

THE 'VISUAL SPECTACLE' OF SOAP OPERA AND REALITY TELEVISION

Communitas

ISSN 1023-0556

2010 15: 131 - 150

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to the concerns of scholars that the visual spectacle of television lulls audiences into passive consumption of pre-packaged entertainment, this article argues that popular television formats can address matters of social concern. It is shown that reality television and soap operas can engage the audience into actively taking part in 1) formulating messages for the television serials, 2) reflecting on the media messages, and 3) participating in identification processes. It is this active participation in formulating and reflecting on the televised messages and the identification processes (with the celebrity persona of the programme presenter and/or the fictional characters in the fictional soap opera and/or the authenticity of ordinary people that appear on reality television) that counters passive consumption of pre-packaged media entertainment. Furthermore, if media entertainment is used to enhance dialogue through such audience participation regarding matters of social concern, the assumptions of the latest approaches to social change/development communication are adhered to. In this article four South African television programmes, Soul City, Kwanda, Khumbul'ekhaya and Zola 7, are discussed as edutainment programmes that actively seek to address matters of social concern.

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INTRODUCTION

The field of development communication has evolved over time to include all communicative human interaction that seeks to enhance the well-being of humans as far as social change/developmental issues are concerned. Increasingly, visual images on television play a prime role in such communicative events. The television genre of soap operas has been used extensively to facilitate communication on matters of social concern. On the one hand, the visual medium of television has been criticised for turning the masses as “spectators” into passive consumers of mediated messages (Littlejohn & Foss 2005: 293–295; Merrin 2005: 17–21; Debord 2006: 117–121). In this sense “visual spectacle” refers to the legacy of Debord’s (2006: 117–121) notion of the “spectacle society”: society tends to choose the media spectacle and passive entertainment above actively participating in creating entertainment for itself. This passive consumption of pre-packaged media entertainment displaces active participation and authentic experiences (Debord 2006: 117–121). Baudrillard (2005: 460–462) further develops this view, arguing that the media creates simulated experiences of enjoyment to the extent that such experiences are seen as improving on real authentic experiences (simulacra). This is one further step in reducing media audiences to passive consumers of messages.

On the other hand, proponents of edutainment argue that television and other popular cultural media can make a meaningful contribution towards addressing matters of social concern, as they provide people with time to reflect through emotional identification rather than conceptual reasoning (Fuenzalida 2006: 715–717). Fuenzalida (2006: 715–717) argues that the concept of the visual spectacle does not need to be seen in opposition to pro-social educational messages, but that the two concepts are often integrated in Latin America. Fuenzalida (2006: 715–717) therefore argues that entertaining visual spectacles can be used as a fruitful vehicle for pro-social messages that advocate social change/development.

It is this latter train of thought that is associated with the newer approaches to social change/development, where the assumption is that social/developmental problems are complex and not necessarily merely the consequence of a lack of information (Carlsson 2005: 211–212; Mefalopulos 2005: 158–159; Servaes & Malikhao 2005: 93; Waisbord 2001: 3–15). Proponents of these newer approaches to social change/development argue that social and developmental problems may be the result of a lack of information, but may also be a result of structural problems often associated with geopolitical inequality (Eriksen 2005: 36–37; Mefalopulos 2005: 158–159). Consequently, human rights issues such as inequality and oppression should also be addressed. In the process, care should be taken to address the non-material aspects of diversity, culture, identity, and human dignity to ensure that social change/developmental efforts do not impair the individual members of society’s chances of empowerment, self-efficacy and finding meaning in their own lives (Burger 2008: 107–113; Carlsson 2005: 211–212; Mefalopulos 2005: 158–159; Servaes & Malikhao 2005: 93; Singhal & Rogers 2004: v15).

Edutainment,¹ a well-established practice in the field of social change/development,² combines educational messages with entertainment to address a range of social/development issues. Edutainment can influence audiences' awareness levels, attitudes and behaviour toward a socially desirable end, and it can influence the audiences' external environment to help create the necessary conditions for social change at the system level (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 5–6). A wide variety of edutainment efforts exist, ranging from national programmes to small-scale community efforts; from reliance on research to reliance on intuition and creativity of the production staff; and from a few lines in the media to a long-running edutainment series on national television (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 8–9). A variety of communicators are used in edutainment, including ordinary people, actors and celebrity performers (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 9). Some edutainment initiatives focus on widening the audiences' knowledge, while some focus on individual self-efficacy or collective efficacy – that is, the perceived capacity to deal effectively with a situation or the perceived control over one's situation (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 15).

In this article the edutainment aspects of two television genres, the soap opera and reality television, are investigated. The particular examples investigated are the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) soap opera *Soul City* and the reality television serials *Kwanda*, *Khumbul'ekhaya* and *Zola 7*.

EDUTAINMENT, AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND THE SOAP OPERA *SOUL CITY*

The early roots of edutainment can be traced to Mexican telenovellas, where a dramatic crisis spurs exciting intrigues and tension between members of a well-established family (Sabido 2004: 69, 71). Cliff-hanging excitement heightens this tension and after 250 one-hour episodes a resolution between the protagonists and antagonists is found and a new social and family order is established (Sabido 2004: 69, 71).

Drawing on Latin American telenovellas, Miguel Sabido drafted his own edutainment telenovellas model (Poindexter 2004: 26–28). In so doing Sabido incorporated “educational” messages through ensuring that a) the protagonists share the value system of the audience; b) the antagonists' values are rejected by the audience; and c) the satellite characters who have to choose between the two value systems, choose the value system of the protagonists (Sabido 2004: 70). The Sabido model ensured further that the satellite characters are framed in such a way that the audience identifies with them, and when they are swayed towards the protagonists' value system, the audience follows (Sabido 2004: 70). The focus of this form of edutainment thus falls on using the telenovellas format in combination with a deliberate educational message. The Sabido model provided the blueprint for contemporary dramatic serial telenovellas and soap operas in the edutainment mode, and these have evolved over three generations of edutainment programming.

This first generation edutainment programming has a persuasive orientation, where information is transmitted to an audience with normative and behavioural change in

mind (Tufte 2004: 699). Programmes usually focus on transmitting health-related information (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 8) and are often accompanied by the promotion of foreign cultural practices (Tufte 2004: 699). The implication is that an external change agent formulates persuasive educational messages and presents them through an entertaining format to relatively passive recipients with the aim of persuading the audience to change its values, norms and behaviour.

In contrast to this persuasive orientation, the second generation of edutainment programming moved from one-directional messages towards a situation where the audience would start to be involved in creating messages for television programmes. From the perspective of the second-generation edutainment programmes, the root of developmental problems was a lack of information and skills due to structural inequalities (Tufte 2004: 699). This generation of edutainment programming generally follows the contours of postcolonial thinking, attributing social problems and issues largely to geopolitical and other inequalities. For this reason a partnership between change agents and developing communities is suggested, leading to greater public and private debate than in the case of the first-generation edutainment programmes (Tufte 2004: 699). The outcome of second-generation edutainment is, however, still seen as change in the norms and behaviour of the audience and/or structures or institutions of power (Tufte 2004: 699).

The third generation of edutainment programmes evolved still further away from the primarily one-directional communication process implied in the first two generations of edutainment. From this newer perspective the reasons for social problems are lack of information, structural inequalities, unequal power relations and social conflict (Tufte 2004: 699). Edutainment is consequently seen as a process of using popular culture to help communities articulate and discuss social problems (Tufte 2004: 699). The implication is that, instead of assuming that the solution to social problems and social issues is a matter of simply changing the norms and behaviour of individuals, it is proposed that the solution to social problems lies in addressing the possible lack of information, inequalities, and a complex range of contextual aspects. In contextually addressing social problems these problems should in the first place be articulated collectively by the developing community, and secondly the structural problems need to be addressed through a citizenry that actively seeks solutions for complex problems.

One of the ways of articulating, investigating and eliciting social dialogue about social and developmental problems is through the serial drama. The serial drama forms the backbone of edutainment programmes, mostly in the form of a soap opera or edutainment telenovellas. The appeal of the serial drama lies in its use of the dramatic to draw on the emotions of audience members and subsequently to facilitate emotional identification. Various scholars (cf. Fuenzalida 2006: 715–717; Tufte 2004: 401, 410–411; Piotrow & De Fossard 2004: 39) argue that it is a mistake to see emotions as unimportant and irrational, because emotion is one of the prime motivational principles of behaviour. In his large-scale Brazilian study of women's experiences of telenovellas, Tufte (2004: 411–412) confirmed this: he found that the use of the dramatic to elicit

emotions increased social dialogue and debate, even regarding controversial or taboo issues, and that it socialised viewers into new lifestyles and articulate cultural citizenship. Tufte (2004: 410–411) also found that if the settings focus on everyday realities the emotional attachment of the viewer is even stronger. The tendency for audiences' emotional involvement in serial dramas to stimulate discussion was also confirmed by Piotrow and De Fossard (2004: 39). Moreover, the emotive effect of audiences' identification with actors, and the stimulation of dialogue that this induces, is enhanced when serial dramas span many episodes – sometimes years or even decades.

After long and repeated exposure to the characters of soap operas some audience members develop parasocial relationships with fictional characters. A parasocial relationship is a pseudo-relationship that forms after long-term exposure of audience members to real people or fictional characters in the media (Brown & Fraser 2004: 103–105). Identification is stronger if characters are depicted in credible ways, for instance where they experience setbacks similar to those in real life and they then overcome these (Piotrow & De Fossard 2004: 51). It has been found that if this identification process takes place over a long time-span it is stronger (Piotrow & De Fossard 2004: 51). In long-running serials credible characters with which audience members form parasocial relationship can evolve into strong credible role models (Piotrow & De Fossard 2004: 39). These relationships are powerful as they often have the effect that the audience member wants to be like the celebrity, and adopts his/her values, beliefs and behaviour, including his/her clothing, manner of speaking and lifestyle (Brown & Fraser 2004: 103–105). The powerful effect of such psychological and emotional attachments between the audience and media persona has been researched and confirmed extensively (Brown & Fraser 2004: 103). It has been found in many studies that more audience members identify with positive role models than with negative role models (Brown & Fraser 2004: 107–110). It has further been found that greater identification with a celebrity role model will produce greater audience awareness of the issue at hand and actual change in values and behaviour (Brown & Fraser 2004: 107–110; cf. Sood, Menard & Witte 2004: 129).

The longevity of serials has the further benefit of allowing complexity in terms of main and subplots as well as a range of characters that explore the complexity of social issues (Piotrow & De Fossard 2004: 51). This results in a rather realistic social context that mirrors society and creates multiple opportunities to present a social issue. Furthermore, it offers the possibility of presenting different perspectives, which could subsequently stimulate the audience to critically engage with the message of the serial (Piotrow & De Fossard 2004: 51).

To summarise: the serial drama has the edutainment benefits of emotional identification with the celebrity characters, which stimulates social discussions and allows for the complexity of a situation to be investigated. The likely effect is that the audience members will be more aware of the social issue at hand and social dialogue will be elicited. Serials could thus induce a change in values, norms and behaviour through audience identification with a character.

A prime example of the third generation of edutainment programmes is found in the efforts of the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication. The work of the Soul City Institute includes, firstly, the television soap opera *Soul City*, which, in a manner similar to the first generation of edutainment programming, conveys health and development information in a deliberately persuasive manner (cf. Sood, Menard & Witte 2004: 132). *Soul City* is persuasive because it has the purpose of increasing the audience's knowledge about a particular social issue; changing attitudes; shifting social norms; and changing individual and collective behaviour (Usdin, Singhal, Shongwe, Goldstein & Shabalala 2004: 155). In its nine seasons since 1994 *Soul City* has sought to instruct people through information and attitudinal and behavioural change on a wide range of social issues: maternal and child health, HIV/Aids prevention, housing, land reform, the control of tuberculosis and tobacco usage, alcohol abuse, energy conservation, violence prevention, violence against women, youth sexuality and Aids, hypertension, personal finance, small business development, access to HIV/Aids treatment, cervical cancer, health equity, and masculinity in South Africa (The Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication 2010; Usdin *et al.* 2004: 156).

The second focus of the Soul City Institute is to combine its advocacy with supportive environments for change (Sood, Menard & Witte 2004: 132). It is this quest to address structural problems that moves the work of the Soul City Institute from the first to the third generation edutainment programme category. In this regard the Soul City Institute's work includes using multiple media in promoting its message, but also other efforts to address unsupportive structures.

In order to both address the audience's lack of knowledge and the structural problems associated with addressing the social problem at hand a lengthy research process is used. The research process is not unique to *Soul City*: Singhal and Rogers (2004: 6) mention that edutainment programmes generally benefit from formative, process and summative research.

The Soul City Institute's formative research process spans several months before each *Soul City* season, and includes stakeholder consultations, literature reviews, case studies, general audience research and workshops with various stakeholders (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 156). In preparation for the soap opera's fourth season, *Soul City IV*, which addressed the issue of violence against women, workshops with the National Network on Violence Against Women and other stakeholder organisations were held (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 156). Members of such organisations provided valuable insight into both the victim and male perpetrator, which helped the Soul City Institute team members to gain both a "male" and a "female" perspective on the issue (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 156). Before writing the script, consultations with other stakeholders such as government and civil society officials were also held. Some of these stakeholder consultations made the Soul City Institute aware of the possibility that women could, after exposure to the television series, take action that could place them at an increased risk of harm by their male partners (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 157). Thus a toll-free telephone helpline was instituted by

the Soul City Institute to act as a “safety net” for abused women (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 157). The research process furthermore included studying traditional conceptions of gender: this revealed that men teach their sons to be “captains of the ship”, while girls were socialised by their mothers “to endure” (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 157).

From studying various sets of literature the Soul City Institute research team learned that while abused women show a strong desire to seek recourse from the law, various structural barriers prevented them from seeking help, including the indifference of health workers, the police, and the judiciary (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 157). For this reason the Soul City Institute team decided to depict the reality of police indifference and apathy to domestic violence and, in the television serial, brought the message home of how police, legal, and health workers should have behaved (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 157). Actual *Soul City IV* scenes were used to develop training material for police, and legal and health workers (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 157). The Soul City Institute team further learned that the South African society largely sees domestic violence as a “private affair” and for that reason neighbours do not interfere or seek to prevent it (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 157). Following the Latin American practice of neighbours banging pots the minute they know that domestic violence is taking place, this practice was introduced to the South African society through *Soul City IV* (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 163). In this sense pot banging is a form of passive resistance and through using female domestic symbols such as pots, women’s liberation from domestic violence is sought (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 163).

In most edutainment programmes the formative research includes researching audience needs and preferences to ensure that the type of characters and situations tie in with what audiences find credible (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 6). With *Soul City IV* it was no different, as the initial script was tested with various stakeholder organisations and members of the public and adjusted as a result of their objections and the credibility of the story line and characters (Usdin *et al.* 2004: 158–167).

Summative research found that the *Soul City* message reached 80% of the South African population (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 8). This success is not solely attributed to *Soul City*, but to its combining with the other Soul City Institute initiatives that sought, inter alia, to address structural problems that prevent the *Soul City* message from being successful (such as indifference amongst the police, health workers and legal workers). Other initiatives that reinforce the *Soul City* message include the “One Love” campaign, the children’s television soap opera series *Soul Buddyz*, which conveyed pro-social messages on television and through its Internet site and Soul Buddyz Club, Action4Children (direct support for child projects), the short reality television series *Kwanda*, which was presented in the form of a competition between various community-based developmental projects, and an interactive website with blogging opportunities (The Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication 2010).

This discussion of the work of the Soul City Institute demonstrates that the television soap opera series *Soul City* is essentially a first-generation television soap opera due to

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its persuasive educational stance towards addressing developmental efforts. The baseline *Soul City* message is created by “experts” outside the audience. This includes scientific health information (for instance regarding the working of HIV/Aids) or human rights information (for instance that domestic violence is a violation of human rights).

What moves *Soul City* into the third generation of edutainment is firstly the fact that some audience involvement is evident in the formulation of the communication message. This includes the development of the storyline, the dialogue, choice of characters, and so on. Consequently, even if members of the audience do not have expert information, they sanction it by participating in the process of helping to facilitate the message. The *Soul City* case has shown, in contrast to the general conception that it is not practical for large-scale edutainment programmes to be participatory (cf. Storey & Jacobson 2004: 418), that it is indeed possible to obtain some form of audience participation in a large edutainment effort. Participation is furthermore seen in audiences’ active identification with characters in *Soul City*. *Soul City* is thus not an example of a television spectacle that lulls audiences into passively consuming mass-mediated entertainment. A second factor that moves *Soul City* into the third generation of edutainment programmes is that the other activities of the Soul City Institute reinforce the message through its other television programmes, the use of the Internet for transmitting information and creating a virtual community through blogging, and its campaigns. A third factor is that the workings of the Soul City Institute include addressing the structural obstacles to social change/development – for example, in the case of *Soul City IV*, addressing the unresponsiveness of the police, judiciary and health workers.

These aspects put *Soul City* in line with the latest thinking on social change/development communication, which assumes that social and development problems might be attributed to a lack of information, but that structural inequalities should also be addressed.

In the next section three reality television serials, *Kwanda*, *Khumbul’ekhaya* and *Zola 7*, are discussed, and it is shown that these have even greater audience participation than *Soul City* and that, moreover, they reflect the latest thinking on social change/development – namely, empowerment and self-efficacy.

REALITY TELEVISION, THE VISUAL SPECTACLE AND EDUTAINMENT

The advantages of the soap opera serial with its focus on dramatic emotions, possible identification with characters, and the audience being (to a certain extent) involved in formulating pro-social messages can also be utilised in reality television. This genre includes a large number of formats – for instance, soap-docs (*Airport*); game programmes (*Survivor*); romantic excursion programmes (*Relate – Rate My Date*); talk television programmes (*3 Talk with Noeleen* or *Oprah*); voyeuristic programmes (*Big Brother*); self-actualisation programmes; home improvement programmes; social experiment programmes (*Temptation Island*); concealed camera programmes (*Candid Camera*); and programmes that include the supernatural (Hill 2005: 8–11, 20–23; Huff

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2006: 13–21; Andrejevic 2004: 3–6). The genre also includes a variety of other such shows that frequently change their formula in order to satisfy audiences' need for new types of mediated entertainment. In order to continuously satisfy audience hunger for the dramatic, reality shows tend to increase their dramatic intensity to include more challenging competitions, more spectacular footage, to offer more emotional moments, and so forth. Reality television thus excels in presenting visual spectacles.

Reality television not only boasts dramatic emotional visual spectacles, but does so in real terms. Reality television is, in contrast to the fictional edutainment soap opera, "real" as it is non-fictional, non-scripted, non-contrived, non-staged, and, in a way, factual (Andrejevic 2004: 8–12, 81; Crew 2006: 61, 68–70). Andrejevic (2004: 8–12) argues that the appeal of reality television lies in its being real (the "appeal of the real"), or at least offers itself to the audience to be experienced as real. The sense of "realness" is further enhanced by the use of ordinary people who convey their own unique life stories in their own authentic ways, often revealing their gut reactions and emotions (Crew 2006: 61, 68–70). These stories are not scripted, even though the situations in which the programme participants are put when telling their own life story might be well-calculated. Reality television is thus real, in stark contrast to the "contrived" nature of the scripted "stories" of soap operas.

The use of ordinary people in reality television seems to enhance audience identification: firstly by virtue of the fact that it is real (not staged/acted by professional actors), and secondly by the use of ordinary people (Hill 2006: 59–61). Audience members might think that the participants appearing on reality television "are like me, in fact, it could have been me, my sister, or my neighbour" (Andrejevic 2004: 86–88). The processes of audience identification are thus greatly enhanced due to reality television's being more believable. It can thus be said that reality television gives ordinary people the power to express their deepest emotions publicly. Because these emotions are real (and not staged, as in the case of fictional characters of a soap opera), the audience tends to experience the emotions as real and tends to identify with the emotions. Reality television may very well give audience members the sense that they could have produced the message themselves. Audience participation also happens on a second level, namely that the actual participant on the reality television programme is empowered to have his/her say or to tell his/her life story (Andrejevic 2004: 5–7; Hill 2006: 59–61). The actual participant on the reality television programme might feel that "I am worth listening to" (Andrejevic 2004: 86–88). Herein lies the crux of the social change/developmental orientation of reality television: the actual participation in producing the communication message of the programme, both from the participant's point of view and that of the audience.

One of the largest factors threatening the success of edutainment initiatives is that edutainment is not acceptable for cultural, traditional and other reasons (Piotrow & De Fossard 2004: 45–47). This can be overcome in reality television, as ordinary people formulate messages in their own ways – often directly addressing cultural, traditional and other normative positions. *Soul City* overcame the potential problem of presenting

foreign cultural, traditional and other norms by testing the storyline and script with members of the intended audience. In reality television, however, this “testing” is not necessary, as audience members formulate the messages themselves.

The fact that audiences formulate the messages of reality television means that they are empowered in the sense suggested by the latest thinking in the field of social change/development. Instead of focusing on information transmission, problems associated with inequality and social structures can be exposed, and in this way the individual community member appearing on the screen experiences the first steps of self-efficacy by expressing concern and other views regarding a particular situation. This might furthermore lead to public discussions, social debate, and dialogue regarding issues of social concern.

A few examples will suffice to prove that it is indeed possible to use the genre of reality television as edutainment. One such example is found in India. In 2002 and 2003 a 40-episode edutainment reality television show aimed at creating awareness of HIV/Aids among children was broadcast (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 10). The show followed the journey of two buses, one for boys and one for girls, on their way to Delhi (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 10). Along the journey the children and the show presenters talked about HIV/Aids, and the children undertook various creative and entertaining activities (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 10–11). One such activity investigated who was least embarrassed to buy a condom, and another was a role-playing game where the advances of the opposite sex were repulsed (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 10–11). Every now and then the routes of the two buses coincided, and then further educational activities took place – each with the aim of enhancing knowledge about HIV/Aids (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 10–11). This show reported a 12% positive change in sexual behaviour of the target groups four months after the broadcasts began (Singhal & Rogers 2004: 11).

Why this serial is significant for the edutainment debate is that ordinary people (actually children who are not actors) formulated the serial’s message – albeit within the constraints of the serial master plot. Through participation in the serial the children had the opportunity to gain information and assess it. The fact that they were real and ordinary enhanced the audience’s chances of identifying with the children. This serial furthermore had a documentary quality, as the journey of the children’s learning about HIV/Aids was documented. This “docu-reality” genre, which is a well-established format, is perceived by audiences as “real”.

Three more examples of reality television documenting a journey of discovery regarding social issues are found in the form of the SABC1 programmes *Kwanda*, *Khumbul’ekhaya* and *Zola 7*.

Kwanda (which means “communities with soul”) is a reality television series that was broadcast once a week on SABC1 between 2 September and 23 November 2009. The serial followed the activities of five volunteer teams that worked to make a difference in their respective communities by ensuring that children had enough to eat and by reducing violent crime (Kwanda 2010: online). In the television series, each team’s

quest to help their communities were documented and viewers had to vote for the winning team – the team that the audience thought made the biggest difference to the community. In this sense documentary and a competition/game show elements were combined in this reality series, enhancing its sense of being real and adding excitement to the project.

The five teams were made up of 50 volunteers of each of the participating communities: Pefferville (near East London, Eastern Cape), Umthwalume (near Port Shepstone and Hibberdene, KwaZulu-Natal), Tjakastad (near Barberton, Mpumalanga), Lepepane (near Tzaneen, Limpopo) and Kwakwatsi (near Sasolburg, Free State) (Kwanda 2010: online). The 50 participants chosen by each community attended a five-week training camp to acquire new skills, learn how to organise themselves and devise a social change plan for their community (Kwanda 2010: online). Ten participants of each team received further training in fashion design and sewing, and this enabled them to partake in the Kwanda Klothung Project, which was launched during the television serial (Kwanda 2010: online).

Kwanda did not have a single message, but, as mentioned earlier in this article, formed part of the workings of the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication. *Kwanda* is thus, by implication, linked to the other activities of the Soul City Institute, making it a multiple-media effort as it uses more than one avenue for its message. The *Kwanda* message is supported by the *Kwanda* Internet website, which seeks to help communities that want to help themselves to “start kwanda” in their communities – in this sense “kwanda” refers to bettering one’s community (Kwanda 2010: online). Apart from the “starting kwanda” section, the *Kwanda* website offers information regarding HIV/Aids, discusses concerns around multiple concurrent sexual partners, and presents information regarding problems associated with alcohol abuse and how to deal with it. Various taboo issues are addressed directly on the website and on the social networking and blogging sections of the site (Kwanda 2010: online). These interactive opportunities on the website are used by the public to ask for information regarding health and developmental issues; such requests are followed by a reply, which often sparks long discussions (Kwanda 2010: online).

This brief discussion of *Kwanda* illustrates that it, *Soul City* and the other efforts associated with these two programmes collectively seek to address matters of social concern. The messages of *Soul City* and the other ventures of the Soul City Institute are enhanced through *Kwanda*, even though the *Kwanda* series was mainly aimed at addressing violence and caring for children. It seems that these initiatives seek to address the moral fibre of society and presents self-help opportunities. These efforts are cast in entertainment formats. The initiatives of the Soul City Institute provide a wide variety of options for the public to participate not only communication-wise, but also to actively participate in their own communities, to gain information, and, if they so wish, to change behaviour.

Both *Kwanda* and *Soul City* are in a particular way based on externally formulated messages: the baseline message of *Soul City* consists of “expert” information being

conveyed, while in the case of *Kwanda* the parameters within which each team participated were predetermined. In *Kwanda* the journey, plan and actual words spoken by each team are authentic, giving it a distinctive quality of realness that marks reality television. *Kwanda* is more “real” than *Soul City*: instead of being scripted, ordinary people participate in the televised competition in their own authentic ways. *Kwanda* is also more “real” than the HIV/Aids reality serial in India, as it is set within the everyday realities of communities. Not only do the participants of *Kwanda* talk (as on the Indian bus), but they also take responsibility for their own futures by actively doing something about their fate and the fate of others. Another element that enhances the “realness” in *Kwanda* is that the participants remain in their community, where emotions and the dramatic are easily elicited.

Kwanda was broadcast for a period of three months only, and the identification of the viewing audience with the community members could therefore not have been that pronounced. In contrast, two other South African SABC edutainment reality television serials have been running for several years: *Khumbul’ekhaya* and *Zola 7* boast a well-known kwaito music celebrity as presenter, and in each episode of both serials different members of the public are invited to participate, and they appear on television. The purpose of both serials is to help these participants in different ways. As new participants appear on these two serials every week, there is no possibility of audiences identifying with them, but this is compensated for by the possibility of identifying with the celebrity persona presenting the serial.

The celebrity persona is used in both serials to represent the “good” in society working towards a good social cause. Such “aid celebrities” act as emotional sovereigns, where the sovereign manifests in the “true will of the people” – the celebrities speak the truth on behalf of the people (Richley & Ponte 2008: 719). Aid celebrities thus embody the “good” in society (Richley & Ponte 2008: 719). Such aid celebrities can say things in much more persuasive ways than “experts” can, given these celebrities’ “field experiences” (Richley & Ponte 2008: 719). They often do so in a rather sensational and emotional way, with the purpose of bolstering support for a specific social cause (Richley & Ponte 2008: 719). Such totemic aid celebrities merge disparate longings into a new social modality, namely the search for “meaning” among ordinary people. They also help various social causes – usually in an emotional fashion to get the “people” behind them and in doing so gaining support for the cause (Richley & Ponte 2008: 719). Indeed, it has been found that celebrity endorsements have a far greater positive impact on the public than non-celebrity endorsements (Byrne, Whitehead & Green 2003: 393).

Both *Khumbul’ekhaya* and *Zola 7* follow this “aid celebrity” line by using celebrities who speak on the basis of their “own field experiences”. The presenter of *Khumbul’ekhaya* was raped, while the presenter of *Zola 7* comes from a broken family, has a criminal background and comes from a violence and crime-stricken suburb. Their own field experiences thus speak “the truth” regarding social and developmental issues.

Khumbul'ekhaya (which means “remember home”) is presented by Andile Carelse (nee Gaelesiwe), a female kwaito star who revealed during her radio show on Gauteng Youth Radio Station (Yfm) that she was raped as a child (GSport 2007: online). Carelse’s disclosure was spurred by a young woman who called in to the radio station threatening to commit suicide because she had been sexually abused (Who’s Who SA 2007: online). After this disclosure, Carelse decided to take action and founded the Open Disclosure Foundation (ODF) in 2002, which empowers young people to talk about abuse and to seek help (GSport 2007: online). The slogan for the ODF is “talking is therapy and therapy is healing” (Speakers of Note 2009: online).

After establishing ODF, Carelse became the presenter of *Khumbul'ekhaya*. In the serial the real journeys of South Africans on a quest to re-unite families and bring healing to families are followed (SABC1 2010: online; TVSA 2006: online). These journeys include tracing long-lost relatives, finding estranged family members, and healing longstanding family feuds (SABC1 2010: online). The aim of the serial is to show how, through reconciliation and forgiveness, broken family relationships can be healed (TVSA 2006: online). The “heartwarming” series “spark[s] laughter and tears, as viewers reflect on their own family relationships and are moved to implement positive change in their own homes” (SABC1 2010: online). This emphasis on emotions has led to the serial being described as a docu-reality series that uses emotainment (emotional entertainment) (SABC1 2010: online; TVSA 2006: online).

Carelse has also written a book for school-going young people entitled *Claiming back your soul* (GSport 2007: online). This and other socially responsible work won her a Clinton Democracy Fellowship (GSport 2007: online) and in 2009 *Khumbul'ekhaya* won a National Film and Video Foundation SAFTA Golden Horn in the category Factual Entertainment Programme (National Film and Video Foundation 2009: online; Society News 2009: online). This, together with her radio work and her fame as a kwaito artist, makes her not only a celebrity but an advocate for pro-social change.

This short introduction to Carelse and *Khumbul'ekhaya* shows that the serial, like *Soul City* and *Kwanda*, is not a once-off effort that exists in isolation, but is supported by other efforts. The aim of the serial is thus not only to help the participants of the reality television programme, but also to elicit public discussion or dialogue about the issues of social concern addressed in the programme and in Carelse’s other activities. The possibility of identification with the serial participants is not excluded, but Carelse’s positive role model offers an identification opportunity with a celebrity.

The reality serial *Zola 7* also uses a celebrity as a presenter, a triple platinum kwaito music star (Bassline 2009: online). Zola (Bonginkosi Thuthikani Dlamini) has presented this reality television programme with a pro-social message since 2003. In each episode of the series an audience member who has a dream is helped to achieve his/her dream (Discogs 2009: online; TVSA 2009: online). The dreams usually have to do with social (developmental) issues, such as seeking food and resource sponsors for communities and centres; finding equipment for teachers who without it cannot provide

schooling; solving family crises and restoring good relationships; and encouraging people to accept themselves and others, to show respect, not to harbour prejudices and to be more tolerant (TVSA 2009: online). Like Carelse, the host of the series is a well-known celebrity in South Africa: Zola is not only a renowned musician, but is also known for his acting roles in *Tsotsi* and *Yizo Yizo 2* (Clayton-Millar 2006: online). Moreover, he is a well-established entrepreneur with his own clothing brand (Discogs 2009: online; cf. FNB 2009: online), and is co-branded with the telecommunications company Cell C (in the form of the Hola7 cell phone starter pack) (Cell C 2009: online). Zola is also a public figure who is part of the United Nations' celebrity team and often talks at public forums presenting pro-social messages (UNICEF 2006: online) – an example of this is his appearance at the 2007 World Aids Day (Marketingweb 2007: online).

Zola's media and entertainment company, Guluva, releases his and other music albums. The term "guluva" is associated with the culture around kwaito and is a greeting to someone who comes from a severely disadvantaged background and who "made it big". (An analogous term would be the skateboarding fraternity's "top dog".) Zola owes this name to his childhood years in the violence-stricken Soweto township of Zola, where he grew up without a father and where, as a juvenile, he was associated with car theft (Cell C 2009: online; Independent Online 2006: online; Owen 2009: online; InsideOut 2010: online). The controversy of his private life does not belong only to the past, however: from time to time the media reports his antisocial behaviour – his extra-marital children, for example, and how badly he allegedly treats his girlfriends (Khumalo 2007: online; Pillay 2009: 14–17; Chauke 2010: online). His controversial private life is also discussed widely on the Internet and in blogs (cf. Afritude 2007; Holgate 2009; Khumalo 2007; Pillay 2009: 14–17; Chauke 2010). In the television serial, however, he often addresses the male viewer directly, motivating men to stay faithful and to be involved in the lives of their children. The problem with Zola's public image is that it does not support his pro-social work in his television serial.

Despite this problem, it can be said that the genre of reality television offers the possibility to ordinary members of the public to appear on the serial and to have their say, to get their problems addressed. Those not part of these select few have the opportunity to identify with the ordinary people who participate in the serial and/or with the celebrity persona of the presenter. Edutainment scholars Singhal and Rogers (2004: 10) are sceptical about the merits of the more established forms of reality television such as *Survivor*, *The Jerry Springer Show*, *Temptation Island* and *Big Brother*, arguing that they valorise lewdness, sexual irresponsibility, greed, and other antisocial messages. Nonetheless, it is possible for reality television to be employed as edutainment. Edutaining reality television gives audiences the opportunity to formulate messages and to identify with the celebrity persona and/or the participants on the serial. Viewer identification with participants is enhanced by the fact that they are ordinary people with real emotions, often depicted in their everyday environments.

CONCLUSION

This article assumes that social change/development efforts should focus on three aspects, namely to address a possible lack of information; to address matters regarding structural inequality; and to provide opportunities to explore self-efficacy, identity and other intangible aspects related to social change/development. Based on this assumption this article emphasizes a number of points.

Firstly, it has been argued that edutainment soap operas and reality television both use emotional and dramatic elements to attract audiences. The soap opera uses these elements to forge the audience's identification with fictional characters, who in time achieve celebrity status. For its part, reality television provides the opportunity for viewers to identify with celebrity presenters and/or ordinary members of the public who participate in the serial. Identification with ordinary people is a particularly strong form of identification because these people are "real" people in their everyday environments.

The second point made above is that the scripted nature of soap operas (where the message is tested with audiences and other stakeholders) means that it belongs to the persuasive first generation of edutainment programming, while reality television's unscripted nature makes it more real.

The third point is that edutainment messages are stronger if they are reinforced through other media such as the Internet and if they address structural problems (such as the indifference of the police, health workers, and the judiciary system addressed by *Soul City IV*). This means that the messages conveyed by a soap opera or reality television serial in isolation are not that effective in addressing matters of social concern in terms of information transmission. They also do not address structural inequalities, nor provide opportunities for self-efficacy and identification.

The last point is that edutainment genres such as soap operas and reality television serials can be fruitfully used for pro-social messages and addressing issues of social concern. The participatory nature of these genres poses a real challenge to scholars who object that the visual spectacle of television lulls audiences into passive entertainment consumption.

Endnotes

¹ Edutainment (education through entertainment) is also referred to as "enter-educate" or "E-E" (Piotrow & De Fossard 2004: 51).

² "Development communication", "communication for social change" (Tufté 2004: 403) and "participatory communication for development" (Storey & Jacobson 2004: 417) are used as synonyms in this article, and are captured in the term "social change/development".

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