

4.0 Television and Film as popular culture **(Published as a Unit for a BA in Media Studies Module)**

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4.1 Introduction

Television and film are part of our everyday life. We mean, our life styles have increasingly been associated with the television and film in one way or the other. This makes film and television part of our popular culture. Your hairstyle, dress code, speech behaviour, eating habits, family life style and understanding of the world are constantly reflected and influenced by radio, television and the film industry. Thus, information from television, films and mass media in general, has impacted greatly on how we spend our daily lives. The television in particular, is arguably the most important source of information and entertainment in the modern world. Apparently, to talk about television is also to talk about the film because television without film is unimaginable.

Zimbabwe has currently one television channel, The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings owned Television (ZTV) that provides entertainment and information. Joy television which briefly programmed in 2002 was phased out when ZTV reclaimed its license. However, a number of households with satellite technology, have access to television channels from all over the world provided they pay the stipulated subscriptions. Cause for concern is about the majority of people in rural areas who do not own television sets. Despite this, a fair share of television and film content is transmitted to them by word of mouth. Zimbabwe still commands a strong oral tradition. This, however, is not an ideal situation. Rural people should be empowered to own television sets. Movie houses should also move with speed into rural areas so as to offset the imbalance. We briefly justify why television and film are considered as popular culture below.

4.2 Viewing film and television as popular culture

As you are aware, the term popular culture was coined in the 19th century to connote, if you like, 'the world surrounding us.' You are aware that television and film are part of our world toady much as they inform about our contemporary world. You may as well be knowledgeable of the fact that popular culture is mass produced. It is delivered in large quantities through the mass media. Similarly, television sets, programmes and films are produced by machine in large quantities to a mass audience. You will find it increasingly difficult to name anything in our mass culture that is not either mass produced and promoted by the mass media including television and films. This is why the terms mass culture and popular culture are often used interchangeably.

Television and films also qualify as popular culture because they are not for free. For example in Zimbabwe you need to have a large sum of money to acquire a television set and to hire films. Films shown in movie houses are also expensive.

The other point is, television and films are consumed by people in different places daily. For example, our studio 263 can be watched by people in Zimbabwe, in the region and

beyond. The other aspect is that television and films can be played to anyone's convenience. Let's not forget the issue of copy rights which seeks to protect television programmes and films from abuse by unscrupulous people be it through reproduction and piracy. As can be noted anything in popular culture has copy rights. Think about coca cola, designer jeans, a t-shirt and so on.

The other aspect is that of interdiscursivity or bricolage, - a situation whereby films and television programmes would often refer to scientific, political, social and economic facets of life at the same time. This can also be referred to as intertextuality. A good example is that of say a mazoe advert making allusions to the scientific processes involved in the manufacturing of the product and the artistic presentation of the labels, arrangements of packs in a shelf and so on. This takes us to the fact that products of popular culture lack obvious authors and originators but plurality of sources. For example, a movie is a product of the writer(s), actors, engineers, drivers, photographers, editors and film directors.

The next point is that consumption of television programmes and films is worked over. Desire is motivated through well calculated promotional effort. Therefore, as commodities, television and films are paid for through advertisement. This takes us to the argument that, 'Popular culture is commercial in organization and distinctly urban in tone' (Chambers, 1985:6). Lastly, films and television are associated with an amorphous sweep often viewed as a threat to what was assumed to have once been a more 'healthy' and 'genuine' culture of the people (ibid: 6).

4.3 History of film

The history of film dates back to 65 BCE when the Roman poet Lucretius discovered the principle of persistence vision which was later proven by the astronomer Ptolemy of Alexandria in 165 BCE. The concept was carried forward by the Belgian, Joseph Antonio Ferdinand, who developed the phenakistoscope in 1832. This device allowed pictures to appear to move. This was a landmark achievement considering that films make use of motion. However, by 1887, the San Francisco photographer Edward Maybridge was the first to photograph motion when he set up 24 still cameras along a racetrack. As horses raced bypassed the cameras, they broke the strings which were hooked to each camera. This enabled the shutter to open and expose the film. Before 1900 Thomas A. Edison had invented the kinetoscope which made it possible to take films in more or less the same way as today.

In the Western world, by 1900 movies had become popular attraction in amusement arcades, music halls, traveling fairs, wax museums and vaudeville houses in many countries. Another important development happened in 1903 when the American film director Edwin S. Potter released his most important film entitled Great Train Robbery. It was the first movie to use modern film techniques such as filming out of sequence for practical reasons and later editing the scenes into their proper order. By 1901 many studios were created due to an increase in the demand for films. This led to a rise in movie stars in 1910. These were popularized by television, radio and newspapers and

they also became household talks by their fans. However, the film industry began in earnest in 1911 when the Nestor company built the first studio in a district of Los Angeles known as Hollywood. Today Hollywood has become the world's hub of motion pictures.

By 1913 the American Director D.W. Griffith defined the art of motion pictures. Some of his techniques like altering camera angles, using close-up in dramatic way, breaking scene up into multiple shots, are still used today. This led to the mass production of films in 1915. By 1925 most of the Hollywood motion- picture studios were established namely, Fox, Metro- Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Paramount, United Artists, Universal, and Warner Brothers. The Warner Brothers developed a movie with sound in 1927 and, by 1929 public demanded only movies with sound. By the 1930s some of the most popular dramas of the time were musicals, gangster films, and occasional horror films. These led to the rise in professional actors in 1947. In Zimbabwe examples of professional actors are the late Safirio Madzikatire and Walter Muparitsa.

Activity 1

1. Explain why film and television are conceived as popular culture.
2. Identify key players in the history of film and account for their contributions.

4.4 Film Genres

The phrase *film genre* refers to types of film texts. Dirks (1996-2006) also define a genre as an identifiable type of film text with a certain trait of character, behaviour, sequencing of episodes, action, setting, plot and motifs to constitute content and form. There are eleven film genres but since the adoption of the 75% local content policy in Zimbabwe, ZTV has almost phased out genres like gangster films, westerners and horror films that tend to foster negative behaviour patterns particularly among the youths. In some instances though, war films are shown as a way of depicting dangers of war particularly in hot spots like the Middle East. Let us go through each genre.

4.4.1 Action and Adventure Films

These are closely related. Both of them are associated with hyper- activity usually featuring physical clashes and chases, at times with rescue operations, escapes and destructive crises (e.g. floods, explosions, natural disasters and fires). In these films good people are depicted fighting and usually overcoming bad people. Such films are designed for audience escapism. In Zimbabwe action films like *Most Wanted*, *The Terminator*, *Under Siege*, *Die Hard* and *Vandem Films* have been popular with the youths and adults alike. Regrettably though, all of these are products of Hollywood.

4.4.2 Comedy Films

Comedies are mainly most popular with women and children since they offer humorous plots designed to ease tension by provoking laughter and amusement. They also tend to exaggerate contexts, language and action. In Zimbabwe the following comedies have been quite appealing: *The Gods Must be Crazy*, *Wedding Crashers*, *In Her Shoes*, *Family Matters* and the *Home Alone* series. In addition, studio 263 and the mini-series *Amakorokoza* have attracted a large audience as well.

4.4.3 Crime and Gangster Films

As put by Dirks (ibid), “Crime (gangster) films are developed around the sinister actions of criminals and mobsters, particularly bank robbers, underworld figures and ruthless hoodlums who operate the law, stealing and murdering their way through life.” Some Zimbabwe film goers have been attracted to films in this category like, The Terminator, Woodlam and The Best of Best series. However, due to their lack of positive cultural values, such films are no longer shown on ZTV.

4.4.4 Drama Films

Drama films are those in which real life situations are acted upon. They can be viewed as serious plot-driven presentations, portraying realistic characters, settings and life situations. They often involve intense character development and interaction. Due to realism, drama films tend to have a high entertainment and educative value. Being probably the largest film genre, drama films have various sub-genres like melodrama, epics (historical) dramas and romantic genres. Examples from ZTV are Lifeline, Why Me?, Neria, Mukadota series, Notorious Kapfupi and Gringo mini-series. Our last example, in this category, is the America film, Maid in Manhattan. Since they exploit various realities in life, drama films can be reviewed as both influencing and being influenced by life. Hence, many people easily identify with characters like Neria, Gringo and Kapfupi in the way they may behave and dress.

4.4.5 Epics/ Historical Films

These are films that show fearlessness and heroic exploits be it historical or fictitious. The genre includes fictitious costume, stage dramas, historical dramas such as those depicting the Zimbabwean War of Liberation. Other examples of epics are Roots and Alex Hailey Films. Epics are closely related to adventure films. You might be aware that epics can be historical or imagined event, mythic, legendary, or heroic figure. Epics that depict the military prowess of fighters of liberation wars tend to inculcate a sense of patriotism couched in bravery, resilience and determination among people. The challenge is to produce epics that teach values of oneness, and communalism in Zimbabwe in keeping with the 75% local content policy.

4.4.6 Horror Films

This is a highly controversial genre in that it derives its entertainment value from instilling fear, shock and terror to the audience. They are often combined with science fiction when monsters are linked with corruption of technology or when the environment is threatened by ghostly aliens. The horror film may be linked with the African fable in that both genres may incorporate changelings that render audiences in a world of make believe. Usually we witness serial killers, satanic characters or the all powerful Dracula character. You may note that despite its shortcomings the genre has a high entertainment value as it enables audiences to derive pleasure from fear. Examples are, Blade 1, 2 and 3, Friday The 13 th and the Nigerian Chains.

4.4.7 Musical (Dance) Films

This genre combines the performance of music and dance as part of the film narrative. They can be conceived as films in which the plot is centered on intertwined music, dance, song or choreography. It has the musical comedy or the concert as its subgenre. Examples that come to mind are Mary Poppins, The Body Guard and Fighting Temptations.

4.4.8 Science Fiction Films

These are films with a shed of scientific discourse and worldview. They are often quasi-scientific in that they need not dwell on pure scientific data in terms of scope and sequence but should reflect some form of scientific notions with respect to vision and imagination. As such, they are complete with heroes, aliens, distant planets and impossible quests, improbable settings, fantastic places (e.g. under the sea). They also showcase great dark and shadowy villains, futuristic technology, unknown and unknowable forces and monsters. You might have observed that they are closely related to adventure or action films. Science fiction films are indicative of man's wild and moderate imaginations as he thinks seriously about strange scientific developments such as discovery of fires that would destroy the whole world. You may be familiar with science fiction films like X-Men, Amagedon: Arnold Swazneiger, Men in Black and Herman. The genre has attracted a considerable audience among both old and young people all over the globe.

4.4.9 War Films

This genre revolves around the tribulation and suffering brought by horrors of war situations. Combat fighting of all categories take place through out the plot. This genre is closely linked to action/adventure film genres. In Zimbabwe the local film, Flame, which dwells on the liberation war has attracted huge followers. The South African Saraffina has also proved to be popular.

4.4.10 Eclectic/ Non Genre Film Categories

A number of films that have been popular in Zimbabwe are eclectic in that they share aspects of different film genres. As such they are non-genre films. In this category you may recall animated films popular with children namely, Pinochino, Codelyko, The Smurfs and The Turtles.

British films such as between the lines, Some Mothers Do Have Them and Keeping Appearances, also form a special category of non-genre films consumed by some Zimbabweans.

Another category is that of family films which attract family members of all ages. Examples are the ZTV programmed Why Me?, and Lifeline. Further examples are, Home Alone, Millions, Pride and Prejudice, The Lion King and Mary Poppins.

There is also a category of cult films like a number of Nigerian films that have been programmed on our local television. Six Feet Under – a USA film for homosexuals, Origin of The Earth and Animals are other examples. There is also the ETV programmed Third Degree. In addition, serial films such as the local studio 263 and the mini-series

Amakorokoza are eclectic and hence can be perceived as non-generic. These have made an appeal to a large audience locally and beyond our borders. Other serial films are the US soaps entitled The Young and The Restless, the South African Black Stage and Passions.

You could have picked up the fact that sexual/ erotic films like Santa Babra, Desperate Housewives and Basic Instincts are non-genre films.

The last cluster of non genre films is that of silent films such as Charlie Chaplin and Mr Beans which were both developed in the United Kingdom. These used to feature on ZTV in the 90s.

Activity 2

3. Define the concept 'film genre.'
4. Identify and describe film genres that have been popular in Zimbabwe.
5. In your view why have some genre been unpopular in Zimbabwe?
6. Define and give your own examples of non-genre films.

4.5 Media Projection Cycle

We now look at the media- projection- cycle, also called the elitist- specialized- cycle. This theory was developed in 1971 by two scholars of mass communication namely, John Merrill and Ralph Lowenstein, who argued that all media develop in three stages. They argued that all mass communication media start in the elite stage. This is when media appeal to, and is consumed by, the affluent leaders in the culture. However, in Africa it is very difficult to conceive how this applies because even if very few people have access to media content such information is shared orally with others either in public transport, at work places, in beer halls and in other walks of life. There is a consensus among scholars that Africa is still mainly an oral society where information is passed by word of mouth as people interact in life. So, even if few people might have access to television and film contents, as is the case with the elite cycle, in Africa information spreads rapidly through the word of mouth.

The elite stage points to the culture of the educated aristocratic and wealthy. It is also called high culture while the culture of the common people, the peasant class is folk culture or low culture. However, as has been already maintained, oral cultures in Africa make this distinction blurred and almost negligible.

The theory proceeds to say as a nation breaks through the barriers of poverty and illiteracy, its media enter into the popular stage where it is enjoyed by the mass culture. The third stage is that of specialization which is characterized by that media meets needs of specialized groups in a fragmented society. At this stage we can have films of groups like women, children, gays and Christians much as there can be programmes of the educated and the affluent. It is argued that some rich nations are already in the third stage of demassification of the mass media (Roy, 1994). However, African States are still at the stage of mass culture, where people still strongly depend on oral heritage for the transmission of cultural values.

Activity 3

7. Write short notes on the media projection cycle and indicate how it relates to Zimbabwe.

4.6.0 Brief History of the Television

Scholars are generally agreed that by 1948 television had literary taken over from the radio which had enjoyed a monopoly of the air waves as from 1916, when it started, to the Great Depression of 1929, right up to the end of the second world war in 1945. As you may be aware, the advantage of television over radio was its ability to combine verbal and non verbal (e.g. in form of pictures and film) information. You would agree that it started as a novelty then. Its popularity however, was accelerated by its inheritance of radio programmes like the popular vaudeville (a form of story telling and acting), variety shows, political, economic and religious programmes, soaps and advertising. We look at its history more closely below.

The concept of television was first conceived in 1923 when Vladimir Zworykin, a Russian working for Westinghouse Corporation in the US developed the iconoscope. This was the first practical electronic tube for a television camera. From this Zworykin developed the kinescope of picture tube. In 1928 General Electric improved upon Zworykin's effort by starting to experiment with telecasting. This made it possible for an National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) station in New York, to offer regularly scheduled programmes in 1923. By 1936 a number of companies in New York as well as the British Broadcasting Corporation, were offering regular programmes. The mention of the BBC is critical for this is where Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation originated.

You may want to know how this history relates to commercial television programmes. It suffices to mention that commercial television started around 1941, slowed down during the Second World War and picked up with greater vigour thereafter. Television began to generate interest in popular culture in 1947. Television broadcast was able to spread in 1951 due to the discovery of a microwave relay system that allowed for the coast- to – coast network broadcast. However, in Zimbabwe television dates back to the 1950s.

4.6.1 Television Entertainment

You have already noted that television inherited programmes from the radio. So, former radio entertainers introduced radio programmes like the vaudeville, variety shows, game shows, quiz shows and so on to television. Television became popular instantly among those who could afford it and by 1950s prerecorded dramatic series were introduced. The mini-series like, Why Me?, Amakorokoza, Lifeline et cetera, shown on ZTV today began in the mid 1950s. Sports television which is part of our popular culture today, began in the 1950s after the development of a new technology in the form of instant replay television recorders. This made it possible to show live, taped and filmed sport events as we have them today.

4.6.2 Tabloid Television

This is a form of television programming that concentrates on sensationalizing information in the mode of tabloid newspapers. Tabloid television emerged in 1988 with

the media mogul Rupert Murdoch promoting television stations that specialized on sex, murder and general mayhem. You may be aware that Murdoch, who owns Fox Broadcasting Company has a number of tabloid newspapers, radio and television stations in the US, Australia and England. His media is associated with the biased reporting of wars in Iraq, Lebanon, Rwanda and that of generally creating the image of a conflict ridden, suffering and backward Africa. But, just like any other part of the world, Africa has her light and sad moments. This calls for balanced and objective media coverage.

Activity 4

8. State the major highlights in the history of the television.
9. Write short notes on tabloid television.

4.7 Television, Films and Post-Modernism

Television and films and other forms of modern media have been blamed for playing a significant role in popularizing aspects of high or elite culture. This goes with the thinking that definitions of cultural excellence have traditionally been associated with dominant or powerful groups and classes in society. In Zimbabwe like in other African states, this is debatable since government adopted media policies that call for 75% local content. This enabled radio and television broadcasts to reflect the cultural aspirations of the people of Zimbabwe in a more favourable way. Of concern however, is the issue of films that are shown in privately owned movie houses such as Repts Theatre, Seven Arts, Vistrama, Rainbow and Liberty. Definitely, these have played a significant role in inculcating aspects of post modern culture particularly among the youths. The kind of fragmented and sometimes anti-historical life styles removed from time and space associated with the youths partly stems from movie houses and satellite dishes. This is the case as post-modernism arises from a confluence of cultures aided by technology.

As put by Real (in O'Sullivan et. al. 1994:238), "post-modernism as a designation for a media culture points to a sense of irony, build commercialism, a playful ambiguity, a nostalgic blend of past, and present disparate art styles, a lack of absolutes." Real goes on to argue that it is unstable in that, "popular culture and media images saturate and increasingly dominate our sense of identity and reality, that there is no longer a reality outside of popular culture and the media and the fragmenting increasingly intertextual world (ibid:28). So, communication technology like television and films constantly provide us with a culture of mass production and consumption. It is a culture where images and copies exist without being tied to the authentic original. Popular culture has thus eclipsed art and high culture and the simulated and contrived has replaced the real of experience and history (ibid). In this culture people concentrate more on consumption and how to spend than on how to conserve and produce. Children are usually undisciplined. Social styles are pursued to satisfy the individual's ego and not society. Hence, style is emphasized at the expense of content and substance. So, you can get elements from the past juxtaposed with the present on television and in films and these find inroads into real life be it as dress code, hair style and language behaviour.

The other aspect is that of confusion of history and place, time and space. These once secure anchors of identity tend to be confused so that we end up having incoherent entities and spaces. Similarly, national cultures and identities have been eroded by forces of global communication like films and television. These have collectively affected public life, home life and everyday life with individual withdrawing into the inner space. His new environs are the home, the domestic and connection with the outside and public sphere is highly fragmented.

Activity 5

10. Make a brief summary of what you have read in this passage.

4.8.0 The Cultural Impact of television and films

Scholars of popular culture like Tom Adaba (1987), Briggs Adam and Cogley Paul(1998) and Stanley J. Baran (2002) contend that television and films have had profound impact on cultural traits in the modern world. Of particular importance is the **Modeling Theory** which states that under certain conditions people will imitate television and film models and adopt their patterns of behaviour. Closely related to this is the **Cultural Norms Theory** which argues that the media tend to establish the standards or norms which define acceptable behaviour in society. From these theories it can be argued that both television and film have tremendously contributed in the transformation of life styles of most people in Zimbabwe and the world over hence claiming a major stake in culture change. Scholars further argue that the television's impact on culture was instantaneous. For instance, "Nielsen reports that the average television usage in U.S households in 16 hours and 56 minutes a day. This translates to more than 2,400 hours/ year – the most time consuming activity besides sleeping. However, in developing worlds it suffices to argue that television consumption rates are on the increase particularly during evenings and weekends. Before we explore the socialization effects of television and film let us conclude this paragraph by citing what some prominent African scholars say about the impact of television in Africa. On this issue Domatob et al (1987:343) write:

In almost 30 years of its introduction to the African scene, television which started as a novelty than a necessity has grown to be a veritable and powerful means of communication in the African setting The audio visual appeal of this medium has presented it as a rare source of information, education and entertainment.

4.8.1 Socialization effects

Television dominance as a household activity has been blamed for reducing interpersonal family socialization processes credited for transmitting cultural awareness among people particularly in Africa where cultural values are transmitted by the word of mouth from generation to generation. Hence, culture being disseminated to youngsters today comes from the tube rather than the family. So, after- dinner- conversations, and story telling among family members including parents reading to children have been eroded by a host of television programmes and films such as variety shows, adventure films, behind the camera et cetera. Television usage in homes with children is the highest and, from studies carried in the US it is believed that the average child has watched more than 18,000 hours of television by the time she/he reaches the age of 15 (Wilson, Stan Le Roy 1994:260). This needs to be compared with 11,000 hours of schooling and 5000 hours of church attendance. This makes television the most powerful tool for socialization that

civilization has devised. In Africa a similar socialization effect is realized mostly in urban settings where the majority own television sets.

The cultural impact of television needs not be underestimated given that it is a commodity liked by both the elite (high culture) and non-elite (low culture) groups of our society. Ever since its arrival television has become a psychological necessity hence an important factor in popular culture. It carved its own niche by bringing the world to individuals isolated from the dominant culture. In addition, television has played an important role in reflecting, for the masses, the cultural changes that have been occurring in society. Land redistribution, marital family relations, political developments (e.g. the 1987 Unity Accord bet ZANU P.F and P.F ZAPU) and the Look East Policy, as well as monetary policies have all been effectively disseminated to people by the mass media with the television playing a major role.

Besides merely reflecting cultural changes television helps transmit them to the masses and thus accelerating their acceptance into the mainstream popular culture. For example, television has played a significant role in disseminating information on equality between men and women adopted by government soon after independence. Hence, women are being portrayed in other than stereotyped roles. In adventure films, for example, they are depicted playing male only roles of cops, detectives and lawyers. In the local television programme *Breaking New Ground*, they are depicted playing prominent entrepreneurial, academic, political and economic roles.

Together, with other media of mass culture, television and films have been criticized for transforming culture into a commodity that can be bought and sold. Television in particular has been blamed for being intellectually destructive because it provides and creates a narcotic function in society. It promotes a culture of consuming rather than conserving cultural objects. It is equally criticized for conforming to average tastes but doing nothing to elevate the cultural levels of the masses. This is however, debatable since policies like the adoption of 75% local content are aimed at promoting indigenous cultures. You may want to reflect on the television drama *Tiri Parwendo* (We are on a journey) and the programme *Nhaka Yedu* (Our Heritage). You may have picked up the criticism that some of these programmes amount to the homogenization of culture. Still, this can be dismissed by the fact that the adoption of eclectic media policy dominated by **The Social Responsibility** and **The Libertarian Theories** in independent Zimbabwe, was a noble idea aimed at ensuring that all cultural values are given due media attention. However, implementation is still problematic.

The other criticism is that both television news and entertainment are treated superficially. This is the case since there seems to be preoccupation with conflict and celebrity status where the major focus is to entertain rather than to inform and educate. However, we have a fair share of educative and informative television programmes though few namely, High School Quiz Shows and revision lessons. For adults there are dramas like *Nzungu Muriva* which pursues the theme of morality and responsible behaviour. More work needs to be done though.

Lastly, television and film have been blamed for sexually and morally corrupting people. Our response to this is that media should be more socially responsible. At the moment we applaud the removal of anti-cultural lyrics and movies on television. More efforts should however be put in ensuring that private movie houses follow suit.

4.8.2 Television, Film and violence

The **Information Imitation Theory** holds that television (and film) violence plays a prominent role in causing bizarre and violent behaviour in society. The theory holds that some people particularly those associated with unbalanced mental dispositions, imitate what they see on television and film. You want to critically think about the impact of films of war scenes in Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia and Rwanda. Similarly, violent scenes in television dramas like Kapfupi and Nzungu Muriva may influence people to be violent especially the youth. A number of studies carried support the relationship between aggressive behaviour and television violence. One such study was carried in 1982 by the US National Institute of Mental Health. It concluded that,

“... the scientific support for the causal relationship [between violence on television and aggressive behaviour] derives from the convergence of findings from many studies, the great majority of which demonstrate a positive relationship between televised violence and later aggressive behaviour (Wilson, Stan Le Roy, 1994:263).

We conclude by pointing out the measures taken to minimise television- violence- inspired- aggressive- behaviour in Zimbabwe which are:

- The removal of detective and horror films;
- The adoption of the 75% local content policy;
- Minimising of dramas that include violent episodes;
- Restricting some films with violent scenes to late night viewing aimed at adults.

4.8.3 Television, Films and Children

Research has been conducted to find out possible psychological, emotional and physiological effects of television on children. A study carried out in 1993 established that excessive television viewing by children lowers their metabolism and causes obesity. However, this can be dismissed for lack of preciseness on the term ‘excessive.’ A more credible finding is that by the National Television and Radio Centre. This followed research activities of the 1950s and 1960s which concluded that, “For some children, under some conditions, some television is harmful while for other children under some conditions, it may be beneficial. It proceeded to argue that for most children, under most conditions, most television is probably neither harmful nor particularly beneficial” (Wilson, 1994:265). It is however, generally agreed that most children learn some behaviour from television. Thus, television either positively or negatively influences children. It is argued that children from broken families like those run by single parents are the most vulnerable to bad influences from television. Generally, parents are urged to explain television programmes to their children in order to circumvent negative influences. We conclude by emphasizing that family stability determines how television and film viewing affect children.

4.9 The Future of Television and Film

Scholars like Biagi (1999), name the teleputer, a perceived combination of a computer and television as a possible replacement of the television, film included. This aside, unless such a development becomes reality, the future of television and film as popular culture remains bright. Future generations will continue to enjoy fast and dramatic programmes offered by television and film today. However, the real challenge for Africa is three- fold. Firstly, there is need to churn out more socially responsible television programmes. Thus, Africa needs television broadcasts and films that correctly inform and entertain her citizens. This is a call for television and films that inculcate positive cultural values of the African people couched in the philosophy of Ubuntuism. Secondly, Africa needs to fully democratise her air space by allowing other players, mainly from her citizenry, to introduce more specialized programmes in the areas of gospel music, religious debates and issues, sports and political discourse. Lastly, Africa must fight her economic challenges in order to adequately fund her information and entertainment industries. This would also facilitate training for high profile staff for the media and improve upon the infrastructure in the industry. A sound economy would enable all citizens to acquire television sets as well as to fully participate in the entertainment industry. It is sad to note that currently most people in rural areas do not own television sets thereby making them to solely rely on oral communication for television relayed information and entertainment. The current hurdles faced in the information and entertainment sectors in Africa require an urgent economic recovery plan.

Activity 6

11. With particular reference to Zimbabwe, show how television and film viewing is related to how people behave.

12 Briefly discuss challenges faced by television and film in Zimbabwe. Also try to suggest your own solutions to the problems.

5.0 Summary

In this unit you have learnt the following:

- Television and film are part of our popular culture as they both influence and are influenced by our every day life.
- Film began in 65 BC when Lucretius discovered the principle of persistence vision. However, film industry started in 1911 when the Wester Company built the Hollywood studios. This led to the emergence of professional acting by 1947.
- There are 11 types of film texts called film genres. Some of the examples given and explained within the Zimbabwean context are, Action/Adventure Films, Drama Films, Historical Films. Non-genre films were also explained.
- Media projection Cycle was given as consisting of elite, popular and specialized stages. Even though Zimbabwe is still at the popular stage it also relies on oral communication.
- Tabloid television tends to sensationalise negative information about Africa.

- Television and films are responsible for creating a fragmented society in Africa as enshrined in Post-Modernism mainly associated with some urban youths.
- The Information Imitation Theory, The Modeling Theory and the Cultural Norms Theory attribute both negative and positive cultural values of society to the media.
- Television and film have a bright future wherein they should be more responsible in fostering positive cultural values and identities among Africans. This is only possible if Africa addresses her economic challenges.

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