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Integrated Eighties Situation Comedies and the
Struggle against Apartheid

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, prime-time, episodic television featured African Americans almost exclusively in integrated, middle-class situation comedies. Despite the massive domestic and international popularity of *Roots* in 1977, U.S. television executives remained unconvinced that African American themes and characters could generate the kinds of audience ratings that warranted the greater expense of dramatic genres, relegating them instead to cheaper genres such as the sitcom. At the same time, international buyers generally shunned U.S. sitcoms because they considered them too culturally specific to translate to foreign markets. As a result, African American television did not circulate widely for most of the 1980s.

A notable exception, highlighted in this chapter, was the renegade black South African broadcaster Bophuthatswana Broadcasting Corporation, or Bop-TV, which programmed integrated U.S. sitcoms to construct a distinctly antigovernment, antiapartheid political stance. American race relations, as signaled through the integrated settings of these sitcoms, provided a racially progressive alternative to the strictly segregated broadcasting policies of the government-controlled South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) channels. However, as the chapter demonstrates, the representations of race relations in American imports, while central to Bop-TV's institutional strategy, were no more important than the broadcaster's scheduling practices. Indeed, while the programming carried a range of political potentialities, it was only through Bop-TV's scheduling practices that particular political content became realized and articulated to specific commercial and political projects.

During the 1980s, scheduling was primarily a national or subnational practice, though, as we saw in the scheduling of roundtable discussions surrounding broadcasts of *Roots* in different parts of Europe in chapter 1, the seeds of transnational scheduling practices had already been planted. Due to the localized nature of scheduling, transnational industry lore had a difficult time forming, because every broadcaster tended to use imports differently. In subsequent chapters we will trace how, as scheduling practices

standardized beginning in the late 1980s, transnational industry lore began to flourish.

Despite their inability to influence wider industry perceptions at the time, the institutional labors of integrated U.S. sitcoms in South Africa in the early 1980s do point to different cultural dynamics, trade routes, and industry practices than those that dominate the pages of the trade journals, reminding us that the history of globally traded African American television programs is more complex and diverse than dominant industry lore admits. In particular, we will see how the trend toward media liberalization that swept the world in the 1980s, combined with global discourses of human rights, antiracism, and anticolonialism, met with local discourses of race, nation, ethnicity, and economic globalization to produce the institutional conditions that led Bop-TV to program integrated American imports in politically radical ways.

The International Market for Situation Comedy

The situation comedy genre has never fared well in the estimations of global television merchants. Klaus Lehman, president of international sales for the independent U.S. distributor Metromedia Producers Corporation, which produced some of the most memorable television shows of the seventies and eighties, including *Charlie's Angels*, (1976–1981), *Hart to Hart* (1979–1984), and *Starsky and Hutch* (1975–1979), struck a common refrain in 1977 when he explained, "Most of the comedies produced in America have unique meaning to American viewers. Will foreigners really be receptive to a black American junkman, a working woman in a Minneapolis newsroom, and a blue-collar bigot?" ("U.S. as TV Programmer," 1977, 49). This attitude continued well into the mid-1980s, appearing frequently in trade journal articles. In 1985 Bert Cohen, senior vice president of international sales at Worldvision Enterprises, explained, "You can't translate comedy into another language, because much of it is too Americanized" ("U.S. Programmers Converge," 1986).

The idea that situation comedy is too culturally specific to translate across cultural and language borders was not, however, uncontested, particularly among distributors with a number of sitcoms to sell. Bruce Gordon, president of international sales at Paramount, for example, claimed, "I've sold every comedy Paramount has ever had to Japan, which is probably the most difficult market in the world for comedy" ("U.S. as TV Programmer," 1977, 49). The one exception he mentions, interestingly enough, is the TV adaptation of Neil Simon's *Barefoot in the Park* (1970–1971), which featured a

predominantly African American cast. "The Japanese couldn't make head or tail" of it, according to Gordon. We see here the presence of a nascent industry lore that would become more widespread in the 1990s, in which sitcoms perform poorly abroad, and sitcoms with recurrent African American characters perform especially poorly. When trade journal articles do mention African American sitcoms, they are almost always held up as examples of programming that is too culturally specific for international syndication, as evidenced in the comment above about the limited international appeal of a "black American junkman" (i.e., *Sanford and Son* [1972–1977]).[1]

In the early to mid-1980s, even well-performing integrated sitcoms such as *Diff'rent Strokes* (1978–1986) were most commonly used as filler at emerging commercial channels in Europe. As such, their impact on prevalent industry perceptions about the universality of the genre or of African American characters and cultures was minimal. However, in the case of South Africa, integrated U.S. imports had a marked impact on politics, programming practices, and even the broadcasting environment of the nation itself, forcing the introduction of a fourth government-run channel devoted to entertainment television.

Integrated U.S. Sitcoms on Bop-TV

On New Year's Day 1984, Bop-TV began broadcasting to the black South African homeland of Bophuthatswana, a jigsaw puzzle of oblong areas carved out of Transvaal Province (see fig. 2.1). The first commercial television station in South Africa, Bop-TV was retransmitted to predominantly black South African areas outside Bophuthatswana as well, including the Johannesburg suburbs of Soweto and Kagiso. With a mixture of international news feeds, locally produced current affairs, and imported U.S. sitcoms, action-dramas, and specials, this "handful of American trash on a tinpot TV channel" (Cowell, 1984) became an overnight success in black and white households alike.

Because Bop-TV originated in one of the ten South African homelands, which had been founded in the 1970s in an effort to reassign the national identities of all blacks and strip them of South African citizenship, the South African government considered the channel a foreign broadcaster. Although no other government recognized the independence of Bophuthatswana, the South African government had ceded nominal independence to the homeland, including the right to originate radio and television broadcasts. In return for assurances that Bop-TV would not adopt an overtly antigovernment editorial stance, South Africa agreed to retransmit the channel to blacks in the Johannesburg area (Cowell, 1984). This agreement did not, however,
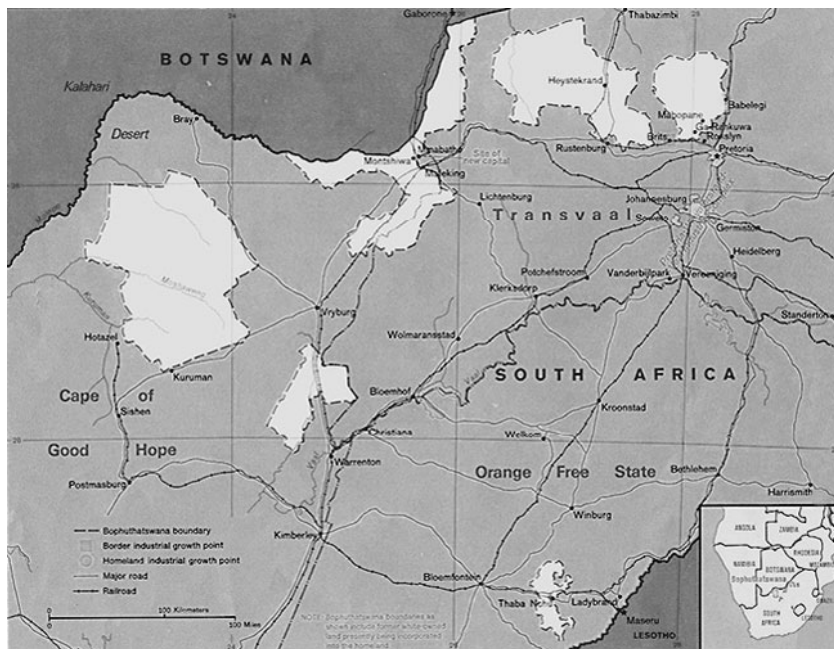
Figure 2.1. This 1977 map of the South African homeland of Bophuthatswana shows the homeland (shown as white areas) as well as some of the Johannesburg suburbs that could receive the Bop-TV broadcast signal.

prevent Bop-TV from crafting an antigovernment, antiapartheid message, which it articulated through creative counterprogramming of South Africa's three state-run channels.

Bop-TV's signal emanated from Mmabatho, the capital of Bophuthat-swana, about two hundred kilometers west-northwest of Johannesburg, and was boosted and rebroadcast to black viewers in the western suburbs of Soweto and Kagiso (Lander, 1984). Of course, whites in the western Johannesburg suburbs could also receive Bop-TV. Viewers in Roodepoort, Krugersdorp, and Bekkersdaal reported watching Bop-TV, as did viewers in the eastern suburbs of Germiston and Boksburg. During the first quarter of 1984, approximately 20 percent of Bop-TV's viewers were white, according to research conducted by All Media Products and Services (Correia, 1984b).

White viewers often went to extremes to bring in the distant Bop-TV signal, spending as much as $200 on high-power aerials (Cowell, 1984; Lander, 1984; Van Slambrouck, 1984). Beginning on July 13, 1984, however, several white viewers noticed that they could no longer receive Bop-TV, or that their reception had sharply degraded. Many speculated that, in order

to maintain its advertising revenues and dominance over the ideological content of television, the SABC was jamming Bop-TV's signal. For its part, the SABC claimed that any change in Bop-TV's signal quality in white areas owed to the corporation's efforts to boost the quality of the signal in black areas. Besides, SABC officials insisted, viewers had long been warned that the "spillage" of the Bop-TV signal in white areas was only temporary ("Bop-TV Blackout," 1984).

White viewers went ballistic: they accused the SABC of censorship, paternalism, and fear of competition. If the SABC wanted to eliminate the competition from Bop-TV, went a common refrain, it should concentrate on improving its own channels rather than blocking Bop-TV (Correia and Faulkner, 1984). The fallout from the conflict between the SABC and white fans of Bop-TV continued through the summer and fall of 1984, often making the front page of the *Rand Daily Mail*, an English-language, antigovernment Johannesburg newspaper (Pfister, 2005, 22). Fans collected more than sixty thousand signatures on a petition demanding that Parliament allow free access to Bop-TV ("Bop-TV Petition," 1984). Foreign Minister Roelof Frederik "Pik" Botha and members of the opposition Progressive Federal Party clashed publicly over the Bop-TV issue multiple times ("Bop-TV Issue," 1984; Cowell, 1984). Even the international press got wind of the controversy, and articles appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the trade journal *TV World*, mostly praising American-style commercial television for giving black viewers what they wanted and turning the tables of racial exclusion on whites ("Bop-TV Petition," 1984; Cowell, 1984; Lander, 1984; Van Slambrouck, 1984).

Despite protests from Bop-TV's white fans, the Parliament ultimately ignored their petition and the channel remained out of reach for most white South Africans at the time ("Bop-TV Petition," 1984). Still, as newspaper accounts from the time make clear, the Bop-TV incident became a lightning rod for debates among white South Africans themselves about freedom of the airwaves, apartheid, and the paternalism of the National Party government that pointed up strong political divisions among English-speaking and Afrikaner whites. In the wake of the Bop-TV controversy, the SABC reorganized its channels and began offering a fourth channel that provided a broader range of popular imported programs aimed at a cross-racial audience. Combined with black South African resistance, the divisions among whites that surfaced in the Bop-TV debates would eventually lead to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa ten years later.

Bop-TV ignited such strong political divisions at the time because of its reputation as anti-Nationalist and antiapartheid. It achieved this reputation

primarily through program selection and scheduling practices that tapped into political and cultural similarities among white and black viewers, in which integrated U.S. sitcoms played an important role. In other words, Bop-TV's channel identity and the political debates it engendered stemmed primarily from the ways executives positioned the channel in relation to existing competitors. Bop-TV's intervention rested predominantly on three program categories: international news feeds that portrayed a wider variety of foreign news than the SABC; local news and current affairs programming that, while relatively tame, nevertheless allowed viewers to hear people and viewpoints excluded from the SABC; and integrated U.S. imports, particularly sitcoms, that showcased interracial harmony and equality. These programming strategies allowed Bop-TV to associate itself with integrated programming, cosmopolitanism, and modernity.

Reading Television Program Schedules

If television programs are imported into preexisting broadcasting environments that profoundly influence their institutional labors (Ellis, 2000), the identities of broadcasters and the ways they conceive of and target viewers are significant elements of that environment. Much of a broadcaster's image comes from how it organizes its program offerings into schedules that compete with other broadcasters. A good deal of this chapter focuses on a critical analysis of program schedules in South Africa during apartheid, reading those schedules for how they privilege particular discourses and position viewers. While not nearly as common as textual analyses of television programs or genres, analyses of television schedules are similar in that they seek to read the processes of domination and resistance that circulate through popular texts (Ellis, 2000; Havens, 2008; Scannell, 1988; Silverstone, 1994; Williams, 1974). However, while an analysis of a single program or genre tells us only how that program or genre imagines society, a reading of program schedules tells us how entire channels or entire national broadcasting systems imagine viewers' identities, sympathies, and relationships.

Programmers in competitive markets use their schedules to construct a particular brand or channel identity in comparison with other channels, most often with counterprogramming techniques, which seek to appeal to audience segments that other channels ignore, or to cobble together several segments in a manner that differs from other channels. Bop-TV, for instance, sought to bring white English speakers and black viewers together by counterprogramming the SABC's channels with internationally oriented programs.

In addition to counterprogramming, television broadcasters use schedul-

ing to capitalize on "inheritance effects," or the tendency of well-performing programs to increase the ratings of prior and subsequent programming on the same channel. Scheduling, therefore, involves both vertical structures internal to a specific channel's programming, and horizontal structures that develop in relation to competitors' program offerings. Thus, the fact that Bop-TV's news included coverage of domestic unrest and was scheduled against the SABC news not only suggested the inadequacy of the latter's coverage, but also contributed to Bop-TV's definition of itself as antigovernment. In what follows, I read the vertical and horizontal constructions of South African television schedules in the mid-1980s in order to understand how they imagine the similarities and differences among racial and linguistic groups, with a particular eye to how integrated U.S. sitcoms fit into the overall organization of its program schedule.

Bop-TV in the South African Broadcasting Landscape

Prior to Bop-TV's launch, the SABC programmed three channels divided along racial and linguistic lines. TV1, aimed at whites, broadcast in English for half the day and Afrikaans the other half. TV2 targeted black Xhosa and Zulu speakers, the two largest black linguistic groups. TV3, meanwhile, broadcast to black viewers in Sesotho and Setswana languages. Thus, the SABC's programming structure reflected the apartheid system of the government that it served, dividing white channels from black at the same time that it envisioned a unified white audience and a black audience fragmented by language and ethnicity (Goldberg, 1993).

The segregated SABC channel lineup was the outcome of struggles among whites over the meanings and functions of television in South African society. While most national governments around the world found the integrative powers of television useful for mobilizing nationalist sentiment among the citizenry, South African nationhood was built on the idea of difference and incommensurability among the races (Barnett, 1995; Nixon, 1994, 50). Combined with concerns about the influence of secular capitalist modernity on the religious, premodern Afrikaner culture, the National Party forestalled the adoption of television until 1976, when increased terrestrial and satellite signals from abroad forced the government to develop its own channels in response (Nixon, 1994, 76). As was the case in Western Europe and elsewhere, then, the liberalization of broadcasting regulations—in this case, the legalization of television broadcasting—followed the introduction of new technologies that slowly encroached upon government broadcasting monopolies (Papathanassopoulos, 1989; Tomaselli, Tomaselli, and Muller, 1989).

The animosity of the Nationalists toward television and modernity was not shared by all whites, most notably English-speaking whites, many of whom were economic elites with little political power. Many English-speaking whites considered the Afrikaners to be impediments to economic progress and the inclusion of South Africa among First World nations (Nixon, 1994, 68). The refusal to allow television broadcasting was, for them, symbolic of the problems with South Africa, a sentiment that spilled over into apartheid politics.[2]

Although the Afrikaner-controlled National Party acquiesced in television broadcasting, the SABC generally refused to program the contemporary U.S. and U.K. imports that many English-speaking whites wanted. In part, this refusal stemmed from a ban by Equity, the U.K. actors' union, on program sales to South Africa. Thus, while English-speaking South African whites got access to Western communications technologies, they remained largely isolated from Western popular culture. The sense that the SABC perpetuated South Africa's isolation from Western modernity is nicely captured in this comment from the *Rand Daily Mail*'s television critic at the time: "When we watch SABC, its [sic] like climbing on to the back of an oxwagen [sic]. . . . In almost every aspect of our lives we are in step with the Western world. But SABC lags sullenly behind" (Michell, 1984).

Bop-TV managed to cut across the segregated South African television landscape by exploiting the lingering tensions between white English speakers and Afrikaners. While the broadcaster ostensibly targeted black Setswana speakers in Soweto and other black neighborhoods near Johannesburg, it also drew large numbers of white viewers in the surrounding areas. During the second quarter of 1984, the channel attracted an average of 81,000 white viewers per day on weekdays, as compared with 165,000 black viewers (Correia, 1984b). While it is impossible to know the total number of white viewers that Bop-TV reached, and therefore how popular the channel was compared with other channels, a survey conducted by Complete Media at the time claimed that the channel averaged 3.37 viewing hours per day in white households capable of receiving it, as opposed to 1.13 hours per day for the white channel TV1 in the same households (Correia, 1984a).

Bop-TV built its appeal to white English speakers around the programming of imports, especially American ones. Although some British distributors sold programming to Bop-TV in defiance of the ban by Equity (Leavy, 1990), the availability of British programming was meager in comparison with U.S. programming. Bop-TV programmers would have preferred to feature popular British programs as well, as the importation of the Channel 4 soap opera *Brookside* (1982–2003) attests (Leavy, 1990), but international

conditions restrained them. In this manner, geopolitical realities shaped how Bop-TV chose to target South African viewers.

Domestic political considerations also set limits on Bop-TV's programming practices. As we might expect, these limitations particularly targeted news coverage, which nevertheless tended to offer a broader range of international news and slightly less censored domestic coverage than the SABC channels. Bop-TV's news included feeds from the British service UPITN, a joint venture of United Press International and the Independent Television News, while its local news included occasional footage of local unrest that went so far as to quote strikers and activists (Lander, 1984). Its current affairs programming sometimes featured discussions with people who were banned from speaking in public in South Africa, ANC leaders, and other critics of the National government. While documentaries on the SABC addressed topics such as the founding of the Afrikaans language, Bop-TV's documentaries included the story of the founder of the black nationalist movement in South Africa, Steve Biko (Cowell, 1984; Michell, 1984). Still, Bop-TV's news remained relatively tame. Reports on corruption and human rights violations in Bophuthatswana were rare, due at least in part to a news director with pro-Mangope sentiments (South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 1997). Bop-TV's news programs as well as its entertainment programs were allowed to critique the Nationalist policies of apartheid, but not internal Bophuthatswanan policies.

In the face of domestic and international pressures, Bop-TV nevertheless managed to connect with black South African viewers by programming U.S. imports featuring racial integration and cross-racial interaction, which were generally taboo on the SABC (Spiller, 1990). Integrated American sitcoms such as *Benson* (1979–1986), *Gimme a Break* (1981–1987), and *Diff'rent Strokes* populated Bop-TV's schedules (Spiller, 1990). A local jeans company that aired different versions of the same commercial on the SABC and Bop-TV in 1984 demonstrates well the broadcasters' different programming sensibilities. Both commercials featured a black male hand stroking the torso of a white woman in jeans. In the version run on Bop-TV, the man's hand also patted the woman's buttocks and ran up and down her thighs; in the SABC version, these latter scenes were edited out (Games, 1984).

Bop-TV's handling of controversial content, as compared with the SABC, helped define the former as modern and subversive and the latter as a backward tool of the government. While television critics certainly bemoaned the sad state of the SABC in comparison with broadcasters in other nations prior to Bop-TV's launch, Bop-TV gave critics and viewers clear evidence of the limitations of the SABC's offerings. Letters to the editor of the *Rand*

Daily Mail in the summer of 1984 frequently compared programming on TV1 and Bop-TV in order to take the SABC to task for failing to provide compelling entertainment and objective news ("Big Brother," 1984; "Bop-TV's Fare," 1984).

Its antigovernment stance made Bop-TV appealing to both white English speakers and black viewers, even though the groups' grievances against the Afrikaner-controlled National Party differed. Despite these differences, however, Bop-TV's success demonstrated unequivocally that black and white viewers had a great deal in common. As mentioned, Bop-TV could bring these viewers together in this way only because it entered a preconstituted, segregated television environment. While different program offerings were an important dimension of Bop-TV's appeal to both black and white viewers, so was its strategy of counterprogramming the SABC channels in real time, which worked to draw together white and black audience segments in specific ways.

Scheduling Racial Integration

Examining in detail the juxtaposition of programs on the three SABC channels and Bop-TV can help us interpret the institutional labors that U.S. imports performed to help identify Bop-TV as dramatically different, non-Afrikaner, antigovernment, and antiapartheid. Table 2.1 summarizes the Johannesburg-area television schedule for Sunday, August 26, 1984, including TV1, TV2, TV3, and Bop-TV, all of which broadcast from about 3:00 to 10:00 P.M. TV1 broadcast in English from 3:31 to 8:00, and in Afrikaans from 8:00 to 10:00. TV2 broadcast Xhosa programs in the afternoon, including *Ikhaya Labantwana* (Home for Children) and *Ubhazil Nopekora* (Bazil and Kora), and Zulu titles such as *Imisebenzi Yenkolo* (Works of Faith) and *Ukholo Lunje* (Such Is Faith) in the evening. Meanwhile, TV3 scheduled Setswana programs such as *Legae la Bana* (Home for Children) in the afternoon and Sesotho programs such as *Mahlasedi A Tumelo* (Waves of Faith) in the evening.[3] Bop-TV's original programming used a mixture of Setswana and English that was familiar to many black viewers, while its imports were aired in English. At first glance, Bop-TV's and the SABC's program offerings look quite similar, including imported U.S. and U.K. series, sports programs, news, current affairs, music programs, and religious fare.[4] Upon closer examination, however, we see that the broadcasters schedule these similar programs in very different ways, articulating quite distinct visions of the nation, its viewers, and their political and cultural sensibilities.

Table 2.1. Johannesburg-Area Television Program Schehdule for Sunday, 26 August 1984

	SABC TV1	TV2	TV3	Bop-TV
3:30	Baby Crockett (UK animation) (3:31) The Saga of Noggin the Nog (3:33)	Educational (5)	Educational (3:40)	Sport (3:00)
3:40	Cheesecake (UK animation) (3:43)			
3:50	Tom 'n Jerry (U.S. animation) (3:45)			
4:00	This Happy Breed (UK Film, 1944) (3:59)			
4:50				Tales of Washington Irving (U.S. special, 1970) (4:48)
5:40				Studio Service (5:38)
5:50	Flare: A Ski Trip (sport) (5:45)	Ikhaya Labantwana (Home for Children)	Legae la Bana (Home for Children)	Religious Discussion (5:53)
6:00	Country Comes Home (concert) (6:04)	From the Book Ubhazil Nopekora (6:05)	From the Book The Story of the Bible (6:05)	
6:10		Story of the Bible		AO Ultwile (talk/ variety) (6:08)
6:20		Imisebenzi Yenkolo (Works of Faith) (6:25)	Le Reng? (What Do They Say?) (6:23)	
6:30	Cherokee Trail (U.S./ Aus series, 1981) (6:27)	Ukholo Lunje (Such is Faith) (6:32)		Benson (U.S. series, 19791986) (6:34)
6:40			Mahlasedi A Tumelo (Waves of Faith) (6:37)	
7:00		News	News & Weather	UPITN Roving Report
7:10	Crossroads (religious) (7:13)			
7:20				Project UFO (7:25) (U.S. series, 1978)
7:30		Harvest Jazz: Stan Getz (7:32)	Sedibeng (To the Wells) (7:33)	

(*continued*)

Table 2.1 (continued)

	SABC TV1	TV2	TV3	Bop-TV
7:40	Thy Kingdom Come (7:38)			
8:00	News & Weather	Genesis Project	Good Times (U.S. series, 19741979) (7:59)	
8:10				News & Weather (8:15)
8:20			Harvest Jazz: Bobby Hutcherson (8:25)	
8:30	Kruis & Kroniek (talk) (8:33)	Maynard Fergusson (sic) (8:28)		Jesse Owens Story (U.S. movie, 1984)
8:50	Helena van Heerden (classical music) (9:00)	The Green Man	New Media Bible (8:54)	
9:10		In Concert (9:20)	Genesis Project (9:12)	
9:30	Arabesque (Ballet)			Benny Goodman Special
9:50	Lig vir de Wereld (Light of the World)			

Source: "Your Full Weekend Television Guide," *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 August 1984, 11.

Programming Apartheid on the SABC

While TV1 divided its broadcast schedule equally among English and Afrikaans programming each day, with the language groups switching between afternoon and evening time slots every day, Afrikaans language and culture retained a superior position: TV1 chose to program prime time in Afrikaans four days a week and in English three days a week. Moreover, it is significant that the channel chose to program prime time in Afrikaans on Sundays in particular, which avoided offending the strict religious sensibilities of the politically influential Calvinist Afrikaner churches (Loader, 1985, 287).

TV2 and TV3, meanwhile, took significantly different approaches to programming for black linguistic groups. TV2 broadcast in Nguni languages, mostly Xhosa and Zulu, while TV3 broadcast in Sotho languages, predominantly Setswana and Sesotho. Moreover, as table 2.1 demonstrates, TV2 and TV3 offered identical programs in different languages for portions of their broadcast schedules. While much of the work in media and cultural studies emphasizes the integrative nature of such shared viewing experiences for

constructing imagined communities, TV2 and TV3 divided the black community with this programming strategy (see also Tomaselli, Tomaselli, and Muller, 1989). Thus, although language distinctions were far less clear than these strict programming divisions suggest, with many people speaking several African languages as well as English, the schedule gave the impression that black viewers were irreconcilably divided by language, a division that was reinforced every time a viewer selected whether to watch *Legae la Bana* (Home for Children) in Setswana or *Ikhaya Labantwana* (Home for Children) in Xhosa at 6:05, or whether to watch the news in Zulu or Sesotho at 7 P.M. Hence, TV1 created the appearance of an integrated if somewhat unequal white viewing public, while TV2 and TV3 articulated a linguistically divided black audience.

The SABC's construction of English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking whites, then, was contained within the vertical structure of the programming schedule of TV1, while its construction of black South Africans was dispersed horizontally across TV2 and TV3. Examining TV1's English-language program offerings in table 2.1 more closely, we can see that the channel imagined white English identity as rooted in historical rather than contemporary differences, with cultural preferences that aligned with Great Britain rather than the United States. With the exception of *Tom 'n' Jerry* (1965–1972), the animated children's shows from 3:31 to 3:59 were imported from Great Britain, as was the film at 3:59, *This Happy Breed* (1944). This historical film, along with the imported American series Louis L'Amour's *Cherokee Trail* (1981), represented British culture in the interwar period and eighteenth-century America, respectively. Indeed, the only present-day programs targeted at white English speakers were sports at 5:45 and the imported American concert program *Country Comes Home* (1982).[5] In this way, TV1 distinguished white English speakers from white Afrikaners by way of language and ethnic roots, rather than contemporary cultural or political differences. Indeed, by airing religious programs in both languages as well as cultural programs that overcame language differences, TV1 gave the impression that white viewers of both ethnicities had a great deal of cultural similarity.

TV2 and TV3, meanwhile, constructed an image of black South Africans as ethnically divided, culturally inferior, politically disinterested, and largely disconnected from black struggles worldwide (see also Tomaselli, Tomaselli, and Muller, 1989). The programming in table 2.1 consists primarily of religious programs, educational children's programs, jazz concerts, and thirty minutes of news at 7 P.M. We have already seen how the distribution of programs across TV2 and TV3 created an image of a linguistically divided black audience. In addition, the program offerings indicate an audience in need of

social uplift. Children's programs on TV2 and TV3 from 3:45 and 3:40 to 5:50, respectively, were educational, as opposed to the entertainment-oriented programs aimed at white children and families at the same time. From 5:50 to 6:20, both TV2 and TV3 programmed almost identical religious shows. For most of the rest of the evening on both channels, the programming alternated between religious programs and jazz. Very few entertainment programs appeared on the black channels. Evoking the idea of the white man's burden under apartheid, the program offerings on TV2 and TV3 aimed to enlighten and ennoble viewers rather than provide them with culturally relevant programming.[6]

Not only do TV2 and TV3 position black viewers as culturally backward, they also imagine them as apolitical. Thus, the only program about Africa, *The Genesis Project* (TV2 at 8:00, TV3 at 9:12), is a nature documentary about efforts to preserve African elephants and rhinoceroses (Botha, 2006). Magazine programs like *Le Reng?* (What Do They Say?) focused mostly on personal, middle-class black concerns rather than contemporary political issues (Botha, 2006; Tomaselli, Tomaselli, and Muller, 1989). Meanwhile, although religious services and discussions such as *Imisebenzi Yenkolo* (Works of Faith) and *Ukholo Lunje* (Such Is Faith) might have addressed political issues from a religious perspective, the largest black religious bloc at the time, the independent churches, were generally apolitical and did not actively challenge the racial status quo (Loader, 1985, 281).

Ironically, evening jazz programs may have carried the most radical political voices on TV2 and TV3. While jazz music was decidedly less political in connotation than African music or imported rock music of the day, it did possess immediate associations with the Sophiatown black renaissance of the 1950s, which had been crushed in 1955 when blacks were forcibly relocated and the city was razed and replaced with white suburban dwellings (Nixon, 1994, 11–13). Thus, the inclusion of jazz music in the program schedule does allude to cultural associations that run counter to the Nationalist ideology. The alternating jazz programs on TV2 and TV3 also allowed for cross-linguistic viewing among black audiences. Indeed, white viewers, especially English speakers who didn't care for the cultural offerings on TV1, may have turned to these channels to watch the integrated jazz bands perform.

The SABC's approach to imagining the national audience along racial and ethnic lines, then, articulated a white audience that may have been divided by its roots, but shared a common culture. The schedules of TV2 and TV3, on the other hand, portrayed black viewers as literally incapable of communicating across language differences. Program offerings identified black

audiences as largely apolitical and culturally backward. However, this pro-
gram structure also allowed for, and even sometimes encouraged, a degree
of cross-linguistic and cross-racial viewing, suggesting that the neat bound-
aries of race and language that the SABC had constructed suppressed other
possible categorizations of viewers and their cultural and political sympa-
thies (Tomaselli, Tomaselli, and Muller, 1989). This was the broadcasting
landscape into which integrated U.S. sitcoms were imported and from which
Bop-TV's programmers imagined their institutional labors.

Constructing Integrated Audiences on Bop-TV

Bop-TV's program schedule reflected a concerted effort to imagine and
assemble an integrated viewing audience, even while maintaining its primary
identity as a black channel. While U.S. imports were an important compo-
nent of this effort, they were only one ingredient in the overall strategy. At
different times of day, Bop-TV adopted different programming strategies
that identified the channel as an integrated alternative to the SABC channels'
image of the South African nation.

   At 4:48, for instance, Bop-TV counterprogrammed educational children's
programs on TV2 and TV3 with an entertainment-oriented animated U.S.
import, *Tales of Washington Irving* (1970). Not only did this choice demon-
strate a more populist approach to programming for black children, it also
acknowledged, though obliquely, the imagined cultural sensibilities shared
by black South African and American cultures. Furthermore, the schedul-
ing of *Tales of Washington Irving* also countered the British slant of TV1's
programming with a distinctly American children's program. Thus, Bop-TV
created an integrated audience among children at this time of day by tapping
into a shared interest in American stories.

   At other times of the day, Bop-TV programmed head-to-head against the
SABC's black channels, abandoning its integrated audience for a predomi-
nantly black one. Beginning at 5:38, Bop-TV programmed a church service
and a religious discussion against religious programming on TV2 and TV3.
Studio Service and *Religious Discussion* were self-produced studio shows
that featured mostly black participants who spoke a mixture of English and
Setswana, which may have been difficult for some English-speaking white
viewers to understand. The abandonment of white viewers helped identify
Bop-TV as a distinctly black channel that appealed sometimes to white
viewers because of shared tastes and sensibilities, rather than a channel that
valued white and black audiences equally.[7] Although the views of Bop-TV's
religious programs were likely more critical than those of TV2 and TV3,

religion nevertheless played an important role in Bop-TV's construction of its black audience.

As the evening progressed, Bop-TV began to imagine an integrated black and white family audience as members of the modern, Western world, predominantly through the use of imported U.S. programs with integrated casts. Beginning at 6:34, Bop-TV counterprogrammed the SABC channels with *Benson*, which featured the African American actor Robert Guillaume as a wisecracking butler who works for a white state governor and rises in the ranks to become budget director and eventually lieutenant governor. Unlike the rival Australian-American program on TV1, Louis L'Amour's *Cherokee Trail*, *Benson* was a popular American series set in contemporary times that dealt with current political and racial issues. Bop-TV's airing of the series identified the broadcaster with integration, modernity, and America, in contrast to TV1's association with whiteness, history, and the racist frontier spirit that helped settle the American West and South Africa alike. Meanwhile, by countering TV2 and TV3's religious programming in this time slot, Bop-TV addressed black viewers as members of a taste culture that included not only English-speaking white South Africans, but also multiracial viewers in the United States. By employing both head-to-head and counterprogramming strategies in relation to TV2 and TV3, Bop-TV was able to imagine a black South African identity that was locally distinct yet interconnected with white South Africans and the international community.

Bop-TV reinforced and extended this international connectedness when it returned to a head-to-head programming strategy against TV2 and TV3 at 7:00 with the imported British news program *UPITN Roving Report*, which also counterprogrammed TV1. Due to its capacity to reach across racial divisions by airing in English, the *UPITN Roving Report* imagined both black and white viewers as part of an international political system, as opposed to the parochial news broadcast on TV2 and TV3 at the same time. Significantly, TV1 showed no news or current affairs programs in English on Sundays, which was also the only day that Bop-TV programmed the *Roving Report*.

A close comparison of U.S. imports on the SABC and Bop-TV helps clarify how the broadcasters constructed quite different images of America. At 7:59, TV3 aired the imported American sitcom *Good Times* (1974–1979), a "pluralist" (Gray, 1995) television series that featured an almost exclusively black cast living in a segregated world. Although early seasons of the series did feature numerous scathing critiques of racism in the United States, the show remained segregated. Moreover, given the intense comparisons that the Nationalist government often drew between South African and U.S. racial

politics (Nixon, 1994), such a segregated image of the United States reinforced the perception that segregation was a widespread international practice.

By contrast, Bop-TV's earlier showing of *Benson* drew a very different picture of contemporary U.S. race relations.[8] Herman Gray (1986) has written that *Benson* promoted an assimilationist ideology of blackness, framing racial difference in solidly middle-class terms that required no sense of change or sacrifice on the part of whites to achieve assimilation. Although the main character, Benson, served as the ethical center of the series and retained a communicative style rooted in African American culture, particularly his cutting, mumbled, and sometimes subversive sense of humor, he had no connection with the wider African American community, encountered few difficulties because of his race, and always worked to resolve conflicts well within the bounds of polite, white, middle-class society. Still, in order for this assimilationist ideology to work effectively, the series needed to reference the historical racial unrest that the world of *Benson* had supposedly transcended, if even obliquely. Such references came across perhaps most strongly in the opening sequence of the pilot, which depicted Benson arriving at the governor's mansion, only to be sprayed with water by the lawn sprinkling system and chased by guard dogs. These tamed images of the violence that white authorities, including southern governors, had unleashed against civil rights activists in recent decades subtly suggest how far the United States as a nation had come with regard to race relations and racial violence. But the allusions to more difficult race relations than those that predominated in *Benson* were, nevertheless, present, both here and throughout the series.

In South Africa the integrated idyll of *Benson* must have seemed quite distant indeed, much more a utopian dream than a representation of contemporary race relations, as it may have been perceived in the United States. While *Benson* may have created a false sense of the true state of U.S. race relations, the series' utopianism also provided an imaginary release from the day-to-day racial exploitation that South African blacks faced, large numbers of whom were employed as domestic servants in white households, much as was Benson. Finally, it is important to note that *Benson*, along with other integrated U.S. sitcoms, portrayed the *domestic* space as integrated, as opposed to the workplace, a move that might have seemed particularly radical in the South African context due to undertones of interracial sexual and marriage relationships. A sitcom such as *Gimme a Break*, which told the story of an African American live-in maid who worked for a widowed white police officer and was widely panned as a racist throwback to 1940s film portrayals of African American women, might have been quite differently regarded among South African viewers for this reason. Many of Bop-TV's imports

demonstrate a preference for integrated domestic U.S. series, substantiating claims by two Bop-TV program buyers that they specifically sought out such programming (Spiller, 1990).

If Bop-TV addressed black viewers as locally distinct, yet cosmopolitan and already integrated into South African society, it projected an image of the white audience as incompletely integrated into Western capitalist modernity. Because Bop-TV remained primarily a black channel, with white viewers forced into the position of eavesdroppers who had to invest both effort and money to bring in the signal, the channel served as a persistent reminder of the Nationalist government's censorship of Western popular culture and its refusal to fully join the Western world. Letters to the editor of the *Rand Daily Mail* made it clear that many English-speaking whites resented the isolation that Bop-TV made them aware of, at the same time that they reinforced the isolation among viewers far beyond Bop-TV's broadcast signal by informing them, often in detail, about the programs they were missing. One viewer in the white suburb of Krugersdorp wrote to the English-language *Rand Daily Mail*'s television reviewer, "Please Mr. Michel, let us have reviews on Bop-TV as well. Even though many readers can not tune into Bop-TV, I am sure they would like to know what they're missing" ("Bop-TV's Fare," 1984).

Although the petition for greater access to Bop-TV failed, the broadcaster had a lasting impact on the South African television landscape. Throughout 1984, TV1 imported greater amounts of current, popular American fare, including the integrated 1980s police drama *Miami Vice* (1984–1990). In 1985 the SABC launched a new channel, TV4, which targeted an integrated audience with entertainment programming, in a move that some observers saw as a direct response to Bop-TV's popularity (Correia, 1984c; Reynolds, 1984). Bop-TV's broadcast signal continued to be limited to black areas, and the broadcaster continued to associate itself with antiapartheid politics through its importation of programming that addressed African American cultural, political, and historical themes.

Program Scheduling as Culturally Embedded Institutional Labor

In this chapter I have gone into some depth analyzing South African television schedules in the mid-1980s and the ways programmers used imported U.S. series, particularly situation comedies, to bring together certain segments of the black and white viewing public and to project an integrated, cosmopolitan channel identity. The image of the audience that Bop-TV projected developed in the way that it did only because of competing constructions of the audience on other South African channels, specifically

the representation of viewers, through scheduling, as consisting of a racially coherent white audience and a black audience fragmented by language and ethnicity.

Scheduling, then, serves as a primary site where institutionalized perceptions of viewers' tastes, affiliations, and identities become available for analysis, where cultural processes and commercial imperatives interact to produce industry lore. In the case of Bop-TV during apartheid, the dominant industry lore held that racially integrated American programs, particularly those centered in the home, served the broadcaster's needs best because they identified Bop-TV as irreverent, thus drawing in a broad range of disaffected South African viewers of all races.

This industry lore, meanwhile, arose from a complex tangle of local and transnational discourses and institutional practices. The SABC promoted a "separate-but-equal" ideology through its racially and linguistically targeted channels and segregated imports, while Bop-TV's scheduling and imports advanced a vision of racial integration that drew upon long-standing transnational discourses about the universality of white values (Fiske, 1996), as well as the history of civil rights struggles in the United States and elsewhere. The appeal of Bop-TV's integrated imports also arose in part from the global circulation of the discourse of cosmopolitanism, as opposed to provincialism, as the hallmark of contemporary modernity. Bop-TV's scheduling, meanwhile, was deeply influenced by uneven economic development and the global movement to divest Western business from apartheid South Africa. That is, Bop-TV's decision to import integrated American series stemmed not from the fact that it was the best *possible* way to meet its institutional needs, but rather because such programming represented the best *available* alternative. American, British, and Australian programming was abundant on the market at the time, while programming from other African nations, other predominantly black markets—even other nonwhite markets—was virtually nonexistent due to the historical exploitation and consequent economic underdevelopment of these societies. And finally, the transnational discourses of antiapartheidism and divestiture had led the U.K. television industry to ban sales of current programs to South Africa, again shaping the ways Bop-TV could enact its particular form of antigovernment, antiapartheid cultural politics.

The realization that program trade is deeply embedded in local and transnational institutions and discursive flows recognizes that program buyers and schedulers act as cultural interpreters. Certainly they work within constraints imposed by larger economic, political, historical, and cultural forces, but they nevertheless exert personal agency in their decision making,

which articulates a host of similarities and differences among domestic tastes and foreign television culture. While their perceptions of the commonalities among communities worldwide do not determine audience members' perceptions, they do determine cultural flows. Thus, while numerous textual features may resonate across national boundaries, only those features identified by the local gatekeepers of global cultural trade shape the kinds of cultural products that circulate internationally.

This idea that programmers actively articulate the cultural connections between viewers, channel identities, and imported texts stands in stark contrast to the dominant industry lore—and perhaps conventional wisdom more broadly—that black viewers abroad prefer imports with African American characters primarily because skin color similarities decrease the foreignness of the imports. Several sales executives, for instance, have explained to me that African American programming does well in South Africa and other African nations because "there's a high population of blacks" (personal communication to the author from anonymous sales executive at a Hollywood distributor, June 28, 1999). By contrast, Cawe Mahlati (1999), the last CEO of Bophuthatswana Broadcasting before its incorporation into the SABC, identifies the role that cultural and political sensibilities played in Bop-TV's preference for acquiring African American programming over the years:

> Because we are a black station, the preference for acquisitions are television programs where African Americans appeared or acted. For a number of reasons. The one being that African Americans have got a very, very great influence on South African black urban culture. And therefore, they've always been thrown up as role models. For instance, if you look at the dressing style and also if you look at the music . . . and the whole neighborhood thing, the whole dancing. . . . Consequently, it makes sense, then, for one to show programming that contains images that people in South Africa can relate to. Secondly, as well, Bop television has shown most of the movies that depict the African American experience in the U.S. There's a lot of resonance in South Africa for that kind of programming.

Mahlati's comments demonstrate the inherently cultural considerations that acquisition executives take into account in constructing linkages between black communities worldwide, while the more conventional wisdom of the Hollywood sales executive sees those acquisitions choices as natural expressions of skin color preferences.

Given the highly localized nature of program decision making traced here, it is perhaps a wonder that worldwide programming trends ever developed.

Of course, the limited amount of programming to choose from is one factor that helps create those trends, but even in the early 1980s, tens of thousands of hours of programming were available on the international markets. Today that number is likely in the hundreds of thousands of hours. The solution to the riddle of worldwide programming trends lies in the active efforts of program merchants, especially syndicators, to influence buyers' perceptions about which imported programs can best serve their institutional needs. In addition, the increasing numbers of global advertisers utilizing similar demographic categories in every market, as well as specialty channels that target those demographics, have created political-economic conditions that further facilitate similar thinking about channel identity and viewers' preferences across national markets.

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