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Retelling Joburg for TV: Risky City

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This paper deals with my experiences as a researcher on a TV show about youth in the city of Johannesburg – now officially called Joburg – while working on a study of intertextuality. My study into intertextuality became my doctorate thesis and, later, turned into a book¹ and a few published articles.

The title of this paper refers not only to the findings in the seedy underbelly of the city that inform one chapter of my book, but is a nod, intertextually, to the title of a conference on risk and the city held at an institute linked to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) some years ago. At the Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research (Wiser), in conversation with two directors of *Yizho Yizho*, I made an early presentation of my city findings and its representation within the series. At that point, my research had not been written up. As time went on, the city research became the least important aspect of my work, and fell outside of my main focus.

It has been suggested that for this essay I soup up aspects of my research and attempt a narrative ‘functioning like the memoirs of an «explorer» in the margins of a culture’.² Exploratory it will certainly be, not only because the ur-text of this slender cityscape was an unpublished report that led to the initial oral account during the Wiser conversation. It was a conversation that would continue later in a different direction at CODESRIA, where the focus was on youth and culture rather than on the city. Even as I write it up now, the focus shifts with each draft as I find it necessary to use the text to point out exactly where and how there have been changes in the city, and for that matter in the political landscape, for better or worse. My findings may have long since strolled out of the margins of culture, lurking now as graffiti on the walls surrounding urban studies, education, psychology, sociology and politics. This is not only because I am writing at the time of the South African election of 2009, and I am therefore more alert than as usual to events in my city, but because my initial research was into a basket of

issues lying beyond the domain of a single discipline. If I wanted to, I could spend my life rewriting my findings for different branches of science and the arts. I promise not to do this. It is boring to reread the works of academics who mercilessly exploit the same tired piece of original research (sometimes, it is not even their own research but observation about someone else's work, and even then, the observation might not be original) so that they may increase the number of their publications. Besides, those authors who continuously plagiarize their early published works – pinching an earlier article from, say, *The Mail & Guardian* to fatten a brand new book of their reflections, lifting articles from a lesser known journal when they were young and unknown to republish in an accredited one when they are longer of tooth and think they are no longer capable of innovative thought – will shortly find themselves in a great deal of trouble with the stringent new international copyright laws that make filching of one's own work a sin.

So for showing me the pointlessness of reproducing one's earlier work verbatim, I am, in the first place, grateful to the editor of this collection. But secondly, I am delighted to be thrown a challenge. As students, we should be ready and able to work in the fashion of any stylish theorist, just as a film maker might pay tribute stylistically to Sembène Ousmane or Gillo Pontecorvo. It is pleasing to consider that the editor must be getting fed up with the cultures of Facebook, Mxit and Twitter. No short words, short sentences and short paragraphs for this editor. He challenged me to drop the 'telegraphic style' I have developed through excessive usage of communication networks for lazy people in a hurry and to inspire myself instead with a bit of Claude Lévi-Strauss in the course of writing this piece. Indeed, I have even been encouraged to attempt to write in the style of that charming old youth, for that is how I experience him, through a reading of some chapters of his *Tristes Tropiques* (1973, translated from the French by John and Doreen Weightman, London: Jonathan Cape London. It is a fine translation that I would heartily recommend except for the fourth sentence, which I find unforgivable in its clumsiness: 'It is now fifteen years since I left Brazil for the last time and all during this period I have often planned to undertake the present work, but on each occasion, a sort of shame and repugnance prevented me from making a start').

Lévi-Strauss is a delightful writer who makes a statement in a ten-line sentence then deviates to make an aside about a related topic, and another, and yet another. He does not become trapped by a discipline's rules and he does not write in annotated footnotes. Hence, while we follow his anthropological adventures in Brazil, we simultaneously smile over his experiences as a student at the École Normale Supérieure in an earlier decade and laugh out loud at the account in his travel memoir of how Columbus encountered mermaids. These separate

chronotopes form part of one rich telling. Our senses are awakened on all levels by his description of foods, of tastes, smells, colours, sounds. Lévi-Strauss is supposedly very French in the way he goes about his tale, but the truth is that he is one of a kind. His clever long-windedness is certainly no longer in vogue. Perhaps this is lucky for those of us who have to attend conferences with Lévi-Strauss wannabes who lack the original's knowledge, insights, focus, wit and style, but who still take a full twenty minutes to make their point. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss' meandering style is distinctly at odds with the twittering culture that unites youths of all languages today. I wonder what Lévi-Strauss makes of a rule that dictates that one must have one's say in 140 characters. Does he even bother with the populist forms of post-textuality with which we have to engage and theorize now?³ Perhaps, Lévi-Strauss is a strong enough figure to reclaim and rethink the printed page for modern scholars. If the new telegraphic styles bore him (+ i&i, u2?) or make references he does not get, let our man Claude lead us, well those of us who can manage a lengthy sentence anyway, back to the art of framing our content in a form entertaining enough to give readers a giggle while we dip into theoretical approaches from a range of disciplines.

Does Lévi-Strauss' comment about inter-disciplinary poaching, written three decades before De Certeau's famous comments about cultural poachers, not ring a bell for those who work across disciplines:

I have no aptitude for prudently cultivating a given field and gathering in the harvest year after year: I have a Neolithic kind of intelligence. Like native bush fires, it sometimes sets unexplored areas alight; it may fertilize them and snatch a few crops from them, and then it moves on, leaving scorched earth in its wake (Lévi-Strauss 1973:53).

Certainly it does for me. I will try not to unnecessarily derail my narrative about my stint with a trendy film company. Instead of leaving behind scorched earth and ruined turf, I would like to light some fires of inspiration for scholars wanting to expand their own research beyond the confines of academia.

The drama on which I was employed was *Yizho Yizho 3*. The 3 refers to the third season of a show. The two previous seasons had enjoyed mass youth audiences. It had the highest AR – audience ratings – of any South African TV programme. But besides its popularity among youth, it was a controversial show for many adults. Parents and teachers accused the production house, The Bomb Shelter, variously of portraying gratuitous violence, underage sex (the first two seasons were set in a school), a rampant drug culture and alienated youth.

The third season of *Yizho Yizho* was to take place in Joburg. I was invited on board by *Yizho Yizho* director Angus Gibson. Directors like Angus frequently handpick the individuals with whom they wish to work. Angus had initially

earmarked me for a different project on the city. To this day, I am not sure why Angus sought my help; probably he wanted me to work as a scriptwriter, which I had been doing in my spare time. You can be sure it was not for my acting skills, although he did create a tiny cameo for me as a mean business woman interviewing youths applying for jobs. In retrospect, I understand this was his response to the concept of auto-citation (in the course of working with the *Yizho* team, I explained Genette's categories of intertextuality to the film makers).

One day early in 2002, Angus phoned with a proper research offer. The money for the film had not materialized. Instead, the company of which Angus was a partner had been asked to make a new *Yizho Yizho*. There was a vacancy for a researcher. Angus wanted me to meet his co-producers at the Bomb Shelter, Desiree Markgraaff and Teboho Mahlatsi, for a discussion about my possible involvement on the new *Yizho Yizho* project.

The production house values research and spends more than R250 000 on it for each major production. Consultation with experts, focus groups, in-depth interviews and testing of filmic treatments, 'messaging' and dialogue quickly swallow up this money. *Yizho Yizho* finances came, in the main, from the national education ministry under its then-minister, Kader Asmal.

The producers' brief to me: The students featured in *Yizho Yizho 1* and *2* have finished school in the township. They will be moving into the city looking for jobs. How will they survive, and what structures would they need to sustain them? These were the questions the producers wanted me to find out in my initial research. I was to produce a literature review, a list of resources in the city, and a 'top ten' prioritization of issues affecting city youth in Johannesburg. Some of those issues had already been defined by the producers. This is usually the case when working with film makers. The researcher should not expect to create a scientific framework and work within it. Film makers have their own vision that skews research from the outset. In this case, the two topics the producers insisted upon were religion and boxing. The latter would almost certainly not have entered my list if the approach had been entirely left to me. The only thing I know about boxing is what I remember, as a small child, hearing my parents discussing excitedly the morning after the matches they listened to on radio late at night; like most people on the African continent, we did not encounter TV until the mid-1970s.

Teboho also had a morbid interest in hard drug usage by Afrikaner youth, particularly since there had been a number of attacks and killings by addicted youths in Pretoria. If I remember correctly, the attacks were supposedly 'Satanist' in nature, according to an occult specialist in the South African Police Service. Further research into this was vetoed by Desiree Markgraaff. At the Bomb Shelter, Desiree holds the purse strings. She is the producer proper and does not throw money about. Previous productions of *Yizho Yizho* had already adequately researched

drug culture, she said. Another money-saving device Desiree insisted upon was to include some of the organizations that had already worked with *Yizho Yizho*. They knew and understood the brand. It meant easier access to data and furthered the Bomb's ethos of building community partnerships.

I did not set out to find 'the risqué'. Angus and Teboho would obviously quickly find a way to subvert and retell dry research points in a way youth would enjoy anyway, so revealing Joburg's sleazy shadow was never my conscious intention. When Desiree struck drugs off my list before it had even emerged as a research issue, I wondered if the producers were barking up the wrong tree. How was I supposed to locate squeaky clean youth in Joburg – one of the drug capitals of the world – church-goers and boxers to boot? Desiree had made me aware that the characters in *Yizho Yizho*, or some of them anyway, had to be role models for youth if another storm was to be avoided when the new series was screened. I was not sure whether it was possible to sanitize the research so in the end, no, from the beginning, I did not even try.

A note to those unfamiliar with Joburg: even a short ride through the city centre of Joburg will quickly reveal how difficult it is to spot obvious role models for a youth show. Fast movement, colour, excitement, fashion, noise, dramatic day-time storms at times of the year are perhaps more obvious components of the city to be captured in a TV drama; and, of course, highly visible is the co-existence of different worlds, referred to by anyone who has ever written or spoken about Joburg. It strives to be an African city in the way it recognizes both a developing economy and posits itself as a global city simultaneously. Besides the impressive buildings and big businesses contained therein, are hawkers and street markets. There is Joburg city, an enormous modern structure of uneven architecture that represents the financial headquarters of South Africa. It is owned and run by people with enough money to travel, wear and consume wherever and whatever they choose. Rubbing spines with this global Joburg is a different world and a different economy – that of street people, windscreen washers, child glue-sniffers, job seekers and travellers. In any street a visitor will notice thousands of people on foot and others navigating the taxi system, indicating their required destination with their fingers pointing up or down in order to escape the wrath of taxi drivers who rapidly become foul tempered and mouthed if they pick up a passenger who wants to go somewhere not on the usual route. Taxi drivers have been cross as long as I remember. In 2009, they are particularly angry that a new government transport system threatens their income. As one driver put it in a radio interview, 'taxis are now moving into transport. We are saying that there can be no transport plan without us'. On 20 April 2009, taxi drivers met with ANC President Jacob Zuma and national transport minister Jeff Radebe, who had mooted the new plan, to share their grievances. Zuma

promptly agreed with the taxi drivers that the rapid transport plan should be shelved until after the elections on 22 April. If every issue that has been shelved until after the elections were to erupt one month later, to remind the politicians of their pre-election promises, this country would be explosive. But I digress.

I stumbled upon the first issue on my top ten, 'Identity and support in the city,' by chance. A domestic worker living in the high-rise suburb of Berea in Joburg unexpectedly died of untreated AIDS. AIDS, ridiculously, is a taboo-ridden illness here, thanks to a spate of politicians who are AIDS denialists. Former President Thabo Mbeki, for example, famously declared that he did not know a single person with AIDS; his friend the health minister Manto Tshabalala Msimang touted a diet of beetroot, garlic, potato and olive oil as a panacea for AIDS. Until the mid-2000s, anti-retrovirals were unavailable except to private, paying patients. In this context, imagine the shame and fear of a sick woman, too poor to ever get treatment for an illness that was officially unrecognized. No one knew Maria⁴ was sick until one day she appeared to go mad. She shouted loudly in the street before collapsing. She never rose again and died within weeks. Her teenage children Jeremiah and Simon, who attended school close to where I lived and were known to me, had to fend for themselves. I had already spoken to them about my project researching youth. After the death of their mother they continued to give me access to their lives until their circumstances changed dramatically.

It became apparent that the majority of people living in their apartment block in Berea, a high-rise central Joburg location, were in a similar situation to these boys. In some cases, it was because their parent figure, usually their mother, lived elsewhere – closer to work or even on the property of her employer. Child-headed households had been a factor of existence since the 1980s when Alan Morris did his research (Morris 1999). However, from what I established after doing the rounds of local government departments, nothing much had improved in the decade to follow. There had been minimal interventions, except in the social welfare portfolio, despite a human-rights supporting government taking over in the mid-1990s.

I found that poorer residents of Joburg – particularly those not in formal housing settlements – had no greater access to basic services than people in underdeveloped regions of the country. There was little help young people – or old people, or any cash-strapped resident – could expect from any authority if they faced a crisis or fell ill. This discovery terrified me (I too was cash-strapped, lacked hospital or any other kind of insurance, but had previously harboured an erroneous belief that the post-apartheid government cared for us and would look after us if, say, a taxi mowed us down), and probably marked the moment that I ceased to believe government promises.

City health services had fallen away because of under-funding. This is a common factor in the creation of megacities, which are built around fairly inflexible business principles. Megacities are given additional functions by their national governments, but without the necessary funding, which often remains tangled up at the provincial level. At the local level, they stop delivering certain services that are not considered to be core functions. Inevitably, the people-centred services relating to ‘care’, which run at a loss, have to make way for others that are profitable. In the case of the Joburg Metro, many of its research components and health care functions had been taken over by the University of the Witwatersrand, churches and NGOs shortly after the implementation of city manager Ketso Gordhan’s 2001 Unicity plan. The programmes that remained in place were redesigned to fit in with key city messages and plans. AIDS was now called ‘community health’ and abortion was referred to in discreet advertisements as ‘reproductive health’.

On the whole, I would argue that although it looked good on paper, in practice Gordhan’s Unicity model worked in a people-unfriendly direction. As a former communications executive at the Joburg Metro in Gordhan’s era, I am in a position to compare his approach to earlier attempts five years before his time when the African National Congress (ANC) was, indeed, showing itself to be a rights-based political party. For example, I remember bringing out a pamphlet on citizens’ rights as a project before Gordhan’s administration, modelled on a similar document produced in Reggio Emilia, Joburg’s sister city in northern Italy. Councillors, citizens, unions and urban activists made major contributions to the green paper on local government in the first five years of ANC rule. The eventual legislation called for citizens’ participation in all aspects of governance.

In the same period, councillors and officials worked tirelessly with developers to bring water and sewage to areas neglected in the apartheid decades. Soweto (the collective name given under apartheid to the South Western Townships outside Joburg, but now no longer remembered except as Soweto) is a bustling city today, but it would not be without the earlier efforts of the ANC council in 1995-2000. For that brief period, the pre-Gordhan city even made provision for indigents and taught its officials to be friendly with the hawkers. But with Gordhan’s plan, most of the rights identified earlier were discarded if they got in the way of the plan, and so too were progressives working within the city who raised objections given a tough time, in much the way that Zuma’s youths now threaten to wipe out those of us, the ‘cockroaches’, who dare criticize him.

It is astonishing how quickly we forget the apartheid past as we tear up and destroy whatever gets in the way of the chosen leader’s jog to power. Metro officials were, by the time I did my research for *Yizho Yizho*, waging war on the hawkers who had previously co-existed with the city. Armies of ‘red ants’ threw non-paying city tenants’ possessions over balconies, herded hawkers into central

markets and gathered up 'squatters' by the truckload to be dumped in spots out of town. It was curious for me to discover that while local government in 2002 happily spent money on sports and recreation centres, they kept fairly distant from the much bigger problem of shelter for homeless people and the youth who were supposed to put the sports centres to good use. Religious organizations funded and ran the bulk of shelters in the city, and it was the churches and mosques that provided food to the hungry through soup kitchens.

Although the Metro was working on an exciting inner-city development project (witness the successful revamping of Newtown), in 2002 there was not much evidence that this would eventually materialize. The city was dark, some streets were dangerous, even around the few clubs and food outlets that continued to operate during this period. The side window of my car was smashed in exactly the same way, by exactly the same man, on three separate occasions. I discovered that I felt safer driving with the window partially open in extremely dark places. This made the smashing of my windscreen far less likely.

Some things do not change much. On 1 April 2009, I drove through the centre of town and found it was in pitch darkness. Not one street light was working. A friend I was meeting was robbed at knife point as he stopped at a traffic light near the theatre. We had gone to see Pieter-Dirk Uys' *McBeki*, an adaptation of Shakespeare about the rise and fall of the previous president. The three cronies saying the lines about 'toil and trouble' are the media, our politicians' favourite scapegoat. I heard on Radio 702 news the following day that a man had been stopped by the police, on the exact route on which I travelled to the theatre and at around the same time. When he pulled off to the side of the road, the police stole his wallet and valuables.

Eight years ago, although I drove through the city in a car, I watched closely how women who depended on public transport survived. Movement in the city at night was stressful, especially for women. I noticed how they tried to walk in groups at night, bags clutched tightly under their arms. The public transport situation then was as hideous as it is now. Youth too seemed, to my eye, to avoid walking alone. They walked at night in groups of twos and threes. Where were they walking to? Where was home? The groups were swallowed up by buildings in Joubert Park and Hillbrow, high-density areas like Berea.

Jeremiah, one of the teenagers I knew who had lost his mother to AIDS, faced further difficulties. He got caught breaking into a car and was thrown into jail. He was around 17 at the time. His brother Simon started acting out in various ways, primarily bunking and flunking school. In his case there was intervention. Simon saw a counsellor regularly and did not end up in jail like his brother.

In post-apartheid South Africa, it has never been politically correct to talk about crime. We get jumpy and defensive when those from the previous regime

say we have not adjusted from a liberation consciousness, or that we are incapable of adequately subjecting our police to rules. We defend the Constitution and the Rule of Law, even when we notice cops behaving like robbers. We are not supposed to undermine the cops, despite having the national police commissioner facing a range of serious criminal charges over many years (and still facing charges as I write in 2009). So, too, is there an investigation into allegations of corruption against the suspended Joburg Metro Police chief. If citizens experience sensations of abandonment, and of having no one to depend upon, it is partly because South Africa is experiencing a crisis of ethics in these years of transition.

It has taken time to dismantle the previous regime, which, for those who missed it, was probably as brutal towards and as unrepresentative of the people over whom it crunched its fascistic boot as the current Israel. In the chaos of transition, it is the crooks and opportunists able to barter with all and sundry who flourish, while the developers who manage to create different levels of housing within contested terrain are the people who leave a legacy. If there were once good men and women who entered at independence to battle the apartheid demons in every institution of the country, they are likely by now to have gone the way of their former enemies, or they are dead, or they are suffering from severe burn-out. Sadly, it might be decades before a generation arises that is untainted by the ideologies and corruption of the past and present. Of course, we do have our marvellous Constitution, but there is a large gap between our ideals and our realities. In the dizzy spaces where the Constitution has not yet entered, the world is so upside-down that one cannot really blame youths for wanting to escape from it. A TV documentary about drug dealers, which aired in the period I was doing *Yizho Yizho* research, showed dealers speaking to the camera about their work, while the uniformed cops covered their faces. No one wrote in to a newspaper to say, 'how odd'. Now we are farther down the cul-de-sac of denial. One month ago, our President-in-waiting stood accused of numerous crimes including corruption and the taking of bribes, but the charges were dropped without a hearing. We have not yet seen whether he will punish his former enemies or not. He says no, this will not happen, and the vast majority of South Africans agree with whatever he says. He is very much 'A Man of the People', to borrow a title from Chinua Achebe.

As I was to discover in the earlier part of the decade, what is obvious in South Africa is often officially denied. Take the issue of youth and crime. I was told by the Metro Police that there had been only one individual under the age of 18 involved in a city hijacking in the previous year, and that it was a girl. Youth crime was not an issue in the city, the cop I interviewed in 2002 said. I did not believe it. I had seen many youths participating in violent crimes such as hijacking and car theft – thirty cars were stolen or hijacked from the street outside my house in a

six-month period during this time. On occasion, I saw how young the thieves were. It took a while to establish that *all* under-eighteens are passed on to the Child Protection Unit. Youth statistics do not show up in Metro Police records. Instead, these are kept by the South African Police Services (SAPS) and bodies like the National Youth Commission. Still, while the Metro Police might not technically keep youth crime statistics, to deny the existence of the problem at city level is disingenuous. The truth is that the average perpetrator of crime was aged 17 in 1998 (Dunlap 2000), and may have been even younger by 2008. SAPS figures show that between 11,000 and 14,000 children under the age of 18 are arrested every month (Philp 2009). Children under 18 do not have identity documents – which require the taking of fingerprints – and are often used by crime syndicates. When they get arrested, they are expected to conduct their own defence. I spent many hours watching children who were officially too young to be considered criminals by the Metro Police conducting their own defences at the Hillbrow Magistrate's Court.

The link between being alone with nothing and being 'at risk' to drugs and crime was made clear by the Joint Enrichment Project (JEP). JEP was a downtown NGO that had previously worked with *Yizō Yizō*. JEP uses 'diversionary programmes' to empower unemployed youths. Using focus groups, JEP establishes individuals' needs for technical training and entrepreneurship skills. Many youth have opted to become trained caregivers of others who were dying of AIDS, and I later established that occupational health provided the second biggest job possibility for school leavers.

After interviewing everybody I could about the provision of help for youths in the city, my next move was to establish what was available, firstly, at tertiary institutions and secondly, within the job market, if school-leavers were not to be 'at risk'. I spoke to every formal tertiary institution in Joburg and a number of informal ones. The findings were not promising.

Tertiary education is under-budgeted and under-provided. Spaces at tertiary institutions are limited. Only 7-14 per cent of matriculates are able to continue with tertiary education, my research showed. Two key life skills linked to the types of careers that *were* opening up according to 1998 HRSC reports predicting trends in the future – IT and communications – were generally *under*-taught at schools. School leavers require 'bridging training' if they are to be among the 5 per cent of school leavers lucky enough to get a job. Unfortunately, there are many sham institutions offering 'bridging training'.

I suggested, in my report to the Bomb Shelter, that they place a *Yizō Yizō* character in the University of the Witwatersrand's (Wits) African Literature department (in representation) in order to find a mechanism to highlight many contemporary post-colonial African themes; and another character in a technical

college, studying IT-related subjects since the need for IT skills featured so prominently in my research. I wanted another character to be conned by a bogus institution.

The few openings for post-matriculates led me to explore the type of work that was available to school leavers. Employment and self-employment became issue number three on my list. I looked at entrepreneurship, distance education, informal employment and strategies for unemployment. I argued that post-school youth must be able to employ themselves if they wished to avoid employment linked to lifestyle or criminal violence (such as drug dealing). Readily available paying jobs included working within the sex and ‘escort’ industry. This is not a job I would easily recommend to a school leaver, but this sector could not be ignored. It is a business that has grown most extensively in the inner-city since the mid-1980s (Morris 1999: 258-259). I had subsequently found evidence of the scale of our sex industry in reviews on the internet of South Africa as a sex destination, as well as menus of sex workers who could be delivered to the door, like a pizza.⁵ However, sex work is still unregulated, despite constant lobbying to our human rights’ government to make the sector safer for its workers, who are subjected to violence and are at risk of AIDS and other STDs. Both Childline and the Child Protection Unit, in my interviews with them, linked prostitution with childhood abuse or poverty. One of the *Yizho Yizho* writers researched this link further, spending most of his evenings over the next month in discussion with sex workers at venues and street corners I had identified, getting further texture for the character arcs he was developing.

Other informal city jobs included the usual options – shop/salon assistant, waiting tables, delivering goods, moving into the glamour industries as a trainee dancer, technician, model, DJ, or TV extra – but they also included manual labour. Washing dishes, shovelling coal or collecting garbage might be unpopular choices for school-leavers who would prefer to work in an office, but they are paid, available jobs. Finally, I proposed that elements of South Africa’s ‘risk culture’ such as pyramid schemes and the national lottery should feature in the series.

In the course of my research at the educational institutions and interacting with youth, I identified youth culture as a top-ten issue. ‘Slam poetry’, spoken word and stand-up comedy were then emerging oral genres in South Africa, and I pushed for their representation in the series. I dragged the producers and writing team to a late-night Joburg venue to witness the beginnings of this phenomenon.

This section of my research also raises the twin issues of consumerism and devotion to branded goods. Through talking to poor youths who could not afford originals, I was introduced to the world of ‘Fong Kong’ (fake designer goods). I also found, through my own teaching at Wits University and students’ responses in critical theory classes during this period, that my students were fascinated by and eager to discuss gender and sexuality issues (and were rather bored by

class and race). From there, it was a quick hop to identifying ‘sugar daddies’ as a common factor in the lives of many poor young women. I put some of these issues forward to be taken up more rigorously within the focus groups. The groups were largely run by a student researcher using questions I had assembled. *Yizō Yizō 3* ran at least five focus groups investigating attitudes of groups of school-leavers. The results were speedily built into trial scripts and tested against target audience groups and key consultants. When they rang true and worked for the audience groups, they were used in the final scripts.

In trying to find a theoretical approach to these diverse issues, I was bobbing between cultural studies into youth audiences and sociological studies into new social movements. From both sides (audience studies and Sociology), I found myself being drawn to ‘the Built Environment’ (and hence, ‘the building’) as a major issue. Although the producers were all mad about architecture, they had not imagined their focus might be required to move beyond the aesthetic.

My research into popular TV drama had revealed the importance of a single building for school-going youth viewers. Hodge and Tripp (1986), looking into the popularity among schoolchildren of the Australian series *Prisoner* (in some countries it is called *Prisoner: Cell Block H*), found pupils experienced similarities between the lives of prisoners and their own. They were ‘shut in’, separated from their families, experienced ‘silly rules’ and were bullied by powerful gang leaders (Fiske 1987: 67-68).

My research, similarly, showed tensions between residents of abandoned buildings, landlords and their rent collectors. This developed into a major primary research leg into absentee landlords and the taking over of abandoned buildings by homeless people. In many cases, gangsters were running flats and buildings that had been abandoned by landlords. In 2008, another film company made a movie about a hijacked building, called *Jerusalem*, possibly with someone who had previously worked on the *Yizō Yizō* research or writing team, but it was long after *Yizō Yizō* had explored the problems. Paying tenants existed, at the mercy of sometimes ruthless committees set up by the gangsters, in buildings in which services such as water and garbage collection had been cut because no one was paying levies. In one case in Hillbrow, tenants had resorted to tapping into hidden pipes below the ground in their search for water mains, accidentally opening up the sewage pipe which leaked into the street for months before the council mended it. I have a memory of a Joburg landmark, the Drill Hall, being set on fire, and homeless people catching fire in the middle of the night as they lay sleeping on the floor. I could not say now whether this was in the early days of *Yizō Yizō 3*, before filming started, or after the programme had finished. I remember wondering who had set it on fire – vigilantes who wanted to get rid of the tenants, rogue cops or Red Ants, possibly an illegal landlord...

By the time *Yizho Yizho* aired, there was not a member of the writing team who was not an expert on city buildings. Interviews and focus groups took place with tenant committees, individual residents, city service managers, city property developers and bystanders. The writers went on a downtown tour, including a visit to some squatter camps. An ethical issue arose with this particular stage of the research, I was later told by one of the writers, as the writers felt they were intruding on, or becoming voyeurs of, people's living spaces.

The politics of poverty, unemployment, globalization and HIV/AIDS led directly from the research into the built environment. I argued, in my report for the Bomb, that abandonment, depression and frustration were psychological issues for youth who must fend for themselves. Post-apartheid expectations had not been fulfilled. There were plenty of civil society issues to engage youth. I imagined, because there was no way to establish, that the disenchantment being expressed by individual youths in the early research could herald another phase that would see the mobilization of entire urban communities around global urban issues. Clearly, the inner-city youths I was speaking to were facing different issues from those articulated through youth leagues affiliated to political parties. At the time, the ANC Youth League and Congress-aligned student bodies seemed to be talking in the language of a much earlier era when youth were mobilized against apartheid and Bantu Education (today youth linked to political parties appear to talk in the language of the rich, since Johnny Walker Black Label was the drink of choice at the ANCYL's pre-election party hosted at the swanky Hyatt Hotel, if the *Sunday Times* of 19 April 2009, is to be believed).

I argued that characters in the series should be shown to be involved in taking a stand against the issues they faced. These might include disrepair of essential services (like street lights, as dark places lend themselves to attacks), lack of policing in public parks, or the general lack of institutional responses to residents' queries and problems. I wanted the programme to look at how youths out of school would deal with and communicate these problems. Knowing that South Africa had failed to deliver on post-independence promises to make the internet universally accessible, I wanted *Yizho Yizho* to show youths struggling to access communications technology.

In my report, 'Youth in the City', whose contents are owned by the Bomb, I offered a framework for the new series within a political process model of new social movement theory, particularly since the various characters had much in common (age, nationality, class, interests, environment, structural conditions, aspirations, expectations and so on). The producers initially stated they did not want to formally follow my suggestions on an approach to group action in the building. Theoretical approaches did not interest them. They said the series might or might not explore some collective action by the characters.

While researching buildings and street people, I became acutely aware of the prejudices faced by non-South Africans living in South Africa. My research, conducted in 2002 and written in 2004-5, predicted a major issue emerging with xenophobia. The racism that black people experienced under apartheid has cloaked itself differently, as Fanon predicted it would in his essay 'Racism and Culture' (Fanon 1967). Migrants constantly experience being verbally and physically abused, sometimes in public but more frequently in the government's institutional spaces, particularly at the hands of the police, as Bronwyn Harris has shown (Harris 2001).

My major objective was to persuade *Yizho Yizho* to challenge stereotypes about 'foreigners'. It was difficult because both Gibson and Mahlatsi believed Nigerians were behind the major drug syndicates in Joburg. However, the directors got my political point about the violence that arises through stereotyping and rose to the challenge.

Almost as soon as I had presented my research findings to the producers, writers and SABC Education Unit, the writers began their work on storyline development. They would raise their heads only to eat lunch, get a briefing from an 'expert,' or respond to focus group results. The writing took on average ten weeks to first draft, eleven to second draft, and another eight weeks to develop a script. Writers employed on the series crafted and re-crafted a scene as many as twenty times before the producers were satisfied. Unlike a Hollywood movie where one scriptwriter writes the script, the scripting process in *Yizho Yizho* was producer-driven.

This is both the strength and weakness of the series. The producers were so set on certain ideas before I had even begun my work that no amount of research might have changed their minds. But they did like most of my ideas on identity and support in the city.

The fictional characters Sticks and Bobo are shown struggling to get jobs and food. Though many characters feel let down by the city and lonely without their previous community, they experience the forming of new family bonds. A lonely old woman cares for a young woman on her own. Other youth characters find trusted adults and friends to talk to. Bobo – who has overcome his own drug demons – assists a glue-sniffing street child. On the whole, women characters are mutually supportive and people are caring when Gunman, another popular character, discloses his positive HIV status.

With the portrayal of tertiary education, most of my ideas were followed. The characters Thiza and Nomsa are placed at Wits University. Nomsa studies medicine while Thiza enrolls for a BA (Law) and takes a course in African Literature. He participates in an on-going debate in real time, about language. One of the actors who participated in this debate, Brett Goldin, was subsequently murdered,

though the murder was not linked to the role he played. Javas struggles with technology in his IT studies at the technical college.

The producers addressed entrepreneurial activity seriously through the deployment of their characters. Zakes opens a boxing gym. Snowey sets up a hairdressing salon. Sticks starts a car wash. Bobo dresses as a chicken and sells spicy chicken meals. He is also briefly employed as a coal worker. *Yizho Yizho 3* takes a strong position on the need to put pride away when it comes to finding work. The fictional stripper Nbulungu and sex worker Candy, a character who trades sex for drugs, were the producers' responses to my findings on the sex trade. A pyramid scheme eats up the savings of all who join it.

The producers also made good use of my research into culture, body issues, sexuality and consumerism. The spoken word scene plays a big part of *Yizho Yizho 3*, and showcases new and existing talent such as a piece by Kgafela Oa Magogodi, who worked as a writer on *Yizho Yizho 3* (Ndabele and Magogodi 2003). The culture of consumption is shown through the activities of various characters. Thiza decides to buy designer jeans through the parallel market, Javas investigates cars and Manto finds a 'sugar daddy', who gives her money for a cell phone and fancy food in restaurants in return for sex.

'First sex' is shown through a clumsy lovemaking scene shown entirely from the young woman's point of view while gay issues were explored through Thiza's 'coming-out'. Low self-esteem is represented through a bulimic character who acts out her anxiety by stealing.

Yizho Yizho 3's criminal violence is arguably artistic and at times funny – though mostly scary – and not inevitably linked to sexual violence and sadism. For example, in representation, Thiza's designer jeans are stolen off him in the street. He has to run home in his underwear. Some of the nastiest baddies are shown to be big and powerful while surrounded by their supporters, but very small inside when they are alone.

The producers gave the building in *Yizho Yizho 3* a hero-shadow nature of its own, just like the human characters. The building reaches out and gobbles up characters. Its 'good' side allows creative relationships between inhabitants. Its 'bad' side sees the electrocution of a child who steals wires, as well as the eerie interiors revealed when the services break down.

Despite directorial resistance to representation of political or social movements and accompanying theory, the producers took clear delight in surprising me with their interpretation of my research. They show youth seeking information about their building. They report a corrupt councillor. Adults work with school-leavers to mobilize the tenants of the building to negotiate their rights. They topple their rotten landlady as well as the corrupt councillor, and return care to the building

and its inhabitants. Characters begin to play with street children who have lost their mothers and fathers. They go out on limb to save the life of Candy, the drug-addicted sex worker. They get difficult people to co-operate with service providers and become environmentally friendly, to boot.

Xenophobia, in *Yizho Yizho 3*, is shown through two attacks on a Nigerian character. A South African woman confronts and overcomes her own deep-seated prejudice about foreigners and ends up getting married outside of her culture. Nigerian culture, for a change, is not represented through drug dealers but looked at through discussions over meals and music. The *Yizho Yizho* directors parallel xenophobia to racism and homophobia in their strong filmic treatment of this theme.

My research findings into religion showing that it provides support, food and often shelter for homeless people were largely ignored. It is a pity, because if the producers had worked with that part of the research they would have shown patterns that continued well into 2009. For example, in 2009 the Central Methodist Church in Joburg got noticed by the media because it was taking responsibility for homeless Zimbabwean refugees. Had *Yizho Yizho 3* put better use to my research into the way downtown churches and mosques help desperately poor people survive, it may have been documented much earlier.

Instead Teboho Mahlatsi's villains wear religious icons. His boxer reads the Bible before he punches his opponent. These 'reversals' can be understood in a number of ways and might bring a smile to the viewer but they say little about Joburg. I know from having spoken to Teboho at length about his interest in religious ritual that he wants to deliver multidimensional people to his viewers. The sinner can have an inner life, the good character can have an evil streak. Teboho often uses light to draw attention to an aspect of his meditation on good and evil, with a result that suggests the occult rather than a religious path. But as a viewer living in a world increasingly polarized by religion, I often shudder when I see one or another religion depicted in ways that stereotypes believers. Artists and producers of all types have to keep track of their own prejudices when writing religion; there are consequences for not taking care of the way in which images of communities are generated and might be received. These interpretations function exactly as do all racist imageries. Instead of writing off a character in fiction because of his actions, there have been cases of writers and producers proceeding to write off a faith, with dire consequences – I am thinking now of Theo van Gogh. It will take time to communicate to artistic creators that just as skin colour or language or sexual identity or disability are sites of caution, so it is with religions. They might represent difference, but should not be treated as subjects of comedy or hatred, or to generate fear. It is clear to me why Muslims should take exception to images of themselves as war-mongering hordes or object to

the sexualisation of Islamic believers in filmic imagery. As I write, there is a piece playing at the Market Theatre ('At her feet') in which a Muslim actress walks an uneasy path between a convincing and amusing telling of experiences within her own knowledge, in this instance of racism within her community which she does so well, and an appropriation of crude western propagandistic concepts which portray Muslim men as barbaric and cruel, Muslim women as oppressed. 'The stoned Muslim woman victim' is a trope annoyingly imported to South Africa, but why exactly should we want to import it? Why not show our Muslim women as tough and outspoken as they often are, our Muslim men as frequently gentle family men, and export those images? And why not demystify the veil? Why buy into western prejudices and represent the veil as a fetish? It is, after all, something that has always existed widely and is worn in varied styles in both our Muslim and non-Muslim cultures here not as 'cover' but as statement – of respect, of pride, and of fashion.

Similarly, I would understand why a down-town Christian faith worker who has slogged tirelessly on behalf of the poor might be saddened to see the occultization of a branch of his or her religion privileged within a fictional piece, while the good work on which his faith has embarked is ignored. Spare a thought for poor Paul Verryn, a priest who survived a character assassination in the now forgotten years of Winnie Mandela's Football Club in the late 1980s, only to be fingered by irate government officials as the pastor in the woodpile of refugees in 2009. The *Sowetan* of 9 April 2009, tells a disturbing tale about two men who claimed they were sent to kill Verryn for R200, 000. They were arrested.

Religion notwithstanding, on the whole I cannot complain about the Bomb's use of my research. Xenophobia, as a national issue, was to raise its ugly head in 2008 and remains one of the country's most difficult human rights issues a year later. It pleases me to have been working for the programme that opened up the issue in such a sensitive way; I wish *Yizho Yizho 3* had been held back until now because many of its issues were ahead of its time.

For example, my research showed a problem of youth at risk at a time when the Metro Police would not admit to it. Despite the SAPS statistics that have subsequently been revealed and which are cited above, that up to 14,000 youth offenders are arrested every month, we have yet to see the Metro Police owning the extent of the problem. In 2010, Joburg will be hosting the Fifa World Cup. The managers of the city will be doing their best to contain the problem, known about from 2002 by *Yizho Yizho* and hence indirectly its sponsor, the Department of Education. The matter is finally in the public sphere. Rowan Philip of *The Sunday Times* of 5 April 2009, wrote that one quarter of South Africa's children are 'at risk' of leading anti-social lives because of 'bad parenting, poverty, poor role models and materialism' (Rowan 2009). So what is the city going to do about it?

Working on the series made me understand the fragility of our democracy. Shortly after *Yizho Yizho 3* began its run in 2004, there were calls from Parliament to ban the series. What had transpired to make a government pay for a show in 1998 that it would try to ban in 2004? And how can you ban the fiction of a country while trying to force that country to believe that a massive arms deal involving the whole government was mere fiction?

We have reached a moment where, if Claude Lévi-Strauss permits me to take his words, change their meaning a little and return them to him, we might find the answers in the exchange of a glance 'heavy with patience, serenity and mutual forgiveness', with... a cat (Levi-Strauss 1973: 415).

Notes

1. Muff Andersson, *Intertextuality, violence and memory in Yizho Yizho: youth TV drama, 2009*. A book in the 'Imagined South Africa' series edited by Abebe Zegeye. Unisa Press: Pretoria.
2. Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, email to Muff Andersson advising on the narratorial stance written on 1 April 2009, copied to Virginie Niang, Marindo Ravayi and Pinkie Mekgwe.
3. See, for example, a new collection on the übertext edited by Nathalie Collé-Bak, Monica Latham, and David Ten Eyk, *Left-out: Texts and their Ur-Texts*, Nancy (France): University of Nancy Press, 2009. My contribution in this volume is 'Writing «Dawgs» as Shadowmen: Killing me Softly with Tsotsitaal, Chickens, Apples'.
4. Names have been changed.
5. Internet sources in 2002 were www.sex.co.za and www.worldsexguide.org/johannesburg.txt.html

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