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FIXING FAMILIES THROUGH TELEVISION?

Television has played a central role as a tool through which to imagine and re-imagine the South African nation, family and selfhood, and to 'fix' these same categories. From the apartheid state's blacking out of healthy everyday life images of black families, through the efforts of founding a 'new' nation using the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to modern day therapeutic talk shows, television has progressively placed less salience on the 'nation' and more on family and interpersonal relationships within this social unit. Self-disclosure on television, especially through a talk show significantly called Relate, *ironically reveals and occludes legacies of class and racial differentiations with their attendant socio-economic imbalances. Talking about personal affect to 'fix' one's problems on national television emerges as an instrumental undertaking that appears to benefit guests to the show but perhaps not as much as it does the production company and South African Broadcasting Corporation, suggesting that the participants are being exploited. Be that as it may,* Relate *emerges as an exercise in the interiorization of control, as well as an invitation to undertake serious dialogue about interpersonal intimacy.*

Keywords television talk show; political democracy; family; truth and reconciliation commission; selfhood; emotional work

In Series II, Episode 5, as part of helping a guest who suspects that her husband has infected her with HIV, Angie Diale, the host of *Relate*, a television talk show on SABC1, one of South Africa's television stations, discloses to the whole nation that she is HIV positive, was infected by her husband and has (at the moment of recording the show) a 12- year-old HIV-positive son. As early as Series 1, Episode 2, Angie had introduced herself as 'a professional counsellor . . . [and] single mother living with my three children and my mother'. In both instances, Diale is transformed from host to a confessing subject; she becomes like one of her guests. Immediately, there is a blur between her television and private personal life. Her professional background is quickly subordinated to the personal on a national television programme designed as a model of solving intimate relationship problems through airing such problems to the nation, '*Mzansi*' as Diale is wont to call South Africa and South Africans. Boundaries between the personal, familial and national are broken but at the same time reaffirmed. Such is the paradoxical nature of the publicness of private

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human intimacies on television with regard to therapy talk shows; those shows informed by the trauma-therapy approach and whose focus is conflicted human intimacies located in the family, or broken familial relationships.

The paradox, highlighted above, results in what Lunt and Stenner (2005, p. 59) call an 'emotional public sphere' and Bystrom (2010, p. 139), referring to a somewhat different but related context, a 'public private sphere'. *Khumbul' Ekhaya* [literally, 'Remember Home', airing on South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC 1)], *Forgive and Forget* (on eTV) and *Relate* (on SABC 1) are examples of talk shows that identify familism as a desirable value but one fraught with conflict in its practice. Through their focus on interpersonal relationships within families – and their desire to re-establish, mend, heal and make whole – these three talk shows ask one broad but pointed question: what does political independence and the imagined sense of nationhood mean to the personal and/or familial lives of formally repressed and marginalized South Africans post-1994? This broad question prompts other related and significant questions: What role does television play in the expression of 'real' personal affect? Who uses the medium of television to resolve personal conflicts and why? What drives guests to disclose their personal feelings and problems through the public medium of television? What do guests benefit and are they prone to exploitation? How does television, particularly the therapeutic talk show genre, mediate new configurations of selfhood, family and nation?

In varying degrees, all the three programmes focus on family. What is apparent is that in all three, family is no longer viewed as political metaphor as used to be the case in the fight against apartheid, but rather, as an institution whose individuals have a purport at both micro- and macro-social scales of nationhood. The talk shows offer 'the nation' or '*Mzansi*' a chance to re-examine itself through the prism of family or the intimate. Compared to the other two programmes, *Relate* offers a more layered structure that invites us to think about the overlaps and intersections between the private and public. Where the other two programmes are concerned with re-connection and reconciliation in a manner that does not concern itself with the *quality* of resultant reconciliations or re-connections, *Relate* evinces a more problematized awareness of family and an enduring interest in the meaningfulness of familial relationships. It suggests a nuanced critique of internal family dynamics and new interpretations of this institution in relation to ideas of nationhood.

Clearly, the television station that beams *Relate* (SABC 1), the indigenous languages used on the show, the racial composition of most of the participants, the residential areas where most of the participants live, all seem to point to a show that was designed for, and is predominantly watched by Blacks, mostly in the low-income bracket. The 'nation' that the programme addresses, is instead, a segment of it. It makes visible, fissures that criss-cross the disparate imaginations of the South African nation – an enduring legacy of the country's history which cannot be plastered over by broadcasting slogans such as SABC 1's '*Simunye*' meaning 'We are One'. Nonetheless, programmes such as *Relate*

present a platform for populations previously excluded from public life under apartheid South Africa to grapple with relational as well as personhood issues through the public medium of television, and thus increasing the visibility of such groups and the diversity of voices on television.

Apartheid, the political independence of South Africa in 1994 and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are three factors that have shaped the focus and form of South Africa's 'serious' talk shows – serious in the sense that they are not simulated and attempt as far as possible, to eschew sensationalism. Such shows are not to borrow from Gamson (1998, p. 7) 'tabloid talk shows'. They focalize individual testaments but are in essence a collective practice with social significance to their imagined audiences or publics. The private pains expressed by the participants on these shows become part of shared public discourse when viewers discuss specific episodes in various public spaces such as minibus taxis, buses, work places, train stations and so on. Other discussions happen in print (newspapers and magazines) as well as electronic (Internet chat rooms) media. The shared communicative space of television reveals both enduring and shifting notions of family, self and self-disclosure.

Nuttall and Michael (2000b) in their article 'Autobiographical Acts', make a salient point that any serious attempt at studying 'autobiographical acts in the post-apartheid period must include a sense of the pluralities that have come with the opening of the public sphere in South Africa' given the 'multiple ways of telling stories of the self in public' through diverse forms, including those less intensively used previously as well as new ones (317). These two scholars identify television talk shows as a conduit for the 'configurations of self-hood' and television itself, a 'highly popular autobiographical site in post-apartheid South Africa' (300). Owing to the wide scope of its topic, the article by Nuttall and Michael (2000b) briefly discusses the talk show genre on South African television in the early 1990s, but they make the point that rather than dismissal as trivial, talk shows deserve serious study. This paper then, in its reference to *Khumbul' Ekhaya* and *Forgive and Forget* as well as its close discussion of *Relate,* takes up the challenge posed by Nuttall and Michael (2000a) by analysing the discursive significance of intimate exposure through public broadcasting on South African television.

South African television, nationhood and selfhood

The history of television in South Africa can be mined for instances and images of *relating* on South African television and in the country's public life, an exercise that will be instructive for the discussion of nationhood, family, talk television, private and public life in that country. Barnett (1999, p. 276) writes that 'the media [in South Africa] have been used as an ideological and material

technology of separation and division'. This observation applies most appropriately to the apartheid era whose principal relational mode between races was separation. I add that media have also been used as tools of reconstruction and unification, particularly in the post-apartheid period of nation-building, in the imagining of a 'Rainbow Nation'. Part of apartheid's strategy to entrench separation was the deliberate choice by the government of the day not to offer a television service in case the images on television exploded the myth of white superiority by depicting alternative (healthier) race relations, and also Black people in their capacity as fully functioning beings – with families, private lives, hopes and dreams – in short, as not fundamentally different. Thus, the apartheid government was aware of the potency of alternative images of 'everyday life' depicted on television, that these could fundamentally upset the bedrock of apartheid, hence the structured absence of television.

Even as the apartheid state conceded to having a television service which was switched on 5 January 1976, long after numerous other countries with similar and in other cases, less economic power, had done so (Krabill 2010), television was aimed solely at a white viewership. The only programmes that featured blacks featured them as functionaries, for example, as domestics. They were in the background as two-dimensional characters, commensurate with their supposed inferiority. At the inception of television broadcasting, access reflected the racial and economic divides already obtaining in the country. The following comment by Krabill (2010) is instructive:

> White South Africans had far greater access to the medium of television, particularly in the first decade of its presence in South Africa, than did Black South Africans . . . . In one of the most economically disparate nations in the world (both in 1976 and today), White South Africans could afford television sets – which were prohibitively expensive at the time – much more easily than could Black South Africans. The vast majority of blacks did not purchase sets for personal use until the mid-1980s at the earliest, when many townships were placed on the electrical grid, and most waited much longer than that. Even as late as 1986 approximately three-quarters of television viewers were white South Africans.
>
> (p. 6)

In response to growing international condemnation, and in an attempt to develop legitimacy, the then government of the National Party introduced two channels, 'aimed exclusively at the growing Black middle class in 1983' (Krabill 2000, p. 20). These two were called TV 2 and TV 3. These two stations, just like the rest of the apartheid state's interventions, were in the service of separating the two races. They carried a lot of programming that showed 'traditional' programmes depicting the African as belonging in the

past, incompatible with or inadequate for the city and modernity (Barnett 1999).

The post-1994 dispensation through its discourse of democracy, non-racialism and unity in diversity used television as a vehicle for nation-building. Ives (2007, p. 162) comments that 'Central to the construction of this "new" national imagination was the rectifying of past invisibilities – showing the existence of a Black middle class, of an urban Black population, among others'. Thus, plurality entailed giving a voice to those previously excluded from the mainstream. But that exercise was and still is complicated. Barnett (1999) writes:

> Nation-building in the South African context of the 1990s is not officially understood merely as a project of constructing a single, overarching national culture or identity. Policy makers have conceptualised it primarily in terms of facilitating processes of exchange and dialogue between South Africa's different cultural, regional, and linguistic communities. And official national-building rhetoric ascribes a central role to radio and television as the media of communication through which such exchange can be facilitated.
>
> (p. 275)

Post-1994 political democracy brought with it improved electrification, accelerated growth of the Black middle class and increased access to television by Blacks largely through the availability of cheap television sets, all of which have resulted in both the entrenching and dissolution of viewing patterns according to television station, type of programme, race and class, as will be demonstrated through *Relate*. Any programme that claims to appeal to 'the nation' tends to appeal rather to a section of it, at times of a clear racial and/or class category.

The transformation of SABC has resulted in numerous programmes that foreground the lives of black people through the national broadcaster's mandate to provide programming that 'Reflects South African attitudes, opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity' in the advancement of 'national and public interest' (vcmstatic.sabc.co.za). Currently, SABC has three free-to-air stations – SABC 1, 2 and 3. SABC 3, which carries most of the English content draws most of the advertising and subsidises the other two channels which are public-service oriented (Krabill 2010). Most of the programmes on SABC 1 and 2 are in indigenous languages, which partly explains why they are popular with Black audiences.

SABC 1 is the most watched television station given its efforts to provide broadcasting in the country's 11 official languages as well as its beaming of popular programmes such as the country's most popular soap, *Generations* (www.southafrica.info/about/media/satv.htm). It is the station that broadcasts *Khumbul'ekhaya* and *Relate*, both of which use mostly IsiZulu, isiXhosa and

SeSotho. It is not overreaching to claim that most of the viewers of this station are Black South Africans (who comprise about 80 per cent of the entire population) and that a sizeable portion of this population group is in the low-income bracket given the endemic poverty in this demographic group. SABC 2 also offers programming in several languages, with the bulk of Afrikaans programmes featured here. The viewership is likely to be more varied than that of SABC 1, incorporating Coloured, Black and White Afrikaner segments, with Afrikaans being the draw card.

As mentioned above, SABC 3 carries most of its programming in English. The viewers are likely to be more varied across race and class. eTV, on the other hand, is a private station launched in 1998 and carries news, sports and entertainment, mostly in English and tends to attract less viewership. It is the station that beams *Forgive and Forget*. The assignation of certain racial and class or income groups to each one of these television stations is tentative given television's ability to 'break down social divisions in a society of such linguistic diversity and high literacy as South Africa' (Krabill 2010, p. 23). But this breaking down of divisions refers to the viewers' ability to choose any of the commonly available and free or relatively cheap channels. Even here though, some viewing patterns might entrench the very same divisions with reference to which television station and which particular programmes are popular with a certain race or class of people. This paradoxical nature of television will be demonstrated in the detailed discussion of *Relate* and its imagined viewership.

It is very difficult, as to be almost impossible to understand post-1994 South Africa without considering the role and legacy of the TRC. As such, the TRC is the fulcrum of both the preceding discussion and the one to follow. The use of televisual space to repair private hurts through public means was not popularized by talk shows in South Africa. Instead, it was through the extensive media coverage, especially television, of the TRC that the 'disclosure of traumatic family histories' (Bystrom 2010, p. 139) happened at an unprecedented scale. The aim of the TRC was to achieve national catharsis through private testimonies and as such, the national took precedence over the private. Similarly, talk shows of the 1990s, Nuttall and Michael (2000b, p. 308) argue, 'appeared to be about psychic healing but were largely preoccupied with the creation of the nation'. In other words, just as in the South Africa of the 1980s (the height of the struggle against apartheid) in the South Africa of the 1990s too, personal relations tended to take a backseat to the politics of nationhood as reflected in talk shows. The family was still 'writ large', constructed as 'metaphoric kinship' (Mallet 2004, p. 108) in the service of nation-building. Family and interpersonal relationships were seen as casualties of the violence of apartheid which negatively impacted on both victims and perpetrators of state violence, especially the former.

Nonetheless, the TRC did usher in 'newly complex, framings of the narrative self' (Nuttall and Michael 2000b, p. 307) which have found expression in some SABC talk shows. These include *Relate* on SABC 1, which

places solutions to relational and personal crises within the individual's grip as the corollary to the achievement of nationhood. Nuttall and Michael (2000) write that 'talk shows . . . can only exist where nationhood is already achieved', meaning that 'Personal healing finds its imperative in healing the self so that one can enjoy one's rightful place in the abundance of freedoms equated with nation' (p. 309). This situation gives rise to 'the rubric of individual trauma or childhood deprivations' in which, Kipnis (1998, p. 304), although writing about therapy for adultery, is correct in pointing out, 'You can be fairly certain it's not going to be the social order that's organized pathologically, it's you. Conflicts . . . act out something "unresolved" in the self – as a buried thing you certainly have to spend years excavating . . . .'

Beyond the TRC

The legacy of the TRC is the efficacy of self-disclosure towards the attainment of forgiveness and reconciliation, two concepts that inform the programmes referred to in this paper. That legacy became possible as already indicated, largely through television. As Orgeret (2009, p. 67) points out, 'The first decade after the end of apartheid in South Africa was important in creating a democratic foundation for the new nation and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was expected to play a leading role in this process'. The television of the TRC was a stock-taking exercise that asked the soul-searching question, what kind of a nation South Africa had been and was. It was about reconciliation in the name of nation-building. It was also a self-projection exercise concerning what kind of a nation the country could be and desired to become. If apartheid represented a dark period of the South African nation, characterized by denial of both a healthy selfhood and inclusive nationhood, then its end represented a dawn through the recognition of the individual's humanity and that very same individual's value towards the creation of a 'new' healthier nation. Hence, the TRC as launch pad, model for self-examination, truth, honesty, accountability and willingness to work at being a better nation. Those who testified largely explained their behaviour as having been conditioned by the conditions of apartheid. For example, they killed because it was their job or had been given orders, or were fighting for freedom. Thus, the testifiers placed the blame for dysfunctional psyches and relationships at the door of apartheid where individual agency seemed to have been completely usurped by the brutality of the apartheid system.

After the themes of commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle, after the nation-building ethos of unity through the TRC, after the euphoria of political independence, after the discourse of the 'new' rainbow nation and 'Madiba magic' of reconciliation and unity through sport (seen by most on television), there is now a focus on the intimate as an arena for reconceptualizing routes

to nationhood. The talk show ceases to be just a popular cultural form. As Illouz (2003, p. 4) observes, 'Popular culture is not only about entertainment. It is also, more often than is acknowledged in cultural studies, about moral dilemmas: how to cope with a world that consistently fails us and how to make sense of minor and major forms of suffering that plague ordinary lives'.

The focus on familial contestation and conflict, the 'everydayness' of people's relationships as we see on *Relate* and other talk shows of its kind, is a desire to reformulate social relations for the better and a shift from the erstwhile disproportionate focus on wider political and economic concerns that tended to occlude selfhood. Thus, much as the self is still located in a community, self continues to gain more salience over nation and is often bracketed in familial matrices. Whereas earlier South African biographies in different forms and media ignored the contestation in the family as focus on the fissures in this social structure was viewed as divisive and secondary to the fight against apartheid as well as to nation-building post-1994, *Relate* invites viewers to a dialogue on interpersonal intimacy by acknowledging that familial conflict is inevitable regardless of, and in addition to, the debilitating effects of apartheid. The building of 'better' families for a 'better' nation is seen as dependent on paying attention to individual relationships and one feels, at times, that the mention of the wider context of the nation is used to provide a back-drop and not as the rallying point it once was during the fight against apartheid and soon after the gaining of political independence. Thus, self-examination in the post-apartheid era suggests that in post-conflict South Africa, the burden of 'fixing' personal and familial problems must be carried by individuals who must 'work' at their own feelings and relationships without heavily falling back to apartheid or the current dispensation.

Khumbul' Ekhaya, Forgive and Forget, Relate

The three talk shows mentioned in the sub-heading above have, as indicated earlier, a common subject – family. The goal is to achieve intra-kin harmony but the programmes differ in form and depth. *Khumbul' Ekhaya* premiered on 28 November 2006 and is the oldest of the three shows. Its identity, focus and function are captured through the press release that claims the programme is 'a family docu-reality series that tracks the journeys of real South Africans who ask *Khumbul'ekhaya* for help in their search to heal their relationships with lost or estranged family members' (www.sabc1.co.za/index.php/khumbulekhaya). It is informed by the ideology of family through the concept of home. The link between home and family is intertwined (Mallet 2004) and home is viewed as a haven, a source of refuge, personal and family security – indeed, the locus of one's bearings without which one is lost. However, the re-unification of participants is done in a somewhat simplistic manner. In spite of this, the programme has higher audience ratings compared to the other two. Clearly, it

requires less emotional 'work' but is very instrumental in uniting 'lost' or estranged relations. *Relate* follows closely behind *Khumbul' ekhaya* with regard to audience ratings.

Significantly, the programme positions itself as righting the wrongs of the past:

> The old political system of Apartheid destroyed the African family structure and rendered it dysfunctional. This dysfunction has spilled over to the broader society and is characterised by broken families and violent relationships. By facilitating reconciliation between estranged family members and televising this process . . . *Khumbul'ekhaya* inspires viewers to also start the journey toward reconciliation with their own families.
> (www.sabc1.co.za/index.php/khumbulekhaya)

Much as it is true that apartheid did unravel some familial ties through forced movement and land alienation, to put all the blame for family dysfunction at the door of apartheid is naïve given some of the separations did not have apartheid as their immediate cause. Unsurprisingly, some of the broken family ties, for example, were the result of downright irresponsible parents who shirked their responsibilities. At the same time, the reconciliation achieved on the programme, if it does happen, is somewhat superficial as we do not see the participants grappling with the reasons for their separation. A typical episode goes like this: The presenter welcomes the viewers and may do a recap of the previous week's episode in which relations will have been re-connected or not. Then there is reading of a few letters from people looking for lost or estranged relations and where photographs were supplied by the writer, they are shown on screen. Then participants for the evening's show are introduced; they say who they are looking for, how they got separated, what leads they have for the search and how they feel about the separation as well as (sometimes) how they will feel should they find the relation they are looking for. At times, the relation being sought might have died in which case there might be a visit to that person's grave and gaining of new relatives. When the missing relation is found, it is either a happy re-union or a problematic one in which the missing relation may be asked to account for his or her disappearance. For example, a father who would have impregnated a young woman and disappeared might be asked by his grown-up daughter or son to say why he did such an irresponsible thing. Did he ever think about the woman he had impregnated? Did he ever think about the child? What really did he think would be the future of a fatherless child? What did he have to say for himself? Such a father may have an answer or none; show great contrition or none at all and may be enthusiastic about the re-union, lukewarm or downright indifferent. There is no push to make such participants engage with their emotions.

Another weakness of the show is that there is no follow-up to see how such re-united people fare after a certain length of time. Concerning its value,

Khumbul' ekhaya is touted as 'educational' with the two stories in each episode hopefully getting viewers to reflect on 'their own family relationships and being moved to implement positive change in their home' through reconciliation and forgiveness (www.sabc1.co.za/index.php/khumbulekhaya). To tout the show as 'the truth and reconciliation process of the soul' is an overstatement given that we do not see any real emotional work being done by any of the parties. The programme offers assertions and not demonstrations of 'truth and reconciliation'.

The first season of *Forgive and Forget* was in 2007, a year after *Khumbul' ekhaya*. It is informed, as the title suggests, by the concept of forgiveness. According to eTV, the aim of the programme is to 'show South Africans that an honest apology can mend relationships, dissolve anger, soothe shattered pride or heal a broken heart' (http://www.forgive and forget.etv.co.za). It is more complex than *Khumbul'ekhaya*. Participants contact the production team, express what they would like to be forgiven for and are shown apologizing to the people they wronged on camera. Sometimes, the wronged party speaks to the programme only and refuses to meet the person in need of forgiveness. Thus, at times the chance for forgiveness is not granted. In the event that it is, the causes of the hurts are addressed in a shallow way that in most instances does not display the soul-searching necessary to achieve healing. Even as participants in some episodes do shed tears and so on, there is no drawing out of the very issues that caused the conflict. There is also no clear programme of action for the future. It is very much a show about the present – restricted to the shoot. Like *Khumbul'ekhaya*, there is no follow-up on the quality of relationships mended through on-camera reconciliation.

Relate, the youngest but most complex of the three programmes, premiered on 14 April 2009. The programme 'provides real-life counselling sessions, with a real-life counsellor, Angie Diale' (http://www.sabc1.co.za/index.php/community). It deals with broader aspects of personal and relational affect in a more nuanced and layered manner. The aspects dealt with in *Khumbul' Ekhaya* and *Forgive and Forget* are subsumed in *Relate*. The latter acknowledges the problematic nature of the very concept of family, its fluidity as well as the necessary and consistent effort to make it work. It is also unique in its relentless teasing out of individuals' thoughts, desires, hopes and anxieties. This is captured by the host Angie Diale who remarked, 'For the first time in South Africa there is a show that says 'who are you . . . and where are you going in your relationship? [It also says] look at your life and change it for the better' (Diale interview, December 2011). According to the content producer of Series 3, Lusanda Chauke, the focus on intimate detail is to 'open ourselves [South Africans] up more and become a community that talks about issues instead of bottling them up'. Thus, the individual is put on a national platform to bare him/herself to encourage dialogue and introspection at personal level, for the benefit of the nation.

Like the other two talk shows mentioned earlier, *Relate* is driven by relational conflict and self-revelations. This show adds two aspects missing from the other two – interrogation of participants and evaluation of relationships after intervention. In a way, this is also the programme's self-evaluation. The main themes are communication between spouses as well as parents and children, physical and/or emotional abuse, extramarital affairs and disputed parentage amongst others. The aim is to facilitate, through the expression of affect and subjectivity, the creation of better families and by extension, a better nation. Angie Diale succinctly captures this idea in Series I, Episode 20 when she remarks that the show 'helps people by resolving [the] guests' problems. Their solutions can work for you as well. We're here to help the nation'. Through occasional direct address of the viewers ('those of you at home') or 'Mzansi' (South Africa) and then back to the participants, Diale expresses the sense that individual cases have social relevance. The idea of empowering both the guests and audiences is flagged as the core of the show. The guests on the show will have embraced therapeutic storytelling, described by Illouz (2003) in the following vein:

> Therapeutic storytelling is . . . inherently circular: to tell a story is to tell a story about a diseased self . . . . Therapeutic framing of biographical stories narrates the self in terms of its 'diseases'. If failure is the result of a disease of the will, then it is self-made, it can be unmade, which legitimates and perpetuates the very existence of the show and the therapeutic institution that feeds it. Indeed, what is particularly interesting about therapeutic narrative about the self quickly becomes a 'narrative in action' – a story about the very process of understanding, working with and overcoming (or not overcoming) one's problems.
>
> (p. 90)

But the guests on *Relate* expect more out of the show. They expect help with their medical conditions, addictions, joblessness and so on – something that suggests an awareness that their personal problems require more than just therapeutic storytelling; that in fact, the problems are rooted in problematic socio-economic arrangements. The programme itself, through sourcing help from diverse institutions such as hospitals, support groups, income-generating projects and so on, is also aware of the prevailing and enduring socio-economic inequities that make some population segments of South Africa more vulnerable to certain psycho-social problems but lacking the resources to deal with the problems. Hence, *Relate* is conceived as social commentary offering a service to the 'nation' through challenging assumptions about interpersonal intimacies with the hope that lessons learnt can lead to better practice in the lives of both the guests and audience. *Relate* shares with other talk shows certain stylistic conventions and is also unique in other ways. A description of this programme on and off the air will be useful.

Relate and discourses of improvement

Relate is produced by Ochre Media and is hosted by Angie Diale. In 2003, Ochre Media, the company that produces *Relate*, needed a show that would help improve communities, something in the mould of *Zola* 7, a programme aimed at improving people's lives in the townships (Diale interview, 3 December 2011). Right from the outset then, the programme was conceived as one that would offer a service to all South Africans (Diale interview, 3 December 2011). The idea of community improvement has some of its roots in the post-1994 reconstruction some of which took the form of social and economic empowerment projects for formerly disadvantaged groups spear-headed by both the democratically elected government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The assumption is that happy or content individuals make happy families and happy families make a healthy nation that focuses on self-improvement, whose net result is, hopefully, a materially and psychologically well-adjusted 'nation'. It would appear that the interventions by government and NGOs were targeted at poor Blacks and it should come as no surprise that the programme participants and the bulk of the imagined audience for talk shows that focus on 'upliftment' is largely the same demographic group.

Like other talk shows of its genre, *Relate* follows the basic 'problem/solution narrative structure' (Moorti 1998, p. 86). The problem is identified, discussion parameters drawn, both 'feuding' parties listened to and quizzed, and eventually reconciliation or solutions are considered. With regard to *Relate*, participants are given tasks to perform off screen and there is a follow-up which entails the evaluation of task performance and quality of relationships during the performance of tasks. A couple of episodes, for example, Series I, Episode 20, are actually dedicated to the evaluation process in which previous guests are invited back into the studio to talk about whether they found the *Relate* intervention useful or not.

The running time for each episode, excluding commercials, is roughly 23 to 25 minutes, 30 minutes long including commercials. The show is driven by Diale's training as a psychologist, especially the adaptation of conflict resolution methods commonly used in formal counselling. The show is consciously designed not to surprise or shock either guests or audiences. Unlike sensationalist shows like *The Jerry Springer Show* that thrives on extreme forms of both public and private vices of the sordid kind, featuring highly dysfunctional individuals and families or 'freaks', some of whom are paid guests (Lunt and Stenner 2005), *Relate* eschews 'trash talk' and 'manufacturing' of guests and problems. The show's ground rules of 'no anger, no insults, no threatening language, no swearing, no shouting or fighting' give it a sense of restraint, respectability, decency and seriousness (Diale interview, 3 December 2011). It is described by the Series III producer, Lusanda Chauke, as

'serious' to the point that only 10 percent can be said to be pure entertainment (Chauke Interview, 3 December 2011).

The host of *Relate*, Angie Diale, is often affable but 'confrontational' at times. Through television, she has opened up herself to publicity and public opinion. She has endeared herself to some of the viewers (as seen through various chat rooms) and attracted negative criticism from some who have accused her, for example in an article by Amanda Ngudletitled 'Presenter doesn't relate well to Issues', of 'speculation, contempt and self-righteousness', as well as allowing emotions to get the better of her (*Sunday World*, 30 October 2011). Ngudle takes great exception to Diale's scolding of some guests who were told by the host, for example, that they were 'selfish and troublesome' (*Sunday World*, 30 October 2011). Anton Burggraaf, executive producer of Relate defended Diale's hosting style saying 'She does not mince her words in her role as counsellor and agony aunt. Angie tells it like it is and this is the appeal of the show. She's passionate' (*Sunday World*, 30 October 2011). In Diale's words, 'People love it that I tell the participants the truth, and that I am able to tell people off, that I'm able to put them in line, to scold them if necessary' (Diale interview, 3 December 2011).

Just as it is difficult to think of the Oprah Winfrey show without thinking about the host's personality, so is it with *Relate* and Angie Diale. Diale has followed in the footsteps of this 'Queen of Talk' who 'systematically blended her private self with her public persona to guarantee success' (Illouz 2003, p. 21). Oprah, by baring her background of poverty and disclosing her troubled past, especially sexual abuse, sent a message that anyone could succeed against all odds and that she is just as human as the guests on her show and viewers in their homes. The description of *Relate's* Series II, Episode 5 which is used to introduce this paper, works in a similar way.

In addition, the way Angie Diale describes her family points to changing family forms in South Africa, the move away from the conventional two-parent nuclear family. As a successful counsellor on and off television, she challenges the overgeneralized idea that single motherhood speaks of a deficit. Her presence on television and her role as counsellor both challenge the notion and discourse of lack associated with single motherhood – that single motherhood is an index of social decay. In an ironic twist of single motherhood as pathology, the single mother is the one who is 'fixing' families and seems to have won the confidence of many as typified by a statement from one of the six former guests' response to why she took part in *Relate*: 'I knew I could speak to Sis Angie. She is serious about helping people'. Another former guest responded: 'I wanted to get the truth about our relationship, whether he [her husband] still wanted me or not and I knew Sis Angie will do that for me'. For another former guest, Angie comes across as a genuine, sympathetic and impartial friend. Said the respondent, 'I wanted someone who would help me in a real way. You know that people who know you, like your friends and relatives . . . people who see you every day, they can't give you good advice,

[because] sometimes they are jealous'. This is another paradoxical situation where because of her success as a television talk show host who solves people's private conflicts, Angie is regarded as both stranger and helpful friend. Her 'distance' and closeness as a familiar stranger on television makes some participants trust her assessment will be unbiased.

Linked to Diale's personality is her fluency in a couple of South Africa's indigenous languages – isiZulu, siPedi, Sesotho, isiXhosa and siSwati. One former guest commented, as reason for taking part in the show: '. . . because I can speak in my own language [isiZulu] to someone who understands it and who listens'. Overall, the programme's aim of drawing viewers into a dialogue that will lead to a rethinking of certain cultural and social arrangements is expressed through the host's capabilities and also embodied not only in her personal life but also the role television plays in making her familiar to strangers yet at the same time making viewers aware that in real life, Angie Diale is not part and parcel of their everyday lives although through television she can touch their lives.

Participants or guests are invited to write to the programme (regular mail or email), fax or phone, asking to take part. Most of the participants' communication is through regular mail and phoning. This part of the programme, making initial contact, is similar to that of the other two – *Khumbul' ekhaya* and *Forgive and Forget*. In fact, through writing in, participants present problems they need solved. *Relate*'s research and production team chooses participants, arranges for their travel, counselling and other sessions. According to Chauke, there are more communications from women (approximately 90 per cent) than men (Chauke interview, 3 December 2011). Diale accounted for this situation by arguing that men fear exposure, generally do not like talking about their feelings and are likely to feel emasculated by self-revelation (Diale interview, 7 December 2011). This appeared to be confirmed by the fact that of the six former guests interviewed, only one was a man and was somewhat reluctant to take part in the interview.

Asked to confirm if most or all the participants came from low-income households, Chauke was at pains to dispel this although her explanation plus the participants' localities in name and visuals, confirmed this situation. Quite a few lived in shacks in squatter settlements. To Chauke's understanding, the main determinant was locality: 'the difference between urban, peri-urban and rural. Urban people don't want to talk about their problems in public. They had rather talk about them behind closed doors'. For the most part, the spatial distribution that Chauke mentions coincides with class, and to a large extent, race. That South African urban dwellers (rather than Black or wealthy South Africans) do not want to discuss their problems on TV is very debatable.

Later on during the interview, asked why middle-class blacks were not visible on the programme, Chauke was of the opinion they would rather see a psychologist behind closed doors and gave herself as an example of someone who would never consider appearing on *Relate* and added, 'Why go on TV

when you can see a psychologist in private . . . with no cameras?' (Chauke interview, 3 December 2011). Eventually, she agreed that it was a question of financial means, whether one could afford a private consultation or not. All the six former guests interviewed, cited the need for help as the primary motivator for taking part on the show. Asked to elaborate on the nature of the help, four said they knew that some of the services they needed would require sums of money they could not afford. This concurs with Diale's comment concerning this situation. Unlike Chauke, Dilae was very direct and commented: 'At the end of the day, poor people will take advantage of the services available to them, where they know they don't have to pay anything but are guaranteed quality help' (Diale interview, 3 December 2011). How much of this is help and how much exploitation, will be considered later.

With reference to the consequences of going public, both Chauke and Diale said that participants were made aware of the possible implications. Diale observed that some guests tend to be camera shy and some get overwhelmed by being on set. This however, according to Diale, is usually mitigated by the fact that the guests' level of desperation for a solution often stops them thinking about cameras and makes them focus instead, on exploring their problems (Diale interview, 3 December 2011). As soon as guests engage with their issues, 'the thought of tv has left their minds' (Diale interview, 3 December 2011). Five of the six former guests said they had worried about appearing on television, especially being laughed at by people who knew them. The value of the possible help they would get, they said, is what drove them to take part in the show. One was driven by acute desperation: 'I thought if I did not get help, I will kill myself'.

Concerning the racial composition of participants, the producer said the programme was open to all races but the overwhelming majority of the participants were Black. In the 10 episodes chosen for this study, only one features a coloured couple and was shot in English. One would not be off the mark in claiming that for the most part, the imagined participants and audiences are Black, including those who do not speak any of South Africa's indigenous languages as seen through the use of English subtitles. In response to the question why participants (the question did not mention race) chose to bare their problems through *Relate*, Diale had this revealing comment to make:

> For me the question is: what is the mind-set of an ordinary black person? It has never been to go to counselling. In black families any challenge is an internal challenge. If you even tell the neighbour, it becomes a problem – why did you do that?
>
> (Diale interview, 3 December 2011)

As such, the programme is seen as providing a service to 'ordinary' Blacks who are financially challenged (and therefore cannot be middle class) and thought to lack a culture of open communication. Diale further added that 'For *black*

people, like I said, we don't talk' (emphasis added). The truthfulness or otherwise of this statement is open to debate. However, with specific reference to *Relate*, it would appear Diale meant that poor black people do not talk effectively about their thoughts and feelings. The show however, seems to be informed or influenced by 'middle-class coffee-klatch propriety and rationality' as opposed to 'working-class irreverence and emotional directness' (Gamson 1998, p. 30). Which begs the question: apart from the need to access services by taking part on the show, is it also the case that the programme is attractive to poor blacks because the middle class are already a converted lot as far as the gospel of introspection and 'intimacy labour' (Kipnis 1998, p. 291) is concerned? Whereas in the American context 'trailer trash' (poor whites) are identified by some critics as comprising virtually all the participants of talk shows of the crudest and most debased kind (Gamson 1998, p. 14), the same cannot be said about *Relate*. Although the participants are poor, they are not 'freaks' and the discussions are far from prurience. But will the black middle class take part because of that? Chauke's response (Interview, December 2011) seems to suggest the absence of that possibility even if the black middle class realized the programme's value. Could it mean that the show, by focalizing poor blacks has lost both black and white middle-class viewers? Probably.

Regarding structure, Series I starts with an introductory theme song and clip that features Soweto scenes. More of similar scenes and a few different ones are added in Series II. The visuals include traffic (mostly minibus taxis), Soweto Towers, a train moving past a township, a man and woman holding hands; then the same couple with the woman angrily pushing away the man, Angie Diale talking, a smiling middle-aged woman sitting next to a young man in a moving car, a hut in a rural area with a woman and man walking towards each other, pupils in school uniform, a woman in tears, a man covering his face with both hands (probably crying) and then Angie Diale outside 'her house', inviting the viewers in with a sweep of her hands towards the door. At the bottom of some of these images is written the words 'Communication', 'Friendship', 'Love' and 'Honesty' in bold. The order of these words is significant. *Relate* announces, through the first word, 'Communication', that like most talk shows of its kind it is undergirded by therapy talk; that it valorizes the need for effective communication in order to solve problems. In extolling effective communication, the programme suggests the benefits in the last three words (friendship, love and honesty). The flashing images remind us of the importance of individual relationships (woman pushing away the man, the crying man and woman, the smiling middle-aged woman) in the wider society (minibuses, crowds walking in the streets). The flashing of the images might also suggest a blurring of the private and public.

We are then shown a smiling Angie in her 'living room' which is a studio setting with a couple of sofas, a coffee table, some display cabinets and decorative artefacts. Angie's 'house' is not on a Soweto or township street as the visuals from the introductory snap shots would have us believe. It is a

studio in Balfour Park, a low residential area. The manipulation of location is a clear indication of the target audience. Revealing the actual location of Angie's 'house' might alienate some viewers and would-be participants. Notice below, Angie's persona of 'ordinary aunt in the township'. The 'formatting gimmick', (Carpignano *et al*. 1990, p. 46), the idea of a living room to create a sense of homeliness and hospitality is not new. Moorti (1998) writes that 'The majority of . . . talk shows mask the public nature of the programmes by constructing the idea of intimacy associated with the domestic sphere. [. . .] the programme is produced in a studio resembling a living room . . . . This setting . . . recreates the domestic atmosphere – a space where 'private' issues can safely be discussed' (87). Diale's observation, that the idea of a house is meant to contrast the clinical psychology environment and portray instead, an 'ordinary aunt in the township in an ordinary home' echoes the idea just mentioned above. To enhance this idea in the minds of the viewers, Diale goes through the motions of dusting the table or a decorative artefact on a couple of episodes, just before she faces the camera to open the show. According to Diale as well, the setting of a lounge lessens participant aggression as the setting creates a sense that participants are in someone else's house, which they should not disrespect (Diale interview, 3 December 2011).

Diale starts by introducing the episode's topic, usually framed as a general subject, something that can affect anyone. For example, she opens Episode 13 of Series II whose theme is child-headed households by saying, 'The passing away of parents brings hardship to many children'. Child-headed households is a term used to refer to households where all the members of that household have not reached legal age of majority (18 years in South Africa) and as such are led or headed by a minor due to death of parents or other misfortunes (Maqoko 2006). This phenomenon has been made widespread by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa as well as high levels of internal migration. At times Diale outlines the topic, sneaks in a homily and ends with a rhetorical question to grab the viewer's attention. The following is an introduction to Series II, Episode 5, which focuses on a marriage threatened with collapse: 'A wedding lasts only a day but a marriage and the making of a home take longer. A marriage requires patience, love and mutual trust. But what happens when trust is broken? How can we gain it back?' Then she asks the audience to meet the participants in their own locality – inside their homes, in a garden, cattle kraal and so on. The applicant or initiating guest, who would have written in, introduces him/herself and states his/her problem. The second person that the applicant has a conflict with introduces themselves and responds to the matter initiated by the applicant. A third person might be brought in to comment.

After this, a voice over tells us that the guests are travelling to Angie's house or the house of *Relate*. Angie ushers them in, greets and asks them to sit down. She then explains the ground rules; specifically that she will speak to them in turns in the lounge, starting with the initiator. Whilst she is speaking to the one, the other goes to a study where he/she can view and hear the

conversation via a closed circuit television. On the audiences' television screens, the person in the study is shown for the most part in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen in a smaller frame so that we can see the reaction(s) to what the initiator is saying.

The show then unfolds as a model of balanced turn-taking to achieve effective talking and listening – the vey skills on which the show is founded and what the show attempts to foster in the participants and viewers. Once the initiator or first guest has spoken to Angie, it is then the turn of the second guest and we see the initiator on the smaller frame. When Angie has spoken to both parties separately, she either brings in another third person, usually a friend or relative or (rarely) a specialist on the topic at hand. The third person is meant for 'balance' as this person is assumed to be neutral and guided by a desire to help resolve the conflict between the two guests. For example, Series II, Episode 2 features an expert on 'African Culture' who clarifies the concept of 'traditional marriage' as well as the dissolution of such. After the 'third party', Angie then talks to the conflicting parties in the lounge, probing them for possible resolutions and also suggesting others.

This turn-taking unfolds in a manner reminiscent of a detective movie, in this particular context, with viewers equating the guest in the 'wrong' with the villain, the one to be blamed and in need of chastisement. This process starts in the editorial room with the 'first public', the production team who watch the show unfold from the editorial room. The production team consists of two researchers (who do not take part in the shooting process), a content director/producer, a vision controller who works with three or four camera operators (the camera men are inside the studio), a technical director, two psychologists and Angie Diale herself when she is off the set. To help shed light on *Relate* as structured along the lines of a detective plot with wider social implications, Kipnis (1998) writes:

> In scandal and other genres devoted to exposing secret things, citizens have the opportunity to play the role of *social detectives*, a term [that expresses] the way certain kinds of knowledge are produced in investigation plots. In plots organised around detection, there are stories in which an individual detective confronts crimes of collective dimensions, and there are stories in which the collectivity ferrets out the solution to an individual crime. But in both cases the detective role widens to take on a social function because . . . it's invariably society as a whole that's the mystery to be solved and revelations of its hidden nature that are exposed. (p. 315, emphasis in original)

Some of the comments I overheard in the editorial room from the production team concerning some participants included, 'He's lying'; 'There's something about this girl . . . something that tells me she is not serious'; 'This guy is just using this woman'; 'Of course she did it for money . . .' and many more.

Also as part of the 'who done it' plot, the content producer occasionally speaks to Diale from the editorial room through a blue tooth device that is well hidden inside one of Diale's ears in a manner that conjures up a spy movie. The producer's intervention to indicate to Diale where the story is losing focus, is actually part of 'closing the net' on a 'suspect'. Typical questions relayed by Chauke to Diale included, 'Ask him what really it was about the new woman that made him leave home?'; 'Why in the first place did she leave her children with such an irresponsible father?'; 'Did she not have anybody to talk to about this – maybe people from church, neighbours?' As much as the questions help clarify issues and signal moments when the conversation is becoming heavily skewed in favour of one guest, they help narrow down to identifying the guest in the 'wrong'. Some of the prompts are provided by the two resident psychologists through similar questions as Chauke's above. This also explains why at times Diale scolds some 'rogue' participants as she does with one male guest in Series I, Episode 4:

> What gave you the right to discuss your girlfriend's abortion with her mother, ignoring her [girlfriend] entirely in the process? And why didn't you tell her [girlfriend on the show] that you had another pregnant girlfriend? So everything must revolve around you . . . because you are a man, right? When your parents raised you didn't they teach you the value of respecting other people as people?

During a break, Diale joins the rest of the team in the editorial room, with the exception of the technical team (although I observed that the technical director would occasionally comment on the guests and other content-related aspects, at times in a judgemental way). The four confer on the participants' responses; discuss what the 'real nature' of the problem could be to determine the direction the shoot should take and the relevant tasks for the participants. In all these discussions, the team emerges as the first 'public' that not only witnesses the show before editing but also channels it in a certain direction.

Irrespective of whether the two parties find an amicable solution or not, Dilae gives one or both of them a number of tasks, usually three, to perform towards finding closure to their problem. The tasks are arrived at in consultation (during a break in the shoot) with the two resident psychologists and content producer. Often, and depending on the nature of the tasks, participants are referred to health institutions (general practitioners, psychiatrists, public hospitals, family planning clinics, paternity testing laboratories), rehabilitation centres (to quit drug addiction, life of crime), counselling centres such as Men as Partners where men 'can learn what being a real man entails' (Series II, Episode 2) or Sunrise, a counselling centre where one participant was referred to learn to love herself. The decision then to take part in the programme, as indicated earlier, is an instrumental one geared towards accessing free but effective help. Two organizations to which guests are

frequently referred are FAMSA (Family and Marriage Association of South Africa) and BOSASA (literally, 'tomorrow' in Northern SeSotho) – an economic empowerment organization.

Thus, the resolution of the problem continues off screen. First, each party is given a portable video camera to record their thoughts which are then incorporated into the episode. This helps underline the fact that the achievement of intimacy requires work as solutions are not arrived at because people in a conflicted relationship have effectively discussed their problem(s). It is an illustration that to make a relationship work requires extra effort or labour, what Laura Kipnis (1998, p. 305) calls 'intimacy shift work' – working at a relationship right round the clock. In Series II, Episode 5, a disgruntled wife who had suspected her husband of infidelity records herself crying on camera and saying:

> Ever since we got back [from the studio recording of the show in Johannesburg], there's been no improvement . . . at all. We don't go to movies, we have no romantic dinners . . . we don't do what people in love do and our sex life is so boring. There is absolutely no hope. Sometimes I feel I'm in this relationship for the sake of the children. I'm so angry right now. There's nothing this man has done to improve things. I'm wasting my time. I feel you people [*Relate*] are also wasting your time. He says I am doing this to impress people. I can't take it anymore.

Thus, as part of the conflict is added, ironically, the show itself whose mission was to solve the problems the couple had. This alerts us to one of the problems of solving one's intimate relationship's problems publicly – that some do not approve of it as a useful strategy and may see it as either embarrassing or an exercise in seeking cheap publicity. At the far end of the disapproval continuum are critics such as Abt (cited in Gamson 1998, p. 8) who writes that disclosing one's intimate secrets on television is 'like defecating in public'. Gamson (1998), expressing the same conviction but in a less graphic manner, one that seems to have informed the husband's accusation of the wife above, is of the opinion that 'talk shows are not a smart place to look for either therapy or problem-solving'.

In what seems to be a direct response to this allegation, that talk shows are not effective tools for problem-solving, after giving the guests tasks to perform, Angie pays a visit to the parties to find out the progress made. If needed, further tasks are given. Through such persistence, some of the problematic issues in relationships are resolved and the couple cited above benefited from this – getting the husband to eventually carry out some of the tasks he was avoiding such as taking an HIV test and discussing some issues he had been avoiding. The episode ends happily, with trust seeming to have been restored and both wife and husband promising to leave the past behind them and put in the required effort to make their relationship work.

Not all episodes end happily. In fact, Series I Episode 23 ended tragically with a suicide. In this episode, a mother is on the show to get help for her son who has been consistently in and out of prison for 14 years (since he was 17, now 31), has violent drug-induced tendencies and is preoccupied by suicidal thoughts. This episode is significant for the clues to the impending suicide of the son as well as the modification of the production team to include two 'resident' studio counsellors/psychologists to pay close attention to the participants and intervene where required. Part of the episode unfolds like this (for reasons of anonymity, the son will be called 'K'):

> Angie: K my friend, what really is the problem?
>
> K: I don't know. Maybe it's the way I grew up. [He has bloodshot eyes and sniffles]
>
> A: How did you grow up?
>
> K: [Speaks ponderously] In a rough environment. I kept bad friends, played truant at school and got involved in many bad things until it became a habit. [Occasionally sniffles, avoids direct eye contact with Angie]
>
> A: What is your aim in coming here?
>
> K: My mother needs help and so do I because I don't like the things I do. I need a good life . . . I need a job. I do some art work but it requires money. [Cries and Angie gives him tissue paper]
>
> . . . .
>
> A: But why do you constantly talk about killing yourself?
>
> K: I don't know but it has been on my mind for quite a while. [He has stopped crying but keeps sniffling].
>
> A: How do you feel when you get that idea?
>
> K: That killing myself is a solution to all my problems.

With hindsight, we see how a team of psychologists watching from the editorial room will have noticed that K was very unstable and did look and act like someone who had taken drugs just before the show. It was difficult for Angie Diale to spot some of these things given the rigours of each shoot. I witnessed Diale attempt to wrap one segment of an episode through more than

six takes until she was almost about to give up. Sometimes, she would use the wrong word and sometimes it was a slip of the tongue.

Thus, the two resident psychologists are not only there to deal with guests but Angie Diale herself when she gets overwhelmed by a situation. A good example was one of the shoots I observed in which there seemed to be no way of reconciling an estranged couple largely because the man no longer loved the woman and he made it quite clear to all. Angie commented that she felt very sorry for the woman, to which one of the psychologists said she should not, reminding Angie of the need to maintain a professional distance. After the shoot, however, Angie almost in tears, said something very revealing: 'Oh Jesus, how do you end somebody's marriage like that? On national tv?'

One of the tasks Diale had given the couple, in consultation with the team, was to formalize their divorce. Both psychologists, the producer and technical director assured her that she had not ended the marriage – it had already ended before the two guests came to the show. The four were firmly of the opinion that the show had helped the woman guest to move on with her life. Asked later in an interview whether she felt she could successfully put a distance between herself and the guests' problems, Diale's response was that to a large extent she could but there were moments when she got 'sucked in' (Diale interview, 7 December 2011). She described herself as a human being 'with a caring heart' and that in fact, a demonstration of empathy was good to settle guests on the show and to convey the 'seriousness' of engagement to the viewers.

A shoot for a particular story ranges between 1 and 2 hours, which is reduced during the editing to the required 23 to 25 minutes. The editing process itself is problematic because some aspects of the show, irrespective of their value or truthfulness, are left out if they are perceived to violate one or more of the broadcasting mandates (Chauke interview, 3 December 2011). Second, as Chauke points out in the same interview, each episode has to be driven in a specific direction, especially stories that tend to sprawl, where participants cite numerous issues and at times contradict themselves. In such cases, it is likely that the angle chosen by the production team during the editing might not capture what the main point of contention between the participants was.

With the exception of one former guest, the other five said *Relate* had helped them immensely. But one is immediately reminded of Gamson's (1998) remark that:

> talk shows are show business, and it is their mission to exploit. They commodify and use talkers to build an entertainment product which is then used to attract audiences who are then sold to advertisers, which results in a profit for producers. Exploitation thus ought to be the starting point of analysis and not, as it so often is, its conclusion.
>
> (p. 7)

Be that as it may, relations were reported to have improved by *Relate* participants. In instances where they had not improved greatly, as in one case, the participant cited the gaining of self-knowledge and knowledge of available support structures. None felt that they had been used.

Conclusion

Television, this paper has demonstrated, was earlier on recognized by the apartheid state as a tool that could work against the racial segregation that apartheid was founded on. The structured absence of television was then used to 'omit' any inclusive version of the South African nation. When television was introduced, the lens was trained on the white Afrikaner minority and their limited racist notion of 'nation'. Post-conflict South Africa with its ethos of equality in diversity made visible erstwhile 'invisible' or half-seen segments of the nation on television and public life, such as Blacks. The forging of a 'new' nation required South Africans to work at it by acknowledging their traumatic past, mostly through the TRC, which became synonymous with television through the widespread coverage of the Commission by this medium. The healing of the 'nation' through personal testimony marked a shift from the grand theme of political resistance to personal affect although the personal confession was still in the service of founding a nation. In a way, it was the beginning of a discourse that would shift notions of family, selfhood and self-determination from the victimhood of overbearing socio-political forces to individual agency. In addition, psychic pain and socio-economic inequalities have continued beyond the TRC. These conditions require rational explanations. This partly explains the emergence of the family as an analytic paradigm to illuminate psychic problems which are invariably viewed as relationship problems whose solution lies with the individual and how the individual relates to those closest to him/her. In other words, the continued suffering in post-conflict South Africa makes it possible for sufferers to admit that they are 'failed selves' (Illouz 2003, p. 8). As such, programmes like *Relate* offer a chance to critique some of the understandings of human intimacies and politics around the concept of family. Like any thought-provoking text, *Relate* becomes a '"laboratory" for debating larger issues in the society' (Hofmeyr 2004, p. 129). What may not be so apparent is that talk is only one way of solving what are essentially socio-economically induced problems. That could explain why *Relate* as a 'self-help' programme, targets the economically disadvantaged and why people in this economic bracket find the instrumental interventions of the programme useful as they hope to access therapy and other services for free.

The production, airing and viewing of talk shows such as *Forgive and Forget*, *Khumbul' ekhaya* and *Relate*, have managed to undo the marginality of the township, informal, peri-urban and rural areas. Through televisual space, these

formerly marginalized zones, their populations and socio-economic troubles are brought into the living rooms of millions of South Africans across disparate spatial and social divisions. Instead of the apartheid television which presented these areas and their people 'as pestilence, vermin, the location of chaos and disorder' (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004, p. 351), *Relate* pays attention to these people as individuals that matter. Be that as it may, programmes such as *Relate*, judging from the channel that broadcasts the programme, its guests, language and imagined audience, have clear racial and class markings that throw up to the surface, the layered and fractured nature of the South African nation – the enduring legacy of apartheid. In spite of the view of former participants that they did not feel exploited, *Relate* like other talk shows, is concerned with audience ratings, a clear indication that the profit motive is highly significant. Notwithstanding additional problems that can be attached to *Relate*, such as its narrow conception of 'nation', the voyeurism of viewers and the possibility that it can be seen as a show for the poor and intellectually lacking, it plays a crucial role in bringing to the fore, a section of the South African society that was excluded from public life for a long period, creating a vibrant space to discuss personal affect with a view to improving lives and families in this section of South African society. The self-improvement imperative and the 'free' interventions *Relate* offers, suggest that people's personal problems are also undergirded by wider socio-economic and political arrangements that may require reform in order to effectively improve the lives of economically vulnerable groups.

Notes on contributor

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