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**Television, Race and National Identity:**  
**A study of South Africa's lifestyle**  
**programme *Top Billing***

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**A minor thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree of Masters in Media Theory and Practice**

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## DEDICATION

With all my love, I dedicate this project to my soul mate Rezario Salie, who believed in me and was so proud of me for undertaking this task. He loved me to the full and changed my life in ways I never imagined. This is dedicated to my true love who used to say, “I love you forever and even that’s not enough.” Words can’t describe how much I love you, Rezario Salie. To my rock, my guardian angel, my one love – you will *always* be in my heart.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an in-depth investigation into the weekly lifestyle/magazine programme *Top Billing*, aired on SABC3 (South African Broadcasting Corporation) – primarily in South Africa and in other surrounding African nations – to a total of over 6 million viewers. In its eighteenth year on South African television, *Top Billing* has entered the domestic lives of its viewers weekly, and has markedly become one of the country's longest-running lifestyle and entertainment programmes. This study investigates the various meanings and pleasures that loyal viewers of *Top Billing* make of the programme, and how these 'meanings' relate to their identities as middle class South Africans.

Categorised as the 'lifestyle' programme, it arguably has significant effects on the lifestyle and lives of its viewers. Studies on the 'lifestyle' programme genre, especially in context to contemporary television studies, has not been widely written about. Further, as there is growing interest and a need for ethnographic and audience studies on the impact of television, particularly in Africa, this study thoroughly examines *Top Billing in situ* – in a media-saturated, post-modern, post-apartheid society in South Africa, while simultaneously locating the study in a larger, cross-disciplinary landscape.

Since 'meanings' are a cultural and social formation, the study examines the concept of 'ideology' as a site of struggle; a place for the negotiation of race, gender, and other identities. The study brings to the fore the hegemonic ideology projected and 're-presented' by *Top Billing*, by taking an in-depth look at the makeup of the programme – both externally and internally, its relationship with its broadcaster and other social markers of society, and its audience. Through the use of content analysis, in-depth interviews and ethnography, this thesis examines issues of imbalanced representation of race and class, and the effects of commercialisation which take toll on the media landscape today. By further investigating the signifying role of the media and the ways in which *Top Billing* is constructed, the study determines ways in which identity is informed by *Top Billing*.

## ACRONYMS

<b>AA</b>	All Adult Ratings
<b>ARs</b>	Audience Ratings
<b>BBA</b>	<i>Big Brother Africa</i>
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>BCCSA</b>	Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa
<b>BEE</b>	Black Economic Empowerment
<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Network
<b>HH</b>	Households
<b>IBA</b>	Independent Broadcasting Authority
<b>ICC</b>	International Cricket Council
<b>LSM</b>	Living Standard Measurement
<b>PR</b>	Public Relations
<b>PSB</b>	Public Service Broadcasting
<b>SABC</b>	South African Broadcasting Corporation

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Problem statement

This thesis examines the production, content and representation of the long-standing lifestyle programme *Top Billing* on SABC3 (South African Broadcasting Corporation). It aims to explore the various meanings and pleasures that loyal viewers of *Top Billing* make of the programme, and how these ‘meanings’ and ‘pleasures’ relate to their identities as middle class South Africans. The theoretical framework of this study will be based on a critical political economy and cultural studies approach. Since television is interlinked with the economy, and plays an active role in creating material desire and symbolic reproduction of capitalist interests (Ives 2007), the analysis of this thesis will draw on the Critical Political Economy: an examination of ‘ruling-class’ interests; institutional practices in production and distribution; and the ideological content of popular material and its effects (Willis 2000). This is relevant as the ‘construction of the nation’ projected by some South African television programming “can mask enduring racial and economic inequalities ... [which] play a role in reasserting hierarchical relations of power, especially along race, class, and gender lines” (Ives 2007: 155).

Further, the concept of ideology can be best analysed by a Cultural Studies approach, which recognises that cultural identity and representation reflect the ‘normative standard’ created by the producers of popular culture. It also recognises the significance such representations and ideologies have in contributing to the assumptions and attitudes of sectors of society (Bignell 2008). Television is not only a powerful medium which influences a ‘normative national consciousness’, it also acts to provide and create “a forum for constructing, reflecting, and contesting the national imaginary” (Ives 2007: 155). Thus, through a cultural studies approach, popular culture can be understood as “a site of struggle, a place for the negotiation of race, gender, nation, and other identities and for the play of power” (Dolby 2006: 33). Although the theoretical approaches have their downfalls as the dominating theories of the ‘West’ and proffer a set of paradigms foreign to South Africa and South African television programming, it is nonetheless important to best explore the gap in Television Studies through the examination of existing theoretical structures.

Referring to theories of constructivist representation, the study questions the positioning, role and possible influence of a lifestyle programme aimed at the economically affluent, in a country where at least a third of the population lives below the breadline. Despite the fact that in South Africa nearly 19% of households do not have working television sets<sup>1</sup>, *Top Billing* has become one of the country's longest-running lifestyle/entertainment programmes in its eighteenth year<sup>2</sup> on South African television. *Top Billing* is a multi-media brand, with a strong presence on TV, in print, on the web, and in the lives of South Africans – both in the home and at brand-building events held for public participation and for further growing support. This study examines the various factors that condition the production of symbolic texts, and the role of the media as a key institution that mediates and perpetuates social understandings and practices, including the formation of one's 'identity' and 'reality'.

It is important to note here, that this thesis will not be driven by a behavioural effects theory, nor will it attempt to pinpoint ideological agents to 'blame' for the persisting class, race and gender inequalities. The focus is not solely the 'effects' of *Top Billing*, which can become tricky to measure – if not immeasurable. Rather, through the use of a critical political economy and cultural studies approach, this thesis describes the representations found on *Top Billing*, i.e. identities proposed or offered by it. Since 'identities' are constructed through popular culture, *Top Billing* thus plays a crucial role in creating 'realities' in the lives of its consumers. This thesis hence looks at the many different ways in which 'identities' are formed through the various representations that are created through the production culture and practice<sup>3</sup> found at *Top Billing*.

## **1.2. Aims of the study**

This research project aims to answer the research question: What are the various meanings and pleasures that loyal viewers of *Top Billing* make of the programme, and how do these relate to their identities as middle class South Africans? It aims to examine television genres on a new level of 'relativity' in a postmodern context. Television is a pervasive medium, and the 'new domestic' medium in a postmodern world which still begs for studies on various angles. Postmodernism – which indiscriminately borrows from a variety of sources, involving

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1 See Appendix 1.

2 At the time of writing and completing this thesis. *Top Billing* was launched in 1992.

3 Both micro- and macro structural practices that condition the production of symbolic texts.

a multiplicity of styles and incongruent cultural codes and practices, forsakes modernism's unifying meta-narrative or any single theoretical principle (Harvey 1990). Within the realm of critical studies, the relationship between television and postmodernism is inevitable (Collins 1992). As a medium, television invariably "raises issues and points to values and ideas that are problematic or disruptive and that cannot be neatly or easily subsumed in general social consensus as television attempts to fashion a unified 'world' out of discontinuous textual fragments" (White 1992: 192).

Social theorist Anthony Giddens (1991) argues that "we live in a post-traditional (late modern) society that is characterised by a questioning of traditional values and ways of life: 'What to do? How to act? Who to be? ... [which] are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity'" (70). Thus, viewing this research project in a postmodern context, *Top Billing* can be examined in light of providing and encouraging new and varying interpretations to 'identities'. The underlying key concept of this thesis will thus point to the idea that alternative readings are possible for television viewers because of the overriding contradictions that characterise contemporary social practices, including television – indicating that there can be more than just one single theoretical foundation. Further, by using a critical political economy and cultural studies approach, this study aims to place the discussion of *Top Billing in context* of a media-saturated, post-modern, post-colonial, post-apartheid society at a particular historical juncture. In this way, it brings to light a new direction in television studies – which looks at an African media product in an African context – by examining *Top Billing* methodologically, against the backdrop of a particular South African political, economic, cultural and social reality.

Thus, a rich analysis means examining "the conjunction and effects of global processes within specific, localised settings, [while] exploring the dynamics of external forces combined with internal processes" (Sreberny 2000: 64). Hence, this study examines the various factors that condition the production of symbolic texts, including micro-structural ones, such as the 'ideology' proposed by individual producers; as well as macro-structural elements, such as *Top Billing's* relationship in the broader social context with the SABC and in South Africa at large, as well as being part of the global consumerist world. This thesis aims to provide a methodological body of work, which shows the interplay of these factors, in order to reveal how media institutions work to produce certain 'texts'. It thus provides an

important premise of work that reiterates the significant role of the media as a key institution that mediates all social understandings and practices.

There is a need to reiterate clearly at this stage, the difficulty in trying to establish the ideological effects of *Top Billing*, which is neither the way the research question is intended to be understood, nor is it possible to attempt to ‘measure’ the effects. This research does not aim to make sense of the psychology of audience interpretation. Notably, there are certain limitations to this study – for example, to make use of the ‘uses and gratifications’ theory due to the nature of discussion, may confuse matters, since the aim is not to summarily conclude that A equals B, but rather to discuss A thoroughly, to understand why and how B can be ‘formed’ or at least partially affected by A through the ideologies it projects. Since ‘identities’ are a complex matter, the thesis aims to dissect the programme *Top Billing*, by looking at its structure, content, and representation – to thoroughly examine its makeup, in order to understand how its audiences take up certain ‘identities’ from the certain ‘meanings’ that it creates – in conjunction to a particular socio-economic, political, and cultural setting.

### **1.3. Significance of the study**

This research contributes towards the existing gap in the study of Television Studies of lifestyle magazine programmes, and more certainly so in South Africa. The genre will be discussed in comparison to other genres, to shed light on the nature of its categorisation, and to create a platform for further discussion on its (ever-changing) characteristics. Notably, Media Studies have tended to provide a “scopic gaze from the West toward the rest of the world, proffering a set of paradigms about media dynamics in political, economic, and cultural contexts” (Sreberny 2000: 63), which are foreign and distant to the varying third-world countries. This study presents a new frontier for further research into the lifestyle programme genre, and television programmes found in Africa, and in particular, South Africa – by taking a step towards expanding this arena of study which has been neglected.

There is no existing academic literature on *Top Billing*. Given the researcher’s involvement as part of the programme’s production team, this study will be ethnographically enlightening and enriching. Despite the theoretical sophistication found in television studies in the past two decades, they are still ethnographically thin (Abu-Lughod 1997). Hence, ethnography is a useful point of entry into the study of television, which allows the study “to draw out the

significance of television's existence as a ubiquitous presence in the lives and imaginaries of people in the contemporary world" (Abu-Lughod 1997: 110). Through ethnography, this study brings to light interesting aspects about the production culture of *Top Billing*, and reveals the existing tension between editorial staff and both management and marketing departments, demonstrating how South African media are experiencing pressures on different fronts and levels. This is a source of invaluable knowledge that is not easily open to the public, and does not currently exist in the public sphere. Through this platform, the study contributes to new dimensions of discussion in the academia, and can further create a public forum to contest and reflect on the 'national imaginary' (Ives 2007).

Further, "[a]cademics are always vulnerable to the accusation that they study what they cannot do but in Television Studies the accusation is particularly sharp since the students involved often see themselves as preparing for a career in the media, while those working in television can be actively hostile to the methods which have been adopted for the study of television" (Geraghty & Lusted 1998: 4). Sitting on both sides of the fence then, the knowledge shared in this thesis will provide an outlook that takes into consideration both sides of the coin. It further validates the researcher's standing as a part-time associate of the programme under scrutiny, without the mere criticism of 'going native' and reserving favouritism for the programme – as it is openly discussed in this thesis for public debate.

By unravelling the social constructions found in *Top Billing*, this thesis examines how the conceptions of race since South Africa's historic apartheid times still play a role in permeating media discourses today, in *Top Billing* and significantly, in other media productions at large. Thus, it highlights the need to view 'ideology' as a symbolic form – which is not ideological in itself, but is a negotiated position, serving the 'dominant' culture, or operating within particular socio-historical circumstances. Through this study, viewers and producer alike will be equipped to re-evaluate their understanding of the current 'dominant' culture and to begin asking questions, rather than to consume unquestioningly, the inventory of its taken-for-granted element. Thus, this thesis provides the needed platform to create and to develop media literate consumers in South Africa, to allow one to understand the important role that media plays in shaping one's 'identity'. More broadly, it will also create critical and reflective media producers – both the current practitioners and those coming out of academic studies.

The broader implication of such a research is that all the contributors in the line of media production at *Top Billing* and various other programmes can ideally act more conscientiously, with ethical integrity, in producing an effective genre which enters the viewer's domestic life. This is a call for all producers to be reminded of the significant effects of a programme's end product, instead of letting it become a 'means to an end' by being consumed in a day-to-day focus on merely reaching deadlines. A media product is more than a finished, complete product – but it is a raw material or a refined commodity, which citizens can and should be able to engage with (Campbell 1999). Through this synthesis, media consumers can be better equipped to understanding their social world.

#### **1.4. Organisation of the thesis**

This chapter established the importance for the study of *Top Billing*, by introductorily offering explanations for the neglect in what deserves attention in Television Studies. It highlights the importance of a critical and theoretical enquiry into the kinds of representations that are constructed by the media – in particular, a television programme produced and aired *in* South Africa, for the South African audience<sup>4</sup> – and the identities that are proposed or offered by them. It also highlights the significant effects it can have when entering the private space of its viewers weekly, by providing a lifestyle in a 'real-life' format. Thus, this chapter has introduced the need to use a critical political economy and cultural studies approach, in examining the *re*-production of symbolic 'texts' found in *Top Billing*.

Following on from here, Chapter 2 offers a more detailed explanation for why there is a gap in the study of television which needs attention, by providing an overview of Television Studies internationally and in South Africa. The chapter maps out the context of this study on a broader scale, to define and to position the subject of discussion. In reviewing the history of television studies broadly, important points in its history are discussed to pinpoint the theoretical approach relevant to this study. It also provides an overview for the various genres found within television models on a global level – determining the lack of a sufficient exploration of the lifestyle/magazine programme genre, which is lacking more so in South Africa where development of new entertainment genres has been slow. The chapter then

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4 i.e. representing South African lives on the programme, telling stories about South Africans with a South African voice, by taking on a 'proudly South African' angle.

generates insight into the transcendental quality and migration of ‘genres’, demonstrating the ways in which the ongoing transformation of generic traits serve to uphold unequal relations of power. This introduces the ongoing discussion of this thesis, on how the ‘hegemony’ is created and served in dominant discourse. Further, the lifestyle programme genre and in particular, *Top Billing* is compared to various ‘genre’ traits, to create a backdrop against which *Top Billing* can be measured and discussed in depth, in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed outline of the methods employed in the thesis. It provides a clear outline of the three data-collection methods used, and substantiates for them: a broad content analysis; participant observation of the production process and a focus-group with the production team; and in-depth interviews with the *Top Billing* audience. Taking on a route of methodological eclecticism to best understand a complex and multi-faceted medium in question, various analytical methods – both quantitative and qualitative – are used to cross-examine the data. Importantly, the chapter provides a significant reflection on the ethnographic paradigm as the thesis draws on participant observation and self-reflexivity – conducted while the researcher was employed at *Top Billing*. This forms a key component of the research, by providing direction and pinpointing the key points to consider. The chapter also provides a rationale for the choice of its overarching research approach/methodology (which is qualitative), and justifies for the various research data to be cross-examined, through ‘methodological triangulation’ to strengthen its findings.

Chapter 4 begins discussions on the findings of the research by looking particularly at the imbalanced representation of race in *Top Billing*. While observing the micro-structural factors influencing the production of ‘text’, the theme of race is interwoven with the discussion of the political economy of the programme. It examines the ways in which *Top Billing* exists under the assumptions of a particular normative state, cultivating the dominant ideology. The chapter reveals how the show maintains ‘whiteness’ as the status quo, which often goes unquestioned and at times unnoticed, by both the producers and consumers. With a focus on race constructs as an ideological discourse, it examines the concepts of ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’<sup>5</sup> as well as postmodern concepts such as multiculturalism, relevant to the

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5 When discussing race, either inverted commas or upper case letters will be used to avoid the naturalising of these socially constructed categories. It can carry powerful consequences to not recognise that these are indeed social constructions.

contemporary South Africa today. The discussion is placed within a particular socio-economic, political, and cultural setting in which *Top Billing* is found, to reveal specific ideologies that are projected by *Top Billing* to its loyal viewers. The chapter also reveals how class privilege attached to apartheid conceptions of race still permeates media discourses today.

Chapter 5 thus explores the construct of ‘class’ and the ways in which it interacts with other ideologies in the formation of ‘text’. Through constructivist theory, the chapter explains for the ‘naturalisation’ of *Top Billing*’s discourses, which takes for granted what the ‘national interest’ is by projecting the upper elite lifestyle as though a ‘naturalistic discourse of fact’. It reveals how this in effect can create class constructs. This chapter also highlights how viewers are simultaneously seen as consumers in the marketplace, just as much as they are viewed as a television audience. Demonstrating how the market interest in the global world is prioritised above all other conflicting ideological interests; it examines the ‘white’ upper class content found on *Top Billing*. It further provides the theoretical framework which underpins the thesis, by examining the new ‘critical’ paradigm in media studies, which questions how ideological processes work and exist in relation to other social practices.

Chapter 6 thus locates *Top Billing* discourses within the broader social context, to provide a more coherent explanation of the representations found on *Top Billing*. It provides a better understanding to the intent of such ‘class’ and ‘race’ constructs discussed in the earlier chapters, by placing them in context to the global marketplace. The chapter indicates how the capitalist owners’ views of the world form the predominant thinking of subordinate groups, making *Top Billing* a media apparatus in the maintenance of power and in defining the ‘consensus’. The hegemonic ideologies created by *Top Billing* is explained for, while observing the macro-structural factors that are at play in the articulating element of ‘discourse’. Specifically, the chapter examines the effects of story selection for brand building and/or other internal purposes, the effects of advertorial inserts as well as the synergy between *Top Billing*’s magazine and television programme. The chapter deals with the complexity of ‘text’, and reveals an interesting aspect of the varying factors that influence message selection. It raises valid questions of ethics for the producers of *Top Billing*.

Chapter 7 concludes that globalisation and the concepts of postmodernism – with its countervailing tendencies – cause a crisis in the politics of identity in postmodern South Africa. It also highlights how commercialism may have positive outcome for the viewers, who aspire to attain the ‘lifestyle’ portrayed by *Top Billing*; and further, able to allow South Africans to enter this global, modern world, in the context of a post-apartheid society. The concluding chapter sums up the argument of this thesis, without providing a directive answer for the ‘open-endedness’ of the interpretative frame, especially in the postmodern context. It nonetheless reiterates the importance of this study in creating a platform, to develop media literate consumers and critical, reflective media producers; as well as to generate and encourage further academic discussions that have begun through this thesis. Hence, this thesis contributes to the existing gap in television studies.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH GAP IN TELEVISION STUDIES**

This chapter briefly examines the history of ‘Television Studies’ in order to map out the research gap in this broad spectrum of study, hence revealing the relevance for this study. The chapter will begin with a brief overview of Television Studies and the influences that have marked a point in its history, which also points to the necessary theoretical approaches needed to tackle the topic of this thesis. In particular, the second phase of work in Television Studies – to be discussed shortly – should be noted, as it is the perspective on which the study will rely. Although the second phase of work emerged from Europe – and there are problems in the lack of comparable notions between the theories of the West and television in South Africa – it is nonetheless important to regard theories of Television Studies for its umbrella function and its relevance, to best explain for the content of *Top Billing*.

While television is a fairly new phenomenon in South Africa, the following subchapter briefly foregrounds the challenges South African television faces against pressures of commercialism and the importation of popular American programmes, to meet the demands for ‘entertainment’ and to cut costs – regardless of its initial grounding principle of prioritising ‘infotainment’ programming. It provides an overview of the landscape of South African programming, and the SABC on which *Top Billing* is aired. The following subchapter on Television Genres further points to the gap where Television Studies has not yet treaded – to substantiate for where this research comes in – and to introduce the transcendental condition of ‘genres’ which will help unravel the makeup of *Top Billing* in the latter chapters.

#### **2.1. Overview of ‘Television Studies’**

Television is a production of the complex interplay of different histories – disciplinary, national, economic, technological, and legislative (Brunsdon 1998). The contested bodies of commentary by various theorists who have sought to define it, generate the very contribution to the formation of ‘television studies’ itself (Brunsdon 1998). The difficulty in working with television is that it is an ever-changing, ‘flourishing’ academic enterprise (Newcomb 1994). “Television continues to change ... To think quickly and precisely about the medium requires more than a regular reading of the trade press or even of scholarly journals. It seems even

more difficult when one tries to make sense not only of the medium itself, but of the many efforts to understand and explain it” (Newcomb 1994). Hence, it is necessary to have an overview of the different phases – not so much to delve into television history, but to pinpoint what is relevant to this thesis. An examination of this academic enterprise – outlining four major backgrounds from where television studies developed – will suffice for this purpose.

Firstly, in the United States, literary studies developed with a broadly cultural agenda – in redirecting critical analysis toward popular entertainment forms such as novels, magazines, and radio programmes (Newcomb 1994). This movement occurred as there was a need, both philosophically and politically, to look into the less mainstream popular culture as a way of broadening ‘cultural studies’ and understanding the relationship between works and audiences, and the value of ‘traditions’. Additionally, there were questions around how to go about the study of “nontraditional forms of cultural expression” such as games, events, designs, and fashion (Newcomb 1994: 5). This movement of exploring what was then seen as “profane” culture is the last significant contributor of critical analysis in the traditional literary studies known as the ‘New Criticism’ era. This was even before the concern of “theories of how meanings might be systematically imposed through cultural codes, social strategies, industrial organisation, or other more embedded and socially grounded influences on expression” (Newcomb 1994: 5).

It is thus, the second major influence on Television Studies, which focuses on and introduces the complexities of the concept of ‘ideology’ by looking at deeper structures that inform ‘texts’. This is the perspective on which this study relies. Emerging in Europe, this second phase of work was “profoundly influenced by continental Marxism and structural anthropology, two varying but in their early stages almost equally powerful forms of ‘structuralism’” (Newcomb 1994: 5). However, basing a South African programme such as *Top Billing* on media theories arising from the West, due to its dominating academic material, poses a problem. Since the dominant strain of global mass culture remains centered in the West and in English due to the beginnings of television history, in effect, developing countries are unable to prioritise local culture (Curran & Park 2000). Instead, these countries foster “dependency within an exploitative system of global economic relations ... [and] promote[] American capitalist values and interests ... [which] erodes local culture in a process of global homogenisation” (Curran & Park 2000: 5). Although American television

may appear as the dominant norm for its worldwide export of programmes, it is important however, to bear in mind that each country has its own set of conventions, laws and assumptions about television due to the different evolution, nature and function of television broadcasting in any particular country (Bignell 2008).

While questioning the origins of defining what constitutes ‘knowledge’ about television, Spigel (1998) notes that the concept of ‘representation’ in Cultural Studies developed from the need to understand the complexities of ‘identities<sup>6</sup>’ by social and political margins as well as by academics. One of the primary works of this era, explaining for the complexities of contemporary culture is the work of Antonio Gramsci and his notion of ‘hegemony’. This notion is the process of making and reproducing existing authoritative meanings and practices (Barker 2000) which effectually creates the ‘dominant’ ideologies / ‘normative standard’ to understanding the social world. Importantly, this notion of ‘hegemony’ provided a useful framework in understanding how “economic and political powers [could] maintain control not only through violence and coercion, but also through ideology” (Ives 2007: 157). Thus, by providing the ability to look closely at television as an ‘expressive’ form, this phase had a key impact on the climate of television, by altering many previously existing perceptions (Newcomb 1994). This thesis will thus examine the ways in which ‘ideologies’ created by social structures such as the media have the power to ‘create worlds’.

The third major influence on the development of Television Studies – which is also relevant to this thesis – was the natural progression towards sharpening previous understandings by recognising the weaknesses of relying on a naïve notion of ‘liberal pluralism’ (Newcomb 1994). With the arrival of the ‘British Cultural Studies’ it saw weaknesses in the earlier popular culture approach. Maintaining the tradition of the Frankfurt School of thought, and moving into the realms of social psychology and sociology, it provided ongoing debates around the varying emphases on and definitions of ‘ideology’ (Newcomb 1994). Additionally, the need for social sciences and ethnography in the field of Television Studies was recognised, allowing for a deeper examination of the context in which symbolic ‘texts’ emerge (Willis 2000, Dolby 2006). This phase acknowledged ethnography as a critical point of departure, in analysing the multiple texts that constitute a ‘site of struggle’ in a changing

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6 Of individuals and of groups.

and complex reality. Without delving into the strand of social psychology however, a process of self-reflection<sup>7</sup> will underpin the critical analysis of ‘text’ in this thesis – in order to examine the lived cultures and the dialectical relation between people and social/symbolic structures (Willis 2000).

The fourth influence on Television Studies emerged from the growing body of film studies in the United States and abroad, and formed a new wave of work which turned the attention of film scholars to television. Similar to, but diverting from the ‘New Criticism’ era which looked at ‘non-traditional forms of cultural expression’ – it turned towards the appropriation and development of various forms of structuralism infused with theories of Marxism and Cultural Studies (Newcomb 1994). This thesis will take on a Cultural Studies approach and also touch on theories of structuralism, while examining the concept of ‘ideology’ and ‘discourse’, and the mediating role *Top Billing* plays in representing race, class and cultural identity in the current South Africa.

## **2.2. Television in South Africa**

Comparatively, while ‘television’ has been around now for about four decades as a ‘full blown mass medium’ it is still relatively new in South Africa (Mersham 1998). Krabill (2002) argues that South Africa resisted television into the country even long after it had the financial and technological capacity, due to the then “ruling National Party’s ideology of cultural purity combined with the appropriation of cultural imperialism discourses from leftist critiques in the West” (1). Thus, South Africa only established a television service in 1976, after more than 130 nations had preceded it (Krabill 2002). Naturally, this is reflected in the dearth of literature on television in the South African context in comparison to, for example, America’s long history on television and abundant literature on an array of research topics. Further, while nearly all homes in Western Europe and America (98% in the United States) have television (Mersham 1998), a mere 23 million<sup>8</sup> South Africans own television sets, watching on an average of 3.2 hours a day and 22.6 hours a week<sup>9</sup> (SAARF 2010a).

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7 Self-reflection is possible due to my ongoing involvement as part of the *Top Billing* production team.

8 See Appendix 1 for exact figures.

9 See Appendix 2 for exact figures.

By the time USA and Britain had reached a multichannel environment and a boom in digital and satellite technology, South Africa was then undergoing its democratic transformation, which brought about changes to the SABC (Mersham 1998). With a newly formed Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), SABC aimed at becoming a true public service broadcaster (Mersham 1998). South Africa and its first public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) on which *Top Billing* airs, takes on the ‘Reithian principle’ of public broadcasting, originating from its colonial heritage of the Commonwealth model (Teer-Tomaselli 2008). The statement by the Chairperson of the SABC in *The Annual Report of the SABC 2010* reads: “The SABC mandate remained unchanged and our commitment to entertain, inform and educate remains the same ... an obligation that the broadcaster will continue to deliver on, in spite of the pressure of limited resources” (SABC 2010a: 8). Unlike the American broadcasting model as a commercial enterprise, John Reith<sup>10</sup> who wrote the founding documents for the SABC in 1933, argued that public broadcasting “should be developed and regulated in the interests of the nation, assigned through state intervention. Thus, from the outset the state was at the heart of public service broadcasting” (Teer-Tomaselli 2008: 75). Evidently, as stated in the *Commissioning Policies and Procedures*, SABC acknowledges its relationship with the State, in that “the overall governance of the SABC as a public entity [is] wholly owned by [the] Government” (SABC 2010c: 147).

Given South Africa’s fairly new discussions and exploration into television studies compared to American and British literature, Hydén, Leslie and Ogundimu (2002) assert that South Africa is ahead of the rest of the sub-Saharan Africa. Although the media may be relatively weak, compared to their positions in liberal democracies, media in sub-Saharan Africa play an important role in bringing about significant political change (Hydén et al. 2002). This is not to say that commercialism has not taken its toll on the television scene in South Africa. As Mersham (1998) argues, “in terms of television programming there will always be a disparity between ‘what the people want’ and ‘what the people need’. In fact, television audiences are tyrannical in their demands for entertainment programming” (224). Thus, it has become the norm that developing countries and their need for more popular entertainment

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10 John Reith is BBC’s first director-general, who was also for a short time the British minister of information (Teer-Tomaselli 2008).

forms<sup>11</sup> have been fulfilled by purchasing American-produced material, which is cheaper than locally producing programmes, due to the lack of resources.

In South Africa, the cost of local television production is “approximately ten times higher than that of foreign programmes” (Strelitz 2005: 46). Evidently, there are numerous imported entertainment programmes that air during primetime slots on SABC, varying from soap operas, talk shows, reality programmes to drama series, such as *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Days of Our Lives*, *Oprah*, *The Tyra Banks Show*, *Survivor*, *The Amazing Race*, *Top Chefs*, *Top Gear*, *Gladiator*, *The Biggest Loser*, *CSI Miami*, *The O.C.*, *Desperate Housewives* as well as *WWE Smackdown* and its variations. Further, with the current financial crisis at the SABC<sup>12</sup>, imported programmes have become much more visible on the television screens – for its cheap alternative as a ‘quick fix’ solution for cost-effective entertainment. Evidently, the top ten most popular shows<sup>13</sup> viewed on SABC3 are mostly American-imported programmes.

Moreover, the local media systems have more recently been integrated into the wider, international/global media system, i.e. Time Warner holds a 20 per cent share in the Midi group, which controls e-TV, South Africa’s only independent television station (Strelitz 2005). Hence, for South Africa, the challenge is to “ensure a balance between profit and public service in the framework of joint ventures between the state and the skills and resources of private enterprise[s]” (Mersham 1998: 233). Part of SABC’s mandate is to “ensure that broadcasting services are effectively controlled by South Africans ... [and to] encourage the development of local programming content”, yet simultaneously it aims to “encourage investment in the broadcasting sector” (SABC 2010f) where commercialism and the need for advertising as well as cost-efficiency is bound to play a role. Thus, the challenge is to avoid falling into the trap of commercialism<sup>14</sup> for larger audiences, in competing with satellite transmissions (Mersham 1998), as well as to guard local content and encourage

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11 In a process of global homogenisation, there has been demand for popular entertainment forms.

12 SABC has undergone a serious financial crisis in the past few years, not only due to the global economic crisis of 2008-2010, but also due to internal irregular financial activities; the collapse of governance instruments; and months of striking taking place in the public sectors throughout the country in 2010. SABC had to be 'bailed out' to prevent near liquidation by the government with R1.5 billion because the SABC was unable to meet its financial obligations on time (SABC 2010).

13 See Appendix 3.

14 The influences of commercialism will be further examined in Chapter 6.

independence, growth, and development.

Television alone, poses a difficult task for discussion, due to the nature of television being a global medium, with a global audience, and an array of programmes and channels – especially within the times of ‘globalisation’ and ‘post-modernism’. This is even before considering the history of the medium, and the multiple ways in which television addresses its audience, even at a single given moment (Bignell 2008). However, there is also the problem of assuming that the ‘international media system’ – or any media system of any country for that matter – can be understood merely by identifying the philosophical and political rationales and theories of the West (Curran & Park 2000). Thus, although some texts endorse a wide sweeping assumption of Western viewpoint as an authoritative view (Curran & Park 2000), it is important to take note of this, and further, for the purposes of this thesis, to note the importance of placing *Top Billing* within a particular political, socio-economic context for a relevant discussion.

### **2.3. Television genres and its transcendental quality**

The lifestyle/magazine programme is arguably the under-represented genre in the study of television, internationally, and even more so in South Africa where development of new entertainment genres has been slower than in countries where television has been around longer. Given African states’ nascent or newly emerging democracies, as much as there is lack of discussions on popular programming, there is abundant research on media, democracy, and resistance (Abu-Lughod 1997). In account of this, much of the literature found on popular programmes in the African context deal with issues of identity and the role of television in the public sphere, under the environment of a transforming society. This is because African media have long played the role of serving the needs of the colonial administrators, thus dominated by programmes with a political agenda (Rønning & Kupe 2000). Lacey (1998) notes that often, media institutions are “dominated by stereotypical white, middle-aged men, and media production reflects this bias ... [to] help create the conditions for hegemony” (143). Hence, there is a need to understand the transcendental quality of television ‘genres’ and how the ‘genre’ under which *Top Billing* is categorised is socially constructed.

According to Feuer (1992), genres are “not neutral categories, but rather ideological constructs that provide and enforce a pre-reading ... Genres are made, not born” (144). Thus, a particular ‘genre’ no longer exhibits the distinct genre boundaries of the past, but new ‘genres’ can emerge from a recombination of various generic traits (Feuer 1992). For example, infotainment programmes, such as reality TV, gratify the viewer by allowing them to “connect what they see with what they know” (Hill 2005: 89). The effect of this is that it is a reflective process where “the personalised stories and tips on living that feature in some reality formats are internalised by viewers, and stored for potential use at appropriate moments in their own lives” (Hill 2005: 90). Not only does *Top Billing* have these characteristics, it also falls under this category of ‘infotainment’ programming in a ‘real’ format. A viewer of the in-depth research stated, “I change my house decor, lounge, cushions, bedding, rearrange my lounge, carpets and things every month or two ... from [watching] *Top Billing*” (interview, 29/05/2010). This viewer made use of what she had absorbed from years of viewing at ‘appropriate’ moments in her life when she needed decor ideas. She continued to explain how she recollected ideas from past shows: “At one stage my son got married and we went straight to ... get what we wanted because I saw it on *Top Billing* three years ago” (interview, 29/05/2010). Thus, this characteristic of reality TV genre, i.e. the ‘internalising’ of information by viewers, is also relevant to magazine programmes like *Top Billing* as it reflects ‘real’ life with ‘real’ effects.

Jost (2004) argues that genres are “not stable and static objects without any history ... their structure is not established once and for all ... Depending on the kind of communication one wishes to make, genre classifications change ... because they are the battle ground for social actors with diverging interests” (105-106). Much like ‘ideologies’, genres are not inherent, but created to serve the dominant discourse. *Top Billing* for example, explicitly cites itself as a ‘lifestyle’ programme in order to endow the *Top Billing* brand in the interest of mass-circulation. It aims to attract viewers to believe that it is ‘The Best of the Good Life’ (*Top Billing*’s slogan) and a lifestyle that one should watch, consume, and tune in again the following week. Advertising and other intertextual references found in *Top Billing* are also vital sites of generic discursive practice (Jost 2004). For example, the SABC channel would need to categorise it as a ‘lifestyle’ programme in order to make them desirable; while mediators would use this category to circulate to the public; and the viewer – for use as a regulating concept for one’s own interpretation (Jost 2004).

Referring to the ‘contemporary lifestyle programme’ genre, Hill (2005) argues that fundamental to its format is the attempt “to consider the transformation of the self, as well as the transformation of the home environment” (92-93) – which is quite similar in characteristic to the above mentioned reality TV genre. “[A]dvice, transformation and consumer awareness bec[o]me part of the language of lifestyle television for popular audiences ... We can watch (and copy) ordinary people transforming their business practices, or personal relationships, as well as their living arrangements, or personal appearances” (Hill 2005: 92). This was indicated by some of the in-depth interviewees of this thesis. A viewer stated, *Top Billing* “is your ‘glitz and glam’ show – so copy it to the best you can. You can work within your means” (interview, 15/05/2009). Another viewer commented, “If there is something I like, I will buy it ... I like to see where they [*Top Billing*] go and maybe one day I’ll go there to those hotels and restaurants and things when we visit that country one day ... Anything nice and I can afford, I’ll go and buy it” (interview, 29/05/2010). There was a clear consumer awareness found among various interviewees. Non-Executive Chairman / Director of Tswelopele Productions<sup>15</sup>, Basetsana Kumalo confirms, people “are looking for ways to improve their own lives, so our viewers take something back with them to their own homes in order to create a better environment for themselves” (Impumelelo 2008: 75).

Hence, *Top Billing*’s ‘lifestyle programme genre’ can be situated within larger cultural contexts and relations of power. Whilst positioning itself as a ‘lifestyle’ programme, it crosses over and carries characteristics of other ‘genre traits’ in order to market itself. Thus Mittell (2005) argues that the “mixing of genres is a cultural process, enacted by industry personnel, often in response to audience viewing practices” (42). From receiving viewer feedback and understanding that viewers enjoy inserts which show them how to do things at home, the Managing Director of Tswelopele Productions and Executive Producer of *Top Billing*, Patience Stevens ensures that there is a weekly inclusion of a ‘D.I.Y.’<sup>16</sup> segment –showing the viewer what to wear, where to eat, and how to decorate the house. Moreover, texts are interlinked to form a ‘genre’. Often, the production staff at *Top Billing* will discuss trying new styles: “*Top Billing* meets *Survivor*” or “*Top Billing* shot in a more *M-TV Cribs* style” or

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15 Tswelopele Productions is an independent production company which houses *Top Billing* and various other TV shows, such as *Pasella*, *Ses’khona*, as well as the more recent *Top Travel*, *Life’s A Journey*, *Top Dogs*, and *No Reservations*.

16 Do It Yourself (DIY).

“*Top Billing* meets *Top Gear* and *Pimp My Ride*” – referring to various other genres and programmes, in an attempt to draw more audiences, and effectually more advertisers. Mittell (2005) argues that genres are culturally salient, discursive practices, which emerge from the intertextual relations between multiple texts. Further, texts “cannot interact on their own; they come together only through cultural practices such as production and reception” (Mittell 2005: 41).

Other transcendental quality of genres can also be observed, as Geraghty (1996) compares the soap opera genre with having values of ‘light entertainment’ such as show-business and musical comedy. They hold the aesthetics of “appreciation of beauty and the application of good taste ... The pleasure in lavishness and extravagance leads to an emphasis on glamour which underpins the use of locations and the presentation of the stars” (Geraghty 1996: 88-89). This is also true of *Top Billing* whose slogan is ‘The Best of the Good Life’ and where the hour show is delivered from a fancy location, presented by a celebrity presenter dressed in a formal evening gown or suit. According to Mittell (2005), many genre scholars have noted that “there are no uniform criteria for genre delimitation – some are defined by setting (like Westerns), some by actions (like crime shows), some by audience affect (like comedies), and some by narrative form (like mysteries)” (41). Thus, genres are not intrinsic to texts, and due to the transcendental condition of genres which overlap in characteristics and constantly evolve, it acts to serve the ongoing dominant discourses.

Hence, certain genres can have impact on other genres. For example, “soap opera storytelling and their relationship to market interests and values influence content trends in news, entertainment, and sports” (Wittebols 2004: 40). Thus, *Top Billing* can be viewed as a ‘contemporary lifestyle’, ‘light entertainment’, and ‘infotainment’ programme, altogether. The ‘soap opera’ genre can also be categorised under ‘light entertainment’, while ‘reality TV’ can be seen under the ‘infotainment’ category. In essence, while *Top Billing* incorporates different characteristics of different genres to categorically cite itself as a ‘lifestyle’ programme, the ‘genre’ is created in order to attract audiences of a particular moment in time, to maintain its viewership, and to draw advertisers to the show. As seen, there is an overlap of qualities found in ‘genres’, as they are merged, redefined and created. Mumford (1995) renders that it is essentially pointless to label strict identification to genres. Rather, the

important thing is “not so much to give [particular programmes] the correct label but to recognise why there is a problem about definition” (17).

Since genres are categories that are labelled for cultural convenience, this thesis will further situate *Top Billing* within larger cultural contexts and relations of power and market interests, while investigating the micro- and macro structural features influencing and defining *Top Billing* in a particular way. Although there are more recent efforts to “make connections and to locate the study of television in a larger, cross-disciplinary landscape of overlapping interests” much of the study in television has been “undertaken with a high degree of ignorance about work lying outside the specific field of interest receiving attention” (Corner & Harvey 1996: xv). In order to begin filling the gap in Television Studies, particularly looking at South Africa, the lifestyle/magazine programme ‘genre’, *Top Billing* will thus be the topic of discussion in this research project.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RATIONALE OF METHODS**

This chapter outlines and justifies for the chosen methods employed in this research: content analysis; ethnography; and audience research, through in-depth interviews and viewer observation. First, it outlines the content analysis of the show with particular reference to programmes aired from February to May 2009 in order to allow a concise discussion of the range and frequency of representations found in the programme. By revealing the frequency of the categories of programme inserts/segments, it aims to foreground the inserts which privilege certain locales, people and events, to add depth to understanding the significance of particular representations. Secondly, it outlines research/data collected from the ‘emic’ or insider’s perspective (Fetterman 1998) through ethnography, examining in particular, the decisions of the ‘makers’ of *Top Billing*. This ethnography is substantiated by a preliminary focus group research of the internal production staff, which highlights the ongoing discussions evident in the *Top Billing* office. It is however, important to note that the focus group research is not part of the primary methods, but acts to further support the findings on more objective grounds for the ethnography, which is bound to be intertwined with the researcher’s viewpoint and involvement as part of the *Top Billing* production team. Finally, the method employed for the third part of this research focuses on the receptive audience through in-depth telephonic interviews by snowball sampling ten viewer participants; as well as observational research in the home of a viewer couple.

While the research consists of both quantitative and qualitative methods; the theoretical framework, or the research approach of this study, as indicated in Chapter 1, will be based on a critical political economy and cultural studies approach. By taking on a qualitative methodology/approach, it will examine the ideological content of *Top Billing* while recognising that cultural identity and representation found in the show reflect hegemonic discourses. These discourses play a role in reasserting hierarchical relations of power – especially along race, class and gender lines (Ives 2007) which contribute to the existing assumptions and attitudes of society (Bignell 2008). This chosen methodology also indicates that there can be more than one consensual textual reading, from which one can understand the programme in question. Thus, the combination of both quantitative and qualitative

research methods – within this larger, qualitative framework – will allow each stage of research to inform each other, and to bring out the best possible results.

The chosen methods (and the categories identified for exploration) have been selected to be used as a form of ‘methodological triangulation’ – justifying and strengthening each other’s results/findings by revealing consistencies. Thus, categories created for content analysis, for example, was selected in such a way as to be used again in the interview analysis – to specifically examine those hierarchical relations of power along race and class lines, and to explore the negotiation of the nation and ‘identities’ in a ‘site of struggle’ (Dolby 2006). Further, both the ethnography and the preliminary focus group research play an important role in opening up insiders’ knowledge of the *Top Billing* programme and its most prominent matters – the selection of ‘representation’, the commercialisation of editorial content, ownership influence, and the existing tension between editorial staff and marketing departments. Thus, the findings of the preliminary focus group research will also be discussed alongside the ethnography, especially as the two methods in cross-examination will be important in illuminating the chosen topical issues in a ‘site of struggle’. In sum, the categories for examination have been selected to be used in all the chosen research methods employed in this thesis, in order to explore the various meanings arising from the programme which are related to the viewers’ identities in the current South Africa.

### **3.1. Content analysis**

In order to explore the various meanings and pleasures that loyal viewers make of the programme, it was first necessary to undertake a brief content analysis in order to determine the nature and frequency of topics found in the show. The need for counting content is to obtain an expansive, panoramic view by some form of measurement, to determine “the degree to which they [stories] are slanted towards a particular perspective within a high frequency of occurrence” (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock 1999: 114). This was thus central to tackling the given research question, by laying the foundation for a sufficient exploration on the representations found in *Top Billing* inserts that carry meaning. This method was appropriate to make broader inferences on *Top Billing* and what it entails, as well as on the processes and politics of representation (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock 2007).

The decision to review the four months of February to May 2009 was to examine the most recent past programmes available for analysis, at the start of this thesis in June 2009. The format of every show is the same, and hence a convenience sample was used, which was believed to be reflective of the broader whole. The dates of the shows analysed are: February 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>; March 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>; April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>; and May 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> – sixteen shows in total, with no show airing on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April<sup>17</sup>. Each insert within the sixteen shows was ‘counted’, for the unit of analysis of ‘insert genres’ and ‘race’. As previously seen, genres are not intrinsic to texts, but much like ideologies, act to serve the ongoing dominant discourse, and hence, should be situated within larger cultural contexts and relations of power. To create the kinds of categories which are relevant to all the different stages of this research<sup>18</sup> in examining ‘identities’, the various categories/variables selected and used for counting ‘genres’ as well as the category of ‘race’ was selected.

Determined by the actual research question around ‘identities’, the unit of analysis used to ‘count’ the content were: a) the different genre of segments/inserts in a show; then more narrowly, b) the number of inserts divided by race; and c) the number of links/shows presented by either a Black<sup>19</sup> or White presenter. The variable of ‘genres’ does not necessarily have clear-cut distinctions due to the transcendental condition of ‘genres’ and since one insert can be a mix of two or more genres. However, the way in which it has been counted here, is in accordance to the way in which the insert has been ‘labelled’ or categorised within the production office<sup>20</sup>. By counting the variable of ‘genres’ found within the shows, it also brought to the fore – by quantity – the type of inserts most frequent in the show. The categories used to count these ‘genres’ were: location/decor, celebrity profiles, DIYs, weddings, events, travel, movie review, fashion, theatre productions, artist workshops, themed entertaining, fitness/health, and gardening. Any inserts not fitting into the given categories were counted in the category of ‘other’. The variable of ‘race’ on the other hand, was quantifiable with a clear-cut distinction for counting – to reveal the categorical

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17 No show was aired on the 9th April, 2009 due to ongoing broadcasting of the ICC (International Cricket Council) Twenty20 Cricket World Cup Tournament.

18 In a process of methodological triangulation.

19 The ‘Black’ category here includes all non-White presenters.

20 Each insert is seen in a particular light as being part of a particular genre, when the Executive Producer decides so. She often selects different ‘genres’ and not two of the same where possible – in one programme, to bring a good balance to the show.

‘identities’ that are represented and which viewers can take up from these shows. The way in which ‘Black’ and ‘White’ was counted, was that all pertaining to ‘non-White’ fell under the ‘Black’ category – thus using ‘Black’ as an umbrella term for counting. When counting stories, all inserts which included a mix of ‘White’ and ‘non-White’ personalities in a single insert were categorised as ‘Mixed’ content.

Overall, the content analysis was a method of choice, to “reveal features which you may usually take for granted, without examining how they are effective, why you may accept them as unremarkable, or why you do not view them with a critical eye” (Deacon et al. 1999: 114). The content analysis was able to analytically highlight the salient features found in the show, which would otherwise go unnoticed – such as the imbalance in racial representation, and the number of stories on the show which was initially *Top Billing* magazine stories that had carried over to TV, merely to boost magazine sales. Thus, the content analysis was useful in providing a starting point by indicating which aspects to further explore in depth.

### **3.2. ‘Production’ of *Top Billing*: Internal research**

The ethnography, which forms a significant part of this research, aims to reveal an ‘emic’ perspective on the various factors that condition the production of symbolic texts and its role in defining ‘reality’. It provides insight on the decision-making process of the representations found on the show. The ethnographic research will be substantiated by the parallels found in the preliminary focus group research, as a way of strengthening and cross-examining the data. The focus group research aims to reveal more prominently – alongside the ethnographic findings – the contesting interests within the internal production staff regarding selection of content. Although the focus group research does not form part of the primary methods of this research, it not only pinpoints – more obviously when placed side-by-side to the ethnography – the topical concerns that needs addressing, but also acts to bring more objectivity due to the flaws of the nature of ethnography. Hence, the findings of the focus group will be discussed in this thesis, to open up the insiders’ knowledge on the programme, on a public platform in the academia.

### 3.2.1. Ethnography

It is important to acknowledge one's own involvement as a researcher in studies of text-based cultural contexts during ethnographic research, "to reflect carefully on the extent to which the research design privileges the researcher at the expense of both understanding the other and operating with a keen awareness of the context" (Markham 2005: 809). While Abu-Lughod (1997) points to a lack of ethnographical sophistication in the past two decades, specifically in the study of television, my reflections and involvement will be made clear in the discussions below. This is because "[c]ritical reflection on how social discourses and processes shape or mediate how we experience our selves [sic.] and our environment is, perhaps, the most prominent feature of cultural studies" (Saukko 2005: 350). Moreover, one unavoidably needs to discuss the discrete cultural texts that are produced, circulated and consumed, when discussing television programmes in depth, instead of merely talking on the surface about cultures-as-text (Abu-Lughod 1997).

The core reason and interest for the research question around *Top Billing* and the representation of race and national identity initially arose from my own experience as an employee at Tswelopele Productions, working with the *Top Billing* TV programme and managing its content in particular, over the past four years. Arriving at a lifestyle programme setting from a journalism/news background, and understanding the current day-to-day issues from producing the show, questions around ethics became important. The research question arose from the realisation that much of the content seemed to go unquestioned, and was understood as the 'normative standard' of the programme by the production staff. Thus, with my knowledge and involvement, I was able to fine-tune this project towards the existing concerns at hand, i.e. the issue of commercialisation; the ongoing debate around the problem of advertorial inserts, using the programme as a marketing tool for magazine sales; the contesting factors involved in content selection; and the lack of 'black' content<sup>21</sup> in a 'white' status quo show; as well as the lack of attainable and achievable content. Hence, the importance of self-reflexive awareness of mediation is that it is the 'most characteristic criterion' for valid research in cultural studies, since it forms the social discourses that underpin and guide the analysis (Saukko 2005).

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21 Often, the Executive Producer makes the staff aware of the different races represented on the programme. The majority of the time, people interviewed on the show is dominated by White South Africans, reflective of the dominantly White staff.

Thus, the primary method of the present study is ethnographic research – by using the knowledge of the internal workings of the programme to give direction to this research, but more importantly, allowing a careful selection for the use of internal information gathered naturally over the years. Due to ethical implications, no classified information has been disclosed in this thesis. However, alongside the years of general knowledge gathered, I further collected field notes and jotted down ‘significant speech verbatim’ and ‘situated lexicons’ (Deacon et al. 1999) which have been used in this thesis with discretion. With regards to the focus group research with internal staff, it was conducted from the onset with the consent that everything discussed and transcribed during the forty-five minutes was not spoken in confidence, but with the mutual understanding that it would be recorded for the use of academic research. Nonetheless, to avoid any negative implications or damaging effects to the remaining staff members, certain quotations are used anonymously.

Permission to conduct the research was granted by Patience Stevens, the Managing Director of Tswelopele Productions and Executive Producer of *Top Billing*, under the condition that I was carrying out my duties at work as per usual. Apart from my ongoing participation in the making of the *Top Billing* television programme, I formally gathered data between January and June 2009. This became a valuable method particularly to this project, since ethnographic research is capable of capturing the ‘nuances of action’ in its relevant context (Marvasti 2004). Further, the trouble with attempting to discuss television in a contemporary perspective is the absence of reliable data. “There is no published database containing recent, comprehensive information on television output that can be drawn on when discussing the medium as it currently operates” (Daniels 1998: 133). Hence, there is much to be valued with the reliable and recent data made available in this thesis, due to my privileged access to *Top Billing*.

This privileged access to *Top Billing*, however, was a challenge I faced during this research as I needed informed consent, which is an important part of the codes of ethics for ethnographic research. Christians (2005) notes that “research subjects have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of experiments in which they are involved ... [and their collaboration ought to be] based on full and open information” (144). Notably, the methods used, and the amount of exposure the observation notes received in this thesis, as well as the possible risks involved, were not discussed at length with the Executive Producer. In this

case, codes of ethics served as a guideline at the risk of saving an innocuous research project from being completely cut off due to informed consent, under the condition that it was not replaced by deliberate deception or misrepresentation (Christians 2005). Moreover, privacy and confidentiality was safeguarded where necessary, “to protect people’s identities ... against unwanted exposure ... [and concealed] behind a shield of anonymity” (Christians 2005: 145). Since I was in the same boat as the focus group research participants, to determine what was to be kept confidential – which can be of conflicting interests – the general guideline that I took was the understanding I had as an employee myself, not the least disregarding potentially negative consequences. For the purposes of protecting respondents’ identities, pseudonyms or only first names (in the case of telephonic interviews) are used where appropriate.

Another challenge of this chosen method was being part of the *Top Billing* team. Given the ‘entry’ and having ‘complete membership’ in the field (Marvasti 2004) meant that the task was not only “to collect information from the emic or insider’s perspective but also to make sense of all the data from an etic or external social scientific perspective” (Fetterman 1998: 11). In an attempt to remain objective, given my role and positioning as part of the *Top Billing* staff, the preliminary focus group research also played the role of bringing diversity of opinion whilst strengthening the prominent matters by bringing them to the fore collectively, from more than one source – that is, myself as pseudo-staff and part-time researcher, in context to this thesis – and to reveal the production team’s assumptions concerning the necessary content of *Top Billing*.

Hence, observation is “rarely sufficient in itself as a method ... [as it] lends itself to use alongside other methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative [but nonetheless provides] ... a rich and rewarding component of the research tools available to the researcher in communications” (Deacon et al. 1999: 277). In this case, the findings of the focus group research effectually – though not deliberately in its intent during the process of the focus group research – reiterate and support the ‘emic’ perspective of my ethnographic research, highlighting the prominent issues at *Top Billing*. This also compliments the findings of the content analysis, which reveals the privilege of certain people and events in the various shows’ content. The privilege of certain representations seen in the findings of the content analysis is better supplemented by the production team’s assumptions, thereby revealing the

significance and purpose of these particular representations, and reason for extended discussions on this preliminary research method.

In terms of analysing the data, accuracy was prioritised consciously. Alterations were not made to speech verbatim, transcribed in-situ during the observational research methods, in order to stay as true to the actual words spoken (word-by-word) as much as possible. Nonetheless, as much as the researcher can attempt to reflect interpretations accurately or truthfully, I confess that “consciously or not, [with regards to] certain decisions about what to include as part of the interpretive consideration, only some ... can be identified or controlled” (Markham 2005: 807). Thus, the power and significance of this method is that it has the ability to “extend people’s ordinary good knowledge of how things are put together in our everyday lives” (Smith 2006: 3). Through ‘complete membership’, the findings “do not just enhance the quality of the data, but it becomes data” (Marvasti 2004: 51), and hence “appropriate in opening up those aspects of [the] institutional process” (Smith 2006: 13), especially in light of the public debate in South Africa in the past year, regarding the infringement of the public’s right to know. The insights gathered from the ethnographic research carefully selected and shared in this thesis due to the circumstances of my privileged position is not taken lightly, and thus becomes an invaluable contribution to the academic discussion on *Top Billing*.

### **3.2.2. Pilot research: Focus group**

As part of the preliminary research, a focus group was conducted with the internal *Top Billing* staff<sup>22</sup> to discuss various aspects that make up *Top Billing*, as well as the key concerns and considerations in the ‘making’ process, before the final product is aired and its ‘representations’ projected to the public. The focus group discussion was held at the *Top Billing* head office in Cape Town in May 2009. It aimed to explore what the *Top Billing* Brand meant to the meaning-makers and producers of the show; how one materialises ‘the brand’ in one’s own line of work in contributing to the production process; and whether the lifestyle portrayed is accessible to its viewers; as well as what improvements could be made. Through this semi-structured interview, general feelings and attitudes by the staff who ‘produce’ the show was gathered, foregrounding topical discussions on class and race,

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22 See Appendix 4 to view the list of participants and their designations/occupational titles.

marketing and sponsorship aspects, as well as the cross-relationship between *Top Billing* TV and *Top Billing* magazine. This was useful for contextual background information, since it brought to the fore real existing issues, for further discussion in line with the concerns of this research, i.e. structure, content, and representation of *Top Billing*. Further, it was also able to strengthen my own ethnographical conclusions about the internal workings and perceptions of the ‘production’ process, particularly through the parallels found.

The intent of this preliminary research was to see how producers’ intentions might differ or be similar to viewers’ reception; how their intentions may carry through to the public in the same or different light as intended (or whether it went unnoticed altogether by the public); and whether their choices in the meaning-making process were conscious efforts or driven by other motives. By primarily investigating the various factors in the production line of formulating a particular ‘reality’, it provided the basis for a thorough examination of *Top Billing*’s representation. This focus group research helped to formulate the right questions concerned with class, race and gender, as well as other issues raised from this discussion, to give direction and focus to the audience research arm.

### **3.3. ‘Reception’ of *Top Billing*: Audience research**

In order to gather information on the ‘reception’ level – on the viewers’ general feelings, perceptions, and engagement with the *Top Billing* show, the chosen methods included one-on-one in-depth telephonic interviews with ten viewers, and an observational research of a viewer-in-context in the home. The aim of the audience research was to reveal what viewers take from the programme and how they relate its content<sup>23</sup> to their own lives. As limited as the in-depth interviews may be in quantity, in its qualitative form, was nonetheless able to illustrate the ways in which the ‘encoding moment’ of the programme is interpreted, i.e. often in the dominant mode. The telephonic interviews revealed interesting, unexpected findings; while the observational research in context to the television-viewing experience in the home added texture to the data.

To avoid a mere call for praise, questions were formulated in such a way as to determine one’s general feelings. The warm up questions were: “What would you like to see more of on

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23 i.e. the categorical ‘identities’ that are represented, as determined by the content analysis.

*Top Billing*?” and “Who is your favourite presenter and why?” These questions were also a way of determining whether the viewer would mention without my prompting to do so, the issue of imbalance in representation within the show – something that the *Top Billing* staff are constantly made conscious of by the Executive Producer, especially in working with the visual and audio bound television medium. The interview questions were primarily aimed at discovering viewers’ thoughts on *Top Billing*’s a) imbalanced representation – whether one felt it existed in race, class or gender; b) overtly advertorial aspects like marketing strategies seen through the show; and c) the unattainable, illusory depiction of ‘reality’ found in *Top Billing*.

### **3.3.1. In-depth interview: Snowball sampling**

An in-depth telephonic interview was conducted in May 2009 and May 2010 of ten viewer participants in total. The telephonic interviewing method was chosen for practical reasons. Given the time and location-bound constraints, a nationwide audience could be reached telephonically, as opposed to conducting a face-to-face interview restricted to one city in which the researcher resides. Further, telephone interviews were beneficial in cost-efficiency, and in speed of data collection (Frey & Mertens Oishi 1995) useful for a part-time researcher and part-time working professional lacking in the luxury of time. Although the quantity of ten viewers may be small in size, due to the nature of the interview being in-depth and qualitative, the findings were revealing of the general viewers’ engagement with the programme. Although opinions differed with individuals, a general consensus could also be reached within the recurring perceptions expressed for particular topics of discussion. It addressed the same concerns as discussed in the focus group research, on issues of class and race, and marketing and sponsorship aspects – but revealing different audience interpretation and conclusion.

The way in which this research method was undertaken, was by selecting a random number from the *Top Billing* internal database<sup>24</sup> which existed in line with the *Top Billing* brand. This database was used as a tool for initial entry to reach a *Top Billing* television audience. Since

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24 The only internal database which exists at *Top Billing* is the database which reaches the weekly newsletters – comprising of people who have had dealings with the brand in the past – either by entering a *Top Billing* competition; or having been featured, or as a spokesperson to someone featured on the programme; or being part of the *Top Billing* wine club or magazine subscription.

the database comprised mostly of magazine subscribers, and in an effort to move away from the initial target population for a more reflective sample of television viewers, the snowball sampling technique was appropriate. This technique is “mainly used where no list or institution exists that could be used as the basis for sampling ... [and] where the social knowledge and personal recommendations of the initial contacts are invaluable” (Deacon et al. 2007: 55). Through the choice of the snowball sampling method, the first contact was made with someone who was already familiar with the *Top Billing* brand, and who could then make the necessary recommendation of a *Top Billing* TV viewer for further interviewing. By the third participant, it was clear that there was a significant move away from magazine readers towards a television audience. Notably, the snowball sampling technique in this particular instance, revealed the power of the brand and the loyal following that *Top Billing* had attained over the years.

Each telephonic interview lasted about thirty to forty-five minutes, transcribed immediately with the ability to type 75 words per minute on the laptop placed in front of me, in an attempt to record ‘speech verbatim’ as accurately as possible. Given the findings of the content analysis research as well as my understandings from the ethnographic research, I was also able to fine-tune the relevant interview questions for the purposes of this research project, and thus effectively delve into the topics of discussion with the aim of acquiring a more ‘authentic data’. Thus, the methodological triangulation of cross-examining data between the other methods with this method proved useful, in gearing the focus to essentially help answer the research question. Through the conversational mode and unstructured nature of these in-depth interviews, I was able to allow the discussions to flow naturally, according to the interviewees’ answers, while primarily directing the discussions in a way which would reveal one’s inner feelings and attitudes and enquire into the deeper layers of their consciousness (Marvasti 2004) regarding programme content.

### **3.3.2. Observational research: Viewer in context**

In search for additional knowledge on the audience in particular, their perception and reception of the given media text, I embarked on an observational research on the viewer in context – at home (November 2009). This was primarily to investigate what Morley (1986) refers to as the “politics of the living room”, vital in understanding the viewer and to investigate the “differences hidden behind the catch-all description ‘watching television’”

(Morley 1986: 50). Thus, it was necessary to observe the ‘typical’ behaviour of the *Top Billing* viewer in the home, as *Top Billing* enters one’s domestic life. This method allowed the ideas and feelings on the programme from the viewers’ perspective to surface more naturally after a fresh viewing, while I was able to observe more broadly, the way in which *Top Billing* was consumed alongside other activities that may occur simultaneously in the home, while the show is being ‘watched’.

This observational research was able to uncover factors that influence viewers’ opinions, behaviour, or motivation – taking the in-depth interview research a step further – by firstly observing the viewing patterns, and then following up with a few questions after the show. This helped to ask the right questions regarding particular moments in the viewing experience and to enquire on what it was that was showing at that moment receiving a particular response from the viewer. It also added depth and colour to the audience research data since the missing link from all the other research data collection was this particular knowledge on audience reception. By random selection – drawing a number from a hat – of the flat numbers within my complex, I came out with the number 29. My neighbour living in number 29 however stated that he did not watch TV. The next number drawn was 34, whose resident stated, “I don’t watch *Top Billing* because I hate the way they just throw money around.” Finally, the next number drawn was 54, whose residents Ryan and Helena Lucke allowed me the interview in their home, identifying themselves as regular *Top Billing* viewers.

By entering a viewers’ home, I was able to investigate the “differences hidden behind the catch-all description ‘watching television’” (Morley 1986: 50) to explore the possible hidden meanings in this seemingly mundane ‘everyday’ practice. As *Top Billing* enters one’s domestic life, observing the ‘typical’ behaviour of the *Top Billing* viewer in the home was useful to reveal “a more active conception of the audience and ... in establishing variant readings” (Morley 1986) in order to supplement the audience research arm. Morley (1986) argues that it is important to examine the different ways in which television is watched within the context of family life, since the act of ‘television watching’ “is not simply a question of looking (or not looking) at a screen ... television watching makes sense within a variety of contexts which may link it to social arrangements (viewing in a family, discussing it in a work group) or to other entertainment and communication formats (cinema, computers)” (Geraghty & Lusted 1998: 155). Thus, the observational research in the home provided

insight into “the terms within which respondents themselves defined their viewing activities ... [and] the criteria used by viewers in making choices and in responding (positively or negatively)” (Morley 1986: 51) to the show.

The various challenges of an observational study however, involve the stages of entry, sponsorship/gatekeeping, planning, data collection and data analysis (Deacon et al. 1999: 268). As an associate of the *Top Billing* production team, when it came to gathering ethnographic material at the office and conducting a focus group with the internal staff, ‘entry’ and ‘gatekeeping’ were not an arena of challenge. However, given the ‘private space’ within which this observational research had to take place – in the home of strangers, where rapport had not been built before – I adopted an ‘overt role’. My intentions as researcher were disclosed and revealed from the onset (Deacon et al. 1999: 269) while steering clear of my association with the programme, to gather as much an unbiased, truthful response as possible, for a richer analysis.

This chapter has usefully pointed out that the chosen methods are interlinked by way of ‘methodological triangulation’ such that data is cross-examined. It has outlined the reasons for the chosen research methods employed within the broader methodological framing of this research, which will use the critical political economy and cultural studies approach – allowing *Top Billing* to be discussed in context of a postmodern, post-apartheid society at a particular historical juncture in the current South Africa. All the methods – and the categories created for content and interview analysis – lend itself to use alongside other methodologies in this broader context. The findings of these varying methods are thus strengthened by the consistencies found in the results. As such, the following chapters will explore the analysis of data of each of the research methods undertaken, but under the thematic categories arising from the findings.

Subdivided and grouped according to the key thematic concerns, the following chapters will first delve into discussions of the micro-structural factors, such as race and class constructs found in *Top Billing*. Thereafter, the macro-structural factors determining the motives in contributing to the creation of these constructs will be examined, with particular focus on advertising, ownership and the commercial imperative of *Top Billing*. The following chapters will explore the production of ‘text’, demonstrating how the interplay of the micro- and

macro-structural factors all play a critical role in how media institutions such as *Top Billing* work to produce hegemonic discourses, in the process of the politics of signification. As we now begin to discuss the findings of the research, the themes of race and class will be interwoven with the discussion of the political economy of the programme in the following two chapters.

## CHAPTER 4

### RACE CONSTRUCTS AND REPRESENTATION

The importance of delving into the question around race is that it proposes certain subject positions from which one can make sense of *Top Billing*. Conceptions of race since South Africa's historic apartheid times play a significant role in permeating media discourses today, which cannot be ignored. These constructions, "while sharing certain common conditions of existence, do not automatically form a core unified ... consciousness but are cross-cut by conflicting interests as they are formed and unformed in the course of actual historical development" (Barker 2000: 57). Thus, these forms of cultural identity are not absolute existent 'things' but are unstable cultural creations with which we identify, and through social practices they become temporarily stabilised and not absolutely arbitrary (Barker 2000). However, they cannot 'exist' outside of cultural representation, but are formed 'in' and 'by' it – through social and political power struggles. How then, does *Top Billing* construct 'race' in its representations to its viewers, and how do the loyal viewers relate them to their own identities? This chapter thus aims to unravel these constructions of race and the signifying role it plays in *Top Billing*. At this stage, it is important to note that as with the writings of Ron Krabill (2002) who takes queue from earlier theorists, the use of upper case letter and/or inverted commas will be used when referring to Black or White "to avoid the naturalising of these socially constructed ethnic categories, a particularly necessary distinction in apartheid South Africa, with its complex and arbitrary categorisations of people which carried such powerful consequences" (1).

#### **4.1. Imbalance in racial representation**

What is prominent from the findings of the content analysis is the imbalance in racial representation in content. Of the hundred and twenty-two inserts, only fifteen inserts were Black<sup>25</sup> content stories, while a contrasting eighty-nine inserts were White. Inserts which include a mix of Black and White personalities, categorised as Mixed content amounts to eighteen inserts:

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25 Used as an umbrella term to count all 'non-White' content.

Category	Number of Inserts
'Black' content	15
'White' content	89
Mixed content of 'Black' and 'White'	18
<b>Total:</b>	<b>122</b>

Notably, the 'Black' and 'Mixed' contents added together barely make up half the amount of 'White' content found on *Top Billing*. Moreover, 'Mixed' content inserts include stories like *AIGP*<sup>26</sup> and *Mr. SA Pageant* where only one or two *vox-pop*<sup>27</sup> comments included in the final edit are people of Colour; and stories such as *Mexican Entertaining* which shows one guest out of eight who is Black. These inserts are purely 'Mixed' by placing people of Colour in an all-White context, making the Black inclusion token. The significance of such representation is that White remains the normative standard, where such Black inclusions can create an imaginary existence far-off from the real context (Johns 2009), hence letting the power of *Top Billing*'s visual representation of 'popular imaginations' lie within the White interpretation.

When examining key players of the workforce behind the *Top Billing* show, there is a clear domination of White South Africans – from producers, directors, and editors – in posts that have a direct impact on the content of the show and the way in which a story is told. Further, in the production office of *Top Billing*, never does one talk about 'White content' and 'Black content', it is always about 'adding Black content' and 'adding Indian content'<sup>28</sup>, to 'the show' (taken for granted as a 'white' show). In every contents board meeting at the production office, Executive Producer, Patience Stevens makes it clear that she wants at least one Black insert in a programme in order to tap into the Black audience market to raise Audience Ratings (ARs). It is often the case that Stevens makes a conscious effort to "add in" other races to the show, without realising that she is already rendering the show as a non-raced, normative standard, which according to Dyer (2000) is not far off from saying that Whites are people whereas other colours are something else.

Interestingly, the SABC television demographic profiles (SABC 2010i) divided up by the three channels show that the least Black viewers watch SABC3 as opposed to other SABC

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26 A1 Grand Prix.

27 A snapshot of public opinion.

28 In this context, 'Indian' refers to 'of Indian descent' living in South Africa, much like the category used by United States federal government termed as 'Asian or Pacific Islander'.

channels; while most White viewers watch SABC3 as opposed to the other SABC channels. Of the SABC3 viewers, 69.9% are Blacks while a mere 14.8% are Whites<sup>29</sup>. The lack of numbers in White viewers across the SABC channels may be attributed to the fact that they prefer satellite television, or e-TV – which has not been included in the demographic profile chart. Nonetheless, the SABC3 channel attracts nearly five times as many Black viewers as to White viewers<sup>30</sup>. Hence, it is often the case that Stevens strongly emphasises the need to “tap into the Black market” which *Top Billing* has continually “missed out on”. However, many of the prominent key players in the role of decision-making process at *Top Billing* have no knowledge or interest in Black content. Many are ignorant of ‘who’s who’ in terms of Black celebrities, as often expressed in the contents board meetings. A pressing concern is that the *Top Billing* audience profile<sup>31</sup> more narrowly shows that there are as many Black viewers as there are White viewers. If Black and Coloured viewers are added together, they certainly make up twice as many White viewers – this is even before considering the substantial number of non-White viewers there are, when including Indian viewers as well – as per the numbers on the chart in Appendix 8.

Further, the content analysis of the four months also reveals that there was coverage of thirteen weddings, of which only five falls under the category of Black content. Although there are no hard-and-fast rules, ethnographic findings show that *Top Billing* wedding inserts are mostly chosen when either the bride or groom are a celebrity, or secondarily, when it is an elaborate wedding with exorbitant amounts of money spent, or at times, when it has a unique theme or one which is promoted by a wedding coordinating company to which *Top Billing* has close ties. Of the Black weddings seen in the four months, every one fitted into the top criteria for wedding coverage: Actor Thabiso Mokhehi, KwaZulu Natal’s princess, Actress Bridget Masinga, *Top Billing* presenter Ursula Stapelfeldt, and Ofentse Tshwane – a descendant of chief Tshwane, who Pretoria<sup>32</sup> is now named after. However, ‘white’ weddings which have been covered have not necessarily been at such level of importance/relevance, but ones which have been chosen for other secondary criteria, especially the wealthy weddings

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29 See Appendix 7 for more details.

30 This is also reflective of the South African demographic at large, where the Black Africans are in the majority (39,68 million) and constitute just more than 79% of the total South African population (Statistics South Africa 2010).

31 See Appendix 8 for details.

32 The capital city of South Africa.

which highlight the economic standard of the represented Whites in the upper LSM<sup>33</sup> level. This is a common complaint that is placed in to the office from viewers, disgruntled that *Top Billing* only shows rich and over-the-top White weddings. A research participant viewer further pointed out that there were not enough different cultures portrayed in the weddings that were covered. “We see a lot of Black weddings and White weddings, but not Coloured or traditional weddings” (interview, 29/05/2010).

When asked for whom *Top Billing* caters race-wise, observational viewer participant believed, “It’s aimed at White people. The target market seems to be for the White people because of the presenters and what they show. Where *Top Billing*’s interest lies, it’s for White people” (interview, 12/11/2009). Another viewer also felt that there was racial imbalance, but it was understandable because South Africa’s history told her it was majority Whites in the upper-income bracket who initially enjoyed the ‘arts and culture’ (interview, 29/05/2010). With other races being exposed to entertainment, fashion, gourmet cooking, décor and the hospitality industry in the late years, she felt that *Top Billing* was hence able to portray different races in a more balanced way, as the recent phenomenon would allow this balance in real-life. As a person of Colour, although she did not see as many non-Whites on the show as she would like, she felt that it had much to do with South Africa’s historical past, and that the equality she saw with the presenters allowed all viewers to relate to the show by relating to the different raced presenters.

Importantly, this racial imbalance has ‘real effects’ in that some viewers regard it as though a ‘natural discourse’ and legitimate under the assumptions of the ‘taken for granted’ element (Gramsci 1971). Hence, the unit of analysis used for the content analysis also included the counting of the number of links/shows presented by either a Black<sup>34</sup> or White presenter, to reveal the categorical ‘identities’ that are represented and which viewers can take up from these shows.

Category	Number of Shows
‘Black’ link	6
‘White’ link	10
<b>Total:</b>	<b>16</b>

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33 Living Standard Measurement

34 This includes all non-White presenters.

When reviewing the *Top Billing* presenters<sup>35</sup>, there is a good balance between Black and White, between the senior presenters<sup>36</sup> such as Michael Mol, Ursula Stapelfeldt, Tumisho Masha, Jo-Ann Strauss, Jeannie D, and Nico Panagio. Likewise, the rookie presenters<sup>37</sup>, Kelly Parkhurst, Salamina Mosese, Angelique Schoeman, and Dhiveja Sundrum also bring a balanced mix. Nonetheless, the content analysis shows that there were ten White presenter links<sup>38</sup> while there were only six Black presenter links. The effect of this is quite prominent in that when a link is done by a Black presenter, it makes “the shows appear ‘more Black’” as quoted by Stevens. This is significant as there is no real effort to include Black content in the entirety of the show’s content – in an attempt to bring ‘multiculturalism’<sup>39</sup> – but rather, through the incorporation of presenter links, the show is made to ‘appear’ Black.

Moreover, multiculturalism cannot be achieved when it is so often the case that when interviewing a Black personality, a Black presenter is used<sup>40</sup> – making the story as Black as it can get for either of the following reasons: a) assuming that the White presenter will not know enough about the Black celebrity, to draw an interesting Q&A<sup>41</sup> session; or b) the assumption that the Other has to be categorised together in its own boundaries, to make it appear ‘normal’; or c) to avoid confrontational or awkward situations due to ‘cultural’ differences – as expressed in board meetings. Hence, the problem remains, that the White show is located in a position of structural advantage and power, and a point from which to identify difference (Carby 1992).

During the focus group research (May 2009), it was stated that no solutions could be effectively put in place overnight to rectify the imbalance in racial representation, as the final *Top Billing* content was the sole decision of the Executive Producer. A focus group participant

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35 Presenters mentioned here are those found in the shows under examination. The presenters have changed since the time of Feb-May 2009, but the findings are similar. For relevance and consistency in this research, the discussion remains to the presenters of those times.

36 At the time of the study.

37 At the time of the study.

38 A ‘link’ is where the presenter ‘carries’ the show throughout the duration of the programme, by presenting and introducing each insert /segment.

39 A postmodern concept which seeks national unity by regarding the nation as a cultural whole while fostering recognition for sub-national identities.

40 This was true at the time of writing this thesis. However, discourses at the *Top Billing* office are constantly contested, and the unspoken rules continue to change over time. Currently, there is a move towards ‘mixing’ White presenters into ‘Black’ stories, to ‘balance’ the Black personalities. Presenters have also changed, such that there is currently a good balance in representation on the different inserts more naturally.

41 Question and Answer / interview.

added, “Patience makes the choices and she decides. I’m only doing what Patience thinks is best. In our capabilities, I’m not accountable for the ARs really – so we do what we’re told” (focus group, 24/05/2009). This kind of attitude thus reflected the same assumptions of the viewers, where one believed that it could not be changed. Former *Top Billing* Offline Editor, and current *Top Travel* Producer, Du Toit pointed out that race didn’t matter; what mattered was to cater for ‘the best of the good life’. TV Insert Director, Grant also agreed, stating that different genres call for different people, i.e. South African soccer players being mostly Black and hence ‘black content’, while rugby players in contrast are mostly Whites – hence concluding that “*Top Billing* isn’t racist. We search for the best designer, or the best soccer player, and it’s not always for race.” Another participant disagreed, stating: “Well a lot of it is money related, actually. Success is about wealth. Design and good taste come with money. You have to have money, unfortunately, to dine in those restaurants, to buy that furniture, to own that house – for those we cover, and those we show it to” (focus group, 24/05/2009).

What is of significance here, is that the show’s naturalised discourses of what forms ‘the best of the good life’ – as well as the taken for granted ‘whiteness’ – constructs a class and race-based identity which is acceptable to the elite viewers and to the show’s advertisers. Thus, ‘race’ and ‘class’ cannot be viewed as separate entities – more so, given South Africa’s history – as they interact and exist in relation to each other, in the process of ideological formation.

#### **4.2. Naming ‘whiteness’**

Racial imagery is central to the organisation of the modern world, as it determines whose voice is heard at international gatherings, whose goods and services are valued, and “who gets what jobs, housing, access to health care and education” (Dyer 2000: 539). In this sense, racial imagery, or the conception of racial identities has cultural and economic significance in impacting one’s life, as it is related to the issue of power. Hence, it is necessary to view ‘whiteness’ as a construction like any other, since without looking at the ‘racialness’ of white experience – as “white people have too often viewed themselves as nonracial or racially neutral” (Frankenberg 2000: 447) allows this ‘neutral’ position to hold the authority of power in the social context.

Until recently however, there has been a notable absence on the study of images of White people, yet “race is not only attributable to people who are not white, nor is imagery of non-white people the only racial imagery” (Dyer 2000: 539). Giving an example of an article on lesbian and gay stereotypes, Dyer points out that a ‘fashion queen’ from the film *Irene* is not raced whereas the ‘black queen’ from *Car Wash* is reduced to race (Dyer 2000). There is a significant incident that comes to mind – during the time that I was employed at *Top Billing*. I had agreed to interview Shamim Sarif, writer-director of Award winning film, *The World Unseen*, via the approval of the Executive Producer, because it was “Indian<sup>42</sup> content”. Only after promising the interview was it brought to our attention that *The World Unseen* was a lesbian film. Stevens immediately disapproved of this content due to ‘our conservative, loyal audience’ who would be ‘forever scarred’ by this hugely detrimental and consequential ‘mistake’. By cancelling this interview however, much criticism towards *Top Billing* bombarded the South African entertainment news. Appendix 9 shows a full article of one of the write-ups found on the World Wide Web at the time.

In this article, it is written, “Stevens’ argument for not covering the film and its director seems to be based on the notion that homosexual themes are inherently not ‘family-friendly’ and are best relegated to late-night, adult only time-slots. It’s an argument that could be seen as not only homophobic, but possibly in conflict with constitutional values” (Mambaonline 2009). Further, it quotes, “Sarif, the film’s director, commented: ‘It would be wonderful to feel that my characters are judged according to their core human values and their actions, rather than innate characteristics such as colour or sexuality’” (Mambaonline 2009).” What is significant is that this content was no longer seen as ‘Indian’ but regarded as ‘Indian-lesbian’ content within the *Top Billing* production office – reduced to both race and sexual orientation – and reflected as so, to the consumers of entertainment news at the time<sup>43</sup>. Just as the ‘black queen’ from *Car Wash* is reduced to race as opposed to being labelled a ‘fashion queen’, so too were Sarif’s characters reduced to race and to their sexual orientation. Due to much criticism which followed publicly, within a week after cancellation, Stevens decided to give Shamim Sarif the interview we had initially promised.

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42 Shamim Sarif is directly from India – not South African of Indian descent.

43 This may have been strategic from the Sarif’s representatives to boost ticket sales, which it successfully did – given the curiosity and hype it created for the public just prior to its release date, by pulling in *Top Billing*’s name in the controversial and ‘sensationalised’ entertainment news. Sarif also recognised in her statement of the article seen in Appendix 9, the power of the media and its powerful position in opening up dialogue.

Baderoon (2003) points out how representation makes ‘worlds’ by the power of the media with which consciousness is forged, and the choice of words used to describe it has a significant effect in creating that ‘world’ and creating phantoms and phobias. Dyer (2000) further argues, “There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that – they can only speak for their race. But non-raced [White] people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race” (539). Further, Dyer (2000) comments that an “old-style white comedian will often start a joke: ‘There’s this bloke walking down the street and he meets this black geezer’, never thinking to race the bloke as well as the geezer” (540).

Likewise, this notion of ‘whiteness’ seen as racially neutral can effectively be observed in the Public Relations (PR) information found on *Top Billing*, used for distribution to potential clients. From the words of Patience Stevens, it reads: “Celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, *Top Billing*’s success has brought more projects to the reputable Tswelopele brand, such as the Afrikaans magazine programme on SABC2 (*Pasella*), a youth TV show in SiSwati on SABC1 (*Ses’khona*), and a sophisticated glossy print magazine (*Top Billing*) that covers the best of the good life” (Internal Data, 2008). This document does not state, “sophisticated [English] or [white] magazine, nor does it say, “Celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, [white] *Top Billing*’s success has ...” Nowhere in this document is ‘*Top Billing*’ ascribed any ‘race’, but when referring to any other media products under the Tswelopele Production house, it is given an ascription.

Thus, the problem with the invisibility of ‘whiteness’ as a racial position in ‘white’ discourse is that it gives the Whites the position of power (Dyer 2000). There is a necessity of seeing the racing of Whites, in order to “dislodge them/us from the position of power ... by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world” (Dyer 2000: 539-540). Frankenberg (2000) talks of the ‘apparent emptiness’ of ‘white’ and asserts that to unfold its relations of domination, it is necessary to name it, in effect, to look head-on at this site of dominance. “Naming ‘whiteness’ displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance ... their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility ... [Hence] [t]o speak of whiteness is ... to assign *everyone* a place in the relations of racism” (Frankenberg 2000: 451). Carby (1992) argues that it is necessary to consider ‘whiteness’ as well as ‘blackness’ to make visible the (invisible) normative state of the

(‘white’) point in space from which we tend to identify difference. Hence, it is necessary to view *Top Billing*’s normative standard – the unmarked positioning it upholds, in the content of the programme as well as in the ‘logic’ of its producers.

### **4.3. The normative standard of *Top Billing***

A major concern existing hand-in-hand with the ‘melting-pot’ concept and postmodernism’s multiculturalism is that although it “may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white West ... it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them” (Dyer 2000: 541). This is clearly evident in all the existing write-ups on *Top Billing*. Much like a White person saying, “I’m not racist; look, I have a Black friend,” *Top Billing* equally promotes, through all its press releases and company PR documents, on how ‘non-racist’ and ‘multicultural’ they are to be perceived. For example, “Tswelopele Productions is a leading TV production company with an audited BEE [Black Economic Empowerment] certificate of Level 4. It is accredited by Impumelelo as one of South Africa’s Top 300 empowerment companies” (Internal Data, 2008). In another document, it reads: “Tswelopele Productions is owned (50:50), and managed by two women, Patience Stevens and Basetsana Kumalo. The name means ‘progress’, and was chosen because it encapsulates what this company is all about: two women – one black, one white, putting their skills and strengths together to form and run a successful business. It’s a story of progress made possible by the liberation of a new South Africa” (Internal Data, 2000).

Further, in the words of Stevens, “Tswelopele is one of a very few empowered television companies in South Africa. Although it is important to us that we are an empowered company ... we never assume the acquisition of business contracts based on our empowerment status ... For our clients, the fact that we’re empowered is just an added bonus” (Internal Data, 2008). However, a staff member pointed out, “I’m actually surprised that we don’t have such a mix of staff – we don’t actually have as many Black staff as we announce ourselves to be.” From my experience of having worked at *Top Billing*, there is certainly an obvious imbalance in racial representation, not only in the show, but so prominently in the staff makeup. The entire Black staff at *Top Billing* consists of a gardener, two kitchen ladies, one archive person who shelves tapes in their right places, and one young man – without an official job title – doing all the odd-jobs of fixing lights, delivering post, and at times acting as back-up

receptionist at best. Some of the Coloured<sup>44</sup> staff members are sound operators and cameramen, slightly better positioned than the Black staff, yet not in any decision-making roles, and nowhere half as many (put together) as the White staff found at *Top Billing*.

Olorunnisola (2006) examines the under-representation of Black media employees in decision-making positions, attributing it to South Africa's past where training opportunities were not made available for Blacks. Although this may be partially true, there are subsequent effects of this kind of thinking. As seen in the findings, when viewers have no regard for racial imbalance on the show and believe it is 'just the way it is' due to South Africa's history, they accept (whether they consciously agree to or not) a normative standpoint which allows the dominant discourses of 'white' privilege to prevail. The same parallels can be drawn with the Executive Producer's stance: Stevens talks of the "importance of skills transfer, so on-the-job training becomes an added bonus for employees who demonstrate a natural aptitude for certain jobs or roles within the company. I do, however, insist that staff should first demonstrate the will to achieve as well as demonstrate an inherent ability to succeed before we embark upon specific training programmes ... no dream at Tswelopele is ever too big" (Impumelelo 2008: 71). Besides the PR write-up however, promotions rarely take place at *Top Billing* with the exception of being 'promoted' strictly by default due to the high turnover in staff and the immediate need to fill holes with a sudden departure. At times when staff is shifted around to fill the gaps, Stevens often talks about "an inherent ability" of staff members, which is partially confined to the same line of excuse of South Africa's past, which effectively affects a staff member's disposition<sup>45</sup> in her decision making process.

When reviewing the responses from the in-depth interviews, the White viewers took on the same stance, perhaps unknowingly, this position – which Frankenberg (2000) describes as the position of "dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (454). An interviewee believed that there is imbalance in racial representation on *Top Billing*, but stated that she did not mind it. "There are more Whites than Blacks in the show, but personally I prefer it because it suits me – it's my culture

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44 'Coloured' in the South African context, although I acknowledge that it is problematic to use this term since it reiterates the notion that some people have colour and Whites do not; and because it underpins racial thought which is the very thing that needs to be dislodged (Dyer 2000).

45 This refers to those who "have the ability and the skills to do a job, and those who simply do not have that ability," as expressed by Stevens.

and I'm comfortable with it" (interview, 15/05/2009). This is the kind of attitude which Frankenberg warns against – viewing 'race' constructs as external and as "an issue that people of colour face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us [Whites]" (Frankenberg 2000: 451). Three other interviewees also had disinterest in the matter. Lisa said, "I've never looked at it in that light, to be honest. I would think it was equal?" Lynn stated, "I don't know. I've never thought about it. I haven't noticed such a thing..." She then added that she personally didn't know of any Blacks in the upper class, as the only Blacks she dealt with were people like her gardener and nanny whom she commissioned (interview, 15/05/2009). Kiya mentioned, "There are more Africans in the programme than Coloureds, and there are more Whites than Africans, but it doesn't really bother me. I couldn't care less. It's just a beautiful show" (interview, 29/05/2010).

In this light, the viewers of *Top Billing* perceived the show that was produced from a dominant standpoint<sup>46</sup>, took it and consumed it in the same dominant view, assuming nothing else of it. This, Frankenberg argues, results in Whites seeing antiracist work as "an act of compassion for an 'other,' an optional, extra project, but not one intimately and organically linked to our own [White] lives" (Frankenberg 2000: 451) and hence allowing the dominant discourse of 'whiteness conferring race privilege' to continue. With no such recognition, in the first instance, of sub-national identities existing, multiculturalism<sup>47</sup> and its concept of seeking national unity are far from being realised.

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46 It is along these lines of race, class, religion and gender, which privilege and corresponds to the nature of the dominant ruling party. Every state upholds its dominant 'identity' to define the outlook and profile of its media content.

47 A concept which is also contested, since without having a real political agenda to make change, the term stands to signify 'tolerance' or 'accommodation' for the Other.

#### 4.4. The new ‘Black Diamond’

Drawing on the past of South Africa’s apartheid system, Baines (1998) argues that “the assertion of a single national identity has precluded the assertion of others. National identity is invariably defined by the dominant group, which excludes others from the locus of power” (2). The effect seen today, since the apartheid regime and its efforts on ‘Whites only’ nation building since 1910, is that it has evidently reduced individual ethnicities into a simplified ‘White and Black’ and ‘us and them’ (Baines 1998). However, drawing attention to the findings of the media landscape in post-apartheid South Africa, Olorunnisola (2006) argues that the “termination of institutionalised racism confronted South Africa with fresh ideological challenges ... [the concern being] how the nation would establish a democratic, nonracial, and nonsexist coexistence” (2006: 169).

Further, in the second half of the twentieth century, ‘postmodernism’, a new social epoch emerged, replacing modernism. Postmodernism as a celebration of the exotic and the marginal, including ethnic and gendered ‘others’ thus paid closer attention to ‘other worlds’ and ‘other voices’ (Thompson 1992). Moreover, with the rise of consumerist culture, there has been demand for western commodification of marginal identities (Hansen 2005). According to Banton (2000), in recent times, people who have been subject to such doctrines as ‘the other’ have been inclined to turn the tables in a stand for non-White solidarity, precisely by identifying themselves in racial terms “because they believe that their experience of disadvantage has been so much more profound than that of white ethnic minorities” (61). The new Black image thus came to existence, in line with “capitalism’s need to attract multiracial South African television audiences ... [predominantly portraying Blacks] as successful members of the middle class” (Olorunnisola 2006: 169).

Evidently, prospective Black interviewees for *Top Billing* content have been proud to announce themselves as the ‘Black Diamond’ – a selling point for why they should receive coverage. Often, they label themselves as the ‘Black Diamond’ or as the ‘progressive Black’ while proposing to get on *Top Billing*. This new terminology has in effect brought new meaning by connoting class power to Blacks, leveling them on par with their former ‘superiors’. However, under the surface of a new terminology with positive connotations, remains the fact that such a term has been generated from the presumption of an already existing dominant ideology. That is, it has been formed from the demands for western

commodification of marginal identities due to the rise of consumerist culture, and *therefore* the birth of its terminology. The mere fact of such a term coming into existence highlights yet again, the categorisations created and used by the same dominant thinkers/producers for their convenience. Hansen (2005) argues that such marginal and ethnic identities have become marketable commodities because the ‘white’ dominant culture in South Africa chose to make it enter the fashion world, yet they remain limited within the ‘white’ dominant culture’s own interpretation and cultural codes of it.

Some analysts show how the manufactured notion of the ‘other’ may produce the fantasy of the “exotic” Orient. Kabbani (1986) argues that this concept termed the ‘Orient’ is exotic because it is different and attractive precisely as it is ‘the other’ which remains incomprehensible. The power of the media thus has the ability to ‘create’ rather than simply describe, by ‘naming’ and thus bringing it into existence (Bourdieu 1998). Similarly, at *Top Billing*, and presumably in the new South Africa, there is a fascination for this new ‘kind’ of ‘exotic’ – manufactured and *named* the ‘Black Diamond’. As per the findings of the viewer participant interviews, most believed that only the upper-class Blacks were either featured, otherwise suitable to be featured on *Top Billing*. According to Lacey (1998) however, such predictable characters lead to stereotypes which form a part of everyday life, reflecting a particular set of ideological values, as well as the consensus views – in this case, the portrayal of Blacks in the upper class, seen on *Top Billing*.

A further problem with the term ‘Black Diamond’ is that the representation of a Black bourgeoisie cut off from one’s ‘real condition of existence’, i.e. not reflective of the real South Africa, allows this “cookie cutter impression of Black identity” to be acceptable – even during the apartheid regime, as it aided in apartheid’s ‘cheerless vision of African life’ (Johns 2009). Notably, the ‘Black Diamond’ was formed and hence exists within the ‘white’ dominant culture’s own interpretation of it, integrated into the ‘white’ hegemony. Hence, much like the saying about ‘Coconuts’ who are “Black on the outside, but White on the inside” and well-received by White social circles, the ‘Black Diamond’ has become acceptable, not because of an inner acceptance for sub-national identities, but due to the ‘sameness’ as the Whites. ‘Black Diamonds’ are not only on par with its White viewers in the upper income bracket, they also speak with an educated accent, and those represented on *Top*

*Billing* lead a western, non-African-traditional way of life. This disguises their ‘blackness’ for the convenience of the White viewer.

Even with the old illusory, unified identities breaking up in the new South Africa and in the postmodern context, there is still an imbalance where ‘white’ cultural agendas are in the ascendant, and where “whiteness still confers race privilege” (Frankenberg 2000: 457). Dyer (2000) argues that the “media, politics, [and] education are still in the hands of white people, still speak for whites while claiming – and sometimes sincerely aiming – to speak for humanity” (541). Hence, there is a need to continue conversing, and to look at ways to develop subordinate discourses that can emerge outside of the dominant spatial imaginations.

#### **4.5. The ‘rainbow nation’ rhetoric**

As a programme associated with the SABC, there are certain rules to abide by. SABC’s powers and functions<sup>48</sup>, as well as its rights and obligations, are derived from a number of sources: legislation, the Charter, the license conditions of each SABC station and channel, and regulations issued by ICASA from time to time, including the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters set by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) (SABC 2004). The SABC is thus subject to the rules of the BCCSA, which ensures that broadcasters adhere to certain minimum standards of programme content (SABC 2004) such as promoting equality. Hence, the SABC’s aims to “contribute to democracy, development of society, gender equality, nation building, provision of education and strengthening the spiritual and moral fibre of society” (SABC 2010h) must be translated in all the programmes it houses. Thus, its objectives are filtered down through to Tswelopele Productions, and to *Top Billing*, through communications by the SABC3’s Commissioning Editor. The Commissioning Editor provides weekly feedback to the Executive Producer as to what is needed, such as ‘Black content’, and special requests for ‘Indian content’ and Indian presenters, to bring a balance to the hegemonic representations of a show already dominated by ‘white’ content.

On a broader level, the core editorial values of the SABC takes note of the South African constitution whose values the SABC, as a national public broadcaster, upholds. Encouraged

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48 To be further discussed in Chapter 6.1.

by the SABC Mandate is nation building and multiculturalism. Part of this movement is creating the ‘rainbow nation’, a discourse which invokes a sense of belonging and inclusiveness. It supposedly<sup>49</sup> has positive effects for the citizens of South Africa in imagining a nation – what former South African President Thabo Mbeki termed a ‘new patriotism’ – creating a sense of belonging and pride for the South African community at large (Baines 1998). Important questions to ask here is whose vision this is, and to what extent it has informed/formed the imagined community of the South African nation.

In line with this movement, *Top Billing* also prides itself in being a “proudly South African” product. According to Kumalo, *Top Billing* “celebrates South African excellence ... [and] showcases South African success stories and is a truly South African brand” (Impumelelo 2008: 75). Amongst the viewer participants, there was a general consensus that women enjoyed empowering stories such as seeing powerful women on screen and proudly South African stories. In some ways, *Top Billing* stands for this notion of the ‘rainbow nation’ even whilst staying ‘true’ to its loyal viewers by not bringing any content too far off from its pre-existing discourses, i.e. from a ‘white’ dominant standpoint. Stevens, a White South African woman, conscious of different races – evident in her choice of words – often talks about ensuring that there is “not too much black content” in one show, so it does not disinterest and lose its loyal audience. Thus, while remaining safely ‘white’ unless otherwise instructed by the SABC regarding what ‘must’ be included<sup>50</sup> in a particular show, the content, voiceover script and visuals all point to the words or concept of “proudly South African”. Slogans such as “Simunye – We are one”, and “One beer, one nation” are also examples of the dissemination of the rhetoric of ‘rainbowism’ encouraged by the media<sup>51</sup>, seen on SABC.

However, the rainbow nation rhetoric is not an area that is uncontested, but is constructed by media producers differently, depending on how one situates oneself in relation to these discourses. For example, in abiding with the “proudly South African” concept, ‘black content’ on *Top Billing* consists of Black South Africans, as Stevens so often disregards non-South African ‘black content’ to keep it ‘relevant’ to its South African viewers. Although

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49 This is an area that is contested, since on the other hand, it can also create racial consciousness and/or xenophobia.

50 Often, it is requests which attempt to include ‘other’ races.

51 This was especially evident on South African television, at the start of the twenty-first century.

there are scholarly arguments as to why such notions of ‘rainbowism’ may be counter-productive<sup>52</sup>, multiculturalism<sup>53</sup> nonetheless seeks national unity by regarding the nation as a cultural whole and fosters recognition for sub-national identities (Baines 1998). The new constitution recognises that cultural diversity enriches and strengthens democracy, by making provisions for the recognition of eleven official languages for heritage preservation (Baines 1998), which was also brought into effect in the delivery of SABC news bulletins in all the official languages.

Of the core editorial values of the SABC, after nearly two decades of the end of apartheid, is its aims to “build a united and democratic South Africa ... The SABC celebrates South Africa’s national identity and culture, and provides its citizens with the information they need to participate in building our democracy ... To heal the division of the past” (SABC 2004). *Top Billing* also aims to “honour the creative minds of our country [South Africa] ... encouraging others to aspire ... [and by combining] South African stories with international content ... to prove our equal status with the rest of the world” (Impumelelo 2008: 73). Filtering down from SABC’s attempts in rebuilding a nation and to terminate the ideologies of the apartheid times, *Top Billing* has in recent years also attempted to build new multicultural interpretations to ‘identities’ especially by showcasing the ‘Black Diamond’. However, it still remains that these objectives are kept at a comfortable distance, while *Top Billing* continues to produce a show that will maintain its loyal followers. Hence, *Top Billing* much like its broadcaster SABC can be seen as paying lip service to multiculturalism on the condition that – whatever it is – it does not undermine the status quo (Bennett 1982).

As much as *Top Billing* promotes the ‘proudly South African’ concept, on closer inspection, multiculturalism is something that is non-existent within *Top Billing*’s content alone. Moreover, the different SABC channels have for a long while catered for the different ‘niche’ markets with distinctions based on language on each of the channels – the SABC1 channel catering for the African languages, SABC2 for the Afrikaans language, and SABC3 – the English channel (Mersham 1998). Similarly, divided and not multi-sited, *Top Billing*’s individual inserts of ‘Black’ vs. ‘White’ – which are already imbalanced in numbers – are

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52 The concept can be counter-productive due to the lack of consensus on its meaning, and possibly for the highlighting of race distinctions once again.

53 As part of the ‘rainbow nation’ rhetoric.

“mixed” within a ‘white’ show, and not within the inserts themselves. Neither is the *Top Billing* staff reflective of a mix of South Africa’s subcultures. Rather, *Top Billing* aired on SABC3, *Pasella* on SABC2, and *Ses’khona* on SABC1 – together, make Tswelopele Productions a multicultural production company. Although there are more recent efforts for the different SABC channels to cross-promote and to mix shows of different languages in each of the channels, it still remains that the ‘multiculturalism’ ideology is accepted and tolerated according to the basic normative standard, i.e. as long as they do not disturb the established order.

Thus, Baines (1998) argues that the essentially liberal democratic constitution of the new South Africa still “falls short of actually enshrining a policy of multiculturalism” (Baines 1998: 4). Notably, the notion of a ‘national unity’ and acceptance of ‘sub-national identities’ was born not singularly, but within a context of postmodernism and the global consumerist culture, in order to reach a wider middle-class target market (Olorunnisola 2006). As seen in this chapter, racial identities have cultural and economic significance. In the South African context, ‘race’ does not stand apart from the concept of ‘class’ as they are intertwined and entrenched in South Africa’s past.

Daniels (1998) argues that there has been “very little discussion of the ways in which the various institutions have an effect on programme-making, of the ways in which media ideologies interact with other ideologies of race, or of the theoretical and practical assumptions behind notions of media ‘racism’ and ‘anti-racism’ or a ‘black point of view’” (139). Since television presents ‘texts’ that never stand alone, viewers always make ‘meaning’ from a particular standpoint which is of the viewer’s own social experience – interlinked with other markers of social positioning, including class and gender (Allen 1992). Hence, the following chapter will delve into discussions into the construct of ‘class’ and the ways in which it interacts with other ideologies in the formation of ‘text’.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CLASS CONSTRUCTS AND THE SIGNIFYING ROLE OF TOP BILLING**

Television is interlinked with the economy, and plays an active role in creating material desire and symbolic reproduction of capitalist interests (Ives 2007). Fundamentally, *Top Billing* sees its audience as market consumers, just as much as television viewers. Baines (1998) argues that the ‘national identity’ is invariably defined by the dominant group. Hence the market interest in the global world is prioritised above all other conflicting ideological interests. In the current South Africa, the “narratives that African youth seek are representative of the longings that they feel from being positioned as consumers by the global marketplace, while simultaneously being largely unable to consume” (Dolby 2006: 43). Meehan (1994) argues that television simultaneously presents a vision for consumption to a viewer seeking ‘identity’, but also to an audience for sale in the marketplace. Thus, the ‘white’, upper-class content found on *Top Billing* reflects not just an ‘identity’ to which one can subscribe, but a commercial need to attract an audience of the consumer culture it upholds. Interlinked with ‘race’ as previously discussed, ‘class’ is also an articulating element of discourse in representation, which needs to be questioned critically. This chapter enters into the discussion on the findings of ‘class’ constructs, while also providing further theoretical framework that underpins this thesis.

Thus, this chapter examines the new ‘critical’ paradigm in media studies, which questions how ideological processes work and exist in relation to other social practices. It is vital to understand this relationship between media and ‘reality’ – as we continue to analyse the findings of this research – since media ‘texts’ function like language, used to make meaning and to analyse the world. In order to examine *Top Billing* more specifically, as a tool for shaping one’s identity, and to inquire into the kinds of representations that are constructed and the identities that are proposed, the concept of ‘ideology’ needs to be examined. By investigating the signifying role of the media, and the theories of media and representation, this chapter takes on a theoretical and analytical critique on the construction of *Top Billing*. This chapter will further illustrate how interviews gathered in this research indicate the ways in which ‘encoding moments’ of the programme is interpreted – often in the dominant mode.

## 5.1. Media as definers of social reality

To provide an overview of the concepts of ideology and culture, Hall (1982) examines three distinct phases of mass communications research. Mostly looking at the sociological approaches of ‘mainstream’ American behavioural science to the emergence and rise of an alternative ‘critical’ paradigm, an overview of the relationship between media and ‘reality’ is observed. In sum, on the one hand is the mirror or reflective theory, which proposes that the media is expressive of, and reinforce, an already achieved consensus. The notion is that different individuals derive different meanings by bringing their own structure of attention, i.e. a ‘selective perception’ to the values and norms of what the media offer (Hall 1982). This was indicated by some of the participants of the interview: “What I don’t like is the movie reviews, because I’m just not into movies. They [*Top Billing*] film all the stars and things, but that doesn’t really interest me. I love the interior and new houses.” Another viewer stated, “I hate DIYs but [I] watch all the décor” (interview, 15/05/2009).

Thus, the term ‘representation’ is one way of posing this relationship, i.e. to see the media as institutions whose role is to *re-present* reality. In this view, the media mirror an already meaningful ‘reality’. Thus, different individuals receive different satisfactions from different parts of the programming to fulfill different needs, which effectually strengthen the core value system of society at large. Concluded from the in-depth interviews, some viewers watched *Top Billing* for inspiration, while others watched it for ideas or escapism, and still others, for entertainment value. The question then arose around the social role of the media. If media was reflective of an already achieved consensus, the question was whether it was actually reproducing the very definitions of the situation that was favoured by an already existing structure. Thus, its role could be seen as being part of the process of ‘consensus’ formation, in a process of social construction, within a set of social, economic and political structure (Hall 1982).

An opposing view is the conventional/constructivist theory, which transpired from the questioning of the ‘consensus’ in the reflective theory. Constructivist theory places particular focus on language as a sign system and the activity of making meaning, taking seriously the structuralist approach. It proposes that events have no inherent meaning which is transferred to language, but rather, meaning is socially produced and is the outcome of processes of *signification* and assigning meaning. This diverting view put into doubt the reflexive role of the

media and placed focus on language as a sign system (Hall 1982). It suggested that “reality could no longer be viewed as simply a given set of facts: it was the result of a particular way of constructing reality ... [implying] the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning” (Hall 1982: 64). It argued that “media defined, not merely reproduced, ‘reality’” (Hall 1982: 64).

## **5.2. The new ‘critical’ paradigm**

Hence, the ‘reconceptualisation’ of the ‘ideological’ occurred, with two distinct aspects within this new ‘critical’ paradigm in media studies – questioning how ideological processes work and how ‘the ideological’ is conceived in relation to other practices within a social formation (Hall 1982). In dealing with the question of signification, the structuralist approach then implies that meaning is a social production, and that the world has to be *made to mean*, since “things and events in the real world do not contain or propose their own, integral, single and intrinsic meaning” (Hall 1982: 67). Two questions which followed from this was, how a dominant discourse is created and sustains a limit to alternative or competing definitions; and how the institution is responsible for explaining events, i.e. the mass media put into practice the articulation of ‘preferred meanings’ in the dominant systems of communication (Hall 1982: 67). To make sense of these outcomes, the ‘indirect’ notion of power must be understood: ‘power’ is not only a conscious, forceful intervention – when A does something to B – but rather, a result of processes in which the social conditions and discursive terrain are so ordered that they limit the production and efficacy of B’s views and values (Hall 1982). In this light, institutions such as the media can no longer be seen as merely maintaining economic and political power through coercion, but through ‘ideology’ it can shape the ‘order of things’ and endow limiting perspectives in as much a powerful form.

It is this naturalisation of a particular perspective, as if it is the only valid view that Hall (1982) identifies as an ideological process. Hence, the media has the ability to shape the whole ideological environment, making its representations “appear universal, natural and coterminous with ‘reality’ itself” (Hall 1982: 65). In this ‘politics of signification’, the concept of ‘ideological power’ is the ability to signify events in a particular way, taking for granted what the national interest is and making it appear credible and legitimate (Hall 1982). Gramsci called this inventory of taken-for-granted element of our practical knowledge, as ‘common sense’ (Hall 1982: 73).

Gramsci writes:

“Every social stratum has its own ‘common sense’ and its own ‘good sense’, which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of men ... Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life ... as a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time” (Gramsci 1971: 326).

What is made to appear ‘normal’ in *Top Billing* and the brand it upholds is the ‘lifestyle’ that it projects. As Stevens expresses, “When I created the *Top Billing* television programme fifteen years ago, I did so with the idea of celebrating South Africa and the achievements of South Africans. We continue this celebration to this day through Tswelopele Productions and Tswelopele Publishing ... [b]y profiling South African men and women who are making a contribution to the country” (Impumelelo 2008: 17). Thus, *Top Billing* takes for granted what the ‘national interest’ is, making the ‘rich and famous<sup>54</sup>’ lifestyle projected by *Top Billing* to appear normal, ‘credible and legitimate’ by representing it as though a ‘naturalistic discourse of fact’ (Hall 1982). This is what Gramsci (1971) termed ‘hegemony’ – “the process of making, maintaining and reproducing these authoritative set of meanings and practices” (Barker 2000: 59).

Later theorists dealing with the politics of signification further proposed that given limited ideological matrix or set, certain discursive formulations were generated unconsciously (Hall 1982). Lévi-Strauss’s proposition was that “speakers produce meaning, but only on the basis of conditions which are not of the speaker’s making, and which pass through him/her into language, unconsciously” (Hall 1982: 72). On these lines, it was proposed that producers of media were not necessarily aware of the hegemony which they draw on, to re-produce the existing ideological inventories of society. Ethnographical findings have shown that within the *Top Billing* production office, one is made to work under an assumed existing paradigm, and often, made to assume what *Top Billing* is. The way in which this ‘encoding moment’ of the programme is interpreted by the internal staff was based on two things – which are somewhat interlinked. Firstly, by representations that derive from the equation of material

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54 The ‘rich and famous’ element may merely be the ‘style’ of the programme, but consequentially, it is projected and perceived by the public as the defining factor of what *Top Billing* is.

success and noteworthy (white) lifestyle; and secondly, the unspoken, underlying norms of ‘excellence’ set down by the Executive Producer. Both these aspects will be further discussed below.

### **5.3. Interpreting ‘The Best of the Good Life’**

Within the *Top Billing* office, there are various assumptions which can only be known to those who work under the long existing ‘historically-elaborated discourses’ found within the office space. Often, unable to verbally express or consciously identify what those are (as seen in the focus group research), there is a general underlying understanding that exists within the ‘politics’ of the office. An example of the representation which derived from the production team’s understanding of ‘material success’ (as a determining factor in the ‘encoding moment’) is when one commits to covering an event or doing a profile insert, only if the subject is ‘good enough’ for *Top Billing*. Defining what is ‘good enough’ could only be determined from understanding the existing paradigm under which the Executive Producer operates, e.g. capturing young, beautiful people, who speak well on camera. Another example is when those in the production process line ensures that there is no filming/airing of real fur, or trophy heads and animal skins – anything that may offend the ‘loyal viewer’. Ethnographic research also reveals that Stevens is consistent in her demand for excellence, and to distinguish *Top Billing* from other shows, she makes a point that *Top Billing* only covers the “top chefs”, “top designers”, “top houses” and “A-list celebrities – not someone no one knows” in order to raise ARs. Subsequently, the only interior designers in each week’s location that *Top Billing* has featured in the past five years have all been White, implicating a certain idea about the projections of ‘the good life’.

Often, it may be that representations on *Top Billing* results unconsciously, but we can observe that some of the significations may be conscious. The focus group findings show that the staff, without having the terminology to explain it, believes this ‘taken-for-granted knowledge’ results in a show with a distinct mark. From this research group (May 2009), some of the words used to express ‘what *Top Billing* is’ included: ‘the best of the best’, ‘inspirational’, ‘elitist and only appealing to a particular market’, ‘for the rich people’, ‘flashy’, the ‘glitz and glam’ show, and ‘proudly South African’. However, everyone agreed and believed that *Top Billing* is ‘The Best of the Good Life’ as per its slogan and thus projects this to the public. All participants unanimously agreed that *Top Billing* is not so much racist

as 'classist'. Grant stated, "Well we certainly can't be 'the best of the best' if we were to cover anything. We have to differentiate – that's how we are 'The Best of the Good Life' show." According to Stevens, "*Top Billing* celebrates and lives the Channel's vision of achievers – lifting as they rise. It reflects on air, the success stories of entrepreneurs in search of excellence" (Internal Data, 2008).

The biggest pitfall of this however, is that the lifestyle *Top Billing* portrays becomes unattainable. A focus group participant pointed out, "The show sets itself apart from the rest. To make it the best show, we have to be classist. Our LSM is high elites – it's sometimes unattainable. We've basically shot ourselves in the foot by creating this brand that's so up-market, but then it becomes unattainable" (focus group, 24/05/2009). Online Editor Nutter added, "That's why people don't like us. It depends what class you're looking from" (focus group, 24/05/2009). Although some believed that the show provided inspiration and motivation to aspire, it was also stated that it can become discouraging for those who feel it's beyond one's reasonable reach. As stated by one of the loyal viewers who had sent in an email to Tswelopele Productions, this sort of 'unattainable' aspect is something which receives regular complaint from the public, just as much as praises are sent in.

**Sent: 27 August 2009 11:22 AM**

**Addressed to: The Producer of *Pasella* and *Top Billing***

I would like to express my wife and my opinions regarding *Pasella* and *Top Billing*. Firstly let us say that the presenters of both programmes are excellent. We have watched both programmes for a long time and we feel that some aspects of both programmes do not meet the views and aspirations of the average television viewer.

*Top Billing* - at first the complete programme was entertaining but for the last while far too much emphasis has been put on Designer Homes, furnishings, architecture and opulence that the average viewers could never aspire to, let alone the poorer viewers who we feel must feel a lot of resentment towards the Rich 'Fat Cats'.

You could say that *Top Billing* is aimed at the 'Top Bracket' but the 7.30pm - 8.30pm slot is prime viewing time. Places that the presenters visit and have visited were exciting and interesting but lately it is Mega expensive hotels, villas and shopping at designer shops that the average viewers will Never see or go to! *Pasella* - is far more down to earth and visit places in South Africa that all can identify with and recognise. The trips abroad were handled in such a way that did not appear to be only for the Fat Cats.

Unfortunately lately *Pasella* is progressing into the 'same mode' as *Top Billing*. Outlandish parties on the beach, ridiculous children's parties and again ridiculous wedding receptions! Consider reviewing some of your content to cater for the taste, interest and affordability of the forgotten 'average viewer'. Come back to earth and smell the flowers.

Moreover, various emails are sent in from the public on a daily basis, requesting monetary funding and/or event sponsorships due to the power of *Top Billing*'s significations that create certain perceptions of the 'good life' among the public which cannot be ignored. According to Bennett (1982), such descriptions (defining *Top Billing*) are notable since our social context and our social codes inform or define the way in which we 'read' media texts. Media text and meaning-making is like the language to analyse the world. Signs, much like language can analyse a media text, composed of the 'signifier' and the 'signified' (Bennett 1982). The 'signifier' is thus the television show and the brand '*Top Billing*' itself; while the 'signified' is the words or meanings associated with '*Top Billing*' which immediately comes to mind when hearing the words '*Top Billing*'. While signs can either be mutable or immutable (Bennett 1982), the *Top Billing* programme within its set of signs is mutable, as there is no natural link between the 'signifier' and the 'signified'. *Top Billing* is merely a lifestyle magazine programme on TV, but due to its power of signification, it is automatically perceived as the 'glitz and glam' show, or as 'fashionable', or 'inspirational' for example, and very often seen as having sufficient funds to hand out – as indicated by various viewers' requests via email.

Much of the data collected further indicate that the public in deed perceive '*Top Billing*' as 'the best of the good life'. Especially with the in-depth interview responses, it was evident that this up-market 'elitist' element of the show was seen as 'normal' by some of its viewers. When asked what message *Top Billing* gives, a viewer responded, "*Top Billing* says, we can still spend money during these [economically difficult] times, and still be at the top of our game, and still have quality in our lives – that's really enlightening" (interview, 15/05/2009). When asked if the programme was portraying something that was unattainable especially at a time when South Africa is undergoing recession, another viewer claimed that *Top Billing* offers top quality material that has "nothing to do with the times" simply because it stays in line with its 'profile' by showcasing the 'best of the best' no matter what the situation (interview, 15/05/2009). Another maintained that, "Some people do live that lavishly. It's realistic for a lot of people. Obviously it appeals to a certain group, but I'm in that group so it's real" (interview, 15/05/2009).

However, television appearing as though it is reproducing "the actual trace of reality in the images they transmit" is a 'naturalistic illusion' as they are put into a system of narration or exposition, which 'makes sense' (Hall 1982: 76). Further, this 'naturalistic illusion' allows for

a programme to have more impact in its ideological role of disseminating the ‘dominant ideology’ as though credible and real (Bennett 1982) in its subtle form. Thus, *Top Billing* being a non-fiction television programme – and as a ‘lifestyle’ programme genre – has greater impact in convincing its ‘reality’ to the viewers as though ‘factual’ and as Hall (1982) has argued, a ‘naturalistic discourse of fact’. It is this very commitment to ‘impartiality’ that television has, which allows the promotion of its ideologies to be most unnoticeable, yet most significant (Bennett 1982).

Another defining ‘encoding moment’ of the programme which is interpreted in the dominant mode by the producers of *Top Billing*, is the demand on ‘excellence’ by the Executive Producer. Unanimously agreed upon at the focus group research was that one is made to act upon these assumptions in one’s own responsibilities in the making of the show. Not only is there a constant discussion at the production office about the assumptions of what Stevens would say, a focus group staff participant stated that “there’s this nagging voice at the back of your head – it’s that voice that tells me what it is that Patience Stevens wants. That voice is instilled in everyone. No matter what our jobs are, we hear her voice” (focus group, 24/05/2009). Many of the staff members agreed that the excellence that Stevens demanded was a consistent factor which brought quality to the show, and that even if it meant working through the night, not a single bad shot could enter the final product. Stevens states, “As head of Tswelopele, I lead by example. It’s not easy to maintain the high standards we have set over the years, but we continue to do so because of the dedication and passion of all our employees” (Impumelelo 2008: 17).

During the focus group research (May 2009), the high standard of the show was attributed to Stevens: “She’s the backbone to the show. She sets the standard to which everyone has to match up to, no matter what – it’s something that all employees here understand. Her perfection is a requirement without any compromise, and that’s the real reason why the show has kept up its high quality and remained on air for so many years.” Another focus group participant added, “The standard of work behind the scenes is of high quality industry standards – not that any of us actually live the upper income life, but the quality is so high end and of an international standard, that we are able to produce a show for the upper income bracket to watch.” Another participant elaborated, “What we do to contribute to the high quality of the show is to basically match up to the high bar that’s been set out by Patience. We

basically make the show appear flawless – cut out comments where one doesn't speak properly and make them sound as though they had no 'ums and ahs' in their sentence ... But we put in our own creativity, manipulate what's not of great quality – edit that out completely, but still keeping it '*Top Billing*' of course" (focus group, 24/05/2009). It was clear that the staff had been drilled with an "unconscious pressure towards implicitly affirming the status quo" (Bennett 1982: 37) without realising what that was.

However, underlying both the defining factors which influence the way in which *Top Billing* is interpreted in the production process is the need to make the show a marketable commodity for the consumerist culture and for its advertisers. Du Gay et al. (1997)<sup>55</sup> proposes that "meanings embedded at the moments of production and representation may or may not be taken up at the level of consumption, where new meanings are produced ... [But] representation and consumption shape the level of production through, for example, design and marketing" (Barker 2000: 53-54). Hence, due to the pressures of commercialism and maintaining its up-market profile/reputation which attracts advertisers, *Top Billing* sells itself as glamorous and as the 'top of the class', 'best of the best' brand. It consistently tells its viewers that *Top Billing* is 'the best of the good life', revealing of the kind of audience it wishes to attract.

#### **5.4. Matters of referentiality**

Theorists like Pêcheux (1982) took 'reality effect' to a more linguistic approach, demonstrating how particular discourses closed off certain possibilities of meaning while promoting those discourses that were pre-constructed. This notion of the linguistically 'pre-constituted' identifies what Gramsci (1971) referred to as the 'inventory of common sense'. Following from this, some important arguments developed, such as the concept that language could have multiple referentiality to the real world through the different accenting of 'meanings' in the same set of signifiers. The social struggle over which kind of accenting is to prevail, in creating 'meaning' – depended on the 'equivalences' secured through discursive practice at a particular moment (Hall 1982). Further, the Althusserian paradigm<sup>56</sup> proposed that "subjects formed in ideology are not unitary wholes but fragmented subjects who take up

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55 Proposed by Du Gay et. al, the 'Circuit of Culture' includes moments of 'representation', 'identity', 'production', 'regulation' and 'consumption'.

56 Althusser's works are one of the core, founding works in the concept of 'ideology'.

plural subject positions” (Barker 2000: 56-57) which are cross-cut by conflicting interests and hence ‘formed and unformed’ in the course of historical development. Different accenting of the same term was also a mechanism through which signs and language took on a ‘struggle’ over its connotative meaning (Hall 1982).

What Barthes (1977) termed the ‘connotative field of reference’ was “the domain through which ideology invaded the language system ... by exploiting the associative, the variable, connotative, ‘social value’ of language” (Hall 1982: 79). For example, the concept of ‘proudly South African’ is the term now used instead of ‘anti-racism movement’ which gives the same concept a new meaning, focus, and way of representing the idea. Similarly, while the production office at *Top Billing* used to refer to the mix of content as, “needing more Black or Indian content”; it was soon after spoken of as “needing to cater for the Black Diamond.” This in effect shifts the focus and its re-presentation in the making of the programme, and thus may present to the public a different connotation of ‘black content’.

As indicated by the ethnographical findings, *Top Billing* can be perceived from a wide array of understandings, just as certain segments and its varying connotations are understood differently by various research participants. A focus group research participant pointed out, “Basically there’s a cross section of people – those who watch *Top Billing* as a fantasy show and accept that it’s unattainable, but watch it as a form of escapism, like dreamland. Then there are those who resent the show because it’s simply not reality for them” (focus group, 24/05/2009). While some viewers expressed how ‘real’ *Top Billing* was in portraying ‘the best of the good life’; other viewers expressed how the show’s projections was ‘unreal’. A viewer stated, “When I watch it [*Top Billing*] on TV, it’s those things that I don’t see in my ‘everyday’, so I look forward to seeing it, to see what’s happening in the *Top Billing world*” (interview, 29/05/2010). Thus, the domain of ideology is able to have multi-accentuality, vulnerable to contradictory ideological inflexions and open-endedness. This thus allows room for the varying ways in which a viewer understands the same insert differently to another viewer, or even at a different moment in time.

Jhally (2002) notes that contesting stereotypes help open up the very practice by which these closed representations are represented in the ‘politics of image’ where so easily a meaning is taken for granted or naturalised. There is a necessity therefore, to move towards a

multidimensional and multiperspectival approach (Barker 2000). New kinds of subjectivity need to be explored in order for new kinds of meaning to come into play. Hence, the important questions to ask is whether *Top Billing* can signify in different ways; whether less class-orientated ‘realities’ can be projected by *Top Billing*. Since there is no natural link between the ‘signifier’ (*Top Billing*) and the ‘signified’ (e.g. classist, elitist, up-market, ‘the best of the good life’), Bennett (1982) points out that these set of rules of language can and may change over time.

However, for *Top Billing* to break away from its existing ‘terms of play’, i.e. to lower its LSM level or bring more average, ‘down to earth’ inserts – is not something that would easily be put into effect, especially given Stevens’ pride for the brand of her creation and its ‘high’ profile which ‘stands out’ from the rest. Stevens holds to the belief that *Top Billing* provides a valuable contribution to South Africa by highlighting the success stories in various industries, and thus providing inspiration for the new generation (Impumelelo 2008). A viewer participant expressed that although she would like to see more arts and crafts from the lower-class, she believed that if *Top Billing* was to cover anything below the upper LSM level – it would take away from the very essence of what made ‘*Top Billing*’ (interview, 29/05/2010).

Fundamentally, *Top Billing*’s spoken and unspoken rules to formulate what constitutes “*Top Billing*” have continuously been produced and consumed, so much so that its projections have been taken as if ‘real’ – without any intervention or space for one to realise that they are of culture (Jhally 2002). However, if class distinction was no longer at play in *Top Billing* content selection, it would no longer be *Top Billing*: the very “*Top Billing*” which is created by a staff drilled with an “unconscious pressure towards implicitly affirming the status quo” (Bennett 1982: 37) – and hence understood by the consumers in various ways as discussed above.

This chapter has thus explored the ‘politics of signification’, outlining how the naturalisation of a particular perspective – as if it is the only valid view – is evident in *Top Billing*. Recognising the ability of the media to shape the ideological environment through its representation, this chapter has looked at the various factors influencing the ‘encoding moments’ at the *Top Billing* production office – which create ‘class’ constructs. The underlying unspoken norms that have been translated into content have in effect, offered a

certain kind of 'reality' to its viewers. This chapter has thus provided an important premise of understanding, to answering what the various meanings are that loyal viewers can make of *Top Billing*. Importantly, it has revealed that viewers can take up multiple meanings at different moments in time. Further, by having the positioning in society to reflect and provide the *privileged* definition, *Top Billing* can thus both shape and reflect the 'consensus'. In producing consensus, it has the ability to manufacture 'consent' (Jhally 2002), favouring the hegemony of the powerful. These hegemonic ideologies will be further examined in more depth in the following chapter, while observing the macro-structural factors that play a role in the articulating element of 'discourse' in *Top Billing*.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **ADVERTISING AND THE COMMERCIAL IMPERATIVE OF *TOP BILLING***

The previous chapters have thus far discussed the research findings – dealing with the themes of race and class as social constructs – which have been interwoven with the discussion of the political economy of the *Top Billing* programme. These constructs play a significant role as markers of social positioning, which viewers can take up, but nonetheless all point to the commercial imperative and the consumerist culture *Top Billing* upholds. As we have discussed in depth the micro-structural factors which influence the construction and projection of ‘meanings’; this chapter will discuss the macro-structural factors in the broader social context of *Top Billing* – within its hierarchical structure – with particular focus on the pressures of commercialism, and its relationship with the broadcaster. The power of the *Top Billing* brand will be observed, in discussing the synergy between the television show and the magazine, and brand building attempts – all of which go hand-in-hand with the development of class constructs and a sense of ‘exclusivity’ which effectively promotes class inequality.

Since any programme, past the aesthetics, can be and is a platform which is readily available for exposure to advertising, the content of the *Top Billing* programme thus reflects a show which attracts the kind of audience fitting to its consumer market. This chapter will also indicate how the capitalist owners’ views of the world form the predominant thinking of subordinate groups and viewers alike, making *Top Billing* a media apparatus in the maintenance of power and in defining the ‘consensus’. It is important to note here, that it is not only media institutions that circulate discourses about ‘realities’ but other institutions as well (Jhally 2002) since ideology is part of a macro-structural framework. Hence, this chapter will locate *Top Billing* discourses within a broader social context that it is part of, in order to provide a more coherent explanation for the various representations found on *Top Billing*.

#### **6.1. Story selection: Hierarchical structure**

There are hierarchical structures within which *Top Billing* falls, and these structures also inform message selection. *Top Billing*’s relationship with its broadcaster for example, plays an important role. Often, Stevens talks about “owing to the channel” to air something

requested by members of the SABC, even if it means bypassing the normal criteria for what is normally covered on *Top Billing*. Further, when requests come from Basetsana Kumalo for coverage of her friend's wedding for example, even if the couple is not a well-known celebrity, coverage is often given, without a second thought.

When looking back into history, it was often the case that the SABC tended to prioritise the state's affairs, giving it prominent coverage or depicting certain subjects in a favourable light (Shoemaker 1991). Although it is not as strictly the case today, we can still evidence a glimpse of this kind of political affair within the production office. Although *Top Billing* has its own particular genre, style and feel, from its long existing 'historically-elaborated discourses', whenever a request is made by any of the SABC associates, merely by suggestion over an email, those events (which do not necessarily fit the story-selection criteria) are meticulously covered and aired. An example of this is the coverage of the 'Women's Show' which was suggested by the SABC Brand Manager – even though Stevens makes it a point not to cover launches or expos which are "boring". Thus 'gate keeping' in the SABC which effectually flows down to *Top Billing*, is apparent through communication routine influences, as those working within the organisation conform to the existing structural rules in the process of producing mass media (Shoemaker 1991).

Much like previous years, where it was evident that any ideology in line with that of the government was accepted (Fourie 2001) there is a certain line of hierarchical instructions that are followed. However, at the same time, within this hierarchically arranged bureau, there are certain individuals who have the position of prominent 'gatekeeper' within the organisation, filtering and determining story selection. This gives more power to these individuals – such as the SABC3 Commissioning Editor: Entertainment, Shanitha Rathilal-Bhageloo<sup>57</sup>, over the various programmes including *Top Billing* that she oversees – to develop organisational policies, whether it be written or unwritten that influences the message selection (Shoemaker 1991). Within this hierarchical structure, Rathilal-Bhageloo is unable to keep track of the day-to-day details of each individual's contribution to the *Top Billing* programme produced under an independent production company. While overseeing several other programmes on SABC3 and SABC2, the Commissioning Editor then relies on Stevens to micro-manage *Top*

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57 SABC3 Commissioning Editor: Entertainment, Shanitha Rathilal-Bhageloo is South African Indian (of Indian descent), and often requests more 'Indian content'. She is also the SABC2 Commissioning Editor.

*Billing*. Stevens then ensures senior staff within the company work in line with her wishes and the wishes of the SABC<sup>58</sup> – thus, ensuring that power remains at the top where influential decisions of the company, goal, and policies are made (Barrat 1986).

Hence, *Top Billing* has an ‘allocative’ control, where ‘owners’ “set the general framework within which managers and professional employees operate” (Barrat 1986: 66). The substantial shareholders at the top, namely the SABC in the broader social context, as well as Stevens and Kumalo<sup>59</sup> have effective control. Further, the control of the “flow of social imagery is concentrated in the hands of groups towards the top end of the ... structure” (Murdock & Golding 1977: 12). Hence, the capitalist owners’ “views and accounts of the world receive instant publicity and come to dominate the thinking of subordinate groups” (Murdock & Golding 1977: 15). In short, class inequalities can be attributed to this hierarchical structure of ideological domination.

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58 The demands from the SABC includes guidelines for advertorial inserts and mixed-race inserts.

59 Basetsana Kumalo has ‘allocative’ control, but is not actively involved in the day-to-day decisions or the production process of *Top Billing*, as is the case with Stevens. However, Kumalo owns 50% of Tswelopele Productions – ensuring that it qualifies as a Black Economic Empowerment company, alongside the *Ses’khona* programme.

## 6.2. Compromising of ARs: The synergy between TV and magazine content

Ethnographic data reveals that an ongoing concern at *Top Billing* is the cross-over between the magazine and TV content. What is prominent from the content analysis findings is the high degree of magazine related content found in the *Top Billing* show. Inserts were counted and divided into various types/genres – to highlight which types were most prominent. Following is a summary<sup>60</sup>:

Category	Number of Inserts
Location / Décor	21
Celebrity	17
D.I.Y.	15
Weddings	13
Events	11
Travel	10
Movie Review	8
Fashion	7
Theatre Productions	5
Artists' Workshop	4
Other <sup>61</sup>	4
Entertaining / Food	3
Fitness / Health	2
Gardens	2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>122</b>

What is notable here is that the décor stories and entertaining stories are contents linked to the *Top Billing* magazine. There were thirteen magazine-content-related stories found in the sixteen shows aired in the given four months – almost one in each show<sup>62</sup>. This is excluding DIY and travel segments, as well as paid-for inserts, which are also found in the magazine<sup>63</sup>. This clearly indicates how many of the purely magazine related stories crossover to television content<sup>64</sup>. The problem with this – as also indicated by the preliminary research and

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60 See Appendix 5 for more detailed findings.

61 The category 'Other' includes a restaurant review, behind the scenes of the making of the *Top Billing* logo, behind the scenes of a *Top Billing* crew going on an extreme sport adventure in Knysna, and a story on three sets of sisters who each run a business together.

62 76% of the time.

63 All in all, there were 37 out of a total of 122 stories, which were also found in the magazine.

64 *Top Billing* has dedicated Marketing and Sales representatives who work specifically for the magazine (not *Top Billing* TV), hence sponsorships are linked directly to the magazine. These sponsorship deals thus flow into TV content by the request of the magazine sales team to provide their clients with exposure on a more powerful platform.

ethnography – is that magazine stories riding on TV exposure (in order to boost magazine sales) is done at a cost, bringing down the ARs for the TV programme.

During the focus group research (May 2009), Sales Executive, Reid expressed that the brand-building events actually bring audiences closer to the brand, and could be seen as an attribute to *Top Billing*. Brand-building events are events such as artist workshops and food-and-wine pairing evenings at various restaurants, which take place at least once a month, allowing *Top Billing* TV viewers and magazine readers to attend and to actively participate in ‘the best of the good life’. Through these events, attendees are able to mingle with *Top Billing* brand promoters, a few presenters, and senior staff members – to bring the brand closer to their ‘reality’. Since *Top Billing* has ventured into the multimedia spectrum, Stevens believes that the “*Top Billing* brand is no longer one dimensional – it has become a lifestyle brand that people can now touch and interact with. Viewers and reader events are providing us with constant opportunities to build relationships with and learn from our audience” (Impumelelo 2008: 72).

One of the biggest ‘successes’ of *Top Billing* as a multi-media brand, according to Stevens is that since the birth of the *Top Billing* magazine, “a glossy reflection of the show in print” – there are “excellent opportunities for brand and loyalty building through events held in association with the broadcaster – such as the food and wine pairing evenings, and art workshops, that are featured in the magazine, and filmed for the show” (Internal Data, 2007). Stevens maintains that, “These SABC3 *Top Billing* functions allow the brand and the broadcaster to be taken to the viewer – so that they can interact with the presenters – live the content – and see themselves on the show being a part of their programme” (Internal Data, 2007). On the contrary however, the content analysis and ARs indicate these inserts having the lowest ratings, as with other inserts that have carried over to television, from the magazine.

The magazine initially started out as supplementary to the show and to the brand, and further aided in generating cash-flow for the company, but as of late, it has become a burden. Currently, not only does the television show carry the magazine financially, it has also allowed the magazine to negatively affect the programme’s ARs due to its troublesome synergy. Turning some of the magazine features into stories on the show – for the initial idea

of making two mediums of one powerful brand to become *complementary* and to create more space for advertiser interests and a stronger brand – has in fact shown detrimental effects than beneficial. Since *Top Billing* TV is the first of Stevens’ brainchild and has had loyal followers for a longer period of time, to lose television viewership is a considerable loss as opposed to not making magazine sales. However, in an attempt to let the magazine become self-sufficient again as when it was first created, magazine stories receiving dismal ARs are overlooked, and are still included in the show. Due to the growing *dependency* of the magazine on the TV programme, in an attempt to regain the magazine’s own financial grounding, it has placed *Top Billing* TV in a very compromising situation.

As seen in the content analysis, magazine events which do not necessarily fulfill the requirements of a ‘good insert’ are filmed and aired on *Top Billing* to promote the brand. However, it has been a trend that many of the participants at these events – mainly magazine subscribers, who have signed up to the event once advertised through the programme, magazine, or website – have been the same ‘regular’ faces appearing on *Top Billing*. During the focus group research (May 2009), Grant expressed the negative effect of the crossover between magazine content and television: “Those ‘brand building’ events are so incestuous – the same people who are part of the magazine subscription are the same people who are always at the art workshops, food-and-wine-pairing evenings and all those other events. When we show this on television, other viewers will think we are inviting only an elite group.” This not only highlights the problem of a ‘non-event’<sup>65</sup> being covered and aired on *Top Billing*, but it also draws attention to the idea of ‘exclusivity’ found in *Top Billing*.

In the production office, these ‘non-event’ inserts get the least preference in the running order of the show by the Executive Producer, such that it is often placed at the end or second to the end of the show. This may be because the second half of the show always receives low ARs – for whatever reason it may be – and hence Stevens placing ‘non-events’ in the second half of the show; but it could also mean that this very act contributes to the consistent drop in the ARs in the second half of *Top Billing*, indicated as so in Appendix 5. Audience Ratings per quarter of an hour drawn from March 2009<sup>66</sup> – to coincide with the same time-span period of

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65 A ‘non-event’ is a jargon used by the *Top Billing* TV production staff, when it is an event that is not good enough to hold on its own to air as a strong insert for TV purposes, without the cost of losing viewers.

66 See Appendix 6.

the shows selected for content analysis (February to April 2009) – reveal a clear drop in the last quarter of each *Top Billing* show, which affects negatively on the overall ratings of the show.

Observational research viewer Helena however, stated that she enjoyed the synergy between the TV show and other media platforms, for its longevity of content. She found it useful that the magazine and the website offered additional information to what was shown on television, hence allowing her to look back on certain elements in hard-copy formats that could be accessible anytime after the show was aired and ‘gone’ (interview, 12/11/2009). Without being prompted, Helena continued, “It’s nothing major that they advertise the magazine on TV for magazine sales, because the magazine has different things – more than what you see on TV. It’s like the programme gives you a little taste of what you can find in the magazine and online. So I personally like to buy the magazine and go online for extra information and things” (interview, 12/11/2009).

A viewer of the in-depth interview also indicated that there was a good link between the magazine and the television show since entertaining stories in which recipes are given cannot be written down as quickly when watching the show (interview, 15/05/2009). She liked the idea that you could actually get the magazine and find the recipes that were used on the show, not knowing that it was the other way around – magazine stories riding on TV for exposure. Another viewer however believed that the magazine and TV were exactly the same – nothing more was offered from either medium in terms of content. She simply regarded the magazine as a “good relaxing book ... with good articles in them” (interview, 29/05/2010). Overall, the responses on the synergy between magazine and TV were varied, but no viewer found it having a negative impact, as opposed to the focus group findings.

### **6.3. Material desire and the power of the brand**

During the internal staff focus group research (May 2009), Nutter mentioned that the DIY inserts which were branded with *Builders Warehouse* throughout the insert was “killing the show”. He stated, “I think the general public says that *Top Billing* is current, and they say DIY is great – the feedback from people is always positive, but it doesn’t really reflect in the ARs because DIY has low ARs” (interview, 24/05/2009). A viewer of the in-depth interview went into criticising DIY inserts, saying “No one is going to make something from watching

DIY because if you're watching *Top Billing*, you can afford to have quality in your life. I think *Top Billing*'s lost the plot – they've really confused the issue by bringing in DIY which is completely different from the rest of the show. It really is inappropriate for the show and downgrades the image completely" (interview, 15/05/2009).

Although the DIY segments are full of branding, a viewer expressed her appreciation for DIY inserts, because "it gives great tips on gardening" and she was actually able to materialise the DIY ideas by getting her gardener to re-create what was shown. For Lynn, as a creative mind, what *Top Billing* represented was a glitz and glam show, which showed you how to copy it within one's means. The value of the show lay in the ability for her to gather ideas to copy; hence she had no complaints about advertising (interview, 15/05/2009). Another viewer, Sharon also stated that she gained a lot of ideas from watching the show, and wanted to see "more DIYs where they show you how to make things interior-wise, how to play with certain items [and] where to place them" (interview, 29/05/2010). Kiya also took from the show ideas which she could translate into her own table settings when entertaining guests. Chantal saw DIY inserts in a positive light – something that could cater for the male viewers as well (Interview 29/05/2010). Stevens states, "Much of our audience will never have the opportunity to travel to the destinations we travel to, eat in the restaurants we feature or meet the actors we do. Through our TV shows and the magazine, however, they are able to sit in their armchairs at home and experience these fascinating aspects of South Africa and the rest of the world. At the same time, they're forming ideas on what to do with their leisure time, as well as being given home-improvement projects to try around the house" (Impumelelo 2008: 71-72).

Similarly, a viewer participant stated that advertorial inserts were not too bad, especially for the compensation it offered the viewers: "*Top Billing* probably needs those sponsorships, so I have no problem with it, especially because they give back to the viewers – like the fifteen birthday celebration<sup>67</sup> and trips they're giving away" (interview 15/05/2009). Observational research viewer Ryan also expressed his views along the same lines: "I understand why they do it – it's fair exchange for publicity they give to these guys and especially when they giveaway something as a competition prize" (interview, 12/11/2009). Further, Stevens states,

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<sup>67</sup> In lieu of *Top Billing*'s fifteenth year on air, *Top Billing* gave away fifteen overseas travel packages to viewers through weekly competitions.

“Our empowerment strength has evolved naturally and as a result of striving to create the strongest company possible, seeking always to bring the top people in to help us grow our brand. ... This year we celebrate our fifteenth year and have numerous exciting plans in place to bring the *Top Billing* brand even closer to the public” (Impumelelo 2008: 17).

From the content analysis of the four months, February to May 2009, there were ten competition questions aired during the shows, and five viewers were announced to have won the fifteen birthday destination giveaway trips. To make it more real and tangible, these winners were not only announced but shown on TV – *Top Billing*’s tactic to promote its own brand. Evident in the viewer responses, the branded inserts such as DIYs and the *Top Billing*’s fifteenth birthday prize segments, as well as magazine related stories – were well received. As intended by the Executive Producer, all the branded inserts – which created ethical dilemmas for the producers of *Top Billing* – nonetheless brought the brand closer to the viewers, allowing them to interact with the brand in a ‘real’ life format and to materialise certain things that they gathered from watching the show.

While some viewers of the in-depth interview noticed marketing aspects in the show; others were ignorant of the fact. A viewer oblivious to the marketing aspects stated that she watched the show to fulfill her own needs, and had no regard for the marketing aspects (interview, 29/05/2010). Another viewer mentioned that she was not too bothered by advertorial branding (interview, 15/05/2009). One viewer however, was well aware of the advertising found in DIY inserts – naming *Builders Warehouse* and *Peugeot* as a distraction to the show, where she would be prompted to do something in the kitchen during that time (interview, 15/05/02009). Two other viewers Linda and Lisa pointed out that they tend to do other chores or ‘switch off’ when too much commercial content comes on air (interview, 15/05/2009).

Interestingly however, of the participants who recognised the advertorial elements, the majority stated that specific brand mentions allowed the viewers the knowledge of where to acquire what was shown on *Top Billing*. In essence, it allowed accessibility for the viewers to ‘re-create’ the lifestyle that was featured. Much like magazines which show trends and fashion, including where to purchase particular items, *Top Billing* regarded as a magazine programme ‘genre’ was appreciated by the viewers for its specifications on where to acquire what was shown. A viewer mentioned that she liked the paid-for *Wetherlys* décor inserts and

wanted to see more detailed information on where to acquire other things that were shown on *Top Billing* (interview, 15/05/2009). Another viewer also saw the marketing aspects as a positive thing – where one was able to know where to purchase or acquire certain material goods or services shown on *Top Billing*. In this regard, it made the lifestyle more accessible and all-inclusive, for one particular viewer, who felt that the show catering for the upper income bracket was distancing her from the show (interview, 29/05/2010). Another viewer also expressed that the marketing aspects made the show more accessible to her (interview, 29/05/2010).

Generally, most of the viewer participants received ‘advertorial’ inserts or magazine-related-content in a positive light. Thus, *Top Billing* is reflective of the dominant discourse in the hierarchical relations of power, as it contributes to the “increasing trend towards a profit-oriented industry selling programmes to audiences, and audiences to advertisers” (Mersham 1998: 233). Further, being part of the hierarchical structures, part of the SABC’s mandate also encourages to some extent, commercialism and the need for advertising, in its aims to develop investment in the broadcasting sector. A focus group participant commented, “Because of all that money we bring to the SABC, we have credibility with the SABC and that’s the only way our show’s been running all these years” (focus group, 24/05/2009). Mersham (1998) argues however, that “South Africa cannot afford to have public service television become a mere market place for commodities” (233).

During the focus group research, Van Deventer expressed his concern for the fickleness of television audiences, especially those with more channels to choose from, such as those viewers in the *Top Billing* average viewers’ income bracket (LSM 5-8). “TV audiences especially, I think, unlike radio – are fickle. They’ll simply change the channel and watch something else.” Hence, commercialism is bound to play a role in *Top Billing*’s attempts to compete with satellite TV for ARs, and in doing so, to become a marketable commodity for the advertisers. In an attempt to draw larger audiences, *Top Billing* thus falls into the trap of commercialism. Although a conflict of interest for the producers of *Top Billing*, who regard these marketing elements in a negative light and as a source of losing its viewers, on the contrary, it has arguably attracted some of its viewers (as consumers in the marketplace) and advertisers (seeking marketing opportunities) alike. Thus, Mersham (1998) argues that the challenge is to find the right balance between profit and public service, which as we will see

in the next sub-chapter, can be a conflict of interest for Stevens, if not a matter of keeping the company afloat; and a conflict of ethical and moral values for those working within the production office.

#### **6.4. Influences of commercialisation and the effect of advertorial inserts**

Wittebols (2004) examines the role of the media, its commercial influences and the centralisation of the television industry, arguing that programme genres<sup>68</sup> reflect the situation of the times, by reflecting the “market interests and values that guide television and the larger media industries in which it operates” (40). Further, “television always and simultaneously presents a vision for interpretation and an ideology for consumption to a viewership that is always and simultaneously a public celebrating meaning and an audience produced for sale in the marketplace” (Meehan 1994: 564). Thus, the upper-class content found on *Top Billing* reflects a commercial need to attract the kind of audience fitting to the consumer culture it upholds. The advertising space is hence bought by the companies who fit in line with the profile of the *Top Billing* brand, and whose brand also aims at the same target market, such as ‘*Wetherlys*’<sup>69</sup> and ‘*Browns*’<sup>70</sup> for example.

When Impumelelo asked Stevens, “The success of your company seems to be built upon establishing extremely popular and enduring brands that capture a significant market share in the TV industry?” she answered, “Most certainly that has been instrumental to our success” (Impumelelo 2008: 72). Stevens attributed successes of all three major programmes under the Tswelopele stable as having demand from various companies to be associated with Tswelopele Productions. Hence, Wittebols (2004) argues that programmes create a loyal audience that advertisers covet because the ‘grand narrative’ of television “consists of celebrating material consumption and presenting the ‘American dream’ primarily ... preaching that material prosperity will generate substantial happiness and contentment” (43).

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68 Soap operas in particular reflect the market interests of the times.

69 *Wetherlys* is a costly, up-market furniture chain store, whose advertising is found within the *Top Billing* programme in the form of interior / ‘makeover’ segments. Its slogan is “Living the Lifestyle” and promises to offer “South Africa's finest home furnishing and lifestyle experience.”

69 *Browns* is an up-market jewelry store “offering South Africa's Most Beautiful Diamonds”, which are seen in *Top Billing* segments and links.

In contrast to the in-depth interview findings of viewers, most participants of the focus group believed that the branded inserts including DIYs had a negative impact. Grant expressed the problem with the *Peugeot* sponsorship, stating that the concern was not so much the show's identity alone, but its association and alignment with commercial brands, which was turning the show into a marketing tool. Grant expressed her frustration at the numerous advertising found throughout the show. "Just don't do it! Like art workshops – it's targeted at a very small group of people – so when you show that on TV, it's like cross-pollinating." However, Reid continually shook her head in disagreement. Reid stated, "Events have real impact on TV, not only in the magazine. Together there's a synergy – it's a great marketing formula." Grant argued, "We should have 'synergy' in content only – contents like location inserts that are clearly *not* branded and suitable to both the TV and the magazine." Everyone except Reid from the Magazine/Sales department agreed with Grant. Offline Editor, Van Deventer agreed with Grant stating, "The show shouldn't be a marketing tool – the show shouldn't be used for that ... Travel should be the only exception – travel sponsored by so and so, since that's a big budget and everyone knows that, but everything else – it really does kill the brand" (focus group, 24/05/2009).

Notably, the segments which reveal an overly advertorial marketing aspect within a TV insert is mostly due to the way in which the trade exchanges are initially set up. Trade exchange agreements are normally transacted by a representative of the Finance or Sales department at *Top Billing*<sup>71</sup>, hence the lack of prioritising the need to avoid all visually damaging effects for the programme. With no experience in television, Sales/Marketing Executives outside of the television production office have no guidelines to distinguish between an acceptable promise to create subtle yet effective advertising and what makes a hard-sell insert. With little understanding of the damaging consequences of overt advertising on air, their interests often lie in closing a deal and an end result of happy clients who would potentially renew their contracts. Often it is the case that there are too many visual and verbal mentions promised on behalf of the television team, disallowing a good, natural, story-orientated television insert, but providing instead an 'infomercial' effect.

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71 At the time of writing this thesis, trade exchanges were transacted by the finance or sales department at *Top Billing*. Currently, more efforts are made for TV insert directors themselves, who conceptualise the story and direct on set, to initiate and finalise trades prior to shoot.

Although acknowledging that it may be the only way a programme survives this long, Van Deventer mentioned a source of conflict, expressing that apart from the travel inserts, advertisements are no longer subtle enough on *Top Billing* inserts. Du Toit added, “Our LSM market is educated people, and they know what’s happening” (focus group, 24/05/2009). All staff participants agreed that advertising was weakening the brand, as Van Deventer added, “We’re no longer showing what trend there is out there; we’re showing where the money is coming from.” Grant agreed, “Especially with the competition travel trips and sponsorship with *Wetherlys*, we’re not showing the trend – like how to custom-make a desirable, design-pretty furniture for example. We’re now only using *Wetherlys* furniture because of the sponsorship – because we have to.” Du Toit concluded, “*Top Billing*’s editorial integrity is something we lost many years ago” (focus group, 24/05/2009). Unanimously everyone agreed. Nutter stated, “The strength of this show is the strong brand, I think. It’s been around for fifteen years and everyone knows [of] it ... So the problem is that everyone has a certain amount of expectation. Now, when we show an insert that’s so badly branded all over the place, it doesn’t get forgotten. We lose audiences like that.”

Highlighting once again, the ‘open-endedness’ of the interpretative frame as previously discussed, Nutter further added, “We need to have objectivity in our inserts. But it’s really hard to figure out what the general public thinks because some say it’s good; some say it’s bad – for the same insert.” As discussed, in contrast to the producers, the viewers who are also an audience produced for sale in the marketplace, have regarded certain marketing elements as enhancing to the show. The source of knowledge of specific brands provided these viewers the tool to get closer to the *Top Billing* lifestyle brand. In their minds, *Top Billing* was creating trends, and they wanted to know where to acquire them to fulfill their material desire. Hence, we can observe that certain viewers become subject to *Top Billing*’s role in reproducing capitalist interests to provoke the dream of prosperity and material desire (often unknowingly), which then serves the ongoing interests of the dominant capitalist state’s ideologies (Ives 2007).

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

In the context of globalisation and postmodernism, *Top Billing* cannot be neatly defined under the lifestyle/magazine programme, especially with the trend of overlapping characteristics and ‘crossing-over’ of previous genre lines. While reviewing ‘race’ and ‘class’ constructs found on *Top Billing*, and recognising that they are indeed social constructs, the underlying factor influencing the creation of dominant discourse has been the fact that television audiences is both a consumer and a target market susceptible to advertiser content. Regardless of the unattainable pleasures of the upper class stratum that *Top Billing* projects, it provokes the dream of prosperity and material desire, which serves the ongoing interests of the dominant capitalist state’s ideologies. With viewer participants, it was evident that the advertisement-based inserts became an affirmation for the viewers who wanted to acquire the lifestyle *Top Billing* portrayed – as it told them where to purchase what was shown, in a step towards attaining that ‘lifestyle’.

In the context of a post-apartheid society, *Top Billing* has been able to enter this global, modern world, while simultaneously staying unique to South Africa, especially through the opportunities it has lent to the Black South Africans, i.e. ‘Black Diamonds’, by providing a playground where all South Africans can consume this lifestyle, bypassing the past regulations of race distinction. This distribution of the ‘dominant spatial imaginations’, which once remained out of reach for Black, Indian and Coloured South Africans, allows a sense of identification and belonging under a ‘united South Africa’. In effect, it contributes to the rainbow rhetoric of multiculturalism.

Consequentially however, the ‘Black Diamond’ also creates an imaginary relation between individuals and their real conditions of existence (Johns 2009), making this cookie cutter impression of Blacks acceptable to even the apartheid regime which saw such pendulum as portraying hopelessness and destitute for Blacks. Nonetheless, the portrayal of the Black Diamond – which represents only the tiny elite of a poor continent – is still positioned on the global marketplace, being able to ‘consume’. Hence, the kinds of representations that are constructed and the identities that are proposed by *Top Billing* can differ between individuals

given their own understandings of the world. The overarching narrative however, is that the free-market positions of the dominating ideologies within which *Top Billing* exists, governs any of the various meanings and pleasures that loyal viewers of *Top Billing* make of the programme.

‘Race’ and ‘class’ constructs as ideologies have been an important part of this thesis, to shed light on the fact that these constructions are not absolute existent ‘things’ but are unstable cultural creations, which are constantly formed and unformed in a site of struggle in historical development, and which become (temporarily) ‘real’ in cultural representation through social practice. However, race imagery, just like class identifications has cultural and economic significance – as they are central to the organisation of the modern world. They are created under the assumptions of the dominant thinkers of society, within the boundaries of the hegemonic structures. Although postmodernism and multiculturalism in the new South Africa has encouraged the recognition and celebration of sub-national identities, it all occurs under the demands of western commodification to reach a wider consumer market.

Further, a major concern with the ‘melting-pot’ concept and multiculturalism is that although it has opened up a space for ‘other’ voices to be heard, it also acts as a side-show for the dominating group to justify its domination under the pretence of an “equal” society. Hence the way in which the *Top Billing* programme is devised feeds into the widely accepted neo-liberal rainbow-nation rhetoric, which avoids direct confrontation with class, as well as race-based inequality – still to be found in the current South Africa. This is because of the particular ‘representations’ that are selected for content in *Top Billing* which reflect the dominant thinkers’ ‘consensus’ views.

With *Top Billing*, the ethics of ‘an equal slice of cake for every ethnicity’ does not go beyond the fact of merely existing side-by-side. There is no real ‘mixing’ of cultures in a ‘melting pot’. Rather, an attitude of ‘acceptance’ is practiced, while keeping a comfortable distance – a possible flaw of the concept of ‘multiculturalism’. The inserts found on *Top Billing*, as well as the programmes found within Tswelopele Productions do not reflect a melting pot of cultures, but a mix of cultures which are contained within their own insert or show. Moreover, the power to conceptualise new ‘meanings’ and identities still lies in the hands of capitalist owners, the dominant minorities, i.e. Whites in South Africa – evident for example,

in the staff makeup of *Top Billing*. On the whole, the deconstruction of the divisions of class, gender, and ethnicities come second to pushing capitalist needs and interests. This is because the media has the power to signify events in a particular way, making it become ‘real’ with ‘real effects’, and existing under the assumptions of the national interest, ‘taken for granted’ and made to appear natural and legitimate.

Moreover, such progressive ideas look promising, but the South African state has “embarked on the task of nation building at a critical historical conjuncture when the autonomy of the nation-state is being eroded by forces of globalisation” (Baines 1998: 7). With the effects of globalisation, not only has the narratives of a nation become more entrenched – but added pressures from September 11 (2001) atrocity for example, and most recently, with the global financial crisis of 2008-2010 where emphasis has been placed on job creation by the South African government – any idea of letting in others has corroded. There has since been a sudden backlash of extreme right wing conservatives, drawing a clear boundary of “us” and “them” (Baines 1998). Chaney (1994) argues that there is a deep irony within modernity, as it is marked by our ability to recognise difference, yet also a concomitant inability to deal with difference where it matters. The “paradox is that we have both a more widespread and well-grounded appreciation of the significance of tolerance in cultural diversity, and a more tenacious sense that ‘our’ culture, whichever that might happen to be, is both an essential protection and needs protecting” (Chaney 1994: 120-121). A heightened appreciation of difference can also be handicapping.

Further, the interaction between local and global pressures has a heavy influence on TV viewers, especially for young people in Africa – on the one hand is the fragmentation of local culture, and on the other, the influence of global culture (Diouf 2003). Thus, globalisation has been accompanied by countervailing tendencies, creating transnational consumption cultures on the one hand, and social fragmentation on the other (Baines 1998: 7). Baines (1998) suggests that “the widespread adoption of multiculturalism signals the disintegration of the national and the emergence of the post-national state” (7). This causes a crisis in the politics of identity in postmodern South Africa. There is no simple answer as to how we should go about ‘nation-building’, and to place judgment on what discourses are most effective. What we can do to help the progression of South Africa as a nation state is to be fully aware of the

discourse that we take up, and how that informs our national identity and that of others – in essence, to be educated media-literate consumers.

Television has been and is a central part of many people's lives. Television's landscape and the 'Study of Television' are ever-changing as times and notions change, and new forms emerge. Although, any approach to television leaves much unaccounted for, it is important to challenge those existing concepts and assumptions, and to ask how television is made meaningful, relevant and pleasurable; and how the relationship between television's text and the viewer's experience differs (Allen 1992). This thesis has thus taken the task of answering the following research question: What are the various meanings and pleasures that loyal viewers of *Top Billing* make of the programme, and how do these relate to their identities as middle class South Africans? However, when asking how text attempts to construct one's identity, there is little agreement on answers, as there are multiple meanings that people can make of any given text, at any given time – intertwined with one's historically specific conditions as social subjects. Further, alternative readings are possible because overriding contradictions that characterise contemporary social practices, including television, "raises issues and points to values and ideas that are problematic or disruptive and that cannot be neatly or easily subsumed in general social consensus" (White 1992: 192).

Thus, television presents 'texts' that never stand alone (Allen 1992). By looking at how television viewing fits into the 'lived experience' of viewers, we have only begun to provide a glimpse into the complexities and subtleties of television's roles in the lives of the viewers (Allen 1992). By examining *Top Billing* theoretically and analytically, this thesis has brought to the fore, the factors that influence the decision makers in implementing and projecting a certain image to the viewers; and effectively, the significant effects it has had and will continue to have on its consumers. This thesis has also shared the invaluable knowledge gained from the ethnographic research undertaken. It has thus contributed to begin further discussions on the existing gap in the study of television – on the lifestyle/magazine programme, particularly to television studies in South Africa. Newer and richer viewpoints on the discussions found here may continue in academia, but what is important is that this thesis marks the beginning stages of engaging concertedly with those 'parts' in television studies that have been "plunged into darkness" (Corner & Harvey 1996).

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### *Average Number of Working TV Sets in Household 2010*

TV Information AMPS 2010BA

Source: AMPS 2010 Main Branded BA (July 2009 – June 2010)

Weight: Household 15+

Table – All

Units: 1000's

Source: AMPS 2010 Main Branded BA (Jul 2009-Jun 2010)  
**Weight: Household 15+**  
 Table - All  
 Units : 1000's

		<b>Total</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>Audience(000)</b>	13 369
	<b>Resps</b>	25 170
	<b>%Col</b>	###
<b>TV set - Large appliances in HH</b>	<b>Audience(000)</b>	11 081
	<b>Resps</b>	23 109
	<b>%Col</b>	###
<b>Average No of Working TV Sets in Home - Average data</b>	<b>Value</b>	1
	<b>Resps</b>	22 940
	<b>%Col</b>	
<b>Meter Universe (Including Rural)</b>	<b>Audience(000)</b>	10 583
	<b>Resps</b>	22 494
	<b>%Col</b>	###

TNT+ 4.0.78 e2.80.9  
 Report Date: 01/12/2010  
 Notes: \* data relatively unstable \*\* data highly unstable

Notes:

- In total, there are 13,369,000 households in South Africa, with 11,081,000 households with television sets, regardless of its working condition. On average, there is 1 TV in working condition per household.
- Meter Universe refers to households (HH) with working TVs and mains electricity, hence 10,583,000 households with working TVs and mains electricity.
- Out of the total number of households in the country, 82.9% of them have a television set.

## APPENDIX 2

### *Patronage & Time Spent Viewing 2010*

Target All Adults		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly Patronage	Ave Daily Viewing
Variable	Day of Week / Channel									
RCH %	Total TV	53	53	57	58	53	50	52	85	03:24
	SABC 1	38	38	41	42	39	36	36	72	00:55
	SABC 2	36	38	39	38	34	31	32	70	00:36
	SABC 3	31	31	31	30	30	25	29	64	00:28
	e-TV	34	34	38	35	34	33	35	69	00:42
	M-Net	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	8	00:03
	CSN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	00:00
	DSTV Total	12	12	13	14	13	12	13	20	00:38

Section 3 SAARF (2010b) Television Audience Measurement Survey Week 48/10:

22 November 2010 - 28 November 2010

## APPENDIX 3

### *Top Ten Most Watched Programmes of the Week (February 2009)*

Channel: SABC 3

Market: National

Target: All Adults

Note: **Light Shading indicates imported programmes**

Week: 02/02/2009 - 08/02/2009				
Counter	Description	Day of week	Level 1/ Variable	AMR %
1	DAYS OF OUR LIVES	Wednesday	Soap opera	10.6
2	THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW	Thursday	Magazine	6.2
3	HUNTER & HUNTED	Sunday	Documentary	6
4	LAS VEGAS	Monday	Drama	5.5
5	ISIDINGO:THE NEED	Tuesday	Soap opera	5.3
6	MONSTERS INC.	Saturday	Movies	5.1
7	THE WAR AT HOME	Monday	Sitcom	5
8	NEWS	Sunday	News	4.8
9	TOP BILLING	Thursday	Magazine	4.6
10	ISIDINGO -R	Tuesday	Soap opera	4.5

Week: 09/02/2009 - 15/2009				
Counter	Description	Day of week	Level 1/ Variable	AMR %
1	DAYS OF OUR LIVES	Thursday	Soap opera	10.7
2	THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW	Wednesday	Magazine	6.7
3	ISIDINGO:THE NEED	Wednesday	Soap opera	6.2
4	NEWS	Thursday	News	5.3
5	ISIDINGO -R	Tuesday	Soap opera	5.3
6	TOP BILLING	Thursday	Magazine	5.2
7	PRISON BREAK II	Thursday	Drama	5.1
8	ALL MY CHILDREN -R	Wednesday	Soap opera	5
9	LAS VEGAS	Monday	Drama	4.4
10	THE WAR AT HOME	Monday	Sitcom	4.4

Week: 16/02/2009 - 22/02/2009				
Counter	Description	Day of week	Level 1/ Variable	AMR %
1	DAYS OF OUR LIVES	Tuesday	Soap opera	10.2
2	THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW	Thursday	Magazine	7.5
3	ISIDINGO:THE NEED	Thursday	Soap opera	5.9
4	PRISON BREAK II	Thursday	Drama	5.4
5	SABC 3 TALK	Tuesday	Magazine	5.3
6	NEWS	Thursday	News	5.2
7	ISIDINGO -R	Thursday	Soap opera	5
8	THE PERFECT STORM	Saturday	Movies	5
9	NEWS IN 60 SECONDS	Thursday	News	4.7
10	TOP BILLING	Thursday	Magazine	4.7

Week: 23/02/2009 - 01/03/2009				
Counter	Description	Day of week	Level 1/ Variable	AMR %
1	DAYS OF OUR LIVES	Wednesday	Soap opera	8.7
2	THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW	Wednesday	Magazine	6.8
3	ISIDINGO:THE NEED	Wednesday	Soap opera	6.1
4	NATIONAL GEOGRAPHICS	Sunday	Documentary	5.9
5	NEWS	Sunday	News	5.4
6	ISIDINGO -R	Tuesday	Soap opera	5.1
7	TECH HEAD	Thursday	Magazine	4.8
8	STYLE V.I.P.	Thursday	Magazine	4.7
9	MUSIC	Monday	Music	4.7
10	TOP BILLING	Thursday	Magazine	4.4

## APPENDIX 4

### *Participants of Focus Group Research (May 2009)*

The titles of the following staff members are accurate for the time at which the research took place. Some members no longer work for the programme or are no longer in the roles as stated below.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>Emma du Toit</b>	Former <i>Top Billing</i> Offline Editor, and current <i>Top Travel</i> Producer
<b>Graham Nutter</b>	Online Editor (On-lines the final inserts, and cleans up each shot frame-by-frame to perfection)
<b>Kerry Redelinghuys</b>	Production Co-ordinator (Responsible for pre-shoot setups)
<b>Lucky Ncube</b>	Sound Operator
<b>Michelle Reid</b>	Sales/Marketing Executive (Responsible for magazine sales)
<b>Paul Van Deventer</b>	Offline Editor (Cuts raw footage into an insert / final edit)
<b>Sunay Grant</b>	TV Insert Director (Directs shoots on site)

## APPENDIX 5

### AR's and Content Review of Top Billing shows (February – May 2009)

Abbreviations used below:	
AA: All Adult audience ratings	Loc: Location. As a standard feature, there is one location per show, from where the presenter links are recorded as well.
Ave: Average ratings	Low: Low AR insert of the whole show
b-t-s / BTS: Behind the scenes of a movie/commercial	LSM: Living Standard Measurement
Celeb: Celebrity	Mag: Magazine story – story which originates from, or is linked to the <i>Top Billing</i> magazine.
Comm: Commercial Break	OTT: Over-the-top
Comp: Competition quiz question for big giveaways	Peak: Peak in the highest ARs achieved in the whole show
DIY: Do-It-Yourself	TB: <i>Top Billing</i>
Ent: An entertaining story – dinner/lunch party involving table decor, (celebrity) guests and cuisine fitting to a given theme.	TX: Transmission Date (date the show airs on TV)
High: High AR insert of the whole show	
Intv: Interview	

\*Explanation of all inserts mentioned below to follow after the charts – in alphabetical order, for ease of cross-referencing when reading charts.

TX: 21 May	LSM 8-10	LSM 7-10	AA	Peak (rating LSM share)
<b>High</b>	Night at the Museum, then loc, rugby, travel	Movie	Movie	Salamina intv Hank Azaria*
<b>Low</b>	Hotel Hubertus – after comm 3	Hotel Hubertus	Hotel Hubertus	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 4.48 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 3.06

Ave AR of the inserts in this show: 6-8

\*Hank Azaria: Actor in 'Night at the museum' (movie)

TX: 14 May	LSM 8-10	LSM 7-10	AA	Peak
<b>High</b>	Amor ent – Steenberg 1920's	Danny K loc / fashion	Danny K Loc	Nico intv Annie's wardrobe* at Amor ent. insert
<b>Low</b>	Travis Logie (last insert)	Travis Logie	Travis Logie	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 5.10 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 3.98

Ave AR of inserts: 8, except for one insert with a 7 and two 6's – 6 being DIY and Travis Logie (Overall high AR show)

\*Annie's Wardrobe: clothing/fashion spokesperson in Amor ent. story

TX: 7 May	LSM 8-10	LSM 7-10	AA	Peak
<b>High</b>	Billy Zane (charity) 6.77	Billy Zane 6.11	Glen Josselson	Salamina intv architect about pool area (Loc), and when young girl from charity sings to Billy Zane and Jeannie D
<b>Low</b>	Thabiso wedding (after comm. 3) – 4.26	Oscar the dog 3.83	Oscar	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 3.04 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 2.04

Ave AR of inserts: 4-6 (Show with low ARs) – 3 for charity inserts: Billy Zane, Princess project, Oscar the dog - TX 7 May contains 9 inserts, as opposed to the usual 7 or 8 inserts. Perhaps it would have been beneficial to have shown more interesting inserts for longer – as per audience feedback of snowball sampling – for higher overall AR.

- AA: Billy Zane (3.44), Princess project (3.38), Oscar (2.29)

- Magazine stories in show – Mag wig fashion (2.74), DIY Metallic (2.75), Decorex Expo (2.53), Thabiso wedding (2.61). This goes to show how magazine-turned-TV stories receive low ARs.

TX: 30 April	LSM 8-10	LSM 7-10	AA	Peak
<b>High</b>	Wetherlys Glamour	Wetherlys Glamour	Wetherlys	Middle of Wetherlys – presented by Jeannie D & Colin O'Mara
<b>Low</b>	DIY metallic – last insert in show	DIY metallic	DIY metallic	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 3.69 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 3.08

Ave AR of inserts found in this show: 5-6

TX: 23 April	LSM 8-10	LSM 7-10	AA	Peak
<b>High</b>	Loc: Westcliff Karen Shorts – 1 <sup>st</sup> insert, then Bassie birthday & Coda soccer (2 <sup>nd</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> inserts respectively)	Loc	Loc & Coda soccer	End of Loc Karen Shorts – presented by Michael Mol
<b>Low</b>	Sex & City BTS mag cover shoot – last insert	Sex & City	Sex & City, then Sharukh Khan & DIY Ivy Wall (the last 3 inserts)	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 4.45 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 3.40

Ave AR of inserts in this show: 6-8 (with the exception of one insert receiving 9 and the other 5) – show with a rather leveled high AR

\* No show aired on the 9<sup>th</sup> April due to ongoing broadcasting of the ICC (International Cricket Council) Twenty20 Cricket World Cup Tournament

TX: 16 April	LSM 8-10	LSM 7-10	AA	Peak
<b>High</b>	Fast & the Furious, then Zermatt ski & Sonia chocolate	Fast & Furious	Location	End of Fast & Furious – presented by Zuraida
<b>Low</b>	Loc: Grant White – 1 <sup>st</sup> insert	Brothers story	Brothers	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 5.42 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 4.02

Ave AR of inserts: 6-7 in all categories:

- LSM 7-10 Adults
- LSM 5-6 Adults
- AA = All Adults
- Competition just as popular to higher LSM as to lower LSM
- Lower LSM does have effect on overall All Adults Ratings. Given the difference in the inserts receiving lowest or highest ARs in category of LSM 7-10 and LSM 8-10 – the insert found in overall AA high and low inserts correspond with LSM 7-10 because of popularity with lower LSM viewers
- Second half of show dropped from first half – as usual, but then rose slightly again at the very end with DIY Water Feature.
- Notably, a similar viewership number of lower (7-10) and higher (8-10) LSM in this show

TX: 2 April	LSM 8-10	LSM 7-10	AA	Peak
<b>High</b>	Shimansky store opening (9.39) then Ice Palace, Cindy Nell wedding, Comp2 Salzburg, Loc Westcliffe	Shimansky	Shimansky, then loc	Middle of Cindy Nell wedding – no presenter
<b>Low</b>	Durban restaurants	Durban restaurants	Durban restaurants	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 5.23 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 3.76

Ave: 1<sup>st</sup> half 8-9 (high), 2<sup>nd</sup> half 5, except of one insert with 7

- Significant drop in ARs in second-half of show, as usual
- As viewership was gradually dropping in the second half of the show, there was a slight raise in the last insert: DIY John Vlismas, just like in TX 16 April. This may mean that people actually enjoy DIYs in contrast to internal staff perception, or it may mean that a programme on another channel drawing viewership ends just before TB's one hour slot.
- Overall drop in second half of show, with the exception of a rise during Wedding dress trashing insert
- Quiz more popular with the upper LSM group than the lower LSM group

<b>TX: 26 March</b>	<b>LSM 8-10</b>	<b>LSM 7-10</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>Peak</b>
<b>High</b>	West Green House Garden (London), then inserts in first half generally – Exhibition Dancers, Loc, West Green Garden, Norway Per Gynt	West Green House Garden	Loc Bishops court	End of Exhibition Dance (Salamina) and end of West Green House Garden (Salamina)
<b>Low</b>	Maya Prass – last insert	Maya Prass	Maya Prass	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 5.02 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 4.52

Ave: 7-8 (High AR show, especially given the fact that it remained level throughout the whole show)  
- No AR given (by SABC) for Norway trip and Comp Quiz 1 Salzburg  
- Second half almost as strong as first half – overall an average carried throughout the whole show  
- KZN Princess wedding – with average rating in 2<sup>nd</sup> half of show (but still part of drop-line in 2<sup>nd</sup> half of show)

<b>TX: 19 March</b>	<b>LSM 8-10</b>	<b>LSM 7-10</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>Peak</b>
<b>High</b>	Mr SA pageant (10.09), then Loc Nico vd Meulen, Natasha Norman art workshop	Mr SA	Mr SA then Natasha Norman	End of Loc Nico vd Meulen (Dhiveja), and Beginning of Mr SA pageant (no presenter)
<b>Low</b>	Street fighter (7.34), then DIY coffee table	DIY coffee table with DJ Suga (6.32)	DIY coffee table (3.70)	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 5.48 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 3.99

Ave: First half 8-9 (highest reaching 10), second half 7 – show with extremely high ARs  
- Even the lowest dips in ARs remained at an average rating that TB normally achieves, hence great overall viewership for this show

<b>TX: 12 March</b>	<b>LSM 8-10</b>	<b>LSM 7-10</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>Peak</b>
<b>High</b>	DIY Distressed cupboard in Parys, then Isidingo wedding – Meshack & Neo	DIY distressed cupboard	DIY distressed cupboard, then unconventional fitness (Jeannie) and Isidingo wedding – though all are relatively low (in the 5's category)	Middle of DIY Distressed cupboard (insert before comm. 2) presented by Aidan
<b>Low</b>	Kelly Clarkson (6.48)	Kelly Clarkson	Kelly Clarkson (Nico as presenter)	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 4.98 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 3.57

Ave: first half all 8 (except opening insert with 7), second half all 6  
- Kelly Clarkson low – possibly because it doesn't appeal to older audience as per TB (current) Audience Profile, or because it is a music insert (as per internal staff perception/conclusion reached by Executive Producer that music talents receive low ARs)  
- Competition Quiz Port Palace – last insert, again slightly raised the consistently dropping second half AR line  
- Competition more popular to upper LSM than lower LSM (also seen in TX 2 April) – but this can be because TB viewership is generally more in the upper LSM group  
- High AR to a DIY insert – easy-to-do DIY insert, involving mini-travelogue to small town Parys. Feedback from Parys antique store was that many viewers of TB had actually come into the store to have a look at the very cupboard featured on TB.

<b>TX: 5 March</b>	<b>LSM 8-10</b>	<b>LSM 7-10</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>Peak</b>
<b>High</b>	Zanzibar (Michael Mol)	Zanzibar then Design Indaba fashion	Design Indaba fashion, then a close Loc: Shamwari Townhouse (Tumisho)	Middle-end of Zanzibar insert – Michael Mol
<b>Low</b>	Tarina Patel wedding (opening insert), then Jonas Brothers	Winner of Scotland & Comp Quiz Port Palace (last insert of show), then Jonas Brothers	Winner of Scotland & Comp Quiz Port Palace (together as one insert)	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 5.34 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 4.13

Ave: 6-8

- Overall average rating (6-8) with Tumisho Masha presenting links
- Low AR for Jonas Brothers – too young for TB audience, or perhaps because it is a music insert
- DIY Argus cyclist – higher AR than Jonas Brothers and winner announcement insert
- Again, this show reveals that the travel competitions are more popular with the higher LSM

<b>TX: 26 Feb</b>	<b>LSM 8-10</b>	<b>LSM 7-10</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>Peak</b>
<b>High</b>	Wedding Bridget Masinga and The World Unseen (controversial movie– with much pre-hype over why TB refused to cover it)	Wedding Bridget Masinga	The World Unseen	Peak at comm. 1 (then next highest peak is just before comm. 1 – Loc Plett) * Then next peak is after comm. 1 – celeb wedding
<b>Low</b>	Wetherlys bedroom & dining – Josh & Zuraida	Wetherlys	Wetherlys	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 4.75 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 4.05

Ave: 6-7 (with exception of the last insert of show receiving 5)

\* This could signify another popular show on at the same time on another channel

- TB has a conservative viewership and hence can conclude that ‘The World Unseen’ with lesbian content may have received AA highest viewership in the show because of hype and controversy around the issue that was all over the internet and news prior to it actually airing. Many complaints reached the office after airing this insert – but even more complaints and questioning occurred when TB initially turned down the story idea that came in through ‘proposals’ – proposing that TB cover the BTS of local movie. Major hype of this nature, criticising TB occurred 2 weeks prior to TX date
- DIY Home Bar Quentin Chong didn’t do so badly – but following from there – Port Palace travel (first insert of the second half of show) onwards it deteriorated and dipped down. This can be attributed to the ‘unpopular’ DIY inserts, or due to the second half of show always being so weak in maintaining viewership.

<b>TX: 19 Feb</b>	<b>LSM 8-10</b>	<b>LSM 7-10</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>Peak</b>
<b>High</b>	Monte Carlo, then Quiz to win trip to Scotland Pete Gottgens (which aired in previous show TX 12 Feb)*, then Ursula wedding	Loc Bloemfontein (opening insert), then Ursula wedding	Ursula wedding	Beginning of Ursula wedding (no presenter) and end of Monte Carlo (Jo-Ann)
<b>Low</b>	BTS Logo, then DIY Wheelbarrow (last insert of show)	DIY Wheelbarrow	BTS Logo	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 5.18 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 4.21

Ave: 8-9 (with exception of two insert receiving 7’s) – extremely high AR show

- Comp more popular with higher LSM – continuously seen in other shows as well – but may not really mean much since TB Audience Profile consists of more viewers of the higher LSM bracket
- Usually competitions are popular when viewer sees an overseas travel insert first, but in this show, the competition was first released (Quiz to win trip to Scotland), then only later the travel insert of that particular prize (travelogue on Scotland) aired
- DIY Wheelbarrow received higher ARs than BTS Top Billing logo
- DIY Wheelbarrow more unpopular with the lower LSM than upper LSM. Perhaps less attainable for lower LSM?
- Loc Bloemfontein more popular with lower LSM – this may be attributed to fact that this week’s loc insert was geared more for the middle-class, not OTT as usual

<b>TX: 12 Feb</b>	<b>LSM 8-10</b>	<b>LSM 7-10</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>Peak</b>
<b>High</b>	Wedding Kunene (10.61), then DIY Garage Nico & Christi (10.12)	Wedding Kunene (9.42) then DIY Garage (8.61)	Wedding Kunene (6.11), followed by DIY garage (5.98), and then Tango Nights with (5.54)	Wedding Kunene (Dhiveja)
<b>Low</b>	Amor ent. Artists plate (8.05) – last insert, then Loc: Bantry Bay (9.03) – first insert	Amor entertains (7.51) then Pete Gottgens (7.65)	Amor ent (4.25) – last insert, then second last insert A1GP Malaysia (4.92)	1 <sup>st</sup> half: 5.29 2 <sup>nd</sup> half: 5.16

Ave: 9-10 (exception of only one insert receiving an 8 – the last insert) - exceptionally high AR with phenomenal second-half results

- Pete Gottgens insert AA (5.06), followed by Quiz question where AR went up in AA ratings (5.37)

- Items in this show, marked with // to indicate comm.. breaks:

Location – Bantry Bay // Pete Gottgens, Pete Gottgens Quiz 1, Tango Nights // DIY Garage, Wedding Kunene // A1GP Malaysia // Amor Entertains Artist Plates

<b>Review of Feb – May 2009 Content:</b>	
<b>Black Content</b>	15 inserts
<b>White Content</b>	89 inserts
<b>Mix Content</b>	18 inserts
<b>Total number:</b>	122 inserts (16 shows)

For more detailed comprehension of above chart:

<b>Presenters mentioned in chart:</b>
Aidan Benetts
Cindy Nell: <i>Pasella</i> presenter
Colin O'Mara: In-house decor writer
Dhiveja Sundrum: New/junior presenter
Jeannie D
Jo-Ann Strauss
Michael Mol
Nico Panagio
Salamina Mosese: New/junior presenter
Tumisho Masha
Ursula Stapelfeldt
Zuraida Jardin: Former <i>Top Billing</i> presenter

<b>Name of Insert:</b>	<b>Type of Insert:</b>
A1GP Malaysia	A1 Grand Prix in Malaysia
Amor ent: Artists' plates**	Ent story with artists making plates to fit theme
Amor ent: Steenberg 1920's**	Entertaining story with theme of 1920's on wine farm
Bassie birthday	Celebrity, TB presenter birthday bash with celeb guests
Billy Zane	Celebrity, charity story
Brothers story	Celebrity, success story of brothers: soccer player & musician
BTS making of new Top Billing Logo	BTS Top Billing's new logo

Continued on the next page.

Name of Insert:	Type of Insert:
BTS Mr SA pageant	BTS of Mr South Africa pageant
BTS Sex & the City Mag cover shoot	BTS of Top Billing magazine cover shoot with theme
Coda soccer	Celebrity story – music band making Makaraba soccer hats
Comp2 Salzburg	Competition quiz to win trip to Salzburg
Danny K Loc	Location of a celebrity home incorporating profile and fashion
Durban restaurants	Restaurants (X3) Review in Durban
Decorex Expo	Annual decor expo
Design Indaba fashion	Design/Fashion story
DIY distressed cupboard in Parys	DIY antique furniture & travelogue small town Parys
DIY John Vlismas	DIY artwork with celebrity
DIY Garage: Nico & Christi	DIY garage makeover with TB presenter Nico & wife Christi
DIY Home Bar Quentin Chong	DIY home bar with Quentin Chong (Muay Thai champ) at his gym
DIY Ivy Wall	DIY of garden feature linked to Loc
DIY metallic	DIY decor look linked to Loc
DIY Wheelbarrow	DIY water feature with wheelbarrow
Exhibition Dancers	Profile of dancers
Fast & the Furious	Movie review
Francois Louw	Rugby personality/celebrity at home story
Glen Josselsohn	Art workshop (Magazine story)
Hotel Hubertus*	Travel/ Hotel review (Marketing story)
Ice Palace	Travel story (linked to competition)
Jonas Brothers	Celebrity Intv
Kelly Clarkson	Celebrity Intv
Loc: Bantry Bay	Location TX 12 Feb 2009
Loc: Bishops court	Location TX 26 March 2009
Loc: Bloemfontein	Location TX 19 Feb 2009
Loc: Durban	Location TX 21 May 2009
Loc: Grant White	Location TX 16 April 2009
Loc: Nico vd Meulen	Location TX 19 March 2009
Loc: Shamwari townhouse	Location TX 5 March 2009
Loc: Westcliff	Location TX 2 April 2009
Loc: Westcliff Karen Shorts	Location TX 23 April 2009
Mag wig fashion	Wig/hair fashion (Magazine story)
Maya Prass	Fashion designer and her collection
Monte Carlo	Travel story (linked to competition)
Natasha Norman	Art workshop with Lino print (Magazine story)
Night at the museum	Movie review
Norway Per Gynt	Travel story (linked to competition)
Oscar the dog	Oscar, a celebrity dog and his journey (charity story)

Continued on the next page.

Name of Insert	Type of Insert
Princess project	Fashion / Celebrities giving away dresses (charity story)
Quiz Scotland Pete Gottgens	Quiz question to win trip to Scotland
Sharukh Khan	Celebrity, Bollywood Actor story
Shimansky store opening*	Opening of diamond store (Marketing story)
Sonia Sedibe chocolate	Celebrity, Easter story
Street Fighter	Movie Review
Tango Nights	Theatre Production
The World Unseen	Local movie review (media hype for TB's refusal to cover)
Thermal Spa*	Spa review/travel (Marketing story)
Travis Logie	Surfer/Celebrity story
Unconventional fitness	Fitness story
Wedding Bridget Masinga	Celebrity wedding
Wedding Cindy Nell wedding	Celebrity/ <i>Pasella</i> presenter's wedding
Wedding dress trashing	New trend of 'trashing' wedding dress for unique photos
Wedding Isidingo: Meschak & Neo	Celebrity/Isidingo actor's wedding
Wedding Kunene	Celebrity wedding
Wedding KZN Princess	Loyal wedding
Wedding Tarina Patel	Celebrity wedding
Wedding Thabiso	Celebrity wedding
Wedding Ursula Stapelfeldt	Celebrity/TB presenter's wedding
West Green House Garden	Botanical Garden in London
Wetherlys bedroom & dining*	Marketing story with Zuraida & husband at décor store
Wetherlys Glamour*	Showing decor look at store (Marketing story)
Winner of Scotland & Comp Quiz	Competition winner announcement & next quiz question
Zanzibar	Travelogue with Michael Mol
Zermatt Ski	Travel story (linked to competition) – ski resort

\* Marketing story: A story that is not necessarily an insert suitable to *Top Billing* TV, but aired as a trade exchange – for airtime sales by the advertisement/marketing department

\*\* Amor: *Pasella* Producer, and Food Editor of *Top Billing* Magazine, who creates entertaining stories for *Top Billing* Magazine, which is covered for TV in order to boost magazine sales

## APPENDIX 6

### *Average Ratings of Top Billing Programme per Quarter Hour (March 2009)*

SECTION 4, SAARF (2010c) Television Audience Measurement Survey:

<http://www.saarf.co.za/TAMS/tams-cd.htm>

Market: National

**SHR % between SABC1, SABC2, SABC3, e-TV, M-Net, and CSN**

**TVR %: Total Ratings across all Channels per quarter of an hour**

**AMR %: Channel Rating**

**SHR %: Channel Share**

**Week 10/09: 2 March 09 - 8 March 09**

Date: 05/03/2009

<b>Channel</b>	<b>Total TV</b>	<b>SABC 3</b>		
<b>Target</b>	<b>- Adults</b>	<b>- Adults</b>		
<b>Day Part / Variable</b>	<b>TVR %</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>AMR %</b>	<b>SHR %</b>
19:30:00 - 19:44:59	40.5	Top Billing	5.3	13
19:45:00 - 19:59:59	41.9	Top Billing	5.4	13
20:00:00 - 20:14:59	42.8	Top Billing	4.4	10
20:15:00 - 20:29:59	42.8	Top Billing	3.9	9
<b>Total Average:</b>	42.1		4.7	11

Top Billing achieved an All-Adult average minute rating of 4.7% on SABC3, which is 11% share in the 42.1% average available rating across all channels for that timeslot of 19:30-20:30.

**Week 11/09: 9 March 09 - 15 March 09**

Date: 12/03/2009

<b>Channel</b>	<b>Total TV</b>	<b>SABC 3</b>		
<b>Target</b>	<b>- Adults</b>	<b>- Adults</b>		
<b>Day Part / Variable</b>	<b>TVR %</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>AMR %</b>	<b>SHR %</b>
19:30:00 - 19:44:59	41.5	Top Billing	4.8	12
19:45:00 - 19:59:59	42.4	Top Billing	5.2	12
20:00:00 - 20:14:59	43.0	Top Billing	4.1	9
20:15:00 - 20:29:59	43.1	Top Billing	3.1	7
<b>Total Average:</b>	42.5		4.3	10

Top Billing achieved an All-Adult average minute rating of 4.3% on SABC3, which is 10% share in the 42.5% average available rating across all channels for that timeslot of 19:30-20:30.

**Week 12/09: 16 March 09 - 22 March 09**

Date: 19/03/2009

<b>Channel</b>	<b>Total TV</b>	<b>SABC 3</b>		
<b>Target</b>	<b>- Adults</b>	<b>- Adults</b>		
<b>Day Part / Variable</b>	<b>TVR %</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>AMR %</b>	<b>SHR %</b>
19:30:00 - 19:44:59	44.9	Top Billing	5.3	12
19:45:00 - 19:59:59	45.4	Top Billing	5.6	12
20:00:00 - 20:14:59	45.6	Top Billing	4.3	9
20:15:00 - 20:29:59	45.7	Top Billing	3.7	8
<b>Total Average:</b>	45.4		4.7	10

Top Billing achieved an All-Adult average minute rating of 4.7% on SABC3, which is 10% share in the 45.4% average available rating across all channels for that timeslot of 19:30-20:30.

**Week 13/09: 23 March 09 – 29 March 09**

Date: 26/03/2009

<b>Channel</b>	<b>Total TV</b>	<b>SABC 3</b>		
<b>Target</b>	<b>- Adults</b>	<b>- Adults</b>		
<b>Day Part / Variable</b>	<b>TVR %</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>AMR %</b>	<b>SHR %</b>
19:30:00 - 19:44:59	42.5	Top Billing	4.9	12
19:45:00 - 19:59:59	43.2	Top Billing	5.1	12
20:00:00 - 20:14:59	44.0	Top Billing	4.7	11
20:15:00 - 20:29:59	44.8	Top Billing	4.3	10
<b>Total Average:</b>	43.8		4.7	11

Top Billing achieved an All-Adult average minute rating of 4.7% on SABC3, which is 11% share in the 43.8% average available rating across all channels for that timeslot of 19:30-20:30.

## APPENDIX 7

### SABC Television Demographic Profiles By Channel 2010

SABC 3 pdf. from South African Broadcasting Corporation website:

<http://www.sabc.co.za/wps/portal/SABC/SABCBIZINFO>

Last Retrieved: November 24, 2010

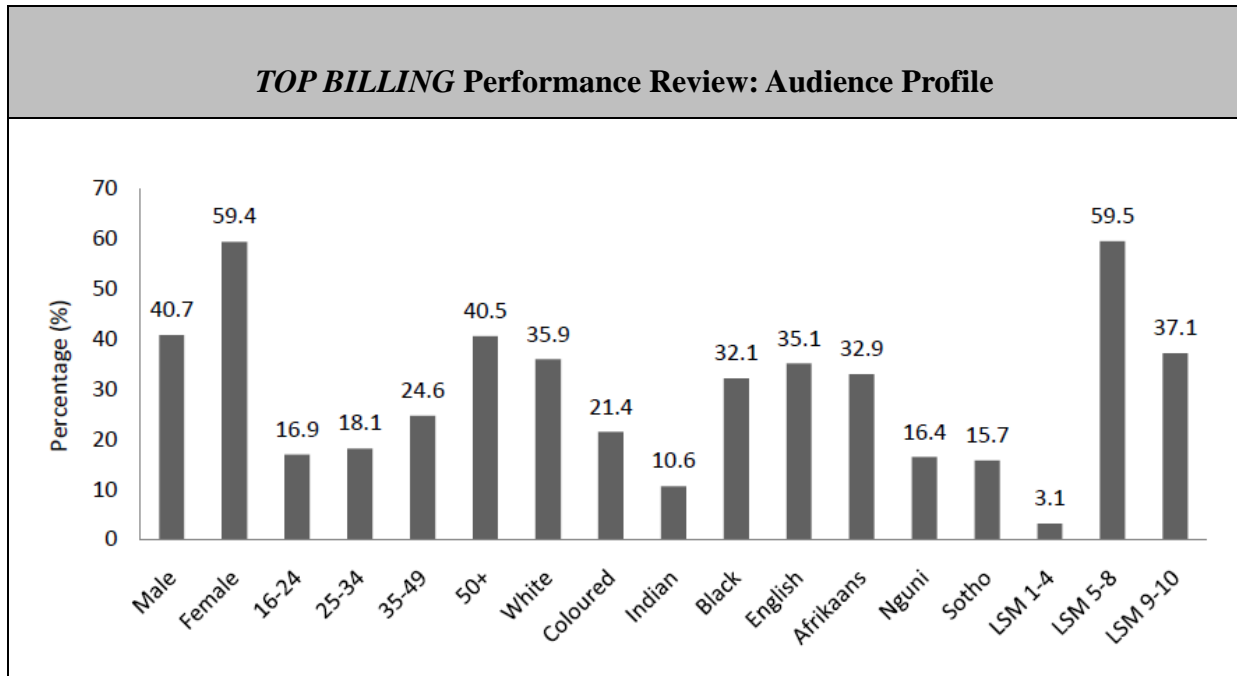
Profile	Total	Total		SABC 1		SABC 2		SABC 3	
		32,498	100.0	26,208	100.0	23,465	100.0	19,995	100.0
		000	%	000	%	000	%	000	%
Gender	Men	16,206	49.9	13,260	50.6	11,656	49.7	10,138	50.7
	Women	16,292	50.1	12,949	49.4	11,809	50.3	9,857	49.3
Age	15-24	9,283	28.6	7,958	30.4	6,809	29.0	5,832	29.2
	16-24	8,470	26.1	7,308	27.9	6,279	26.8	5,364	26.8
	25-34	7,575	23.3	6,398	24.4	5,549	23.6	4,921	24.6
	35-49	8,460	26.0	6,807	26.0	6,300	26.8	5,370	26.9
	50+	7,180	22.1	5,046	19.3	4,808	20.5	3,871	19.4
Race	Blacks	24,623	75.8	20,813	79.4	16,873	71.9	13,982	69.9
	Coloureds	2,856	8.8	2,394	9.1	2,657	11.3	2,291	11.5
	Indians	854	2.6	726	2.8	723	3.1	754	3.8
	Whites	4,165	12.8	2,275	8.7	3,213	13.7	2,968	14.8
	WCI	7,875	24.2	5,395	20.6	6,592	28.1	6,013	30.1
LSM	LSM 1	1,031	3.2	* 211	0.8	** 100	0.4	** 54	0.3
	LSM 2	2,436	7.5	1,243	4.7	669	2.9	377	1.9
	LSM 3	2,610	8.0	1,901	7.3	1,221	5.2	725	3.6
	LSM 4	4,641	14.3	4,005	15.3	3,098	13.2	2,252	11.3
	LSM 5	5,153	15.9	4,854	18.5	4,204	17.9	3,288	16.4
	LSM 6	6,086	18.7	5,685	21.7	5,245	22.4	4,698	23.5
	LSM 7	3,182	9.8	2,863	10.9	2,867	12.2	2,722	13.6
	LSM 8	2,449	7.5	2,092	8.0	2,200	9.4	2,132	10.7
	LSM 9	2,895	8.9	2,215	8.5	2,449	10.4	2,349	11.7
	LSM 10	2,015	6.2	1,139	4.3	1,413	6.0	1,398	7.0

## APPENDIX 8

### *Top Billing Audience Profile 2009*

Supplied by the SABC (May 2009)

Source: TAMS 2009



## APPENDIX 9

### *Entertainment News Article on Top Billing*

*Mambaonline News* from Mambaonline website:

<http://www.mambaonline.com/article.asp?artid=2790>

Last Retrieved: May 2, 2009

#### LESBIAN FILM SNUBBED BY TOP BILLING?

*Thursday, 12 February 2009*

*Top Billing*, SABC's television lifestyle show, has been accused of homophobia by snubbing an award-winning local lesbian-themed film because of its gay content. Mambaonline was told that Tswelopele Productions, the producers of the glitzy show, had cancelled an interview with director Shamim Sarif at the last minute – this despite her film, *The World Unseen*, recently winning 11 SAFTA awards and earning considerable international acclaim.

According to an e-mail from *Top Billing* producer Jin Jeon to representatives of Sarif, the provisionally booked interview was cancelled by the show's executive producer because "the controversial content/synopsis... is not in line with what *Top Billing* covers."

The film is set in the 1950's Apartheid South Africa Indian community and tells the story of the relationship between Miriam, a married woman and mother, and the free-spirited Amina. Mambaonline contacted the Managing Director of Tswelopele Productions, Patience Stevens, and asked her if the company was homophobic in its decision to can the interview.

Stevens described the accusation as absurd, adding that "Tswelopele Productions probably employs more gay/lesbian people than any other production company in South Africa." She did however confirm that the interview had been cancelled because *The World Unseen's* content was not seen as suitable for *Top Billing's* target audience.

"...it is a family programme, with a family audience. We did consider doing an item on the Shamim Sarif movie, *The World Unseen*, precisely because of the movie's success - but - it would be impossible to cover the movie without dealing with the subject matter in a fairly detailed way." She added that, "...it could sit better in a programme aimed at an adult only audience."

Stevens' argument for not covering the film and its director seems to be based on the notion that homosexual themes are inherently not 'family-friendly' and are best relegated to late-night, adult only time-slots. It's an argument that could be seen as not only homophobic, but possibly in conflict with constitutional values.

Sarif, the film's director, commented: "It would be wonderful to feel that my characters are judged according to their core human values and their actions, rather than innate characteristics such as colour or sexuality.

"The character of Amina in *The World Unseen* is a dynamic, charismatic, intelligent woman who happens to be gay. Her values are in no way in conflict with 'family values' in the sense that she has great integrity, honour and kindness."

She told Mambaonline that she was disappointed that the interview was cancelled:

"While I am aware that any TV show is a business that has to cater to its audience, I would ask all companies with influence on the media in South Africa to keep in mind that they hold a powerful position and have the opportunity to encourage openness and dialogue by perhaps pushing the envelope a little now and then," said Sarif.

In addition to its eleven SAFTAs (including best director for Sarif) *The World Unseen* has also been awarded "World Cinema Best Director" at the Phoenix International Film Festival, "Official Selection" at the Toronto International Film Festival, "Official Selection" at the 51st BFI London Film Festival, and "Audience Award, Best Feature" at the Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival. It also won a silver medal at the Verzaubert Film Festival.

*The World Unseen* is scheduled for release in South Africa this Friday 13 February 2009, and stars David Dennis, Colin Moss, Natalie Becker and Lisa Ray.