

Media consumption and everyday life

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Deputy-Vice-Chancellors, Deans, colleagues, students, friends, and family. Thank you for the opportunity to address you all on this important occasion in my academic life.

I would like to begin by thanking those who have helped bring me to this point.

I am part of that generation of local Media Studies scholars that helped develop the field in this country. As a result, my academic development has largely come about without the help or aid of mentors. However, I would especially like to acknowledge Dr Lynette Steenveld, my Rhodes colleague. Her engagement with me, right from the start of my academic career, about the key issues and debates helped clarify and develop my understandings. We also became engaged in another sense, and have been married for 17 years.

I would also like to thank my two PhD supervisors, Professors Jan Coetzee and Peter Dahlgren. They enabled my entry into the field of empirical qualitative research out of which much of the work I will discuss this evening emerges.

I would also like to thank my friends for providing encouragement and intellectual companionship. I will not name them all in case I leave any of them out, but they know who they are.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife and children for providing me with a rich life outside of the academy, and my mother, sister, and parents-in-law who have provided me with much love and support over the years.

I see this inaugural lecture as an opportunity to trace my journey into the field of media studies, showing how significant youthful experiences with the media set me off on my particular research trajectory. In this address I will use the umbrella term ‘mass media’ to cover both the traditional news media as well as forms of popular culture such as soap operas, popular music and so on. Sometimes we use the terms ‘popular culture’ and ‘mass media’ interchangeably as they both constitute the cultural life of ordinary people.

I will begin by recounting two indelibly etched memories. It is the early 1970s. I’m 15 or 16 years old, and I am standing at an ironing board pressing a multi-coloured tie-dyed headband, which I’ve made from a strip of linen torn from a bedding sheet. The strip is loaded with meaning for it signifies my identification with the American counter-culture. Putting it on, imaginatively transports me to Haight-Ashbury, the centre of an emergent youth culture. This distant place

signifies communal living, sharing, personal freedom, and experimentation. It contrasts strongly with the isolation and restriction I experience growing up in a small South African town, part of a Jewish, white middle class nuclear family.

Significantly, my knowledge of this distant culture is mass mediated. It comes to me through magazine images and increasingly, through the sounds of American West Coast musicians – the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, the Quicksilver Messenger Service, and the Jefferson Airplane. Their songs celebrate these counter-cultural values against which my own lived ‘reality’ is judged and found wanting. This latter ‘reality’ has been shaped by the local ‘ideological state apparatuses’: the militaristic all-white school I attend, the state-controlled radio I listen to, and the local newspaper I read. All of these institutions generate the discourses which maintain the deeply conservative political consensus of white South Africa prevalent at the time.

When I recounted to my sister this incident of ironing the linen headband she commented that this was probably the last time I was at an ironing board. For the record I wish to publicly state that she is wrong in this.

The second memory comes from a slightly earlier period. It’s late at night and I should be asleep. Instead I am turning the short-wave dial on my radio hoping to pick up a foreign station. By chance I tune in to

Radio Freedom, the external radio service of the African National Congress (ANC), broadcasting from Lusaka, Zambia. The presenter condemns the “racist white boers” who hold the reigns of power in South Africa. I find the broadcast deeply unsettling. This is a voice of the ‘hidden’ black majority, a voice silenced in the local white-controlled state and independent media. It is a voice from the margins, to which I have not been exposed. It poses a threat to the ‘white’ reality I inhabit. The broadcast categorises me as part of white militaristic conservatism and in one sense it is correct in this. But that is not all of me and the broadcast fails to recognise the difference I am trying to forge for myself.

These two incidents illustrate contradictory roles played by the mass media at certain points in my life. On the one hand, via the media, I was transported (symbolically, at least) from what I experienced as the confines of my local culture. I was given access to other worlds and ways of being and was provided for the first time with an external vantage point from which to make sense of my own life circumstances. At the same time, as the second incident attests, my worldview remained contained by the ideology of apartheid, hegemonic in white South Africa. This worldview was sustained in part by the local media to which I had access.

In his classic work *The Sociological Imagination* published 60 years ago, C. Wright Mills writes that scholarly thinkers should not split

their work from their lives. Rather, they should learn to use their personal experiences *in* their intellectual work. My awareness of the contradictory roles played by local and global media in the construction of my youthful identity provided the impetus for my attraction to the field of media studies, many years later. It led to my attempts, through my reading, research, and teaching to interrogate the mass media more closely.

My entry into academia in the mid-1980s, as a temporary Junior Lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University coincided with the importation into South African Media Studies of British Cultural Studies as it was then developing at the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies under the inspired leadership of the Caribbean scholar, Stuart Hall. Its arrival helped break the hold that Communication Studies, largely taught at Afrikaans Universities, had had on the field up until then.

Communication Studies saw itself as apolitical and was primarily interested in improving the flow of meaning from sender to receiver – so you would study, for example, non-verbal communication and cross-cultural communication. In contrast, Cultural Studies, with its roots in Marxism, was interested in the relationship between culture and social power. In its application to Media Studies, it drew on continental and British theorists, examining the role that the media played in helping to naturalise societal relations of domination and subordination along lines of race, class, and gender. This obviously

resonated with those of us, and there were not many, who were looking for ways to theorise the role that much of South Africa's media had played, and continued to play, in helping to sustain the relationships of racial inequality existent under apartheid.

Two important 'moments' were to shape my academic trajectory and help me reconnect with those youthful experiences that first drew me to studying the mass media. The first was the "ethnographic turn" within Cultural Studies. Drawing on qualitative research methods – primarily in-depth interviewing and observation – the aim was to provide detailed descriptions of how audiences *negotiate* and *use* the different media they consume in the course of their everyday lives.

The second 'moment' was the rapid development of theorising around the rise of globalisation and the perceived centrality of Western media to the cultural aspects of this process. As will become clear, these two 'moments' – the 'ethnographic turn' and the concern with media globalisation – spoke to each other and provided the impetus for much of my own subsequent work.

Prior to the mid-1980s, a dominant approach to understanding media globalisation was the Media Imperialism thesis. This thesis had evolved to deal with questions which earlier international communications theories generally ignored. Where these earlier theories perceived modern media as tools for development, the Media

Imperialism approach viewed them as an obstacle to meaningful socio-economic progress. In essence the thesis argued that Western transnational media were the means for the global extension of Western culture and power. They provided, it was argued, the necessary cultural context for the reception of Western countries' economic policies and thus served Western economic and political interests.

A central claim of the Media Imperialism thesis was that media globalisation is resulting in global cultural homogenisation, resulting in the erosion of national cultures and historical traditions. As Anthony Appiah put it, "The fear is that the values and images of Western mass culture, like some invasive weed, are threatening to choke out the world's native flora".

A blind spot for the Media Imperialism theorists was that while they were able to provide sophisticated analyses of the production, distribution and content of global media, they had little to say on the reception of these texts by local audiences. The claims made for the global dissemination of Western capitalist media and culture had rarely been tested empirically. And this was where those working within the 'ethnographic turn' within Cultural Studies intervened. Against many of the sweeping claims made by the Media Imperialism theorists, they argued the need for close empirical investigation in order to understand what meanings *actual* audiences in *actual* social,

political and economic situations, took from *actual* globally produced texts at the point of reception. In other words, we could not conclude the effects of these media and popular cultural forms on audiences by simply examining the content of these texts alone. Emerging qualitative studies, drawing on interviews with audiences contextualised in the particularities of their daily lives and social conditions, started to reveal the complex reasons for their attraction to particular media and popular cultural forms, highlighting the often unanticipated meanings they took from these.

For my part, while following this debate with some sympathy for the ethnographic cultural theorists, I could not ignore the fact that I had also experienced the ideological role played by media in my own youthful construction of identity. I thus needed an approach which could acknowledge that audiences, as stressed by the ‘ethnographic turn’, do have some degree of autonomy when it comes to what meanings they take from media texts, while also acknowledging that in many instances the media do produce meanings which help naturalise and sustain relationships of inequality. The approach which comes closest, and that I have used in some of my research, derives from the work on ideology by British sociologist, John B. Thompson. He writes that:

[T]he concept of ideology can be used to refer to the ways in which meaning serves...to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically

asymmetrical...Ideology...is *meaning in the service of power*. (1990: 7)

Thompson argues that we need to remain sensitive to the meaning-making processes of audiences while insisting that texts can and do play an ideological role in helping to uphold relations of domination and subordination. However, rather than thinking of ideology as ‘built in’ to the products themselves, he asks us to look concretely at the ways in which these products are understood and used by the individuals who receive them. Importantly, we need to consider how the localised uses of these products are interwoven with forms of power. Thus, whether we decide to prioritise the interpretive freedom of audiences or the determining power of the media cannot be decided in the abstract, but requires careful situational analysis.

Much of my own work on the local reception of global media has emerged from my desire to provide such situational analysis here in South Africa and to concretely explore the theoretical concerns I have discussed so far. Without being immodest, it would be true to say that my own body of work has played an important part in opening up this area of research within South African media studies. I would now like to go on to briefly discuss some examples from my research.

One of the critiques of the Media Imperialism thesis is that part of the attraction of global media for local audiences is that their

consumption of these materials enables individuals to take some distance from the conditions of their day-to-day lives – not literally but symbolically and imaginatively. Through this process individuals are able to gain some conception, however partial, of ways of life and life conditions which differ significantly from their own. Thus, global media images can provide a resource for individuals to think critically about their own lives and life conditions. My own engagement with American West Coast music and culture in the 1970s provides an example of this.

Khulani

My own research has provided numerous examples of symbolic distancing. Take the example of Khulani, a young man who grew up in a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal, in a family which still adheres proudly to a traditional way of life. As he stated in an interview, “we use our cultural way of doing things. Everything is traditional”. This is a patriarchal culture, which obliges its members to adhere to strict ways of relating to family members, particularly the father. This relationship, as Khulani explained, was formal and distant, evidenced by the fact that he could not look at his father in the eye, or speak to him directly and openly regarding personal problems. Rather, approaches to the father had to be made via the mother who he described as his “liaison officer”.

There was no television in the household when Khulani was growing up. His father had decided that Western media would pollute their minds and undermine their home culture. As a result, his first sustained exposure to Western culture via the media came after he completed school and moved to Johannesburg to look for work. There, he lived in the George Goch men's hostel, where he viewed for the first time the American soap operas, *Days of Our Lives* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*:

What I saw [in *Days of Our Lives*] was so amazing actually because in our culture a girl can't approach you and say what she feels about you... I liked that programme because I learnt that everyone has got a right, if they feel strongly about something, to express it. In our culture there are boundaries, clear distinctions between a male and a female in terms of roles and the way they relate.

Soap operas provided a means for Khulani to consider more satisfying ways to conduct personal relationships as well as interact with those in authority. He now felt that he and his father should have more open and direct communication, similar to the parental relationships portrayed in the soap operas. He felt there was a need to dismantle, as he put it, "that wall of formality, because the manner in which we relate is not satisfactory at all". The American soap operas also

provided examples of women working outside of the home, something he was not used to:

In terms of our culture, a rural woman is only expected to care for her family and kids...she should just be a housewife. I now think that's a terrible mistake because if only a man is expected to provide, that can prove problematic if the father dies.

Despite these deep impressions, the American media that Khulani consumed did not supplant or obliterate his Zulu identity. Rather, they caused shifts in perception and understanding so that traditional and Western values could co-exist:

I feel I am a very strong Zulu man. I feel I know what is good for the Zulu nation. Our nation will be very progressive and strong should we address those imbalances like having a woman just sit and care for her kids only. I will address those imbalances by starting with my own family. I will make sure that my children are also my friends and that my wife is my equal. No one person is a head of a family...we are all heads. So as soon as we kill those mentalities that will be better.

Khulani's words support the claim that Western culture as carried by Western media does not constitute an indivisible package that is either adopted or rejected by local cultures. Rather, some aspects are adopted while others are found irrelevant and are resisted. Khulani rejected certain aspects of Western culture which he felt did not accord with respected Zulu values, such as beginning relationships too young, or sending elderly relatives to old age homes. As he told me, "According to our culture we support our elders, we bury them when they're dead. In Western culture everyone only cares for themselves".

A further example of this was provided when Khulani matter-of-factly discussed with me the educative value pornographic movies have played for his male and female friends in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

Some of my friends back home they like those blue movies. They like to explore new ways of making love and all that. That's something that is not there in our culture because a woman is expected to just lie back and a man must do his thing. But guys back home, they like to get the woman involved as well.

Thus, for Khulani we see that the 'progressive' meanings he derived from American soaps and pornographic movies came from the interplay between the context of reception and the formal properties of the texts he consumed.

If there any of you here tonight who have had similar experiences with pornographic movies, I'd be happy to discuss this with you afterwards.

Zukile

Next I will briefly discuss Zukile. His interview highlighted the contradictory roles media can play at different points in our lives but in a somewhat different way from Khulani. Zukile was born in 1970. His parents were both teachers at a mission school on a white-owned farm near the rural town of Adelaide in the Eastern Cape. The family, four brothers and two sisters, lived with his parents at the school. His parents were deeply rooted in traditional Xhosa culture – “we lived our lives the Xhosa way in every respect”.

As a youth Zukile found himself drawn to foreign television productions because, ironically, they reflected his lived reality more adequately than local productions. American programmes were not experienced as ‘foreign’; rather, to the extent that they reflected local conditions, they were experienced as ‘local’.

There were very few local productions in fact that I could relate to. When I talk of local productions I think of things that were relevant to my culture.

Dallas was, for example, a very extravagant kind of drama but it still had white people in comfort and luxury and that is what I grew up seeing on the

farm and I could immediately relate to it. In fact I was not aware for a long time that *Dallas* was not a local production. I did not bother to ask, because why would I ask? It was life; it reflected life to us.

For Zukile, then, the American programmes he watched in his youth helped ‘naturalise’ his lived experience of class and ‘race’ oppression as structured by apartheid. This process of ‘naturalisation’ is one of the ideological functions of the media. Through repetition over time, we often come to experience particular ways of portraying society and social relationships in the media as somehow natural. These representations stand outside of history and human invention. In Zukile’s case, the meanings he obtained from *Dallas* both reflected and reinforced his self-identity and his experience of apartheid South Africa:

On television these shapely glasses, cars and all those gadgets were seen as white man’s things. If you broke a glass in our home you’d be told, even by a family member, that you cannot handle white man’s things.

In the 1980s Zukile studied at Fort Hare University. He joined the Black Consciousness movement and became a student activist, for which he was later expelled from the university. Increasingly, Zukile’s identity as a modern, educated person was constructed in opposition to what he perceived to be the rural and traditional

identities of his parents. The need to distance himself symbolically from his family influenced his decision to watch American sitcoms in their presence.

I used to watch American comedy, not understanding a word. But, whenever there was laughter [on the soundtrack], I would laugh alone. People at home would be amazed that *I* could understand these things and they could not. My grasp of the language was at a very elementary stage, but I wanted to create an impression. So TV provided this opportunity for me to develop an identity for myself – who am I...I am going somewhere, I am better, I've got to be better. My reality and that of my immediate environment was quite different from what the TV was bringing to me, but as I say, those were my aspirations then.

Of significance is that these programmes were in English, a language Zukile had come to use increasingly at university. English was associated with the modern subject that he wished to become. In the traditional rural environment within which he was raised, and in which his parents still lived, "...it was odd to speak in English or even to include a word of English in a sentence".

Here we see an example of how our consumption of particular goods is often undertaken in order to draw the lines of social relationships. Our enjoyment of material goods is only partly related to their physical consumption. It is also crucially linked to their use as markers in which we declare to others who we are and how we wish to be recognised.

Arguably, the social context of Zukile's consumption practices was one in which modernity was opposed by tradition. The pleasure Zukile obtained from these foreign television programmes came in a large degree from the way they were able to act as a sign for modernity. His signs of enjoyment were meant to signal his participation in the modern world that the programmes described, rather than the pre-modern circumstances of his viewing.

Pristine local culture versus contaminating global culture

In much of my work I have argued against an assumption that runs consistently through the Media Imperialism thesis that before the United States-led media/cultural invasion, Third World cultures were largely untouched by outside influences. This bi-polar vision pits a culturally destructive and damaging 'global' force against the 'local'. The local culture is often seen, in the words of one writer, as a site of "pristine cultural authenticity".

However, cultural encounters – often backed by coercive political and

military power – have been taking place for centuries. As Appiah points out, hybridity and creolisation have historically characterised adaptive, living cultures the world over. I am using the concepts of cultural creolisation and hybridity to refer to the intermingling and mixing of two or several formerly discrete traditions or cultures.

Appiah writes:

[T]rying to find some primordially authentic culture can be like peeling an onion. The textiles most people think of as traditional West African cloths are known as Java prints; they arrived in the 19th century with the Javanese batiks sold, and often milled, by the Dutch. The traditional garb of Herero women in Namibia arrives from the attire of 19th century German missionaries...And so with Kente cloth: the silk was always imported, traded by Europeans, produced in Asia. This tradition was once an innovation. Should we reject it for that reason as untraditional? How far back must one go?...Cultures are made of continuities and changes, and the identity of a society can survive through these changes. Societies without change aren't authentic; they're just dead.

The South African cultural critics Nuttall and Michael point out that in many South African studies – in the fields of literature,

photography, art and so on – the focus has tended to be on separation. As the authors explain, ‘Such studies broadly echoed the logic of a generalized anti-apartheid movement that strategically emphasised enforced separation over the cultural fusions, intimacies and creolisations of which South Africa also spoke’.

Here’s a well-know South African example of this process: In their discussion of jazz musician, Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), Carr *et al.* point to his diverse musical influences, from his own African heritage to various strands of American popular music. All were strongly evident in his sound:

He grew up with the hymns, gospel songs and spirituals of the American-influenced African Methodist Episcopalian Church; he also heard Louis Jordan and the Tympany Five’s popular hits blaring from the township ice-cream vans; and Duke Ellington’s music was so familiar that he was ‘not regarded as a foreign musician, but rather as something like a wise old man of our community *in absentia*’.

Lucia points to yet further influences in the creation of Ibrahim’s distinctive sound:

Ibrahim used the piano, an instrument central to western classical music for 200 years and central

to jazz for 100 years, as a vehicle for expressing a kind of South African music that contained American and South African jazz styles, Islamic chant, Cape Malay drumming, African traditional music, European parlour songs, hymns and gospel music.

The threat posed to national cultures by global media

Let me now relate this discussion of hybridisation to the related claim that contemporary forms of global media pose a major threat to ‘national cultures’. It is difficult to define national cultures and relate these in any unproblematic way to the nation state. This is because within nation-states, and even possibly across national boundaries, there exist patterns of cultural identification which are quite different from, and often in direct conflict with the ‘national culture’. Given the deep social divisions in South Africa – both historical and current – along lines of ‘race’, class, tradition, and modernity, it is not surprising to find that a unified national identity does not really exist.

It is these social divisions, and the lack of a unified national identity, which give credence to the claim that, at least in the cultural sense, places should no longer be seen as internally homogeneous bounded areas. Rather, as I have argued in some of my work, we should see places as “spaces of interaction”. In these spaces, I have argued, local identities are constructed out of material and symbolic resources

which may not be local in their origins, but should still be considered “authentic”. People construct their identities from the symbolic resources at hand (including foreign media products), which are then subjected to a process of ‘indigenisation’. It is more useful to assess these cultural resources in terms of their *consequences*, rather than their *origins*. Or, in Stuart Hall’s words, we should consider their *routes*, not their *roots*. The recognition by Abdullah Ibrahim and other South African jazz musicians that Duke Ellington ‘was a wise old man of our community *in absentia*’ is one such example of this.

The uneven penetration of global media into local cultures

In some of my work I have argued that the penetration of foreign cultural forms into local cultures is a far more complex process than the Media Imperialism thesis would predict. In some sectors of society the global media resonate with local audiences, while in other sectors the global media is less popular than local forms. An immediate example of this uneven penetration of global media is to be found in the far higher percentage of local music played on rural radio stations compared to urban radio stations.

Interviews conducted with African male students, on the Rhodes University campus in Grahamstown, who had attended township and rural DET schools, revealed a fascinating example of uneven penetration. Many of these students felt estranged from the dominant student culture at Rhodes. For example, most had gone through

traditional initiation and thus found themselves at odds with what they regarded as the infantile behaviour of many of their fellow students. This included excessive drinking and prank playing. They also felt that the majority of African middle class students are culturally no different to their white counterparts. One of the most obvious signs of the perceived assimilation of middle class African students into white culture was seen as their preference for the English language. This was interpreted as a denial of traditional black culture. As one of them noted, everything African middle class and (African) Zimbabwean students do, “is something that is done by whites... I’ve never seen them being proud of their (African) culture”.

At the time of the research, their cultural isolation was reflected in the fact that many of them preferred to watch television in their own viewing space, attached to one of the university residences. They named this space the ‘homeland’. Every evening, with the regularity of the ritual it had become, 15 to 20 of these young men would gather to watch their favourite programmes. The viewing sessions started at 18.30, when they gather to watch *Isidingo*. At 7 o’clock they dispersed for supper in the residences, returning at 7.30 for the African language news. At 8 o’clock they viewed a local black drama *Generations*. At weekends they often met to watch South African soccer.

Conspicuously missing from their daily television diet were any

foreign productions. The attraction of the local dramas was that they raised issues of cultural concern for further discussion which in turn helped cement a particular world view amongst the homeland viewers. As one of them, Thabo, explained it:

When watching *Isidingo*, it's quick for us to select a particular aspect of what is happening and talk about it. But when it comes to these white soapies, I find it very difficult. In *Isidingo* there's this guy on the mine who doesn't want to go underground because he had this dream which said he shouldn't. Those are things that happen in our culture and they reflect the way we think.

The 'homeland', where only Xhosa was spoken, allowed these students to interact with each other confidently, free from what they perceived to be the ridicule of the better educated, more urbane, middle class 'modern' students. What became clear in the research was that faced with an institutional culture in which they felt white and black middle class norms dominated, these students felt the need to consolidate and signify their difference from such a culture and to reconfirm their traditional African identities. The nightly ritual of local television consumption in the 'homeland' was one of the means of achieving this.

A number of writers have pointed out that migrant populations – and

one could argue that these students had ‘migrated’ to Rhodes University – often display a strong quest for roots. The appeal of this quest is that it offers a way of recovering, and indeed inventing, traditions which reconnect individuals to (real or imaginary) places of origin.

Of significance is the fact that many of these students, before entering the ‘alien’ space of Rhodes University, were avid consumers of global media. Interviews with them revealed that in many cases, within a rural context of reception, such media conveyed the ‘promise of modernity’. Now, in contrast, within the context of Rhodes University, they were experiencing what I have referred to as the “threat of the modern”. This was reflected in the institutional culture, their relatively poor grasp of English, their relatively poor educational background and so on all of which contributed to a psychic and cultural insecurity. This led to a rejection of the foreign and preference for the local, all of which helped solidify an identity rooted in a more traditional African culture.

The apparently anomalous experience of the ‘homeland’ is a reminder of the importance of taking into account both text and context when we attempt to understand the media’s meanings for its audiences.

Narrative interview

In my most recent work in this area I have attempted to deepen my understanding of the complex uses we make of our consumption of popular media. Employing the episodic narrative or biographical interview, I have been able to track some of the significant moments in my interviewees' lives. I have been able to demonstrate the relationship between on the one hand, these lived moments, structured by their changing socio-political contexts and on the other hand, media consumption patterns. Through this work, I have sought to demonstrate how our media consumption choices and the meanings we take from the media are shaped by our lived cultural experiences, while the media we consume also affects how we make sense of these experiences. This involves a continual 'interplay' between lived culture and media culture. This is set within a personal history which in turn has a context of a broader social history.

My interest in the relationship between socially situated audiences and the texts they consume has recently led to a new area of research, undertaken with Dr Lynette Steenveld, into the upsurge in popularity of tabloid newspapers in South Africa. A common view of tabloids is that they pander to the lowest common denominator of public taste, they simplify complex issues. They generally fail to provide information that citizens need in order to make informed political

judgements – the latter being the rationale of serious newspapers. In short, tabloids “lower the standards of public discourse”.

In a recently published paper we take a different view. Rather than dismissing tabloids, we argue the need to treat them as important cultural phenomena, as objects of study in their own right rather than exemplars of a lamentable debasement of popular taste. We have written that our task as academics should be to transcend the futile moralism that characterises much of the local debate. Rather we need to account historically and sociologically for their emergence. An important aspect of this project is to investigate why South African readers with a particular socio-economic profile are drawn to these newspapers which are characterised by a particular form and content. Although we have yet to undertake audience research, we have in our work suggested possible explanations for the co-incidence between the emergence and particularities of the democratic South African state, the creation of first-time citizens, and the popularity of this form of newspaper.

To conclude: In this address I have tried to show how a common theme runs through much of my academic work, a theme which has its roots in my own youthful experiences of media consumption. This has been to examine what popular audiences do with the cultural and media products that they consume in their everyday lives. It has involved a focus on the interplay between text and context in the

production of meaning. And parallel with this has been another theme: to see consumption practices as part of our ongoing attempts to make sense of our lives and the specific class, gender, race, and other identities we inhabit.