ONE CHARACTER, ONE BULLET

An Investigation of the Death of Character
In Contemporary South African Television Drama
and the Multiplicity of Social Self as a Possible Means of Character Revival

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

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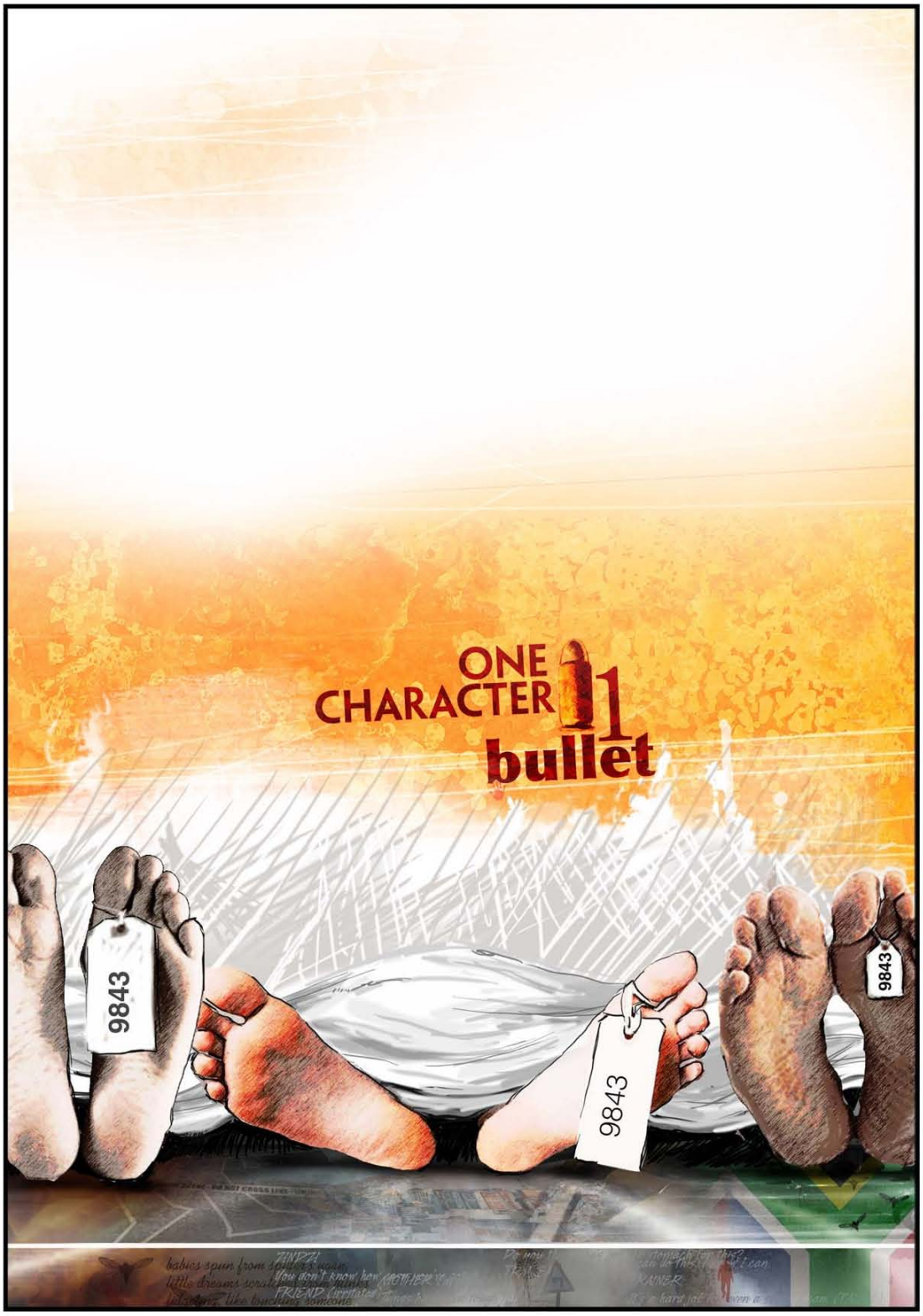
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ABSTRACT

Television drama demands a strong sense of story to sustain a viewer's engagement, and fictional characters are key dramatic vehicles in story construction. Creators of television drama acknowledge the importance of character development, yet it remains an area that is severely neglected in terms of both theory and practice at this time in South Africa. My research is underpinned by the notion of 'the death of character', an idea first presented by Elinor Fuchs (1996), who highlighted a waning interest in character in a postmodern America. I shall argue that in South Africa we have the same crime, but not the same cultural weapon. Instead of the postmodernist impact on characters that Fuchs describes, South African television characters appear to be 'dying' due to different reasons altogether. I have disengaged from the original postmodern roots of her idea, in order to try and understand why this is the case. I have discovered that the 'death' of the South African television character can be attributed (at least in part) to a unique set of challenges facing practitioners. My aim is to discover if the moribund television character can perhaps be resuscitated through the application of a concept called 'the multiplicity of social self', which finds its roots in the discipline of social psychology and the theories of William James (1890). In an attempt to merge practical skill with critical thinking and research, this written explication and its accompanying experimental television film, Zindzi, are twin sites from which to consider the death and possible revival of contemporary South African television characters.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Let us linger on a beginning

(Baderoon, 2005: 27)

1976 was a significant year.

It marked the period of the Soweto uprisings in which thousands of Black school students launched a movement that began in opposition to the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, and developed into a countrywide protest against the Apartheid regime. This movement opened up a huge fissure in South African history, separating one era from another and politicising a new generation of youth.

1976 also marked the year in which the South African Broadcasting Corporation television service (SABC-TV) broadcast nationwide for the first time. This debut created manifold opportunities for television practitioners, technicians and academics. For example, it led directly to the broadcast of South Africa's first locally-produced television drama, The Dingleys (1976), and led indirectly to the introduction of film and television studies at English-speaking universities towards the end of the 1970s. In addition:

> The impending introduction of television in 1976 led to a fall in South African feature film production, and the onus of ideological and cultural legitimation shifted to SABC-TV. Local film producers soon began to copy television for the screen, producing films such as Nommer Asseblief (1982), Bosveld Hotel. Die Moewie (1983), Verkeerde Nommer (1983), and Geel Trui vir 'n Wenner (1983). These films were not always self-contained. An understanding of who the characters are, why and what they do, where they live, and the work they perform is assumed from a prior knowledge of the television programs (Tomaselli, 1988: 178).

The copying of television for the film screen that Tomaselli describes is in effect the replication of one cultural form in the medium of another, a postmodern characteristic, which raises an interesting question. Had the South African television (and film) industry unwittingly entered the postmodern era, alongside the American arts industry? Fuchs (1996) describes the blurring of seemingly impermeable boundaries; the rupture of traditional dramatic and cultural form; multi-track thinking; and waning interest in character as some of the defining trends of this epoch. Although her research concentrates

on theatre, Fuchs acknowledges that the defining trends of postmodernism could be found in many other creative industries, such as architecture, music and fine art. She states: "Those of us in the arts and the academic world saw it there, in the breakdown of formerly distinct styles and disciplines, and in the vanishing boundaries between high and popular culture" (2). These characteristics will be explored in greater detail in Section 3.2 entitled "Postmodern Trends", but here a sketch of postmodernism is necessary in order to illustrate the theoretical underpinning of my research; for in Fuchs's The Death of Character I have discovered a seminal text for my study. Fuchs explores the notion of Eurocentric theatrical characters 'dying' in a postmodern America, as interest in character fades in favour of other dramatic elements such as plot or spectacle. I shall draw on Fuchs's central thesis on The Death of Character to contend that interest in the South African television character is diminishing too. I shall then disengage with her idea to argue that South African characters are 'dying violently' due to the applied forces of severe production resource deficits as opposed to the theoretical influences of post-modernism. Significantly, this annihilation of the South African character is not by choice.

The title of my dissertation One Character, One Bullet serves to locate the research in a South African socio-political landscape; one that is permeated by violence. I shall explore this milieu and its possible impact on the television character in more depth in Section 4 "The South African Social Experience". There is some dispute about the origin of the political slogan 'One Settler, One Bullet'. Some believe that the term was introduced by the Azanian People's Liberation Army (A.P.L.A.) during the struggle against Apartheid, while others assert that it originated from Peter Mokaba of the African National Congress Youth League (A.N.C.Y.L.). Nevertheless Coetzee (1996) asserts: "There is nothing inherently insulting in the name 'settler', but in the discourse of contemporary South Africa it is a word appropriated; it comes from another's mouth, with a hostile intentionality behind it and a great deal of historical baggage"(1). Section 5.4 "The South African Production Context" outlines how the political climate has influenced (and continues to influence) the national broadcasting mandate, and in turn this mandate has impacted on television character and content choices, suggesting that South African television characters come with a great deal of historical baggage too.

Thornham and Purvis (2005) assert that television drama, in its increasingly varied and hybrid forms, is always seen in relation to the conflicts of history, as well as to shifts in discourse, ideology and representation (ix). The new millennium has witnessed an increasing preoccupation with the role of the mass media in society. The analysis of television drama not simply as a site of pleasure but also as a site of definitional power is one that is rapidly gaining ground in academic circles. Previous research includes – but is certainly not limited to – the para-social relationship between viewers and fictional characters (Konijn and Hoorn, 2005; Cohen, 1999; Livingstone, 1998); the role of television drama in reflecting and shaping socio-cultural attitudes (Henderson, 2007); the role of mass media in the social transformation of South African society (Zegeye and Harris, 2003); and the ways in which South African cinema represents national identity, particularly with regard to race (Maingard, 2007; Saks, 2001; Prinsloo, 1996). The insights and implications derived from these analyses and others have significance for not only South Africa, but also for the rest of Africa and for societies with similar conditions in other regions of the world. However, these studies engage with processes of representation or reception instead of initial conception or production. Furthermore, these studies appear to emphasise national identity and not social identity. This is significant, as Blaine (2007) states: "Individuals are literally part of the social contexts in which they behave, those situations cannot be understood independently of the people in them" (1). The lack of literature on the interdisciplinary subject of social identity and television character affords me and others the opportunity to contribute to artistic knowledge by offering a greater understanding of the processes and challenges involved in the conception and production of fictional characters for contemporary South African television drama. This is the primary motivation for my investigation.

A secondary motivation for my research comes as a result of problems encountered during professional practice. My career has led me into broadcasting and all four phases of television production (character and script development; pre-production; production; and post-production). I am of the opinion that my peers and I have a sense of which characters work for television drama as a result of experience and intuition without necessarily understanding or interrogating the reasons why. From my observations in the workplace, more time and consideration is given to pre-production, production and post-

production than to character and story development. Furthermore, more time and consideration is given to story-lining and script development than to fictional character development. This is significant, because television drama demands a strong sense of story to sustain a viewer's engagement, and characters are key dramatic vehicles in story construction. Therefore I seek to interrogate character development, not only in the idealistic pursuit of creating 'better' characters, but because our characters are populating dramas that are circulating as commodities across international media markets and festivals. Zegeye and Harris (2003) acknowledge that:

> South Africa is a major media player in Africa. Not only do the country's well-established state-run and commercial TV networks and radio stations broadcast nationally, there are also both television and radio broadcasts from South Africa to other parts of the continent (11).

South African film and television drama is also being exported globally. For example, in 2009 pay-tv broadcaster M-Net sold its locally produced drama Known Gods to Jordan TV and Kuwait TV; and between January and August of 2010 seasons 3 and 4 of Jacob's Cross were sold to twelve foreign broadcasters, including France TV and The Africa Channel in the United Kingdom and the United States (Dearham, 2010). Maingard (2007) notes that our post-1994 segue into the international arena has opened up numerous possibilities, all of which are making new projects possible in unprecedented ways. Massive strides are being made in production technology (such as the introduction of the revolutionary Red Camera, a digital alternative with an image quality that is not High Definition, yet rivals 35mm), and in broadcasting technology (such as the start of the migration from analogue to digital television in 2008). Television drama is now available on mobile TV and the internet. 'Accessibility' and 'quality' are the buzz words across the continent. Badenhorst (2000) asserts: "To build up a loyal African audience of viewers of their own products, quality of product would seem to be essential, especially if Africa is to challenge the more Western style of programming successfully" (160). With great strides being made in technology and policy-making, and with the increased volume of South African drama on local and international airwaves, should not our aim as practitioners be to extend the notion of 'quality' to all four phases of production? Surely there is not only value but also necessity in developing better-quality characters to populate South African narratives?

It is my belief that television professionals can and should aim to merge practical skill with critical thinking and research. Therefore, this dissertation not only examines the historical and theoretical basis of my creative work, but also documents the thoughts and concerns of other creators of television drama, using contemporary examples to link practice to theory. It is my hope that by exploring character development in my own professional practice and professional research, I will present my viewers with vibrant fictional characters that move beyond the 'typical'.

1976 was also the year in which I was born. And so, over the course of the last three decades, my life and work has been influenced by a trio of meta-narratives: South African democratisation, the accession of postmodernism and the proliferation of television drama. This research provides a site of intersection and exploration for these trajectories. My written dissertation and its accompanying practical narrative are therefore twin sites from which to consider the death and revival of fictional characters in contemporary South African television drama.

2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CHARACTER

It is necessary to highlight some of the ways in which character has functioned dramaturgically in different eras. As theatre has played a critical part in television and its history, an awareness of some of the transformations that the theatrical character has undergone can alert us to potential trends and possibilities for reshaping the South African television character. To this end, I have drawn on Fuchs's analysis of the history of character's changing dramaturgical function in The Rise and Fall of the Character Named Character, the first chapter in The Death of Character (1996) as a primary source of reference for this section. Fuchs traces the role of character within drama from the action-driven tragedies of the Greek Classical era, to the Romantics' exploration of spiritual inwardness and the Modernists' turn to metaphysical pattern over character. In addition to this broad historical arc, I will also consider the Commedia dell'Arte's loud and colourful representation of stock-types. To fully explore the history of the 'life and death' of character is far beyond the scope of this section, however my highlighting of these four major periods will provide an important historical and contextual framework for understanding a few of the key developments that have taken place in relation to postmodernism, television studies and contemporary character development.

The Greek classical era (500–322 BCE) marked the dawn of European drama with the advent of tragedy. Fuchs opens her investigation into 'the death of character' with the following passage from the Poetics (c. 335–323 BCE), Aristotle's celebrated study of tragedy:

> For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality…. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all…. The Plot then, is the first principle, and as it were, the soul of the tragedy: Character holds the second place (Fergusson, 1961: 62–63, cited in Fuchs, 1996: 23).

Fuchs concludes that, in Aristotle's view, the actor should seek the actions, "not the coherent personality that commits them" (24). Rorty (1992) adopts a similar reading of Aristotle's essay, but points out that action and character are co-ordinate, because character is expressed in choice and choice determines action. However, it is important to

note that Rorty's research confines itself to the psychology of Aristotelian tragedy, whereas Fuchs dismisses such interpretations of classical Greek drama, arguing that: "… their tragic actions do not appear directly to be anchored in the recognizable contexts of psychological and material life" (Fuchs, 1996: 24). Although the Poetics is a source of contentious debate, theorists agree that the oldest surviving work on dramatic theory in the Western tradition positions plot as the most important dramaturgical element.

In contrast to Aristotle's dismissal of character, the professional troupes of the Commedia dell'Arte (c. 1575–1775) revered it. The Commedia dell'Arte, which flourished during the Italian Renaissance, was based on the freewheeling principles of improvisation rather than the written text, yet it provides one of the best examples in theatre history of an artistic movement that emphasised character over action and plot. Henke (2002) describes its unique use of character as follows: "With its characters structured by a system of binary pairs, [Commedia dell'Arte] performance was shaped by physical, verbal and emotional exchanges or duels between contrasting and often antagonistic [characters]: father and son, servant and master; Magnifico and Dottore, lover and beloved" (1–2). Henke asserts that actors were encouraged to completely inhabit and give life to their characters to such an extent that specific characters became both the subjects and the producers of this popular literature. The Commedia dell'Arte is an artistic movement that Fuchs does not explore; however, I believe that it is significant, for where character is the chief business of the actor, "The actor was the heart of the Commedia dell'Arte and almost the only essential element" (Brockett, 1992: 151).

The Renaissance spread relatively quickly from its birthplace in Italy to the rest of Europe and England. Maus (1995) argues that the English Renaissance produced a distinctive way of thinking about human subjectivity that emphasised the disparity between what a person is and what he or she seems to be to other people. A shift from outward to inward emphasis occurred, which led English dramatists of the Renaissance period to privilege the inner lives of characters over action and plot. This turn toward inwardness was epitomised by playwrights such as Shakespeare. Fuchs (1996) notes that, in contrast to Artistotle's rejection of character, Shakespeare's tragic roles encouraged actors "to make new wholes of the feeling and thinking dimensions suggested by the text" (25). In highlighting the gap between an 'unexpressed interior' and a 'theatricalised

exterior', terms which Maus refers to on her book sleeve, she insists that the 'self' is not independent of or prior to its social context. To illustrate this, she explains that:

> The English Reformation witnessed numerous political, religious and economic realignments, for example: between the early 1530's, when Henry defies the authority of Rome, and 1558, when Elizabeth ascends to the throne, England changed religious course four times…. Each major alteration, and some of the minor ones, involved the sometimes violent but never wholly successful suppression of what was heretofore the approved doctrine (Maus, 1995: 17).

Ongoing strife between Protestants and Catholics left each accusing the other of attending only to outward 'shows' of faith, while heretics attempted to avoid persecution by concealing their true allegiances from hostile authorities. Perhaps it was inevitable that a milieu such as this caused Shakespeare and his English Renaissance contemporaries to explore themes such as cognition and paranoia, secrecy and disclosure, knowledge and ignorance, thought and utterance. Nevertheless, Fuchs asserts that: "from the eighteenth century on, theorists looked almost exclusively to Shakespeare as they began to advance a standard of inwardness for character, and, as a parallel development, began to revise the Aristotelian assimilation of character to plot" (Fuchs, 1996: 25).

The German Romantics (c. 1790–1850) championed a more radical approach than Shakespeare and his peers, for they nearly dispensed with plot entirely in their pursuit of the inner life of the character. In particular Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) is recognised as one of the founders and critical leaders of the German Romantic movement. Fuchs describes how the "romantic values were clarified and pushed forward" by Schlegel and his contemporaries for whom "the inward, or subjective, was elevated to a transcendental principle" (25). In fact, one of Schlegel's peers, the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831), advocated that "character was the only artistic vehicle that could give material form to absolute spiritual subjectivity" (27), a notion that was in complete opposition to that of the Aristotelian period of over two thousand years earlier.

Where individual subjectivity had become a gateway to connection with universal psychic forces for the German Romantics, several dramaturgical and performance strategies emerged within the twentieth-century Modernist period that deliberately undermined the illusion of autonomous character. Fuchs cites the 'dream' plays of August Strindberg (1849–1912), the Absurdist approach of Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936) and the Epic Theatre of Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) as the seminal examples (31–32).

In Strindberg's 'dream' plays, "character is presented as material to be molded by great forces in the universe" (32). In this way, Strindberg sought to refocus his audience's attention on the eternal ideas of humanity, and away from the particularities of character. Like Strindberg, Brecht's characters are also "rearranged and formed in accordance with ideas" (Willett, 1990: 278). However, Brecht's dramaturgy "requires of the spectator another kind of allegorical reading, not primarily idealist and metaphysical, like the later Strindberg, but ironic, dialogic, and analytical" (Fuchs, 1996: 32).

Brockett (1992) notes that in Pirandello's plays: "the dramatic action turns on a question of fact that cannot be resolved because each character is convinced that his or her own version of it is the true version" (228). As a result, Brockett states: "He [Pirandello] concludes that 'truth' is personal, subjective, relative, and ever-changing" (228). The premise of Pirandello's masterpiece, Six Characters in Search of an Author (1921) is that six characters take on a life of their own because their author has failed to complete the story. They rebel against their creator by invading the rehearsal of another Pirandellian play and insisting on playing out the life that is rightfully theirs.

> In Six Characters in Search of an Author, Pirandello drives a wedge between actor and character, as Brecht in a very different way was to do later…. But whereas in Brecht's production dramaturgy it is the actor whose consciousness is wider than, and superior to, the character's, in Pirandello's text it is the characters [that] see more than the actors (Fuchs, 1996: 34).

Indeed, "Dramatists of all movements or periods have sought to convey truthful pictures of humanity, but they have differed widely in their answers to the following questions: What is ultimate truth? Where is it to be found? How can we perceive reality" (Brockett, 1992: 54)? In numerous attempts to answer these questions, the notion of character has shifted over time, with the theatrical character often being side-lined in favour of other elements such as action in Aristotelian drama and ideas in Modernist drama. Yet through it all, the live-actor/dramatic character coupling has survived, and, as Fuchs points out: "The very act of putting character into question still marks its place as central" (Fuchs, 1996: 35).

The following Section 3 entitled "Theoretical Overview: Television Drama" shifts from a historical and theatrical background to a present-day television context. In order to understand the notion of the death of character in contemporary television drama, one

requires a better understanding of both the nature of the medium of television and the period of postmodernism.

3. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW: TELEVISION DRAMA

3.1 Definition of Relevant Terms

This section serves to provide a concise theoretical overview of contemporary television drama with a key focus on the areas pertinent to my practical research.

Historically, television drama has tended to fall into one of five categories:

(i) Anthologies are free-standing fictional installments, in which stories and casts differ in every program. Each installment is unconnected to the others, except by perhaps the title or a narrator.

(ii) The single drama is a self-contained fictional story told in a once-off program. It is also known as a 'made-for-television-film' or 'TV movie'.

(iii) The drama series is a 'closed-ended' fictional drama which is made up of multiple episodes, but each episode is a self-contained story in which a situation is resolved. The same cast continues across all the episodes in a season.

(iv) The drama serial is an 'open-ended' fictional drama in which one main cast and story are continued across multiple programs. The story is resolved in the final episode of a season.

(v) The soap opera or daily drama is a continuing fictional drama, broadcast in high frequency and consisting of multiple serial installments with interlocking storylines. The key distinction between soap operas and drama serials is that soap operas do not end, or *could* continue without ending.

My dissertation excludes further reference to anthologies, because they are no longer broadcast and therefore no longer constitute 'contemporary' television drama, which is the period that my research considers. Although I have drawn on examples from all of the other four categories in my written research, my practical investigation confined itself to single drama for five key reasons. First of all, Pramaggiore and Wallis (2008) assert that episodic narratives offer an alternative to conventional narrative structure, because events are not tightly connected in a cause-and-effect sequence and characters do not focus on a single goal. Conversely single drama (with its conventional narrative structure) offered me the opportunity to keep the practical narrative fairly contained in

order to concentrate on my core research area of character development. Secondly, Schulz (1994) declares that the made-for-television film has emerged in broadcast practice as "a privileged site for the negotiation of problematic social issues" (166). For a television practitioner such as me, who carries a sense of responsibility for addressing social issues in a developing country like South Africa and who is aware that 'issue-led' television drama can inform, educate and provoke audience debate, Schulz's assertion holds particular relevance. Thirdly, I have observed that there is significantly less literature available on single drama than series, serials and soap operas, thus indicating a greater need for me to use my research opportunity to contribute to this particular area. My observation was supported by Schulz's call for further research in her statement that: "The popular TV movie, in terms of its possible meanings, pleasures, and politics for the audience, deserves a second look" (173). The fourth reason originated from a practical concern, as it was more feasible for me to produce a single drama in terms of budget, time and people resources than it would have been to produce an episodic drama. Lastly, I had experienced episodic drama in my professional practice and I was eager to strengthen my practical understanding of single drama or the TV movie. Once I had decided on the type of category that I was to use for my practical project, I focused on pursuing a better understanding of the term 'narrative' in a television framework.

In contemporary media studies, Lacey (2000) stresses the importance of chronology, logic and cause and effect in a classic narrative structure, stating that if there are discontinuities within the text, audiences may not 'believe' in the world that is being offered to them. He asserts that: "narrative does not deal with reality at all but strives to create an illusion of reality…" (Lacey, 2000: 77). Barker (1999) supports Lacey's view of classic narrative, acceding that television does not actually offer a 'window-on-the-world'; instead it constructs representations using realist conventions that suggest a picture of an independent universe. The 'realist aesthetic' is therefore significant in the representation of a classic television narrative world. Moreover, in creating this imagined world, narrative structure "allows ideas, themes or characters to develop or move forward in a coherent fashion" (Casey et al, 2002: 138). I find it interesting that Lacey and Barker do not place any emphasis on the role of character in their definitions of classic narrative, implying that classic narratives can exist independently of character. However, more

recent descriptions appear to be more inclusive. For example, Quy (2007) describes television classic narrative as a story told over time, in which events happen to characters in chronological order. My research shall be anchored by Quy's definition of television classic narrative for it is succinct yet inclusive of both key notions of chronology and character. Now that we have a better understanding of the relevant terminology, it is appropriate for me to try and identify what postmodern trends are in order to ascertain whether or not these tendencies exist in South African television.

3.2 Postmodern Trends in Television Drama

In investigating the postmodern trends in the television drama that is currently broadcast on South African channels, it is impossible to ignore the fact that a great deal of the content is American. This proliferation of Americana is primarily due to finance. It is far cheaper for South African broadcasters SABC, M-Net and etv to license foreign content than it is to invest in locally produced dramas. "Imported American/British/French programming will always be more affordable than the local African equivalent" (Badenhorst, 2000: 175). Badenhorst's assertion that Western content will 'always' be more affordable is disputable, but in all likelihood the 'sandwiching' of foreign and local content will remain the status quo for quite some time. As postmodernism originated in the West I shall first turn my attention to American television drama in my search for postmodern trends.

> The major world views such as Marxism or Christianity, which offer comprehensive explanations of social change, are rejected by postmodern thinkers who tend not to believe in 'final truths' and prefer to think of reality as endlessly open to further interpretation. Thus postmodern drama tends to reject historical authenticity, mixes styles and genres of television using the technique of bricolage, and even draws attention to its own constructedness, like Brechtian theatre, in order to frustrate attempts to derive stable meaning from the text (Page, 2001: 43).

'The mixing of styles and genres' to which Page refers is a primary characteristic of postmodernism. In fact: "The degree of hybridity and overlap among and between genres and areas has all too often been underplayed" (Neale, 2001: 2). For example, Henderson (2007) explains that: "The soap opera as a continuous serial has become less easily defined…" (14) as it has infiltrated other categories. This 'soapisation' of television

dramas has led to the coining of terms such as 'docu-soaps' (Henderson, 2007). Yet the blurring of boundaries extends beyond categories and genres of television drama. For example fictional characters are even penetrating boundaries between drama series, as is seen in the protagonists from CSI: New York guest-starring in CSI: Miami and vice versa.

The postmodern rupture of traditional form is evidenced in other ways too. For example: the disciplines of information technology and television drama have become nebulous. In 2009, the Disney/ABC Television Group began putting clips on the social networking site YouTube. These clips included video highlights and interviews with the stars of its most popular prime-time dramas, such as Desperate Housewives, Lost and Grey's Anatomy, as well as highlights from its cable sports network, ESPN (Chmielewski and Sarno, 2009: 8). Coyle (2009) reported that network broadcaster Fox added Tweets (from executive producers and lead cast members) to a repeat broadcast of its supernatural television drama series Fringe: "The Tweets (messages of 140 characters or less from the microblogging website Twitter) ran throughout the show on the bottom third of the screen" (3).

Furthermore television producers are beginning to change aspects of their programmes in response to specific audience feedback, illustrating another postmodern trend: that audiences are beginning to participate as co-creators of television drama. "Characters can be killed off or foregrounded; presenters can be siphoned out of prime-time into late night or weekends, or off-air altogether" (Turner, 2001: 6). In further discussion on Fringe, Coyle (2009) reported that at times the actors and producers responded directly to fan questions online via the microblogging website Twitter:

> Sometimes [the actors and producers] simply spoke between themselves, once asking each other how the weather was at their location. Mostly, they attempted to give the kind of behind-the-scenes look typically offered on DVD commentaries: what it was like shooting particular scenes, how the cast members get along, and their fondness of certain clues (3).

Depending on how fans respond, the network might add Tweets to future repeats (*Ibid*: 3). The blurring of boundaries between authors and audiences; information technology and television drama; categories, genres and other areas in contemporary prime-time programs such as Desperate Housewives, Lost, Grey's Anatomy, Fringe and C.S.I. serves

to illustrate the postmodern characteristics that Page (2001) describes in the introduction to this sub-section.

However most significant to my research is the postmodern attribute of a waning interest in character, which Fuchs terms 'the death of character'. In the crime drama franchise C.S.I. which is broadcast on M-Net, focus is directed to the subject of criminology and therefore the viewer is encouraged to care much more about solving the murder mystery than about the protagonists. Although interest in protagonists such as Grisham and Horatio Kane is not absent completely over the course of the series, primary emphasis is placed on plot. This is not the case in all contemporary television drama. In the medical series Grey's Anatomy, the viewer is invited to care about its protagonists *as much as* the medical crises that unfold. In the suburban serial Desperate Housewives, the viewer is persuaded to care about its protagonists *more* than the secrets of Wisteria Lane.

In postmodern American television drama, we can find multiple instances of a dramaturgy and treatment of character at work that is far more radical than that of the early twentieth century, which was based on linearity, cause and effect and the psychological motivations of the characters. Indeed the American dramas currently broadcast on South African television channels are enjoyed by fans in multiple and diverging ways. The question that now arises is whether or not South African television drama exhibits similar postmodern trends?

Caughie (2000) states: "In television studies, there seems to be a creeping sense that television is so thoroughly a technology of post-modernity – perhaps even the defining technology which makes the decisive break with the 'modern age' and reshapes everyday life as post-modern – that all its forms must be *ipso facto* post-modernist" (163). Although Caughie acknowledges that television is essentially postmodern in nature, there is also a cautionary note against the assumption that 'all its forms' are too. Thornham and Purvis (2005) are more emphatic, pointing out that: "Whilst television, as noted, is often discussed in relation to the conditions of post-modernity, is it safe to assume that [all television] dramatic texts are similarly postmodern" (165)? Certainly for the purposes of my research it would be dangerous to assume that as the West is in a postmodern age, South African television is similarly postmodern.

At a conference entitled 'Africa and the History of Cinematic Ideas', which took place in London in 1995, practitioners, critics and cultural theorists gathered to debate a range of issues. These issues included the difficulties of film and television production, exhibition and distribution; as well as the disputed points around modernity, postcolonial theory and Western cultural imperialism. Speaking to the topic of 'African Cinema and Postmodernist Criticism', film academic Roy Armes asserted that: "The application of the very Western concept of postmodernism to a body of film work which extends for barely thirty years illustrates the considerable problems involved in a truly critical and historical approach to African cinema" (Armes, 2000: 134). At the same conference, Idrissa Ouedraogo responded to Ferid Boughedir's paper on 'African Cinema and Ideology: Tendencies and Evolution' as follows:

> Much is said about postmodernist production. I don't know what that means.... We make films in urgency and often in desperately under-resourced situations.... It is hard enough for us to make films and when we do I am sure we are not thinking about classifications.... We need know-how, because we came late to cinema after colonialisation. We don't have infrastructure, we have very little experience and a lack of administration.... We want to make films and we don't give a damn about the rest. I don't mean it isn't good to talk, but theoretical categories have nothing to do with me.... You, the critics and theorists exist in relation to ideas... (Ouedraogo, 2000: 122).

Ouedraogo insists that the reality of the African film practitioner's experience is not grounded in Western ideology and discourse. Certainly this is true of my own observations in professional television practice too. The 'reality' of the South African television practitioner's experience will be examined in more depth in Section 5.4 "The South African Production Context". However it is at this point that I shall disengage from the postmodern origins of Fuchs' idea in order to pursue my investigation into the actual cause/s of waning interest in the South African television character. Ott (2007) asserts that: "... television both structures (orders) and is structured (ordered) by our society. Television does not lie outside the realms of culture and history and must therefore be viewed contextually" (19). Hence it is in the next section, "The South African Social Experience", that I shall consider the South African socio-political context.

4. THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

In pursuit of an answer to my central question of why South African characters are dying and the secondary question of how to revive them, I have disengaged from the idea that the death of South African character can be attributed to postmodernism. In Section 2 I have provided an historical overview of character and in Section 3 I have explored a theoretical overview of television drama. This section seeks to orientate the reader in terms of time, place and *mood*. Here I shall attempt to define the prevailing South African 'social experience'; not only in name but also in atmosphere, for it is my belief that the social milieu influences the type of characters that are created.

Firstly the term 'milieu' is problematic, for it refers to 'surroundings', whereas I am in search of a term to describe 'mood'. D'Vari (2005) defines zeitgeist as: "the spirit of the time; the general intellectual and moral state or temper characteristic of any period of time" (213). Yet this description is also problematic, for it is too broad for my purposes and does not capture the 'social' experience. I have found a more appropriate description in Raymond Williams's notion of a dramatic 'structure of feeling'. Raymond Williams (1921–1988), recognised as one of the twentieth century's most radical literary and cultural theorists, describes structure of feeling as: "a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period" (Williams, 1977: 131). O'Connor (1989) interprets it as "the total or common experience of a period" (85) explicating that "in Marxism and Literature, the term is given the specialized meaning of a pre-emergent cultural phenomenon: a trend that is developing but is not yet clearly emergent" (84). Williams asserts that a key-word in such analysis is 'pattern', as in the "emergent pattern of general experience" (Williams, 1977: 84). It is a social experience, rather than a personal one. It is embedded in subtle changes in the style of language, manners, dress and architecture from one generation to another. "Methodologically, then, a 'structure of feeling' is a cultural hypothesis" (132), which has "special relevance to art and literature" (133). The very first indications that such a new structure is forming are often evident in artistic disciplines.

Central to Williams's argument is the notion that an individual is not a creative mind but "an ensemble of social relations within the foundation of a structure of feeling" (O'Connor, 1989: 105). In The Long Revolution (1961) Williams elaborates that where the social character is "a valued system of behavior and attitudes" (63) and the pattern of culture is "a selection and configuration of interests and activities" (63), the structure of feeling would be "the actual experience through which these [both social character and pattern of culture] were lived" (64). The structure of feeling therefore corresponds to and is an expression of the dominant social character and pattern of culture of the period. It is "only fully accessible to those living in that time and place" (66). At times the emergence of a new structure of feeling is best related to the rise of a class; at other times to contradiction, fracture or mutation within a class; or when a formation appears to break away from its class norms (Williams, 1977: 134). Furthermore, there can be more than one social character and pattern of culture operative in any given period, and thus the structure of feeling is not experienced in the same way by the many individuals within the community. Every individual will possess his or her own version of it, but "it is with the study of the relations between them that we enter the reality of the whole life" (Williams, 1961: 80).

In applying these definitions to the present South African context, I would argue that our social character is focused on a valued system of democratic processes, national pride and national unity. The pattern of culture is focused on interests and activities such as reconciliation, the redistribution of wealth through Black Economic Empowerment policies and addressing issues such as poverty, education and health. To achieve these aims requires all South Africans to 'pull' in the same direction. However problems originate from self-interest, exhibiting themselves as corruption and crime. Problems also derive from certain sections of society being unwilling to let go of their previous advantages and privileges, all of which militate against national interest.

The question that now arises is what *is* the structure of feeling in South Africa? Pottinger (2008) states that: "The political liberation of the country in 1994 had invoked a very powerful national sense of zeitgeist, of mission and of hope …" (105). Yet the spirit of the nation has changed rapidly since the inception of democracy, having been described in various and frequently negative ways, including 'apathetic' (Rosenthal,

2009: 20). In an interview for the documentary Murder Most Foul (2007), which highlights the persistence of South African violent crimes, former Constitutional Court judge and political activist, Albie Sachs stated that:

> South Africans have not risen above Apartheid, because de-humanization still exists…. South Africans are still at war with each other…. South Africa is a country permeated by fear. Fear of crime, fear of the political climate, fear of loss – of one's job, money, livelihood, lifestyle, innocence. South Africans live like military citizens: defensive and desensitized. We've won our political freedom, but not our personal security (Sachs, 2007).

Sachs is able to draw on a wide range of experience of both political and social crime, from his time spent as a political activist living in exile in Mozambique (where he was maimed in a bomb blast in 1988) and as a Constitutional Court judge. In the documentary he acknowledges that the country's recent crime boom affects all races, all ages, all genders and all socio-economic brackets. Separate incidents of racism, xenophobia, ethnic infighting and service delivery protests have also become disconcerting problems in South Africa. In an episode of Third Degree, which was broadcast on 14 September 2009, host Debora Patta asked journalist Kevin Bloom to speak to the topic of what it means to be South African. Bloom responded: "We're not citizens or residents. We're survivors. Whether we're intact or not is questionable. But we're here" (Bloom, 2009). In particular, Bloom was a subject of interest for this discussion, as he authored Ways of Staying (2009), which investigates why South Africans opt to stay in the country if their daily lives are constantly permeated by fear and dread. McKendrick and Hoffman (1990) assert: "That South Africa is a particularly violent society is indisputable" (38). In analysing the evolution and scale of the crime problem Altbeker (2007) describes how government has sometimes sought to deal with the crisis and sometimes sought to deny its existence. He asserts that violence has become so commonplace in South Africa that the result is a society deformed by its fears.

J.M. Coetzee's novel Disgrace (1999) is arguably the iconic literary text of this mood: "The world outside the university is represented by Disgrace by post-Apartheid South Africa in all of her brutal violence and the economic squalor that the violence leaves in its wake" (Kochin, 2004: 5). Disgrace offered a bleak view of the country in the late 1990s; however, a film adaptation of the novel was released in 2008, suggesting that the content and its ideas are still relevant nearly a decade after it was first published. In

fact South Africa has begun to develop a new wave of films many of which centre around themes of violence, crime and gangsterism, such as Hijack Stories (2000), The Wooden Camera (2003), Stander (2004), Tsotsi (2005), Jerusalema (2008) and Crime – it's a way of life (2009). It is not only South African literary and film traditions that have begun to explore these themes of violence, crime, fear, dread and survival, but theatre practice too. Perhaps it is understandable then that 'trauma' was a prominent motif at the 2009 National Arts Festival.

> South Africans are no newcomers to trauma. Transition and progress aside, guilt, poverty, paranoia and anger have left us with an inherent sense of dread. Daily events and news headlines that would put people elsewhere into therapy are things we have learned to deal with. At this year's National Arts Festival I witnessed how directors and performers have chosen to explore and deal with trauma, a fundamental step in the retrieval of humanity in Post-Apartheid South Africa (Rawoot, 2009: 2).

If the country's structure of feeling can be described as fear/dread/anxiety, this kind of structure of feeling holds true for only some South Africans. For structure of feeling is subject to many personal variations within a community, becoming noticeably more complicated within a diverse community such as South Africa. In Section 5.3 I shall outline the difficulties in accurately representing a diverse community thereby presenting additional challenges to the creation of fictional characters.

What interests me is the possible use of 'structure of feeling' (whether it be fear/dread/anxiety or another form) as an analytical tool relating to television texts, for it provides a means of accessing attitudes and of exploring orientations, which can be examined and evaluated in the light of the moment of their emergence. "Part of the articulation of a structure of feeling through dramatic performance is through a directly physicalised attitude" (Wallis, 1993: 137). Perhaps by applying the notion of structure of feeling to the development of characters and their social experiences, we would achieve more nuanced characters; characters that 'feel right' for the time and place because they are more in tune with the social milieu. For writers and producers pitching to the national broadcaster, this is an important consideration, as the SABC mandate states: "The SABC reflects South Africa's diverse languages, cultures, provinces and people in its programmes" (SABC Corporate, date unknown: 2). If the public broadcaster's mandate is to create a television drama that is 'representative' and that 'speaks' to its viewers, it is

imperative that practitioners achieve a better understanding of how to construct successful or interesting characters unique to the prevailing structure of feeling.

However there is a conflict that lies between the particular structure of feeling of dread/fear/anxiety and the nuanced ways it might inform and enrich character; and the desire of the national broadcaster to portray an altogether different kind of image (togetherness/harmony/co-operation) in their programming content. While attention to the prevailing structure of feeling might make viewers identify more with characters, the broadcaster is in fact trying to re-imagine the social. So how *does* one capture a structure of feeling such as dread/fear/anxiety in television drama? How does the television-maker represent not only the diversity of South African identities but also the different variations of structure of feeling accurately to viewers? This assembly of background information (Sections 2, 3 and 4) contextualises my research. The following Section 5 "The Challenges of Creating South African Television Characters" is aimed at answering the above questions and unravelling my problem statement.

5. THE CHALLENGES OF CREATING SOUTH AFRICAN TELEVISION CHARACTERS

What follows below serves as a brief introduction to my attempt at unpacking the challenges of creating South African television characters. In order to further my investigation into the cause(s) of the death of the South African character, it is important to acknowledge that multiple parties are involved in the process of character development. I have therefore briefly considered questions such as: Who are the creators? Who are the viewers? Who are the subjects and how are they represented on screen? Dyer's 'Typography of Representation' (Dyer, 1985, cited in Lacey, 1998: 131) provides a concise illustration of how media texts represent the world to us:

1. *Re-presentation* describes the conventions which are used to represent the world to the audience;

2. *Being representative of* describes the extent to which types are used to represent social groups;

3. *Who is responsible for the representation* often describes how the institution creating a media text influences representation (for example, the contentious issue of men representing women);

4. *What does the audience think is being represented to them* suggests that audiences can construct different meanings to the ones offered to them.

Dyer's 'Typography of Representation' will serve as a framework to unpacking the challenges that follow, the first of which lies in episodic characterisation.

5.1 Episodic Characterisation

Douglas (2005) reveals that among the characteristics that distinguish television drama from other kinds of screenwriting, episodic characterisation is especially significant. In feature film writing or writing for the single drama, an arc is created for a protagonist that takes him or her from one state to another: "The character struggles toward a goal and once that is attained, your story ends" (Douglas, 2005: 8). However, television series,

serials and soap operas require a different kind of character arc due to their long narratives. Douglas asserts that episodic television characters are "more like people you know than figures in a plot" (8) because we continue knowing them after a single encounter. Consequently the television viewer is "invested in the process, not just the outcome" (8). Recent research on the viewer-character relationship, that is the (actual or perceived) relationship between television characters and viewers, supports this view (Konijn and Hoorn, 2005; Cohen, 1999; Livingstone, 1998). Douglas goes on to explain that instead of developing horizontally towards a goal, the television character should develop vertically, exploring internal conflicts that create tension. The character may be revealed incrementally within each episode and throughout the series, but viewers need reassurance that the characters are the same people they 'knew' last week. Therefore the first challenge with creating episodic characters is in striking the right balance between creating characters that are familiar to viewers yet also do not lack range and variation. This challenge is particularly prevalent in soap operas, in which heightened melodrama is required to generate enough stories to sustain multiple episodes per week. Unfortunately, the speed with which episodes are produced often results in "stereotypical characters, dialogue that lacks subtlety and unbelievable situations" (Douglas, 2005: 10). Here Douglas refers to one of my key concerns (introduced in section one) about the artistic quality of South African television drama. Episodic characterisation appears to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provides the viewer with a character that is familiar due to the long narrative arcs in which it operates. On the other hand, the development of believable characters can also be hampered by the speed of the process of episodic characterisation in the South African production context.

5.2 Collaboration

The second challenge in creating authentic fictional characters lies in the fact that episodic writing is more of a collaborative practice than any other form of writing. Hofmeyr (2008) explains that in his experience, characters are conceived in teams during brainstorming sessions with writers. However, the process of creating television characters does not 'begin' with a writers' brainstorming session, nor does it 'end' on the

completion of a written text. Other participants, each with their own set of aims, also have significant roles to play in bringing screen characters to life. These participants include the actor, the director, the producer and the broadcaster. In considering, for example, the actor, Worthen (1997) notes that: "actor and character are both rearranged by the text of the other, yet this mutual rewriting is finally referred to an author, who appears *ex nihilo*, mysteriously present in the flesh of the actor/character" (144). He goes on to state that:

> The text inscribes itself in the person of the actor, textualizing his or her experience and identity; the actor represents the text, rewrites it in the dynamics of the 'theatrical self'. In this sense, the Death of the Author, is in modern stage practice, accompanied by the Death of the Actor and the Death of the Character: neither actor nor character remains a self-present authority prior to their production in performance; both emerge as effects of representation (144).

The broadcaster, on the other hand, understands that the television drama is "a media product which has considerable public visibility and has proved to be an enduring popular format with significant economic importance" (Henderson, 2007: 7), and even though the production philosophies may differ, "every television drama programme shares a commitment to commercial imperatives" (42). The institutional culture of broadcasting heavily influences the nature of storylines and characters, and as Henderson points out: "In the negotiating process some voices are more powerful than others" (107).

The nature of the production team is complex. The collaborative process of episodic characterisation demands the involvement of many individuals and departments. Even though television drama-makers may strive to speak with 'one' voice in an attempt to ensure continuity of style, multiple creators inevitably leads to multiple points of view, which in turn can present fractured characters. This is particularly evident in soap operas, where a larger writing, production and broadcasting team means that authorship runs the risk of becoming diffuse.

5.3 Type and Stereotype

The third challenge in the creation of television characters is the blurred boundary between type and stereotype. Lacey (1998) explains that: "Types are characters who are defined by what they represent rather than being genuine individuals" (133), adding that: "The type is signified by an actor's appearance and behaviour and, unlike the stereotype, does not exist in the real world" (133). It is common practice for television-makers to cast characters for roles according to type and as 'Dyer's Typography of Representation' illustrates, the actor is usually cast in a role that s/he is 'representative of'. Television-makers consider a specific demographic (such as race, age, gender or ethnicity) for a specific role.

Most South African practitioners begin by looking to the broadcaster's commissioning brief for an understanding of the intended target market. Each channel has its own set of specifications in terms of *who* is watching and *when*. The target market therefore directly informs the *type of characters* that are created and conversely the *type of actors* that tend to be used. When a local broadcaster issues a brief for a drama, the producer responds by creating a proposal that speaks to the channel's needs. For example, if the brief was for SABC1, the producer would take into account that SABC1's target audience is urban black youth and therefore in order for the drama to 'speak to' urban black youth, the narrative would need to be populated with the same *type* of characters as its viewers. This is the starting point for most writers in terms of creating characters for local dramas.

Waddell (2006) points out that we produce meaning both intentionally and unconsciously and that it is critical to differentiate between the two when exploring meaning-making. So if for example the writer unintentionally neglects to give characters depth or the casting agent overlooks 'nuanced' social stratifications, a problem arises in the form of unintentional negative stereotypes. "The notion of stereotypes is important because of the way representations make meaning" (Casey, et al. 2002: 198). This is particularly significant in a South African public broadcasting environment as the SABC Mandate states: "The SABC respects the inherent dignity of all South Africans, reflects them in all their diversity and does not use language or images that convey stereotypical

or prejudiced notions of South Africa's races, cultures and sexes" (SABC Corporate, date unknown: 2).

Writing about the opening of 'Crime and Punishment', a fine art exhibition by Conrad Botes, critic Zingi Mkefa states: "… there is a generation of young black art consumers who are concerned about the way in which 'blackness' is portrayed" (Mkefa, 2009). This concern about race portrayal is shared by a number of consumers of television drama too. For example: in 2001, the Film and Publications Board (FPB) presented its comments to the Home Affairs Portfolio Committee on the classification of the controversial SABC youth drama Yizo Yizo. Members felt that Yizo Yizo creates the impression that "black children live like animals" and that the programme is "an assault on African people" (Film and Publications Board, 2001). To illustrate another instance:

> Mfundi Vundla, do something to save your programme. Fire your scriptwriters. No black people in Africa talk like that! In fact, most white people don't even use that high brow phraseology. As urban, sophisticated South Africans we don't know ANYONE who speaks like that. And where do they come from? Mars, London? Who gave birth to them? Do they never go home to visit their parents? Why is there no mention of townships? We never hear any of them speaking about Soweto or Umlazi or Khatlehong. Don't they know anyone who lives in a township? These really are funny black people (Mutuba and Owen, 2005).

Mutuba and Owen were directing their comments at Mfundi Vundla, the executive producer and creator of Generations, SABC1's flagship television drama. SABC1, which specifically targets the black youth segment of the population, is South Africa's biggest television channel, drawing over 23, 6 million adult viewers or 74 percent of the South African adult population (SABC Board, 2010). Generations enjoys a large viewership, so evidently South Africans are still *watching* despite the perhaps questionable portrayal of 'blackness'. Yet the concern about negative representations extends to other race groups too. Gerwel (1988) asserts that in Afrikaans literature published prior to 1948, coloured people were negatively portrayed as 'Jolly Hotnots'. Yet there is fairly recent evidence of the 'Jolly Hotnot' depiction (coloureds who are happiest when drinking liquor, and can sing, dance and fight – much like the Commedia dell' Arte buffoon) in television drama too. One of Isidingo's storylines in 2001 explored the abusive relationship between the coloured characters of Chico Booysens and his wife Vanessa. Terrence Bridgett played

the alcoholic husband prone to violent jealous rages and Ilse Klink played the cheerful shopkeeper, who was happiest when singing and ballroom dancing.

Having said this, I do not believe that stereotyping is necessarily a bad thing, provided that it is contextualised. Fictional characters represent identities, which to a greater or lesser extent play on social stereotypes. Therefore stereotypes are a critical element in mass media communication, as they are easily recognisable, allowing television-makers to communicate a story effectively to a specific audience. Stereotypes may also provide comic relief for the comedy-hungry South African consumer. However if we spent more time on character development, if we really came to grips with when to employ stereotypes, when to break them and when to delve deeper, we would produce more powerful characters (and stories) for South African screens. Furthermore, if this practice was informed by an understanding of structure of feeling, I believe that we would be better equipped to craft subtle nuances and depth.

It is my belief that we do see *some* degree of diversity of character types representative of a particular ideological representational project. However the extent and depth of the diversity that we do see is not enough. Unfortunately South African television-makers cast tend to actors in roles according to broad social stratifications (gender, race and age) while more 'nuanced' social stratifications (such as language and ethnicity) are often overlooked, disregarded or are simply not present amongst the available pool of talent at the time of casting. For these reasons we may see subtle inconsistencies in characterisation, such as in the case of Afrikaans-speaking actress Milan Murray playing the role of English-speaking Dusty in Isidingo; or South African actor Hlomla Dandala playing the role of part-Nigerian Jacob in Jacob's Cross; or English-speaking David Rees playing the role of Afrikaans-speaking Niek in Egoli. Otherwise it is possible that more glaring inconsistencies, as in the case of Yizo Yizo, may be attributed to the compounding of multiple challenges as outlined in Section 5 – provided that these inconsistencies were unintentional.

5.4 The South African Production Context

The fourth challenge in 'authentic' South African character development is peculiar to the current South African production context. The aim of this section is to illustrate that this country's broadcasting and production practice is *in itself* one of the major challenges facing practitioners trying to creating 'believable' South African characters. Thus I shall discuss not only the broadcasting processes, but also the production processes in order to demonstrate their respective influences on television drama character. Throughout this sub-section I have drawn on a series of interviews that I conducted in Johannesburg and Cape Town in October 2009. These interviews comprised a select forum of respected television industry players, chosen specifically on the basis of their expertise in South African television drama and film (for a list of participants/interviewees see Appendix A). I have referenced the interviewees heavily. This is intentional, for it serves to document what practitioners think about the challenges that they confront in professional practice on a daily basis. In this way, I hope to further my central thesis that interest in South African characters is waning due to reasons unrelated to postmodernism; as well as demonstrate the need for a more considered approach to the complex processes of South African character development.

As outlined in Section 5.2 "Collaboration", the broadcaster's influence on the development process is heavy. Therefore it is worthwhile highlighting the country's current broadcasting context. At present there are three national television stations: SABC, M-Net and etv. The country's semi-public broadcaster, the SABC, receives funding through both license fees and advertising. The SABC owns four television channels (SABC1, SABC2, SABC3 and SABC Africa). M-Net is a subscription-based commercial broadcaster and owns over twenty television channels (including M-Net, kykNet, Mzansi Magic, Africa Magic, Channel O and Vuzu). Etv is the only free-to-air commercial television station in South Africa and owns three television channels (etv, eNews and eNews Africa). At present there are only two avenues available to independent producers to produce television drama for SABC, M-Net and etv: commissioning and licensing. As outlined in the previous Section 5.3 "Type and Stereotype", the South African commissioning process involves the broadcaster issuing a

brief for the type of drama it wants, detailing the category, genre and the values that a particular channel subscribes to. A broadcaster that commissions essentially pays for the production, in return for owning the content and intellectual property (IP). Licensing, on the other hand, involves the producer paying for the production, thereby owning content and retaining IP. The catch with licensing is that the broadcaster pays significantly less for a finished product than for the funding of an entire production. The finished product may not necessarily fit the channel's requirements in terms of programme duration, core values or target audience. Instead it serves primarily as a 'filler' for the programming schedule. Although most producers would opt to retain IP wherever possible, it is usually not feasible in the South African production context, as most producers cannot afford to pay exorbitant production costs upfront. Therefore commissioning is the route that most local producers choose to go. The commissioning and licensing methods of broadcasting heavily influence the way in which a particular drama is developed, the time that is spent on the various production elements and the type of content and characters that are formed. My interviewees spoke frankly on the matter:

> The South African broadcasters have been very conservative in terms of drama and understandably because with drama, it's hard to make money from advertisements unless you have a long-running soap. I mean that's the reason why the soaps are the only kinds of drama that are continuing on the SABC. It's because they earn revenue. Thirteen or twenty-six part episodes of drama series don't earn revenue, because the advertisers wait to see how popular a thing is going to be before they put money into the slot and so none of the short series make money. M-Net put their money into known quantities like Survivor, Big Brother…. You know, drama is a tough cookie unless you're an HBO or somebody like that where it's highly publicised and they can spend fortunes on their dramas and the development. They can throw away so much money on projects that don't make it (Hofmeyr, 2009).

Hofmeyr makes a critical point about finance. Broadcasters are required to fill many broadcast hours with local programming. Therefore instead of allocating a generous budget to one drama, it is more cost-effective to spread the funds across several projects, which results in smaller budgets but multiple dramas. As outlined in Section 3.2. "Postmodern Trends in Television Drama", it is more expensive for a South African producer to deliver a local television drama than any other type of programming. Herein lies the conundrum and the reason why the South African television drama industry has become 'soap-driven': the soap opera allows the broadcaster to fill up required hours of

airtime with programming, giving the writers 'time to get it right', while growing a loyal audience and, in turn, giving advertisers time to assess ratings in order to prove that the product is worth investing in. It is understandable, then, that the soap opera is favoured by our local broadcasters, over all other categories of drama. However, budget limitations directly impact on the length of *time* that a drama spends in the development, pre-production, production and post-production phases. The smaller the budget, the less time available to create, shoot and edit. A lack of development time is a source of immense frustration among practitioners. Booysen (2009) states: "I've never known any production in this country where there has been enough time given to get it right. We work under these incredible deadlines." Selane (2009) agrees.

> Based on my experience, I don't think we [spend] enough time [on] script and character development. And we recognise that. We all know that we should spend more time on the process. But usually with us it's always "Okay, so you guys want to make a local drama. When can you get it on air?" And so everything else in terms of scripts ... I mean to be in a situation where you are still writing scripts while you are shooting is not ideal in any environment and in most cases we have to work in that kind of climate. And it's to our detriment. I mean you can see it on air (Selane, 2009).

The practitioners are in agreement that artistic quality is compromised during the developmental phase. Thus the broadcaster's influence on character can be summarised as follows:

(i) Commissioning processes allow for South African broadcasters to determine (among other variables) the production budget and on-air scheduling. Limited budgets or on-air scheduling demands lead to a lack of development time. In turn, a lack of development time results in the demise of characters.

(ii) The creation of a soap-driven industry at the expense of other categories of drama.

As illustrated in Section 5.2 "Collaboration", the development of television drama involves multiple authors. Therefore in considering the challenges from the practitioner's point of view, Booysen (2009) assents: "We produce an awful lot of hours of soap per week for a small industry." Yet she attributes part of the reason to the *artistic quality* of South African soap opera:

> I think that the standard of South African soap is far better than anywhere else. From what I've seen in America, the U.K., countries like Germany and Holland – absolutely. There's a way that our stories are told that sets them apart. If you look

> at South African soaps – across the board – you've got top directors like Gerrit Schoonhoven, top writers like Malan Steyn. In no other country would you get actors like Rapulana Seiphemo, Anna-Mart van der Merwe and Jamie Bartlett acting in soaps. These are astonishingly good actors that are bringing so many levels to their characters, far more than foreign soap actors. I think these are people who were truly committed to making theatre, who have entered soap or television drama because it's the only way they could survive. But they keep that commitment to excellence, of wanting to go deeper. And I think you can see it (Booysen, 2009).

The soap opera also provides the best training ground for local crew, as it is produced in a contained environment over a long-term period. This, in turn, means that the local drama industry has more practitioners skilled in soap than any other category of drama. It is inevitable, then, that those skilled in soap would apply their 'soap' skills to other types of drama. Similarly, there is an inference that other categories of television drama, on the whole, are not produced by a team primarily skilled in those particular forms. Our strength appears to have become soap, so where does that leave our other categories of television drama? Not very well off, according to my interviewees. Booysen asserts that while soap opera performs best, at the other end of the spectrum, English-language series, serials and single drama perform worst.

> I think we'll always struggle with English drama, because people have gotten used to watching American and British stuff. You're fighting against the production values that come with that sort of thing. But local Zulu, Sotho or Afrikaans drama will always have a much easier way, because viewers are happy to see their languages, cultures and characters they recognise. And you know it's the age-old thing of English [White] South Africans struggling to find their identity. We're probably the South Africans with the weakest sense of identity. And so there are other places we go to. In wanting to make it 'authentically' South African, you end up with a Zulu social worker, an Afrikaans prosecutor and a Xhosa doctor in your English drama. It becomes an English-speaking version – but it's not the absolute world in which most English-speaking South Africans live. It's a very tricky thing. I think a lot of local broadcasters are struggling to make English drama more successful. That's the one that is the hardest to do (Booysen, 2009).

In the South African television context, it appears that strong narratives and authentic social settings often rescue weak characters in local English dramas. If viewers are frequently presented with weak characters, the narrative is ultimately not as effective as it could have been. I was particularly interested to know which dramaturgical element is

given greater emphasis in South African television drama by my interviewees. Plot or character? I was surprised by the responses.

> … My experience is that you start with the plot and you create a story and once you get the story or once you get an *idea* for a story, then you start to create your characters and you make them as interesting as you possibly can. But the plot is what hooks people…. Although soap is a different kettle of fish. I think in soap character is possibly king, because the public identify with the people they see on the screen and so the integrity, believability and recognisability of the character is hugely important in daily soaps…. Yet the times when Isidingo has done best is when we had huge plot-driven stories.... (Hofmeyr, 2009).

Hofmeyr places clear emphasis on plot in series, serials and single drama, yet appears uncertain of where he places emphasis in soap opera. I found this interesting as Hofmeyr is perhaps best recognised for his contributions to award-winning South African soap opera (see Appendix A). Is it possible then, that the success of his professional practice could be largely attributed to intuition and experience as opposed to considered choice? Ngcobo asserts:

> I think that the best dramas are from a character's point-of-view. Where we're on a character's journey, and the character grows over time and we see them change from what they were in the beginning to something else. And that journey we follow…. However, there must be events that take us through that journey. So the plot is also important in shaping the journey. Because it can't happen without events that determine how we feel about a character at certain moments…. As much as character and plot inform what one does, I think the societal zeitgeist is also a really big informant of what one does. The political context and the political dynamic are critical to informing the kinds of stories that are being told at any particular time …. I think that you always operate on a number of different levels. Said and unsaid. Spoken and unspoken (Ngcobo, 2009).

Ngcobo states here that character, plot and 'zeitgeist' are equally important dramaturgical elements in television drama. Yet earlier on in the interviews, the participants had been unanimous in their assertions that the South African television drama industry is plot driven. There appears to be a disconnect between what practitioners *say* or *think* they focus on and what they actually *do* place emphasis on. I attribute this discrepancy to either (a) the tension that lies in practitioners *wanting* to devote time and attention to all dramaturgical elements, yet *needing* to deliver story hours to the broadcaster; or (b) practice-based assumptions formed as a result of experience, intuition and audience

research, without an informed knowledge of the current theoretical discourse; assumptions that therefore may be flawed or conflicting.

The production influences on character can therefore be surmised as follows:

(i) Some television practitioners consider the standard of South African soap opera to be extremely high in comparison to American and European soap opera. This may be attributed to an exceptionally high level of artistic skill and a commitment to excellence that is traditionally not found in this category of drama.

(ii) However in order to meet the broadcaster's scheduling demands or budget constraints, the practitioner's focus is directed to generating as many story hours as quickly as possible.

(iii) There is a tension that lies between the practitioner's artistic desires, the practitioner's lack of current theoretical discourse and the broadcaster's business model which 'knot' the shared understanding of how characters work for particular audiences, in particular genres, in particular categories, in particular contexts. Consequently the practitioner's choices in terms of where to place dramaturgical emphasis are largely unintentional.

(iv) There is a flaw in approach in relation to the practitioner's attempt to create 'representative' characters in order to meet a broadcaster's - in particular the national broadcaster's - requirements. In English serials, series and single drama, this is rarely executed successfully. The writer frequently skips a crucial part of the character development process: breathing life into 'type'. Instead the writer, operating under severe time constraints, skips from creating 'type' to simply generating narrative. This is done in order to fill the stipulated hours of airtime with story, for which the practitioner is contractually bound. 'Cutting corners' in this way can cause a lack of development of 'depth' as well as the unintentional creation of negative stereotypes.

This sub-section illustrates the challenges, peculiar to South Africa, of creating authentic characters. Yet if we recall the other challenges (episodic characterisation, collaboration and the representation of diversity) that are experienced by *all* television

drama writers, both local and international – it becomes apparent that the South African television drama writer, in particular, is faced with a monumental task. Given the complexity of representing not only a public; but a diverse South African public; with its broadcasting mandate of nation building; and its budget and time constraints - it is now clearer why the South African television character is dying. Perhaps a way to facilitate character development is to consider the process in a new way? It is for this reason that I turned to the discipline of social psychology.

6. THE MULTIPLICITY OF SOCIAL SELF

> I had a sense of myself with several identities in competition with one another
> and yet each rich in its own way
>
> (Mangcu, 2008: 22)

I operate in different spaces. In the home environment I am a daughter, a sister or a cousin. In the workplace I am an employee, a colleague or a client. At university I am a student, but I am also a friend, a volunteer and a citizen. We modify our behaviours, attitudes and even moods or personality depending on the situation, time and individuals present. Not only do I *behave* differently in different ways under different circumstances with different people, but I also *speak* and even *think* differently depending on the situation and who I am talking to. This concept is called 'the multiplicity of social self', an idea that finds its provenance in social psychology and the theories of William James (1890).

James made several major contributions to self theory or the notion that the self-concept is a representation of an individual's personal identity. Most significant to my research is James's articulation of the principle of 'multiplicity of social self', where he states that: "...a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognise him and carry an image of him in their mind" (James, 1890: 294). Salgado and Hermans (2005) explicate that for the better part of the twentieth century, social psychologists primarily subscribed to the Cartesian heritage of thought in "the conception of the ego as a sole basis of meaning and consciousness" (3). However the notion of a plural self has been increasingly recognised by social psychologists over the last thirty years. Yet: "...this recognition raises the problem of explaining how a sense of self-identity is achieved within a multiplicity of selves" (Salgado and Hermans, 2005: 3).

In researching the psychology of diversity, Blaine (2007) asserts that diversity is "the presence of difference" and that the "most common usages of 'diversity' refer to *social* difference, or differences among people" (2). Indeed, South Africa is known for its cultural diversity. According to 2010 mid-year population estimates, the total population of 49,991,300 South Africans is 79.4 percent Black, 9.2 percent White, 8.7 percent

Coloured and 2.7 percent Indian/Asian (Statistics South Africa, 2010: 4). There are numerous sub-groups, including gender (fifty-one percent of the population is female) and age (31 percent is aged younger than fifteen years and approximately 37.6 percent is 60 years or older) (Statistics South Africa, 2010: 3). Although eleven languages are recognised by the Constitution, there are numerous others, plus an extensive number of ethnic groups, religious affiliations and income brackets all residing under the democratic 'rainbow nation' flag. In a diverse environment such as ours, there exists an even greater degree of difference. Our interactions become more heterogeneous in nature due to "… the complexities of real-life inter-group relationships in socially stratified societies" (Turner and Onorato, 1999: 18). Thus, with every distinction between the self and the other, our social interaction becomes more layered. Turner and Onorato (1999) also point out that: "People do not have social and personal identities in a fixed, static sense as part of their individual identity" (24). This view is supported by Tyler, Kramer and John (1999), who state that: "… the self is part of a constructive and dynamic process rather than a separate and fixed cognitive structure" (3). Blaine (2007) expands on these complexities as follows:

> Although we are frequently unaware of it, our lives unfold within social contexts which are populated by people who are different – both from us and each other. The people who populate the situations in our day to day lives may differ in many ways, such as their ethnic identity, sex, cultural background, economic status, political affiliation, or religious belief. The specific dimensions of difference do not matter nearly as much as the fact that we think, feel, and behave within diverse social contexts … We, as individuals, are perpetually embedded in social difference (1).

Salgado and Hermans caution that: "Diversity creates a 'multiphrenic self', a self that needs to deal with different kinds of ways of meaning-making" (Salgado and Hermans, 2005: 6).To illustrate this phenomenon in social psychology, Turner and Onorato make use of the term 'the looking-glass self'.

> The looking-glass self is a metaphor for the idea that the individual sees (acquires) self in the "reflected appraisals" of others. Others in the social environment are not self – which is unique and personal – but they are a mirror for the self. They provide social reflections of the self, which, when internalized, make self-awareness reflexive (able to function as both object and subject), provide social identities and content, and enable participation in a world of shared symbolic meanings (Turner and Onorato, 1999: 14).

To consider characters in this way is not a concept that is new to the performing arts. For example: "The epic theatre is chiefly interested in the attitudes which people adopt towards one another, wherever they are socio-historically significant (typical)" (Willett, 1990: 86). In A Short Organum for the Theatre, "Brecht's most complete statement of his revolutionary philosophy of the theatre", Brecht comments on the process of characterisation (by fellow actors) as follows: "The realm of attitudes adopted by the characters towards one another is what we call the realm of gest. Physical attitude, tone of voice, and facial expression are all determined by a social gest" (Brecht cited in Willett, 1990: 198). According to Brechtian philosophy:

> A character's piecemeal development as he initiates more and more relationships with other characters, consolidating or expanding himself in continually new situations, produces a rich and sometimes complicated emotional curve in the spectator, a fusion of feelings and even conflict between them (*Ibid:* 101).

Furthermore:

> The idea is that the spectator should be put in a position where he can make comparisons about everything that influences the way in which human beings behave. This means, from the aesthetic point of view, that the actors' social gest becomes particularly important. The arts have to begin paying attention to the gest (*Ibid:* 86).

Perhaps it is possible then to achieve greater 'depth' by thinking about fictional television characters in terms of 'multiplicity of social self'? If characters could more accurately reflect this notion that we are different people at different times under different circumstances, would we not achieve a greater sense of the realist aesthetic (as was referred to in Section 3.1 "Definition of Relevant Terms")? Livingstone argues that:

> ... television programmes provide more complex and naturalistic texts for social perception, attribution and stereotyping research than the artificial scenarios often used by social psychology. The fact-fiction distinction has been a hindrance to theorising. Not only is it increasingly meaningful to see life as fiction, as games or as ritual, but also psychologically both television and 'life' are to the participating individual equally a source of meaning" (Livingstone, 1998: 6 - 7).

To consider character development, not only in terms of the representation of a personal self, but also through the eyes of the *other* characters that populate the narrative is an idea that excites me: the linking of the collective to the personal; a method in which character is revealed through relationships *with other characters*. An inter-disciplinary approach

such as this; one which is rooted in television drama yet draws on social psychological theory and is supported by theatre practice, could perhaps offer practitioners and theorists a new way of understanding character development for South African television drama. The question now is: how to apply this theoretical knowledge to a practical project?

7. ZINDZI: AN EXPERIMENT IN APPLYING THEORY TO PRACTICE

In turning my attention to a practical exploration of my central research question, I was faced with the dilemma of how to demonstrate the theoretical notion of 'multiplicity of social self' within a narrative project. How does one measure or explore depth of character on a *practical* level?

My practical project found provenance in plays such as Martin Crimp's Attempts on her Life (1997) and Luigi Pirandello's Right You Are, If You Think You Are (1917); and films such as Akira Kurosawa's Rashomon (1950), Pete Travis's Vantage Point (2008) and Nick Cassavetes's My Sister's Keeper (2009). The commonality between these works is that they revolve around different characters' points of view of an event. Pramaggiore and Wallis (2008) assert that: "Rashomon offers an alternative to classic narrative form through its structure, characters and lack of closure" (84), an approach to storytelling which "helps the film develop its central theme: the impossibility of comprehending the truth" (85). Similarly, in their discussion of Right You Are, If You Think You Are, Beesley and Joughin (2001) state that the truth of this play's events is presented as relative to three different viewpoints and therefore the play is notable for its wholesale rejection of the idea of objective truth.

My practical project is slightly different from the above works in that it is structured around different characters' points of view of a central protagonist. The narrative is an experimental exploration of the notion of 'multiplicity of social self' and so Zindzi is the story of one central character and her social relationships. I intended for each support character's point of view to reveal a slightly different personality facet of the central character, as well as another piece of the narrative puzzle. The narrative aimed to encompass various 'truths' by illustrating the perspectives of Zindzi's mother, her boss, her friend, her daughter, her neighbour, her lover and her own view of herself in subtle ways. With each support character, Zindzi dresses slightly differently, speaks slightly differently and behaves slightly differently. In my attempt to apply the notion of 'multiplicity of social self' to practice, I had hoped for my practical project to develop technique through theorised experiment. I wanted to create a stronger, more 'rounded' central character, and also to illustrate how different people can bring out different sides

of ourselves. In this way, I hoped to better understand how one might play with the representation of identity on screen.

For a time I was paralysed by the fear that I could not create a 'typically South African' character. Who was typical? What was typical? The complexity of creating 'character' was daunting. Ultimately in locating my protagonist, I looked to national statistics for guidance, conscious that this method was similar in approach to that of standard commissioning processes (as illustrated in section 5.4 on "The South African Production Context"). Therefore, in some ways, Zindzi represents the majority of the South African population, for she is under the age of twenty-four, black and female (Statistics South Africa, 2010). This process provided me with a recognisable 'type' of South African that also seemed to 'fit' with the form of the made-for-TV movie, which: "frequently features women centrally in its narratives" (Schulz, 1994: 170). But in order to create depth of character, I needed to explore further.

> The well-formed narrative is typically one in which the characters (or objects) in the story possess a continuous or coherent identity across time. A given protagonist cannot felicitously serve as a villain at one moment and a hero in the next or demonstrate powers of genius unpredictably interspersed with moronic actions (Gergen, 1994: 191–192).

Evidently Gergen is a firm supporter of classic Hollywood narrative. But what would happen if a story *did* have a central character that was both protagonist and antagonist? Would that make the narrative 'badly-formed'? Certainly it may in commercial television drama. However, my practical project was an experimental one: an exploration of character. Rorty (1992) asserts that 'real' people: "…are not only capable of acting intelligently and wisely, but also of acting in error and ignorance" (7). I experimented with this notion so that instead of simply being a flawed character or an anti-hero, Zindzi actually became both the antagonist (worst enemy) and protagonist (heroine) of her own life. To explore television character development in this way presented me with a unique opportunity to put the notion of 'multiplicity of social self' into practice.

The developmental process of my central character was in contrast to the developmental processes of the supporting characters, which were largely concept-based. For example, Ma'Khulu was created from the notion of *Ubuntu*, which originates from the Zulu maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. This translates into English as *a person is a*

person through (other) people. A person who embodies *Ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated, tortured or oppressed. However this notion of humanity and good will is not unique to Zulu culture. Gianan (2010) explicates that it is also essentially expressed in other cultures and philosophies, such as the Buddhist school of Zen and the Filipino philosophy of *loob*. Yet I chose to apply *Ubuntu* as a concept to the character of Ma'Khulu, because it is seen as one of the founding principles of the new democratic South Africa and therefore holds greater relevance to my research. *Ubuntu* speaks particularly about the fact that you cannot exist as a human being in isolation. We are interconnected therefore you cannot be human all by yourself. When you possess this quality of *Ubuntu,* you are known for your generosity: I am because we are. This was the concept on which the support character of Ma'Khulu was based. The salient point here is that in Zindzi, not all the characters were designed to be fully rounded. Sometimes characters are simply types, created to co-exist with more complex characters. Types work well in certain genres or narrative contexts. For example, recall Section 2. Aristotelian characters are not intended to be 'real' or fully rounded. They are meant to be iconic representatives of particular ideas.

Once my central themes, ideas and characters were in place, I elected to bring a foreign co-writer on board. This was for three reasons. Firstly, I felt the need to step back from the characters and story, in order to produce and direct it. Secondly, as was illustrated in sub-section 5.2, television drama is a collaborative process. Thirdly, I was prompted by the following statement:

> In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding…. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise for itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths (Willemen, 1989: 26 cited in Murphy, 2000: 246).

The notion of 'writing for the other' resonated strongly with me. I had encountered some criticism during the making of one of my medium projects, Pad·kos (2008), a documentary that examines the Afrikaner identity crisis in a democratic South Africa (refer to Appendix B: Figures 5 - 6). Questions were raised by several of my peers and

documentary subjects, as to why I (an English-speaking coloured filmmaker) was making a film of this nature. There was a tone of scepticism and suspicion in questions as to why I would *want* to explore this particular subject-matter and also why I believed I had the *right* to tell this kind of story. It touched a creative nerve, because across all of my minor, medium and major projects I had asked similar questions of myself. Could someone who has not been raped tell an authentic story about a rape? Could someone who is not a mother tell an insightful story about motherhood? Could someone who is coloured and English-speaking create a 'believable' black Xhosa-speaking character? An outsider's view of a culture can indeed be deeply enriching for both parties, as I was to later discover not only working with the cast of Zindzi, but also in collaborating with my Nigerian co-writer, Victor Sanchez Aghahowa. Wayne Wang in discussion with bell hooks (1996) about the representation of cultures to which we do not belong, states:

> … I don't agree with people who say that you can only make films about blacks if you're black, you can only make films about Chinese if you're Chinese. The criteria for me is for the person to be open-minded, and to do their homework on that culture, and whatever that they're trying to portray (hooks, 1996: 128).

Before I commenced collaboration with my co-writer, however, I turned my attention to themes. All of my postgraduate projects have explored the breaking of stereotype, such as the notion of womanhood in my minor project, Stripped (refer to Appendix B: Figures 1 – 2). The central theme of 'breaking the stereotype of motherhood' was explored in one of my medium projects, Suburban Madonna (2008) (refer to Appendix B: Figures 3 - 4). We all expect mothers to love their children. It's a societal given; it's considered 'natural'. But what if a mother, who was a very good mother, actually felt absolutely no connection to her child? What if she wasn't suffering from post-partum depression or any kind of mental illness that society could explain away; what if she just genuinely didn't love her child, even though she fed it, clothed it, and saw to all its other practical needs? What then?

Zindzi (2009) was a progression of these ideas (refer to Appendix B: Figures 8 – 11). We generally equate sex with 'making love', but how would a child conceived in an act of violence actually come to terms with his or her existence? If you knew that you were never planned, that your parents never loved each other, never even knew each other, in fact hated each other in the worst possible circumstances, how would that affect

your view of the world? Conversely, if your child had been conceived as a result of rape, surely it must be painful to look that child in the face every day and be reminded of the incident; to see features that are a constant reminder of your rapist. We have never really explored this particular subject in film or on television, yet this situation *must* be applicable to many African women. The incidence of rape is extremely high in South Africa. Recent crime statistics indicate that a total of 55,097 rape and indecent assault cases were reported to the South African Police Service in 2009/2010 (South African Police Service, 2010). So how are the 'children of violence' that result from rape actually coping? This is the heart of the piece. If motherhood is a familiar form of unconditional love, then the *loving* motherhood of a child of violence must be one of the highest forms of sacrifice and love. Having said this, I was less interested in the Ma'Khulu character and far more interested in how Zindzi deals with it. How does she treat her own child (Thandi), whilst carrying the knowledge that her child's father is also her rapist and that her own mother loves her and her child unconditionally, for no reason that she can explain?

Where motherhood is the central theme, the notion of 'life versus death' is secondary, although these two themes are certainly inter-connected. I have illustrated this in Zindzi through the understated introduction of a milk motif: Zindzi's fondness for milk results in the household running out of it; Ma'Khulu's desire to please Zindzi by replenishing the milk supply leads her into a dangerous situation; and ultimately milk serves as the catalyst that leads to Ma'Khulu's assault. To return to the 'life versus death' theme, I was captivated by Rorty's (1992) insight that:

> Except for self-contained activities that are completed in the very act of performing them, we rarely grasp the structured unity of what we do. That is one of the reasons we cannot judge a person's life happy until he is dead, and perhaps some time after he is dead, when the full shape of his actions are finally revealed, their trajectories completed (7).

Moreover, on a personal note, I am at a point in my life where I find myself grappling with various forms of 'death': the end of a five-year relationship with my boyfriend; the passing not only of a grandparent but of a very close friend; the closing of a certain chapter in my career. In particular, I have this vivid memory of standing next to my mother, before a full congregation, at her father's funeral in 2009. An open casket

allowed us to stare at the body; to regard a once-familiar face caked in make-up. I was dismayed, because his features looked grotesque. My mother took his hand, touched his face and wept. Afterwards it was established that the amount of make-up had not been a source of distress to her at all. In that particular moment, I had been horrified at the sight someone badly 're-membered', yet my mother had been devastated at the loss of a man remembered. This is also where the character of Zindzi was born. I asked myself what if someone who did make-up for the dead actually had to do the face of someone they knew. How do you reconstruct life? And how would you reconstruct life for a person you either loved or hated? Would your prior relationship with the deceased then influence the reconstruction process? This evolved into an exploration of a character 'reconstructing life' for the person she hated most in the world. In particular, with the character Zindzi, although the rape may have been a 'death of innocence', Zindzi's pregnancy with Thandi was the point at which she faced a crossroads. She could have aborted Thandi, or given her up for adoption, but she chose not to. She made a conscious decision to give birth to her and an unconscious decision not to love her. And so the point at which Zindzi decides to *live* is paradoxically when she encounters *death*.

The third theme revolves around the concept of 'wholeness versus parts'. Just as my written research opened with a brief consideration of Aristotelian drama, my practical research began with a deliberation of Aristotle's maxim: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. For what is a 'whole' character, but the sum of its parts? How your friends see you is going to be very different to how your family sees you, how your colleagues see you, how an institution (such as the law) sees you and to how you see yourself. Furthermore, each person or institution in your life brings out very different sides of you, which in turn affects your social interaction with them. Similarly, in my practical investigation, every 'act', social relationship and character's perspective of Zindzi was intended to reveal a different part of the story puzzle to us.

Although I believe the central themes behind Zindzi to be strong and relevant, I failed to achieve some of my aims. I think in part characterisation largely diminished in importance under the extremely difficult conditions of production (as experienced on a macro-level in the South African broadcast and production environment). Although the production of a made-for-television film allowed me to eliminate the problems associated

with ‘episodic characterisation’, it also introduced a different set of challenges such as shooting in an uncontrolled environment and restricted location access. I still had to contend with collaboration, which in turn meant grappling with different viewpoints and interpretations to my own. A research environment fortunately allowed me to eliminate the principal constraint of time, yet I still had to contend with severe budget constraints.

Furthermore there is a tension that lies in the application of theoretical knowledge to a practical project such as mine. I have invited viewers to engage with the narrative Zindzi on two levels: conceptually and emotionally. By positioning the character Zindzi as both the protagonist and antagonist of her own life I have asked the audience to view the text with an omnipotent all-knowing eye. By including, for example, the character of the rapist as an antagonistic force, I have asked the audience to engage with the story on an empathetic level. Although the perspectival shift on a scene-by-scene basis aids the illustration of my theoretical concept, it also creates a rather disjointed and jarring story experience. In addition, my co-writer and I struggled to use Zindzi as our access point to examine the people in her world, as opposed to using *her relationships* with them to examine facets of *her* character. Furthermore I have suggested that in South African character development, practitioners should be more cognisant of the notion of ‘multiplicity of social self’ in order to create more believable on-screen social relationships. I have proposed that this may result in any given character carrying a greater realist aesthetic. Yet it is possible that my practical experiment did not work precisely *because* my experience of others is singular. In real life I only ever encounter one part of a multi-faceted individual. It is my experience of *myself* that is multi-faceted. These fractions proved difficult for me to communicate and (perhaps) for viewers to absorb. Possibly these are tensions that can never be resolved.

The making of Zindzi thus highlighted not only a possible flaw in methodological approach; but on a practical level, it also demonstrated the difficulty of achieving in-depth focus on character as a result of the severe pressures of the production process. In the following Section 8 “Conclusions” I shall explicate the primary deductions that can be drawn from my research.

8. CONCLUSIONS

I have advocated that where postmodernism is Fuchs' cultural weapon and theatre is her arena, although we may witness the 'death of character' in the South African television context, the cause of death is different. I have made three key inferences as a result of my investigation:

(i) The attributes which distinguish television drama writing from that of feature films and plays are episodic characterisation and collaboration. These features are essential to the television script development process; yet collaboration and episodic characterisation can also thwart authentic character development. Episodic characterisation increases the number of times that a viewer can make contact with a character, resulting in familiarity. Viewers are thereby allowed to invest in the process, not just the outcome. However the development of believable television characters can also be hampered by the speed of the process. Collaboration involves multiple creators, which in turn leads to multiple points of view and an increased risk of creating fractured characters. A variety of author viewpoints can be beneficial to the process if the process is not stunted due to the speed of episodic characterisation.

(ii) As part of their mandate towards nation building, South African broadcasters stipulate that their programming be representative of the country's diversity and/or appeal to their target audiences. And rightly so. However, this policy necessitates that commissioned practitioners remain cognisant of modelling fictional characters on social types. To create a character based on 'type' is not problematic in and of itself, however additional research and time is required in order to convert 'type' into authentic character - particularly if the individual/s responsible for the representation are writing for an 'other'. If additional research is not undertaken at this point - before the scripting of dialogue begins - the characters are likely to reflect the social spectrum *breadth* but only as seen from a particular point of view. Therefore the process of representing the unique confluence of peoples and culture in South Africa, without adequate research into the 'other', can hinder authentic character development.

(iii) A television industry located in a developing country is frequently forced to contend with problems relating to inadequate production infrastructure and resources. Although the South African film and television industries have enjoyed many local resources in the form of multifarious locations, mild climate and accessibility, the television industry is primarily soap-driven, which in turn means that recording occurs principally in contained studios and not in outdoor locations. Therefore the development of the television drama industry is severely hampered by a lack of resources primarily relating to *time* and *finance*. The two are inextricably linked; for the production budget dictates the amount of time spent on development, shoot or post. There is a tension that lies between South African practitioners *wanting* to focus on character, yet *needing* to accommodate a plot-driven industry as a result of the local broadcasters' stipulations that they generate a large number of story hours. The problem of 'authentic' character is therefore exacerbated when 'type' is left undeveloped in the precipitation to generate as many hours of drama as possible within the time and budget constraints.

The South African television character stands vulnerable in the trajectory of these three frangible bullets. This understanding about the cause of death of the South African character led me to pursue my experiment in 'multiplicity of social self'. The aim of this experiment was to demonstrate the need for a more considered, serious and complex approach to the notion of character in South African television drama. I have illustrated that the concepts which find their roots in social psychology can add value to the process of character development. Despite the limitations and somewhat flawed nature of my experiment due to the difficulties I faced in production, the process has deepened and broadened my understanding of the South African television character. Williams (1977) tells us that: "The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products" (128). Similarly, in this instance, I believe that the end-product is of less importance than the process by which it has been produced. The process has allowed me to contribute to artistic knowledge by offering a greater understanding of the processes and challenges involved in the conception and production of fictional characters for contemporary South African television drama. My research presents a new way of thinking about the South African

television character. It has considered our unique socio-political landscape, the concerns of industry practitioners and current theory. My research connects ideas to demonstrate a proficiency in conceptualisation and it could serve as the starting point for future research in the following ways:

(i) To expand the literature base on processes of initial conception and production in television drama.

(ii) To call for further research into social identity and its links to television drama.

(iii) To encourage more rigorous interrogation of television character development; as well as to encourage the identification of potential trends and possibilities for reshaping the local television character.

I do not propose that character should be the primary dramaturgical element in all South African television drama. Instead I believe that local practitioners should be clearer about their artistic *choices* by interrogating (in any given television drama) where principal emphasis should be placed; whether it be on character, plot, 'structure of feeling' or any other element. In the process of making considered choices such as these, practitioners will achieve a greater awareness of the relationships between characters; thus contributing to character revival in strengthening on-screen interaction and the overall artistic quality of the television drama. Yet a question still remains (albeit slightly modified after my deductions): *How does one increase depth of character in South African television drama, given the constraints?*

9. APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Referenced Interviewees:

Mitzi Booysen is the current Head Writer of Binnelanders (2005–), a popular South African medical drama. She has eighteen years of soap opera writing experience. She is also the former Head Writer of Isidingo (1998–), the former Head Writer of Egoli (1992−2010) and the former Head of the Creative Department for Endemol South Africa.

Gray Hofmeyr is the current Head of Drama for Endemol South Africa. He created the popular comedy series Suburban Bliss (1996), The Big Time (1990−1992) and the drama serial The Villagers (1977–1978). He is also creator and producer of the SABC3 flagship drama series Isidingo (1998−). He has directed several feature films, including Jock of the Bushveld (1986), Sweet and Short (1992), There's a Zulu on my Stoep (1993), Mr Bones I (2001), Mama Jack (2005), Mr Bones II (2008) and several critically acclaimed made-for-television films, such as The Outcast (1982).

Kethiwe Ngcobo is the current Head of Drama: SABC. Originally trained in feature films and television dramas in the British industry, her current portfolio includes Izulu Lami (My Secret Sky) (2009) and Shakespeare in Mzansi (2008).

Bongiwe Selane was the Head of Content for Special Interest Channels: M-Net at the time of her interview. She has been extensively involved in story development for South African films such as Gums and Noses (2004) and The Flyer (2005); as well as television drama such as Snitch (2004–2007) and Jacob's Cross (2007–2009); and the M-Net New Directions project (1993–), a filmmaking initiative founded on the principles of skills development and training. Bongiwe is now a freelance producer.

Unreferenced interviewees:

Vicki Bawcombe is a sitcom scriptwriter, a script editor and an active member of the Writers' Guild of South Africa (WGSA). She is also co-founder and co-partner of Dog Tail Incorporated, an 'intellectual property management' company.

Vanessa Jansen is Senior Commissioning Editor: Long Running Series for the SABC. Her portfolio includes soap operas such as Generations (1994−), 7de Laan (2000−) and Muvhango (2007−).

Michael Murphey is a producer for Kalahari Pictures. He co-produced the critically acclaimed South African feature film District 9 (2009). His feature film credits include Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989) and Trick or Treat (1986).

APPENDIX B: JPEG STILLS TO ILLUSTRATE MY PRACTICAL RESEARCH

Figure 1. Woman

As seen in the minor project *Stripped* (2008)

Figure 2. Woman

As seen in the minor project *Stripped* (2008)

Figure 3. Frustrated Mother

As seen in the medium project *Suburban Madonna* (2008)

Figure 4. Mother Institutionalised

As seen in the medium project *Suburban Madonna* (2008)

Figure 5. Die Klein Karoo Nationale Kunstefees Slogan

As seen in the medium documentary *Pad·kos* (2008)

Figure 6. Allison Triegaardt located in her own work

As seen in the medium documentary *Pad·kos* (2008)

Figure 8. Zindzi before the rape
As seen in the major project *Zindzi* (2009)

Figure 9. Zindzi prepares to work on the rapist
As seen in the major project *Zindzi* (2009)

Figure 10.
The relationship between Zindzi and her daughter
As seen in the major project *Zindzi* (2009)

Figure 11.
The relationships between Zindzi, her daughter and her mother
As seen in the major project *Zindzi* (2009)

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