

# **NOTIONS OF COMMUNITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN TELEVISION ADVERTISING**



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# **NOTIONS OF COMMUNITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN TELEVISION ADVERTISING**

**A STUDY IN COMMUNICATION AND  
THE PURSUIT OF COMMUNITY IN SOUTH AFRICA  
AS REVEALED THROUGH INTERVIEWS ABOUT  
SELECTED TELEVISION ADVERTISING**

**BY**

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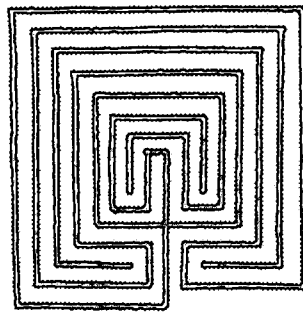
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**Date**

***The self-creation demanded of us by our national realities is no different from that which similar realities are demanding of others. The past has left us orphans, as it has the rest of the planet, and we must join together in inventing our common future. World history has become everyone's task, and our own labyrinth is the labyrinth of all mankind.***

**Octavio Paz**



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# INTRODUCTION

The social and political upheavals of South Africa have been widely documented not only from within the country, but also in the international media. The system of apartheid, which brought such notoriety to South Africa, has, besides its effects on the people, had a major impact on the arts and culture of the land.

Advertising, which 'borrows' from contemporary cultural innovations, and is sensitive to both social and cultural trends, traced a conformist path through the apartheid era. There was no attempt to protest against apartheid or to disturb the status quo - though it has to be acknowledged that any attempt to do this would have been quickly quashed, if not by the client then certainly by the government. Target audiences were accepted as separate cultural 'groups', being in essence the various race groups in the country as demarcated by the political system.

However, in the middle to late 1980s, certain television commercials - against the grain of govt. policy and the tense and violent situation in the country - endeavoured to find some kind of a vision for the future. A way out of the impasse. Attempts were made to portray a national community. This usually was a reversal of apartheid divisions and a move towards inclusive notions of a multi-racial, but 'normal' society. Some commercials appeared to be 'building' a nation at the very time that an underground civil war was tearing it apart. The advertising world seemed to be ahead of many of the politicians of the time and at the forefront of change.

Then, after the election in May 1995, there was a flowering of new advertising that celebrated the changes... the new democracy - a fresh start. The old social and political constraints no longer had the power to impose. It was these new initiatives in advertising that prompted this study.

The purpose of this study is to investigate in-depth, certain notions of community

(iii)

that were being expressed in selected television commercials one year after the election - actually, during the period from November 1995 to February 1996.

Three commercials (identified by their intention to portray an inclusive South African community) were selected. Each of these commercials was subjected to a detailed denotative analysis - a cataloguing of the essential narrative and visual details. Then followed a connotative analysis of each commercial, this time focusing on the artistic, cultural, and metaphorical resonations of the imagery, the narrative, the dialogue, and the music.

Then, the primary research began. In-depth interviews were conducted with agency personnel who were involved in the production of the commercials. Thereafter, in-depth interviews were conducted with randomly selected individuals in the target audiences of two of the selected commercials. This phase of research allowed a certain amount of reflection and cross-referencing because data was transcribed when it was received, and access to interviewees (living their lives and having all kinds of commitments, demands and appointments) was not always easily scheduled, and often subject to change.

The purpose of these interviews (with both agency personnel and target audience) was to explore the content of the commercials, and the perceived credibility and relevance of the commercials as models/portraits of a national community for South Africa.

(A study of this nature is exploratory. Being concerned with interpretation, it touches on many disciplines and sources of information, so the candidate structured the study as follows:

Chapter 1 contains a review of the historical and political context which is important in a study so specifically focused on, and situated in, South Africa.

In chapter 2, advertising is studied in terms of its cultural resonance and its potential as a means of persuasion and myth-building, through the media.

In chapter 3, some contemporary discourses which impact strongly on cultural and media studies, are discussed under the subtitles: A Marxist critique of advertising; Mythology, Glamour and Consciousness; Ecology; Feminism and Ecofeminism; Postmodernism.

In chapter 4, Semiology and the Construction of Meaning are considered, and an argument is put forward as to why a Qualitative methodology, namely the in-depth interview, is most appropriate for a study of this nature. Thereafter, the practical application and details of the methodology are discussed.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9, are concerned with the analysis of the interviews and the process of interpreting the data collected. At the end of each of these chapters, conclusions are drawn.

In chapter 10, a critical evaluation of the study is made, final conclusions are drawn, and suggested areas for further research are considered.

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# CHAPTER 1

## THE NATURE AND SETTING OF THIS STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a brief overview of the historical and socio-political developments in South Africa which form the context for this study. This is followed by a brief review of responses to these socio-political developments, both by government and the advertising industry. The motivation for and purpose of this study is then discussed, followed by an examination of the terminology 'Notions of Community...' used in the title of this thesis.

### 1.2 The Historical / Socio-political Context

The system of Apartheid has, since its inception in 1953, fragmented South African society, repressed human expression, and retarded racial integration and ultimately, the building of a national community. In broad terms, Apartheid can be defined as the socio-political system imposed on South Africa's multi-racial population by a minority White government. It was a system of segregation, enforced by law, and labelled 'Separate Development'. '...the apartheid programme of Afrikaner nationalists ...was intended to make white supremacy permanent.' (Parsons 1982:291)

Since the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck at Table Bay in 1652, South African history tells the story of European imperialism and its impact on the indigenous peoples. There has been continual conflict with the indigenous peoples, whether Khoisan or African, and this conflict has been primarily over land and the use of natural



**REMEMBER ...**

**SHARPEVILLE**

**REMEMBER ...**

**UITENHAGE**

**MARCH 21 1960  
1985**

**REMEMBER ...**

**THE SHARPEVILLE SIX  
THEY WILL NOT HANG**

**FORWARD TO  
PEOPLES' POWER!**



resources. The colonists, who considered their civilisation and culture to be far in advance of the indigenous people, let nothing stand in the way of their will to power and industrial expansion. The colonists could imagine no communal life with Africans unless the Africans were in a subordinate position. They were patronised and excluded from affairs of state, and their role was defined in terms of a master-servant relationship.

In the course of time there developed a resistance to European arrogance and as a consequence there was a growth of tribal-nationalism. And, 'especially among Christian-educated (*black*) people, there was a widening sense of African nationality'. (Parsons 1982:207)

In 1912 the South African Native National Congress was founded, and in 1923 changed its name to the African National Congress - the ANC. It was from the ANC that the most effective resistance to apartheid came. 'In response (*to apartheid*), African nationalism itself began to undergo changes in South Africa. Mass protests and passive resistance were met by even firmer police repression. African nationalism was forced underground, and turned towards plans for armed revolution.' (Parsons 1982:291)

The African National Congress and various support groups, established a network of underground resistance within the country. Outside the country the anti-apartheid movement and their allied groups, including the ANC's army in exile, *Mkonto we Sizwe*, orchestrated a powerful resistance movement that made shrewd use of international media to promote the justice of their cause. As these forces of resistance increased so the forces of counter-resistance and repression increased. But the government was forced to make concessions. Resistance was strong, and sanctions on trade, culture and sporting links with South Africa, were imposed by the international community.

In 1983, under the prime minister, P.W. Botha, the white electorate was asked to vote on the issue of the inclusion to parliament of the Indians and Coloureds. The Africans were excluded. Although the electorate (limited to a vote of Yes or No)





**PLATE 2** MANDELA & DE KLERK. 'Rainbow Nation'

voted in favour of the new Tricameral parliament, these changes were too late and too little to stop the powerful forces gathering against the government. The result was a subterranean civil war which manifested itself in acts of unprecedented violence, public sabotage, 'necklace' murders, and police brutality.

The Nationalist government was eventually forced to capitulate, and in May of 1994, South Africa had its first democratic election which included all sectors of the population. The African National Congress won the election by an overwhelming majority. Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the president with F. W. De Klerk (the previous state president) as one of two deputy presidents. This new government, of 'national unity', had the task of organising and facilitating the transition of South Africa to a full democracy.

The inauguration of President Mandela was accompanied by a great sense of national jubilation. It was an international media event. Mandela and De Klerk appeared before the cameras of the world. They took hands and held them up together in a symbol of triumph; a symbol of unity. Both black and white appeared to have the sincere intention of working out the future together. Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop of Cape Town, had called South Africa the 'Rainbow Nation', and on that auspicious day, this country seemed to fit his description. South Africa appeared to be an example for the world in terms of race relations. The unusually mature approach to the resolution of past conflict also seemed to be exemplary.

Many considered the process to be nothing short of a miracle since the predictions for South Africa's future in the press had always tended to the apocalyptic. Words like 'Bloody Revolution', 'bloodbath' and 'powder keg' were used often to describe the expected outcome. Images in the media of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the Soweto riots of 1976, and the long string of acts of public violence in the 1980s and 90s seemed to be but the prelude to a great and terrible conflagration. This country was one of the world's trouble spots - a likely arena for violent racial conflict. Yet at Mandela's inauguration, South Africa seemed like a nation ready to make the changes necessary to lay aside the conflicts of the past and to build a

peaceful and democratic national community.

## **1.3. Responses to Socio-Political Conditions and Change**

### **1.3.1 Formal Initiatives for Development, Education and Public Broadcasting**

Since the jubilation of the inauguration, the difficulties of implementing change to match the election promises of the ANC government have become apparent. Attempts to integrate society are being negotiated, but are taking a long time. South Africa's economy has been structured upon and formed by the separationist policy of apartheid, leaving a large sector of the African population in a position of extreme material disadvantage.

It appears that the racial and economic polarisation that was intensified by Apartheid is still deeply imbedded within the collective psyche of the various race groups. The 'us and them' mentality which characterised apartheid continues to emerge with hostility into the daily life of the society, despite the 'success' of the Revolution and the professed intentions to live in harmony. A lack of trust continues despite the liberal and democratic sentiments enshrined in the new constitution.

The nation's search for its true self, which has been deformed and hidden by the fascism of the nationalist government and its repressive institutions, appears to be a difficult and lengthy task. 'Liberation' and 'democracy' are just words and give no answers to the social and economic challenges facing the nation or to the irrational subconscious forces shaking the society.

The ANC government's major initiative for national development has been the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) instituted to address inequalities in the national infrastructure. Its focus has been on housing, electrifi-

cation, waste disposal and water supplies. In 1994/95 the government spent eleven billion Rand on development projects (RDP Review 1995:4), but there is still a great deal to be done in terms of uplifting the poor and providing basic housing, health services and some form of social welfare.

Much attention has been given to the development of a national policy of education that is integrated and no longer skewed in favour of the white race. Education has been a contentious political issue because of the apartheid government's policy of separate education - 'Bantu Education' - which led to the Soweto 'riots' of 1976, where the school children of Soweto rose up against attempts to institute Afrikaans as first language for tuition. The climate of revolution engendered by this occurrence has made it difficult to normalise the running of certain schools where political objectives were placed ahead of education. However, across the nation as a whole, the policy of non-racial, or integrated, education has been instituted without a great deal of protest, although voices of concern have been raised by educators, and by parents from traditionally advantaged schools, about a drop in the quality of public education as a result of the larger classes and the ill-preparedness of those previously disadvantaged.

The struggle to free the country from Apartheid has taken a heavy toll, and has had far reaching effects on the lives of individuals and communities. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), initiated by a multi-party agreement at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) in 1992, continues to conduct daily forums in which people are telling their stories, revealing and facing their pain and loss. It is hoped that this form of confession under amnesty will bring out into the open the truth behind so many of the acts of violence committed during the Revolution and, thereby, enable the process of forgiveness and national reconstruction to begin. The stories are broadcast through the media and there is a weekly report on the commission's progress on television on Sunday nights. These reports are anchored by Max du Preez and are currently (22/3/1998) being screened at 18:00 under the programme title *Special Report on Truth and Reconciliation*. This allows interested individuals in the nation to follow the process, and to see that there is concern about the injustices of the past, an official

policy in operation to bring them before the nation, and where possible, to make restitution.

Another important change in terms of the material infrastructure is that the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), particularly the medium of television, has been restructured to address the racial and cultural diversity of South African audiences. Of South Africa's eleven official languages, five (English, Zulu, Afrikaans, Xhosa and Setswana) are used in news broadcasts and in programmes on the three major channels, which are endeavouring to cover the activities and interests of all members of the population. This means that the SABC now has a much wider reach and potential as a means of communication, education or advertising in this diverse society.

### **1.3.2 Initiatives in Advertising**

Well before the elections, advertisers were responding to impending change, and seeking ways to make their communication relevant. Because of the wide cultural and racial diversity of South African audiences, advertisers were forced to re-envision and redefine South African society in order to facilitate more effective communication to potential target markets. The society had to be observed from a new and different perspective. It was no longer the simple dichotomy of white or black audiences. Now freed from an outworn system, communicators had to find ways to include all the people, and this required an observation of the society from an inclusive point of view, which had previously been taboo.

One of the first initiatives has been a definite drive to include and incorporate the full spectrum of South Africa's racial and cultural diversity in advertisements.\* The more difficult problem, however, has been to break from the apartheid stereotypes and to show some kind of humane, positive and convincing interaction

\* All information on commercials which follows in the text of this subsection (*Initiatives in Advertising*) has been obtained from Ornico Facilities, 1 Stan Road, Morningside, Johannesburg.

between people. A commercial for Sanlam Bank, first flighted on 22nd August, and which continued on into the nineties, titled 'Babies In The Boardroom', showed an innovative approach to the problem by using children to represent the racial diversity of the country. Besides the cuteness and humour of seeing children masquerading as executives, the commercial was pointing to the future when these children would be adults and members of the national community.

Similar use of children from different racial groups has been made in commercials for Jungle Oats, titled 'Champions' (first flighted 05/09/88), and Milo, titled 'Gymnast' (first flighted 30/03/89), where the nutritional value of these foods is seen to be building the strength of the coming generation and a multi-racial nation that will be a strong competitor against other nations.

South African Breweries (SABS) have been conducting a beer campaign for Castle Lager which has been running since 1987 and has, through a series of television commercials, attempted a relationship with the changes in the society, and people's aspirations, by presenting a non-racial society in which blacks and whites can form close friendships and mix comfortably over their drinks. Initially the idealised and harmonious racial interaction between blacks and whites depicted in these advertisements was far from the reality, yet favourable public response indicated that there was something in them which resonated with the aspirations of the society. (This campaign comes under discussion in this study.)

Another method of dealing with the awkwardness that can bedevil social interaction with different race groups in South Africa, is through humour - to tackle such weaknesses head on. A commercial for Radio Metro, titled 'Dinner Party', (first flighted 11/04/94), prior to the election, featured a young, white executive at a cocktail party who makes the social fauxpas of treating the new black director of the company as a servant. The commercial's effectiveness relied on the reversal of role stereotypes.

The Vodacom commercial (first flighted 19/12/94), which is considered at length in this study, also plays on the racial stereotypes and humourously exploits the



unexpected twists brought about by the changes of South Africa's new social and political dispensation.

Spoornet flighted a campaign, titled 'Bushman' on 4/11/91, which used representations of Bushman people as a kind of celebration of our African context and racial diversity. Referring to the Spoornet campaign and a South African Airways campaign by the same agency, Barbara Buntman (1994:125), comments: 'these adverts' reflect a largely new concern of much of the white elite to recognise and even celebrate South Africa's African context. Intrinsic to this concern was an increasing lack of comfort with, and perhaps even rejection of apartheid, its associated vision of racial separation, and European identification for whites.'

The socio-political changes have had a marked effect on advertising generally. Not only have they forced the redefinition and observation of the society but also of the markets and the market forces now operating. As the country breaks away from the racial segregation of the past, markets are no longer divided solely along racial lines. Factors like education and income, irrespective of race, now also determine market segmentation and definition. (Green & Lascaris 1988:18)

## 1.4 Motivation for and Purpose of This Study

Having observed initiatives in television advertising which attempt to make ameliorative response to the socio-political changes, the candidate felt motivated to investigate these responses through primary research - to explore the reasoning and motivation of the makers of these commercials, and to explore audience response and reasoning.

In the wake of the social fragmentation caused by apartheid, 'nation building' or 'community', and the means of inspiring it, are likely to play a role in the recovery of the society. The season of apartheid is officially over, and stories and notions about a 'new' national community are likely to reflect current notions of a multi-ethnic, but inclusive society. Such models of a potentially humane society,

expressed through advertising, may be valuable catalysts in the collective imagination of the society as it moves towards normalisation.

The study is designed to explore at primary level:

1) the notions, motivations and rationale of the makers of television commercials which have attempted to respond to the present socio-political needs of South Africa by offering myths or models of an inclusive, but diverse national community, and

2) the response to these commercials of individuals in the target audience.

The design of this study rests upon certain assumptions:

1) Images of a harmonious society or a national community created by advertisers are likely to reflect the cultural aspirations and ideas of the creative team which made the advertisement. (As such, these ideas and aspirations are best described as 'notions' in that they prompt creative ideas, though they may be based on assumptions not fully considered or conscious.)

2) Notions of community in this time of transition, can only be constructive catalysts if they are accepted, and found to be culturally valid by target audiences.

3) Advertising, which reflects our aspirations and links products to the wider currents of social change and the confluence of contemporary ideas and images, is a powerful cultural force.

4) The in-depth interview is the most appropriate method of probing the motives and thoughts of both the makers and the receivers of advertising. By probing in this way, and asking questions that require deep and thoughtful responses, the notions underlying the communication process may be revealed.

## 1.5 Notions of Community

**An examination of the terminology used in the title of this thesis.**

South Africa, with its extensive infrastructure, has the potential to become the biggest market in Africa with a fast rate of development and economic expansion, but the inherent 'human' problems in this society are preventing this. There is a great need for a healing of the wounds of the past and the inherited lack of trust. To engender community, what is needed is some kind of inspiring vision (even myth) of the nation as a community, a cohesive entity, conscious of itself and responsible for its own maintenance. E.H. Carr (1961:149) comments: 'Modern history begins when more and more people emerge into social and political consciousness, become aware of their respective groups as historical entities having a past and a future, and enter fully into history.'

There are no ready-made models for South Africa - it has its own unique social and economic problems. However, new ideas and visions have to be found for the realities that are challenging the country. This study considers some attempts in advertising to do this.

It seems as if certain advertisers feel the need to help to build the nation in order to build their markets. Attempts to envision a national community that is convincing and relevant to all South Africa's diverse peoples is part of the process of community building. The quest to portray a national community as diverse as South Africa's has become a driving force in communication and media, and particularly in advertising, where there is a strong motivation to expand and develop the markets and to engender the trust and goodwill necessary to do this.

Advertising is not generally considered to be a philanthropic activity, but the changes in South Africa have forced a great deal of rethinking in many fields. What worked in the past no longer works in the present, and a consideration of very real human issues is imperative. Some of the questions that challenge are these : How, after such a divisive past can South Africa build a cohesive nation?

Can such different cultures as Europe and Africa be united in an urban and technological infra-structure that has its origins in Europe? How can South Africa achieve a civil society that will allow all her diverse peoples to feel a sense of belonging? Does South Africa have a positive story that such a diverse and fragmented nation can share? Can positive social reform be brought about through conscious effort? Can the media and the current forms of electronic communication play a role in such a process?

It is through concerns with such issues that the title of this study, *Notions of Community in South African Television Advertising*, was chosen. 'Notions' being ideas, facts and opinions, as well as vague ideals, intimations and rumour. Notions are also ideas and ideals that can fuel action, but which are often not carefully considered or brought to reasoned consciousness. It was expected that certain imprecisions of thought were likely to be revealed in the interviews, hence the inclusion of this term in the title.

With regard to the word 'community' in the title of this thesis, the study focuses on that idea of community which includes the different race groups and cultures of South Africa. It is a national community, perhaps even the concept of a nation, that offers a challenge to those involved in communication and advertising.

In the context of the 'new' South Africa and the conscious efforts to transcend the past, an active definition of community seems most fitting. Instead of using community as a noun to describe a fixed body of persons in the same locality or sharing a common culture, it is used in this study to describe a process that is continually evolving. Community, like culture, is not a static entity. Community can be seen rather as a process - the process of people building something together, or working on a common project. Such a definition, closer to a verb than a noun, is not at odds with the Latin origins of the word : *Com* means *together*, and *Munis/Munio* means *serving, obliging* or *building*. (Fox 1983 : 26) To use the word 'community' in the national context, implies some kind of interaction, communion, harmony, or collective responsibility between the different peoples that make up the nation. It would appear that some level of collective consciousness is

needed for this to occur.

A valuable contribution to these ruminations comes from Octavio Paz. Although writing about Mexico, his insight is relevant to this country - not only as a warning, but also in terms of defining community. He says :

*In one sense, then, the Revolution has recreated the nation; in another sense, of equal importance, it has extended nationality to races and classes which neither colonialism nor the nineteenth century were able to incorporate into our national life. But despite its extraordinary fecundity, it was incapable of creating a vital order that would be at once a world view and the basis of a really just and free society. The Revolution has not succeeded in changing our country into a community, or even in offering any hope of doing so. By community, I mean a world in which men recognise themselves in each other, and in which the 'principle of authority' - that is, force, whatever its origin and justification - concedes its place to a responsible form of liberty. (Paz 1985:175)*  
(emphasis mine.)

Further to these notions of community, there is also to be considered the concept of a nation in the twentieth century context. Ortega y Gasset claims: ... 'a nation is not really a nation unless it has both a past that influences it inactively and a valid historical project that is capable of animating dissimilar spirits and of giving unity and transcendence to solitary efforts'. (Paz 1985:127)

Certainly, the situation in South Africa meets his criteria. South Africa has before it a 'valid historical project', namely the recovery from a history of racial antagonism, and the building of a nation that will animate 'dissimilar spirits'. In short, the building of community.

Concerns about community are being expressed world-wide through conferences and publications in a range of areas of human endeavour. The Institute of Noetic Sciences in California held an international conference on the fostering of community in 1995, entitled *The Transformative Spirit of Service. Open Heart. Open*

*Mind. Rebuilding of Families, Neighbourhoods and Communities and the Transformation of Individual Lives.* The explanatory notes on their conference invitation read as follows:

*As we approach the end of a millennium, transformational changes are taking place in our personal lives, in our organisations and communities, and in social, political and economic institutions around the world. For many of us, the concept of making a living has been replaced by the philosophy of right livelihood, undertaking work to which we can contribute through direct service to both personal and social well-being.*

(Institute of Noetic Sciences Conference 1995)

Artists and psychologists are using the word 'community' with increasing frequency. In January 1996, The Child Guidance Clinic at the University of Cape Town hosted a conference titled *Community Partnership and Mental Health Training*.

In a recent publication of collected essays, edited by Susan Lacy (1995) and entitled *Mapping the Terrain - New Genre Public Art*, the word 'community' appears frequently. Guillermo Gomez-Pena suggests that artists are 'media pirates, border crossers, cultural negotiators, and community healers.' (Lacy 1995:40)

Arlene Raven says :

*... community is not only an ever-present construct of contemporary life by virtue of human nature alone but a self-conscious assembly united by geography, values, goals, or social conditions. Even without geographical unity, in groups such as 'the feminist community' or 'the art community', a society can still exist... there is a pressing need and burning desire for family and community, with their attendant commemorative events of continuing kinship.* (Lacy 1995:163 &165)

In 1997, The Congress of the International Congress of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) held a conference in Toronto. Their concerns with humane design and compassion also reflect this concern about community. In the introduction to

*The Humane Village Journal*, Michel Dupy says: 'Design can be used to direct creative energies towards a more human and harmonious world...The attempt to re-establish communities as places that encourage creative wisdom and the emergence of new cultures is not only an admirable venture, it is a vision whose time has come.' (Manu 1994:8)

From these definitions of community, it appears that community provides a much needed sense of belonging; is the result of conscious decisions; and requires a sense of mutual responsibility or obligation to the group.

South African's notions of community are likely to be affected by the past. In the context of South Africa, even the word 'community' still has about it the divisive echoes of apartheid. Terms such as the 'black' or 'coloured communities', bring to mind the euphemistic vocabulary used by the 'engineers' of apartheid to enforce the system of 'separate development'. Communities were encouraged to be exclusive and insular, whereas now, an inclusive vision has to be sought if a national community is to be built.

# CHAPTER 2

## ADVERTISING

### &

### Its Socio-Cultural Impact

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, some definitions of advertising are considered, and the role of advertising is examined in terms of its social and cultural impact.

#### 2.2 Advertising

J. Bullmore, chairman of J. Walter Thompson, provides a basic definition of an advertisement:

*An advertisement is a paid-for communication intended to inform and/or influence one or more people. (Tenniswood 1981:96)*

Although this definition gives a concise explanation of the aims and commercial basis of advertising, it does not expand on how the process of influencing and/or informing people reaches into the realms of culture and psychology. For this reason, a broader definition of advertising has been selected for consideration.

*Advertising is not just a business expenditure undertaken in the hope of moving some merchandise off the store shelves, but is an integral part of modern culture. Its creations appropriate and transform a vast range of symbols and ideas; its unsurpassed communicative powers recycle cultural models and references back through the networks of social interactions. This venture is unified by the discourse through and about objects, which*



*bonds together images of persons, products and well-being.*

(Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1990:5)

This broader definition acknowledges the cultural range and resonance of advertising in contemporary society - the aspect that is the focus of this study.

[In the analysis of this quotation which follows, where quotes have been used verbatim, the authors have been acknowledged as L. K.&J.]

The proliferation of advertising in the contemporary urban environment would seem to confirm the truth that advertising is integral to modern culture. Advertising is part of the whole process of market-research, mass production, commerce, media and the national and global economy. In short the lives of most human beings affect, and are affected by the evolution of a capitalist system, whose handmaiden is advertising.

Harvey (1989:299) expresses it this way:

*If we view culture as that complex of signs and significations (including language) \* that mesh into codes of transmission of social values and meanings, then we can at least begin upon the task of unravelling its complexities under present-day conditions by recognising that money and commodities are themselves the primary bearers of cultural codes. Since money and commodities are entirely bound up with the circulation of capital, it follows that cultural forms are firmly rooted in the daily circulation process of capital.* (emphases mine)

In effect this means that the flow of capital within the system, and a study of media, advertising, the nature of the lifestyles and products advertised, is, in fact,

\*That 'language' is included in brackets, after signs and significations, demonstrates the degree to which culture has become a complex of signs and significations - images in the media - as opposed to pure verbal communication, reason and reading.

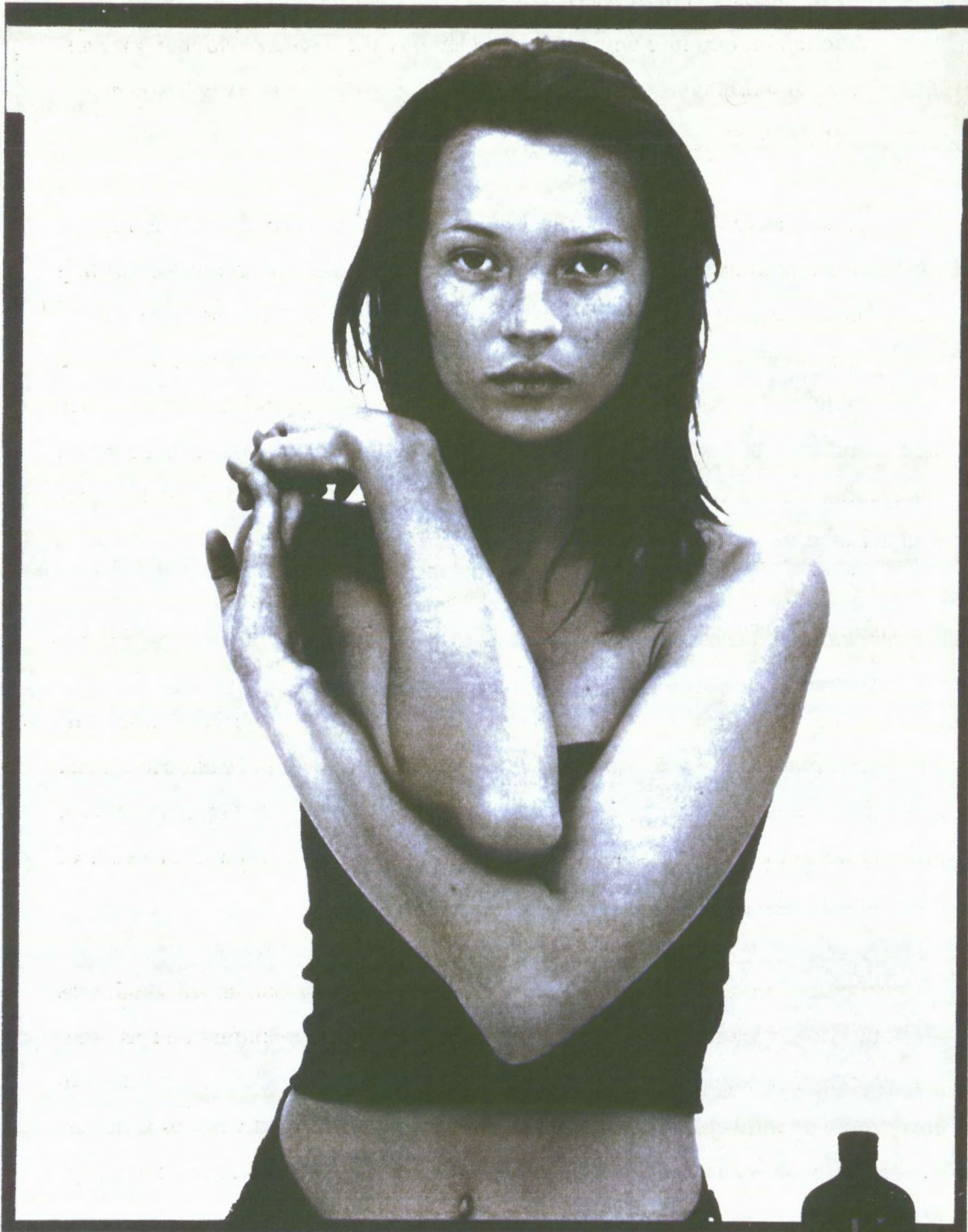
a study of the workings of 'modern' culture. Or, to put it another way, one cannot study contemporary culture without acknowledging the integral role that advertising plays in its workings.

Advertising not only appears in the media, but in large part sponsors the media. No television show or magazine can become viably commercial without the revenue brought to the venture through the time or space sold to advertisers. There is a symbiotic relationship between the medium and its message. Marshall McLuhan's famous maxim is, 'the medium is the message', by which he meant, 'Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication.' (Manu 1994:56) His emphasis is on the media itself, particularly electronic media and television, which in the urban environment appears to have become the primary source of social or national communication, and, some would even go so far as to say that 'television is the only universally shared source of stories left in our society.' (Taylor 1996:14)

As advertisers seek to reach and persuade their target markets (audiences), they make use of a range of signs and signifiers mediated through the technologies of print, radio, film and television. The symbols, ideas and signs that they use (and transform to suit their own purposes) are derived from cultural and historical sources, collective responses to global and social realities, and the contemporary confluence of ideas, stories, images and signs in daily life and in the media. In short, the stories we tell ourselves. This flow of media, is so ubiquitous and 'loud' that French sociologist, Baudrillard, went so far as to argue that '... capitalism is now predominantly concerned with the production of signs, images and sign systems rather than with commodities themselves.' (Harvey 1989:287)

Harvey (1989:287) continues this line of thought:

*...advertising and media images have come to play a very much more integrative role in cultural practices and now assume a much greater importance in the growth dynamics of capitalism. Advertising, moreover, is no longer built around the idea of informing or promoting in the ordinary*



**be good. be bad. just be.**

cK be. The new fragrance for people. Calvin Klein.

PLATE 3 CALVIN KLEIN 'be good. be bad. just be.'

*sense, but is increasingly geared to manipulating desires and tastes through images that may or may not have anything to do with the product to be sold...Furthermore, images have, in a sense, themselves become commodities. (emphasis mine)*

The images of advertising have themselves become commodities because they are the language linking trade and culture - the means of influencing and persuading the target market. Consider such 'labels' as Gucci, Calvin Klein or Nike - these brand names are in themselves valuable commodities and can be linked to a whole range of products. A large percentage\* of the budget for the launch of any new product, or the continued marketing of an established product, is set aside for advertising - a) the purchase of images (and concepts) that will draw the market, and b) the purchase of advertising space or time in the media.

Advertising has great power in terms of its cultural impact and quantifiable reach into the mass market, where it recycles 'cultural models and references back through the networks of social interactions'. (L.K.&J.) Advertising does this through its power to persuade and to influence people's buying patterns, taste, and cultural aspirations. This recycling of cultural models through the media and back into the networks of social interaction can be seen at work in the promotion of contemporary fashions.

An example of this, observed by the candidate on a trip to London in 1995, was the then current fashion of Dr Marten's boots. Originally manufactured as standard workman's boots in England, this style of footwear became high fashion in the late 1980s and continues into the 90s. These boots were first worn as a 'cultural' statement by individuals who espoused the Punk, anti-glamour, movement in England. But the anti-glamour sentiment was collectively sensed and shared by

\*According to Partnership's Arnie Gelber (p 3 of interview), it is not uncommon in the case of a brand leader, to spend as much as 50% of income from the market on advertising. '...theoretically, one should always spend a little more than one's market share.'





PLATE 4 'DOC' MARTENS

many young people, both male and female, so an 'alternative' fashion started - offering an alternative identity to the status quo and its notions of middle-class glamour, particularly the high-heeled female stereotype. The manufacturers of these boots capitalised on the fact that their product had been selected for a fashion statement, and increased their sales by commissioning advertising that responded to the aspirations of the youth - providing a 'cultural model'. The result was that these boots became a highly sought-after cultural icon, not only in England, but throughout the Commonwealth, including South Africa. This gives a clear example of the power of advertising to 'recycle cultural models back through the networks of social interaction'. (L.K.&J.)

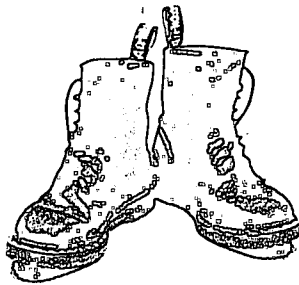
The irony is that what set out to be a symbol of rebellion against media glamour, has now become an alternative form of 'glamour'. The innovators who started the fashion have in all likelihood moved on to a new means of stating their cause. Meanwhile, the 'Doc' Marten's company continues to amass great profits while their product remains in favour with the youth market.

The Dr Marten's fashion story demonstrates that advertising is a 'venture unified by the discourse through and about objects, which bonds together images of persons, products and well-being'. (L.K.&J.) These workman's boots became the symbolic object - the key to young people's desire to belong to an alternative community - a 'tribal' community or culture, with an alternative view of the present, with its own fashions, music and lifestyle. To 'belong' to this group is to be assured of an identity in a changing world, and this is a source of well-being.

Most advertising is about products or objects, and plays an important role in the discourse which relates these objects to people and their ideas of well-being. These ideas are usually tied to notions of glamour, acceptance and success, to the point where it can be said, '...the television commercial is not at all about the character of products to be consumed. It is about the character of the consumers of the products.' (Postman 1985:127)

The need to belong, to be admired, to feel part of a community, is a powerful

*They won't just  
impress your friends.  
As an added bonus,  
they'll aggravate  
your parents.*



Dr. Martens' classic 1460 boots. They're comfortable, they're durable, and you can even get your parents to pay for them. Just tell them you're getting a mohawk. Then settle for the shoes.



PLATE 5 Dr. MARTENS

drive in humanity, and such drives in the human psyche lend themselves to exploitation by advertisers. Harvey (1989:287) states it more cynically: 'If we stripped modern advertising of direct reference to the three themes of money, sex and power there would be very little left.'

Finally, Andrew Wernick's comment serves to ratify and summarise these notions:

*By continually tapping into our dreams and identities and by integrally linking products to the wider circulation of signs, advertising has ... developed into a major cultural force.* (Erasmus 1996:25)

So, although advertising has a primarily commercial *raison d'être*, it has a powerful cultural influence, and is an integral part of modern culture. Its creations are linked to a vast range of symbols, ideas and stories from varied sources, and in response to social aspirations and market demands, brings them together in the media - the contemporary confluence of signs and ideas, which are in essence the stories we tell ourselves.

With its 'integral place in modern culture', its 'recycling of cultural models back through the networks of social interactions' (L.K.&J.), and its responding to aspirations, dreams and needs, advertising should indeed be seen as an important cultural vehicle in contemporary urban society. It not only provides us with a vocabulary - models of the way we want to see ourselves, our stories and myths - but also, in its influence and impact, may be a potential vehicle for deeper social transformation, especially where television is the primary source of shared images and stories.



## CHAPTER 3

# CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES

## Glamour, Myths, Ecology, Feminism & Postmodernism

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, some contemporary discourses which are particularly relevant to advertising, communication and community, are reviewed. These discourses, which touch on notions of inclusion, glamour, and story-telling, (all concerns relating to community, advertising and media communication), and which have made a major contribution to the theoretical framework of this study, are discussed under the following subtitles:

- 1) A Marxist Critique of Advertising.
- 2) Mythology, Glamour and Consciousness.
- 3) Ecology
- 4) Feminism and Ecofeminism
- 5) Postmodernism

### 3.2 A Marxist Critique of Advertising.

Karl Marx fathered a new way of looking at history and society. In the preface to *Capital* he claimed to have discovered 'the economic law of motion of modern society'. (Carr 1961:58) This economic system he called 'capitalism', and more than once drew attention to what he called the 'false consciousness' of those enmeshed in a capitalist economy and capitalist society. '...the conceptions formed about the laws of production in the minds of the agents of production and circula-

tion will differ widely from the real laws.' (Carr 1961:369)

Marx saw history in terms not of battles, heroic generals, diplomatic manoeuvres and political intrigues, but in terms of economic factors, social conditions, statistics of population and the rise and fall of classes. (Carr 1961:170) He was critical of class structures within the capitalist system, and his ideas have influenced many aspects of contemporary thought and culture and continue to provide a basis for criticism and analysis of contemporary trends. For example, John Berger, a well-known English art historian, who works from within the marxist paradigm, articulates a provocative critique of advertising and the nature of western culture.

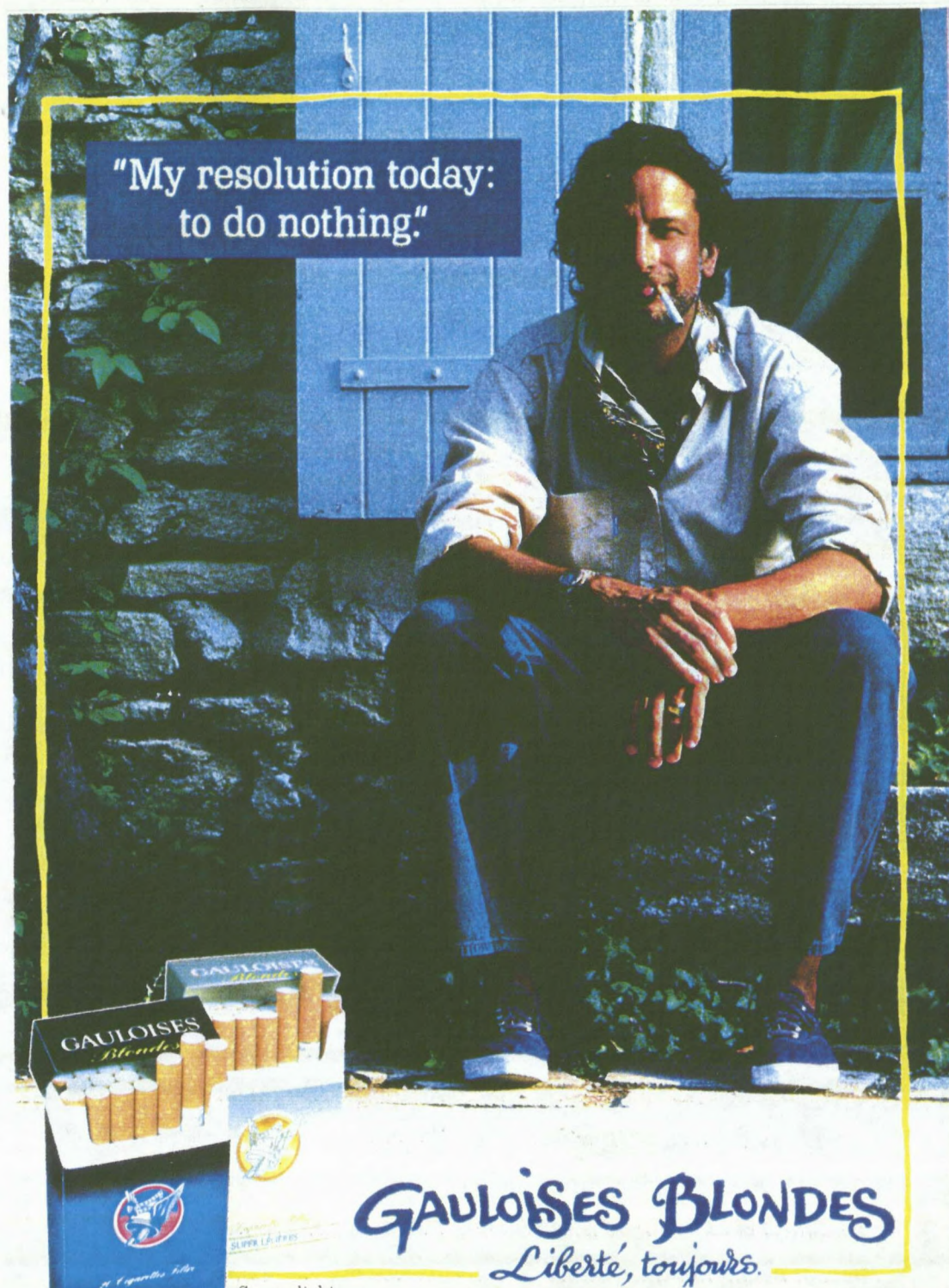
Berger analyses the acquisitive nature of the 'ruling classes' to show how the system of capitalism determines the nature of the images and textures of Western art. He uses the term 'publicity' for the aims and images of advertising in the media, and comments, 'It is a mistake to think of publicity supplanting the visual art of post-renaissance Europe; it is the last moribund form of that art.' (Berger 1972:139) His condemnation is clear. He refers to this art form (publicity, or advertising), as 'the final empty claim of an oligarchic, undemocratic culture.' (Berger 1972:23)

Berger has little sympathy with the system of capitalism and its handmaiden, advertising. He speaks of publicity as 'the process of manufacturing glamour' (Berger 1972:131) (emphasis mine) and also states that 'glamour is a modern invention.' (Berger 1972:146) He says:

*Publicity speaks in the future tense and yet the achievement of this future is endlessly deferred. How then does publicity remain credible - or credible enough to exert the influence it does ? It remains credible because the truthfulness of publicity is judged, not by the real fulfilment of its promises, but by the relevance of its fantasies to those of the spectator-buyer. Its essential application is not to reality but to day-dreams.*

(Berger 1972:146) (emphasis mine)

"My resolution today:  
to do nothing."



**GAULOISES BLONDES**  
*Liberté, toujours.*




PLATE 6 GAULOISES BLONDES

Both Marx and Berger work within the modernist paradigm in which fantasy and dream are considered 'unscientific' and of little use in the hard reality of an industrial world. Marx himself described religion as 'the opiate of the masses'. So, when Berger uses the words 'glamour', 'fantasies', and 'day-dreams', he does so in a derogatory way, seeing such activities as escape from the real world - a moral failure to confront and to change a decadent system.

As stated previously, advertising 'bonds together images of persons, products and well-being' (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1990:5) through notions of glamour, acceptance or success. Despite Marxist critique, the need for glamour and fantasy should not be underrated. After all, advertising exploits this need so effectively. If people are motivated by day-dreams, fantasies, and notions of glamour, then it only shows that the faculty of fantasy or day-dreaming is a very important consideration in human communication, motivation and thought.

### 3.3 Mythology, Glamour and Consciousness

The words 'glamour', 'fantasies', and 'daydream' mentioned by Berger in connection with publicity touch on a very important consideration with regard to the human psyche. It has a need for glamour and myth. Carl Jung, a leading 20th century thinker and psychologist, states :

To the intellect, all mythologising is futile speculation. To the emotions however, it is a healing and valid activity; it gives existence a glamour which we would not like to do without. Nor is there any good reason why we should. (Jung 1961:331) (emphasis mine)

*Reason sets the boundaries far too narrowly for us, and would have us accept only the known - and that too with limitations - and live in a known framework, just as if we were sure how far life actually extends. As a matter of fact, day after day we live far beyond the bounds of our consciousness; without our knowledge, the life of the unconscious is also*





GUCCI  
ENVY

PLATE 7 GUCCI ENVY

*going on within us. The more critical reason dominates, the more impoverished life becomes; but the more of the unconscious, and the more of myth we are capable of making conscious, the more of life we integrate.*  
(Jung 1961:333)

Besides pointing to the limitations of the intellect, Jung emphasises his belief that mythologising, (telling stories that resonate with the unconscious mind and give meaning to experience), gives glamour to existence, and that this is a good thing - no, more than this, it is, in fact, something that we cannot live without. Or, in the words of Joseph Campbell (1972:10), '... life requires life-supporting illusions.' Reason and the intellect have limited powers over human imagination and inspiration. Notions of glamour, beauty and eroticism inform the human psyche. The importance of day-dreaming, of glamour, of myths, of fantasy and stories, which waken the imagination, have to be acknowledged, and successful advertising not only does this, but effectively exploits this aspect of human nature.

Though we might use the intellect to criticise and deconstruct our systems and stories, we remain human in our need for myths, those '...structures of thought, frameworks for making sense of experience, that rise along with cultures and shape their evolution.' (Johnson 1982:63)

Advertising, if not exactly creating myths, is making a patchwork out of mythological fragments which touch the unconscious. Human archetypes, day-dreams, symbols, stories and images in advertising are working on us daily 'beyond the bounds of our consciousness'. (Jung 1961:333) Postman, (1985:127), comments: 'The distance between rationality and advertising is now so wide that it is difficult to remember that there once existed a connection between them'.

Glamour, eroticism, mythology and fantasy are particularly well-suited to the medium of television, which is primarily visual, and which has evolved powerful imaging techniques which allow the sophisticated envisualisation and imaging of practically any fantasy situation. This engagement of advertising with the unconscious, and the human need for glamour and mythology, gives advertising the

power to affect and influence society.

If Postman's assertion that television is 'our culture's principle mode of knowing about itself' (1985:92), is true, then mythology may well be a valuable motivator and vehicle in media communication. As Toby Johnson says: 'The subject matter of myth is no longer as fascinating as the fact that the mind creates and uses myths.' (1982:199) (emphasis mine)

Although advertising can be seen as culturally limited by its essentially mercantile focus, it is a theatre for a wide range of potent cultural and psychological forces. These forces affect human consciousness and demonstrate that television can be used as an effective means of communication - for sharing images and dreams which inspire and stimulate our mythological nature.

If advertising has such a potentially powerful influence in terms of our mythological nature, then there is a greater need for designers and creative directors to review their ethics and to become conscious of the way in which they are shaping our dreams. And in South Africa, to consider whether their activities are working towards the building of community or the fragmentation of the social fabric. Concerns like these have been a major consideration in the interviews, and form a part of this study.

These concluding words by Ben Okri serve to highlight this line of thinking:

*Stories are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals or nations live by and tell themselves, and you change the individuals and nations. (1996:21)*

*Beware of the story-tellers who are not fully conscious of the importance of their gifts, and who are irresponsible in the application of their art: they could unwittingly help along the psychic destruction of their people. (1996:17)*

### 3.4 Ecology

Ecology is the broad term used to describe concerns about the relationship of human development, urban, agricultural and technological, with the finite resources of the planet - 'what people need and what nature can tolerate'. (Manu 1994:74)

Ecology is concerned with the inter-relationship of all life on the planet. Ecological thought tends to be inclusive, and to embrace the whole. It seeks to understand the relationships between the elements of which the whole is comprised. It is the opposite of a 'parts', or specialist mentality, which focuses on elements in their unique isolation, selects some as essential and marginalises others. Ecological thinking impacts strongly on notions of community in that community may be seen as a balance of conflicting interests and the control of resources, rather than an abstract ideal of human harmony in the political sense.

Under the banner of ecology there is a range of criticism, most of it hostile, about advertising. In the preface to his book *Design For The Real World*, Papanek states: 'There are professions more harmful than industrial design, but only a very few of them. And possibly only one profession is phonier. Advertising design, in persuading people to buy things they don't need, with money they don't have, in order to impress others who don't care, is probably the phoniest field in existence today.' (Papanek 1984: ix)

Papanek may have raised the question, but many others have continued to raise it, albeit less simplistically - the question of moral responsibility about the productions of the industrial culture and its impact not only on the natural resources of the planet, but also on the 'undeveloped' cultures of the world. These concerns were the central focus of the ICSID 1997 HUMANE VILLAGE CONGRESS held in Toronto, August 23 - 27.

In preparation for this congress, Alexander Manu, a member of the Humane Village Board of Directors, published *The Humane Village Journal* in 1994. The



publication is a collection of quotations that are specifically relevant to 'ecological' concerns as they relate to design generally. For example: 'Designers are not destroying the planet because they're specifying the wrong kind of toilets or hardwoods. They're destroying it because they're encouraging the wrong ways of living'. (Manu 1994:71) Though this reference is primarily to product design, it speaks as strongly to the advertising profession which is paid to endorse and sell all kinds of products in our contemporary urban/industrial culture. It can be interpreted as a critique of the destructive role advertisers play when they encourage wrong ways of living by using their powers and skills of persuasion without thinking of the long-term ecological results on society and on the planet.

The concerns of ecology are in many ways aligned with the contemporary concern with community. Lewis Mumford states:

*In an attempt to control the disintegrating forces that are at work in our society, we must resume the search for unity; and to this end, we must explore the historic nature of modern personality and the community in all their richness, variety, complication and depth, as both the means and the end of our effort.* (Manu 1994:92)

In many ways the direction of this thesis has been determined by such ecological concerns, but not in the sense of a general criticism of the capitalist system. The thesis approaches these concerns from the viewpoint that the existent technologies of communication, despite the flaws in the capitalist/industrial system, are an important means of story telling, influence and persuasion, which may be used to guide and effect positive social change. And, that 'positive' social change be considered 'ecological' in the sense that it works toward wholeness, healing and the creation of community, where community is a settled, harmonious, sustainable human environment to which diverse peoples feel that they can contribute and belong.

### 3.5 Feminism and Ecofeminism

Feminism is a broad term to describe a wide spectrum of particularly feminine perspectives on practically every aspect of life. However, the aspects of feminism that have a relevance to the theoretical framework of this thesis are: Its critique of advertising; the relationship between ecology and feminism - ecofeminism; and feminism's role in the dialogue of postmodernism.

Strong feminist critique has been levelled at advertising and its maintenance of the status quo. Assumptions about women's roles in society are brought under scrutiny. In advertising there are certain female stereotypes that need re-evaluation because they are the chevalier projections of a patristic culture. Jeanne van Eeden comments:

*Gender stereotypes are the products of a patriarchal (and some would argue capitalist) ideology. Stereotypes make patterns of behaviour predictable, become role models, exploit the female, and perpetuate falsities (and fantasies). Stereotypes are popular in the media because they are a shorthand system for communication - clichés (the dumb blonde, the good housewife, the faithful secretary) with which we can all identify or at least recognise because we have been subjected to shared enculturation.*

(Van Eeden 1994:3)

Berger (1972:53) comments on the Western European tradition of painting the female nude - a likely source for such stereotypes, '...the nude is always conventionalised - and the authority for its conventions derives from a certain tradition of art'. And, in this tradition, 'the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man.' (Berger 1972:54) The images of naked women are presented to the spectator as if in submission to his power and appetites. This tradition has continued in advertising and Berger provides convincing visual evidence of it.

Gender stereotyping has been challenged since the days of Emily Pankhurst. Women have rebelled against being cast in the role of impersonal sex-object on



PLATE 8 GUERRILLA GRAFFITI

display for male eyes, and have expressed their own individuality and potency through political acts and literature. French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir said 'Woman is an idol, a goddess, a mother, a witch or a muse, but she can never be her own self.' (Paz 1961:197)

In terms of media protest against insensitivity to the female, a group called the Guerrilla Girls in America, has been active since 1985. They put up posters in the streets, and when making public appearances, dress up in gorilla suits and masks. Their observations are incisive. One of their famous posters contains this message: 'Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.' (Mc Quiston 1993:169)

The Riot Girls are a further development of such protest and they use the language of contemporary rock and punk music to put across their message. 'The Riot Girl manifesto (a rushed, two-page document that's constantly being revised) declares, "We seek to create revolution in our own lives every day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit christian capitalist way of doing things." They urge their members to "resist psychic death" and "cry in public." Their goals include getting "all girls to be in bands" and making it so "girls rule all towns."' (McDonnell and Powers 1995:397)

Feminism, however, has had a much deeper, ecological, impact on thinking. It gives a voice to those who were voiceless or historically disempowered. It is part of a move away from the old hierarchical status-quo with its fixed role categories, towards community and the inclusion of groups previously marginalised, or considered inferior, in a paternalistic status-quo. Feminism in its widest sense can reach to include all those who have been exploited, including 'primitive' cultures and children. Even men, in so far as they are the victims of social pressures which have forced them to reject the more 'feminine', or compassionate side of their nature. While patriarchy is heirarchical and exclusive, feminism (at its best) tends to be egalitarian and inclusive. Ideally it is a way of seeing which prefers *both and* rather than *either or*. (Fox 1979)





PLATE 9 NICARAGUA

While feminism proposes inclusion, it is also a reaffirmation of those traits traditionally considered to be feminine, like nurturing and compassion, and pushes for a general and broader adoption of these traits in all fields of endeavour.

'Ecofeminism' is a term which incorporates both the concerns of ecology and of feminism - the twin powers of women and nature. Ecology, with its focus on the interrelatedness of life-forms on the planet is combined in Ecofeminism with a reaffirmation of the feminine, nurturing or mother-like aspects of the earth - 'Mother Earth'.

Social, ecological and economic problems in the modern world have become increasingly pressing. Despite the fact that '...the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty', we have to admit that '...the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.' (Bartholomew 1997:33) Such a critique of the rational, 'enlightened', modern world is shared by those ecofeminists who make a plea to reintroduce compassion and caring into it by reaffirming the feminine, the mystical, and the generative powers of nature. 'The maternal is the place of new birth, of new wombs, new stories, of new beginnings, of new possibilities.' (Fox 1988:19)

Adrienne Rich articulates the plea of ecofeminism:

*The mother's battle for her child - with sickness, with poverty, with war,  
with all the forces of exploitation and callousness that cheapen human life  
needs to become a common human battle, waged in love and in the  
passion for survival* (Fox 1988:12)

Feminism and ecofeminism make an important contribution to the postmodern discourse, which challenges not only the status quo but also the metanarratives of history, of lore, and of the scriptures by which the status quo has been supported and maintained.

The need for community and the healing of social and ecological systems seems



to require the 'feminine' qualities of compassion and nurturing - an understanding of the interrelationships between all creatures and cultures as opposed to the 'masculine' qualities of competition, hierarchy and control. Such issues may be viewed as 'religious', and the debate echoes throughout the postmodern discourse. To favour an inclusive pluralism, requires a review of religious concerns and their (often patriarchal) traditions, and some opposition to the secular and authoritative stance of modernity.

### 3.6 Postmodernism

In broad terms, the condition of postmodernity is one in which the assumptions and imperatives upon which the 'modern', urban, industrial world has been built, are called into question. The rapid growth of information, through information technologies, has provided a widening, global perspective through which to review our assumptions. The results of this are far reaching. In art, architecture and design there has been an increasing eclectic tendency as artists, architects and designers have a wide range of source material to choose from. Information technology offers a smorgasbord of ideas, cultural artifacts and design sources that can be incorporated in new ways.

In philosophical terms, the authority of the Western, European tradition is being undermined. Its metanarratives are now seen in relation to the metanarratives of the many other cultures on the planet. '...Now history has recovered its unity and become what it was at the beginning: a meditation on mankind.' (Paz 1961:172)

The result of this, besides reducing the authority and complacent assurances of the Western European culture, is that this one voice is no longer at the centre of world society. Now there are many voices to be heard, many interpretations of history and human purpose. It is no longer possible to accept as 'fact' the world view of one specific culture. Nietzsche expressed this idea in the late 19th century when he said: 'There are no such things as facts, only interpretations.' (Bradbury & McFarlane 1976:451) Or, to put it another way, '... all human order

is an imposition on the absurdity of experience... there is no commonly apprehensible experience out there that we all share in common and all value in common.' (Bradbury & McFarlane 1976:413) Or, in the words of Lopez, 'It is the imagination that gives shape to the universe.' (Fox 1983:178) And, in terms of media or signs 'There are no final meanings that arrest the movement of signification.' (Van Niekerk 1991:55)

Postmodernism is more than just a term or theory to describe contemporary social and cultural phenomena. It may better be seen as a contemporary condition which has grown out of modernity and which acknowledges the complexity of perception within the ambient visual, technological and literary culture in which we now live. The analyses of French philosophers Foucault and Lyotard contributed greatly to the formulation of postmodern theory. Both of them condemned any notion of universal or eternal truths. Lyotard defined postmodernism simply as 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Harvey 1989:45). In like manner, Baudrillard, a French writer/philosopher, who based his theories on American society, commented on the overwhelming dominance of speed, cinematic images, and technology in that society. This he feels has caused a crisis in explanatory logic. The emphasis placed on 'effect' as opposed to 'cause', 'surface' as opposed to 'sense' in the theatre of media, ruptures the society's sense of historical continuity, particularly with regard to beliefs and value systems. (Harvey 1989:291) The French philosopher, Derrida, is critical of any attempts to search for an ultimate metaphysical certainty, and considers cinematic collage or montage as the primary form of discourse in a postmodern world. He believes that such discourse has to be deconstructed if it is to be studied effectively. (Harvey 1989:51) Another French intellectual and critic, Roland Barthes, whose field is semiotics and the constructs of language, sees a loss of historical continuity in an image-inundated city. He sees works of art being reduced to mere 'text'. (Harvey 1989:57-59).

All of these French thinkers contribute to the foundation of the postmodern formulation. The latter three, Baudrillard, Derrida and Barthes, postulate a situation in which the fantasy of media dominates the urban landscape and in which this language of media no longer has its classical roots, but consists of collage, mon-



tage or text - a layering of images and meanings that have no final authoritative source of reference. To use a phrase from José Gorostiza, modern, urban man lives in a 'wilderness of mirrors'. (Paz 1961:21) From such notions comes the idea that such texts or images need to be de-constructed.

The voices of feminism, ecofeminism, the previously marginalised, and the focus on mystical, subconscious and religious concerns are all further manifestations of the condition of postmodernity and are modulating and changing our conceptions of knowledge, perception and interpretation. Bartholomew (1997:37) quotes Flanagan:

*Postmodernity denotes a condition of ambiguity with implications for religiosity. Unexpectedly, it has placed issues of religion back on the agenda of mainstream sociology. This return of religion to sociology might surprise. As an issue it seems disconnected from society, a corpse modernity buried with a tombstone called secularisation. But now comes a resurrection, the seeds of which can be denoted in the issues that have come to signify postmodernity. A searching, an escaping, a rootlessness of image and affiliation, the effects of technology and globalisation, mark an unsecured self, now forced to ask questions of metaphysical identity inconceivable on the agenda of a radical sociology of critical concern two decades ago.* (emphases mine)

The contemporary climate of postmodernity has affected this study in the following ways:

1) The focus of this study on community is a response to the inclusive concerns expressed in ecology and ecofeminism, which reach into the realms of religion and compassion.

2) A qualitative methodology, namely the in-depth interview, has been chosen because it acknowledges the humanity and subjectivity of the interviewee and the interviewer, thereby providing a more direct, honest and revealing response to the complexities of perception and interpretation in social studies which attempt to interpret media.

3) Texts resulting from in-depth interviews have been included in italics in

the text of the study to provide an intertextual dialogue and to allow the voices to be heard (without an intermediary) and the reader to participate in their reconstruction and analysis by the researcher.\*

4) In the complex interaction between advertising, media and society, as revealed in the interviews for this study, aspects of psychology, religion, and mythology cannot and have not been overlooked or excluded from the text.

\* Postmodern theory supports such an approach. 'Postmodern texts are openly dialogical in nature, foregrounding their stratification and historical precedents, and so are ideologically preferable to the attempts at unification and essence of modernism.' (Van Niekerk 1991:36) Bartholomew (1997:32) quotes Harvey: '...postmodernism's preoccupation with the signifier rather than the signified, with participation, performance, and happening rather than with an authoritative and finished art object, with surface appearances rather than roots.' and mentions Hassan's schema of differences between modernism and postmodernism, which sets distance (modernism) against participation (postmodernism) and art object/finished object against process/performance/happening.

# CHAPTER 4

## METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the 'construction' of meaning in media, is discussed. This leads to a brief subsection on qualitative methodology to explain why a qualitative methodology is considered most appropriate for this study. Thereafter, the methodological approach to this study is discussed in detail.

### 4.2 Construction of Meaning

Human communication is a vastly complex process, particularly where it involves the technologies of 'the media'. Theories of communication cannot 'explain' the process, but they do help us to analyse and articulate aspects of the process, and thereby, to increase our insight. The simplest explanation of the communication process is called the 'bull's eye' model posited by Shannon and Weaver in 1949 (Morgan and Welton 1986:4) Here the sender of a message is compared to an archer and if his arrow hits bull's eye - the message reaching, and being fully understood by the receiver - then successful communication is deemed to have taken place. This model gives little acknowledgement to the active role which the receiver of the message plays in its decoding or reception. This rudimentary model was developed to improve telecommunication systems in America in 1949, and focused on the technological aspects of message channelling. The most useful application of this model is its focus on the factors that can cause communication breakdown.

Wilbur Schramm's theory is that communication is a shared experience and that the receiver is as active a participant as the sender in the construction of meaning.

(Morgan and Welton 1986:116) According to his theory, the successful communicator is able to identify areas of common interest shared by both parties and uses them as the means of conveying his message/reaching his audience. Failure in communication is when the signs used in the message are misinterpreted, misunderstood, or produce a negative reaction in the receiver. (Such concerns are of particular importance in South Africa where there is a mixture of race, language and culture in one society) Being a shared experience, the aspect of feedback, or response, has to be considered, not only in personal face to face situations, but also in media, and this is usually done by testing: Prior to the production of a television commercial, concepts are tested before sample audiences (see interview with Gelber, page 111 of this thesis), and after production there is constant monitoring of audience response, ratings, awards, and the response of the market in financial terms - the bottom line for a successful commercial.

At the turn of the century, Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of modern linguistics, initiated a new approach to communication studies which he called 'Semiotics'. This he defined as 'the science which studies the life of signs in our social interaction'. (Morgan and Welton 1986:36) He divides the sign into two aspects, the signifier and the signified. The 'sign' may be any image or object that is understood to be a sign - as Eco, the Italian critic and semiotician says: 'something standing for something else' (Van Niekerk 1991:50)

As an example, consider a circular sign attached to a pole beside the road. The 'signifier' is the actual image on the sign, which in this example is a P crossed out with a diagonal line. The 'signified' is the concept or message that the sign seeks to convey, in this case 'no parking'. Signification is the process of relating the signifier and the signified to produce meaning.

The production of meaning from a sign may be based to some degree on resemblance (eg. if the signifier is a picture, as in the case of a 'no smoking' sign, where a drawing, which resembles a cigarette, is crossed out by a diagonal line) or it may be a completely arbitrary relationship (eg. where a school badge is meant to communicate tradition and pride, while this can only be shared by receivers who

have some knowledge of an elite school system or the kind of society in which such a system is valued).

The semiological approach to the study of signs on television, is to treat the film or commercial as a 'text' - a sign system, which is a flow of moving images, words and music, a fabric or tissue which has layers of meaning, and is open to an infinite number of interpretations. 'There are no final meanings that arrest the movement of signification.' (Van Niekerk 1991:55)

It is possible to make a denotative study of a commercial by labelling the images as objectively as possible, while a connotative analysis of these same images will focus on their symbolic nature, an interpretation of the metaphoric or poetic resonations intended, and the associations they may trigger. This often relies on such technical considerations as camera angle, lighting, colour and background music. At the connotative level, the study becomes much more subjective and expansive. (Both denotative and connotative analyses have been made of all three commercials in this study).

The process of producing a television commercial is in itself a lengthy series of communications, negotiations, compromises, financial restraints, technical limitations and time constraints. The final product is the work of a team, and even this can still be altered or 'cut' by an editor. When one gets some idea that one is looking at a 'communication' or a sign, produced by a media organisation or a cultural institution which has its own needs and imperatives, then one begins to realise just how complex is the whole process of communication in television advertising. Once a commercial has been released it fades from the minds of the people who made it - the commercial is to them the by-product of a series of actions and decisions which, though fully engaging at the time of production, have now become the fading memory of another completed job.

And even with all these complexities involved in the process of television communication, there is the further complexity of current attempts to respond to the social changes in South Africa and to the need to speak to a broad audience of

different cultures, races and language groups. Since the meaning of the sign is a transaction between the sender and the receiver in which the meaning has to be negotiated, and depends on the knowledge and needs of both parties, cross-cultural communication makes the process of negotiating meaning even more complex.

It is hoped that the interviews in this study, conducted with members of target audiences from different cultural groups, will reveal some of the problem areas of cross-cultural communication in South Africa and also the degree to which the intended messages about a national community are understood, shared, or interpreted by the target audience.

### 4.3 Qualitative Methodology

In making this study of television communication in South Africa, the theory of semiotics, with its emphasis on the role of the viewer in constructing meaning, and the culturally determined basis of this, has formed the broad framework for this study and has been the reason for the candidate's choice of a qualitative methodology for the research, namely the in-depth interview.

In the context of a multi-racial and multi-cultural society, especially one which has been divided by a policy like apartheid, communicators cannot assume that their signs will be accepted or understood by the society. Therefore the need to explore audience response in depth is vital if the intentions of the communicators are to be evaluated.

An in-depth interview does not acquire quantitative data of the nature of market research, but is the means to probe deeper into the interviewee's motives, concepts and culture. By recording the communication process through an in-depth interview, the reasoning and emotions which lie behind the interviewee's thoughts can emerge. In fact, it is highly questionable whether a study of this nature could be conducted without hearing the voices of 'the other'.

For the candidate to speak from within his own culture and context, while professing to study communication in a multi-cultural society, and not allow the other voices to be heard, would be just another modernist monologue. This would continue the arrogant assumption that the actual voices are best heard once filtered through the candidate's metaphysical or theoretical framework. Such an approach ignores the contemporary, postmodern concern with process and participation, which includes the reader in the process of deconstructing the text of the original data. The candidate believes that it is essential for the many voices or narratives to be heard, (verbatim where necessary), and that the candidate's interpretations and conclusions be seen for what they are - interpretations - another narrative, which if it has any authority or value, is because of its integrity and because it opens up thinking on the subject.

Transcriptions of the in-depth interviews provided a weighty primary text which has been selectively used in the thesis to provide an intertextual dialogue.\*

Postmodern theory has had a strong influence on the methodology of this thesis. Harvey, quoting from an architectural journal *Precis* 6, 1987, describes postmodernism as:

*a legitimate reaction to the 'monotony' [sic] of universal modernism's vision of the world. Generally perceived as positivistic, technocentric, and rationalistic, universal modernism has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardisation of knowledge and production.'*

*Postmodernism, by way of contrast, privileges 'heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse.'*

(Harvey 1989:8)

\*This primary text has not been appended to this thesis because of its inordinate length, but it is housed in the department of Graphic Design at the Technikon Natal.

Eagleton, in describing postmodernism says:

*We are now in the process of waking from the nightmare of modernity, with its manipulative reason and fetish of the totality ...  
...Science and philosophy must jettison their grandiose metaphysical claims and view themselves more modestly as just another set of narratives.* (Harvey 1989:9)

In using the in-depth interview, it has to be admitted that much of its effectiveness depends on the interviewer. A bad interviewer gets between the listener (reader) and the interviewee, and by presenting only the interviewer's interpretation (whether it be a garrulous monologue or a carefully argued thesis), excludes the reader from participating in the process of analysing the primary text.

It takes a while in the rather unnatural and formal context of an interview for both interviewer and interviewee to relax and to talk more freely - we wear masks or 'personas' in formal situations. In order to allow the interviewee a measure of ease, and to encourage a less guarded response, it is necessary to allow the conversation to flow before returning once more to the subject under consideration. The listening skills of the interviewer are important. The interviewee has to feel that his/her responses are interesting to the interviewer, and received with a sympathetic attitude and an open, or unbiased, mind. It is said by researchers who are committed to qualitative methodologies that qualitative research depends largely on the character of the researcher.

At this point in the text, the voice of Dr. Ineke Meulenberg makes a very relevant contribution. In 1992 the candidate attended her course at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) on Qualitative Methodology, in particular, the in-depth interview, where it was explained that the purpose of this technique is to probe more deeply the consciousness of the interviewee than is possible with a questionnaire or tightly structured interview. Both of these latter techniques tend to regiment and direct the thinking process by tightly pre-planning the nature of the dialogue, (sometimes to the point of merely providing the substance for a researcher's monologue).



*There is, furthermore, an appalling misconception in methodological thinking which is a real impediment in qualitative research. This is the belief that the technique, rather than the way in which it is used, can be perceived as the main agent.*

*Two important insights are missed here. In the first place, knowledge can not be worthwhile without the skill to bring it into practice. In our normal daily lives we are aware of this: we do not go to a dentist who is only theoretically oriented. Our teeth are too precious for that. In the second place, a technique cannot exist separately from the person using it.*

*Why this methodological insight has never been taken to its logical consequence might be owing to the fact that taking a look at one's personal make-up is threatening for many people. The myth of 'avoiding subjectivity in order to gain objectivity' has provided the academic discourse with an acceptable, scientifically glamorous excuse for a long time.*

*As with so many myths, this particular one has also fooled many otherwise intelligent people and has actually prevented from happening that which it has claimed to preserve; namely, the gaining of insight and wisdom, which is what research is really about.*

(Meulenberg 1992:44) (emphases mine)

## 4.4 The Methodological Approach

### 4.4.1 Conceptualisation - theory & literature survey

In developing the conceptual framework for this study, with its focus on communication, television advertising and the pursuit of community in a multi-ethnic society, a literature survey was undertaken in order to establish a theoretical perspective regarding:

- 1) Socio-political developments and their history in South Africa.
- 2) Contemporary concerns with Community and community building.
- 3) Advertising and its cultural impact.
- 4) Advertising in relation to Marxism, Mythology and Consciousness.
- 5) Advertising in relation to Ecology, Feminism and Postmodernism.
- 6) Qualitative Research methodology in response to Semiology, the Construction of Meaning, and the Postmodern condition.

These perspectives have been explored in chapters 1, 2, 3 & 4.

#### **4.4.2 Operationalisation**

The following procedure was used to explore attempts by selected advertisers to respond positively to the socio-political pressures brought about by the changes taking place at this time in South Africa's history.

#### **Selection of Commercials**

From the 1st of November 1995 through to 19th February 1996 the candidate viewed daily the commercials which were being flighted in the evenings on the available SABC channels. Those which were attempting to portray a harmonious or equitable society, and could be considered to be constructive in terms of nation building or normalising the society, were listed. There were seven. \*

\* Vodacom, 'Windmills', 19/12/94 (60 sec); Olympic Sponsors, 'Bushman/Desert/Flames', 25/03/96 (90 sec); SABC TV, 'Your Voice Your Vision', 04/02/96 (90 sec); Old Mutual, 'Painted People', 20/02/95 (70 sec); Macdonalds, 'Wedding', 13/11/95 (45 sec); Castle Lager, 'Visitor', 18/09/95 (60 sec), and Castle Lager, 'Celebration', 02/10/95 (45 sec). [ This information, with Advertiser, Title, Week of Flighting and Duration was supplied by ORNICO Facilities, 1 Stan Road, Morningside, Johannesburg]

These were recorded at Ornico studios in Johannesburg (an archive of television commercials) and the original commercials were transferred from Beta to VHS. From these seven commercials, two were selected to form the basis of this study.

A third commercial for Castle Lager, was later used as the stimulus for an interview with the maker of the commercial, because it was referred to on several occasions during the interviews on Vodacom and SABC. The commercial was initially criticised as portraying a falsely harmonious and integrated community in South Africa, but this critical perception changed as the socio-political climate of the country changed.

### **Denotative and Connotative Analyses**

The three selected commercials, Vodacom 'Windmills', SABC 'Your Voice Your Vision', and Castle Lager 'Visitor', were subjected to a denotative analysis - a literal description of images and events. This was followed in each case by a connotative analysis which, besides commenting on cinematic technique and cultural resonances, investigated the following:

- 1) Relationships - between individuals and cultural groups.
- 2) Situations - the places or environments in which the social behaviour occurs.
- 3) Social Structures - pointers and cues to social or class structures.
- 4) Artefacts - objects or products which were pivotal to the action.

### **Creative Team Interviews**

A list of questions or prompts was drawn up for each commercial with the intention of probing the interviewees' notions about community in South Africa and their perceived role as advertisers in the process of nation building. These questions or prompts were not rigidly adhered to since the aim of these interviews was to allow a flow of thought from each interviewee which might reveal their notions of community.

The interviews were recorded on a portable, battery-operated Phillips conference tape recorder and dictaphone. The tapes of the interviews were then transcribed to provide a verbatim record of the dialogue. These transcriptions formed the primary data for the study.

The following list of questions was used in the interviews with selected members of the creative teams:

- 1 Technical details: Client. Budget. Briefing. Target market. Planned duration of screening. Use of other media ie. print. Research done.
- 2 The Concept or Big Idea. Was this generated by a group or an individual? The intention?
- 3 Define the community or nation that the creative team aimed to portray and reach in this commercial.
- 4 What makes this commercial uniquely South African?
- 5 Comment on the interaction between the characters in the commercial.
- 6 What role does race play in this commercial?
- 7 Does the society or community portrayed in the commercial seem credible or convincing?
- 8 What are your personal feelings about South African society today?
- 9 'We dream ourselves into being.' Do you believe that advertising is a vehicle for changing social attitudes or building a national consciousness? [This idea or notion is not a direct quote from its source, but has been derived from the writings of Jamake Highwater (Fox 1988:224), who said: 'We are myth makers. We are legenders. Of all the animals

we alone are capable of dreaming ourselves into existence'. Its relevance to the topic refers back to myths, stories and 'daydreams' in advertising covered in sections 3.2 & 3.3 of chapter 3.]

**10** Respond to the following prompts:

- 1) Healing the past
- 2) Racism
- 3) Cultural differences
- 4) The economy
- 5) Africa
- 6) Advertising

**11** Has this commercial been successful?

**12** Comments on selected images.

**13** Comments on the soundtrack.

**14** Final comments of a general nature.

In the case of the interviews with the creative teams it was not necessary to screen the commercials because the interviewees were more than familiar with their content.

After repeated readings through the completed interviews, themes which began to emerge from the text suggested four areas of focus to investigate in relation to notions of community, and to reveal the frames of reference and rationales of the creative teams:

- 1) Commitment - to nation building and the normalisation of this society.
- 2) Insight - into the society and the social dynamics at play.
- 3) Vision - dreams and aspirations which affect notions of a future national community.

- 4) Advertising - the role that advertising can play in normalising society and building community, and the team's method of pursuing social objectives within the strictures of the given brief.

## Target Audience Sample and Interviews

Individuals in the target audiences were randomly selected, but with due demographic considerations. These aspects were considered in selecting interviewees:

1) Race. The majority of interviewees were either African, Indian or Coloured (all groups previously defined as 'non-European'). Out of twelve interviewees (two groups of six) six are African, two are Indian, one is 'Coloured', and three are European.

2) Gender. Six interviewees were female and six male.

3) Age. In terms of age groups there is some spread, though this was not a primary area of concern, two were over fifty, three over forty, three over thirty, and four over twenty.

4) Language. Because the candidate was conducting interviews in English it was necessary to find individuals who were reasonably proficient in the language so that they could answer questions requiring some linguistic and conceptual subtlety. This led to the creation of a sophisticated group in that three of the Africans chosen for their proficiency in English, were journalists and had some insight into media. Further, two elite informants, who both worked in the medium of television, were included to provide a potentially insightful, contrasting, and well-informed text.

In the case of the interviews with the target audience samples, it was considered essential in each case, to screen the commercial before an interview. Obviously it was necessary to have a video and television monitor available to do this. In some cases, where the interviewee did not have the necessary technology available, a battery-operated video and television unit were provided for the screening. Some interviewees had already seen the commercial, while for others it was their first viewing. Since the aim was to probe the interviewee's reflections on community

and media, these differences were not considered to be of major importance. If an interviewee needed at any stage during the interview to see the commercial again, it was duly shown.

As with the creative team interviews, these interviews were recorded on a portable, battery-operated Phillips conference tape recorder and dictaphone. The tapes of the interviews were then transcribed to provide a verbatim record of the dialogue. These transcriptions provided the primary data for this thesis.

The prompts and questions used in the interviews with individuals in the target audiences paralleled those used in the interviews with agency personnel. The prompts, questions, and themes discussed, were essentially the same, and presented in the same order, with minor changes to suit the interviewees. The only real difference was that target audience interviewees were not asked technical questions about the commercials. [See list of prompts (pages 44 and 45) - the first three questions were excluded.]

Using the same method of repeated readings of the transcribed interviews, (as for agency personnel), the following themes emerged:

- 1 Response to the credibility and cultural validity of the commercial.
- 2 Response to the notions of community portrayed in the commercial.
- 3 Personal notions of community (not necessarily related to the commercial).
- 4 Racial issues - as they affect community.
- 5 Impressions of the new South Africa - personal responses to the changes taking place in South Africa.
- 6 Advertising - general response to advertising and consideration of its

role in social change.

**7** Africa - responses to the continent and context of Africa.

**8** Anti-Community or Negative Factors - factors perceived to be working against community.



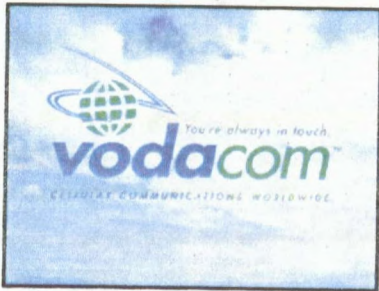


PLATE 10 VODACOM 'Windmills'

## CHAPTER 5

### THE VODACOM COMMERCIAL

#### 'Windmills' by Lindsay Smithers

##### 5.1 Introduction.

The Vodacom commercial titled 'Windmills', flighted frequently between November 1995 and February 1996, and produced by the Lindsay Smithers-FCB agency, is analysed in this chapter.

This commercial was chosen for study because it offered a fresh, original and humorous way of portraying a common South African social interaction, while at the same time responding to the currents of change working in our society towards democracy and community.

In a recent personal communication (19/3/1998) with Klaas Jonkheid of Lindsay Smithers's marketing department, the candidate was informed that the Vodacom commercial was an overnight success as measured by a weekly tracking study carried out by an independent research company (Impact Info.) and the brand rose to leadership status almost immediately. In 1995 the commercial won the 'ONE AWARD' for being the best-liked commercial on channel one. This was an annual award, but it was discontinued at the end of 1996 when the SABC rescheduled its programming.

The yuppie's greeting 'Yebo, Gogo' has become a national catchphrase and has been taken up and repeated in various contexts. The most obvious and successful of which was the World Cup Rugby match played between South Africa and New Zealand at Ellis Park in 1995, where South Africa emerged victorious. As a short commercial filler, the old African man who featured in the Vodacom commercial

was filmed sitting in the stands as if he was a keen rugby supporter, holding above his head a placard with the familiar 'Yebo Gogo' written on it. Needless to say the spinoff for Vodacom was immense in terms of building a very favourable image of their product. Sport has the ability to unite the supporters of a team, so at the international level it has potential as a strong nation-building force, and Vodacom has been seen to be there, supporting the 'new' nation, and sharing in South Africa's triumphs. The same character was used to advertise Vodacom during the All Africa Football Cup Title in 1995, from which South Africa once again emerged victorious.

The Vodacom character became associated at a particular time in our history with a positive sense of our national identity. It is not unlikely that the popularity and legendary character of Nelson Mandela may have underpinned the positive feelings about this old black man, whose patience and dignity triumph over scornful arrogance.

## 5.2 Denotative Analysis

An old African man sits beside the road surrounded by the wire windmills he is selling. A car pulls up and two affluent whites, a male and a female, climb out. The male strolls over to the old African and greets him in Zulu. His tone of voice is arrogant and patronising. The female, meanwhile, enjoys herself looking at the old man's wares, smiling and giggling appreciatively as she does so. The old man makes no response to the man's greeting and, when asked how much the windmills are, states flatly, 'One hundred rand'.

The white man baulks at the price, and gesticulating dramatically, walks back to his car, calling his girlfriend to accompany him. When he tries to open the door of his car he is unable to do so because the keys have been locked inside the car. He sees them in the ignition through the window. By means of a close-up of his face, the horror of his realisation is shown. His arrogant exit has been completely undermined by his predicament. The camera pans across to the old African man

who smiles and holds up his cell-phone, saying in a tone of amusement 'Hullo...Vodacom.'

At this point a male voice-over says 'Even in an emergency...isn't it nice to know that Vodacom has expanded its cellular network to cover major national roads.' After the logo is displayed on screen, the end result of the situation is revealed. A locksmith's truck is parked on the scene and the couple drive off with the roof of their convertible car folded down and the back seat packed with wire windmills. The old man is smiling and counting a large wad of money to the background music of James Brown's 'I feel good'.

### 5.3 Connotative Analysis

The commercial opens with a medium distance shot of an old African vendor sitting quietly on the side of the highway surrounded by his merchandise, wire windmills, which can be heard spinning in the breeze. The old man wears worn, comfortable, unfashionable clothing, which suggest that he is not wealthy, although he does own an old, battered truck, which is parked at the roadside. In terms of South African stereotypes he represents an African at the lower end of the economic rung who is forced to find some ingenious and rudimentary means of survival. As part of the 'informal' economic sector he makes artifacts out of wire and relies on the wealthier whites, or foreign tourists, to buy his goods. The old man has grey hair and a quiet dignity. His demeanour suggests fatherly insight, and he appears slightly amused and mystified by the frenetic activities of the yuppie couple. He is a symbol of that which is wise, honest and earthy - a perfect foil to the blind materialism and arrogance of the yuppie.

An exciting, rhythm and blues tune starts simultaneously with the first image. It is Canned Heat's 'On the Road Again'. This piece of music from the 60s, played by a white American blues group, conveys the feel of movement, travel, and adventure on the road. At another level, it reveals the extensive influence of American culture in South Africa, particularly on that sector of the population who grew up

influenced by the culture of the American 60s (as was the art director of this commercial), and who shared vicariously in the 'tribal' community and glamour of Woodstock - the archetype of pop festivals. Even the title of the song has a subtext which harkens back deeper into American culture, into the 'beat' literature of Jack Kerouac, who pioneered a new, experiential and youthful 'freedom', described in his book *On The Road*.

This American subtext has the effect of increasing the yuppie's rather pitiful arrogance and reliance on material possessions. The American beat 'heroes' were not at all materialistic. Their freedom on the road was a romantic, earthy, 'political' statement - they were seeking to break with the conformities of a materialistic society. The Vodacom yuppie is doing just the opposite.

In South Africa, a BMW is the primary status symbol for the nouveau riche or the young upwardly mobile executive (yuppie) with a car allowance. In a motorised urban society it is a way of displaying financial success. The colour red in this context lends a certain youthful brashness to the car, emphasising the idea of masculine potency which the yuppie so obviously seeks to display.

The environmental setting is clearly South African with the wide open spaces, bright sunlight and the heat of the day. The wide open space emphasises the distances between towns, and the isolation experienced on the long distance journeys between them. (An aspect of the South African landscape that needed to be mentioned in terms of the brief - cell-phone 'coverage' was the focus of the commercial.)

The car pulls up left of screen with the sound effects of the tyres skidding to a halt on the gravel beside the highway. The arrival is energetic and aggressive. The driver's door opens and the camera pans in to the driver's leather boot as he steps out of the car. The image triggers associations of American cowboy films where a hero-stranger arrives on horse-back and some confrontation is about to occur. The camera moves back and the driver of the car climbs out. As the car door slams behind him, the background music cuts, and the sound effects become stark and

natural. They emphasise the rural isolation and the stark organic reality that the couple confront once they leave the safe comfort of their car.

After this dramatic entrance, the driver's appearance is an anti-climax. Clearly he is a 'yuppie' from the city, slightly balding but with a ponytail, a goatee and a gold chain around his neck. He is wearing a green leather jacket and a pair of leather 'cowboy' boots. He has all the status symbols to make a statement about his aspirations to being 'hip', to status and trend, including the red BMW. and a pretty, sexy girlfriend. He is actually a figure of fun in that his desire to be 'with it' is so transparent that he has little dignity or poise. He is a stereotype tailored to a South African model of bad taste.

In terms of the social structures of South Africa, the yuppie is a member of the 'formal' economic sector and he displays the arrogant self-assurance of one insensitive to the struggles of those less privileged - the kind of arrogance and racial 'pride' displayed by many whites when they had the apartheid system to back such behaviour and to protect them from equal and open competition with all races. (As one of the interviewees, Nomavenda Mathiane, stated in an aside: 'Apartheid gave the scum of the earth confidence.') In some ways the yuppie can be seen as a symbol of the negative, complacent arrogance that once held sway in South Africa.

His girlfriend is the stereotype of a pretty but mindless 'doll'. She walks amongst the windmills in her high heels, swaying her hips in a pair of tight fitting leather shorts. She giggles and responds to the merchandise lovingly. In colloquial terms she would be called an 'airhead', and is really just another of the yuppie's possessions or status symbols. She appears to have no discernment or insight into the social nuances of the situation, nor does she have the independence or strength of character to insist on purchasing (albeit with her own money) the windmill which she appears to like so much.

The yuppie, meanwhile strides up to the old man (The eye-level of the camera is at shoulder height, with the yuppie's head being slightly above eye-level. This

emphasises his arrogance as he stands over the old man who is seated and is seen slightly below eye-level, reinforcing visually the subordinate position with which the yuppie views him.) He condescendingly greets him in Zulu, saying, 'Yebo gogo'. His arrogant saunter and complacent use of the African language is off beam as he has in fact greeted the old man as 'Yes grandmother' instead of 'Yes father (sir)'. The old man makes no response to this rather insulting greeting and just looks at him patiently, almost pityingly, but without any subservience.

When the yuppie asks in English 'How much?' The old man's reply is flat and firm, 'One hundred', implying not only that he is not subservient, but also that he is unimpressed and perhaps even stung by the arrogant insensitivity of the yuppie.

The yuppie's reaction to the old man's reply is pitiful because his gestures become exaggerated and camp as he turns on his heel and strides back to his car, shaking his head and muttering. Besides being insensitive, and blind to certain organic and economic realities, it is clear that he has no intention of learning about them either. He also demonstrates a calculating quality in that he appears to think that his melodramatic exit might persuade the old man to drop his price and to 'beg' for another chance at negotiation.

To find that he has locked himself out of his car after such an exit is more than just embarrassing or inconvenient - his whole posture of pretentious arrogance is utterly deflated. In some ways he becomes more endearing and human by making this mistake - locking oneself out of a car is one of life's unpleasant but commonly shared experiences. His humiliation is made complete when the old man holds up his cell-phone and smiles.

This is the pivotal moment in the action. The stereotypical situation has been humorously and cleverly reversed. Suddenly the yuppie has been humbled and the old man is in a position of power because he has the means to help him. Few would have expected the old man to own a cell-phone, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility, and it has the effect in South Africa of overturning usual expectations. Further, the old man has a kind of fatherly compassion which shows



up the rather pathetic struggle of the yuppie to try to build himself into someone that he clearly is not. It is a kind of parable to teach South Africans to stop playing the old stereotypical roles and to realise that change is in the air - you never know who might be your help in time of need.

As the yuppie couple drive off with their wire windmills and the old man smiles as he counts his money, there is significance in the background music which features James Brown singing 'I feel good'. James Brown is a negro rhythm and blues singer, so the sound is loaded with resonances of the Negro energies in American culture - gospel and rock and roll. A fitting counter to the 'white' blues ('On the road again') which opened the first scene.

This commercial does not attempt to glamorise South African society or to paint a brave national portrait which celebrates our diversity. Instead, it tells the story of a social exchange between individuals (stereotypes really) from two race groups and couches the message in humour. It is a parable that uses South African stereotypes to demonstrate some of the unexpected changes taking place in this society.

## 5.4 Notions of Community

The interview has been analysed as described on pages 45 & 46.

**Francois de Villiers, an Art Director at Lindsay Smithers, has been in advertising for sixteen years. He is a South African by birth and an Afrikaner, his home language being Afrikaans.**

### 5.4.1 Commitment

The first thing that is apparent is that de Villiers has compassion. He has listened to the pain in our society and is aware of the interconnectedness of South Africans, no matter what race or culture. Besides his own experiences of the injustices of apartheid, he demonstrates a reaching within himself to a wider community that includes the African people:

*I always thought that if I see it as a white oke, what do the black people think of it ? All their hardships...all the apartheid stuff. To see some black oke there dressed like a white having a great time as if there's nothing wrong. That's problematic.*

Despite the fragmentation of the nation into isolated groups or racial communities effected by apartheid, de Villiers is aware and concerned about the greater community - the nation and the interconnections between communities.

Again his compassion is demonstrated in his observation of certain interactions between the race groups,

*...the same old patronising thing...you always got those okes whom you knew their hearts weren't in it when they said 'Yebo, baba', when you get out at the petrol station, and now this poor oke who's been battling is hassled, been humiliated his entire life, his kids are battling, his father's battled, everything, must now in the wink of an eye forgive this oke because he's saying 'Yebo, baba', and expect to be treated well. It is just like another typical, terrible thing for people to expect.*

Further to these demonstrations of compassion and insightful observation of social nuance, he reveals the strength of his religious conviction.

*...us being Christians and really loving some wonderful black people that are in our church, who are my true brothers in God's eyes because we are God's children....we can embrace our true brothers, and...the state of one's blood is so much more important than the state of all this culture and language.*

Notions like these are likely to affect the way de Villiers sees his task as a communicator in the South African context. His religion provokes the vision of another kind of community - a spiritual one - a vision of Christian unity before a creator God. And, Christian community is egalitarian, acknowledging that which is common in all humanity, recognising the potential for spiritual growth, and the equality of all before God. Paul, a founding father of the church, said, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in

Christ Jesus'. (Galatians 3:28)

As an Afrikaner, de Villiers has had to face and reject the right-wing element in Afrikanerdom which is so at odds with egalitarianism, or a community that includes Africans. Having to make decisions of this kind, against the flow of his own culture's prejudice, tends to make conscious the resistance to forces which are anti-community, and to strengthen individual conviction. When speaking of Africa he says, 'we laugh and we cry', clearly including himself as part of Africa's passion.

### 5.4.2 Insight

The building of community requires a knowledge of the existent social realities if it is to be rightly guided. The imposition of foreign archetypes can thwart the dynamic forces that are moving the society from within. There are psychic, historical and cultural realities unique to the society which cannot be reflected in the stories and myths of other nations. Thus attempts at community building in South Africa need to be in touch with the psychic, historic and cultural realities of this society, and de Villiers demonstrates insight of this nature.

He recalls a joke from his school days that is uniquely South African. It deals with certain social dynamics about language and its nuances, class structures, the farming community, labour and race relations. This kind of insight can only come from South Africans themselves once they face up to and value their heritage rather than turning first to American or European archetypes. The quote in its entirety reads:

*I always think of the story of the white guy in the joke that we've had for years from when I was at school...the story of the oke that got out with his short pants and his long socks and his comb and his safari suit. He gets out and there's a black man selling watermelons on the side of the road in a rural area. The guy gets out and he says 'Middag, my boytjie' (which has already got the guy's back up), 'Wat vra jy vir die waatlemoene?' speaking in an Afrikaans language but in the way that a black man would*

*...speak it, so that you would understand that he's already being patronising as well, and the black oke turning around and saying, 'Nee, ek vra vir hulle niks baas. Wil die baas vir hulle iets vra?' So this is a way of doing it legitimately on TV where the guy comes and he's so windgat, he gets out and walks around, and from the minute that we now started we had many scenarios.*

It is apparent that this joke about an aspect of South African social interaction - where the patronising white is put down by the black vendor - was a vital stimulus to the making of the Vodacom commercial. De Villiers has taken a situation that reveals a lack of compassion and community, and made it work in a positive way in the commercial.

Further to this kind of social insight, de Villiers has imaginative knowledge of specific character stereotypes. The old African vendor's costume was carefully chosen as were the outfits worn by the yuppie and his girlfriend:

*He had to have a leather jacket (he's got like a green leather jacket) that they sell specifically at Sun City in a couple of those shops, the gold chains, the boots, definitely the ponytail, definitely the bokbaard - so all of those things had to be in - oh, and definitely the red BMW - it's a smaller and cheaper one but it still makes the statement.*

Insight into the society, and responding to the changes enabled de Villiers to pick the right timing for a commercial of this nature:

*...the timing was right - it was in the same year as the elections, so timing was good. The fact that the blacks have come into their own. The fact that the whites are starting to laugh at themselves and in fact being able to see something funny in the whole racial thing which has always been such thin ice.*

Being sympathetically responsive to the collective 'climate', enables de Villiers to form a clear sense of what is credible in terms of depicting social interaction in the media.

Speaking of the pressures to find ways of reaching and portraying the full spectrum of the society in the wake of apartheid, he comments on some of the difficulties of achieving this credibly, without resorting to a formula.

*We worked on commercials where you had to have a thing as soon as you had people together that you would now have to put in a black or coloured oke into the situation. Even when you get little kids together, sometimes you had to put all races in. I always tried to find some sort of a relevance for a person like that to be there. This is done everywhere and you saw where it was false...*

### 5.4.3 Vision

Although de Villiers doesn't formulate any kind of ideal society of the future, it is clear from the interview that he is a committed participant, working constructively towards just change in South Africa. In response to the prompt 'Healing the past' he answers:

*I suppose healing means opening up things, taking coverings off so that you can get a bit of sun so it can dry up, and I suppose in a context like this, or what we find at work here...to not be shy and not cover it up - opening it up, but to talk about it, to see it from another perspective. I don't go too deep into it, but the fact that you can be yourself and talk about it and laugh about it...that they can, in that sort of way, see your perspective and you see their perspective.*

Such an 'opening up' of things is actually occurring in the national arena through the TRC (see page 5), where people are taking off the 'coverings', and talking about their experiences under apartheid and during the revolution. These 'confessions' are broadcast on television on Sunday nights at 6pm in a programme called *Special Report on Truth and Reconciliation*, which is anchored by Max du Preez. (This special report has varied in its duration and time-slot since the first screenings soon after the election, but Max du Preez has always been the anchor man.)

#### 5.4.4 Advertising

In dealing with the theme of advertising and community-building it is necessary first to establish the primary intention of the commercial. The client's brief was that the agency focus on coverage. In the words of de Villiers:

*...coverage was the main thing that they wanted to say and also now do it in the sense of saying 'coverage' - meaning that you can travel almost anywhere in the country and have a connection. And the masts and the base stations that they had placed along the roads in the cities and so on, and that you could have the least chance of a break in call. Obviously you are then looking at the message that you want to get across - all national roads are now covered. The emergency aspect of that comes out.*

The clients wanted to '...anchor themselves and get themselves into the mind and hearts of the people of the nation.'

In order to do this, the Vodacom commercial had to take its stance in competitive response to the MTN campaign. De Villiers comments:

*It was an interesting exercise because at the time MTN had done the most fantastic radio campaign - one of the greatest radio campaigns this country's ever seen - with the American voice and the sort of very monotone monologue carrying on and bringing humour in there, but I always felt that it was like a British type of humour - head type of humour - rather than a true South African belly laugh or heart type of humour. There's a difference you know, the quick and clever British wit and the South African humour. And another thing, they've always been joking with yuppies, but somehow they never distanced themselves from yuppies. So there they sat with a very slick sort of communication and with a British type of head humour talking about yuppies, but in fact associating themselves with yuppies.*

The competitive thrust is clear when de Villiers says:

*...we wanted to use a BMW as I've always thought that if we're going to*

*knock the yuppie and through that everything that yuppie stands for, including MTN, then we have to be very careful with him.*

So, although the MTN campaign was a stimulus, the Vodacom commercial sought to reach a wider target market, ('the mind and hearts of the people of the nation') and to develop the use of South African humour. De Villiers says:

*...we decided to go for the heart - to make people laugh and to touch them here [indicates the heart] - and at the same time using a very much South African look, shooting it outside. See, clearly all the triggers are there - this is South African, this is sunny, the heat of the day and all of those sort of things. All of that helped to position us cleverly away from saying that although it is for yuppies and a lot of yuppies use it, we think that the greatest thing of all is that it's for ordinary people, not just for yuppies - the target audience is too small...we're not going to make enough money, we're not going to get enough network contacts going if we just focus on that - we've got to say it's for everybody.*

Once de Villiers had checked out the advertising campaigns for cell phones in the overseas media he was clear in his intention to give a strong personality, or face, to the product:

*It should be characterful. It should say Vodacom in it so that it's not just a cell phone, because Vodacom or a cellular network actually has no face. You can see it in the poles next to the road - that's the only place you can see it. It's got no face.... So we wanted to give them a face, we wanted to give it character but also say Vodacom. A Vodacom ad. and an MTN ad. offer exactly the same...now it's even more important for you for the personality that the one has as opposed to the personality that the other one has. Long ago I realised that there is a big truth in the statement that a brand or a product is a person, a person just like you and me. My job is to give it a heart, to give it a face, to clothe it, what type of language, how old is it - all of those things - you work it out and then that is the thing that people invite into their homes, feel comfortable with and like to be*



*associated with.*

In response to the prompt: 'In South Africa we are very self-conscious about becoming a nation right now. Do you believe that advertising is a vehicle which can play a role in this process?', de Villiers answers:

*Yes, definitely. I think that it is so wonderful that we can be doing it without pretending. Because advertising can just reflect what is going on out there, otherwise it's false.*

De Villiers is responding here to the changes in the country since the election, and the sense of freedom. He now feels that attempts to portray harmonious racial interaction, or the development of an integrated society in the media, are no longer contradicted by the laws of the country. He is definitely in favour of advertising that reflects the realities of the society.

*...real advertising, reflecting real, relevant situations - to me that is what it's all about.*

## 5.5 Conclusions

In the Vodacom commercial, the needs of the client and the aims of the brief, had to take priority over any attempt to play a role in social development through the media. Although de Villiers has such a clearly humanitarian outlook and is in his own way working toward community, the process of responding to the brief and making credible, relevant advertising to reach the South African market came first, and has led to a commercial which reflects with humour certain aspects of our society.

In this case, the notions of community that are manifest in the commercial, are not the result of any specific intention to portray some kind of society that might act as a model for South Africa, but are rooted in De Villier's first hand, experiential knowledge of South African society, and give a certain validity to the commercial.

The society that is portrayed is a humorous reflection of an aspect of our society. So many of the components in the commercial are the result of responding to the brief, and the confluence of ideas in contemporary media (both here and overseas) and through the experience of living in South Africa at this time.

Certainly, the interview seems to prove that the making of a television commercial is not a science, especially considering that de Villiers only came up with the 'Yebo Gogo' catchphrase on the morning prior to the shoot - by consulting an African camera-operator. There is no easily repeatable formula or model that will deliver a successful commercial.

Persuasion is an art and relies heavily on intuition, timing and a knowledge of communication media. The notions of community made manifest in the Vodacom commercial are the result of de Villiers and the creative teams' understanding of their own country as a reference, a source of stories, and a setting for the action. It is difficult to distinguish between those elements which have a conscious intention and those which are quite unconsciously assumed to reflect reality. This seems to be determined by the creative team's own sense of self and society.

The Vodacom commercial is a piece of creative work which stands out for its excellence and appeal, and certainly came at the right time, judging by its popularity and acceptance by South African audiences. There are notions of community expressed in it, but they are not all the result of conscious intention. There may well be an unconscious response to Mandela's rise to prominence in the choice of an old African man, who by courage and perseverance, turns the situation around. This kind of consideration only emphasises the complexity of studying media and meaning because there are so many factors operating in the broad confluence of ideas - the tissues of text - both in the media itself and in the surrounding society.

## **CHAPTER 6**

# **THE VODACOM COMMERCIAL**

## **Target audience response**

### **6.1 Introduction.**

This chapter sets out to analyse the response of six selected individuals in the target audience.

All the interviews were conducted in English. (The rationale behind the selection of interviewees is described on page 46). Of the six interviewees, two were African, two European, one of mixed race and one Indian. Two of the interviewees work in media, Alex Gower-Jackson is the creative director of a design studio, and Khaba Mkize is a prominent journalist. Ernest Sempe is a student studying to be a town planner. Yvette Birch is a supervisor at a supermarket, Barbara Brincat is a housewife, and Gail Govender operates a computer for stock control in the motor industry.

Leading questions were asked or prompt words used, to elicit a broad, reflective response. The aim was to reveal the notions that individuals in the sample groups have about the stories, images and symbols used in advertising to convey ideas about community in South Africa.

### **6.2 The Vodacom Commercial**

#### **6.2.1 Response to its credibility and cultural validity**

All of those interviewed agreed that the Vodacom commercial was convincingly

South African in content and that it presented a feasible social situation. The inclusion of two race groups (African and European) was noticed and the class differences between them were accepted as being a credible reflection of society. Those who were aware of the customs of journalism and media used the term 'stereotypes' eg. '...the guy gets help from a guy who in the national stereotype is supposed to be on the running board of society.' (Mkhize), affirming the use of stereotypes for the purposes of advertising.

In response to the question 'Does the society portrayed in the ad. seem convincing to you?' most answered in the affirmative eg. 'Ja, definitely, without a doubt...100% convincing.' (Gower-Jackson), though two individuals expressed certain reservations, one implying that it was valid only in stereotypical terms (Brincat) and the other expressing an awareness of a deeper need for change and the time it will take before such a scenario could unfold so humorously,

*...I think it won't happen as quickly as someone may expect it to happen because...apartheid has been a long time and...for it to come to an end, it will also take a long time....people who have been wounded in the age of apartheid seem to have that unforgiveness in their hearts. (Sempe)*

However, no-one felt that the characters, the situation, or the interaction between them, were false or jarring.

### **6.2.2 Response to the Notions of Community Portrayed in the Commercial.**

The parable that unfolds in the commercial has been understood by the audience and it has been interpreted positively by four of the interviewees as being a lesson in community building.

Sempe: *Actually they need each other, there is no-one who is lower - they need each other... it's a way of showing that we really need each other.*  
(emphasis mine)

Brincat: *Even people we view as lesser...can actually help you.*

Mkhize: *I think it's joining two sectors of the country.*

*Communication... Everyone can help everyone... We need each other, it's an ubuntu situation - it's popularising ubuntu - that a person is a person because of other people, umuntu, ngomuntu, ngabantu....we've got to interact in order to win. Let's work together. (emphasis mine)*

And also: *...those who are powerful, who have the economic muscle need those who need to be lifted up. The two should interact.*

Gower-Jackson: *...suddenly people are waking up with a new respect... stereotypes have been broken... (emphasis mine)*

The responses of the other two interviewees did not convey any opinion about the issue of community in the commercial. Govender did not really grasp the narrative content, while Birch felt that the interaction between the yuppie and the vendor was a straightforward form of bargaining untainted by racism or class arrogance.

### 6.2.3. Response to the 'Yebo Gogo' catchphrase

The response to the 'Yebo Gogo' catchphrase is interesting because although de Villiers intended it to be a way of showing the yuppie's patronising arrogance, none of the interviewees picked this up, and its satirical intention was generally missed. Brincat made comment on the yuppie's patronising tone, but did not understand Zulu sufficiently well to realise that 'gogo' is a grandmother.

Four of the interviewees were very forgiving of the yuppie's incorrect use of the Zulu language, and tended to see it rather as a positive thing:

Gower-Jackson: *...you can imagine your average white who can't speak an African language and has heard the word "gogo" that has like an affectionate connotation to it...and it's almost like a relief that they can*

*now use that African culture which has always been despised in this country as being second rate. (emphasis mine)*

Mkhize: *...So it's a learning process, because now, after addressing me as "gogo" the mum will teach him at home that "gogo" is grandmother. So, you are actually increasing the national vocabulary of respect.*  
(emphasis mine)

Birch: *...He's probably just started learning Zulu. Maybe that's the only Zulu that he knows. At least he's saying something, greeting in the language.*

Sempe : *...sometimes people use the words without understanding what does that mean...other people when they see a black man...take any words that they come across and thinking that maybe that person will approve or appreciate that they can speak Zulu or whatever.*

It is quite ironic that this loaded piece of satire has become a national catchphrase and, as explained in the introduction to chapter 5 (pages 49 & 50), a symbol of national community in the sports arena. Perhaps the humour in the commercial, and the victory over arrogance, has enabled everyone to see the phrase 'Yebo Gogo' in such a positive light. Perhaps it is also the novelty of seeing the interaction between races, and hearing an African language used in the context of such a commercial.

## 6.3 Broader Frames of Reference

### 6.3.1 Personal notions of community

All the interviewees indicated that they 'believed' that South Africa could resolve its problems and develop into a national community. Some examples of the responses are as follows:

Gower-Jackson: *...I think the potential is there for an ideal society...I think we are heading towards hopefully an ideal society, which maybe could only ever happen because of our history...we're just going to have to learn more and more tolerance and more acceptance and more and more every thing and maybe that's an ideal society, where people grow in their levels of acceptance and tolerance on all levels. (emphasis mine)*

Mkhize: *Through communication and contact we will attain the goal of sanity because we come from a very loaded past whereby contact was discouraged. You cannot communicate without contact. (emphasis mine)*

Sempe: *...but the main important things that will heal those wounds of the past, is to find ourselves living together, showing approval with one another, showing that we are really equal.*

And also: *...I believe that we will really need each other in a good way and that in the future we will need the help of one another. (emphases mine)*

Brincat: *I got hurt by apartheid...I've had to unlearn what I was taught...I'm trying to teach my little ones, now, not to be like that.*

Govender: *I think the main thing is communication. As long as we can communicate we can resolve problems.*

There is a general sense of hope expressed here but it is offset by the kinds of reservations people have about the turmoil that is being currently experienced, particularly the increase in violence. This will be discussed under the two headings which follow.

### **6.3.2 Racial Issues**

Both of the Africans interviewed stressed contact through living together as a very important means of achieving social evolution and the building of a national



community. This expression of a need for contact, and the cultural education it provides, comes in the wake of an apartheid system which not only kept the races apart, but tended to exclude and marginalise Africans.

It is interesting to note how this separation led to an African perception that white affluence was a kind of state sponsored privilege.

*As black people, we were thinking in the past that there are other things that white people are getting free of charge, but living together we see that even the white people work to get money. (Sempe)*

Both Africans viewed education as a vital means of assimilation into the new integrated national community.

*I think really, the culture itself, somewhere, somehow goes together with education. (Sempe) (emphasis mine), and  
...racism is ignorance and we need to inculcate the ability for people to think, especially from pre-school. (Mkhize)*

As regards racial conflict and the patterns of the past, attitudes haven't changed much and there is still the general tendency to think in terms of US and THEM. Even an individual like Gower-Jackson, who is generally unbiased in terms of racial prejudice, is forced to make the distinction between 'us' and 'them', though it is done more in terms of economics. He articulates a fear that the 'first world', or developed part of South Africa, could be suffocated or swamped by the 'third world' or under-developed South Africa:

*...the ever expanding population, the inherited lack of education...it's far too much for this country to cope with. (Gower-Jackson).*

The THEM in the case of the European, Coloured or Indian people interviewed, are the Africans, or the 'blacks'. They are perceived as a threat to future community whether expressed as directly as

*...the blacks feel that now they are in power and they tend to abuse it...they are abusing us. (Govender),*

or as obliquely as in the previous quote from Gower-Jackson.

All three of the females interviewed expressed either directly or indirectly a certain fear of African people.

*If you don't follow them your life is at stake. (Govender).*

*I think I would feel a bit intimidated if it was African. Because they are a bit aggressive towards you - some young ones can be. (Brincat).*

*...we were told that the neighbouring black townships are gonna come and take over our houses and things like that...we were just terrified. All of us. (Birch)*

The candidate would conclude from this that the old attitudes, fears, and ways of seeing other races, have not changed much. The fact that the Africans are a majority, and are now in power, has merely exacerbated these tendencies. The arrival of democracy has not alleviated these fears. The revolution, though it has provided a greater sense of freedom and international acceptance, brings with it a great deal of stress, tension and suspicion.

Neither of the Africans interviewed expressed any fear of the other race groups. They stressed only their need for contact, education and approval.

### 6.3.3 Impressions of the new South Africa

This prompt elicited a range of responses.

Mkhize:

*I feel very optimistic...You see the country is coping with change.*

Birch :

*It's definitely getting there...your colour doesn't mean anything any more...I'm very pleased about the new South Africa. For me, being a coloured, I feel that we're getting somewhere. We're finally getting somewhere. Our opinions...the 'larnies' look at our opinions, you know, sit back*

*and they listen to us. In the past we had no say.*

Gower-Jackson:

*A mixture I think of harsh reality and incredible excitement. What I mean by that is, I've never before been so excited and patriotic and motivated by what's around and what's happened, by the whole nation-building story, but at the same time I live with harsh reality. You've still got all the hard images which we had before, you know, the poverty, and I've had my car broken into, we've had personal experiences of violence, there's still the violence going on, there's still a lot of bitterness.*

Brincat:

*I think there's hope. I feel there's hope though I get very discouraged when I watch TV and the news is just violence, violence, violence...I haven't really seen much difference in attitude, but I know that's going to take a lot of time.*

Sempe:

*At the present moment it's a little bit tense because we are not yet trusting one another because it has been a long time not being together and knowing how each other lives...*

Govender:

*I prefer the way it was previously...there was better control.*

and:

*It's gone bad to worse...when we had our previous government, we didn't have major strikes, we didn't have companies leaving the country...you can see the country is being crippled.*

and:

*I can't say I've got a good future here in South Africa...I love South Africa, but it's sad to say that with the new government, I've just lost interest.*

Everyone interviewed was clearly aware and interested in the changes happening

in the country, and most acknowledged a new sense of freedom. But, this freedom brought with it stress and tension, and the social problems of integration coupled with an increase in crime and violence.

There is a difference in the perception of individuals from different economic levels. It is easier for those reasonably well-off, and removed from the struggles of poverty, to be idealistic and optimistic (eg. Gower-Jackson & Mkhize) while those struggling to move upwards in society are more aware of the hardships and struggle of daily life on the lower rungs. They tend to be a lot less idealistic and optimistic. (eg. Govender & Sempe).

Govender was the only interviewee (without any prompting) to mention affirmative action, and her reaction is extremely negative. She sees it as just another damaging socio-legal device to entrench racial prejudice and feed African nationalism.

All of the interviewees spoke well of Nelson Mandela and saw him as an important symbol for unity in the new South Africa, but two individuals were a little concerned at the way his health (or ill-health) could affect the economy - the implication is that we need to widen the range of positive symbols for our future here.

All those interviewed agreed that only time can heal the wounds of the past and change attitudes in the new South Africa.

### 6.3.4 Advertising

In this section on advertising, the prompt was to investigate whether interviewees felt that advertising could play a role in transforming society, or building community. Both male interviewees (Mkhize & Gower-Jackson), who work in media, believed that advertising can have a positive effect in building community and transforming society. They both saw great potential for change and diversification in advertising in South Africa. Mkhize introduced some interesting ideas about

the relationships between commerce, western culture and African culture. He feels that African culture is inherently communal and co-operative unlike western culture, which he sees as individualistic and competitive:

*Western culture is influenced by commercial purposes, the value on trade - Christmas, Easter, you see it on TV, you're being reminded; the cash registers must clang all the time. It's Valentine's day tomorrow. I nearly forgot. I must go and buy a present. You see it's been motivated by gain. And then you look at African culture, it's motivated by generosity. I like to see people happy. We slaughter a beast, you see. You are communicating with your ancestors. But that mentality was put there in order to get people to come to your home and then you'll feel good by being applauded. Co-operation versus competition. Communal or Individualism - which will actually set the agenda for different cultures. (Mkhize) (emphasis mine)*

*...the advertising fraternity here must be encouraged to use a filter, a funnel-filter of ubuntu - what comes below, underneath, would be what is community friendly - it must be community connected - it mustn't think in terms of returns only...this consciousness of knowing that you are not the only one is important. Advertising is...capable of creating a whole culture for a nation. (Mkhize) (emphasis mine),*

*Those adverts (positing community ) are playing a major role in transformation because we see this thing almost every day, and something is impressed in your mind. (Mkhize)*

The females interviewed were not convinced that commercials are able to transform society, though they all agreed that commercials are effective in increasing the sales of products.

*It won't do any good. It will not. Even if you advertise and show the unity, they sort of ignore that. ...I mean everyday on TV you can see the crime rate, how people are abusing themselves - that part alone can teach them. Even if you advertise up there it still won't help. (Govender)*

Two of the interviewees, Mkize and Brincat, made mention of the power of advertising on children because they had witnessed its effects on their own children. Mkize saw advertising as a potentially positive means of 'educating' children, while Brincat saw it as an unhealthy form of exploiting young minds.

### 6.3.5 Africa

This prompt was included to place the developments in South Africa within the greater context of the continent of Africa. Those who expressed a strong appreciation of Africa's mystery, vibrance and beauty were of European origin (Gower-Jackson & Brincat), while the African's themselves focused on the social problems of Africa, the aftermath of colonisation, and the need for a more effective and relevant system of education. (Mkhize & Sempe)

### 6.3.6 Anti-Community or Negative factors

As regards negative factors - those working against community - every person interviewed stated directly or obliquely that violence, and the fear it causes, is the most all-pervading problem currently facing this country. Although few of the interviewees had had personal experiences of violence, all were affected by its emotional impact on our collective lives and on the economy.

## 6.4 Conclusions.

Characteristics of community that the target audience responded to in the commercial were:

- a) The interdependence between people which the situation highlighted.
- b) The recognition of individual contributions to community.
- c) The need to break from past prejudice with its habits of easy and superficial stereotyping.

With regard to general notions of community in South Africa, all those interviewed believed that this country has the potential to become a unique national community with the proviso that, a), tolerance and acceptance increase in our daily lives, and that b), these qualities be consciously pursued in the contact and communication taking place between previously separate or antagonistic groups, and c), the education system reinforce tolerance and eradicate racial discrimination.

[Research in America has found that the best means of eradicating negative racial prejudices is through mixed schooling. 'Education is the institution of contemporary American society that fights the actual practice of racial double standards more effectively than any other.' (Sniderman & Piazza 1993:7)]

The collective and unconscious racial prejudices of the past cannot and have not been swept away by the change of government. They seem to be continuing. There is a general awareness of the need to transcend these limitations. There is an ambivalence to people's optimism. At times they feel that they are included in this new South African democracy, but the continuing level of violent crime speaks only of division and hostility. Not only does it suggest unresolved conflict in the collective psyche, which is antagonistic to nation-building and community, but it can also be seen to imply that the society is too diverse, immature and fragmented to be able to rally itself. Further, the high crime rate tends to undermine the fragile initiatives for increasing trust, and allows many to slip back into old divisive and hostile attitudes.

Televised sport at international level has a powerful nation-building impact. South Africans are seen to be standing together and taking on the world.

There were only two interviewees, Mkize and Gower-Jackson, who believed that an advertisement or commercial could encourage social change, but since both work in the media, such a view was to be expected. The other four interviewees were not convinced that advertising could really instigate social changes in South Africa.



However, Mkize raised an interesting issue which does warrant further research, namely that African 'culture' has at its heart a drive for community and co-operation, as opposed to European 'culture', which seems to favour competition and personal gain for the individual. Whether or not these distinctions are sufficiently comprehensive, there is a dichotomy in our society which may have roots in such notions.

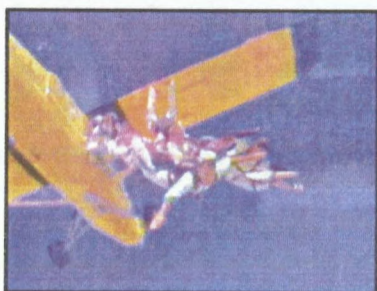


PLATE 11 SABC 'Your Voice Your Vision'

## CHAPTER 7

### THE SABC COMMERCIAL

#### 'Your Voice Your Vision' by The Agency

##### 7.1 Introduction.

The SABC commercial titled 'Your Voice Your Vision', flighted between November 1995 and February 1996, and produced by The Agency, is analysed in this chapter.

This commercial was chosen for study because it attempted to 'paint' a portrait of the South African nation, celebrating its rich diversity of landscapes, peoples and cultures.

For the last forty years in South Africa the issue has been the separation of the race groups through apartheid, so an attempt to paint a portrait of a cohesive, integrated South African nation comes with little historical precedent. It can be argued that this early attempt, whatever its shortcomings, is, in fact, the embryo for further portraits of the nation. Like the Vodacom commercial this commercial is a response to currents of change working in the society towards a new national community.

##### 7.2 Denotative Analysis

This commercial is a series of images of places and people. The images flow quickly into each other so the effect is that of a moving montage. What follows is a sequential list of all the images that make up this commercial.

1 A windmill stands in a Cape landscape. (The music of the soundtrack begins

and plays throughout)

- 2 Ballet dancers move gracefully.
- 3 The SABC tower is seen from above - an aerial view.
- 4 Steelworkers carry a large metal **C** that they have constructed.
- 5 A group of people are setting up a satellite dish on top of a shack.
- 6 Steelworkers line up in front of the camera as if for a photo-portrait.
- 7 An aeroplane takes off with a group of skydivers - they are seen clustered around the door of the aircraft.
- 8 The camera travels into a 'traditional' African yard where Rastafarian Africans are building a wire model of a broadcasting tower.
- 9 N'debele ladies are at work painting a brightly coloured mural.
- 10 Three ladies, who are members of one of the African Zion churches, wade across a shallow stream in their yellow jackets.
- 11 The camera focuses on a trumpet and a musical score.
- 12 A conductor, who is casually dressed, conducts an orchestra practice in a room lit by natural light coming in through a series of arched windows.
- 13 An old man in his workshop completes the carving of a large wooden **B**.
- 14 A classroom of deaf children are learning from the teacher via sign language.
- 15 A close-up of a French horn.
- 16 The skydivers jump from the aeroplane.
- 17 Ballet dancers.
- 18 The skydivers, as they fall, form themselves into the shape of an **A**.
- 19 African school children are running around in a circle waving coloured flags.  
One of the flags has an **A** on it.
- 20 A paraplegic with a bright smile is playing basket ball in his wheelchair.
- 21 The camera returns to the scene of the satellite dish being raised onto the roof of the shack.
- 22 The camera focuses on the face of a smiling grandmother who lives in or near the shack.
- 23 In a high-tech environment, a constructed drawing of an **S** is visible on a computer screen.
- 24 The ballet dancers are seen from above and they move their bodies to make the large shape of an **S**.

- 25 The camera returns to the music conductor. He turns and smiles.
- 26 A brawny African steelworker, wearing a hard-hat, smiles and laughs.
- 27 N'debele women are on a scaffold painting a large mural that incorporates the letters **SABC**. A yellow bus passes by in the foreground.
- 28 The camera returns to the original windmill scene and now some farm workers are posing in the foreground.
- 29 A group of fishermen are on the deck of a boat, mending nets, gutting fish etc.
- 30 African musicians sit in a field. One plays a large drum.
- 31 Camera returns to the steelworkers who are holding up and carrying the large metal **C**. The figures are almost in silhouette because the sun appears to be setting.
- 32 A railway line runs through an open field. A few people start to walk along the side of the track.
- 33 The number of people increases and includes many of those that have appeared in some of the previous scenes.
- 34 The crowd of people grows and the camera records the scene from an aerial position. ( At this point a male voice over says: 'The new SABC TV...hearing your voice, sharing your vision ).
- 35 The SABC tower is seen from above.
- 36 The SABC logo appears on screen.
- 37 To the logo is added the byline 'Your Voice, Your Vision.'

### 7.3 Connotative Analysis

Because the commercial is a series of fast-moving images of people and places in South Africa, the connotative effect is achieved by the layered sequence of images in conjunction with the soundtrack. The soundtrack of the commercial, which provides a musical background all the way through, has a sophisticated but indigenous sound, with African voices singing in Zulu 'Yizwe Lethu' (*This is our land*), and later the same voices singing in English 'This is our land, this is our vision'.

The first image of a Cape landscape is presented in silence. A windmill is turning and the sky is changing from the deep blue of the night to golden orange as the sun colours the morning mists. There is a farm building in the middle distance. It is still very early, and there is no one about. Suddenly the silence is broken by the first notes of the soundtrack, which bring a sense of exotic African mystery to the scene. The sound is like that made by a 'makhweyana' - an African instrument played by tapping a single string with a small stick. The bowl of a calabash is used for resonance. The sound also evokes the resonance of an 'umphe' mouth bow, or bushman harp. This beginning suggests that a new AFRICAN nation is awakening.

As soon as the rhythm is picked up by the percussion, the flow of images begins, and ballet dancers, dressed in diaphanous, golden-orange colours are superimposed on the landscape. As they move the film is 'stopped' to cause a delayed ghosting of the movement, and this increases not only the grace of their movements, but also gives a mystical, magical quality to the images. The light is cool, and suggests early morning and although the sky is blue, mists rise from the horizon. The camera then moves to include a distant aerial shot of the sun as it rises, shedding a golden light. In the foreground the SABC tower emerges through the morning haze. The golden atmosphere is taken on into the next scene of workers in a foundry who are carrying a large metal C. The golden light now comes from the fires of industry as the workers move through the metal struts and structures of the foundry. A burly worker in a hard-hat tightens a bolt with a large spanner. The atmosphere has the feel of a promising new day in which these workers will use their strength and ingenuity. The atmosphere and soundtrack, with its African sound and lyrics, give a sense of magic and mystery to the images. The workers appear in a poetic, heroic form - labour is not seen here as demeaning or dull, but as the dynamo that underlies a national initiative.

The camera moves to a windswept scene where a satellite dish is being placed onto the roof of a shack. The viewer watches the scene from a distance - the people are standing in the wind in a group of their own. The following two scenes of the workers posing for a portrait in the smoke of the foundry, and the sky divers

prior to their ascent, are also seen from a distance. These images suggest that South Africa has technological capabilities which can be shared, even by those living in third world conditions. The colours used in every scene are vivid and atmospheric.

The bright colours and mystical atmosphere continue in the next three African scenes (Rastafarians in a mud-walled compound, N'debele mural painters, and three members of Zion's church) and then the camera moves to the golden colour of the french horn and to the conductor conducting an orchestra in a golden light which streams through arched windows. The viewer is reminded of the abundant sunshine, the gold at the heart of the economy, the colourful diversity, and the artistic gifts to be found (and appreciated) in this diverse nation.

Continuing in this golden light is the image of an old carpenter who is carving a large wooden B. The scene speaks of craft and care, and the deep African voices of the soundtrack remind us that South Africa is uniquely African.

The camera now revisits many of the earlier scenes/themes and the atmosphere, though just as magical, (with the viewer in most cases remaining an observer, at a distance), suggests that time has moved on and it is later in the day. Moving from scenes 14 through to 27 (as listed in the denotative analysis), the initial effect is added to. The viewer is taken a little closer to some of the individuals featured in earlier scenes, who smile. The colourful qualities remain, with blue skies, sunshine, and happy people who are not only gifted in the arts (music, dance, painting and wire modelling) but are up to date in terms of technical skills, engineering and computer technology.

In scene 28 the camera revisits the first scene in the Cape where a group of farm workers now pose in the foreground. This scene is followed by portraits of fishermen at work, musicians, and the steel workers set against a golden sunset. Again the portraits are 'formal' in the sense that the viewer stands at a distance - s/he is a witness who does not move amongst the people or share their conversation.

The remaining scenes (32 - 37) are a celebratory build-up to the final gathering of the diverse peoples of the nation. Not only those who have appeared in earlier scenes, but others are included, such as moslems in their robes, a Zulu woman in a beaded headdress, and various other individuals. As a national portrait it evokes harmony, colour and promise, amid great diversity.

The national portrait is achieved through the focus on people. Diverse, colourful images of individuals with character, emphasise the humanity of South Africa's population. The people are shown to be likeably human and of value as contributors to a diverse and colourful national community. Because many images show people at work, the conglomerate effect is to suggest that these diverse individuals are constructive participants in the building of this nation.

These cinematic images - a fast flowing montage of scenes - provide a wider perspective in the viewer's mind of the nation, and suggest an interrelationship between sectors of the society. Sequences of images, especially when carefully selected and bound together by a musical soundtrack, suggest relationships (in this case, harmonious) between the images. In this way, a positive, somewhat idealised portrait of the South African nation is built up.

The images of the steelworkers in their hard-hats and overalls, labouring in the flames of the foundry, evoke the heroic images of Russian socialism - paintings and murals that depict the workers as the vanguard in the redemption of the nation. However, the images or portraits in this commercial flow so rapidly that there is little chance of such resonances dominating the essentially South African nature of the imagery.

There are no attempts to move close in to the relationships between individuals or cultural groups, but there is an overall feeling of happiness and harmony. The situations or environments have been chosen to give some idea of the diversity of South Africa's topography, ranging from farmland to township, city, veld and ocean. The only artifacts that can be considered pivotal to the action are the large letters which appear at different points in the commercial and make visual contri-



bution to the build up towards the final SABC logo. Obviously the SABC tower is there to tie all the images to the SABC, and to imply their concern for and coverage of the nation.

This is not a 'hard-sell' commercial featuring the product (SABC programming) alone, but is rather a focus on the humanity of the people involved in the communication process, a celebration of their diversity, and a new style of co-operation between the SABC and the nation. Also celebrated is the new-born opportunity and promise that the political changes have brought to South Africa.

There are, however, limitations to this kind of visual, social idealism. None of the conflict in the society is shown, and social or class structures are glossed over in the broad scope of the imagery, so it can be argued that this is an unrealistic or romantically heroic picture of the nation.

## 7.4 Notions of Community

The interview has been analysed as described on pages 45 & 46.

**Graham Buchard, the Creative Director at The Agency, is a British citizen who has been resident in South Africa for twenty five years.**

### 7.4.1 Commitment

Unlike Francois de Villiers in the previous commercial, Graham Buchard gives away very little personal information. He does express a general optimism about the future, his enjoyment of the country, and his belief in the new democratic order. In response to the prompts 'The economy' and 'Africa', he replied cryptically, 'positive', and, '...Africa! Magic.'

In describing the intention of the commercial he says:

*...the intention was to show 'This is our country. Look how beautiful it is. Look at the different types of people here that we so rightly share.'*

His focus is clearly on the positive, the visually beautiful and the unique, and the intention in the commercial is not only to show this beauty but to imply that it is something that we may 'rightly share'.

Again his enthusiasm and enjoyment of this diverse and colourful society is expressed in the last line of the interview:

*It's all part of this magic country we are in at the moment.*

Whatever the foundations of his optimism, it is clear from the interview that Buchard has a vision for the country that is positive. He enjoys the 'magical', exotic diversity of the visual environment with all its different textures, cultures and races. This view, although loving, is distant in that it makes no attempt to touch on the social dynamics that underlie the visual splendour. Despite this criticism, it can be safely concluded that Buchard is committed to the building of a national community in South Africa.

### 7.4.2 Insight

Buchard's approach to portraying the society is primarily visual - a collection of diverse images of the people that make up the nation. There has been no attempt to incorporate the sense of conflict and stress that is currently being felt in the society.

He is aware of the South African stereotypes in that he set out to avoid them.

*...we tried to avoid the stereotypes of South Africa. They're beautiful to show, they shouldn't always be shown in the same way. The N'debele lady painting - they do paint beautifully and their work is very distinct but they don't only paint the sides of walls in little rural villages. Here they are in downtown Johannesburg painting a big billboard...So we wanted to try and bring those changes into the thinking as well. There's this whole bunch of engineers who manufacture a C, two of them are women and they're macho women, they're not just women, they're macho women, so*

*the thing is a bit more balanced, you know...We're such a multi-national land and it's quite phenomenal that we go from one extreme to the other.*

In making his selection, he has attempted to achieve a '...reflection of our entire society.' , and included interesting details like the satellite dish on top of a shack.

*There's a fantastic image of - we actually kind of contrived it - but we saw it for real and that's why we put the satellite dish on top of this little hut. But I've seen it for real, they're out there, you know, and it's little stories like that that make many interesting movies.*

He continues:

*There are interesting images in this ad. that have never been used before in advertising. We used the twelfth official language, which is sign language. We had paraplegics, who are often excluded for some reason, that's because people don't want to see it. We've got religious groups...We had the Red Cross there. We had the ZCC group and Rastafarians. We had the skydivers. We had businessmen in suits, businesswomen in suits. They really were from different sections of society.*

It is true that many of the images have not been used in advertising before, but because of the multitude and speed of the many images, some of the more subtle details are lost in the overall effect. This commercial has, however, broken new ground in finding some of the more unique and less stereotypical images (eg. the church matrons in their colourful vestments) that can widen the conventions used to portray this society in terms of its visual range.

### 7.4.3 Vision

As regards Buchard's vision of the future and the development of community, he is positive and committed to working towards community. He is aware that there is currently this conscious effort being made by many to build the nation.

*It is a brave new world that we've created in South Africa, you know. It's been a brave process, and if you consider what's happened in other*

*societies which one would have thought had less of a problem than we had, in real terms, we've really made an effort at doing it, and I think this all goes to contribute to the well being of our society, the well mixing of our society. I think there's quite a bit of it out there, but that's the trend...We're a nation of winners at the moment...so let's see some of those winners. (emphases mine)*

Speaking of the SABC he says:

*They're setting some good precedents. They're going to make more local stuff which I think is very important for the industry. They made a commitment to that. So I think they're doing their bit. I really do. And if big institutions everywhere can all contribute in that way, then the dream will be built. I think it is being built. (emphasis mine)*

The 'dream' that Buchard refers to here is the myth or image of South Africa as a united prosperous nation, colourful, unique, and diverse - a national community.

#### 7.4.4 Advertising

In dealing with the theme of advertising and media it is necessary first to establish the primary intention of the commercial. The Agency worked in conjunction with the client in constructing the brief. Buchard says:

*...we actually helped them construct the brief in that they hadn't envisaged a corporate approach to that particular change over. They were seeing it more as a particular station as opposed to a collective message, and we felt it was very important to produce a collective message, based on a tremendous amount of in-depth research in the market that led to the changes and restructuring. ...Effectively that ad. is a report back ad. We listened and we heard what you said, which is why 'Your voice, your vision'...it's yours now. It's not this monolythic, non-touchable thing that one predicted for the last 21 years, it's now your broadcast, your voice, your vision...so we worked collectively with them. (emphases mine)*

So, the intention was to present the SABC as a fully representative voice for the nation. They sought to change not only their programming, but also the public's perception of the SABC as a large unresponsive corporation.

The research done by the SABC for this new structuring had been going on for two years prior to the re-launch.

*They'd been out in the field for I think almost two years prior to the re-launch conducting opinion poles really on the SABC, their programming, what people wanted, what people didn't want, so that they could prepare a more equitable spectrum of programming to our market.*

(emphasis mine)

As discussion took place between The Agency and the client, the aims of the SABC became clearer.

*...the public's perception of the SABC or any huge national broadcasting corporation is always one of 'them and us'. Them up there and us down here somewhere. What we really wanted to do was to demonstrate the kind of spirit that exists within the SABC, certainly in some quarters...and, I think that by working closely with them we started to realise it was more and more their vision. More and more what they wanted was a working together process with the public.* (emphasis mine)

The essentially inclusive and broadly communal nature of the process needed to be reflected in the commercial. In this new democracy they sought to show the collective interdependence of all South Africa's people, while at the same time presenting the SABC as the link and leader in this new, inclusive approach to broadcasting and communication. Buchard was aware that this commercial was a unique opportunity to help build the nation - to show the potential. He says:

*For me it was a once off occasion. They'll never re-launch the SABC. It's a bit like the first inauguration. It will never happen again.*

Once the general direction had been decided upon, they felt that the SABC needed to have a human face.

*The idea initially is to present the SABC in a far more graphic and formalised way, and we started looking at that, and realised that we wanted to make the thing look a bit more organic, so people make up the lack...*

The sense of new possibilities and a new freedom, an idealism almost touching on religion, is revealed in Buchard's description of the commercial's evolutionary process.

*...At one point in the ad. we thought it was called 'Offerings' where South Africans can create their own vision, their own identity of the SABC and what it stood for, and we felt, quite rightly, that we back down from that a little bit because that was starting to become a little bit worshipping. A little bit too pressured. We see it more as a celebration, OK, where people come together...really it's just a celebration, they are sharing each other, you know what I mean ? (emphasis mine)*

*I think the intention was to show 'This is our country. Look how beautiful it is. Look at the different types of people here that we so rightly share.' We're such a multi-national land...*

The way in which they decided to create a positive and inclusive portrait of South African society has been analysed both in the Connotative Analysis, and also under the section headed 'Insight' (page 84).

As in the previous interview with Francois de Villiers, it is clear that the 'creative' aspect of making a television commercial relies on some kind of artistic intuition. This intuition comes only with training and experience - a certain kind of confidence and giftedness in communication through media. As stated before, persuasion is an art and not a science. It is a process that cannot be satisfactorily or convincingly quantified.

Certain quotes reveal this:

*On the commercial itself, no, we didn't do any research. We did some*

*discussion groups. We had discussion groups, nothing quantifiable really, looked at general vibes in terms of presenting the stories.*

*(emphasis mine)*

*It's usually group generated. It involved quite a lot which is, I believe, a sign of a good commercial. From its evolution, from its conception point through to its completion, you're dealing with very much of a live thing. You've got live things happening behind you on the celluloid, it changes and it evolves, the music evolves... (emphases mine)*

Buchard comments on the making of the soundtrack and the evolution of the artistic process.

*We originally had quite a lengthy script which went into 'we are your voice, we are your vision. Our lessons reach you, our lessons teach you.' It was very poetic. It was full of all these like...teaching, informing, educating, entertaining...all of these things. And eventually, when it finally came down to it we had various artists in the studio and this happened very late on Saturday night, early on Sunday morning. It was far too wordy, so we cut all the words apart from 'We are your voice, we are your vision'. We also simplified it. It was terribly busy...it was much faster originally in its pace which didn't suit the movie...and it was full of all sorts of other instruments. We thought we should be reflecting our society in our music as well. So we had sitars in there, a pot pourri, and it was absolutely too much. So we literally just took everything out, apart from the drum beat and had voices doing the music.*

On consideration of the question whether commercials can change our society by changing our vision of ourselves, Buchard believes they can have a positive impact.

*I think they have that potential. We know that the ad. is well liked, we've had a lot of feedback and I think again, people like to see beautiful things. So I think if we show them good, well-meaning things, it rubs off. It must rub off. (emphasis mine)*

And further to this:

*So I think there is an ability within advertising, when people start to take it and trade off of it and use it...a lot of people prefer Vodacom...people trade off things they like, they use them, they repeat them..*

*...The more one sees the ad., the more one takes out of it and I think it's very positive imagery.*

As regards the feedback or success of this commercial, Buchard responded thus:

*It's been very positive. We launched it for the first time for the staff within the SABC on the 2nd of February and their response was absolutely wonderful because it was the first time that they had ever gathered together as a group of people in 21 years, and they feel it's them, it's their identity. So from that aspect we've done a tremendous job, I believe, although it's not been flighted much. It will be over a period of time. The more one sees the ad., the more one takes out of it and I think it's very positive imagery.*

## 7.5 Conclusions

In the making of this commercial, the creative team had an unusually high level of freedom. They not only worked out the brief with a client who was open to their suggestions and in need of their direction, but also, once the concept had been approved, had a budget of R1, 2 million to work with. This does allow for a measure of experiment and ambition in terms of the scope of the national portrait that could be achieved. (By way of contrast, the Vodacom commercial had a budget of about R 250,000)

The notion of community portrayed in this commercial focuses on the interconnectedness and diversity of a colourful range of humanity who are building a nation and enjoying their country.



Such a positive portrait of the nation is open to criticism in that it doesn't touch on the underlying nature of the society - the relationships between peoples, history, the conflicts and imbalances caused by colonisation, cultural differences, and apartheid. Also, there is the psychic reality of the ever-changing present - the joy or fear that can be experienced on the streets - which has not been included.

It could be argued that such a positive portrait is too far from reality to provide a national portrait that can be aspired to, and may only increase cynicism. On the other hand, South Africa does need some positive myths and stories to counter negative, unconstructive views of the future, particularly in this transitional phase.

A further critique of the commercial is that in its naturalistic/photographic portrayal of the nation, even though it does have a magical atmosphere, it leaves out some of the more obvious and important contributors to South African society eg. Afrikaans farmers who feed the nation, or Indian traders who make a strong contribution to the economy of Natal.

However, this commercial does enlarge the range of possible South African stereotypes. It focuses on the very real, exotic, visual nature of this land and its society. It takes the usual pictorial stereotypes further than those conventionally used to promote tourism, by showing their interconnectedness in the broader scope of a national community - a community that is no longer forced into fragmentation by a national policy of apartheid.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE SABC COMMERCIAL

#### Target Audience Response

##### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to analyse the response of six selected individuals in the target audience.

All the interviews were conducted in English. (The rationale behind the selection of interviewees is described on page 46) Of the six interviewees, four were African, one European, and one Indian. Three of the interviewees work in media. Both Denis Beckett and Nomavenda Mathiane are prominent journalists based in Johannesburg and Fred Khumalo is a script writer for The Television Company in Johannesburg. Queeneth Buthelezi is an accounts manager who lives in Kwandengezi in Natal. Jeffrey Bhengu is a school teacher living and working at KwaNgcolosi, a rural area near the new Inanda dam in Natal, and Jennifer Iyman is a cashier at a supermarket in Kloof, Natal.

##### 8.2 The SABC commercial

###### 8.2.1 Response to its credibility and cultural validity

In response to the question 'Is this a convincing portrait of South African society?' the interviewees exhibited a certain ambivalence weighted towards the negative. The reason for this appears to be that the commercial has not attempted to deal with conflicts within the society

Beckett: *It's convincing in the sense that they're all South African people.*

*I'm quite happy about that. If it's meant to represent the day to day life then it's not all that convincing. First of all we're not quite as imbued with the kind of togetherness it portrays, and secondly, that's all the up side of activity. (emphasis mine)*

Khumalo: *Ah...it's too beautiful (laughs). Beautiful to the point of being kitsch. Well...then again in advertising you do try to be optimistic and ensure some kind of hope in everything you do, but if you really want to reflect the diverse culture and people, they don't really get there...Not enough cultures...I didn't see a 'pantsula' there - a street-wise township boy. I didn't see a Zulu in traditional attire. Did I see an Afrikaans farmer in khakis or something? I know that's a stereotype, but...so it's not really balanced. (emphases mine)*

Iyman: *No, it's not convincing because, if you do look around us, there's a lot of violence. It's too pretty a picture. (emphasis mine)*

Mathiane's response introduces further complexities to the notions of conflict and possible community:

*First of all the opening line of the advert is 'Yizwe Lethu' - our land. And coming from where I come from...the rest of it is not about our land, it's about the country. When you say 'the land', it conjures nationalism, it conjures us being vanquished...When you talk of 'this is our land' it's not a flippant statement. It's a very pregnant statement. It encompasses the African in me, that I am landless in the land of my forefathers. It encompasses all that. It's not something that you take lightly. So when you hear 'Yizwe Lethu' (she sings the tune in a high voice) already you imagine that this is about repossession of what I have lost, and then you find it doesn't mean repossession.*

Mathiane finds that the promise in the soundtrack is not fulfilled in the commercial. The song 'Yizwe Lethu' touches on the pain that exists for those who lost

their rights to land under the apartheid government. If anything, it demonstrates the difficulty of attempting to portray a united nation after such a difficult period of history. There is always the danger of appearing flippant and superficial to those whose losses were great.

Bhengu finds the portrait a 'convincing' one in that 'all the people are represented', but his statement, '...they are trying to show the unity' (emphasis mine) tends to imply that the community, or unity, portrayed is not entirely convincing.

Bhutelezi is the only interviewee whose response is entirely positive, though she seems to imply that the commercial is pointing to an ideal or aspirant society rather than attempting to convey the present reality:

*...there were nations we had in our country, but they were not shown. Nations which were not anything, like the ones who are doing the drawing - the N'debele nation. Now they're being shown to everybody, to say that this nation is also existing. When we were in that state or country where everything was depressed, their talents were not brought into light so that everybody could see them. This ad. is creating more visions, showing that we are going somewhere... So now, by bringing all those different nations and people together, their talents, it shows that we are going somewhere.*

### **8.2.2 Response to the notions of community portrayed in the commercial.**

It has been established that the national portrait presented in the commercial was not entirely convincing to the majority of the interviewees. However, most of the interviewees understood the didactic intention of the commercial, and saw it more as an attempt to picture a future ideal - to portray a national community yet to be formed, rather than attempting to include the negative aspects of contemporary social conflict.

Bhutelezi comments:

*...I think they made that ad. like that in order to encourage us to do every*

thing together. (emphasis mine)

Beckett's comment articulates well the intention of the commercial, its idealism and positive, future orientation:

To project a very wide range of South Africans co-operating in happy harmony and everybody incorporated... Rather than displaying a reality, that ad. is a kind of ideal which will probably never be there. It'll never be an overall depiction because there's going to be the rough as well as the smooth, conflict as well as harmony...as an ideal, I think it's fine.  
(emphases mine)

Iyman agrees that the intention of this commercial is to provide an image that will work in a positive way by demonstrating potential harmony and co-operation.

*It was to show us that we can live together as one nation. The point of the ad. was to show us that by watching that, we can live together.*

## 8.3 Broader Frames of Reference

### 8.3.1 Personal notions of community

When asked to define 'community' most of the interviewees agreed that community included people (not necessarily family relations) living together in harmony, who are able to understand and co-operate with each other.

Beckett, however, introduced an interesting comment about the current use of the word 'community'. As a journalist reporting on contemporary political issues, he feels that this word has become distorted in the context of South Africa:

*Well, a member of the community means a black person...It's slightly distorted in South Africa to mean black people - it becomes virtually synonymous, a synonym...If you're a dreaded old whitey you're no longer a member of the community.*

As a last question in each interview, interviewees were asked: 'Are we ever in South Africa going to get to the place where we really can share each other and recognise ourselves in each other, or are we already living that reality?'

In responding to this question the majority of the interviewees agreed that it will take time before South Africa becomes the kind of national community in which we will be able to recognise ourselves in each other.

Khumalo comments:

*...It will take some time to break the racial barriers, cultural barriers. OK we do have blacks living in the suburbs, but those, in most cases, have to subscribe to the dominant culture, which is not South African culture, but a culture imposed from Europe into this context. Again it's not a European culture, it's some kind of a bastard culture, so, people coming from township communities have had to subscribe to new values all of a sudden - they can't slaughter their sacrificial goats or whatever in the suburbs.*

Iyman declares, 'We've got a long way to go'.

Bhengu says, '...in the future we (may) live as brothers and sisters. That is my hope. We're not there yet', and Buthelezi says, '...we are not yet already there...though we are saying that we are already sharing, you can see that there are certain spots where we are not yet really sharing...it's a racial thing...'

Beckett's also stresses the role of time in the development of a national identity in South Africa, but he believes that positive developments are taking place:

*In many ways we are there already...the extent to which we can all identify as South Africans and indeed relate to one another individually, is very nice...However, bit by bit, we get more and more into a joint understanding of ourselves and bit by bit "ourselves" becomes a more wide spread idea...there is actually a much wider sense now of "ourselves" being a broader entity. I suppose inevitably we get to a stage of a national consciousness, but that can be quite a long thing, where the national con-*

*sciousness is as complete as say a British national consciousness...A national consciousness is there and develops further and further as we go along. It gets broader...I feel positive. (emphasis mine)*

Two of the interviewees mentioned sport as a unifying factor and builder of national community.

Khumalo comments:

*... in a lot of senses we're on the threshold of that big room called harmony. Occasions like the Bafana Bafana win and the amaBokke Bokke win attest to the fact that we really can share and be part of the same whole. I mean, some years ago I didn't even want to watch rugby. It said so many negative things to me, but now I even know the rules...So, we are not really, really harmonious, but we're getting there, ya, we're getting there.*

Mathiane also mentions the World Cup rugby match. Since rugby was seen so negatively by the African population during the apartheid years as a sport that evoked Afrikaner racism, the change is worthy of notice.

*We had that experience once. The world stopped still for once. The World Cup rugby match. It's never happened again...I mean, I'm not a rugby enthusiast, but that day I found myself on the side of the South Africans.*

Mathiane also provides a provocative notion about community - one that raises the issue of conflict in the building of community. She stresses the idea that a common enemy causes unity and helps to build community.

*There was a time when I felt national community. Before the ANC took over, when we were still a liberation movement and we had a goal... We had a home. We had an enemy. That made us into a community. (emphasis mine)*

Though a common 'enemy' may be helpful in building community in the sports arena, it can be a dangerous means of building community in a society as diverse

as this one. This issue is discussed further in the conclusion of this chapter.

### 8.3.2 Racial issues

Again when racial issues are expressed it appears that there has not been that much change despite the broader changes in the socio-political environment. Whereas previously the great divide was between 'whites' and 'non-whites', it is now more a case of 'Africans' and 'non-Africans'. Consider these comments from Iyman who is a member of the Indian community.

*Now, we're still shunned. Now blacks have first preference, every time.  
We're still in between.*

In like manner, Beckett comments on what he perceives to be reverse racism.

*...there's a standard kind of ordained black view which is meant to automatically take the black side. And that's quite perverse...It's really quite common for blacks to say 'of course we're taking sides...because he's black'...People have to sort things like that out.*

All of the interviewees admitted that racism continues to operate on a daily basis despite the changes and the potential for a new beginning.

*It's just that everyday we experience racism. People think that because we're working on the tills we're still inferior...Some of our staff are management and they are a bit racist as well. (Iyman) (emphasis mine)*

*...even at work we are acting as if we are already sharing but you'll find that where for instance you have taken or used someone's chair, he'll start saying that you are not supposed to use it, it's mine, and from there using a handkerchief and maybe trying to clean it up...It's a racial thing because if somebody from the same nation uses the chair, they'll never do that that they are doing to us. (Buthelezi) (emphasis mine)*

*I came from a society where I didn't trust white folks. (Mathiane)  
(emphasis mine)*



The habits and racial conventions of the past are tied up not only with the psychology of this society, but are also embedded in the economy. Mathiane comments:

*The evils of the past are embedded in so many things. The lack of material things. You know, you saw those people standing in queues...and all the white people are already in their homes.* (emphasis mine)

### 8.3.3 Impressions of the new South Africa

Although most of the interviewees are pleased that changes have been made, particularly in the political realm, they recognise that a deeper social change is necessary to engender a real sense of national community. Those who were oppressed by apartheid are relieved to be living without the fear that they used to experience.

*I would say that I like living in South Africa now. Why ? Because before, although it was our country, we were living in a state of fear, now, we are living in a bright country where I can voice my vision and it will be accepted if it's a good one.* (Buthelezi) (emphasis mine)

*...It seems as if the people who are going to benefit from the new country will be our kids - growing up together they'll be the same nation, the same kind of brothers and sisters. They won't have that fear that we, at our age, have.* (Buthelezi) (emphasis mine)

Mathiane comments on the oppressive nature of the pass laws:

*When I see a policeman I no longer think twice about 'do I have my pass ?'...it's a huge relief, and for someone who did not experience it, it's meaningless.* (emphasis mine)

The 'new South Africa' is in some ways a dream - an ideal - the pursuit of democracy which has never existed before in a country so diverse and with a history so filled with conflict. Led by Mandela, many share the dream, and all the interview-

wees have displayed a consciousness of the need to find a way to unite and build the nation. Both Khumalo and Beckett comment on the nature of the democratic vision in this context:

*If I were to be fair with myself and with reality, it is depressing at the moment, particularly what's happening in Natal. There doesn't seem to be any progress...So in as much as one wants to be optimistic, the reality is not easy. It is a dream, yet, but how achievable it can be is another question altogether.* (Khumalo) (emphasis mine)

*...It's a brave process. Hell it's got shortcomings but it's certainly a brave process. The attempt to create an encompassing democracy that is as diverse as this one is really quite bold, quite noble.* (Beckett)  
(emphasis mine)

Despite the nobility of the cause for a 'new' South Africa, there are shadows from the past which continue to darken the future. Bhutelezi comments on the problem of reconciling those of the older generation who lived under, or fought, the regime, and those who feel this new freedom.

*The way we were brought from different nations, different cultures, it has created something in our hearts and in our minds that even if we are now in a free state, we don't see ourselves as free because our elders still feel as if they're living in that oppressed country.* (Bhutelezi)  
(emphasis mine)

So, although there is a dream to be built, a vision to pursue, all the interviewees are aware of the very real problems to be overcome. They realise that time is needed, not only to heal past psychological wounds, but also to find the means to restructure the economy. Khumalo comments:

*The new government has only been in power for about two years, so, I mean, they can't undo what was entrenched over 48 years. It will be a long process, a gradual process, a trial and error kind of process. We can't get everything right the first time.*

Iyman's comment encapsulates the view of all of the interviewees:

*It's just up to the people now to realise that they have to work towards building a better nation. They have to be educated. I don't know how that is going to happen. So many thousands are uneducated, walking the streets and begging, you know. I really wish I had the answer as to how they are going to go out and earn their place in society. It's a very, very long way to go for South Africa... (emphasis mine)*

### 8.3.4 Advertising

The prompt question asked about the general role of advertising in nation building was: 'Do you believe that a commercial like the SABC commercial, which displays things in a positive way, can help to build the nation by giving us a better vision of ourselves?'

Though most interviewees agreed reservedly that television commercials might improve South Africa's vision of itself as a nation, there was some criticism of this particular commercial. Mathiane felt that the message needed to be more direct:

*I don't think that adverts like those are capable of doing that...to be a medium that unites. It's too much of a pot pourri. There's too many things thrown in. Africans in particular like a direct message.*

Khumalo corroborates her criticism:

*I think it's not really focused. You wonder what the product is that's being sold. It takes a long time, you have to wait till the end of a long ad. I don't know how they should have done it, but it doesn't really work for me. As selling an image of a station. No.*

However, all agreed that the media can and do affect us. Those interviewees who were mothers commented on the fact that television (both commercials and programmes, films etc.) is providing role models and new ideas for their children. Khumalo felt that a positive myth of a national identity would only be effective if

the nation was exposed to sustained images and stories.

*It shouldn't be a once-off thing. It should be a sustainable effort, sustainable campaign. The ad. in itself can't really solve all the problems...If those kind of efforts are sustained over years, gradually they'll be engrained in the consciousness of the nation. That way it can work.*  
(emphasis mine)

Clearly all would accede that advertising, and the media generally, has power to influence society, and is doing so, though attempts to alter prejudice and engender community need to be sustained if they are expected to impact on the nation.

### 8.3.5 Africa

Although this topic was not a prompt in these interviews, the subject of Africa did come up, and where perceptions were expressed, they were strongly pessimistic as regards the general socio-political situation in Africa north of the borders of South Africa.

### 8.3.6 Anti-Community or Negative Factors

Most of the interviewees mentioned the ongoing violence as being a particularly negative factor in South Africa and definitely one that is working against community.

Our history seems to make reconciliation problematic. eg.

*But here, for us, we were dispossessed of our land. You remove people from their land. They remain with nothing.* (Mathiane)

Because of the difficulties confronting the society, Mathiane observes that many white people are giving up and are leaving the country.

*But South African whites here are throwing in the towel. They're beginning to feel that they have no role.* (Mathiane)

## 8.4 Conclusions

Target audience response to the portrait of a national community in the SABC commercial was not overwhelmingly positive. All but one of the interviewees agreed that it was too pretty a picture to be credible. However they understood its didactic intention, its focus on the positive, and that it was an ideal vision of community in South Africa. It can be concluded that some form of response to the conflicts within the society would have made the commercial more credible and relevant.

With regard to general notions of community in South Africa, all agreed that we are not really a cohesive national community yet, but that our concept of 'ourselves' is becoming wider and more inclusive. This coming to 'national consciousness' will take time because the problems and prejudices of the past are deeply entrenched and tend to reach into the future. Most interviewees agreed that a much deeper kind of change was needed to grow past the racial prejudices that were fixed by apartheid and seem to be continuing.

Mathiane raised a very interesting idea in saying that having an enemy is a good catalyst for building community. There is truth in this, as nothing unites people quite so much as when they have a common enemy to face. Perhaps that is why sport at an international level has been so constructive in building South Africa's national identity - we all stand together against our opponents. However, the idea of a 'common cause' or 'enemy' has often led to abnormal societies and a lack of tolerance, and this should be remembered. Even sport has caused violence between opposing nations eg. soccer hooliganism.

As regards the effectiveness of commercials in helping to build the national community, most interviewees agreed that they did provide ideals, images or role-models, but that to be truly effective they would need to be carefully sustained and monitored. In like manner they implied that social credibility is needed for a commercial to have impact and to be accepted, and that would include insight into the conflicts particular to the society.

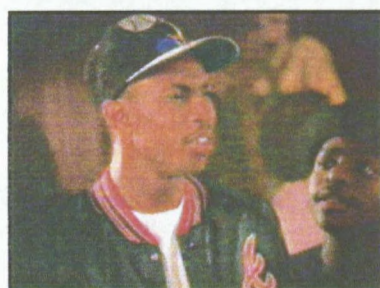


PLATE 12 CASTLE LAGER 'Visitor'

## CHAPTER 9

### THE CASTLE LAGER COMMERCIAL

#### 'Visitor' by Partnership

##### 9.1 Introduction

The Castle Lager commercial titled 'Visitor', flighted between November 1995 and February 1996, and produced by the Partnership agency, was one of the initial seven commercials chosen for possible study. After choosing the Vodacom and SABC commercials for the full range of interviews with both producers and target audiences, it was decided to include an interview with the producer of the Castle Lager commercial since it had been criticised during interviews for attempting to portray a community that was 'false', or 'idealistic' and 'naive'.

For example, de Villiers made these comments:

*I'm glad that we've actually got the Castle situation as well because the Castle situation has been reflecting that [a harmonious national community] for years while being false, and now for the first time it's not. I still find the new oke that says that thing where that American comes...there's a white token outjie there...the oke says something about 'you gotta make it roll off the tongue.' I still think he's a token - he should not be there...he can be there as a friend but he's being false... I always think to myself, 'Where do they find that pub?'*

And Beckett said:

*Look, I think that those SABS ads, years ago already, even a decade of years...in fact it is written somewhere that I, at that time, rather mocked these ads for being idealistic and naive etc. when they were showing us*



*living this kind of grandly together life - a long time before the elections. In fact it has in many senses become a kind of reality and I congratulate them for having been ahead of their time.*

It was difficult to get an interview with the creative director at Partnership because the agency does not disclose confidential information about their working methods or about a client, especially one like South African Breweries (SABS), who spends R25 million per annum on advertising Castle Lager. The candidate was requested to submit a report on the aims of his thesis, and to list the actual questions that would be asked in the interview. This report was presented by the agency to SABS, and after two weeks, the candidate was informed that Partnership was interested in the project and would be prepared to give an interview. Arnie Gelber, the strategic planning director, was chosen by the agency as being the best spokesman on the Castle campaign because he had been involved with the campaign since its inception in 1985.

Since Gelber had been involved with the whole campaign, the candidate was able to find out about the progress of the campaign over the last ten years instead of concentrating only on the most recent 'Visitor' commercial, for which the candidate had prepared specific questions. This approach was fruitful because it gave insight into Partnership's methods of keeping in tune with the annual changes and 'the dynamics of the new South Africa' and keeping their campaigns socially and politically relevant.

This commercial was chosen for study because it is one of several commercials in the Castle Lager campaign that portrays harmonious social interaction between race groups. This harmonious 'community' was criticised initially as being 'false', (see previous page, 104), but has now come to be seen as an acceptable reflection of social reality by the same critics.



## 9.2 Denotative Analysis

The commercial opens with the arrival of a plane from America as it touches down on the runway at sunset. A male voice-over says: 'When a friend from overseas was introduced to the fellows he was to get quite a taste of South African custom.' In the arrivals lounge of the airport three South African friends (two Africans and one European) animatedly greet their American friend who has just arrived. Next they are seen driving through the city in a large convertible. As they stop at a robot, three Tshonga women are seen crossing the street. The visitor exclaims, 'Where the huts man? We looking at buildings here. Where the huts man?' One of the friends says, 'Let's go grab a beer.' The visitor responds, 'Now you're talking man.' The friends are seen walking past the wood carvings of street vendors towards the local pub which has a neon-lit Castle Lager sign reflected in the window.

Inside the pub, which has a predominantly African clientele, there is a band playing African music which features the penny whistle and the evocative sound of Kwela. The singers are wearing traditional African head-dress. As they approach the bar, one of the friends greets fellow revellers with a 'Hi guys.' He then orders a round in Xhosa and the visitor says, 'You gotta teach me some of that man.' The friends proceed to make him repeat the phrase after them, with the European guy saying '...tongue clicking.' At this point the voice-over says 'Wherever great friendships are being made, there's always been Castle Lager...Here's to making friends with the rest of the world.' A friend who was already in the pub calls to Victor, the barman, to give the American visitor a chance to try out his newly-learned Xhosa. The barman is a cheerful, well built African dressed in conventional pubman's clothes with a white apron. On the wall behind the bar there is a picture of Charles Glass, the 'originator' of Castle Lager. The visitor says 'Inquabapha' (Castle here) and then asks his friends 'How did that sound?' They laugh and say 'Sounds good - you just bought the whole pub a round of Castle.' There is much merriment, and the visitor, who is a spirited person, laughs at the joke they have played on him. They all take a drink of their beer and one of the friends, instead of saying 'cheers', says 'Charles.' The visitor is heard saying 'Who's

Charles?' amid the laughter. The camera pans back to the neon Castle Lager sign on the window. The payoff line appears across the sign 'Since 1895. The taste that's stood the test of time.'

### 9.3 Connotative Analysis

This commercial uses the presence of a foreigner to make South Africans look at their own society through new eyes. The American visitor with his baseball cap and jacket represents young, hip, black America. Like Eddie Murphy, he has a sense of humour and is game, and interested in this new country that he is visiting.

On arrival, the visitor is loudly greeted by his friends and they embrace. Their friendship is portrayed as being manly, international and without fear of censure for embracing a man. Their banter is typical of male society and the American visitor forms a very effective foil to the 'fellows', who, because they live here, are able to share in a kind of conspiracy which they use in their banter, though it is not unkindly done. This kind of banter or exchange of wit is a natural form of exchange used by males when bonding. (Shakespeare makes use of such witty banter when young male protagonists meet, as in *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and in the beginning of *Romeo and Juliette*. Also there is the witty tavern banter of Falstaff and his cronies in *Henry iv* parts 1 and 2.)

The visitor was obviously expecting to see a more tribal or rural Africa (perhaps the kind of 'primitive' stereotypes that Hollywood and Walt Disney implant in the minds of untravelled Americans), but he still appears to be fascinated by the exotic, urban environment he encounters. He feels safe to express his excitement and enthusiasm because he is surrounded by friends he can trust and who know their way around the environment.

The situations that the commercial sets up allow unique aspects of South African society to be shown: Tribal Tshonga women crossing a Johannesburg street, the





PLATE 13 50s TOWNSHIP SCENE



wood carvings of street vendors, a sophisticated city environment with neon lights and reflections on glass and chrome, African Kwela music (a uniquely South African form of jive music that started in the semi-urban townships of Johannesburg in the 40s and 50s and which still evokes the era, and the men in Chicago-style suits recorded in *Drum* magazine) incorporating sophisticated city girls dressed in tribal head-gear, African language, and a mix of Europeans and Africans in society.

A sense of camaraderie and conspiracy is developed as the 'fellows' drop their own local terms, using 'Charles' instead of 'cheers'. This serves to imply that the South Africans have their own culture and society which, although inclusive, is also exclusive. The commercial cleverly builds on previous Castle Lager campaigns which allow the viewer to know that these 'fellows' are members of the Charles Glass society, a non-racial society of beer drinkers that the visitor would not know about. The Charles Glass society is a society that represents the aspirations of South Africans for a 'normal' society in which past animosity and racial divisions can be put aside in a time of sharing, relaxing, learning (from each other), being generous, hospitable and humorous. The Charles Glass society exists in its own 'space' which is one of male bonding and community around Castle Lager, but this 'space' is not entirely without reference to the realities of South African life and politics - the issues that the 'fellows' deal with in their comradely ways touch on real and relevant issues that are current eg. Exiles returning after the elections, or the increase of negro American visitors to South Africa. The Charles Glass society is a community of reasonable men who know how to have fun, but who are politically astute and stand for non-racial democracy - in many ways the aspirations of the ANC, and the many South Africans who pursue that ideal for the normalisation of this society.

The pub is urban, sophisticated - not a shebeen. There are no real attempts to show class structures. The patrons of the pub are young and sporty, displaying a healthy exuberance. Some of the patrons are formally dressed, but because a pub is a place away from the workaday world, none of the normal hierarchical relationships and class differences are apparent. [It can be argued that pubs generally

are not over concerned with class issues or the nature of a man's work, whether tradesman or professional. People are there to escape their daily constraints and to relax in the pub of their choosing.] The single European fellow does seem a little out of place, especially when he is the one who tells the visitor how to pronounce Zulu or Xhosa click sounds, yet his presence is not beyond the bounds of credibility. One would assume from the people in the pub that most of them are gainfully employed, fairly sophisticated urban people. The relationship between the South African 'fellows' is simply that of youthful friendship.

Castle Lager is the product that is pivotal to the action, not only visually, through the reflected neon sign and the close up shot of the barman opening the bottles, but also in the dialogue between the characters. Castle Lager is presented as the catalyst that enriches friendships and gives membership to the Charles Glass society, an aspirational society, 'normal', fun-loving and non-racial - exclusive yet inclusive. Those excluded do not share the democratic, non-racial aspirations of the society.

The fast moving pace of the commercial helps to build a sense of youthful energy and friendly interaction in an atmosphere of good cheer.

## 9.4 Notions of Community

The interview has been analysed as described on pages 45 & 46.

**Arnie Gelber, the strategic planning director at Partnership, is an American citizen who has been resident in South Africa for twenty years.**

### 9.4.1 Commitment

Gelber does have a sense of purpose in his work and believes that the projection of an 'aspirational' society is needed in South Africa.

*So it's been a mutual belief that we [he is speaking on behalf of all those in the agency who are involved with the Castle campaign] have to project*

*an aspirational society. We don't do it just to be nice and goody-goody. We do it because we think it's needed in the country.* (emphases mine)

He feels positive about South African society.

*Well, I'm basically a positive, optimistic person, but I believe it's like the business index - the more people feel positive, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy - if you feel positive, positive things happen...I think as long as one continuously sees moves in the right direction to improve the situation at all levels, be it health, education, security, the economy, the international relationship we have with other countries, as long as one sees moves in the right direction every six months, every year, I think one actually owes it to oneself to be positive.*

Gelber enjoys and celebrates cultural differences, particularly within Partnership itself.

*I think it makes for an interesting world and the smaller our world becomes, the more we're exposed to these cultures, the more we can learn from them. I certainly believe that by bringing people of different cultures into our company we are, in fact, a stronger company for it because different points of view actually add - we don't get everybody thinking the same way.* (emphasis mine)

## 9.4.2 Insight

In terms of insight into the society, the Partnership team is concerned that the society portrayed in their commercials is congruent with South African society and is credible. Gelber says:

*...we are conscious of the fact that we choose situations and people that are credible...So, even though we are not trying to be overly sensitive to being credible, we still try to not be foolishly unreal, let's put it that way...The third ad. (Visitor) is very simply a black guy who one of the members of the Charles Glass society met in South Africa or met overseas - there's no reason to know how they met - and he's coming to visit his*

*friends in South Africa, so it's again very, very natural. There are clearly situations where people wouldn't meet. Even the situations that we tested in research, where rural meets urban, is a logical thing. When a bus breaks down it doesn't matter whether you're black or white, you're in an area where there are only blacks. You wouldn't expect to find whites there, so it's logical that a group of people, black and white, who happened again to have been soccer players on their way back or to a soccer game, meet a black trader who doesn't speak English. There's nothing incredible about that. Similarly, people get together to form a little company. Today more and more companies are combined of whites and blacks...We've tested ideas like that. So, we are conscious of the need to be credible within reason. (emphases mine)*

In order to gauge the credibility of social situations in their commercials, Partnership produces story boards and animatics which they test in research.

*We actually animate story-boards and then test these in research. So they all had something to do with the dynamics like urban and rural, the need to bring the two together, the idea of empowerment, starting your own radio station. We did group discussions, by the way, where people get around and chat about it and you get a very nice sort of cross-pollination of ideas. You watch...it's not quantitative, but it gives you a very good feel, which is important with beer. (emphasis mine)*

So, their insight is gleaned through observing the interaction of a group of South Africans discussing social and political trends within the context of a given story-board. This enables Partnership to 'harness the mood of the country.' Gelber continues:

*...Things were a bit more positive in the country. In 1990 Mandela was just released so we felt that the tone of the ad. had to mirror the seriousness of what was happening in the country. Now I don't think there's another brand in this country that has actually taken advantage and harnessed the mood of the country. And though there's still a lot to do, I think what the latest ad. 'Visitor' does is it mirrors a positivism in the*

*country. It's our job. Let's call it the Cosby principle. When Bill Cosby was first introduced on SABC TV I think that he did a lot to bring people together. It's just a sit. com., but he did a lot to show that blacks are just as human as you or I and they have senses of humour and they're, funnily enough, very sophisticated and they have kids with the same kid's problems that you and I have. And it's that that we have recognised in our advertising and we don't think that there's anybody else who has done that, and that's good because you want to be unique. (emphases mine)*

The media generally, (sit. coms., news etc.) and the confluence of ideas flowing through it, is also incorporated into their feeling for social situations likely to reflect aspirational trends.

Further to this, speaking of the campaign generally, Gelber states:

*...Previously with the 'Joggers' ad. we were very flighty, we were very superficial and we said the new South Africa is a very positive place to be, but also everyone started to take themselves a little bit more seriously - we have to work together to get ahead - and 'Homecoming' was the first in that series, and we used a very timeous situation of people coming back home, having been away for five years and it was very much in keeping with exiles coming back to South Africa. (emphasis mine)*

And, with regard to the 'Visitors' commercial he continues,

*...and if you ask Satour, or whoever it is who has the statistics, they'll tell you that foreigners coming to South Africa have increased vastly in percentages. So it was mirroring what was happening in the country and it was a chance to give the mass market an idea that we were becoming more popular, we were no longer the pole-cats. It was almost a pride in our country - the foreigner coming to South Africa...so, the vehicle of the foreigner is also actually a nation-building vehicle, if you will. (emphases mine)*

These quotations reveal Partnership's approach to the campaign and the ways in



which they seek to remain relevant to the mass market. Current socio-political trends are recognised and used in some form to project a positive sense of our society that will make a contribution to 'nation-building'. Interestingly, when asked what role race played in the Castle Lager commercials, Gelber responded with,

*It doesn't play any role at all. We use people who mirror the market. If they happen to be black, they're black, but they're not black because they're black, they're the market. Race...we're only conscious of race in the sense that there are many black people who drink Castle Lager, but we don't think about it as a racial issue. It's just a marketing consumer issue.*

This confirms the target market profile which Gelber reveals as, '85% black and 15% white. In fact 26% of all beer is drunk by black females.' Obviously this target market profile will determine which kinds of social interactions will be seen as credible by the market.

On the development of the Castle campaign, it is apparent that the sense of a growing national community, and ways of portraying it, have been a motivating factor for the last decade.

*We did our first ad. in 1987 when we created the whole concept of the Charles Glass Society, which took Charles Glass and made him more relevant to the new South Africa as it were...But we developed this concept of the Charles Glass Society... In a sense it actually was the first step in trying to recognise this multi-racial society in which we live. Prior to that, the campaign was all about a Victorian age where the only role black people played was labourers and they were pictured as such in the ads.*  
(emphasis mine)

### 9.4.3 Vision

In terms of a vision for the future it appears that Partnership intends to continue using this aspirational and socially relevant approach to their advertising for the SABS. Gelber himself is optimistic and believes that South Africa has a unique

potential for development, because he says, '...basically I think there's a very special relationship here in this country between people.'

In response to the notion 'we dream ourselves into being' and to the question 'Do you think that advertising is a vehicle for building a national consciousness and community?' Gelber says:

*Our whole campaign is about that very idea. It was the cynics who felt that you shouldn't dream, you know, and I think our campaign is all about aspirations and is about trying to move to a better world. I think our campaign does that. I think vision is very important. All companies have a mission statement and a vision about where they want to go and certainly a visionary is someone who dreams. Great marketers are always many steps ahead of the market and in order to be able to be a few steps ahead, you have to dream that situation into reality and that's maybe why Castle Lager is doing so well, because it is actually leading the way, it's not just looking at life and mirroring it. (emphases mine)*

#### 9.4.4 Advertising

Most of the motivational aspects of Partnership's approach to the Castle Lager campaign have been covered in the section titled 'Insight' (pages 110 - 113), where credibility, relevance and harnessing the mood of the nation has been discussed. However, the brief and the aims of their campaign have been clearly stated in the following quotation.

*...And we said, that was all very well and good to build quality and taste that's stood the test of time, but we had to become much more relevant. So we created the new campaign in which we positioned Castle Lager as the beer of the people without saying those very words...And then in 1990 we moved to a much more relevant campaign where we were very much in tune with the dynamics of the new South Africa.' (emphases mine)*

The 'Charles Glass Society' was a useful vehicle to portray a culturally diverse association of beer drinkers.

*We did our first ad. in 1987 when we created the whole concept of the Charles Glass Society, which took Charles Glass and made him more relevant to the new South Africa...In a sense it actually was the first step in trying to recognise this multi-racial society in which we live.*

(emphasis mine)

Continuing on this topic, Gelber states,

*...that's what the Charles Glass Society is all about - people of like mind getting together...if you're a little less sophisticated, your Charles Glass Society will be a less sophisticated group of people and they could all be blacks, or blacks and whites, or all white, there are plenty of unsophisticated white people in our country and they would form this unit. So, that's really where we're going.*

Clearly it is apparent that the socio-political atmosphere in the country has been a powerfully motivating factor in their advertising because they have sought to capture the lead in market share and to speak to a full range of South Africans. As Gelber says:

*...When you're talking mass media, like television, you actually have to go with, call it a very democratic approach, when you're looking at a mass market like Castle Lager. When you're talking about a very sophisticated niche brand you can, in fact, appeal to niches and you can become very conscious of sensitivities or minority group sensitivities.*

Castle Lager is the brand leader in the market and the total budget spent in the previous twelve months (ending February 1996) on the production of television commercials, radio commercials, printed advertisements, billboards and research by Partnership was twenty-five million Rand. Radio is used primarily to extend the reach of their advertising into the rural market.

The interest of this particular study of the Castle campaign is that it demonstrates just how important social credibility and relevance are in South African advertising at this particular time in our history. As stated previously in the section on

Initiatives in Advertising, (pages 6 to 8), advertisers are being forced by the socio-political changes in South Africa to build the very markets that they seek to reach, and in order to do this they have been forced to look for means of showing inclusivity and a new national community. The Castle campaign is a leader in this field, and though initially criticised as being 'false' or 'naive', has established Castle as a brand leader in the market. Their success is a result not only of responding to the changes in the national psyche, but also of in-depth research into the market and its responses to socio-political events. Clearly, part of their brief was to find a way of establishing some kind of harmonious national identity which could embrace the full diversity of the market, so Partnership have been wrestling with notions of community for at least a decade. A final quote from Gelber sums it up:

*I think when we first started, way back when, with 'Joggers' in 1987, people found we were really way ahead of our time. Some people found, including intelligent journalists, that the whole thing was off-putting. They were angry that we were showing a very aspirational society that didn't exist, but, I think, as people themselves became more positive and aspirational they are buying into what we started, like nine years ago.*  
(emphasis mine)

## 9.5 Conclusions

The Castle Lager 'Visitor' commercial is but another in a series which has included 'Joggers', 'Homecoming', and 'Visitor', (all of which are discussed above), and which attempt to portray a South African community of beer drinkers who have overcome past conflict and prejudice, and who embody a consciousness which is non-racial, friendly, democratic and urbane - a sophisticated, urban, 'first-world', cosmopolitan mix of culture and race set in Africa, and tied together by modern global interests such as sport, business or communications, rather than the old tribal or racial affiliations which were divisive.

This socially conscious aspect of the Castle campaign started in 1987, long before

Mandela was released - in fact, long before there were any really positive signs to indicate that South Africa would escape a long predicted and violent revolution. When these commercials were flighted in 1987 they were criticised as idealistic and naive by both Beckett and De Villiers (see introduction to this chapter, section 9.1) as, the 'usual' 'pseudo-globalism and ersatz racial harmony of ad campaigns engineered by the makers of ...drinks...' (Coupland 1991:122) which in South Africa, with its racially segregated past, could even be deemed an insult to the nation's consciousness.

However, these commercials, despite their seemingly naive optimism, were actually tapping into underlying aspirations within the society - a desire for a 'normal' society to replace the fragmentation and isolation caused by apartheid. So, the credibility of the commercial did not depend on a factual reflection of the society (what was happening at the time), but rather on the response to a deeper mood, or aspiration, in the collective psyche of the nation, what Gelber describes as 'harnessing the mood of the country'.

How Partnership managed to achieve this is of interest. First, Gelber shows that the creative team is culturally alert and uses statistical information to probe the 'mood' of the country eg. their use of flight and tourist statistics for the 'Visitor' commercial. Second, Gelber appreciates a mixed creative team on his staff. Intercultural communication is therefore a physical and real part of daily intercourse at Partnership. This not only assures different cultural and racial inputs, and different ways of thinking, but is likely to give a more credible end result when attempting to portray the aspirational consciousness of the nation. Third, Partnership rigorously tests their concepts and commercials through 'animatics' (an animated story board), even to the point of carefully observing the discussions taking place between the diverse individuals in their test audiences

Gelber himself states quite outspokenly that South Africa 'needs' to project an aspirational society (build the dream or the myth, if you like). His positive attitude and optimism depends on a positive sense of working towards a national community. His response to the election, and the Truth and Reconciliation

Campaign, show that he believes that at a deeper level in the collective unconscious there is the aspiration towards an essentially harmonious multi-cultural and multi-racial national community. He implies that South Africa's struggle toward community is a psychological battle, in that negative beliefs result in negative occurrences, thus he can say 'if you feel positive, positive things happen...it's a self-fulfilling prophecy'

Partnership's portrait of community focuses on individual male characters in the age-old institution of brotherhood, with its inherent sense of loyalty and belonging. By using humour in their interaction, a modern, urban sense of fun and sophistication is achieved. The commercial strives after the social aspirations of the market rather than merely mirroring the way things are.

In closing this summary, it is of interest to note that although 26% of the market for Castle Lager are African women (more than the sum total of whites, who make up 15% of the market), the television commercials ostensibly make no effort to address the female community - all protagonists in Castle Lager commercials are male.

# CHAPTER 10

## CRITICAL EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 10.1 Introduction

The material result of this study is this 'text' which explores and deconstructs notions about community in South Africa at a particularly fluxional period of its history.

The study investigates the relationship between the notions of a South African community, expressed in selected television commercials, and the perceptions of the creatives who made them. It also investigates the response of a target audience sample in order to gauge the degree to which these commercials were perceived to be a convincing reflection of the society and the times.

A secondary consideration of this study is the way in which advertising can, or does, reflect the mood of the society, and as such may be a contributory catalyst in social change and 'nation building'.

This study does not presume to provide a basis or formula for generalised pronouncements about television commercials on the theme of national community in South Africa. It is intended, rather, to provoke thought, and by the very nature of its approach to the subject, to increase debate on advertising media, its study, and its role within the very specific context of South Africa, and the idea, or myth, of nation-building.

## **10.2 Critical Evaluation of the Specific Objectives of this Study**

The specific objectives of this study were these:

- 1) To determine the structural, sociological and psychological values in chosen advertising material which contribute to notions of community.
- 2) To investigate the frames of reference and rationales of the creative teams who made the selected advertisements/commercials.
- 3) To investigate the response of the target audience through analysis of their frames of reference and rationales.
- 4) To draw conclusions from the material gathered during the above investigations.

A critical evaluation of these objectives, in the order listed above, follows.

### **Choosing the commercials - structural, social and psychological criteria**

In choosing the three commercials which were studied in depth, the structural, sociological and psychological values which contributed to a notion of community in South Africa, were evaluated by the candidate. There were very specific requirements that had to be satisfied, namely:

- a) The commercials had to deal with a specifically South African situation which included interaction between different race groups;
- b) This racial interaction had to offer an alternative to the vision and stereotypes of apartheid, which emphasised the separation of communities.
- c) The commercials had to express an awareness of the new social potentials offered by the socio-political changes in South Africa.



d) The commercials had to offer some insight into the concepts of nation building and community (fully racially inclusive).

The denotative and connotative analyses of the commercials (see chapters 5, 7 & 9), give a deeper insight into the way the requirements for selection were seen to be articulated, both conceptually and technically, in the chosen commercials.

On reflection now, and by way of critical evaluation, the candidate believes that his choice of commercials was appropriate. Both creative 'teams' and target audience samples found no difficulty in recognising and sharing the concepts about community in the commercials. All interviewees demonstrated a concern and interest in nation-building in South Africa at that specific time in the country's history.

### **Frames of reference and rationales of the creative teams**

In investigating the frames of reference and rationales of the creative 'teams', the candidate found that it was not possible on a limited budget to interview the team together or even individually. In each agency, with its time restraints and busy creative personnel, a spokesman was selected by the agency to speak on behalf of the team. (Even appointments for these interviews were subject to postponements and time changes, depending on the work load of the agency and the constantly pressing nature of their deadlines.)

A team interview may have given a broader insight into the creative process itself, but the spokesmen who were interviewed, (all senior personnel), were gripped by the socio-political situation in South Africa, and displayed a sensitive and intimate concern with the socio-cultural vision they believed was needed to build the nation.

Although this part of the project did not run in the way that the candidate had expected, he was satisfied that these individuals were able to speak on behalf of the creative teams, and to share some of their collective aspirations with regard to

the making of the commercial, and their ideas about community and nation building.

### **Target audience response**

The investigation of target audience response, through analysis of their frames of reference and rationales, was successfully done. However, there are limitations to the representative nature of the sample, in that all were chosen for their ability to communicate in English. Because of this language limitation, a sophisticated African group was formed - three were journalists. This did not, however, prevent a great diversity of opinion from emerging.

Also included in the target audience sample were two elite informants who worked in the medium of television and were directly or indirectly connected with the advertising industry. They were included to offer a potentially more informed, insightful view.

Despite the relatively small size of the two target audience samples (six interviewees in each), the in depth nature of the interviews and the comprehensive responses does unearth an interesting, if not fully representational, range of contemporary notions about community in South Africa - with regard not only to the commercials, but also to the society itself.

Certainly, the credibility, or cultural validity, of the commercials is discussed from a diversity of viewpoints, and the references and rationales of the interviewees are revealed. This validates the candidate's assumption that a qualitative methodology is most appropriate for delivering both depth and an unpredictable diversity of viewpoints.

### **Drawing conclusions**

In drawing conclusions from the interviews, the candidate deconstructed and interpreted the text according to themes. The themes for the creatives (pages 45 &

46) were different from those used for the target audiences. (pages 47 & 48) These themes were considered to be relevant and helpful in focusing on the notions of national community within the parameters of this study, and brought order, clarity and cohesion to the data, which was extensive.

Quotations from the interviews were included, not only to support the candidate's arguments, but also to invite the reader's participation in the exploration and deconstruction of the data, which revealed the interviewees' many assumptions and layers of reasoning.

Such a participatory approach does not seek a closed, or neatly sewn-up argument. It seeks rather to reveal the complexities involved in a study of this nature and to highlight the pivotal reliance on language, not only in the deconstruction of the media images, but also in the interviews themselves.

Accepting that the meaning, or interpretation, of a commercial does not exist as an objective reality, any conclusion reached by the candidate is but one of many possible interpretations. It is the participatory process of interpreting the data, (which includes the candidate, the interviewee, and the reader), that is considered to be of more value than a single interpretation.

## 10.3 Conclusions

### 10.3.1 The Commercials

A comparative analysis of the three commercials studied, serves to highlight different insights into the South African community, and the different approaches adopted in communicating these.

#### **Vodacom**

The Vodacom commercial was a response to a marketing brief that placed no

emphasis on the idea of nation-building, or community. Relevance and social credibility were of course expected if the commercial was to succeed in the 'new' society.

The commercial is a compact and effective parable which not only uses, and breaks, socio-cultural stereotypes in a humorous way, but lightly and compassionately touches on the history and conflict of the society in which the parable is played out. Though the parable/story had particular relevance to South African society just after the elections, in that it showed an old African man rising to a position of power, it still remains a parable in which one learns that the arrogant can be deflated in their careless complacency. In the view of the candidate this is a great part of its appeal. Everyone likes to see the fall of the arrogant and the rise of the 'poor but honest' underdog. This is a standard formula in popular cinema. The commercial demonstrates such proverbs as: You can't judge a book by looking at the cover; Pride comes before a fall; Treat people with respect because you never know who you may be speaking to; In the human community help can come from unexpected areas.

Add to this narrative strength, the typically South African scenery, the humorous touches, the over-familiar use (or misuse) of the African language and the vibrant music of the blues, and you have a very interesting, effective and popular commercial which teaches a simple moral lesson - we are all human and part of a greater community.

The commercial in effect is saying to South Africans (particularly to the European sector): 'Wake up and get real!' and at the same time as it does this, it brings into focus the product and meets the client's brief. That the parable should be so effective in this social context, relies largely on the fact that the story has its roots in the socio-cultural reality of South Africa, both political and historical. (See interview with Francois de Villiers in chapter 5)

## Castle Lager

In contrast, the Castle commercial celebrates a universal ideal of camaraderie and brotherhood which transcends race and social restraints. This is of particular significance in South Africa with its past history of apartheid and conflict. The narrative makes use of the effective device of a visitor from another land - an outsider - who, by entering the society, allows the inhabitants (the viewers) to see themselves through new eyes.

There is no hint of the conflict within the society - something for which the Castle commercials have been fairly widely criticised - but in the jovial brotherhood engendered by the sharing of a drink together, a 'normal' (or is it utopian?) society is portrayed. This 'normal' society is believed by the producers of the commercial to be the society to which most South Africans aspire. (It is certainly in line with the ANC ideal of a non-racial society without discrimination.)

Although it does portray an ideal, it can be argued that the commercial might be more credible if the conversation between the friends touched on some of the more difficult truths about the nature of this society eg. It would add a touch of realism if the fellows mentioned to the visitor that a few years previously it was against the law for all of them to meet together in the same pub.

Although this commercial responds to the broad, positive, social and political changes taking place in South Africa, it makes no attempt to touch on the conflicts which underlie the society. To attempt this would certainly silence some of the critics, but it would change the essentially friendly and superficial relationships between the 'fellows'.

## SABC

In the SABC commercial, the producers' aim was to 'paint' a portrait of the nation. To show the nation to itself in all of its diversity, and to show the response and commitment of the 'new' SABC, which is fully conscious of its role as a proactive

participant in the building of the 'new' national community.

The national portrait in this commercial attempts to show the diverse population of South Africa as a unified nation. To introduce the many faces and cultures which had been marginalised or discounted during the apartheid era. To show all these new 'players' as valuable partners, interconnected, and working in collaboration to build the future of a 'new' and promising nation.

During the apartheid era, *Panorama* magazine (a government-sponsored, public-relations/propaganda showcase) used to portray the nation as efficient and thriving under the system of apartheid. This was achieved by photographing people of varied race and culture, and from all different fields of human endeavour, involved in their seemingly positive and 'normal' activities, without touching on the social, legal and cultural strictures of the apartheid system.

So, it is possible to portray the nation as one that works together and is exotically diverse, and picturesque, without touching on underlying conflicts. It has been done before.

The SABC commercial charms the eyes and the ears with its colourful visuals and African music, but it does not reach the deeper and more complex socio-cultural realities of South Africa - something most of the target audience interviewees believed should be acknowledged if any portrait of the nation claims to be credible.

However, 'ideal' and aspirational portraits of the nation are necessary, but they need not exclude some recognition of conflict. Conflict is not only an ever-present characteristic of life, but is also an essential ingredient in story telling. The portrayal of conflict can always be tempered by humour, which can bring a sense of perspective to an area of unresolved conflict.

### 10.3.2 Creative Personnel

The creatives believed, and held it as self-evident, that they needed to make some contribution to community-building through their advertising. They did not question this. They were all aware of the need to reach the wide and diverse audience of the nation, and were very alert to the nuances of this changing society. All were endeavouring to reflect a notion of a multi-ethnic, but inclusive society, and attempting to respond to and celebrate the changes in it.

All the creatives believed that they had in some measure succeeded in doing so, though audience response to these models of society varied. All believed that their commercials would be catalysts working positively towards normalising the society, but again, audience response did not corroborate their assumptions.

Referring back to the themes used to explore the creatives' approach to community, namely, Commitment, Insight, Vision and Advertising, all the creatives expressed a definite commitment to the building of a national community. All expressed a positive vision of the future, and all believed that advertising could play a role in helping to change society.

However, the theme of 'Insight' into the society, provided some interesting comparisons. De Villiers (Vodacom) had an insight into the society that was based on his own experiences growing up as an Afrikaner in South Africa. He expressed strong awareness of the plight of the African in the society, and the basis for the Vodacom commercial was a joke that he had heard at school - a kind of anti-racist joke but one which revealed much about the conflict and pain of the black-white relationship in South Africa. (See pp. 57 & 58)

Buchard (SABC) is a British citizen who has lived in South Africa for 25 years. His insight into the society is not as deeply rooted as De Villiers's. His portrait of the nation focuses on the pictorial beauty and diversity of South Africa's people, a reality worth celebrating, while leaving the thorny issue of relationships untouched.

Gelber (Castle Lager) is an American citizen who has lived in South Africa for 20 years. His insight into the society takes particular cognisance of trends in politics, travel, sport, and both the national and international aspirations of the nation.

Gelber repeatedly stresses the need for research, not only of market trends, but also of contemporary social, political and cultural issues. Such research helps his agency to create credible social situations in their commercials, and to make successful aspirational advertising, which not only reflects social reality, but resonates with the aspirations of the target market. All their pilot commercials are tested before target audience samples.

All three creatives professed to be reflecting aspects of the society in their attempts to make credible and relevant advertising. De Villiers (Vodacom) states: 'Advertising can just reflect what's going on out there, otherwise its false.' Gelber (Castle Lager): '...we choose situations and people that are credible...mirroring what *is* happening in the country.' Buchard (SABC) claims that the SABC commercial is a 'reflection of our entire society.'

The attempts made by these creatives to portray and reach a society in change, and thereby, to catalyse social change, is a far more abstract endeavour than merely selling a product. It is, in fact, this concern with socio-cultural issues that makes South African advertising so interesting at this time. Because of the socio-political situation in South Africa, communicators are forced to come to terms with a new society, or rather, the possibility of a new society.

How each of the three creatives imagines himself to be reflecting society or portraying a 'new' one varies, but all three display certain characteristics. All of the creatives are alert to media generally, the news, politics, current advertising, contemporary plays, sport, movies, music, aspirational trends etc. All are committed to the vision of a new and democratic nation, and enjoy the challenge of communicating to a culturally diverse audience. All have expressed a strong determination to work towards what they consider to be a positive future in South Africa,



where peace will reign and where all South Africans will feel part of a national community.

### 10.3.3 Audience Response

All interviewees agreed that the Vodacom situation was credible and very South African. All agreed that the SABC portrait of the nation, and the racial harmony of the pub scene in the Castle campaign, were selectively credible. Reservations were expressed that these two commercials were idealising society, painting a brighter picture of things than actually existed. Audience response seemed to imply that a more socially credible reflection of South Africa should include the conflict which was felt to be a very real aspect of the society.

Audience response generally did not support the creatives' notion that a commercial could make a difference to the social situation, or contribute to the building of community. They tended to see the commercial's mercantile intentions before any higher kind of social aim. However, this view was tempered by the fact that they admitted that the medium of television (in a general sense) was an extremely formative influence in contemporary life, and this would naturally include advertising.

Most interviewees expressed their dismay at the escalation of crime and violence since the election, but also the hope that in time the positive forces working towards community would begin to triumph. Fears were expressed that the economy could collapse and the country degenerate like so many other African countries, but this was offset by the hope that South Africa's infrastructure and economy would be able to support the changes taking place.

The racial divisions inflamed and reinforced by apartheid remain, although there is a general consciousness that greater tolerance of the 'other' is essential.

From the interviews, the candidate concluded that each interviewee, randomly selected as they were, was well-informed about the socio-political scenario, was

very conscious of the fact that South Africa now has a democratic government, and has been through some kind of a revolution, and that a process of nation-building lies ahead.

All interviewees agreed that South Africa needed time for healing to take place - healing not only from the violent angers of the revolution, but also from the wounds impressed into the psyche of the nation by the separation and fragmentation of forty years of apartheid (not to mention the 'apartheid' foisted on to the indigenous inhabitants since the arrival of the white colonists).

There was unanimous agreement that sport is an important and effective means of building a national community. It unites supporters, gets good media coverage, and thereby gives South Africans a perspective of themselves as a nation in an international community.

Of more than passing interest is the notion of 'community versus competition' raised by certain of the African target audience interviewees. The implication is that African society is communal, in a way that European society is not. The word 'Ubuntu' was used to describe this notion. Certain of the interviewees claimed that the competitive, commercial nature of 'European' society is at odds with the communal tendencies in 'African' society.

Such distinctions are rather vague and general, particularly the assumption that the nation can be divided neatly into a 'European' cultural block and an 'African' cultural block. However, these issues were raised on several occasions during target audience interviews, and serve to highlight the need for research into the deeper socio-cultural realities underlying South African society. (More listening and less monologing, perhaps?)

In conclusion, it is apparent to the candidate that a deeper, wider, and more honest analysis of both self and society is called for in the wake of the apartheid system. Further research, if public money is to be spent on it, should seriously endeavour to come to terms with such issues. Apartheid was a system, which, with its rigid

legal, political and authoritarian forms, led to a great deal of subterfuge, dishonesty, and disqualification in every aspect of the society, and, at another level, it prevented the society from getting to grips with its inevitable future of racial integration and collaboration. Open, cross-cultural exploration in the social sciences was severely hindered during the apartheid era. The humanities too, were distorted and distracted. Only a rebirth of the critical faculties can begin to untie some of these knots and bring blood back to atrophied limbs.

## 10.4 Proposals for Future Research

### **Beer Commercials for Ladies ?**

An area of suggested research arose as a result of the interview with Arnie Gelber. When speaking of the Castle Lager campaign he revealed that of the total market for this product, 26% of Castle drinkers in South Africa are African women. The total number of white Castle drinkers (male and female) is 15% of the market. Since this is the situation, it raises the question about target markets and the effectiveness of the advertising, since none of the commercials in the Castle campaign make any attempt to include women as protagonists in the social situations they portray.

Is the notion of women drinking beer on commercials a taboo? If it is, to what does it owe its origin, and would a less hypocritical stance on this issue in the media be acceptable to women? To men?

### **Cultural Paradigms and Conflict**

The notion of 'Ubuntu'\* raised by Mkize in his interview appears to make some

\* The candidate first heard this term in 1992 while attending Dr Meulenberg's course in qualitative methodology at the HSRC. It was then being used within the context of human resource management and development in South Africa.

important distinctions between the cultural paradigms of African and European society.

Mkize says: 'Western culture is influenced by commercial purposes, the value on trade...You see, it's been motivated by gain, and when I look at African culture, it's motivated by generosity.' He continues, and this is where the candidate believes he touches on what the notion of Ubuntu may really be about: 'Co-operation versus competition. Communal or individualism...the agenda for different cultures.' (emphases mine)

The maxim, 'A person is a person because of other people' (Umuntu, ngomuntu, ngabantu), is the likely source of the term Ubuntu. However, this humanistic and humane notion of African community is refuted by tribal divisions and the violent political acts that preceded elections here, not to mention the horrors that have occurred in Ruanda and other parts of Africa. So, where or what is this notion of 'ubuntu', and where can it be seen to exist? Is it just a romantic notion, something that exists only in some tribal dream of a golden age before colonialism and modern politics, or is it a genuine social dynamic that can operate in the building of community in the contemporary world?

Since it is clear that ubuntu does not refer to community without conflict, the term may speak of a tendency in African society to avoid individual, maverick behaviour in favour of group solidarity. Does this mean that the individual is not valued as highly as the group itself? More likely, it means that an individual's value is primarily determined by his/her relationship to the group. The comments of Mathiane seem to corroborate this in a negative way. Referring to society in Soweto as she has experienced it, she says: '...we've got this Phd syndrome - pull him down syndrome...It's the padda syndrome. The frog syndrome. The frogs are in a pool and if one frog wants to come up and out, the others drag it down because you have to be the same. Hence the "pass one, pass all".'

Though 'communal' jealousy, or envy at the good fortune of others, is certainly not only an African trait, Mathiane does seem to imply that the pressures to con-

form to group 'demands' are much more active and intimidating in African society, than in white South African society.

The egalitarianism of western democracy, on the other hand, places its emphasis on the notion of 'equality', in which each individual is the basic 'unit' of nationhood, equal before the law and on the voters' roll. Such egalitarian democracy is claimed to be the model for ANC policy.

Ubuntu, a communal social order, which binds African society is being eroded by the drive towards western egalitarian ideals and the more abstract notion of nationhood, which, in a global sense, deals with even more abstract concerns like industrial and economic relationships.

Further, egalitarianism, though it attempts to found social harmony on the notion of equality, opens the door to competition and rivalry. (Paz 1974:133) This leads to envy and the 'Phd. syndrome' that Mathiane mentions. This conflict needs to be looked at more closely. Egalitarianism which accepts the primary axiom that individuals are equal (before God and the law) and that the individual is the basic unit of society, is not the same thing as Ubuntu.

It has been established in this study, that despite a wealth of good intentions, there are deep-rooted and potential sources of conflict within South African society. Attempts to portray a utopian, egalitarian society in the media, without acknowledging these difficulties, are not found to be completely credible or relevant by the audiences who live within the society and experience its conflicts at first hand.

Mathiane raised the notion that having an enemy strengthens community, and the majority of interviewees mentioned the unifying, nation-building effect of sport, where South Africans cheer on their teams against their opponents or 'enemies'.

What is clear, is that humanity contains hostile, conflict-causing energies that won't just go away. Attempts to build or portray a national community in South

Africa need to recognise this. The contradictory nature of the human soul has to be accepted, and in like manner, the contradictory forces operating within the society. Society, or a community, is perhaps best defined as a contradictory totality. (Paz 1974:149)

To suppress, or marginalise 'negative' elements and forces that do not appear to 'fit in' with current notions of community, or nation-building, is a form of denial. However, the ability to accept a contradictory totality is difficult - we do not like contradictions and spend a good deal of time trying to get rid of them, whether in the name of efficiency or of political expediency.

An 'Inclusive Community' in South Africa requires a widening of our perspectives - the ability to tolerate and accept diversity - with all of its seemingly contradictory and conflicting tensions. Deeper social realities need to be researched. A wider, and more inclusive vision of ourselves is required.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

### PLATE 1 REMEMBER SHARPEVILLE

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### PLATE 2 MANDELA & DE KLERK. 'Rainbow Nation'

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(Photograph sourced from the cover of the book. Original photograph from Reuters/ Corbis - Bettmann 1994)

### PLATE 3 CALVIN KLEIN 'be good. be bad. just be.'

from *Elle* (Nov) 1997 U.K. Edition

### PLATE 4 'DOC' MARTENS

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### PLATE 5 Dr. MARTENS

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### PLATE 6 GAULOISES BLONDES

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PLATE 8 GUERRILLA GRAFFITI

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PLATE 9 NICARAGUA

(Image cropped from popular poster owned by a friend.)

PLATE 10 VODACOM 'Windmills'

9 frames 'grabbed' from Vodacom commercial.

PLATE 11 SABC 'Your Voice Your Vision'

9 frames 'grabbed' from SABC commercial.

PLATE 12 CASTLE LAGER 'Visitor'

9 frames 'grabbed' from Castle Lager commercial.

PLATE 13 50s TOWNSHIP SCENE

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No.16 8th October. (original photo from Jim Bailey's African History Archives.)