-state is positive in *A bitter harvest*, so too is the notion of national culture. The modernist theme of reconciliation contained in much of the video, projects a humanistic, uplifting attitude, which works extremely well with the positive depictions fuelled by the use of global theories and trends. While the reconciliation approach could be criticised by those believing it to be naïve, in *A bitter harvest* it works well in fostering a path towards new identities and an overall national identity that rejects race as a basis for exclusion.

6. CONCLUSION

The positive elements of *A bitter harvest* undoubtedly predominate in the documentary. Global trends and theories work together with images of national culture and nation-state to create a programme that is potentially productive in terms of nation-building. Consequently, it is interesting that it should be documentary convention that provides the primary stumbling block for the realisation of this potential. The imaging of victims and the slide into sensationalism represent a downward turn for the video, as with *The Lima connection*. A secondary problem with the documentary in terms of fulfilling the broadcaster's mandate is the way in which diversity is lacking. The variety of locations that are mentioned, are never supplemented by additional, area-specific information. It is these two aspects of *A bitter harvest* that mar what could be seen as a real step in the right direction as far as fulfilling the SABC's mandate is concerned. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that, overall, *A bitter harvest* is one of the more positive documentaries under examination here.

Architecture of fear is undoubtedly the least positive of the three under discussion in this chapter, conforming to a postmodern trend where “the content of the penal sanction is said to shift away from reform and rehabilitation toward incapacitation” (O’Malley, 2000: 157). Indeed, much of the message in *Architecture of fear* exhibits a disbelief in the possibility of ‘truth’, scepticism with progress and disillusionment with the modernist project, such that strategies of crime control are best seen to be residing in containment rather than cure. Global theories of risk management and situational crime prevention characterise this approach and the latter manifests itself in extreme form in the fortress city. In *Architecture of fear*, this fortress city is Johannesburg. Ignoring the global context of security-obsession, as this characterisation does, results in a moral panic that is exclusively tied to South African national identity. Documentary techniques of pace, music and interviews reinforce this message, as do the local levels of Johannesburg and Soweto, which link up explicitly to global theories of risk, fear, crime wave and decline. If the depiction of the local is lacking in optimism, it also lacks when it comes to conveying true diversity, falling short of the broadcaster’s mandate in multiple ways. Local variations in crime rates are ignored as the local is conflated with the national providing, firstly, an inadequate exposition of local conditions, and secondly, a negative image of national culture. Indeed, the overall view on national culture is somewhat bleak, with fear and ‘dangerisation’ prevailing. If national identity, as it inheres in culture is pessimistic, so is national identity as it inheres in the nation-state. This is a typically postmodern stance, where the modernist state and its institutions are accorded no legitimacy at all. In *Architecture of fear*, the feeble, ineffective nation-state is seen as being overwhelmed by an ethos of neoliberalism where private policing, community policing and vigilantism eclipse official efforts at crime control. Ultimately, in terms of the message about the nation, *Architecture of fear* is a catalogue of nihilistic pessimism, avoiding any suggestions for solutions, such that, “[Postmodernism’s] scepticism about ‘progress’, its deconstructing of the concepts of crime, its antipathy towards grand theory, mean that it can too easily lead towards nihilism, cynicism and conservatism” (Matthews & Young, 1992: 13). Having said that, it should nonetheless be acknowledged that the documentary does, at points, exhibit optimistic promise. This promise lies in its local-level analysis of class in Diepsloot and its observations on race and gender in the sphere

of national culture. The identification of these structural factors in the realm of crime and crime control could potentially point towards macro-solutions that need to be addressed before healthier attitudes towards crime can be developed in South Africa. It is a pity that more is not made of this.

Atlantis lost offers a middle ground between the extreme pessimism (read postmodernism) of *Architecture of fear* and the sometimes uncritical optimism (read positivism) of *A bitter harvest*. In doing so, it remains within the broad ambit of modernism, but employs a largely left realist approach that compels a critical look at the nation-state without suggesting its replacement. In this documentary, the examination of the overworked Child Protection Unit is framed within a larger left realism that implicitly suggests the buttressing of crime control institutions through the provision of more resources. The communitarian offerings embodied in Barbara Rass's organisation are seen as supplements to, rather than substitutes for state institutions – unlike, perhaps, the private policing in *Architecture of fear*. In adopting this posture towards the nation-state, *Atlantis lost* avoids both the rose-tinted obfuscations of *A bitter harvest* and the inflexible cynicism of *Architecture of fear*. If the nation-state is seen in conditionally optimistic terms, so too is the level of the local. Although the environment of Atlantis is plagued by structural inequality and social problems like alcoholism and prostitution, the identification of these problems points towards long-term solutions that must be embarked upon. Additionally, viewers are offered a slice of diversity and local depth that is missing from the other two documentaries examined in this chapter. The only concern here, is that the linkage of child abuse to a poverty-stricken community may have the inadvertent effect of demonising the underclass. This is undoubtedly an issue that documentary-makers need to be aware of as they undertake projects using positivist analyses that focus on socio-economic conditions. Nonetheless, positivist analyses are undoubtedly productive and, in *Atlantis lost*, the local level not only links to global theory, but also to national culture, so that the existence of social problems works intertextually with an implied history of apartheid. Apartheid itself may not have been constructive, but its recognition in documentary is – particularly for the purposes of fostering a common national identity. As a whole, *Atlantis lost* straddles the optimistic

and the critical in its appraisal of national culture and the nation-state. In this way, its valuable left realist investigation (including a positivist contribution) constitutes a middle ground in terms of viewing the nation in terms that are conducive to nation-building. Additional value could, however, have been added in the documentary firstly through the inclusion of gender in the structural scrutinisation, secondly through the inclusion of global empirical comparisons and thirdly through the avoidance of sensationalised victimology (which is a problem *Atlantis lost* has in common with *A bitter harvest*).

Ultimately, the three documentaries examined here comprise examples of descending degrees of pessimism when it comes to the depiction of documentaries on crime and punishment. Undoubtedly, the positivist project of *A bitter harvest* provides the most optimistic offering, regardless of its analytical value or relation to ‘truth’. Left realism, as seen in *Atlantis lost* includes the encouraging aspects of positivism, while nonetheless criticising the nation-state. It is still constructive in terms of nation-building, but has a discriminating edge that sets it apart from *A bitter harvest*.¹⁴⁷ Both of these documentaries could have been improved in their own right through a more thoughtful assessment of the victim, a caution in demonising the underclass and an inclusion of gender – all of which are, in theory, left realist prerogatives. *Architecture of fear* represents the height of postmodern nihilism. In terms of fulfilling the broadcaster’s mandate, documentaries need to avoid this kind of taken-for-granted pessimism that characterises the global era through an awareness of its components and their implications for the image of the nation.

¹⁴⁷ It is, perhaps the left realist approach that is most useful for the SABC: it offers conditional optimism – but not to a degree that the SABC could be accused of partisanship in the portrayal of the nation-state.

CHAPTER 6: THE CRIMINAL AND DOCUMENTARY

1. INTRODUCTION

To some degree, many of the programmes in my selection deal with the offender and the crimes that he commits – particularly those facing incarceration. The three programmes under discussion in this chapter, however, contribute the largest portion of their documentary exposition to the offender on the ‘outside’, with *Very fast guys* concentrating entirely on the sociology of gangster life in Orange Farm.¹⁴⁸ Interestingly, *Very fast guys* was one of the documentaries under discussion in the 2002 South African Communications for Development (SACOD) Forum, which examines South Africa documentaries with socially responsible messages. For my purposes, however, analysing *Very fast guys* – and the other documentaries in this section – is done with a view to determining the extent to which they fulfil the SABC’s mandate. In terms of global trends in the media portrayal of offenders, three issues which impact on the fulfilment of this mandate are immediately pertinent – although it must be noted that these exist within a larger relevancy of many criminological, national, local and global questions raised by the documentaries.

Firstly, there is the demonisation of the underclass, already touched on in the previous chapter and consisting both of subject matter selection and subject matter presentation.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ As noted in my methodology chapter, the content of all the programmes is very disparate in nature, making it difficult to group them together in chapters. Consequently I have adopted an approach of fitting the documentaries together in terms of what I consider to be their defining characteristics. This does not, however, preclude similarities or comparative possibilities with documentaries from other chapters. Beyond this, it should also be noted that the sorting of the programmes into chapters is a strategy that has been used to facilitate the analysis and is not in itself an integral *part* of the analysis, which means that the ‘best fit’ approach that I have used does not materially alter the conclusions I reach in the dissertation as a whole.

¹⁴⁹ Selectivity is an inescapable factor in any news or documentary production. It is the consistency of a particular type of selectivity that is a cause for concern in documentaries dealing with crime and punishment where it is the crimes of the ‘powerless’ that are cast under the magnifying glass far more often than crimes of the ‘powerful’. The result is that the lower class becomes synonymous with the criminal class (Barak, 1994: 11). Unsurprisingly, the fearsome lower classes are not depicted in their mundane transgressions either. It is the “violent and predatory street criminal [that] dominates the public’s constructed image of criminality” (Surette, 1997: 69). The lower classes equal the criminal classes equal the brutal classes. Consequently, by presenting the subject matter in such a pejorative fashion, the humanity of offenders is frequently lost. Surely these documentaries could at least acknowledge offenders as people

Secondly, the focus on the individual offender to the exclusion of social context is fundamental to the question of documentary representation and the building of national identity. Often, this individual focus can contribute to the demonisation of the offender by drawing attention away from cause and towards the offender's 'wicked' nature.¹⁵⁰ Finally, the ever-present bogeyman of sensationalism seems to find ample opportunity, where brutal details of specific crimes and criminals are shown with relish on television.¹⁵¹

Together, these three elements are just some of the ways in which international documentary trends pose a challenge to the constructive portrayal of crime and punishment on television. This broad, global context in which the SABC produces and broadcasts its programmes contradicts its local objective of producing positive programmes that are able to build national identity. Together with a variety of other issues that are addressed in the analysis below, the extent to which the SABC is successful in its mandate will be explored, remembering too that, "As the mass media

through contextualisation, explanation and sociological detail (Fattah, 1997: 235)? Essentially, while some criminologists believe in the inherent difference of criminals from the rest of society, many more believe that the motivations for criminal behaviour are no different from the motivations for 'normal' behaviour – profit, status, power, machismo and so on (Fattah, 1997: 129). The extent to which the videos under discussion here espouse this belief - or its negative alternative - is essential to the question of how the nation, including its criminal elements is depicted. It is just one of the many issues raised in the examinations of the three programmes that follow.

¹⁵⁰ For practical reasons, the television medium is conducive to portraying individual stories rather than structural or social analyses. Yet, having said this, programmes such as *Atlantis lost* manage the latter with ease. Particularly with regard to representing the offender, focusing on the individual not only seems a convenient way in which to home viewers' interests, but to reinforce cultural norms about who offenders are. Indeed, "The belief in individual responsibility and individual-based explanations for crime is the primary image reflected in our social stereotypes. The belief in individual responsibility and individual-based explanations for crime is the primary image reflected in our crime and justice media" (Surette, 1997: 82). While individual responsibility is undoubtedly an important feature of criminality, it is nonetheless a partial view that neglects broader social forces while it demonises the individual offender (and, inadvertently, the criminal class, lower class or racial group from which he comes). Notably, the concentration on the individual offender in a way that demonises, is particularly pronounced where 'black crime' is concerned. According to this general, cross-national perspective on media trends, white-collar crime is most often situated in a humanising context where "societal accountability is attributed" (Ericson, 1995: xviii).

¹⁵¹ Fundamental in the media representation of culpability in crime, is the way that sensationalism is used to 'hook' viewers into a lurid world of voyeurism with its "contrived appeal to the 'baser' human emotions" (Roshier, 1973: 47). Here, documentaries that highlight the brutality of individual crimes reflect negatively on the offender or offenders – once again at the expense of deeper explanation or analysis. While the sensationalistic approach is certainly not confined to documentaries about criminals, it appears to play a significant role here too – both in South Africa and around the world.

create a social reality of crime for their audiences, they also shape their audiences' perceptions about crime and the larger world" (Barak, 1994: 21).

Very Fast Guys is the first programme discussed here and it is immersed in sociological positivism, while including left realism's concern with structure. Both approaches together are extremely constructive in terms of analytical value for the documentary. Most importantly, however, the programme yields an explanation for crime that allows the viewer to see the gangsters as human in a way that is positive for national culture and hence, national identity. Language and race are similarly dealt with and the only drawback of the documentary is the fact that the nation-state is conspicuous by its absence. Overall, it can be said to be an extremely useful programme for the broadcaster. The other two programmes discussed in the chapter fare dismally by comparison. *The day the gangs came to the other side of town* shows how an entire documentary can be based on culturally stereotypical assumptions about who the perpetrators are. It demonises the potential offenders, makes extensive use of racial and class stereotypes, excludes causal explanation and bases its exposition on sensationalism to the detriment of analysis. All of this is devastating to the project of constructing and promoting national identity through television. Finally, *Strong Medicine* also proves problematic, addressing the issue of culture and crime, including issues of the western definition of crime, in a way that is entirely unsatisfactory. Argument and analysis in the documentary are obscured by the focus on individual stories, which do nothing for the fulfillment of the broadcaster's mandate. That these stories are told through the use of 'spy cameras' and reconstructions further removes the viewer from any insight into the context and rationale behind the crimes, which might be useful for understanding national culture. The only promising direction offered by this documentary is in the realm of local culture, but even this is sometimes essentialist.

2. BOYZ N THE HOOD: *VERY FAST GUYS*

I. SYNOPSIS

This hour-long documentary was produced for the SABC by an independent producer and was broadcast on SABC3. The central focus of the programme is the ‘very fast guys’ - a gang of young men living in Orange Farm, just outside Johannesburg. Tebza, Lucky, Scar, Special and Grey are the members of the gang whose everyday lives consist of smoking drugs in ‘the Ghetto’, engaging in criminal activity and drinking alcohol. Drifting in and out of prison and hiding out in the shacks of Orange Farm are simply part of daily existence. Thoughts of death are ever-present and result in a ‘live for the moment’ ethos. Part of this ethos is the pursuit of women and maintaining a girlfriend is cited as a primary motivation for committing crime. It is the maintenance of a certain lifestyle – buying certain commodities - that the men say provides the basis for their crime. Unemployment, poor education and the breakdown of social structures are constant background themes in the programme and function as explanations of the behaviour of the ‘very fast guys’. Police corruption facilitates their activities. Even the families of the ‘very fast guys’ are powerless to stop their activity. In spite of their dubious activities, there is a constant element of humanity about these men that the programme also captures – Tebza’s loyalty towards Lucky, Lucky’s affection for his girlfriend Malulu and Special’s refusal to make members of his own community victims of crime.

II. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

Anomie, relative deprivation and undersocialisation

In nineteenth century England, social institutions were being subordinated to the market economy in such a way that the cultural norms inscribed in these institutions were disrupted and distorted (Polanyi 1968: 70 cited in Bernburg, 2002: 734). Emile Durkheim observed this unchecked dominance of the market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and it became the basis for his theorising on Institutional-Anomie. As

the industrialisation and consumer culture characteristic of modernity, have become rooted in countries across the world, so the theory of Anomie or social deregulation becomes applicable to them.

Two schools of thought - belonging to Robert Merton and Durkheim - dominate on Anomie. Both schools begin at the same point, which suggests that economic ambition and materialism have disrupted 'traditional' social and cultural norms in society. The pursuit of the success inherent in 'the American dream', for example, takes over and individualism and competition become defining features of culture. The relevance of this for *Very fast guys* is that where access to education and opportunity may be lacking, crime well may proliferate, since people use the "most technically efficient means" of attaining material success (Bernburg, 2002: 732). The documentary certainly reflects this. Value-orientations that characterise this cultural 'condition' - where Institutional-Anomie has taken over the social structure - have been postulated as

- (1) An overriding pressure on the individuals to achieve at any cost; (2) intense individualism, where one's fellow member becomes one's competitor; (3) universalism; the standards of success apply equally to all members of society; and (4) monetary 'fetishism', where money is the metric of success, a social fact that gives rise to a 'never-ending' achievement – in principle, it is always possible to have more (Messner & Rosenfeld, 1994: 62-5 cited in Bernburg, 2002: 736).

The goal of material success, according to Merton, is not necessarily destructive in itself, but rather it is the *means* by which these goals are pursued that constitute a dangerous trend. The focus is on deregulated means rather than deregulated ends (Bernburg, 2002: 732). The alternative school of thought, defined by Durkheim, believes that the goal is questionable – that it relies on unsound norms. Most analyses of crime focus on the Mertonian approach, examining the illicit ways in which criminals attempt to fulfil their dreams of material success.

If *Very fast guys* draws on prevailing conditions in South Africa, it is not difficult to see why the theory of Anomie applies to the documentary. Many studies in South Africa

emphasise that it is not poverty in simple terms that drives people to acquisitive crime.¹⁵² In *Very fast guys*, this is indeed the message, with the underlying theme of greed constituting a close, if unconscious, link with Institutional-Anomie.

In trying to explain the actions of the *Very fast guys* and by pointing towards Anomie as an explanatory factor, the documentary averts a moral panic by viewing the gangsters as rational and motivated, rather than as evil unknowns, as postmodern approaches might. Although positivism in criminology often points to deviancy as being ingrained in psychologically inadequate individuals, the way in which Anomie looks at social structure and a culture of materialism defies this. By providing explanation for deviance, it slots in well with modernist criminology in general. In *Very fast guys*, it becomes evident that the gangsters are embroiled in a malaise of consumer culture, rather than a malaise that has to do with their innate deviancy. Lucky says, for example,

We move in with our girlfriends and their children and become the head of the house. When you come home, they are looking to you for what you've brought back. When I dress smartly she should also look good. If she doesn't get money from me, she's going to get it from someone else (video7).

Also in the video we see Tebza, Malulu, Scar and Special going shopping. Special stands next to a shelf full of shoes, holding a shoe, while Malulu faces a rack of clothing. Tebza holds a pair of pants, which he then buys. We see him unfolding the money. The shopping spree is followed by an elated scene of the 'guys' driving down a dirt road, with Scar holding a large bottle of beer. Clearly, shopping is a cause for celebration. Tebza says, "When you have money you can do anything. The world is yours. We want to buy and wear quality. We won't wear poorly made clothes. We aren't rich. We just like to dress well" (video7).

¹⁵² A close look at gangsters in South Africa calling themselves 'Amagents' is revealing. Researchers note that, "Running beneath all of the amagent's narratives are issues of status, lifestyle and materialism" (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 97). The pursuit of hedonism and glamour are identified as key motivating factors for committing crime (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 98). One gangster called 'Steve' said that he used his illicit loot to pay for clothes, alcohol and drugs (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 98). Women and their consumerist 'needs' are also blamed for creating the desire to earn easy money (Segal, Pelo and Rampa, 2001: 100). Another study of juvenile offenders interviewed 'Sipho', who said that, "rather than using the fruits of his crime for food and maintaining the household, he used the profits to buy attractive goods" (Dissel, 1999a: 20). Indeed, it is clearly not desperate poverty that drives these gangsters to their life of crime. Instead, machismo, rebellion and consumer culture define their lives. Many come from comfortable middle class homes and it is not uncommon for model-C school pupils to become gang members as a way of proving allegiance to their township (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 106, 107)

In focusing on the offenders and explaining the reasons for criminal activity, Anomie, as exemplified in the video, provides a useful way of understanding crime in South Africa. Further to this, and adding depth to the perspective, Merton's focus on opportunity also provides a lens through which *Very fast guys* can be understood. According to this view, unequal opportunities in society mean that those without access to education or who do not "have the 'connections', the 'polish' or the 'presentability' to wangle a good job", are more likely to resort to illegitimate means to achieve the goals of a materialist society (Braithwaite, 1993: 32). The social structure is lacking in providing opportunity and "The genius of Merton's approach is indeed the recognition that *objective conditions in which goals and norms operate are crucial in specifying their effect on action*" (Bernburg, 2002: 739). This is a constant undercurrent throughout the video.

Closely related to this, and feeding into the explanatory model of Anomie with its own explanatory power is the modernist concept of relative deprivation. Adolphe Quetelet, a theorist from the cartographic school of criminological thought writing in the nineteenth century, already disputed the idea of a straightforward link between crime and poverty, just as Anomie would later. He found that some of the poorest areas in France were also the most 'moral' (Fattah, 1997: 210). Thus the concept of relative deprivation was born at a time when biological reasons for criminal activity were sought over those to do with social conditions (Fattah, 1997: 211). The concept suggests that rather than absolute deprivation or poverty alone causing crime, it is the visible disparity between rich and poor in a society, and the lack of social cohesion accompanying this, that does so (Emmett, 2000: 296). It is the gap between poverty and the 'American dream', so easily attained by the upper echelons of society.¹⁵³ The combination of relative deprivation and individualism is said to be a lethal one as far as crime is concerned, and one that is prevalent in the South African context (Young, 1998: 280). Indeed, as early as

1970, the richest 20% of the population of South Africa owned 75% of the wealth. The Gini Co-efficient (which measures economic inequality) for South Africa in

¹⁵³ In many countries across the world, the 1960s was a time when the concept of relative deprivation was said to have been vindicated. A general rise in living standards was not accompanied by a reduction in crime and, as the gap between rich and poor increased, it appeared to be getting worse (Young, 1998: 280).

1978 was the highest of the 57 countries in the world for which data was available (Stevens, 1991: 3).

The video hints at relative deprivation in many ways, showing the poor conditions in Orange Farm where the gangsters live and with a memorable comment from Lucky, which bridges both Anomie and relative deprivation. He says,

We go after those who have money. The whites and the blacks who are rich and stay in Morningside. Those who eat well. We don't have a life, that's why we stay in Orange Farm. We all like townhouses, but I can't live in a townhouse when I can't even buy a pair of shoes. I have to dress well and look good so that when I'm in town I don't look like a guy who comes from Orange Farm (video7).

Although the theories of Anomie and relative deprivation are not mentioned in the video explicitly, it is done implicitly as "The invisible structures that determine [the 'guys'] are visualised, humanised and revealed in method: style, form and exposition" (SACOD Forum Report, 2002: 17).

The notion of undersocialisation accompanies both Anomie and relative deprivation as modernist explanations that underpin the reasons for crime depicted in *Very fast guys*. As in *A Bitter harvest* and *The cage unlocked*, the value of focusing on the offender with a view to understanding the underlying reasons for his behaviour is twofold. Firstly, through understanding, the offender is humanised in such a way as to encourage a national identity based on inclusion. Secondly, by looking to causes, it opens the way to meaningful solutions, rather than the immediate 'finger-in-the-dyke' approach depicted in *Architecture of fear*. Although positivist criminology does not always see solutions, sometimes by overpathologising the offender using biological or psychological explanations, in this case, solutions seem to be on the horizon. With solutions comes optimism on which to build a constructive, positive national identity.

Although criminological fashion is directed towards a neo-classical focus on free will, modernist notions that a person is a product of his or her social circumstances dominates in *Very fast guys*, as it did in *The cage unlocked* (Braithwaite, 1993: 5). Neo-positivism looks to the family and the childhood socialisation process for answers, seeing "criminal choices as the result of low impulse control and antisocial individualism engendered in childhood" (Young, 1998: 288). In *Very fast guys*, Tebza says,

I started crime when I was 12 years old. I left home and went to live with these guys. Our parents didn't have money, my step-father used to give me a hard time. He used to tie me up and beat me badly. That way I saw the situation, my mum was working, and my step-father wasn't. So I decided I was going to live my own life. I then broke into shops and robbed banks (video7).

Scar describes a similar life story, pointing directly at the connection between undersocialisation and crime,

My dad died when I was 6 years old. I was a kid. My mother died when I was 13. When you don't have a mother and father, it's hard. So you ask yourself: Why is God playing with me? He took my parents. He chose to leave me by myself. What does He say I must do? He broke my strength. So now I try not to think too much. I have no parents, so if I'm arrested, who will go to court and worry about me? If I'm arrested, that's it. If I'm shot, I'm shot. If your life doesn't have much meaning, what do these things matter? (video7).

Positivist Anomie, relative deprivation and theories of undersocialisation point towards social structures and social organisation as the reasons behind criminality in a way that is often touted as sidelining the scope for change. This is because offenders are not seen as responsible for their 'destiny' and thus capable of change on an individual level.

Revisionist Anomie, however, is an area of criminology that focuses explicitly on the individual and therefore does allow for change. Furthermore, as *The cage unlocked* illustrated, undersocialisation can also be accompanied by discourses of rehabilitation that *do* point to change. In the case of *Very fast guys*, change is on the horizon by the end of the programme. It is precisely through explaining the link between criminality and social circumstances using modernist criminology, *but also focusing on the individual*, that the viewers are able to envision the capacity for change: after all the 'guys' are not inherently evil or criminal and are therefore able to extricate themselves from their lives of crime. On a macro-level, the theories underpinning the programme point towards fundamental changes in society that need to take place before crime levels start waning. This is done by "showing how structural forces so often imprison individuals into particular responses, choices and understandings" (SACOD Forum report, 2002: 17).

In terms of change, the final note of *Very fast guys* is indeed one of redemption and hope, which is hinted at earlier in the documentary when Tebza is in jail and says, "Once I'm out I'm going to find my own place and a girl to marry" (video7). Captions, which provide closure for the documentary, tell the viewer what has happened to the members

of the gang – and it is largely positive. As far as Tebza is concerned, we are told that, “The charges against Tebza were dropped in 2001 due to lack of evidence. He is now employed part-time in Orange Farm. Special is still in prison on related charges” (video7). Lucky and his girlfriend also seem to be progressing, moving into the legitimate world of employment and away from a life of crime. The captions state, “In February 2002 Lucky got a job working on a construction site. His girlfriend Malulu has returned to high school” (video7). Similarly, we are told that Scar is employed on a farm in Meyerton. Undoubtedly, the modernist focus on the offender, and accompanying explanations of why the ‘guys’ turned to crime resulted in a positive outcome, which clearly reflects well on the image of the nation and the potential for building a national identity.

Radical criminology and left realism

If the theories discussed above allow for a productive focus on the criminal and the causes for crime, radical criminology intervenes in a manner that humanises the offender. Traditionally, radical criminology is at odds with positivism, while nonetheless falling under the broader umbrella of modernism. Despite differing theoretical approaches, at least one element of radical criminology, humanising the criminal, works well in the *Very fast guys* as “an opportunity for audiences and the public to understand what is commonsensically seen as sheer barbarism, brutality and moral turpitude” (SACOD Forum Report, 2002: 19).

Indeed, radical criminology sees both criminals and their actions as normal, so that criminal activity becomes “an illegal means of satisfying normal biological, psychological, or socioeconomic needs” (Fattah, 1997: 258). While *Very fast guys* does not explicitly go this far, it certainly aims to depict the ‘guys’ as everyday people, rather than as psychologically impaired deviants. It is, perhaps, precisely the inclusion of this logic in the programme that allows the modernist, positivist theorisations about crime to include solutions: if the criminals are ultimately normal, the case for redemption is strong.

Indeed, Tebza and the other ‘guys’ experience emotions that are no different from what we would expect in non-criminal members of society. Criminals, it seems, are people too. While in jail, Tebza experiences emotional turmoil with which viewers can surely empathise. He says,

I do feel scared. But I keep myself busy in here. We play games like ludo and draughts. The sun takes so long to go down. Time goes so slowly. There is no life in here. I feel pain because of what’s happened to my Mum. The community is hounding her. She phoned me in tears. A mob was trying to take her furniture (video7).

He later expresses further anxiety about being in jail, lamenting about the potential loss of contact with his child if he is sentenced for a long time. There are many other instances where the normality of the ‘guys’ is underlined. Just one example is the way in which the viewers are allowed a peek into the domestic normality of Lucky and Malulu’s lives. The two of them potter around in their house, Lucky carrying a metal basin and Malulu busy in the kitchen. Malulu’s baby sits contentedly on the floor. As part of the domestic routine, Malulu shakes and straightens a blanket on the bed. The indoor scene is accompanied by an equally happy outdoor scene, as we see Lucky with a group of people busy playing soccer (video7).

In *Very fast guys*, it is a fruitful combination of radical criminology’s focus on individual normality and its mapping of power differentials in society, both of which humanise the offender, that makes the documentary extremely positive. In an unlikely combination, it works well with the evidence of Anomie, relative deprivation and undersocialisation in the video and this is largely because both fall within the ambit of modernist criminology and coalesce in a left realist approach.¹⁵⁴ The productivity of this approach is indisputable and, while it may not offer optimism on the same level as sociological positivism, it is certainly more positive than postmodern approaches. Because of postmodern criminology’s preoccupation with “questions of how to identify dangerous offenders and then how to justify their semi-permanent incapacitation, any broader sociological

¹⁵⁴ As discussed in my examination of *Atlantis lost*, in the 1980s, many radical criminologists faced pressure from politically conservative backlashes and adapted their stance in what became known as left realism. Their traditional leftist approach incorporated notions of Anomie and relative deprivation, so that “Within criminological theory it owed more allegiance to Merton than to Marx” (Muncie, 1998: 226).

significance that these offenders might have has been largely overlooked” (Brown & Pratt, 2000: 4).

Observation and humanisation

Very fast guys finds a comfortable, if somewhat modified, niche in the global trend of observational documentary. Most documentaries include some element of observation, whilst in others, it becomes the primary method of exposition, allowing viewers to supposedly get in touch with ‘the real’ (Corner, 1995: 85).¹⁵⁵ Through this ‘window to the world’, signifiers are supposedly directly, one-dimensionally, simplistically attached

¹⁵⁵ The kind of intimacy required for the observational approach, where the camera intrudes on the lives of others, is not without its critics. Undoubtedly, in the viewing process, the vicarious dalliance with ‘the other’ objectifies the observed “precisely as objects of observation” (Corner, 1995: 86). Others are critical of the approach for different reasons. Suggesting that it is impossible for film to simply capture ‘the real’, Baudrillard aligns it instead with the hyperreal, with the referentiality it aims to capture being completely intangible (Rosen, 1993: 84). A third criticism is that the presence of cameras unavoidably alters the course of action in any film. *Very fast guys* exemplifies this in a couple of scenes. The most striking is when one of the gangsters, Grey, who is standing on the street, becomes involved in an argument with a passing motorist. Much finger-wagging and incitement to a fist-fight ensues, with the following exchanges taking place:

Grey: I’ve heard that Lucky is out for revenge. But when he tries I’m going to get him. I won’t be on earth forever. Life here is temporary. Right now, I could die anytime as we speak. Hey mister! Stop making such a noise with that van!

Bystander #1: Jabulani! Leave him alone!

Motorist: Are you mad! Who do you think you are?

Bystander #2: Grey! Go away. He’s going to kill you!

Bystander #3: Do you see how we live in this neighbourhood? Trouble starts out of nowhere. We don’t have a chance.

Motorist: I’m going to kill you!

Bystander #4: Leave him alone!

Bystander #5: Grey is causing trouble for us.

Grey: Did you see that? That was hot! (video7).

There is no way to tell how much of the scene was orchestrated specifically to gratify the camera – Grey’s final comment in particular draws attention to this. At the 2002 SACOD Forum, “in spite of the film crew supposedly being flies on the wall, the question that Martin Mhando raised remains: to what extent did the camera instigate, to what extent did the characters control it?” (SACOD Forum Report, 2002: 18). In another segment, an awareness of the camera is also directly referred to with one of Scar’s cronies asking, “Are we being filmed with this stuff?” (video7). A little later he adds, “How can you sell us stuff with people filming? Selling with people filming!” (video7). This kind of awareness of the camera devalues the authenticity of the observation, and possibly some of the sociological significance of the *Very fast guys*.

Yet it is for far more practical reasons rather than these kinds of ideological ones, that true observational film has often been modified. In the original schema, observational film should come to the screen *sans* any superimposed discourse (such as voice-over), external intervention (such as questions posed to interviewees), or technical intervention (Corner, 1995: 88). Yet this ‘purist’ approach may lead to incoherence in the exposition and boring footage, particularly where editing is disallowed. Consequently, much observational film is edited, “using high ratios of film shot to film screened (30:1 is not uncommon in this kind of work)” (Corner, 1995: 88). The result is that the film is as constructed as any other directed documentary where claims to observational film are *not* made.

to the signifieds (Kaplan, 1988: 85). The absence of commentary is thought to facilitate transparent understandings of a subject by an audience (Winston, 1988b: 23).

Yet voice-overs are sometimes used in the observational mode as a way of bridging the gap between the captured 'reality' and the viewer (Corner, 1995: 86). More logical, perhaps, for a documentary claiming to be observational, however, is the use of participant voice-over, which is seemingly less intrusive and authoritative than using an omniscient narrator, but which nonetheless is able to "powerfully subjectify and interiorise what is in the image" (Corner, 1995: 86). This approach has become increasingly popular with documentarists. Interviewees in the film have been snapped up for roles as narrators, thereby avoiding the shortcomings in explanation of observational film and the uncompromising authority of the conventional narrator (Nichols, 1988: 53).

In *Very fast guys*, it is Tebza who plays the role of 'presenter-substitute' (Corner, 1995: 98). What he does consists of creating "continuity, facilitating the flow of otherwise disjointed nuggets of interview or spontaneous outbursts" (SACOD Forum Report, 2002: 18). At the very beginning of the documentary, his role is established as he sets the scene for the rest of the film, with a suspenseful introduction that defies the everyday-ness of 'purist' observational documentary. He says, "Gangster life is hard. We dare death, you see. Our lives can be difficult but this is what we have chosen. It's how we survive. We call ourselves the 'very fast guys'. Looking back I had no idea how things would end for us. No idea what would happen" (video7). Later, his role continues and he explains, "This is the Ghetto where my gang hangs out. Lots of girls come here because they want to be with us. We're the men. This is our home" (video7).

Often documentarists lose their voices in the quest that observation and empiricism tell their own story (Nichols, 1988: 50). Yet modified observational documentary, as is evident through the editing and use of a 'presenter-substitute' in *Very fast guys*, creates very specific meanings. In the video, it is clear that,

the building blocks of the argument are drawn from the statements of the addressees themselves. However, structure and argument do not emerge unless the footage is adequately edited. *Very Fast Guys* does this well. By intercutting

statements of banter, interviews and responses to a questioner, both a description and explanation of causes of crime – a sketch of the motivations and self-generated explanations – emerge via structured editing, which builds continuity, character and atmosphere (SACOD Forum Report, 2002: 17).

In *Very fast guys* the ‘intention-to-mean’ inherent in the video and accompanying the ‘indirect communicative mode’, which allows viewer autonomy in interpretation, supports certain conclusions in the video, but without the dogmatism of direct exposition (Corner, 1995: 87). Where the ‘voice’ of the documentary is clear, this modified form of observationalism could be called ‘proactive observationalism’ (Corner, 2000: 147).

Through a variety of techniques, ‘proactive observationalism’ ensures that the ‘guys’ in *Very fast guys* are seen in a very specific light. Overlapping with the attempts to humanise them in the radical criminological undercurrents in the video, ‘proactive observationalism’ selectively chooses its images of the ‘guys’. Once again, domestic normality dominates in what the viewers see. In an intimate association, we see the inside of Lucky’s home, dimly lit by a single light-bulb hanging from the ceiling. As with other similar shots, scenes of domesticity allow a familiarity that would otherwise not have been possible. Malulu sits on the bed with her child, Lucky smiles, the child bounces up and down. At Scar’s grandmother’s house, we see an ironing board and iron. Scar is busy ironing, half bent over and concentrating. We also see him in the lounge, as he picks up two pairs of jeans and moves past a woman sitting on a chair (video7). The family inside the house is visible at another stage in the documentary, where Scar sits in a lounge chair, next to a man and a child. A baby sits on the floor (video7). At Tebza’s mother’s house there is similar normality, mitigating the deviance of the gangsters’ criminal lives. Tebza’s mother bends down, picking up a basin full of washing and the camera follows her as she moves to the washing line. We see a close-up of her back as she hangs a piece of clothing on the line. As she picks an item out of the basin, the camera pans up her body as she straightens up and shakes it out before hanging it up. Perhaps the most poignant images of normality arise from the discussions and scenes of family life in the video. These will be addressed later on, suffice to say here that, “Participation/observation ensures that the humanity of the gangsters is tangible, solid” (SACOD Forum report, 2002: 18).

Humanising the gangsters in this way performs the vital function of creating viewer identification, as do the smaller narratives or dramas in the documentary, which sweep viewers into the gangsters' perspectives (Cowie, 1999: 30). Essentially, identification "involves taking up the position of the social actors presented by the documentary so that we are moved by their stories as if they were our own" (Cowie, 1999: 30). Even at the very beginning of the documentary, viewers are encouraged to identify with the 'guys' through their introduction as people, rather than simply being nameless caricatures of gangsters. Tebza says, "I am Tebza. They also call me 'Rambo'" while Lucky introduces himself as 'Killer'. Scar says, "My name is Scarface. These guys all know me. The gang likes me, they know about my life" (video7). By using their own voices, this approach goes one better than the caption-introductions of access documentaries (Corner, 1995: 91).

In the case of *Very fast guys*, the value of the observational approach far outweighs its negative associations. Indeed, by modifying the nature of observation through the inclusion of a 'presenter substitute' and through efficient editing, a selective view of everyday gangster reality is presented: and it is a view that humanises it. Ultimately, this humanisation is valuable for the production of an inclusive image of the nation, where criminals are seen as part of society and where their deviance is explained and contained within their broader normality. In this respect, *Very fast guys* goes a long way towards fulfilling the broadcaster's mandate.

Criminalising the underclass/family values

In locating the programme in Orange Farm and by focusing specifically on a criminal gang, a glance at *Very fast guys* seems to suggest that the documentary fits in well with a global tradition of criminalising the lower classes. Stereotypes of the 'criminal type' are easily identified in the documentary – poor, drug addicted, black (Fattah, 1997: 126; Gordon & Rosenberg, 1989 in O' Sullivan, Dutton & Rayner, 1994: 106). The selectivity of this kind of stereotype, its exaggeration, and its masking of real causes and conditions make it extremely problematic (Jewkes, 1997: 82).

Yet just as *Very fast guys* seems to make use of this stereotype, tying in with global notions of the typical criminal and focused on the locality of Orange Farm, so it diffuses it. This is once again attached to images of home life, where poverty is infused with dignity rather than only criminality. Evidence of productivity in Orange Farm centres on Tebza's mother's house, where we see maize plants and a hose watering the ground as Tebza waters the plants (video7). Images that normalise the poor Orange Farm community, such as this, are as plentiful as those that demonise it. In a context of overall optimism and hope in the video, the images of normality are surely victorious in colonising the 'voice' of the documentary.

Indeed, these images of normality extend to the focus on the family and not only serve to dispel the underclass-criminality association, but work together with observational techniques and the undercurrent of radical criminology in order to humanise both the 'guys' and the Orange Farm community. Showing their local lives in this way does *not* articulate with the global trend of criminalising poverty, but rather serves to mitigate it, articulating instead with a global nostalgia for the family (as discussed in Chapter Three). Consequently, optimism is indicated through the depiction of the family.¹⁵⁶

Although *Very fast guys* does point to *past* family problems as part of the undersocialisation thesis, much of the *present*, immediate focus in the documentary is on the resilience and persistence of family ties. Perhaps the most poignant statement of the importance of family is Tebza's acknowledgement of his mother. He says, "My mother. She's the person I love. She's the one that I would like to be looked after by. She

¹⁵⁶ In South Africa and around the world, family breakdown and criminality are linked and it would surely have been simple and easy for *Very fast guys* to toe this line. The many informal settlements that have burgeoned in urban areas around the country are characterised by their lack of family networks and community structure. They are places where recent migrants from rural areas come to escape even worse poverty in the rural areas. As cross-generational family and community structures are left behind, the inhabitants of these areas face great insecurity as crime breeds in the absence of strong normative moral boundaries (Steinberg, 2001: 3). The young criminals controlling the underworld could be described as outlaws: they live in a world that is beyond the scope of the law. Neither the law nor the moral boundaries on which the law is based has influenced their lives (Altbeker, 2001b: 25). Interviews with delinquents confirm the breakdown in family and social structures as primary factors in defining their criminal careers (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 1999: 23).

supports us on her own” (video7). Family cohesion seems intact as the visuals accompanying this statement indicate very normal, harmonious interaction in the household. While Tebza’s mother is busy in the kitchen, Tebza walks into the shot and up to the counter. He takes a cloth and starts drying plates that his mother is washing in a big basin (video7). Lucky’s relationship with his father also indicates family cohesion and loyalty that tempers any two-dimensional conclusions about the underclass, Orange Farm and gang mentality. Lucky says to his recently arrested father, “Don’t worry dad. We’ll fix this. You will get out of here” (video7).

Family connections in the documentary make use of the extended family too. Inside Tebza’s mother’s home we see a variety of children. One plays with an electronic game and behind him there are more children. Another two delightedly watch two women in front of them as the one braids the other’s hair (video7). As this scene progresses, Tebza’s mother’s voice is audible expressing concern for her son, once again indicating family cohesion. In another scene, family/community atmosphere is also captured, and significantly, includes heartwarming images of children, which emotively tie the gangsters to conventional family life. In this instance, the camera follows Tebza inside a shack where a teenage boy lies on a couch with another boy next to him. A small girl sits on the arm of a chair (video7). Talking about children in his family certainly does reveal a tender side to Tebza, which softens his gangster identity. He says, “They don’t know I’m a gangster. They do hear talk about me but they haven’t seen anything. I spend a lot of time with them. I want these kids, especially this girl, to get an education. I don’t want them to rush into this life I’m leading” (video7). Interviewed about his own child, the following exchange takes place between Tebza and the interviewer:

Interviewer: What is the name of your child?

Tebza: His name is Gift. I love him more than his mother. I’m not with her, but I would love to see him.

Interviewer: What would you like for your child?

Tebza: I want him to have a good future. I want to provide for him. Even if I don’t have money, I should be there for him (video7).

While there may be a global inclination, discussed in Chapter Three, that views the family as being in a state of decline, in *Very fast guys*, the family remains ever-present. This is in spite of the simultaneous existence of an alternative means of communal

identification in the form of the gang. While this dichotomy may create an unresolved tension in a large part of the programme, the eventual decline of the gang and the continued persistence of the family suggests a triumph of the latter, which has vital implications for the overall meaning of the documentary. Indeed, this triumph surely signifies a potentially positive resource for the gangsters and a positive way forward for the local community.

III. THE LOCAL

Observational documentaries are very focused on the particular and the immediate. The lack of using a ‘voice-of-God’ approach avoids the drawing of sweeping conclusions, instead leaving these understated or implicit. *Very fast guys* is no exception. The concentration on the immediate environment of the ‘guys’ means that it is the local, rather than any larger constituency, which is tangible.

Globalisation has undoubtedly disturbed our understandings of what ‘local’ means (Tomlinson, 1999: 28). The local has been infiltrated by distant events and forces, modifying the nature of experiencing the local (Tomlinson, 1999: 29). Although some might believe the local to be increasingly ‘phantasmagoric’, many more might argue that local forces and experiences, by virtue of their undeniable specificity and physical reality, still characterise local culture. The global trend of insecurity and the nostalgic hankering after community accompanying it, also creates the reasonable expectation that that preserving the integrity of the local is a reality. In *Very fast guys*, the nature of culture and experience in Orange Farm, while having broad global resonance and articulating with global ideas (Anomie, relative deprivation) is very much tied to the local.

At the beginning of the documentary, Tebza’s words anchor the programme in the local. He says, “This is the Ghetto where we lived happily. It’s in Orange Farm, close to Johannesburg” (video7). Images of Orange Farm supplement this and as the caption introducing *Very fast guys* runs across the screen, the background shows a dirt road, a small patch of grass on the side of the road and a couple of shacks with a makeshift fence. A young girl runs barefoot through the shot and then just the view of the shacks is

held again. Another example of imaging the local consists of a shot, which moves across some beautiful roses in a garden with small houses behind them. As the shot continues moving, it goes to an open piece of ground, where some people are being pulled on a cart by a horse. The resulting impression received by viewers, is certainly one that does justice to the broadcaster's mandate of showing diversity. Whether it could be described as positive diversity is up for debate, with some of the negative aspects of local culture coming into sharp relief in the programme. The proliferation of gang culture in Orange Farm is one of these.

Gang subculture

The highly developed gang subculture that *Very fast guys* shows in Orange Farm links broadly with global understandings of Anomie and relative deprivation. As the collective victims of Anomie, the guys have banded together to achieve common goals through the sharing of strategies, information and resources (Braithwaite, 1993: 33). In this way, their Anomie manifests itself in local gang subculture.

On a global level, alternative forms of collective identity are developing, perhaps even challenging the nation-state as the foremost indicator of identity (Castells, 1997: 2). Where families are breaking down, schools and other community-oriented institutions are on the decline, this seems particularly to be the case and the gang, or 'skeem' in South African slang, is one of the alternatives presented by societies under strain (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 1999: 24, 25). In South Africa, interviews with gangsters revealed that gangs were "a place where they feel a sense of belonging and find solidarity" (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 103). Communal principles, such as those found in gangs, are perhaps more significant now than they have ever been (Castells, 1997:11). Gang loyalty is one such principle and it is clearly evident in *Very fast guys*. Tebza says,

I'm very close to Lucky. I don't think our friendship will break. Maybe only death will part us. I grew up with him and he's the only guy I could work with. A lot of guys I know are not really honest with me, so I choose to live my life with him (video7).

When Lucky's father is in jail, Tebza expresses a desire to help, again suggesting that he and Lucky will "die together" (video7). After Lucky is arrested, later in the video, Tebza

organises bail money, saying, “I *work* for my friends. I know that if I was in prison, Lucky would do the same for me” (video7). Global evidence of Anomie, the global way alternative identities are being formed, and the global consumer culture that underlies both, coheres in *Very fast guys* around the very specific area of Orange Farm and the very specific identities of the ‘very fast guys’. In this way, the local articulates with the global, but it is the local gang culture that provides the viewer with a sense of flavour, immediacy and diversity within the South African context.

Many characteristics of gang formation in South Africa can be attributed to South Africa’s turbulent history.¹⁵⁷ Gang members’ own sets of rules, rights, rewards and punishments define their gang culture. It is “an elaborate ‘system’ of deviance which is characterised by its own symbols, language and rules of the game” (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 96). Most importantly, it is characterised by extreme violence and the possibility of prison and death (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 96). Machismo and nihilism dominate in gangsters’ cultural attitudes.

While the general defining features of gangs in South Africa could be said to create a cultural commonality on a national level, in *Very fast guys*, there is no indication that the lives of the ‘guys’ are comparable to the lives of other gangsters in the country.¹⁵⁸ This is

¹⁵⁷ In many urban centres in South Africa, the political turbulence of the 1980s and early 1990s provided both a platform for youthful rebellion and a window to brutality and violence. Many gangsters of today may have been influenced by what they saw during this period - and by the violent breakdown of neighbourhoods that continued even after political turmoil subsided. Where guns and violence provide an education for the youth, it is easy to imagine how fantasies of aggression and power come to rule their lives (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 108). This is not to suggest that gang allegiances did not exist before – only that the conditions of transition catalysed and prompted further gang activity (Simpson, 2001: 118).

¹⁵⁸ In *Architecture of fear*, the level of the local is explicitly linked to the national, both through direct reference and insinuation. This is not the case with *Very fast guys*. While the local is conjoined to the global in the themes of (1) Anomie in Orange Farm, (2) the criminalisation of the underclass and (3) concern with the status of the family in an era of alienation, the category of the national is left out. No broader conclusions are drawn about South African society through the microcosm of Orange Farm - a feature, which can largely be attributed to the observational nature of the video, where the expert voices and omniscient narrators that might draw broad conclusions are absent. This is not to say that viewers would avoid considering the broader significance of the specificities in the documentary. Perhaps even, it is a natural path for the viewer to take, where “even in the most ‘purist’ of fly-on-the-wall documentaries, the imaged particularism of local action and behaviour, however fascinating and ‘watchable’ in itself, must be filtered upwards by the viewer to a more general level of significance, must be seen to ‘say’ something about the *kind* of events and people being observed” (Corner, 1995: 97). Indeed, it may be the intention of

despite the fact that the ‘guys’ display textbook symptoms of South African gang culture. For example, on death and violence, which are features of all gangs in South Africa, Lucky is macho and nonchalant. He says, “Just like the other day. We were sitting here when some guys burst in and opened fire. They shot at Tebza three times. One of their bullets just missed me” (video7). At another point in the documentary, Scar says dismissively, “We do think about dying, but we don’t dwell on it. It is a reality that we might die” (video7).

A further element common to gangs across the country is drug use. Yet, as with the attitudes to violence evidenced in *Very fast guys*, the images of drug abuse are restricted to local snapshots, with no explicit connection to the national. As the guys engage in drug use in the documentary, they are firmly embedded in their Orange Farm environment. In a context of bare dirt ground and a half-finished brick house, Tebza meets some of his companions, slaps their hands in greeting and smiles and laughs. This is the prelude to showing Lucky smoking a joint. After he has inhaled, it gets passed from one gangster to the next. Such scenes are common throughout *Very fast guys*. In another scene, Lucky is holding a broken bottle neck and is stoking and prodding inside it with a matchstick. A little later we see a man leaning across and lighting the bottleneck for Scar, who is holding it to his lips. (video7). Tebza says, “We are smoking strong stuff so when we hit the streets we don’t have any fear” (video7). This kind of attitude is not unusual in the criminal underworld of South Africa (Dissel, 1999a: 22), yet any connection with the national level is not made in *Very fast guys*.

If in *Very fast guys*, the level of the local, is inherently negative, as the focus on drugs, violence and nihilism seems to suggest, surely it cancels out any positive outcomes? Yet *Very fast guys* skilfully turns this around. Showing gang culture in decline provides hope and optimism for both the lives of the ‘guys’ and for the state of Orange Farm. It eschews the victory of violence, neutralises the ‘guys’ machismo and articulates with their humanisation, discussed above.

the documentary-maker that the audience do this and yet the connections between the local and the national are not explicitly made (Corner, 1995: 97).

The breakdown of the 'very fast guys' begins with Grey. By going against the 'rules' and finding a buyer for a stolen car by himself, Tebza says, "Grey was the one who betrayed us" (video7). Special exhibits anger at the way Grey flouted the rules of the gang and caused trouble for the rest of the 'guys' (video7). Lucky too, says, "We no longer hang out with Grey" (video7). After an altercation with Grey, where Lucky's face was slashed, Grey's alienation from the gang is confirmed even further (video7). It is not only the incident with Grey that highlights the deterioration of relations in the gang. Scar also distances himself from the 'guys'. He says, "I have moved away from the guys. We have had bitter arguments and now there is mistrust" (video7). Perhaps the most poignant evidence of the gang's decline is when Tebza and Special land up in jail. While earlier in the programme Tebza went to great lengths to help Lucky and his father out of jail, the gesture was not reciprocated in Tebza's time of need. Tebza laments,

I also hear that Lucky went to take my cell phone. He is making me angry. He should come and see us but he doesn't. Since we've been arrested he hasn't come. And I hear that Malulu and them are wearing our clothes. They are just having a good time. When he was arrested we ran around for him. But he doesn't look after us. He is just getting on with his life. He's forgotten us (video7).

It is this evidence of the decline of the gang that works with the theme of redemption, where the guys embark on new, legitimate lives by the end of the documentary. Despite the violence and drugs that comprise the local culture, showing gang culture as being unsustainable has both a positive message for Orange Farm and the individual 'guys'.

Finally, it should be reiterated as true that *Very fast guys* does link strongly to global trends in the media and in criminology that focus almost exclusively on the lower classes as the perpetrators of crime. The manner in which this trend is realised in the documentary is through the 'gangsterisation' of the 'guys' and consequently of the community from which they come. Yet this is not the concluding note of *Very fast guys*. In fact, it becomes neutralised to a large extent through the alternative imaging of the 'guys' and of Orange Farm. Ultimately, the level of the local is depicted as positive through the inclusion of family life and through the expression of commitment to the family, which works in conjunction with the many other elements humanising the gang.

The absence of broader conclusions about national culture does not detract from the value of the local representations, which offer fundamental insight into one of the diverse life-worlds that comprise South African society. The valuable perspectives on offer extend from the diversity aspect to the optimistic labelling of Orange Farm, in spite of the ease with which this informal settlement could have been depicted as beyond hope. While gangsterism, in all its debauchery, is given a large slice of the attention in *Very fast guys*, by the end of the programme, this lifestyle is no longer seen as a viable option for the 'guys'. Orange Farm, it seems, may not be on an inevitable path towards self-destruction. Along with the impact of the global trends and theories that seem to inform the programme, the level of the local ensures that the most positive stance possible is adopted for a documentary on essentially negative subject matter. Kudos can undoubtedly be claimed by the SABC both for doing justice to diversity and for creating a benchmark of optimism on which national identity can ultimately be built.

IV. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL CULTURE

While national culture is largely absent from the immediacy of images and words that bombard the screen in *Very fast guys*, there are perhaps at least two markers that could draw viewers towards a conclusion about the national. While these markers do not offer any impact on the meaning of the story itself in *Very fast guys*, they surely reflect on current policies and perspectives of the SABC regarding the depiction of national culture.

Language

Human experiences can never be communicated in an unmediated form: language always intervenes (Tomlinson, 1999: 69). While it may be constituted from an arbitrary set of symbols, it can be considered symbolic on another level too. It is one of the primary ways in which identity is built. During apartheid, the bureaucratic and cultural boosting of Afrikaans meant that it became the language of education, politics and power. While shared historical experience may often be a primary means of identification, language is often more effective in binding people together. This is because,

language, and particularly a fully developed language, is a fundamental attribute of self-recognition, and of the establishment of an invisible national boundary less arbitrary than territoriality, and less exclusive than ethnicity... (Castells 1997: 52, emphasis his) (Muller et al, 2001: 13).

In postcolonial Africa, legislative prescriptions abound as far as language policy is concerned. Most attempt to undo the damage to indigenous languages of colonisation's 'civilising mission'. Yet in practice, discriminatory language hierarchies continue to exist and, in South Africa, this means the continued privileging of Afrikaans and English. Where wealth and social status is imprinted on the use of these languages, it is difficult to escape them (Alexander & Heugh cited in Zegeye & Kriger, 2001: 6). Interestingly, there seems to be evidence of this in the follow-up documentary to *Very fast guys*, called *Very fast girls*. The documentary is concerned with the women in the 'guys' lives. While undoubtedly valuable in terms of the gender perspective it delivers, it is significant that the only the only successful woman in the programme, Lucy, narrates in English. It appears that even among the black population itself, "the attitude took root that all that is worthwhile in life was (and is) accessible only through knowledge of English" (Alexander & Heugh, 2001: 21).

As far as the SABC is concerned, in spite of promises that came with the 1996 re-launch of the station to deliver more in South Africa's eleven official languages, English still prevails. The international availability of English programming plays a large role in this, as does the common perception of English as South Africa's lingua franca (Teer-Tomaselli cited in Zegeye & Kriger, 2001: 7).

In this environment, the role that *Very fast guys* plays is highly significant. African languages are not blocked out through the imposition of a translator. They are consistently audible throughout, accompanied only by unobtrusive English subtitles. The voices of the guys are ever-present, doing justice to the observational nature of the account. This contrasts most starkly with *The cage unlocked*, where the melodic tones of a sympathetic translator largely replace the harsh voices of the Cape Flats. The BBC

audience for which the latter documentary was made undoubtedly played a role in the decision to do this.

In terms of national identity, the SABC aims to project unity in diversity. *Very fast guys* achieves this with flying colours as far as its use of language is concerned. In forging the programme with English subtitles, inclusivity is ensured for a large segment of the (albeit literate) population, using South Africa's so-called lingua franca. At the same time, the retention of indigenous voices ensures that, "Sub-national identities, whether the basis of affiliation is language, region, religion, gender or any other significant social marker, constitute part and parcel of the patchwork which is framed by the national identity" (Muller et al, 2001: 134). In this way, it seems that the SABC is unobtrusively sending out a message about national culture, which, although not as apparent and strident as the local culture of Orange Farm, is just as significant.

Race

If *Very fast guys* attempts to show cultural diversity through language, race is perhaps the most significant marker by which it attempts to fashion national unity. Indeed, both cultural diversity and national unity are fundamental principles guiding SABC policy (Barker, 1999: 4).

In *Very fast guys*, the absence of racial cleavages and references plays down this divisive element of South African society in spite of the fact that most South Africans continue to identify themselves in racial terms (Zegeye, 2001:14). Absences and silences such as these can contribute to the preferred meaning of the television message just as strongly as overt constructions - and this certainly appears to be the case in *Very fast guys* (Brunt, 1990: 70). In a context of South African history, where apartheid categorised and excluded according to race and built identity on imagined ethnic purity, the approach taken by *Very fast guys* seems surely to be a conscious one (Zegeye, 2001a: 3). Otherwise, how could the issue of economic inequality be touched on in the documentary without referring to race? How could Orange Farm be examined without specific

reference to the “cities where economic inequality has become entrenched along racial lines” (Frescura, 2001: 100)?

Perhaps even more convincing of the conscious selectivity with which the documentary was made, is the stark disparity between *its* reality and the reality on the ground where, “Most [black gangsters] are unapologetic and feel that white people are getting what they deserve if they are victims of crime” (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 104). Indeed, there appears to be an acute awareness of racial inequality in much of the interview material collected from gangsters for academic research (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001: 104).

In *Very fast guys*, race is mentioned once, when Lucky says in a very egalitarian fashion, that the ‘guys’ steal from whites and blacks. Aside from this, there is no reference to race and certainly no indication that the guys harbour any sort of racial resentment - or that the culture of gangsterism in South Africa might belie larger racial clefs in the national culture. Indeed, the approach of *Very fast guys* should undoubtedly be commended for acknowledging language diversity at the same time as projecting a national culture that is not beset by apartheid-era racial problems. In this regard, it has much in common with the conciliatory approach in *Bitter harvest*, and fuels the fulfilment of the SABC’s mandate in an understated, yet fundamental, way.¹⁵⁹

V. OMISSIONS AND THE NATION-STATE

If meaning around race is created by omitting it as a primary constituent of national culture in documentary, it is interesting that the same is done for the nation-state – with far more ambiguous results. There are only three real references to the nation-state and its institutions, none of which constitutes a basis for a real portrait. Scar says, firstly, that the government needs to provide more jobs. Secondly, Tebza discusses the necessity of bribing the police. Although these are both negative, they are also limited in their impact

¹⁵⁹ While *Very fast guys* does not do justice to gender issues, its sister documentary, *Very fast girls*, certainly does. The captions at the beginning of the programme tell us that, “In the lives of the VERY FAST GUYS gang are the girls who love them. This film is about these young women” (*Very fast girls*). The two complementary documentaries together provide a composite view of the cultural perspectives of both genders, ensuring that this aspect of national culture is also addressed. The documentarists seem to have thought of every angle.

by their brevity. Tebza's comment, for example, cannot reflect the reality where police bribery is a central theme in many gangsters' lives (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 1999: 26). The third reference to the nation-state in *Very fast guys* is equally limited. As with the negativity of Tebza's comment, we see the negative effect produced by state inefficacy (and possibly bias) in the manner in which Lucky is arrested for a robbery that happened while he was attending his cousin's funeral. The underclasses are seen as having little control over the institutions of power in society as these institutions discriminate against them (Fattah, 1997: 178).

Had the documentary been infused with more of these kinds of snippets, *Very fast guys* could certainly have been characterised as a left realist documentary, combining positivism's Anomie, theories of undersocialisation and so on with a healthy criticism of the criminal justice system. However, rather than the nation-state being central to the 'voice' of the documentary, it is undeniably peripheral – perhaps due to the observational focus of the video, where the locality of Orange Farm is focused on and larger constituencies are sidelined in the process. Perhaps, in turn, this local focus is an indication that the nation-state is losing its significance both in reality and in the world of documentary (Comaroff, 2001: 40; Waterman, 1996: 39).

One of the results of sidestepping the nation-state in *Very fast guys* is that the documentary ends up residing largely in the realm of sociological positivism. In one critical view, "the positivist school attempted the impossible – to separate the study of crime from the study of the state" (Young & Matthews, 1992: 2). Ignoring the criminal justice system means that there is no analysis of how the state intervenes in crime, what could be done to improve these interventions and how it discriminates against the poor. The implication for the documentary's analytical depth is thus severe. Ignoring the nation-state means that there can be no serious engagement with it. The implication for the SABC's fulfilment of its mandate is consequently less than positive.

If the manner in which *Very fast guys* deals with the nation-state – or more specifically its lack of dealing with the nation-state – is positivist in orientation, so is a large portion of

the rest of the documentary. Here specifically, Anomie and theories of undersocialisation provide a global theoretical foundation for the empirical examinations of the gangsters' lives in *Very fast guys*. The advantage of Anomie is its strong sociological orientation, which "has the potential to explain a broad range of delinquency, including theft, aggression, and drug use" (Agnew, 1998: 186). This is also the case with undersocialisation, which attempts to isolate the root causes of criminality through an examination of the immediate environment of the gangsters.

From this positivistic basis, the way in which the documentary expands its explanations indicates how positivism can become subsumed in a more analytically useful left realism where "Left realism's main root is anomie theory and the concept of relative deprivation" (Hudson, 2000: 174). Left realism points towards structural concerns – as does *Very fast guys*, through the depiction of poverty. In this way it bridges structure and sociology in a way that is not unlike *Atlantis lost*. Different from *Atlantis lost*, however, is the way in which it focuses on the offender in far more detail. The incorporation of radical perspectives that humanise the offender adds to the efficacy of the left realist perspective, which views understanding the offender as paramount in understanding crime. Humanisation is buttressed through observational documentary techniques that allow viewers to see the gangsters' lives in everyday terms, rather than simply violent terms. This defies the media tendency to concentrate on violence while constructing an image of "a faceless predator" (Surette, 1997: 69).

The humanisation of the gangsters extends to a humanisation of their local environment too, in a way that blows apart stereotypes that demonise underclass existence. While the focus on the underclass itself has much in common with pejorative media and criminological approaches where the offender is seen as "young, impoverished, often black, usually male, and marginalized" (Hudson, 2000: 168), this is not the end of the story. The focus on the underclass is rendered productive for the image of both the local and the nation, situated as it is in images of normality and family cohesion. The local gang subculture of Orange Farm is also used productively in the video. While an exposition of drugs and violence may seem negative, not only do they point to structural

and social solutions that must be sought to combat crime, but are also shown to be self-defeating and ultimately unviable ways of life. A more constructive message would be hard to come by. Focusing specifically on the level of the local, in a way that links up to global theories of Anomie, undersocialisation and relative deprivation is illuminating analytically, while also providing depth, character and humanity to the gangsters and diversity to the representation of the nation for the SABC.

If the manner in which the local is conveyed is useful, so too is the depiction of national culture. Although national culture is not addressed in an overt way, the manner in which language is dealt with is telling. Instead of blocking out the African voice with English translations, discrete subtitles are used while the original audio is retained. As far as race is concerned too, the lack of overt reference to racial tensions, despite their existence in reality, is a positive step in the construction of national unity on television.

Very fast guys does well in constructing a positive and analytically useful commentary on the nation. In doing so, it operates on a theoretical level that is somewhere between left realism and positivism. It includes some left realist perspectives – the indirect allusions to structure, the humanised offender, Anomie, relative deprivation, undersocialisation and gang subculture - but ignores others, such as the focus on the victim, the nation-state and public involvement in combating crime. Ultimately, its largely positivist approach functions in much the same way as *The cage unlocked* when it comes to the projection of the nation in positive terms. *Very fast guys* shows the nation to be comprised of criminals with humanity, who are subjected to a variety of social pressures and the solutions that are implicitly suggested are both structural and social. This depiction is smoothly executed in a manner that retains analytical depth. Its value for the public service broadcaster is consequently immeasurable.

3. WHODUNNIT?: *THE DAY THE GANGS CAME TO THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN*

I. SYNOPSIS

As a 'breaking news story', this *Special Assignment* programme attempts to bridge news and documentary as it reports on the unsolved killing of nine men in a gay massage parlour in Seapoint, Cape Town. Primarily an investigative programme, it aims to get to the root of this particular crime, avoiding in-depth sociological analysis in favour of scrutinising immediate causes. Anneliese Burgess, *Special Assignment*'s usual in-studio presenter, is transformed into an on-location super-sleuth as she attempts to get the bottom of what became known as the 'Sizzler's massacre'. In particular, one possible avenue of explanation for the killings is privileged: a drug deal gone bad and the ensuing gangland retribution. The brutal methods of Cape Town's gangs are explored and the 28s gang is implicated, buttressed through the testimony of experts and wrapped up in Anneliese Burgess's sweeping conclusions. Notably, the perspectives of the police and other official sources are absent. If in-depth analysis is missing, sensationalism is not. The tantalisation of the murder-mystery format is enhanced by the 'sex 'n violence' emphasis and the 'human interest' inclusion of the victim's friends and families. Together with the investigative components, these form the basis of a programme designed to construct a normative morality for the nation.

II. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

Gang subcultures and documentary selectivity

The day is pre-occupied with the notion of gangland culpability in the Sizzlers massacre. As *Very fast guys* illustrates, an exploration of gang subculture can offer valuable sociological insights that contribute to a sense of understanding and which are valuable in terms of national culture. Indeed, it is surely imperative, when discussing gangs that any

examination be underscored by a theoretical contribution from criminology. In the case of *The day*, sociological positivism that concentrates on subculture formation would undoubtedly have been the most useful.¹⁶⁰

Although the limitations of subcultural theory are many, its strength and value should also not be overlooked. Most fundamental is, firstly, its quest for sociological detail, which strives for understanding. Secondly, its positivist orientation is useful, where “The positivist side of the equation has focused on why people commit crimes” (Young & Matthews, 1992: 2). The value of understanding and explanation for any documentary is clear: it sidesteps moral panic, bypasses sensationalism as it both humanises the offender and points to potential solutions in crime prevention. *Very fast guys* does this superbly. *The day*, however, is severely lacking, exhibiting a selectivity of the most dangerous kind in the discussion of gangs. Without in-depth analysis, simplistic descriptions of gang activity ensure that the logic of gang subculture is lost and the consequent demonisation of gang activity reigns supreme.

It is certainly true that selectivity in any documentary is unavoidable. Indeed, “All filmed accounts of reality are selective. All edited or manipulated symbolic reality is impregnated with values, viewpoints, implicit theorizings, commonsense assumptions” (Hall, 1988: 361).¹⁶¹ While this may be the case, as far as *The day* is concerned, its

¹⁶⁰ Closely linked to Anomie, subcultural theories largely focus on thwarted expectations as the reason behind gang formation. Writing in the 1950s, Albert Cohen pioneered criminological thought in this regard, believing that the inability to achieve middle-class goals and status resulted in the grouping together of non-conformist ‘misfits’, who hoped to recoup their dignity in some way (Hagan, 1994: 33). Far from being a positive, empowering solution, however, the gang “reinforces negativistic, nonutilitarian, hedonistic, and malicious practices and attitudes. Emphasis is placed on immediate gratification, destruction of property, rowdiness and violent outbursts” (Voigt et al, 1994: 230). While Cohen focused specifically on middle-class values as a factor, variations in subcultural theory have produced other approaches, some of which are critical of Cohen’s implication that subcultural activity is strictly a lower-class phenomenon (Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 176; Voigt et al, 1994: 248). One of these approaches was Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin’s thesis in the early 1960s, which chose to focus on exposure to illegitimate opportunities as fundamental in subculture formation, rather than simple rejection of middle-class values. According to this understanding, “Different types of opportunities and settings produce different subcultural adaptations” (Hagan, 1994: 34). Writing at a similar time, Walter Miller suggested that certain ‘focal concerns’ in the value-systems of lower classes in particular, such as machismo, nihilism and excitement constitute an explanation for their involvement in illegal activities (Voigt et al, 1994: 231, 248).

¹⁶¹ Organisational imperatives ensure that there is gatekeeping control over what is eventually broadcast (Shoemaker, 1997: 57). Over and above this, ‘internal gatekeepers’ mould stories according to their own personal viewpoints” (Shoemaker, 1997: 62. See also Gianetti, 1990: 317 cited in Fetveit, 2002: 34). What

particular manifestation leaves a gaping, pernicious hole in explanation that eclipses the oversights and exclusions in many of the other documentaries under examination here. Politically, the implications are serious. *Atlantis lost*, *A Bitter harvest* and *Very fast guys* all trod the thin explanatory line between seeing cause in poverty and the demonisation of the underclass. Yet all successfully managed to avoid any simplistic conclusions through thorough contextualisation, explanation and humanisation. Through a selectivity that avoids these crucial expositional mechanisms, *The day* fails where these other documentaries succeeded.

Implications of selectivity: The underclass and right realist sentiments

Critical criminology attempts to address the media's privileged exploration of 'street crime' over white-collar offences and crimes of the lower classes over those of the middle classes. In media portrayals generally, certain types of crime (violent, sexual) and certain offender demographics are favoured such that we see "the qualitatively pejorative labelling of certain individuals and groups using lurid and sensationalist language and images to create stereotypes of persons and urban myths about crime" (Brown, 2003: 30). As stereotypes are fuelled, right realist perspectives triumph. Right realists see the underclass as inherently *different* from the rest of society – whether because of biological, social or psychological factors (Hudson, 2000: 173). Consequently, the underclass is blamed for crime in a way that is conducive to politically conservative solutions. Rather than favouring rehabilitative or communitarian approaches to crime prevention, for example, the 'wicked' underclass is seen as being controllable only through punitive means (Matthews & Young, 1992: 6). In some ways, this is where the postmodern perspective on crime control converges with the conservative stance in producing stagnation rather than progression.

The selectivity that produces this effect in *The day* is not based on deliberate deception and, "Rather, it involves omission, differential selection, and preferential placement"

this means is that documentarists' claim to show 'truth' is eminently disputable (Kuehl, 1988: 104). The line between fiction film and documentary becomes blurred and the methods of fiction film are employed for dramatic effect and narrativity in documentary – reconstruction, tension-building, climaxes and the use of a central character, for example (Rosenthal, 1988: 13).

(Breed, 1997: 108). Selectivity in this instance, involves the exclusion of causal understanding in such a way that *The day* ends up having much in common with limited news discourses (Barak, 1994: 33, 34). The limitations of the documentary not only have implications for the image of the nation in terms of creating narrow perceptions that potentially exacerbate moral panics. They also work to maintain an ideological status quo about who the criminals are.

Fulfilling expectations

Without understanding the workings of the gang in sociological or structural terms, it is easy to create unquestioned stereotypes, which fuel the assumption of responsibility when a murder like that at Sizzlers takes place. From the very beginning of the documentary, viewers are encouraged to see the murders as being gang related – despite the fact that this was not remotely conclusive at the time the programme was made. Far from being treated as ‘developing news’, where facts are partial and outcomes incomplete, *The day* largely takes it as a *fait accompli* that events at Sizzlers constituted a gang massacre (Tuchman, 1997: 177). It is true that this conclusiveness may reflect the desire for narrative closure in television stories (Dahlgren, 1999: 193). More likely, however, is that it represents the way in which television offers constructions that support certain “social, material, and class interests” (White, 1992: 172, 173). In this case, ideological interests consist of a ‘bourgeois worldview’ that pins criminality on the underclass (Seiter, 1992: 41, 44).

Through a selectivity that focuses exclusively on gangs, middle-class expectations of offenders are met. The gang is a convenient, expected, ‘safe’ outlet for criminal blame. The pre-emptive blame-game works together with the under-explanation of gang logic to produce discriminatory characterisations of the underclass. This reflects badly on the nation in terms of *who* comprises our offenders (mad black gangsters) and *why* they offend (their wicked natures). Distortions of race and class become normalised through ‘common-sense’ expectation (Barak, 1994: 10). Critical criminologists are particularly scathing of these media distortions, where young people, black people, poor people and so on are demonised through assumption and description rather than interrogation and

explanation (Brown, 2003: 30). Yet it continues to be the case that, “Instead of reflecting [the] increasingly greater diversity, the media...provide homogenized, mainstream, and uniform versions of reality that tend to avoid fundamental controversy” (Barak, 1994: 10). A circular relationship between expectation and representation is created so that the avenues of exploration open to media institutions become limited (Vaughan, 1988: 36).

In presenting a series of questions about the unsolved murders, Anneliese Burgess assumes gang involvement by asking *what* the ‘gangland significance’ of the murders was, rather than questioning *whether* they had gangland significance.¹⁶² While the discussions around ‘Maruaan’ and his involvement in gang-related drug deals indicate that many unanswered questions remain, the acknowledgement of uncertainty does not resolve the issue of blaming the gangs. Indeed, no alternative explanations are on offer. Even as the concluding note of the programme announces that official blame for the murders has not taken shape, it still assumes that gangs were responsible,

As yet, the police have not officially blamed the Seapoint massacre on gangs operating in the area. But Sizzlers was in 28s territory. We don’t know if the owner paid protection money or whether he or anyone linked to the parlour was involved in drugs or any other illicit deals. But if he had angered a gang or was branded as a ‘vuil mpatha’, Sizzlers could have expected a visit from the gangs (video8).

The ‘gang’ story is part of the established cultural pattern of understanding crime. Gang activity functions as an easy, ‘slip-on’ explanation for a variety of social maladies and the manner in which *The day* does this conforms to a global trend where, “Unexpected or unusual events will be selected [for news], but they will be presented in terms of previously established stories or explanations. The better an event fits the established themes, the more likely it is to be selected” (Surette, 1997: 61). By fitting the Sizzlers massacre into a ‘safe’ explanatory box, it becomes “culturally meaningful and consonant with what is expected”, thus reinforcing the ideological status quo (Galtung & Ruge, 1997: 55).

¹⁶² She says, “The brutality of these murders has shocked and baffled policemen, journalists and family members. Why would the killers slit throats and then shoot people at point blank range? What would the significance of this be in a gangland killing?” (video8).

The viewer, some argue, craves the cultural reassurance offered by such approaches. Even stories about crime create a sense of security by being ensconced in the familiar. The familiar becomes the predictable and we feel we can control our lives through the routinisation that calculable representations create (Ericson, 1995: xvi). Perhaps, even, the “viewer feels cheated” if expectations are not met (Vaughan, 1988: 36). The so-called verisimilitude of the documentary takes on new meaning, creating a ‘mirror’ to the recognisable from our real world by showing only what we already know – or think we know (Cowie, 1999: 30).

The interview

Filmmakers often make use of interviewees whose opinions coincide with their own. It is primarily through the use of authoritative interviews in *The day* that the fulfilment of cultural expectation occurs. While a narrow choice of interviews usually has the effect of flattening argument and producing a “less dialectical sense of history”, in this case it has the added result of reproducing negative stereotypes (Nichols, 1988: 58).

The use of narrowly selected interviews becomes detrimental for the documentary in two ways – both of which are to be found in *The day*. Firstly, there is no distinction between the voice of the interviewees and the voice of the text (Nichols, 1988: 55). The interviewees discuss potential gang involvement in the Sizzlers murders and, from there, the documentary assumes it. Secondly, in *The day*, there is no notable distinction between the two primary interviewees’ hypotheses about who might be responsible for the murders. In this way, the interviewees are like “a series of imaginary puppets conforming to a line. Their recall becomes distinguishable more by differences in force of personality than by differences in perspective” (Nichols, 1988: 59).

The two expert interviewees in *The day* are Irvin Kinnes and Jeremy Veary. The former is labelled simply as a ‘gang expert’ and the latter as the former head of an investigative anti-gang task team. Their perspectives are almost indistinguishable from each other and the overall meaning of the documentary. From the very beginning of the programme, Veary launches into a discussion of gang ‘turf’ in a way that closes down meaning by

shutting out alternative explanations and focusing only on the one that both fulfils cultural expectations and demonises the underclass. Throughout the programme, he discusses Sizzlers as a prime example of a gangland killing, saying, for example,

Murders of this nature – maybe not of this kind of scale – but murders in general, gang-related murders, are normal. They’re normal. They’re not supposed to be normal. I’m not condoning it. But they are perfectly an average occurrence in some gang areas in the Northern suburbs – in part of this province (video8). The second major interviewee, Irvin Kinnes, echoes these sentiments almost exactly and makes similar assumptions about gang culpability in the process. “For me”, he remarks, “there isn’t anything that is new in this particular method, particularly in Cape Town. We’ve seen in the heart of the gang vigilante war, several people executed in this manner” (video8). Bouncing off these interviews, Anneliese Burgess’s contribution validates the position of the two interviewees and aligns the overall documentary message with this single, unchallenged perspective. She comments that, “In the day this hardly looks like gangland. But behind this suburban façade a multiple murder took place – a murder that, some say, carries the hallmark of a gangland killing that took place under the cover of darkness” (video8).

Supposed evidence for why the murders are gang-related is also on offer in the video – but it is nothing more than speculation. While Jeremy Veary says that he does not “want to speculate”, this is exactly what he does by suggesting that the manner in which the men were killed specifically signifies gang involvement (video8). Once again, Irvin Kinnes echoes this.¹⁶³ An additional source, a former policeman also speculates about gang involvement, pinning the Sizzlers murders on gang activity because of “the actual extortion racketeering that’s going on in this province” (video8). It is not the suggestion of gang involvement that ensures the ideological function of this documentary, but the *exclusive* suggestion of gang involvement. In this way, it constitutes “one definition of politics and excludes, represses, or neutralizes other definitions” (Hall, 1988: 359). The status quo is reinforced through this fulfilment of cultural expectations and it is the

¹⁶³ He intimates that the murders are solvable by looking at the ‘methodology’ of killing that was employed. Ultimately, he concludes that, “the pattern would seem to suggest that it follows the pattern of earlier killings in Cape Town” (video8). The killings to which he refers were gangland killings.

interviews that ensure that any potential voice of the documentary vanishes - and the range of possibilities for meaning with it (Nichols, 1988: 56).

Sensationalism

If the documentary tradition of using interview material is harnessed to ill effect in *The day*, so is the documentary tradition of sensationalism. As with the issue of spectacle, discussed in *It's nice to have a friend*, sensationalism serves as a substitute for meaningful content and analysis while also eliciting emotional reactions that are conducive to moral panics. In *The day*, sensationalism is evident both through the selection of story and through its telling.¹⁶⁴ In terms of the former, *The day* conforms to a trend where documentary's subject matter becomes more melodramatic in the struggle to prevail in an increasingly competitive media environment. The lure of other genres, including documentary hybrids like docusoaps and docuglitz, and the pace of commercial competition means that "Documentaries became more slap-dash and more sensational than they ever were in the past in order to survive" (Winston, 2000: 56).

The exploitation of sex and violence is a strong feature of both *The day* and of the documentary trend of sensationalism, where stories that have this kind of potential, are given priority (Fattah, 1997: 15). At points in the video, sex and violence are forced together in the production of an overload of dramatic effect. While the murders were not evidently connected to the fact that Sizzlers was a gay massage parlour, the two are linked where possible to create an extravaganza of sensationalism. For example, Anneliese Burgess says,

This is Sizzlers, a gay massage parlour at 7 Graham Street in Seapoint. It was famous for its collection of young men who were for sale for sex. But when police arrived here in the early hours of Monday morning a week ago, they found a bloodbath. Seven sex workers, a client and a brothel owner were dead. Their throats had been slit and they had been shot execution style (video8).

¹⁶⁴ From the outset, the programme confirms the notion that "Mundane, average or typical crimes do not make headlines and are not, by any account, big news. What makes the news are the atypical, the abnormal, and the extraordinary" (Fattah, 1997: 14). Stories about random, unpredictable violence cause media hysteria as their dramatic value is mobilised to boost audience ratings (Sacco, 1995: 150). Psychotic serial killers or 'folk monsters' are a particularly popular reservoir for sensationalist stories, despite the fact that these types of offenders are extremely rare in reality (Brown, 2003: 42).

The sexual orientation of the victims and the sordid workings of Sizzlers adds nothing in the video to the investigation of who was responsible for the killings – especially considering the documentary’s limited focus on gang culpability. Yet it receives a significant amount of attention that moves beyond contextualisation and into the realm of the spectacular. Abe Bush, a young masseur who used to work at Sizzlers, is interviewed – not in terms of any insights he could offer about the murders or the victims, but simply as a way of exploring the lewd underworld of gay prostitution. He says, “Sizzlers was known for young guys, you know, for good-looking young guys. And, you know, I was very young and, you know, very good-looking. And that’s what they want” (video8). Five clients a day, he tells us, is the average that employees at Sizzlers were expected to handle and,

You sometimes had to wait for clients to arrive or maybe the clients didn’t want you because they’ve already had you and they just want to try somebody else or, you know, have to see what the other people like (video8).

He later adds that most of the clients were married men and that they would all watch ‘gay movies’ together (video8). While the visuals accompanying this are perhaps meant to suggest a sense of loss by showing photographs of Abe Bush in happier, carefree days, the overwhelming emphasis is on the inner working of Sizzlers in a manner that slots in well with global documentary sensationalism focusing on sex.

Indeed, most telling, perhaps, is an interview with Bryan Jenkins, cousin of one of the victims. In a description that is completely irrelevant to the investigative mission of the programme, he explains the hiring policy at Sizzlers,

Well I know about interviews, you have to...you gotta strip for the owners. You gotta strip totally naked for them so they can see if you’re well endowed enough, I suppose and how your muscular features are and everything, before you do get the job (video8).

Where sex is not the focus, it is often violence that is, supporting the notion that both “Violence as spectacle and violence as normal news are everyday frames through which we enact culture” (Brown, 2003: 123). While reporting on violent crime may be necessary, the manner in which it is done in *The day* illustrates how the preoccupation with gruesome details serves a melodrama potentially useful to media organisations in the

way that it 'hooks' viewers. Indeed, this logic depends on the fact that "while some audience members may view crime news as an important sources of information about the 'facts' of crime, others may be caught up in the dramatic and sometimes lurid nature of events reported" (Fattah, 1997: 13).

The quaint house with the white picket fence where Sizzlers was based is offset in its suburban tranquillity by a shot of part of the house as two people carry a stretcher (presumably with a dead body on it) out of the front door. Inside the house, a close-up shot of a pair of shoes on the floor suggests normality. Yet this is powerfully disturbed by the pool of blood behind it (video8). Verbally, it is the head of the Gay and Lesbian alliance who offers superfluously violent imagery. He says, for example, "These people were really slaughtered, you know, totally from ear to ear. I checked small things...some of the guys still was lying with open eyes" (video8). He describes the way in which the young men were tied up in a 'praying position' and how they tried to extricate themselves from the tape that bound them, undoubtedly consumed by fear, "especially the guys that had to witness that were still alive had to witness to see that number 1, number 2, number 3, number 4 got executed" (video8). He delves into the horrifying details of a 'chase' that ensued as the attackers tried to get at one of the men hiding behind a bed, concluding that, "you don't even kill animals like this at all" (video8).

The privileging of lewd spectacles of violence and sex over causal analysis has important implications – and these are linked to the short sighted, stereotyped assumption of gang involvement. Not only does it become easier to blame gangs in a context of sensationalism, but the *manner* in which gangs are depicted in *The day* – without logic, beyond understanding, capable of unimaginable violence – becomes a typical facet of the media's mercenary quest for audience share.

The victim

Both *A Bitter harvest* and *Atlantis lost* included snippets of the victim that were neither empowering nor explanatory. In so doing, these two programmes sidestepped many of the progressive developments in critical criminology where victimology provides insights

into the nature and meaning of victimisation. Instead, voyeuristic spectacle into the pain of others prevailed as a means of securing viewer interest. *The day* may be different in the degree to which it does this, but it nonetheless runs along parallel lines. The voyeuristic lure of violence and sex is extended to include the trauma of those left behind. In doing so, the media exerts a particular power, which “derives from their ability to elicit emotions” (Johnson, 1995: 17).

The secondary victims in *The day* (the primary victims are, of course, dead) consist of the families of those killed at Sizzlers, and, rather than offering any useful insights into the men or the motives, they are trotted out as the same tired ‘human interest’ litany that characterises so many documentaries. Alison Fleischman says, “I keep asking what Travis...Travis must have been terrified. Terrified. And that’s what’s worrying me. He didn’t go out peacefully. He went out a frightened little boy” (video8). Although the depth of her anguish seems limitless, its function in the documentary *is* indeed limited. It fulfils the exclusive role of procuring empathy from viewers who are drawn in by its emotiveness (Cowie, 1999: 31). Evocatively, Fleischman later adds,

I’m waking up at night and I can see their throats and I can see them so clearly. I mean you wake up and you can see this face and then I gotta go and deal with Travis – all that blood all over his face. How could they try and help themselves when they were taped, gagged, made to lie on the floor? (video8).

At one point in the video, her husband, Peter Fleischman, adds helplessly and grimly, “I think it was pretty gruesome” (video8).

As part of this narrow kind of ‘victimology’, we see the funeral of one of the young men. A middle-aged woman cries and lifts a tissue to her nose. Another woman dabs a tissue to her eyes. At the end of the scene, a sense of finality is created as we see a shot of the mourners taken from between some of the gravestones (video8). Similarly, viewers are party to the trauma of secondary victims as they mourn the death of Sizzlers owner Aubrey Otgaan in a church in Cape Town. Viewers’ heartstrings are undoubtedly tugged by the photograph of Otgaan with his two Maltese poodles and its juxtaposition with the sad scene in the church. Abe Bush is particularly prominent as he tearfully rests his head on a woman’s shoulder (probably his mother) and she strokes it gently. This certainly is

evidence for the way in which “Personalization is part of the entertainment formula, especially in broadcast media” (Ericson et al, 1995: 10). One of the problems with this approach, however, is that the process of personalisation is often also one of simplification (Ericson et al, 1995: 10). In turn, this simplification often relies on dramatising the victims to produce a limited discourse. Not only is this detrimental to a coherent and illuminating victimology, but also to a complex, nuanced, positive image of the nation. A sense of helplessness and disillusionment prevails, where empowerment through victimhood could be mobilised.

III. THE LOCAL

Seedy Seapoint

In formulating and shaping the dialectic between the local and the global, the media plays a pivotal role, revealing “the tensions between the macro and micro levels of socio-economic structures, cultures, and development dynamics” (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 178). The manner in which local culture is presented in *The day* articulates clearly with a global condition characterised by nostalgia for local community and prompted by a pervasive ontological insecurity in a contemporary environment of competing identities and fragmentation. In establishing this particular local-global nexus, another global trend is apparent. This time in the realm of documentary, it is that of observational film.¹⁶⁵

Although *The day* could not be described in its entirety as an observational undertaking, the manner in which much of Seapoint is captured certainly suggests a leaning towards this technique in parts of the video. Discussions of gang activity in Seapoint are nestled in lurid images of sleazy nightlife activities, which we ‘observe’ as they are happening. At the beginning of the video, as we are introduced to Seapoint, we see a blurred view of a street at night with the steamy haze. The outlines of two people, who could be prostitutes, stand on the pavement with a blue neon light behind them (video8). More explicitly

¹⁶⁵ The fly-on-the-wall approach, pioneered in the 1950s and 1960s, and made possible through technological innovation, added an air of authenticity to documentary production. Through supposed non-intervention, and strict observation, the video product theoretically had a closer link to its referent (Winston, 2000: 22). See also the section on documentary in Chapter Two.

observational is the ‘tour’ of Seapoint offered to the viewer as Abrham Smith, former policeman and security expert, drives through the streets, pointing out all the ‘bad elements’. Images of Smith in the car, talking, are intercut with images through the windscreen of the street outside. Seedy looking establishments pit the roadside and prostitutes walk along the pavement (video8). Viewers are even treated to the immediacy of a drug deal on their tour through the streets of Seapoint with Smith.¹⁶⁶

Throughout *The day*, Smith has only negative things to say about Seapoint. In supplementing and shaping the observational conclusions of the video, he says, for example,

This area is actually at the moment in a state of anarchy – total anarchy. It’s gone to waste. The criminals are in charge. Seapoint has become a springboard for organised crime. I think as we progress through the night, the footage will speak for itself and then one can actually exploit and see what actually happens in the underworld on this side of Cape Town. On the left we have two prostitutes. Two locals. A lot of these women are under restraint and controlled by local gang groups and pimps and, of course, very strong street to street block (video8).

In presenting the programme from Seapoint, Anneliese Burgess echoes Smith entirely, asking “But what’s going on in Seapoint?” (video8). It is as if topsy-turvy madness prevails, where the world has turned upside-down, where traditional values have been displaced, where disorder reigns and, notably, where local communities are under siege. She later adds that Seapoint has become known as Manenberg by the sea (video8). The verbal information about the spiralling decay of Seapoint works well with the seedy images offered by observation to form a composite impression of decline. The link to a global insecurity, obsessed with the erosion of healthy, community-oriented identity, is clear. Consequently, the local level of Seapoint in the video buttresses a global context

¹⁶⁶ The following exchange takes place, capturing the rough reality of ‘actuality’, the presence of which shows how observational techniques rely on unpolished footage to convey a gritty sense of the real (Nichols, 1988: 52).

Abrham Smith: What you got?

Drug dealer: What you want?...[inaudible].

Abrham Smith: Just go, just go – drive fast, drive fast. That’s how they rob you. They’ll jump in here and they’ll knife you.

Accompanying this, we see a blurred, indistinct shot, through a car window, of a man approaching the car. The unpolished shot, filmed from the back seat of the car, becomes dark as it is slightly obscured by the front seat of the car. Barely visible is a man holding onto the passenger window and he runs with the car for a way, as the car drives off (video8).

where “metaphors of uncertainty, contingency and ‘chaos’ replace those of order, stability and systemacity” (Barker, 1999: 40, 41).

In order to understand the evolving manifestations of either the global or the local, the two need to be examined as part of the same contemporary phenomenon (Braman, 1996: 21). In the case of *The day*, the level of global trends and theories only attains meaning from its expression in the local arena of Seapoint. Most notably, theorisations about decline and nostalgia are legitimated through the representation of one of South Africa’s localities. From this ‘evidence’, the notion that we are in a second phase of globalisation, characterised by extreme wistfulness for past senses of community, is legitimated on the television screen (Featherstone, 1993). The implication for the nation is not particularly positive – nostalgia is inevitably attached to a belief in a better past. The present is seen as criminal, degenerate, corrupt and disintegrating. Additionally, the notion of decline – also seen in *Architecture of fear* – works together with an increasingly sensationalistic tradition in documentary of producing lurid drama that elides complexity, works on emotion and ultimately relies on negativity.

Gangs in the Cape I: description sans explanation

As part of the culpability thesis developed by the documentary, local gangs in the Western Cape are discussed in some detail. Although these discussions verge on the sociological in some parts, they are nonetheless all characterised by an absence of significant explanation, supporting the assertion that most documentary excludes “any meaningful analysis of cause” (Winston, 1988b: 31). Only the immediate reasons for gang violence are explored, manifesting themselves as motivations rather than causes. The result is that the documentary shows neither the deeper causes of gang formation nor the inner workings of the gangs. This section focuses particularly on the *descriptions* of the local gangs produced by *The day*, to the exclusion of *explanation*. It illustrates how local material fortifies the global trend of selectivity, where discussions of gang subcultures are often incomplete.

At various points in the video, both Anneliese Burgess and Jeremy Veary provide converging testimony about the nature of gang activity in Cape Town and specifically Seapoint. We are told that the gangsters moved from the Cape Flats to the inner city in the 1990s and that Seapoint is controlled by the 26 and 28 gangs, with the 28s sometimes living in backpackers hostels and hotels. Jeremy Veary explains how both gangs are involved in prostitution and dealing in cocaine. The 28s, he says, also specifically cater for the market in homosexual prostitution, although “they hate the word gay and they hate to be referred to as homosexual in some cases” (video8). Nigerian drug lords supply the gangs with cocaine, we are told, but do not have the strength to control the entire drug operations in the area. Consequently, they have been forced to recognise the authority of the gangs. Territorial claims are explained in detail by Jeremy Veary, who points out 26s and 28s areas of control, also referring to other gangs like the Americans, HLS and the Lions (video8). Anneliese Burgess echoes this by saying, “Different gangs control different turf. Whoever controls the land, picks the fruit of the underworld. To the gangs, everything in that area belongs to them. In gang logic, any business operating in their turf does so on gang terms” (video8). The result of gang claims to ‘turf’, Jeremy Veary tells us, is that business – legitimate or otherwise – may only be conducted in certain areas with gang sanction (video8). Violence is the consequence of non-adherence to gangland territorialism. Veary explains further:

If I was a 28, for example, if I reason the way they reason, I needed to make an example of a ‘vuil mpatha’, who’s operating a business within my land as a 28, to which he has no right to do. He’s earning an income with money that is rightfully mine as a 28. I need to send a message to everybody that this should not be done again. And the way I send this message is through slaughter. I will slaughter them if I should reason in those terms (video8).

He underlines this sentiment again later in the video.¹⁶⁷

While the explanation here may seem fairly comprehensive in terms of laying out gang logic, it is one that should rather be seen as functioning *without* logic. Although Veary

¹⁶⁷ He says, “I don’t want to say that this is the case here, but the slaughtering would be about part of, in some cases, 28 ritual, but under particular circumstances – when you want to make a point – a statement about something. You see, 28s don’t shoot at random. They don’t just kill randomly, they kill in a particular way to project a certain message. Not to you, who don’t understand it, but to the camp, whoever they want that message to go out to” (video8).

acknowledges that gang reasoning allows these ‘slaughters’ to take place, there is no further explanation of how or why such reasoning takes place. The *description* of why does not tend to an *explanation* of why. These limitations may be due to *The day’s* investigative nature, focusing on the immediacy of events in the quest for answers, without the time or space to concentrate on depth. Yet it is ironic that the programme nonetheless manages to find sufficient airtime for superfluous information that tends to project elements of sexual and violent sensationalism.

Particularly damning for the use of selective explanations is the inclusion of prior examples of gang massacres in the footage, where archive footage “produces an expositional system which is able to achieve a wide range of affective as well as cognitive effects” (Corner, 1995: 100). Here selectivity converges with bloody images that firstly demonise gangs as they perpetuate stereotypes. Secondly, they exploit the trend in sensationalism and thirdly they ‘prove irrefutably’ that the only violence extreme enough to explain the Sizzlers massacre would emanate from gang activity. Anneliese Burgess tells us,

This is a 28 massacre – a bloodbath that is similar to what happened in Sizzlers just over a week ago. In this massacre at Eersterivier two years ago, three people were mowed down. Police subsequently blamed the 28s for the bloodbath (video8).

Viewers see a kitchen in disarray and the crumpled body of a woman lying on the floor in a pool of blood. A close-up of the back of the woman’s head reveals that she is wearing blue curlers, some of which are stained red with blood. Another dead body lies on the lounge floor with blood on the back and under the head. We see the lifeless forearm of another of the victims, before a closer shot of the body in the lounge is offered, ensuring that we note the blood on the back and the head. Finally, a body lying crumpled in the garden is shown. A large blood-stain mottles the chest. The camera zooms in closer (video8).

In a second example, reinforcing the message of the first, Anneliese Burgess adds,

Massacres like these have happened before in Cape Town and are not new in the Western Cape. For example, this is a 1998 execution of 6 suspected drug dealers in a house in Woodstock, Cape Town. One of the victims was gang leader

Pinocchio. Four men entered his house late at night and shot them at point blank range (video8). More dead bodies and blood punctuate this story. Dead men lie on the floor. A close-up of a woman's hand shows it covered in blood. Blood spatters on the wall. Another body on the floor, peak cap covering his face as he lies dead in a pool of blood. Another body (video8).

These images avoid discussing gang complexity by replacing analysis with sensation. While undoubtedly functioning as an audience magnet, the tandem features of selectivity and sensationalism ensure that gang members will be understood *only* as inexplicable monsters characterised by illogical brutality. While their brutality is clearly a disturbing aspect of gang subculture, it is not the exclusive or presiding characteristic. Nor does brutality explain the broader origins, growth and pressures that lead to gang formation. It certainly seems that the limited scope with which gangs are explained in *The day* is proof that stereotyping of both place and people "is one of the more vicious form of bloodletting within the media" (Harvey, 1993: 27). In this way, the depiction of local gangs links up seamlessly with global media trends to the detriment of representing local culture.

Not only does local culture become both frightening and hopeless, it also becomes unavoidably, inextricably linked to gang activity. Indeed, while diversity in the arena of the local is fundamental to the broadcaster's mandate, it is not shown at all in *The day*. The singular explanation of gang culpability, reinforced by the sheer number of images and discussions about gangs, falls in line with a pejorative global trend where expectation is fulfilled by blaming disempowered members of society for crime. It seems that *The day* was made without realising that "we should seek from television *a diversity of representations*, which, in turn, suggests the need to produce 'transgressive' programmes which offer competing ways of looking at the world" (Barker, 1999: 155).

Gangs in the Cape II: the potential link to local culture

The day could have become a far more productive documentary in terms of creating an understanding on which to build a national identity, by linking to a subtext of subcultural

theory and left realism's structure in a quest to further explanation. Had the documentary persisted in blaming gangs exclusively in this unsolved massacre, it could nonetheless have mitigated the negative impact through examining at least some elements of complexity to do with gang formation. These useful components could have replaced some of the more baseless forays into sensationalism and victim voyeurism.

Most fundamental in linking up to the broad sociological positivist preoccupation with cause, would be a historical contextualisation of gang formation in South Africa and the Western Cape. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the formation of the numbers gangs (the 28s, 27s and 26s) can be traced to the mining compounds and to one man in particular – Nongoloza Mathebula (Human Rights Watch, 1994: 43). Yet the acceleration of gang formation in the Western Cape had little to do with mining culture and much to do with apartheid. The disintegration of the family as a direct result of apartheid forced removals is a factor that has garnered much attention in sociological analyses of gang formation in South Africa. Forced removals from District Six, Diep River, Claremont, Constantia and other areas left a lasting impact on the social coherence of communities (Kinnes, 1995: 5). As extended families disintegrated, alternative forms of identification developed, often in the form of 'street brotherhoods' (Simpson, 2001: 119). Not only does this kind of historical contextualisation humanise gang members through the creation of understanding, but it also opens the way for an insightful subcultural examination, which would then link to the global theories of gang subculture discussed above.

Structural inequality, and the left realist perspective that supports its examination, have been discussed in detail in *Atlantis lost*. It is another global arena of analysis that could have usefully been invoked through the local gangs in *The day* as a means of creating understanding and challenging one-dimensional stereotypes. Indeed, the formation of gangs as being facilitated by economic inequality, is integral to understanding what has driven and sustained their operations. Here, the left realist analysis goes further than subcultural examinations by focusing specifically on inescapable macro-issues. In terms of these macro-issues, history again plays a vital role. In District Six during World War Two, for example, young men with nothing to do and 'empty stomachs', "started

hustling, picking up this and that from shops, leaning on a few people for cash or favours” (Pinnock, 1984: 24). The prevalence of structurally-induced poverty and unemployment in areas of gang dominance is alluded to in many academic analyses which focus on how, particularly on the Cape Flats, “many people turned to crime as a means of survival and hence the formation of street gangs” (Kinnes, 1995: 5). The sale of drugs, alcohol, and stolen goods all form part of the way in which gangs make a living in an environment that is not conducive to economic advancement.

The exclusion of a well-theorised complexity in the examination of gangs in *The day* is detrimental for the image of the local that is produced. Perhaps it is not easy to convey complex analyses on television – yet some of the other documentaries under examination do it extremely well. In the absence of any deeper analysis, sensationalism is facilitated through the demonisation of gangs in one-dimensional descriptions and bloody images. Gangs are never seen as logical, only as brutal. This kind of limited characterisation dramatically reduces the possibility of constructing a positive national identity from a diversity of local understandings. Furthermore, in the exclusive culpability laid on gangs in the video, as seen here through the sheer extent of discussions about local gangs, any national identity that is created is one that is middle-class, exclusionary, focused on convenient scapegoats for crime – regardless of the actual truth. At best it is partial and discriminatory. Finally, the expression of the local in *The day* is not only confined to local gang culture, but also includes place. While showing Seapoint certainly contributes to the depiction of variety of localities in documentary, it is a decidedly negative portrayal. Seapoint is seen as ravaged and in decline, linking up to global feelings of insecurity.

IV. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL CULTURE

There is no blatant sense of national culture that is vociferously advocated in *The day*. Instead, culture inheres insidiously in the exclusions and inclusions on which normative morality is based. The creation of a normative morality in *The day* is notably powerful, and is produced by the horror and sensationalism of the violent details in the

programme.¹⁶⁸ In aligning themselves with this perspective, viewers reject gangs and violence, indirectly support the rule of law and perpetuate mainstream perspectives on crime and violence. The way in which this is encouraged in *The day* is testimony to how “the final editing process is carried out in such a manner as to fit the expectations of the general public’s discourse as well as those of advertisers, politicians, lobbying groups and social movements” (Bar-Haim, 1996: 145).

Viewers are bound to an accepted ‘cultural grammar’ (Colby, 1975 cited in Bird & Dardenne, 1997: 341) through accepted formats and styles. The narrative is the most self-evident of these, crafted by ‘cultural rhetoricians’ who promote some perspectives over others (Dahlgren, 1999: 194). The narrative ensures that both story structure and closure reinforce normative values and in *The day*, this means that middle-class demonisation of the underclass prevails. Indeed, “the idea that the news appeals to deep and subconscious cultural patterns of fear and fantasy is one which relates directly to its organisation along narrative principles” (Corner, 1995: 57). Additionally, the inclusion of personal, dramatised narratives within the broader narrative structure enhances the assertion of cultural norms. The often extreme perversity that personal narratives show creates an intense proclamation of ‘normality’ that would be absent from general discussions on crime (Sparks, 2000: 132).

If narrative is one way of expressing normative morality in news and documentary, the ‘folklore tradition’ is another (Barak, 1994: 22). This feature of Western culture has left an enduring stamp on many media products and ensures that simplified dichotomies, rather than ambiguity and nuance, predominate in the preferred meanings we are offered. In a sense we are “trapped, seemingly forever, in morality plays of ‘good’ versus ‘evil’” (Barak, 1994: 22).

¹⁶⁸ The project of normative morality is generally positivistic, dependent on a certain notion of culture, values and society that is taken for granted (Voigt et al, 1994: 222). In *Atlantis lost*, it was the acceptance of contemporary definitions of child abuse. Here, it is the rejection of gang-based violence as being beyond reason. While some do not believe that depictions of violence can reinforce normative morality (the ruling class surely has more sophisticated ways to reinforce dominant values?), many others would beg to differ (Moss, 1999: 163).

Branding the criminal underclass simplistically in terms of villain/hero dichotomies is evidence of how crime news becomes metaphoric for “relationships of similarity/otherness and inclusion/exclusion, most commonly” (Brown, 2003: 45). Through a reliance on these unsophisticated characterisations, the reality of crime becomes dangerously distorted - remoulded by the media in terms of “difference and otherness” (Brown, 2003: 68).¹⁶⁹

In *The day*, the dichotomy between normal and abnormal, understandable and perverse, reasonable and irrational is suggested throughout. At some points, it is illuminated by interviewees who point out the way in which our rationality is distinctly, entirely, irreconcilably different from that of the gangsters. Jeremy Veary suggests that gang violence is beyond reasoning in the conventional sense, as does Irvin Kinnes, who says that only to the killers can it “make perfect sense”. The killers are consequently inherently different. We hear Veary noting that, “In that type of reasoning, in their frame of reference, it’s normal” (video8). While it might be productive to ‘other’ violence in documentaries, *The day* achieves this in a disadvantageous manner by simultaneously ‘othering’ the gangsters who perpetrate the violence. They are seen as beyond redemption in a manner that denies their complexity as people and as part of an established subculture. It is ultimately exclusionary. This is harmful to an inclusive, reconciliatory notion of national culture and also offers no solutions on which nation-building could be based. Thirdly, it has political implications, which are also damaging to the project of national identity.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ While some believe that binaries of inclusion and exclusion are not a defining feature of culture (Tomlinson, 1999: 68), many more believe that it is. Manuel Castells believes that, while we all may have many identities, a primary identity predominates and this identity is based on difference (Castells, 1997: 7). Similarly, Stuart Hall powerfully maintains that, “Every identity is an exclusion. Unless we are going to identify ourselves as nothing but members of the human race, every other identification leaves something out. To leave something out is an act of power” (Hall, 1997: 14).

¹⁷⁰ Ultimately, “It [thereby] legitimates the prevailing structure of interests, while scrupulously observing ‘balance between the parties’” (Hall, 1988: 359). In addition, the lack of understanding that ‘othering’ promotes is conducive to law and order arguments that foster increased punitiveness as the solution to crime, rather than ameliorative or rehabilitative strategies (Ericson, 1995: xi).

V. USURPING THE NATION-STATE

In *The day*, Abraham Smith says, “There’s no visibility of policing in this area” (video8). This is an indictment of the police, and consequently the nation-state’s ability to maintain law and order. It is one of the few sites in which a reference to the nation-state can be found. While we see police tape and policemen outside Sizzlers following the massacre, there is no comment on what the police are doing, how their investigation is proceeding, whether they have found any leads and what future preventive strategies will be utilised.

In some ways, it appears that the investigative documentary project has usurped the nation-state in *The day*. Both the media and the police react in similar ways to criminal events, “concentrating their resources on investigating the facts for later presentation to a specific audience” (Surette, 1997: 21). *The day* seems to take this phenomenon to the extreme, entirely replacing any assessment of state involvement. Instead of acknowledging police investigation, the documentary is entirely preoccupied with its own. Anneliese Burgess says, for example, “Tonight a *Special Assignment* team will attempt to bring you answers. Who committed these murders? Why were innocent young boys killed and what happened that night?” (video8). Later, she adds a comment about the effectiveness of the *Special Assignment* investigation, highlighting the stark omission of any assessment of the state in this regard, “It took a *Special Assignment* team only a few hours to trace someone who lived in the area and said they’d seen the killers” (video8). The experts in the documentary are all *Special Assignment*’s ‘own’. The complete absence of police comment is remarkable.

It is certainly true that “The police role as the dominant gatekeeper means that crime news is often police news and that the advancement of a police perspective on crime and its solution is advocated” (Sacco, 1995: 146). While this kind of approach should undoubtedly be avoided, by sidelining officialdom entirely, *The day* takes its analysis to the other extreme. This is simply another way in which the documentary falls short of a meaningful exposition. Admittedly, the exclusion of the nation-state also means that a

criticism of the nation-state is avoided. Nonetheless, an acknowledgement of state structures – whether seen in positive or negative light – at least sanctions their existence.

VI. IN MITIGATION?

The *Special Assignment* team produced this documentary in an extremely short space of time. Undoubtedly, institutional time pressures shaped the nature of the outcome far more than in conventional documentaries. It was never likely that *The day* could be comparable to *Very fast guys* or *The cage unlocked*, with the painstaking, time-consuming research that informed these two remarkable projects. Indeed, the working environment is one of the fundamental forces that shapes the “decisions made by individual journalists” (Berkowitz, 1997: 53). In *The day*, this environment was almost certainly characterised by time pressures and production under these circumstances “can only be done at the expense of originality” (Vaughan, 1988: 40).

4. MURDER MOST FOUL IN *STRONG MEDICINE*

I. SYNOPSIS

This extremely controversial and provocative *Special Assignment* programme examines the selling of body parts in South Africa. The documentary begins by taking the viewer to Limpopo Province, where it examines some of the historical roots of using body parts for 'muti'. According to the video, there is clearly a conflict between modernity and the beliefs of many of the people, who still claim that human parts have special powers. From there, the programme travels to Johannesburg and the markets in the centre of town where, the video claims, tradition has been modified and corrupted to include the selling of body parts for profit. Financial gain has become intertwined with 'tradition'. Later in the programme, suppliers from hospitals and mortuaries are captured on a 'spy video' plying their trade. Various interviews pepper this programme. On the one hand, those who have been intimately involved in this trade are interviewed: a mother whose small child was murdered and cut up for 'muti'; a young man who was attacked and had his genitals mutilated for 'muti'; the father of a woman whose grave was dug up and her breasts, intestines and other body parts removed. On the other hand, a prosecutor and 'experts' are interviewed as they try to get to the root of this trade.

II. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

Labelling, conflict criminology and deconstruction

In a very basic way, the video exposes the constructedness of western criminological definition by looking at how human sacrifice was natural and part of the cosmological world of 'traditional Africa'. But it sidesteps any further analysis by telling viewers its focus is on the *selling* of parts, which is strongly linked to modernity, rather than the *possession*, which has more in common with the past and complicates positivistic, western criminal definition. Furthermore, in some parts of the video, deconstruction is

overshadowed by the demonisation of body part harvesters, which implicitly accepts their criminalisation by western justice. While the process of criminalisation is clearly not a focus in the video, and there may not have been space for an extensive analysis of the subject, by sidestepping the issue, there is a lack of engagement with the juncture between western modernity and African tradition¹⁷¹ – and this has a decidedly negative impact on the way that the video grapples with the issue of national culture. It is also the uncertainty that impacts negatively on the image of national culture. On one hand, deconstructive directions *are* hinted at.¹⁷² On the other, the video avoids, rather than confronts this issue. The result is a multiaccentuality that eschews cultural consensus in a manner that is confusing for the creation of a unified national identity.

Rather than vacillating between two poorly developed perspectives, one which accepts western criminal definition and the other that challenges it, the documentary could have

¹⁷¹ These terms are used for ease of explanation. It is acknowledged that neither term denotes a self-contained reality defined by unified, static meaning.

¹⁷² To some degree *Strong medicine* does engage with the deconstruction of criminal definition, however implicit or understated this may be. Instead of accepting the criminalisation of possessing body parts as a given, in parts of the documentary, it is suggested that this possession is part of a dignified historical legacy where modernity's criminality was not an issue. The voice-over says, for example, "Ancient beliefs hold that hands, feet, or any other human part can be used in the making of powerful medicines. Much more powerful than mixtures containing animals or plants" (video9). The description of historical context is drawn into the present as the voice-over observes, "Whichever parts are used in the medicine will be determined by the client's needs and the ancestors' instructions to the healer. Purists say the parts must be freshly obtained and imbued with the life force of the victim. Parts should be harvested while the victim is screaming. This awakens the ancestors and ensures their presence at the healing" (video9). The explanation also extends beyond the use of body parts to include a historicised description of human sacrifice, "Sacred Lake Fundutsi (?) – the site of an important annual ritual in times gone by. Tribal elders would select a virgin who would sacrifice herself to the ancestors. For her family, her selection would be a great honour. They'd hold her down while the chief and Inyanga cut her in prescribed ways. Her flesh mixed with medicinal plants would make a powerful potion. They'd sprinkle it around the village to strengthen the leaders. The virgin's screams would awaken the ancestors, call on their blessing. Her life force – selflessly offered - would protect the village from harm. Ritual sacrifice took place all over what used to be rural Venda" (video9).

The danger of this kind of description is, of course, that it can essentialise culture by fixing it in an unchanging past. Deconstruction/labelling can potentially exacerbate this: by unmasking the process of criminalisation, it could claim to have found an authentic cultural reality, existing in a timeless limbo before being subjected to western criminological distortion. As will be discussed in the section on national culture, *Strong medicine* skilfully manages to avoid this pitfall. Unfortunately, however, it also avoids using deconstruction in its most positive guise. While the above examples naturalise the use of human body parts and consequently expose the western criminological construct that prohibits their use, they do not extend far enough. The issue of modern criminal definition in a South African context is underplayed and even obfuscated through a self-professed focus on the phenomenon of selling body parts, which offers less of a grey area in terms of culture and criminalisation.

made good use of a criminological tradition that confronts the question of how certain actions become defined as criminal (Voigt et al, 1994: 252). Crime has no ontological reality and instead,

Crime is culturally defined. An act cannot be regarded as criminal or non-criminal in the abstract but only with reference to a specific culture. Since crime is culturally defined, it changes with cultural evolution and varies significantly in time and space (Fattah, 1997: 54).

Moral beliefs about what is 'normal', 'acceptable' and 'deviant' change as societies change (Lianos with Douglas, 2000: 263; Hogg, 1998: 145). In the discussion on *Atlantis lost*, this was evident with regard to child abuse. Here too, it is evident that some kind of evolution in belief is significant in the criminalisation of body part harvesting. As the practice evolves (some say is distorted), so does the definition of the practice.

The earliest theoretical developments questioning criminal definition are encapsulated in labelling theory. It looks at the constructedness of criminal definition, suggesting that behaviour is only deviant when it is defined as such through legal classification (Voigt et al, 1994: 251, 254; Young, 1998: 272; Belknap, 1996: 45; Henry & Einstadter, 1998: 291). Labelling theory came under fire in the 1960s and 1970s as conflict theorists criticised it for its focus on the individual. Instead, they applied the logic of labelling to macro-sociological examinations, with structural implications (Melossi, 1998: 338; Hagan, 1994: 48).

While there are many variations in conflict theory and radical approaches to criminal definition, fundamental for the purposes of *Strong medicine* would have been a recognition of its most basic precepts. Interrogating the origins of western criminal definition in the criminalisation of the harvesting of body parts would have provided a sound basis on which to really develop an understanding of national culture, instead of badly fudging the issue by claiming to focus on the ideologically simpler examination of the *selling* of body parts. Postmodern deconstruction is another avenue offering similar analysis in terms of criminal definition, which could have been used to good effect in

Strong medicine.¹⁷³ Without these approaches, an elite, western definition of crime is accepted unquestioningly in a context where cultural diversity should be acknowledged as a means of fostering the broadcaster's 'unity in diversity' approach. This is not to suggest that there is a dichotomy between unchanging 'tradition' and modernity, but rather that in the evolution of culture, there are inevitable junctures, conflicts and negotiations between varying world views, which should be confronted, rather than swept under the carpet. This is undoubtedly indicated by the demand for body parts, despite its prohibition in law.

The normative prescription of moral boundaries that the acceptance of western definition offers, has the effect of delimiting culture on the most basic level. The existence of this phenomenon in *Strong medicine* is simply an indication of a global trend where the media adopts a role as "a primary cultural device for defining acceptable behavior, identity, and reality" (Barak, 1994: 32). In a similar way that folklore or myths outline acceptable and deviant behaviour in 'story-form', so do news and documentary serve as "a force for conformity" (Bird & Dardenne, 1997: 336). There are three consequences of this. Firstly, public discourse becomes limited in terms of what is on the agenda and how it is discussed (Barak, 1994: 4). Secondly, watching news and documentary functions as a 'ritual moral exercise' for the general population (Fattah, 1997: 13). Thirdly, these 'ritual moral exercises' uphold the criminal justice status quo, demonising disempowered segments of the population as they support western elite interpretations of criminal activity.

It is the third consequence of affirming a normative morality that is the most significant for *Strong medicine*. Those who diverge from the mainstream in terms of beliefs (the

¹⁷³ Deconstruction in this criminological vein has much in common with its labelling predecessor and most of the themes of labelling are echoed and expanded in deconstruction (Young, 1998: 264). It certainly seems that, "In some respects, therefore, postmodernism is a rediscovery of some of the traditions within radical criminology itself rather than the importation of new ideas from without (Cohen, this volume)" (Lea, 1998: 168). The re-articulation of labelling ideas in a deconstructionist overcoat is a testament to the importance of understanding why certain actions become defined as criminal and, if postmodernism embodies a distaste for grand narratives, the large, modernist panoply of law provides an excellent candidate for its theoretical manoeuvres (Lea, 1998: 166). In *Strong medicine* "postmodernist critiques about the imperialism of western conceptions of justice" would have been particularly illuminating for an exploration of culture (Hudson, 2000: 179).

marginalised, often poor sectors of the population) are criminalised both in law and in the media (Barak, 1994: 11; Brown, 2003: 30). This demonisation serves to affirm elite definitions of crime and punishment (Hall, 1988: 363). At least partially, the cultural frame for *Strong medicine* is one that upholds western notions of crime and justice that deny the legitimacy of body part harvesting as a cultural practice.

Graphic descriptions of three victims of body part harvesting serve to condemn the practice – in line with a criminal justice system that does the same. The heart-wrenching story of a mother whose baby was killed by its father, a ‘self-appointed healer’, is emotively described in terms of a ‘butchering’ (video9). Although it is acknowledged that the father, Ernest Mabutha, expected to make money from his deed, the money-making issue is underplayed in favour of a focus on the killing itself, which intends to bring the viewer in line with mainstream definitions of brutality, crime and punishment.¹⁷⁴ Another example of how the practice of harvesting body parts is condemned, is through the story of Ronnie Maluleke, where descriptions of his suffering and trauma serve to illicit outrage in the viewer.¹⁷⁵ Finally, we are offered the story of Queen Mokebe. After committing suicide and being buried, her grave was raided for body parts. Her head, genitals, breasts and arms had been cut off. Her intestines were also missing. The testimony by her family of their horror of this discovery and the criminal justice system’s framing of it in criminal terms serves to support the status quo in an unquestioning manner. The suggestion is not being made here that the harvesting of body parts is morally credible, only that its continued practice indicates a normative acceptance of it

¹⁷⁴ Empathy and outrage is invoked through extensive interview material with the mother of the murdered baby. She says, for example, “He tied her up and said come and hold her. I felt I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t hold the baby down. Then he stood up and took an axe, knocked me over the head and said, ‘Hold the baby’” (video9). She is imaged wringing her hands in despair as she says this. We are also told how the murder was premeditated, how Mabutha took mother and child to a secluded spot where no-one would hear their screams, and how he cut the baby’s throat and collected the blood that streamed from it. In a further graphic description, Sarah, the mother says, “He collected the blood, put the calabash aside, held the baby, cut her piece by piece. Hands cut off, legs cut off, genitals. I felt bitter. The baby cried until she fell silent as he cut her open. Then it dawned on me that he really killed her” (video9).

¹⁷⁵ After being sick, Maluleke consulted an Inyanga where masked men attacked him and cut off one of his testicles. We hear of the pain and suffering that ensued as Maluleke says, “With every breath I bled profusely. Flies were crawling all over me. I tied my shoelaces around my trouser legs to try and keep them out. I noticed my wound had maggots. I reached a stream and washed myself. And then I struggled to the village. I slipped, fell and stumbled” (video9). He spent twenty-one days in intensive care.

somewhere along the cultural spectrum in South Africa – and that this has not sufficiently been investigated or acknowledged in the documentary.

The individual case

The focus on the individual is a trend in media that is globally predominant, and consequently globally detrimental for understanding cause, process, context and history (Sacco, 1995: 153). The limited and often discriminatory understanding of criminality that results is cited as problematic in much of the literature dealing with crime and the media (Surette, 1997: 82). Also known as episodic framing, the manner in which it sidelines ideology is recognised as having real-world consequences for public policy (Ericson, 1995: xviii). Indeed, it reinforces existing punitive crime control measures by eschewing the need for an overhaul of the socio-economic structure, instead supporting the “dominant power relations in society” (Barak, 1994: 12). The conservatism that it promotes is extremely limited in the solutions to crime that it implicitly offers – in line with right realist/new realist perspectives in this regard.

Beyond the political and social implications, the focus on individual culpability facilitates a turn towards sensationalism. A preoccupation with the details of brutal crime is, perhaps, meant to evoke victim empathy and in so doing, promote “‘pro-social’ or ‘positive’ values” and a moral solidarity that asserts common humanity (McQuail, 1992: 263, cited in Barak, 1994: 17). In many documentaries, however, it seems that the line between this and voyeuristic sensationalism is a very fine one, where individual stories of unfamiliar brutality have been associated with “sensationalism, as a ‘cinema of attractions’, presenting the exotic and the horrific, as well as the bizarre and unusual” (Cowie, 1999: 28). As with *The day, Strong medicine* seems to follow the ‘gory detail’ trend with vigour, focusing on the details of mutilation and on the pain of victims and their relatives to a point where it seems gratuitous rather than functional. In the case of Mabutha, who killed his own baby, for example, Sarah says, “I tried to close my eyes, but he told me to look. I watched as he cut her throat. Blood streamed. He collected it” (video9). This is accompanied by a further detailed description of the killing. In Ronnie Maluleke’s case, the voice-over uses harrowing words such as ‘mutilation’ to describe

the chain of events that landed Maluleke in hospital. While acknowledging that this 'emotional exhibition' is a way of preferring one morality over another, its extensive use in *Strong medicine* seems to indicate a tinge of sensationalism too (Ericson et al, 1995: 17).

Spy cameras and reconstructions

Mesmerising reconstructions in *Strong medicine* draw the viewers' attention towards individual stories and dramatic detail and away from explanation and analysis. The depth of their emotive impact also intensifies the horror of the individual cases in a way that feeds sensationalism and supports the criminal justice status quo, where the harvesting of body parts is illegal and where conservatives advocate punitive crime control measures.

The use of reconstruction for dramatic effect is a technique that dates back to Grierson's era and his 'creative treatment of actuality'.¹⁷⁶ Although in the 1950s, André Bazin claimed that "the documentary-film-by-reconstruction is dead" (156), the imaginative exploration of documentary potential revived by postmodern thought, seems to indicate otherwise (Fetveit, 2002: 15). Prompting this 'renaissance' is a belief that the boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred, such that reconstruction on television might be seen as being just as 'true' as 'fact' on television (Fetveit, 2002: 18). If "there is no reality outside representation" (Gaines, 1999:3) and no truth in any representation, it is no surprise that documentary and fiction 'inhabit' each other unproblematically in postmodern thought (Renov, 1993a: 3). In this climate, where boundaries are reconfigured and where truth has no meaning, documentary has once again adopted an artistic licence reminiscent of the Griersonian era. Re-enactments are prolific in *Strong medicine* and indicate that the documentary reliance on representing the 'objective world' is undergoing a transformation where exposition extends "into the implicit and the

¹⁷⁶ In this era, documentary was not seen as journalism, but rather as a means of promoting certain perspectives through "all manner of interventions and manipulations" (Winston, 2000: 20). It was an era where artistic licence reigned supreme. By the 1940s, the definition of documentary began to change and reconstruction was seen as justifiable only as it furthered the depiction of 'truth' in documentary (Winston, 1988b: 22). Soon reconstruction disappeared as a means of legitimate representation in documentary, largely facilitated by Direct Cinema's suggestion that capturing events as they happened in front of the camera was tantamount to capturing a 'truth' which could then be shown on tape (Winston, 2000: 23).

associational, often in the process touching on imaginative territories more closely associated with narrative fiction” (Corner, 1995: 81).

As we hear about Mabutha’s motives for committing the crime, we see the start of the reconstructions in *Strong medicine*, beginning with a vision that Mabutha had which supposedly compelled him to kill his child. Here we see ‘Mabutha’s hand’, with a fist loosely clenched. In an extreme close-up, the fingers uncurl to reveal what looks like a grasshopper on the palm, and another one that jumps onto the thumb and flies away.

At points in *Strong medicine*, this kind of simple reconstruction becomes more dramatic and captivating through the use of ‘hallucinatory realism’ or ‘displaced realism’, which creates atmosphere through “lighting style and mode of composition” (Corner, 1995: 95). It seems a deliberate acknowledgement of the connotative powers of television, where lighting, sound and camera angles have always been used to create meaning (Ericson et al, 1995: 6). The reconstruction of Ronnie Maluleke’s story is one example of how the technique is used in *Strong medicine*. As ‘Ronnie’ walks outside in the dark, clutching his stomach, jerky, disorientating camera movements enhance the impact of his feelings of sickness. Two men, the ‘perpetrators’ grab ‘Ronnie’ and the viewer is treated to fragmented shots of the struggle – almost like the fractured memory that the real Ronnie would have of the experience – a hand here, a piece of clothing there. We see ‘Ronnie’ lying on the side of the road as the real Ronnie legitimates the reconstruction, saying “They grabbed me and threw me to the ground. They pinned me down while one of them ripped my trousers off” (video9). In the ensuing reconstruction, we see things from Ronnie’s perspective where the sun is shining beyond, but is muted, suggesting the struggle of drifting in and out of consciousness. The sky is a smoky beige-grey and tree branches are silhouetted black against it. Another shot of black reeds becomes an overlay for the shot, so that the two shots move through each other in a disorientating haziness.

In terms of the conscious employment of ‘hallucinatory realism’, colour filters are one of the most important techniques used for a dramatic effect that advances ideology. It is into this territory, which *Strong medicine* forges. In the *Shaka Zulu* series shown on South

African television in the 1980s, sepia filters were used to indicate ‘olden days’ while blue filters suggested the chilling supernatural aura of the witchdoctors (Tomaselli & Shepperson, 2002). In *Strong medicine*, it is purple filters that are used. They are used in the re-enactment of Mabutha’s killing of his child and they serve to dramatise the chain of events while demonising Mabutha through connoting a maelstrom of surreal psychosis and malevolent mysticism.

Viewers see ‘Mabutha’s legs’ walking at night. The shot is shimmering and enveloped in a purple stain. ‘Mabutha’ drops to his knees, holding a calabash and swirling around the ‘blood’ it contains as the voice-over tells us, “Night fell as Mabutha worked on his baby. Sarah was reeling. Blood streamed from the head wound where Mabutha had hit her. Methodically, Mabutha collected blood from both his victims” (video9). As Sarah describes her confrontation with death, the re-enactment continues. ‘Sarah’ walks through the dark forest at night. ‘Mabutha’ is also there and the purple haze reappears to stain both him and the tree trunks, towering ominously around him. He walks purposefully, carrying the ‘child’, which appears as a wrapped up bundle. Both ‘Mabutha’ and ‘Sarah’ continue to walk and there is a haunting purple glow in front of them. They walk, almost zombie-like, into the glow in a surreal invocation of something mysterious, almost paranormal.

Undeniably, there are some advantages to using reconstruction. It allows a depth of representation that might not otherwise be possible if conventional documentary methods are adhered to. This is because,

the methods of traditional documentary condemn its practitioners to present only the surface of people or events. By excluding reenactments, reconstructions, and invented dialogue, traditional documentaries abandon the possibilities of ever penetrating beyond appearances to the three-dimensional reality (Kuehl, 1988: 104).

In addition, reconstruction is useful for practical reasons, where a lack of actual footage presents the documentary-maker with a dilemma as he/she tries to tell his/her story (Corner, 1995: 59). Reconstruction certainly allows for the effective filling of space in the quest for exposition. At the same time, however, the dangers that reconstruction present lie in the realm of simplification and dramatic effect as a substitute for

meaningful explanation. As it is, news told through the television medium tends towards the “dramatic and has great difficulty in being subtle” (Ericson et al, 1995: 7). News in particular, but documentary too, is often treated first and foremost as a means of entertainment and only secondarily as a vehicle for analysis (Ericson et al, 1995). The spectacularity and visual sumptuousness that this brings, can sometimes supplant argument, in what John Corner describes as ‘aesthetic displacement’ (Corner, 1995: 97). This is what the documentaries of the 1930s are sometimes accused of and, where the techniques of the 1930s are being revived, the same accusation again becomes the basis for a closer inspection of documentary technique (Corner, 1995: 97).

If reconstruction in *Strong medicine* has a tendency to displace argument and focus attention more on gruesome individual details than the structural questions posed by radical criminology/deconstruction, the ‘spy camera’ approach does much the same. Many of the implications of this approach, including the way in which it promotes unmerited viewer voyeurism, have been discussed in the examination of *It’s nice to have a friend*. In its attempts “to place the viewer as ‘witness’ to the ‘evidence’ of its own inquiry”, documentary seems to indulge a hedonistic desire to spy, over and above a desire to understand (Corner, 2000: 145). This feature seems particularly pronounced in *Strong medicine*, where presenting the evidence procured by the spy camera is so extensive as to move beyond the provision of proof for the viewer and into the realm of addictive ‘spy camera’ pleasures.

There are three instances in *Strong medicine* where ‘spy cameras’ are used. In the first instance, we are told that an undercover member of the *Special Assignment* team posed as a traditional healer from Venda and that he has gone to the market under Faraday Bridge in Johannesburg to “stock up on supplies of human ingredients” (video9). The documentary lingers on the ‘spy camera’ footage, where we see jerky black and white shots of Mr Thumba, who is the go-between for human body parts. Casually leaning and talking against what looks like one of the pillars of the bridge, the following exchange takes place, illuminated for viewers through the use of subtitles:

Undercover reporter: Do you know any place or anyone I can go to?

Mr Thumba: Like those who work in hospitals. Yes, yes...it's best to...Yes, because there you can even get human blood. Everything...people who've been hit by cars.

Undercover reporter: I don't want one who died of disease. I want one who died by accident.

Mr Thumba: Yes, those who were hit by cars are good.

Undercover reporter: Now, don't you know anyone who can organise for me?

Mr Thumba: Just sit here, I'm coming (video9).

Further negotiations about acquiring body parts ensue – and the 'spy camera' captures all of this. Afterwards, the transition from undercover footage to conventional documentary footage is marked by a long-shot through the market, in black and white, apparently still in 'spy camera' mode. As the camera pans across the makeshift stalls and jumbled piles of wares, the images of buildings and trees behind and just in front of the bridge, are in colour, signifying a return to 'reality' (video9).

The second 'spy camera' approach finds itself capturing Mr Thumba's associate, Pretty Bhukuta unawares. The location is some sort of shack or stall and the footage is all in black and white, ensuring that the viewer will constantly be aware of format above all else. There appear to be three people involved in the exchange – Mr Thumba, Pretty Bhukuta and the undercover reporter. As they sit down inside the shack, the black and white footage jostles and jumps – another reminder to the viewer that this is all 'spy camera' material. Pretty Bhukuta holds a cigar in one hand and a plastic bag in the other. After sniffing the package, he passes it to the undercover reporter to smell. In the ensuing scenes, Bhukuta opens the package and pulls out various body parts, puffing on his cigar as he does so. He pulls out a small container holding an eyeball, opens it, dips his finger inside and shuts it again. He also picks up a container with a brain in it, holding it up as he talks (video9). Accompanying these scenes is the following verbal exchange:

Pretty Bhukuta: They put this powder on dry things. Smells good, hey?

Mr Thumba: It kills germs.

Pretty Bhukuta: It's getting late. Here, let me show you...I managed to get one eye. Yes sir. Brains.

Undercover reporter: Is it whole?

Pretty Bhukuta: We negotiated a small amount, but I took the whole thing (video9).

Finally, a mortuary employee at a medical school is captured on film as he negotiates the selling of two human hands. Levi Masebe, the employee, is seen in his office and, in ‘spy camera’ mode, viewers see him unwrapping the hands, which lie on a table. After he wipes Vaseline off the hands, he re-wraps them – captured by the jerky movements of the camera. In contrast to the dead hands, Masebe’s very lively hands greedily count the money (video9). As has become customary in the video, subtitles are used to track the conversation patchily recorded by the hidden camera:

Levi Masebe: They are both rights hands.

Undercover reporter: Don’t you get the left ones?

Levi Masebe: No...because they use them for specimens. Don’t be surprised, this stuff is just Vaseline...so that it doesn’t get extremely hard. So that it can stay fresh...so don’t be surprised.

Undercover reporter: In future, will you be able to help me in the next three or four months?

Levi Masebe: Yes, I will wait to hear from you.

Undercover reporter: Can I call you anytime?

Levi Masebe: Yes (video9).

Both the technique of reconstruction and that of using a ‘spy camera’ highlight individual stories in a mesmerising quashing of context. Admittedly, the value of these two strategies lies in the way they can attract and hold audiences using a medium that *does* tend to privilege concrete stories over structural explanations. Yet in *Strong medicine*, their value is undoubtedly overshadowed by their counterproductivity. Indeed, three effects of the way that these two techniques are inimical are immediately tangible. Firstly, both the sensational exposé and the dramatic supernatural effect in the reconstructions serve to avoid analysis by drawing attention to the format of the documentary, rather than the content. In *Strong medicine*, more than other documentaries, we seem to witness how “The format requirements are paramount. Content must always fit the format, and it is therefore always secondary to the format” (Ericson et al, 1995: 4). Secondly, in terms of content specifically, these techniques promote a focus on the individual stories before broader structural questions related to the construction of criminal definition. Thirdly, and related to the previous point, the focus on individual cases diverts attention from the historical context so crucial to a sense of national culture.

The approach seems very much at odds with the deconstructive potential of the programme discussed above.

Addendum: the global trade in body parts

It certainly seems true that media representations, while focusing on domestic issues, are increasingly underscored and informed by global understandings. In terms of South African crime documentaries, this is no different and “With democracy promoted as global politics, and free-market economics the preferred paradigm of modernisation, certain symbols of criminal justice and crime problems are reiterated as aspects of globalisation” (Findlay, 1999: 10). When it comes to the use of concrete global comparative examples, however, this is somewhat different. In most local documentaries, it seems that the realm of global comparison is largely ignored, denying a forum through which the seriousness of South African crime could be contextualised and mitigated through the depiction of other similar ‘societies under siege’. Indeed, it would be a useful manner in which to thwart moral panics.

While different in a variety of ways from the global trade, it is interesting to note that the harvesting of body parts for sale is not exclusively a South African phenomenon. Many developing nations illegally export body parts to wealthy clients in the west for medical purposes. Parts from Argentina, Brazil, Honduras, Mexico and Peru end up in Germany, Switzerland and Italy (Castells, 1998: 177). Although different, this international trade certainly has at least some degree of resonance with the domestic front. The connection is, however, ignored. Through the maintenance of an exclusively domestic context, the brutal images and indictments offered by the programme seem to suggest a society that is equally brutal and requires moral censure in a way that other countries around the world do not. The sense of national culture constructed by the programme is consequently unapologetically damaged.

III. THE LOCAL

Texture is given to localities in *Strong medicine* in a way that is absent from many documentaries in my selection. Although this is not done with the same focus or sociological detail as *Very fast guys*, it is remarkably well done considering the pressures in terms of being edited for a half-hour slot. Viewers are always told explicitly where they are located as they watch events unfold. We are informed, for example, that, “Our investigation begins in Johannesburg in Eloff Street extension under Faraday Bridge” (video9). The accompanying visual footage ensures that the dizzying pace of urban life is clearly articulated through disorienting shots swinging between blue sky, a skyscraper and another building in the city centre. Taxis zoom along a city street. Robots, cars and congestion exist in a haze of smog and the urban complexion of Johannesburg is thus characterised. Importantly too, it is distinguished from generic city-life by the visual exploration of the world under Faraday Bridge. Traders’ wares are strewn out under the bridge. Among the cluttered variety of bags and unidentifiable concoctions, are some bottles and bones that are clearly visible. Also visible is a monkey’s hand and, behind it, a skull. Two wooden planks burn in a dustbin. A man pulverises something with a large pole and a woman sprinkles generous amounts of powder on the stalls at the market (video9).

The rural areas are also depicted in a manner that creates texture and dimension for the local. Viewers are able to taste the essence of Queen Mokebe’s village near Potgietersrus through the vivid visualisation of everyday life. A twisted, uneven piece of fence seems to indicate poverty, as do the houses, which are nothing more than makeshift shacks. Yet life moves inexorably forward – a young boy peddles a bicycle and a young mother walks with a baby on her back. Perhaps the hub of village life is ‘Bra Jones spaza’ - the spaza shop that we are shown, with its uneven, unpainted bricks and tin sheeting for a roof (video9).

If this approach to showing the local is undeniably positive in its invocation of both rural and urban ‘realities’, at times there seems to be a somewhat less useful characterisation of

the local that serves to erode rather than add depth. A revival in documentary techniques from the 1930s seems to underlie this, where experimental films imbued realistic composition with “more symbolic renderings of place and space” (Corner, 1995: 94). In *Strong medicine*, this symbolic rendering serves to essentialise place and culture through the depiction of an ‘authentic’, mystical, timeless African landscape. We see parts of what used to be Venda from a mysterious distance so that the hum-drum banality of everyday life evaporates. A beautiful valley with a lake nestles in the surrounding hills. It appears completely uninhabited. Is this pristine, primal Africa?

In Venda, as we are told that it was the site for many human ritual sacrifices in the past, we see misty hills from a distance that add to the sense of mystery surrounding this depiction of ‘darkest Africa’. Heavy blankets of cloud in the background seem to suggest an ominous moodiness associated with the human sacrifice described. The mysterious surroundings include a shot of the dark silhouette of skeletal trees against a foreboding, cloudy sky. The shot spirals around, becoming more and more overshadowed by the looming trees as the angle looking upwards becomes sharper. The mood of threatening, exotic, unknown danger prevails.

A similar atmosphere of the timeless supernatural is created in the exploration of Ronnie Maluleke’s village. While scenes of normality are projected – where we see neat huts and water barrels – these are interrupted by a reminder of otherworldliness. A scenic shot of blue mountains in ageless Africa is combined with the paranormal as clouds blow in fast motion across the landscape (video9). The everydayness of Ronnie Maluleke’s fishing on the side of the lake is irreparably disturbed.

It certainly seems that the notion of projecting ‘reality’ in documentary is being displaced by consciously symbolic depictions and,

Recently, this established television tendency towards a ‘literalisation’ of the documentary image, the visual rendering kept flat and spare, consonant with the terms of an observed, objectified and mundane social reality, has given way to the emergence of much more symbolically dense ways of rendering place and action, and relating them both to the human subjects of the documentary and the development of topic (Corner, 1995: 95).

Aesthetically, this may indeed be a breakthrough in representing ‘fact’. Yet as *Strong medicine* shows, it also has its dangers, where the unmasking effect of deconstruction and well-intentioned efforts to do justice to culture, backfire in a regressive portrayal of an ‘authentic’, mystical Africa. It works together with the supernatural effect of colour filters in reconstructions and spy camera voyeurism to detract attention from explanation and analysis, instead providing blunt assumptions about culture. Yet, having said this, many of the depictions of the local *do* serve a positive function in the projection of national identity based on a variety of rich localities. Important here, is the subtle attention given to the rural-urban divide in a way that is absent from all the other documentaries.

IV. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL CULTURE

By focusing on the issue of *selling* human body parts, *Strong medicine* avoids cultural debate over the issue of *using* body parts and the question of western criminal definition. While its role is thus partially obfuscatory, it also illuminates an important issue – the modification of ‘tradition’ over time through a process of commercialisation. Although this, to some degree, assumes the original existence of a pristine tradition, it also shows one of the ways in which the relatively recent impact of modernisation has assumed shape and form in South Africa.

The voice-over notes that,

But times have changed. A sacred custom once performed to benefit all, has now turned into killing for personal gain. Ritual sacrifice has become the brutal harvesting of body parts for paying clients. No-one knows how extensive the trade in human parts is. However, the conversations we record build a picture of a trade that is lucrative and routine for the participants (video9).

Further indicating how ‘tradition’ has changed, we are subsequently told that,

It was clear during our travels through Limpopo province that ancient beliefs are as alive today as ever. But these beliefs and the people that hold them are increasingly manipulated for financial gain. The congress of traditional healers is waging war on corrupt Inyangas who exploit peoples’ beliefs (video9).

Two of the primary individual stories in the documentary serve to illuminate the corruption of ‘tradition’ epitomised by the selling of body parts. Pretty Bhukuta accepts a R400 deposit for a brain, eye and kneecaps (video9). His story and the story of Mr

Thumba are entwined in a chain of commercialisation. Secondly, Levi Masebe, the employee at a medical school mortuary negotiates the selling of two human hands for R4000 (video9). The victims of body part selling are also given attention, with Ronnie Maluleke's father condemning the selling of his son's testicle for profit (video9).

The issue of the *selling* of body parts certainly provides *Strong medicine* with a concrete way in which to address cultural change and the intersection between modernity and tradition. Yet the *use* of body parts as a cultural practice is treated with more vagueness and obfuscation in the video with no reference to how using body parts for 'muti', and not just the selling, may be a corruption of 'tradition'.¹⁷⁷ In addition, it seems that there is little interrogation of the practice in terms of a prevalent culture of demand. Rather than acknowledging that the practice of harvesting body parts exists as an established aspect of South African culture, legal definitions are used to make a moral prescription that overrides analysis. In spite of this vagueness and obfuscation, the video does make some cultural inroads, including hints at (1) how using body parts for 'muti' represents a significant belief in South Africa and (2) how the belief in the power of 'muti' connects to broader belief systems in South Africa. It is a pity that the analysis of these 'hints' is not taken further – and is even denied with the documentary persistently claiming that its focus is on the selling rather than the use of body parts.

In terms of the prevalence of a belief in human 'muti' in South Africa, there is evidence on offer in *Strong medicine* – albeit evidence that does not explain the demand for body parts and the origins of the belief in any culturally illuminating way. We are told for example, that,

The whole hand is dried and sold to a client – maybe a businessman who wants success in his business. And that hand would be buried at his door, upside down. The belief is that the hand is calling customers into the shop. Then the knuckles of the finger – the elbow – are used, are dried and crushed and powder is then used in a salve or mixed with other herbs. The skin is sometimes taken from the buttocks because that's a layer of body fat and the body fat is dried and also used in a salve. The brain and the skull is used as the receptacle for that brain, that

¹⁷⁷ There is much to suggest that the practice of using body parts for 'muti' is a distortion of 'traditional' practices. As one journalist suggests, "It is a perversion of traditional African healing practices" (Nicodemus, 1999).

would be eaten (Anthony Minnaar, for Human Rights and Criminal Justice Studies in video9).

In describing the wares at Faraday Market, the voice-over tells us of the impossibility of distinguishing between mixtures that contain human parts and those with animal parts, suggesting implicitly that there does exist a demand for the former in South Africa, despite its illegality (video9). The story of Mabutha, who killed his own child, suggests something similar. We are told that he believed that the ‘muti’ made from the child’s body parts would help to cure AIDS. According to the voice-over, he also believed that the child’s blood, mixed with cola and drunk with a piece of bread would “fortify him against the police when they came” (video9). Undeniably, these sorts of descriptions blow open the opportunity for an analysis of culture in the video. How prevalent is the belief in human ‘muti’ in a context where “Ritual murder and witchcraft cases are on the increase in rural and urban townships of the Transvaal” (Koch, 1995b)? Where does this belief come from? How does it intersect with modernity? What sort of cultural intersections have shaped this belief? Yet the potential remains unrealised. While the video claims that it investigates where the belief in human ‘muti’ originates, this is explained in terms of an ancient ritual of human sacrifice alone. The intervening developments between the ancient and the present-day seem to have been forgotten, even though this is possibly where the most important cultural explanation lies. Viewers are left in the dark about the exact nature of these beliefs in a way that inhibits understanding of a significant factor in national culture.

In terms of how the belief in the power of ‘muti’ connects to broader belief systems in South Africa – *Strong medicine* follows in its patterns of laying down excellent foundations for an analysis that is not fully realised. Ronnie Maluleke’s father suggests the importance of Inyangas but the relation of this to a belief in ‘muti’ is not further explained (video9). Similarly, we are told that Mabutha is a traditional healer, and that he received visions, which, he claimed, compelled him to kill his daughter. The voice-over says,

Like most traditional healers, Mabutha claimed he’d received the recipe for his cure in a vision. In his dream, he saw himself holding two insects. The small one represented his baby, the bigger one her mother – his girlfriend. Whichever one flew away would be the one whose life he’d spare (video9).

The place of visions and healing, their relation to culture and how the issue of ‘muti’ intersects with these is not revealing. Finally, the practice of traditional medicine is shown visually as we see images of an animal sacrifice and are told that, “The only sacrificial slaughter Takalani Mathiba will condone these days is that of animals. Different parts are cut out and mixed with medicine. Each part has a unique ritual significance. Human parts supposedly work in a similar way” (video9). Although this tries to bridge the divide between the documentary’s subject matter and broader cultural practice, there is not enough substance to this. Yet it certainly provides a useful *beginning* for establishing a broader cultural context in which to situate the practice of ‘muti’ in the video and a starting point for examining how the practice of ‘muti’ became distorted to include the use of body parts. It is a pity that the enormous potential offered by brief glimpses into the cultural landscape of South Africa is not realised, although admittedly there may not have been scope for an in-depth analysis in a documentary of this length.

In spite of my criticisms of *Strong medicine* in terms of its projection of national culture, it does significantly more to address this issue than most of the other documentaries under examination here. In terms of fulfilling the SABC’s mandate, it seems that *Special Assignment* is on the right track with programmes such as these. If some of the sensationalism could be replaced with a sensitive cultural analysis, even more could be done for the project of building a national identity through documentary.

V. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATION-STATE

The presentation of the nation-state in *Strong medicine* is understated, implicitly upholding the status quo without any direct comment on how its institutions are tackling the issue of either body part murders or body part selling. A positivist approach might have looked at the way the police are successfully combating both practices, a left realist approach might have questioned discrimination in the nation-state’s attempts to address the practice, while a postmodern approach could have challenged the ability or place of the nation-state to take action and its competency in doing so. Yet *Strong medicine* does none of these. What it does do is include references to police and legal action through comments such as, “The prosecution team had never seen anything like it” (video9). We

also know that Sarah and Mabutha were arrested after the killing of their baby and we see police evidence photographs from the court case where Mabutha points out the crime scene. The prosecutor for the case is interviewed, explaining the nature of the injuries to the child and Mabutha's motivations (video9). This does not, however, create any real impression of the nation-state. *Strong medicine* seems evasive in this regard and passes up an opportunity to build national identity around a strong statement about the efficacy of the nation-state's institutions. With even negative assessments of the nation-state being avoided, all analytical possibility in this regard is ignored. This is certainly a weakness in the programme that, once again, may be related to the necessity of paring down exposition to fit a half-hour time slot.

From beginning to end, *Strong medicine* seems to be involved in a tussle between multiple voices and preferred meanings for the programme. To begin, the global theoretical trend of radical labelling/deconstruction is mobilised for an attack on western criminal definition that never really happens. In some ways, these nodes of deconstruction offer valuable insights into a South African culture in flux, where fluidity of cultural understanding, diverse cultural origins and a multitude of cultural intersections blur issues of simple criminalisation. Yet at the same time, deconstruction disappears in assumptions of criminal definition that defy the in-depth analysis that has seemingly been set up in the documentary. Because of this, the use of body parts is condemned in a manner that suggests *Strong medicine* does, after all follow the hegemonic status quo. This reinforces the notion that "politically and economically dominant sources frame news debates, ensuring the privileged reproduction of their discourse and even determining what is socially thinkable" (Ericson, 1995: xvi). Supplementing the condemnation of body part use in *Strong medicine* is a limited discourse that focuses largely on individual stories at the expense of context and explanation. The use of reconstructions and spy camera tactics consists of a process of 'spectacularisation' which similarly relies on emotion and drama to construct a social reality of limited engagement with broad context and argument (Ericson, 1995: xxii). These globally used techniques draw the viewer towards immersion in the individual stories in *Strong medicine* and away

from structural or macro issues that might contribute to a more meaningful understanding of national identity.

Just as ambiguity governs the manner in which global trends and theories manifest themselves in the documentary, so is the case with the depiction of national culture. On the one hand, there are significant developments in the way in which questions are posed around the issue of human 'muti', with an acknowledgment of the prevalence of the practice. This ensures that attention is drawn to important issues of cultural diversity and definition. Yet at the same time, in-depth cultural analysis is avoided. The origins of present-day cultural beliefs, their path in history, their existence (and distortion) within a particular cosmology in South African culture and their articulation with other cultural norms in present-day South Africa are all rich areas of possible investigation that are ignored in the documentary. From promising beginnings, the analysis reaches a dead-end and this dead-end allows the ultimate resting place for documentary exposition to be within the established criminal justice with its western cultural precepts.

It is, perhaps, the arena of local culture that offers the most promise for the documentary, with texture and depth being offered to the various locations in the video and the representation of a diversity that encompasses a rural-urban divide. Having said this, the depiction of the local nonetheless also presents some problems. The manner in which the rural areas are portrayed sometimes tends towards the mystical – suggesting an essential, mysterious, primal Africa that is conducive to reductionist interpretations of culture. Once again, there is ambiguity in *Strong medicine* that defies one-dimensional categorisations of the programme, and which also defies the project of building a positive, unified national identity in programmes shown on the national broadcaster.

5. CONCLUSION

If the representations in *Strong medicine* are largely ambiguous, often steering towards the positive and then veering off into oblivion, more clearly delineated in terms of positive and negative representations are *Very fast guys* and *The day*. As far as the former is concerned, the positive elements far outweigh the negative. For the latter, it seems that

there is very little by way of positive input that it offers, relying, as it does, on simplistic assumptions of gang culpability and underclass inhumanity.

Very fast guys seems to exist somewhere on the spectrum between left realism and positivism. Advantageously, the focus on Anomie, relative deprivation and undersocialisation (all of which bridge these two theoretical divides), means that the cause of crime is addressed, as both social and structural solutions are pointed to. These global theoretical underpinnings are made relevant for the local arena through the investigation of life in Orange Farm, providing the only real in-depth focus on the level of the local in all the documentaries under examination here – and one which does justice the broadcaster’s imperative of showing a diversity of localities. Beyond this, the specificities of gang subculture in Orange Farm provide a gritty sociological examination of criminal life that links to understandings of Anomie and illuminates cause (and indirectly solutions) that potentially offer useful building-blocks in the construction of national identity. Most importantly, however, the local details that viewers see humanise the gangsters in a way that is supported by radical criminology and facilitated through the video’s observational techniques. This is vital in developing an image of national culture that is nuanced, avoids moral panic and defies the demonisation of the underclass that seems to have become fashionable and accepted in global media circles. Instead of seeing only dysfunction, we see family cohesion. And all the time, detailing the ups and downs of the guys ensures that the locality of Orange farm is instilled with dignity. If the local is invested with value, so is national culture. In terms of language and race – two vital components of national culture – *Very fast guys* has a progressive, useful approach. It is only in the arena of depicting the nation-state that the documentary is overtly lacking and this, in combination with its oversight of the victim and public involvement, renders its left realist paradigm incomplete. Having said this, the documentary’s sociological insights remain invaluable and its projection of national and local culture is positive for the image of the nation and positive in terms of fulfilling the broadcaster’s mandate.

If the major strength of *Very fast guys* is the way it humanises the offender, the way in which *The day* demonises potential offenders is its downfall. The selectivity of the

documentary is one that focuses exclusively on gang culpability in the Sizzlers massacre, despite the absence of conclusive evidence. Additionally, it excludes causal explanation when examining this supposed culpability. This results in a negative fulfilment of cultural expectation where gangs are both assumed to be involved and involved on a level that defies understanding humanity and sociological explanation. Middle-class values are vindicated as racial and class stereotypes are perpetuated - largely through the mechanism of the interview. Viewers are led to believe that any act of brutality *must* be perpetrated by gangsters and *must* be due to their 'wicked' natures – an interpretation that hints at right realist conservatism, which presumes that “members of the so-called underclass really are different” (Hudson, 2000: 173). If we are a nation comprised of qualitatively divergent criminals and non-criminals, where is the potential to build a reconciliatory national unity? Just as the depiction of gangsters in a presumptive and pejorative fashion is ultimately negative, so too is the sensationalism that fuels disparaging representations, while further diverting attention from cause and responsibility. In this so-called investigative programme, the spectacle of sex and violence sensationalises as it refuses analysis. The story of the victim, focusing unnecessarily on grief and horror, serves a similar end. If global trends and theories reveal the way in which the programme falls short in creating a meaningful analysis, the level of the local does much the same.

The local focus on Seapoint does not redeem the programme in any way. On the contrary, it links up with global trends exemplifying nostalgia for community and condemning the contemporary environment as being one of decline. It is the 'observational' trips through Seapoint that serve this end and also add to the lurid quality of the video, where sensationalism replaces explanation. If place is shown in a negative light, culture is equally so. There is no production of a sense of local culture from which a national identity could be built. Instead there are only superficial descriptions of gang activity, which avoid explanation and contribute even further to the sensationalism of the video. Consequently, the intersections of the local and the global produce sensationalistic, one-dimensional interpretations of culpability and gang life. This ensures that any sense of national culture that is produced could only be one that reinforces a limited normative

morality characterised by middle-class expectations of who criminals are and what they do. *The day* is clearly a slap-dash attempt at throwing together a documentary – even meaningful contributions from representatives of the nation-state are absent. While acknowledging that time pressures undoubtedly played a large role in the outcome, it is nonetheless an outcome that does nothing for the image of the nation, for national culture or for building national unity. It is probably the least useful documentary here – sidelining useful positivistic analyses of cause in favour of sensationalistic obfuscation.

The three documentaries considered in this chapter have in common their exclusion of the nation-state to an extent that is not evidenced in most of the other documentaries under examination. In promoting nation-building efforts, the SABC would certainly have to address this – although this also does not simply mean including pro-state propaganda. Rather, it should prompt the inclusion of well-considered assessments that support state involvement in criminal justice issues, whether or not this involvement is up to scratch at present. Aside from the nation-state, all of the documentaries also deal with the underclass in some way. While this itself is problematic in terms of a general media selectivity that ignores crimes of the wealthy, its ultimate impact depends on the lens through which the underclass is viewed. In *Very fast guys* it is their humanity that garners the spotlight, but in *The day* it is their total brutality. The focus on individual crimes and perpetrators often buttresses stereotypes about the underclass by ignoring broad social context in a manner that demonises the offender and the class or race to which he belongs. *Strong medicine* exhibits this negative tendency, where those who operate outside of the mainstream are regarded in individual terms as simply being wicked anomalies rather than the product of particular social and cultural circumstances. If the demonisation of the underclass and the related focus on the individual are two common (and negative) strategies used by documentaries, so too is the globally utilised technique of sensationalism, which draws attention away from cause and analysis. *Strong medicine* and *The day* both exhibit this tendency in a manner that contributes both to their global character and to the manner in which they defy the public broadcaster's mandate. For this reason and the many others discussed, it is only *Very fast guys* that really contributes to

the broadcaster's nation-building efforts in any meaningful way – avoiding pitfalls in depicting the offender and situating him in an explanatory and humanising context.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

It is ironic that in an environment of political and constitutional overhaul in post-apartheid South Africa, everyday preoccupations for the ordinary person have remained much the same.¹⁷⁸ Violent crime is a problem that seems to prevail even as political, economic and social change progresses. In addition, anxieties about this in South Africa are exacerbated by a global ontological insecurity around crime. Crime, risk and danger are no longer marginal concerns, but have become central to the lives of many (Young, 1998: 269). In this context, it seems pertinent to ask how a public service broadcaster should project this issue of serious social concern. For the SABC specifically, how is the fulfilment of its mandate affected by documentaries on crime and punishment? Is it indeed possible to marry such negative subject matter to the constructive identity project of representing cultural diversity and national unity? This is the central question addressed by the dissertation. Complicating the analysis is an awareness that the SABC exists in an era where identity is multifaceted and contested, where culture no longer inheres in place and where the nation-state is losing its primacy (Tomlinson, 1999: 28). What then do cultural diversity and national identity actually mean? I have attempted to use flexible and inclusive definitions throughout – ones, which are nonetheless rooted in theoretical guidelines and conceptual categories that lend structure to any analysis. Culture, for example, is understood as the everyday symbolic practices, which have common meanings for certain groups of people. Local identity is seen to be rooted in time, place and the community – all of which are vital in determining how diversity is dealt with. National identity is explored in its cultural and civic manifestations. The examination of these is embedded in a text-context analysis – the relationship of the text to historical context, contemporary social context and global context.

¹⁷⁸ Indeed, “In South Africa, this is obvious in respect of the sustained levels of violence which characterised both the ‘uncivil war’ of the late apartheid era, and the negotiation and democratisation phases which followed” (Simpson, 2001: 115).

Nation-building through television is affected by broad global media trends regarding crime and punishment where representations often create ‘media crime waves’ and descend into the realm of the moral panic (Surette, 1997: 66). This is particularly significant when one considers the place of the media in society, “as the main engine in the social construction of reality process” (Surette, 1997: 7). Stereotyping, sensationalism, extreme selectivity, the pejorative labelling of the ‘other’ and a preoccupation with the grisly details of individual crimes are all features of the global, commercialised and limited media environment. The SABC is unavoidably part of this environment. Despite its commitment to public broadcasting ideals, it is entrenched in a neoliberal milieu with all the concomitant pressures to perform. Entertainment before education has become one of the primary features of documentary in this context. This global documentary trend, along with many others, are examined in this dissertation with a view to establishing the ultimate impact on the message produced by the text and the implications for the project of creating national unity-through-diversity on television. Criminological theories and trends underscoring the programmes comprise a second major area, which is global in scope, which informs the texts and which has implications for the construction of national identity on television. From positivism to left realism to postmodernism, the theories articulate with the depiction of local conditions, which provides the empirical basis for their exploration.

1. GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEORIES

Globally, documentary is often subject to pressures to sensationalise its subject matter in a bid to win audiences. Where sensationalism is premised on shock-tactics and scandalous revelations, it is difficult to imagine how a positive image of the nation could be produced. Many of the documentaries examined in this selection used lurid details to the detriment of the broadcaster’s mandate. *The day* is, perhaps, the most blatant example, where sex and violence are wantonly exploited at the expense of analysing the Sizzlers massacre. *Strong medicine* evidenced a sensationalistic preoccupation with the grisly details of ‘muti’ murders, excluding context and explanation in the process. Interestingly, the observational world of the ‘spy camera’ was a method used in two of the documentaries to create an exposition based on voyeurism and spectacle. Indeed,

drawing on the growing tradition of reality television, *It's nice* spied on corrupt warders at Grootvlei Prison. *Strong medicine* used 'spy camera' pleasures to fuel excitement as undercover journalists caught out those responsible for selling human body parts. In this programme, dramatic reconstructions similarly drew attention away from analysis and towards sensational details. Not only does this detract from the value of the documentary exposition, but it prevents a productive national identity being constructed from a balanced analysis. Instead, sensationalism elicits emotional reactions that are conducive to moral panics.

In some of the documentaries, sensational ends were achieved specifically through a focus on the victim. Rather than choosing to represent a path of postmodern victim empowerment, in *Atlantis lost*, *A bitter harvest*, *The Lima connection* and *The day*, victims are seen as broken, helpless and caught in the throes of despair and disillusionment. In *Atlantis lost* we are offered voyeuristic clips of the misery of abuse victims. In *The day* we ogle the trauma of those left behind after the Sizzlers Massacre. In *The Lima connection*, we view the lower-class victims of society – pitiful drug smugglers imprisoned in Peru. *A bitter harvest* subjects us to a spectacle of gruesome details where the victims of farm attacks become the media's victim too. This kind of approach cannot be said to be constructive in any sense. Are we a nation of victims? Is our victimhood entirely disempowering on every level? How then can a positive, optimistic national identity be constructed through lurid victimologies?

The limitations of the documentaries as regards positive national identity were not confined exclusively to its obliteration through sensationalism. Labelling the underclass in the fashion of right realism views criminality as existing in a very narrow spectrum of the population and diverts attention away from explanation through the convenient fulfilment of middle-class expectations about who is capable of violent crime. Indeed, "television is essentially and deeply conservative. It is conservative because culture is conservative: values, beliefs and above all forms of expressing those values and beliefs are fundamentally engrained into our way of life" (Silverstone, 1985: 177). The selectivity of *The day* in particular, with its focus on gang culpability in the Sizzlers

massacre, demonises the underclass in a way that views them as different and incomprehensible. This offers an exclusionary, unrealistic, skewed basis on which to construct a national identity and is detrimental for the project of national unity. So much more productive would have been a perspective humanising the gangs. Better still would have been the exploration of a variety of possible motives for the murders before pinning them exclusively on gang activity. *Atlantis lost* almost falls into the trap of demonising the underclass, but successfully avoids it through an exploration of cause that elides such limitations. Nonetheless, in all the documentaries on offer in this selection – even where ‘balance’ with regard to depicting the underclass prevails - there is a persistent trend of *focusing* on the underclass. Where are the middle-class criminals? Where is the white-collar crime? Why is our national identity, as depicted through these programmes, one of elitist values about the nature of crime and the identity of criminals?

A variety of documentary and narrative techniques are used in the creation of a negative preferred meaning in the selected documentaries. Interviews in *The day* support the cultural expectation of gang culpability, such that pejorative stereotypes are reproduced. The string-of-interviews in *Architecture of fear* make preferred meaning almost non-negotiable, where a variety of interviewees bombard the viewer with similar messages about the parlous state of crime in South Africa. The racy pace of the video enhances this: choppy interview snippets and the dash from one scene to the next conveys the impression of danger, adrenaline and threat. Shriill, anxious music adds the final touch to the message of pessimism and risk. In *It's nice*, the binary of folk hero/folk devil constitutes a global narrative technique which impacts strongly on the outcome of the programme. The folk devil of the moral panic constitutes one half of the binary and finds form in the corrupt prison warders at Grootvlei. The use of this symbolic code in such a simplistic manner effectively obliterates meaningful analysis and ensures a two-dimensional understanding of the warders and their motivations. No national identity can be built on this kind of limited depiction. While these documentary techniques - and the many others that shape and form the programmes under scrutiny here – are not necessarily negative for the project of nation-building on television, the way in which they have been employed in many of the videos ensures that this is the case.

If documentary trends constitute one major global tradition informing the programmes under examination here, criminological theories are another. While it is unlikely that the documentaries on offer were specifically researched with regard to criminological direction, it is clear that many assumptions of criminological theory, which have filtered into everyday understandings, inform the programmes on offer. In the first chapter, with its focus on prisons, postmodern penology plays an important role. Here, there is an overriding pessimism with regard to order and control in the prison, where the postmodern environment is seen as one where chaos prevails. Prisons in both *It's nice* and *The Lima connection* exemplify this trend entirely, reflecting badly on the regulatory ability of the nation-state and hence the national identity that inheres in it. According to the postmodern penological perspective, the desirable countermeasure to this chaos is a disciplinary one – a control discourse rather than a solution-oriented one on which to base a forward-thinking national identity. Indeed, “the content of the penal sanction is said to shift away from reform and rehabilitation toward incapacitation” (O’Malley, 2000: 157).

If postmodern penology offers one negative theoretical strand with which to underscore documentaries, postmodern crime control strategies offer another. Characterised by a disillusionment with the modernist enterprise, crime control becomes ultimately conservative, based on immediate strategies of crime prevention as opposed to long-term solutions (Lea, 1998: 163; Matthews & Young, 1992: 13). Indeed, postmodern crime control focuses explicitly and exclusively on the immediate causes of crime, rather than the longer-term psychological or societal conditions prompting the offender to lead a life of crime. Risk management organises the everyday and the theoretical world and situational crime prevention plays an important role as a defensive strategy against risk. *Architecture of fear* embodies a variety of postmodern crime control perspectives, none of which is positive for the construction of national identity. The fortress city is shown to be exclusionary, citizens are seen to be living in cages, the nation-state is seen as unable to protect its citizens and crime is seen as out of control. The scene is set for a moral panic around the notion of a nation in decline.

The absence of glaringly relevant global theoretical underpinnings is a factor, which also contributes to the negative image of the nation constructed in many of the documentaries. Firstly, gender is, perhaps, the most damning oversight and its exclusion smacks of a mainstream criminological trend of ignoring this fundamental category of analysis. Only *Architecture of fear* addresses gender issues at all.¹⁷⁹ *Atlantis lost*, which constitutes the most appropriate programme in the selection for an in-depth gender analysis, sidelines the issue entirely.¹⁸⁰ Secondly, *The day* ignores positivist theories on gang subculture formation with the result that the gangs are not explored on a sociological level as in *Very fast guys*. This, in turn, contributes to their demonisation and a national identity based on short sighted exclusionary politics. Thirdly, the deconstruction of western criminal justice definitions is not fully explored in any of the documentaries. Although this is, in most cases, to the benefit of creating normative morality, in some cases it could be taken simply as a means of avoiding complex questions around culture, identity and diversity. *Strong medicine* is just such an example. It does not really engage with the cultural questions around the harvesting of body parts and its criminalisation, focusing instead on the selling of body parts (which then accepts the western criminalisation of this practice). Extensively addressing questions about the evolution, corruption, criminalisation and legitimate existence of cultural norms regarding ‘muti’ would certainly have contributed to the project of depicting cultural diversity on television.

Many of the criminal trends depicted in the videos are not exclusive to South Africa, but are part of a global landscape of criminal commonality. Although these develop specific characteristics as they manifest themselves in the local environment, they are seldom acknowledged as having any relationship to the global at all. While it must be acknowledged that finding the space in documentaries for comparative examples is difficult, in many cases their use could have proved extremely productive. Mitigating the

¹⁷⁹ Commendably, it must be noted, however, that, while *Very fast guys* does not offer a gender analysis, a second programme called *Very fast girls* does. This documentary centres on the lives of the women with whom that the gangsters are involved.

¹⁸⁰ There are at least two good reasons why *Atlantis lost* should have acknowledged the role of gender. Not only does feminism have a history of involvement in child and women abuse, but the construction of masculinity as a major contributing factor in the perpetration of abuse is undeniable. As a consequence of ignoring this link, the notion of abusers as dehumanised sexual fiends, rather than socially constructed men is perpetuated. It is this kind of interpretation that is detrimental for the image of the nation.

impression of exclusive violent criminality associated with South Africa, comparisons could serve to negate a national identity based on pessimism. In *Architecture of fear*, the fortress city problem is shown only as a distinctly South African malaise, rather than part of a growing global culture of insecurity.¹⁸¹ Viewed through this tunnel vision, South Africa's problems are magnified and the programme becomes one where a positive national identity is almost impossible to foster. *It's nice* similarly refuses to acknowledge the widespread prevalence of warder corruption in countries throughout the world. *Atlantis lost* overlooks the way in which the construction of masculinity is a worldwide problem.¹⁸² *The cage unlocked* ignores the way in which prison gangs exist on an equally brutal scale in prisons across the world. Even *The Lima connection*, which would have provided the most fertile grounds for comparison, ignores this potential by viewing Peru and South Africa as having self-contained national cultures.

Along with the abovementioned features of the documentaries, it appears that, where global trends and theories are concerned, the *Special Assignment* and *Expressions* programmes either use them to their disadvantage or ignore them to their disadvantage. Yet, flouting this pattern, are also many examples where the programmes are positive in this regard, constructing a positive sense of national identity by employing globally relevant concepts and through global documentary techniques.

Despite a resurgence in popularity since the 1980s, commentary in documentary is often viewed with suspicion, as a technique that closes down debate by closing down meaning. Yet in *The cage unlocked*, where a voice-over is used to make the arguments and additional visual and verbal footage is used as substantiation, it has proved useful for the image of the nation that is produced. This conservative documentary style facilitates

¹⁸¹ Indeed, in reality the fortress city phenomenon is found in countries as diverse as Brazil, Israel, Indonesia, India and the USA (Hughes, 1998: 141). The limited perspective showing this kind of problem to be associated with South Africa alone gives the impression that there is something wrong with the *country*, rather than the world.

¹⁸² South Africa's experiences regarding the abuse of women and children are certainly not unique in a global context where "Domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape – these issues cut across national boundaries" (Hahn Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995: 8). Yet by sidelining a general gender analysis, complexity is elided, the project of understanding cause is unfulfilled and the context suggests that child abuse in Atlantis is inscribed with exclusively South African characteristics.

interpretations that centre on optimistic rehabilitation. As with the use of interviews, as discussed above, employing commentary is not *necessarily* positive. However, the way it has been used here serves as an example of how documentary trends can boost the project of nation-building on television. The same is true for *Very fast guys*. Here it is the technique of proactive observation that creates an uplifting image of the nation on which to base national identity. Selectively observing the guys in their everyday environments develops viewer empathy with them and, consequently, any sense of national identity that is built from this is one that is both inclusive and humanising.¹⁸³

A further humanising touch that is, surprisingly, included in many of the videos is that of family and home. The notion of family has resonance on a global level, where its disintegration in the contemporary era is met by a nostalgia for the security it offers. The promotion of the family on television offers a positive set of values on which national identity can be built and this is tangible in at least a third of the videos. Although there is some indication of the disintegration of family relationships in *The Lima connection*, for the most part, the family is seen as a sanctuary. In *The cage unlocked*, familial dysfunction, including gender violence in the family, is offset by gradual steps towards the restitution of the family. The dangerous trend towards demonising the underclasses as criminal is avoided in *Very fast guys* by including, among other things, a portrait of family life, which shows the guys to be normal and even personable.

As with the global trends and theories which inform a *negative* construction of the nation on television, criminological theories also offer much in the realm of the *positive*. Documentaries that are underscored with elements of positivism appear to construct the most hopeful message for the nation, one on which a valuable sense of national identity can be built. Positivist elements are perhaps felt most strongly in *The cage unlocked* where both individual and social positivism find a space. Crime is seen as being caused both by family and individual circumstances as well as poor social conditions. In looking to social aetiology, the path is opened for rehabilitative solutions. The distinctly

¹⁸³ The objective of humanising the guys is, perhaps, couched in radical criminological thought where criminals are viewed as entirely normal members of society.

modernist strategy of rehabilitation, couched in the history of the welfare state, and shown in *The cage unlocked*, suggests that crime can be cured rather than simply contained.¹⁸⁴ Through this, a national identity based on optimism and hope is constructed: the gangsters are not inherently bad, their circumstances can be changed through their proactive efforts and their damaged psyches can be mended through counselling – all for the betterment of society. The undersocialisation thesis presented by *The cage unlocked* can also be found in *Very fast guys*. The intense sociological detail offered by the approach not only humanises the guys, but opens the path for solutions through the identification of social problems. Beyond this, weaving the precepts of Anomie into *Very fast guys* ensures, firstly, that explanation rather than simple description prevails, secondly that the guys are seen as rational and motivated rather than simply evil and thirdly, that the guys have the capacity for change. Through this, understanding is created and moral panics are averted. Solutions, understanding and the humanisation of criminals provides a solid basis for the way in which viewers perceive crime in South Africa and the concomitant impact on national identity is a positive one. This is not to suggest that positivism should be used uncritically to inform programmes on crime and punishment. A wholesale transplantation of its concepts into a documentary could be detrimental for the image of the nation produced. Instead, it should be used selectively, with an awareness of its shortcomings.

In many of the videos, elements of individual and social positivism are accompanied by useful structural analyses, with roots in radical criminology. In *Very fast guys*, a theme of relative deprivation ties in with Anomie through its focus on the gap between rich and poor. *Architecture of fear* illustrates the way in which the fortress city excludes on the basis of class and also the way in which the poor are more frequently victims of crime than the rich. While such observations *do* suggest an unhealthy inequality in South African society, they also point towards macro-solutions for the improvement of crime and thus implicitly contain a positive spin. Where a positivistic aetiology is married to structural examinations, useful analyses of crime in South Africa often result – and this

¹⁸⁴ The rehabilitative ethos often focuses “on changing potential offenders’ current life circumstances”, which we see in both Mogamat and Erefaan (Ekblom & Tilley, 2000: 377).

combined approach suggests a left realist discourse informs these documentaries. *Atlantis lost*, for example, straddles positivism and radical criminology to create, in many respects, a left realist map for the programme.¹⁸⁵ The documentary wants to understand child abuse by looking to cause, but it also incorporates a radical criminological stance of seeing that cause residing in structural factors rather than biology, psychology or sociology (as with positivism). Poverty is seen as an important aetiological factor and the creation of this kind of understanding is the first step in any nation-building project. Left realism's structural explanations for crime also exist in *A bitter harvest* in the focus on poverty together with a sociological focus on the offender's circumstances. Indeed, in the search for cause, this inclusive approach fulfils the function of bridging structure and society.

If radical criminology and positivism coalesce in a left realist approach in some of the documentaries, affirmative postmodernism is extremely scarce. Although postmodern penology and crime control techniques do not bode well for the image of the nation that is produced, perspectives that include postmodern communitarianism, for example, are substantially more promising. It is a great pity that they are largely missing from most of the programmes. *Atlantis lost*, however, *does* include informal interventions and community empowerment as far as crime and social order are concerned, which is suggestive of a postmodern communitarian link. Although the uplifting message behind these interventions ultimately has its roots in a welfare era mentality, their inclusion points to a constructive postmodern direction for programmes on crime and punishment in the contemporary era. This proactive community element suggests that,

If postmodernisation has any meaning, then it lies in the hypothesis that decentralised informal mechanisms come to dominate and partially replace formal centralised institutions and their accompanying discourses or grand narratives (Lea, 1998: 181).

Another important postmodern influence is that of viewing the offender as motivated rather than simply the product of social and psychological forces beyond his/her control. A motivated individual has the ability to change his/her mind about continuing a life of crime, whereas the victim of a psychologically based compulsion may not. Most

¹⁸⁵ Its exclusion of gender in its analysis, its lack of focus on the individual offender as well as its limited interpretation of the victim ensure that its left realist approach is incomplete.

advantageous to the depiction of the nation would be a representation that deals with both motive and cause - both the immediate and the long-term factors in producing criminality. Through this, a huge step towards understanding crime (and hence pointing to solutions) would be taken. In *A bitter harvest*, this is skilfully achieved. The motive of money is addressed, but is also encased in a broader modernist examination of cause.

As discussed above, the avoidance of global trends and theoretical paradigms, such as gender, can sometimes be to the detriment of the construction of national identity on television. In some cases, however, it should be noted that avoiding these trends and theories is advantageous - and the SABC is to be commended for doing so. *Atlantis lost*, for example, tackles a subject, which is handled by global media in a melodramatic and limited fashion. The trend is one that focuses on individual, extreme cases of abuse, removed from their social context and sensationalised in the 'child abuse horror story' (Wilczynski & Sinclair, 2000: 268). *Atlantis lost* avoids this on every level. The programme also illustrates how deconstruction can be damaging in the creation of a useful normative morality on which national identity can be based. While deconstruction may have been useful in *Strong medicine* as a route towards examining cultural diversity in South Africa, in *Atlantis lost* it would have created a confusing, morally bankrupt perspective on child abuse. Indeed, challenging what the criminal justice system defines as abuse could never yield a positive outcome. In terms of global moral panics about an increase in crime, *A bitter harvest* manages to successfully avoid hysteria through the employment of consistently moderate perspectives. This is particularly notable when considering the actual anxiety around this issue in South Africa - an anxiety, which does not reflect the actual rural/urban distribution of crime. That this video avoids the global trend in moral panics is a testament to the SABC's fulfilment of its mandate - the level-headed approach ensures that any sense of the nation that viewers might draw from the programme is one that is *not* based on a view that crime is out of control or that the country is headed for disaster.

2. LAYERS OF THE LOCAL

The manner in which the local is depicted is often intimately connected to the global theories and trends underpinning the programmes, vindicating the notion that “the global never exists except in the local – and today there is no local that is not infected by the global” (Braman, 1996: 22). Consequently, where the global trends and theories are negative, the depiction of the local is also negative – going against the grain of the positive diversity encapsulated in the broadcaster’s mandate. The local environment of Grootvlei Prison in *It’s nice to have a friend* articulates with globally understood tenets of postmodern penology in a manner that bodes ill for the image of the nation that is projected. Grootvlei is seen as chaotic and serves as a symbol of decline. This means that the local, as it exists as part of the nation, is seen in pessimistic terms. Since the video also explicitly suggests that the local is a microcosm of the national, it becomes more glaring how the SABC does not fulfil its mandate regarding the presentation of a positive national identity. In a similar manner, the local level of Lurigancho Prison in *The Lima connection* is shown in a way that slots in with the theorising of postmodern penology. Diminished control is the order of the day as disorder reigns in the prison. Here, an observational style tour of Lurigancho helps create a strong preferred meaning in this regard.

Not only is the nature of the depiction of the local important for the broadcaster’s mandate, but so is its scope. In *It’s nice to have a friend*, for example, there is a very limited setting for the local – it exists only in Grootvlei Prison. The implication for depicting diversity is not positive. Other videos also include this kind of ‘micro-level’ of the local. Most notable, perhaps is *The Lima connection*, where, as with *It’s nice*, the local economy of the prison is explored. Neither video examines the ‘micro-level’ with any ambiguity. Images of decline, lax prison security and the commodification and coercion involved in homosexual sex in the prison proliferate in *It’s nice*. In *The Lima connection*, the theme of drugs is consistently in focus. In both cases, context and explanation that would mitigate the impression of degeneration is absent.

Another 'layer' of the local, which has a broader reach than the 'micro-level' is that of the neighbourhood. Shrouded in misery and hopelessness, the neighbourhoods in *The day* offers no sense of positive diversity. Interview material and observation ensure that we see Seapoint through a lens of degeneracy. This is also the case with the portrayal of Soweto in *Architecture of fear*. While a rich depth of images combined with historical context provides a valuably tangible sense of the local, their constructiveness is obliterated by the pessimism attached to the township in this documentary. Here evil triumphs over good as the postmodern theme of out-of-control-crime is vindicated. Consequently, while diversity is addressed through the inclusion of the level of the neighbourhood, in many cases it is not a *positive* diversity that would contribute to the fulfilment of the broadcaster's mandate.

Surprisingly, the level of the city is not often established as a setting for many of the crime stories contained in the documentaries. While the length limitations obviously dictate the depth with which this local level can be explored in a documentary, even as a background setting for the exposition, it is often absent. Where it is explored, the result is not often positive. In *Architecture of fear*, Johannesburg is cast in the harsh light of a crime epidemic, which links to the variety of postmodern themes in the programme, including risk, decline and a belief in escalating crime. In this programme too, Johannesburg and South Africa are used interchangeably, encouraging the idea that the nation as a whole is also in decline. In *The Lima connection*, the local level of the city is only explored with regard to Lima. 'Othering' Lima, as the programme does, does not really create a sense of what the self might be at the level of the city. Cape Town is mentioned in the programme, but is ultimately ignored.

Different understandings of what constitutes diversity make its manifestation in these documentaries difficult to assess. Regional diversity, however, is undoubtedly another level of the local, which offers a potential avenue for the fulfilment of the broadcaster's mandate. Yet for the most part, this potential remains unrealised. There is a consistent lack of complexity in dealing with regional characterisations and regional differences. *A bitter harvest*, for example, does not acknowledge the regional differences in farm

murders, which translates into a lack of acknowledgment of diversity. In *The day*, the limited view of the western Cape, where gang subculture inheres in its very fabric, ensures that local culture is seen as one-dimensional, frightening and hopeless. Insufficient sociological detail about the nature of this subculture works with the demonisation of the underclass in a manner which is conducive to moral panics and which does no justice to the region or its multiplicity. Similarly, the limitations with regard to parts of what used to be Venda in *Strong medicine* ensure that the regional environment does not contribute to the fulfilment of the mandate. Instead of showing a nuanced, contextualised diversity in this regional setting, viewers are treated to a 'timeless' African landscape along with commentary that panders to the notion of essential Africa.

The level of the local is dealt with positively in about as many instances as it is dealt with negatively in the selected documentaries, putting paid to any notion of a pattern in SABC productions on crime and punishment. While the 'micro-level' of the prison articulates with postmodern penology in two of the videos, in *The cage unlocked*, the portrayal of the local level of Pollsmoor Prison points to a distinctly modernist discourse of rehabilitation. Ultimately, this discourse is one of optimism, hope and resolution. It is this kind of positive depiction, in settings as diverse as prisons, that facilitates the construction of a useful national identity. The nature of the depiction of the local in itself and in the way it is extrapolated to the level of the national is fundamental to the SABC's mandate, which is comprised of requirements regarding both the national and the local (insofar as the local constitutes part of the diversity element in the broadcaster's mandate).

Some of the neighbourhoods in the programmes also contribute to a positive sense of the local. While Johannesburg and Soweto provide a dim view of South African society in *Architecture of fear*, Diepsloot is shown in less negative terms. Although it is not portrayed through rose-tinted lenses, its focus on poverty usefully alludes to structural inequality and the role it plays in crime, linking to global understandings of class in the process. As a result, an understanding of the factors at play in causing crime is created for

the viewers and this constitutes a first step in creating a solution-oriented national identity. Similarly, using a left realist perspective, Atlantis in *Atlantis lost* gives attention to structural inequality and poverty as a cause of crime. In a positivist fashion, it also looks specifically at social problems – alcohol abuse, prostitution and cycles of family violence – thus creating a circular relationship between structure and culture. While this may not seem particularly optimistic, through explanation, moral panics are avoided and a sound basis for national identity is created – one which consists of understanding the crime problem and searching for answers. *The cage unlocked* also offers explanation through a lens of poverty and drug-addiction. Importantly, in this case, the images are balanced by constructive visuals of uplifting community life. Orange Farm in *Very fast guys* offers a more apparently optimistic slant on local culture, which, in turn, offers a hopeful outlook for national identity. The ultimate message in the programme is one where gang subculture is in decline and the promise of a legitimate, gang-free future for some of the country's citizens exists. Not only is the nature of the neighbourhoods productive for national identity in some of the programmes, but the variety of neighbourhoods shown and the depth with which their characteristics are explored, is important for illustrating diversity in the South African context. Atlantis in *Atlantis lost*, for example, offers a rich texture of place, which is accompanied by a valuable historical context. In *Strong medicine* too, a depth of texture is offered for both rural and urban localities. The market under Farraday Bridge, for example, offers detailed insights of a world that may not be readily accessed by a middle-class audience.

3. QUESTIONS OF CULTURE

Intimately linked, the depiction of local culture and national culture play a fundamental role in the nature of the message produced. Although understandings of culture are in flux, this dissertation has chosen to make use of categories commonly associated with culture and which define the everyday life, which *is* culture. Race, language and religion are examples of this and are constituted by symbolic representation, which “constantly orientates people, individually and collectively, towards particular actions” (Tomlinson, 1999: 24). Once again, positive portrayals of culture in the videos are balanced by

negative ones, refuting the possibility of any pattern in these documentaries.

Interestingly, however, the way in which *apparent* elements of culture are actively addressed (such as the abovementioned language and race) is largely constructive.

To begin, the manner in which language is used in the documentaries is integral to the understanding of culture, which is produced. Although its use may not often be questioned by the viewer, its important function is indicated by the fact that, “Language is taken to be at the heart of culture and identity” (Barker, 1999: 11). Only one documentary appears to disregard the importance of the vernacular, where the original Afrikaans is largely obliterated by the translator’s English. The result is that national culture based on diverse indigenous languages remains unacknowledged in *The cage unlocked*. Unsurprisingly, however, this documentary was made for a British audience and the programmes specifically intended for South Africans offer a far more positive application of language – although it must be acknowledged that English still predominates. In *Very fast guys*, there is the audible retention of the original languages with the added accompaniment of English subtitles. The same is true for *It’s nice to have a friend*. Similarly, in *The Lima connection*, the Afrikaans is retained and subtitles are added. In this programme, there are even a few examples where Afrikaans is spoken without the inclusion of subtitles.

Interestingly, where intimations about race occur, both implicitly and explicitly, the result is largely positive for national culture. Race has played a fundamental role in our history where “Residential and social segregation came to play a significant role in the formation of collective racial identities in South Africa” (Zegeye, 2001a: 10). Consequently, it is no bolt from the blue that it features strongly in some of the documentaries. That race works productively in terms of racial representivity, in terms of explaining the relationship between race and crime and in terms of encouraging reconciliation is surely a testament to the way in which the SABC is dealing with this aspect of national culture. Although not a conscious *Special Assignment* choice of interviewees, *It’s nice to have a friend* includes a useful cross-section of race in the prisoners that it shows. *Architecture of fear* shows the way in which the history of racial discrimination continues to play a part in

national culture, where blacks are seen as criminal and certain neighbourhoods are seen as exclusively white. Although this may not be particularly positive, its value lies in the provision of explanation around issues to do with crime – and these explanations usefully link to the (albeit limited) historical context in the video. *Very fast guys* builds national unity by circumventing race as a factor in the guys' criminality, despite evidence that, in reality, gangsters are often governed by race and the perception of racial inequality. Consequently, this potentially divisive element of national culture is downplayed in the national culture projected in the documentary. Avoiding the issue is not necessarily the best approach, however, since an examination of race is important in order to defuse stereotypes about race and crime and to explore any relationship between race and crime in a non-alarmist, explanatory fashion. Looking at race in a general context and in a specific context of criminogenesis is thus important. Although *A bitter harvest* does not look at race as an element in the cause of farm murders, race is still seen to play a role and racial tensions are addressed. Most usefully, its reconciliatory stance offers the most productive approach to race – and one, which is fruitful when it comes to fostering national unity. Here cross-racial alliances are shown in a manner that flouts the rigid racial cleavages of the apartheid era and offers hope through the suggestion of new identities based on new alliances. Through this, national culture becomes inherently positive.

Perhaps one of the most important ways in which national unity through culture can be fostered in documentaries is by giving attention to the common history that binds all South Africans. A couple of the programmes in my selection do this very well. *Atlantis lost*, for example, refers to the community of Atlantis as an apartheid construct, thus invoking the national history of the Group Areas Act. Although the history of apartheid and the social problems it produced is certainly not to be lauded, by making intertextual connections with a national history through *Atlantis lost*, viewers are inadvertently subscribing to the notion of a tangible national identity. The specific focus on the coloured community in one area of the Western Cape ensures that diversity in the context of this national history is addressed, thereby helping to fulfil the 'unity in diversity' aspect of the broadcaster's mandate. In *A bitter harvest* too, poverty, lack of education,

labour abuse and migration to urban areas are consolidated in an exploration of the role of South African apartheid history. *Architecture of fear* is another video that includes historical context. Unfortunately, the contextualisation is not sustained throughout the video and, instead of explaining crime through history, crime is described in terms of an aberrant society.

If national culture inheres in history, so does it inhere in the sense of normative morality, which is often applied in the videos. Very often this serves as a useful adhesive for the nation, gluing us together in a collective condemnation of criminality. Acts of child abuse in *Atlantis lost* are unquestioningly accepted as abhorrent, despite evidence that what we now understand as abuse was not always seen in these terms. Similarly, the outrage with which warder corruption is regarded in *It's nice*, encourages the viewers to unite in moral indignation and to thereby set a standard for national culture based on right and wrong. At times, however, the normative morality depicted in the videos is limiting and exclusionary – to the detriment of creating national unity. In *The day*, culture is defined through the exclusion of certain segments of the population, which do not conform to the normative morality defined in the video. The underclass is demonised and national culture is thus projected only as what is middle-class and mainstream. In *Strong medicine*, normative morality is based on an acceptance of western criminological definition and middle class values, thereby excluding the cultural space where the harvesting of body parts is morally acceptable. Although the documentary need not condone the harvesting of body parts, it should acknowledge the existence of this practice as an established part of South African culture. The severely circumscribed outline of normative morality does not allow it to do this.

The projection of culture occurs in the most mundane areas of life depicted in the documentaries. In *The Lima connection*, national unity is fostered through the motif of a hybridised food, which becomes a symbol of 'South Africanness'. Every aspect of everyday life contains a cultural message, from the religious undertones in *The Lima connection* and *The cage unlocked* to the postmodern fear of crime in a dangerised

society in *Architecture of fear*.¹⁸⁶ The prison gang defines culture in *The cage unlocked*. Absences also define culture significantly and in *Strong medicine* it is the absence of an exploration of ‘muti’ (in its ‘traditional’ and corrupted forms) as a popular practice that impacts on the cultural message produced. In *It’s nice*, the characters whose stories shape the programme remain two-dimensional and any potential they might have had to illustrate cultural diversity through their different backgrounds, is lost.

4. THE NATION-STATE

As discussed in the introduction and Chapter One, this dissertation has chosen to view national identity as not only residing in culture, but also in the nation-state. In the contemporary global era, the continued relevance of the nation-state as a source of identity is increasingly being questioned (Waterman, 1996: 39; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 4). While this may be true, it is undeniable that, in many contexts, the nation-state remains an important symbol of identity. The emphasis on the post-apartheid regime and the ‘new South Africa’ in our own country certainly suggests that this is the case. The depiction of the nation-state on television consequently offers an important message about identity. It can either bind citizens together in an embrace of positive unity based on an efficient nation-state, or it can indicate degeneration and pessimism, on which no national identity can be forged. This dissertation is not suggesting that criticism of the nation-state should never be included in documentaries – this would severely compromise the watchdog role of the media. Rather, that criticism should never be gratuitous and that healthy criticism be accompanied by commendations of the nation-state where relevant.

The instances in which the nation-state is regarded with disdain outnumber those in which it is depicted positively in the videos. In both *The Lima connection* and *It’s nice to have a friend*, the prison environment seems to indicate a complete loss of control by the

¹⁸⁶ In *The Lima connection*, there is an unchallenged universalism, which assumes Christian dominance in a culturally limiting way. On the other hand, both Islam and Christianity are at least nominally included in *The cage unlocked*, illustrating cultural diversity to some degree.

state. In the former, the ‘delegados’ control the prison and illegal activities thrive. Although this does not refer to the South African prison system, it offers a general commentary on prison and the nation-state in the global era.¹⁸⁷ *It’s nice to have a friend* also offers a negative outlook on control in the prison, working intertextually with a variety of other media reports that are negative about the prison system and that link to postmodern penology.¹⁸⁸ It is not only the prison system in the videos where a message of loss of control is conveyed, but also in terms of crime in general. The prevalence of the global criminal economy in *The Lima connection* undermines the nation-state’s efficacy. In *Architecture of fear*, there is a postmodern loss of trust in the systems of modernity. Faith in the criminal justice system is declining and is met by an increase in private security and vigilantism which supports the notion that, “In many countries, but especially in South Africa, the public questions the ability of the police to protect them from crime” (Schönsteich, 1999: 15). This too bodes ill for the manner in which the nation-state is projected.

In some cases, it is the absence or invisibility of the nation-state that subtly conveys a message of incompetence or lack. In *The day*, for example, the investigative documentary seems to have usurped the nation-state’s role in terms of solving the crime. The approach of the police to the Sizzlers Massacre is ignored completely. In *The Lima connection*, the state’s low profile in coming to the prisoners’ assistance is conspicuous. Similarly, in *Strong medicine*, viewers receive no information about what the state is doing to curb the selling of human body parts. While this certainly appears to be an oversight, it should also be considered that it is, perhaps, a judicious way in which to tackle the fact that, in reality, the state is not doing much. Certainly, in *Very fast guys*, the exclusion of the state functions positively, so that the poverty and criminal activity in the video are not linked to state inefficiency, as they might be in reality.

¹⁸⁷ The video does refer to the South African prison system to a limited degree – and here the message is one of incompetence. Firstly, the prisoners say they would rather be in a Peruvian prison because of the threat of rape in a South African prison, which suggests that the state cannot provide safe custody. Secondly, it is Shona Ali, rather than the nation-state, who is fulfilling the religious component of rehabilitation.

¹⁸⁸ In this video, warder corruption is rife and the state cannot stop it. This is accompanied by general suggestions that Correctional Services cannot cope; drugs and coerced sex are seen to thrive.

Once again, the absence of constructive comparative material has the effect of casting the South African nation-state in a worse light than may have otherwise been the case. In *Architecture of fear*, the withdrawal of the nation-state in terms of policing, can be seen through the proliferation of private security. This phenomenon is not exclusive to South Africa, yet through the depiction of it in this way, it seems as if our nation-state is the only one experiencing challenges to its jurisdiction. Obvious comparisons between Peru and South Africa in *The Lima connection* remain latent – and the potential that this has to cast the South African nation-state in a favourable light consequently remains unrealised.

The few positive depictions of the nation-state in the documentaries are notable. Particularly in *A bitter harvest*, it seems that the state is self-consciously projected in a constructive light. The voice-over and the use of expert witnesses from the police and the SANDF carefully promote the idea of a state which is doing everything it can to curb farm attacks and a criminal justice system which is organised and efficient. *The cage unlocked* also offers an optimistic perspective on the state's approach to crime and punishment. Rehabilitation is associated with the nation-state, Correctional Services seems proactive and state intervention to curb crime is tangible through the gangland police and army intervention to which viewers are privy. While undoubtedly useful in terms of the broadcaster's mandate, the consistent use of such an approach in documentaries may open the SABC to criticism of partisanship. Perhaps the most practical approach to the nation-state is that contained in *Atlantis lost*. Here the state's efforts in dealing with child abuse are realistically criticised, yet kudos is also given to the Child Protection Units for their hard work. Ultimately, the programme promotes the idea of potential solutions to child abuse emanating from the nation-state while also recognising the positive protective function of the state.

Overall, a unified, strong national image is seldom projected. Where the documentaries are positive in some aspects, such as national culture, for example, they are negative in others, such as the depiction of the nation-state. The lack of consistency within the programmes is matched by a lack of consistency in the overall selection of programmes: some tend towards the positive and many tend towards the negative. While clearly

fulfilling the broadcaster's mandate in some aspects of some programmes, SABC3 does not evidence a coherent, dependable approach where this is concerned. It has neither met the challenges of the global era nor the challenges of a new political dispensation requiring ideological overhaul.

In many ways, discovering this lack of a pattern was extremely disappointing for the study. While it may seem idealistic to have expected the producers of the documentary programmes to keep the mandate uppermost in their minds during production, I was nonetheless hoping for at least *some* sort of consistent approach. In retrospect I should have used the producers own expectations as a yardstick against which to measure and evaluate the actual textual result. This may have been more realistic and would also have ensured less repetition in the study, since the producers' expectations (unlike the SABC's mandate) would have varied from documentary to documentary. External input of this sort would have made a difference in another way too. As it stands, the dissertation is very 'closed' in the sense that the analysis is all my own and alternative views and interpretations do not have a place. At times this has made it extremely difficult to recognise and address my own subjectivity and I have had to consciously not 'over-criticise' the SABC. I am not entirely sure that I would include extensive interview material if I had to do it again, since the dissertation is already long, but it should be mentioned here that the lack of audience and producer feedback is problematic.

If the success of the study has been affected by the use of the SABC mandate as an unattainable ideal, so has it been affected by the selection of programmes. While the differences between the documentaries have, I believe, made for a very interesting analysis, comparison of such disparate material has also sometimes been extremely difficult. If I had taken a longer period with which to select the documentaries, holding out until I had nine that fitted into a more obvious group, I may perhaps have found far more of a pattern in SABC programming than I did. This is certainly something that I will consider before embarking on future research endeavours.

Aside from the shortcomings, I believe that my dissertation can offer a model on which to base future analyses, not only of documentaries, but of a wide variety of programming. Most interesting for me was the confluence of criminology and textual analysis. I found it fascinating to consider the way in which theoretical criminology has been watered down, simplified and transplanted into documentaries in a common sense way. Further understanding of how and why this has been done could prove invaluable to both Criminology and Media Studies. Also leading on from this dissertation are many questions about the broadcaster's mandate and how such utopian ideas can be represented through documentaries, especially where documentaries have a negative subject matter, such as crime. These two aspects could usefully occupy future research leading on from this dissertation.

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