'SUDDENLY THE FILM SCENE IS BECOMING OUR

SCENE'!

THE MAKING AND PUBLIC LIVES OF BLACK-

CENTRED FILMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

(1959-2001)


LITHEKO MODISANE


A Thesis submitted to the Faculty for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

February 2010.

# Table of Contents

**DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university or institution.

----------------------------------
**Litheko Jeffrey Modisane**

-----------**DAY OF**--------------------**2010**

# ABSTRACT

Through an examination of the making and public lives of a selection of apartheid and post-apartheid black-centred films in South Africa: *Come Back, Africa* (1959), *u'Deliwe* (1975), *Mapantsula* (1988), and *Fools* (1997), their contexts of production, circulation, appropriation and engagement, I investigate the role of film in the public life of ideas. While my focus is chiefly on film, I introduce a brief comparator with the television series *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2001), where I deploy the same methodology. To this end, I ask how these films relate to ongoing contemporary discourses about black identity. To explain the making and extended public lives of the films, I combine elements of public sphere theory, literary theory and film analysis to develop a theoretical model that treats film as a circulating text open to appropriation and engagement over time. The results indicate that in ways that shifted throughout the films' public lives, their genres, modes of circulation as well as contexts of their appropriation, mediate the manner and extent of their relations to critical public engagements of black identity. I argue that through the combination of its nature as a modern form and its specific generic attributes, with the conditions and circumstances of its circulation and engagement, film stimulates critical public engagements of certain types. Film achieves what I have called public critical potency, when its content directly or otherwise, resonates with contemporary social and political struggles. Through its public critical potency, which is the capacity of film to stimulate critical public engagements, film demonstrates its importance in the public life of ideas. However, film also has the potential to fail in that respect. As a result, the margin between its success and potential for failure to achieve public critical potency, makes precarious, the role and status of film in the public life of ideas. In examining film as a circulating text over time, the thesis challenges approaches that investigate the public sphere of film solely in terms of genre and cinematic spectatorship. In the process, it has engaged the concepts of 'film' and 'public' within film studies in a way that recognizes its wide reach and extensive role in the public sphere. In the final analysis, the thesis is instructive with regard to the ways in which film may or may not relate to the public sphere in repressive and post-repressive societies in particular, and in modernity in general.

## DEDICATION

To my mother Mamothepane Ruth Modisane, my grandmothers Mokhala Jacobeth Maseola and Makubila Pauline Modisane.

To the memory of my father Mboki Joseph Modisane, and my grandfathers, Ntsie Isaac Maseola and Ndebe Gabriel Modisane.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the help of the Constitution of the Public Intellectual Life Project (PIL) where I spent many challenging and fruitful days as a doctoral fellow. This thesis has immensely benefited from the learning opportunities offered by the Student Writing Project of the then Graduate School for Humanities. It would not have been possible without the intensive intellectual support of the PIL project and the generous financial assistance of its scholarship. The additional and opportune financial support of the National Film and Video Foundation, for one year of my fellowship is hereby acknowledged. To my supervisor and director of the PIL project Professor Carolyn Hamilton, thank you for believing in me. I would like to thank you for always reminding me to keep a steady hand in my work and not to put up with mediocrity. Your motherly voice pulled me away from any negative doubts I may have entertained in the course of the study. To my supervisor, the Oba, Professor Bhekizizwe Peterson, thank you for the gift of the Word. You brought me up from the dawn of my intellectual youth, when doing a Ph.D. appeared to be distant and daunting. Your immeasurable insights and advice are a true blessing to this work. My teacher and senior colleague Dr. Windsor Shampi Leroke, your highly contagious passion for ideas will always find a ready student in me. My humble gratitude goes to my colleagues and friends in the PIL project, Pascal Mwale (Zikomo kwambiri!), Anthea Garman, Yvette Greslé, Rory Bester and Lesley Cowling. I thank you for your constant and fiery intellectual vigilance which brooked no excuses for shoddy work. I hereby acknowledge the help of Professor Suzan van Zyl, director of the Centre for Graduate Studies, for her assistance in parts of my Ph.D. and other work.

To Dr. Jacqueline Maingard, even though you sit in the beyond of the North Atlantic, your critical work and warm personality nourishes my hunger for sustaining this, our common engagement with the rising republic of images down in the south. Special thanks go to Drs. Maina Mutonya and Grace Musila for their friendship and countless engaged exchanges. My colleagues Mapule Tsoari, and Lenore Longwe, your patient willingness to attend to

## *Chapter 1*
## OPENING SHOTS

Through an examination of the making and public lives of a selection of apartheid and post-apartheid black-centred films in South Africa: *Come Back, Africa* (1959), *u'Deliwe* (1975), *Mapantsula* (1988), and *Fools* (1997), their contexts of production, circulation, appropriation and engagement, I investigate the role of film in the public life of ideas. While my focus is chiefly on film, I introduce a brief comparator with the television series *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2001), where I deploy the same methodology. I have consciously identified the films as 'black-centred' and not as 'black', because blackness is the subject of their focus, and not an *a priori* and hermetically sealed category. The differences in the films' production circumstances, the diversity of their representations and genres precludes the homogeneity suggested by the category 'black'. The circulation of ideas and their extensive engagements beyond their points of inception constitute these films' public lives. The thesis asks how the selected films relate to historical and ongoing public discourses on black identity. The problem of the thesis is the public critical status of film particularly in relation to modernity, the very condition and discourse with which film is intractably linked. The link between film and modernity is manifest at various levels including the technological, cultural and social levels. Thus, not only is film a modern invention, but its social and cultural dimensions constitute the subjective experiences of modernity itself. The social convention of cinema-going, which is a notable part of urban modern life, and film's address of modern social relations, exemplify film's social and cultural relations to modernity. This study explores the concept of 'film' in relation to the concept of the 'public'. In the effort to understand the nature of film and its critical importance in modern public life, the thesis investigates film as a circulating text subject to many uses and interpretations. The thesis is motivated by provocations emanating from theories of the public sphere, film scholarship, African intellectual history, and the condition of modernity- especially as it relates to South Africa. The first task in the consideration of these provocations is to present a précis of the pre-history and then of the historical contexts of the selected films.

**Overview of African Encounters with Film (Cinema and Television): 1908-2004**

A lack of symbolic control and ownership of African images by Africans themselves marks Africans' historical encounter with the cinema. As part of colonial society and later racist settler capitalism in South Africa, film became one of the objects around and through which the power relations that typified these societies were buttressed symbolically and socially. Deeply ingrained in these relations was the very iconography of Africa on screen. According to the philosopher Sylvia Wynter, the continent through the object of film, among others, 'was submitted to the memory of the West' (cited in Givanni 2001: 29).[1] In South Africa in particular, film was founded on the construction of colonial history that was ultimately a celebration and validation of the violence that led to the subjugation of Africans. Arriving in Southern Africa in early 20th century 'when fundamental assumptions about the nature of African intellect, and the identity of white society were undergoing a process of reformulation' (Burns 2002: 2), film became an important instrument in the instating of the idea of white superiority, and therefore, the legitimacy of white people to rule over the black colonised.

Black people's participation in film overlapped with and was significantly informed by the repressive political framework of the colonial, and later, of the apartheid state. The apartheid system ceased to exist in 1994 when a new democratic dispensation came into being. The new political dispensation reversed the *status quo* and established a democratic culture in which black South Africans could participate and stake claims on the meanings of black identity and experience. Mapping the involvement of black people in South African film culture, at the level of filmmaking and in the employ of films for social engagements, provides a historical perspective of their changing social and political fortunes within and in relation to it. More importantly, it draws attention to the interface between social and political struggles and the terrain of filmic contestations of the social

---

[1]For a strictly philosophical attention to this observation, and on which Wynter ultimately relies, see Mudimbe V., 1990. *The Invention of Africa, Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, London: James Currey.

and political imaginary of black identity and experience. By this move, I do not intend to confine public engagement of black identity to black South Africans per se. However, to locate the study strictly outside the actual historical challenges attendant on Africans' experiences of film risks losing the historical texture in the relations between film and discourses on black identity.

The imprint of black South Africans in film goes as far back as the turn of 20th century. In this early period, blacks were mainly constructed as 'noble savages', 'serving or killing white people' in movies that depicted frontier wars like *The Zulu's Heart* (1908) by D. W. Griffith, *De Voortrekkers* (*Winning a Continent*) (1916) by Harold Shaw, and *A Zulu's Devotion* (1916) directed by Joseph Albrecht (Peterson 2000: 130).[2] Other key fiction films of the period were *Symbol of Sacrifice*, (1918), and *Allan Quatermain* (1919). According to scholar and filmmaker, Bhekizizwe Peterson (2000: 130), with the emergence from 1927 of 'authentic African documentaries' filmed by Europeans, a 'deviation from the frontier features' occurred. For example, *Africa Today* (1927) by T. H. Baxter, 'explored the impact of Western civilization on the native' (Peterson 2000: 130). However, the mining recruitment film, *Native Life in the Cape Province*, later changed to *From Red Blanket to Civilization* (1925), by one Henry Taberer, the African Labour adviser for Native Recruiting Corporation, precedes *Africa Today*. *From Red Blanket* includes reconstructions of African encounters with industrialisation. In a recent study, the historian, Glenn Reynolds, has made an interesting observation that 'noticeably absent from the film are demeaning depictions of traditional life- what Rhodes once dismissed as the "life of sloth and laziness"' (Reynolds 2007: 136). However, its sequences are 'constructed through a decidedly teleological and Eurocentric perspective' (2007: 136). In this period, black-authored or assisted productions were practically non-existent.

---

[2] See also Davis P., 1996. *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa*: 127-141.

The African elite challenged the negative portrayals of Africans in cinema. Writer, Secretary-General of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC)[3], and its founding member, Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, registered his doubts about the cinema.

> I have since become suspicious of the veracity of the cinema and acquired a scepticism, which is not diminished by a gorgeous one exhibited in London which shows, side by side with the nobility of the white race, a highly coloured exaggeration of the depravity of blacks (Plaatje cited in Willan 1996: 212).[4]

Plaatje was responding to the racist film, *Birth of the Nation* (1915), particularly the crucifixion scene in which a black actor played the ill-famed biblical character, Judas Iscariot. According to his biographer, Brian Willan (1996), Plaatje and his collaborators successfully protested against the film's exhibition in South Africa. It can be intimated from these protests that the cinema's relations with colonial modernity were in this early period predicated upon contestations over black identity, particularly its role in the battle for ideological supremacy between African intellectuals and colonial ideologues. From the vantage point of his own efforts with the cinematograph, it seems that Plaatje's vigilance against *Birth* inspired in him the need for counter-narratives to white supremacist representations. In 1923, Plaatje brought films from his trips in the United States to black South African audiences (Balseiro and Masilela 2003: 19-20).[5] According to film scholar, Jacqueline Maingard, Plaatje's acquisition of part of his 'bioscope' apparatus, a portable generator, was not without irony. De Beers, the diamond mining company had donated it (Maingard 2007: 68). With his mobile biscope, Plaatje managed to reach remote parts of the country, and set in motion '… the entry of blak South Africans into the world of cinema audiences' (Maingard 2007: 68). Film scholar, Ntongela Masilela, writes that the idea behind Plaatje's efforts was to impress upon Africans, the achievements of America

---

[3] The SANNC is a forerunner of the present African National Congress (ANC), rulIng party of the Republic of South Africa post-1994.

[4] See also Peterson B., 2000. *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 132-134. Plaatje's protests appear as a contribution to a book written in homage to Shakespeare. See Plaatje S., 1916, in Gollanczs I., (Eds.) *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare,* London: Oxford University Press.

[5] See also Peterson, *Monarchs*, 128.

Negroes in the areas of education, agriculture and industry. Masilela also ascribes Plaatje's bioscope to the vision of the New African Movement- intellectual elite of which he was a 'member' (Balseiro and Masilela 2003: 15-30).[6]

Plaatje showed features and shorts of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, drills at the Institute and Negro spirituals as well as footage of the weddings of Sir Seretse Khama and the Duke of Westminster.[7] Plaatje's mobile bioscope demonstrates that Africans' encounters with cinema were sometimes influenced by the exhibitionary practices of early American cinema.[8] These practices involved the showing of silent films to the accompaniment of a full music band, and a soloist (Plaatje's son St. Leger), as well as a lecture by Plaatje himself.[9] These exhibitionary practices are in keeping with the US-based film scholar Miriam Hansen's description of early cinema in the United States, which I will discuss in due course. Interestingly, she argues that these practices are central to the 'alternative public sphere' constituted by early cinema. Maingard observes, in a recent study, that Plaatje's bioscope constitutes the beginning of a national alternative film culture (2007: 5). Plaatje's introduction of cinematic ways of engagement with black identity was alternative because it was not in keeping with South Africa's mainstream cinematic culture. In South Africa, '....cinema, until the 1950s, was targeted, almost exclusively, at white audiences' (Peterson 2000: 127). Therefore, Plaatje's bioscope constituted a relatively autonomous space of construction of black identity, against the racially exclusionary colonial film culture.

---

[6] See also Maingard J., *South African National Cinema*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 5. According to Ntongela Masilela, the New African Movement emerged in the post-Anglo Boer War years and ended with the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. Influenced by the attainments of African Americans- the so-called New Negro Intelligentsia, its thinkers, Masilela observes, were generally preoccupied with the construction of modernity for Africans, and used outlets such as the newspaper *Umteteli wa Bantu* (the Mouthpiece of the People). See Balseiro I., and Masilela N., 2003. (Ed.) *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 15-30.

[7] For an account of Plaatje's bioscope, see his letters to the African American scholar, Dr R. R. Moton in Willan B., 1996. *Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings,* Witwatersrand University Press: Johannesburg, 329-333.

[8] Hansen presents a full account of these relations in her book, *Babel and Babylon*. 1991. See Hansen M., 1991. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 42-57.

[9] The exhibition practices in Plaatje's bioscope can be read off a poster of one of his shows in Bloemfontein in September 1924. See a copy of the poster in Willan B., *Selected Writings:* 332.

Plaatje's efforts suggests that a rapport and identification with modernity lay at the centre of black people's early encounter with the cinema, as represented by the images of English and Tswana royal matrimonies, and the activities at Tuskegee (an African American college). Thus, the Africans' encounters with cinema coincided with their aspirations of accessing modernity and its promising fruits of 'progress'. From a historical perspective, the decade of the 1920s was formative in the intermittent participation of black people in cinema. It registered new tendencies in 'black experiences' of cinema and in their representations. In relation to cinematic culture in general, 'the spread and popularity of cinematic screenings among Africans can be traced to the early 1920's' (Peterson 2000: 127-8). However, a regime of heavy censorship attended the films shown to Africans, 'firstly by the Cape Town Board of Censors and secondly, by Dr Phillips and later a special board appointed by the Native Recruitment Agency' (Gustche 1972: 378-379). Low wages and low viewing charges prevented the development of cinemas among Africans, at least until the 1940s (Gutsche 1972: 379, 385). The condition of irregular or lack of African patronage of the cinema gave way to the intervention of corporations such as the Chamber of Mines. As part of these interventions, Plaatje's contemporary and ideological nemesis, the Reverend Ray Phillips, of the American Mission Board, introduced a well-funded and more sustained cinematic project.

Phillips and his senior colleague Dr. F.B. Bridgman, showed documentaries and short films to African mine workers.[10] *Safety First in the Mines*, *Dust that Kills*, *Lovedale Missionary Institution*, *The African Witchdoctor*, *From Kraal to Mine*, and *From Red Blanket to Civilization* were among the educational documentaries made by Phillips and Dr A. J. Orenstein (Peterson 2000: 131). The idea behind Phillips' efforts was to 'moralise the

---

[10] About European interventions in African experiences of cinema, like the Bantu Cinema Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit, see Diawara M., 1992. *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1-2. See also Burns J. M., 2002. *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 60-105. For a more recent study, see Reynolds G., 2005. *'Image and Empire': Cinema, Race and the Rise of Mass Spectatorship in Southern Africa*, 1920-1940 (South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe) (Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York at Stony Brook).

leisure time of migrant workers living in mining compounds' (Maingard 2007: 68).[11] Phillips articulated this moralising crusade in the wake of the 1922 white miners' strike., which he assumed was fecund for seeds of discord among 'idle' Africans, with 'their animal energies accumulating day by day' (Phillips 1930: 149-50). However, over and above the moralising intentions, the desire to pre-empt potential 'racial' and class solidarity among African mineworkers appear to have informed Phillips's cinematic vision. Phillips' endeavours were also designed to counter the burgeoning commercial cinemas around the mining compounds, hence his presentation of censored material that he deemed suitable for African workers (Phillips 1930: 141). The pioneering South African film historian, Thelma Gutsche, credits Phillips' work with redeeming the value of cinema, 'the success of Dr Phillip's weekly exhibitions proved the direct value of the cinema in sublimating potential criminal tendencies' (Gutsche 1972: 378). Curiously, Gutsche does not reflect on the political implications of Phillips' work, and only succeeds in affirming its apolitical and moralising claims.

Maingard (2007: 70) argues that Phillips' moralizing intentions dovetailed with state censorship of films and that it 'related to the perceived otherness of these (black) particular audiences'. Indeed, increasing state use of film suggests that the colonial state found in the medium, an avenue for ideological control of black people:

> If Plato was right in saying that he who makes a nation's songs exerts a greater influence than he who makes a nation's laws, then it will certainly not be far wrong to say that he who controls a people's films exerts a greater influence for good or ill, than he who makes the country's laws (Interdepartmental Committee on Native Education in South Africa, 1936, cited in Reynolds 2007: 90).[12]

Maingard (2007: 69) sees in Phillips' writings the indication of the development of 'black migrant worker audiences positioned between their rural traditionalist homes and the

---

[11] See also Phillips R., 1930. *The Bantu Are Coming*: *Phases of South Africa's Race Problems*, London: Student Christian Movement, 124.

[12] Phillips endorses this belief in his work. See Phillips R., 1938. *The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustments on the Witwatersrand*, Alice: The Lovedale Press, 315.

urban industrial space'. In tapping into Phillips' accounts of black experiences of the cinema in the period, Maingard alerts us to its colonial sensibilities and missionary perspectives of the time. Casting aspersions on Phillips' observation that the films shown, such as *A Zulu's Devotion* (1916), had 'fine appeal' for the workers, Maingard proposes that the workers' responses were likely to have contradicted such 'self-congratulatory' postures (2007: 69-70).

Among his most well known works, Phillips' *The Bantu Are Coming* (1930) captures the ominous overtones in settler anxieties about urbanization of Africans. Thus, his introduction of cinema among African workers was co-extensive with attempts at reversing the perceived threat embodied by large-scale entry of Africans into industrial modernity. Masilela characterized Phillips' project as 'a pre-occupation with policing the African imagination' (cited in Maingard 2007: 70). Ironically, the modernity of cinema suggests that such efforts were in vain. Not only was cinema poised to widen the loci of Africans' experience of industrial modernity- but the missionary zeal notwithstanding, it was fecund for the creation of new spaces for charting a new urban worker consciousness. The industrial context of cinematic encounter, coupled with the unpredictability of reception, as well as the inevitably conflictual interests of the workers and the management stratum of the mining industry, harboured the seeds for the destabilization of the ideological certainty behind such efforts. Noting the critical temper among African migrant labourers, Reynolds has argued that between the 1920s and 1940s,

> while the gold mining industry used films as a hegemonic strategy for expanding the industrial sector, the film shows conversely provided many villagers and potential recruits with a new venue for 'talking back to power' by contrasting the minutiae of working conditions, pay scales and the like (Reynolds 2007: 134).

In the 40s and 50s, cinemas for African audiences became available for the first time. For example, the South African History Online, an internet resource concerned with the history opf South Africa, describes some of the new moviehouses in Sophiatown, the Odin

8

and Balansky's in terms of their class distinctions and openness to various activities[13]. These cinemas served in part, as spaces where Africans' encounters of the city were negotiated. Political engagement and leisurely social interaction combined to generate a publicness, which though defined along class lines, contributed to Africans' opinion formation in the political sphere. Towards the close of the 40s and into the 50's, African artists and foreign white filmmakers collaborated in productions that markedly, brought Africans into the fold of urban cinematic modernity. A new product, black-centred films featuring local artists, instated a new African cinema audience, against the backdrop of Hollywood cultural influence. According to the anthropologist and music historian, David Coplan, 'the rapid development of the recording and cinema industries during the 1920s and 1930s brought American performance culture to many countries, including South Africa' (Coplan 1985: 121). However, it was only from 1949, with the production of *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* (1949), that American performance culture found a local resonance in local black-centred films.

*Jim Comes to Jo'burg* (aka *African Jim*), an independent film directed by Donald Swanson of Warrior Films, was the first film to extensively thematise blackness and urbanity in South African film culture. As the first film in South Africa with a blacks-only cast, *African Jim* was hailed as an important development. The film relies on a thin plot structure in which a rural 'boy' and a timid 'girl' make it in the city on terms set by a white patron of undependable character. Jim, the protagonist travels to Johannesburg to seek work. The city's petty gangsters rob him of his clothes and money. Fortunately, a night-watchman comes to his rescue and finds him a job as a domestic worker, but he is fired for not using a hosepipe properly. Later he finds work as a waiter-singer thanks to Dolly, the night-watchman's daughter. His former employer, who is in search for 'black talent' offers him a singing contract. Jim and Dolly, who is also a singer, become a successful duo and lovers.

---

[13] See *Sophiatown*, ‹http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/places/villages/gauteng/sophiatown/history3.htm›, (Accessed 5, March 2007).

Film scholar, Peter Davis, sees the film as valuable because 'it preserved a flavour of personalities who otherwise would have gone unrecorded' (1996: 21).[14]

*African Jim* introduced a new era of black and white collaboration in South African film culture. According to Maingard (2007: 67), the film inaugurated participation of black people at the level of production. She notes the casting role of one Dan Twala. Maingard (76) suggests that the film and others produced between the 40's and 50's 'represent a key 'moment' in South Africa's cinema history, a point where black modernity was cinematically represented in feature films for the first time…'. Yet, according to Masilela, *African Jim* and others such as *Zonk!* (1950) and *The Magic Garden* (1951)[15] did not elicit responses from African intellectuals because they were made by Europeans, and had a 'superficial coating of blackness' (Balseiro and Masilela 2003: 26). The lack of responses by the intellectual elite is however, a partial account of *African Jim*'s publicness because if Maingard's observation is anything to go by, the 'film's reception was far more complex than might otherwise be thought' (Maingard 2007: 79). Thus, 'despite the image of Africans as simple-hearted, dogged and irrepressible in the face of hardship that certainly falsified their experience….Africans were pleased to see their communities and performers represented in this prestigious medium' (Coplan cited in Maingard 2007: 79). A memorable acknowledgement by one of the film's African audiences, and which Maingard quotes, illustrates this appreciation: '….the fact that Dolly Rathebe was greeted by a crowd shouting the ANC slogan *Mayibuye iAfrika* (Come Back, Africa) at the Durban première of the film, reflects something of the film's value to African audiences' (Maingard 2007: 79).

*Cry, the Beloved Country* (1951) by Zoltan Korda marked yet another key point in the history of black people's involvement in film. It was an adaptation of a novel of the same title. *Cry, the Beloved Country*, by the anti-apartheid South African writer of liberal persuasion Alan Paton, was published in 1948. It is about the journey of Stephen Khumalo,

---

[14] Other commentators have highlighted the social implications of the manner in which this 'preservation' occurred. In an interview with Davis, author and critic Lewis Nkosi decried what he called 'the domestication' in the film of the singer beauty queen Dolly Rathebe's public persona. See Davis *Jungles*, 29.

[15] *Zonk* was a variety show adapted to film. The *Magic Garden* is a musical film about the theft of a church donation and the pursuit of the thief who stole it.

a priest from the countryside, to the city in search of his son Absalom Khumalo. Absalom is sentenced to death by hanging for killing a white man. At the end, Stephen Khumalo returns to the countryside, his son's pregnant girlfriend by his side, and continues his ecclesiastical duties. Journalist, Arthur Maimane, opined that *Cry, the Beloved Country* was 'the first professional film about what it was like to be black' (Davis 1993, 1996). However, the film, like its parent text, could not escape charges of white paternalistic liberalism.[16] It was also criticized for its heavy 'investment in an asocial Christian salvation' (Davis 1993, 1996: 41). Journalist and writer, Lewis Nkosi likened it to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1938) in the United States (in Davis 1993: 29).

*Come Back, Africa* (1959) was the most radical film in its time. This 'docu-drama'[17] focused on the lives of the black working class in 50's Sophiatown and Johannesburg, particularly the impact of apartheid on African rural migrants and urban intellectuals. By the beginning of the 1960s, black and white collaboration in film was virtually impossible. Something akin to a lull in the industry followed the political inactivity gripping the country in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre.[18] This inactivity stemmed from renewed state repression of political resistance. However, Henning Carlsen, a Danish filmmaker clandestinely directed *Dilemma* (1962), a fiction film based on the author and Nobel Prize Laureate, Nadine Gordimer's 1958 book called *A World of Strangers* (Maingard 2007: 139).

In the 1970s, the participation of black filmmakers in film production increased. White filmmakers who were in control of the production processes granted black filmmakers some technical leeway (Tomaselli 1989: 58). At the level of technology, this period proved auspicious for black filmmakers because of newly available lightweight hand-held cameras,

---

[16] For an example of this school of thought, see Ssali 1996, in Mbye Cham, (Ed) *African Experiences of Cinema*: 96-7. See also chapter three in this study.

[17] Commentators are not agreed about the film's genre. According to Balseiro, 'some critics have called the film documentary while others fit it squarely in the fictional category'. See Balseiro and Masilela, *To Change Reels,* 91.

[18] On the 21st March, 1960 police killed Africans in Sharpeville Township who were protesting against the 'pass' system in South Africa. Until the middle of the 1980s Africans in South Africa carried a 'pass', a form of identification through which the state could monitor their movement in the urban areas.

tape-recorders, and fast film stock, which had emerged in the preceding decade. In this period, the production of anti-apartheid films by foreign television producers also marked a new turn in global- South Africa film relations. These films included the documentaries *The Dumping Grounds* (1970) by John Sheperd, made for the UK's Granada Television, and *The Search of Sandra Laing* (1979) by Anthony Thomas and made for the British Broadcasting Corporation.

A group of five young black South African exiles, all members of the underground Pan Africanist Movement of Azania (PAC), among them Nana Mahomo, Vusi Maake, Rakhetla Tsehlana, and some British collaborators, secretly made a documentary film on the day to day effects of apartheid. It was called *Phela Ndaba- End of the Dialogue* (1970). The film exposes apartheid racial inequalities through a stark contrast of the quality of life of black and white people. *Phela Ndaba* was anonymously released under the aegis of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. Mahomo clandestinely made other documentaries, *The Dumping Grounds* (1973) and *The Last Grave at Dimbaza* (1974) which 'represented the genocidal effects of Bantustan policy' (Maingard 1998: 1).[19] Maingard hails *The Last Grave at Dimbaza* as revolutionary because of its use of unconventional stylistics. The 70's also saw black theatre professionals such as Gibson Kente independently embark on filmmaking, a bold but risky act given the state's hostile attitude towards openly critical cinema. In 1976, Kente directed and financed his own film, *How Long?*, an adaptation of his play of the same name. Regrettably, the state harassed Kente and impeded the wide circulation of *How Long?* According to film scholar, Keyan Tomaselli (1989: 57-8), the film was only distributed in the apartheid-created homeland of Transkei.

Tomaselli (1989: 58) also notes that in the late 1970s, there was a proliferation of films aimed at black audiences. This draws attention to the importance of film, for both the

---

[19] *The Last Grave at Dimbaza* is about the life-threatening conditions endured by black people who were banished to the unproductive reserves officially called Bantustans. These were designated regions for different black tribal groups in South Africa, the result of the apartheid state's policy of separate development.

apartheid state and independent filmmakers. The realization of the extent of its reach and influence made film the state's ideological tool *par excellence*. The international impact of *The Dumping Grounds* and *The Last Grave at Dimbaza* for example, instigated counter representations by the state through such documentary films as *Solution to the Dilemma of a Plural Society* (1977), *To Act a Lie,* (1980), *A Place Called Soweto* (1979) and *Journey to the Sun* (1975). These films represent the state's policy of apartheid in a good light in general. Importantly, the state's concerns about the international image of South Africa motivated its ventures into film. This is corroborated by the events surrounding the showing of *Last Grave at Dimbaza* in England. Maingard (2007) gives an account of how in the wake of the intervention of the South African embassy in England, the British producers of the film changed its title to *Black Man Alive- the Facts* (1974), and subjected it to significant cuts. Maingard further observes that the film's showing on British television was also followed by a panel discussion. She argues that the focus of the discussion was 'on the BBC and its dogged commitment to "impartiality" and the facts about Dimbaza were lost' (2007: 141).

While other films had been available earlier, which do not reflect apartheid ideology, in the 70's there was a substantial increase in the availability of films for black South African audiences than before. These included African American films such as *Sweet Sweet Baaaadddd Ass-Song* (1971), *Shaft*, *Sounder* (1972), *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972), *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and *Brother John* (1971). Television was introduced in South Africa just before the 1976 uprisings,[20] necessitating the development of black expertise in television technology. Although at this stage television catered for the white population, moves were under way to introduce channels for black viewers. This became a reality in the early 1980's when the national broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)'s TV2 for Nguni speakers and later TV3 for Sotho languages were

---

[20] The South African play and its film adaptation, *Sarafina* (1992), were inspired by these uprisings. For the film, see *Sarafina* 1992. Roodt Darell, (South Africa). The 1976 events, and the disappearance of one of the schoolchildren, Mbuyisa Makhubo, are the subject of the post-apartheid documentary: *What happened to Mbuyisa*, 1998. Mamdoo Feizel, (South Africa).

13

launched. The advent of television in 1976 also points towards the emergence of a new avenue for the constructions and contestations of ideas and black identity.

Simon Sabela was the first black fiction director with *u'Deliwe* (1975), the film through which the thesis establishes the public dimension of films aimed at black audiences. These films were made through a state subsidy scheme, which required a minimum of 75 percent of the dialogue to be in an indigenous language. In the early 1980's, films featuring black people that were a part of the state's racial and ethnicist ideology continued to flood the 'black film circuit'.[21] Tomaselli observed that in the spirit of the government's gradual and conditional multi-racialism through such organs as the Tricameral Parliament[22], a new phase of 'Structured Integration' was born. The key themes in these films were popular culture such as sports (boxing) in Rod Hay's *Stoney the One and Only* (1983), (soccer) *A Way of Life* (1981) and *Will to Win* (1982) (1989: 77). Tomaselli noted the treatment of traditionalism in Ronnie Isaacs's *Umjuluko Negazi* (1982), and good against evil in *Johnny Tough* (1983).

A new cluster of overtly anti-apartheid films hit South African and international circuits in the mid-80's. Most of these were Hollywood films aimed at galvanizing international sympathy for the anti-apartheid cause. By Hollywood films, I refer to the films that emerge from the 'studio system'[23] in the United States, and which are essentially driven by the profit motive. They tend to have a formulaic structure and their narratives centre on heroic figures, usually white males, whose actions impel them towards the attainment of social and economic power, within a patriarchal and capitalist sphere of relations. Being palatable to Western audiences is a cardinal feature of Hollywood films. Hollywood anti-apartheid films include *Cry Freedom* (1987), and *A Dry White Season* (1989). These films

---

[21] The 'black circuit' refers to all the venues of film exhibition exclusively reserved for black people during apartheid.

[22] This was a parliamentary system which operated on three unequal levels: an Upper House of Assembly for whites, Middle House of Representatives for 'coloureds' and lastly a House of Delegates for Indians. Black local authorities who did not have any real power were appointed in the townships.

[23] In the United States, the film industry is dominated by a few powerful oligopolies or studios which control the production of films and dominate the country's film culture.

and the independent ones such as *Mapantsula* (1988) changed the film landscape in the country[24].

*Cry Freedom*, a film about the life and death in prison of the Black Consciousness leader Steve Bantu Biko, was banned on its release in South Africa. Although *Cry Freedom* was hugely popular, the radical, black Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) criticized it for the centring of a white protagonist in its narrative. Commenting on its banning, AZAPO argued: 'We believe that government is not afraid of how Comrade Biko is portrayed. Rather it does not want to look itself in the mirror- that is Donald Woods and white society in general as portrayed in the film' (*Sowetan* 1988, 28 July). The organization also doubted the efficacy and legitimacy of the film to represent what it stood for: 'As to what Steve Biko says or depicts, we believe that is being said everyday by members of the movement he founded and all other people involved in the liberation struggle' (*Sowetan* 1988, 28 July).

*Mapantsula* registered the social and political consciousness among grassroots activists. It was made with the collaboration of local township residents. Made clandestinely like *Come Back, Africa*, its aesthetics and circulation marked its anti-Hollywood and pro-*Third Cinema* sensibilities. Third Cinema is a theory of cinema marked by a patently anti-Hollywood aesthetic and an overt political bias towards the perspectives of the marginalised.[25] The Hollywood anti-apartheid films as well as the home-grown *Mapantsula* and others in the form of documentaries, instated a new cinematic convention, which represented black people as political beings. In light of the challenges posed by political oppression, this shift in the representation of black identity meant that black people's agency became the subject of cinematic publicity and discursivity. Since *Come Back*, *Africa*, *Mapantsula* became one of the most explicit cinematic engagements with the social and political imaginary of blackness.

---

[24] *Cry Freedom* (1987), and *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1952, 1995) targeted overseas markets.
[25] For an extensive exposition of Third Cinema, see Chapter 5 in this work.

Parallel to the political changes of the 1990s, which ushered in democracy in South Africa, the film industry also entered a new era. For the first time, the SABC showed previously banned anti-apartheid documentary films installing as it did this, film as an object of public deliberation. The Department of Arts, Culture Science and Technology (DACST), newly established in 1994, supported film directly and later through a special statutory body for local film funding. Pursuant to policy directives of its Film Development Strategy (1996), the Department promulgated the National Film and Video Foundation Act 73 of 1997. This act established the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), a government body tasked with the development of the film industry in South Africa. According to Maingard (2007: 7), the NFVF is mandated to 'encourage the development and distribution of local film and video products and to redress the historical imbalances of the past especially in relation to disadvantaged communities'. However, the NFVF only became fully functional from 1999 onwards. The significance of the NFVF is in its reversal of the film subsidy system, which approved funding for films based on their ticket returns. On the contrary, the new film policy encouraged local film production regardless of profit value.

The widening of approaches to film, and registration of themes other than those dealing strictly with apartheid or the liberation movement, were notable tendencies in this period. For example, Michael Hamon's *Wheels and Deals* (1991) and Oliver Schmitz's *Hijack Stories* (2000), address post-apartheid crime. Another example is Ntshaveni wa Luruli's *Chickin Bizniz* (1998), a comedy about a small black entrepreneur. The film scene in post '94 South Africa evinces increased participation of black people in cinema and television. In 1999, *Yizo Yizo*, a highly controversial educational drama series, ushered in a new era in South African public television. It ended with a third season in 2004. The series was unprecedented in terms of both the use of television to forge public debate on matters of social and political importance, and its animation of public engagements. Feature films in this period include Ramadan Suleman's *Fools* (1997), a film about a township teacher's degeneration. *Fools* is an adaptation of author and critic Njabulo Ndebele's novella of the

16

same name. Like *Mapantsula*, *Fools* advances an *auteurist* aesthetic predicated on African cinematic conventions. Both formally and in terms of content, *Fools* engages its eponymous novella. As the first South African film to win a major international award, at the Locarno International Festival, *Fools* was a forerunner in the global independent circuit's recognition of post-apartheid black-centred South African films. Other black-centred films that emerged in this period, and that also won international recognition include *Chiken Biznis* (1998), *Drum* (2005), *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), and the Oscar-winning *Tsotsi* (2006).

## Film and Critique

Several scholars (David Attwell 2005, Bhekizizwe Peterson 2000, Thandika Mkandawire 2005) show how African intellectual history is a paradigmatic instance of the history and role of texts other than film, in the generation of public intellectual culture. These works demonstrate the production of modernity that arises from black intellectuals' critiques and appropriations of trans-Atlantic texts, and Enlightenment values. However, these scholarly works tend to bypass the production of films and the ideas which films generate in public. They foreground the genres of poetry, novels, short stories, journalism and plays and their engagements with modernity. The thesis draws attention to the empirical pathways of the circulation of films, the texts linked to the films, and explores their significance for critical public engagements about black identity.

Although she focuses on African film adaptations of literature, film scholar Lindiwe Dovey's work is instructive with regard to the question of film and critical public engagements.[26] Through *Fools* and other African films, she reflects on the question of the

---

[26] Dovey's work on African film adaptation of literature, has appeared in a number of articles and was the subject of her Ph.D. It is also the theme of her most recent book, which is based on her Ph.D. While the book has only appeared in the last stages of my writing of this thesis, I have opted to use it to update as much as possible, some of the observations she has made in her earlier work. See Dovey L., 2009. *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence on the Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press. For her Ph.D. see also Dovey L., 2005. *African Film Adaptation of Literature: Mimesis and the Critique of Violence*, Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge.

formal attributes of filmic adaptation in the light of the question of 'whether African film adaptation as medium is able to achieve a critique of violence in a way that is not available to verbal, concept-bound rational critique' (Dovey 2005c: 3). She asks further whether African film adaptation as a form of performative literary criticism and cultural critique, presented through an audio-visual medium and in a fictional form, is able to avoid what she calls 'the uneven power relations in conventional critique' (2005c: 45). Situating her discussion in contemporary thought about mimesis, Dovey argues that 'African film adaptation offers a kind of alternative, counter-gnosis to Western critique' (Dovey 2005c: 45). For Dovey, the films in her work 'gesture towards alternate forms of knowledge, which are embodied rather than abstract and conceptual, and do not repress the identity of the object or Other' (Dovey 2005c: 68). In her most recent work, Dovey discusses the films' critique of violence in terms of their rehistoricisation of violence and engagement of the viewers:

> I discuss the kinds of meanings that are made out of the source texts and their historical moments in the new contexts. And I closely examine the way that these adaptations are able to rehistoricise violence and thereby engage viewers' capacity for rational analysis of the multifaceted sociohistorical forces of contemporary violence (Dovey 2009: 10).

Dovey's work is salutary because it argues for the authority and particularity of African film adaptations to revise Western conceptions of critique. Her conclusions give indications of the rapport between African filmic adaptations and their audiences. They signal that these films' embodiment of violence reaches the audiences at the level of affect. The effect, Dovey implies, is that African film adaptations guide empathetic identification with victims of violence, and in the process, dismantle the inequality wrought in occidental rationality. Here, Dovey intimates the question of the equal availability or the lack thereof, of the rational-critical modes of the public sphere to audiences of African films that adapt literature. Applying herself to African film adaptations and their audiences, Dovey argues that 'while African films cannot be located wholly outside of a culture industry, they can be located within a public sphere that is characterised by closeness rather than the

distance that has been associated with mass culture...' (Dovey 2009: 21). For Dovey 'this allows for a recuperation of the intentionality of both filmmaker and viewer, and it also enables a particular kind of engagement of filmmakers with their subject matter and of the viewers with the images on the screen, a relationship that makes critique possible' (Dovey 2009: 21). However, Dovey's work elides the relation between these films and their publics. There is a marked absence in its formulation of the question of how such critiques might be seen to reverse the exclusionary tendencies of the public sphere in Africa. In considering this question, the thesis is compelled to put to the test, the relation of black-centred films to critical public engagements on blackness.

**Film in the Public Sphere**

In the schema of contemporary concerns about the state of 'public intellectual life',[27] film does not feature significantly as a site of public intellectual engagement. Nor is it hailed as a contemporary redeemer of the rational-critical modes of what Jürgen Habermas ([1962] 1991) calls the public sphere. The Habermasian public sphere, suspended between the state and civil society, is a space of critical public activity, chiefly defined by the public use of reason. For Habermas (1991: 27), the public sphere is constituted by private individuals who come together to form a public. However, his focus is on a particular type of the public sphere: the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas locates the formative period of the bourgeois public sphere in 17th century Europe.[28]

---

[27] The coupling of the concept of 'public' and 'intellectual' originates in Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals*, a lament of the decline of intellectual life in the United States of America. See Townsely E., September 2006. The Trope of the Public Intellectual in the United States, *The American Sociologist*, V. 37. No3: 39-66. However, Edward Said has questioned the explicit ascription of 'public' to 'intellectual' thus: 'there is no such thing as a private intellectual, since the moment you set down words and publish them, you have entered the public world. Nor is there *only* a public intellectual, someone who exists just as a figurehead or spokesperson, or symbol of a cause, movement or position'. Said E., 1994. *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*, Vintage Press: London, 9.

[28] For discussions about the decline of the public sphere in contemporary societies, see the following works: Russell Jacoby., 1987. *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, New York: Basic Books. Richard Posner., 2001. *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. Frank Furedi., 2004. *Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone? Confronting 21st Century Philistinism*, London, New York: Continuum.

According to him, this public sphere[29] evolved out of historical circumstances related to the societal shifts and the changing economic and political fortunes of the aristocracy. Yet, from the middle of the 19th century, Habermas argues, the institutions of the public sphere were weakened.[30] 'The public sphere in the world of letters was replaced by a pseudo-public or sham-private world of culture consumption' (1991: 160). He explains this through what he sees as the increasingly individualized nature of leisure and reception, brought about by the mass media, and the compromised nature of debate that they make possible. In Habermas' view, 'the world fashioned by the mass-media is a public sphere in appearance only' (1991: 171). In the wake of the rise of the culture industry, Habermas argues, new forms of bourgeois civility took root that were not amenable to the cultivation of rational-critical public debate. Marked by the tendency to abstain from literary and political debate, these new forms of sociability 'lacked that specific institutional power that had once ensured the interconnectedness of sociable contacts as the substratum of public communication- no public was formed around group activities' (1991: 163). Even then, Habermas observes the continuation of a tendency towards rational-critical debate. However, the consumer logic that the practices of the mass media, publishers and associations established stifled the free public use of reason: 'Thus discussion seems to be carefully cultivated and there seems to be no barrier to its proliferation. But surreptitiously it has changed in a specific way: it assumes the form of a consumer item' (1991: 164). For Habermas (1991: 170), a further assault on conditions agreeable to the cultivation of the public use of reason is at play in the commercial packaging of the media for entertainment and impersonal indulgence by the reader, and

---

[29] Since the inexactness of the English translation of the German original '*öffentlichkeit*' has been noted and corrected to be 'publicness'; I shall use the 'public sphere' reservedly. See translator's note in Habermas J, (Trans) Burger T., 1991. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into A Category of Bourgeois Society* The Cambridge Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts: xv.

[30] Habermas wrote that in 17th century France, what would later be called the *salon*, 'replaced the Hôtel de Rambouillet the great hall at court in which the prince staged his festivities…' (Habermas, *Public Sphere*: 31). Coffee houses, also became the centre of exchanges among the bourgeoisie in France and Britain. 'In both countries, these were centres of criticism- literary at first and then political- in which began to emerge, between aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals, a certain parity of the educated' (Habermas, *Public Sphere*: 32).

not for the public use of reason. According to Habermas, the new media (i.e. radio, film and television) also undermine the public use of reason.[31]

> Radio, film and television by degrees reduce to a minimum the distance that a reader is forced to maintain towards the printed letter- a distance that required the privacy of the appropriation as much as it made possible the publicity of a rational-critical exchange about what has been read (1991: 170).

Habermas (159) argues that the rise of 'culture-consuming' and the decline of 'culture-debating publics' characterizes the decline of the public sphere in contemporary societies.[32] However, Habermas recently reversed this view and recast the mass media, including film, as an adjunct to the contemporary political public sphere. He observes that: 'At the periphery of the political system, the public sphere is rooted in networks of wild flows of messages- news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes and images, shows and movies with an informative, polemical, educational, or entertaining content' (Habermas 2006: 11).

Habermas' characterization of film as a tangential fraction of the political public sphere reveals what Peters John Durham correctly observes as his distrust of the visual and aesthetic modes of representation, as normative vehicles for democratic culture and rational-critical deliberation in particular.[33] The rationale of Habermas' distrust of film as a significant site of the public sphere can be tested against the ways in which films relate to

---

[31] About what the historian Geoffrey Eley regards as the negative influence of the media on Habermas' model of the public sphere, see Eley G., 1993. Nations, Public and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the 19th Century, in Eley et al. *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, (Ed.), Princeton: Princeton UP, 297-335. See also Curran J., 1991. Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere, in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (Ed.) *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*, London and New York: Routledge, 27-57.

[32] Contrary to this lack of confidence in the media, Dana Polan questions the indistinction between culture and media in Habermas' *Öffentlichkeit*'. He shows that Habermas conflates culture with the media and therefore runs the risk of missing the ideological and cultural specificity of cultural production. For the full argument, see Polan D., 1990. The Public's Fear, or Media as Monster in Habermas, Negt, and Kluge. 'Jurgen Habermas The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society' in *Social Text*, No 25/26 Duke University Press: 260-66.

[33] See Peters Durham J., 1993. Distrust of Representation: Habermas on the Public Sphere, *Media, Culture and Society*, October, Vol. 15. No 4: 541-571 (562).

contemporary discourses. This study does this through the investigation of the relation between black-centred films and the unfolding public discourses on black identity.

The discussion of the public life of films in the context of apartheid South Africa, which forms part of the historical backdrop in this study, in terms that assume a classic Habermasian sense, might seem incongruous. To the extent that apartheid South Africa is different to 17th and 18th century Europe, any charge of inconsistency is well founded. This is chiefly because Habermas' public sphere assumes as a prerequisite, an open deliberative atmosphere among co-present equal actors, which in South Africa under colonial and apartheid rule was considerably disallowed on the basis of 'race' and gender. Yet, to deny the applicability of the concept to the study on the premise of state repression, risks positioning the state at the centre of the public sphere. By locating the public sphere outside institutional apparatus of the state, Habermas' work invalidates such thinking. Therefore, its subjection to state repression notwithstanding, the public sphere is conceptually autonomous from state authority. This makes possible its application to contexts other than egalitarian ones. Engaging the limits that repression places on the public sphere, the study examines the making and public lives of the films against its normative ideal of deliberation and the formation of opinion.

There are professional and scholarly precedents to this study's concerns about film's relations to the public sphere in general, and the early Habermas' marginalization of film from the public sphere in particular. These works, by author, filmmaker, and film scholar Alexander Kluge and Miriam Hansen respectively, are confined to 20th century Germany and the United States. The thesis engages these works, and applies some of their analyses to the South African context.

**Film in the Public Sphere: New German Cinema**

The first major attempt to conceptually articulate film in relation to the public sphere can be found in an intellectual tendency of the post- Second World War school of filmmaking in Germany called *New German Cinema*, and in particular, in the work of Alexander Kluge. *New German Cinema* sought to establish a convention of cinema in Germany in general, and a new kind of feature film specifically. It aimed at lessening commercial and political pressures on cinema.[34] According to Kluge, one of its principal lights, the capacity of film to inspire active reception by the spectators determines the actualization of *öffentlichkeit* and therefore the potential formation of an alternative or oppositional public sphere.

The notion of an oppositional public sphere, which Kluge employs, issues from his and philosopher and social theorist, Oskar Negt's critique of the Habermasian notion of the public sphere whose abstraction from the context of commodity and distribution they questioned (Negt and Kluge [1972] 1993).[35] They argued that Habermas celebrated the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere without questioning adequately its legitimacy as a regulative idea with a concealed bias to the interests of the ruling classes. While they accept the Habermasian thesis of the historical rise and decline of the bourgeois public sphere, Negt and Kluge question any attempt to salvage its ideality. They also question the private and public dichotomy in the public sphere of the bourgeoisie type because it tends to disregard human experience, which they define as a totality of productive relations, and which they argue, is ultimately public.

---

[34]For a brief introduction to the *New German Cinema* (*NGC*) and discussion of Kluge's films, see Pflaum Hans Günther., Prinzler Hans Helmut, 1983. *Cinema in the Federal Republic of Germany: A Handbook*, Trans. by T Nevill. Bonn: Inter Nationess, 5-12. The book also includes discussions of films within the school other than those of Kluge. See also Franklin J., 1983. *New German Cinema*: *From Oberhausen to Hamburg*, London: Columbus Book, 21-44. Franklin discusses the films from the *New German Cinema* collective and their reception in the United States. See also pages 59-73 for his analysis of Kluge's films. Thomas Elsaesser's contribution to the debates on *NGC* is probably the most comprehensive to date. See Elsaesser T., 1980. *New German Cinema: A History*, New Brunswick: New Jersey Rutgers University Press.

[35] Polan finds Kluge and Negt's conception of the media bleaker than Habermas'. He also argues that the myth of purity in Habermas' bourgeois public sphere recurs in their suggested alternative proletarian public sphere. However, he welcomes their appropriation of the media for an alternative public sphere. See Polan, *Media as Monster,* 260-66.

Working off their critique of Habermas, they suggest a new model in which a relatively 'autonomous, collective organization of the experience specific to workers' can be attained and whose intimate links to the marketplace is acknowledged (Hansen 1993: 28). They call this model the *proletarian* public sphere. Therefore, the *proletarian* public sphere is an alternative model to the bourgeois public sphere whose remnants, Negt and Kluge argue, are still traceable in the working class organizations such as the trade unions. However, the writers caution against the identification of the *proletarian* public sphere with what they call 'the public sphere of the workers' (1993: 33). Rather, they define the *proletarian* public sphere as 'an operative process' working within the public sphere of workers (1993: 33).[36] Although issuing from the concrete conditions of workers in relation to capital, Negt and Kluge conceptualize the *proletarian* public sphere discursively as a principle of negating 'hegemonic efforts to suppress, fragment, deligitimise, or assimilate any public formation that suggest an alternative, autonomous organization of experience' (1993: xxxii). Importantly, Hansen notes that Kluge has increasingly abandoned the epithet *proletarian* in his work, in favour of 'an emphatic notion of publicness, defined by such principles as openness, freedom of access, multiplicity of relations, communicative interaction and self-reflection' (Hansen 1988: 184). She also suggests that this marks Kluge's return to Habermas (Hansen 1991: 13.)[37] Following Hansen, this thesis treats Kluge's model as an attempt at founding an oppositional or alternative public sphere, not necessarily of a *proletarian* type.

---

[36] Consider also the elucidation of the term in Negt and Kluge's second collaboration, which the Marxist scholar and cultural critic, Fredric Jameson, quotes: 'Proletarian, i.e., separated from the means of production, designates not merely the labour characteristics of the industrial proletariat, but all similarly restricted productive capacities'. See Jameson F., 1988. On Negt and Kluge in *October*, Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories, and an Interview, 151-177. (156).

[37] Kluge has also expressed doubts about the viability of a *proletarian* public sphere. For his original comments, see Liebmann S., and Kluge A., 1988. On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere: An Interview with Alexander Kluge, *October*, Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories, and an Interview, 23-59 [43].

In *On Film and the Public Sphere*, (1982)[38] Kluge and one of his collaborators, Günther Hörmann, define as their ultimate objective, the professional production of an oppositional public sphere which will replace what Kluge calls the 'pseudo-public sphere of the bourgeois type' (Kluge 1982: 212). Kluge finds in 'phantasy'[39] the basis for the filmic cultivation of an oppositional public sphere: 'In addition to language, which is public, the public sphere should grant phantasy the status of a communal medium, and this includes a stream of associations and the faculty of memory (the two main avenues of phantasy)' (Kluge in Klaus 1982: 215). For Kluge, (1982: 215) the tendency of phantasy to disregard 'real obstacles as a compensation for the reality principle ….', could be used to serve any cause pursued by the filmmaker. Therefore, he seeks to cultivate an oppositional public sphere, with a method that is analogous to what he argues, is the multi-perspectival tendency of phantasy. To this end, Kluge suggests the method of 'mixing forms' in film which he calls 'perspectivism'. The goal of this method is to produce phantasy in the viewer, followed by deepened understanding, and a redirection of phantasy 'to the real course of events' (1982: 216). For him, 'perspectivism', which he articulates clearly in relation to his treatment of history in film, 'permits radical change in perspective' (1982: 215). Kluge summarizes this method thus: 'One basically takes the standards according to which one composes the film image (framing, perspective, depth of field, contrast) and applies them to the dramaturgy of context' (1982: 216). Accordingly, 'perspectivism' is mustered by disrupting one-dimensional flow of events in the film with cuts and breaks.

Montage is a central strategy used by Kluge to build and encourage phantasy in the spectator. However, in the interests of encouraging the critical participation of the spectator, Kluge adopts a non-linear montage because he argues, it does not suggest the

---

[38] This short article is a collection of excerpts from Kluge's film *Die Patriotin* (Frankfurt/Main Zweitausendeins, 1979). See Kluge, A., Interview by Eder Klaus, Autumn 1981-Winter 1982. (*Trans*) Thomas Y. L., Hansen M., On Film and the Public Sphere, *New German Critique*, 206-220. The views pertaining strictly to film and the oppositional public sphere were originally published in Eder K. and Kluge A., 1980. *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser).

[39] The term 'phantasy' and not 'fantasy' is in the original translation.

imposition of a structure of images in the spectator's mind (1982: 220). Kluge's use of montage retains connections between the images and texts depicted, ensuring the centrality of his notion of context (*Zusammenhang*).[40] The use of film to stimulate the oppositional public sphere is for Kluge also a matter of understanding how spectators deal with films. Kluge suggests that:

> .... the spectator never deals with single films but with clusters, with relationship between films- the films the spectator knows, his or her concept of cinema, and genre expectations. This is why only films in series have a proper influence and function in the public sphere (1982: 218).

In the light of this insight, Kluge suggests a strategy of producing films in series in order to establish a particular relationship with spectators, and therefore, sustain the production of an oppositional public sphere.

The conviction, clearly discernible in Kluge's reflections, that the ostensible correspondence of certain film aesthetics to phantasy guides the capacity of film to stimulate the public sphere, is ripe for questioning. Whatever the political aspirations behind this thinking, Kluge's analysis draws on an unstable assumption of causal relation between particular film aesthetics and states of spectators' minds, to the public sphere. In referring to the spectator's mind as a measuring field of *öffentlichkeit* through film, this thinking also stops short of explaining how the impression of film on the spectator manifests the public sphere. This has the undesired effect of theoretically reducing the public sphere generated by film to the strategies filmmakers employ and to the states of spectators' minds. Kluge's suggestion that producing films in a series is apposite for the production of an oppositional public sphere begs the question of whether films produced and circulated in other ways have any relation to the public sphere. Therefore, Kluge's approach presents an inadequate reflection on the public dimension of film. Kluge's work raises the question of what a more nuanced reflection on the public sphere might look

---

[40] Commentators on Kluge's films have frequently observed the disjunctive sense in his use of montage. See for instance, Bowie A., 1986. Alexander Kluge: An Introduction, *Cultural Critique*, No. 4: 111-118.

like. While Hansen's interests lie in the public sphere of silent cinema spectatorship, and not on film per se, to date, her work offers what might be considered as a more comprehensive response to the question.

**A Cinematic Public Sphere?**

Hansen (1983) has examined early cinema and the public sphere in Germany, and in relation to American silent cinema (1988, 1991). Her major work *Babel and Babylon* (1991) is a comprehensive argument for a rethinking of theories of cinematic spectatorship and reception, in terms of the public sphere. Recognizing that theories of spectatorship lack 'a public dimension of cinematic reception', Hansen sets out to rethink the spectator in terms of 'the constitutive tension between … her inscription by the filmic text and the social viewer who is asked to assume certain positions …' (1991: 4-7). Following Kluge, Hansen's spectator is also 'a position addressed not to the empirical viewer as socially contingent individual, but to an audience endowed with historically concrete contours, conflicts and possibilities' (1991: 14).

The public dimension of Hansen's spectator is patterned after Negt and Kluge's concept of the public: 'a social horizon of experience, the experience in particular of those excluded from the dominant space of public opinion' (1991: 12). Hansen (1993: 201) has also noted that this public is marked by the articulation and contestation of social experience 'in an intersubjective, potentially collective and oppositional form'. Thus, Hansen's 'public' intimates discursiveness, and ideally, a potentially oppositional social consciousness. This implies that the potential of collective political solidarity is a central conceptual element of Hansen's public.

The attempt in *Babel* to show how cinema operates as an alternative public sphere is based on a reading of the relations of reception and exhibition practices in early American cinema. For Hansen, these relations 'provided the formal conditions for an alternative public sphere, a structural possibility of articulating experience (for particular social

27

groups, such as immigrant working class audiences and women across class and generational boundaries) in a communicative relatively autonomous form' (1991: 7, 17, 90).[41] These conditions, Hansen observes, were predicated upon the exhibitionary practices of early cinema and the situation of reception, which had more effect on the viewer than the film itself (1991: 93). She attributes this to the integration of the actual spatial distribution of viewers and the exhibitionary arrangement of the shows. Hansen makes an example of the variety show of early cinema, which provided a sense of continuity between a fictional space mediated through lectures, sound effects and music, and the theatre space itself (93). Consequently, 'the meanings transacted were contingent upon the local conditions and constellations, leaving reception at the mercy of relatively unpredictable, aleatory processes' (1991: 94).

Hansen's argument for the public sphere dimension of spectatorship in early cinema is also based upon what she argues, was a short-lived female subculture centred on the Italian actor, Rudolph Valentino, and his exoticism as an ethnic other (1991: 18, 248- 253, 292). According to Hansen (1991: 294), this subculture constituted a 'collective horizon of gender-specific experience'. Hansen interprets the subculture as an alternative public sphere because of its appropriation of Valentino into a function of discourse of female sexuality that contested the patriarchal discourse of gender in American public life.

Hansen's work is instructive because it draws attention to the potential of cinematic reception to constitute an alternative public under certain conditions. Her work is significant in another respect: after Negt and Kluge, it provides a critical substantiation of their model of the public sphere that is, its embedment within the domain of commodity exchange and distribution and not above this domain. However, in surfacing the public dimension of cinematic spectatorship through the conditions of reception, and what she

---

[41]See also Hansen M., 1983. Early Silent Film: Whose Public Sphere? *New German Critique*, Vol. 29, (1983), The Origins of Mass Culture: The Case of Imperial Germany (1871-1918), Spring-Summer, 147-184.
Consider Hansen M., 1988. Reinventing the Nickelodeon: Notes on Kluge and Early Cinema. *October,* Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories and an Interview (Autumn), 178-198.

presents as an outcome of this spectatorship, the gender-specific star-cult, Hansen implies that spectatorship is an essential condition for the generation of the publicness of film. This notion of publicness also appears to guide her approach to contemporary forms of film reception. This has the effect of denying film the potential of generating publicness, over and above and even occasionally, without the requisite condition of spectatorship.

Admittedly, Hansen's earlier work is cognisant of the fact that contemporary experiences of film are not located in the classical institutional complex of the cinema and its attendant conventions (1983: 198). The implications for spectators other than cinema ones, is that the latter are more 'empowered' to control patterns of experiencing film and of displacing film as an integral part of the commodity of cinema,' in less regulated viewing situations (1983: 198). Even then, Hansen does not demonstrate how such control takes place and how it affects the ways in which film relates to the public sphere, over and above spectatorship. Hansen's interpretation of the public dimension of spectatorship in terms of a collective horizon of experience tends to ignore the possibility of disparate interpretations within such horizons. This absence of disparate interpretive world-views underplays what I have called the public critical potency of film. By public critical potency, I mean the capacity of film to stimulate critical engagements in public. Therefore, Hansen's approach misses aspects of the publicness of films and the conceptual bases of their public critical potency.

**Further Reflections on Film**

In addition to the explicit engagement of film and the public sphere, some independent cinema initiatives have explored the potential of film in contesting prevailing political ideas. These initiatives attest to the understanding of film as a tool for critical engagement. However, the extent and implications of the discursiveness of film is related often, and only, to its production, and to spaces of expert reflections on it. At the same time as film production and expert writings on film cannot be discounted, accepting them as constituting adequately, the discursive purview of film, presents a narrow and

29

problematic understanding of the relations between film as text and its publics. The operating assumption here seems to be that although film circulates beyond spaces of expert commentary, its critical potency rests exclusively within such spaces, or in its immediate effects on the seated audience. Considering that this assumption attenuates the discursive possibilities of film in public, this thesis examines the publicness of films both within and outside spaces of expert reflections about them. It pays attention to expert commentary in and of itself, and to the networks of circulation into which film enters, and how it shapes and it is shaped by other extra-expert forms of critical engagement.

Reception theory, which is concerned with how spectators actually interact with film, constitutes an attempt at understanding the role of film in society.[42] It foregrounds context and not text as the site of meaning making by spectators. To its credit, reception theory embraces the idea of active and not passive spectators. In doing so, the theory has contributed to the understanding of film as a site of the making of meaning within actual contexts of viewership. The conditions of these contexts also occasion a multiplicity of interpretations. However, the focus in reception theory, on spectatorial interactivity with film distinguishes it from the focal point of this thesis, which is on the publicness of film. Admittedly, this emphasis on publicness of film is alert to the idea of active spectators and the multiple interpretations of films but eclipses it. It does this by examining the critical role of film not only in relation to the scenes of engagement by a seated audience but also importantly, in relation to other scenes of engagement beyond viewership. The thesis recognises that the imprint of film in modern life, including but not restricted to physical sites of its viewership, and its relation to ongoing public discourses, strongly militates

---

[42] For a useful theoretical background to reception theory, see Holub R., 1984. *Reception Theory: a Critical Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge. Janet Staiger, offers an excellent historical materialist perspective of reception theory with a specific focus on American films. Her work incorporates a discussion of the theory's application to television. See Staiger J., 1992. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*, Princeton N, J.: Princeton University Press. See also Staiger J., 2000. *Perverse Spectators: the Practice of Film Reception*, New York and London: New York University Press. While its focus is on reception theory and television, David Morley's work is also pertinent for film studies. See Morley D., 1980. *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding*, London: British Film Institute.

against 'reception' as a conceptual premise for the understanding of the role of film in critical public engagements. Therefore, the thesis goes beyond reception theory because it views films in terms of relations with public discourses, and is not limited to the actual readings of films by spectators. This approach widens the scope of the relation of film to modernity in general, and to the public sphere in particular.

## South African Film Scholarship

Critical appreciation of South African films has shown extensively the hegemonic or counter-hegemonic tendencies at work in these films. Scholars have also highlighted the representations of identity, class and gender in South African films. While attention to the films' critical tendencies has driven many an analysis of their strategies and significance, their public dimension has frequently been ignored. This approach constitutes a failure to reflect critically on the dialectical demands engendered by the relation between the concepts of 'film' and 'public'. This thesis focuses on the critical public engagements that arise in relation to the films and their circulation. By focusing on their engagements of black identity, I hope to put into perspective the role of film in critical public engagements. Far from undermining the work that has already been done on black-centred South African films, this thesis encompasses such work in an attempt to explore conceptually, how film can be said to enhance critical public engagement.

The concern with the critical role of film is not new. However, in their considerations of film as a site through which modernity in South Africa may be critically apprehended in relation to questions of identity, and historically specific contexts, these analyses hardly deal with film as a material object that has a 'public life'. By public life I mean the totality of the events, and engagements in the films' circulation across time and space. Contemporary studies in South African cinema have documented historical nuances of black people's involvement in film. *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*: (Balseiro and Masilela 2003), includes discussions about the import of film in the forging of black identity and agency in modernity. In the book, Balseiro and Masilela mooted the idea

of treating film in South Africa as a phenomenon of cultural history. They write against the backdrop of a film culture that 'reluctantly took black South Africans into account' and a scholarship that only 'takes account of the participation of black people as background figures' in South African film history (2003: 1-2). It is partly against the reluctant inclusion of black South Africans from film culture that this study fashions its exploration of South African films - with an eye on black participation and the problematic of black identity. However, the concepts of 'film' and 'public' do not brook neat relations with the question of black participation in film.

Balseiro and Masilela hail Gutsche's 1972 seminal work on South African films, namely: *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, as a precedent in terms of methodology because it placed film in its social context. Together, the works of Gutsche, Balseiro and Masilela embody an important, and distinctive but small area in South African film scholarship, which relates film to its cultural and social context.

Maingard's (2007) study of South African films in light of the question of national cinema is the most recent offering. Though the book's focus is on South African film culture in general, it gives considerable attention to black experiences of film from the 1920s to the present. An incisive discussion of modernity and identity forged through film is at the centre of Maingard's concerns. In its linking of modernity and identity to film, her work complements the present study. The consideration of film as a cultural phenomenon forms an important part of this thesis but my focus is on the public critical nature and significance of film.

In their attention to representations of black identity in South African films, and black experiences of film, Maingard, Balseiro, Masilela and others including Magogodi, have updated and significantly expanded earlier concerns with black experiences of film, undertaken by Tomaselli and Peter Davis. Tomaselli only devotes a brief chapter to 'black'

32

film in his 1989 work, *The Cinema of Apartheid*. In terms of its vision, Tomaselli's book is aimed at bringing to light and encouraging critical perspectives on South African film culture, particularly as part of the anti-apartheid struggles. His latest book, *Encountering Modernity* (2006) which is admittedly a collection of his works on South African films in general, does not give significant critical attention to black-centred films. Davis on the other hand commits a substantial part of his and Daniel Riesenfeld's documentary film: *In Darkest Hollywood*: *Cinema and Apartheid* (1993), and Davis' book *In Darkest Hollywood: The Jungles of Cinema's South Africa* (1996), to the history of the representation of black identity in South African cinema, and its meaningfulness for them. While these works are important in their foregrounding of the black experience of cinema, they have not attempted to discuss how film relates to critical public engagements.

**Film, Modernity and History in South Africa**

I undertake the thesis against the background of film's imbrication within modern capitalist relations. Film is a capital-intensive and primarily a commercially driven cultural object, and therefore exists within the realm of capitalist relations and consumption. In societies 'structured in dominance'[43] such as in colonial and apartheid South Africa, this meant exclusion or marginalisation of black people from film culture. It is important to consider how film enhances critical public engagements because its conditions of production and bias towards profitability may counteract its potential to engage what cultural theorist, Paul Gilroy (1993: 41-71), has called 'the antinomies of modernity'. By 'antinomies of modernity', Gilroy refers to white domination, racialised slavery, and by allusion, to exploitative and dehumanizing systems in the forms of colonialism, and neo-colonialism, all of which are significantly informed by the global capitalist enterprise. These practices are 'antinomies of modernity' because they are incongruent with the

---

[43] The formulation of 'societies structured in dominance' is from Stuart Hall. See Hall S., 1980. "Race", Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance, in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, Paris: UNESCO, 305-345.

rational claims underwriting the universalizing and dominant occidental versions of modernity, with which they are historically affiliated.

Hegel defines modernity historically as an epochal concept (Habermas 1987: 5). According to Habermas (1987: 5), the Renaissance, Reformation and discovery of the New World which happened around 1500, are for Hegel constitutive of the threshold between the Middle Ages and 'modern times'. For Hegel, the intellectual reawakening of Europe and exploration of the West form a genesis of a 'rupture' retrospectively called 'modernity'. In this study, modernity is understood to be the concept of society as a progressive aggregate founded on instrumental rationality. Technological or scientific inventions, the systematization of societal life, as well as economic and political organization, are manifestations of this rationality.[44] As one of the modern scientific inventions, film is intractably caught up within the logic of this new rationality. Not only is it a major economic enterprise but as apparatus, it stands witness to the logic of modernity as a progressive discourse. However, the history of South Africa throws into sharp relief the contradictions of modernity in colonial and neo-colonial societies. To understand modernity in South Africa, its relationship to black identity and its relation to the films under study, it will prove useful briefly to delineate the history of colonialism, and apartheid, and the meanings of blackness across time.

Imperial Britain occupied the Cape Colony in 1795 and seized it from the Dutch in 1806 (Simons and Simons 1983: 11). According to the historians, Ray and Jack Simons (1983: 15), the British victory 'led ultimately to the emancipation of slaves, the subjugation of

---

[44] According to Weber, modernity is marked both by the secularization of society and by its development from the viewpoint of rationalization. Rationalization is simply the formulation of economic, social and political activities with the aim of facilitating their management and therefore controllability. It is a feature of modernity to rationalize structures of society around capitalist enterprises and bureaucratic state apparatuses. The concatenation of life into a rationalized system presents many problems for philosophy, beginning with Hegel, whom Habermas credits with being the first philosopher of modernity. See Habermas J, 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press: 1, 43.

[44] For an instructive discussion of modernity within colonial settings, see Comaroff J.L., and Comaroff J., 1997. *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London.

Africans and a cultural dualism among the whites that developed into rival nationalisms' (1983: 15). The racial tolerance of colonial liberalism gradually gave way to the rising tide of racial segregation among the British settlers, who by 1865, 'disenfranchised Africans and developed under the British rule a white supremacy state...' (1983: 20). Thus, a liberal spirit marked the formative years of colonialism in South Africa, that however tended to permit different forms of inequality over time. The onset of colonialism in South Africa unfolded against the background of the Industrial Revolution, a historical and economic phenomenon typified by a shift from a manual labour-based economy to a machine-based large-scale manufacturing mode of production. In effect, colonialism and its enterprising industrialisation supplanted the economic mode of production in the region. Thus, the Industrial Revolution lay at the root of modernisation in South Africa, and gave birth to new social and economic relations. The discoveries of diamonds in Kimberley in 1867-1871, and gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 fuelled the rapid industrialisation that forcibly brought Africans into a modernity marked by racial segregation, super-exploitation and dispossession.

In the period following the mineral discoveries, Britain embarked on a series of wars with the various African nations and the Afrikaner Republics (Simons and Simons 1983: 31). The establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 cemented the post Anglo-Boer war rapprochement between the British and the Dutch. The Union gave white supremacist politics a formidable legislative platform through which successive governments passed Acts that dispossessed Africans of political rights and whatever remained of their lands. The 1913 Land Act allocated Africans only seven percent of the remaining largely unproductive land. However, 'the Native Land Act had of course been preceded by a vast number of land laws in the British colonies and the Boer republics before 1910; laws regulating squatting, tenancies, imposing taxes and rents...but the 1913 Land Act while it echoed details from earlier legislation went much further' (Bundy 1990: 5). The effect of the Act was 'to drive the native peasant off the land....the only refuge that the native had

was the town' (Sir William Berry cited in Plaatje 1916: 48-50). However, the presence of Africans in the urban areas threatened white separatism.

In this period, new pseudo-scientific 'disciplines' such as physical anthropology and Bantu Studies that professed racial typologies and evolutionary difference, took root in South Africa. However, racial classificatory schemes, which originated in the European enlightenment, preceded these 'scientific' preoccupations in South Africa (Dubow 1995: 25). These so-called 'sciences' were underwritten by white supremacy: 'In charting the paths of evolutionary development they helped to confirm- by implicit analogy if not outright comparison- the intrinsic superiority of the white races and the inexorable progress of European civilization' (Dubow 1995: 39). Physical anthropology infantilised the 'bushmen' in particular, casting them as child races and in need of protection from Europeans (Dubow 1995: 50-51). An instructive example of the 'scientific' ascription of racial inferiority on Africans is the controversial depiction of the 'bushman diorama' still on display in the South African Museum (Dubow 1995: 36). The racial 'scientific' notions of the period percolated into the early twentieth century South African political scene. According to Dubow, the then Prime Minister of the Union, General Jan Christian Smuts, expressed sentiments for the preservation and celebration of the bushman as 'a childlike reminder of the noble innocence that Western civilization has long lost' (1995: 52). Ultimately, early racial 'sciences' gave a semblance of dignity to inherently racist attitudes that gave vent to colonial and later apartheid casting of Africans as existing outside history, and as having no claims to modernity. The cinema, being a marker of modern sophistication, became an instrument for ostensibly scientific scrutiny of the Africans' intellectual abilities. Although its primarily context is colonial Zimbabwe, historian, James Burns's work, *Flickering Shadows*: *Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe* (2002), offers some insights into the mobilization of cinema in pseudo-scientific colonial enterprises. Burns shows that from the late 1920's, white scholars began to do research that cast aspersions on Africans' ability to understand cinema. According to him, '...settler fears that Africans were incapable of understanding cinematic images became entangled in a

broader debate about African "difference", a discussion that held a crucial relevance for white politics in Southern Africa' (Burns 2002: 3).

In response to African urbanisation, the Transvaal Local Government Commission under the chairmanship of one C.F. Stallard, made recommendations which denied Africans permanent abode in the urban areas. The commission suggested that 'the native should only be allowed to enter the urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister' (cited in Baines 2003: 37). This line of thinking which was also allied to missionary and conservative African traditionalists' concerns about the moral implications of what they believed were the corrupting ways of the urban areas, played a significant role in giving content to official imaginations of African identity. Accordingly, Africans were traditional and only temporarily encountered industrial modernity at the behest of the white man. This ideology motivated government to pass the Native Urban Areas Act in 1923, which made provision for the accommodation of Africans in separate urban locations. However, by the 1940s, large numbers of Africans were urbanised and some owned property in freehold suburbs[45] which were also called 'black spots' because they were purportedly in white land. However, these 'black spots' were deemed unsafe for white residents and in time, were demolished and their residents removed by force of arms to 'locations' in the outskirts of the cities and towns.

The rise to power of the Nationalist Party in 1948 saw the establishment of the apartheid system. Based on an extreme form of Afrikaner nationalism, this system further entrenched white racial dominance in South Africa. No sooner was apartheid promulgated than its legislative machinery kicked in with laws that governed the social, political and even intimate lives of Africans. The restriction of African life in the urban areas was a cardinal goal in the Nationalist Party's ideology of separate development.

---

[45] These were areas in the city in which Africans were allowed to buy and own property.

A stream of legislation emerged- the Population Registration Act (1950) which labelled every individual by race; the Group Areas Act (1950) which delimited living areas; the bantu Authorities Act (1951) which reinforced traditional African tribal structures; the Separate Amenities Act (1953) which divided the use of public amenities; and the Bantu Education Act (1953) which defined African education (Barber 1999: 141).

Apartheid led to the radicalisation of African opinion, and throughout the 50's, anti-apartheid activism intensified only to be rudely crushed by the state at the beginning of the 1960s. 'Following Sharpeville, Pretoria moved quickly – prohibiting public meetings, banning the PAC and ANC as unlawful organisations, declaring a state of emergency and rounding up political opponents' (Barber 1999: 169). State hostility to African political demands drove the latter into exile and a revolutionary method of operation- the armed struggle.

By the 1970s however, ideological rifts emerged from within the National Party, leading to a profound destabilization of apartheid, particularly the extreme Verwoerdean[46] interpretation of it. This inspired a reformist turn in the history of apartheid. While some of the reforms, for example the Wiehahn (1977) and Riekert Commissions (1979), did not necessarily suggest the erosion of apartheid, they were significant in areas such as labour-where black workers were recognized for the first time.[47]

In theatre scholar, Ian Steadman's reading of the work of the historian, Herman Giliomee, (1985: 346, 349), the reformist gestures were responsible for the creation of divisions within both black and white political ranks, and to the emergence of two opposing tendencies- the radicals and 'accommodationists'. Steadman argues that this was significant because it changed the political image of balkanization between whites and blacks. Importantly, the accomodationist stance was significant because it posed a

---

[46] The so-called architect of apartheid, H.F. Verwoerd (1901-1966), was the Prime Minister of South Africa from 1958 until his assassination in 1966. He refined the system of apartheid in a rigid and even extreme manner.

[47] These were state-appointed commissions, which came in the wake of the growth of trade unionism, the major expression of which was the unprecedented 1973 strike by black workers. For the Riekert Commission, see Republic of South Africa, 1979. *Riekert Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Legislation Affecting Utilization of Manpower* (Pretoria: Government Printer).

challenge to the Verwordean 'homelands' system in which black people were arbitrarily allocated separate rural territories along their so-called 'ethnic lines'.

Challenges from a resurgent black political activism also played a role in the weakening of apartheid. Towards the end of the 1960s and well into the 70's, black student leaders heralded a radical paradigm with regard to black identity and agency. This paradigm took the form of the political ideology of Black Consciousness. The custodians of Black Consciousness, the South African Students Organization (SASO), defined it as a mental attitude and a way of life that is primarily guided by a rejection of 'all value systems that seek to make the black man a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity' (cited in Steadman 1985: 111). SASO argued for black self-definition and accepted the premise that:

> .... before black people should join the open society, they should first close their ranks, to form themselves into a solid group to oppose the definite racism that is meted out by white society, to work out their direction clearly and bargain from a position of strength. SASO believes that a truly open society can only be achieved by blacks (cited in Steadman 1985: 111).[48]

The rise of Black Consciousness in South Africa in the post-Civil Rights era and in the wake of Black Power Movement in the United States, also point towards continued trans-Atlantic influences and exchanges regarding the local discourses of blackness. These had resonances in the local black press- *Drum* magazine, *The World* newspaper and others. Engagements of black identity gained a foothold in the public sphere in South Africa. Narratives of black redemption inspired theatre, poetry and music of the time.[49]

---

[48] For a comprehensive account of the philosophy of Black Consciousness, see Biko S., 1978. *I Write What I like*, London: Bowerdean. See also Biko S,. 1978. (Ed) Millard A., *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, New York: Random House. See also Fatton R., 1986. *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy*, New York: State University of New York. See especially the chapter: The Growth and Definition of Black Consciousness: 63-80.

[49] Steadman gives an extended account of the influence of Black Consciousness on black theatre in the 1970s. See Steadman I., 1985. *Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984*. See also Chapter three in this thesis.

The hiatus in political protest and resistance, which had begun with the brutal suppression of the 1960 uprising in Sharpeville, ended with yet another massacre in students uprising of 1976. In this year, schoolchildren in Soweto actively challenged the attempts by the state to institute Afrikaans forcibly as a medium of instruction in black schools.[50] A major crackdown by the state followed in which many schoolchildren were killed. Some of the children fled the country to join the armed forces of the exiled liberation movements. In the 1980's anti-apartheid activism gained more ground, culminating in the demise of apartheid by the beginning of the 1990s.

On the strength of the cited historical contradictions in the social and political relations in South Africa, the thesis treats modernity in that country as the historical cauldron and discursive arena in which colonialism, neo-colonialism and various guises of imperialism are played out. Subjection and resistance, negotiation and manoeuvre, as well as appropriations and expropriations of cultural and political resources to define 'new' African worldviews characterize modernity in South Africa. In the South African context modernity and the challenges it poses change over time. For instance, colonial and apartheid modernity significantly located blackness outside modernity because of the binary logic which put blackness in opposition to a progressive whiteness. Thus, if whites resided in the city and were modern, blacks were fixed to an archaic rural traditionalism and were, ostensibly, perpetually unsuited to industrial modernity and its attendant political and social life. The logical conclusion of this thinking was that blacks were to be held in trusteeship, as they were not capable of self-rule. Therefore, underlying colonial and apartheid modernity was a racial attitude that confined black people to an inferior social and economic status. Consequently, colonial and apartheid modernity significantly denied black people social and political agency. Through segregation, both colonialism and apartheid cast Africans as aberrations of modernity, the intent and effect of which was to

---

[50] For a rich historical discussion, see Hirson B., 1979. *Year of Fire, Year of Ash. The Soweto Re- volt: Roots of a Revolution?* London: Zed Press.

exclude them from the public sphere. However, Africans repeatedly succeeded in resisting that exclusion and sometimes in creating public spheres.

The terms by which blackness was contested were affected by the rapid urbanisation of black people and the apartheid state's waning 'control' over their lives. As a result, other challenges, including class, gender, sexuality and intergenerational differences, have come to significantly define the problematic of blackness. These differences or issues constitute a discursive terrain in which the social and political assumptions about blackness unfold. For instance, as well as projecting the flexibility of their cultural identities, class relations in the urban setting draw attention to the social and economic status of black people in the city. Thus, in black people's encounter with urbanity, the question of what it meant to be black in the city is salient. Part of the challenge issuing from this encounter is the relation of political agency to blackness. This question is germane to those conditions of political resistance against apartheid, particularly those marked by political solidarity that foregrounded a homogenous black identity and political agency. With the attainment of independence in 1994, questions of sexuality and gender gained momentum; no longer could they be marginal subjects in the discourse of liberation especially in regard to its moral and ethical imperatives. By addressing themselves to these questions, some of the films in this study illuminate the complexities of blackness and modernity. If I appear to historicise the problematic of modernity in relation to blackness, it is because of the salience of the shifting discursive currents in the public sphere, which are greatly affected by the unfolding political and social relations in South Africa. The films are no less subject to these shifts, and their relations to the public discursive currents tend to surface their public engagements in those regards.

The films respond to problems that have defined modernity in South Africa including the migrant labour system, urban separate development, and the attendant problems of mass urbanisation and poverty manifest in tropes such as petty criminality and *lumpen* subjectivity. The post-apartheid films also address problems attendant on South Africa's

41

post-repressive period namely: nation-building, gender and masculine violence, the crisis of public education and sexuality. Contemporary public deliberations and contestations of the cited issues have a bearing on the films' relations to critical public engagements on black identity. These deliberations constitute the discursive currents in the contexts of the films' initial and ongoing circulation. These discursive currents facilitate the study's exploration of the link between the concepts of 'public' and 'film'.

The problems that relate to colonial and apartheid history are relevant to the thesis insofar as they touch on historical and philosophical aspects of modernity namely, colonization, instrumental rationality and commodification. However, the thesis is not interested in the ideological questions about modernity per se, but in the question of how film, one of the objects of modernity, engages with many questions that are related to modernity, and the nature of the ideas themselves. Film, a thoroughly modern enterprise, runs across, (in no particular order), the many processes of modernization raised above as apparatus, it is a product of capital and labour; as form, it is a site of the production of values, and norms; and as culture, it is a locus of social relations. This raises the question of how its many manifestations across the economic, social and political spheres relate to each other because the norms of capital are not value-free, nor co-extensive with those of the publics that film calls into being. This is a question, not of political economy *qua* political economy, but of the possibilities, limits and nature of the sphere of engagement, within which film as form operates, including but not restricted to political economic contexts. The imbrication of film within the rationale of modernity raises the question of its critical potency- that is its capacity to bring into being critical public engagements of contemporary issues, which have a bearing on subjectivity and identity.

**Conclusion**

In the colonial and apartheid eras, attempts have been made to divert black identity from engagement with modernity, by confining it to the spaces of tradition and Bantustanism.

42

There have of course, been significant exceptions such as the rise of the *amakholwa* (educated and Christianized Africans), and the New African movement, as well as the establishment of the liberation movements. Historically, some of these exceptions recognized the intrinsic modernity of film, and the importance of engaging the medium as part of the project of realizing modern black subjectivities. Solomon Plaatje's bioscope exhibition project exemplifies this tendency, as does for example, the inter-war and post-war commentary by writer, and public intellectual H.I.E. Dhlomo. Partly in response to these kinds of engagements, and in the context of a rapidly mediating world, the apartheid government invested in films that envisioned black identity. The thesis takes up the 'project' of the exploration of black identity through and around film, when black-centred films began decisively to engage modernity. Cognizant of a handful of precursors, the thesis takes as its starting point *Come Back, Africa*, which was made clandestinely in 1959, and represents one of the first significant cinematic engagements with black identity and modernity in South Africa. The real rupture with the past however, occurred in the 1970s when internal apartheid certainties about tribal and rural identities ascribed to South African blacks were themselves beginning to collapse. This happened against the background of the assertive ideology of Black Consciousness that flourished in the 1970s, infusing the quest for new forms of black identity. The thesis tracks the efforts of these philosophical and ideological shifts through the political struggles of the 1980's to the post 1994 period of democracy.

# CHAPTER 2

# RESEARCH METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

Method entails the choice of the films to be studied, and the procedure of collecting research material that speaks to the films' relation to public engagements of issues concerned with black identity, gender, sexuality and violence. The methodology includes an analytical approach to the films; other materials collected and acknowledges the strengths and limits of the available evidence. It also describes the central concepts in the study, that is of film, circulation, and text, and how they inform my objectives. It also describes how these concepts illuminate the analysis of the evidence and other materials used.

## Identification of the Films

My choice of the films was based on their particular historical locations and distinctions pertaining to 'black experiences' in general, and the problematic of black identity in particular. The films were made at different stages of the apartheid and post-apartheid period. *Come Back, Africa* (1959) was made at the height of Verwoedean-inspired apartheid. *u'Deliwe* (1975) emerged when apartheid was going through a political crisis because of the internal ideological rifts within the National Party, and when new challenges posed by the Black Consciousness movement emerged. Some apartheid ideologues in tandem with capital argued for the permanence of Black people in urban areas, thereby destabilising the notion of black people as essentially rural and traditional. When *Mapantsula* (1987) was made, overt political challenge to apartheid was at its peak. The production of the film was itself mired in underground alliances between grassroots political organisations and the exiled ANC and PAC. Both *Fools* (1997) and *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004) came about after the formal demise of apartheid. The atmosphere of national euphoria following political independence, defined the context of their making and initial

44

circulation. The differences in the periods allow for a wide range of historical shifts and challenges with regard to black South Africans' encounters with film.

While I accept that blackness or African identity is a historical problematic, constructed and reconstructed in varied ways over time, I approach blackness or black identity in terms of heterogeneous cultural and political constructions with which people of African descent, and variously people of colour with generally similar historical experiences of modernity, identify. Such constructions are premised on a negotiation of modernity and a resistance of its contradictions- racial prejudice in particular and negative stereotypes in general. Thus, regardless of the different social and cultural particularities among black people the world over, I understand blackness as a cultural and political identity because of its coming into being in modernity, particularly in relation to the contradictions of modernity that are based on negative cultural assumptions about blackness. This understanding eschews essentialist approaches to identity and adopts instead, its cultural, social and political constructedness: 'the fact is "black" has never been just there either. It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically. It too is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found' (Hall 1996 (b): 116). In the context of the study, I use 'black' and 'African' interchangeably to refer primarily to the formerly politically oppressed South Africans and their descendants. I must point out however, that so-called Indians and coloureds were not excluded from a claim to modernity in the same way as Africans and their descendants.

The themes, circumstances of emergence, circulations and discursive contexts of the films allow for a wide range of questions and engagements with regard to the central objective of the thesis, which is to reflect on the critical status of film in relation to the challenges of modernity. Whatever their objectives, the films addressed a primarily black viewership. With the exception of *Come Back, Africa*, the selected films' actual circulation was projected in the main to black South African audiences. Alive to the historical circumstances in which they emerged, these films demonstrate different attempts at

'authenticating' black South African images and their cultural milieu. The films invoke 'senses of blackness' in different ways.

The thesis divides the films in two categories, the early and later black-centred films. These categories are historical in that early black-centred films emerge in the colonial and apartheid periods. Early black-centred films include Plaatje's films of the 1920s but properly begin with *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* in 1949. Later black-centred films begin with *Mapantsula* in the late 80's and end with *Yizo Yizo* in 2004. The categories take into account the production conditions of the films and the circumstances of their circulation. The relation of early black-centred films to the contexts of their production and circulation was largely at the mercy of the historical context of apartheid. However, the effects of apartheid on the films were not homogenous. For example, earlier films such as *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* and *Zonk*, were made and circulated when apartheid had just been promulgated, making it impossible for the system to exercise absolute control on theor productions and circulation. The early black-centred films tend to be constrained aesthetically and sometimes thematically because of the circumstances influencing their production as well as the people producing and directing them. Later black-centred films display a degree of autonomy denied the earlier films, and are therefore more aesthetically adventurous and thematically diverse. The availability of advanced outlets of distribution such as video, DVD and television characterise the circulation of the later black-centred films. The thesis does not set out to provide a historical account of black-centred films across the period 1959-2001. It rather uses the 'punctuated moments' of focus on particular films across that period, as opportunities to reflect on the role of film in contemporary public engagements, in an effort to gain understanding of the contribution of film to what Habermas terms the public sphere.

*Come Back, Africa* (1959) was one of the first black-centred films. It engaged critically with apartheid, and the circumstances of its making and circulation establishes the background to the study. Produced clandestinely in the formative years of the apartheid state, *Come*

*Back, Africa* entered the South African cinematic record by stealth, in a way that foreshadowed the challenges that significantly typified the relations between cinema and critical public engagements of black identity until 1988. Its narrative centres on black urban identities, apartheid and industrial society in the late 1950s. The film draws attention to the issue of migrant labour and black-intellectuals' contestations of black urban identity in particular. As such *Come Back, Africa* raises the question of how early black-centred films related to reflections on black identity.

In the 1950s, black South Africans accessed the cinematic apparatus largely at the mercy of white independent filmmakers. As such, the involvement of Africans in the making of independent black-centred films depended on white benevolence. Eschewing liberal tutelage, the American filmmaker, Lionel Rogosin collaborated with a group of Africans intellectuals in a film that engaged the apartheid system and exploitative industrial relations. Precisely because of its focus and circumstances of production, *Come Back, Africa* is a window into the nature of the publicness of black-centred films over-time. Unlike *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, *Zonk* and the *Magic Garden*, its constraints pose searching questions about the publicness of films without circulation in the countries of their making, or settings that they actually address. However, *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, *Zonk* and *Magic Garden* may give an insightful glimpse into Africans' entry into South African cinematic culture, and publicness, and therefore deserve thorough attention on their own.

*u'Deliwe* (1975) was produced by the apartheid state's Department of Information. Directed by a black filmmaker, it was infused with a distinctively black sensibility. Because of the changes in the composition of its production team, that is in reversing the 'racial' composition of its principal filmmakers, and even in its circulation, *u'Deliwe* constitutes a distinct 'moment' in terms of the cinematic engagements of blackness in South Africa. The film reconstructs black encounters with urban modernity in Johannesburg in the 1970s. In the film, a middle class patriarchal privileging of familial stability and values is pitted against the independent forays of young women into the social scenes of the city. Being a

47

state subsidy film focusing on black social life without direct reference to the political context of apartheid, *u'Deliwe* raises the question of the critical value to public engagements of black identity, of apartheid-era films that were heavily affiliated to the state. In particular, it throws into sharp relief class and gender in the engagements of black identity in the apartheid period.

*Mapantsula* (1987), an overtly anti-apartheid *engagé* film about a petty gangster in the context of the 1980's political unrest in the townships, constitutes a militant filmic idiom in the tradition of Third Cinema theory and practices. Through its narrative and visual tapestry of unrest and petty criminality, the film openly challenged apartheid hegemony. As a film that emerged in the heat of unrest in South African townships, it allows the thesis to explore the changing critical engagements of blackness in relation to equally dynamic historical continuities and discontinuities in the 1980's and beyond. The film provokes the examination of the problematic of blackness in relation to arguments that seek to define blackness in terms of a collective political agency. The film's political commitment constitutes a radical engagement of apartheid and enables the thesis to explore the critical tendencies of its commitment. The critical engagements in *Mapantsula* of class, gender and racial injustices, and its circulation within politically engaged contexts, enables the thesis to ask questions about the relation of film to the public sphere within the context of late, but still repressive, apartheid South Africa.

The post-apartheid film *Fools* (1997), reconstructs the historical wheel of the late apartheid era by representing a 1980's township in a manner that revealed levels of violence among the black township residents. The narrative of *Fools* revolves around the rape of a young woman by her teacher, and the injustice of patriarchal attitudes towards her ordeal. *Fools* is set in the 1980's, but its making in the 1990s, during the transition to democracy redirected the South African cinematic focus from overtly politicised violence to 'gendered' violence. It also eschewed, albeit critically, the euphoria of the new dispensation. Its metaphoric stylistics, and focus on gender- an issue of address that

appears to be 'out of joint' with the local film culture and the euphoria of black independence set it apart from other films that I consider in this thesis. *Fools* is adapted from a novella of the same name, and therefore invites consideration of the public intellectual form that a film might assume in relation to its literary origins. This poses questions about how *auteurist* films generate critical public engagements on black identity from the perspective of gender. How these engagements related to the question of blackness is of paramount import because part of the colonial constructions of black identity was based on generic stereotyping of black sexuality.

*Yizo Yizo* (1999, 2001) is a state-commissioned three-season television series addressed at the problems in the township schools in South Africa. As an outcome of a campaign by the South African National Department of Education called Culture of Learning and Teaching, Teaching and Service (COLTS), it was part of the Departmental strategies for addressing problems besetting township schools. The film was charged with the development of positive role models, as well as 'modelling a process of restoration in a typical South African school serving urban Black South African community' (<http://www/southafrica-newyork.net/consulate/education.htm"> (accessed 2, July 2006). *Yizo Yizo* was aimed at high school and out-of-school youth.

The thesis premises its choice of *Yizo Yizo* on its wide audience reach, overt mandate to generate debate, and generic strategies such as the use of explicit language, and highly suggestive sex scenes. *Yizo Yizo* allows the thesis to explore the question of how film constitutes publicness from the perspective of its format (television series), platform (television) and its mandate. This question is significant in view of the different dynamics that shaped the distribution and production practices of the other films in the study, which were made primarily for cinematic viewing.

I have selected films which over-time have attracted a lot of attention, about which much has been written and researched; films that have been largely consecrated as significant.

49

As a sequence, and in exception of *u'Deliwe*, each film has already attracted to it significant secondary literature. This literature is at various points in the thesis my object of study, as evidence of the publicness of the film concerned. At the same time, key texts within that literature are secondary texts of film scholarship on which I draw, both conceptually and as sources of information for my analysis. My methodological need to focus on films that have already garnered substantial scholarly attention means that the emphasis of the thesis is not on the location, and use of hitherto unknown archival sources, as well as fresh material, but on the application of a fresh analytical approach to a text-rich field.

## The Concatenation of Texts through Time

In presenting and sustaining the conceptual foundations of the study, I draw on the social theorist Michael Warner's theoretical explanation of publics that come into being in relation to texts that circulate (Warner 2002). Warner delineates three senses of the concept of public. The first and the most common-sensical is of 'a people in general, a kind of social totality' (2002: 65). The second refers to a 'crowd witnessing itself in visible space such as a theatre audience' (2002: 66). The third sense is of 'a public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation' (2002: 66). It is largely in the third sense, which describes the relation between publics, texts and their circulation that the thesis bases its methodology.

> Without the idea of a text that can be picked up at different times and in different places by otherwise unrelated people, we would not imagine *a* public as an entity that embraces all the users of the text, whoever they might be. Often the texts themselves are not even recognized as texts [...] but the publics they bring into being are still discursive in the same way (2002: 68).

It follows then, that circulation is essential to the publicness of texts. Following Warner, the thesis adopts circulation as a key concept that makes possible the publicness of the films. Thus, in the thesis circulation is important insofar as it facilitates the possibility of

various encounters with the films, and secondarily, in the manner in which the films are engaged by their publics.

For Warner, 'a public is a space of discourse and is organized by nothing other than discourse itself' (2002: 67). It exists by virtue of being addressed. This means that as the end goal for which texts are published or other modes of address used- *a* public is 'conjured into being by discourse in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence' (2002: 67). Accordingly, a public is an infinite discursive space whose existence is made possible by the discourse that texts constitute. Thus, as an object of address *a* public is a *condition* of discourse as well as an *object* of address by discourse itself.

Warner's understanding of *a* public in relation to texts that circulate is useful for the thesis. Appropriating this insight and his argument that publics are discursive, permits me to consider films methodologically as texts that circulate and, through their circulation, engender publics. However, for Warner 'no single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, even a single medium. All are insufficient to create the kind of reflexivity that we call a public, since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse' (2002: 90). Thus, the approach of this thesis entails the consideration of film as a text whose circulation and interaction with, as well as generation of other texts, media and their concatenation through time, creates publics (2002: 90). It is precisely this circulation and intertextuality, which gives film the capacity of bringing publics into being. Examining publics in terms of their discursive tendencies in relation to the films in the thesis, allows me to arrive at some conclusions about their capacities or the lack thereof, to animate critical engagements.

> A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies just in this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence.  A public in this sense is as much notional as it is empirical (2002: 67).

51

Thus, the publics of the films in the thesis are not restricted to film viewing audiences, but include non-film viewing publics who might constitute discursive spaces that are not immediate to the exhibitions of the films. Such publics come into being in the wake of the public engagements into which the films enter or stimulate through their circulation. The extensiveness of publics differentiates the methodology in the study from the approaches of reception theory. The thesis is not about the reception of films; rather, it is about their public discursiveness.

**Film**

The thesis proceeds from the assumption that film satisfies the attributes of a text that circulates, and is open to varied uses, and engagements. I approach film as the object of the thesis as a specific instance of text. Methodologically therefore, the question of text arises at the very primary level of engaging with the research object. In the present context, the idea of text is grasped as a publicly apprehended object which obtains at the point of public engagement with its 'meanings' or significance. Therefore, text is an object that has complex effects- it both engenders and inherits discourse. However, these effects can only take place through circulation.

In tandem with its textuality and subjectivity to circulation, the thesis treats film as an impression of object relations and a constitution of their ontological statuses, assigned by cinematic or televisual apparatuses.[51] In other words, film is a sphere of representation of objects and their perceived nature. Thus, film exists as an object of human consciousness. It makes the engagements of ideas possible. However, as form, it facilitates engagement of ideas by appealing to the human senses, in a way that renders almost im-*mediate*-ly

---

[51] Increasingly however, cell phones challenge televisual and cinematic apparatuses such as 35mm cameras and the smaller digital editions as the traditional preserve for film production and experience. Recently, for example, a South African feature film was shot on cell phone cameras. The film, *SMS Sugarman* (1998), by Aryan Kaganof, was shot on Sony Ericcson W900i model. For more details, see Cinema Goes Cellular with *SMS Sugarman*, *Vodaworld Magazine*, (Ed. Rhoda Davis), Winter, 2006, Ravi Naidoo, Cape Town, 22-25.

available, the world it depicts. It is necessary to explicate the link between film as form and the apparatuses through which it is made possible. Here are the basic features of the apparatus and that are relatively separable from film as form.

The impression of visual motion forms the basic attribute of the film apparatus in that the objects it organizes are always in flux through its illusionary 'space'. This sense of 'flux' encompasses film's impression of life and is eventuated in the relations of life recognizable to the world external to it- hence the assumption of the ontological attributes of objective 'reality'. Although not strictly essential to it, the auditory attribute of the apparatus is also important in the facilitation of the 'unity' of the experience of film and contemplation of its meaningfulness.

## Critical Engagements

By critical engagements, I mean the public reflections- direct or indirect- that come into being in the wake of films or in anticipation of a film. The thesis examines such engagements in relation to the themes of black identity, gender, sexuality and violence, and in how they relate to the discursive sphere immediate to the films' making and circulation. A principal way in which the thesis examines the relation between film and critical public engagements is through their contextual affiliations. When a film resonates with its context, it has contextual affiliation- a key element in its capacity to generate critical engagements. The lack of contextual affiliation presents the tendency to narrow, at least in the first instance, a film's critical potency.

In the attempt to understand the status of film as an object that circulates within and in relation to the myriad intersections of technology, discourse, and social practices that encompass modern life, I have treated film as a dynamic site of complex discursive relations within the contexts of its production, circulation, appropriation and engagement. This approach entails firstly, analyzing the intratextual (internal to the film) elements such

53

as narrative, narrative space, dialogue and titles according to how they orient films to their imagined publics. The thesis shows that, the films relate to the discursive dynamics of their contexts in different ways at different times. I have identified these differences in terms of the films' intratextual addresses, aesthetics (form), and themes. These differences and the films' historical circumstances and contexts coalesce around the issue of black identity as the principal theme and discursive motif in the thesis.

Secondarily, I focus on how the films are launched into public life. This includes giving attention to the films' paratexts, those texts associated with the films, which form part of their orchestration, and are designed to frame their public engagements. This approach has allowed me to begin to demarcate the publicness of the films. Where possible I focus on the relations at play in the films' production and give attention to issues of funding, that is who actually funds the productions and where possible, the distribution of the films and why.

Then, in tandem with the films' intra-textual foregrounding of issues and questions that have a bearing on public deliberations, I have surfaced the engagements and deliberations that flow from the films and extend beyond the reach of the cinema and formal outlets. These are what the thesis terms, the sites of film's 'public life'. While this approach is helpful, its reliance on secondary texts (reviews, scholarly critiques, newspaper commentary) means that I had to deal with data that was erratic at times, and that sometimes offered scanty information about the atmosphere in forming people's experiences of the films. In the thesis, publics are identified as the discursive spaces, which can only be encountered through texts that directly or indirectly flow from the films.

In the third leg of the methodological task, I focus on events, debates and engagements that are beyond the reach of the filmmakers, some anticipated (e.g. reviews) and others not. The filmmakers are alive to the predictability of reviews, and to some extent, they may try to ready their films in particular ways for anticipated developments in the

reviewing process. Nevertheless, to some extent, the protocols and conventions of the 'field' (in the Bourdieu sense of the cultural field)[52] govern the reviewing process. The thesis shows that film can exceed the boundaries of that field, and enter into others such as the political and the familial. I point out that film festivals, and commentary on films, such as that by newspaper columnist Xolela Mangcu, are different from the reviews, which are governed by the rules and conventions of their field. The thesis shows that in taking discussions of the film out of the review field, forums, commentary and festivals often propel film into surprising twists in its public life. Thus, they turn film into the occasion for the engagement of the contemporary nature of black identity.

Academic engagement, itself a specific field, forms part of the public life of the films. Through the discussions around particular films, academic critique contributes to the construction and extension of film as a site of critical public engagements. My selection of the films was mindful of the role of academic critique. The selected films are subject to this form of engagement. In the methodology, academic critique is treated both as a part of the public life of the films and as primary data. At the same time, I am alert to the fact that as a form of raw data, academic critique is, in relation to each film, ancestral to my own scholarly analysis. In that sense, it is part of the secondary literature available to me.

**Paratexts**

Although its theoretical concerns are about the textuality of books, Gerard Gennete's (1997) concept of 'paratexts' is a useful tool for examining the films focussed on in the thesis. According to Genette (1997: xviii), paratexts are 'liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritexts) and outside it (epitexts), that mediate the book to the reader'. Thus, the role of the paratext is to define the nature of a text, it 'enables a text to

---

[52] By cultural field, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu denotes 'the cultural site of the production of the cultural goods that the different classes appropriate in their struggle for legitimating distinction'. See Gartmann D., 2002. Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Change: Explication, Application, Critique in *Sociological Theory,* Vol. 20. No. 2: 255-277.

become a book and to be accepted as such by its readers and, more generally, to the public' (Genette 1997: 1). Genette (1997: xviii) cites as examples of paratexts, 'titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and aftewords….but also the elements in the private and public history of the book, its epitexts'. Genette (1997: 344) calls epitext 'any paratextual element not appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space'. The study's concerns with the public lives of the films guides its emphasis on Genette's notion of 'epitexts', itself a category of paratexts- in order to make explicit the changing discursive spheres in the films' circulation. As alluded to in the above quote, the sub-category of epitext, that is, the public epitext is even more germane to this study.

> The public epitext is always, by definition, directed at the public in general, even if it never actually reaches more than a limited portion of the public; but this directing may be autonomous and as it were spontaneous, as when an author publishes (in the form of an article or volume) a commentary on his work, or it may be mediated by the initiative and intervention of a questioner or interlocutor, as is the case in interviews and conversations…. (1997: 352).

The spatial flexibility of the paratexts, that is their presence within and outside the book, means that they operate between the world of the book and its circulation. Paratexts constitute the books' thresholds' which Genette (1997: 2) defines as

> an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text)…. Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies).

It is upon the tendency of the 'threshold' to manifest the lives of texts in terms of a 'negotiation' of 'meanings' and relations with their projected readers, that the thesis

premises its exploration of the making and public lives of black-centred films in South Africa. While the thesis places stress on the public epitexts in their concrete facticity, it is equally cognizant of the film's thresholds- the contingencies in their circulations, and the relation of their internal elements to the discursive spheres which they enter. The paratexts, it must be noted, are not restricted to the written genres but also encompass the visual regime (pictures, paintings) through which the films' bills are made. The concept of paratexts allows the thesis to track film as text, not only through its actual pathways, but also through the conventions that mediate film to its publics. The thesis is especially interested in the processes by which certain paratexts and epitexts themselves come to enjoy significant public life, not only at the time of the films' initial circulation, but also over-time. Thus, I focus more on paratexts that appear and reappear in secondary literature than those which emerged only at the time of the films' circulation and then dropped wholly out of view. There is no doubt that such texts and their public demise could add a further dimension to my analysis. However, their investigation would entail an extensive archival investigation with its own specific theoretical and methodological implications, a research project in its own right. Methodologically, this is an exclusion that I was obliged to implement and hereby acknowledge.

**Identification of Secondary Literature**

The criteria for identifying the secondary literature, that is the core material on which this thesis is based, are informed by their engagements and relations to the films in the study and to South African and African film scholarship in general. I have organized these texts into two broad clusters, the expert and the popular. The expert cluster is made up of commentators with professional critical competence and knowledge of film. It includes but is not confined to extensive scholarly studies on South African films. Film criticism, for instance, belongs to this cluster. The popular cluster is made up of commentators with little or no professional competence and knowledge of film. The clusters are not strictly divided and they sometimes intersect such as when a film expert contributes to a political

debate on a film in a newspaper. Thus, the blurring of the clusters also happens when commentators straddle both popular and academic spaces. This also happens in relation to conventions internal to the film industry itself, such as is characterized by paratextual conventions such as the production of film bills, previews and interviews in the popular press.

The expert cluster is dominated by commentaries, reviews and studies that are academic in nature and are found in theses, books, and journals and to a lesser extent web-based texts. Works by South African film scholars dominate the cluster and I extensively draw on them to illuminate the historical and discursive contexts of the films under study. Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid*, (1989) and Davis' *In Darkest Hollywood* (1996) and more latterly, Balseiro and Masilela's *Film and Film Culture in South Africa* (2003), as well as Maingard's *South African National Cinema* (2007) are dominant. Tomaselli and Davis focus more on films produced in the 80's while Balseiro, Masilela, and Maingard's works are more comprehensive. Over and above the South African specific books, I have also identified and used work by a scholar of African cinema, Frank Ukadike. His *Questioning African Cinema* (2002) includes an interview with Ramadan Suleman, the director of *Fools* and shows extensively the director's impressions on the film's engagements of post-apartheid South Africa. Though not academic, the book proffers an expert view.

Theses on *Fools* and other African films by film scholars, Lindiwe Dovey, (2005c), *Yizo Yizo* by René Smith (2001) and Muff Andersson (2004), are an important part of the academic cluster in the study. Most of the journals, which give space to extensive engagement of the films, are not local. The only local journal is *Critical Arts* and it has proven to be largely attuned to films that were produced in the 70's and 80's. In the study, Gavshon's contribution in *Critical Arts* (1980), about films aimed at black audiences, forms part of the discussion of *u'Deliwe*. The international journals that have a direct bearing on the films in the thesis include *Screen*, and to a lesser extent *Journal of Post-Colonial Writing* (2005), *Theatre Research International* (2002) and *NKA*- a journal of African art. These journals

58

have published significant readings of *Mapantsula* and *Fools* by Maingard, Dovey and Magogodi. Another journal *Media, Culture and Society* (2004) includes work on *Yizo Yizo* by Clive Barnett, which this thesis engages. Among the journals are specialist ones such as *Screen*, *Film Quarterly*, *Film and History* and *African Arts*.

A small part of the textual pool investigated in the thesis is internet-based. Most of these are sites of the film festivals in which the films were exhibited. Web-based texts of the cited magazines such as *New Internationalist*, *Sechaba* and *NKA* are also used. However, these are not dominant in the thesis. There are no particular websites dedicated to deliberations on South African films and those used in the thesis are varied and have disparate objectives.

The popular cluster is constituted by non-expert commentaries on films by the readers of magazines and newspapers that appear in 'letters to the editor', columns, op-eds and review sections of the press in general. These commentaries, reactions, and sometimes complaints are found in popular magazines particularly in *Drum*, and in national newspapers such as the now-defunct *New Nation,* and in *the Sowetan*, *Weekly Mail* (later *Mail & Guardian*), *City Press* and to some extent the *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Independent*. The role of the *Mail & Guardian* in the use of film as a tool for engaging censorship and apartheid related problems in the late 80's and early 90's is especially important in the chapter on *Mapantsula.* This is due to its enduring attention to South African and international films through film festivals and supplements. The *Sowetan* and *New Nation* are also important in respect of their reviews of the anti-apartheid films *Mapantsula* and *Come Back, Africa*, and in relation to making space for popular commentary on the television series, *Yizo Yizo*. In the *Sowetan*, *City Press*, *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Independent*, letters and columns by non-expert as well as expert commentators on *Yizo Yizo* easily collapse the line between expertise and non-expertise. For instance, in relation to *Yizo Yizo*, the *Sunday Independent* sometimes published letters

and columns, which though they do not show film expertise, are not strictly popular in their slant.

Atypical texts such as *Mapantsula*: *The Book*, traverse the popular and expert clusters. Through interviews of the directors of the film, commentary by the anti-apartheid Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) cultural activists, the book is co-extensive with the popular activism against apartheid in the 1980's. *Sechaba*, (1989, 1990) the political journal of the exiled African National Congress, as well as *Fighting Talk* (1960) a mouth-piece of the Congress Movement in the post- Second World War period, are other atypical texts in the thesis. In staging a debate around *Mapantsula*, *Sechaba* moved beyond its usual focus on politics. At the same time, it extended the film's capacity for setting in motion significant spaces of public engagements. In addition to *Sechaba*, the leftist and United Kingdom-based *New Internationalist* also forms part of the popular texts. However, unlike *Sechaba*, *New Internationalist* is renowned for its consistent attention to film, especially films that it views as advancing leftist causes.

## Scope and Limits of the Thesis

The take up of the films is mostly in written texts. This means that the absence of and lack of access to oral texts particularly with regard to exchanges at film workshops, unrecorded public discussions and interviews, limits the conclusions of the study. In exception to the letters, other textual forms such as reviews, books, theses, and op-eds- suggest generic continuity with either the press, educational and publishing institutions. This means that most of the texts are not extensively reflective of voices outside conventional institutional arrangements, and only relatively (in terms of letters to the editors and talk shows such as the *Tim Modise Show*), are they extended to non-institutionalized voices.

At the same time, I made a conscious decision not to conduct oral interviews, partly because of a methodological consideration: what people remember is not necessarily

what actually happened, and also because the thesis is not concerned with what that form of data shows, that is to say, what aspect of the public life of the film is remembered when a prompt is given. If I was trying to understand the impact of the films, that kind of data would be significant. I have, however conducted a limited number of interviews in order to trace as far as possible, the pathways of the texts under study.

The object of my focus is not confined to the circulation of the film object. I also attempt to track the ripples of discussion that flow out from the film object. Some of these happen in conversations between people in varied spaces, some of whom may not have seen the films. The conversations are hugely significant but for the most part ephemeral, and beyond my capacity to find any archival traces, except in the memories of people interviewed. Therefore, I have relied largely on traces in the media, other forms of publication, paratexts and in archival recoveries of films in later years, to build a picture of the public life of the films over time. In each instance, the nature of the particular medium, genre involved, has to be taken into account, as in distinguishing between commentaries, reviews and academic critiques. Consequently, the thesis, of necessity carves out only a slice of the infiniteness of enquiry into the publicness of the films.

A further limitation concerns the exclusive use of English-based texts. Attempts at gaining access to texts in languages other than English, especially isiZulu which has currency in the South African media industry, have proven difficult. Film commentary in the newspapers is predominantly in English. Admittedly, my own biases as a researcher trained mostly through the English language are apparent in the thesis. Thus, the issue of language is also applicable to the difficulty in accessing oral sources in local languages. The same applies to languages outside South Africa where most of the films in the thesis were also circulated.

**Structure of the Rest of the Thesis**

*Chapter 3* discusses the making and public life of *Come Back, Africa* (1959). Through the film, it focuses on the question of the nature and significance of the publicness of early black-centred films. It also examines how the film related to public engagements on the discourses of blackness at the time of its inception and circulation. *Chapter 4* ruminates on how *u'Deliwe* (1975) related to contemporary debates on black identity, including but not restricted to those expounded by the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. It considers the film's critical import against the backdrop of often-dismissive scholarly accounts of subsidy films aimed at black audiences. *Chapter 5* examines the making and public life of *Mapantsula* (1988) in the light of the question of the relations of film to the public sphere. It also observes the film's relations to discourses of blackness. The chapter tracks the manner in which the film, produced in an anti-apartheid context, continues to invite different kinds of engagement in a post-repressive regime era. *Chapter 6* deals with the archival reappropriations in the public engagement of *u'Deliwe* (1975), *Come Back, Africa* (1959) and *Mapantsula* (1988). It asks how the later public lives of the films unfolded.

In *Chapter 7*, the thesis explores the ways in which *Fools* (1998) animated public engagements of gender and gender relations, chiefly in relation to the changing discourses on black identity. The chapter draws attention to the setting of the film in the post-apartheid dispensation, its form and circulation. Alert to these factors, it arrives at some conclusions about the public critical potency of *auteurist* African cinema. Central to *Chapter 8* is the role of orchestration of debate about issues that films raise. The chapter examines the making and public life of *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2001) paying close attention to how through its strategies, and linked multi-media support, the film set out to orchestrate debate about educational issues. It explores these strategies against the actual public engagements of the series and notes the limits and strengths of orchestration particularly in relation to the series' public critical potency.

*Chapter 9* revisits the major objective of the thesis, which is to investigate the role of film in the public life of ideas. It gives an overview of black-centred films' relations to public engagements on black identity. It considers the circumstances under which black-centred films may stimulate critical engagements of blackness. Through its examination of these circumstances, and of the films' relation to public engagements on black identity, it arrives at some conclusions about the role of film in the public sphere.

# CHAPTER 3

## Migrants, 'Intellectual *Tsotsis*',[53] and a Conniving Foreigner: *Come Back, Africa* (1959) and the Challenges of Cinematic Publicness

### Synopsis

*Come Back, Africa* opens with a still image of a seemingly disused building. There is no sound as the camera pans from high angle shots, showing a montage of high-rise buildings. After a shift to an unconnected part of the city, the doorway of a slum house, the camera segues to a morning scene of the hustle and bustle of Johannesburg. Here, unsophisticated and bewildered African migrants walk down the street, their *Induna* (headman) in the lead. A close up of one of the men, Zacharia Mgabi, reveals his confusion as he lifts up his eyes to examine the towering buildings around him. He marches sombrely with his fellow migrants. A legend appears against these visuals:

> This film was made secretly in order to portray the true conditions of life in South Africa today. There are no professional actors in this drama of the fate of a man and his country. This is the story of Zacharia one of the thousands of Africans forced off the land by the regime and to the gold mines.

The migrants are now in the outskirts of the city. They walk towards a mineshaft which appears ahead. In a mine hostel scene, Zacharia speaks for the first time with a fellow worker. We learn of his famine-induced migration to the mine and of the false promises of good pay as a worker. However, Zacharia realizes that a litany of prohibitive laws stands in his way to find better work in the city. When eventually he finds a job, it is as a domestic

---

[53] This description is a self-reflexive coinage of 50's *Drum* journalists, in particular Can Themba, whose fear and admiration of the *tsotsis'* (township petty criminals) ingenious subversion of apartheid, put their ethics to the test. Lewis Nkosi, in an obituary for Can Themba, describes him as 'the supreme intellectual *tsotsi*… raising hell in the neighbourhood'. See Nkosi L., 1985. Obituary, *Themba Can, The Will to Die*. London: Heinemann, x. The ascription has also gained currency in contemporary texts about the Sophiatown School of journalism. See for example, Fenwick M., 1996. 'Tough Guy, eh!': The Gangster-Figure in *Drum*, *Journal of Southern African Studies,* Vol. 22. No4. (Dec), 617-632.

servant for Mrs. Myrtle, a shrewish white employer. After some misunderstandings, the employer wastes no time in firing Zacharia. Vinah, his wife and his children join Zacharia at his rented shack in Sophiatown. Moving from one menial job to another, Zacharia goes through a series of dismissals. Street scenes of musical jumbles by penny whistle-blowing kids, Bapedi drummers, a Methodist church revival, a wedding and urchins running about punctuate his trials. Transitional scenes of morning rushes at the train stations in the city also capture the viewer's eye. Zacharia makes friends with an elderly servant who introduces him to the Sophiatown shebeen scene. His encounter with a local *tsotsi,* Marumu (*sic*)[54], becomes the subject of a shebeen discourse among the suburb's literati- Can Themba, Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane and their companion Morris Letsoalo. One fateful night, the police swoop on Vinah and Zacharia while they sleep in the backyard of Vinah's workplace. They arrest Zacharia. While Zacharia is in prison, Marumu goes to his shack and attempts to harass Vinah sexually. When she resists, he kills her by asphyxiation. Back at his shack, Zacharia is lost for words when he discovers the lifeless body of his wife. The film ends with Zacharia banging on the table in a rage.

**Introduction**

*Come Back, Africa-* by American independent filmmaker Lionel Rogosin (1924-2000), made in collaboration with the Sophiatown intellectuals Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane and Can Themba, is a slice of black urban life in 50's Sophiatown and the greater Johannesburg. Its documentary and dramatic visualizations of an emergent apartheid city, increasingly hostile to black social and political claims on the urban space, were anomalous with film culture in this period. Under the circumstances, the collaborative authorship of the film by an American filmmaker and black intellectuals was also extraordinarily unusual. *Come Back, Africa* was not circulated in South Africa at the time of its release. It was practically banned and only re-emerged much later. As an anti-apartheid film, its local circulation would have been germane to the public engagements of apartheid that unfolded at the

---

[54] The spelling of the Sotho-Tswana name in the film as 'Marumu' is incorrect. The correct spelling is 'Marumo' but I have retained the film's spelling to avoid confusion.

time of its making. This is made sharper by the fact that 'anything that addresses a public is meant to undergo circulation' (Warner 2002: 91). Therefore, the lack of circulation of the film in South Africa is provocative. It invites the examination of the nature of the film's publicness.

Through *Come Back, Africa*, this chapter draws attention to the publicness of black-centred films produced in repressive conditions that do not allow for their circulation within national boundaries. The objective is to nuance our understanding of cinematic publicness from the perspective of black-centred films produced in repressive circumstances. Ultimately, the chapter tests the public critical role of film through the example of this early black-centred film, the making and initial circulation of which took place in conditions that were unfavourable for the stimulation of public critical engagements.

The critical significance of *Come Back, Africa* is an enduring theme in South African cinema studies. These studies, in particular Masilela (1991) and Maingard's (2007), reflect on the film's import in forging a sense of national cinema in South Africa. This chapter adds to these important works by exploring the making and public life of *Come Back, Africa* both to document its public critical record, but importantly, also to examine its circumstances of non-circulation or erratic circulation and how these relate to its publicness. It asks how in the limited and policed circumstances of its production, prohibition and eventual release, *Come Back, Africa* related to the historical discourses around its main theme, that is, black urban life under apartheid. To this end, the chapter explores the making and public life of *Come Back, Africa*.

Made at the height of apartheid, *Come Back, Africa* engaged the social implications of this system, especially the phenomenon of migrant labour system and pass laws. At the close of the 1950s, Africans were thoroughly urbanized but were subjected to the demeaning migrant labour system and the pass laws. However, the state and capital were at variance

66

with regard to the migrant labour system (Barber 1999: 142). While capital saw in the permanence of Africans in the urban areas, a steady flow of labour, the state under Verwoerd maintained the hardline policy of residential separation along racial lines. Asked by the Orange Free State mining oligarchs to house 'a higher proportion of African families on their mines', Verwoerd reportedly argued that 'migratory labour is the best system, not only did the government support it, there is also good reason to believe that the Bantu people prefer it' (cited in Barber 1999: 142). Even so, Verwoerd was not prepared to industrialize the 'native reserves'. In the thinking of the Tomlinson Commission, such a move would have reduced the flow of Africans to the urban areas. However, Verwoerd maintained that industrialization was not in keeping with the competencies of the natives and that it would lead to racial integration; and ultimately undermine the fundamentals of apartheid (Barber 1999: 142-143). This chapter considers the relations between the film and the critical public engagements of African experiences of urbanisation during the early apartheid order. These relations also show how *Come Back, Africa* related to apartheid discourse on blackness.

## Emerging from a Hidden Lens: The Making of *Come Back, Africa*

*Come Back, Africa* is a product of its chief maker, New York-born Lionel Rogosin's dream of making of an epic trilogy on racialism in the United States, South Africa and Asia. It also stems from his campaign against what he saw as the post-war reawakening of fascism in South Africa's emergent apartheid state (Davis 1996: 57). Prior to *Come Back, Africa*, Rogosin made *On the Bowery* (1956), an Oscar nominated and award winning film about alcoholism among working class people in New York's skid row.[55] Rogosin's focus on the social conditions of lumpens is an enduring theme in his works.[56] The vision of *On the Bowery* was co-extensive with a later initiative, the avant-garde American independent

---

[55] Skid row or skid road is a run-down or dilapidated urban area with a large population of impoverished abusers of alcohol and, often, other drugs. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skid_row> (accessed 03, June 2008).

[56] Rogosin later made films about the black experiences in the United States, namely: *Black Roots* (1970), *Black Fantasy* (1972), and *Woodcutters of the Deep South* (1973). See Rogosin L., 2004., (Ed) Davis P,. *Come Back Africa: Lionel Rogosin, A Man Possessed*, Johannesburg STE, 12.

filmmakers' adoption in 1960 of the *New American Cinema Group Manifesto*. The objective of the manifesto, of which Rogosin was signatory, was to find alternative ways of distributing avant-garde films.

According to the film historian Kenneth Hey (1980: 61), 'the idea of a film dealing with apartheid South Africa developed during conversations between Walter White, secretary of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), Alan Paton author of *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Rogosin'. It is remarkable that the vision of *Come Back, Africa* related to *Cry, the Beloved Country*, a work by a globally influential writer.[57] This speaks to the transnational publicness of *Cry, the Beloved Country* and even strongly to its influence as an anti-apartheid text of note.[58] How the relation between the two texts occurred will be discussed in due course.

In making *Come Back, Africa*, Rogosin also aimed at conscientizing white people about the horrors the apartheid system imposed on Africans (Rogosin 2004: 65). Thus, he imagined a white viewership for the film. Because the circulation of the film in South Africa was not likely, it follows that these viewers were transnational. Accordingly, at the same time as the film focused on black experiences of apartheid, it was projected towards 'white consciences', and therefore white publics. While this might appear to iterate, perhaps unintentionally, the legacy of black people as the racially-othered objects of cinema and cinematic discourse, their dominance of *Come Back, Africa*'s frame subverted this otherness.

Importantly, Rogosin wanted to show apartheid's horrors through the eyes of black South Africans themselves, an unconventional tendency in South African film culture at that

---

[57] Interestingly, at the time of making *Come Back, Africa*, the first film adaptation of *Cry, the Beloved Country* had already been made a few years earlier in 1951. A second adaptation came out in 1995. A musical play adaptation, *Lost in the Stars* was also made in 1949.
[58] For a useful discussion of Paton's influence as a spokesperson for South Africa in America, see Cowling L., 2005. The Beloved South African: Alan Paton in America, *Scrutiny2*, 10.2.

time.[59] This was important because it constituted an attempt at according black people the status of being publics, at a time when their publicness was discouraged by the apartheid state. That Rogosin's cinematic bias was for the urban blacks is also revealing in this regard. This is because he believed that 'the essential struggle of races took place in urban South Africa not in the rural- which was also changing' (Rogosin 2004: 44). Therefore, his bias towards the city was in keeping with his interest in the relations between the state, industry and the increasingly politicized and urbanized Africans. Rogosin's efforts were projected towards a publicity of the cinema, which provided an avenue for black people's contestations of the urban space. Through the example of *Come Back, Africa* then, it is possible to propose that black people's experiences of urban life played a significant role in the relation of early black-centred films to discourses on blackness.

Yet, Rogosin did not want to make a film about political leadership or leaders and certainly did not want to make 'a pure polemic on political terms about the wrongs and injustices of apartheid' (Rogosin 2004: 34). Rather, he sought 'a communication of human spirit so that the people on the other side of the barrier could feel emotionally what Africa really is and not what their particular mentality had created for them- the stereotype image' (Rogosin 2004: 34). The refusal to focus on black political leaders distinguished the film from the sphere of organized politics and allowed it a certain measure of critical autonomy. Its refusal to focus on political leaders also made *Come Back, Africa* a watershed radical black-centred film. This is because later films such as *Mapantsula* and *Fools* replicated, with some variations, its emphasis on the critical independence of cinema from organized politics.

In brief, Rogosin made *Come Back, Africa* with a strong intention to challenge the political and economic status quo in South Africa, in order to inform struggles against post-war fascism in general and, apartheid in particular. As I will show later, Rogosin projected a

---

[59] See Davis, *Jungles*: 50.

transnational social space charged with critical public engagements of apartheid, against the backcloth of thitherto largely suppressed black perspectives. Imagining the scene of its engagement in this manner signals that Rogosin was set on a collision course with the apartheid state. On another level, the anticipated transnational circulation of the film stood squarely against global commercial cinema trends. In countering ideological stereotypes from the perspectives of black South Africans, *Come Back, Africa* did not only differ from the conventional cinematic representations of Africans anywhere, but it was poised to challenge these trends as well.

Alert to the risks involved in the attempts at making part of his envisioned trilogy on racialism in apartheid South Africa, Rogosin resorted to subterfuge. He entered the country under the pre-text of being a tourist and misinformed the South African authorities that he was making a musical travelogue on the country.[60] Rogosin eventually shot *Come Back, Africa* around Johannesburg and in Sophiatown in the late 50's, the twilight years of this vibrant and legendary multi-class and multi-ethnic community.[61] A skeletal crew from Israel and Europe and a few sympathetic acquaintances assisted him. In-between the shooting, the most politically explosive footage was spirited out of the country lest the authorities discovered and confiscated it.

In terms of casting, Rogosin selected characters that would represent themselves in the film (Rogosin 2004: 51). In casting whites, Rogosin 'worked with mostly progressive white South Africans. But they were so aware, so familiar with the brutalizing aspects of black and white life in South Africa…' (Nkosi in Davis 1996: 51). Quite signally, Rogosin also collaborated with the Sophiatown literati. While Modisane and Nkosi co-wrote the script, they also appeared in the film alongside Themba. Critics are agreed on the importance of Rogosin's collaboration with the African intellectuals. Commenting on this collaboration, Davis observes:

---

[60] For the full account, see Rogosin, *A Man Possessed.*
[61] One of the Sophiatown scenes in the film evokes its besieged state at the time of the film's making. The camera reveals graffiti on one of the walls: Hands off Western Areas.

> Drawing on the intimate experience of Modisane, Themba and Nkosi of township life, Rogosin gave us the first, and probably the greatest, depiction of the confrontation between unskilled labour and industrial society, the breakdown of traditional values, and the trauma of apartheid (Rogosin 2004: 10).

The literati's fortuitous involvement in *Come Back, Africa* gave them a space and opportunity to give content to the cinematic imagination of urban black identity. In addition to its challenge of the racial complacency of the cinema in the 50's, Rogosin's collaboration with the intellectuals is significant in that it extended African challenges of the apartheid state. The extension took place in terms of effecting a 'shift' from literary practice, arguably significant for engaging issues affecting black South Africans, to the cinematic. Lewis Nkosi's testimony of his involvement in the film is revealing in this regard.

> For an African who is accustomed to seeing films that present a stereotyped image of Africa- an Africa where every American or European tourist stands a fair chance of being cooked and served as a choice steak for an evening meal to a bunch of "Native Savages", working with film producer Lionel Rogosin was a rare and unforgettable experience, full of exciting moments (Nkosi in *Fighting Talk*: February 1960: 12).

A close reading of this statement carries the substance of an entire people's troubled encounter with cinema in the 50's. Against the dominant and alienating staple of the colonial lens, Nkosi's account places *Come Back, Africa* firmly in the forefront of Africans' 'new' experience of film. While this 'new' experience is captured through the pen of an African collaborator in the film, it is a pointer towards the critical status of *Come Back, Africa* in the cinematic imagination of African identity at the time. However, this experience was unavailable to most Africans because they were not allowed to see it, the result of the problem of circulation at the heart of the film's public life.

During their collaboration with Rogosin, Modisane, Nkosi and Themba wrote creatively and for the press, work which they carried out under the hostile watch of the state. Nkosi worked for the *Golden City Post*, a weekly tabloid, which, between 1955 and 1971, had various regional editions aimed at racially defined readerships (Les Switzer and Donna

71

Switzer 1979: 115). Its Southern Transvaal edition was aimed at an urbanized African readership. *The Golden-City Post* was founded and published by one Jim Bailey, whose father, Abe Bailey, was a mining magnate. According to the Switzers, *The Golden-City Post* was popular, politically neutral and its tabloid style captured a multi-racial readership throughout Southern Africa. 'If anything, *Post* was more sensational than *Drum…*but on the whole its news coverage was relevant and reliable' (Switzer and Switzer 1979: 115).

Themba and Modisane worked for *Drum* magazine, as associate editor, and staff journalist respectively. *Drum* is a South African consumer magazine aimed mainly at a black readership. Over the years, it has evinced a political outlook and an overtly anti-racist and anti-apartheid stance. It started in 1951 as a government-initiated magazine for Africans called *African Drum*. In its formative years, the magazine had a tribal slant and was noted for its 'anthropological studies of the language and culture of rural blacks, and the serialised publication of Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*' (Fenwick 1996: 617). The *African Drum*'s tribal angle culminated in the rejection of its first editions by the African readership it was targeting (Fenwick 1996: 617). Jim Bailey ultimately owned *African Drum* and changed it to a modern investigative magazine called *Drum* that explored the social lives of black South Africans (Fenwick 1996: 617). Anthony Sampson, the new editor of *Drum,* provided a telling explanation for this change, 'while we were preaching folk tales and culture, they (Africans) were clamouring to be let into the Western world' (Sampson in Fenwick 1996: 617). Nkosi bears testimony to the importance of *Drum* for the urbanized blacks: 'it wasn't so much a magazine as it was a symbol of the new African cut adrift from the tribal reserve- urbanized, eager, fast-talking and brash' (Nkosi 1965: 10). Further, 'by the end of the fifties *Drum* and *Post* had become widely accepted as the most authoritative newspapers on the life of black South Africans' (Nkosi 1965: 30). Nkosi's claim signals that the black writers' collaboration with Rogosin sought to produce an authoritative cinematic engagement of black experiences of urban life. The making of the film remarkably evinces the role of black intellectuals in the public life of the time. This role, it appears, was to challenge official constructions of blackness and offer oppositional

72

or counter-imaginations of black identity. An outstanding feature of the re-constructions was the heightening of black urbanness, a direct contradiction of the apartheid imaginary of blackness.

The audacity with which *Come Back, Africa* was made, was coterminous with the investigative and highly politicized journalism of the writers, itself constantly subject to state harassment.[62] It follows then, that the writers' consistent address of black publics, coincided with and were extended by Rogosin's equally arduous desire to register black perspectives in the cinema. Interestingly, this prefigured a subtle dialogic relation between the black press and *Come Back, Africa*.[63] The significance of this relation lay in its potential to accord cinematic publicity to the social and political anxieties in the outlawed black public of *Drum* and *Golden City Post*. However, the black press was not the only site through which the filmmakers sought to make black publics visible. According to Nkosi, their research for the script of the film involved people of different classes and educational backgrounds:

> Whether the group consisted of ordinary workers or a number of articulate intellectuals, in that single moment of excited conversation, these people fumbled around with words that revealed an inner experience of which we had not been aware. We used these recorded conversations as rough guidance as to how to shape the ultimate movie story.....they talked the movie into being (1960: 13).

Anchored in surreptitious critical exchanges that valorised deliberation, the anticipated film was projected towards a publicness founded on the critical arraignment of apartheid and of industrial exploitation from black perspectives. These exchanges found their way into the film, especially through the celebrated shebeen scene. Importantly, the fact that

---

[62] About the adventurous nature of 'black journalism' in the '*Drum* era', see Nkosi, *Home and Exile*: 12. Through its focus on the life of one of the *Drum* writers, Henry Nxumalo, the film, *Drum* (2005), by Zola Maseko, also gives a glimpse of the dangers of political journalism in the period.
[63] The tendency to base black-centred films on the popular black press was well and alive in this era. It can also be found in Zonk! (1950) a film based on a variety show and a magazine for black readership called *Zonk: People's Pictorial*. About *Zonk*, see Maingard, *National Cinema*, 91.

*Come Back, Africa* was made with the knowledge of a few people, is an indication of the near-impossibility of certain black-centred films' garnering of publics in South Africa.

So far, the chapter has drawn attention to the difficulties that the filmmakers faced in the attempt to make the film. Thus, at the level of its making, the would-be film was subject to restrictions arising from the political hostility of the emergent apartheid state. At the same time, the significance of the film's cinematic publicness lay precisely in its capacity for calling black publics into being, which were however, rendered absent by state hostility. Because of this hostility which significantly denied blacks publicness, the local cinematic publicness of *Come Back, Africa* would have appeared unfeasible. In the section that follows, which deals with form, I show how the filmmakers applied themselves to the challenges of *Come Back, Africa*'s anticipated lack of publicness, and the systematic exclusion of blacks from the public sphere in South Africa in particular. I discuss the form of the film and demonstrate its critical aspirations, as well as its multifaceted textuality.

## A Cinematic 'Ghetto Salon'[64] in Search of a Public: Form in *Come Back, Africa*

Influenced by the Italian neo-realist filmmaker Vittorio De-Sica and documentary filmmaker and ethnographer Robert Flaherty, Rogosin made *Come Back*, *Africa* in a neo-realist fashion. The use of non-actors, on location shooting that 'captures' authentically the social context of its subjects, and an impulse towards an imperfect cinematography, are some of the elements that typify the neo-realist tendency in *Come Back, Africa*. The film combines a realist documentary style and fictional dramatic recreation, partly dialogue-driven, and sometimes soundless visuals in a simple plot. Four strategic manoeuvres are discernible that unite the film's form: the paratextual, narrative, realist documentary, and lastly, the overtly intellectual stylistic.

---

[64] I use the notion of a 'ghetto salon' as a variation of the French *salon*, which Habermas described as an institution of the public sphere in 17th century France.

In its paratextual manoeuvre, *Come Back, Africa* deploys the peritextual device of written captions at the very beginning of its narrative. At this point, we learn that it was filmed secretly and that it used non-professional actors. This establishes the film's co-extensiveness with the circumstances of its production, and the historical world it depicts. Interestingly, the captions appeal to the viewers' sense of aesthetic judgment and historical consciousness. These declarations mean that the film dropped its guard as a constructed text. The peritext of *Come Back, Africa* almost denies its 'film-ness', that is, it destabilizes its ontology as film and privileges its historical context and political content. In locating the film firmly within its historical circumstances, the disclaimers establish a discursive space in which reflection on the film can take place without strict recourse to its formal status as film. Yet, it is the formal stylistics that draws the viewer to the context of the film, and attempts to orchestrate public reflection on the limits and implications of a space in which creative expression is ruthlessly policed. This is indicative of Rogosin's alertness to the problems of the film's publicness. Therefore, at the level of the paratextual manoeuvre, *Come Back, Africa* guides the viewer to the historical problems that informs its making, over and above the film itself. Whether they are its transnational post-war public, or a later transnational and local public that incorporates democratic South Africa, *Come Back, Africa* forces a historical consciousness in the viewers. Significantly, this consciousness laid the grounds for public critical engagements sensitive to the film's historical limitations and possibilities.

The narrative manoeuvre is anchored in the plot. Here, Zacharia's trials in the cheap labour market, and attempts to find a decent life in the slums, identify the humiliation of apartheid at a personal level. His tribulations are representative of the black migrants in the city. Importantly, it also narrows the divide between the migrant characters, who play themselves and their actual experiences, which they replicate in the film. This is in keeping with Rogosin's bias for realism: 'My aim was to express realism in a dramatic and poetic manner, to abstract then humanize, or better still synthesize' (Davis 1996: 51). In his

commentary on the making of Zacharia's last scene, Modisane gives an idea of the force of the film's realism:

> …the script called for him to breakdown mentally, and in a rage of hysteria, to smash up whatever his temper directed him to. The crack-up of the character and the man were so closely linked that we were horrified to be in the presence of the destruction of a man. It was a nightmare which we could not stop or turn our faces from, and when Lionel did assume the presence of mind to shout 'cut' we were sick. The scene had come- for us- too close to the real thing and for Zacharia it was the real thing, it was in his face (Modisane 1963: 283).

Though tangential to the plot, Marumo's victimization of Vinah complements the narrative manoeuvre and adds an important element to the film's engagement of social violence in the city, the gender perspective. Incorporated towards the end of the film, the scene in which Marumo attempts to rape Vinah, and eventually murders her, suggests that part of the city's social violence was gendered. *Come Back, Africa* invited as it did this, its public's consideration of the problematic of gender and violent crime in the apartheid city.

It is the narrative's concern with what happens to ordinary migrants and more importantly, its proximity to their social reality, that brings it closer to the documentary manoeuvre. The documentary manoeuvre, which is more concerned with historical documentation of the apartheid city, is at play in the depiction of the city in a soundless and shifting montage of high angle shots. The shots punctuate the empty and distant coldness of the city, the very edifice of an alienating capitalist modernity. This soundless montage intersects with the plot at intervals. Maingard observes that this constitutes the film's recurrent flashes of the Brechtian device: 'alienating us as audience from the images, enforcing a critical sensibility' (Maingard 2007: 113). The documentary manoeuvre is at play in the mine scenes in which the audience is invited to bear witness to the conditions of black migrants in South Africa's mines. It is further used in the subsequent street scenes of Sophiatown and occasionally in Johannesburg. In these scenes, the camera interferes minimally with its subjects but retains control of the historical 'documentation' of the urban milieu within and against which black identity is engaged.

76

The camera's differential treatment of the city and the ghettoized *Sophiatown* is instructive as to the film's depiction of black identity and modernity. When migrants appear in the city, they walk its streets in files of regimented labour- a journey to the city's outskirts where they mine its gold in deplorable conditions. Permanently transient, black workers' morning rushes off the trains is a compelling visual testament of their total subservience to the authority of the labour clock. However, in Sophiatown, life is punctuated with vivacity that is both promising and deadly. The musicality of street performers and Sunday weddings mingle in a carefree cacophony. In this scenario, violent crime is not far. Criminality and violence are subject to discussion within the film itself and form part of the intellectual manoeuvre chiefly represented by the shebeen scene.

In the shebeen scene, which Rogosin regarded as the climax of the film, *Come Back, Africa* evinces an explicitly intellectual approach. The scene unfolds towards the plot's denouement, at which point the viewer is sufficiently aware of the trials of the protagonist. This allows for a dialogue on the themes of criminality, violence, 'race' and public engagement itself. Can Themba, appearing as himself, tackles these subjects by giving context to the violence represented in Marumu- Zacharia's nemesis. He is joined by Modisane, Nkosi and Morris all of whom also appear as themselves.[65] Because the conversation in the shebeen scene is semi-directed, the scene, like the narrative manoeuvre above, breaks the boundaries between its audience and the intellectuals- whose arguments 'write' them into the public spaces in which the film would eventually circulate. This 'writing' is broached through critical views of 'literary liberalism'[66] in South Africa, acerbic engagements of what Nkosi and Modisane felt were the paternalistic treatment of black identity in Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country.* In the film, Nkosi argues:

---

[65] About the uneasy relationship between the *tsotsis* and the Sophiatown intellectuals, as well as the latter's identification with the former, see Modisane W, B., 1986, (1963). *Blame Me on History*, AD Donker: Johannesburg, 67.

[66] I coined 'literary liberalism' as shorthand for the manifestation of liberal thought in South African literature.

> Well, I'm telling you, the liberal just doesn't want a grown up African. He
> wants the African he can sort of patronize, pat on his head and tell him
> that "with just a little bit of luck, someday you'll be a grown-up man, fully
> civilized". He wants the African from the country, from his natural
> environment, unspoilt (cited in Balseiro 2003: 93).

Interestingly Nkosi later reported that:

> *Cry the Beloved Country* was as important for South Africa as *Uncle Tom's
> Cabin* was important for the United States. For the first time the
> international community was really alerted to the plight of black South
> Africans. Yet, at the same time the black community itself, especially the
> intellectuals had reservations about *Cry the Beloved Country* because of
> what they thought was its paternalistic tone (Nkosi in Davis 1994).[67]

If Nkosi's comments are anything to go by, *Come Back, Africa*, through its intellectual
manoeuvre, created a cinematic space for the surfacing of critical engagements of black
identity in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, which were already current in South Africa of the 50's.
If this institutes a relationship between the cinema and history in which engagements
freely flowed between the two sites, it also demonstrates the intellectuals' critical
challenge of the influence of *Cry, the Beloved Country* on Rogosin. This signals that the
dialogic relationship among its makers, guided the engagements of black identity in the
film, which also created a space for the critical public engagements of black identity
elsewhere. Evidently, *Come Back, Africa* exemplifies a critical tendency in early black-
centred films' relation with liberal discourses on black identity. This relation was
particularly predicated on the black intellectuals' view that liberalism infantilized black
people by denying them agency in modernity. However, the intellectuals' deliberation on
blackness bristled with an assured masculinity, which assumed a gender-neutral
conception of blackness. Their deliberations were oblivious to the gender dynamic, to the
effect that they painted, perhaps unwittingly, a masculine-inclined picture of blackness.
Interestingly, in the shebeen scene, Themba expresses his belief in the transformative
power of 'getting at each other' through 'talk', and therefore makes rational debate or
public engagement a problem of the film:

---

[67] See also Nkosi, *Home and Exile*, 4-8.

I'd like to get people to get at each other. If I could get my worst enemy over a bottle of beer, maybe we could get at each other. It's not just a question of getting at each other. It's a question of understanding each other, living in the same world.[68]

Its militant tone regardless, Themba's words profoundly instances the objective of Habermas' concept of communicative rationality, which is to achieve through rational communication, the best possible ethical standards and conditions of critique. The exchanges in the scene are demonstrative of the cinema's capacity to widen, in casual but critical moments of exchanges between characters, profound reflection on the challenges presented by modernity and its antinomies. At the same time as this is reflective of the intellectuals' modern aspirations, it is also illustrative of the film's staging of its critical role.

If the film occasionally alienates the audience in the documentary manoeuvre to enforce critical appreciation, it also invites, through intellectual exchanges of its characters, publics, primarily 50's to 60's publics, to be involved in its engagements. The scene is powerful as a strategic element of the film's 'thresholds' in that, by 'capturing' the conversation, it accords cinematic publicity to the 'ghetto salon' status of the shebeen. The virtue in this publicity does not only lie in rendering the 'ghetto salon' visible, but also in inviting public debates beyond the 'salon' itself. The 'salon's ghetto status is constitutive of the film's self-reflexivity, that is its focus on itself as a space for public engagement, but one that is rendered clandestine by the state's 'criminalization' of rational critical debate. Therefore, the shebeen scene summarizes the preceding scenes and renders it an important 'threshold' of the film.

The combination of various film strategies in *Come Back, Africa* underwrites its self-reflexivity. Accordingly, documentary visualization of black encounters with the city and

---

[68] Themba's penchant for rational debate was as cinematic as it was historical. Nkosi drew attention to this tendency by Themba: 'In the shebeen it was always talk, talk, talk.....' "All I want", Can challenged, "all I am suing Stridjom for is a chance to sit down with him over a glass of brandy and talk to him man to man. I reckon I have a few things to tell him. It may very well be that after the umpteenth drink, even with the lowest intelligence, a man may see reason!'" See Nkosi, *Home and Exile,* 21.

explicit commentary flank its narrative. The mix of documentary visualization and commentary occasions intra-textual reflections designed to enhance *Come Back, Africa*'s public critical potency. The combination of documentary visualisation and commentary achieves intra-textual reflection by adding to the film's narrative, a deliberative window that encourages public engagements of black identity, modernity, violence, racism and rational-critical deliberation. These strategies also set up, through the shebeen scene, or what I have called 'ghetto salon', a template for public reflection.

The film's mix of documentary realism with neo-realist fiction aesthetics enhances *Come Back, Africa*'s critical engagement with Africans' encounters with industrial modernity. *Come Back, Africa* does not only mediate these encounters but also invites in a manifestly intellectual manner, intra-textual critical engagements on them. Through this approach, which truncates the distance between its textuality and history, the film makes itself a space for concrete historical causes. *Come Back, Africa* offers a rare glimpse outside literature, of the discourses on blackness among the rapidly modernizing and modernized Africans. As an infinitely circulating visual object, it also extends the discursive space for public engagements.

Form in *Come Back, Africa*, which is unique and engaging, constitutes the film's alertness to the challenges pertaining to its role as a space for public critical engagement. Being a product of clandestine efforts, the film's form evinces attempts at exceeding its lack of public visibility and engagements, which it strongly encourages. It is precisely because of the anticipated lack of its publicness that *Come Back, Africa*'s stylistic strategies became significant for encouraging critical public engagement of issues that were marginal to cinematic culture at that time. So far, we have learnt of the film's intra-textual staging of its own publicness. Yet, the effects of the attempts at garnering visibility and critical public engagements are best tested against the film's actual circulation.

**Transnational Publicness: The First Phase**

Due to the political circumstances in South Africa, *Come Back, Africa* could not be possibly shown here. Yet, even circulating the film outside South Africa proved difficult for Rogosin. He could not secure an opening in New York in 1959 because of the high exhibition charges and the large backlog of films waiting to be shown (Rogosin 2004: 126). Nor were the film's aesthetics and subject matter in keeping with the conventions and conservatisms of the larger commercialized circuit. For instance, in Manhattan, 'though several exhibitors liked the picture, they had no theatre for it' (*Time* 25, April 1960). At the same time, the apartheid government 'embarked on a massive campaign of vilification, tarring Rogosin with the communist brush. This accusation and the spirit of the times made it impossible for Rogosin to find an American distributor' (Rogosin 2004: 12).[69]

With its transnational circulation tarred by the South African state propaganda, an action that ironically made the state a protagonist in the film's public life, the publicness of *Come Back, Africa* was mired in controversy. This implies that the South African state hitched *Come Back, Africa* onto the ongoing Cold War hostilities, to the extent that the film's focus on the black-experience of apartheid did not get the airing it sought.

The European run of *Come Back, Africa* took place at the Venice film festival in the summer of 1959 (Elinor Rogosin in Rogosin 2004: 130). However, it was exhibited out of competition ostensibly because many large-budget American films were already admitted at the festival (Rogosin 2004: 124). This did not stop the film from winning the Italian Critics Award. Interestingly, some of the critics in Italy called into question the festival organizers' decision to disallow *Come Back, Africa* from the festival competition. In spite of its critical success, *Come Back, Africa* was not widely distributed in Italy and the rest of Europe. However, the film's Italian run secured distribution contracts in a limited number

---

[69] Elinor Rogosin, Lionel's wife later wrote of a brush with the political establishment in the United States. Although she did not elaborate on it, she noted that back in New York, a man from the State Department visited their home (Ellie Rogosin in Rogosin, *A Man Possessed*: 130).

of venues in France and London (Rogosin 2004: 125). *Come Back, Africa* entered North America through the Vancouver Film Festival in 1959. At the festival, the Canadian Federation of Film Societies gave *Come Back, Africa* an award for 'the film showing the most significant advance in content, means of expression and technique'. This happened in spite of Rogosin's reservations about the film's formal astuteness.

Predisposed towards critical engagement through cinema, and failing to register the help of major cinemas in that regard, Rogosin resorted to independent exhibition through his newly-bought Bleecker Street Cinema, Greenwich Village, New York which has been called, in retrospect, 'a kind of university of film' (Robert Downey in Rogosin 2004: 144). Rogosin, who came from a wealthy Jewish background, bought the cinema with the aim of showing *Come Back, Africa*. The opening of the Bleecker Street Cinema was an attempt at a cinematic public sphere, which was fertile for what Negt and Kluge call 'autonomous organization of experience'. Interestingly, the cinema became a haven for avant-garde film culture until 1974 when Rogosin sold it. Rogosin also organised 'private' screenings in New York, which were attended by dignitaries including Eleanor Roosevelt, first lady of the United States from 1933-1945.

Remarkably, the film's opening in Bleecker Street on April 4, 1960, took place only two weeks after the Sharpeville massacre, almost coinciding with a significant event in the history of apartheid South Africa. This prompted Davis to argue that since the massacre was 'captured on film, and appeared in newsreels across the world… no one could claim that *Come Back, Africa* was an exaggeration' (Rogosin 2004: 12). The unintended timing of the film's release in New York, favoured Rogosin's objective of drawing international attention to apartheid South Africa. Thus, by taking advantage of the unfolding events in South Africa, Rogosin orchestrated a cinematic transnational sphere around apartheid, a mere 12 years after its official promulgation.

82

*Come Back, Africa* won important awards including a selection by *Chevalier de la Barre* in Paris, as 'Most Worthy Picture of 1960' and another by the influential *Time* as one of the 'Ten Best Pictures of 1960'. However, these accolades were accompanied by critical reviews. The New York based and major US weekly newsmagazine *Time* acknowledged the timeliness of the film, and interestingly called it a 'remarkable piece of cinema journalism', ascribing a journalistic functionality to it. The newsmagazine praised *Come Back, Africa* for its incisive exposure of black experiences in South Africa: 'Rogosin's camera looks deep into the private nightmare and social desperation of a man and a people' (April 25 1960). This depth notwithstanding, *Time* argued that Rogosin's depiction of poverty, violence and white racism was restrained: 'Dramatically, the end of the film is false, but statistically it is true, rape and murder are commonplace in South Africa's slums. Indeed, Director Rogosin's reading of the facts is conservative. He is scrupulously fair to the whites, and the camera leans over backward to avoid some of the more unpleasant aspects of life in the Johannesburg slums: the open sewers and the unchecked disease' (25, April 1960). This argument is in keeping with *Time*'s categorization of *Come Back, Africa* as 'cinema journalism' which makes the film both a reportage and a creative cinematic intervention. The argument by *Time* that the film was conservative demonstrates the newsmagazine's highly involved engagement of Rogosin's South Africa. A bold assertion of socio-political conditions in South Africa underwrites the review, a tendency that provoked scrutiny of the film and, importantly of South Africa by the newsmagazine's readership. The review rendered contestable the film's representation of social and political facts in the country, and guided the public deliberation on the film to the morass of black lumpen life and the bigotry of white South Africa.

Film reviewer of the *New York Post* Winsten Archer recommended *Come Back, Africa*: 'If you want to see and understand South Africa, there is no better way than this picture of Johannesburg: the bitterness of the whites, the growing anger of the Negroes and the horrors of the shelters and tin shacks of Sophiatown...extraordinary timeliness' (*New York Post*, 1960). Acknowledgements of the film's timeliness easily lent authority to the film in

the ongoing political drama of South Africa. Equally, Bosley Crowther, film reviewer of the mainstream *New York Times*, recognised the film's timeliness: 'This is a timely picture, although it was filmed last year. What it lacks in dramatic structure, it makes up in pictorial urgency' (Crowther 5, April 1960). Not unlike the *Times'* review, Crowther felt that 'the helplessness and frustration that the average African native must feel in the face of the social dilemmas that exist in South Africa today are put forth in clumsy, stagy fashion but with a certain amount of raw vitality in Lionel Rogosin's documentary drama, Come Back, Africa' (Crowther 5, April 1960). Jesse Zunser, newspaper editor and reviewer of the New York magazine *Cue*, billed as a guide to weekly events in the city, also commended the film thus: 'Highest Recommendation! Extraordinary film, powerfully dramatic, brilliantly photographed, splendidly played against the background of explosive South Africa' (*Cue Magazine*, 1960).

One intriguing aspect in the US media regarding *Come Back, Africa* is what the *New York TImes* film reviewer Paul Becxley argued was the ambivalence of the press towards the film. Becxley made his comments in the *Herald Tribune*, the international edition of the *New York Times*. According to him, *Come Back, Africa* was 'a lucid expression of a modern tragedy even if the front pages had not lifted it into an area of special significance' (cited in Rogosin 2004: 145). According to Becxley, this ambivalence found expression in the attention that critics paid to the artistic elements of the film and less to its social and political concerns. This is borne out by the New York-based leftwing newspaper, *The Village Voice*'s challenge of this tendency. Reflecting in retrospect, film historian Hey, observed that

> the underground weekly criticized writers who wasted time and valuable
> column space contemplating the relative merits of the artistic elements
> of the film and who should have exploited the available space to
> denigrate the evil system which the film exposed (Hey 1980: 63).

The *Voice*'s activist intervention suggests a debate on the political value of *Come Back, Africa* and its implications for the American public. It is decisive in its assumption, namely

that the reviewers' role was to advance *Come Back, Africa*'s anti-apartheid agenda. Therefore, as part of *Come Back, Africa*'s New York publics, the *Village Voice* orchestrated its publicness by summoning an engaged transnational public against apartheid. The *Village Voice*'s own position as an underground weekly guided its publicising of the film's difficult circulation and the media's ambivalence towards it. For the weekly, the media's ambivalence towards *Come Back, Africa* was a high point in the film's significance for New Yorkers. The *Voice*'s suggestion which, Hey called 'sarcastic', of how *Come Back, Africa* might have lessened the antipathy of journalists towards the film and attracted substantial audiences in the US, is a notable indication of the challenges in the film's transnational circulation:

> Come Back, Africa, (title taken from an African love song) is a film of pure fiction which will rock you away from your daily realities. Here is a movie which shows Africa in all its exotic beauty (have you chosen the place for your next vacation?); thrilling lion-hunting cradle of Jazz, the country of love, adventure, and slumbering beauty! Bring your sweet heart with you! (in Hey 1980, 63).

*The Village Voice* read in what it saw as *Come Back, Africa* 's poor following, the result of the US journalists' pre-mediated sympathy with the colonial imagery of Africa and blackness, which the film disavowed. Hey sadly pointed out that 'despite admonition, the public refused to see Rogosin's film, and it gathered little popular following….' (Hey 1980: 63). Quite manifestly, the film's lack of popularity in the United States means that Rogosin's attempt at internationalizing an anti-apartheid spirit did not succeed as much as he had hoped. The film was caught up within the contradictions of global capitalist modernity- in which its capacity to animate critical public engagements was compromised by a largely indifferent transnational cinema circuit and audience. Evidently, as a film dealing with explosive social and political questions that implicate the complicity of Western capital in the super-exploitation of apartheid lumpens, the status of *Come Back, Africa* in the transnational Western public sphere was fraught with ambivalence. But that this ambivalence became subject to scrutiny by alternative media in New York is noteworthy. Thus, *Come Back, Africa*'s entrance into the New York public sphere set in motion a critical self-reflection within its publics about media commitment to addressing

injustice in other countries and in New York itself. This is as much a question about the transnational commitment to fighting global injustice as it is about metropolitan media practice itself.

Even more remarkable is the fact that the New York media carried reviews of *Come Back, Africa* against the South African state's attempts at silencing the film's publicity. The effect of the reviews was to cast aspersions on white South Africa's international image, and to privilege black South Africans' perspectives on apartheid. Ultimately, colonial and apartheid imaginaries of back identity were discredited in a transnational public sphere. In the United States itself, the reviews opened a space for national debate on racial relations, which at the time fairly echoed those in South Africa. *Come Back, Africa* also garnered noteworthy media attention outside the United States. A review in the London-based *Daily Worker* instances this attention.

The People's Press Printing Society, a readers' cooperative, published the *Daily Worker* (*The Morning Star* since 1966), formerly the organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Therefore, workers and leftists who were engaged in its running constituted the newspaper's immediate readership. Nina Hibbin, the British socialist film critic of the *Daily Worker*'s review of *Come Back, Africa* resonated with the political concerns of this readership. The circulation of the review put *Come Back, Africa* at the centre of the *Daily Worker*'s immediate political preoccupations. Hibbin confessed that the film was:

> The most damning indictment of apartheid and the pass system that I
> have ever seen...in a climate of almost unbearable anger and frustration,
> it beats the question, which, though unspoken, must be in the mind of
> everyone who sees it: How long are we going to allow these appalling
> conditions to exist? (In Rogosin 2004: 145).

Hibbin's appeal for the involvement of the *Daily Worker*'s readers in the unfolding drama of apartheid, denies them the status of mere onlookers, and constitutes the *Daily Worker*'s readers as protagonists in the anti-apartheid fight. Ultimately, in the *Daily Worker*, we can glean the critical effect of the film's invitation of engaged transnational

publics. Other reviews opened a space for reflection on white supremacy. For instance, when he saw it at the Venice film festival, journalist Anthony Carthew noted:

> I have just seen a film that makes me ashamed of belonging to a race which can oppress and terrorize people of other colours…I recommend any white South Africans who read this to look up the word humanity in a dictionary (*London Daily Herald*, 1959, 4 September)

In Carthew's comments, Rogosin's objective of conscientizing white people about apartheid struck a significant nerve. However, the transnational location of Carthew meant that his comments were lost to many white South Africans who, if they applied themselves to his challenges, could have formed a significant part of the film's publics. The critical significance of Carthew's comments lay in their challenge of white supremacy.

With the above reviews and showings at festival venues, the publicness of *Come Back, Africa*, which included both expert and non-expert commentators, slanted towards the film's political import and formal approach. The reviews and awards constituted and enhanced the publicness of the film by giving space to the discussions of the political situation in South Africa. Even if the showing of the film was confined to festival circuits, the media reviews ensured that it enjoyed wide publicity. This in turn, made possible the engagement of the film beyond the readers of the newspapers. The incongruity between *Come Back, Africa*'s lack of wide exhibition in commercial cinemas, and accolades from influential institutions is remarkably telling as regards to its publicness. A sphere of critical engagements that are nonetheless independent of the established cinematic networks marks its transnational publicness.

Interestingly, the role of the media in *Come Back, Africa*'s publicness extended to the film's paratexts- its posters. Some of the reviews found a way into one of the film's New York posters. In the poster for *Come Back, Africa*'s exhibition at *The New* Yorker, another independent theatre in New York, press reviews occupy the better part of the poster's background. An edited version of the *Time Magazine* review resurfaced: 'a timely and

87

remarkable piece of cinema'. 'Extraordinary timeliness!' cried an edited version of The *New York Post* review. From the *New York Daily News*, the poster borrowed: 'the volatility of the racial situation in South Africa has again conspired to make Rogosin's film topical'. *Cue Magazine*'s recommendation of *Come Back, Africa* also found a place on the poster: 'extraordinary film…splendidly played against the background of South Africa'. In the poster, the sole visual is a side profile of a pensive Zacharia Mgabi. The profile appears in the foreground and occupies a third of the poster space. It appears then that the immediate function of the press reviews, as they appeared on the poster, was to give an idea of the issues behind the man's contemplative mood. Importantly, the use of the reviews also echoed the film's concerns with the South African situation, which the Sharpeville massacre had catapulted into the United States public imagination. The bias in the reviews is notably directed at the timeliness of the film, a decisive choice in the projection of the film's role in the United States public sphere. This role, the poster strongly suggests, was of a cinematic window and mediation into the unfolding events in both South Africa and the United States. *Come Back, Africa*, it appears, was as much germane to Sharpeville as it was to the Civil Rights Movement.

## Beyond the Media

With its showing in marginal venues such as the *Bleecker Street* and *The New Yorker*, *Come Back, Africa* entered what can be called an oppositional and transnational public sphere of avant-garde film thought and practice. This is borne by the take-up of the film by some film scholars and practitioners. Rogosin's affinity with the New-American Cinema eased the film's entry into the United States avant-garde film scene. Although very critical of the film's aesthetics, especially its dramatized parts, film scholars Roger Sandall and Cecile Starr formed part of the American avant-garde film thought and practice. They expressed their thoughts in *Film Quarterly*, the academic film journal based at the University of California, Berkeley. Thus, its academic setting had roots in the west coast film industry. Amongst other preoccupations, the journal is dedicated to in-depth discussion of avant-

garde film culture. The journal's academic nature signals its readership of academics and film enthusiasts.

Sandall and Starr commended *Come Back, Africa* for what they called its 'documentary comment', that is its visual documentation of the squalor of Sophiatown, the exploitation of miners, the 'impersonality of the city towers' and 'the vigor of Negro ceremony, dance, and song...' (1960: 59). They also lauded 'the film's experimental use of conversational dialogue', which they thought would be 'the preoccupation of film-makers in the coming decade' (1960: 60). This accent on filmmakers' interest bears testimony to *Come Back, Africa*'s signal status in the United States avant-garde film culture. However, Sandall and Starr questioned the film's use, though occasional, of Hollywood conventions. For them, the scene in which Zacharia kisses Vinah is 'made in Hollywood's standard images of passion' (1960: 59). They contended that in its dramatization of Zacharia's life, *Come Back, Africa* is weakened both as film and as argument (1960: 59). In describing the film's dramatizations and Zacharia's character, Sandall and Starr use words such as 'banal', 'shallow' and 'melodramatic'. For the two thinkers, these led the film to miss the essence of apartheid life:

> From Zacharia's dismissal for incompetence through the gratuitous death of his wife, the film barely touches the unique aspects of apartheid life.[70] The pass system, the effect of Groups Areas Act, the curfew, the Negro hostility to liberal whites, all find expression in talk alone….Here we see a group of Negroes engaged in a prolonged discussion of race, politics, art, and the rest of life as they see it. Although many important points are touched upon, the remote and rambling naïvetés in which they are smothered give a portrait of the South African Negro leadership which does disservice to hundreds of men now shut in Verwoerd's jails (1960: 59).

The film is here discussed both as a document of revolutionary possibilities and with regard to its aesthetic make-up. The two thinkers saw the dramatic bits as being underlined by a statement of political challenge. Therefore, their celebration of the documentary manoeuvre in the film is a logical outcome of their expectations of the

---

[70] See also Hey K., 1980. Come Back Africa (1959), Another Look, *Film and History*: 61-66.

political task of the film: to forcefully depict life under apartheid and to question it. With regard to the shebeen scene, Sandall and Starr directly criticize the Sophiatown intellectuals' embrace of rational debate.[71] Rather, they celebrate as forceful and eloquent, 'the prophetic closing image of Zacharia's pounding rage' (1960: 59). Sandall and Starr were not alone in pondering the validity of rational debate. Nkosi's retrospective reflection on the shebeen scene also shows that the idealism of the rational-critical engagement of apartheid quickly fizzled in the wake of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, which occurred several months after the film was made (Nkosi in Davis 1994).[72] In its entrance into the transnational public sphere, however marginal, *Come Back, Africa* encountered reflections on the merits and demerits of rational-critical debate. It appears that this took place in relation to questions around the best political cause of action against increasingly violent colonial regimes in the Third World. The fact that the film was shown in 1960, at the beginning of a decade of revolutionary movements and political independence in Africa, burdened its publicness with questions around strategic responses to colonialism. The unfolding wave of decolonisation also informed part of the intellectual preoccupations in the United States. The Indiana University-based journal *Africa Today* was one platform in which intellectual engagement of the wave of African independence took place.

Theatre producer, playwright and film critic, Robert Nemiroff, reviewed *Come Back, Africa* in *Africa Today*. The journal is publicized as 'one of the leading journals for the study of Africa' and as being 'in the forefront of publishing Africanist, reform-minded research'.[73] Thus, the readership of the journal is easily academics and Africanist activists across the United States universities and elsewhere. The readers' encounter with the review makes *Come Back, Africa*, a significant vehicle in their engagements about Africa. Remarkably, the review is alive to the film's import to the preoccupations of the journal's readers:

---

[71] According to Davis, journalist Bosley Crowther also had a problem with the shebeen scene: '…its not only verbose but stagy and stuffy in tone'. See *The New York Times*, 5 April 1960.

[72] See also Balseiro and Masilela, *To Change Reels*: 111.

[73] See ‹http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/africa_today/› (accessed: 28, September 2008).

'Never, to our knowledge has a more searching or true film come out of Africa. No student of Africa or cinema will want to miss it' (Nemiroff 1960: 8). Among other factors for its significance to students of Africa and cinema, is what Nemiroff argues is the film's illustration of the contradictions of modernity.

'Come Back, Africa is a primary document of what "civilised" barbarism actually looks like in the 20th century' (Nemiroff 1960: 8). The manifest contradiction in the phrase 'civilised barbarism' calls into question the claims to civilization in the 20th century. Notably, Nemiroff eschews the film's immediate context of South Africa, and instead emphasises its global applicability. His observations suggest that *Come Back, Africa* gave impetus to deliberations on the contradictions of modernity not only in South Africa but also transnationally. Considering the context in which he made these observations, his thinking hints at the film's resonance with the social and political injustices in the United States, which gave impetus to the civil rights movement then under way. While he accepted that the film was not a 'great motion picture', Nemiroff argued that the complex representation of both the whites and blacks in *Come Back, Africa* underscores its sophistication:

> Particularly incisive is his dissection of the white community- probed with telling understatement to reveal that grotesque perversion of personality which oppression has wrought in the soul of the oppressor: its overweaning pride, its utter loss of sensitivity, the self-imposed tension, fear, suspicion which surround and stifle it. It is a pitiful and awesome and unnatural thing to look into the faces of ordinary people who truly believe they are a Master race, yet this is what Rogosin achieves (Nemiroff 1960: 8).

Thus, Nemiroff finds in the film, an intimate portrayal of the nature of racial oppression, and its toll on white people. Importantly, his portrayal makes *Come Back, Africa* an engaging and highly instructive film, the critical value of which derives from the manner in which it dramatizes white supremacy. Though Nemiroff does not address the white supremacist tendencies in the United States specifically, his argument made way for the scrutiny of precisely these tendencies in the country's racial relations. Of the film's

depiction of the black community, Nemiroff finds a transcendence of victimhood and perceptiveness:

> Come Back, Africa is no mere recital of despair, a naturalistic tale of victims. Scattered throughout are marvellous moments of warmth, humor and humanity.....Nothing is oversimplified here, neither the complexity of the differing reactions to oppression, nor the many shapes oppression takes: confused, militant, sly, witty, self-denigrating, brutalised, conscious, and immensely sophisticated (Nemiroff 1960: 8).

In considering the film's complex approach towards the representation of Africans, Nemiroff alludes to the subject of the depiction of black identity in the cinema in general. Nemiroff's argument suggests that this subject was worth considering by the readership of *Africa Today*. Against this background, it is possible to intimate that in the context of American cinema, *Come Back, Africa* had critical value for the readers' deliberations on African American cinematic experiences in the 1960s. These experiences were significantly typified by the marginalisation of African Americans in the US cinema. Under these circumstances, the film's complex approach was beneficial for debates on the representation of African Americans in US films.

We have seen thus far, the initial circulation and publicness of *Come Back, Africa* in Europe and the United States. As a black-centred film that sought to institute a cinematic public sphere around apartheid, it is increasingly becoming clear that the film had an uneasy relationship with Western commercial cinematic culture. Rogosin's struggle to find a space of exhibiting the film is indicative of this relationship. The profit motives of mainstream cinema, and the interests of political organs that the film engaged, like the South African state, played no less a role in the film's difficult transnational circulation and publicness. Notwithstanding its lack of showing in the established cinema circuit, and vilification by the state, a wealth of engagements around the film took place across various platforms in North America and in Europe. Ranging from deliberations by the *Daily Worker*'s engaged readership, to the Africanist intellectuals, the film carved an alternate space for the engagements of the social and political discourses in the transnational settings

92

themselves. Interestingly, it also opened a space for the reflection of modernity and its contradictions. American scholars and critics actually lay the ground for the film's public critical potency, which provided the basis for its accumulating archival value. That such attention occurred in spite of the film's failure to register interest from mainstream cinema, illustrates the value of the experts' role in the film's orchestration.

## Transnational Publicness: The Second Phase

Rogosin rereleased *Come Back, Africa* in New York in 1979. I categorise this rerelease as the second phase in *Come Back, Africa*'s circulation. According to Hey, 'Rogosin rereleased his film, partially because guerrilla warfare once again focused world attention on Rhodesian and South African apartheids (sic) and partially because he needed funding for a film project on the Navajo Indians' (Hey 1980: 63). That Rogosin released the film to coincide with a renewed focus on the political tensions in Southern Africa shows once again, his conviction of the film's potentially critical role in the engagement of the unfolding political situation in the region. Quoting Rob Baker of the *Soho Weekly News*, Hey observed that on its rerelease, critics noted the film's continued relevance, 'the passage of twenty years has sadly enough done little to lessen the impact of the message' (Baker in Hey 1980: 63). According to Hey, business journalist and film critic Udayan Gupta also observed that the documentary sections of the film showed that by the late 70's, the political situation in South Africa remained the same as it was in the 60's (in Hey 1980: 64).[74] Interestingly, Gupta made the latter observation alongside *The Last Grave at Dimbaza*, which was also in circulation in New York. Hey paraphrases him thus:

> The accuracy of Rogosin's "bleak and frightening visions of South Africa"
> has been returned to the screen in the form of Nana Mahomo's Last
> Grave at Dimbaza (1975). Taken together, Gupta concluded, these two
> films on South Africa proved that nothing had changed (in Hey 1980: 64).

---

[74] See also Gupta U., 1978. *Amsterdam (New York) News*, 3 June.

However, Gupta felt that, 'though the film remains topical even today, since little has changed in South Africa…viewing it in 1978 one's reactions are mixed …' (in Hey 1980: 64). Gupta made his comments in the form of a preview for the weekly newspaper *New York Amsterdam News*, a leading African American newspaper in New York. The newspaper is noted for its long history of support for the Civil Rights movement. Prominent African American activists such as W.E.B. Du Bois and the radical Malcolm X have at different times served as columnists for the newspaper.[75] The appearance of the preview in a newspaper that is predominantly read by black people means that *Come Back, Africa* entered a predominantly black public sphere of New York. The film's resonance with *Amsterdam News*'s focus on issues that affected black people easily poses the question of the kinds of engagements of blackness that took place in the transnational public or publics of the film, especially among black New Yorkers.

If Sandall and Starr rendered the significance of the shebeen scene ambiguous, at this point, one reading of black identity in the film reiterated their ambivalence towards the Sophiatown literati.[76] Gupta painted a bleak picture of the film's representations of black identity: '…. in his effort to show a more social side of blacks…. Rogosin succeeded only in reinforcing a stereotype of Blacks as lazy, hard-drinking types who love to sing and dance…. the film lacks dramatic tension, with most of its situations being predictable and unconvincing' (in Hey 1980: 64). Thus, *Come Back, Africa* increasingly became subject to interpretations of blackness that were contrary to its filmmakers' avowed wish to reverse its apartheid and colonial imaginaries. Gupta seems to have found it difficult to accept dynamic representations that show blacks as having contradictory qualities. His reading indicates that in spite of their acclaimed 'progressiveness', some early black-centred films faced the difficulty of re-imagining blackness against its stereotypical assumptions. Unless they reconstructed black identity through upright figures, who unambiguously constitute the perceived high ideals of human conduct, depictions of blackness in black-centred films

---

[75] See ‹http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/newbios/nwsppr/amsterdam/amstrdm.html› (accessed 21, May 2009).
[76] Hey, *Another Look*, 63.

was likely to be called into question. Yet, Gupta's negation of the film's representation of black people hints at a deep-seated anxiety about the cinematic depiction of black images in the United States itself. At the heart of Gupta's anxiety is an illustration of the fact that the film's portrayal of the ambiguities and contradictions in black South Africans' experiences guides its capacity to enable forms of engagement which are in themselves, indicative of 'difficult matters and ambiguities of the present' (Hamilton and Modisane 2007: 100). Thus, by depicting blacks either as subject to industrial super-exploitation and state violence, or as free thinking and acting social beings, whether as migrant workers, singers, dancers, and writers, *Come Back, Africa* 'entertains ambiguity,.... and invites the critical engagement that ensued' (Hamilton and Modisane 2007: 104).

Gupta's silence on aspects of the film's representations of blacks as modern agents negotiating challenges of industrial modernity, as either marginalised intellectuals, or lumpen proletariat, is also lost to Hey. In a slightly different vein, Hey saw the film in terms of what he called 'the "infantilism" of blacks...which appears repeatedly throughout the story..' (Hey 1980: 64). To illustrate his point, he draws a number of examples from the film, including one in which Zacharia's employer rebukes him like he was a child: 'The wife screams and scolds calling the young black man a "savage", while the husband pleads for patience because the native was not educated like the whites' (Hey 1980: 64).

*Film and History* in which Hey discussed *Come Back, Africa* is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of film and its relation to history. Its mandate is to advance the objectives of its conveners, the Historical Film Committee, which are to

> further the use of film sources in teaching and research, to disseminate information about film and film use to historians and other social scientists, to work for an effective system of film preservation so that scholars may have ready access to film archives, and to organize periodic conferences and seminars dealing with film ‹http://www.uwosh.edu/filmandhistory/about/index.php› (Accessed 19 December, 2008).

Clearly then, its appropriation within American historical studies constitutes the second phase of *Come Back, Africa*. This registers a new role in the film's publicness, the effect of which was to make it a reference point for historical studies, and consecration[77] within the United States intellectual archive. According to Hey, 'an historian taking "another look" at the film will conclude that Rogosin worked with his material under the same assumption which marked the concentration theories of Bruno Bettelheim and slave histories of Stanley Heskins' (1980: 64). In so arguing, Hey marks his interpretive distance from the film from the context of its inception and initial circulation. Locating himself firmly in the context of the film's later circulation, Hey observes that the film's initial context was characterised by the popularity of theories of 'infantilism' hence his reference to Bettelheim and Heskins.[78] He suggests that in making *Come Back, Africa*, Rogosin relied on theories of 'infantilism'. Except for the examples from the film which show black people being treated like children, Hey does not explain to his reader what these theories are. Nor does he avail the similarities the thinkers ostensibly share with Rogosin's work. Yet, Hey's comparison of *Come Back, Africa* to what are effectively theoretical works on slavery and the holocaust, occasions its evolved relation with the scholarly 'field.' In this relation, analyses of the film become a site of public engagement which not only looks at the film as

---

[77] I use the term 'consecration' to refer to the scholars' authorial conferment of status on the film. Formulated by Bourdieu as a part of his Field Theory, the term originally referred to the conferment of legitimacy on an individual, by an established figure in a particular field of work. See Bourdieu P., 1983. The Field of Cultural Production, or: the Economic World Reversed. *Poetics* 12(4-5): 311-356. See also Bourdieu P., 1981. The Specificity of the Scientific Field, in Lemert, C., (Ed). *French Sociology Rupture and Renewal since 1968.* New York: Columbia University Press: 257-292.

[78] Bettelheim was a psychoanalyst and Nazi holocaust survivor whose writings were motivated by and informed by his experiences in Nazi war camps. The aspect of his work to which Hey alludes concerns his theory that in response to their experiences in the camps, some Jewish prisoners underwent 'a regression to infantile behaviour'. For more information, see for example, Fleck C, and Muller A., 1997. Bruno Bettelheim and the Concentration Camps, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 33, (1) Winter, 1-37. Elkins is a novelist, essayist and historian. His *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959) closely represents Hey's reference to Elkins' discussion of 'infantilism'. The book is a comparative historical work on the institution of slavery in the United States and Latin America, but considers other contexts that instance the exercise of absolute power. According to one of its reviewers, Henry Simms, in Elkins' book, 'the slavery system of the United States and the concentration camps in Germany are represented as analogous in portraying the "infantilising tendencies of absolute power". See Simms, H, H., 1960. Review of Elkins' *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 329, No. 1, 201. See also Elkins S., 1959. *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

film, but as a text with particular theoretical lineages. In this manner, *Come Back, Africa* attains archival value for being part of a particular historical and intellectual 'moment', the lessons of which lend critical valence to subsequent historical challenges.

For Hey, the film is best understood in terms of 'the clash between contradictory cultures' (1980: 64). 'With a flawed sense of social interaction, and an imprecise study of the tribal-technological conflict, Rogosin's film falls quite short of an adequate documentary study of South African apartheid' (1980: 65). To make his argument for the understanding of the film's context in terms of a cultural clash, Hey draws from African literature,

> On the point of cultural interaction, the film offers a look at Africa long after the white invasion, described in Chinua Achebe's novel Things Fall Apart (1959). In Achebe's trenchant look at pre-invasion customs in Africa, the tribal world-view is shattered when white missionaries invade the traditional sanctuary: the world becomes unexplainable when the tribe's spiritual explanations, heretofore accepted, are replaced by the "reality" of western terminology. In Rogosin's film, blacks are alienated from white society, because they move between two irreconcilable world-views (Hey 1980: 65).

Hey's discussion is replete with assumptions of black identity that owe their logic to the colonial and apartheid mindset of the absolute binary between Africans and Europeans, the pre-modern and the modern. In this schema, Africans' encounter with industrial modernity is shorn of all social and political experiences characteristic of urban life. According to Hey, Africans do not belong to the city as their culture contradicts that of Europeans whose claim to the city is a supposed given. The silence on the migrant system, its connection to grand apartheid and the engagements of the literary intellectuals, convey a picture of a transnational public sphere that refuses to admit black people as equal interlocutors but as mere species of anthropological curiosity. At the same time, Hey's attention to the film also reveals a grudging acceptance of its import in the United States public sphere, especially with regard to African American experiences.

To resolve what he sees as the problem of the film's inadequacy, Hey further suggests that any study of *Come Back, Africa* must be undertaken through the theory of 'infantilism', and alongside the books *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), as well as films like *Nothing But a Man* (1964) and lastly *Battle of Algiers* (1965). Hey's comparison of *Come Back, Africa* to *Nothing But a Man* is striking. I shall quote it at length:

> In fact <u>Nothing But a Man</u> and <u>Come Back, Africa</u> have much in common, even though the later film studied racism in the American South. Like Zacharia, Duff Anderson (played by Ivan Dixon) exists in an unreasonable world where jobs are given to docile workers while "troublemakers" are forced to move "up North". Zacharia learns of his new atmosphere in the "shebeen" discussion concerning politics; the music is tribal. For Duff, saloons and pool halls serve the same purpose; the music is Motown popular. Rogosin's documentary footage of Sophiatown is matched in the new film with actual footage of Birmingham slums. The major difference between the two films involve the possibilities for change (Hey 1980: 65).

Significant in Hey's textual comparison is its highlighting of a marked dialogic tendency between *Come Back, Africa* and other texts from the United States and elsewhere. His comparative discussion, one purpose of which was the provocation and address of the prevailing domestic issues around black experiences of the films, set *Come Back, Africa* within a thoroughly American context. Therefore, notwithstanding his lack of confidence in *Come Back, Africa*'s critical authority as a single text, Hey's consideration of the film reveals the film's notable presence as a site of reflection in the United States public sphere. As part of the scholarly fraternity of history and of film, Hey anchored *Come Back, Africa*'s role within the scholarly domain. Yet, the potential of spawning other sites of public reflection remained.

Hey's discussion of the film instances the accumulating publicness of *Come Back, Africa* across time. Having entered the early public sphere of metropolitan United States, the film now circulated in a changed American public sphere, without the immediacy and urgency of early apartheid politics. The accumulating publicness of the film is discernible in Hey's reference to his historical and contemporary interlocutors such as the *Village Voice*, Gupta

and Baker. Through his contemporaries, Hey situated *Come Back, Africa* firmly within the seventies. In this way, the film proved fitting for the discussion of prevailing issues in the United States particularly around blackness. While the concerns about its artistic elements remained, it had become an archival piece traceable to a past context, which moreover, provoked reflection about contemporary African American cinematic images. This is highlighted in Hey's conclusion about the film's suitability to understand African encounters with modernity alongside such books as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, as well as the films *Nothing But a Man* and *Battle of Algiers*.

That Hey proposed what he considered a proper reading of the film against a range of texts noted for their engagement of the colonial and post-slavery encounters evolves an entirely new interpretation and take up of the film. This take up is marked by a bias to words, scholarly rigour and the resonance of the film with contemporary social and political challenges. Consequently, *Come Back, Africa* no longer served as an activist intervention against apartheid, it now assumed the task of facilitating social theories through which to understand blackness and modernity. Importantly, *Come Back, Africa* was now a textual conduit alongside other genres such as novels and biographies through which a comprehensive engagement of the contemporary United States public sphere would take place. Hey's lack of sympathy with *Come Back, Africa*'s competence as an adequate text through for engaging black people's experiences notwithstanding, his discussion delivers the film into the fold of contemporary scholarship and the contemporary political public sphere of the United States. At the same time as it disavows the film's adequacy and questions its observations on blackness, Hey's discussion constitutes a canonisation of the film within the scholarly domain. His discussion enhanced the film's public critical potency.

In brief, the consideration of *Come Back, Africa* by Gupta, Hey and Baker's discussions point to the film's ongoing public life and the significance thereof, of its sustained intervention in transnational public deliberation. If Hey and Gupta's treatments of the film

are anything to go by, the second phase in the film's transnational circulation instances a particular shift in the film's public life. This is a shift from a publicness significantly characterised by appropriation and deliberation on the film's engagement of political injustices, to its representation of black identity, and theorization of black cultural identity. While Baker admitted that the film had continuing relevance, Gupta and Hey's discussions largely detract from Rogosin's projection of critical engagements of developments in Southern Africa. This is indicative of the film's proneness to unanticipated reflections on the subject of its focus. Therefore, by the late seventies, the film had become a platform for issues other than those it was originally projected to address. This tendency constitutes the dynamism of *Come Back, Africa* as a text that harbours public critical potency within the shifting contexts of its circulation.

## Local Publicness

On its release in Venice and later Greenwich Village, New York, the film attracted the attention of the mainstream press in South Africa. The views expressed in these newspapers reveal the extent of *Come Back, Africa*'s aberration in that country. Davis reproduced some of these stinging reviews in his 1996 work: *In Darkest Hollywood*. In the first one, he resuscitated Julian Neale of the English language *Rand Daily Mail*:

> One of the greatest hoaxes in cinema history has just been unveiled in New York- and South Africans are not going to like it at all. But it is doubtful if they will ever see this film, *Come Back, Africa* which has been described as the most appalling 'document of 1959'....*Come Back, Africa* is a high powered, emotionally charged attack on South African race relations. It is bitter, biased and cynical (In Davis 1996: 57).[79]

Clearly then, the *Rand Daily Mail* denied *Come Back, Africa* any claim to rational sophistication and instead, reduced it to bias and emotional outbursts. The bias charge was re-circulated in another mainstream English language newspaper, the *Sunday Times*. In a review titled 'Ace liar hoaxed South African police while making film, now uses it to besmirch union abroad' (Davis 1996: 58), the newspaper protested:

---

[79] See also Neale, 1959. South Africa through a Distorted Lens, *Rand Daily Mail,* 12 August.

> While squalid scenes of shanty-town Sophiatown are shown with its forced mass movings,[80] there is nothing to be seen of Meadowlands, where the people were later housed. There are only stark misery, domineering policemen, and debauched, pathetic shebeen scenes, with nothing of the laughter and smiles of street corner kwela players…. (In Davis 1996: 58).[81]

It is noticeable that the above responses to *Come Back, Africa* were based on a similar understanding of the film. Thus, the mainstream press was concerned with the political comment of the film and its implications for capital and the apartheid state. While they form part of the film's public, these newspapers, particularly the *Rand Daily Mail* assumed in their reviews, that their readers formed a distinct and recognizable public: South Africans. Notably, both newspapers' primary readership was English-speaking and affluent white South Africans. Yet, the ascription of 'South African-ness' to their public suggests that the newspapers also put forth the tendency to dislike the film in spite of not seeing it, as a defining element of this public. This suggests that the press marshalled a nationalistic identity and the sharing of similar opinions as categories of judgment against an effectively virtual text. The assertion of a public that shares a national identity, and holds similar views about a text, is exclusionary.[82]

---

[80] Noting that there were no visuals of the removal in *Come Back, Africa*, Davis observed that the review shows inattentiveness to the film. To add to David's observation, it may very well have been that the reviewer did not see the film- and only associated its setting in *Sophiatown* to the removals. If that was the case, it shows the fact that films do not have to be watched in order to animate public engagements.

[81] The view that *Come Back, Africa* was biased was also replicated internationally. Leftist activist and writer Rex Winsbury reported this tendency in the London-based leftist journal *New Left Review*: 'Some saw it as an opportune propaganda document whose message was, and was intended to be political. Others…said primly there must be a counsel for defense as well as the counsel for prosecution' (Winsbury, 1960. Come Back, Africa, *New Left Review*, July-August). This reference is available online from: <http//newleftreview.org> (accessed 2007, 26 March).

[82] The deployment of a national identity was obviously problematic because South Africa's racist apartheid policy excluded blacks from public life. This assumption of a national identity is in keeping with the state's views about the film, which were also given space in the *Rand Daily Mail*. In the wake of what Davis calls 'a uniformly bad press' (from the state's perspective) in international circles, 'the South African government officials suggested that Rogosin was trying to introduce 'a form of sensationalism' into the apartheid question. The director was smeared with a communist brush….' See Davis, *Jungles*, 56. For the original entry, see the *Rand Daily Mail*, 1959. 8 June.

Black people, who were hardly likely to endorse state policy, were kept out of the public the newspapers wished to call into being. This tendency to exclude can be gleaned from the press' implicit privileging of state-imposed modernisation projects- exemplified by the new housing development of Meadowlands. That this modernisation was not in keeping with the aspirations and class interests of the majority of urbanized blacks, particularly those who were resident in Sophiatown, is tenable. Therefore, the newspapers' inclination for asserting opinions and carving out their public is suggestive of a publicness defined by a containment and not encouragement of public debate.

The *Sunday Times* and the *Rand Daily Mail* constitute a refusal to recognize, let alone accept Themba's invitation in the film, to rational-critical debate. Since the film was not circulated in South Africa, and yet attracted mainstream press attention, *Come Back, Africa* had become a virtual text. This means that as a material object, the film became secondary in the generation of its publicness. In their desperation to counter the film, the newspapers attempted to contain the publicness of *Come Back, Africa* along racial and class lines. Yet, they rendered *Come Back, Africa*'s publics unpredictable and infinite. This is simply because the newspapers made possible the generation of other virtual scenes of encounter with the film. Consequently, their negation of the film did not go far as they prompted a significant response from a co-writer of the film.

Writing in a locally based leftist monthly journal, *Fighting Talk*, Nkosi took critical note of the newspapers' comments. *Fighting Talk* began life as an anti-Nazi newspaper in 1942 as a mouthpiece for the Homefront League of the Springbok Legion, a servicemen's association founded in 1941. At the time of Nkosi's writing, it was the 'organ of the Congress Alliance until the organization was banned in 1963' (Switzer and Switzer 1979: 83-84). Against what he called 'ill-informed criticism of the film in local newspapers', Nkosi reminded his readers that,

> The film sets out to tell the story of what happens to a man when he
> leaves the reserves for the big city! It does not pretend to be a

documentary on the housing problem in the Union nor was the producer
obliged to vindicate the Government (Nkosi February 1960: 13).[83]

In response to the mainstream press' charge of exaggeration in the film, Nkosi questioned whether it was 'still possible to exaggerate about such a grossly misgoverned, misinformed and misdirected country' (1960: 13). It can be justifiably argued that as co-maker of the film, Nkosi set out to endorse it. However, at the same time as he commended the narrative of *Come Back, Africa* as 'a powerful document of social truth', Nkosi was critical of its aesthetics: 'the film is not great by any standard. There are too many technical weaknesses in the development of the story', (1960: 13). Nkosi was also well aware of the challenge filmmakers working in the formative years of apartheid faced, regarding the relation between genre and social truthfulness, particularly at the level of narrative.

> In South Africa a film producer has to watch out, first and foremost against the temptation to overlay his picture. The material lends itself so readily to the kind of propaganda that tends to defeat the very purpose of the film, not so much because he distorts the truth, but because there is too much of it! I mean truth that is **social fact** rather than aesthetic (1960: 13).

This observation shows cogently the difficulty for *Come Back, Africa*, of striking a balance between historical truth and 'propaganda'. In registering his experiences and thoughts on the film to *Fighting Talk,* Nkosi closed whatever remained of its secrecy and rendered it public. His riposte constitutes a notable tendency in which a film *artiste* avails the film's aspirations for publicness. That Nkosi wrote at all is interesting because he transformed himself from an interlocutor in the film, into its public textual function, that is, into a textual agency of its circulation. A 'public textual function' is associated with a particular film not only at the level of production, but also at the level of public engagement. As the film's public textual function, Nkosi has kept alive the texture of the film's production circumstances and made the critical projections of the film part of its extended public life. He exploded the neatness with which the state sought to silence black publics. Through

---

[83] Winsbury also wrote against the charges that the film was biased, which he argued- South African authorities assumed that 'Rogosin was a one man fact-finding committee who unfortunately forgot the other side'. See Winsbury, R., 1960. *Come Back, Africa* review, *New Left Review*, July-August.

Nkosi, *Come Back, Africa* gained a foothold that was critical for its publicness in South Africa and that allowed it to undermine the restrictions on its circulation. Nkosi's role in the film's circulation points to the strategic import of film crews in the enhancement of the publicness of films produced in repressed conditions.

Nkosi's use of *Fighting Talk* is instructive. As its title suggest, the journal enabled prospects of challenging the state and capital through a militant, but rational approach. Through *Come Back, Africa*, these prospects were not only encouraged but also given a critical perspective by Nkosi. That his review touched on aspects of the difficulties of making the film signals his protestations against the status of public engagements in South Africa. Nkosi's review brought the film closer to the political and discursive heat of 60's South Africa. It invited a critical appreciation of a text, which though it was not available to the readership of *Fighting Talk*, was presented as key to the engagements of the apartheid system. It can be surmised therefore, that *Come Back, Africa* left a public critical imprint germane to the readership of *Fighting Talk*. This generated a significant space of discourse for a readership that was already grappling with the political challenges of apartheid.

The *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Times* reviews, and Nkosi's riposte, bring to life a public discursive atmosphere around the film in South Africa, which however was stunted by the mainstream press' lack of acknowledgement of Nkosi. The shortcomings of the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Times*' engagements around the film notwithstanding, *Come Back, Africa* evinces the fact that the public discursive 'ripples' around a film do not depend exclusively on its local circulation, but may stem entirely from its transnational circulation and publicness.

The film's public, 'that social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse' (Warner 2002: 90), was hereby self-creating through other genres, newspapers and a journal, within a scene of circulation other than that of the film itself. Therefore, if the circulation of texts remains important to their publicness, this is not constituted merely

104

through concrete encounters with them. This is a point that Warner repeatedly makes and that the film powerfully demonstrates. This tendency eloquently surfaces the shortcomings of Hansen's privileging of audiences in the public sphere provided by the cinema. Thus, the 'cinematic public sphere' to use her phrase, is not restricted to the structural conditions of the cinema, but to the complex relations between the protagonists the texts imagine or call into being, and the conditions in which texts may or may not be circulated. So far, the protagonists and scholars who were called into being by *Come Back, Africa* were primarily white journalists in South Africa, journalists and scholars outside the country, as well as local black commentators who were also participants in the film.

*Come Back, Africa* transgressed its non-circulation in South Africa by entering through secondary texts, the public engagements on black life under apartheid in that country. Thus, the film also illustrates Warner's point that 'the concatenation of texts through time creates publics' (Warner 2002: 90). However, the novelty of *Come Back, Africa* is in drawing attention to the relation between transnational circulation and publicness and the local non-circulation of texts. In this scenario, the cinematic publicness of *Come Back, Africa* was constituted chiefly through its transnational circulation and the local circulation of the texts it generated. It is the distinction of *Come Back, Africa* that it animated critical public engagements in a country where it had no circulation. This occurred due to local anxieties about the political implications of its transnational circulation for South Africa, and because of its explicit provocation of local publics. Consequently, in tandem with local discursive and political relations, transnational circulation and transnational publicness, *Come Back, Africa* undermined its local non-circulation. It did this by provoking a social space of discourse in which publics considered the merits and demerits of its intervention.

Thus far, we have taken cognizance of the problems *Come Back, Africa* encountered in terms of circulation, both in South Africa and outside. Notable in these public forays of the film, is the concerted efforts by the apartheid state to prevent its circulation, and the main international cinema circuits' acquiescence or 'subtle' collusion in these efforts. Yet, this

105

marginalization only affirmed its critical autonomy and authenticity, and in terms of its publicness, shows the limits and possibilities that black-centred films faced in their attempts to animate public critical reflections.

The South African press and government's efforts notwithstanding, *Come Back, Africa* effected important engagements about African identity and the condition of modernity. Through the examples of the critical public engagements of *Come Back, Africa* in South Africa, it is possible to argue that the publicness of early black-centred films is defined not just by the significant absence of black publics, but concerted efforts from marginal spaces to make that absence visible. In so doing, black-centred films made possible engagements of this absence. The public life of *Come Back, Africa* also inaugurated black- centred films' occasioning of film as a site for public deliberation.

## Conclusions

The public life of *Come Back, Africa* throws into harsh relief the deliberations on black experiences of industrial modernity in early apartheid. Broadly, these deliberations occasion perspectives about the film's relation to public discourses on blackness. Gupta and Hey's discussions exemplify the first perspective, which raises the problem of the representation of blackness in the film. Though the arguments by Gupta and Hey are not similar, they share common weaknesses:  they are both silent on the agency of black people within modern settings and effectively 'others' blackness. Contra Gupta and Hey, Nkosi draws attention to the agency of black people by raising issue with colonial representation of black identity which fixed black people in the pre-history of modernity. However, such deliberations are not without their limits. The lack of consideration of gender as an important variable in the engagement of blackness is an example of a limit in the deliberations in *Come Back, Africa*'s early public life. That the film occasioned discussions around black people's experience of the apartheid city while making room for arguments that sustained colonial imaginaries of blackness is notable. Not only does it point to the indeterminacy of public engagements of the film's representations of black

identity, and its ambiguities, but it also registers the shifts in the film's public critical potency. By indeterminacy, I mean that it made possible heterogeneous interpretations of blackness, and did not enhance critical engagements in a neat and unproblematic manner. The salience of black identity and agency in *Come Back, Africa* endures with differing accents in the different 'moments' of its public life. If the first phase focused on black identity in relation to apartheid, the second phase highlighted its import in relation to the transnational preoccupations with African, African American identity, and modernity. Thus, in conjuring up public deliberations around the injustices of the migrant labour system, which in itself challenged the apartheid disavowal of black participation in industrial modernity, *Come Back, Africa* also exposed the extension of colonial imaginaries of blackness in the transnational public sphere.

With all its limits, *Come Back, Africa* evinces tendencies through which it is possible to draw some conclusions about its publicness as an early black-centred film with certain critical ambitions. The film shows that the erratic and circumscribed circumstances of circulation are actually constitutive of a particular kind of publicness. *Come Back, Africa* addressed a public that was outlawed, and therefore could not be, and in so doing, constituted a public in the conditions of its own absence. Projected to a public that significantly includes local Africans, its failure to circulate in South Africa meant that its actual publics were exclusively transnational. Consequently, the absence of black publics underwrote its publicness. The film's lack of local circulation posed a problem that has made possible the adoption of a form that is indicative of its addressing of its black publics in their absence.

Further, *Come Back, Africa* reveals that transnational circulation can stimulate engagements back home. This tactic proves to be important in calling into being publics in the conditions of their absence. However, the significance of this tendency must be measured against the substance of the minimal engagements that constitute its publicness locally. Nkosi embodied a textual function that enhanced the film's publicness through a

107

critical engagement of its aesthetics, and of its cultural and political significance. The mainstream press did not.

Against the restrictions on its circulation, the tendencies in the publicness of *Come Back, Africa* show that the possibilities of critical public engagements through cinema, may lie not just in transnational circulation, but also in how its transnational publicness relates to local politics. The film's closeness to the issues around apartheid and black life and its form, conspired with historical events such as the Sharpeville massacre, to enhance its publicness in ways that resonated in South Africa. The mainstream press in South Africa recognized the importance of these engagements for local political relations, hence their response. Therefore, films, which are made in repressive circumstances, can be secondary in the generation of their publicness; that is films about important issues can cause debate in their absence.

*Come Back, Africa* evinces publicness that was oriented to the critical engagements of early apartheid and capital. It follows then that the test for its public critical potency lay in its calling into being, and stimulating publics that critically engaged with the question of apartheid. Under the circumstances in which it was made and circulated, the film shows that its public critical potency lay in making visible the absence of black publics, thereby creating the possibility of new kinds of publics. That this was poised to challenge apartheid's vision of black South Africans as tribal and pre-modern- denying them the status of being publics, constitutes the public critical potency of *Come Back, Africa*. However, the public life of *Come Back, Africa* also illustrates the shifting significance of early black-centred films as the second phase of its transnational circulation attests. Here, the film was no longer only about apartheid, but it was taken up in relation to issues of wider African and African American encounters with slavery, colonialism and post-slavery racism.

The early public life of *Come Back, Africa* is significantly indicative of the publicness of films produced in extremely repressive conditions. As much as this publicness was important insofar as its challenge of apartheid and colonial imaginaries of blackness was concerned, its confinement to marginal transnational and local spaces of critical engagement suggests that it was compromised. Arising from the particularities of the public life of *Come Back, Africa* is the question of how films produced in conditions that are not strictly synonymous with its own, garner publicness. What might this publicness look like and what is its significance? The chapter that follows raises these questions in relation to *u'Deliwe*, a film that was produced in the '70s when the National Party's internal rifts threatened the survival of apartheid. *u'Deliwe* is significantly different from *Come Back, Africa* in terms of content, genre, and conditions of production and circulation.

## CHAPTER 4

## 'SUDDENLY THE FILM SCENE IS BECOMING OUR SCENE'!

## ENGAGEMENTS OF BLACKNESS IN THE MAKING

## AND PUBLIC LIFE OF *u'Deliwe* (1975)

In this chapter, I ask how *u'Deliwe* related to public discourses on blackness at its inception and early circulation. *u'Deliwe* is a film adaptation of a popular 1964 Radio Bantu serial of the same name.[84] Radio Bantu was a radio station targeting a black South African listenership, which was set up to implement apartheid ideology (Gunner 2005: 161-9).[85] Emerging in a context of important changes in South African film history, when the world of filmmaking gradually opened to black artists, *u'Deliwe*, the chapter shows, signalled a turning point in black South Africans' experiences of cinema. Yet, as a product of Heyns Films, a production company later exposed as a front for the state Department of Information, scholars have read *u'Deliwe* along with other films aimed at urban black audiences, largely in relation to the question of whether they fulfilled apartheid propaganda. In the process, they have lost sight of its possible critical effects as a circulating text. I suggest that this approach is premised on a monolithic and fixed idea of apartheid ideology, which is oblivious of its historical internal rifts and contestations. In the so-called 'crisis years' of apartheid, there were some Afrikaner ideologues (*verligtes*) who were advocating racial integration and the abolition of petty apartheid. And there were others (*verkramptes*) who sought to maintain ethnic separation, bantustanism, and the containment of black South Africans in rural traditionalism.[86] I propose that this contestation constituted an opening which made possible public engagements of *u'Deliwe*

---

[84] Reportedly, the serial had a listenership of five hundred thousand a month (*Drum* July 1974: 24).

[85] According to Gunner, the radio serial *u'Deliwe*, is 'the first serial drama listed in the Johannesburg SABC sound archives holdings'. Gunner pointed out that its popularity may have influenced another drama made in the same year called *Khumbula u'Deliwe,* which ran for 59 episodes. See Gunner L., 2000. Wrestling with the Present, Beckoning the Past: Contemporary Zulu Radio Drama, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 26. No2. Special Issue, Popular Culture and Democracy, 223-237.

[86] See Giliomee H., 1979. Afrikaner Politics: How the System Works in Adam H., (Ed.). *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power*, David Phillip: Claremont, 217-218.

that exceeded any apartheid propaganda, especially with regard to black identity. I argue that in spite of its derivation from a state-related institution, *u'Deliwe* harboured a critical value that subverted any objective of co-opting blackness in the service of apartheid propaganda.

**Film Synopsis**

The narration by the veteran Radio Bantu broadcaster, K.E. Masinga inaugurates the story of a young girl called Deliwe. Through the narrator's voice-over, we learn that Deliwe's father passed away and is survived by Deliwe and her mother. Thereafter her sickly mother passes away and a local teacher, Mgathi and his wife adopt her. They reluctantly decide to send Deliwe to Johannesburg to stay with her uncle. In an unfortunate twist of circumstances, she fails to meet him. However, the opportune offer of accommodation by a benevolent stranger, Reverend Makhathini, reverses her misfortunes. An ill-fated agreement to take a walk around the township with Jack, a young thug, disturbs Deliwe's harmonious stay at the Makhathini's.

Embarrassed and overwhelmed by boredom, Deliwe steals out of the Reverend's house for a domestic job. She befriends two local girls and begins an affair with a young man George. Shortly afterwards, she finds fame in the world of mail-order fashion and beauty pageants. At the height of her success, Deliwe finally meets her uncle Mabaso. However, Mabaso's conservative airs do not accommodate Deliwe's blossoming career. In one of his occasional rages, Mabaso forcibly takes Deliwe away from a film set. Consumed by rage, he drives his car recklessly and it rolls over, instantly killing himself and injuring Deliwe. In the final scene, Deliwe reconciles with George, the Reverend Makhathini and his wife. She returns to stay at their residence. The narrator, in voice-over, ends the film on the note of Deliwe and George's matrimony.

**Form in *u'Deliwe***

Structured in the mode of classic narrative realism, the plot of *u'Deliwe* borrows heavily from established Hollywood conventions. In classic narrative realism, the construction of film narrative is governed by the verisimilitude of its fictional world and a coherent, linear movement of its plot from a state of imbalance towards an inevitable resolution (Cook 1985: 212, 242). The compulsion of the realist text towards resolution underlies its tendency to avoid contradictions. Instead, the realist text builds a 'hierarchy amongst its discourses and this hierarchy is defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth' (Easthope 1993: 54). If we accept this brief exposition of classic narrative realism and its deployment in *u'Deliwe*, it follows that the film is driven by a progression towards a 'governing truth'. In light of the film's emergence from within the state apparatuses, such 'truth' would appear on the surface to be consistent with apartheid ideology.

That the narrative of *u'Deliwe* unfolded against the backdrop of an increasingly reformist apartheid state, without any direct reference to it, has given easy ammunition to readings that ascribe to it the role of serving state propaganda. The film's association with the state Department of Information corroborated this ascription. However, where *u'Deliwe*'s relations with the state apparatus is assumed to serve a propagandist purpose as these readings do, the need for appreciating its relations to contemporary and ongoing public engagements of blackness falls away. This can lead to the assumption of the film's lack of critical value. The few brief studies on the 70's to mid-80's films aimed at black audiences (Keyan Tomaselli 1980, 1989, Hariett Gavshon 1983, Gairoonisa Paleker 2005), *u'Deliwe* included, do not reflect on the discursive intricacies in these films' relations to blackness. Instead, they have treated blackness in relation to the films as if it was not a problematic, only framing it in terms of a fixed and seamless subjection to an unchanging apartheid. A more nuanced reading of the films' relations to public engagements is in order. Such a more nuanced reading can be productively grounded in the theoretical recognition of *u'Deliwe* as a text subject to various interpretations and contestations that change over time.

112

*u'Deliwe*'s circulation and the circumstances of its production, which saw for the first time in the history of film in South Africa, the installation of a black filmmaker in the position of director, foregrounds the extent of its consistency with apartheid propaganda. As part of the slew of the 70's and 80's films covertly financed by the state through the Department of Information and Heyns productions, it was exclusively circulated at black venues. Thus, *u'Deliwe'*s making and context of circulation constitute dimensions other than its form and assumed 'messages'. These dimensions compound the role of form and purported messages in the films' publicness. Its genesis and circulation invite the question of how *u'Deliwe* related to debates on blackness, primarily in the 1970s and beyond.

## Context and Discursive Currents

*u'Deliwe* was produced and circulated during one of the most trying periods in the history of apartheid when fissures began to emerge in its hegemony. The historian Hermann Giliomee made the observation that from 1974 to 1979, what he calls a 'watershed period' in Nationalist politics, a tendency among the *verligte* Nationalists emerged in which separate development was no longer seen as a goal of Nationalist Party politics, but its instrument. According to him, 'the term '*verlig*' is related to those Nationalists who emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s…. and advocated greater white unity and 'harmonious' 'race' relations through mixed sport and the abolition of petty apartheid measures…. *Verkramptes* during the same period championed undiluted Afrikaner domination and racial exclusiveness'.[87] The emergence of rifts within the National Party exposed the instability of grand apartheid, and importantly, the poverty of the notions of 'race' on which it was based. The rifts marked a momentous shift in the apartheid discourse on blackness. While at the inception of apartheid, its ideologues advanced the line of thinking that black people were not adaptive to the urban areas, in the 70's apartheid discourse grudgingly admitted the permanence of blacks in the urban areas. The

---

[87] See Giliomee H., 1979. *Rise and Crisis*, 217-218.  See also Henry K., 1991. *Power, Pride and Prejudice: The Years of Nationalist Rule in South Africa*, Jonathan Ball Publishers: Johannesburg.

113

effect of this change was the recognition of class as an influential dialectic in the social status of urbanised blacks. This is because the social and economic dimensions of urbanised life necessarily entailed relations of class. Thus, while 'race' was still a powerful category of identity in apartheid discourse, class compounded its significance. The shifts in apartheid discourse constitute a discursive context that any reflections on *u'Deliwe* ought to acknowledge, the better to locate the challenges to its engagements on black identity.

Outside the internal political relations of the National Party, a counter discourse to apartheid in the form of Black Consciousness emerged from the ranks of the black educated stratum. In a pioneering thesis on black theatre in South Africa, Steadman argued that, 'Black Consciousness had created an opposing hegemony and for the first time since racism had been institutionalized under Verwoerd; it became apparent that white survival depended on accommodating the urban blacks, even at the expense of eroding apartheid' (Steadman 1985: 339). Steadman further argued that 'after 1976 complacent white supremacy came to an end'. However, *Black Review* traces the influence of Black Consciousness back by at least a year,

> By the end of 1975 Black Consciousness had become an undeniable force in the black man's quest for an identity and his need for a national consciousness. Black Consciousness was at this time found to be existing in historical perspective and could only be evaluated from within that perspective. The tags had been dropped as far as the blacks were concerned. As a result many social and cultural groups had come to accept Black Consciousness as a way of life (*Black Review* 1975: Chapter 6)[88]

Black Community Programmes (BCP), Durban, which was a major organization within the Black Consciousness Movement, published *Black Review* as an annual publication. The publication was intended as a 'survey of contemporary events and trends in the black community'. *Drum* magazine was another platform where some of the debates around

---

[88] See also Digital Imaging South Africa, <"http://disa.nu.ac.za"> accessed 2005, 3, 22.

blackness took place.[89] The more radical of the debates on blackness in *Drum* are exemplified by its columnist Jackie Heyns' questioning of black identity. He argued:

> To be or not to be black is our dilemma. [….] Can it be that we were too hasty, seeking a quick and easy alternative without giving thought to the fact that we are dealing with people and not seeking a new name for a group of "things"? (*Drum* September, 1972: 53)

Concerns such as Heyns' show that in spite of the 'opposing hegemony' of Black Consciousness (BC) philosophy, engagements with blackness were varied and did not always iterate BC philosophy, and even questioned it. Thus, *u'Deliwe* entered a deliberative sphere marked by diverse perspectives on blackness. Contra state reformism, which also increasingly acknowledged class, the Black Consciousness Movement evolved a sophisticated multi-class discourse of identity and political consciousness among the black oppressed.

Despite emerging at the same time as Black Consciousness became politically influential, the conceptualization and making of *u'Deliwe* evinces no obvious concerns with it. Nor does the film engage apartheid as a sphere of relations that largely governed black people's lives. Its lack of overt political engagement notwithstanding, *u'Deliwe'*s focus on township life is noteworthy. By turning its lens on the township social terrain, the film intimates the relative autonomy of black urban social relations from those of apartheid political relations. What then is the preoccupation of *u'Deliwe*? Moreover, of what consequence was this preoccupation to public engagements on blackness in the seventies?

*u'Deliwe* is concerned with the tension between the moral strictures of family and the freedom that urban social life promises, especially for young women. The film appears to lament the increasing distance between family and the freedom of the individual which is

---

[89] By 1975, the magazine had a circulation of 50, 000 copies. Swift K., 1991. A Retrospective Look at *Drum* Magazine in the 1970s, *Rhodes Journalism Review*, 2/1: 35-42: (39).

characteristic of urban life. It seems to pose for itself the question of how best to apprehend the myriad choices that urban life avails to the individual, without compromising the ostensible sanctity of the family. The film's setting and distance from overt engagements with historical issues surrounding urban black life in South Africa, almost immediately mark it as apolitical and shorn of critical significance. On the contrary, the surfacing in *u'Deliwe* of relations of gender, age and class among black people easily exposes the inadequacies in this line of thinking. Insofar as they surface conflicts of interests against the backdrop of black urban experiences in South Africa, these relations are ultimately political in content. The manner in which these social relations relate to black people's actual experiences and various ideas about their encounters with the urban, determines *u'Deliwe's* role in contemporary engagements of black identity. Thus, even without overtly engaging organised politics, *u'Deliwe*'s focus on social relations among black people harbours a tendency to address the problematic of black identity at various levels, including age, class and gender.

In itself, the narrative pursuit of stable family life engages the dynamics around the very idea of a black urban family in an apartheid context. Its patriarchal assumptions and middle class values regardless, a stable family life is a particular social experience that the gamut of prohibitive apartheid legislation significantly denied black people. The film's evincing of the black middle class family as ideal, though broached through a gendered discourse, brings a particular dimension of black urban experiences to any reflections on critical engagements on blackness. Even at the level of gender relations and class itself, the film projects social relations that throw into harsh relief its role in the engagements of black identity in the 1970s. Ever mindful of the charges of propaganda against the film, and the intricate issues around class, gender and family in the film's focus on black experiences of the city, I turn to the making of the film and progressively ask how *u'Deliwe* related to engagements on blackness.

## The Making of u'Deliwe

First-time director Simon Sabela, who also stars in it, directed *u'Deliwe*. Heyns Films, a white film company with more than cordial relations with the state, as I will show in the course of the chapter, produced *u'Deliwe* and other films that were aimed at black audiences. At the time of directing *u'Deliwe*, Sabela was an actor in major international films shot in South Africa. Among others, he had acted in *Gold* (1974), *Zulu* (1964), *One Step to Hell* (1967), *Diamond Walkers* (1965) and *Sanders of the River* (1963). Most notably, he was assigned the part of Mandela in a West German film called *Rivonia Trial* (1966), a dramatized biography of Nelson Mandela (Deane 1978: 161). The film was never shown in South Africa. After *u'Deliwe*, Sabela directed a number of films for Heyns that were also distributed in black venues. These were *Inkedama* (1975) (about a mistreated orphan in the rural Transkei who becomes a medical doctor), which had already been seen by 100 000 people within three months of its release. Others were *Ikati Elimnyama* (1975), (about the double life of a township businessman), *Ngwanaka/Mntanami* (1976), (a love story within feuding taxi owning families and gangsterism) (*Drum* 8 February 1976: 28). These films featured all-black casts and were characterized by exclusive 'black' social settings. While black filmmakers directed quite a number of films aimed at blacks, white-controlled production companies produced these films. According to Tomaselli (1989: 59), 'there were only two sources of finance for films aimed at blacks'. There was the Bantu Investment Corporation which 'as state body promoting economic apartheid through economic aid aimed 'to stimulate a Bantu film industry of their own'.[90] There was also what Tomaselli (1989: 59) called 'secret' money provided by the Department of Information to Heyns Films.

---

[90] The Bantu Investment Corporation Act No. 34 of 1959 was passed to constitute a Corporation the purpose of which was to promote and encourage industrial and other undertakings and to act as a development, financial and investment institution among Bantu persons in the Bantu areas, and to provide for other incidental matters. See Aluka Digital Library at: <http://www.aluka.org/action/showMetadata > (accessed 15 November 2007).

In late 1978, after making *u'Deliwe*, the press exposed Heyns Films as a front for the Department of Information.[91] Undoubtedly then, the state or at least a part of it, was the real producer and financier of *u'Deliwe* and other films aimed at black audiences. Tomaselli observes that an anthropologist Mrs. Van Zyl Alberts, 'vetted' most of the Heyns Films. According to Tomaselli (1989: 57), Van Zyl Alberts was primarily concerned with their '"ethnological" accuracy in terms of the ideology of separate development'. Incidentally, Van Zyl Alberts was the script-coordinator for *u'Deliwe*. The covert involvement of the state in the production of these films suggests that they were conceived as instruments of state propaganda. This propaganda, which was revealed in the Muldergate scandal, was aimed at influencing, in terms of a positive image, local and international opinion about the apartheid government.

For Sabela, *u'Deliwe* and other films made by Heyns, were meant to be 'simple family entertainment' (*Drum* 8 February 1976: 28). Sabela implies that the black family constitutes the primary public and preferred viewer of the films. Such a reading, he suggests, ought not to be guided by assumptions in the viewer of complexities in the film. Rather, it must see in the films, 'innocent family leisure' with no inkling whatsoever of its implications for society. His statement also appears to evoke the intimacy of family against the publicness of normally unrelated, unfamiliar viewers. Simple family entertainment appears suited to the propaganda efforts of the Department of Information because of its potential to draw public attention away from national politics.

However, the embattled status of black families in apartheid South Africa destabilizes the denial of the complexity underwriting his projection of the film's audience. Sabela obliquely draws attention to the status of the black family in relation to the film's actual circulation and the constitution of its publicness. Read in relation to the actual circulation

---

[91] According to Giliomee, 'between 1973 and 1978 the cabinet allocated R64, 000, 000 in secret funds to the Department of Information in order to counter "the so-called total onslaught on South Africa"'. Giliomee, *Rise and Crisis*, 207. For the so-called 'Information Scandal or Muldergate', see also *Sunday Times* 1978, 8 October, 1978, 12 November, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1978, 13, 26 December, *Sunday Express* 1979, 10 June. I am indebted to Harriet Gavshon's work for the press references.

of the film, Sabela's statement surfaces the layered constitution of the film's publicness, and of the role of the black family in it. Constrained by the vicissitudes of urban living, yet given free textual scope in *u'Deliwe*, the black family is a trope of the limits and possibilities of public discourse during apartheid. The representation of the black family in film ultimately constitutes its movement from the intimacy of the conjugal space to the new publicity of the cinema.

Whatever its ideological usefulness to the state, the production of *u'Deliwe* was symptomatic of the changing patterns in the intellectual or work relations between black artists and the white film establishment, as well as the attitude of the state to these relations. It heralded a significant development,  and that is, the participation of black artists as filmmakers. Thus, the emergence of *u'Deliwe* points to a guarded capitulation by the state and the film industry, to black aspirations for determining the cultural and social destiny of black people. It also shows a sophisticated form of state appropriation of film, which seemed to be guided by attempts at co-opting black filmmakers into the apartheid hegemony, in order to legitimize it. Such appropriation is a clear indication of the acceptance by the state and white producers of the challenges posed by the political sophistication of urban blacks, '....I believe that the increased level of black buying power, the increased level of sophistication that has subsequently come through a middle class system will inevitably cause the films to improve because of increased awareness' (Hay in Tomaselli 1989: 77).[92]

## Films Aimed At Black Audiences: Simply Propaganda?

Given its imbrication in the state and state-related institutional spaces, *u'Deliwe* would appear on the surface to be simply a vehicle for apartheid propaganda. Indeed, the few commentators on films aimed at black audiences have argued with some variations, that

---

[92] For Ndebele, the political sophistication of urban blacks posed a threat to the apartheid state, and was one motivation behind the policy of Bantustans. See Ndebele N., 1972, Black Development, in Biko S., (Ed) *Black Viewpoint*, 17-18.

these films were made for propaganda purposes. In the wake of the exposure of the Department of Information scandal, in 1980 film scholar Harriett Gavshon undertook research into the levels of state interventions in the films aimed at black audiences. Her aim was to explore how through 'relative consistency in their content', and procedures of production, these films were in keeping with apartheid hegemony. Gavshon (1983: 15) identified these films as 'back to homelands' films which she observed were mostly shown in rural areas, in contrast to 'fantasy' or 'conditional' urban films which are shown in urban areas. Admittedly, Gavshon did not set out to include all genres of films made for black audiences. Yet 'urban' films of the period were replete with the rhetorical tendencies consistent with Gavshon's schema of 'back to homelands' films. According to Gavshon (1983: 16-17), such films were marked by gaps or *structuring absences*: the near absence of whites, marked absence of poverty, political issues and the rural/urban dichotomy. Gavshon argued further that 'the mere image of whites would have the result of drawing correspondences between that fabricated world (of the films) and the historical reality of the spectator, and corrode the illusion of the logicality of the narrative' (1983: 17). In arguing that the subsidy films are marked by the absence of politics, Gavshon obviously has in mind national politics. In so doing, she commits the error of denying the narrative diegesis of the films any political content outside of national politics. Even the observation that the films are marked by the absence of poverty is unsustainable because films like *u'Deliwe* do show poverty as a limiting condition.

For Gavshon (1983: 14), not only were films aimed at black audiences reflective of state propaganda, but they also showed the ideological collusion between the state, and white filmmakers who formed part of the ruling classes, as well as the profit motive of industry. She argued that these collusions only took place at the level of distribution, and the bureaucracy of censorship. In addition, she suggested that 'as part of the ruling classes, the producers not only reproduce those ideas that are necessary for the reproduction of these classes but are an expression of its cohesion' (1983: 16). Gavshon's work sheds light into aspects of the films' imbrication within the state ideological machinery and industrial

120

motives. However, she argued against the inevitability of the films' ideological effects: 'apartheid has never nor will ever be able to incorporate the majority of South Africans into its ideological framework…' (1983: 13). This is a significant observation because it acknowledges the limits of film as a propaganda tool. However, without analytical attention to their relations with contemporary debates, the discursive terrain of the films remains wedded to their function as propaganda tools.

Another reading has emerged latterly, which iterates the observation that films aimed at black audiences were made for propaganda purposes. Film scholar Gairoonisa Paleker (2005) locates *u'Deliwe* exclusively within the state's homelands policy. For Paleker (2005: 3), '*uDeliwe* is a moral tale of what befalls those who forget their station in life and overreach their ambitions as Deliwe did in her search for fame, wealth and easy life'. No doubt, this may be so, if we remain on the level of narrative only; but narrative is bound to be limited by other aspects of the film such as the personal success of Deliwe and its resonance with black social aspirations. Framing her discussion within the context of the ideology of separate homelands, Paleker sought to examine the extent to which such films were 'deployed to create specific African ethnic identities'. In this schema, she read what she saw as the urban-rural dichotomy in *u'Deliwe* as being reflective of the ideological alienation of Africans from the city. Paleker found the rural-urban dichotomy in *u'Deliwe* in keeping with the ideology of separate development. Social scientist Ted Matsetela equally held the view that most of the films aimed at black audiences

> ….are subtle custodians of the 'back to the country' move envisaged in homeland policy. Like the government, these pictures continuously stress that city life is foreign to the black way of life: "the urban setting is not your home; you belong in the homelands" (Matsetela cited in Tomaselli 1989: 72).

Although Paleker's discussion captured the relation of *u'Deliwe* to the state's designs on black people, it did not reflect on the dynamics of this relation. Nor did Paleker note the generic differences between the films aimed at black people, and the possibility thereof,

of their different constructions of black identity. Tomaselli's brief but important contrasting of *u'Deliwe* with other films aimed at a black viewership is a compelling rebuttal of this homogenization of films aimed at black audiences. Tomaselli (1989: 72) conceded that *u'Deliwe* did not conform to the 'back to homelands' films. He argued that 'despite the state's attempts at indoctrination, most of the films made by Sabela are more adventurous and accurate than those found in the back to homelands category' (1989: 72). Tomaselli does not demonstrate the significance of this accuracy. Thus, in spite of its 'accuracy', the film, in Tomaselli's reading, ultimately serves the objectives of the state and of capital. For him the films' function as propaganda tools is also reinforced by the sources of their themes, namely the popular magazines,

> The popular culture reflected in these kinds of films is not from an organic class experience or cooperation, but through media reconstructions of it. These reconstructions inevitably reinforce the dominant ideology of racial capitalism....the choice of print media, however, automatically skews perceptions, for they are the propaganda vehicles of capital. The more liberal of them perform the socialising task of preparing the new black class to form an alliance with their homelands compatriots (Tomaselli 1989: 66-67).

The fault line in this thinking is in its lack of consideration of the fact that texts are not reducible to their authors' intentions, but are ever subject to engagements that stem from the intricate social and political relations of which they are a part. Such engagements may not necessarily lead to a particular desired outcome. Rather, they are likely to give birth to varied ways of understanding social and political relations, the outcome of which may make possible new strategies of relating to power in all its forms. Tomaselli makes a rather easy correlation between capitalism and popular culture. Conceptually, this assumption denies popular culture a space for reflection and self-fashioning outside of the dictates of capital. There are aspects in the making and public life of *u'Deliwe* which destabilize readings that reduce its role to propaganda. Of these, I note its differences from the radio serial, the direction by a black filmmaker and the participation of black celebrities in it, as well as the ambiguities at play in its narrative.

### *Unmaking or Re-making of the Radio Soap*

Analysis of the film against the radio soap opera explodes readings that append it solely to the politics of apartheid and racial capitalism. Though this chapter is not about adaptation, *u'Deliwe*'s derivation from a radio soap calls for a brief discussion of the similarities and differences with its eponymous text. The discussion must surface the intra-textual specificities of *u'Deliwe* to put into proper perspective the subsequent discussion of its critical status. The film and the serial largely follow a similar plot. They also share a tendency to contrast explicitly the country and the city. In the first episode of the radio drama, Deliwe's guardians warn her about Johannesburg. Theirs is a grim picture of the city: full of criminals, poverty and populated by un-Christian and unproductive youth. The earlier scenes of the film are also characterized by an equal contempt for the city. After pleas from his wife, Mgathi reluctantly allows Deliwe to leave for Johannesburg but firmly instructs her to return to the country. In both texts, the admonitions against the city are reinforced when Deliwe nearly falls prey to township hoodlums who attempt to rape her, and when she falls on hard times. Her return to the Reverend Makhathini's house, entrenches the moral inclinations of both texts.

However, the most notable difference between the two texts is in their endings. In the last scene of the radio drama, Deliwe, on the train to Estunjini, declares that she is leaving 'Johannesburg and its evil ways'. The film, on the contrary, ends with Deliwe staying in the township, ready for a new Christian marital life with George. Though it also depicts negative aspects of the city, the film does not attribute Deliwe's problems to the 'nature' of city life in the same way as the radio drama does. In resolving the narrative of *u'Deliwe* by returning her to Soweto and not Estunjini, the film disavows the ending of the radio drama, in which it is suggested, that the return to the countryside is the solution to Deliwe's problems.

**The Black Urban Imaginary Revisited:** *u'Deliwe* **as Film**

It is worth reminding ourselves that the context in which the initial circulation of *u'Deliwe* occurs was defined by a realignment of relations between the state and capital, and it was therefore fecund with contestations that have a bearing on black identity. In 1975, on the matter of state restrictions on the movement and residential rights of black people, the Transvaal Chamber of Commerce challenged the state with some far-reaching recommendations. One of the proposals by the Chamber was that the state needed 'to recognize urban blacks as permanent urban dwellers since industry needs the blacks on a permanent basis' (*Black Review* 1975: Chapter 6).[93] The state's capitulation to these challenges guided its reforms, which allowed black people to be permanent residents in the urban areas. Steadman (1985: 340) argued that the state modified the apartheid system because of the obvious 'permanence of the urban blacks'.[94] The drive towards reform manifested contradictions in the historically stable relations between the state and capital. It exemplified the new challenges faced by the state that could no longer sustain grand apartheid in the form of strict application of restrictive residential and labour laws. Although the state reforms signalled the first steps towards the attainment of limited rights for black people, it was however, still peppered with conditions that created new contradictions in the social and political sphere of South Africa.

The reformist rethinking in the apartheid state occurred at the time of the making and circulation of the film. Thus, the new Deliwe belonged to the urban space at the same time as the country and the state's ideology were going through social and political convulsions. Given the conflicting objectives of the state and capital, these convulsions evinced the destabilization of the apartheid imaginary of black identity in terms of a perpetual rural traditionalism. Thus, the new Deliwe's stay in the city and her negotiation of its challenges decreases the burden of the rural space from any engagements of the film. Her shifting

---

[93] See also Davies R. H., 1979. Capital Restructuring and Modification of Racial Division of Labour in South Africa, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2.

[94] See also Giliomee H., 1982. *The Parting of the Ways: South African Politics 1976-1982*, Cape Town: David Phillip, X.

class position constructed in terms of the rise and fall in her social status is significant. Not only does it draw attention to class as a significant marker of urban black identity, but also invites considerations of the instability of middle class positions for urban blacks. The resonance between the shifts in Deliwe's class position and the actual instability in black people's middle class positions, calls into question the certainty of the argument that the film serves as propaganda. It is in the light of the ambiguity wrought in the shifts in Deliwe's class position and social status that the film's ending opened up an opportunity for black contestations of the urban public space. It allowed for the constructions of black identity that are grounded within the sphere of social and political action that an urban setting was likely to inspire.

In addition to the film's significant ending, the production dynamics in which a black filmmaker directed *u'Deliwe* at a time when black filmmakers were not allowed principal roles in film production is notable. However, Tomaselli (1980: 5, 1989: 67) has observed that Sabela's white employers chose the scripts for him. Thus, in Tomaselli's observations, Sabela's white colleagues determined the content of his films at the primary level of their conceptualisation. Implied in this observation is that Sabela's films were not in conflict with the interests of his employers. Although it points to a highly likely state of inequality, this observation is not an adequate account of the relations of production in the making of Sabela's films. A brief examination of Sabela's work conditions in Heyns Films illumines part of the complexities Tomaselli ignores. For instance, Sabela (in Deane D. 1978: 162), argued that although his white colleagues chose the scripts for him, their choices were 'often inappropriate'- a statement that Tomaselli summarily dismisses (1989: 68). While Sabela does not explain the inappropriateness in his white colleagues' choices, it can be surmised that the interpretations of the scripts did not entirely lie with them.

Though Tomaselli recognizes that Sabela enjoyed a modicum of creative autonomy, through translation of the scripts, he stops short of seeing in this, a marginal but significant scope for independent interpretation. Sabela's command of the African cultural

125

codes and his colleagues' choices of the script defined the division of labour in the production of the film. It can be safely intimated that through his mastery of the Zulu language and familiarity with township culture, Sabela negotiated the contradictions of his and township residents' aspirations against the authority of his white colleagues. This is borne out by Gavshon's observation (1983: 15) that one of the production conditions of films aimed at black audiences is 'the extensive use of interpreters on set'. Thus, the relations of production in the making of the film, and Sabela's awareness of the cultural limitations of his colleagues, logically throw into disarray the supposed singleness of the vision of *u'Deliwe*.

As a celebrity, Sabela was marked as a modern African by virtue of being a film star. His international casting as the outlawed heroic Mandela, a cultural role outside of apartheid framing, also signalled his modernity. All these gave *u'Deliwe* its distinctiveness, as being more than yet another apartheid film. That Heyns Films wanted a black director, and more specifically Sabela, intimates on the one hand, its pursuit of township 'cultural authenticity', which under the circumstances, only a black filmmaker would muster. However, that the company also appropriated Sabela's local cultural credibility and currency is not far off the mark. Against the diet of Hollywood fare, *u'Deliwe*, a film with a local background and a local black celebrity of international standing, motivated the possibility of the accessibility of the cinematic image for black viewers.[95]

The participation of Cynthia Shange, then a popular beauty queen added colour and modern glamour to the profile of the film. Shange took the principal part of Deliwe in the film. She had won the Miss Africa South in 1972, two years before the making of *u'Deliwe*. Miss Africa South was restricted to black women while Miss South Africa was exclusive to white South Africans. Thus, the part of Deliwe dovetailed with Shange's real-life career and the racial framing of beauty pageants in South Africa. In a recent interview, Shange has referred to the resonance between Deliwe with her real life:

---

[95] Consider also Sabela's participation in other Heyns titles such as *Ikati e'limyama* (1975).

> When I was cast for the role of Deliwe, I had never acted before. But I think the role was tailormade for me. It reflected my life. Deliwe was a beauty queen who had swept the boards way back in Natal and continued the trend when she hit Johannesburg. I was also a beauty queen from Natal who hit the big time there before continuing my career in Johannesburg. The only difference is that Deliwe went off the rails and became a big headache but I was focused (Shange in *Sowetan* Timeout Supplement, 20, 02, 2009).

Shange's assumption of the role of Deliwe gave the film a measure of immediacy to the cultural politics of 'race' in South Africa. Because Shange's iconicity negated the domestication of young women, which the film seemed to encourage, she brought to *u'Deliwe* a popular currency, which was also tinged with a degree of political significance. The cultural horizon against which Shange participated was one in which local black female actors did not assume central roles in films. Her assumption of the lead role in the film stood out and extended as it did this, the transgressive-ness of *u'Deliwe*. Importantly, her participation resonated with debates on black female subjectivity, and a patriarchal anxiety over it. One particular debate took place between Gibson Kente, the renowned playwright and 'Black Sister under the Wig', a reader of *Drum* magazine. Kente criticized fashion-conscious girls and those who took a drink (*Drum,* 8 June 1975). The reader asked, 'Why in this world are we girls always criticised? Nobody seems to agree with everything we do…. Mr. Kente says that we believe more in outside appearance, I don't agree. You will find that there is more under the wig than outside. I, like my fellow sisters like fashion but can also go to town on Black Consciousness' (*Drum*, 22 June 1975). Thus, Shange's participation resonated with black female desire, which was increasingly pitted in the public debate against patriarchal discourses that arguments like Kente's represented.

Kente's argument echoes Black Consciousness thinking as exemplified by its principal exponent, 'the way they make up and so on, which tends to be a negation of their true state and in a sense a running from their colour; they use lightening creams, they use straightening devices for their hair and so on' (Biko in More 2008: 61).[96] Importantly,

---

[96] The African male elites' disdain for African women's use of cosmetics has a historical lineage going as far back as the 1930s. According to a recent study, 'most *Bantu World* writers disapproved of black women

female desire makes apparent divergent views in engagements on blackness. Thus, against the radical overtones of Black Consciousness informed as they were by a masculine sensibility, *u'Deliwe* drew attention to gender as an important theme in debates on black identity.[97] The consequence of this was to destabilize the masculinist assumptions of black identity that were to be founded in the Black Consciousness philosophy.

The participation of Shange and Sabela gave content to the understandings of modernity for the film's viewers and its public. Such understandings were not simply in keeping with state hegemony, but actually allowed imaginations of black identity over and above hegemonic interests. It is through the power of such mediations, that we can see *u'Deliwe*'s ambiguities at play. The involvement of black talent in the making of the film also brings in cultural sensibilities, which enhance the ability of the film to surface every-day political logic. This makes *u'Deliwe* analogous to Jameson's analysis of commercial film, which he argues, contains

> Political content of everyday life, the political logic which is already inherent in the raw material with which the filmmaker must work: such political logic will then not manifest itself as an overt political message, nor will it transform the film into an unambiguous political statement. But it will certainly make for the emergence of profound formal contradictions to which the public cannot not be sensitive, whether or not it yet possesses the conceptual instruments to understand what those contradictions might be (Jameson 1977: 846).

---

wearing cosmetics' (Thomas 2006: 477). For instance, R.R.R. Dhlomo, 'celebrated black women's educational and professional achievements, and advocated compassionate marriages. When it came to black women wearing make-up, however, Dhlomo found nothing redeemable' (2006: 477). Thomas's argument that cosmetic use was one of the most contentious issues surrounding the black modern woman because it drew attention to the phenotypic dimensions of racial distinctions, resonates with the rationale behind some Black Consciousness adherents' antipathy towards cosmetics. See Thomas L. M., 2006. The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability in 1930s South Africa, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 460-490.

[97] Commenting on her experiences within Black Consciousness, a former activist Mamphele Ramphele points to the silence on gender in Black Consciousness organisations. According to her, 'gender as a political issue was not raised at all….there is no evidence to suggest that the BWF (Black Women's Federation) was concerned with the special problems women experienced as a result of sexism both in the private and public spheres' (Ramphele cited in Mangena 2008: 255). However, in a revisionist move, Oshadi Mangena has recently argued that 'while gender was not an organising principle of the Black Consciousness Movement', the movement 'tacitly endorsed gender concerns' (Mangena 2008: 255).

Jameson acknowledges rightly the fact that- regardless of its 'intentions', commercial film is always already 'burdened' with significations that are ultimately politically important for its audience. *u'Deliwe* surfaces referents (the segregated landscape of the city, the allure and glamour of a black female socialite) that were open to associations and memories by viewers other than those intended by producers. These relations and associations were not inimical to the stimulation of apprehensions, however tenuous, of the racial injustices typical of apartheid urban modernity, and possibly their transcendence. Thus, caught up in its attributes as a 'medium of modernity', and its positioning as a purveyor of the antinomies of modernity embodied in the apartheid system, *u'Deliwe* is indicative of the limits that film can place on ideological manoeuvres of political organs such as the state. It is precisely because of the political dynamics at play in black people's 'experience' of the city that such constructions were necessitated. While the modernity presented in *u'Deliwe* is congruent with the changing apartheid vision, which by 1975 admitted that blacks may be urban, this does not necessarily support any argument predicated on a neat correspondence between public sentiment and state designs. The manner in which public engagement of this urbanity occurred is ultimately important in the film's enhancement of critical engagements on black identity. In further considering the film's relations to discourses of blackness, I now turn to the film's circulation.

### *Circulation*

According to Alan Girney, producer of *u'Deliwe,* the film opened in Umlazi in Durban. It was made into four major languages English, Xhosa, South Sotho and North Sotho (Private correspondence, 01, Feb 2006).[98] *u'Deliwe* advertisements, which sometimes featured posters, ran through the pages of *World* newspaper between 9, April 1975 as part of a triple bill from April 11, 14, 17 and 21 until 1, May 1975. All the advertisements were for *Eyethu* Cinema in Soweto. It appeared that whenever there was more than one film on the programme, *u'Deliwe* would be the main attraction. This is evident in the triple bill of April

---

[98] The validity of this claim by Girney remains in question as the only copy of *u' Deliwe* in circulation is in Zulu.

21, 1975, which was dubbed 'Second Great Week' featuring 'All-Black films made in South Africa': which also showed *Dingaka* (1964) and *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1951). According to Gavshon (1980: 15), 'most of the producers initiated their own distribution, although there are also small privately owned hiring companies. Because of the lack of cinema facilities, they are shown in church and school halls. The films are also hired by black entrepreneurs, Administration Boards, mining companies and organizations such as Inkatha'.

The showing of *u'Deliwe* in venues patronized by black people was in line with the directives of the Publication Board to make the film exclusively available for black viewers. Film censorship laws were amended in 1974, and cancelled 'race' as the basis for censorship (Tomaselli 1989: 16). However, Tomaselli (1989: 16) stated that the laws retained the 'showing of films to persons in a particular category… or at a specific place'.[99] Coupled with the use of African languages with no subtitles, the circulation of *u'Deliwe* was patterned along the lines of apartheid's racial logic and linguistic strictures.

The narrative space of the film strictly corresponded to the geography of the film's circulation. For example, a scene in which a reluctant Deliwe goes to the cinema with the hoodlum Jack illustrates the intimations of the horizons of the film's circulation. As they alight from a car of one of Jack's outlaw friends, the camera slowly tilts upwards, revealing the name 'Eyethu' emblazoned above the cinema entrance. To all intents therefore, the 'producerly text', provided a spatial template for the projected audience's intimation of its world, and produced the viewer as an urban African.[100] By 'producerly text' is meant how the producers constructed and understood the film (Andersson 2004: 15). The circulation of *u'Deliwe* in accordance with the designs of the state was reinforced by the economy of film distribution. Proprietors of cinemas and cinematic apparatuses had significant control

---

[99] Racial discrimination prevailed at least two years after the amendments. In 1976, cinema owners were still obligated to apply for permits to show films to blacks. See Tlholoe J., and Heyns J., and Padayachee M., 1976. Open Entertainment to All Races, *Drum*, June.
[100] *Eyethu*, the only cinema in Soweto then, served one million inhabitants. (Gavshon, *Levels of Intervention,* 20).

over the viewing of the films. This was due to the considerable inaccessibility of visual technology other than the cinema in South Africa.

### *Charting the Thresholds of u'Deliwe*

In the summer of 1974, *Drum* published an article, which celebrated a new development in the South African film industry in which black artists were beginning to work as senior creative artists (*Drum*: 1974, 22 October). An article appearing in the magazine that dealt with black involvement in local film was unprecedented. In the 70's, *Drum*'s attention to film was usually in relation to Hollywood films playing in the local black circuit. These reviews mostly focused on storylines and the films' entertainment value. The article highlighted the import of this new development against the historical background of their limitations as major actors in South African made films. It then gauged the success of black involvement in film through the achievements of artists like Corney Mabaso, Simon Sabela and Mandla Sibiya. 'Suddenly the film scene is becoming our scene …' the article began. This self- referential documentation of black involvement in films suggests that the few blacks in the industry were representative of the magazine's affirmation of blackness. Significantly, it celebrates their sense of ownership of the means of producing films. It also heightens 'race' as a decisive factor in the cinematic conditions of production. Therefore, the fact that the films were directed by black filmmakers was a notable aspect of its publicness. In this way, *Drum* argued that in spite of their problems, the slew of films produced in the 1970s and aimed at black people allowed for black participation in film.

Yet Mabaso, like Sabela, did not see himself as a scriptwriter and director but as an apprentice. The article ends by differentiating *u'Deliwe* and *Maxhosa* (1975), a Xhosa version of Shakespeare's Macbeth, in terms of language, setting and market. It states that '*u'Deliwe* is township life as we know it, dialogue in Zulu and is intended for the South African market'. *Maxhosa,* on the other hand, featured an all black cast in Xhosa dress, used English dialogue and was intended for the international market. The confident assertion of the consistency of the film with township life suggests that the writer

accepted that *u'Deliwe* was reflective of black life. The article accepted as authentic the film's representations of township life. In addition, the stress on language seems to be a marker of import in the film's rendering of 'authentic black life'.

*Drum*, it appears, invested *u'Deliwe* with significance. The accent on authenticity takes reflection away from the narrative of the film. Yet, it locates the film's import in its capacity for facilitating the pleasure of identification. Accordingly, the film's realistic 'mapping' of the quotidian: township landscape, language and character traits, established a common horizon of experiences for its audience. This experience, *Drum* suggested, was located in the contiguity of the profilmic world, with its historical referents. Consequently, the textual relaying of the film by the magazine, authenticated and celebrated *u'Deliwe*'s mediation of black experiences of modernity.

A poster for *u'Deliwe* appeared as part of an advertisement for the film in the Arts section of *The World* newspaper of May 1, 1975. The centrepiece of the advertisement features the profiles of Deliwe (Cynthia Shange) and Reverend Makhathini (Simon Sabela). Deliwe's profile advances in the forefront. In the background, Reverend Makhathini, with a priestly collar around his neck, and eyes bespeaking parental concern, stares at Deliwe admonishingly. A halo surrounds the Reverend's head, attaching saintly attributes to him. Although the object of her gaze is not clear, Deliwe is also reflective as she looks off the frame into the middle distance. The moral conscience invested in the profile of the Reverend seems to suggest a tension in moral judgment between himself and the young woman. While he appears to be a figure of saintly surveillance, Deliwe- the object of his moral admonitions- looks ahead and appears to contemplate a future free of his surveillance. Though the Reverend seems to recede behind the future-bound youth, the authority of his religious wisdom is kept intact by the halo. In this moral scheme, Deliwe's future remains a question for the viewer's consideration, but most fundamentally a problem for religious patriarchy.

132

The religious or moral tone in which the poster is organized represents the 'producerly' intent for the reading of the film. It serves as a rhetorical strategy for cultivating, in the audience, a broadly Christian approach to the film. This is congruent with the film's Christian leitmotif, which underwrites its melodramatic tone, and the narrative devices of intermittent hymns and prayers. Yet, the deep-seated anxiety in the Reverend's admonishing stare at Deliwe sharply puts across the uncertainty of his authority over her. Through a subtle but suggestive arrangement of power relations between the Reverend and Deliwe, the poster invites reflections on the justification and durability of masculine articulations of black female subjectivity. Thus, through its epitext, *u'Deliwe* inserted black female subjectivity as a discourse through which the dominant masculine definitional authority over black identity was implicitly disrupted.

Further, the recourse to the solemn authority of religion- contends, in the same poster, with the promise of secularized virtues: success, entertainment and love. The caption above the poster reads: *Umdlalo ono thando nesasasa!!!-* (a story full of love and success). Below the poster, another caption reads: *Umdlalo u'Deliwe owawukhishwe emdyeni abase-msakazweni manje osuwenzwe isithombe esiqavile se-bioscope* (The story of *u'Deliwe* taken from the radio and is now a well-known film). In bold: *u-Simon Mabunu Sabela no-Cynthia Shange kanye nabanye abomdabu abangopheta kweze zithombe umqondisi lapha u-simon mabunu sabela* (Simon Sabela and Cynthia Shange as well as professionals in the film industry).

The references to Shange and Sabela, both icons of popular culture in their own right, concretize the poster's claims to success, love and entertainment. Rhetorically addressed to the viewer as an individual with desires, these qualities deflate the weighty solemnity of the visuals. Thus, at the same time as it entrenches a moral universe for the film, as an epitext, the poster also deploys written text to lure the viewer to the aspirations and pleasures associated with modern life. This is indicative of the dual compulsion of cinema to entertain if only to engage critically the absorbed viewer. However, the attribution of

133

value to either the visual or the written text depends on the viewer of the poster. The epitextual projection of *u'Deliwe* expands its horizons as a text, and therefore its intervention in public life. This expansion means that people who might not have seen the film, including the viewers of the poster, constituted part of its public life.

## *Instituting 'Black Films' in Drum*

In the 1970s what would have earlier been regarded as subversive films, produced and directed by African Americans, hit the 'black circuit'. This in itself showed the changing patterns of censorship. Prior to this development, films like Mario Van Peebles's *Sweet Sweet Baaaadddd Ass-Song* (1971) were not allowed in black venues. A review article in *Drum* addressed itself to some of the debates around these films (1974, 22 July: 19). A brief examination of this review helps frame the magazine's subsequent attention to *u'Deliwe*. Reflecting on an earlier article that anticipated black involvement in film, the article, tellingly entitled *Split on Black Films*, circulated debates about African American films. The films cited were Van Peebles's *Sweet Sweetback Baadassss Song*, *Shaft*, *Sounder* (1972), *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972), *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and *Brother John* (1971). In the major caption of the article, the reader is introduced to the debate:

> The new wave of black films from the United States has sparked out a big debate in that country and in South Africa. The controversy has been more intense within the black community itself. *Drum* takes a searching look at the scene and presents a selection of comments from a number of prominent blacks involved or concerned about the black films of today and tomorrow (*Drum* 22 July 1974: 19).

Responding to optimistic observations about representations of black identity in a 1972 *Drum* article, the article posed the question of whether black actors were featured in 'intelligent roles' (*Drum* 22 July, 1974: 17). The article acknowledged the views of artists in the film industry especially in what it designated as the 'black community'. The films' morality was questioned and their explicit visualization of sexual encounters commented on. An unnamed critic characterized the films as having 'profane street language and

134

almost ritual violence' (*Drum* 22 July, 1974: 19). The same critic decried the 'fixing of whites as villains or fools or both' in films like *Sweet Sweetback Baadassss Song*. On the contrary, *Sounder* garnered glowing reviews. One of these reviews described the film as 'reaching out and touching the common thread of humanity' (*Drum* 22 July, 1974: 19).

Another issue covered by the debates was the concern with the sincerity of the films to positive portrayals of black people. Some critics featured in the article felt that some of the films, 'exploited frustrations, anger and hope of blacks – notably among young people in need of black heroes- by portraying criminals as romantic figures and women as little more than sexual toys'. These films, the critics continued: 'provided mundane competencies like swiftness at using pistols and fists as solutions, especially if the problem is White' (*Drum* 22 July, 1974: 19). The films were also seen as being constrained by the persistent financial patronage of white studios and were therefore viewed as rewrites of white stories. Cecily Tyson an actor in *Sounder* opined that the question of blacks supporting 'black films' was a more crucial factor.

> I don't put those films down because they helped open the door. My concern is that we should not be given only one type of film. Give us some people with some character, some truth, and some history. […] our whole black heritage is that of struggle, pride and dignity (*Drum* 22 July, 1974: 19).

*Drum* also ran a series of observations by African American artists under the caption *Blacks look at Black movies*. In one of those observations, Gordon Parks, director of *Shaft* argued that the black youth supported *Shaft* because he was a salutary hero for them. Julius Griffin, President of the Hollywood Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People felt that the films were offering a diet of violence, murder, drugs and rape- while failing to give positive images of blacks. Jim Brown, an actor and former sportsman urged filmmakers to pursue what he called the American Dream- by approaching film as a business, making good films and dropping 'race' consciousness in the categorization of film. Actor and singer Lena Horne reckoned that she was 'yet to see

the definitive black movie'. Interestingly, Roy Innis, national director of the Congress of Racial Equality argued against the loss of 'psychic energies' of black youth to film 'instead of participating in meaningful political action'.

*Drum* assumed a critical identification with the above commentaries on 'black' films from the United States.[101] Their circulation in the black circuit since 1971, grounds these films within the sphere of 'black film culture' in South Africa. The attention to the representation of black identity, violence, issues of control of the cinematic means of production mirrors the challenges faced by black filmmakers in South Africa. Such challenges demonstrate the many claims to black identity, from the moral to the strategic perspectives. Some of these challenges reside in the tension between cinema as a site of engaging black identity, and the assumptions of its incongruity with 'meaningful political action'.

The magazine's reiteration of these debates within the context of a changing film culture in South Africa constituted it as an important platform for engaging black-centred films in South Africa. In giving a glimpse of arguments around black- centred films in 70's South Africa, *Drum* asserted the importance of film in the reconstruction of black identity that supplanted its colonial and apartheid imaginaries. Interestingly, this reconstruction draws important links between black identity in the United States and in South Africa. The magazine invited its readers to inhabit, through black-centred films, a global and decidedly politically resonant space on which to imagine their blackness. In the light of *Drum*'s own reconstruction of blackness in terms that eschewed its apartheid disavowal from urban modern life, the following section explores *Drum*'s take up of *u'Deliwe*. I would like to recall Steadman's observation on theatre. He shows that theatre productions at this time were the site of oppositional ideologies. Nevertheless, *Drum*, the major framing text for *u'Deliwe*, through reference to African American films worked to instate film as a site of

---

[101] In a brief study of *Ikati e'limyama*, Maingard makes an interesting comparison between its conventions and those of Shaft- indicating as she does this, the influence of the emergent African American aesthetic on the directorial vision of Sabela. See Maingard, *National Cinema*, 130.

black public discursivity, and doing so in a way that was inevitably already potentially cosmopolitan.

### Take up of u'Deliwe in Drum

*u'Deliwe* was popular with its township audiences. *Drum* reported that by the end of November 1975, 400 000 people had seen the film and that more were still seeing it (1976, 8 February: 28).[102] Tomaselli later wrote that two million viewers had seen the film throughout the early 80's (1989: 63). The high popularity of the film was phenomenal even by today's standards. The film's popularity can be partly ascribed to the popularity of Shange and Sabela. Further, if a study by *The Golden City Post* on films with traditional themes goes, *u'Deliwe*, it can be argued, owed its popular success to its destabilization of these themes. According to the newspaper:

> Blacks don't want traditional themes anymore. They don't like to see where they came from. (sic) They know where they are going to. (sic) They see so much ghetto life they live in it they don't want to really see it. (sic) Part of the reasons for their preferences is because of the degrading ways in which blacks have been portrayed on film (*The Post* cited in Tomaselli 1989: 68).

Some of the views expressed in the black press corroborate the above findings by *The Golden City Post*. In *The World* newspaper for instance, one reader, Jacob Dube, argued for the inclusion of black people in film production. The reader's letter is informed by a Black Consciousness sensibility:

> As a filmgoer, I always get annoyed when seeing only whites on advertisements and films. This does harm to my people who want to improve their standards. They never see their own who are successful. Instead examples come through people who breed fear, and deny them equality. These films are not educative and breed inferiority (Dube, *The World*, Feb 19, 1975).

---

[102]The Black Consciousness leader, Lybon Mabasa, remembers a full *Eyethu*, three or four times a week with audiences coming to watch *u'Deliwe* (Personal Correspondence 2008, 28 August).

On another level, the film's popularity stemmed from the viewers' identification with it. The intersection of setting, language, actors and familiar sounds of Jazz formed a cinematic tapestry that resonates with their 'life-world'. Therefore, the aspirational aspect found in the confluence between the use of film, then a gradually accessible technology for black people, and the participation of local black celebrities was influential. In addition, the fact that in spite of the passing of a whole decade since the broadcasting of the radio drama, the resurgence in film of the story familiar to most radio listeners was a welcome development for the urbanized audience. More so, the story resonated with ordinary concerns about the black urban family in apartheid South Africa. If *u'Deliwe* posited a narrative that was congruent with changing, unstable and contested apartheid policies, it also chimed with concerns about the social instabilities around the black family. Subject to myriad restrictions, the black family was caught up between two struggles: one familial, intimate and political, and the other political and collective.

Attention to Sabela's work came out again in a February 1976 edition of *Drum* which hailed his accomplishments as a black director in the film industry. Entitled *Five-Film Simon Finds Lots of Talent*, it was an overview of Sabela's work since *u'Deliwe*. The main caption acknowledged primarily that Sabela's success came after fifteen years as an actor working with both local and international directors. In the article, Sabela reiterated his apprenticeship: 'I'm still learning. It will be a long time before I can say I know…' (*Drum* 8 February, 1976). He hailed the acting talent that he believed the films displayed, 'one thing that I have been able to prove in this short stint as director is that blacks have a wealth of acting talent' (*Drum* 8 February, 1976).

The angles of the articles show that the film fell squarely within *Drum*'s understanding of the social and cultural aspirations of black people. The interviews of Sabela in the magazine were silent on the ideological strategies and implications of the film. However, the presence of the interviews highlights the significance of films aimed at black people in the magazine's notion of what ought to constitute black identity. Sabela commended the

138

use of African languages because they presented fewer constraints for actors: 'the problem with most black actors doing English is that they concentrate on remembering the dialogue and their acting stops being natural' (*Drum* 8 February, 1976). Interestingly, Sabela's commentaries were directed at the constraints in the institutional space of film in South Africa. Thus, the use of isiZulu was one step towards the reconfiguration of the institutional arrangements of the industry. The advantage in this gesture seemed to be that it would remove hurdles towards creative expression of black actors in film, expose their yet unseen talents, and allow for a wide range of acting styles.

However, the argument for the use of African languages in films aimed at black people had its contradictions. Ray Msengana an actor in one of Sabela's films, *Inkedama* which uses the Nguni language testified to this challenge: 'We have actually been attacked by many people who say we are propagating separate development by producing films in the blacks' languages and we cannot have any strong argument against this' (cited in *Black Review* 1975-1976: 196).[103] Msengana submitted an interesting solution to the challenge: 'The answer is in producing films with black background in English so that all blacks including Coloureds and Indians can participate together and improve the potential of the industry' (cited in *Black Review* 1975-1976: 196).

This questioning of African languages as a medium of communication in the films intimates public critical alertness to their possible cooption by the dominant apartheid ideology. It also signals the aspirations of certain sections of urban black cultural workers towards an inclusive cultural and racial sense of blackness. This sense of blackness is consistent with the inclusive understanding of blackness in Black Consciousness, which cuts across 'racial' and 'ethnic' sections of the black population, stressing a commonality based on the experience of discrimination and oppression. At this critical level, the relation of *u'Deliwe* to public engagements of black identity seems to have been constituted within

---

[103] See also *Daily Dispatch* of 1976, 8 August.

the triad of language, 'race' and political vision in ways that went against Verwordean interpretations.

However, the contradiction between making films in African languages and adopting English as a *lingua franca* for countering apartheid divisions, suggests that films aimed at black people were a locus of the challenges posed by apartheid for the constructions of blackness itself. The many African languages, which were not necessarily equally intelligible to all black people, characterized black urban modernity in South Africa. Held between the linguistic challenges of performance, and alertness to the cultural-political implications of the filmic use of African languages, the public critical status of *u'Deliwe* resides in its textured register of the modern manifestations of black identity. Through the contestations over language, black-centred film constituted a terrain of struggle for black cultural autonomy.

## Take-up of *u'Deliwe* in Black Consciousness

The film's production and its circulation in venues frequented by black people coincided with the rise of debates around blackness and whiteness. Black theatre was one site in which this was happening. According to Steadman (1985: 350), prior to '76, 'a radical social consciousness significantly affected black theatre'. He details the development of black theatre before and after 1976, demonstrating its political context and changing patterns after 1976. Steadman (1985: 339) argues that black theatre reflected the social consciousness of its authors and that it played a significant role in the radicalization of black cultural workers. In the 70's, genres such as poetry formed part of social gatherings including funerals, and rallies and they therefore reached large audiences. However, in comparative terms theatre, poetry reached relatively smaller audiences than film which reached vast audiences. The rise and proliferation of radical black theatre, and indeed verse that either subscribed to the ideology of Black Consciousness or was informed by it, characterized the period. This is explained by the fact that unlike film, which needs huge

140

capital and technical expertise, theatre and literary genres such as poetry do not. As a result, these genres were accessible to political activists while film was largely inaccessible.

According to Tiyani Lybon Mabasa, co-founder of the Black Consciousness Movement and current President of the Socialist Party of Azania, the Black Consciousness Movement welcomed *u'Deliwe*. He submitted that 'although there was no depth to them, movies such as *u'Deliwe* were okay for their time' (Personal Correspondence, 2008, 28 August). Mabasa also observed that black people were used to films which were made from the perspective of white filmmakers, and as such *u'Deliwe* was in the eyes of black people, a refreshing film because it was different.[104] In addition, Mabasa notes the importance of *u'Deliwe* in terms of its linguistic shift from English to Zulu, a tendency that in his view, appealed to black people's cultural sensibilities. Mabasa's comments are indicative of the film's oblique but constructive relations with blackness *a la* Black Consciousness philosophy. It is important that *u'Deliwe* conveyed a cinematic optimism for black modernity, regardless of its level of engagement with the politically charged debates about blackness in the 1970s. Therefore, in its relations with Black Consciousness philosophy, the film harboured a latent but potentially forceful space for engagement with blackness as articulated by the Black Consciousness movement. Not only does this show the possible critical status of subsidy films, but also the conditions within which its critical potency may be enhanced.

## Spaces of Engagements

In terms of spaces of engagements available to black people, *Drum* is in relation to film, evidently dominant. In its foregrounding of the journalistic tendency that was geared towards the social status of blacks, and representation of black identity on film, it played a

---

[104] Incidentally, Terry Tselane, Chief Executive Officer of the Gauteng Film Office, recently confessed that of all films that he watched as a young boy, *u'Deliwe* left a lasting impression on him. Interestingly, his interviewer noted the irony of Tselane's embrace of *u'Deliwe* because it was "an apartheid creation". See the interview online at:
< http://www.gautengfilm.org.za/live/content.php > (accessed August 29 2008).

significant role. Other than *Drum*, the Black Consciousness forum in the form of *Black Review* also proved to be an important space of engagement for blacks. It was a more politically oriented space than *Drum*. This made possible, the engagement of subsidy films or films made for blacks, from decidedly politicized perspectives. Such perspectives spoke directly to the social and political implications of films to the anti-apartheid struggle. However, through the example of *u'Deliwe*, it is evident that whatever engagements of black-centred films took place within such spaces; these were not significantly in relation to organizational programmes. They were however, characterized by preoccupations with the meaning of blackness in the context of anti-apartheid politics. Judging by its popularity, the relative lack of textual treatment of *u'Deliwe* in the 1970s did not mean that it did not have a rich public life. The paucity of the non-textual sources in the 70's and 80's suggests that the extent and nature of the public life of the film remains an open question. However, it also signals that the limits of the film's publicness are attributable to the political configuration of apartheid.

## *Conclusions*

My discussion has surfaced critical engagements at play in the publicness of *u'Deliwe*. It has shown at various levels, the critical impulse in the publicness of the film in the seventies and eighties. Works by expert protagonists, directly or indirectly- Gavshon, and Tomaselli and more recently Paleker- engaged with its ideological implications. Yet many people embraced the film, disrupting as they did this, the assumption in the readings that the film was mere propaganda. The film's popularity, which was made possible by the iconic statuses of Sabela and Shange, and its visual and aural reconstruction of black urban experiences, suggests that it succeeded in eliciting black people's identification with it. It is possible to read in this identification a modicum of popular but critical regard of the film, in particular its importance for the social imagination of black urban identity as politically charged. In this regard, the popular press in the form of *Drum* magazine played a big role in adapting the film as a meaningful object to the social and political struggle for the definitional authority over blackness. The publicness of the film also constitutes critical

142

engagements at the epitextual level. The poster of *u'Deliwe* instituted visual provocations with regard to the relations between black female subjectivity and gendered, particularly masculine, articulations of black identity.

The example of *u'Deliwe* shows that films aimed at black audiences that emerged from state propaganda machinery can effect forms of critical engagements that focus on their significance as meaningful articles and not on their demerits as state ideological tools. Importantly, the cultural and political context of its circulation, appropriation and engagement, in which the exclusion of black people from cinematic culture was routine, also made possible the film's importance in public discourses on blackness at the time. Accordingly, the film related to blackness in terms of lending a cinematic license to its modernity, a calculated move by the apartheid propaganda apparatus, but one that was not necessarily within its control. This made possible ever more public critical apprehensions of blackness, in relation not only to the state, but also to gender, and generational divides. Thus, its significance occurred not only at the level of its disruption of Verwoerdian-inspired notions of blackness as rural, but also in making possible, continuous engagement of the very modernity its producers wished to instate for black people.

However, both the textual reach of the film and its capacity to animate engagements was limited by the social, political and economic context in which it was circulating. Its contribution to public ideas was at best surfaced by the social consciousness underwriting part of the popular[105] black press during apartheid. At the same time, the popularity of the

---

[105]My use of the concept of the popular is derived from Hall's work. He embeds the 'popular' historically within traditions of working class struggle and social positioning. 'Popular culture' according to this thinking, is the ground on which meanings and their transformations are worked. It is a process that relates to the production of culture within a stratified society. These practices evade, resist, turn and appropriate mechanisms of power. However, these efforts are far from homogenous. They are necessarily contradictory, slippery and fragmented because of the ever-present contingencies of social positioning. See Hall S., 1981. Notes on Deconstructing the Popular In *People's History and Socialist Theory*, London: Routledge. 221-239. See also Fiske J., 1990. Popular Narrative and Commercial Television, *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture and Media Studies,* No. 23. (May) 133-147.

film and the relative disregard of it by contemporary scholars and the popular press such as *Drum*, institute a telling ambiguity about its 'agency' in public life. Therefore, the extent to which it was engaged as an instance of the constitution of black identity in the popular press signals a limited but meaningful relation of the film to the discourses of blackness in the 1970s.

Evidently, and in contrast to *Come Back, Africa*, the film's publicness was solicited by state actors in collaboration with black cultural icons. On one level, this shows that by the 1970s the public role of film in public engagements was characterized by the inclusion and not exclusion of black publics. Even in these circumstances, which admitted that blacks were modern and could work as senior filmmakers, the state or its cultural agencies organized these publics around the idea of cinema or film as a form of moral instruction regarding black urbanity. Yet, the example of *u'Deliwe* shows that the visual credibility of black images on film screens, coupled with black South Africans' experiential burdens of apartheid, disrupted, and even destabilized any 'policeable' notion of black cinematic publicness. It is precisely because of this combination of factors that early black-centred films were able to effect critical apprehensions of black modernity against the state's tutelage, however benevolent it may have claimed to be.

# CHAPTER 5

## *MAPANTSULA*: FILM AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

This chapter explores the making and public life of *Mapantsula*, (1988) an overtly anti-apartheid *engagé* film about a petty gangster in the 1980's political unrest in South African townships. The chapter confines itself to the early public life of the film, the period from 1988 to the early 90's.

In the opening sequence of the film, the revving engine of a fearsome *kwela kwela* police van screeching around a corner spoils the merriment of children playing in a Soweto street. As they scatter in different directions, the camera steals into the back of the vehicle where anxious men and women in political slogan-bedecked t-shirts are forced to share its limited space. A man sleeps uncomfortably in the corner. His name is Johannes Themba Mzolo *aka* Panic. His flashy suit sets him apart from the rest. Panic's arrest is the result of his presence at a demonstration against rent hikes earlier that day. In prison, his captors attempt to persuade him to incriminate Duma, a trade union and civic leader. Through flashbacks, we encounter Panic's criminal exploits in the inner city of Johannesburg and unfortunate personal circumstances in nearby Soweto. His unsavoury and sometimes ambivalent relationships with various people, comrades, rival thugs, his kitchen-maid girlfriend Pat and her employer, proprietor Ma-Modise and the police, are revealed in subsequent scenes. After a long and torturous reflection, Panic declines to sign a document that would effectively amount to incriminating Duma.

Central to the chapter's exploration is the question of how *Mapantsula* relates to the public critical engagements on the nature of black identity and on the key preoccupation of the time, the anti-apartheid struggle. It inquires into the publicness of *Mapantsula* - that is the conditions of, and tendencies in the public engagements of the film. The chapter critically builds on the approaches of Kluge, and Hansen on the question of film and the public sphere, through its reflection on what I call the 'public critical potency' of

film. It attempts to develop further a public sphere perspective on South African film scholarship and to reassess the limits and possibilities that Kluge and Hansen's reflections may bring to bear on how *engagé* films relate to the public sphere. Thus, in terms of form, production history and circumstances of circulation, *Mapantsula* is significantly distinguishable from the previous films, and allows a fresh perspective into the forms of publicness that different films may constitute. The chapter argues that their approaches labour with the conceptually restrictive understanding of the relationship between 'film' and 'public', and ultimately underplay the 'public critical potency' of film. Through *Mapantsula*, the chapter further argues that under certain circumstances, the public sphere of film can be more extensive and critical than Hansen and Kluge's works suggest. It proposes that only by considering films as texts that circulate over time, as well as their generic makeup, and contexts of engagement, can we fully appreciate the nature and status of film in the public sphere. Part of the processes through which the public life of *Mapantsula* can be understood can be teased from its generic make up or form and context of production.

## Form in *Mapantsula*

In terms of form, *Mapantsula* is made in the gangster genre and Third-Cinema register. Introduced through a manifesto by Argentine filmmakers and theorists, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Third Cinema is a politically-charged cinematic theory that opposes what they conceptualized as First Cinema (Hollywood) and Second Cinema (European *auteur* Cinema). Solanas and Getino perceived Hollywood as bourgeois and market-driven cinema. In their view, Second Cinema represents an intellectual though modest but misplaced rapprochement with Hollywood and its attendant decadence. The manifesto consciously stressed a political element in film theory. Third Cinema was not however a model of practice, but a set of ideas in the debates about the uses of film in the Third World (Barnard 1986: 103-104). Ideally, the vision of Third Cinema is a collective, militant and *engagé* cinema that would explore all aspects of Latin American life (Solanas and

Getino in Stam 2000: 265-286). Its openness to various aspects and themes enables Third Cinema to go beyond overtly political narratives.

According to Maingard's reading of film theorist Paul Willemen, 'classical' Third Cinema is constituted by three key elements, namely, its opposition to sloganeering, refusal to prescribe an aesthetics, and emphasis on relations between signification and the social world (Willemen in Maingard 1998: 63). Part of the recent work on Third Cinema highlights its predilection for a dialectical representation of history, critical commitment to political causes, and cultural specificity- that is the recognition of culture as a site of political struggle (Wayne 2001: 14-24). Over and above this, Third Cinema encourages parallel distribution of films in order to facilitate discussions about current issues among working class audiences. This is meant to enable the achievement of its goal of raising social consciousness. In *Mapantsula,* this seems to occur in relation to Panic.

In centering Panic, a gangster genre figure – in its narrative, *Mapantsula* introduces into its Third Cinema discourse, an intratextual device that forces the audience to confront its moral and political certitudes. For film scholar Mike Wayne, Panic actually anchors the Third Cinema impetus of addressing the process through which gangsters achieve political awakening. He contrasts this tendency in *Mapantsula* to *Battle of Algiers* (1965), which he argues, elides this process (Wayne 2001: 84). However, the extent to which the film's Third Cinema backdrop, (part of which is the appropriation of a gangster genre) informs the relation of *Mapantsula* to the public sphere must be tested against the actual discursive and political context of its making and circulation.

**In the Pangs of Freedom's Labour: the Perilous Production of *Mapantsula***

The production of *Mapantsula* in the mid-80's coincided with, and was animated by, a highly charged moment in South African politics. An increasingly antagonistic grassroots political coalition in the form of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and other organizations actively challenged the reformist apartheid state. Formed in August 1983,

147

the UDF was an alliance of worker, civic organizations and student movements. Membership of the UDF was open to any organization that supported the then banned African National Congress's Freedom Charter. By 1988, the UDF and several other opposition groups were virtually banned under Emergency restrictions. Demonstrations against rent hikes, civic matters and boycotting of white businesses were a common occurrence. This effectively rendered the public space in 80's South Africa volatile and highly contested.

Confronted with a paranoid and censorious apartheid state, the filmmakers, Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane, concocted a false script for a gangster film, which they presented to the investors and authorities (Schmitz and Mogotlane 1991: 23, 31). Although the film changed, the final draft retained elements of the original gangster genre. The title also remained because of its relevance to the film. 'Mapantsula' refers to a South African township sub-culture of petty gangsters who are largely influenced by American movies of the gangster genre.

The exigencies of the anti-apartheid political atmosphere compelled the filmmakers to seek political legitimacy for their project. They found it in the underground political structures, the exiled African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC). This ensured a relatively smooth shoot in Soweto, and set the scene for an equally free international circulation of the film. At the same time, it defined the film's publicness in terms of the actual anti-apartheid struggles and enhanced its public critical potency. This occurred through relating the film to the discursive space of the anti-apartheid struggle. The organizations also protected the film against the opinion of some in the cultural boycott, that its international circulation undermined the objectives of the boycott. The then four decades-old boycott was a strategy of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Its objective was to prevent the exportation of South African cultural products, and the importation of international culture, in order to encourage the isolation of South Africa internationally, and with it, the demise of apartheid. The moral and

political authority of the ANC, PAC and grassroots political organs in the township implies that their role in the endorsement of the film was an important intervention in political terms. The filmmakers' manoeuvres around censorship, and ensuring of alternative political endorsement, foreshadowed the constrained nature of the film's publicness. It appears therefore, that the encounter between the content of films, with the circumstances of the film's production and circulation, are important to how their engagements might be set up.

However, it is precisely the film's imbrication within a terrain of deliberations across the anti-apartheid political spectrum that made *Mapantsula* more than an anti-apartheid film, or simply entertainment. Therein lay its potency for public critical intervention. In drawing upon the unfolding political circumstances, and in putting film at the service of questions that arose from it, the filmmakers provided a sharp and profound illustration of its import in public deliberation. The experiences and subjectivity of the filmmakers constituted the first site of that imbrication.

The narrative of *Mapantsula* is partly based on Mogotlane's experiences (Mogotlane T. *Sowetan*, 1988, 29 August). Mogotlane hailed from the tradition of protest theatre in South Africa. His debut in screenwriting was with the screen translation of Kente's township anti-apartheid protest play *How Long?* (1976). Having worked for Heyns films, he also boasted a background in television, as a translator. In addition to being the main actor in *Mapantsula*, Mogotlane was second unit director, casting director and co-scriptwriter in the film. His involvement in the film was historically significant because of the dearth of black filmmakers at the time. Mogotlane's participation further gave the film the advantage of an 'insider' and therefore, an authentic 'feel' to it: 'So I felt that now, it will be wonderful writing something about myself, writing something about my situation, about my people, which would be authentic and true' (cited in Davis 1996: 120).

Schmitz's involvement in underground political organizations in South Africa was a contributing factor in the production of *Mapantsula*. One of these, Video News Services operated as a 'news company for foreign commissions, but was really making work for the underground distribution for youth and political networks within the country' (Dovey 2005b, 192). In their attempts at weaving a narrative steeped in political and social reality, the filmmakers used clips from smuggled newsreels, which influenced the confrontation scenes between the police and protestors (Davis 1996: 199). The news-clips added to the historical authenticity of the scenes.

The filmmakers wished to construct a nuanced narrative that 'hit the specifics of the society' they were trying to depict, and they expressed a desire to centre marginalized images of township life, energy and humour in it. Panic's relationship with people, activists, and surroundings would become, in the filmmakers' reasoning, a lynchpin through which *Mapantsula* addressed itself to political questions. Accordingly, Panic's narrative would provoke a rational-critical consideration of the status quo. At the same time however, Panic's iconicity of political subversion, facilitated through his exploits in a recognizable township milieu, also invited the township viewer's fantastical identification with his revolutionary potential. Thus, in addition to the rational-critical approach to the film, the stress on identification with Panic and other cinematic marginalia is indicative of the filmmakers' desire to cultivate an affective rapport with the film, particularly in the marginalized viewer. This is a compelling challenge to the ascription of critical engagement on the narrow focus of the rational-critical mode of engagement. It suggests that the affect which film encompasses can be a significant contribution to public debate, and that through it, filmic aesthetics as a mode of representation can lay claim to critical public engagement.

Panic, the anti-hero of *Mapantsula* fell squarely within the filmmakers' intended audience among whom Schmitz notes the 'unemployed people and *tsotsis* who frequented the bughouse cinemas like the one in *Mapantsula*'. In his words, 'maybe the film could have

150

some impact on them and possibly change their lives' (Schmitz and Mogotlane 1991: 42). The bughouse cinemas were by definition, alternative - suggesting an established condition for autonomous organization of experience *a la* Negt and Kluge- by *lumpen* blacks. While such a possibility cannot be discounted, the racially segregated, limited in number and, tightly regulated cinemas in apartheid South Africa, meant that *Mapantsula* faced difficulties and possibilities in terms of garnering publicness, other than the ones Hansen identifies in early American cinema. However, the ever-looming threat of censorship, the availability of video technology, and the existence of networks of alternative distribution laid the terrain for varied ways in which film could be accessed and its themes articulated. Thus, sites of reception and spaces for articulating experience, did not rest with the cinema in its normative bourgeois state as such, but were many and unstable.

The filmmakers' projection of the film's primary audience draws attention to its public dimension. They imagined the audience of the film in terms of a collective agency, a kind of motive force and importantly, a public with a latent potency to challenge first itself, and then the state. Underlying this move is an authorial staking of the film on the political conscientization of the *lumpen* classes and contribution to the liberation struggle. Importantly, Schmitz located the role of the film, which he called revolutionary, in the interplay between the film and its audiences (Schmitz and Mogotlane 1991: 49).

The circumstances in which *Mapantsula* was made present ostensibly self-evident grounds for publicness that was oriented to liberation politics. Its underground milieu, and drive towards authenticity, indicate that *Mapantsula* was imbued with a layered history of the public sphere of grassroots liberation politics. This raises the question of whether the confluence of the film's production circumstances, with this public sphere, had or did not have a constitutive effect on its publicness. This chapter will tease out from the film's contexts of circulation, the relation of the film's publicness to the public sphere of

liberation politics. It also tracks more extensively *Mapantsula*'s actual pathways of circulation, and through this, elucidates further the nature of the film's publicness.

## Circulating Freedom Un-freely or the Embattled Journeys of *Mapantsula*

*Mapantsula* premièred in 1988 and almost immediately, the South African censorship authorities banned it. Rationalizing their actions, the authorities expressed their fear of the film's potential to incite '"probable viewers" to act violently; result in friction between blacks and whites (employers and employees); encourage confrontation with the police and send the message of non-cooperation with the authorities' (in Davis 1996: 121). However, the banning did not bar its viewership by people considered adult by the Censorship Board (18 years and over), and in venues of not more than 200 seats (Davis 1996: 122). The authorities also demanded that certain cuts be made to the film. Interestingly, the banning order restricted the distribution of *Mapantsula* to video. According to Davis, the censors believed that 'the large screen amplifies the dangerous political effects the film could have on probable viewers in this country' (Davis 1996: 122).

Thus, in the censors' rationale, the large screen of the cinema approximated reality in a way, which, together with the occupation of substantially shared public space, could have easily galvanized black viewers into actual political action. Considering the germaneness of the film to black people's political aspirations, and South African cinemas' perpetuation of racially exclusive experiences of cinema, the censors were not far off the mark. Interestingly, their mistrust of the cinema appears to chime with Hansen's argument regarding the role of the structural conditions of the cinema, in relation to the public dimension of cinematic spectatorship. However, cinematic culture in the apartheid period was racially segregationist and the structures unstable. This suggests uncertainties about its capacity for the autonomous organization of experience, particularly for the oppressed urban black proletariat. Yet, its structural conditions regardless, the cinema in the apartheid era, posed a political threat to the state and capital, not only as a space for the autonomous articulation of experience, but also as a critical context for the mobilization of

agency. In contexts such as those of apartheid South Africa, it is important to cast an analytical eye beyond the structure of the cinema as a condition for the founding of an alternative public sphere. In that way, we can see that the conjunction of actual politics with *Mapantsula*- a film considered germane to such politics, constitute the measure of cinema's capacity for stimulating critical engagements in spite of the limits attendant on cinematic experience.

Ironically, the censorship also yielded grounds for the reputation or notoriety of the film as an intervention in the political conditions of the day. Access to the film on video certainly meant that its rate of travelling increased, and its journeys became unpredictable. It is notable that, due to its censorship conditions, and the reluctance of major distributors, *Mapantsula* was not exhibited in the conventional cinema complexes. This might have also enhanced its status as a potentially progressive text, at a time when such kinds of work were mostly regarded with open hostility by the state and capital, and prized by their opponents.

Maingard (1994: 238) noted that, 'the film was viewed by an extraordinary range of groups from community groups to student organizations to union meetings and street gatherings in both urban and rural areas'. Prisoners on Robben Island had their own copy, as did *uMkhonto we Sizwe* (or MK, armed wing of the ANC) insurgents in Zambian camps (Schmitz and Mogotlane 1991, 47). The primary publics then were the imprisoned, the exiled, grassroots organizations and those in the remote corners of South Africa for whom *Mapantsula* had the distinction of serving as a discursive prism and as a visual window into township conditions. The chance viewings of the film by these groupings, in spite of the prohibitive conditions around its circulation, are a signal of its circumscribed publicness and of the import of the film for them. It can thus be argued that the publicness of *Mapantsula* was in these circumstances and at that time, inscribed with the urgency of political liberation. As such, the film's resonance, and stimulation of actually existing political resistance constituted the discursive horizons of its initial publicness. It can be

153

surmised that the film's unplanned, clandestine distribution and, conditional banning are significant in that they played a constitutive role in its publicness. This is a publicness in which the film's militant gestures were critically appreciated within and against the actually unfolding militant character of the organizations and groupings that accessed it. A debate over the film between two exiled members of the ANC evinces this observation.

## The Ambiguities of *Lumpen* Presences

Between 1989 and 1990, significant public engagements of *Mapantsula* occurred, in the course of which the liberation movement wrestled with the idea of the political import of the film in the anti-apartheid struggle. This took place in the pages of *Sechaba*, a political journal publicized as the 'official organ of the African National Congress'. The debate drew attention to *Mapantsula* as a cinematic mediation of the local political circumstances and imperatives for the internationally- based activists and critics.

Ralph Mzamo, then exiled member of the ANC and an MK cadre, praised the film as a positive contribution to the fight against apartheid. He contrasted it to earlier films whose main thrust, he argued, was a reflection of 'bourgeois ideological conventions, in marginalizing the Blacks, distorting their culture, and being economical with historical fact, when not downright derisive' (Mzamo 1989: 31-2). For Mzamo, *Mapantsula* nonetheless, was 'a piece of naïve integrationism' which simply replaced the white heroes with black ones. In respect to gender, Mzamo saw women as adjuncts in a narrative that was mainly about the exploits of a male hero, a gangster genre convention. The thrust of his argument was that the film's projection of the black hero manifests an undesirable vision of 'cultural decadence and lack of organizational control'.

Thando Zuma, another ANC activist writing from Lusaka, challenged Mzamo's views. For her, the significance of the film lay in the last scene when Panic declined to cooperate with the police (Zuma 1990, 26-7). In contrast to Mzamo, Zuma found the substance of the film

in the outcome of Panic's altercations with the police and not the replay of his *lumpen* lifestyle outside prison. In Zuma's view, Panic's exploits were a narrative illustration of the conspicuous extent of apartheid effects on even those who were outside the relations of production.

Zuma resisted the interpretation of Panic's actions as more than a natural reaction that results from frustration. Accordingly, Panic's actions could not possibly constitute solutions as Mzamo was inclined to think. Further, the importance of the film, Zuma suggested, lay in the film's exposure of the situation of the domestic workers in South Africa; both in Panic's rejection of Pat's work as 'shit'; and in the film's production values, which put a black person as a senior creative artist. Zuma also commended the film for going a step further than *Cry Freedom* (1987), which she suggested 'romanticizes White liberals'. *Mapantsula*, Zuma concluded, foregrounded the fact that people like Panic, a *lumpen* element, 'do become good political soldiers'.

The engagements of *Mapantsula* by Mzamo and Zuma, constitute the film's generation of exilic or diasporic publics, and therefore of the wide horizons of its publicness. Further, the engagements evidently tested the film against the political benchmark that *Sechaba* represented. It is also notable that Mzamo's reading of Panic as a hero, in the scheme of gangster genre conventions, was made through a perspective sensitive to gender. Quite significantly, Mzamo and Zuma's observations consistently reduced Panic to a conflict according to which he could either fulfil revolutionary heroism or remain politically impotent. A difficulty in dealing with Panic's potential of fulfilling the roles they assigned him, is also manifest in the arguments presented. This suggests that the engagements are not neatly defined through the film's resonance with the anti-apartheid struggle, but actually show how the film opened up other perspectives that destabilized the certitudes of the struggle. Therefore, the engagements show that the publicness of the film was also defined by its capacity to generate reflection over social and political certitudes.

155

Mzamo and Zuma's difficulty of dealing with Panic was also at play in other parts of the world where the film was circulated. Writing in the beginning of 1989, film and media scholar Julian Petley, argued that *Mapantsula* was successful as 'a slice of life'. He was writing in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, a publication of the British Film Institute (Petley 1989: 19). The Institute had collected the film as part of its 'Ethnic Notions' catalogue. This catalogue is set up as 'a contribution to the ongoing transformation of British culture' which partly aims to validate black and other minority ethnic communities living in Britain.[106] Petley observed that the filmmaker chose a lumpen petty criminal as the main character and not an exemplary black figure. While he appears to condone this choice because, from a narrative perspective, it allowed Panic's consciousness to unfold, Petley did not totally accept him. The down side of the choice of a *lumpen*, Petley continued, is that it was harder to sympathize with Panic because some of his actions came across as dull and petty (Petley: 1989: 20). He suggested that to avoid audience alienation, the character could have been handled with panache not dissimilar to *The Harder They Come* (1989: 20).

Petley's suggestion of a more flamboyant character makes explicit his assumption about the role of film in public. Accordingly, while film could be political, not in 'a preaching sense', it ought not to alienate its audience. This view is silent on the filmmaker's point of using an anti-hero character, which is to force a re-examination of societal certitudes. However, Petley's uneasiness with Panic, does reaffirm the critical role of this character in the film's publicness.

Zuma and Mzamo's debate as well as Petley's commentary reveal the tensions between the revolutionary articulation of the liberation struggle, and the outlaw configurations of the *lumpen,* itself a powerful theme in revolutionary discourse on class relations during the apartheid era. The figure of Panic became the pivot around which the perceived progressive nature of the liberation struggle was forced to re-examine itself through the

---

[106] See ‹http://www.bfi.org.uk› (accessed 2007, July, 05).

156

disturbing, or even embarrassing figure of the *lumpen*. Further, their contributions allude to the question of the representation of black identity in the film. Against the modernist impulse of progress and political heroism, qualities implied in the apprehension of black identity by liberation rhetoric, *Mapantsula* countered with Panic, an anti-hero struggling at the margins of the bigger political struggle. It can thus be argued that the critical potency of *Mapantsula,* in the discursive space of liberation politics, lay in 'forcing' part of the liberation organs to re-examine the complex interweave of racial and class identities within the struggle itself. It is this tendency to destabilize the content of notions or concepts such as blackness, when their meanings may be considered resolved, that mark the film's critical status. That the film not only occupied the discursive space of political liberation but actually transcended its objectives, is a telling example of how certain films might relate to the public sphere. However, the transnational public sphere of which Zuma and Mzamo were a part, went beyond the immediate sphere of liberation politics and also included trans-Atlantic exchanges.

## Other Challenges of Transnational Circulation

Following its conditional banning, *Mapantsula* found its way to Cannes where it premièred in 1988 (Mtshali cited in Ellerson 2000: 198). It was the first South African film to be invited to the prestigious festival. The invitation gave *Mapantsula* a competitive edge over the anti-apartheid Hollywood films. Joseph Gugler, sociologist and then Director of the Centre for Contemporary African Studies at the University of Connecticut, draws our attention to a significant example of the projection of the film's publicness in England.

> Outside South Africa, *Mapantsula* was promoted in terms of both its political message and gangster story. Thus the British poster reproduced here shows people demonstrating and advertises that the film had been banned in South Africa, but foregrounds Panic in a gangster pose and an altogether misleading headline "Life and Death in the Streets of Soweto" (Gugler 2003: 96).

The surfacing of a gangster genre figure against the background of a political story appears to be strategic. As an independent film, *Mapantsula* faced direct competition from Hollywood anti-apartheid films which had easier access to audiences. Against this challenge, the use of the gangster genre, which has an established presence in the commercial circuit, seems to have been a logical choice. Even then, the poster is indicative of the fact that independent political films faced the test of validating themselves, a reality that signals *Mapantsula*'s challenges in the transnational public sphere. Gugler forgot to add that the poster also indicated that the film is 'even more remarkable than *Cry Freedom* and *A World Apart*', adding a direct competitive edge to its international release. This claim to superiority over other anti-apartheid films, actually suggests that its makers based its value on the authenticity of its depiction of South African situation. The poster's reference to the film's 'banned' status in South Africa added impetus to this claim to authenticity. Being indicative of the extent of its aberration and ultimately its political significance, the reference to the film's misfortunes in South Africa seemed designed to provoke curiosity about how it engaged the political situation there. Accordingly, the poster made manifest the heretofore public life of the film, and at the same time projected a new public that would be alive to the film's challenges as an engaging text.

However, in time the film's circulation in the West exhibited some fissures in the appeal of its engagement with the political ferment in South Africa's townships. There are observations about the film's success in the United States from which we can make some intimations about its transnational publicness. One is by Matt Davies, then doctoral candidate at The Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver. The others are by cultural critics Robert Nixon and Schmitz. Davies briefly reviewed the theatrical distribution of *Mapantsula* in Europe and the United States. He wrote that it enjoyed success in England and France and critical acclaim both in Europe and film festivals in North America. Through juxtaposition with *Cry Freedom*, *A Dry White Season*, and *A World Apart*, Davies reaches the conclusion that commercial success eluded the film in the United States, only reaching a few commercial screens (Davies 1990: 98). For

158

Davies, *Mapantsula* like Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1991), also attracted the same negative criticism, namely that it had the power to incite probable viewers to act violently (1990: 98). However, the criticism of Lee's film did not stop it from gaining commercial success. Davies concluded that even 'films that speak from black people's experiences' could and did gain commercial success.

Because of its 'images, songs and everyday acts of resistance', *Mapantsula* is in Davies' thinking, vigorously 'counter cultural'. This led him to argue that the film was an illegitimate target for the cultural boycott. In his words, 'the cultural boycott is intended to fight against the cultural apparatuses and activities of the forces of repression in South Africa, not against the culture of resistance' (1990: 99). According to Schmitz, people in London criticized the creative team for making the film in South Africa during the cultural boycott. He noted that they saw this as selling out. He also mentioned the fact that the *Daily Telegraph* in London loathed it while the American press loved it. Much of what Schmitz says about the film's distribution in America is positive but Robert Nixon (1994: 78) observed that the film gained little exposure in the United States.

Nixon (1994: 90) wrote glowingly about *Mapantsula*'s 'elaborate sense of resistance culture', and called it 'innovative and representative of the South African progressive film movement'. His observations appeared in a book authored by himself about the cultural implications of the transnational cultural exchanges between South Africa and the United States. *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood* (1994) is a cultural-historical treatise that spans the period 1948 to 1994. Nixon's major argument in the book was that 'Hollywood movies in South Africa muted the radicalism of the freedom struggle, rendering it more palatable to American liberals' (1994: 3). Nixon set *Mapantsula* against this trend. He divided his argument into two: first a reading of the film and then its distribution in the United States. He also registered what I regard as the standard reading of the film, which is that it is marked by the absence of a white liberal mediating voice. Nixon observed that

159

*Mapantsula*'s perspective was patently political in its support for the organizational strategies over the individualized and moral ones.

In terms of distribution, Nixon made the point that the film was cold-shouldered by the 'heavily centralized networks in the United States of America and South Africa.' In the United States the alternative company called California Newsreel distributed *Mapantsula* on 16 mm film and video in 1989, while Ray Gaspard also released it on 35mm the same year.[107] California Newsreel has since 1977 released anti-apartheid films through its Southern Africa Media Project. Moore also writes that as a non-profit distributor, people who rented or bought the film were college professors and media centres at colleges (largely in African studies) as well as activists among students, church groups and other community based organizations.[108] Clearly then, the film was valued by a section of the academic field and the anti-apartheid movement in the United States. It mediated public deliberations of an already engaged section of the international Anti-Apartheid Movement.

It appears that the film's failure to observe the mass-market convention of translating a radical South African narrative into a white mediated one resulted in its failure to draw a major distributor. The significant point to draw from Nixon is that his discussion surfaces the problem of ideological differences attendant on the very practice of filmmaking, and which influence their circulation. *Mapantsula*'s public critical potency was therefore not only beset by problems locally but also by the assumptions and expectations of international viewers whose market is far greater than the local one. Accordingly, *Mapantsula*'s circulation across the Atlantic shows that its critical and political engagement place limits on its transnational publicness.

---

[107] E-mail communication with Cornelius Moore of California Newsreel, (2005, July, 05).
[108] E-mail communication with Cornelius Moore, (2005, July, 05).

## Local publicness: Between Censorship and Resistance

In 1988 *Mapantsula* became an important part of the cultural and political make-up of the alternative organizations and press in South Africa. The exhibition of *Mapantsula* at the 1988 *Weekly Mail* film festival in Johannesburg under the section *cinema of resistance*, was one instance of this development (Maingard 1994: 235). 'The festival focused on censorship in general and how it affected local film and video making in this country' (*New Nation* 1988, 11-17 August). It was a collaboration of the *Weekly Mail* and the Anti Censorship Group (ACAG). The *Weekly Mail*, predecessor of the present-day *Mail & Guardian*, was an alternative anti-apartheid English language newspaper. ACAG was an organization that monitored censorship and created awareness about it, both locally and internationally.[109] *Mapantsula* was allowed three screenings locally at the Market Theatre as part of the festival (*Weekly Mail* film festival supplement, 1988, 19-25 August). The permission to screen *Mapantsula* at the festival was a calculated move by the state against the option of allowing its screening in black areas. For instance, the film was banned at the Alexandra Art Centre, another example of the state's fear of the possibility of political action on the part of the oppressed black majority (*New Nation*, 1988, 18-24 August).[110] Effectively, it was the already politically conscientised who got to see the film.

It is apparent that the political objectives behind the filmmakers' understanding of *Mapantsula* gave way to the question of censorship at the festival. While alive to the political challenges of the day, the discursive atmosphere of the film festival, particularly around its anti-censorship agenda, highlights the changing publicness of the film. In keeping with a festival atmosphere the exhibition of *Mapantsula* under the 'cinema of resistance' section, illustrates the discursive nature that resistance assumes in such contexts, as opposed to its possible militant inflection in bughouse cinemas and organizational spaces. The festival's appropriation of the film was principally guided by its stance against censorship. Therefore, at the same time as it discursively protested against

---

[109]See the Freedom of Expression Institute website: ‹"http://www.fxi.org.za"› (accessed 14 May 2007).
[110]Alexandra is a historically black township north of Johannesburg.

the state's imposition of censorship, the festival inflected the film with its own agenda, and not that of the filmmakers. We can tease out from this focus on censorship that the film's publicness was at this point, defined by the tension between the censorship board authorities' and festival organizers, a result of the authorities' surveillance of the festival. Therefore, the engagement of the film around the theme of censorship owes its momentum to the film's censorship itself. The engagement of *Mapantsula* at the festival, and shift from the political urgency of grass-roots politics, further highlights the importance of context in defining the nature of the film's publicness.

In addition to censorship, the theme of black identity and its representation on film was also registered at the time of its release. The *Weekly Mail* arts writer, Fabius Burger extolled the film alongside *Quest for Love* [111] for, 'at least broadening Third World images available to us on commercial film' (*Weekly Mail* Supplement, 1988). The two films, Burger continued, 'gained an authentic voice by being South African unlike, say, the local international films made here….'[112]

Burger concluded that *Mapantsula* did not 'stop short of showing the black as a political activist' and gave an 'extended image of being black'. Burger also commended the last scene 'when the hero refuses to sign a false affidavit', as holding the essence of its political merit. He was impelled however, to remind his readers that this 'image was often seen through white eyes'. That the review flowed from the festival signals the festival's centrality in the public engagements of the film. Through the festival, the press and readers of the media also formed a significant part of the film's publics. Interestingly,

---

[111] *Quest for Love*. 1988, directed by Helena Noguera, is according to film scholar, Martin Botha (2007: 68), 'the first South African made film dealing with lesbianism and inter-racial sex'. See Botha M., 2007. *Marginal Lives and Painful Pasts: South African Cinema After Apartheid*, Parklands: Genugtig! Publishers, 68.

[112] Many commentators on the film share this view of authenticity. For example, the leftist magazine *New Internationalist*, contrasts the film against the less authentic 'flawed but well intentioned' *Cry Freedom* and *A World Apart*. The magazine commended *Mapantsula* for filling the need to 'dramatize the lives of black rather than white South Africans'. This online review is available from:
‹http://www.newint.org/issue192/reviews.htm› (Accessed 6 Jan 2005). This review also appears in *New Internationalist*: Ed: Baird V., February 1989, 30. For a different take on the question of *Mapantsula* and authenticity, see Achmat Dangor, 'Foreword' in Schmitz and Mogotlane, *The Book*, 9-11.

Burger's observations correspond to the filmmakers' objective of constructing an autonomous and possibly authentic film culture that resisted Hollywood conventions. However, his appraisal of black identity in *Mapantsula* was not always fervently endorsed, as the debate between Zuma and Mzamo, and a subsequent report by the *New Nation* indicate. According to the report, *Mapantsula* elicited mixed responses at the festival.

The *New Nation* was a radical alternative anti-apartheid newspaper. Edited by the journalist, Zwelakhe Sisulu, son of Walter Sisulu, ANC leader who was incarcerated with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, the newspaper was aligned to the exiled ANC. Judging by the *New Nation's* review of the 1990 installation of the *Weekly Mail* Festival, the manner and extent to which it enabled engagements of issues through local films is debatable. Without imposing a retrospective analysis on an earlier historical event, it might prove useful briefly to digress to the review as it sheds light into part of the context of *Mapantsula*'s circulation in South Africa.

Arguing that the 1990 chapter of the festival was poorly attended, the newspaper questioned the demographics and interests of the attendees. According to the *New Nation*, the festival attracted 'white, liberal intellectuals' whom it argued, ignored local films and watched foreign films instead. 'This is not a people's festival as the people were quite plainly not there. For whatever reason. (sic) It was very difficult to distinguish between the latest South African product from the rest. There was no sense of festival or showbiz' (*New Nation* 1990: 21-7 September). The newspaper overtly questioned the publicness of the festival in terms that signal the import of local films for a national project. The fact that it argued that such a project would not be realisable within a designated quarter of the South African population, suggests that increasingly, film became an important asset in the public imaginations of a representative democratic polity. But even more telling in the newspaper's analysis, is its denial of a critical atmosphere at the festival. 'You could not meet the director or the cast. There was no critical debate around the latest batch of South African films, something South African film

163

and video makers sorely need to partake in' (*New Nation* 1990: 21-7 September). If this analysis casts aspersions on the festival, it also allows us to see in the film's context of circulation, a vigorous struggle to make local film a centre of a future national public intellectual life. The frustration of the unnamed writer at not being able to meet the cast and crew, easily comes through as an act of claiming access to film in the comprehensive sense of a form that ought to be engaged. It is simply, a claim to publicness through the cinema. Remarkably, the value of a public sphere around film pervades the review,

> The quality of most of South African films leaves much to be desired. In this era of critical cultural debate, it is not enough to be merely oppositional to the state; one has to make good films and videos. And there was very little of that. It seems as if the South African film makers are the servants of foreign television stations. The true test of the South African films will not be the Weekly Mail Film Festival. Surely, as cinema is a mass based culture, or should be given the cost involved, the true test of South African cinema will be when it leaves the prison of the festival and is judged by the people (*New Nation* 1990: 21-7 September).

Describing the festival in penitentiary terms is an extremely provocative manner in which to delegitimize it as a space of encountering film. Pursuing the argument that cinema is a mass based form, this review suggests that film can only play its role outside 'intellectual circles' and within broader 'communal spaces'. Theoretically, this argument is faulty because publics are not necessarily synonymous with masses. Nonetheless, the context in which it was written, which was not only anti-apartheid but also marred by black people's troubled access to cultural centres such as the Market Theatre where the festival was underway, necessitated a critical consideration of the conditions under which the films' publics were to be formed. Indeed, these conditions also imply kinds of circulation that facilitate greater access to film other than the model of the *Weekly Mail* Festival represent, 'A Namibian Film Festival has just finished. Three video vans showed about 20 films to about 20 000 people throughout Namibia, all in one week. All this at the cost of R10 000. (sic) The *Weekly Mail* showed 104 films to about 5000 people over two weeks at the cost of over R180 000' (*New Nation* 1990: 21-7 September). The implication in the

*New Nation* review is that black people had begun to make claims on film as a form through which to define their agency and identity.

However, this claim and its premises demonstrates an active engagement not only with the festival per se, but with emerging tendencies in South African public intellectual life, such as Ndebele and later, novelist and critic, Achmat Dangor's argument for works of art that are not simply oppositional. That the newspaper assigned to film, the role that Ndebele and Dangor envisioned for all art, is a significant testimony to the public critical potency of black-centred films in the emergent post-repressive South Africa.

In response to *Mapantsula*, an unnamed commentator in the *New Nation* found the plot 'especially when it depicts the lead character as a petty thief, to be yet another "Jim Comes Jo'burg' cliché"' (*New Nation* 1988, 20-6, October). This is a reference to the character of Jim in *Jim Comes to Jo'Burg* (aka *African Jim*). The parallels with *African Jim* indicate that the lowly character of Panic was interpreted in this instance as an iteration of an old problem in South African film culture. This is a particularly telling response because Jim's supposed resurrection in Panic appeared to be out of step with 'progressive' political and social imaginations of black identity. However, the commentator ignored the political narrative unfolding in parallel to the gangster one in the film.

The narrow focus on Panic's outlaw dimension signals the discomfort in the commentator's interpretations of the construction of black identity in the film. The argument namely, that *Mapantsula* was made at the expense of the sufferings of black South Africans, harboured anxieties about film in general, particularly in relation to its meaningfulness to their current political struggles. While the argument of the response underplays the potential progressiveness of the film, it highlights the fact that the strategies of the film as a whole did not dictate the critical engagements it engendered. Like the debate between Zuma and Mzamo, the *New Nation* report points out the ambivalence towards Panic.

Reflecting on *Mapantsula* in 1991, poet, writer and ANC cultural activist Mongane Serote expressed similar anxieties about Panic. The sympathy with Panic and the fear of dealing with him inform Serote's reflections about the film. For Serote, Panic posed a problem in the envisioned new South Africa that he believed the film represented. He wrote, 'Panic's skills as an underworld person makes one wonder how a future society will protect itself against his fearlessness' (Mongane in Schmitz and Mogotlane 1991: 7). For Serote, the experience of watching the film was likely to raise the following question: 'What will cave under Panic's weight...the individuals...the society...the men...the women?' According to Serote, Panic's potential for unbridled violence could very well negate the revolutionary spirit that his other half embodies.

While others viewed Panic solely in relation to the anti-apartheid struggle, Serote's take is futuristic. Far from being out of joint with the times, these prophetic comments demonstrate the historical transcendence of the class and social dilemma that Panic posed, a dilemma that was prescient in the light of the high rates of violent crime in post-apartheid South Africa. Again in Serote's comments, we can see emerge, Panic's refusal to be resolved. This calls attention to the limits of nationalist political discourse in coming to terms with the mobilization of *lumpen* agency. Whereas the film intervened in public deliberations on class contradictions, it also calls attention to the limits of such a discourse. This is another instance of the critical potency of film, a capacity to stand apart from normative modes of engagement, the better to engage their limits and possibilities, and to prompt commentators to engage with these modes. More so, such engagements take place in texts far removed from direct experience of film.

Serote's reflected on the film in the preface to *Mapantsula: the Book*, which came out in 1991, almost at the same time as the film returned to South Africa for a much wider release. *Mapantsula: The Book* contained the script of the film and a transcript of the interview with the director and writer. It was a collaboration of anti-apartheid writers,

published by a non-racial national organization of writers aligned to the UDF, the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW).

In the introduction to the publication, filmmaker Jeremy Nathan and playwright Matthew Krouse wrote that the publication was made to inform readers, both local and international, about a film industry subservient to a racist ideology and the interests of capital (Schmitz and Mogotlane 1991: 15). It was also meant to demystify the process of making a film for people studying film and its related fields. In addition, it was intended to encourage writers to delve into their lives and look for images that represent their real life experiences. More importantly, the publication sought to contribute to spaces of public engagement around film (Schmitz and Mogotlane 1991: 15). This was part of COSAW's identification with the need to 'create our own indigenous cinema' (Schmitz and Mogotlane 1991: 16).

The book was an unprecedented intellectual effort by artists and activists and it was meant to encourage, in the upcoming young writers, a film idiom and approach rooted in the struggles and experiences of ordinary people. The radical African American filmmaker, Spike Lee provided commentary on the blurb of the book: 'Its about time a feature film has come out of South Africa from a black perspective, *Mapantsula* does just that….' (Lee in Schmitz and Mogotlane 1991). The book served to enhance the legitimacy of the film as being a voice of 'anti-Hollywood and antiapartheid' culture. Through the book, therefore, the film became a focal point of debates over film culture, its place in the political terrain, the screenplay of the film and the film itself, and about black identity.

The comments constitute the book's paratexts. Moreover, the book exemplifies an innovation in the film's publicness, one in which the film's credentials were not just vaunted, but also resonated with the space of critical engagements constituted by COSAW. In their appropriation and promotion of the film, the writers called into question, the pitting of the written word and its assumed high values, against suspicions of

vulgarism in film. Therefore, the necessity of founding an oppositional public sphere meant that the normative modes of the public sphere, *qua* Habermas, were troubled in favour of a combination of technologies of representation.

## Conclusions

Through charting the film's inception, production, its initial circulation and publicness, the chapter has shown that *Mapantsula* was engaged in various ways, beyond the bounds of the cinema and cinematic spectatorship. Its publicness is variously defined by critical engagements within organic political spheres; mediation of struggles within the status quo in the 'outlaw' spheres of the prison and exile; as well as the appropriation of *Mapantsula* in the film festival sphere.

The filmmaker's search for political legitimacy through ANC and PAC authorization pointed to the projection of the film to the underground and exiled anti-apartheid political public. However, realization of this publicness was broached in several ways. Like *Come Back, Africa* the publicness of *Mapantsula* was significantly defined through the problem of censorship. Because of censorship, the status of *Mapantsula* as an anti-apartheid film obliged engagement by the ANC and the broad grassroots political movements authorized its anti-apartheid credentials. Therefore, the historical relation of black-centred films to their publics can be determined by the complex interface between censorship and its public perceptions in relation to particular films. Further, part of its publicness generated a critical confluence between cinema and politics.

The film's formal strategies, defined chiefly by the use of the gangster genre also informed its publicness. While the gangster genre served the strategy of getting past film censors, as part of the film's Third Cinema backdrop which were driven by revolutionary objectives, it destabilized moral and political certitudes about revolutionary consciousness in the anti-apartheid context. In this way, it proved to be a difficult challenge for contemporary anti-apartheid heroic visions. Importantly, the anti-apartheid political public sphere partook in

168

the enhancement of the film's public critical potency because protagonists and observers of the political struggle were invited to reflect on its significance for these politics. This is a significant instance of the relation between film and the public sphere outside the physical space of the cinema.

In addition to the political public sphere of the anti-apartheid movement, *COSAW* and the *Weekly Mail* festival related *Mapantsula* to national preoccupations with the emergent discourses such as 'people's culture'. This entered *Mapantsula* directly within contemporary discourses, and availed its discursive projections to actual political challenges of the status quo. Thus, through various events and initiatives that formed part of the film's public life in the latter years of apartheid, *Mapantsula* instances the extent and manner in which later black-centred films relate to their publics. The significance of these relations is evidenced by the capacity of the film to give content to the anti-apartheid struggle and black identity. However, it was largely through these events, which enhanced its public critical potency, that *Mapantsula* was able to animate critical public engagements.

Contra Kluge, generation of a film's publicness involves more than the aesthetic strategies of film or practices. The context, in which film is engaged, actually, either partakes in the explosion of the certitudes invested in the film, or subjects them to more immediate questions. It is in the light of these shifting registers in a film's journey that its publicness and critical potency are illumined. While the differing contexts in which *Mapantsula* was shown are important, a thorough understanding of how film relates to the public sphere ought to eclipse these contexts and appreciate its multiple discursive effects.

All the debates and engagements of the film form part of the public critical potency of film. This notion enables reflections that transcend the conventional postulating of the relations between film and the public sphere, simply in terms of contradiction or congruence between film and its publics. Rather, in tandem with Warner's concept of

public, it allows illumination of the depth in a film's production of publics. In *Mapantsula*, it is evident that this depth lies in the connection between the form, and contexts of the film's circulation. In the context of unequal and unstable access to cinema such as in South Africa, *Mapantsula* shows us that with the circulation of images across time and space, and increasingly diverse visual technologies, film can stem the tide against access to the public spheres. Yet, it is the effect of its critical potency that renders film a useful catalyst in the making of reflexive publics, the ideal type of democratic politics.

## Chapter 6

## Archival Reappropriations in the Public lives of Black-Centred Films

In the last chapter, we have seen how in its making and early public life, *Mapantsula* circulated in a highly politically charged period and environment, and how it critically related to anti-apartheid politics. We also argued that it engaged perceptions about black identity. Importantly, the initial circulation and publicness of *Mapantsula* took place within a cultural and political context that was broadly characterised by the intensification of anti-apartheid film culture. In this context (i.e. 1980's), even old anti-apartheid films were resuscitated. In the post-apartheid period, *Come Back, Africa*, *Mapantsula* and *u'Deliwe* have become objects of expert and popular attention. *u'Deliwe* was screened several times on SABC television well into the post-apartheid period. The re-circulations of *Come Back, Africa, Mapantsula* and *u'Deliwe*, made possible what I call their archival reappropriations. By archival reappropriation I denote shifts in the films' public lives from earlier engagements to later ones. The register of the archive highlights the later engagements' historical remoteness from the films' inceptions, and are underwritten by a retrospective consciousness and alertness to their contemporary relevance. Against the shifting contexts of their circulation, this chapter explores the nature and the significance of the archival 'moments' in black-centred films' relations to public critical engagements.

The chapter discusses the return of *Come Back, Africa* to South Africa in the late 1980's and then focuses on the critical engagements of *u'Deliwe* and *Mapantsula* in the post-apartheid era. Highlighting the shifts in the conditions and circumstances under which they were circulated and engaged, it brings into sharp focus the question of how in their archival reappropriations, the films related to engagements of black identity. It concludes by appreciating the significance of the films' later publicness, with respect to the question of the role of film in the public life of ideas.

## The 'Late-Coming' of *Come Back, Africa*

Given the long time it took to be shown in South Africa, the return of *Come Back, Africa* to that country on May 1, 1988 at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg and also in Cape Town was momentous.[113] Since then, the film has been given a new lease of life through festivals and other events. These constitute the third phase of the film's circulation, which continued well into the 21st century. *Come Back, Africa* re-entered the film events and festival circuits of South Africa, via the *Weekly Mail* Festival in August 1988, and then the Workers' Library Books Fair in November of the same year (*New Nation* October 1988, 20-26).[114] The festival anchored *Come Back, Africa* alongside *Mapantsula* firmly within an anti-censorship critical space. This is because the screening of the films took place in the anti-censorship section of the festival. Thus, *Come Back, Africa's* explicitly anti-apartheid vision, and its biography as a film made under onerous circumstances, gave historical perspective to the festival. This perspective underwrote the salience of *Come Back, Africa* as an archive of the early apartheid public sphere, the contemporary residues of which *Mapantsula* laid bare.

According to the *New Nation* (1990: 21-7 September), the *Weekly Mail* Festival was organised by mostly anti-apartheid white leftist intellectuals. The organisation of the festival by intellectuals manifests their role in the critical employment of film in general and the conservation of old films such as *Come Back, Africa* in particular. By giving another lease to the circulation of the film, these expert publics made it archival. Accordingly, they highlighted the enduring historical indexicality of the cinematic image, which lends to film, both the capacity to bear witness to history and to facilitate the public use of reason across time. Resonating as it did with the circumstances of film's making which were

---

[113] Its first showing on May Day, an important day in the worker's calendar- appears to have been a calculated move to complement the theme of labour struggle.

[114] In 2004, it was screened in Venice, Italy. In 2005, the film was also restored by the *Cineteca di Bologna* a film restoration centre in Bologna, Italy and by the laboratory *l'Lmmagine Ritrovata*. In the same year, it traversed a number of film festivals including Sithengi, Cape Town South Africa; Bologna Italy; Tribeca, New York USA; and Chiasso, Italy. In 2006, it was shown at Austrian Film Museum, Vienna Austria; Svenka Filminstitutet, Stockholm Sweden; National Film and Sound Archive, Acton, Australia; and at the Batik Film Festival, Bari Italy.

censorious, the intellectuals' recalling of *Come Back, Africa* occasioned public deliberations on contemporary apartheid censorship. Therefore the public effect of the intellectuals' use of *Come Back, Africa* and other films was precisely to contest the late apartheid public sphere through film. While the festival underscored the theme of censorship in the public sphere, other sites in the film's circulation revealed other preoccupations including those that dealt with workers.

For the first time, the film was permitted to circulate within an essentially 'workerist' forum in the form of the Workers' Library Book Fair in South Africa. That the censorship authorities allowed *Come Back, Africa* to be viewed suggests that it no longer posed a serious threat to the status quo, coming as did when the apartheid system was shifting towards its decline. Yet, this did not mean that the authorities were wont to endorse all anti-apartheid films, as the conditional banning of *Mapantsula* at the *Weekly Mail* film festival showed.[115] The circulation of the film at the *Book Fair* constitutes a notable moment in its archival reappropriations. The History Workshop project, a social history formation based at the University of the Witwatersrand, was involved in the establishment of the Workers' Library. That *Come Back, Africa* was used in the library's launch is noteworthy. The significance here seems to be that the movement's intellectuals viewed the film as a critical 'source material' about social life under apartheid, and to conjure up workers' historical agency. Such a view marks *Come Back, Africa* as an intellectual intervention. The examples of the *Weekly Mail* festival and the launch of the Workers' Library reveal that in the period towards political reform in South Africa, intellectuals deployed film across various points of social engagement. *Come Back, Africa* owed part of its archival status significantly to the role of intellectuals in the form of engaged scholars.

There is much in the *New Nation* preview of the film that evinces the import of its circulation in the Workers' Library Book Fair. The preview was part of the *Book Fair*

---

[115] Other films that were banned at the festival include *A World Apart* (1988), an anti-apartheid Hollywood film and *La battaglia di Algeri* (*Battle of Algiers*), (1966) - a film about the Algerian Revolution.

*Supplement*. The supplement was rolled out as part of the launch of the Workers' Library in Johannesburg. The preview approaches *Come Back, Africa* through the perspective of the tribulations of the film's protagonist Zacharia, and their significance for understanding apartheid as a dehumanizing system. Among other examples, the preview discusses Zacharia's dual life in Johannesburg and Sophiatown to illustrate the nature of his victimhood under apartheid.

> The two separate spheres of life enable the viewer to see the sharp contrast in Zacharia's behaviour on the job in Johannesburg- docile, subservient, acquiescent- and as himself a quite, reserved person trying to survive in a community where individual lives are ruled daily by poverty and humiliation. What the film ultimately portrays through Zacharia's experience and his family is that apartheid is a carefully devised system of institutionalized and rigid control of the social, economic, and political life of the non-white individual and community (*New Nation* 1988, October 20-26: 12).

The preview emphasizes the film's competence as a study of the structural organization of apartheid and its 'impact on the individual, the family and the community' (*New Nation* 1988, October 20-26: 12). The explicitly anti-apartheid tone of the supplement allowed the Book Fair to appropriate *Come Back, Africa* as a document of historical significance to contemporary anti-apartheid struggles. Therefore, *Come Back, Africa* both served as an illustration of apartheid, and as an avenue for its analysis the better to fight it. However, conspicuously missing from the commentary in the *New Nation* is the distinction between early and late apartheid. This absence suggests that the preview was informed by the contemporary struggles against apartheid. Therefore, the relevance of the film stemmed from its usefulness as a catalyst for understanding apartheid as a lived experience. This appropriation of the film constitutes part of *Come, Back Africa*'s archival status.

Being circulated in South Africa at the height of anti-apartheid struggles, *Come Back, Africa* retained its relevance to the unfolding events in the country. Its meaningfulness to the worker forum convened for the opening of the workers' library, demonstrates the film's role in the conjuring up of a potentially oppositional contemporary public, the public of African workers. As the preview in the *New Nation* shows, the bias in this public's

reflection was to African workers' urban social life and experiences of labour under apartheid. As such, the circulation of the preview negated apartheid's reduction of workers to mere labouring bodies, and encouraged self-reflection in them. Consequently, in the archival reappropriation of its public life, *Come Back, Africa* gave space to black workers' deliberation on the modern social, political and industrial relations, and their involvement in it. *Come Back, Africa* attained its archival status by serving the 'archival function' of authenticating and giving content to contemporary African workers' alienation and ultimately, mobilization against apartheid, giving it historical dimension.

## The Post-Apartheid Turn

Latterly, various efforts by Rogosin's children, friends, as well as contemporary thinkers and artists have sustained *Come Back Africa*'s publicness in the post-apartheid period. A significant event took place in Johannesburg in 2004, at which a book on the making of *Come Back, Africa* was launched. The book *Come Back, Africa: A Man Possessed* was published by STE (Science, Technology, Education), a Johannesburg-based publisher. A long time friend of Rogosin and fellow filmmaker, Peter Davis edited the book from Rogosin's diary. Davis gives no explicit reason for the collection of Rogosin's diaries except to intimate that Rogosin's children Michael and Daniel approached him to prepare their father's manuscript for publication. However, the book's focus on Rogosin's 'trials and tribulations involved in the making of the film' is the closest reference to the objectives underlying the editing of the manuscript and its publication as a book. It suggests that *Come Back, Africa* the book is both a tribute to Rogosin's work and a reflection on the difficulties of filmmaking in apartheid South Africa.

The book enhanced the domestic publicity of *Come Back, Africa*, which became possible for the first time in the *Weekly Mail* festival and the Workers' Library Book Fair. Moreover, the post-apartheid context within which the book was published provided favourable conditions for the film's address of black publics. Interestingly, the book was launched at the Apartheid Museum, an archival institution that focuses on life under apartheid. The

museum venue strongly signals the fact that through the book, the film became an object of explicit archival discourse. Thus, *Come Back, Africa*'s relation to the apartheid archives gave it an archival dimension. The book was also published to coincide with South Africa's Ten Years of Freedom, a deliberate lending of political currency to the film, more than four decades since it was made. The search for publicity around the book and the film is explicit in this strategy. This is because both the museum and the celebration of Ten Years of Freedom are markedly oriented to the theme of emancipation, which the film strongly implies. Interestingly, if the moment of celebration suggests achievement, the book's engagement of oppressive conditions in filmmaking signals a critical outlook to the evolution of black experiences of oppression. Consequently, the book's role lay in according the film a critical lens through which to engage contemporary social and political relations.

In film culture itself, *Come Back, Africa* has come to serve as an archive of black urban identity. Its visuals are frequently used as a source for the social and cultural history of Sophiatown. *Drum* (2005) by Zola Maseko, incorporates a shebeen scene which is imported from the film. Here, a Miriam Makeba archetype, Dara Macala, sings a number that Makeba sang in the earlier film's shebeen scene- inspiring an inter-textual link between the two films. This homage to the film as a record of the cultural history of Sophiatown also intimates its influence in contemporary constructions of black identity. In these constructions, the cultural iconicity of artists such as Miriam Makeba is recycled and fixed on the historical imaginary of black identity.

In addition to the book *Come Back, Africa: A Man Possessed*, in 2005, Daniel and Michael Rogosin launched a website dedicated to their father's work.[116] It is a multimedia forum for people interested in Rogosin's work. The website catalogues discussions and references to *Come Back, Africa*. In terms of circulation of the film, the website is a far cry

---

[116] The address is <http://www.lionelrogosin.com>.

from the initial inception of the film because it enhanced the transnational reach of *Come Back, Africa* in a way that was not possible before. It conjured up virtual publics around *Come Back, Africa* and other films by Rogosin. Part of the younger Rogosin's work includes the production of a documentary: *An American in Sophiatown* (2007) on the making of the film. With the publication of the book and the making of *An American in Sophiatown*- the public life of *Come Back, Africa* has become subject to the story of its making. This focus on its making is significant to the extent that it provides a comprehensive study of the film, in a way that makes possible *Come Back, Africa*'s framing of contemporary public reflections on the state of cinema in South Africa. The launching of the website, publication of the book and production of the film constitutes three sites in which people associated with Rogosin orchestrated latter-day public engagements of *Come Back, Africa*; and accorded it the status of an archive alongside other films by Rogosin. The orchestration hints at the changing fortunes in the publicness of the film, which however is still germane to public reflection around national cinema and black identity in South Africa.

Masilela has challenged readers to think about the film in terms of the question of national cinema. This signalled a shift to a national framework in which film became an avenue for construction of national identity. According to Masilela (1991),

> ....thirty years ago a film was shot in South Africa which, with the passage of time, has prefigured what an authentic national cinema in our country could possibly be. COME BACK AFRICA, by the independent U.S. film director, Lionel Rogosin, is undoubtedly the highest achievement in film culture in South Africa..... The true significance of COME BACK AFRICA is that since its making thirty years ago, and its first appearance on the public screens today back at home, it poses a fundamental question: What ought to be the nature and structure of an authentic South African national cinema?
> ‹http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC36folder/ComeBack Africa.html› (Accessed 18 April 2008)

Masilela's question shows his realisation of the film's significance to contemporary efforts at constructing a South African national identity, of which the development of a national

cinema is an important part.[117] Such a construction, Masilela's observations indicate, flows from the film's framing around historical challenges that have a bearing on national identity. Masilela's efforts give a glimpse of expert voices in the film's archival reappropriations. Occurring just a few years before the instituting of democracy in South Africa, this expert intervention relied on the film to give content to the looming dispensation. The intervention effectively brings national considerations into the fold of public reflections about black identity. That Masilela's focus on national cinema occurs through the lens of *Come Back, Africa* further serves to make it an academic sourcepoint for contemporary public deliberation. Instructive in the discussion by Masilela is the fact that *Come Back, Africa*'s archival role unfolds among others, through the mediation of expert voices. In these interventions, the themes of black identity and modernity are aligned.

In an essay that juxtaposed the film with Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) and in less detail with Bloke Modisane's *Blame me on History* (1963), Isabel Balseiro argued that *Come Back, Africa* was significant because of its 'affirmation of a new black identity irrevocably severed from its rural origins' (2003: 88). For Balseiro, while *Cry, the Beloved Country* planted its two main black characters in the countryside, *Come Back, Africa* puts Zacharia in the transitional space between his rural background and the new urban landscape (2003: 100). Balseiro sees this move as an indictment of discourses around black identity, whether stemming from the apartheid state's penchant for fixing Africans in the rural outback, or in the urban black intellectuals' silence on the role of rural migrants in the city.[118] Based as it is on an intertextual dialogue between *Come Back, Africa*, and *Cry,*

---

[117] Maingard takes note of the involvement of the black writers in the making of *Come Back, Africa*, and others around its time, as well as of the 'growing market of black cinema audiences'. In light of these observations, she observes that: 'this was a comment about what was then the possibility of a national cinema and a national film culture located in urban black experience, that could not be realized under apartheid' (*National Cinema*: 122).

[118] Reiterating Balseiro's contrast of *Come Back, Africa* with *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Maingard finds the complexity with which Rogosin's film treats black identity compelling (*National Cinema*: 112, 117). However, Maingard widens the visual lens to include other black-centred films of the 40's and 50's such as *Jim Comes to Jo'burg, Zonk,* and *Song of Africa.* She suggests that because of their preoccupation with the theme of black urban identity, these films should be viewed as a cluster: 'Together these films represent a key

*the Beloved Country*, Balseiro's work forcefully intimates a cinematic sphere of engagement of the problematic of blackness and urbanity. Interestingly, the return to the screen in 1995 of *Cry*, *the Beloved Country* updates this thematic focus. Thus, the contemporary publicness of *Come Back, Africa* does not occur in a textual void, instead it is informed by and informs film reprises of a text it was meant to engage. This makes *Come Back, Africa* even more immediate to contemporary engagements of black identity.

The film's expert publics contradict the film's relatively muted local publicness of the late fifties and sixties. This constitutes a change in the publicness of *Come Back, Africa* in that the film's struggle to address black publics was now being realized. The 'lateness' of the above engagements regardless, they show without doubt the critical valence of *Come Back, Africa* for contemporary reconstructions of black identity. The experts' appropriation of the film canonises it by making it one of the texts upon which contemporary intellectual endeavours around nation building and cinematic practice ought to occur. Contemporary readings and appropriations of *Come Back, Africa* continue to challenge the prejudiced interpretations of black identity, but are concerned with constructions of national cinema and by implication, cinema's role in the post-apartheid attempts at constructing national identity. The limit and the shifts registered in the engagements of black identity are a telling indication of the complex interface between history and the cinematic publicness of black-centred films.

That it contributed to reflections about national cinema makes *Come Back, Africa* more than a pioneering black-centred film, but one whose content makes such reflections possible. In the broad cultural field, the significance of the archival reappropriation resides in the historical anchoring of reconstructions of black identity among the new publics that films such as *Drum* address.

---

'moment' in South Africa's cinema history, a point where black modernity was cinematically represented in feature films for the first time' (*National Cinema*: 76).

We can now intimate the effects of cinematic canon-building in the contemporary scholarly engagement of *Come Back, Africa*. We can see in the attention accorded the film, a reconstructing of South African cinema history by reclaiming historically marginalized African cinematic culture. Part of this effect is the rewriting of the colonial and apartheid archive, and a fresh appreciation of black experiences of modernity. Scholarly appreciation of the film's focus on the Sophiatown cultural scene makes the film an archival testament to the cinema's role in the larger narrative of the struggle for liberation. This suggests that the canonizing of the film has the inevitable effect of instituting a cinematic discourse from the perspective of social and political struggle. Moreover, the canon gives the black-centred films a national outlook, implied in the phrase 'national cinema', which however, is critically alert to the social and political excesses that are committed in the name of the nation, however defined. Further, the influence upon cinematic practice that such a discursive move implies, constitutes part of the effects of the archival reappropriation of black-centred films.

### *u'Deliwe*: New Circulation, Old Debates?

The circulation of *u'Deliwe* on SABC television spans over two decades. While it was shown in the early 80's along with countless films aimed at blacks, it was also repeated on SABC 1 on 8, December 2002- and again on 25, April 2003. In 2002, the SABC Business Enterprises (sales division) converted it into VHS format and it is still on sale in some private outlets. These include *One World: South African Music Cyberstore*, which inappropriately categorizes the film as 'traditional', and *Reliable Music Warehouse* (a music salon) used to sell it.

The broadcasting of *u'Deliwe* on SABC television met with some protestations. In a submission to the SABC about the editorial policies of the broadcaster, the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) criticised the SABC for repeating old films. The Institute is a Non Governmental Organization that monitors the media's compliance or the lack thereof with human rights culture. For the Institute, *u'Deliwe* was an example of old films that

180

represented 'an old stereotype of black people in the 1970s'. 'How the SABC decided to broadcast these films defeats all logic and goes against the grain of correcting the mistakes of the past, negative portrayal and stereotyping of black people being the prime example' (FXI 2003, 13 June).

In arguing that the SABC represented 'old stereotypes' of black people, the Institute implies that there is a particular dynamic way in which black people could be represented. However, the submission advances no sustained argumentation or definition of what it meant by stereotypical representation. The Institute's complaint can be attributed to anxieties about representations of black identity in films that were produced during apartheid. Its take on the 70's films, *u'Deliwe* in particular, shows that part of the film's relations with engagements of black identity, is overdetermined by their historical provenance. It seems to suggest, that texts are bound to particular historical moments, and that they have no life beyond those moments. We see in the Institute's disdain for *u'Deliwe*, the fact that it is not being elevated into the alternative post-apartheid archive. However, the disavowal of the contemporaneity of *u'Deliwe* was evidently challenged in the SABC's framing of the film.

In 2002, SABC channel 1 produced a video for *u'Deliwe*. The imagery on its jacket is decidedly different from the 1970s' advertisement poster. It is a screen-grab montage, a conversion of selected film shots of Deliwe into pictures. The background of the jacket shows different shots of Deliwe as a beauty queen and lady of fashion. At the centre of the montage, Deliwe in a colourful yellow skirt poses confidently before a camera. Further in the background, an imposing profile of a smiling Deliwe throwing her gaze off the frame appears. Another profile of Deliwe as Miss Johannesburg flanks the centre of the jacket. In the foreground, a jagged line divides the profiles from a graphic illustration of an overturned car. Pieces of glass that appear to come from a broken mirror jump off the jagged line. Shattered dreams, and illusions are intimated in this part of the montage. The obverse of the jacket shows two separate images. In the centre, Deliwe strikes a pose on

181

stage. She wears a beautiful flowing dress. A smaller image of Deliwe appears above right; she is in hospital, her face and head heavily bandaged.

The absence of the Reverend and Deliwe's uncle in the montage is very telling. It disarticulates the religious and patriarchal authority underwriting the 70's posters. Thus, the montage mobilizes Deliwe's agency outside the moral precepts on which the apartheid and religious policing were predicated. However, with the absence of George, the mobilization of her agency takes place at the expense of conventional film strategies of drawing attention to the love interest in the story. The viewer is asked to focus only on the ill-fated Deliwe. This further makes Deliwe an effect of bourgeois individuality- the terms of which do not depend on hetero-normative assumptions of sexual romance.

In contrast to the picture of the overturned car, and signification of illusions in the jagged line, Deliwe's pictures occupy a bigger chunk of the frame. This accentuates the brighter side of her life, over its colourless episodes. This angle percolates into the synopsis of the film that appears on the reverse side of the jacket. The synopsis states that it is a story about a country girl who goes to Johannesburg from Kwazulu-Natal, enters the world of fashion and wins a beauty queen title. It also states that the fairy tale takes a turn for the worse when she is involved in a car accident that scars her for life. The correspondence between the montage and the synopsis is self-evident. Interestingly, both the synopsis and the montage do not attribute her actions to her lack of filial obligations, nor does it relate her social life to a moral schema. Coming out in 2002, the jacket is interesting because of its correlation to the growing momentum of women's rights discourses in post-apartheid South Africa.

The change in the tone of the video jacket invests the circulation of *u'Deliwe* with a substantively new significance. In this instance, it submits black identity to the new challenges attendant to women's claims to the public space. It also constitutes a reading in retrospect of the discourses around the film in the 1970s. This reading ushers in a liberal

discourse of individual agency as the ground for engaging with black female subjectivity. In this new discursive space, the black family might be the consumer and public of the film but it is to the new empowered black woman that the film's discourse is ultimately projected. Through the mediating channel of the epitext, *u'Deliwe* demonstrates alertness to its changing historical challenges, but more importantly, constantly engages certitudes around black identity, religious patriarchy and apartheid claims to morality.

Yet another poster of *u'Deliwe* appeared at the 2006 *Three Continent Festival*.[119] In the poster, a colourful screen grab from the film, a beaming Deliwe and her equally radiant love interest George share a romantic moment in the park. Here, the questions around gender and morality give way to a patently commercial intent *a la* Hollywood. This change in the projection of the film's subject is a significant detour from the film's content, and an indication of the malleability of its public life. The two posters notably show that the film did not always operate as an archival sourcepoint, but as a text that addressed contemporary issues.

The construction of blackness in *u'Deliwe* was the subject of the 2004 Fort West Heritage and Cultural Festival. The event takes place annually at the Fort West village, which is a partnership of the City of Tshwane and the Embassy of France. The film section of the festival was organized with the collaboration of the National Film, Video and Sound Archives, a statutory body. In this appropriation, the function of *u'Deliwe* as an archival sourcepoint is demonstrated. According to the organizers, the inclusion of *u'Deliwe* stemmed from the fact that as a film with a South African jazz score, it documented 'the question of Jazz and the construction of South African black identity'.[120] Therefore, the organizers registered a perspective that marked the film as an archival 'document' of black identity. This attention to jazz as one cultural form within another (film) reveals the

---

[119] See ‹http://www.3continents.com›, Retrieved 12 July 2006.
[120] See the programme of the festival for details: Fort West Film Festival: Roots of South African Jazz (online) available from: <http://www.alliance.org.za> (accessed 31, Jan 2005). The score for *u'Deliwe* was arranged by the Jazz Preachers.

layered nature of films, which is significant if *u'Deliwe*'s relations to the question of black identity are to be fully recognized. This is because jazz is a historically black cultural form, which is invested with political importance, particularly in black artists' and intellectuals' articulation of blackness. Es'kia Mphahlele bears witness:

> We had Jazz; [….] Jazz spoke to us of an imaginary land where Blacks were achieving things we could only dream of. […] Jazz also grounded us deeper in our Black experience because we did sense its other dimension: a state of mind rooted in a life that knew slave ships, whips, back-breaking labour, break-up of family life, alienation and so on (Mphahlele cited in Attwell 2005: 130).[121]

Encountering *u'Deliwe* in terms of jazz destabilizes its assumed 'identity' at once, that of a propaganda film meant to reinforce apartheid ideology of separatist development on racialised ethnic lines. Whatever the political demerits of the film, Jazz throws into sharp relief the internal contradictions in the film. These contradictions enable the reversal of aspects of the text that might be deemed untoward by its viewers. Instead, Jazz expands the horizons of black identity beyond attempts at delimiting its imagination by black people. In tandem with Mphahlele's comments, Jazz in the film sets into motion a motif of journeying, which enables a universal-izable imaginary of black identity. This imaginary is underwritten by identification with the experiences of black people elsewhere, especially in the United States, where they were subjected to the contradictions of modernity, chiefly in the form of slavery and 'Jim Crow' laws. The constructive value attached to Jazz in the film widens the 'conventional' engagements of the film. The festival's appropriation of *u'Deliwe* demonstrates powerfully that the critical 'agency' of films aimed at black people is also derived from their internal contradictions. Thus, even as an 'archival' source, *u'Deliwe* retrospectively forges a critical reversal of marginalizing discourses of black identity, and puts into perspective the empowering aspects of black-centred films.

The post '94 take-up and readings of the film present interesting shifts. While the engagement with the film in the 1970s took place against the background of

---

[121] See the original comments in Mphahlele, E., 1962 (1974). *The African Image*, London, Faber.

contemporary discourses on black family and social life, in the present, the state-initiated event (the Fort West Heritage Festival) proffers a similar but retrospective and conscious effort at committing the film to a new cultural and historical role. The event also demonstrates a significant difference in the constitution of the publics of the film. The public acknowledgement of its import to the constitution of black identity prevails and changes with the times.

In examining the jazz score in the film as a significant modality of black identity formation, the Fort West Heritage festival undermined the ideological resonances of the apartheid state in its sponsorship of the film. Such developments can only lead to the assertion that in its traversing of multiple avenues and its generation of various publics, *u'Deliwe* transgresses its form as film and becomes an archival source for thinking through contemporary questions. Quite tellingly, the constitution of the film in terms of its cultural and social role transforms its pro-filmic elements into immediate useable articles for public life. In the post-apartheid era, its currency was deflated largely by its association with the apartheid regime. Yet, the little attention it sustained, both from the SABC and the Fort West Heritage Festival is a signal of its germaneness to the problematic of black identity.

Across the historical divide, the film assumed the status of an 'archive' of black identity as the Fort West Heritage festival showed. Even within these varied phases in the film's public life, there were limits from which can be drawn some conclusions about the publicness of films aimed at black people in South Africa. The later public life of *u'Deliwe* shows that it related to engagements of black identity in various ways. On another level, the film, through its epitexts, continued to relate to engagements of blackness by destabilizing masculine and broadly Christian definitional authority on blackness. These appropriations occur intra-textually through facilitation of identification with physical, linguistic and cultural (jazz) landmarks signified in the film.

185

### *Mapantsula*: Gender-ing Redemption, Embodying Discourse

The later publicness of *Mapantsula* can be appreciated through a focus on the critical engagements of the film from 1994, the watershed year in South African politics when the momentum of liberation gave way to a democratic rebirth. While most critics generally focused on the film's significance for national politics and film culture, Maingard (1994: 238) drew attention to the marginalized subject of gender. She argued that while *Mapantsula* was an important anti-apartheid film, it had as its major weakness, a primarily male point of view. Her article appeared in *Screen*, an international journal and publication of the Department of Television, Theatre and Film Studies, University of Glasgow, Scotland. Maingard's discussion suggests that *Mapantsula*'s re-entrance into the transnational public sphere occurred through the scholarly field.

Maingard found, in the domestic worker Pat's dreary life, the strategy of exposition of white affluence and its contrast, black poverty. The film's value, she argued, lay in its black perspective, which she explained as textually motivated because the writer of the film was black. Maingard argued that *Mapantsula* committed the fault of marginalizing the perspectives of black female figures, and the despair and alienation of domestic workers. She drove her argument through what she saw as the film's textual centring of Panic illustrated by the interior scene where Pat and Panic conversed about Pat's work conditions. In her view, the 'over the shoulder' shot in the scene was taken from Panic's point of view, revealing as it did this, the silhouette of Mrs. Bentley and an unidentified man. Maingard argued that this scene, supposedly about Pat's frustration over her working conditions, ultimately belonged to Panic. Further, Maingard saw the representation of women in the film as predictably dependent on the activism of the male figures. She argued that MaModise, the matriarch of the property where Panic rents a shack, is also subject to male stereotypes.

Maingard was not alone in the discussion of the critical subject of gender in relation to the film. Writing in his book *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, about the cultural reception

186

of South African culture in the United States, Nixon (1994: 93) also commented on the representation of women as oppressed subjectivities in the film. Nixon thought the film showed the layered oppression of black women, an important feat because in *Cry Freedom* and *A Dry White Season*, they only appeared as backdrop. He celebrated Pat's discarding of Panic for Duma because he saw in this a gesture of independence.

Maingard and Nixon's contributions show that the publicness of the film shifted course on the basis of the political concerns and context of articulation. The imagination of the subjects of the film through the prism of gender throws into sharp relief the fact that the value of the film's realistic aesthetics which, were biased to grass-roots political struggles, were no longer an overriding factor in *Mapantsula*'s publicness. Rather, the analytical context of film scholarship, and its historical distance from anti-apartheid struggles may have rendered the film a reflective space for new questions, themselves highly contested after 1994.

In addition to Maingard's decisive highlighting of the gender perspective in the public engagements of the film, part of the more recent commentary on *Mapantsula* was far-reaching in its foregrounding of sexuality and gender issues. Academic and performance poet Kgafela oa Magogodi (1999) examined 'the representation of the black body' in *Mapantsula*.[122] Magogodi engaged the film across three platforms, in his Master's thesis submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand, in *Theatre Research International* (2002) and in the book *To Change Reels* by Balseiro and Masilela. Magogodi's attention to the film in his Master's thesis, which was supervised by scholar and filmmaker Bhekizizwe Peterson, and later in genres with a wider circulation, multiplied *Mapantsula*'s spaces of engagement. Magogodi's work forms part of a loose network of work around South African film, of which Maingard, Peterson, (and myself) form a part. Through Magogodi and other scholars' efforts, *Mapantsula* increasingly gained a foothold in the local and international scholarly domain. According to its website, *Theatre Research International*

---

[122] He did this as part of a comparative exercise with *Fools*.

187

'publishes articles on theatre practices in their social, cultural, and historical contexts, their relationship to other media of representation, and to other fields of inquiry. The journal seeks to reflect the evolving diversity of critical idioms prevalent in the scholarship of differing world contexts'.[123] The appearance of the article on *Mapantsula* in this journal necessarily admits that, the film is a critical text with significance not only in relation to domestic South African issues, but internationally. Its entrance into a scholarly domain imbued *Mapantsula* with a public role wider than its intervention in South African politics suggests.

Decrying what he saw as an overbearing 'preoccupation with racial politics' in South African film scholarship, Magogodi (2003: 187-200) lexicalized for this scholarship, 'a politics of sexuality'. Essentially this was a politics of 'the gendered nature of power'. Magogodi read the representation of 'the black female body' on the grounds of its relations to black masculinity, the racialising discourses of the state, and labour power. He saw *Mapantsula* as tentatively challenging the male imaginary in its portrayal of Pat as an independent modern woman with the right to control her body. Accordingly, *Mapantsula* subverted the patriarchal imaginary, which assumed that women were always ready for sexual pleasuring. However, Magogodi's thesis was that a male point of view was emphasized in *Mapantsula*. He found fault with the absence of women in leadership positions even in issues that largely affected a female workforce who were mostly domestic workers.

At the same time, Magogodi read a sense of entrapped 'freedom' in Schmitz's women. Magogodi argued that Duma, a trade union leader 'exploited Pat's body' in 'exchange of his political consciousness'. Why didn't she join without being involved with Duma Magogodi asked? He argued that not only was Pat's body at the mercy of the charming township activist, but her hands were also tied to the purse strings of an overbearing

---

[123] See the journal's official website: ‹http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=TRI› (Accessed June 12, 2007).

white 'madam'. Here, Magogodi submitted that her hard labours were an extension of a web of exploitation of her body. Magogodi concluded that black female bodies were treated with ambiguity in the film. By drawing attention to women and not Panic as embodying ambiguity, Magogodi reversed the focus mainly on Panic as the only source of ambiguity in the film. Magogodi's reflections instance the destabilisation of the privileging of race as a critical category in the engagement of the film and society, and analyses of gender, the body and sexuality. This typifies a form of publicness distinct from the earlier ones in its expansion of the terms of political liberation, and context of articulation.

Drawing attention to scholarly engagements by Maingard, Nixon and Magogodi as part of a distinct form of the film's publicness, challenges the conventional bracketing of scholarly commentary from public engagement. The saliency in drawing attention to expert publics rests with their capacity to consecrate *Mapantsula* in the 'film field', as historically and possibly aesthetically paradigmatic. Further, in giving considered extensive attention to the film, academic commentary calls academic publics into being. It imbues *Mapantsula* with public significance within the academic field, and therefore enhances its public critical potency.

## Conclusions

The archival reappropriation of black-centred films is characterised by an increasingly inclusive publicness. Although expert commentators were still dominant, popular publics in the form of black workers have emerged. It also registers thematic shifts in the films' publicness. While in the late 80's, the public engagements of *Come Back, Africa* were significantly defined by reflections on black identity and modernity, recent engagements highlight the theme of gender. This suggests that the changing public discursive preoccupations in which gender gained momentum as an issue of public discourse in the wake of the demise of apartheid and anti-apartheid politics influenced the relation of these films to critical public engagements. Yet, the fact that black-centred films were appropriated to address gender relations hints at their enduring and composite critical

import. Accordingly, the archival status of black-centred films is in this instance derived from the ways in which they help address inequalities across divides other than racial or cultural ones.

The archival reappropriation of black-centred films has certain effects in contemporary public engagements. Such effects as may be found in the scholarly canonization of the films, or cultural and political appropriations, constitute key elements of the films' public critical potency. On their own, scholarly interventions are significant in that they bring the film into the fold of contemporary national preoccupations with identity. These preoccupations have a bearing on black identity and modernity. Thus, the films come to enjoy archival status through scholarly projects that have the potential to make the films documents of official history in which black identity assumes a national dimension. They also inform cinematic thought and practice and consequently make cinema a site of contemporary imaginings of national identity.

With regard to the rescreening of the films, particularly of *Come Back, Africa* and *Mapantsula*, the effects of the films' archival reappropriations lie in their resonance with their contemporary publics' concerns. For instance the workers' encounter with the film at the *Workers' Library Book Fair*, proved the film's consonance with their struggle. Importantly, their relation with capital found a conduit through which their identity as workers was given a historical perspective. Within the cinematic encounter can be seen an 'archival' moment the effects of which lie in black workers attaining a cinematic publicness that they were historically denied.

The archival reappropriation of *Come Back Africa*, *Mapantsula* and *u'Deliwe* shows the open-endedness of the public critical engagements of black-centred films, however removed their settings might be from contemporary life. Importantly, it points to the significance of cinema as both a critical platform of, and powerful 'documenter' of modernity. This is because their production of historically sited narratives, stand to

become valuable records of public understandings of identity- their purported political biases regardless- and are being used as such.

The historical point at which democracy becomes a reality poses challenges for public engagements of social and political relations, which are not necessarily co-extensive with the democratic project. Put simply, the attainment of democracy implies the opening of the public space for deliberating on its health. Yet, this attainment also constitute a rupture in public engagements simply because the major objective of political movements may be assumed to have been achieved. The differences in the way in which *Come Back, Africa*, *u'Deliwe* and *Mapantsula* were engaged after 1994 not only attests to the possibility of ongoing public lives of the films as archival objects. They also signal a major shift in the public discursive engagements of black identity that occurred after 1994, in which the critical reflection on issues of gender and violence struggled to enter into public discourse.

## CHAPTER 7

## THE PROBLEM OF GENDER AND NATION-BUILDING IN THE MAKING
## AND PUBLIC LIFE OF *FOOLS*

*Mapantsula* has been discussed in relation to the question of the critical public role of films that are politically committed to national liberation. The thesis now shifts to a film that emerged after the heat of national liberation had given way to a democratic dispensation in South Africa. This chapter examines the making and public life of *Fools*, an adaptation of the Noma award-winning novella of the same name. The novella (1983) by academic, critic and author Njabulo Ndebele, is set in South Africa in 1966. *Fools* has the distinction of being the first post-apartheid film to be directed by a black South African, Ramadan Suleman.

### Synopsis

Set against the backdrop of a late apartheid township, the narrative of *Fools* revolves around the turbulent relationship between a degenerate teacher and an idealistic youth whose sister the teacher violated. The film opens with a long shot trained on a hillock. It follows the silhouette of Forgive Me- a tramp, walking among tall aloes. He descends from the hillock, shouting a Christian refrain: 'forgive them father for they know not what they do!' Below the hill, the camera pans across a multitude of identical white houses with red roofs. Smoke slowly billows from the houses. It is a township morning. The subtitle across the screen reads 'Charterston Township, December 1989'.

The main plot begins with an intimate sequence: young lovers, Zani and Ntozakhe make love on a moving train. The train's locomotive engine ejects steam to the growing intensity of their heaving. The lovers are from a boarding school in Swaziland. Back at the township, Duma Zamani, a debauched middle-aged teacher, drunkenly watches a television news item about Afrikaner nationalist celebrations of the December 16, 1838 Battle of Blood

River, also an apartheid-era holiday. A group of local elders enters and orders him to switch off the television. The elders summarily inform him of the lifting of his suspension from teaching. The suspension, we learn later was instituted on grounds of Zamani's sexual violation of his former pupil and Zani's younger sister, Mimi Vuthela. The young lovers alight at Springs train station. At the station, Zani confronts Zamani, who spots dried out drool down his mouth. Zamani spent the night on the station benches after an overnight abortive encounter with an inner-city prostitute, thanks to his temporary impotence.

In the days that follow, an unlikely friendship develops between the two men. When Zani proposes to address Zamani's class of young learners, Zamani reluctantly agrees. On the appointed day, Zani impresses upon the young learners, the political naivety of celebrating the December 16 holiday. Zani's talk is interrupted by the humorously sycophant principal (Meneer) who calls the police. In the closing sequence, Zani tries to disrupt the December 16 holiday picnic organized by Meneer. Meneer angrily hurls a stone at him but misses and hits the car of a passer-by, an Afrikaner man. The man pulls out a whip and attacks Meneer, Zani and Zamani respectively. The picnickers flee in different directions except for Zamani. The whip lands on his skin, and strangely, he lets out a maniacal laughter. The whipping man grows frustrated, cries and whips on the ground. The crowd of picnickers slowly engulf him. Ntozakhe who was about to hurl a stone at the man, drops it.

## Form in *Fools*

There are indications that in its form, *Fools* is enmeshed within a search for a cinematic idiom that engages profoundly with established understandings of film in general and the formal tendencies in local films in particular. The film's reprise of the critical tenor in Ndebele's literary work put it squarely within attempts at charging post-apartheid South African film culture with novel approaches and new themes. This move entailed combining a popular form (film) with the critical legacy of a literary work. It is due to the quest for formal distinction that *Fools* is easily an *auteurist*film. By this is meant that the film is

193

predicated upon the creative and intellectual vision of its filmmakers as relatively independent artistes. However, it also includes *Third Cinema* elements. The result is a non-linear plot that combines social realism with elements of humour, narration and allegory.

Though largely treated in a realist mode, *Fools* punctuates its narrative with non-realist motifs such as fire and the allegorical use of a chicken to represent the rape of a minor.[124] The sequence where teacher Zamani, after being chased from Zani's home, runs to his house only to be haunted by the preaching figure of Forgive Me is an example of the non-realist elements and generous symbolism of *Fools*. In a film culture with a fair share of dominant cinema conventions and codes, the first port of call for *auteurist*and Third Cinema resides in the formal combat with Hollywood cinematic formulae. Moreover, this quest for an autonomous film idiom is found in the dialogue with form in anti-apartheid films. Having challenged and eventually transcended Hollywood formulae in the anti-apartheid films, it is to the radically politicized form of its immediate precursor, *Mapantsula* and broadly, the revolutionary tenor of Third Cinema that *Fools* owes its rhythm. *Fools* returns the open-endedness of *Mapantsula*, the anti-heroism of its protagonist, as well as the texture of black township life to the post-apartheid screen. However, it plucks the anti-heroic trait of Panic and appends it on the character of a professional and respectable teacher. The film, in so doing addresses whatever complacent attitude there might be with regard to revered professional figures in society.

On the same score, it extends reflections around morality and ethics away from debates of political loyalty and discipline, to the terrain of 'gendered' conflicts in a new society. Still on the question of form, *Fools* uses orality. This is a stylistic device derived from African storytelling, but can also be found in other cultures. For instance, the old eccentric Forgive Me serves as a narrative suturing device and site of moral introspection for the

---

[124] The use of fire in the film intimates the influence of H.I.E. Dhlomo. Peterson has generously paraphrased Dhlomo in this regard, 'Dhlomo had much to say about the 'human baptism', the 'strange contradiction' that lay in 'the greatness and universality of the meaning of fire'. Fire, in one of its many guises, 'is a social agent for it lays bare the evils of our economic and social caste systems'. See Peterson, *Monarchs*, 217.

protagonist, and an invitation for public critical engagement. It is precisely in its open-endedness, that *Fools* intimated and engaged a virtual public. Caught between the sheer injustice of the whipping Afrikaner and the despicable criminality- even folly of Zamani- this public must reflect on how best to deal with the ever present challenges to its search for social justice.

## Background to Film Setting

*Fools* foregrounds the sexual violation of a pubescent girl within a township setting. At the same time, the film's emergence and circulation coincided with the increasing reports of rape in South Africa (Dovey 2009: 64).[125] *Fools* also emerged and circulated in the formative years of black majority rule in South Africa. The chapter asks how *Fools* stimulated critical engagements of gender relations particularly in relation to black identity from its inception, production and extended public life. Two key concerns inform the chapter's inquiry. The first concern is about the status of the question of gender in public debates engendered through film. Thus, the chapter asks what kind of critical public engagements on gender *Fools* enables. Secondly, as an *auteurist*film that, the chapter argues, stands at a critical distance from dominant articulations of triumphalist nationalism, how does *Fools* animate public engagements?

The chapter firstly describes Dovey's reflections on *Fools* and gender discourse*.* It follows with a mapping of the terrain of gender discourse in South Africa. The next leg tackles the film's production history, and the cultural and political context in which it was produced. An examination of the making of the film, and of the filmmakers' reflections around it follows. The section essays an interpretation of these reflections in the light of the illuminations they offer on *Fools*' focus on gender and black identity especially as they relate to the dominant discourse of nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa. The next section charts the circulation of the film in South Africa and internationally. It is

---

[125] See also Dovey L., 2005a. Engendering Gender Discourses through African Cinema: The Case of Fools (1998) and Karmen Gei, Paper presented at the *Writing African Women*: *Poetics and Politics of African Gender Research* Conference, University of the Western Cape, January, 5.

followed by an exploration of the wider public take up of the film, and its significance for the conceptions of black identity in the post-apartheid period, and the place of gender in nation-building discourses. Through engagement of the limits and the strengths of the publics of *Fools*, the film's thematic register of gender and gender relations, its form, as well as historical relations with the transition, the chapter draws some conclusions with regard to the public critical role of *auteurist*films.

According to Dovey, (2009: 63) *Fools* occupies a unique place in film history and is bound to be 'subject to a great deal of ongoing analysis'. She places *Fools* in the same historical circumstances as *De Voortrekkers* (1916) which was also 'produced at the dawn of a new nation, almost one hundred years previously' (Dovey 2009: 63). However, Dovey observes significant differences between the two. In her view, the purpose of *De Voortrekkers* was to 'glorify Boer leaders in the Battle of Blood River and to (alluded to in the beginning and end of *Fools*), promote what has been called the central constitutive myth of Afrikanerdom' (2009: 63). *Fools*, on the other hand, does not celebrate the anti-apartheid struggle heroes, nor does it depict the historical events unfolding around the time of its production namely, black independence and South Africa's fledgling democracy (2009: 64). Dovey (2009: 64) ascribes Suleman's decision not to deal with these events, to the social and economic contradictions in most black South Africans' lives, and their incongruence with national slogans.[126] Dovey acknowledges Suleman's alertness to the political changes taking place around the film's emergence, '*Fools* proves... that adaptation is not necessarily mutually exclusive to filmmaking on current events, and it adds a depth on these current events by historicising them' (Dovey 2009: 64).[127]

---

[126] O'Brien also finds the choice of the period in the screenplay interesting because 'there is no hint of the ANC or the transition- which thus avoids any direct theorizing or evaluation of the transition'. O'Brien A., *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa*, Duke University Press: Durham and London: 270.

[127]See Suleman's original comments- also quoted in the course of this chapter- in Ukadike N. F., 2002. *Questioning African Cinema Conversations with Filmmakers*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 293.

Indeed, the film's setting in 1989, a few months before the release from prison of ANC leader and later President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, and six years shy of the formal instituting of democracy in South Africa, is an intriguing aspect of its relation to the novella. The novella was set in 1966 but written in 1983. The significance of the year of the novella's setting is not lost to scholar and activist Anthony O'Brien, who notes that it was 'a year before the Black Consciousness Movement officially began at the 1967 National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) conference in Grahamstown' (O'Brien 2001: 268). It is also interesting when viewed in relation to the period of the film's release and circulation in post-apartheid South Africa. The setting of *Fools* suggests a 'historic manoeuvre' on the part of its makers. This poses the question of the kind of public engagement that a film of this nature sets in motion especially in the light of the historical incongruence of its setting to the post-'94 period.

Dovey's focus on *Fools* issues from her interest 'in the way that the filmmakers have attempted to fuel discussion around gender not only in Africa, but- in the vein of the new currents in post-colonialism- to engage in contestatory dialogues between Africa and the rest of the world too' (Dovey 2005a: 2-4). Her interest in *Fools* is also motivated by the question of 'how African film adapters are defining and redefining *gendered* identities through the adaptation of national literature' (2005: 4). I summarize her work on *Fools* in which she addresses the question of gender and debate in the film.

Dovey's concerns with how *Fools* 'engenders gender discourse' resonates with the consideration in this chapter, of the film's stimulation of critical public engagements of gender. However, Dovey explores *Fools* as a film adaptation and her approach is predicated upon its critical relationship with the novella. Thus, her work frames the discursive purview of *Fools* to an engagement with the novella. Dovey (2005a: 9) concludes that the film's use of rape to critique gender relations distinguishes it from the novella in that the latter provides its critique through the weighing of competing epistemologies of mimesis and critique.

This thesis takes Dovey's discussion further by situating what she sees as 'African filmmakers' wish to encourage dialogue around issues of gender in Africa', to *Fools*' sphere of circulation and engagement. Through this approach, the thesis widens the discursive terrain of *Fools*, and 'captures' more dynamically, its tendency to engender gender discourse specifically and to stimulate public critical engagement in general. It is upon *Fools*' pathways of circulation, that the thesis poses the question of its public critical potency, particularly in relation to what is arguably its principal thematic element- that of gender relations- as well as its affiliated ones, namely, violence and black identity.

Describing the making and public life of *Fools* with respect to gender relations requires a certain level of familiarity with gender debates in South Africa. To this end, it is necessary to sketch briefly the debates in historical perspective, particularly in the periods that roughly corresponds to the film's emergence and circulation. The section limits itself to a few but telling commentaries on the question of gender especially as it relates to the pursuit of national liberation in South Africa.

From a broadly historical perspective, the African National Congress' (ANC) commitment to gender equality constitutes an important part of its recent history. In the period under discussion, the ANC's position on gender-related issues, particularly as they related to women, can be traced to a statement it issued a few years prior to the first democratic elections in South Africa: 'The emancipation of women is not a by-product of a struggle for democracy, national liberation or socialism. It has to be addressed in its own right within our organization, the mass democratic movement and in society as a whole' (in Hassim and Gouws 1998: 63).[128]

Hassim and Gouws have hailed the significance of this statement particularly because 'it allowed women in the progressive movement the space to organize self-consciously on

---

[128] For original article, see ANC NEC, 1990. *Statement of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress on the Emancipation of Women In South Africa*, May 2 [Online].  Available from: < http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pr/1990/pr0502.html> (accessed 21, June 2007).

their own terms and in their own interests' (Hassim and Gouws: 1998: 63). Thanks to the commitment to gender within the liberation movement, especially from women activists in the late 80's and throughout the negotiations for multiparty democracy in the 1990s, gender equality was enshrined in South Africa's new constitutional democracy.

However, for Andersson, 'South Africa, at independence in 1994, appeared to have a clear race-class-gender-then-the-rest pecking order of "issues", which has been put on the table by the African National Congress ...' (Andersson 2004: 42). According to Andersson, this could be made on the basis of the ANC's 'Strategy and Tactics' document, and on the focus of various annual ANC founding anniversary speeches. Thus, while the ANC in exile, and indeed the ANC in government, overtly supported the agenda of gender equality, there are strong mitigating currents concerning anxieties about black masculinity, patriarchy and racism that compromise gender equity and confound its discussion.[129]

The arguments presented above, signal problems attendant on debates about gender as a discourse and the quest of national liberation, as well as the uneasiness around rape and black masculinity. Therefore, the emergence and circulation of *Fools* occurred not only against the background of the increase in rape cases in the country, but also of the ideological tensions in debates around 'gendered' violence and black masculinity. This chapter engages with the question of the extent to which these struggles and anxieties around rape and black masculinity had any influence, if at all, in the public life of the film.

The discourse of a racially inclusive nationalism underwriting the new dispensation in South Africa constituted the larger context within which *Fools* was made and circulated. This nation-building discourse is a product of the non-racial ideology of the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies, and generally of the political developments that led

---

[129] For an extended discussion about gender in the ANC, see Erlank N., 2005. ANC Positions on Gender, 1994-2004, *Politikon*, (November), 32(2), 195-215. See also Hassim S., and Gouws A., 1998. Redefining the Public Space: Women's Organizations, Gender Consciousness and Civil Society in South Africa, (*Politikon,* 25 (2), 53-76.

to the birth of democracy in South Africa. In their 'transitional pact', agreed upon a few years after the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, the National Party and the ANC agreed on power-sharing under the terms of an interim constitution. The result was the Government of National Unity, which provided parties with a minimal number of seats in the National Assembly to gain one or more cabinet posts. At its dissolution, this government would pave the way for the new constitution. According to sociologist Slabbert Frederick Van Zyl (1998: 3-4), the ideology of this negotiated settlement was marked by three core principles: 'inclusive nation-building nationalism, a liberal democratic constitution, and a competitive market economy'.

Like all ideologies, the new nationalism needed legitimating. In reinforcing this newfound nationalism, and addressing the abuses of human rights that took place during apartheid, the state adopted a policy of national reconciliation. The eminent religious leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu's use of the 'Rainbow Nation' as the descriptor of the new national identity, though imported from the Civil Rights Movement of the United States, in particular from the Reverend Jesse Jackson, signifies the nation-building agenda in the new dispensation. The 'Rainbow Nation', a metaphor of a multicultural diversity, gained currency during the Nelson Mandela presidency. Under Thabo Mbeki, Mandela's successor, another nationalist rhetorical phrase 'unity in diversity', received official endorsement when it was emblazoned on the national coat of arms. Against this background, *Fools* positioned itself as a text that sought to launch new debates, which as part of its public life will show, call into question assumptions of the new dispensation.

**Background and Production**

*Fools* was co-produced by Natives At Large (South Africa), M-Net Africa (South Africa), Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (South Africa). Internationally, the film was co-produced with France's JBA and Pĕriphĕrie Production houses, Ebano Multi-

Media (Mozambique), and Framework International (Zimbabwe).[130] The co-production was necessitated in the main by the difficulties of raising capital for film. *Fools* is the first film by Natives at Large.

Considering the controversial history of the word 'native' in South Africa, Suleman and Peterson's choice of the name Natives at Large, is provocative. The word was used during and before apartheid as a demeaning term for Africans, apparently to emphasise their distance from the West and supposedly, lack of modern sophistication. Elsewhere, Peterson describes the phrase after Solomon Plaatje, as a reference to the 'social inscriptions of Africans' in the early 20th century (Peterson 2000: 15). The ambiguity wrought in its register of colonial anxieties about Africans, and its affirmation of Africans' claims to South Africa, opened the term to appropriation and subversion by the filmmakers. 'Natives at Large' also signals a self-reflexive reference to the persistent socio-political challenges facing black South Africans even after apartheid- a reality to which the filmmakers are alert. It is no wonder then that the choice of the name was met with consternation in the film circles of Johannesburg (O'Brien 2001: 267).

*Fools* also received financial support from the South African Broadcasting Corporation, (SABC), the European Union, the Hubert Bals Fund, and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to its website, the Rotterdam-based Hubert Bals Fund provides urgent funding towards completion of films from Africa, Asia, Middle East, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. It also states that while the funding is considered on the basis of 'the financial aspects of a project, the decisive factors remain its content and artistic value'.[131] However, securing funding for *Fools* was not easy. According to Barlet, 'Suleman found it difficult to secure funding from producers who thought that he was too critical of Africans'

---

[130] At the time of their co-production with Natives, the equally young Ebano and Framework had co-produced seven films between them, most of which were about African themes or history.
[131] See Hubert Bals Fund [online]. Available from:
<http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/eng/about/hubert_bals_fund.aspx> (accessed 21 July 2007).

(Barlet 2003: 104).[132] The producers' resistance is a telling signal that the film's critical outlook faced the dilemma of producers' self-censorship that stemmed from their hypothesis of audiences' reaction, which is in itself significantly informed by commercial concerns. At this point, a turn to the cultural context in which *Fools* was made must lay the ground for understanding the local circumstances of its production.

In 1994, the newly installed democratic government established a Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) for the first time in the history of South Africa. However, and in contrast to the apartheid state's interest in film, the ANC-led government did not put film at the service of state propaganda. Produced after the demise of apartheid, *Fools* was one of the first films able to address a black public directly without any pressures of political censorship thanks to the openness of engagement allowed by the South African political atmosphere.

Suleman traced the idea of making *Fools* to his student days at the London International Film School in the 1980's (Ukadike 2002: 292). That the filmmaker toyed with the idea of *Fools* in the turbulent 80's partly explains its setting in late 1989. Its distillation through the 1980's and into the 90's signals that *Fools* is a product of engaged relations with the historical signposts of anti-apartheid political struggles, the birth of democracy and the euphoria around it. While in *Fools*, the themes of gender violence and blackness are heightened, the theme of blackness alone seems to define almost every creative offering in Suleman's earlier *oeuvre*.

During his apprenticeship at the London International Film School, Suleman directed *The Devil's Children* (1990) which chronicles the harsh realities of a black boy who delivers clothes from the township to the suburbs during the apartheid era.[133] The film was based

---

[132] See also Bottéon C., 1997. Interview with Ramadan Suleman, *Cinema* 590: 21-2.

[133] The *Devil's Children* won numerous prizes and awards including Certificate of Merit at the Chicago International Film Festival (1990), and others at the International Student Film Festival (Fifrec '90) and at the Prix Bicentenaire. (Ukadike, *Questioning*: 202, 281).

on *The Park* (1983), a short story by South African author and poet James Matthews. Matthews used poetry to articulate Black Consciousness philosophy. *The Devil's Children* reveals Suleman's fascination with literature, particularly of the kind that explicitly focuses on the dehumanisation of black people.

Suleman also worked as trainee editor on Mauritanian filmmaker Med Hondo's *Sarraouinia* (1986) and as assistant director for his *Lumière Noir* (*Black Light*) (1995). He was also assistant director for the Malian filmmaker Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen* (1987), and *Waati* (1995). Thus, his mastery of African cinematic practices can be easily intimated. Suleman has since directed *Deadly Myths* (2004), a documentary about the various myths around HIV/AIDS. Other films in his career include *Sekouba* (1984) and *Ezikhumbeni* (1985). His latest feature, *Zulu Love Letter,* (2004) is about three generations of women dealing with the trauma of the apartheid past. Interestingly, in *Zulu Love Letter*, Suleman explicitly engages the political transition in South Africa, in particular the issues around the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Suleman and his collaborator Bhekizizwe Peterson hail from a tradition of 'black' theatre, which was broadly politicized and antagonistic towards apartheid in particular. In the 80's, they established the Dhlomo theatre[134], 'one of the only two rudimentary theatres in the Witwatersrand under black control (closed by the authorities in 1983 as a fire hazard)' (Peterson 1990: 233). It is unsurprising therefore, that O'Brien (2001: 278-279) traces what he sees as ensemble casting comedy and 'black' theatre idioms in the film to the filmmakers' theatre background.

In the study, the Suleman and Peterson team has the distinction of traversing across academic work and filmmaking. This contrasts them with Sabela and Mogotlane, but

---

[134] The reference to H.I.E. Dhlomo is telling because he was in Peterson's words 'one of South Africa's most illustrious playwrights and pioneering African critics' (Peterson *Monarchs*: 176). More importantly, it recalls resonance in *Fools* with his independent radical stance. According to Peterson, it was in times of revolution when 'patriotic poems and orations....made to give you cheer and courage that Dhlomo oft' brought offerings of pain and tears' (Peterson *Monarchs*: 217).

brings them closer to the Sophiatown intellectuals of *Come Back, Africa* fame and, to Plaatje's efforts in the 1920s. Peterson's academic work largely focuses on black intellectual history in South Africa, and has a bias to those intellectuals that work through literary and theatrical forms such as Plaatje and Dhlomo. The significance in this is that their films are an outgrowth of their expert engagement with film culture in South Africa. In addition, their involvement in film patently extends the various resources of engagement at their disposal. This bridging of their intellectual work through the creative means of film is indicative of a dialogic relation between film, literature and academic work. As will become apparent in the course of this discussion, this relation constituted a tendency of high intellectuality in the publicness of *Fools*.

## Directorial Exposition

In an interview with Ukadike in New York City, 1998, Suleman explained part of the history and motivation for making *Fools* and his choice of Ndebele's novella. The interview and its location is an excellent indication of the film's early transnational publicness and pitching within the transnational sphere of film theory that is oriented to African cinemas. Ukadike later incorporated the interview into a book: *Questioning African Cinema* (2002), a compilation of interviews with African filmmakers. According to the author, the book is an initiation of 'discourses into African cinematic practices that will provoke other discourses' and 'to address pertinent issues that will lead to a fuller understanding of African cinematic practices' (2002: Preface). Thus, Ukadike's project recognized the capacity of African cinema to generate discourses other than those found in its professional ambit and contributed to it.

The questioning evoked in the title of the book, occurs against the backdrop of issues and problems attendant on the conditions of colonial and neo-colonial modernity in Africa. Ever alert to the ideological fixing of Africa to an eternal past, film scholar Teshome Gabriel in the foreword of the book, asserted that 'the questions that Ukadike asks…serve to disrupt Western perceptions of Africa as unchanging and monolithic'. He

204

continued…'neither Africa nor African cinema can be reduced to a fixed, eternal essence'. Suleman's explanations constitute part of the film's epitexts- an investiture of its public life. *Fools* critically revealed the dark underbelly of South Africa at a time when the world celebrated the end of her isolation and what has been called her 'miracle' transition. The inclusion of *Fools* in the book is important for two reasons: firstly, it revised the near exclusion of South African films from critical commentary on African cinemas, and secondarily- it constituted *Fools* as one of the paradigmatic texts in continental pursuits of critical cinemas. The interview and the book's constitutive roles in the film's publicness, ultimately signify the film's high intellectual appeal.

According to Suleman the trend in South Africa, in which films were made by foreigners, was the primary motive behind the making of *Fools*. He argued that it was up to South Africans to tell their stories (in Ukadike 2002: 292).[135] In adapting the book, Suleman decided with Peterson to 'provide a black perspective on what made black people tick…. black people have a history, which is to say they have to come to grips with themselves before coming to grips with white people' (in Ukadike 2002: 293). These statements suggest a return to the philosophy of Black Consciousness movement, which put emphasis on consciousness as the first site of social and political awakening.

Yet, through the character of the young Zani, the film like the novella, articulated a critique of high intellectuality reminiscent of the movement's youthful legacy. Indeed, both the setting of *Fools* and its philosophical underpinnings relive different historical moments- a few years before the demise of apartheid, and in the late 60s' to 70s' when Black Consciousness flourished. Importantly, as a black-centred film, the film's discursive register of, and dialogue with Black Consciousness was not historically contemporaneous with the philosophy's 'historical moment'. That the movement no longer had significant currency in the post-apartheid political atmosphere slightly detached *Fools* from the

---

[135] Note also the interview at the Tenth Cascade African Film Festival. JBA Production, *Notes on Fools* [online] Translated and compiled by Dembrow M.
Available from: <http://spot.pcc.edu/~mdembrow/fools.htm> (accessed 1 September, 2004).

immediate context of its circulation. Novel though it may be in local film, the film's philosophical premise raises the question of its resonance with its post-apartheid publics.

Elsewhere, Suleman extends this theme of blackness to an introspective labour among black people. This introspection, he argued, must transcend what he calls 'black and white confrontation….*Fools* will not be a film about the eternal conflict between the 'diabolical' white and the 'magnificent' black, but simply a film about the black South African people of just four years ago'.[136] Thus, his labours were underwritten by a quest for subversion of the fixed adversarial images in apartheid South Africa's racial imagination. The actor Patrick Shai who played the part of Zamani in the film shares this quest. According to Shai, 'the movie was a therapeutic experience because it is always a relief to engage in South African stories, which have no "Amandla"! as the rallying cry' (Shai in *The Star*, 1998, June 7). The implications for post-apartheid South Africa are pronounced: lest a questioning of simplified approaches in film was launched, mere sloganeering is likely easily to percolate into the present.

In the history of film in South Africa, the impetus for providing 'a black perspective' is not new, nor is the discomfort with foreigners making films about South Africa. However, Suleman's bias for an introspective approach by black people as historical agents seems set to expand the conceptual horizons of 'black perspective' in South African films. Interestingly, this introspection is cognisant of but not guided by the logic of racial conflict. It is therefore fitting to conclude that Suleman framed *Fools* as a study of the ethical and political challenges to the meaning of blackness in the post-apartheid dispensation.

---

[136] See *Notes on Fools* [online] <http://spot.pcc.edu/~mdembrow/fools.htm> (accessed 1 September, 2004) Note the resonances with Ndebele. Ndebele bemoaned the entrapment of South African literature in political stereotypes that could not go beyond black and white oppositionality. Accordingly, mere acceptance of political alliances or enmity as the last word in appreciating society is a ground for oversimplifications. For Ndebele, such inadequacies emanate from 'anthropological approaches that see township society as debased society. Under such conditions, it is easy for sloganeering, defined as superficial thinking, to develop. The psychology of the slogan, in these circumstances, is the psychology of intellectual powerlessness'. See Ndebele, *Rediscovery*, 24-5, See also Helgesson, *Writing in Crisis*, 66. The argument for the influence of Ndebele's critical work in the film is most explicit in O'Brien's work. See O'Brien, *Radical Democracy*, 267.

Consequently, *Fools* according to Suleman, imagined a new discourse of blackness in South African film culture. This results in a profoundly radical approach, which is partially co-extensive with the 'black-perspective' in *Mapantsula* but also transcends it. The incorporation of the ethical dimension guides Suleman to scrutinize deeply historically entrenched views of 'blackness' and of what constitutes a 'black perspective' in film.

In additional interviews with filmmaker and critic, Andrew Worsdale, (1998) the scholar Olivier Barlet (1995) and myself (2004), Suleman unpacked further the focus of *Fools* and explained his choice of Ndebele's work. According to Suleman, *Fools* focuses on 'the psychological sequels of a system inscribed in a 'History' that began long before apartheid' (Interview with Barlet, 1995). I understand 'psychological sequels' to be Suleman's way of explaining the recurring negative consciousness in black people that is the result of historical injustices in the forms of colonial oppression and racial capitalism. For Suleman, 'psychological sequels' resonate in the post-apartheid era. This is an abstract, though historical explanation of the film's focus. As such, the concerns of *Fools* antedate and even post-date the apartheid system. It can be inferred from Suleman's abstraction of South African history as it relates to black people, that through an introspective approach, the film addresses itself to the historical problems, at the same time as it tries to expose and obliterate their psychological effects from the present.

In the adaptation of the novella, time and space constitute challenges of their own. The castigation of apartheid gives Ndebele's *Fools* an anti-apartheid bent. However, as a historical period and experience, apartheid had its definable moments so that the periods from 1966 to 1989, even up to 1997 were not the same. The potential of exteriorising these meanings makes historical time and space the antennae of note in any attempt at locating the distinctiveness of Suleman's *Fools*. Suleman identifies new challenges for the film in relation to its post-apartheid context:

207

> It (*Fools*) also resurrects for me the whole question of how, today, South African politicians tell us we live in a rainbow nation. It is fine to import a fancy African American slogan, which I learned was imported by the honourable Jesse Jackson, but when I walk in Soweto, I still see poverty; I walk around the city and it is full of misery, and I feel the contradiction inherent in the so-called rainbow nation that the politicians have failed to see. ...For me *Fools* is some kind of warning to the politicians not to look for easy answers to society's problems (Ukadike 2002: 293). [137]

In drawing attention to the limitations of the politically symbolic catchphrases, Suleman it seems, sought to make a critical intervention into post-apartheid attempts at nation-building. Suleman's explanations relate the discourse of nation building to the question of black identity in the post-apartheid dispensation. Therefore, *Fools* engages nation-building as a discourse because it questions the assumptions of nation-building and adopts a different premise to it. If Suleman's exposition is anything to go by, *Fools* draws attention to the prior question concerning the ethico-political challenges facing black people. Suleman suggests that a meaningful reconciliation may occur and a 'rainbow-nation' come into being only after these challenges are addressed.

Explaining his choice of an author 'who focuses on ordinary folk', Suleman described his work as an attempt to broach the easy but undue rapprochement between intolerance and extremism among 'black people caught up in the poverty trap' (Interview with Barlet, 1995). Suleman projects 'simple people' as the film's primary audience, as fertile for intolerance, and lastly as agents of change. [138] It is notable that he eschews an elitist perspective, electing instead to begin below. [139] According to Suleman, the problems in black communities that Ndebele addresses are part of the problems he addresses in his *Fools* (Interview with author, 2004). [140] Therefore, a striking aspect of the novella that

---

[137] The production of *Fools* constitutes the emergence of the engagement of the 'Rainbow Nation' as a problem in cinema. This was later taken up in *Yizo Yizo*.

[138] See also, Worsdale A., 2004. Interview with Peterson. In a catalogue of African films, compiled by Worsdale, Peterson, echoed this projection of simple or ordinary people. 'We find ourselves wanting to champion the little person's story ...'. While the catalogue post-dates the production of the film, its relevance to the exposition of the film is patent.

[139] Note the consistency with Edward Said's argument, namely that 'intellectuals belong on the same side with the weak [...] the small people, small states'. Said, *Representations:* 17.

[140] See also Magogodi 2003., Sexuality, Power and the Black Body in *Mapantsula* and *Fools*, in Balseiro and Masilela, *Reels*, 193.

Suleman sought to iterate was its critical stance in relation to black communities. Suleman felt that the novella was revolutionary for its time because it dared to criticize victims of apartheid. However, he hailed its enduring import.

> When South Africa attained democracy, I felt it (*Fools*) was a well placed book that dealt with the past and the now. And I felt it was interesting and I could take it further by adapting it to the present and at the same time deal with certain aspects of the past…its like the past within the present and the present within the past (Ukadike 2002: 294).

The thesis has thus far addressed itself to Suleman's grounds for adapting Ndebele's text, and the intellectual positioning of Natives. What remains is the articulation of the issue of gender relations and the relation of the film to the historical context of nation-building discourse. The intellectual import of Ndebele's work notwithstanding, Suleman maintained a critical relation to it:

> I liked the book *but I wanted to go a step further to make South Africans reflect, especially at this democratic period, about their relationships with women*. […] I think the days are over where man decides everything. A woman in a family situation should be considered an equal partner. A man cannot do it alone. The strength and the force of that relationship in a family are based on how the couple goes about building that family. I felt those issues were important in South Africa and should be addressed in the film (Ukadike 2002: 293).  (Italics my own)

Suleman sought to foreground the theme of gender relations more forcefully than he supposed Ndebele's *Fools* did. He invited viewers to consider *Fools* in the light of a rewriting of gender relations in congruence with the dawn of democracy in South Africa. To be more precise, Suleman's point of departure was to engage the certitudes of black masculinity and to debunk their undemocratic tendencies, especially in relation to the question of gender violence.

> There is a whole issue in the book where Njabulo talks about rape, but he does not deal with rape as the larger issue in the book. He deals more with the relationship and dilemma between the two characters Zani and Zamani. We had a problem in adapting this part of the book because the

issue of rape is very important and needed to be addressed fully.
(Suleman in Ukadike 2002: 294)[141]

Suleman's exposition makes gender relations in general and 'gendered' violence in particular, profoundly germane to the larger questions of nation-building. Accordingly, the attention to gender calls into question the meaning of political freedom and power in the news dispensation. Suleman seems to ask, what is the point of a democratic revolution without social justice between men and women? The filmmakers register a shift from literature to film and take advantage of the generic possibilities of film in order to generate critical engagements of gender relations.

By introducing debates around gender violence among black South Africans a mere five years into the post-apartheid period, the filmmakers chose a subject that was at odds with the celebratory mood around the democratic dispensation. Being at odds with and challenging of contemporary popular opinion around the new dispensation, it attracted a small take up in expert circles.

Thus far, it is evident that the publicness of *Fools* is constituted through interviews with scholars, filmmakers, critics and an actor on the film. The interviewers are all experts in film at various levels. That the scholarly interviews by Barlet and Ukadike took place, or were published invariably outside South Africa is constitutive of the transnational tendency in the publicness of *Fools*. This is a tendency marked by a critical chronicling of filmmakers' work in relation to cinematic developments, both outside their countries of origin and transnationally. The preoccupation, in these interviews with the African cinematic discourses and practices, and with the historical location of the films points to their discursive distinction from the local ones. Indeed, the local interviewers were generally silent about *Fools*' significance or the lack thereof, in relation to nationalism and transnational or African cinematic concerns.

---

[141] See also Dovey, *Critique*, 128.

Levels of critical engagements in South Africa are at play in the comments by Shai and Peterson in *The Star* newspaper and Film Resource Unit film catalogue respectively. The *Mail & Guardian* also registered an interview. Thus, in terms of its publicness, *Fools* was generally spread across publications that targeted either academically inclined publics, and in South Africa, a largely white middle class and steadily middle to high-income black readership.[142] The interviews and the opinions of the protagonists indicate that the public critical potency of *Fools* was realized and realizable largely within spaces of expert commentary. If Suleman's exposition located *Fools* critically at the level of political combat with gender injustice among black people, thus far, the publicness of the film indicated that publics other than those that the film projected were addressed. However, the charge of its expert publicness is at this point only attributable to the interviews and the protagonists that these interviews targeted. A better grasp of the film's publicness and public critical potency can be attained through a delineation of its circulation.

**Transnational Circulation**

*Fools* opened in France in 1997 where it received moderate success (Dovey 2009: 63).[143] In considering the film's premiere outside South Africa, the involvement of European capital in its development, and production cannot be discounted. Because of the film's partial funding by the French ministry and other European funders as well as co-production with the France-based Pĕriphĕrie and JBA, it was able to reach international audiences in European film festivals. At the level of theme, the film's international circulation was predicated on the history of the anti-apartheid struggles. The French poster of the film reveals as much. In the poster, which assumes the form of a multi-media artwork (watercolour painting, pieces of press clippings), a silhouetted figure of a running black

---

[142] By late 1998, the readership of *The Star* newspaper was roughly 60 percent black. However, even for the *Sunday Times*, the readership of which was 80 percent white in 1995, the demographics shifted to more black readers over the years. Yet, it remains a middlebrow newspaper. For these statistics, see Kenichi Serino, 2008. *The Origin of Ideas in the Paper for the People,* Master's Research Report. University of the Witwatersrand: Johannesburg, 9, 163.

[143] See also Barlet O., 2000. *African Cinemas: Decolonizing the Gaze* (translated by Chris Turner), London, New York: Zed Books, 251.

youth, dominates the eye of the frame. Outlines of politically charged youthful figures loom in the background. The poster is organized around the historical theme of apartheid and anti-apartheid struggles, particularly of the 1976 Soweto uprising. The running youth wears an overall, which is symptomatic of the iconic picture of the Soweto uprising. In that picture a Soweto pupil, Mbuyisa Makhubu. holds a bloodied body of a younger boy shot by the police. In itself, the running action is reminiscent of the altercations between police and stone-throwing youth during the Soweto uprising. Written into this gesture is the privileging of '76 as a moment of rupture in the history of South Africa.

That the filmmakers' choice of the youthful uprising occurred in the wake of the new dispensation also provokes reflection of how the actions of the youth relate to contemporary national developments. The historical distance between '76 and 1994 regardless, the poster institutes a historical 'reversal' of the euphoria around the birth of the democratic South Africa. Further, it imagines in the French public, some familiarity with the highlights of South African history, and deploys this to entice interest in the film. While the inclusion of the 1976 theme may be attributed to this commercial imperative, it also indicates an inter-textual tendency. This means that the threshold of *Fools*, that is, the liminal space between its production and exhibition, is premised upon co-presence with the iconographic text of the historical intervention of the youth in South African politics. It is through this threshold that the poster invites the French to take off their gaze from the spectacle of the 1994 'miracle', and rethink their understanding of South Africa from the perspective of the earlier turbulent era.

In the background, a mélange of newspaper clippings written in French, but mostly in English are clattered over each other. Each press piece bears some relation to the Soweto uprising. This is another instance of the poster's inter-textuality. A slightly bigger line reads 'This is not Soweto'- a line uttered by Meneer in the film- when admonishing the politically active schoolchildren. The line submits the film to a double postulation- in which the history of Soweto uprising is called upon to frame the narrative, or negated as a privileged

212

historical background to the film. However, the visual and written references favour the historical meaningfulness of the uprising to the film. This is not without a critical subtext of national history. The image of Mimi's face embodies this subtext. Behind the press clippings, her anguished face cries out for visibility. The buried face solicits considerations of the invisibility of gender politics due to the dominance of politics of national liberation, which are masculinist.

Other references buried in the tattered press articles read, 'the language of the Boers', 'Afrikaans', 'the nationalist-led government and its moneymen', 'fear' and 'black'. Yet others retreat deeper into the history, and surface references to the introduction of Bantu education in 1953. In brief, the French poster shows that internationally, the publicness of *Fools* was predicated upon the political struggles in South Africa in general and, the iconography of the Soweto uprising in particular. The filmmakers' strategy seems to have been premised on the political energy of *Mapantsula* and the thematic elements of *Sarafina*. If the discourse of the poster largely recalled an important episode in the history of South Africa, it also drew attention to the problem of the invisibility of gender, especially as it relates to women's struggles- by dint of Mimi's half-buried face. However, the centrality of gender in the film's circulation remains ambiguous. This near absence of gender and its concomitant violence as the defining themes of the film is curious. It suggests that the problem of gender relations in South Africa fell outside the interest of its international audiences. Consequently, the public critical interventions shifted with the audiences that the film distributors imagined.

**Festival Circuit**

*Fools* was largely circulated in international festival circuits- a trend, which underscored its incongruence with the main commercial circuits. According to Barlet, by 2003, *Fools* still had no distributor in the United States (Barlet 2003: 104). The grounds for this lack of distribution, which stymied its circulation, are not hard to find, 'for its part African cinema remains an artisanal rather than an industrial cinema, producing 'auteur' films in place of

213

the genre films that make up the purely commercial cinema' (Boughedir in Givanni 2000: 117). Shortly after its première, *Fools* found its way to an important international festival, the 50th Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland (1997). The festival awarded *Fools* the Silver Leopard (Leoprado d'argento). This award is given for the best film from a first or second-time director and is second only to the Golden Leopard or the 'Pardo d'oro'. *Fools* was the first South African film to receive the award. *Fools* also got the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury-Special Mention. The Ecumenical Jury is one jury among others at the festival. It is an autonomous body that includes members of the Catholic and Reformed Churches in Switzerland. This signals the film's broadly moral, particularly Christian appeal.

In 1999, *Fools* was screened at the Ouagadougou Pan-African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO), which is held every two years in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. FESPACO is the most important film festival in Africa, which started in 1969. The festival showered *Fools* with the CAP Renov Award, European Union Award, LONAB Award of Hope and the Oumarou Ganda Award for the Best First Work.[144] The critical recognition of the formal and narrative uniqueness of *Fools* as these multiple awards show, signals its historical significance in global film culture in general and in South African cinematic culture in particular. It also means that *Fools* was projected to festivals, and drew attention of expert judgment and commentary in international spaces. While this means that its public critical potency was enhanced, because it would occupy pride of place in transnational critical interpretations of cinema, it also signals black-centred films' 'exilic' status in the transnational public sphere. By 'exilic' I denote the constitution of the public critical potency of black-centred films outside the immediate social spaces of the discourse that

---

[144] Other film festivals that exhibited *Fools* include, the 6th New York African Film Festival (1998), at the 'Human Rights in Film' pro-seminar, University of Iowa's Institute for Cinema and Culture, the Tenth Annual Cascade Festival of African Films in Portland, Oregon as part of a series of South African films commemorating the 1976 students' uprisings in Soweto. *Fools* is also taught in Cambridge University. It was part of the 2006/7 African Cinema and Media course at Cambridge, United Kingdom. Lindiwe Dovey, one of the foremost commentators on *Fools*, teaches the course. The sustained interest in *Fools* can also be teased out from its exhibition at the 2006 FIFET festival. Interestingly it showed alongside Suleman's new film- *Zulu Love Letter* (2005).

their narratives project. It would seem therefore, that its critical approach was not readily resonant with its non-expert publics as it was with expert ones.

## South African Circulation

This section explores the local circulation of the film by a reading of the South African video jacket of its VHS video and later on DVD, which have the imprint of the film's circulation in France. The jackets are overlaid with tag lines from the French press. The major French cultural magazines *Le Monde*, hailed it as 'a remarkable script….a milestone for South African cinema'. The daily newspaper, *Le Parisien* followed with the less ingenious line: '*Fools* shows the force of cinema', while *Humanite* pithily called it 'a courageous film'. Though the appropriation of these accolades can be ascribed to the co-production aspect of *Fools*, it is also a telling indication of its imbrication in international film circuits and conventions of endorsement.

While the jacket serves a commercial purpose, as epitext, it assumes the role of a visual prologue to the narrative and signals its themes for the film's virtual public. Interestingly, the jacket is completely different from the French poster. In the background, the heads of the youth and the teacher are conjoined. The unhappiness and perhaps hostility on their faces, and the fact that they are looking in opposite directions- with their backs to each other, invite imaginations in the viewer, of a relationship gone badly. That the two men are not of the same age is also notable. It implies inter-generational differences and tensions. If their faces express tension, conflicting emotions and thoughts, their conjoined heads suggest alterity and psychic connectedness. At this level, their individuality gives way to a shared subjectivity. Like *Esu-Elegba* the two-faced Yoruba deity, or *Januz* his Roman equivalent, their 'shared subjectivity' constitutes a principle of ambivalence. In imitation of *Esu*, this subjectivity looks simultaneously into the future and the past-weighing the merits of both without prejudice. Therefore, the image of the two men's heads intimates sober reflection and confusion. They provoke as they do this, equal angst in the viewer about the cause of their tension and manner of its resolution.

215

In the darkened spaces between their heads, a faint text of Ndebele's statement runs vertically into the large text of the title. It reads 'when victims spit upon victims should they not be called fools?' The title of the film appears in the foreground below the text. A vortex- symbolic reference to force or energy encircles its middle letter. Are the fools that the title and the quote refer to caught up in it? The jacket seems to sell the film as a narrative of men and their inter-generational conflicts. The poster proffers through bodily relation a symbolic overture to the narrative. That the tension between the two men is the only image on its front glaringly intimates a masculine narrative. Though it demands from the viewer, a pondering of the cause for the tension between its subjects, which might very well involve women, the poster pre-empts consideration of the women's presence and roles in the film. Thus, the poster easily circulates *Fools* as a narrative about the two men. Curiously, the women in the film are absent from the jacket. They only appear in the obverse.

Only in the Film Resources Unit's promotional poster for the video of *Fools* do the women gain some visibility. In its centre, the eccentric Forgive Me appears in his signature gesture, hands pleadingly held high to the heavens, as he does when he shouts his refrain. He is surrounded by the smaller images of Mimi's pensive mother and an irate Busi in the foreground and background. The fighting scene of Zani and Mazambani also beckons the viewer to the action in the video. Tall aloes, which appear in the opening sequence of *Fools*, bedecks the poster's diegesis.

In the background, the poster displays the promotional line: South Africa's First Black Feature Film. Other tag lines follow in the foreground. Meshack Mabogoane of *Tribute* magazine called it 'a fine work that will do black filmmakers proud'. First published in 1987, *Tribute* started as a lifestyle magazine aimed at the emerging black middle class. Its focus was on the achievements of black women and men. In late 1997, *Tribute* re-launched and

216

changed its slogan from 'Tribute to black excellence', to 'It's who you are'.[145] This shift from an explicit focus on black achievements indicates challenges in the magazine's focus on a black readership. However, the appearance of the magazine in the poster, and the appropriation of Mabogoane's words as a tagline, signals that the film's publicness was oriented to black filmmakers and to the invariably black readership of *Tribute*. Mabogoane's statement points to a confluence between the cinematic and the literary in the forging of a 'black public sphere'.

Barry Ronge, the veteran critic of the *Sunday Times* stated, 'I do not believe we have seen township life depicted with such honesty and cinematic beauty'. For Patrick Shai, *Fools* was 'a significant black statement on film'. Shai's statement on the poster makes him, like Nkosi in relation to *Come Back, Africa*, a textual function of the film's publicness. The imagined public in Shai's example is not only black but also familiar with his career. These taglines by local commentators and, by the actor Shai, consistently echo the filmmakers' framing of *Fools* as a black-centred film. In appropriating Ronge's remarks about its honesty, the poster marked the video's critical vitality and capacity for self-reflection. The remark of honesty is a key declaration of the video's ethical premise in relation to similar claims in public reflection on black identity. The poster is intriguing in its interactive sketching of the public engagement of black identity. In selling the film by claims to authenticity, the poster also appealed to the readers' imagination of black identity, at the same time as the new nationalism favoured a retreat from culturally exclusive conceptions of identity. It recalled as it did this, the Black Consciousness conceptions of blackness from the margins of the nation-building imaginary of black identity.

In making the above claims or critical statements, the poster projects for the video a discursive role in relation to the question of blackness. This implies projection of a critical public, but one that would focus only on the question of blackness. Yet, the question of gender relations escapes the poster's frame. The interaction between the images does not convey any sign of relations between men and women. Instead, violent action between

---

[145] For extensive information see Vukoni Lupa-Lasaga, *Why a Black Magazine in South Africa Failed-* [online] Available from: <http://www.journalism.co.za> (accessed 28-July 2008).

Zani and Mazambani (Black Masculinity?) and familial tensions (Busi and her mother) have pride of place on the poster. Buried underneath the declarations of its blackness, honesty and usefulness for a part of its projected publics, 'gendered' violence seems to be a secondary aspect in the video's projections.

The thematic differences between the French and South African posters evince shifting projections of audiences, and by extension public reflections on the film. The French poster clearly raids the iconicity of the Soweto uprising and related political struggles. At the same time, it renders these struggles ambiguous by complementing them with the face of a partially visible girl. Here, the theme of gender is tacitly suggested. With their foregrounding of males in conflict, the South African posters seem to highlight black masculinity as the major theme in the film. Thus, the question of relations across gender divides is not circulated as the immediate concern of *Fools* in South Africa.

## Local Opening

When *Fools* opened in South Africa on the 22nd of May 1998, Ster-Kinekor exhibited it in its cinemas. Ster-Kinekor is a large film distribution company with theatre multiplexes around South African metropolis. *Fools* opened in *Cinema Nouveau*, Johannesburg (Rosebank) where it ran for three weeks (May 22-June 11). *Cinema Nouveau* is part of the Ster-Kinekor chain but distinct in that it shows specialised, *auteur* films. Therefore, the cinema chain's categorization of the film as *auteur* is notable. This effectively means that *Fools* was unsuitable for a largely white and increasingly middle to higher income black mass audience, which patronized Ster-Kinekor's suburban multiplexes. Thus, the film's *auteurist* approach and focus on questions of nationalism, 'race', sexuality and black masculinity, seemed to be considered out of place in the class and 'race'-defined cinema multiplexes.

The demarcation of the film's audience indicates that only by showing it at a specialised venue would the film draw interest and that it could not possibly be of commercial interest to the designated mass audiences mentioned above. By being exhibited at Cinema

*Nouveau*, *Fools* was rendered esoteric, a subject of intellectual curiosity that required effort from audiences that appreciated film primarily for its aesthetic and critical import.

However, parallel exhibitions took place in the less expensive inner city cinemas that are also part of the Ster-Kinekor chain, (Carlton, Kine Centre, and Southgate). *Fools* ran in Southgate near Soweto, and Kine in the city centre for three weeks. Its six weeks run in Carlton from May 22- July 04, was the longest. For its 2000 Launch of African Films Catalogue, Ster Kinekor, screened *Fools* in Hillbrow, at one of its Johannesburg inner-city cinemas. The screening was done in collaboration with Film Resources Unit and Ice Media. Mostly black working class people who cannot afford tickets in the suburban multiplexes frequent the inner city cinemas. This lack of resources is a historical problem going back to Plaatje's cinematic efforts in the formative years of the 20th century.

The showing of *Fools* in these cinemas was in keeping with its projected primary viewers, mostly black and working class audiences who constituted a significant part of its publics. The film's cultural signposts were closer to these viewers' historical contexts or background. For instance, Mazambane's 80's 'kitchen boy' outfit, a pair of shorts called 'mathanda-kitchen' was reminiscent of a not-so historically distant practice, in which township men worked as domestics in the white suburbs. The film would also be of critical interest to these audiences because of its destabilization of the Hollywood staple of films shown in these cinemas. However, *Fools* was also novel in its appropriation of African cinema aesthetics- with which, by the late 90's, local audiences were only beginning to be familiar. O'Brien (2001: 279) points to the relation between the film's primary audience and what he argues is its populist theatricality. Based on his conversation with Suleman, he remarks, 'private screenings to almost all-black only audiences in South Africa drew delighted responses of recognition at almost every point, confounding the filmmakers' fears that the film might be too complex for a mass audience'. This is an important signal of the possibilities wrought in the film's exhibition in the commercial cinemas.

219

A broad observation of the horizon of its circulation shows that *Fools* moved from one extreme end of an erudite audience to another, a 'mixed stratum' of largely working class, and possibly students and unemployed black audiences. This means that in actual terms, the circulation of *Fools* and its public discursivity was constrained by the existing conventions of film distribution in South Africa, which dictated that it was not meant for mass consumption within certain boundaries of class, 'race' and education. Its attempt to intervene in public discourses faced the difficulty of falling outside commercial cinematic norms that matched aesthetics to audiences. Such norms suggest that *Fools* unlike a later film *Tsotsi* (2006), could not only occupy suburbia multiplexes, but was either fit for a marginal public dedicated to avant-garde film, or a large inner-city audience.

That *Fools* played for a relatively long time in the inner-city cinemas is attributable to its viewership, which was textually addressed in the film. This is also due to the conventions of distribution established by the cinema chain and as noted above, to the 'artisanal' nature of African cinema. Compounding the problem of the circulation of the film, local or international, is the few prints that *Fools* seemed to have.

*Fools* has been shown intermittently on South African Broadcasting Corporation Television and on the South African pay-tv channel M-net. However, it drew no significant commentary on the question of gender or black identity or both. In 2004, it was screened at Mogale City Film Festival (South Africa) as part of the city's '10 Years of Democracy' celebration.[146] *Fools* formed part of the 2007 Township Bioscope project organised by the Film Resources Unit, and the Gauteng Film Unit. Township Bioscope project is aimed at reviving the culture of film viewing in townships around Gauteng. The Film Resources Unit has since distributed it on video and later on DVD. The English Department of the University of Stellenbosch has included *Fools* in its course outline. The Department used

---

[146]Interestingly, the showing of the film in Mogale City (formerly Krugersdorp) signals a reversal of the cultural history of the city. This is because *De Voortrekkers* (1916), the colonial war film that Dovey hints at in her exploration of *Fools*, premiered in Krugersdorp. It was shown as part of the celebrations of 'the unveiling of the Pardekraal Monument, symbolic of the stand against the British at Paardekraal on 16 December 1880'. (Maingard, *National Cinema*: 18) However, this showing also had intimations of the battle of Blood River (Ncome) on December 16, 1838.

*Fools* alongside Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, and PeterWeir's *Dead Poets Society*, to illustrate the dynamic between technique and meaning.[147]

Briefly, the circulation of *Fools* both locally and internationally signals its ethico-political resonances with commemorations of events that mark the political shifts towards democracy in South Africa. Its exhibition in the Township Bioscope project and the African Catalogue initiative by Ster-Kinekor assign to it, both legitimacy as a text geared for indigenous film culture, and a cinematic template for the regeneration of commercial film in the townships. As the "Focus on South Africa exhibition" shows, *Fools* further served as a window, through which South African political and social conditions were mediated internationally.

In addition to the inevitable commercial drive in the circulation of the film, its presence in some of the events cited above is highly indicative of its standing as text with broad discursive effects such as human rights, and critical mediation of the geo-political entity called South Africa. By omission or commission, the institutional tendency to put *Fools* under a broad umbrella of 'democracy' and 'human rights' efface the film's privileging of black masculinity, gender and gender relations as societal problems. In so doing, the institutions concerned subsume *Fools* under the national agenda of which it is critical. However, discussions of gender and gender relations can be discerned in the film's local publicness.

According to Elliot Makhaya, South African reviewer, *Fools* was 'a controversial look by a filmmaker of the struggle generation at the realities of black South Africa in complex human terms' (*Sowetan* 1998, 15 May). Titled, 'film examines complexity of moral choices', the review highlights the film's critical surfacing of gender relations. It describes the elders' decision to lift Zamani's suspension as 'difficult' because they are 'repulsed and

---

[147] See *Guide to Undergraduate Courses in English* at Stellenbosch University (International Office, Stellenbosch University) <www0.sun.ac.za/international/repository/**Courses**_UG_Eng.pdf> (publication date not provided) (accessed 2004, 8 June).

angry with Zamani's act' (*Sowetan,* 1998, 15 May). The review avers that the decision 'sets off covert tensions between men and women in the community' (*Sowetan,* 1998, 15 May). Thus, Makhanya's discussion focuses on the film's examination of gender relations, and through them surfaces what it argues, is the film's complex engagement of moral choices. The review quotes Shai's intriguing reflection on power relations which also allude to gender relations in the film, 'how often is it that doctors sleep with young girls and people in power take advantage of those in the lower rungs of society?' (*Sowetan,* 1998, 15 May). Shai's question brings to the fore, the film's relevance to the contemporary challenges of gender relations. The review discussed the film in terms that invited recognition of its critical nature. This means that it challenged readers of the *Sowetan* to appreciate the film from critical perspectives that are alert to its complex treatment of gender relations within black communities. This challenge called into being a public that saw in the film a decidedly honest and critical black perspective in film. Interestingly, it uses Shai's reflection to emphasise this point, 'the film is a step forward. It says lets deal with our own situation and not paint false pictures' (*Sowetan,* 1998, 15 May).

The issues around gender are also the subject of a number of commentators, notably O'Brien, Magogodi and Dovey's reflections on the film *Fools*. In the following section, the chapter summarizes these commentators' relation of the film to the novella, that is insofar as the question of gender and gender relations are concerned. This section also extends the commentators' impressions on themes beyond the contrasts between novella and the film. It makes the observation that while their readings show some differences, they share a broad consensus with regard to Suleman's critical engagement and updating of the novella. Their readings are appreciated according to discussions of the film's perspective, sexual violation of Mimi, representation of women, and politics of sexuality.

## From Novella to Film: Echoes and Eclipses

The discussion turns to the question of how the film replicated the novella and registered its own autonomous voice. While some of the changes Suleman made are for filmic

222

purposes, others represent his reflections on the novella itself, and its implications for the post-apartheid challenges. Differences notwithstanding, both works operate within an ethico-politico domain (Dovey 2009: 66-67). They also reflect on the ways in which apartheid violence, though distant and indirectly alluded to in the film, is integrated in the black community. In the film, these occur through the rape of a young girl by her teacher, and ill-treatment of and utter disrespect for women, in short, the reproduction of violence at the level of the gendered body. At the outset, I appreciate the film's difference from the novella, in terms of narrative perspectives.

According to Dovey (2009: 67), in the novella, Zamani is the storyteller, a privileged consciousness through which the plot of the novella unfolds. In the film however, he is 'devocalised'.[148] For Dovey, therefore, this perspective defines the film's primary point of departure and engagement with the novella. Dovey further observes that while the film retains Zamani as its primary focal point, it expands the novella's less developed characters, and introduces new ones. In the film, for example, Zamani has equally corrupt male friends- who revel in the abuse of girl pupils.

**Sexual Violation**

For Magogodi, Suleman 'narrativizes the gendered body by politicizing the rape of Mimi, and therefore summons thoughts on questions of sexuality' (2003: 199).[149] This conclusion is consistent with Suleman's emphasis on rape in the film; in contrast to what he argues is its downplaying in the novella. Addressing himself to the question of heterosexual masculinity in *Fools* (screenplay and complete film), O'Brien contrasted the rape scene in the film, with its depiction in the novella. O'Brien's reflections are part of his book: *Against Normalization*: *Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa* (2001). The book's major focus is on South African literary culture that radically challenges what he argues is the

---

[148] Dovey takes the concept of 'devocalization' from Genette, (*Paratexts*, 290), by which he means roughly the loss of powers of speech, or being rendered mute.
[149] See also Dovey L., *Critique*, 135.

'normalization of culture'. According to O'Brien (2001: 79), a 'normalized culture' panders to the model of Western market democracies, and maintains neo-colonial conditions as opposed to 'a transformative view of a culture of liberation'.

Working with the understanding that *Fools* 'reconstructs conceptions of masculinity and the gendered division of labour', O'Brien (267) contrasted the lovemaking scene between Zani and Ntozakhe, and the rape scene (Zamani and Mimi). (For him, these scenes are illustrative of 'two rival versions of heterosexual masculinity from the point of view of the two male doubles Zani and Zamani' (272). O'Brien (274) argues that in the 1996 screenplay, the scene is similar to its treatment in the novella in that it 'constructs masculinity as confusedly desirous rather than phallocratic'. However, O'Brien (275) finds the filmed scene different from the screenplay in that its representation of the two lovers is comfortable and affectionate, 'the opposite of Zamani and Nosipho's strained relations'. For O'Brien, the scene embodies egalitarian relationship between men and women, by making Zani closer to women than Zamani.[150] Not so the rape scene:

> The gender and sexual politics of rape take a rather abrupt turn in the filmed version, away from the last vestiges of the ideology of rape as a kind of misplaced, self-confounding, male sexual rapture and towards a conception of rape as pure violence, the intense simplicity of blood (2001: 277).

According to O'Brien (277), the rape scene in the novella was characterized by glamour and voyeurism but that in the film, 'it is almost documentary, reticent, knowing'. Equally, Dovey acknowledges the significant expansion of rape and its aftermath in the film. Accordingly, Suleman opted for realistic visualisation of rape as opposed to its surrealistic depiction in the novella because he wanted to 'define rape as a terrible crime', which the novella, he suggests, poorly captured (Dovey 2009: 67). In extension, Dovey notes that while the novella represented the rape in a rationalising disembodied manner, the film represented the rape in an embodied way, 'using the visual and aural potential of the film medium to enourage the viewer to approach the scene with bodily empathy'  (Dovey

---

[150] See also Dovey, *Engendering*, 9.

2009: 76). However, Dovey is also quick to point out that the altering of the chronology of Ndebele's plot by the filmmakers also encourages rational approach to the rape (2009: 76).

While O'Brien and Dovey equally show the film's critical relation to Ndebele's text, Bester read the rape against its historical context. Bester submitted that *Fools* does not adequately deal with the 'brutality of the culture of silence surrounding rape'.[151] In his view, *Fools* 'treats rape with a certain indifference'. He reads in the silence of Mimi, the perpetuation of her violation and argues that she suffers a second violation in the film. In Bester's commentary, the film's relation to 'gendered' violence is manifested in terms of rape and 'the culture of silence' around it. Not only does Bester's observation bear out the film's germaneness to the problem of rape in South Africa, but it also charges *Fools* with the task of treating the problem with more depth. Bester's comments appeared in the journal *NKA*. The journal is published under the auspices of Africana Studies and Research Centre at Cornell University, USA. The journal's objective is to create a discourse for contemporary African art and African Diaspora art, which it regards as an emerging field. It is also framed as an intervention into the marginalization of African art in 'art historical debate'. *NKA*'s engagement of art-works that it considers to be outside the mainstream discourses of art history, locates *Fools* at the margins of public critical attention. Not only does the journal's attention to *Fools* signal its artistic merit, but its potential for the definition of contemporary African art. The attention is further indication of the international bias in the film's publicness.

Bester's reading disaffiliates sexual violation in *Fools* from questions of nationalism and black identity. According to this reading, rape is a terrible crime in and of itself. However, the reading also suggests that rape is linked to actual power relations whose effect is

---

[151]See Bester R, *Fools*, and [online]
Available from: <http://www.africanfilmny.org/network/news/Rbester.html> (accessed 13, March 2007). See also NKA, issue no 9, NKA Publications, Brooklyn: New York, 1998, 20.

manifested in the silence around it. The example of Bester shows that in foregrounding of Mimi's rape, *Fools* did not only draw attention to the problem of gender relations in South Africa, but opened the agency of violated women to critical scrutiny.

## Representations of Women and Politics of Sexuality

The novella makes room for a child, the product of Zamani's rape of Mimi. However, in the film, there is an abortion. In the scene of the abortion, Mimi gets support from her immediate relatives and Nosipho. Writing in Balseiro and Masilela's *To Change Reels*, the book on film culture in South Africa, Magogodi (2003: 195) reads the scene in the light of societal degeneration manifested by the abuse of women. According to Magogodi (195), the abortion demonstrates that the persistence of violence against women leaves no room for 'forces of renewal. On the other hand, Suleman explained the scene of the abortion in terms of a demonstration of the possibility of the resolution of problems, in spite of conflicts among the women. '….we created this scene, and we put our characters into a dilemma to show how women can be in conflict, and when the struggle is over, how they are capable of regrouping and resolving these issues' (Ukadike 2002: 294).[152]

Dovey appreciates the empowerment of women in the film in contrast to their 'schematic' representations in the novella (Dovey 2009: 72). She notes that Mimi who is almost silent in the novella is a secondary voice in the film. For Dovey, this is exemplified by her voice-over as Zani, anxious about her situation recalls her words about the rape (Dovey 2009: 73). For Dovey, the words, captured in a letter that Mimi wrote to Zani highlight Mimi's perspective on the rape which 'prefaces and frames the events that follow' (Dovey 2009: 73). The character of Nosipho also attracts Dovey's eye. She argues that in the film, Nosipho is made a more vocal character and not idealised as she is in the novella. Dovey

---

[152] See also Dovey, *Critique*, 137. Similarly, part of O'Brien's impressions on *Fools* is that it centres women in its narrative. O'Brien notes the film's 'detraction' from what he sees as Ndebele's 'Oedipal narrative'. He picks the example of the women's networking, in a scene played entirely by women in which the focus falls on Mimi rather than Zamani. In addition, O'Brien hails the expansion of Nosipho's role 'as an independent authoritative actor'. See O'Brien, *Radical Democracy*, 278.

provides as an example, the scene in which Nosipho refuses to play the role of a martyred wife, like the woman who washed Jesus' feet and dried them with her own hair. Yet Dovey's example of Nosipho's vocality in the film also appears in the novella with an extended register about what Ndebele argued was 'the self-righteousness' of Jesus. Dovey's bias for vocality as an antithesis of Nosipho empowerment ignores the film's visualization of her silent questioning of her husband.

While Magogodi (2003: 196) commends Suleman for challenging the stereotypical depiction of black women in film, he argues that following the lovemaking scene of Zani and Ntozakhe's characters, only Zani's character is fully developed.[153] According to this argument, Ntozakhe's agency is only confined to her sexuality. Magogodi (2003: 190) advances this argument in spite of his reading that *Fools* questions the 'stereotypical view that black people have untameable libidinal instincts […] or rampant and wild sexuality'. For him, *Fools* 'present scenes of believable sexual encounters' (2003: 190). Magogodi's turn to politics of sexuality is informed by his anxieties about racial politics, which he believes have drawn the attention of much scholarship.[154] Arguing that *Fools* critically addresses itself to the colonial and anti-colonial discourses of black sexuality, he reads the film according to its figuration of black bodies as gendered and as loci of political metaphors.

Magogodi further makes links between the colonial and Christian morality, with the moral schema(s) informing the representations of attitudes to sexuality in the film. Taking his cue from Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Magogodi submits that in the film, Zamani's

---

[153] On the contrary, O'Brien observes that she gets extensive screen-time and is treated as Zani's equal. See O'Brien, *Radical Democracy*, 275. For Barlet, it is the relationship between Zani and Ntozakhe that is not fully developed, see also Barlet O, *Reimagining*, 102.

[154] This is perhaps an auto-critique since Magogodi has also studied the film in light of its representation of black identity. In this work, Magogodi argues that *Fools* transcends homogenizing strategies and instead reveals and incisive study of black or African identities. For him, *Fools* contested the colonial and Apartheid imaginary of black identity, by imagining the black body differently. For this work, see Magogodi K., 2002. Refiguring the Body: Performance of Identity in *Mapantsula* and *Fools, Theatre Research International*, (27), Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 243-258.

behaviour (rape of Mimi, sleeping with a prostitute) and political depravity operate under the moral sign of Christian civility, which eventuates into his punishment of senility. For Magogodi, the violated and violating gendered body in *Fools* serves the leitmotifs of history. He sees in Zamani's frail body and impotence, a sign of 'emasculation'. In the main, it expresses like El Hadji in Sembene's *Xala*, his political cowardice in the face of apartheid (2003: 190).

For Magogodi, the representation of women in the film is ultimately part of gendered metaphors, which are indicative of a tendency in power relations that consign women to the biological realm. In this scenario, Magogodi argues, women are credited with nothing beyond their 'sexual power (lessness)' (sic) or partnership in African nationalism that is defined in masculine terms. Magogodi also finds the strength of matriarchs like MaButhelezi undermined by their marginal roles in the film. He faults Suleman for not inserting a female character at the centre of the narrative (2003: 195).[155] Magogodi concludes that even when women become united, theirs is 'a fragile form of sisterhood'.

Accordingly, Magogodi's turn to politics of sexuality and the body extends the discursive purview of the film by reflecting on its relations to the discourse of nationalism. The observation about the politicization of Mimi's rape and, the focus on the body as a locus of social and political effects are cases in point. In arguing against the consignment of women to the biological realm in the film, a tendency in the nationalist discourse that the film seems to participate in, Magogodi offers a critique of the premises of the film. Thus, Magogodi's engagement implores the reader to consider the film in relation to the political modernist tendencies prevalent in the discourses of most African anti-colonial literature and political activism.

---

[155] Similarly, Maingard finds the centring of the narrative around Zamani limited because it 'keeps the solutions between his remit only and relegate the women to secondary positions' For this argument, see Maingard J., *National Cinema:* 168.

Interestingly, Magogodi's criticism builds on but problematises the film's critique of gender relations. It does this by exposing the dissonances in *Fools*' critical engagement of colonial discourses and their neo-colonial resurgences. Thus, Magogodi highlights the film's reproduction of the 'regressive' tendencies in African nationalist discourses. In so arguing, Magogodi destabilizes the critical groundwork upon which the film is made, and is able to demand of it, a nuanced reflection about the relation of gender, to the anti-colonial and anti-neo-colonial political discourses. Another important argument that Magogodi makes is that films directed by male filmmakers are 'not inherently disabled in progressively reviewing the gendered body'.

In summary, the commentators underscore the film's critical distance from its parent text, the novella. In so doing, they have garnered reflections on a particular site of the film's public life, which also constitute part of its critical legacy. The commentators' contrasting of the novella and the film shows that while there are disagreements pertaining to the representation of women in the film, the general impression is that Suleman critically destabilizes Ndebele's depiction of women. A significant point of consensus regarding Suleman's engagement of gender relations centres on his approach to the rape scene. Here O'Brien, Magogodi and Dovey all agree that the violence of the rape serves the purpose well because it shows its stark brutality- without privileging the perpetrator's point of view.

The adaptation of the novella has transposed to the film, the tenor of critique at the heart of Ndebele's literary and critical works. Both the film and the novella forge challenges to the agency of black people and their representation. They also consider the ethical and political contradictions within township communities without adopting a prescriptive voice about social and political action. Yet, the film critically updates the novella by inserting into the South African debates around gender, a visualization of the excesses of black masculinity. It changes the masculinity of Ndebele's men and makes it the object of judgment by the women in the film. Here, the film does not seem to excite much

229

discussion pertaining to sexuality and black identity. In exception of Magogodi's discussion, the engagements on sexual violence only hint at the brutal nature of patriarchal gender relations and do not explicitly relate this to black identity. It is precisely in its register of a complex and nuanced reality of gender and gender relations, that the film invites a consideration of its propensity to bring into being a public that is alive to its conceptual demands. While *Fools* called into being a public that is defined by a focus on its relation to the novella, other critical engagements of *Fools* considered it outside this schema. These engagements include some of the above-cited commentators. However, gender remained central to these other engagements.

## More Reflections on Gender

O'Brien extends the film's critical usefulness to the question of feminism in the post-apartheid dispensation. Focusing on 'the fiction into film process in the 1997 screenplay of *Fools'*, O'Brien (2001: 267), considers the film 'as an occasion for measuring the progress of feminism in post-apartheid narratives'. O'Brien is especially concerned with the role of feminism in what he calls South Africa's 'emergent radical democracy' (2001: 267). Because of the gender of the Peterson and Suleman team, O'Brien describes *Fools* as a male feminist text. He also alludes to the problems of men who advance feminist work, but maintains that it is not altogether counter-productive. O'Brien (2001: 108-109), likens the male feminism of *Fools* to another male feminist text, the 1984 play *Gangsters* produced by the Black Consciousness playwright Maishe Maponya. Examining *Fools* in relation to the play and other radical texts of the 80's leads O'Brien to attribute significance to the post-apartheid emergence of the film.

> The significance of a feminist influence in *Fools* is that it is - in the tradition of Gibson Kente's 1976 *How Long?* And Thomas Mogotlane's screenwriting and starring role in the 1988 *Mapantsula*, the first black-produced feature film made after apartheid (2001: 267).

O'Brien argues that grassroots democratic art making, from which *Fools* derives its male feminist politics and textuality, ought to constitute the most profound writing of South

African radical democracy in the future. That *Fools* is the only film in O'Brien's study sharply illustrates its 'dialogic affiliation' with the representational modes of literature, and theatre. This contributes to the critical status of *Fools*. Accordingly, *Fools* relayed the feminism of the above texts into film and historically, into the post-apartheid era. O'Brien's take on *Fools* then gestures to its sustaining of the debates on gender, and pioneering of film as a site for a feminist critical attitude towards post-apartheid liberation. The salutary lesson in O'Brien's work is that in not aligning itself to the dominant political post-apartheid nation-building agenda, *Fools* carved a marginal public discursive horizon for itself. This is a horizon of a small but important and robust engagement of social and political relations.

Significant though it may be, the marginality of this horizon suggests that *Fools* largely stimulated an expert public. Though O'Brien makes the point about the film's resonance with ordinary people, the question of how this resonance might translate into a critical appraisal of the question of gender and violence in relation to publics other than expert ones is significant. Film scholar Mamokuena Makhema's work helps broach the question of non-expert publics.

Contra, O'Brien and Magogodi, the method of Mamokuena Makhema's work attempts to broach a public that is well-defined in terms of 'race', gender and age. *Fools* is the subject of Makhema's Masters Research Report submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand in 2005. The report titled *Representation of Women in Fools* is an ethnographical study of black women's interpretation of the film. It attempts 'to reconcile the subject positions of the creators with the narrative experiences of the women they represent' (Makhema 2005: 1). In its exploration of women's responses, the thesis is alert to class and generational differences amongst the women. Makhema's thesis uses the interview method, which she undertook after screening the film for the interviewees. The ages of women interviewed approximate the ages of women represented in the film, which ranged from 20's to 60's (44-5).

Makhema observes that there are significant differences in the women's interpretations of the representation of women in *Fools*. According to Makhema, the generational differences played a major role in the different responses. For example, the younger interviewees expressed reservations about what they read as Nosipho's submissiveness and passivity. On the contrary, the older respondents were angered by her willingness to leave Zamani.

With regard to the character of Ma-Buthelezi, Makhema argues that all the spectators disagree with her behaviour (59, 62-63). She shows that the interviewees or spectators have a problem with ma-Buthelezi's passivity with regard to Mimi's rape, and Zani's injury. Makhema interprets these readings as reflective of the respondents' embedment within a post-apartheid human rights culture, which recognizes the rights of women. Furthermore, the women in the second group see Ma-Buthelezi's religiosity as a factor in her silence (74-75). Accounting for the viewer's negative attitudes against Busi's confrontational temperament, Makhema argues that it shows the dominance of modesty as a marker of behaviour that qualifies one for a higher social class. According to Makhema, this view reflects the influence of patriarchy on the women's way of looking (65).

Makhema observes that her interviewees ultimately question the representation of women in *Fools*. She reads in their views a yearning for 'instrumental change' in their representations. Makhema argues that black women desire representations that reflect political and social changes they are experiencing (79). Therefore, the women's awareness of their rights leads to their impatience with 'dutiful behaviour of women represented in the film' (79). Further, 'representations of women should mirror the South African society [….] 'there should be structural changes resulting in authentic and credible modes of representations of women reclaiming power' (79). On this point, she submits that men make assumptions about women and that the film, which is made by men, is reflective of this tendency.

One is led to argue that Makhema's readings of the differences in women's responses undermine the assumption inherent in her methodology of the neatness of such responses. Further, her argument, reiterated by some of the respondents that male filmmakers are bound to misrepresent women, is inconsistent with the heterogeneity of the responses. However, Makhema's study, based as it is on her interpretation of her interviewees' comments, widens intimations on the film's critical potency by highlighting age, 'race', gender and gender representation as criteria of analysis.

The consideration in Makhema's work, of the meaningfulness of film for black women in South Africa is notable. She suggests that *Fools* falls squarely within the social and political discourse of women's liberation, particularly as it relates to the birth of democracy in South Africa. In itself, this assumption seems to refute O'Brien's concerns with radical democracy in relation to *Fools*. The respondents' relation of the question of gender to women's rights in the new democracy is an important one. This is because they engaged with it in relation to their immediate personal situations. Yet, the relevance of the film to the political and social discourse of women's liberation draws attention to the historical setting of *Fools* and its circulation in the new dispensation.

The feminist discursive drive running through Makhema's work especially with regard to the film's representations and its being directed by male filmmakers is notable. It evinces *Fools*' constitution of the gender debate at the level of access to women's ownership of the means of telling their stories, and the congruence of its representations with the new dispensation. Considering Magogodi's argument to the contrary, it is clear that at the level of politics of production, *Fools* certainly resurfaces a long-standing dispute about gender and representation.

Judging by the preceding analyses, *Fools*, insofar as it is critically engaged as text, has certainly attracted expert attention the most. It would seem that this critical attention is

233

driven and informed by the general acceptance by its publics, that it is a film with a complex critical purchase. This is explained by the noticeable extension of Suleman's framing of *Fools* as a questioning film. However, the comparatively modest critical attention to the film in newspaper reviews, especially regarding the questions of gender, sexuality and black masculinity constitutes a noticeable limit in its public critical potency. On the one level, this signals the fact that the issues it raised are not strictly cut for popular appeal. If the latter is the case, it surfaces the difficulty that *auteurist*black-centred films face in their attempt at opening a cinematic space for critical public engagements. In addition to the latter, the conditions of its circulation did not favour the enhancement of the film's capacity to animate critical engagements.

It is necessary to revisit the general conditions underwriting the film's making and circulation. As noted, *Fools* in contrast to the earlier films, *Come Back, Africa, u'Deliwe*, and *Mapantsula*, had the historical advantage of being made in a democratic period. This allowed the film wide circulation and unrestrained public engagement. However, this advantage was short-circuited by its conditions of distribution, such as limited prints for exhibition in the cinemas, and therefore circulation that was to be realized through the marginal exhibition practices of the Film Resource Unit and ICE Media. If in terms of stimulating engagement, the difficult circulation of *Mapantsula* worked to its advantage, it appears to have worked to the contrary with regards to *Fools*.

The film's timing also plays a role. Coming as it did after 1994, *Fools* can be regarded as a kind of 'killjoy' in the midst of the euphoria of black independence. The spaces of gender debates as described in the beginning of the chapter have not related to the film in anyway. It is notable that the Non-Governmental Organizations dealing with gender inequalities and violence in South Africa or elsewhere did not take up or appropriate *Fools*.

Nor did the film draw the attention of feminist activists and academics in South Africa.[156] This silence, particularly on the part of activists, can be attributed to what appears to be a generic bias to the genres other than film in public engagements of the significant issues such as gender.

On another hand, the lack of deliberation on the film's meaningfulness for feminist activism, or gender organizational agendas seems to stem from the incongruence of its thematic perspective on black masculinity with the tendency in these organizations to think of gender issues as women's issues. At the same time, its visualization of rape in a black community might have contradicted attempts at the discursive reversal of tendencies to stereotype the sexuality of black men. In not relating to gender-oriented organizations, *Fools* is different from *Mapantsula*, which actually galvanized liberal and leftist organizations to engage it. In relation to the local silent rejection of the film by the political establishment, O'Brien's take on *Fools* is telling in its attribution of the film to the radical tendency in the global anti neo-liberal political activism.

## Conclusions

The chapter set out to describe the making and public life of *Fools*, with a focus on the film's relations to public engagements of gender relations. It placed *Fools* firmly within ongoing debates on gender in the progress towards the watershed elections in 1994 and after. The chapter has also foregrounded the filmmaker's attention to gender, and its affiliation to nationalism and what Suleman calls the 'psychological sequels' of history.

That the engagements of *Fools* were largely confined to expert publics highlights its tightly curtailed critical import. Yet, the relative lack of critical engagements outside expert spaces suggests attenuation in the public critical potency of *Fools*. The reasons for these

---

[156] It seems that Makhema is the only feminist academic to focus on *Fools*. In her latest work on South African Cinema (*National Cinema*), Maingard who is a feminist, does not give extensive critical attention to *Fools*.

tendencies can be discerned through appreciation of the film's form, content, timing, and conditions of circulation. Quite importantly, it is in its bold step at launching a new debate about gender and violence in the manner that it did, that *Fools* guided its own publicness, and public critical potency.

In the annals of black-centred films in South Africa, *Fools* is a distinctive text in terms of form and content, in that it foregrounded reflections on gender relations and violence among black people, without recourse to dominant film conventions. Because of this, it occupies a marginal space in South African film culture typified by subtle conflicts with dominant cinematic trends, and in the face of bold depictions of black masculine violence, minimal critical public engagements. This constitutes a paradox for *auteurist*African cinema within a neo-colonial film culture. The more autonomous this cinema is- in terms of form and content, the more demanding its publicness. The effect is that public engagements of blackness become embroiled in the tension between the historical 'othering' of blackness in colonial, apartheid and Hollywood texts; and the filmic depiction of the underbelly of black societies in the neo-colonial moment. Though layered against a critical discourse with significant implications about 'post'-repressive social and political relations among black South Africans, the focus on rape in the black community registers an ambiguity in the cinematic publicness of black-centred films. This ambiguity destabilizes certitudes about blackness in the film's publics. In this scenario, *Fools* carries the burden of serving as a limit case for the public critical potency of black-centred films. Against the legacy of epistemic violence underwriting cinematic constructions of blackness, the publicness of *Fools* is testament to the public critical limits of *auteurist*films. Consequently, their potential for striking a balance between the pleasures of cinema, and its ruthless but considered public reflection is hindered.

## *Chapter 8*

## *YIZO YIZO:* **SOWING DEBATE, REAPING CONTROVERSY**

## Introduction

*Yizo Yizo1*-2 (1999, 2001), the 13 part pluri-awarded television series was flighted on SABC television between 1999 and 2001.[157] It was a multimedia educational project of the Department of Education, with a mandate to stimulate debate about the conditions of education in South African townships (*Yizo Yizo*1 fact sheet cited in Andersson 2004: 2). Therefore, the orchestration of debate was at the very heart of the making of the series. The Department also launched *Yizo Yizo* to influence the views and conduct of particular segmented groups, primarily the black youth, their teachers and parents. As a result, *Yizo Yizo* addresses a range of social, moral, economic and professional problems as well as relations ostensibly at play in township schools. It treats the problem of violence in the townships in an overt and gritty manner, a strategy projected towards drawing attention to educational problems, and stimulating debates on them. The chapter explores critically the making, circulation and public life of *Yizo Yizo1*-2 (1999, 2001), in order to reflect on the significance of orchestration on its publicness, and on the public critical potency of television series. It also examines how the series related to contemporary engagements of blackness.

## Yizo Yizo 1 (Synopsis)

Set in a fictitious township school, Supatsela High, the story charts the progress, demise and resurgence of the school's youth and teachers as they grapple with the violence unleashed by a school drop-out (Chester), their sponsor (Bra Gibb) and school-going friend (Papa Action).[158] The violence includes rape, extortion and emotional harassment. The story follows the imposition of autocratic order under the leadership of its principal, Mr. Mthembu. Mthembu later resigns after beating up a pupil badly. His colleague Ken Mokwena takes over as acting principal. It is under Mokwena's leadership that the school descends into anarchy in the form of drug dealing, vandalism and violent disorder. The

---

[157] *Yizo Yizo* is township slang for 'this is it'. While there was a third sequel in 2004, this chapter will only focus on the first two series for economy of space, *Yizo Yizo 1 and 2* sufficiently serve my purposes.
[158] *Supatsela* is a Sotho-Tswana word which means 'show the way'.

arrival of Grace Letsatsi, a motivated young female teacher turns the school around and for the first time, the parents, the school governing body, and the Student Representative Council work together to bring back order to the school. The hooligans attempt to reclaim the school but they fail as the community takes charge and ensures they are arrested.

## Yizo Yizo 2  (Synopsis)

A Yizo Yizo fact sheet (2002) describes the second series as the story of an ordinary school overcoming extraordinary obstacles. The series begins at the start of the new school year. The main characters are now in matric. The violence that engulfed the school the previous year has been contained. Basic security and order have been established but the problems are not over. This series celebrates the courage and determination of a school community in overcoming obstacles in the way of the provision of good education. They learn that the best resources are not buildings and money, but people. *Yizo Yizo 2* is about ordinary people's struggle to learn, play, change, read, love, dream and find their place in the world (*Yizo Yizo* fact sheet (2002) cited in Andersson 2004: 3).

While it is a television series, *Yizo Yizo* satisfies a key methodological attribute of film, which is the capacity to organize objects and their relations, and to constitute their ontological statuses through cinematic conventions. In addition, cinematic aesthetics significantly underwrite *Yizo Yizo*. The series differs from the preceding films in several respects, which makes the discussion of its making and public life compelling. Firstly, its circulation through television distinguishes *Yizo Yizo* from films that are made for exhibition in the cinema. Due to its distinction as a television production, *Yizo Yizo* forms part of the electronic media, characterised and underwritten by media practices. *Yizo Yizo* differs from the preceding films in another respect; it is a multi-themed engagement of post-apartheid social relations. The drama series treats many themes ranging from sexual, emotional and structural violence as well as sexuality, the brutalisation of black youth and education-related ones such as teacher conduct, corporal punishment and the structural inequalities in the provision of education resulting from apartheid. It also provokes

reflection on black identity from the perspectives of sexuality, a hitherto rare theme in South African black-centred screen media. In terms of addressing the social deviance of black youth, the producers located the series firmly within the tradition of black-centred films such as *Come Back, Africa*, *Mapantsula*, and *Fools* which also addressed *lumpen* elements on the margins of black communities. Lastly, as a product of the partnership between the post-apartheid state and the national broadcaster, both of whom encourage public deliberation in an open and democratic manner, *Yizo Yizo* was made and circulated in a context wholly different from the disavowed public spheres of the 1950s to 1980s.

Unlike the films in the preceding chapters, *Yizo Yizo* was accompanied by an intensive and deliberate orchestration of debate. This raises the question of the kinds of public engagements that such orchestration may stimulate. Precisely because of its objective to encourage debate, *Yizo Yizo* presents a suitable case study for reflecting further on the status of film within the post-apartheid public sphere in general, and on the nuances of the orchestration of debate through television drama series in particular. I understand debate, which the SABC and filmmakers do not explain, as an interactive genre in which protagonists strive to prove the validity of their opinions on particular issues, against those of their adversaries, usually without consensus as an end. Yet, the anticipation of a positive impact on the primary viewers' attitudes around educational problems in the township schools is instructive as to the SABC and filmmakers' understanding of debate. It signals expectations of consensus among the viewers, about how best to resolve the problems the series raises.

Showing on prime time (evening) television, *Yizo Yizo* was primarily projected for reception in the intimate familial space of the home. Yet it had a linked apparatus of materials available outside the home. The series' projection as family viewing and the availability of linked materials is singularly important. This projection is indicative of the producers' objective to make the familial space the centre of the national debates they sought to launch around the issues the series raised. That a significant part of these

239

debates was intended to address familial issues also informs the filmmakers' strategy of targeting the space of the family as a primary site.

Commentators have drawn attention to the importance of *Yizo Yizo* in generating public debates around the issues it raised. They have also hailed, overtly or subtly, the import of these debates for democracy. The relation of *Yizo Yizo* to democracy and democratic citizenship is most manifest in the work of cultural critic and author Clive Barnett. Barnett considers *Yizo Yizo* in the light of the role of public service broadcasting in supporting citizenship (2004: 254). Against the background of contemporary debates around mediated deliberation, media citizenship, and globalization, as well as South Africa's transition to democracy, Barnett argues that *Yizo Yizo*, as a form of popular culture, was an innovative approach to educational broadcasting 'that drew upon multiple, and increasingly globalised cultural literacies of citizens' (2004: 264). The value of its innovation, Barnett demonstrates, lay in the acknowledgement by media policymakers of the 'capacities of ordinary people to participate as active citizens in mediated deliberation over public issues' (Barnett 2004: 254).[159] Barnett observes that through *Yizo Yizo*, the SABC and its partners have contributed to the generation of a participatory culture of discussion and criticism (Barnett 2004: 265). This observation proposes that democracy is a foundational premise of the publicness constituted by *Yizo Yizo*.

On the other hand, film scholar René Smith highlights what she sees as the generic dilemma of *Yizo Yizo*, that is, of the merits and demerits of its combination of the education and entertainment models (edutainment). Focusing on *Yizo Yizo1*, Smith

---

[159] He also sees the series as an instance of Nancy Fraser's concept of 'weak public sphere', and ascribes to it a broad understanding of deliberation that is not 'narrowly cognitive and rational but also affective'. See Barnett C., (2004). Yizo Yizo: Citizenship Commodification and Popular Culture in South Africa. *Media, Culture and Society,* 26 (2) 251-271. Fraser makes a distinction between 'weak' and 'strong publics'. In Fraser's typology, 'strong publics' are effectively sovereign parliaments, their 'discourse encompasses both opinion formation and decision making'. By 'weak publics' she means 'publics whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion-formation and does not also encompass decision making'. See Fraser N., (1990). Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, *Social Text*, 25/26, 109-142, (74-75).

considers the nature of the success of the series, asking whether audience ratings (AR's) determined it, or 'on its ability to educate South African audiences on the conditions of township schooling' (Smith 2001, *Preface*). Smith focuses on what she calls 'representations of *real life'* in the series, and interrogates representations of violence and gender in it. For Smith, *Yizo Yizo*1 represents violent images both to 'reflect reality' and as 'a stylistic device' to accentuate its dramatic nature (Smith 2001: 45). For Smith (2001: 38) however, at the same time as the series represents 'the real', it commodifies violence. According to Smith (2001: 39), the series 'does not address violent actions with the intention of promoting a sense of social responsibility or social democracy, which an educational drama should and can impart'.

Alert to Barnett's observations and Smith's demonstration of the series' generic problematic, this chapter explores the making, circulation and public life of *Yizo Yizo* in order to understand better the status of film in public deliberation. Yet, the chapter differs from Barnett and Smith's approaches to *Yizo Yizo* and conclusions about precisely how it generated critical public engagements. In confining themselves to the close reading of the series and appreciating the democratic ethos underlying its orchestration of debate, Smith and Barnett respectively, did not attempt to grasp the full extent of the public critical status of *Yizo Yizo*.

The chapter looks closely at the ways in which the series attempted intensively to orchestrate debate around educational issues. Drawing on what it argues is the series' destabilization of the ostensible distinction between the 'private' and public spaces of debate, the chapter discusses the implications of this orchestration for the publicness of *Yizo Yizo.* Through a discussion of the public engagements of *Yizo Yizo*, the chapter argues that the series generated relatively little debate in the media, about the issues it intended to raise, such as conditions of township schools and possibilities of effective interventions. Instead, it shows that the dominant discussions in the media around the series were mostly morally driven, and about what television series should or should not do. However,

241

the series also generated discussions around black identity, a theme that fell out of its educational mandate. These outcomes point towards the limits of orchestration in public engagements around television series in particular and film in general, and in the way that such engagements may exceed the orchestration effort, and provide a window on the critical potency of television series and film. They also show the importance of the circulation of secondary texts and the role of media commentators and academics in mediating public engagements. Thus, in order to understand the public critical role of television series, it is not sufficient to look at the apparatus of orchestration and the series' strategies and reception. The fullest extent of its public critical role only becomes clear through the appreciation of its pathways of circulation, and those of its secondary texts. The chapter advances its arguments with the full understanding that media tend to be sensational in their reportage and engagements of issues, and may therefore compromise the substance of the issues at hand. Yet, the tendency to be sensational does not absolve the media from playing an important role in the public sphere.

## Making of *Yizo Yizo*

*Yizo Yizo* is a product of a campaign by the national Department of Education called Culture of Learning and Teaching, Teaching and Service (COLTS). It was part of the Department's strategies of addressing problems besetting township schools. These were identified as low morale and ill discipline among teachers and learners, lack of community support, lack of essential teaching and learning resources, as well as poor leadership. In addressing these problems, the Department and SABC's Education division, commissioned research in schools, the outcomes of which would be used to develop a drama script, leading to an educational television drama.

The series was aimed at a very well-defined audience of high school and out of school youth. Its objective was to encourage a culture of learning, teaching, and service in schools and the creation of awareness about problems in learning and teaching in township schools. It was also charged with the development of positive role models, as well as

242

'modelling a process of restoration in a typical South African school serving urban black South African community' (South African Consulate General, New York, 2007).[160]

The Education Department and SABC Education commissioned an independent film company, *Laduma Film Factory*, (later renamed *The Bomb*) to do the series. Over a three-month period, the research team, including five writers, consulted with students, teachers, and principals in township schools around Johannesburg. To serve the tenets of its *Tirisano* campaign, whose aim was to encourage community involvement in schools and to promote better management of schools, the Department slightly altered *Yizo Yizo2'*s mandate (Andersson 2004: 3). Interestingly, in the wake of complaints that *Yizo Yzio1* was too short to resolve the problems it posed, the length of *Yizo Yizo2* was increased from 30 minutes to one hour.

Three people were key in the production of *Yizo Yizo*, namely Desiree Markgraaff, Angus Gibson, and Teboho Mahlatsi. Markgraaff is a producer and executive director of *The Bomb* productions. Gibson is a former member of Free Filmmakers, an anti-apartheid collective of left-wing filmmakers. Among others, he directed the documentary *Soweto: A History* (1992)*,* commissioned by the Wits University History Workshop. He also directed *Seven Up South Africa* (1992), and *Fourteen Up South Africa* (1998) documentaries, which dealt with young people's experiences of the transition from the apartheid to the post-apartheid period. The serial documentary filmed protagonists when they were seven years old and later when they were 14 year olds.

The youngest of the filmmakers, Teboho Mahlatsi, belongs to the new wave of post-apartheid black directors. Trained at Afrika Cultural Centre in Newtown, Johannesburg, Mahlatsi's educational background includes the fields of film and African literature. Prior

---

[160] See South African Consulate General, New York, 2007, *Report on Education in South Africa*. Available from:
<http://www/southafrica-newyork.net/consulate/education.htm> [Accessed 2 February 2007]

to *Yizo Yizo*, he directed a short film, *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning* (1999), an award winning short film (Silver Lion, Venice Film Festival 1999, M-Net All-African Film Awards 2000) about a young township killer seeking redemption. He facilitated part of a documentary series for SABC television called *Ghetto Diaries* (1996), in which non-filmmakers in some South African townships were encouraged to film their own stories. Filmmaker, Barry Berk was a guest director on *Yizo Yizo*. *Gazlam* (2002) and *Zero Tolerance* (2002), both SABC television series are among the works Berk wrote and directed. Angus Gibson and Teboho Mahlatsi directed the first series, while Mahlatsi and Barry Berk directed the sequel.

## Orchestration of Debate

The circulation of *Yizo Yizo* on primetime television constitutes the primary site through which the filmmakers, the Department of Education and the SABC sought to orchestrate debate on the issues the series raised. *Yizo Yizo1* and *2* were circulated on SABC television's youth-oriented SABC 1, between 3 February 1999 and March 2001. This circulation guaranteed the series a large national reach. *Yizo Yizo* was shown on primetime television once every week. Thus, its circulation was marked by a punctual temporal rhythm. The effect of this tendency in the circulation of *Yizo Yizo* lay in adapting a primarily familial time and space to a space and time of the reflexive circulation of discourse- that is of a public. Warner (2002: 95), alerts us to the fact that punctuality cultivates an ongoing discursive relation at every scheduled broadcast of televisual series.

The punctuality and also spatiality (typically though not exclusively the familial home) of its circulation, meant that *Yizo Yizo*'s publicness was primarily based on destabilizing the 'private-ness' of familial gatherings. This was meant to occur through representations that were by any measure, not in keeping with the familial premises of primetime television. Once destabilized, these hitherto 'private' gatherings would form distinct publics organized by the discursive space of the series, that is, of the issues that were meant to be of immediate significance to parents, children and teachers. The familial home is made all

244

the more important by the fact that, 'most viewers watched *Yizo Yizo* at home, and often in family groups' (Gultig 2002: 6, 75).[161] However, even those public spaces outside the familial space in which *Yizo Yizo* was viewed were destabilized. This destabilization was constituted by the series' address which was alien to the conventional norms of primetime television and thus, a variation in publics was called into being.

It would seem however, that the impetus of punctuality was not a sufficient condition for conjuring up publics hence the need for the filmmakers' creativity with regard to genre. As a result, *Yizo Yizo* interlaced its punctuality with cross-generic strategies which are atypical of primetime television. Of these, the combination of its educational format with overt depiction of criminal and sexual encounters and use of vulgar language stand out. These strategies transgressed primetime televisual conventions, which are based on moral protection of children from nudity, explicit sexual content and gross violence. The filmmakers adopted these strategies because they believed that their young audiences were sophisticated in terms of being visually literate and did not wish to patronize them (Gibson 2002 cited in Andersson 2004: 48). Therefore, the filmmakers' compulsion to realism was based on their projection of their audiences: 'I felt that any kind of whitewash or creation of wish fulfilment, rather than a real world would create a distance between the producers and the audience. To reach the audience we had to get the world absolutely right' (Gibson 2002 cited in Andersson 2004: 48). The transgression suggests that through *Yizo Yizo*, the filmmakers' attempts to cause debate or orchestration were predicated on shock tactics calculated to grab the attention of parents and children. Thus, the intersection of primetime circulation, with cross-generic aesthetics atypical of it, and adaptation of familial time underwrote the filmmakers' orchestration of deliberation.

In addition to the circulation and generic choices of *Yizo Yizo*, the filmmakers', the Department of Education and the SABC deployed an extensive multimedia strategy. This included the distribution of a full-colour *Yizo Yizo* magazine, release of a soundtrack

---

[161] All references to Gultig are in the present author's personal copy of his Research Report.

Compact Disc, supplements in the press on the educational issues raised by the series, as well as radio talk shows (*Metro FM*) the day after each week's episode (Barnett 2004: 260).[162] Supplementary television programmes preceded the showing of *Yizo Yizo1* on SABC. The first film was a documentary in which two schools were compared. One was incompetent and the other was organized and representative of the ethic of the culture of learning (Smith 2001: 11). The second programme was a trailer of *Yizo Yizo1*.

> During the making of *Yizo Yizo1* and *Yizo Yizo2*, half a million youth booklets (described as magazines in The Bomb's document 6/3/4) were distributed throughout the country. The magazine is built around the characters and stories of the television series and is aimed at encouraging youth to read [presumably youth who watched and loved *Yizo Yizo* would be encouraged to read print media dealing with the same topic] (Andersson 2004: 312).[163]

Given the nature of the media through which the extra-materials were organized, this strategy was not geared to a mere inculcation of messages, and popularization of the series. The radio-talks shows as well as the formats of the press supplements, which posed questions for the youth, meant that the producers took advantage of the interactive options that a multi-media strategy availed. The interrogation and resolution of issues was meant to be realized through these interactions:

> One of the reasons for the importance of developing this multi-media strategy in support of educational broadcasting is that patterns of media consumption in South Africa are not uniformly based in the home. Radio talk shows, magazines, and newspapers have been identified as important mediums through which a broad and dispersed public 'conversation' around topics aired on television can be stimulated and maintained (Barnett 2004: 257).

This strategy was also in keeping with the SABC's adoption in 1998 of a strategic plan called *school educational broadcasting services*. Authored by the South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE) on behalf of the SABC, this plan refers to 'the full range of broadcast and non-broadcast media services that might support educational objectives

---

[162] *Metro FM* is SABC's youth-oriented commercial radio station.
[163] The square brackets appear in the original quote.

regardless of when and where they are offered and accessed' (Barnett 2004: 256-7). The plan was informed by the need 'to move away from overtly pedagogical programming formats to allow for more active learning and learner-centred approaches' (Barnett 2004: 257). The multi-media strategy points towards the filmmakers' employment of paratextual devices.

The projection of debate across the printerly, aural and televisual paratexts invited a dialogue-driven publicness with the objective of enriching the viewers' critical engagements of the series. Thus, the paratextual regime of *Yizo Yizo* sought to broaden the perspectives through which the series could be deliberated on. However, the generous use of paratexts also suggests the filmmakers' strategy to offset possible 'mis-readings' and to lessen the impact of *Yizo Yizo*'s generic transgressions of its educative objective. To the extent that the series was charged with the objective to educate, its orchestration of public debate was limited to educational issues. It is precisely because of the mediation resulting from the media that Barnett views its strategies in terms of the generation of a public sphere based on mediated deliberation (Barnett 2004: 262). In this public sphere, various forms of mass media are used 'to distribute symbolic resources with the intention of generating innumerable, dispersed dialogues about issues of broad public concern' (Barnett 2004: 262).

Over and above the paratextual regime and the series itself, *Yizo Yizo*'s emphasis on audience research formed part of its orchestration of deliberation. The pre-production stages of each series were characterized by audience research in which the question of how the series should proceed was highlighted. While the research constitutes mediation effected through its questionnaire-style methodology, it is nonetheless a form of orchestration. This is because the research considered these opinions with the objective of animating an ongoing interaction between producers and viewers. The opinions were ultimately built into subsequent series.

Andersson provides a useful entry into the phenomenon of the interaction between producers and viewers of *Yizo Yizo.* Through a triangular approach, in which producers' understandings of their work, textual analysis of *Yizo Yizo* and 'readings' of audience responses to the series, are carried out, Andersson attempts a nuanced and extra-textual understanding of the production of meaning in *Yizo Yizo*, and its relation to apartheid and post-apartheid memory. The producers, actors and audiences add to what Andersson calls a 'producerly' text (Andersson 2004: 6). Thus, in their reading of the texts, Andersson's audiences become producers, and through taking into account the audiences' likes and dislikes, producers become recipients (Andersson 2004: 11). The interaction reverses the traditional model of television series in which texts are simply projected to imagined audiences and not to real people. Thus, it widens the deliberative space and adds an air of authenticity to the series itself, one that takes into account, the real issues on the ground. We thus have an account of how the filmmakers, SABC and the Department of Education sought to prompt public debate through *Yizo Yizo*, its paratextual regime and research processes. In considering the import of this orchestration, I now turn to the public life of the series.

### Take-Up

*Yizo Yizo* was celebrated both locally and internationally. The various ways in which it was acknowledged, particularly its acceptance by many international festivals as a film in the cinematic sense, indicates its transgression of a strictly educational television drama genre.[164] The amalgamation in *Yizo Yizo* of soap opera and cinematic elements within a

---

[164] *Yizo Yizo* forms part of the African Films and Video collection at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Locally the libraries of the universities of the Witwatersrand, Cape Town and South Africa, also keep copies for student and staff engagement. *Memorable TV*, a website that archives what it regards as the most memorable television classics, has archived it. See *World Television Classics: Mission Eureka to Yizo Yizo*, http://www.memorabletv.com/worldtwo.htm [Accessed 12 April 2006]. Other places where it was shown include the Australian SBS (Special Broadcast Services) Television in early 2002 and again in March and April 2004. However, it occupied the late night slots. *Yizo Yizo1 and 2* were invited to the Flanders International Film Festival-Ghent, in Belgium in October 2002, and the New York African Film Festival in the same year. *Yizo Yizo2* was invited to the International Film Festival, Rotterdam in 2002. The second series was also shown at a film festival in Basel, Switzerland in August and September of 2004. In September 2002,

plot that is both educative and highly dramatic, explain the numerous awards it has received both locally and across the globe.[165] For his directing work, the ANC Youth League honoured Mahlatsi, and President Thabo Mbeki awarded him the Tribute Entertainment Achiever Award. In addition, the Sundance Film Festival's organisers selected Mahlatsi for participation in the Festivals' 2003 Screen Writer's Lab workshop. While *Yizo Yizo*'s composition may already be hybridised, the various ways in which it was taken up disturbs the rigidity with which televisual and cinematic genres are normally identified.

Contrary to its celebration all over the world and in South Africa, *Yizo Yizo* also proved to be highly contested locally. Not long after *Yizo Yizo1* appeared on SABC television, it was caught up in controversy as the local press published complaints and commentaries on its gritty violence, graphic sex and uncouth language. In the press, the engagement of *Yizo Yizo1* and *2* was chiefly defined by a division between those who opposed and those who welcomed its unrestrained approaches in representing scenes of violence, sex and its use of foul language on prime time television. I will begin by summarizing the arguments of commentators who found the series to be in bad taste or worse, noting their discomfort with its 'bare-all' approach.

The ANC Women's League called for its banning, echoing widespread public discomfort with *Yizo Yizo*. In an unprecedented move, the then ANC member of Parliament Lulu Xingwana also used a Parliamentary session to call for its banning (*The Star* 2001, March 15).[166] A Film and Publications Board presentation before the Parliamentary Portfolio

---

some episodes of *Yizo Yizo* (episodes 1 to 4) were shown in Benin as part of the International Cooperation and Peace event.

[165] Some of the awards for *Yizo Yizo1* include the 1999 Japan International Prize for Educational TV (Hosa Bunker Foundation as well as the Governor of Tokyo Prize) and the 1999 19th Annual AVANTI Awards (Africa) for best drama series, best director, best actress, best supporting actor, and best supporting actress. *Yizo Yizo2* won among others, the Cinema Tout Ecran Award (Switzerland) for best international television series, the Governor of Tokyo Prize at the 28th Japan NHK Awards 2002, Duku Duku Awards for best Television Programme and 2002 RITV Award for Episode 5.

[166] Mike Siluma of the *Sowetan* patently suggested censorship, and branded as 'naïve in the extreme' opposition to any kind of censorship. The *Sowetan* (March 15, 2001) reported that it was inundated with calls from 'disgusted and disgraced' viewers who wanted the series banned, censored or moved from the

Committee of Home Affairs, on the classification of *Yizo Yizo* followed her challenge.[167] Xingwana repeated the calls for *Yizo Yizo*'s banning on the *Tim Modise* show, the SABC radio news and current affairs radio channel- a session of which was especially dedicated to *Yizo Yizo* (SAFM 2001, 19 March). Mahlatsi also took part in the debate. The focus on *Yizo Yizo* in the programme signals its national currency. This currency stemmed from the attention it drew from Parliament and a variety of public fora.

Other commentators expressed frustration about the generic make up of *Yizo Yizo*. On the *Tim Modise Show* debate for example, journalist Nomavenda Mathiyane suggested that the stylistics and strategies of representations in *Yizo Yizo* made its genre imprecise. She could not understand 'whether it was a documentary or a movie'. The issue of its genre also had a bearing on its educative potential. Mathiyane, for instance, found problematic the dilatory tendency of the drama in arriving at the resolution of the problems it raised, which in her view, made room for the glamorization of criminality.[168] The point of glamorization of criminality echoed *City Press* 'Women's Corner' columnist Mmabatho Ramagoshi's anxieties over the series' possible production of criminal copycats (*City Press*, 2001, 25 March).[169]

---

prime time to a late night slot. The arguments over its withdrawal were also raised on SABC television. See Yizo Yizo Speak Out Debate, 2000. Television program, SABC2, Johannesburg, 20 March.

[167] For the full minutes of the discussion, see Home Affairs Portfolio Committee, 2001. *Film and Publications Board on Classification of 'Yizo Yizo'.* 28 March. Available from:
http://www.queensu.ca/samp/migdocs/Documents/Minutes/280301.htm [accessed 15 April 2008].

[168] One Clifford Mlati expressed a similar view. He also suggested that there should not have been a break between *Yizo Yizo1* and *Yizo Yizo2*. See Mlati's views in Thembisile Makgalemele's article: Gangs Derail Education, *Saturday Star*, March 2001. Consider also Andersson's uneasiness about the gap between the violence undertaken by Papa Action and Chester in *Yizo Yizo1*, and the closure in *Yizo Yizo2*. She writes that 'it is questionable that even a regular viewer would find closure between actions, consequences, and repentance scenes', Andersson F.B., 2004. *Intertextuality and Memory in Yizo Yizo.* Thesis (Ph.D.). University of the Witwatersrand, 218.

[169] Incidentally, reports of copycat behavior by some youth appeared in the press. The *Sunday Times'* Sibusiso Bhubezi noted the violent incidents at two Gauteng schools. The incidents were apparently similar to those in *Yizo Yizo*. (21, February 1999) See also a report by McKeed Kotlolo of a gang rape incident in Lesley Township near Secunda. The delinquent group called itself *Yizo Yizo*, see *Sowetan*, 1999. 27 April. For reports on other incidents, see Siluma M., 1999. *Sowetan* 23 April, and Andersson, *Memory*, 293.

The use of foul language in *Yizo Yizo* inspired engagements of aesthetics and black identity. *Sowetan* columnist, Mike Siluma, asked whether the use of foul language meant that television could get through to the black community only by using sensation and foul language (*Sowetan*, 1999, 23 April). Siluma suggested that if the drama was targeted at 'the white community', it would not have continued. Critic and columnist for the *Sunday Independent* Xolela Mangcu's take on *Yizo Yizo* also drew attention to its representation of black identity (*Sunday Independent*, 2001, 8 April).

He anchored his discussion on social pathology as an organizing motif in the series' representations of black identity, which he viewed as a continuation of the portrayal of black identity in colonial and other literature and texts. He also portrayed the directorial vision of *Yizo Yizo* as analogous to that of Quentin Tarantino, the United States-based filmmaker. Against Tarantino's penchant for making violent films, Mangcu impatiently asked, 'when are we going to have our own Stephen Spielberg'? Mangcu hoped for a directorial vision which would portray 'the rich tapestry of our cultural history', of which he intimated the US director, Spielberg, was an example.

In the *Tim Modise Show*, JJ from Pietersburg argued that *Yizo Yizo* was not educational at all and that it was racist. In his view, the absence of Indians and whites in the prison scene contradicted the discourse of non-racialism in South Africa and indicated that jails were filled with black people, which according to him was not factual. Xingwana also foregrounded the argument that *Yizo Yizo* was racist because 'it implied that African children were murderers'. JJ and Xingwana's arguments surface concerns over visual representations of black identity. They reiterate Siluma and Mangcu's arguments against the use of foul language and the televisual focus on social pathologies among black people respectively.

Another wave of public commentaries on the series focused on Episode 4 of *Yizo Yizo* 2, especially the prison sodomy scene. In the scene, an older prisoner coerces a newly

251

arrived prisoner, Chester, into homosexual sex. Author and journalist, Fred Khumalo dedicated the *Feature* column of the weekly *City Press* to the episode. He itemized the sodomy scene and three others in the episode, which he found overwhelming and distasteful in their depiction of violence and sex: the murder of a prisoner, the explicit sex between a teenager (Thiza) and a woman, as well as the suicide attempt by Hazel.[170]

So far, the arguments against *Yizo Yizo* demonstrate widely shared anxieties about the putative conditions in which the series was viewed, that is its showing on primetime television and primarily in a familial space. The arguments are also about the series' approaches. These engagements are an indication of the social proximity of the series to its projected publics. Largely, black South Africans commented or deliberated in the press, electronic media and in Parliament. Moreover, the anxieties expressed were more indicative of the implications of the series' representations of violence and vulgarity for public understandings of black life, than they were about the series' constructions of educational issues. Implicitly therefore, blackness was an overriding concern in the engagements of the series. Because its aesthetic choices were based on realist, often overtly violent interpretations of social and educational problems, *Yizo Yizo* made possible a publicness that was defined in significantly binary terms. Protagonists either agreed or disagreed on the appropriateness of using television to address educational problems in the manner that the series did. That these engagements mostly played out in the media also suggests that the media extensively constructed the debates around the series in a controversial light.

A notable anxiety about the circulation of *Yizo Yizo* relates to the question of black identity. The argument by Saint Molakeng that *Yizo Yizo* was predicated on the assumption that only through foul language and the focus on social pathologies among blacks, was the attention of black viewers secured, is a good example in this regard. However, the fact that the attention to the series' representations, and to black identity fell outside the

---

[170] See also the *Sowetan*, 2001. Letters section, 22 March.

educative remit of *Yizo Yizo,* means that public engagements of *Yizo Yizo* exceeded its orchestration of deliberation.

The arguments against the series by concerned Parliamentarians, politicians, commentators and viewers found its antithesis in the comments that highlighted the importance of the series and that supported its continued broadcasting. In the *Tim Modise Show*, Mathiyane opposed the call for banning or censorship in the light of South Africa's recent history of censorship. Support for this view was overwhelming as many press reports showed.[171] For instance, journalist Nontsikelelo Moya felt that the violence represented in *Yizo Yizo* was reflective of the reality of life in the townships and for that reason justified the showing of *Yizo Yizo* (*The Star*, 1999, 9 March).[172] Moya argued that *Yizo Yizo* was not a catalyst of youth fascination with gangsterism.[173] He concluded, 'those who think *Yizo Yizo* pushes an anarchist agenda must be as ignorant as those who say they did not know about apartheid at its peak'.[174] *Sowetan*'s Saint Molakeng criticized views against the showing of the prison sodomy scene, in *Yizo Yizo2* (2001, 23 March). Molakeng interpreted the condemnation of the scene as reflective of some of the irate viewers' 'spurious' claims to morality.

The circulation of the controversy around *Yizo Yizo* is instructive. Whatever the focus of the individual newspapers, or talk shows, the concerns and arguments went across various media and consequently created a wide space for 'dialogue'. Even then, the debates took

---

[171]According to the *Sunday Independent* and Plus 94 Harris Poll (an international opinion polls company) research, the majority of *Yizo Yizo* viewers supported its graphic scenes of sexual abuse or violence. See *Sunday Independent*, 2001. 25 March.

[172]Manale, National Media Secretary of the ANC also warned against cancelling the series and suggested that instead, readers should consider 'ways through which the issues addressed by the series' become everyone's business', *Sowetan Sunday World* 2001. 25 March.

[173] For similar arguments, see Glued to the Screen 1999. *Sowetan*, 24 February, also Artistic Yizo Yizo is a Winner, 2001. 28 March, and Face up To the Ugly Truth, *Sowetan* 2001. 22 March. Freedom of Expression Institute's Education Programmes officer Ms. Mamasobathe Noko contended that the prison rape scene was not exaggerated and that rape was a reality in prison. For this observation, see *Sowetan*, 2001. 15 March. Wits University academic Dr. Clive Glaser argued that *Yizo Yizo*, as part of the media, partly shaped the 'style' of youth and did not make them violent, and that reasons for youth violence could be found elsewhere. See his letter in *Sowetan*, 1999. 13 May.

[174] For this line of thinking, see also Saint Molakeng, *Sowetan* 2001. 23 March.

place across various genres such as columns, articles and featured articles, and letters to the editor. This generic spread signals the inclusiveness of the 'dialogue'. Professionals, politicians, and ordinary people who were non-experts in screen media engaged in 'dialogue' with experts such as Teboho Mahlatsi.

The sites in which public engagements of *Yizo Yizo* were mobilized were varied. The interaction between Parliamentarians, professionals, television viewers, radio listeners and newspaper readers, registers a publicness that collapses the boundaries of official (Parliament) and unofficial spaces of engagement (media). The *Sowetan*, *Sowetan Sunday World* and *City Press*, are mostly targeted at lower to middle- income black South Africans while the *Sunday Independent*, and the *Star* largely targeted the affluent and highly educated readership. The English language *Tim Modise Show* was also co-extensive with the profiles of the *Sunday Independent* and the *Star*. The commentators were themselves diverse: Mangcu was a critical commentator in the popular press. Khumalo, Ramagoshi, Mathiyane, Siluma and Modise were all media commentators. A further category comprised of the many people who wrote letters to the *Sowetan*, the *Star* and the *Sowetan Sunday World*, callers to radio shows and television viewers. Academic commentators also complemented the public of *Yizo Yizo*. Though largely black, the publicness of *Yizo Yizo* is intergenerational, interclass and it avails a variety of views for debate and deliberation.

Through its manner of representations, and the strategies of causing debate around it such as talk shows, the series opened a platform for commentary on the limits of televisual representations. Yet, this also demonstrates the unstable status of filmic images in public debates. In addition to orchestration, this instability stems from the role of media commentators. Through their mediation of opinions around *Yizo Yizo*, media commentators played a crucial role in 'shaping' the nature of debate around the series.

The controversy around *Yizo Yizo* cannot be divorced from the series' bold transgressions of the family oriented content of primetime television. This controversy shows that *Yizo Yizo* drew attention to itself, over and above its attempt to transform primetime television into a space of public debate on educational issues. At least insofar as the media is concerned, the success of *Yizo Yizo* in stimulating public engagements was significantly defined by moral anxieties over what is supposed to be represented on primetime television, and on representations of real life. Therefore, the anxieties are constitutive of a publicness that was considerably defined in ways other than those intended by the orchestration. Instead, it is a publicness attuned to the question of the legitimacy of televisual representations, particularly representations of blackness. It points towards the limits of orchestration in determining the public discursive space, as well as the role of media commentators in the mediation of the debates about *Yizo Yizo*.

Understanding the publicness of *Yizo Yizo* must also take into cognizance the dynamics of debates in the familial spaces of viewership. The methodological challenge of accessing familial spaces means that such an analysis can only be undertaken with difficulty. However, the SABC-commissioned evaluative reports are helpful in this regard. The findings in the reports were that viewing of the series, especially *Yizo Yizo 2*, occurred in harmonious familial settings, in which parents seldom prohibited children from watching (Gultig 2002: 6-7). Locating his observations within what he calls, 'international research' trends, media researcher, John Gultig, observes that this signalled 'the possibilities of conversation- and an increase in the "horizontal diffusion" of messages' (Gultig 2002: 7). According to the CASE (Community Agency for Social Enquiry) and SAIDE report:

> both series generated high levels of discussion amongst the learners. Almost all (90%) of the learners surveyed claimed to have discussed issues arising from *Yizo Yizo 2* with their friends. The levels of discussion are even higher among regular viewers (CASE and SAIDE Research Report 2002: 92).

255

Therefore, while there was dialogue among learners, intergenerational dialogue did not reach the level that the SABC and the filmmakers anticipated. For example, 'communication between parents and children on issues related to sex is lacking' (CASE and SAIDE Research Report: 2002: 261). Gultig also argued that, 'there is little evidence from the evaluations that *Yizo Yizo* had improved dialogue or even the possibilities of dialogue, between learners and teachers, or schools and communities' (Gultig 2002: 9). Importantly, the research reports are indicative of spaces other than the media, where debate about the issues the series raised took place. Even as the reports point to the limits of the debates, the controversy of the series, especially among adults, constituted a significant part of the series' publicness in the media.

## *Commentary on Commentaries*

The deliberative focus on the series was widened to journalistic interventions in which public furore over *Yizo Yizo* was given another spin. In her analysis of responses to the sodomy scene in *Yizo Yizo2*, journalist Shado Mbatha, draws attention to the silence of commentators on what she considers to be violent scenes in the series (*Sunday Independent*, 2001, 18 March). She regards as problematic the lack of acknowledgement by viewers of the murder of a prisoner in episode four of *Yizo Yizo2*, and of the rapes of Hazel and Dudu. Mbatha argues that South Africans did not demand an inquiry into prison deaths and only found heterosexual sex between the youths problematic when graphically presented and not 'because of its societal consequences'. According to Mbatha, the scene of sex between two prisoners does not show coercion, humiliation, brutality and resistance, all defining features of a rape. Mbatha states that the outrage against the sodomy scene suggests that South Africans are homophobic 'despite our constitution' (*Sunday Independent* 2001, 18 March). Mbatha's observations mark a shift from the largely morally driven controversy typifying the publicness of *Yizo Yizo*.

In a riposte to Mbatha, Xolela Mangcu proposed that the prison scene was homophobic in nature. For him the scene is designed to play to a 'homophobic gallery' and it 'cynically

exploited homosexuality as a cultural weapon in the battle against crime'.[175] Further, in a terse analysis of the debates around *Yizo Yizo*, Mangcu articulates his frustration at the apparent progressivism of commentaries around *Yizo Yizo* while they were actually 'voyeuristic'. By this, Mangcu seems to mean that the commentaries actually focused on representations of sexuality in the series, and gave impetus to the sexual stereotype of black people (*Sunday Independent,* 2001, 8 April). Such tendencies, Mangcu argues, are resistant to a critical appreciation of *Yizo Yizo*. In his view, *Yizo Yizo* is equally implicated in that it continues the legacy of making 'the black community the target of the voyeuristic gaze', which represents 'the black body as a symbol of sexual virility'. Despite arguments among others, by Smith, that *Yizo Yizo* is not only about pathology Mangcu argues that pathology is a dominant motif in the series. In his view, the absence of programmes that focus on the pathologies of the white community reflect badly on South African television culture.

The dialogue between Mbatha and Mangcu takes me to another level, the assumptions underlying representations and public interpretations of violence and homosexuality. While this dialogue was coterminous with the arguments over the series' propriety, they were largely meta-critical in scope, offering a critique of the criticism, assumptions and elisions of critical public engagements of *Yizo Yizo*. These criticisms fall outside the moral codes underwriting the controversy around *Yizo Yizo*. They were also hardly in accord with the deliberative mandate of the Department of Education, the SABC and the filmmakers. Mangcu and Mbatha's observations were not the only ones in circulation. Graeme Simpson, executive director of the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Johannesburg also took a swipe at the debates around *Yizo Yizo,* particularly at the televised *Yizo Yizo Speakout* debate (2001, 20 March). He felt that the debate revolved around 'insignificant issues' such as whether the show reflected reality or not, and

---

[175]Eric Myeni, author and media personality, also thought the scene was homophobic because the director did not consider its impact on 'someone who enjoyed being sodomised' and that it assumed that the entire society was heterosexual (Tim Modise Show, 2001. *SAFM*, Radio program, 19 March).

secondly, whether it should be taken off air or not (*Sunday Independent*, 2001, 1 April). In Simpson's view, the real issues should have been about the success or the lack of it, in the drama's potential or intended educational impact, and ways of measuring it. Simpson's commentary points to the discrepancy in the public engagements of the series, between the media and other spaces. It is indicative of the remoteness of the media from the objectives underwriting the series.

The above comments constitute a particular tendency in *Yizo Yizo*'s publicness which is the inclination to analyze public reactions to the series, and the assumptions behind them. For example, the concern with the public perceptions of black sexuality underwrites Mangcu's critical commentary. This tendency also focuses on the assumptions driving government institutions, the public broadcaster, and the filmmakers' choices. Collectively, these analyses demonstrate the widening of *Yizo Yizo*'s publicness beyond the intended focus on youths, parents and teachers. The tendency to make observations about commentaries in the media is subtly at play in the many arguments over *Yizo Yizo*'s appropriateness for showing sex and violence. However, in this instance, the tendency to critique overrides the simple moral impulse behind the media controversy over *Yizo Yizo*.

Both the concerns about the representation of black South Africans and the critics' focus on the debate around *Yizo Yizo* exceed the intent behind the orchestration. In raising new concerns, these debates show that the controversy, and not orchestration, had a cumulative effect well beyond the educational mandate of the series. Therefore, the predication of the active orchestration of debate on the circulation of the series on primetime television, and extra materials, ceases to be the only foundation upon which public engagements on *Yizo Yizo* are built. It gives way to unexpected debates of issues other than the ones intended by the series' orchestration.

The exchanges between producers, writers and commentators also define the publicness of *Yizo Yizo*. In these debates, Mahlatsi and other officials clarified the objective of the

258

series - but also took into consideration certain criticisms. In the wake of the controversy about *Yizo Yizo1* for example, Mahlatsi acknowledged the criticism levelled at the lack of urgency to resolving problems in the first series, and argued that it was precisely because of it, that the second series presented criminals in a harsher light. However, Mahlatsi countered suggestions for subtle approaches in the drama. For him, the creative vision behind *Yizo Yizo* eschews ambiguity and instead embraces a more direct approach. According to Mahlatsi, conveying the messages of the drama and discouraging misinterpretation informed the strategy behind *Yizo Yizo*.

Yet, the consideration of criticisms to the point of changing certain approaches of the series is significant. It shows that the publicness of *Yizo Yizo* was defined by an ongoing pattern of engagement that empowered its viewers and public. Thus, the ethos of mediated debate also informed the mediating object itself. It must be borne in mind however, that Mahlatsi stressed the changing representations of criminals and not of the entire approach of the series.

## Conclusions

The circulation of *Yizo Yizo* on primetime public television was followed by extensive public debates across the press, electronic media and even parliament. These engagements took on a multi-generic form ranging from letters to the editor, talk shows, and newspaper columns. They evince levels of interaction between protagonists in which comments made prompted responses, thereby bringing into being a national 'dialogue' around the series. Even newspaper columns that were normally 'reserved' for discussions of national politics became spaces for public engagement of *Yizo Yizo*. Interestingly, the press also included significant commentary by black non-professional callers to radio, television viewers and newspaper readers, an unprecedented tendency in the history of South African public service broadcasting. The public life of *Yizo Yizo* registers the conditions of the post-apartheid public sphere, in a manner that illuminates its valorisation of active debate through popular cultural forms.

However, the nature of television series as a cultural form in the public sphere was questioned. *Yizo Yizo* became a site and object of public engagements which were indicative of the dilemma of the capacity of television series and by allusion, of film to represent as closely as possible, the world inhabited by its projected publics. Its circulation on prime time television, in spite of its generic choices, threw into sharp relief the legitimacy of screen-based media (television and film) as platforms for debate and deliberation. However, the media also made possible the destabilization of the educative objective of the series. They focused on the conflict about the suitability of the series in addressing educational problems in the manner that it did, and consequently constructed the debates in a controversial light.

Commentators infrequently focused on the matter of black identity in the discussions around *Yizo Yizo*. This may appear to indicate that as an issue of discourse, black identity did not have the urgency that it used to have prior to the advent of the new dispensation. Yet, implicitly the controversy around the series shows that the anxieties with representations of black images remained strong. Thus, the circulation of discourse around *Yizo Yizo* exceeded the aims of the SABC, the Department of Education and the filmmakers. This indicates that the tendency to debate in the public life of the series was not tied to the control of the institutions and of the filmmakers. It was also the result of interventions by academics and media commentators. By privileging the anti-social aspects amongst the black youth as the window through which to draw attention to the perceived educational and social shortcomings in township schools, *Yizo Yizo* unwittingly stimulated the public deliberations on blackness and aesthetics. Whatever the specific focus of television series and films, the manner in which they represent black social experiences remains a decisive arbiter of public engagements of blackness. These deliberations mark post-apartheid black-centred television and film as terrains of discursive struggles over blackness, notwithstanding the social and political gains against colonial and apartheid discourses on blackness.

In conclusion, the attention to the public life of the series shows that the understanding of the public critical potency of film requires more than a focus on the intra-textual organization of the text itself, or its implications for democracy. Considering the full extent of the public lives of films enables us to understand better their critical potency. In the case of *Yizo Yizo*, the fact that debates tended to focus on the television series' representations of sex, violence and the rampant corruption in township schools, is a tendency that reflected unfavourably on the status of television and film in public debate. Even then, the series' animation of debates about issues other than those intended by its educational objectives, sidesteps its orchestration of debate.

The status of *Yizo Yizo* in critical public engagements was intricate. However, it was largely defined by controversy. In conjunction with the media, which played a role in the series' publicness, *Yizo Yizo*'s realist aesthetics rendered precarious its public critical potency. Consequently, its capacity to set in motion engagements of issues relevant to its mandate was compromised by the uneven discussion of precisely these issues. The precariousness of *Yizo Yizo*'s critical potency suggests that the relation of film to the public sphere cannot be delinked from the ways in which the televisual signs are harnessed in the service of democratic ideals. It compels us to reflect seriously on precisely the meanings and implications of the public critical role of television and film. Lest we conflate the intentions of filmmakers with the lives of the films or television series themselves, we ought not to take for granted the public critical status of these cultural forms.

## *CHAPTER 9*

## CLOSING SHOTS

In this study, I have been concerned with the role of film in the public life of ideas. The restrictions imposed on Africans' experiences of film in the early and late apartheid eras, and the changing public encounters with it in the emergent post-apartheid period, provided the backdrop to the study. Thus, I have considered the critical public role of black-centred films primarily in the context of overt political repression, and in the post-repressive setting. This thesis demonstrates that throughout the films' public lives, their genres, modes of circulation, and contexts of their appropriation mediated the manner and extent of their relations to critical public engagements of black identity. The core of the thesis argument is that under certain evolving conditions and circumstances of their circulation, black-centred films stimulate critical public engagements of blackness. Censorship, orchestration, context of circulation, and importantly, contextual affiliation to contemporary social and political preoccupations and relations, constitute these conditions. The convergence of these conditions with the generic and material attributes of film, underwrites the precarious but potent status of film in the public life of ideas. The status of film is precarious because of its subjection to varied circumstances that render contingent its fecundity for critical public engagements. It is potent because the possibilities for such engagements are enduring. I will explain this seeming contradiction more thoroughly in the course of the chapter.

Importantly, this thesis enquires into the broad theoretical implications that the role of black-centred films present for the relation between 'film' and 'public', particularly in repressive and post-repressive societies. What might this relation imply for the role of film in the public sphere? At the same time as their approaches and objectives are varied, contemporary studies of film and the public sphere, share an explicit preoccupation with its role in the public sphere. Habermas' seminal work on the public sphere is the first to raise, briefly but provocatively, the relation of film to the public sphere. It is provocative because the discussion locates film, together with other media such as radio and the 'talk show' television genre, at the centre of a declining public sphere. Film became part of the all-consuming wave of post-literate forms that, according to Habermas (1991: 170),

reduced to a minimum the degree of reflection that the printed letter afforded its readers. And which he suggested, was indicative of a notable shift from a culture-debating public to a culture-consuming one. Habermas' recent recanting of his arguments notwithstanding, in which he reviews film as an adjunct to the political public sphere; his suspicions of the role of film in the public sphere remain present. The lack of a systematic analysis of the critical public import of film may account for such a hesitant acceptance of its role in the public sphere.

In considering the role of film in the public life of ideas, I have begun to engage in such analysis, in which I counter the Habermasian anxiety and suggest that film does play a role in the public sphere. While this argument is hardly new, later scholars who have been preoccupied with the question of film and the public sphere, have advanced it from different contexts and perspectives. In Germany, Kluge (1982) considered how film could potentially be harnessed formally to bring into being an alternative public sphere. Later, Hansen (1991) discussed how early American cinema-based spectatorship constituted an alternative public sphere. The limitations of the works notwithstanding, Kluge and Hansen have given impetus to the public critical valence of film and filmic discourse in a rapidly changing modern era. The approach, context and argument of this thesis are different. The thesis provides an opening into a new way of thinking about film and its publicness, which is as a text whose role in the public sphere, resides in its circulation and subjection to many uses over-time. Through this approach, this thesis surfaces the critical role of black-centred films in the ongoing and contemporary public discourses of blackness.

## Black-Centred Films: Critical Public Role

Quite signally, the public lives of the films show that film exceeds its entertainment value, and does not simply affirm social and political agendas. They demonstrate the capacity of film to render problematic the very supposition of the 'messages' that the combination of

263

their narratives and profilmic elements might be easily purported to represent. I suggest that the films in the study related to a contemporary public sphere by evolving critical public engagements of blackness. In the colonial and apartheid contexts, such reflections were surfaced through the conditions and relations of Africans' limited encounters with film. Although I do not focus on it in this study, Plaatje's bioscope provides the earliest example of this phenomenon. Through the conditions and relations in the exhibition of silent-era films, the novelty of the form and its generic attributes, as well as the discourse of racial uplift, Plaatje instituted the idea of a global modern blackness. That he did this against the background of Phillips' use of film to moralise the separation of blackness from this global modernity, set the scene for the relations of black-centred films to public discourses of blackness in South Africa.

If Plaatje introduced film as a way of bringing Africans into the fold of global modernity, *Come Back, Africa* gave it a public deliberative dimension that contested directly with the antinomies of modernity. In the latter instance, blackness attained an explicitly critical cinematic presence. For the first time in South African cinema history, the publicness of black-centred films significantly extended across a transnational sphere which threatened colonial and apartheid authorship of blackness. What this underscores is that black-centred films related to discourses of blackness by subverting the space and terms of their engagement. Before *Come Back, Africa*, the space and terms of engagement with discourses of blackness was likely to be heavily policed by the state. The public life of the film is instructive because of its instituting of a transnational public sphere around apartheid when the system was at its most insular state. A later film, *Mapantsula* would in almost identical circumstances, replicate the signal role of *Come Back, Africa*. Setting itself against the then significantly embattled apartheid; the film catalysed critical public reflections on the relation between blackness and anti-apartheid politics. *Mapantsula* became a critical part of the anti-apartheid movement, lending a cinematic lens to it at the same time as the film disrupted conventional understanding of black identity, politics and crime. Thus, black-centred films set forth a critical relation to the anti-apartheid public

264

sphere, by challenging one of its defining tendencies- that of assuming a homogeneous political-activist disposition in every black person.

In the 70's, the South African state's subsidy films resuscitated the practice in which official discourse mediated public reflections on black identity. Parallel to its political shifts to 'reformism' that allowed black South Africans to become permanent dwellers in the city, even if in its designated outskirts, the apartheid state in the 1970s evolved a sophisticated appropriation of film. Although endorsed by state functionaries, the idea of modern blackness gained cinematic affirmation through films such as *u'Deliwe*. The effect of black modernity as represented in the film, unlocked the potential of a counter construction of modernity in which the partial right to urbanity meant the right to make claims on the city, a right that threatened the very existence of apartheid. Thus, the critical public role of even those black-centred films that are widely designated as propaganda films was not simply in the cinematic affirmation of the modernity of blackness, but in the redemptive potential of this affirmation. The intersection between *u'Deliwe*, its paratexts and secondary texts particularly *Drum,* harboured this potential.

The emergence of a post-apartheid dispensation provided a remarkable opportunity for the free circulation and engagement of black-centred films. It also constituted a significant although not clean rupture with racial oppression, a major historical catalyst for public reflections on blackness. Against this background, *Fools* and *Yizo Yizo* centred the themes of gender, violence and sexual identity in the public discourses of black identity. *Fools* extended black-centred films' discursive relations with black identity by convening a debate about gender violence. However, its public life manifests a limit in black-centred films' capacity to catalyse critical public engagements. Beyond the spaces of expert commentary, the silence around the film bespeaks its critical disruption of affirmations of blackness. *Yizo Yizo* demonstrates this limit differently, by animating an extensive sphere of public engagements in the course of which arguments over its manner of representing black youth eclipsed the focus on its educative remit. This lays bare the fact that films are

imbued with a critical role manifest in the publics that they bring into being, but that this role is not automatic. How then does this role become realised? How is its potential realised? I address these questions in the following section which discusses the conditions through which black-centred films animate public critical engagements of blackness.

**The Conditions of Circulation and Engagement of Black-Centred Films**

Notably, what I have called contextual affiliation plays a significant role in filmic stimulations of public critical engagements. I have used the phrase 'contextual affiliation' to define film's resonance with the contemporary public discourses of its circulation and engagement. For example, the discursive and critical engagements of *Come Back, Africa*, through its textual interlocutor Lewis Nkosi, was given urgency by the emergent anti-apartheid politics, and the discourse of black urban modernity articulated by the so-called Sophiatown School of Journalism- of which he was a member. *Come Back, Africa*'s unequivocal address of black urban life in the Johannesburg of the 1950s, then a patently apartheid city, immersed it in this background. Whatever the biases and level of their critical engagements, black-centred films owe their ability to stimulate critical engagement primarily to their contextual affiliation.

Yet contextual affiliation occurs discursively and it is not geographically determined. In the course of its circulation in Europe and North America, two prominent regions in the Cold War era, *Come Back, Africa* provoked some engagements in South Africa in spite of its lack of local circulation. This means that while its lack of domestic circulation relatively minimised the degree of its intervention in local debates around apartheid and black identity, its resonance with the anti-apartheid movement and critical engagements of literary liberalism, certainly mobilised some public critical discussions around it. This shows the power of contextual affiliation, over and above the physical limits, and the legal restrictions imposed on films.

The role of contextual affiliation hints at another related observation, namely that the capacity of black-centred films to stimulate engagements is not simply determined by favourable circumstances, or otherwise. Repressive measures designed to quell the publicness of films, actually fuel the public critical role of film. *Come Back, Africa*, and largely *Mapantsula*, poignantly demonstrate this fact. Censorship or the threat of it gave impetus to the 'fugitive circulation' and engagement of *Mapantsula*, in the course of which anti-apartheid insurgents, ordinary rural and township folk, civic and student organisations traded perspectives on political strategies, 'tsotsism' and black identity. However, we cannot ascribe exclusively to contextual affiliation and censorship, the possibility of the engagements around film to flourish under unfavourable circumstances. Certainly, the films in the study have shown that largely the publics they helped convene emerged through some kind of active mediation or orchestration.

The orchestration of debates around black-centred films constitutes a distinctive and consciously interventionist condition for the enhancement of their public critical engagements. When this orchestration occurs in relation to contemporary issues, this heightens the public critical potency of black-centred films. Consequently, the point at which contextual affiliation and orchestration intersect produces ideal conditions for film's stimulation of critical public engagements. Cultural and political fora around *Mapantsula* provide key examples here. The appropriations and engagements of the film by COSAW, the *Weekly Mail* Film Festival and other groupings positioned it within the various fronts of the anti-apartheid struggle. This tendency to orchestrate public discussion through film, which is also observable in the later circulation and public lives of *Come Back, Africa*, and to some extent *u'Deliwe*, re-emerged in the post-apartheid period in relation to *Yizo Yizo*. The high level of publicness around *Yizo Yizo* profoundly illustrates the indispensable role of orchestration in certain black-centred television series and films' capacity to catalyse public debates. At the same time, *Yizo Yizo* shows that as orchestration aids in calling publics into being, its mediation through the media decisively determines the nature of engagement that films can stimulate at particular times.

267

The fact that they circulate over time means that films do not remain neatly germane to similar issues or questions. Consequently, different forms of publics and the critical responses therein come into being over-time, in relation to individual films. Any one film is subject to changing fortunes in its capacity to stimulate public critical engagements because of the shifts in the contexts of their circulation and engagement. A profound lesson suggests itself here, namely that the status of film in relation to the public life of ideas, is significantly guided and sustained by its adaptability and responsiveness to changing conditions and public discursive preoccupations over-time. This makes film a discursive phenomenon in modernity, whose public critical role is not determined by fixed conditions.

To premise the public critical competence of film solely on the above conditions is inadequate because it elides the specificity of film as a modern object and experience within modernity. In the following section, I turn to these specificities and argue that the distinctive modernity of film intricately complements its capacity to stimulate public critical engagements, particularly when modernity is its subject. These features are themselves an effect of modernity and constitute part of its nerve centre.

## Particularity of Film as Form in the 'Arena' of Public Debate

In the sphere of public engagements, the genre-specific aspects of films give them a special charge when particular aspects of modernity are under scrutiny. Through their capacity to represent perceived 'reality' of black social life, black-centred films proffer social imaginaries of the modern. In their representation of black identity, they make possible the imagination of blackness in ways that are alternative to its conservative imaginaries, which distanced blackness from modernity. However, the fact that various forms, other than film, have the capacity to represent alternative imaginaries of black identity calls for an exposition of the ways in which films do this.

I have suggested that the effect of filmic representation, especially in early black-centred films, is in closing the discursive gap, made possible by the conservative authorship of blackness, between the confinement of black people in a passive traditionalism, and a modern social and political agency. In the following section, I discuss how this happened. Chiefly, the multi-generic manner in which music, sound, language, narrative, space and time coalesce to give a semblance of the 'completeness' of experienced reality is a trait specific to film. In other words, film commands an array of visual and aural competencies, which enable its active modelling of life. The appearance of 'real' life in film, gives it the power to 'capture' the imagination of viewers, especially when its content is local and highly recognizable. This closeness to 'reality' does not give film access to reality. It is nonetheless, consequential to the fact that important critical engagements in the non-expert publics take place without the recognition of the 'fallacy of narrative unity',[176] or of film's power to 'capture' 'reality'.

While contemporary film theory, particularly the work of Noel Carroll[177] has thoroughly brought to light the limits of the classical film theory's supposition that film reproduces nature as is, the capacity of film to produce impressions with the strongest, and closest likeness to objects external to itself, is an enduring and forceful feature of its public critical status. The textual nature of film as an object that gets circulated, and appropriated, in public, draws upon this old problematic in film theory. The popularity of *u'Deliwe* among its early viewers, and its popularization by *Drum* magazine which, avowed the film's authentic representation of township life, were based on the assumption of its access to reality. Therefore, the authority in the form, to model reality, constitutes the first site in black-centred films' capacity to mediate black viewers' relation to the cinematic representations of blackness, and potentially to public engagements of blackness.

---

[176] By this I mean the ascription of truthfulness to film on the basis of the apparent logicality of its narrative, and correspondence of its diegesis to the perceived reality of space and time.

[177] See Caroll N., 1988. *The Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory,* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

However, we can explain the particularity of film as a modern phenomenon in the sphere of public discourse in terms of the circumstances unique to the public life of films. For instance, with regard to *u'Deliwe,* the scarcity of local black images in film played a role. Thus, in certain contexts the discourse of modernity and its concretization through the technology of film has a recognisable effect in the potential engagements around black-centred films. Considered from the perspective of its sophistication, film carries the aura of the ideas of progress, of the sense of newness. Thus, the technological sophistication makes it a coveted object because it indexes modernity. In the colonial context and in the early apartheid period, the modern technology of film and the difficulty of accessing it, projected film as an important site through which urbanised blacks experienced modernity. Access to the technology became, in and of itself an important terrain for defining blackness because it was infused with the value of progress- itself officially distanced from the idea of blackness. However, this did not take place outside the public attachment of value to particular representations of black modernity. *Drum* magazine, which trumpeted the successes of black filmmakers in the 70's, drove this point home when it related Sabela and Shange's successes to its own avowed brand of black urban modernity. It would seem that the entrance of *u'Deliwe* into the fray of the already flourishing discourse of black urbanity enhanced the magazine's projection of black urban modernity by adding a cinematic dimension to it.

The authority of black-centred screen media (television and film) also came strongly through the debates around *Yizo Yizo*, which were replete with emphases on its showing of known social life. The overt representation in the film of violence, linguistic vulgarity and bodily excesses captured the imagination of the viewers. This precipitated a publicness marked by unprecedented debates around the film's representations of social life in the townships. However, the consequent drawn-out media controversy around the representations of reality in *Yizo Yizo* or the lack thereof, constituted a different dynamic to *u'Deliwe*. This is because other questions concerning the film were raised, which were no longer precipitated by filmic authenticity and its affirmation of black modernity, but

270

were implicitly or explicitly informed by questions of black subjectivity and morality. Therefore, the immediacy of film to lived reality distinctively appeals to the subjectivity of viewers to the effect that its capacity to call publics into being is greatly enhanced.

From *u'Deliwe* to *Yizo Yizo*, the filmic affirmation of the modernity of black identity gave way to the representational disturbance of ideas around it, in the post-repressive period. This brings me to another attribute of film, and of black-centred film in particular, its capacity to disturb ideas and to allow debate about such ideas. The intense engagements of *Mapantsula*, particularly of the figure of Panic, explicitly instance this capacity. The visual correspondence of *Mapantsula* to the contemporary problem of *tsotsism*, and the challenges of the political struggle heightened the 'reality' of the dilemma of political heroism and apolitical social strategies of survival. Thus, the capacity of *Mapantsula* to disturb viewers enabled it to enter a social and political problematic within unfolding public debates. An argument may arise as to whether it is the attribute of film as form or of how filmmakers choose to use it, that ultimately make such a disturbance possible. I argue that the manner, in which filmmakers represent images with a capacity to disturb, is made possible by the formal 'manipulability' of film itself.

One important attribute specific to film and that is illustratable in black-centred films, is its unique relation to historical time. This relation informs the archival proclivity of film. The ability of film to visually 'capture' and 'preserve' instances of events across history, and inevitably turn historical time into cinematic or filmic time, underwrites the relation of film to historical time. Historical time is transformed into filmic time when certain events or moments become inseparable from the history, organisation and cultural specificity of film itself. Film renders these moments iconic and therefore indexical of their historical facticity. The wager of this observation is that at any given moment in the circulation of films, this relation precipitates an intimate awareness of the historical specificity of these events among film viewers. Issuing from this awareness is the possibility for public engagements of their implications for contemporary relations. For instance, the

271

engagements of *Come Back, Africa* during the inception of the workers' library relied on its historical specificity in the film. Importantly, the film 'authenticated' its representation of early apartheid in a way that informed contemporary anti-apartheid discourses. The inclination to rely on the visual power and historical proximity of film to events is a mark of its public discursive authority.

The mechanical reproductivity of film enables it to assemble publics repetitively over time in the form of events such as festivals, launches, political and cultural gatherings. This attribute defines film as a mass technology, which facilitates unique visual encounters with modernity for many people, and over a long period of time. Underlying the massness of film, is the effect of experiencing social life in a collective and potentially engaging manner. In the context of social and political strife, this attribute of film is particularly important for the mobilisatiion of agency.

The adaptability of film to rapidly changing formats facilitates and widens its circulation beyond the physical site of the cinema. In conditions, such as in apartheid South Africa where access to the cinema itself presupposes a negotiation of a litany of restrictive laws, black-centred films' capacity to circulate on Video or DVD, opens it to extensive appropriation and engagement in effectively fugitive spaces. Importantly then, the adaptability of film to different formats informs its potential to make possible, the autonomous organisation of experience. In contrast to Hansen's account of the early American cinema spectator, the political objective of the fugitive spaces drove the publics of *Mapantsula* away from the commercial sphere of cinema exhibition. This suggests a qualitatively different autonomous organisation of experience. This experience is qualitatively different because it took place within a political public sphere, which made possible a productive engagement with contemporary political questions.

The relaying of film in the form of paratexts and other secondary texts that come into being in relation to it catalyse its role in the public life of ideas. Accordingly, as a primary text, film is imbued with the capacity for calling publics into being but this capacity

272

remains latent and limited. At the level of form, narrative and other elements, film harbours a tendency to draw attention either to its lack of publicness, or to the kind of publicness with which its signs may primarily affiliate. Yet, only when films' relation with public discourses through texts that emerge in relation to them, can publicness be supposed. Therefore, the operation of film through paratexts and a regime of secondary texts contributes to the ways in which film becomes a catalyst for public critical engagements.

Further, paratexts and secondary texts may be charged with orchestration of debate and deliberation as the examples of *Yizo Yizo* and the archival reappropriations of *Mapantsula* and *Come Back, Africa* show. The latter two films had whole books published on them. However, *Mapantsula* incorporated useful essays, an extensive interview and screenplay, while Davis' book on *Come Back, Africa* was based entirely on Rogosin's diary of the making of the film. The constitutive role of secondary texts is manifest in relation to all the films but is more powerfully demonstrated in the public life of *Come Back, Africa*. Banned in South Africa, the film garnered publicness in that country in spite of its absence. Thus, secondary texts and their circulation, such as reviews in the press, mediate the publicness of black-centred films in their absences as primary texts. The dominant participation of expert publics in the engagements of the films can be discerned in the secondary texts. Therefore, expert publics significantly characterize the films' publicness. However the level at which this occurred, differs with individual films.

Expert and non-expert commentary make up one level of the secondary textual regime that comes into being in the wake of a film. Through posters or bills, films do not only give a foretaste of what they are about, but also widen their publicness. They do this by inviting public engagements with the content and legends in their posters. As such, the publics of the posters become the publics of the film by dint of the possibility of engagement with the social meaningfulness of the elements of its content, characters or milieu, which appear in the posters. The intriguing aspect of these posters is that their thematic focus

273

change with place and circumstances. For instance, the French poster of *Fools* was different from the South African posters in their discursive focus. Judging by the changing subjects, we can see that they consciously call different publics into being and create discursive frames consistent with the filmmakers' or distributors' intents.

If the conditions discussed above make possible the critical public engagements of black-centred films, they also explain the films' precarious status in the public life of ideas. As an instance, the capacity of *Fools* to generate critical public engagements was attenuated. This was due to the incongruence between its critical tenor and genre which tended to contradict contemporary film culture, and public preoccupations with the post-apartheid era. In spite of the precariousness explained by the unevenness in the extent and manner of the film's critical public lives, this does not however mean that the films have no potential for later public engagement. From the foregoing, it is manifest that a deferral, in which the publics that engage the films are not always contemporaneous with their initial circulation, significantly typify the publicness of black-centred films. The delay suggests that they harbour the potential to call new publics into being long after their initial circulation, and engagements. I propose that it is in their archival reappropriations that certain black-centred films are able finally to convene publics. Arising from this convening is not only the reconstruction of blackness and modernity, but also the potential appropriation of black identity in the official discourses of national identity.

I have suggested that the relations between films as media of modernity, and their focus in terms of content, with the contexts of their circulation, underwrite their potential to stimulate critical public engagements. Thus, the capacity of black-centred films to stimulate critical public engagements resides at the points of encounter between their formal particularity as modern form of representations, and resonance with the social and political contexts of their circulation. Without the idea of film as an object with certain attributes that are effectively modern in nature that circulates and becomes engaged in

specific moments and spaces, it is not possible to determine its role in the public life of ideas.

## Theoretical Implications: Film and the Public Sphere

The making and public lives of the films in the study occasion the opportunity to assess the relation between the concept of 'film' and of 'public', and ultimately the implications with regards to the question of how film relates to the public sphere. Through this study, it has become increasingly clear that an orientation towards a public characterizes film. The sphere of its circulation and engagement underscores this fact quite profoundly. This orientation towards a public means that film is chiefly marked by a tendency to constitute publics, even where a pre-existing public sphere may suggests itself, or where it may seem to be absent. Importantly, the pre-existing discourses of the public sphere, but more signally the discursive aura of the films that bring such publics into being, constitute the publics of film. This suggests a dialectic between film and public, which intensifies rather than undercuts the significance of film in relation to the public sphere. This significance can be considered against the various sites and formats in which film circulates, and the overall critical role that it plays in relation to the public sphere. It must be borne in mind however that in global grids of critical exchanges, such contributions are not confined to intimate and localized settings.

Importantly, Habermas' articulation of the public sphere in his early work, as formed around ratio-critical exchanges among co-present private people suggests itself as a contributing rationale for the argument against the role of film in the public sphere. Where co-presence is a necessity for exchanges, the need for considering virtual and ongoing communication falls away, and with it the possibility of the rational-critical exchanges in forms other than a co-present dialogue. Contra Habermas, I suggest that the public sphere of film does not require co-presence in the Habermasian sense, but actually effects a wide space of engagement across local and national borders. Far from heralding

275

or characterizing a decline of the public sphere, film actually salvages its ideal of rational-critical deliberation and opinion formation among individuals who may not be co-present. Here, the trans-local and transnational circulation of film occasions a pan-global effect that makes possible a virtual public sphere. This virtual public sphere is important because it short-circuits conditions of repression in which an open atmosphere of equality may not be possible. This public or publics of strangers has the potential to articulate through the common object of film, questions and suggestions that enable a global critical agency.

An important implication to be drawn from the study is that the circulation of film as text is a central attribute of its critical public role and status in the public sphere. Appreciation of its circulation makes possible the understanding of how film relates to the public sphere. This is because the location of film in the shifts and turns of its biography, occasioned by unstable modern social and political relations, inevitably invites its equally unstable relation to such circumstances as may affect the location of its exhibition and engagement.

This thesis submits that film is not in and of itself the site of its publicity. In locating the public sphere of film spectatorship in the cinema, Hansen acknowledges as much. However, Hansen's work suggests that the cinema is a central feature of the public sphere of film. This observation may appear to relate only to the context of early American silent cinema, but it has conceptual ramifications for the relation of film and the public sphere in other contexts such as contemporary South Africa. Confining the public sphere of film only to cinema and cinema spectatorship has the unwarranted effect of disavowing the capacity of film to relate widely to the public sphere. The effect is to deny film's profound relations with social and political struggles, in conditions where access to the cinema may not be possible. This thesis argues that the public sphere of film goes beyond the cinema. Thus, film has a much wider relation to the public sphere.

I suggest that the circulation and public engagements of films offers a profound lesson concerning the relation of film to the public sphere in respect to the role that Habermas

assigned to literature. The status of film in the contemporary public sphere is subject to the interactivity and convergence of a myriad of textual technologies. This very fact means that Habermas' privileging of literature, though a historical tendency in his discourse, is immaterial to the question of the role of film in the public sphere because literary forms are heavily complicit in the publicity of film and the engagements it brings into being.

## Conclusions

The tendency in film scholarship has been to understand explicitly or implicitly, the relation of film to the public sphere in terms of its supposed intra-textual 'messages' and conditions of viewership, either in the physical space of the cinema, or in the conjugal home. These efforts approach film from the perspective of its encounter by viewers, as a 'sited' experience with identifiable physical, social and cultural contours, outside of which it ceases to exist as a dynamic force. I have suggested that to seek to understand the relations of film to the public sphere in these ways has validity, but ultimately a limited acknowledgement of the dynamism of the public critical status of film. While they constitute helpful shifts in film theory in general, to the emergent 'sub-field' of film and the public sphere in particular, these approaches fail to account for the intricate ways in which film relates to the public sphere. The circulation of film as a material object, and its intersection with other textual objects underwrite its relations to the public sphere. I have proposed a new understanding of film, primarily as a circulating text and as a 'producer' of a regime of texts, the combination of which, makes possible the formation of publics around it.

Although the study of film from a public sphere perspective, is hardly novel, it was until presently, made in relation to particular periods and contexts in the cinematic culture of Western Europe and North America. I have made my observations in the context of South Africa. These have yielded observations about film that show its centrality in public engagements of ideas, the limits of political repression and lack of access and control of the apparatus notwithstanding. It has reversed the tendency to marginalise film from

discussions of intellectual biographies from a pool of textual forms, which due to their relatively easy access, are likely to be used by the oppressed and marginalised to construct and contest ideas. In appreciating black-centred films from a public sphere perspective, the study has registered observations that have a profound bearing on reflections about films and the public sphere.

The capacity of film to stimulate critical public engagements, in spite of or because of the challenges prevalent in repressive and post-repressive periods, is salutary in two respects. Through the convergence of its strictly genre-specific capacities with other texts that it brings into being, film both works through and against the limits which repression imposes on social actors. Consequently, and due to the contingencies of its circulation and engagements, it retains the capacity to reverse, however briefly, the limits that the demands of capital and repressive political discourses place on social actors. The ongoing relations between film and secondary texts, allows film to expand the space of public engagements set up by the traditional public sphere of letters. This expansion makes possible the mobilisation of agency across the class, 'race', age and gender divides and interests. This is particularly pertinent in repressive and post-repressive periods, where the imperative of social justice underwrites social and political imaginaries in emergent democratic societies. Through its mobilisation of agency, film gives a measure of authenticity to what Negt and Kluge call 'the autonomous organisation of experience'.

# Bibliography

278

Achebe C., 1958. *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann.

Andersson F. B., 2004. *Intertextuality and Memory in Yizo Yizo*, Thesis (Ph.D.), University of the Witwatersrand: Johannesburg.

Attwell D., 2005. *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*, Scottsville: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press.

Baines G., 2003. On Location: Narratives of the South African City of the Late 1940s and 1950s in Film and Literature, *South African Historical Journal* 48 (May), 35-46.

Bakari I, Mbye C., 1996. (Ed.) *African Experiences of Cinema*, London: British Film Institute.

Balseiro I., and Masilela N., 2003. (Eds.), *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press.

Balseiro I., 2003. *Come Back, Africa*: Black Claims on White Cities, in (Ed.) Balseiro I., and Masilela N., *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 88-111.

Barber J., 1999. *South Africa in the Twentieth Century: a Political History in Search of a Nation State*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Barlet O., 2000. *African Cinemas: Decolonizing the Gaze* (translated by Chris Turner), London, New York: Zed Books.

Barnett C., 2004. Citizenship, Commodification and Popular Culture in South Africa, in *Media, Culture and Society*, London: SAGE, 251-271.

Beecher H. S., 1938. *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly*, New York: Modern.

Biko S., 1978. *I Write What I like*, London: Bowerdean.

—1978. (Ed) Millard A., *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, New York: Random House.

Botha M., 2007. *Marginal Lives and Painful Pasts: South African Cinema After Apartheid*, Parklands: Genugtig! Publishers.

Bourdieu P.,  1981. The Specificity of the Scientific Field. in (Ed) Lemert, Charles. C., *French Sociology*: *Rupture and Renewal Since 1968.* New York: Columbia University Press, 257-292.

—1983. 'The Field of Cultural Production, or the Economic World Reversed', in *Poetics* No. 12, 311-356.

Boughedir F., 2000. African Cinema and Ideology: Tendencies and Evolutions, in Givanni J., *Symbolic Narratives*: *African Cinema Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, London: British Film Institute, 109-121.

Bowie A., 1986. Alexander Kluge: An Introduction, in *Cultural Critique*, No. 4, Autumn, 111-118.

Bundy C., 1990. Land, Law and Power: Forced Removals in Historical Context, in (Ed.) Murray C., and O'Regan C., *No Place to Rest: Forced Labour and the Law in South Africa*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 3-12.

Burns J. M., 2002. *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Caroll N., 1988. *The Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory,* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cook P., 1985. (Ed.) *The Cinema Book*, London: British Film Institute.

Comaroff J. L., and Comaroff J., 1997. *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) and South African Institute for Distance Education, (SAIDE), 2002. *Research Report on Yizo Yizo 2*,. Written for the SABC, Johannesburg.

Coplan D., 1985. *In Township Tonight! Black City Music and Theatre*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press

Cowling L., 2005. The Beloved South African: Alan Paton in America, in *Scrutiny2,* 10(2), 81-92.

Curran J., 1991. Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere, in (Ed.) Dahlgren P, and Sparks C, *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*, London and New York: Routledge, 27-57.

Dangor A., 1991. Foreword, in Schmitz O., and Mogotlane T., *Mapantsula the Book*: Screenplay and Interview, Fordsburg: COSAW, 9-11.

Dana P., 1990. The 'Public's Fear, or Media as Monster in Habermas, Negt, and Kluge, in *Social Text*, No 25/26, 260-266.

Davis P., 1996. *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa*. Athens and Randburg: Ohio University Press and Ravan Press.

Davies R.H., 1979. Capital Restructuring and Modification of Racial Division of Labour in South Africa, in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, (2), 181-198.

Daymond M J., et al., 1984.  *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Deane D., 1978**.** Black South Africans: A Who's Who: 57 profiles of Natal's leading blacks, Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Diawara M., 1992. *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Dovely L., 2005a. Engendering Gender Discourses through African Cinema: The Case of Fools (1998) and Karmen Gei, Paper presented at the *Writing African Women*: *Poetics and Politics of African Gender Research* Conference, University of the Western Cape.

—2005b. South African Cinema in Exile, in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* Vol. 41, Issue 2. 189-199.

—2005c. *African Film Adaptation of Literature: Mimesis and the Critique of Violence*, Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge.

—2009. *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence on the Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Dubow S., 1995. *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Eder K. and Kluge A., 1980. *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser).

Easthope A., 1993. *Contemporary Film Theory*, London: Longman.

Eley G., 1993. Nations, Public and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the 19th Century, in (Ed.) Dirks N B, (et al) *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 297-335.

Ellerson B., 2000. *Sisters of the Screen*: *Women of Africa on Film, Video and Television*, Trenton NJ: Africa World Press.

Elkins S., 1959. *Slavery*: *A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Elsaesser T., 1980. *New German Cinema: A History*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Erlank N., 2005. ANC Positions on Gender, 1994-2004, in *Politikon*, 32(2), November, 195-215.

Fatton R., 1986. *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy*, New York: State University of New York.

Fenwick M., 1996. 'Tough Guy, eh!': The Gangster-Figure in *Drum,* in *Journal of Southern African Studies,* Vol. 22. No4, Dec, 617-632.

Fiske J., 1990. Popular Narrative and Commercial Television, in *Camera Obscura*: *Feminism, Culture and Media Studies*, No. 23. May, 133-147.

Fleck C., and Muller A., 1997. Bruno Bettelheim and the Concentration Camps, in *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 33, (1) Winter, 1-37.

Franklin J., 1983. *New German Cinema*: *From Oberhausen to Hamburg*, London: Columbus Book.

Fraser N., 1990. Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, in *Social Text*, 25/26, 109-142.

Furedi F., 2004. *Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone? Confronting 21$^{st}$ Century Philistinism*, London and New York: Continuum.

Gartmann D., 2002. Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Change: Explication, Application, Critique, in *Sociological Theory,* Vol. 20. No. 2:  255-277.

Gavshon H., 1983. Levels of Intervention in Films made for African Audiences in South Africa, in *Critical Arts*: *A Journal for Media Studies*, Vol. 2. No 4: 13-21.

Genette G., 1997. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Giliomee H., 1979. Afrikaner Politics: How the System Works in (Ed) Adam H., *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power*, Claremont: David Phillip, 196-250.

—1982. *The Parting of the Ways: South African Politics 1976-1982*, Cape Town: David Phillip.

Gilroy P., 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Black Consciousness*, London, New York: Verso.

Gqola D., 2001b. Defining People: Analyzing Power, Language and Representation in the Metaphors of the New South Africa, in *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa,* No. 47, 94-106.

Gultig, J., 2002. *Yizo Yizo 1 and 2. A synthesis of the evaluation reports*. Written for the SABC, Johannesburg.

Gugler J., 2003. *African Film: Re-imagining a Continent*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Gunner L., 2000. Wrestling with the Present, Beckoning the Past: Contemporary Zulu Radio Drama, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 26. No2. Special Issue, Popular Culture and Democracy, 223-237.

Gutsche T., 1972. *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1920-1940, 1895-1940*, Cape Town: H Timmins.

Habermas J., 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

—1991. (Trans) T, Burger, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into A Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Cambridge Press.

Hamilton C., and Modisane L., 2007. The Public Lives of Historical Films: The Case of *Zulu* and *Zulu Dawn*, in (Ed.) Bickford-Smith V., Mendelssohn R., *Black and White In Colour: African History on Screen*, Oxford: James Currey, 97-119.

Hansen M., 1983. Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere? in *New German Critique*, Vol. 29. The Origins of Mass Culture: The Case of Imperial Germany (1871-1918), Spring-Summer, 147-184.

—Reinventing the Nickelodeon: Notes on Kluge and Early Cinema, in *October,* Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories and an Interview (Autumn), 178-198.

—1991. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Hall S., 1980. "Race", Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance, in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, Paris: UNESCO, 305-345.

—1981 (d). Notes on Deconstructing the Popular, in (Ed) Samuel R., *People's History and Socialist Theory*, London: Routledge, 227-240.

— 1996 (b). Minimal Selves, in (Ed) Houston A. B., Diawara M., Lindeborg R., H,. *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 114-119.

Hassim S., and Gouws A., 1998. Redefining the Public Space: Women's Organizations, Gender Consciousness and Civil Society in South Africa, in *Politikon*, 25. (2), 53-76.
Helgesson S., 2004. *Writing in Crisis: Ethics and History in Gordimer, Ndebele and Coetzee*, Scottsville: Unversity of Kwazulu-Natal Press.

Heribert A., and Giliomee H., 1979, in (Ed) Adam H., *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power*, Cape Town: David Philip.

Holub R., 1984. *Reception Theory: a Critical Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge.

Jameson F., Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: Dog Day *Afternoon* as a Political Film, in *College English*, Vol. 38, No 8, Mass Culture, Political Consciousness and English Studies, (April, 1977), 843-859.

—1988. On Negt and Kluge in *October*, Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories, and an Interview, 151-177.

—1990. *Signatures of the Visible*, New York & London: Routledge.

Kenney H., 1991. *Power, Pride and Prejudice: The Years of Nationalist Rule in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

Kerr D., 1995. *African Popular Theatre from Pre-colonial Times to the Present Day,* London: James Currey.

Kluge, A., Interview by Eder Klaus, Autumn 1981-Winter 1982. (*Trans*) Thomas Y, L., Hansen M., On Film and the Public Sphere, in *New German Critique*, 206-220.

Liebmann S., 1988. Why Kluge?, in *October*, Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories, and an Interview. Autumn, 4-22.

Liebmann S., and Kluge A., 1988. On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere: An Interview with Alexander Kluge, in *October*, Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories, and an Interview. Autumn, 23-59.

Liza K., 1989. *Proposed Weekly Mail Festival*. Box 4 Folder, Lusaka Mission: Fort Hare Archives.

Magogodi K., 1999. *Refiguring the Body in African Cinema: Mapantsula and Fools*, Thesis (MA), University of the Witwatersrand: Johannesburg.

—2002. Refiguring the Body: Performance of Identity in 'Mapantsula' and 'Fools', in *Theatre Research International*. Vol. 27. no.3, 243-248.

—2003. Sexuality, Power and the Black Body in 'Mapantsula' and 'Fools', in (Ed.) Balseiro I., and Masilela N., *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Michigan, New Jersey: Wayne State University Press, 187-200.

Maingard J., 1994. New South African Cinema: 'Mapantsula' and 'Sarafina', in *Screen*, Fall. V35. No3, 235-243.

—1998. *Strategies of Representation in South African Anti-Apartheid Documentary Film and Video from 1976-1995*, Thesis (Ph.D.). University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

—2007. *South African National Cinema*, Oxon and New York: Routledge.

Masilela N., 1991. Come Back Africa and South African Film History, in *Jump Cut*: No 36, (May): 61-65.

—2003. The New African Movement and the Beginnings of Film Culture in South Africa, in (Ed.) Balseiro I and Masilela N., *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 5-30.

Mkandawire T., 2005. (Ed), *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Language, Gender and Development*, Dakar: CODESRIA

Makhema M., 2005. Representations of Women in Fools, Thesis (MA), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Mangena O., 2008. The Black Consciousness Philosophy and the Woman's Question in South Africa: 1970-1980 in (Ed.) Mngxitama A, Alexander A, and Gibson N, C. *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 253-266.

Modisane B., 1986, (1963). *Blame Me on History*, Johannesburg: AD Donker.

Mongane S., 1991. Preface, in Schmitz O., and Mogotlane T., *Mapantsula the Book*: Screenplay and Interview, Fordsburg: COSAW, 7-8.

Morley D., 1980. *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding*, London: British Film Institute.

More M. P., 2008. Biko: Africana Existentialist Philosopher in (Ed.) Mngxitama A, Alexander A, and Gibson N, C., *Biko Lives!: Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 45-68.

Mphahlele E., 1962 (1974). *The African Image*, London: Faber.

Mudimbe V., 1990. *The Invention of Africa, Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, London: James Currey.
Naidoo R., Winter 2006. Cinema Goes Cellular with *SMS Sugarman*, *Vodaworld Magazine*, Cape Town, 22-25.

Nathan J., and Krouse M., 1991. Introduction, in Schmitz O., and Mogotlane T., *Mapantsula the Book*: Screenplay and Interview, Fordsburg: COSAW, 13-16.

Ndebele N., 1972, Black Development, in (Ed) Biko S., *Black Viewpoint*, 17-18.

— 1983. *Fools and Other Stories*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

—1991. *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture*, Johannesburg: COSAW.

Negt O., and Kluge A., 1993. *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere.* (Trans Labanyi P, et al). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Nixon R., 1994. *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*, New York: Routledge.

Nkosi L., 1965. *Home and Exile*, London: Longmans.

—1985. Obituary, in (Ed.) Themba C, Stuart D, and Holland R., *The Will to Die*. London: Heinemann.

O'Brien A., 2001. *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Oliphant W., 1990. Staffrider Magazine and Popular History: The Opportunities and Challenges of Personal Testimony, in *Radical History Review* (Vol. 46/7), 357-367.

Paleker G., 2005. Udeliwe as Film and Radio Play, (presented paper): *Shaping Identities: Radio and Writing in African Languages* Colloquium, Centre for African Literary Studies, University of Kwazulu-Natal.

Peters D., 1993. Distrust of Representation: Habermas on the Public Sphere, in *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. 15. No 4. October, 541-571.

Peterson B., 1990. Performing History off the Stage: Notes on Working-Class Theatre, in *Radical History Review*, (Vol. 46/7), 321-329.

—1990b. Apartheid and the Political Imagination in Black South African Theater, in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 16, no2, Special Edition: Performance and Popular Culture, Vol. 16. No2. Jun. 229-245.

— 2000. *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

—2003. The Politics of Leisure During the Early Days of South African Cinema, in (Ed.) Balseiro I., and Masilela N., *To Change Reels:  Film and Film Culture in South Africa*. Michigan, New Jersey: Wayne State University Press, 31-48.

Pflaum H. G., and Prinzler H. H., 1983. *Cinema in the Federal Republic of Germany: A Handbook*, Trans. by Nevill T., Bonn: Inter Nationess.

Phillips R., 1930. *The Bantu Are Coming*: *Phases of South Africa's Race Problems*, London: Student Christian Movement.

—1938. *The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustments on the Witwatersrand*, Alice: The Lovedale Press.

Plaatje T. S., 1916. *Native Life in South Africa, Before and Since the European War and the Boer Rebellion*, London: King.

—1916, in Gollanczs I., (Ed) *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare,* London: Oxford University Press.

Posner R., 2001. *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Republic of South Africa., 1979. *Riekert Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Legislation Affecting Utilization of Manpower* (Pretoria: Government Printer).

Reynolds G., 2003. Image and Empire: Anglo American Cinematic Interventions in Sub-Saharan Southern Africa 1921-1937, in *South African Historical* Journal, Vol. 48 (May), 90-108.

—2005. 'Image and Empire': Cinema, Race and the Rise of Mass Spectatorship in Southern Africa, 1920-1940 (South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe), Thesis (Ph.D.), State University of New York at Stony Brook.

—2007. 'From Red Blanket to Civilization': Propaganda and Recruitment Films for South Africa's Gold Mines, 1920-1940, in *Journal of Sothern African Studies*, Vol. 33, No 1, March. 133-152.

Rogosin L., 2004. (Ed) Davis P., *Come Back Africa, Lionel Rogosin: A Man Possessed*, Johannesburg, STE.

Russell J., 1987. *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, New York: Basic Books.

Said E., 1994. *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*, London: Vintage Press.

Schmitz O., and Mogotlane T., 1991. *Mapantsula: The Book*: *Screenplay and Interview.* Fordsburg: Congress of South African Writers.

Serino, K., 2008. The Origin of Ideas in the Paper for the People*,* Thesis, (MA). University of the Witwatersrand: Johannesburg.

Seekings J., 2000. *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*, Claremont: David Phillip.

Simms, H. H., 1960. Review of Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (1959), *in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 329, No. 1, 201.

Simons J., and Simons R., 1983. *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa.

Slabbert V. Z,. 1998. The Process of Democratisation: Lessons and Pitfalls in (Ed) De Villiers B., *State of the Nation* 1997/8, Pretoria: HSRC Publishers, 1-26.

Solanas F., and Gettino O., 2000. Towards A Third Cinema, in (Ed.) Stam R., and Miller T., *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 265-286.

Smith R., 2001. *Yizo Yizo this is it? Representations and Receptions of Violence and Gender Relations*, Thesis (MA), University of Kwazulu Natal.

Sole K., 1987. Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Literature and Performance, in *South African Theatre Journal*, 1 (1), 45-111.

Staiger J., 1992. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*, Princeton N, J.: Princeton University Press.

—2000. *Perverse Spectators: the Practice of Film Reception*, New York and London: New York University Press.

Steadman I., and Orkin M., 1984. (Ed.) *The English Academy Review,* Johannesburg.

Steadman I., 1985. *Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984*, (Thesis), Ph.D. University of the Witwatersrand: Johannebsurg.

Swift K., 1991. A Life More Abundant: A Retrospective Look at *Drum* Magazine in the 1970s, in *Rhodes Journalism Review*, 2/1: 35-42.

Switzer, L., & Switzer, D., 1979. *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: a Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines, 1836-1976.* Boston: GK Hall.

Tomaselli K., 1980. Class and Ideology: Reflections in South African Cinema, *in Critical Arts*: *A Journal for Media Studies*: Vol 1. No1, 1-13.

—1989. *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film*, London: Routledge.

Tomaselli K., and Prinsloo J., 1992. Third Cinema in South Africa, in (Ed.) Botha M, and Blignaut J., *Movies, Moguls and Mavericks, 1979-1991 ,* Cape Town: Showdata, 329-373.

Thomas L. M., 2006. The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability in 1930s South Africa, in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 461-490.

Townsely E., 2006. The Trope of the Public Intellectual in the United States, *The American Sociologist*, Volume 37, Number 3. September, 39-66.

Warner M., 2002. *Publics and Counterpublics,* New York: Zone Books.

Wayne M., 2001. *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema*, London, Stirling: Pluto Press.

Willan B**.,** 1996. *Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings***,** Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Worsdale A., 2004. *Films from South Africa*, Film Resources Unit Catalogue: Johannesburg.

Ukadike F. N., 2002. *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Wynter S., 2001. The West and the Analogy of Culture: The Cinematic Text After Man, in (Ed) Givanni J., *Symbolic Narratives, African Cinema Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, London: British Film Institute, 25-76.

X Malcom., 1992. *The Autobiography of Malcom X, with Assistance of Alex Haley*, New York: Ballantine Books.

## Journal Reviews

Black Community Programmes., 1975. Arts and Entertainment, *Black Review*, 211-214*.*

Davies M., 1990. Mapantsula and the Culture of Resistance in South Africa, in *Africa Today*. Vol.37. no1, Winter, 97-99.

Dandridge-Perry C., 1990. Mapantsula, In *African Arts* v23, n3, July, 88-89.

Hey K., 1980. Come Back Africa (1959): Another Look, in *Film and History*. Vol. 10, 61-66.

Mzamo R., 1989. Film Review: *Mapantsula*, in *Sechaba*, xxiii, 7, Jul, 31-2.

Nkosi L., 1960. Come Back Africa, in *Fighting Talk*. 14. 1. (Feb) 12-13.

Nemiroff R. B., 1960. A Look at "Civilised" Barbarity (A review of Come Back, Africa), in *Africa Today*, Vol 7. No 4 (June) 8.

Petley J., 1989. *Mapantsula*, in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 19-20.

Sandall R., and Starr C., (1960), *Come Back, Africa*, in *Film Quarterly.* 13.4
(Summer), 58-59.

Worger H., Oct, 1992. Mapantsula, in *American Historical Review,* Vol.97, No4, 1141-1143.

Winsbury R., 1960. Review of *Come Back Africa*, in *New Left Review*, (July-August).

Zuma T., 1990. Another Look at *Mapantsula*, in *Sechaba*, xxiv, 1 Jan, 26-7.

*New Internationalist*, February 1989. Issue 192. *Mapantsula* Review.


**The Press**


***City Press and Daily Dispatch***

Khumalo F., 2001. Bring Me the Telly, I want to Smash it to Pieces, *City Press*, 18 March.

Ramagoshi M., 2001. Women's Corner, *City Press*, 25 March.

Daily Dispatch 1976. *Daily Dispatch*, 8 August.


***Drum***

*Drum*, 1974. The Break into Top Film Jobs, 22 October.

*Drum*, 1974. Split on Black Films, 22 July.

*Drum*, 1974. Blacks Looks at Black Films, 22 July.

*Drum,* 1975.  08 June.

*Drum*, 1975. Black Sister under the Wig, 22 June.

*Drum*, 1976. Five Film Simon Finds Lot of Talent, 8 February.

Dube J., 1975. Blacks Must Get a Choice in Films. *Drum*, 19 Feb.

Heyns J., 1972. From Cape Town: Jackie Heyns Reporting, *Drum*, 8 September.

Thloloe J., and Heyns J., and Padayachee M., 1976.  Open Entertainment to All Races, *Drum*, June.


***New Nation***

*New Nation,* 1988. 'Mapantsula' Next Best Thing After Cry Freedom, August 4-10.

*New Nation,* 1988. Guide to *Mail & Guardian* Film Festival, 18-24 August.

*New Nation*, 1988. Workers' Library Book Fair Supplement: *Come Back, Africa*, a Film with a Powerful Message, 20-26 October.

*New Nation*, 1988. Workers' Library Book Fair Supplement, Panic Come to Jo'burg, 20-26 October.

*New Nation*, 1990. Art Needs to Help us Understand Change, 23 February – 1 March.

*New Nation,* 1990*. F*estival Opens at the Market, 11-17 August.

*New Nation,* 1990. Film Festival Poorly Attended, 21-24 September.


## *Rand Daily Mail*


Rand Daily Mail**,** 1959. *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 June.

Rand Daily Mail**,** 1978. *Rand Daily Mail***,** 13 December.



## *Sowetan*

Dlamini L., 1999. Yizo Yizo is a Real Slice of Soweto Life, *Sowetan*. 9 February.

Glazer C., 1999. Blaming Yizo Yizo is Creating a Scapegoat, *Sowetan*. 13 May.

Kotlolo M., 1999. Yizo Yizo Copycat Gang Rapes Girl, *Sowetan*. 27 April.

La Kums B. A., 1999. Drama Director Saluted, *Sowetan*, 15 March.

Lenyaro S., et al., 2007. Mama Jackey Saga, *Sowetan*. 21 February.

Makhanya E., 1998. Films Examines the Complexity of Moral Choices, *Sowetan,* 15 May.

Mashego M., 1999. Yizo's Just Fine as it is, *Sowetan*. 24 February.

Mogotlane T., 1988. *Sowetan*. 29 August.

Mohapi M., 1999. Minds Need Change not TV Programmes, *Sowetan* 4 May.

Molakeng S., 2001. Yizo Yizo Portrays Life as it is, Warts and All, *Sowetan*, 23, March.

Sibiya G., 2009. Beauty Queen Looks Back on her Illustrious Acting Career, *Sowetan* Timeout Supplement, 20 February.

Siluma M., 1999. Yizo Yizo Nightmare Must Stop, *Sowetan*. 23 April.

Siluma, M., 2001. *Yizo Yizo* rape outrage, *Sowetan*, 15 March.

*Sowetan*, 1988.  Biko Film Saga, July 26.

*Sowetan*, 1988. Biko Film Had no Chance, 1 August.

*Sowetan*, 1988. Mapantsula Hailed in London, 29 August.
Sowetan, 1999. Glued to the screen, *Sowetan*, 24 February.

Sowetan, 2001a. Artistic Yizo Yizo is a winner, *Sowetan*, 28 March.

Sowetan, 2001b. Face up to the ugly truth, *Sowetan*, 22 March.

Sowetan, 2001c. Letters section, *Sowetan*, 22 March.

Sowetan Reporter, 2001. Yizo Yizo Rape Outrage, *Sowetan*, 15 March.

Sowetan, 2001. No Warnings About TV Sex, *Sowetan*. 22 March.


### Sowetan Sunday World

Chibambu M., 2001. Copycat Sodomy, *Sowetan Sunday World*. 25 March.

Manale B., 2001. The Truth Hurts, Banning Yizo Yizo Won't Help, Clarifying its Message Will, *Sowetan Sunday World*. 25 March.

Mazibuko, L., 2001. TV drama a belated wake-up call to the nation, *Sowetan Sunday World*, 25 March.

Mohapi L. B., 2001. Readers Have Their Say on Yizo Yizo, *Sowetan Sunday World*. 25 March.

Molele M. V., 2001. Why Explicit *Yizo Yizo* Distressed, *Sowetan Sunday World*. 1 April.

293

### Sunday Express/Sunday Times

Bhubezi, S., 1999. TV Horrors Come to Life at Schools, *Sunday Times*, 21 February.

Sunday Express, 1979. *Sunday Express*, 10 June.

*Sunday Times*, 1959. Ace liar hoaxed South African police while making film, now uses it to besmirch union abroad, 6, September.

Sunday Times, 1978. *Sunday Times*, 12 November.


### Sunday Independent

Mangcu X., 2001. Second Take: Yizo Yizo, We Need Stephen Spielberg not Quentin Tarantino, *Sunday Independent*, 8 April.

Mbatha S., 2001. Let's Get Real: The Hysteria About *Yizo Yizo* Just Shows We're Homophobic, *Sunday Independent,* 18 March.

Phahlane, C., 2001. ANC asks SABC to stop screening *Yizo Yizo*, *The Star*, 15 March.

Pearlman H, and Maslamoney S., 2001. *Sunday Independent*, 8 April.

Simpson G., 2001. Yes, but Is Yizo Yizo Effective Education? *Sunday Independent,* 1 April.

Smith R., 2001. Yizo Yizo Prompts Long Overdue Debate, *Sunday Independent,* 25 March.

*Sunday Independent*., 2001. Majority Supports *Yizo Yizo*'s in Your-Face Approach, 25 March.


### The Star

Makgalemele T., 2001. Soweto in crisis: Gangs derail education, *Saturday Star*, 24 March.


Moya F. N., 1999. Yizo Yizo is Not Giving Kids New Ideas, *The Star*, 9 March.

Shai P., 1998. *The Star*, 7 June


### The Weekly Mail/Mail & Guardian

Burger F., 1988. Beyond the Land of Never-never: Local Film's Quest for Authenticity, *Weekly Mail* Festival supplement, *Weekly Mail*, 5-11 August.

Bauer C., 1988. Moving Images under Siege, *Weekly Mail* Film Festival supplement, *Weekly Mail*, 15-28 August.


### *The World*

Dube J., 1975. Letter to Editor, *The World*, 19 Feb.


### International Press

Crowther B., 1960. Social Dilemma Documented: Come Back, Africa at Bleecker Street Movie by Rogosin Uses Native Cast. *New York Times.* 5 April.

*Time*, 1960. A Camera in Johannesburg, 25 April.


### Radio and Television

The Tim Modise Show, 2001. Radio program, *SAFM*, Johannesburg, 19 March.

*Yizo Yizo* Speakout Debate, 2000. Television program, *SABC 2*, Johannesburg, 20 March.


### Interviews

Bottéon C., Interview with Ramadan Suleman, *Cinema* 590. 1997.

Modisane L., E-mail Communication with Cornelius Moore of California Newsreel, (2005, 05 July).

Modisane L., Interview with Alan Girney, 01 February 2006, Johannesburg.

Modisane L., Interview with Lybon Mabasa, 28 August 2008, Johannesburg


### Websites

African National Congress, 1990. Statement of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress on the Emancipation of Women in South Africa.

<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pr/1990/pr0502.html> (accessed 2007, 21 June)

Aluka Digital Library at: <http://www.aluka.org/action/showMetadata> (accessed 2007, 15 November).

Bantu Investment Corporation Act No. 34 of 1959, <http://www.aluka.org/action/showMetadata?doi=10.5555/AL.SFF.DOCUMENT.leg19590603.028.020.034> (accessed 2007, 15 November).

Barlet O., Interview with Ramadan Suleman, *Africultures*, (1997, 1 October). <http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=5279> (2005, 20 June). Bester R., *Fools*, <http://www.africanfilmny.org/network/news/Rbester.html> (accessed 2007, 13 March).

Dembrow M., Notes on Fools, <http://spot.pcc.edu/~mdembrow/fools.htm> (accessed 1 September, 2004.

Digital Imaging South Africa, <http://disa.nu.ac.za> accessed 2005, 22 March.

Film and Publications Board Meeting on *Yizo Yizo*, <http://www.queensu.ca/samp/migdocs/Documents/Minutes/280301.htm> (accessed 2008, 15 April).

Fort West Heritage Cultural Festival Programme, <http://www.alliance.org.za> (accessed 2005, 31 Jan).

Freedom of Expression Institute website: ‹http://www.fxi.org.za› (accessed 2007, 14 May).

*Guide to Undergraduate Courses in English* at Stellenbosch University (International Office, Stellenbosch University). <www0.sun.ac.za/international/repository/Courses_UG_Eng.pdf> (publication date not provided) (accessed 2004, 8 June).

Gwen A., 'Come Back Africa' book review, <http://www.ste.co.za> (accessed 2008, 29 June).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skid_row> (accessed 2008, 03 June).

Information on Hubert Bals Fund, <http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/eng/about/hubert_bals_fund.aspx> (accessed 2007, 21 July).
Lupa-Lasaga V., *Why a Black Magazine in South Africa Failed-* < http://www.journalism.co.za > (accessed 2008, 28 July).

Masilela N., 1990, *Black South African Literature from the Sophiatown Renaissance to 'Black Mamba Rising': Transformations and Variations from the 1950s to the 1980s* in <pzadmin.pitzer.edu/masilela/general/essays/nxumalo.htm> (Accessed 02/April/2005).

Mapantsula, Film Review, <http://www.newint.org/issue192/reviews.htm> (accessed 2005, 6 January).

National Film and Video Foundation website: <http//www.nfvf.co.za> (accessed 2004, 5 April).

Official Rogosin Website, <http://www.lionelrogosin.com (accessed 2007, 23 April). <www.**newsreel**.org> (accessed 2005, 9 June).

*Sophiatown*, ‹http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/places/villages/gauteng/sophiatown/history3.htm›, (Accessed 2007, 5 March).

South African Consulate, New York. *Report on Education in South Africa*, <http://www/southafrica-newyork.net/consulate/education.htm> (accessed 2008, 2 February).

Tselane T., Interview <http://www.gautengfilm.org.za/live/content.php?Item_ID=480> (accessed 2008, 29 August).

Winsbury R., <http//newleftreview.org> (accessed 2007, 26 March).

*World Television Classics: Mission Eureka to Yizo Yizo,* <http://www.memorabletv.com> (accessed, 2006, 1 April).

## Filmography

*A Dry Whites Season*, (1989, US). Palcy E.
*Africa Today*, (1927, SA). Baxter T. H.
*Allan Quatermain*, (1919, SA). Schlesinger I. W., May M.
*An American in Sophiatown,* (2007, SA, US). Ross L.
*A Place called Soweto*, (1979, SA). p.Republic of South Africa.
*A Way of Life*, (1983, SA). Hay R.
*A World Apart,* (1988, SA). Menges C., Johdi M., Hershey M., Suchet D.
*A Zulu's Devotion,* (1916, SA). Albrecht J.
*Birth of a Nation*, (1915, US). Griffith D.W.
*Black Fantasy*, (1972, US). Rogosin L.
*Brother John*, (1971, US). Goldstone J.

*Black Roots*, (1970, US). Rogosin L.

*Buck and the Preacher*, (1972, US). Poitier S.

*Come Back, Africa,* (1959, US). Rogosin L.

*Chikin Bizniz*, (1998, SA). Wa Luruli N.

*Cry, the Beloved Country,* (1951, UK). Korda Z.

*Cry, the Beloved Country*, (1995, SA). Roodt D.

*Cry Freedom*, (1987, US). Attenbrough R.

*De Voortrekkers* (*Winning a Continent*), (1916, SA). Shaw H.

*Dead Poets Society*, (1989, US). Weir P.

*Deadly Myths*, (2004, SA). Suleman R.

*Death Drums Along the River (aka Sanders of the River),* (1963, West Germany). Huntington L.

*Devil's Children*, (1989, UK). Suleman R.

*Dilemma*, (1962, SA). Carlsen H.

*Diamond Walkers,* (1965, West Germany). Martin P.

*Die Patriotin*, (1979, West Germany) Kluge A.

*Do The Right Thing*, (1989, US). Lee S.

*Dust that Kills,* (1921, SA) Oresntein A. J.

*Drum*, (2005, SA). Maseko Z.

*Ezikhumbini*, (1985, UK),   Suleman R.

*Fools,* (1997, France). Suleman R.

*From Kraal to Mine*, (1930, SA) Orenstein A. J., Phillips R.?

*Gaz'Lam* (TV Series), (2002, SA). Berk B.

*Ghetto Diaries* (TV Documentary), (1996, SA). Mahlatsi T.

*Gold*, (1974, US). Hunt R.

*Hijack Stories*, (2000, Germany, UK, SA, France). Schmitz O.

*How Long?* (1976, Unreleased). Kente G.

*In Darkest Hollywood*: *Cinema and Apartheid*, (1993, Canada, SA). Davis P., and Riesenfeld D.

*Inkedama,* (1975, SA). Sabela S.

*Ikati e'limnyama*, (1975, SA). Sabela S.

*Jim Comes To Jo'burg* (aka *African Jim*), (1949, SA). Swanson D.

*Johnny Tough*, (1983, SA). Isaacs R.

*Journey to the Sun,* (1975, SA). p.Republic of South Africa.

*Karmen Gei*, (2001, France). Ramaka G.

*La battaglia di Algeri* (*Battle of Algiers*), (1965, Algeria, Italy). Pontecorvo, G.

*Lady Sings the Blues*, (1972, US). Furie S.

*Lovedale Missionary Institution* (Year ?, SA). Bridgman F.B., Phillips R.

*Lumière Noir* (*Black Light*), (1995, France). Hondo M.

*Mapantsula,* (1988, SA). Schmitz O.

*Maxhosa*, (1975, SA). Stephenson L.

*Native Life in the Cape Province/From Red Blanket to Civilization*, (1925, SA). Taberer H.

*Nothing but a Man*, (1964, US). Roemer M.

*N'gwanaka/M'ntanami,* (1975, SA). Sabela M.

*One Step to Hell,* (*Caccia ai violenti*), (1968, US). Scolaro N., Howard S.

*Phela Ndaba*, (1970, SA). Mahomo N.

*Portrait of a Young Man Drowning*, (1999, SA). Mahlatsi T.

*Psycho,* (1960, US). Hitchcko A.

*Rivonia Trial*, (*Der Rivonia-Prozeß*), (TV Series), (1966, West Germany). Goslar J.

*Quest for Love*, (1988, SA). Noguera H.

*SMS Sugarman*, (2008, SA). Kaganof A.

*Safety First in the Mines,* (1921, SA). Orenstein A., J.

*Shaft*, (1971, US). Parks G.

*Sarafina*, (1992, US). Roodt D.

*Sarraouinia*, (1986, France). Hondo M.

*Sekouba*, (1984, France). Suleman R.

*Sounder*, (1972, US). Ritt M.

*Solution to the Dilemma of a Plural Society*, (1977, SA). p.Republic of South Africa.

*Stoney, the One and Only*, (1983, SA). Hay R.

*Sweet Sweet Baaaadddd Ass-Song*, (1971, US). van Peebles M.

*The African Witchdoctor*, (Year ?, SA). Bridgman F.B., Phillips R.

*The Dumping Grounds,* (1970, UK). Sheperd J.

*The Dumping Grounds*, (1973, UK). Mahomo N.

*The Harder they Come*, (1972, Jamaica). Henzell P.

*The Last Grave at Dimbaza*, (1974, UK). Mahomo N.

*The Magic Garden* (aka *Pennywhistle Blue*), (1951, SA). Swanson D.

*The Park*, (1983, SA). Suleman R.

*The Search for Sandra Laing*, (1979, UK). Thomas A.

*The Shining,* (1980, US). Kubrick S.

*The Symbol of Sacrifice*, (1918, SA). Cruikshanks D., Schlesinger I., W.

*The Zulu's Heart*, (1908, SA). Griffith D, W.

*To Act a Lie*, (1980, SA). p.Republic of South Africa.

*Tsotsi,* (2006, UK, SA). Hood G.

*u'Deliwe,* (1975, SA). Sabela S.

*Umjuluko Negazi*, (1982, SA). Isaacs R.

*Will to Win*, (1982, SA). Hay R.

*Waati* , (1995, Burkina Faso, France, Mali). Cissé S.

*What Happened to Mbuyisa?*, (1998, SA). Mamdoo F.

*Wheels and Deals*, (1991, SA, Germany). Hammon M.

*Woodcutters of the Deep South*, (1973, US). Rogosin L.

*Xala*, (1974, Senegal), Sembene O.

*Yeelen*, (1987, Mali). Cissé S.

*Yizo Yizo 1* (TV Series), (1999, SA). Gibson A., Mahlatsi T.

*Yizo Yizo 2* (TV Series), (2001, SA). Mahlatsi T., Berk B.

*Zero Tolerance* (TV Series), (2002, SA). Berk B.

*Zonk!*, (1950, SA). Kirsten H.

*Zulu,* (1964, US) Endfield S.
*Zulu Love Letter*, (2004, SA). Suleman R.

**Plays**

*Lost in the Stars*, (1949. US). Anderson M.
*Sarafina*, (1986. SA). Ngema M.