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Crossing “The Line”

A Case Study in South African Media Practice and Democratization



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In his study of cultural politics during the apartheid era, Rob Nixon (1994, 1) observed that no other struggle for decolonization during the post-World War II period has been as fully globalized as that in South Africa. Over the course of this century, the anti-apartheid movement developed substantial international links that proved decisive in promoting eventual political change. In response to these global links, the ruling National Party attempted to choke off unsettling images from abroad through the creation of an elaborate state-controlled media apparatus. Once the regime began broadcasting in 1976, television played a particularly crucial role in constructing and disseminating images of national identity (Scannell 1989). The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) gave the regime a powerful tool for articulating popular identity and for controlling access to representations from outside the borders of the apartheid state. Contemporary South Africa is confronted by the crucial question of how to transform this strategic organ of apartheid ideology into a forum for the advancement of national unity and equality.

This task is complicated by the fundamental geopolitical changes that were coeval with the dismantling of apartheid. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid economic development of certain countries in the Third World challenged the ideological foundations not only of apartheid but also of the various movements struggling for national liberation in South Africa. Moreover, the anti-apartheid movement has gained power in a nation polarized not simply by the legacy of racial discrimination and hatred bequeathed by apartheid. South Africa must also surmount the social divisions that characterize an economy segmented into a sophisticated Information Age sector, the increasingly embattled manufacturing



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and agricultural industries, and the burgeoning unemployed population (Louw 1992, 12). This split is likely to grow more contentious as South Africa's international isolation ends and it finds itself more open to global forms of uneven development.

In conjunction with these realignments, new technologies like satellite and cable television have highlighted the transnational flows of information that are one of the most visible and significant faces of contemporary capitalism (Morley and Robins 1995). Media megacorporations with a truly global reach have thrown the nation-state into crisis, creating novel forms of transnational and infra-national exchange that escape and undermine the regulatory power and ideological presumptions of the national public sphere. Questions concerning popular access to contemporary communications technologies are thus central to the democratization of development in post-apartheid South Africa (Tomaselli 1989; Louw 1991).

As Néstor García Canclini (1997) recently put it: Who is entitled to narrate identity within this new world order? This question is a particularly pressing one in post-apartheid South Africa. In the years since the unbanning of resistance organizations such as the African National Congress (ANC), South African society has been transformed to an extent few could have previously predicted. Yet, the sweeping changes of the past decade have also shifted the terms that animated the national liberation struggle. Six years after the ANC's electoral victory, South Africa remains one of the most materially unequal and violent societies on earth. Could the ANC's victory have been a Pyrrhic one since its control of the nation-state was won at precisely the moment when this site was being hollowed out by the transformations associated with globalization? More specifically, how does popular culture in post-apartheid South Africa reflect both the promises and the pratfalls of current initiatives to establish democratic access to a rapidly reconfiguring public sphere?

Such questions can perhaps best be approached through discussion of a specific television broadcast that punctuated the transition to democracy in South Africa in a particularly dramatic manner. *The Line* (a.k.a., *In a Time of Violence* 1994), a docudrama that aired shortly after the historic elections in 1994, was seen by many South Africans as a concrete embodiment of the ANC's call for a multicultural, nonracial South Africa. Yet, its airing also occasioned large demonstrations outside SABC headquarters in downtown Johannesburg, as well as death threats against the film's cast and crew. This milestone television series thus offers a particularly significant case study of the central ambivalences at the heart of South African national identity during the transition to democracy.

In addition, *The Line* (1994) engages critically with the globalizing socio-economic forces that traverse the "new" South Africa, threatening to render democracy and multiculturalism nothing more than empty slogans. Yet,

production and transmission of the film would have been unthinkable without the signal institutional transformations that took place at the SABC in response to popular mobilizations for equitable access to the media. Hein Marais's (1998) recent work suggests both the potential as well as limits of such interventions. While *The Line* represents some of the contradictions that beset liberatory initiatives during the transition to democracy, it also embodies and evokes the resources of hope with which new forms of community are being shaped in post-apartheid South Africa.

Television and Apartheid Era Ideology

To understand the groundbreaking significance of this broadcast, however, *The Line* (1994) needs to be placed in historical perspective. South Africa was the last major industrialized nation to introduce television. It did so only after the Meyer Commission concluded in 1971 that "South Africa must have its own television service in order to nurture and strengthen its own spiritual roots, to foster respect and love for its spiritual heritage and to respect and project the South African way of life, as it has developed here in its historical context" (quoted in Steenveld and Strelitz 1994). When it began broadcasting in 1976, SABC-TV was organized as a public service broadcaster, in emulation of the British Broadcasting Corporation's tradition of relative political autonomy. Yet, behind this ethos lay a long history of apartheid thought that shaped SABC-TV's conception of its audience, not only according to the ideological notion of the nuclear family but also in terms of two distinct racial groups: black and white (Steenveld and Strelitz 1994, 40). The Meyer Commission's references to "spiritual roots" and "heritage" similarly encode the apartheid logic of separate and uneven development using key words that invoke the Afrikaner doctrine of the nation as a sacred and essential unit of difference (Nixon 1994, 59-62).

Notwithstanding such invocations, the commission's attitude was itself a significant transformation in the ideology undergirding National Party thinking since its assumption of state power in 1948. As the head of both the SABC during the 1960s and of the *Broederbond*, the shadowy network of Afrikaner men who developed apartheid's central doctrines, Dr. Piet Meyer himself played a prominent role in attacks on the putative denationalizing role of television. Unlike print and radio, which were used as central agents in consolidating apartheid ideology, television was seen by Meyer and other National Party ideologues as an agent of cultural miscegenation in the 1960s. Television was "the devil in the black box," a subversively innocuous intrusion into the sacred precincts of the Afrikaner home that threatened to undermine divinely ordained hierarchies of gender and ethnicity (Nixon 1994, 51-55). Transmitting transgressive images from what was, in the National Party's eyes, an increasingly decadent Britain and United

States, television furthermore promised to wreak havoc on the micro-national differences whose engineering had been the centerpiece of the apartheid system.

These fears could lead party ideologues to articulate chilling echoes of the apocalyptic rhetoric that characterizes media analysts such as Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard. Like such critics, party hacks tended to depict television as a flattened medium whose flow of undifferentiated images was inherently anarchic. For Beaumont Schoeman, for example, television "doesn't respect differences and stresses uniformity. It breaks and loosens up cultures, it sweeps aside borders and eats away at the values of communities" (quoted in Nixon 1994, 63). To safeguard against this potential cultural fusion, SABC-TV began broadcasting exclusively in Afrikaans and English, the two languages of the hegemonic white minority in South Africa. After four years, this policy was supplemented through the addition of two channels, TV2 and TV3, which broadcast in the major African languages. Programming for whites and blacks was thus rigidly segregated according to the spuriously multicultural, essentialist logic that characterized apartheid ideology following the introduction of the Bantustans, or "native homelands," in 1971. The fears raised concerning television's putatively deracinating power were quickly allayed by state-controlled television's ability to encode formal messages of cultural apartheid. In addition, the Meyer Commission's reinflection of keywords concerning cultural heritage may be seen as a response to the emergence of a powerful stratum of Afrikaner capitalists (Nixon 1994, 71). This new breed of Afrikaners, the *verligtes*, saw television's potential to promote continued economic growth and international trade as the surest guarantee of enduring white domination.

This recomposition of the apartheid hierarchy offers an important warning for cultural theorists as well as analysts of post-apartheid society. The National Party's abrupt *volte-face* concerning broadcasting suggests that discussions of television's ideological function need to be more carefully situated in a material context. Indeed, the leftist model of cultural imperialism that apartheid ideologues appropriated to attack television has become increasingly untenable as peripheral economies have developed and begun to produce and export their own programming. In addition, the prominence of telecommunications exchanges between relatively unified geolinguistic regions in the periphery, such as Latin America and Chinese-speaking East Asia, makes the model of one-way ideological and material domination on which the cultural imperialist argument is based even more questionable (Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham 1996, 7). These developments demonstrate that the technological determinism that animated both leftist and apartheid critics of television in the 1960s mistook a particular stage and set

of power relations that characterized the global development of the media for an inherent formal quality of particular technologies.

SABC-TV was not, for instance, transparently a mouthpiece for the regime's ideology. As Lynette Steenveld and Larry Strelitz (1994, 39) have pointed out, National Party doctrine was most evident in news, documentary, and magazine programming. Dramatic features tended to be seen as nonpolitical and hence, ironically, proved the most likely venue for programming that unsettled dominant ideology. A tradition of docudramas—a genre that occupies the space between historical "fact" and dramatic form—developed during the 1980s that challenged the regime's representations of South Africa's past. John Cundhill's *1922* (1984), for example, which focused on the role of the South African Communist Party in organizing Afrikaner mine workers, was broadcast at a moment during the late 1980s when the party was still banned.

Elaborating the work of John Fiske and John Caughie on television's role as a medium in which the hegemonic views of a culture are circulated, Steenveld and Strelitz (1994, 45) argued that the transgressive docudramas of the 1980s do not ultimately question the logic of apartheid. For Steenveld and Strelitz, these docudramas are characterized by a form that produces an understanding of the past in viewers that does not deviate substantially from the regime's representations of national history. Despite the relatively radical subject matter of docudramas such as *1922*, Steenveld and Strelitz maintained that the fusion of documentary and drama in such films encourages the viewers to see the historical narrative being depicted as self-contained and objective. Moreover, since docudrama tends to focus on dramatic outcomes rather than the social issues introduced, Steenveld and Strelitz argued that the genre works to reduce historical conflict to individual disagreement rather than collective oppression and resistance.

While such arguments concerning the impact of South African docudrama's formal construction of spectator positioning are quite powerful, they tend to replicate some of the ahistorical tendencies of the cultural imperialism debates. Despite Steenveld and Strelitz's (1994, 44) careful citation of Stuart Hall's seminal essay concerning the construction of a preferred reading through form, they fall into a functionalist argument by stating that docudrama "may raise questions about contemporary historical conditions, but [it] never challenges the social order it represents." Granted, viewers are not free to adopt any reading they wish of a media text. Recent revisionist studies of consumer agency that suggest as much are marked by a substantial failure to consider strategies of textual closure that produce preferred readings (Morley 1992, 20). Yet, while the power differentials that frame and shape media broadcasting and consumption certainly need to be noted, such inequalities cannot totally determine the work of decoding

enacted by television viewers. The very immediate political stakes in a South African context should help us move beyond the formalist approach. In place of such an approach, we need to develop a more nuanced sociology of consumption that traces the contested articulation of local viewing practices to regional and global production and distribution networks.

In the docudramas discussed by Steenveld and Strelitz (1994), formal closure takes place through the films' focus on Anglo-Afrikaner conflicts earlier in the century. This subject matter clearly reinscribes white domination by marginalizing black agency. Notwithstanding such a dramatic elision of black identity, the social context within which *1922* was broadcast gives us good reason to be skeptical concerning the film's ability to interpolate viewers ideologically. The efflorescence of anti-apartheid civic activism during the 1980s in the form of the myriad groups within the Mass Democratic Movement dramatically demonstrates the growth of powerful alternatives to dominant apartheid ideology. This counterhegemonic history suggests that the elision of black agency in the docudramas of the 1980s could have been perceived by substantial segments of South African society less as a preferred reading than as a telling gap.

Mediating the Transition

Brian Tilley, writer and director of *The Line* (1994), has substantial experience in the creation of such contestatory readings of national history. During the 1980s, Tilley worked with Video News Services (VNS), a radical collective that made documentary programming for local branches of the United Democratic Front, a broad antiapartheid alliance of workers, community organizations, and youth groups founded in 1983. Following the unbanning of antiapartheid organizations in 1990, VNS members produced a controversial history of the African National Congress titled *Ulibambe Lingashoni (Hold Up the Sun): The ANC and Popular Power in the Making* (1994). This documentary is clearly a response to the fundamental historical elisions of previous films such as those discussed by Steenveld and Strelitz (1994). By stressing popular power throughout the film, VNS attempts to move beyond the white-dominated view of South African history disseminated by previous documentaries. Yet, as Jacqueline Maingard (1997, 265) has noted, *Ulibambe Lingashoni* equates the history of the ANC with popular anti-apartheid resistance per se. The ANC is thereby ratified as the central force behind national liberation. Popular struggle against apartheid folds seamlessly into the ANC's battle, which becomes the new official history of the nation.

This focus on the ANC and "unity" in the face of apartheid has specific thematic and formal implications. *Ulibambe Lingashoni* ignores conflicts such as that between ANC supporters and members of Inkatha, the political

party headed by Mangosuthu Buthelezi that claims to represent Zulu national identity. Major contradictions in the history of anti-apartheid struggle are consequently left unresolved (Maingard 1997, 266). Furthermore, the series bases its documentation of history predominantly on interviews with ANC leaders. The invocation of popular power that characterizes the series throughout is undercut, as a result, by the procession of male, middle-class, business-suit-clad ANC officials that punctuates and authorizes the narrative. While *Ulibambe Lingashoni* is obviously intended as a critique of many of the assumptions and formal strategies that characterize standard documentaries, its focus on institutional history tends to reproduce the top-down style adopted by such traditional documentaries. The dangers of this equation of popular struggle with that of the institutional revolutionary party are all too familiar from the dystopian chronicles of previous decolonizing nationalisms around the world and may yet prove to be a serious problem in South Africa.

The Line (1994), Tilley's first major fictional film, narrates popular history far more effectively than did *Ulibambe Lingashoni*. The film focuses on the disruptive effect in ordinary people's lives of the endemic violence that preceded the nation's historic elections in 1994. Viewers follow the film's protagonist, a member of the ANC Youth League named Bongani, as he and his girlfriend Mpho flee his home in Soweto after witnessing a massacre carried out by an Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) supporter on a Johannesburg bound train. Bongani heads to his uncle Zakes's place in downtown Johannesburg, a slightly shabby apartment block named Coniston Court that serves as a metaphor for the new South Africa. In this multicultural haven, a heterogeneous group of people composed of different races, generations, occupations, and sexual orientations rubs shoulders. Tilley's rainbow assortment of characters include two gay black men, an Afrikaner caretaker, Bongani's uncle the shebeen owner, a "coloured" prostitute, and a racially mixed couple. Though fragmented and potentially antagonistic at the beginning of the film, this group achieves unity through its opposition to an unscrupulous new landlord, who happens to be black.

Tilley's film draws on the legacy of resistance forged against apartheid repression to create a galvanizing narrative of popular power at work. The tenants organize themselves in response to a threatened rent increase, develop strategies of resistance that Tilley models on the boycott movements of the 1980s, and eventually confront their landlord in a particularly resonant scene in the final episode of the series' three installments. In this scene, the "coloured" prostitute Doreen, Bongani's aunt Rosie, and a white neighbor face down their yuppie landlord as he is about to evict one of the block's tenants. This scene dramatizes the multicultural unity for which the film has become known. Moreover, summoning up the long history of women's activism during the anti-apartheid struggle, *The Line* (1994) depicts

the women of the block as the decisive force in protecting residents' rights. Finally, Fanie de Villiers, the Afrikaner caretaker, takes a prominent role in defending the interests of the residents by calling the cops—who are relatives of his—and hence foiling the owner's plans. The scene closes with Fanie, who has been fired by the owner for his objection to the eviction, joining the assembled group of residents, who *toi-toi* in defiance of their landlord's crude insults. Tilley's film thus not only evokes the long history of black resistance to the violence of the apartheid state but also suggests that a new South Africa has been created in which solidarity in the face of the ruthless power of "free enterprise" has become a unificatory, multiracial force.

While evoking this community of resistance, *The Line* (1994) is careful to avoid the creation of formal hierarchies in its narrative style. Although Bongani's unfolding internal struggles over whether to adopt violence in response to threats from Inkatha remain the center of the narrative, Tilley adopts a multiple subplot strategy from popular television genres such as the soap opera to create a many-layered web of contrasting narratives. For example, Mpho, Bongani's girlfriend, is far more militant than he and becomes involved in a series of dangerous intrigues with a Mozambiquan gun dealer in her attempts to procure weapons for fellow members of the ANC Youth League. This subplot creates considerable emotional tension between Bongani and Mpho, forcing the former to reconcile his idealistic beliefs concerning nonviolence with the growing militancy of his lover's stance. In addition, Mpho's autonomy from Bongani demonstrates, as does the eviction scene, that women have taken a far from passive role in the anti-apartheid struggle. Domestic drama is shot through with highly public political concerns in this subplot. Such a powerful appropriation of television's more traditional narrative strategies suggests that, rather than seeing television as a medium whose formal characteristics are inherently limiting, we need to be more aware of the possibilities for creative and unorthodox exploration of the medium's generic parameters.

The Line (1994) is also calculated to avoid the homogenization of social fractures that characterized *Ulibambe Lingashoni*. The series strives to unearth, instead, the multiple institutional sites and subjectivities in South African society. For example, Bongani's nemesis in the film, a leader of the predominantly Zulu hostel dwellers of Soweto named Duma, dramatizes the subversive acts of Inkatha during the run up to the 1994 election. Abetted by a group of rogue Afrikaner policemen, Duma provokes hostel dwellers in Soweto to arm themselves and engage in a series of massacres on trains that threaten to derail the process of national reconciliation, which allowed the elections to take place. The film evokes the need for national unity by depicting the complicity between racist members of the security forces and the leaders of Inkatha. In the culminating scene of this plot thread, Bongani

is kidnapped by the police and pressured to hand over the names and addresses of his ANC comrades. When Bongani refuses to do so, Duma is brought into the room and given a loaded gun by the police, who then tell Bongani that he will be “just another victim of black-on-black violence” unless he hands over the information they seek.

The kind of random violence that the police invoke in this scene is clearly of a different order from the state-perpetuated factionalism that threatened democratic elections in 1994. By juxtaposing these two explanations of social discord, *The Line* (1994) exposes the reactionary political calculus that lies behind the violence that continued to dog South Africa’s transition to democracy after 1990. Inkatha is cast as the antagonist by proxy in this plot thread, cooperating with the violent forces of apartheid that remain embedded in the state apparatus during the period of transition. In addition, Inkatha is also a target of critique as a result of its ethnic particularism, which turns on a rejection of the ANC’s call to a new, nonseparatist national culture. As newspaper exposés during the transition period helped publicize, the head of the Inkatha Freedom Party, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, has a long history of cooperation with the National Party regime. His protests against the ban on “traditional cultural weapons” during the years before the elections were, as Rob Nixon (1994, 200) has argued, merely the latest version of a century-long attempt by South Africa’s rulers to reinvent Zulu traditions to white hegemonic advantage. Duma, the embodiment of this tradition of co-optation and manipulation within *The Line*, meets a bloody end at the film’s conclusion when the police officers who have used him decide that he knows too much to be left alive.

Duma’s death signals the end of the problem of ethnic particularism within the film. Unfortunately, the problem has proven less easy to resolve in the real world. Indeed, *The Line* (1994) became an object of political contention when Phulani Mlotshwa, a spokesman for the National Hostel Residents’ Association, phoned the offices of the South African Press Association after the first episode was broadcast in July 1994 and threatened the lives of the film’s producer and actors should the rest of the series be broadcast (Carlin 1994, 9). Although they distanced themselves from these death threats, Inkatha leaders subsequently organized a march on SABC headquarters to protest what they felt was the unfair political slant of the series (Collings 1994). SABC, after initially withdrawing the series in the face of these attacks, eventually decided to broadcast the other installments. The Broadcasting Complaints Commission rejected claims that *The Line* targeted Inkatha exclusively, arguing that the series “does identify the instigators and defenders as supporters of Inkatha and the African National Congress, but the accent is on the futility of violence and its effects on society” (Collings 1994).

The Line (1994) certainly articulates a strong critique of violent solutions to social enmities. The film ends with a montage that includes a grisly shot of Duma lying with his neck slit next to the train tracks. Juxtaposed with this ugly conclusion to Duma's career of cooperation with state violence, Bongani and Mpho are shown sitting on a train while a voice-over intones a section of Mongane Wally Serote's poem "Time Has Run Out" concerning the blood that stains the nation's memory. Finally, the film depicts the gun dealer, Pedro, cautioning the celebrating residents of Coniston Court by reminding them that Mozambique's bloody post-revolutionary history should offer them a sobering lesson. "Forget who's in government," Pedro says, "when killing is in power." This closing montage, in conjunction with the film's representation of Duma as a leader who manipulates the hostel dwellers to his own ends, effectively underlines the film's explicit intention to reject violence.

Nonetheless, it needs to be noted that Tilley chooses not to focus on the subjectivity of any of the Inkatha supporters in detail in the course of his film. Instead, they are depicted as a club and gun wielding mass of marauders. It is perhaps not so surprising, then, that *The Line* (1994), a film that is so scrupulously attentive to equality of representation in other respects, raised the ire of hostel dwellers. Tilley can hardly be said to be slavishly replicating a partisan ANC position: his protagonist Bongani is clearly opposed to the decision taken by other members of the Youth League to adopt violent forms of self-defense. Nonetheless, Tilley's film frames the conflict between Inkatha and the ANC in terms that echo dominant journalistic treatments of South Africa's internecine conflict. The social causes of violence among the hostel dwellers are reduced to racist white manipulation, corrupt leadership, and filmic spectacle. As a result, none of the complex social factors that impel hostel dwellers to embrace violent measures are opened for consideration. The film's suggestion that such measures perpetuate white domination and hence should be discarded imposes a binary black versus white logic on the conflicts between blacks in places like KwaZulu-Natal and Soweto. This explanation may help underline the complicity of the shadowy "Third Force" within the police and military during the transition period. Yet, without a more attentive examination of hostel dwellers' subjectivity, and by extension, of conflicts within the black population of South Africa, such an approach also risks reinscribing the manichean dichotomies of apartheid thought.

The Line (1994) similarly fails to explore in detail the potential social and economic tensions generated by the ANC's accession to power. As already noted, Tilley draws the details of the subplot concerning the unification of Coniston Court's residents against their unscrupulous landlord from the resistance movement's refusal to pay for basic provisions such as housing, water, and electricity during the closing years of apartheid. It is, then, through

its representation of a national popular struggle against predatory, racialized capitalism that the film engages with some of the most enduringly troubling issues of the post-apartheid era. Yet, unlike the main plot thread, this subplot fails to reach a clear resolution within the film. A residents' committee constituted to confront their landlord arrives at his corporate office only to find that he has disappeared with loan money raised using recently acquired properties such as Coniston Court as collateral. The multicultural nation embodied in Coniston Court is delivered into the hands of the English-accented bankers, who reassure the tenants that their rent will remain stable until a new owner for the flats is found. This subplot concludes here, with Fanie and Rosie exchanging baffled looks concerning the fate of their jobs and homes.

Democratization and New Media Practices

The lack of narrative resolution within this subplot of *The Line* (1994) draws attention to the intractable nature of contemporary forms of globalization, which cut across many layers of South African society despite the ANC's electoral victories. The most clear political expression of the film's lack of closure can be found at the national level. Shortly after the 1994 elections, the ANC announced its nation-building Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP). This program capped an extensive debate conducted within South Africa concerning the economic profile of the new nation. The RDP promised to satisfy the basic need for jobs, land redistribution, housing, water, electricity, telecommunications, health, and education felt by the two-thirds of the black population continuing to live below the poverty line.

As Hein Marais (1997) has argued, the RDP played the ideological role of linking the utopian hopes expressed in the ANC's Freedom Charter of 1955 to the reality of a government constrained by fears of capital flight in response to any deviation from strict fiscal discipline. The incompatibility of a macroeconomic strategy characterized by privatization, deregulation, and fiscal austerity with a social development program such as the RDP did not take long to surface. Although the RDP achieved considerable success in areas where infrastructure already existed—electrification and water provision, for example—its failure to deliver in the crucial area of housing quickly generated significant class tensions within the ANC's constituency (Waldmeir 1997, 282). Moreover, two years after it was established, the government closed the ministry responsible for administering the RDP and announced a new scheme called the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) Program. The upshot of this new plan was an increasing reliance on private sector and self-help programs—both of which transfer the costs of urban upgrading to the urban poor themselves (McDonald 1997).

In abandoning redistributive strategies in favor of policies designed to spur rapid economic growth, the ANC government is following in the wake of the National Party itself. Despite the prominent historic role of the South African state in shaping economic development, by the 1980s the National Party had begun a retreat from significant socioeconomic aspects of apartheid such as controls over the mobility of labor and capital. The regime justified this policy shift using the jargon of "privatization" that had gained international vogue in the wake of Margaret Thatcher's and Ronald Reagan's rise to power. Despite this mimicry of neoliberal orthodoxy, other factors clearly influenced the party's embrace of the free market. By the early 1970s, National Party economic policies, which supported Afrikaner involvement in segments of the economy as diverse as finance, manufacturing, and the core industries of mining and energy production, had rectified the nation's "poor white" problem (Lipton and Simkins 1996, 7). In addition, the massive bureaucracy and other economic inefficiencies necessary to the maintenance of apartheid had become a notable drag on the nation's economy. By embracing privatization, the National Party and its proponents in the business world ensured that a future, majority-led government would not have the same means of redistribution at its control as the Nats had used to elevate their core white constituency from poverty. They could also conveniently wash their hands of the massive forms of state mismanagement and the looting of the public sector that took place during the final years of apartheid (Lipton and Simkins 1996, 16).

The collectivist ideology of the ANC evidently fell victim to this double whammy of neoliberal ideology and harmful state policies. Saddled with a massive apartheid-era debt whose servicing only allowed it to budget 8 percent of its annual revenue to capital spending on development, the ANC found that it had little possibility to fulfill its ambitious promises of economic justice (Waldmeir 1997, 281). It needs to be stressed, however, that continued privatization is not an antidote to the failures of central state planning, as it is so often held to be. Recent work by economic historians of South Africa suggests that privatization should not be seen as a withdrawal of the state but rather as a form of state power that aids large-scale capital (Fine and Rustomjee 1996, 244). According to Fine and Rustomjee's (1996, 11) incisive work, the historical division between an Afrikaner political oligarchy and an English economic elite has played a prominent role in generating the economic crises that have roiled South Africa since the late 1970s. Indeed, the state's failure to develop coherent policies of industrialization and its encouragement of capital flight through an irrationally structured financial system are some of the most significant factors in the economic impasse in which the nation now finds itself. Large-scale South African capital, centered in the mining and energy production industries, tends to be one of the loudest voices in condemnations of the failures of public

expenditure. Yet it is in fact the state's encouragement of the irresponsible patterns of financial speculation and low domestic investment characteristic of this sector and related areas that has been a determining factor in South Africa's poor economic performance over the past two decades (Fine and Rustomjee 1996, 11).

The new nation ignores this history at its own peril: failure by the state to develop the nation's human and infrastructural resources will represent a continuation rather than a break from apartheid-era policies. The deepening forms of economic and social inequality certain to result from a failure to reverse such policies are some of the darkest clouds that hang over the nation's future.

The ANC's capitulation to the neoliberal, trickle-down model of social planning that has become the global status quo makes the imagery of national unity that has thus far legitimated the party hard to sustain. Brian Tilley's film *The Line* (1994) is perhaps more willing to acknowledge the contradictions of the post-apartheid era than is the ruling party. The series' very failure to resolve the question of property rights it broaches implicitly demonstrates the ever-increasing strains on the cultures of collectivity developed during the struggle for majority rule. Nonetheless, globalization is always articulated through local and national forms of adaptation and contestation. Too many analyses of the phenomenon adopt an apocalyptic tone that assumes and, to a certain extent, furthers the total hegemony of global capital (Mattelart and Mattelart 1992, 134-35).

While the South African state's capacity to act as a regulator of the flows of capital, commodities, culture, and people may be severely curtailed by the processes of globalization identified at the outset of this article and by its own historical complicity with large-scale capital, it has by no means been completely eradicated as a site of control and disputation, nor have the many other infra-national sites within which collective identities are framed. This is particularly evident in South Africa, where grassroots mobilization was essential to the defeat of apartheid. The radical social movements that generated *The Line's* (1994) focus on popular history have long contested state power. The success of similar movements struggling for the democratization of the media during the transition period suggests that popular movements can contribute to the rearticulation of globalizing economic and political forces along more egalitarian lines. Indeed, as Carlin (1994) has argued, free markets can often help to ensure accountability and user satisfaction, facilitate development of a pluralistic media, and foster efficient use of resources within the right conditions.

The transformed media environment that made a film like *The Line* (1994) possible demonstrates the possibility for such progressive rearticulations within a particular sphere. As the apartheid regime's use of television to further its repressive separatist ideology underlines, South Africa differs

from other nations where broadcasting played a historic role as the primary public sphere of the nation during the postwar period. This history of repression has given the question of equality of access to the public sphere a far higher profile than in other nations. Consequently, although the move away from state regulation is being felt in South Africa as it is in other nations, this move is not taking place in an environment in which the public good and decentralization are disaggregated from one another and wholly subject to a market logic.

Despite the fact that the SABC is no longer the only broadcaster, its transformation during the years following 1990 suggests that noncommercial, democratic media systems remain a significant priority in South Africa. As Jacqueline Maingard (1997, 261) has documented, changes at the SABC were initially catalyzed by a group of anti-apartheid film and media organizations and unions that publicly claimed the right of access to the national broadcaster. The importance of these claims to democratic access was further underlined by the need to ensure the SABC's independence before the first democratic elections. A coalition of labor and progressive political groups coalesced in the early 1990s as the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting. This coalition managed to pressure the government into electing a new board for the SABC prior to the 1994 elections and helped establish an Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) to diminish state power over broadcasting. As Maingard (1997, 262) noted, the act that established the IBA emphasizes the responsibility of broadcasters to advance the right to representation of historically disadvantaged groups in the nation. These goals have been advanced through the promulgation of broadcasting regulations stipulating linguistic equality for South Africa's eleven major languages and through content quotas that aim to increase the representation of local issues in programming. Despite the limitations imposed on such laudable objectives by lack of funding and worries over continued state intervention, the establishment of the IBA and its subsequent democratic initiatives clearly represents an important foundation for future extensions of equality of access to the media in South Africa.

The Line (1994) provides dramatic evidence of the possibilities opened by the SABC's transformation during the years since 1990. Tilley's film offers a bold corrective to previous depictions of the complex factions and frictions of South African society. More broadly, the series demonstrates that although South African social movements are confronting a difficult struggle to create meaningful forms of community in the face of transnational capital's deterritorializing impact, the recent history of resistance against apartheid has introduced notions of popular power and equality of access into public discourse with an unmatched force. In addition, the co-production of *The Line* by Britain's Channel 4, which played a signal role in giving radical,

independent production collectives access to the airwaves in the United Kingdom, provides significant evidence for the democratizing possibilities of counterhegemonic transnational linkages. These possibilities will only be realized, however, through continuing initiatives to open the new global conduits of media production and distribution to democratic forces. *The Line* proposes such struggles as one of the central problems of South Africa today. Presenting a trenchant and politically radical message through a hybridization of traditional television genres, *The Line* crystallizes both the profound difficulties faced by South Africa's fledgling democracy as well as the elements of unflagging hope that characterize the new nation.

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