

# An exploration of consumption of locally produced television content: Case of Bophelo on Lesotho Television

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**Abstract** - The study sought to gain insight into what informs consumption of locally produced content on television in Lesotho using Bophelo as a case study. The study is informed by the perspective that television production and consumption in Lesotho is dominated by mainstream television from South Africa such as etv, SABC, Mzansi Magic and DSTV. The study therefore interviewed and gleaned information from the cross section of society of Lesotho in order to establish how Basotho view Bophelo, what they learn from the show and what else they expect from the show. The purpose is to help the quality of the content of the show as well as to help the show better meet the viewers' expectations. Information was gathered, presented and analysed qualitatively.

**Key words:** local television, Bophelo TV drama, national ethos, Basotho sensibilities, tradition, culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

Television was established in Lesotho in 1988 as a product of successful discussions between Lesotho's Ministry of Information and M Net, a South African private broadcast company. It started off as a one hour broadcast channel. Lesotho Television (LTV) is owned by the state and subject to the management of the government of the day under the Lesotho National Broadcasting Services. It is the only television station in Lesotho. Motjamela (2005) says that the military government which established LTV's intention was to reduce Lesotho's reliance on the outside world; South Africa in particular. She also says that the visit of the Pope John Paul II to Lesotho was another factor which they wanted to give full broadcast coverage in order to bring the nation together. The government felt Lesotho was too fractured socially and too polarised politically and viewed the Pope as a popular figure who could be viewed as a unifying factor by Basotho as a nation. That initial aim by the government for Lesotho to establish autonomy independent of South Africa and the world at large is the motive behind this study whose aim is to establish the extent to which Lesotho has been successful in the realm of television content production. In trying to establish the extent to which Lesotho television helped achieve that agenda, the study carried out an examination of the success of the local television production using Bophelo television drama as a case study. This was a purely qualitative study employing face to face and telephonic interviews with sources from the cross section of society to glean and establish

their perspectives on Bophelo in terms of informing, educating and entertaining society within the parameters of Basotho sensibilities.

## II. BACKGROUND

The television production Bophelo is based on critiquing greed, power, vengeance, revenge, and conspiracy. Bophelo was availed to the African sub region of Southern Africa viewing community due to DSTV's ability to be viewed beyond the borders of Lesotho. The series talks and brings about drama that is experienced by some families in their daily lives in Lesotho. The plot of the story is based on the Mokwena family (a fictitious family). Mr. Jacob Mokwena was a wealthy man from his efforts of hard work and he built his empire through (sheep farming) wool and mohair production in Lesotho. Sheep farming is one of the most lucrative enterprises in Lesotho after water, diamonds and cannabis. Mr. Mokwena's wife passes away then he marries his secretary Dikeleli. From the first marriage, he sired three children; two sons and a daughter. Into the marriage with Mr. Mokwena, Dikeleli brings a daughter, Zuki. Drama unfolds in the Mokwena family after Mr. Jacob Mokwena dies after an illness leaving a 'WILL' where he left most of his wealth to his hard-working young son Tshepo and his young wife Dikeledi. The other two (Benjamine and Bontle) were left with just enough and the usual arrangement of monthly stipends/allowances. He also left instructions for tasks for his two older children to execute in order for them to prove their worthy in order to claim the remaining inheritance. When the two siblings arrive for their father's funeral and subsequently to cash in on their father's fortune, drama starts to unfold. Bophelo Drama series is inspired by true events, conceptualized and developed for television by Dr Paul Banda Luanga Jr and he is also the writer, producer and director. As of 2022, Bophelo has aired two seasons on the local Lesotho Television that is also anchored on DSTV. It has been running for two years 2020 to 2021 with spill over episodes in 2022. The production's ratings and viewership have been positive because the local broadcaster does not have depth and breadth when it comes to content, therefore when Bophelo was showcased it was a game changer and it became their flagship show. Since LNBS is on DSTV and there are about 4.5 million Basotho living in South Africa, the series experienced a lot of traffic because it aired before the main news and those are the timings when Basotho in SA tune to LNBS to watch

the news. Overall, the producers claim that the series was high quality and it therefore received positive reviews and as a result some of the actors have received recognition and are now doing projects with some media houses in South Africa

### III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the concept of televisual culture; specifically that culture's aspect of the influence that television programming has on the audiences or viewers. The study borrows this from Dasgupta, Hermes, Kooijman, and Stauff's ideas in de Valck and Teurlings (2013) where they scrutinize television concepts like liveness, media event, audiences, broadcasting need recasting as problematics around which the televisual will get interrogated within a dynamic media landscape. The study is interested in interrogating locally produced content for its benefits that appeal to Basotho cultural sensibilities, Basotho way of life's mores and values rather than television programming for mere entertainment that is empty of cultural virtues.

### IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Public television aims to inform, educate and entertain with a variety of popular programmes (Shobiye, Naidoo and Rugbeer, 2018). Shobiye et al go on to say that language is one of the factors that influence viewers for certain programmes; that is, viewers are attracted to programmes produced in their language of choice but especially those in the viewer's first language. However, for economies such as that of South Africa, which are considerably bigger than that of Lesotho, television programme consumption is influenced by factors such as variety of content, but most importantly technological development, are more influential. Technological advancement and variety of content go hand in hand and more so determined by the availability of resources such as free or cheaply available Internet connectivity which in turn enable viewers to have access to Over-the-Top television (OTT TV). In Lesotho, the majority of television viewers follow or use the linear television consuming model, that is, the traditional television service that broadcast programmes scheduled and determined by the provider; in the form of LTV and the LNBS.

### V. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Viewing locally produced television programmes; one encounters imitations of western programming such as talent shows, soapies with western sensibilities or South African inspired violent crime action thrillers or worse still, senseless crime related drama series. In most instances it is apparent that local cultural mores, values, sensibilities and expectations will not have been considered in order to educate, inform and entertain local viewers. This study therefore seeks to

scrutinize the television drama Bophelo in retrospect and get an insight from viewers of the show as to whether their expectations were met and whether the show was understood at all.

### VI. METHODOLOGY

The study is purely qualitative; described by Palmer and Bolderston (2006, 16) thus: "Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live". The study solicited information on television drama viewers and production crew's views on the locally produced drama series Bophelo in Lesotho. Interviews were carried out in order to elicit the interviewees' deep understanding of the television production's influence on Basotho viewers in relation to their expectations, cultural ethos, mores and values. It was not about how many people watched the series when it was running, therefore the qualitative approach. Interviews were the best approach to gleaning information from sources because, according to Frances, Coughlan and Cronin (2009, 309) "The individual interview is a valuable method of gaining insight into people's perceptions, understandings and experiences of a given phenomenon and can contribute to in-depth data collection". The interviews were carried out on a one on one basis between the interviewers and interviewees.

### VII. FINDINGS

#### Respondent one

Under our Basotho customs codified in Molao oa Lerotholi (Laws of Lerotholi), it is the first-born male child in each family who is entitled to inheritance when the parents die. The Laws also provide that each house in a polygamous set up, will have its own assets and the first male child of each house is entitled to inheritance. If there is no male child in all the houses, the senior widow will be the heir and such is on condition that she consults with the husband's family as the rightful advisors.

The heir is expected to use the inheritance with the widow or widows of his late father as well as his younger siblings. The decision in these instances has to be in consultation with the close family members who have a right to be consulted in terms of the laws and customs of Basotho.

The courts as interpreters of any law of the land, decide issues of inheritance in terms of the laws governing such inheritance and applicable at the time and the type of marriage involved, whether it is customary or civil marriage. Such interpretation of the law is not restricted on the law in place only, but also international norms and present acceptable practices, human rights centered approach is also considered.

Both customary law and the Estate Proclamation make provision of a Will that it should be respected and affected. In terms of the Laws of Leretholi, the provision is that such Will must be affected, as long as the heir is not denied a bigger share of the estate. The bigger share has been interpreted by the courts as not less than 60% of the estate.

In general, the Will represents the wishes of the deceased on how his estate should be allocated and it is very helpful in such allocation as long as it is made voluntarily and in terms of the law governing inheritance. If not, such can be challenged and set aside by the courts.

Inheritance is a very controversial issue and much relevant to every human being. On that note, Bophelo series was very relevant and informative by having a storyline about inheritance issues. It reflected issues and challenges related to inheritance allocation. How it can affect siblings relationships and what parents should look into when making such allocation through a Will.

The expectation therefore could be that such television productions be relevant to important issues like this, affecting our communities and people's daily lives.

#### **Respondent two**

Culturally, inheritance must be for the eldest son. The first son of the family is the one who must distribute the inheritance. Where there is a will, it must be followed as it helps with the distribution of the inheritance. The importance of a will is that it helps prevent killings and confusion in the family. The will helps to prevent the feeling of entitlement on the inheritance. It provides a solution hundred percent.

Bophelo drama was very educational because it did not only teach about inheritance but entrepreneurship and the importance of playing a role in family business so that one can run the company even after the death of the founding owner. To the youth, it taught the importance of focusing on studies and not to be side tracked by entertainment such as excess partying.

Bophelo is most relevant due to its alignment to our daily lives as Basotho. It provides some insights into how we can solve our problems. For me, it made me to watch the locally produced drama and temporarily forgot about South African soapies that do not relate to our lives as Basotho. Bophelo captured our hearts. For some of us who are not into the culture of reading books for enlightenment, we found Bophelo very appealing.

#### **Respondent three**

Culturally what happens is that the male and eldest siblings will distribute or inherit the parents' wealth. In the event that there are no males in the family the eldest will distribute or inherit.

In a polygamous set up, this is a tricky one because courts do not recognise polygamous marriages. However traditionally, the first wife and her children are the first to get the piece of the cake then it trickles down.

As far as the courts are concerned, there is a standard inheritance ACT according to the law that tells that when a parent dies the existing spouse is entitled to 50% and the children get 50%. However, if there are dependants then they get 10% of the estate.

A Will is a powerful document that gives detailed instructions on how the Estate will be divided in the case where the owner of the estate DIES. This document is recognised by the courts of law as it acts as a mouth piece on behalf of the deceased person. It is very important because it prevents unnecessary conflicts or fights among siblings and family members who feel entitled

It is from this background why Bophelo was conceptualised to educate and sensitise the community about the dangers of not drafting a WILL. The story line outlines what happens with siblings and family members after the death of a parent or a breadwinner of a family. Bophelo has been like an eye opener as it has sparked a lot of conversations in the communities about behaviour change and harmonising the families regarding the distribution of wealth and subsequently leaving a WILL. This data has been proven with comments on social media platforms and gatherings.

As already alluded to, the drama was highly educational and brought up conversations on social media. It is with these reviews that made the sponsors give us more funds to do season 2.

The biggest lessons that come out of the drama are that there are a lot of myths and misconceptions in the communities not only that, there are a lot of traditional beliefs that disadvantage women and children in some cases marginalize them. Also, we discovered a lot of ignorance towards the law. People do not know their rights.

We intend to expand the story line in order to expose other social injustices such as GBV, Child abuse, Human Trafficking etc.

Story telling that makes people recognise and feel that they are part of the narrative or that the story affects them, is highly welcome because they will have the sense that they own it. When people join in the conversation then you know you are on the right track. Season 3 will involve road shows with our celebrities who will make appearances in the districts to do Question and Answer sessions with fans. We are partnering with Non Governmental Organizations that will facilitate travel etc.

#### **Respondent four**

The first male child, if not only close male like uncle is entitled to inheritance culturally.

Most assets were to go to the first wife then junior wives should get handouts from the first wife traditionally.

The court instructs the family to choose the heir and write a letter to the court to present before court the family heir.

It depends on what the family suggest or how the court sees the issue to the best interest of the children and might distribute equally to the children.

A will lessens the fights within the family as it is said “lentsoe la mofu le aheloa lesaka” that means we must go according to the deceased’s wishes

Bophelo made a lot of Basotho to draw their wills as this can cause killings due to greed in our families. We even aligned it with what we are already going through in our daily lives. We saw it in us.

Bophelo was very educational. Every character had an educational aspect in it, be it bad or good. We learned a lot.

From Bophelo we learnt that it is very important to have a will. In business we must learn to know more about competitors, their weaknesses and strengths. Education is the key to success and independence. Even when you are hired to be a mere receptionist you must learn how business is done and master it like a professional. No criminal deals pay off; easy come easy go. Written and signed deals are imperative. Success is not a sexually transmitted disease so one should work hard for him or herself.

From the show, we expect it to show us how all bad and good characters ended up so we follow the path because we always see bad guys winning. We were actually happy that we have our local soapie that portrays our culture and rightfully direct us to choose better or best unlike South Africa soapies where criminals always get away with crime they committed and innocent people suffer on the hands of criminals. Again, we

had a locally produced television drama that employed people we live and interact with and we hoped it will be ongoing as that would sell Lesotho to the world. Their shots were on point as it showed our mountains, we were so proud to watch and share the content.

Basotho are expecting the content that is relevant to them, that portrays how they live and learn from the decisions taken on screen. They are expecting to see beautiful Lesotho landscape, faces they know, the life they live, wardrobe and cultural clothing, and above all the benefit which is the educational content that can have positive impact on Basotho in all aspects.

#### **Respondent five**

Culturally, all children are entitled to their parents’ legacy although it is the eldest boy child who inherits everything when the parents pass on as the primary custodian.

In a polygamous family, children from the first wife are responsible for the distribution of the inheritance to all the children from the other wives.

The courts in Lesotho acknowledge the first boy child in the family as the rightful heir.

In the absence of a will, all the children can contest for inheritance in court. The courts usually use the rule of the marriage type that acknowledges community of property rights to determine the distribution of inheritance property.

A will protects the rights of children to take over their parents’ assets in the event of the death of the parents before distributing the wealth among their children.

Bophelo was educational although it can do better. I learnt that Basotho actors are talent but definitely need more exposure so that they can have experience in order for them to reach the levels of other actors from the SADC region.

My expectation is for Bophelo to be scripted in alignment with Lesotho legislative prescriptions or amendments to reflect life in Lesotho. There is more that can be done to influence cultural change in the country.

#### **Analysis**

The story in traditional Africa was and is still told following the art form of orature (Ogundokun, 2016). The beauty of orature is not only in the rhythmic arrangement of words that is punctuated with the sing along with the audience kind of song. The essence and the beauty of storytelling in orature is the moral of the story being told. The moral that educated the younger generation and at the same time imparting to them the

ethos, the fibres that hold African society together based on ubuntu (Bolden, 2014): you are because I am. The moral of the story has consistently been on exposing the wicked and the treacherous and the evil because they are regarded as antisocial personal traits, frowned upon by traditional African society. The thief is a villain. The murderer is a villain. The warmonger and plunderer is a villain. The weak is to be protected. The widow and the orphan and every minor are the collective responsibility of society. The powerful and the rich are there to protect society. Their riches and their power are there to serve society. To the King and the Chief's fields, we would go and donate labour because the King or the Chief would be the custodian of the harvest for fair distribution to society in times of drought and famine. Selfishness does not have a place in traditional African society. This should, ideally, be reflected in our story telling which should appeal to African sensibilities.

Producing and broadcasting television drama that displays the success of wickedness such as the murderous robber and the wily thief always getting away with murder or getting filthy rich from con artistry kills the souls of the younger generation of television viewing. What morals are we teaching to our children if we produce television drama for their consumption that celebrates villainy? One responded alluded to the fact of the death of the reading culture; let alone the education where elders would sit down to educate the younger generations of our African values. Television has taken over that role. It therefore is of essence for television drama particularly to be educative and not just provide action entertainment that goes against the grain of our societal morals, values and mores. Television is powerful as a medium (Shah, Hanna, Bucy, Wells and Quevedo, 2015) and can influence society to behave in a particular way based on what they view on television. With production of television programmes, we should be careful not to destroy what evolved in the form of good teachings from our forefathers and our foremothers. We are a people with a soul and we should be careful to maintain that.

### Limitations

The study encountered challenges of interviewees who could not provide an insightful critique of the television drama Bophelo. The majority of interviewees expressed fascination at the locally produced drama and said they enjoyed to watch the drama since it used Sesotho, their mother language but could not critically analyse issues of impact or influence on their day to day existence..

### Recommendations

The study recommends that for television drama producers, relevance of content to educating viewers in proper alignment

with cultural and traditional values should be uppermost rather focusing more on the technique and aesthetics of the production.

Research on societal expectations from television drama should be carried out intensively before production companies embark on producing television drama.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Basotho expect television drama that educates and speaks about their tradition and their culture. Bophelo educated Basotho on issues of inheritance, entrepreneurship and the importance of education and hard work. Local television content is applauded by Basotho as the locally produced content show cases the beauty of the kingdom's mountainous terrain, Basotho dress and way of living therefore showcasing what Lesotho can offer to the world. Local productions also create employment for Basotho.

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