

Color TV: Postcolonial Concerns and “Colored” Television Audiences in South Africa

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As the first postapartheid television show to exclusively address “coloreds,” *Color TV*, a variety comedy show, participates in the postcolonial objective of dismantling historical racial hierarchies in South Africa. Yet contradictory responses by “colored” viewers to the focus on working-class experiences expose fault lines in this democratizing project. Identity theories of strategic essentialism and creolization explain how working-class viewers embraced the realism of *Color TV* that they felt legitimized the significance of their role in the nation, while middle-class viewers perceived the images as too restrictive yet simultaneously identified proudly as “colored.” The uneven reception of *Color TV* highlights the significance of addressing intersectional identities (of race and class) in television programming to expand inclusion of minority groups in multicultural nations.

Keywords: *Color TV, postcolonial, colored, television, audiences, South Africa, intersectional, race, class*

South Africa, brace yourself, phone jou ma en sê vir haar (call your mother and tell her): “There’s a new variety comedy show for Coloreds by Coloreds.” (SABC, 2011, press release, para. 6)

Illuminating the significance of *Color TV* (2011–12), a variety comedy show that aired on a free-to-air public television channel (SABC 2), the South African Broadcasting Corporation’s (SABC) marketing materials acknowledge the historical lack of television representations of, by, and for people who identify as “colored,”² or of mixed race. Besides drawing attention to the broad appeal of the show that even mothers of (“colored”) viewers will appreciate, the press release underlines the uniqueness of the show, as “coloreds” have been “a target market previously overlooked” (SABC, 2011, para. 2). *Color TV* presents an opportunity to assess how television participates in the postapartheid project of dismantling historical racial hierarchies

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² Quotation marks around “colored” acknowledge the contested nature of this term used to refer to people of mixed race and recognize that many of my participants identify with this category.

and constructing unity within a multicultural nation. This case study considers how “colored” viewers use programming to construct a sense of cultural legitimacy and national belonging. Does programming that claims to speak to this group resonate, or does such programming elicit disavowal as viewers perceive cultural distance between their realities and these few images incorporated on television?

Imagined as programming included in a 24-hour television channel, *Color TV* is an hour-long variety comedy show with skits that range from actuality to comedy. A news segment with two anchors satirizes contemporary issues like not saving money for retirement. In this example, the anchors compare people who are poor with no savings with the biblical account of Jesus, who earned no money yet saved millions! The slippage between saving money and human souls introduces the humorous tone of the show. A second skit offers sports coverage of events such as domino tournaments, perceived to appeal to “coloreds.” In this segment, the host claims that “coloreds” are so accomplished at dominoes that players who are not “colored” would never know they were being cheated! A soap opera pits Christian and Muslim “colored” families against each other, incorporating a Romeo and Juliet romance and diverse religious practices. A lifestyle segment, a reporter on special assignment, a game show with contestants, and a late-night talk show round out the offerings, presented by “colored” hosts who speak with an exaggerated “colored” accent. Finally, two behind-the-scenes line producers switch between cameras and add graphics to the show, humorously commenting on the segments and spoofing “colored” cultural practices. The humor of the show relies on both its parodic form—as a channel spoofing a range of genres—and on incongruities introduced by storylines, characters, and line producers that violate norms and construct shared in-group identities or criticize out-group “others.”³

By way of organization, this article contextualizes the controversial category of “colored” first imposed by the apartheid government. After detailing methodologies, viewer responses are analyzed through two theoretical interventions: strategic essentialism and creolization. Strategic essentialism explains viewers’ resonance with *Color TV* as a tactic to establish the significance of their racial position in the nation, despite previous marginalization. In contrast, viewers who responded to *Color TV* from the perspective of creolization struggled to align their emotional reactions with nation building because the show did not address their class position. The show’s economic homogeneity thus marginalized middle-class experiences, despite those viewers’ racial pride in identifying as “colored.” These conflicting reactions to *Color TV* expose fissures in the nation building project. I argue that while television programming strategically emphasizes “coloredness” to achieve multicultural inclusion and reparation, it neglects the significance of intersecting identities (race and class), furthering racial marginalization and class divisions. The conclusion addresses the implications for multicultural programming in global television.

(Re-)Constructions of “Coloredness”

The racial/ethnic category of “colored” has a complex history with shifting definitions that inform *Color TV*’s creation and reception. Although the stereotypes ascribed to “coloreds” predate the Union act in 1910, the racial/ethnic category was first officially used by the Apartheid government in 1948 to bolster

³ See Holmes and Marra (2002) for a discussion of the role of humor in constructing and distinguishing identities.

segregation (February, 1981). The apartheid system of racial classification presumed on the biological nature of race, even though, as Posel (2001) argues, the government combined beliefs of racial science with social and cultural practices to establish race as common sense. As part of this normalization, the categories of White, Black, and Indian assumed discrete racial descent, whereas "colored" inferred racial mixing or miscegenation. Official definitions of "coloreds" as "neither white nor African" contributed to their intermediate status and emphasized their racial and cultural hybridity (Adhikari, 2005, p. 13). Disapproving of racial impurity, the government passed the Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and amended the Immorality Act (1927) to criminalize mixed marriages and interracial sexual relationships. The presumption of shame resulting from these illicit sexual relationships, according to Wicomb (1998), was built into the label used to distinguish "coloreds" from other groups.

Despite negative connotations, "colored" people have made efforts to naturalize their identity label. Their adoption of the term *bruinmens* (an Afrikaans term meaning "brown people") defines "coloredness" as a "pure category" and offers a "denial of shame" to their presumed origins through miscegenation (Wicomb, 1998, p. 92). As a group, "coloreds" have also worked to protect their position of privilege relative to people classified as Black. By appropriating official descriptions of their so-called mixed origins and highlighting their shared language with Whites, "coloreds" have sought out the social, political, and economic privileges associated with Whiteness (Adhikari, 2005).

Resistance by "coloreds" against state classification has been varied. Wicomb (1998) notes that the term "colored" has at times been capitalized to establish its legitimacy (as evident in the opening press release), even as it has been preceded by the phrase "so-called" to acknowledge its impositional nature. Additionally, the term has been placed between quotation marks, destabilizing its meaning, and at times the category has been "replaced by the word *black*, indicating both a rejection of apartheid nomenclature as well as inclusion in the national liberation movement" (p. 93). Advocating for a more progressive conceptualization of "coloredness," Zimitri Erasmus (2001) defines "colored" identities as cultural hybrids, not racial mixing, creatively reimagined through creolization rather than ruling-class impositions, inclusive of "black and African ways of being," and acknowledging the legacies of slavery and apartheid (p. 16).

In contrast to the racial segregation of the past, postapartheid's commitment to "nonracialism" in the founding provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) should eliminate race as "the primary point of reference" (Soudien, 1994, p. 56). Yet, contemporaneously, governance institutions, commercial enterprises, and population groups continue to classify or identify using these same categories, as evident in the most recent census. Moreover, the uneven implementation of postapartheid acts and policies, such as the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (2004) intended to transfer economic access to Black Africans (defined in the act as "a generic term which means Africans, Coloreds and Indians"; p. 4), have become points of racialized contention. Specifically, "coloreds" have staged protests, drawing attention to decreased economic opportunities, inadequate housing, insufficient service delivery, high poverty, and poor policing in predominantly "colored" areas with increased crime and gang violence.⁴ Although critics like Mondli Makhanya (2018), of the *City Press*,

⁴ See Whittles (2017) for a representation of these arguments and protests.

argue that these problems plague all poor communities and are not exclusively “colored” issues, racial/ethnic categories remain germane and contested.

How television participates in the postcolonial project of incorporating racial/ethnic diversity as the focus of this case study requires some context. Before the completion of digital migration, anticipated in 2020, the television landscape consisted of two free-to-air outlets, the SABC and e.tv, as well as a satellite service, DSTv, and pay-per-view service, M-Net. Purportedly independent of state and commercial interests, television is administered by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (2000) intended to “regulate broadcasting in the public interest and to ensure fairness and a diversity of views broadly representing South African society” (p. 3) among other objectives. Specific criteria for regulating broadcasting are clarified in the Electronic Communications Act (ECA, 2005), whose purpose is to “promote the empowerment of historically disadvantaged persons, including Black people” and to “ensure that broadcasting services, viewed collectively—(i) . . . cater for all language and cultural groups and provide entertainment, education and information,” among other goals (p. 20). Television is thus organized to incorporate previously marginalized groups, including “coloreds.”

As one of two free-to-air television outlets, the SABC has addressed “coloreds” on SABC 2, one of its two public service channels, broadcasting in English and Afrikaans. The SABC attempts to incorporate all official languages across their spectrum of channels as its own interpretation of the ECA’s (2005) mandate to “cater for all language and cultural groups” (p. 20). However, SABC 2 has historically integrated representations of white and “coloreds” in programming in lieu of exclusively addressing “coloreds” in any one show.

The integration of racial and ethnic diversity in programming and across channels is an established television nation-building strategy. However, the SABC and other television outlets have also targeted specific population groups. For example, SABC 2 airs *Noot vir Noot* (1991–), a musical quiz show that initially featured rural, White performers, continues to target Afrikaans speakers although “colored” performers have been incorporated more recently; and e.tv aired *Society* (2007), a miniseries-turned-drama that addressed Black women’s entrance into professional and middle-class sectors. Despite the proliferation of shows that target exclusive races or ethnicities, *Color TV* is the first show since the end of apartheid that claims to address the interests of “coloreds.” In addition, most representations of “coloreds” have been limited to aspirational programming, with characters living as middle class or aspiring to these values. “Colored” characters from the soap opera *7de Laan* (*7th Lane*) illustrate their aspirational focus as small business owners and journalists, among others.

Positioning *Color TV* as an intervention into the national, historical, and institutional context, the creators claim it centers on the experience of “coloredness” and informs the nation of the group’s cultural contributions. Bernhard Baatjies, the creative impetus behind *Color TV*, explains the show fills “a niche in TV content that would talk directly to the nation with a colored voice” (“*Color TV* Coming,” 2011, para. 2). Levern Engel, executive producer of the show, emphasizes the significance of the show: “The SABC is very proud to be able to give *Color TV* a platform to talk directly to a broad South African audience” (“*Color TV* Coming,” 2011, para. 5). This institutional commitment is further evident in the SABC 2’s moniker of “Simunye,” or “We Are One,” and its tag line of “The Channel for the Nation.”

Yet the SABC's decision not to commission a second series⁵ of *Color TV*, or any subsequent programming that highlights this group, undercuts the nation-building impetus for equal representation. Although the SABC separates the commercial arm, SABC 3, from the two public service channels, SABC 1 and SABC 2, income from advertising is the primary revenue stream for the institution. Appealing to financial sponsors thus motivates the SABC's lack of interest in commissioning programming that might stir up controversy, especially about racial/ethnic identities, and undermine the nation-building objectives of the organization.⁶

Even as *Color TV* is groundbreaking in its focus on "coloreds," how the show is used by "colored" viewers exposes fault lines in the democratizing project. This case study explores how viewers engage with representations of themselves within the complexities of a multicultural country. An intersectional and postcolonial approach reveals the contradictory decoding of this show, in which working-class viewers embraced the realism of the show, demonstrating their strategic support of essentialized identities, whereas middle-class viewers ambivalently responded to images even as they proudly identified as "colored," displaying their adherence to complex creolized identities. These disparate responses to *Color TV* suggest the need for broad representation to avoid further marginalization of minority groups.

Watching *Color TV*

This study explores audience engagement with *Color TV*'s characters and sketches by using interview material from two focus groups. In recognition of the marginalized position of many "coloreds," and the controversial "colored" label, focus group interviews were selected to foster community among the participants, encourage diverse socioeconomic participation, and minimize my conversational influence.⁷ Interviews were conducted in July 2013 in the Western Cape, where almost 50% of South Africa's "colored" population live (Statistics South Africa, 2012, p. 16). The town of Somerset West was selected based on its proximity to the Cape Flats, where a large population of "coloreds" resides, and because the show represented "coloreds" from this geographic region. Participants were personally invited to join the focus groups by friends or employers known to me (a South African who resides in the U.S. and is fluent in English and Afrikaans) and were first shown an excerpt from *Color TV* before being interviewed. All participant names have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.

The first focus group was composed of four viewers who identified as working class and "colored." Some had completed high school, one was employed, two were looking for work, and one was retired at the time of the interview. Three women and one man participated in the focus group, and their ages ranged from 18 to 69 years. Two of the women were weekly viewers of *Color TV*, the man watched almost every week, and the other woman seldom viewed the show. These participants used Afrikaans exclusively, and although they lived in the same area, they were not acquainted beforehand, but shared a contact who invited them to participate.

⁵ Seasons are referred to as "series" in South African television.

⁶ See discussion by Ives (2007) for competing objectives of nation building and neoliberalism.

⁷ See Madriz (2000) for further discussion of feminist and postmodern methods.

The second focus group consisted of six participants who were upper middle class, had completed college and/or advanced degrees, and were employed in professional careers as a university professor, researcher, clergywoman, theater director, business owner, and government employee. The participants ranged in age from 30 to 59 years, included three men and three women, and code switched between English and Afrikaans, explaining “colored” slang for me, the White researcher. One woman and man occasionally watched *Color TV* during its run, and the others seldom viewed it. The six participants were friends and enjoyed dinner together after the conversation.

Industry figures sketch out a broader view of the audience: data from the Television Audience Measurement System (TAMS) administered by the South African Audience Research Foundation indicates *Color TV* was watched by 1,227,084 adult viewers who were predominantly “colored” (57.4%), whereas 16% were White, and 15.2% were Black. Most viewers were 35 and older (65.9%), with Afrikaans speakers in the majority (44.4%), English speakers at 28.3%, and Sotho speakers at 26%. Audiences were balanced between women (55%) and men (44.6%), and most viewers fell in living standards measures (LSM) 5–7 (62%), with 34.8% in LSM 8–10. Viewers thus tended to be segmented in the middle to upper categories of living standards.⁸

The analysis of viewer responses reveals the intersectional experience of identities in which race, ethnicity, and class are intertwined to construct subject positions and motivate engagement with television programming. These intersecting identities call attention to the challenges facing creators and regulators of programming intended to unify national actors.

Enacting Strategic Essentialism

Aspiring to increase their visibility in the media and nation, the first group of viewers responded enthusiastically to *Color TV*’s exclusive address of their identities, experiences, and contributions to the nation. Yet, despite celebrating their increased visibility, their love of *Color TV* was not uncritical. These viewers acknowledged the political controversy surrounding the category of “colored,” even as they applauded the SABC’s long overdue airing of a show centering on this group. These viewers thus performed what I see as “strategic essentialism”: a tactical choice to animate their shared race/ethnicity while deflecting criticism of this essentialist perspective. Stuart Hall (1994) defines an “essentialist” construction of cultural identity as originating in “common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people,’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning” (p. 393). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) coins the term “strategic essentialism” to reflect on how minority groups take up an essentialist definition of identity as a temporary political tactic to promote group objectives or self-representation. Aligning with these theoretical positions, an “essentialist” understanding invites viewers of *Color TV* to discover the “true essence” of “coloreds” and their established cultural practices. Adding “strategic” to “essentialist” highlights the choice to take up a shared notion of identity for meeting a political objective. The sense of a “shared culture” or “true self” in common with others is established by this group of viewers who acknowledge the controversial label of “colored” yet seek national belonging through this

⁸ LSM is a marketing tool that differentiates audiences into 10–12 categories based on their living standards and acquisitions rather than income (Haupt, 2017).

identity. Their embrace of essentialism appears motivated by a desire for solidarity and visibility as legitimate national citizens. First, these viewers decoded the meaning of “coloredness” by identifying with certain semiotics of the show that perpetuated identity as “essential”; and second, viewers responded primarily to *Color TV* from the position of their identity politics within the context of the postapartheid nation-building project and the market-oriented television show that targets them.

Adopting an essentialist definition of “colored,” the viewers from this focus group emphasized semiotic features of *Color TV* that described “coloredness” as a distinct and shared cultural identity originating in the past. Viewers resonated with the show’s comedy genre, characters who performed archetypal roles as comedians, and vocabulary that was germane to their “colored” identities. Trevor, an 18-year-old who had just completed high school, noted that the show, which he watched regularly, realistically represented “coloreds” or “brown people” making jokes to endure difficult life circumstances: “And look, just like us brown people, there’s one thing that we can do to get around the problems we have; we will always make a joke about them, you see?”⁹ Here, Trevor refers to the humorous storylines of several skits that he finds unique to “colored” responses to life. For instance, two behind-the-scenes technical producers offer metacommentary on the action as they switch between video sources and oversee title credits at the beginning and end of each episode. In the episode that focus groups watched, these characters joked about “coloreds” arriving late for appointments and related this to the episode going overtime on the fantasy news network. Trevor’s reference to the comedy genre emphasizes humor as a shared “colored” practice that can be understood as their cultural “essence,” or “oneness.” Trevor also identified with the comedic archetype as authentic to his experience as a “colored”: “The program puts you at ease so that you just relax and laugh enjoyably, and this is what brown people do best—laugh! That is daily bread [for ‘coloreds’].” Trevor highlights humor as an essential characteristic: “It’s not likely that I will find many [of the jokes] offensive because these are our people; we understand why they do what they do.” Trevor expresses his ethnic belonging through a shared sense of humor which, using Hall’s understanding of essentialism, results in *Color TV* effectively “excavat[ing]” or “bring[ing] to light” humor as the truth of “coloredness.”

Recognizing cultural practices such as preferences for playing dominoes as crucial to “coloredness,” and a good example of the humor of the show, Vinette, an older, retired woman in her sixties, referred to the skit poking fun at “coloreds” who invent names for different domino plays. This sports parody, in which the reporter offered a review of the plays used in the game, assumed that all “coloreds” play the game competitively and cheat. The reporter observed that “coloreds” are so good at cheating that others won’t even know they’ve been cheated. Vinette adopted this perspective on shared cultural practices and said: It “is a ‘colored’ thing—to sit around a table of dominoes and you know all the different plays will be named.” Underlining her claim, the participants all laughed at the skit, exhibiting their resonance with how the show constructed “coloredness” as a shared, in-group cultural identity.

Charlize identified the vocabulary used on *Color TV* as another semiotic that underlined “coloredness” as a coherent cultural identity. A young woman in her twenties who had not completed high

⁹ Translations from Afrikaans to English by the researcher attempt to capture participant voices in their unique form, including colloquial patterns of speech and slang.

school and was looking for work, Charlize noted that characters on the show “talk just like we talk, like the ‘coloreds’ talk, but they just don’t swear as much [on television]!” Using her own well-developed sense of humor, Charlize reverberated with what she understood as the essence of “coloredness,” or the use of a set of words, including profanities, to express their shared cultural identity.

Participants also emphasized the “true essence” of their “coloredness” by responding to the show chiefly from this identity position. Vinette remarked on their pleasure watching images of “coloreds” that bolstered a sense of legitimacy as citizens of the nation:

We were very proud [*Color TV*] was a “colored” program, see, which only had “coloreds” on it. I think it was the first program that was only “colored.” Look, if we think of *Sewende Laan* (a soap opera on SABC 2), or other such programs, the difference is there are [Black] Africans, there are Whites, there are “coloreds,” but this program was only “coloreds.” So we looked forward to Friday nights [when *Color TV* aired]. And we enjoyed it.

Underlining her pride in being “colored,” Vinette also referenced the objective of equal representation of population groups mandated by the postapartheid nation-building project. Her enjoyment of the show depended on her “coloredness,” targeted by the broadcaster as significant to the transformation of the nation. Trevor also responded from his identity as a “colored,” taking pride in seeing images of people like him on the show and by appreciating *Color TV*’s “raising awareness of brown people, to put brown people on the map, to show ‘yes, brown people are here.’”

The importance of *Color TV* to these viewers is predicted by cultural proximity theory that suggests nationally produced television artifacts are more attractive than international productions, based on shared national history and familiar cultural practices. This theory finds a correlation between working-class citizens and their viewing preferences for national television programs in part because these viewers have limited access to satellite or pay-per-view imports. Musa Ndlovu’s (2010) South African study about young adults and television news reinforces cultural proximity theory by demonstrating young adult working-class preferences for national news above international bulletins. In addition, working-class viewers also seek cultural correspondence of “dress, ethnic types, gestures, body language, definitions of humor, ideas about story pacing, music traditions, religious elements and so on” that reinforce traditional identities (Straubhaar, 2014, p. 83). TAMS data bear out this theory as all three SABC channels aired locally produced programming and attracted 75% of the “colored” audience share, whereas e.tv, M-Net and DStv that aired international programming only attracted a combined 21% audience share. Additionally, *Color TV* drew 54% of the “colored” audience with other channels—SABC 1 (13.6%), SABC 3 (10 %), e.tv (11.5%), and M-Net and DStv (10.8%)—posting smaller “colored” audience shares. However, the theory of cultural proximity does not straightforwardly predict these viewers’ reception of the show.

Although working-class participants established their “coloredness” as an essentialist identity, their embrace of the show and performance of “coloredness” is complicated by their awareness of the controversies surrounding this racial/ethnic label. Trevor explained the debates as stemming from the term’s

apartheid origins and its erasure of Khoi-San¹⁰ heritage and the resulting negative responses to the label "colored," but other participants claimed the category as central to their identity. Charlize declared, "I would just say that I am 'colored' and that is it." Although Vinette acknowledged that her darker skin tones might lead others to think that she was Black, "I am also a 'colored,' and I choose the name 'colored.'" These participants professed national belonging as an intentional and tactical decision.

Indeed, Trevor emphasized the strategic use of "coloredness" by both resonating with the show's humor as a shared identity and criticizing its sole focus on "the humorous aspect of 'coloreds.'" He hoped future television shows would include more serious topics such as unemployment, hopelessness, and political disenfranchisement for local communities. Trevor's analysis demonstrates his awareness of the complexities of the category of "coloredness" and his identification with an essentialist understanding of identity based on what Hall (1994) defines as a "shared history and ancestry" with other "coloreds" (p. 393). Yet taking up this essential position is a choice or, as Spivak (1990) explains, strategic essentialism to achieve a political objective. Although Trevor and the other participants in this group did not rage against their marginalization and "fight against the other side," as Spivak predicts (p. 12), they did implore me to request a second season of *Color TV* from the SABC. Specifically, viewers wanted television to educate other viewers about "coloreds" and cement their cultural practices as central to a multicultural nation, a strategic response to their televised marginalization.

Embracing Creolization

In contrast with viewers who enthusiastically adopted *Color TV* as symbolic of their national belonging, other "colored" viewers assumed a more skeptical stance. They granted that the show tried to represent "coloreds" realistically, but they criticized portrayals that, in their perceptions, were limiting and stereotypical. Rejecting an essentialist definition of "coloredness" as "united" by similarities, "fixed" in their historical definition, and based on a shared culture, these viewers understood identity as always in "production" and composed of differences as well as similarities (Hall, 1994). For example, one participant speculated: "I just feel that we can do so much more [than *Color TV*] to develop the identity of us as a people . . . but also as a people that don't all share the same identity, and don't all speak in the same way." Hall's (1994) theory of hybridity, or the "production" of identity "which is never complete, always in process" (p. 392), emphasizes "what we have become" rather than "what we really are" (p. 394). In postcolonial theory, hybridity emphasizes differences, undermining essentialist similarities between people from the same cultural group. However, as Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael (2000) argue, apartheid's single-minded obsession with cultural differences necessitates attention now to cultural similarities. Accordingly, expanding Hall's theory to incorporate the process of creolization invites "complex studies of affinities," recognition of "resonances" (p. 10), and fostering connections between previously segregated groups even as differences in the same identity group remain apparent.

The divergence of responses between the two audience groups indicates the significance of overlapping identities of class and race/ethnicity in understanding the reception of *Color TV*. Kimberlé

¹⁰ A collective name incorporating the indigenous Khoikhoi who herded animals and the indigenous San who were hunter-gatherers.

Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality explains how social identities intersect to create varying experiences of oppression or privilege that cannot be accounted for through separate social identities. The following analysis first attends to how these viewers decoded *Color TV* from the perspective of creolization, exhibiting their ambivalence concerning the comedic "colored" stereotype. Second, viewers resonated with the show based on the historic lack of "colored" television representations and their self-identification as "coloreds." Third, these same participants critiqued images of "coloreds" in relation to their intersectional identity politics and the postapartheid nation-building project; finally, viewers decried the institutional absence of intraethnic diversity, particularly middle-class "coloreds," providing explanation of why they did not identify in large part with the show.

Viewers who decoded *Color TV* from a position of creolization anticipated the show's incorporation of a range of "colored" identities, defining identities as always in transformation to cultural encounters (Nuttall & Michael, 2000). Noting that *Color TV* presented the accent of the Cape Flats as typical of all "coloreds," Hendrick, a businessman in his forties with some college education, questioned this representativeness considering that "coloreds" live in multiple regions of the country. Liesel, a university professor in her thirties, thought *Color TV* should be "displaying the diversity within the 'colored' community and not trying to reduce ['coloreds'] to a stereotype that is funny, silly, and has got hang-ups and all kinds of nonsense." Daniel, a regional government employee in his fifties who had completed some college, suggested the show incorporate characters from various geographic regions, such as Malmesbury in the Western Cape or Upington in the Northern Cape.

Building on their understanding of cultural identities as a process of creolization, and their desire for diversity, viewers expressed ambivalence about the stereotype of the comedic "colored." Although they appreciated and sometimes laughed at the humor performed in the skits, they voiced concern that the show used humor as a prop. Playing on the title of the show, Hendrick joked "I feel there's comedy in life in general. . . . I don't see comedy in color!" Claiming that all people appreciate and use humor, Hendrick asserted that *Color TV* limited "coloreds" to a stereotype. Talia welcomed the portrayal of "coloreds" as "a unique people that you don't find anywhere else in this world, in terms of its language, in terms of just its survival skills, in terms of yes, just making light, seeing the humor even if things are so bad," but she also complained the show made the community "seem bad, uncultured, unskilled, blah, blah, blah . . ." through the skits that did not capture the context or motivations for the use of humor by "coloreds."

Illustrating Talia's concerns about the comedic "colored," Liesel referred to her university experiences:

I was the only "colored" person in the class, and I, you know, obviously, ["coloreds" are] all humorous and we can make fun of a lot of things and can do it very, very quickly without even thinking. . . . As a result of that I actually became the class clown. . . . And it was only much later when I grew older that I actually realized what an impact that perception of them [*sic*] had on me.

In response, the other participants inserted comments humorously, extending how "coloreds" are stereotyped. Mariet, a minister in her thirties with an advanced degree, joked to Liesel that "you're not more than [a funny 'colored']" as she referred to other stereotypes of "coloreds" on television such as the Kaapse

Klopse, or “colored” minstrel troupes who perform at the new year festival. With other participants chiming in, there was much laughter with Liesel, who added, “Or the Malay choirs, I mean that’s also very, I mean, a ‘colored’ thing. But no, people think we’re all coons.” Hendrick’s comeback, “But we are, so that’s fine,” drew more raucous laughter even as he noted, “You can ask any person who’s not a ‘colored’ they’re going to say ‘Ja, you’re [a coon].’”

These participant comments reference the historical figure of the coon that originated in the U.S. with White actors employing blackface to perform African American characters, combining musical elements such as American crooning and operatic style singing. Like other carnival figures, the coon enables a “reversal of social structure and political power” with performers assuming subversive personas and behaviors not permitted outside of these performances (Martin, 1999, p. 39); yet for “colored” elites in the 1940s in South Africa, the coon also came to represent “the epitome of the alienated, stupid person consenting to be oppressed, and behaving in a ridiculous manner, because it was supposed to please the ‘baas’” (p. 117). Participants in this focus group resonated with the latter concern about the racist, overgeneralizing discourse of the coon as a comedic figure, attempting to distance themselves from the stigmas attached to this communal identity. Their ambivalence underlines the ambiguity of the coon figure that is both empowering and stereotypical.

Even as participants critiqued the comedic “colored” stereotype in *Color TV*, they frequently interjected witty comments, interrupted each other to make jokes, and laughed uproariously during the interview. When confronted with what I perceived as the irony between their humorous performances and their critique of the show as stereotypical, the participants defended their humor as only a part rather than the sum of their identities. As Hendrick asserted, “We are more than this stereotypical human being.” Despite the intent asserted in the SABC’s marketing materials that *Color TV* is a “sequence of spoofs and parodies” set on “exploiting [‘colored’] idiosyncrasies” (SABC, 2011, para. 3), participants felt the skits reinforced the comedian stereotype rather than performing a range of identities. Their ambivalence over the comedic “colored” demonstrates their discomfort with an essentialist identity. Despite recognizing how ethnic stereotypes shape identities, their responses underline humor’s power to reinforce and subvert a sense of belonging (Holmes & Marra, 2002).

Second, participants demonstrated creolized identities through their resonance with “colored” images in *Color TV*. They defended this contradiction by referencing the historical paucity of shows about “coloreds” and their proud self-identification as “coloreds.” Liesel justified her affinity because of the show’s groundbreaking nature:

As far as I can remember this was also the first production that centered around [*sic*] “colored” people and what they do and what they [want] in life and whatever, and for that I actually want to commend the producer and director.

Hendrick agreed that the absence of other “colored” programming led to unrealistic expectations of the show “because it’s only this one piece,” a sentiment shared by the rest of the group. Even though the participants admitted to finding the show less than satisfactory, or “crap,” they dedicated time and emotional energy because this was the first show created for and about “coloreds.” As Srividya Ramasubramanian, Marissa

Joanna Doshi, and Muniba Saleem (2017) observe, minority television viewers rely on ethnic media for positive self-portrayals, as mainstream media usually participate in their symbolic annihilation (p. 1891). Had these viewers been aware that the show was created, produced, and edited by "colored" personnel, they might have been less critical.

Participants also defended their resonance with *Color TV* based on their pride in identifying as "colored." Hendrick explained,

I'm actually quite proud to be associated with that term because of my personal journey and my personal development around who I am. . . . So I'm happy with my uniqueness, I'm happy with being called a "colored," and it doesn't even matter who calls me a "colored" because that's who I am.

Liesel expressed a similar gratification: "I associate 'colored' people with being funny first of all, being smart, being resilient, being adaptable, and that's why I say I'm 'colored.'" Both Tania and Hendrick underscored their proud identification as "coloreds" by inviting me to use their real names.

Third, even as participants resonated with images of "coloreds" in *Color TV* they offered extensive criticisms motivated by their multidimensional identities. Mariet distanced herself from the soap opera skit, "Give a Little Love," explaining, "I can't say that I felt like I identified with anything that was happening there. . . . There's a part of me that felt it's not a positive portrayal of who we are." The skit pits Julie's Catholic family against Rafiek's Muslim family when they fall in love. Mariet disliked the melodrama, in which Julie's mother, Muriel, tries to break up the engagement by coaxing Julie's ex-boyfriend to meddle. Interestingly, Talia found the storyline realistic because she was forbidden to "have a Muslim boyfriend, or a Muslim friend, because my father was just against it," but she also distinguished between her experience and the show's target audience: "This was the type of thing that was happening in the homes of my students, so it wasn't necessarily my upbringing and my background, but it's certainly a group of community . . . on the Cape Flats." Talia critiqued the stereotypical way the Romeo and Juliet storyline was developed that did not reflect her identities, even though she recognized the scenario as representative of other communities.

Middle-class participant detachment from working-class "colored" representations emulate European viewers' criticisms of *Dallas*. Even as some viewers found pleasure in the excessive sentimentality of *Dallas*, as Ien Ang (1985) discusses, other viewers rejected the drama because of its low cultural values, its objective of profitability, and the threat it posed to ethnic and national cultures in Europe. Likewise, *Color TV* participants condemned the show for constructing "coloreds" as "bad, uncultured, unskilled" based on selective representations of mostly working-class, uneducated characters that did not portray middle-class viewers' social and cultural capital. Their critique aligns with Ann Gray's (1992) analysis of educated women's preferences for "high culture" television shows and less educated women's partiality for "low culture" shows and confirms Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) analysis in *Distinction* that cultural tastes, such as preferred television genres, correspond with class positions and "fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences" (p. 7).

Further drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) correlation between media consumption and social capital, Ian Glenn and Angie Knaggs (2008) demonstrate how *Daily Voice*, a tabloid paper of the Cape Flats, effectively exploits news values and practices to attract "coloreds" of all LSMs. Targeting readers with lower LSMs, the paper incorporates code-switching between English and Afrikaans, and female seminudity, while pay-per-view and satellite television schedules attract higher LSM readers. Although 34.9% of *Color TV* viewers fell in LSM 8–10, focus group interviews suggest that *Color TV* did not as successfully animate the identities and interests of viewers with higher living standards.

Desire for more aspirational "colored" programming is illustrated through participants' critical assessment of stereotypical representations. Hendrick described his reaction to the show:

A bit upset this goes out to whoever wants to watch it and people tend to have a look and see and then make up their minds "oh that's how ['coloreds' are]." They put labels on it. . . . I feel that we can do so much more in terms of sending out a positive image of us as a people.

Hendrick's frustration was echoed in Talia's outburst: "It's sent out to the world and as you rightfully say, so then people label you: 'Oh, is that what they're all about, I mean, eish!'" Here, Hendrick and Talia draw attention to representational norms on television where race becomes conflated with class. Speculating that viewers might equate working-class representations with negative portrayals of all "coloreds," middle-class "colored" participants subscribed to what Carlos R. McCray (2008) terms "exclusionary boundary work." McCray argues middle-class African Americans create boundaries to distinguish between themselves and working-class African Americans, thereby avoiding racial stigma. Besides emphasizing boundaries, these participants also reference the burden that this one show is expected to carry as representative of all "colored" people. Calling to mind the double standard against which African American films are judged, Tina Harris (2004) explains these films can never just be "entertaining," but "are criticized as devaluing the very people they are embracing because the films fail to present an assimilated image of racial identity within a Western framework" (p. 190). Similarly, middle-class participants find fault with *Color TV* for not showcasing aspirational and assimilated class images.

Further elucidating middle-class desire for aspirational images, the ideology of racial/cultural uplift is defined as assimilating Blacks into middle-class values such as hard work, saving money, sobriety, and monogamy (Baker, 2006). By modeling a more progressive Black class identity, Kevin K. Gaines (1996) explores how "black elites [in the U.S.] made [racial] uplift the basis for a racialized elite identity claiming Negro improvement through class stratification as race progress" (p. xv). Their choice to work within a system of discrimination, as Gaines demonstrates, "says more about power, black vulnerability, and the centrality of race in the nation's political and cultural institutions than it does about the motives or complicity of black elites" (p. xv). Similarly, middle-class "colored" viewers are caught in a system of racial and class inequality that positions them in a double bind. To produce positive portrayals, these viewers desire middle-class representations, but by so doing they distance themselves from working-class images that, in this ideology, need "uplift" and are positioned by producers as "bad, uncultured, unskilled," as Talia explained.

Finally, these viewers found fault with the television institution for airing unrepresentative images of the “colored” community. Criticizing the SABC for a low-quality production, Talia questioned SABC personnel qualifications based on her theater expertise: “So any good producer or director of a movie or TV program should be able to [portray this complexity]. I don’t think they are skilled enough to bring out [our] unique people. Why is the SABC putting this on?” Gavin, a postgraduate researcher in his forties, agreed and suggested a show be made about the producers instead: “That’s how we feel; we want to make fools of them!” Targeting his criticism, Gavin lashed out at producers by provoking me to put the SABC in the hot seat and explain their programming decisions that he felt negatively affected “coloreds.” Although Gavin and Talia’s institutional criticisms refer specifically to *Color TV*, a broader dissatisfaction with the SABC is also at play. Newspaper coverage and TAMS data indicate the SABC’s loss of audience share around the time *Color TV* aired. Yadhana Jadoo (2013) at *The Citizen* details the SABC’s loss of audience share from 57% to 53% from 2011–13, explained by the corporation as due to the “increasing competitive landscape,” and “insufficient compelling television content” (para. 3). TAMS data demonstrate viewership loss of more than 1 million for primetime news programming across all three channels in 2012 (Mahlangu & Maphumulo, 2012). Furthermore, the SABC has been accused of (financial) corruption and (news) censorship, both issues that have affected audience share (MyBroadband, 2017).

Institutional criticisms by middle-class “colored” participants are reminiscent of disparate responses to Tyler Perry’s productions. Although working-class, African American, female, and Christian niche audiences (long neglected by mainstream cinema and television) respond favorably to his cultural productions, middle- and upper-class African Americans (deemed “Black elites” by Perry) tend to criticize his conservative gender politics, patriarchal investment, Black stereotypes, antifeminism, and classism.¹¹ Persley (2012) explains the class-based nature of this diverse reception: “The social stigmas associated with ‘low’ black cultural productions have become incentives for middle- and upper-class black groups to disassociate themselves from any lowbrow black representations” (p. 220), “even if [they reflect] parts of their lived or historical experiences as black subjects” (p. 232). Middle-class participants appear to distance themselves in comparable ways from *Color TV* that they perceive as lowbrow and unrepresentative.

In negotiating their interpretations of *Color TV*, these participants both recognized representations of “colored identities” and objected to images that, in their interpretations, limited the diversity of “colored” identities. Their desire for more middle-class representations illustrates their decoding of the show from the intersectional identities of race and class, and their emphasis on hybrid and creolized identities. Refusing an essentialist view of “coloredness,” these viewers experienced a double bind of identifying as “colored” yet prioritizing their middle-class status over racial solidarity to establish legitimacy in a market-oriented nation.

Conclusion

This audience study reveals the challenges and possibilities of multicultural media programming in South Africa and more broadly for television, the nation, globalization, postcolonialism, and identity politics. One of the challenges stems from a legacy of systemic inequality: while the Constitution of the Republic of

¹¹ See Means Coleman (2012) for an example of wide-ranging literature that includes the popular press, journal articles, and several essay collections.

South Africa (1996) guarantees equality for all population groups, the few television outlets tasked with proportionate representation is restrictive, and inequalities can be reinforced by using racial and ethnic categories to institutionalize inclusivity—evident in the controversy over the label of “colored.”

The competing demands of globalization and nationalism present a second challenge to multicultural media. Although globalization promotes a market orientation to cultural industries (targeting affluent audiences, attracting advertising-based revenue, favoring cheaper imported programming), national interest groups prioritize nurturing a national culture (local content quotas, proportionate language use, diverse racial/ethnic representations). *Color TV* is a product of this second force, emphasizing the national and the local, yet eliciting mixed responses from “coloreds.”

A third concern features the power of social capital to divide, even when racial/ethnic identities are mobilized as markers of inclusion. Although *Color TV* established a hegemonic Cape Flats “colored” identity, middle-class viewers prioritized class identities, minimizing racial discrimination through their social capital. David Roediger (2002) argues that different facets of identity must be studied in “simultaneity,” as they are experienced that way.¹² Accordingly, gender, race, and class interactions among audiences would further bolster the case for intersectional programming, especially as gender has always been significant in nation building (see McClintock, 1995). Ironically, middle-class reception exposes the failure of market-oriented television to cater to viewers with disposable income despite the SABC’s history of noncontroversial programming, and their refusal to air content critical of the ruling party (Govenden, 2009).

Finally, television reception foregrounds the challenge of addressing a multicultural nation. Although sample size is a limitation, the accompanying TAMS data support a class analysis as most viewers identified as LSM 5–7 (62%), suggesting the show resonated with their identities, whereas fewer viewers (34.8%) with higher living standards (LSM 8–10) found the show compelling. As demonstrated through focus groups, working-class viewers took pride in “colored” characteristics they presumed inherent to race/ethnicity. Their awareness of the controversial “colored” label reveals the strategic use of “essentialist” images to legitimize national belonging. Consistent with Karina Horsti’s (2011) analysis of European mainstream media coverage of minorities, these viewers responded to the media’s “nonrecognition” of minority groups by celebrating their limited inclusion in mainstream media, underscoring lack of access to control representations of themselves.

In contrast, middle-class viewers expressed ambivalence toward *Color TV* stemming from their creolized identities. Finding the stereotype of the “funny” “colored” problematic to their class position, they perceived low cultural values as negative, and adopted the ideology of uplift, seeking aspirational, middle-class images. Exhibiting the significance of class over racial solidarity, these viewers demanded intraethnic diversity from the institution, demonstrating their embrace of the “colored” label. The postcolonial attempt to increase minority visibility can nevertheless result in ghettoizing these voices instead of increasing recognition, as Horsti (2011) notes: “Minorities can be recognized and marginalized at the same time” (p. 165).

¹² Roediger (2002) researches the history of White supremacy in the U.S.

Notwithstanding that the SABC has not renewed *Color TV* for a second series, television continues to exert power over identities and hierarchies of race and ethnicity. However, uneven reception highlights the challenge for state-sponsored institutions to equally and fairly represent populations in multicultural nations and signals the complex processes of identification that are not stratified along a single axis of race or class or ethnicity.

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