Cinema from Within

Interrogating Black Identity and Representation
In South African Cinema

Submitted by Teddy E. Mattera to the University of Exeter as a dissertation
for the degree of *DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN FILM BY PRACTICE
IN FEBRUARY, 2020*

Signature: …………………………………………………..

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / DEDICATION

For the stars in my galaxy:

Professor Will Higbee, my supervisor and now a friend, and Dr Jane Roscoe. Thank you for your patience, goodwill, cool heads and exceptional support during this research process.

Jesse Maluleke, Nhlanhla Damoyi, Jimmy Botha, Steve Kwena Mokoena and Coco Merkel, who remained loyal friends, and provided laughter and logic when things got very hard.

Andrea Meeson, my soulmate, who was there from the start, and brought me over the line with her brilliant editing skills and her steady encouragement to do better. Dre, you were my conscience throughout this PhD journey.

Noeleen, my sister, and another mother to my son Amilcar, and her daughters Noelitha and Omphile and our niece Shae. Nola, you kept the immediate family happy and healthy while I worked against the odds to complete this degree.

Don Mattera, my father, without whom I would never have understood the power of the written and spoken word. Toppie you are my bedrock.

Judith (Watie) thank you for life, loyal mother. The lessons you have left me with are worth many lifetimes over.

Other Mattera sisters and brothers, relations who have encouraged and supported me along the way, thank you.

I dedicate this work to my son Amilcar, who is the light and love of my life.

and

to my daughter Kauthar, a river in heaven, whose presence I give thanks for, and wish for more of in our daily lives.

The Triple Gem

INTRODUCTION

"Awaking on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth." —Sol Plaatje, *Native Life*

The principal objective of this Film by Practice PhD is to explore, through both my identity as a black South African man and my practice as a writer/director/producer of film and television, how black identity and representation in South African cinema has developed from the colonial and Apartheid[1] eras to the politically negotiated transition to democracy in 1994.

Discourses on black/ blackness—with regards to cinema in both theory and practice—and their connection to race, class and gender are, of course, wide-ranging and often polemical. My research is primarily concerned with discourses on blackness as they relate to my experiences living and working as a black South African man during and after formal Apartheid.

In this specifically South African context, black/blackness as political, artistic and socio-cultural signifier emerged from the segregated black colleges/universities of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The concept of black/blackness also drew sustained and significant support from the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)[2], developed under the leadership of Bantu Stephen Biko[3] and others in 1969. It came, arguably, as a unifying ideology for all South Africans of black identity: indigenous Africans, South Africans born of Indian descent, and South Africans who are of mixed-heritage—or Coloured[4], as classified by the Apartheid regime. As Saer Maty Bâ and Will Higbee confirm in their book, *De-Westernising Film Studies,* far from being a simple category or descriptive marker,

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[1] Apartheid is commonly understood as a former policy of racial, political and economic discrimination legislated against groups of people deemed "non-European" (i.e., people of colour) in the Republic of South Africa.

[2] See https://black.sahistory.org.za/article/black-consciousness-movement-south-africa

[3] See Mangu, Xolela (2012). *Biko: A Biography*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

[4] Dictionary Britannica defines the term: Coloured, formerly Cape Coloured, a person of mixed European ("white") and African ("black") or Asian ancestry, as officially defined by the South African government from 1950 to 1991. https://blackblackblack.britannica.com/topic/Coloured

black/blackness used in this context, "attempts to re-think and reposition "black" while relating a predicate of being called 'black', as a de-westernizing tool, to the West/Western. 'Black' becomes a category of thought and process that shifts grammatically between adjective and noun" (Bâ and Higbee 34).

In his book *Black Skins, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon—prior to Biko's ideological formulations on Black Consciousness as a psycho-political positioning by Blacks against Apartheid racism—purports that the experience of the colonised/conditioned (black) self must be destroyed or defeated by "…abolition of the ego by desire" (Fanon 84). Fanon expands further about the realisation of self:

> It shatters my unelected position. Still in terms of consciousness, black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something. I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It *is*. It is its own follower. (Fanon 113)

In South Africa at the time, black people, especially those in urban areas, engaged in the social, political and economic activities that redefined their reality to thwart the onslaught of Apartheid cultural dominance.

In contradiction to the empowering notion of Black/blackness described above, the "coloured" identification, a label still prescribed to people of mixed heritage today in South Africa, has abhorrent connotations and denies any clear, identifiable lineage or ancestry to those under this abstract identification. Those who, according to Steve Biko, espoused and lived Black Consciousness did not identify with this racial classification as prescribed by the Apartheid regime and instead echoed Fanon. Biko, quoted in *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial* (2012) by Derek Hook makes clear:

> Black Consciousness (has) …to do with correcting the false images of ourselves in terms of culture, education, religion, and economics…There is always an interplay between the history of a people…the past, and their faith in themselves and hopes for their future. We are aware of the terrible role played by our education and religion in creating among us a false understanding of ourselves. (Hook 31)

In contrast, white referred primarily to people of European descent, whose ancestors colonised South Africa from as early as 1652. Over centuries, this minority appropriated and amassed most of the country's economic wealth and arable land. Though we have lived through momentous political changes since the end of Apartheid in the early 1990s, to date very little has changed in terms of the way that the white South African minority maintain this disproportionate hold on the country's economic resources.

This paper will also address issues of historicity and interpretation—how the policies of colonialism and decades of Apartheid under the National Party regime, post-1948, contributed to fragmentation of indigenous African life and later of integrated black identities. It will further explore how these misrepresentations were realised in cinematic form under successive Apartheid governments as part of the greater project of propaganda to justify oppression and racial segregation.

Of particular interest to me, is how black identities were captured through the lens of the white imagination and funnelled into the film camera as colonised images—a process Peter Davis defines as "...the second colonisation of Africa, not merely in the acquisition of images, but in the way these images were presented…" (Davis 1996, 2). The historical premise serves as a gateway through which I can trace the legacies of colonial and Apartheid cinemas and whether or not they have permeated contemporary South African films and filmmaking processes. I will also investigate what forms of resistance and/or un/re-imagining blackness and gender representations are in place, and how these are realised as part of the restorative process of black identities as prescribed in the law and by the South African experience.

To illustrate this, I am compelled in both the documentary film *Cinema from Within* and research paper submissions, to trace how acts of racial, gender and economic violence— endemic in the colonial and Apartheid systems—served to shape the construct and narratives of black identities. The research also aims to reveal how, through the paradigm of cultural imperialism and economic control, the construction of these identities has been internalised by generations of South African filmmakers and audiences regardless of age or race.

Gender representation (a key focus of my documentary film submission for this PhD) suffers an even greater disconnect for both black men and women in the narratives of the colonial and Apartheid experience. Whereas black men featured in the patriarchal

complex of the colonial archetype—as noble savage or converted native—black women were often cast as muted or as spectacles for amusement or intrigue—as the experience of Sara Baartman, notoriously dubbed "the Hottentot Venus"[5] revealed.

The cinema of the time reflected white, patriarchal hegemony. In the historiography also, black South African women have been largely written out of official accounts of the struggle against Apartheid, in the same way that they have been marginalised within the national cinematic imaginary.

I have selected to explore identity, gender and film practice to interrogate contemporary black South African filmmaking, screenwriting and directing. These distinct features will be explored broadly through the following questions:

1. How did colonial and Apartheid systems employ constructs of race and gender in the representation of black people in South African cinema?
2. To what extent have these neo-colonial representations of blackness been internalised by black South Africans, as both creators and consumers of cinema?
3. How did the process of racial classification in South Africa inform my identity as a black man, as a South African and as a filmmaker?
4. How has my experience as a director and writer of fiction/narrative film influenced my approach to documentary filmmaking?
5. What are the challenges in creating a coherent creative, intellectual and political narrative in a documentary film that shifts between the registers of the personal and political?
6. What are my creative approaches in the documentary to "space" as locations—psychological or physical—wherein identities are realised and/or performed? What considerations are made to create meditative spaces—the landscapes, cityscapes and soundscapes that deliberately challenge these concepts of racialised and patriarchal spaces?

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[5] See pages 90-95 for more detailed input.

7. How will the research and film that support this PhD contribute to knowledge, and pose new challenges and inspirations to academics and filmmakers to tackle the complex issues around race, gender, identity and representation?

8. How will the synergy between theory and cinema practice cross-pollinate and bring innovative conceptual ideas and filmic elements to shape both fiction and documentary forms?

In order to unpack the questions, I will trace the roots of cinema practice in South Africa through the colonial and Apartheid eras to the present. I have conducted research through not only available literature by writers and scholars[6] of the historical periods under review, but also the modes of resistance in the practice of imaging identity and representation as articulated by various the South African writers and filmmakers, including the pioneer of South African cinema, Sol Plaatjie. I have also referenced the creative works of other South African artists, such as painter Gerard Sekoto, photographer Peter Magubane, musicians Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba and my father, the poet and activist Don Mattera.

My interest in interrogating the above emerged from my observations of how, since our transition from Apartheid to democracy, many young black South African filmmakers have developed an amnesia of sorts. This translates as an almost desperate, if not deliberate tendency to refuse or ignore our history because it is too traumatic or that difficult to comprehend the experience of being black under Apartheid in their frames and narratives. In stark contrast, we, the older generation of filmmakers, thrive on this kind of inscription of their individual and collective experiences of Apartheid. Instead of eschewing engagement with our traumatic collective past, we seem to idealise memorialised frames and narratives of the past—an approach that comes with its own pitfalls and limitations.

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[6] These include Franz Fanon, bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Keyan Tomaselli, Litheko Modisane, Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela, Edward Said, Christi van der Westhuizen and Bheki Peterson, amongst others. For a comprehensive list please see Works Consulted.

METHODOLOGY (CINEMA FROM WITHIN—ON SCREEN AND IN TEXT)

In the documentary film, which is the primary deliverable of this PhD, I showcase a selection of black South African artists, including the internationally renowned jazz trumpeter, Hugh Masekela (1939-2018), and Miriam Makeba (1932-2008) the singer and anti-Apartheid activist, as well as my father Don Mattera. Interviews with award-winning black filmmakers, including newcomers to the industry, are punctuated with the archival material, while various other aesthetic and creative interventions are critically engaged to underscore the veracity of my arguments.

I have experimented with visual and sonic moments in the film to enhance the content, thereby inviting the viewer into meditative "spaces" or moments of "respiration" from the visual and audio presentation. For example, the quiet presence of my son, Amilcar Monnapula Giancarlo Mattera, who appears beside me at various points in the film. He accompanies me on trips around the country in the process of making the work. These situations are examples of such moments of reflection. There are other moments when landscapes, cityscapes, locations and soundscapes render a sense of contemplation or draw the viewers' attention to meditate on the content or an issue raised in the film. Consequently, the film gives the viewer a window on how the complexities of space, time, memory, race and gender are represented through lived experiences.

To explore the question of identity, I also engage with the work of scholars of black identity, such as bell hooks, Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon, amongst others. Many of these scholars argue that identities do not necessarily point to an ultimate truth of who we really are. Rather, they are constructs, used to define who we are without really pointing to a definitive sense of self or self-knowing. In the case of black South African identity, for example, the feminist scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola, argues in my documentary film, *Cinema from Within* that as constructed by white people, black people are "…bodies at best and property at worst" (38:23:09). In relation to Gqola's remarks, I interrogate the impact of slavery, colonialism and Apartheid, and its influence on cinematic representations of black/blackness and gender.

This PhD study forms part of the broader discourse on the restoration process, which aims to address issues of race, gender and class inequality suffered by black people in South Africa, as a result of inhumane systems of colonialism and Apartheid and depicted across

cinema practice. The synergy between the film and the written paper is dependent on how these two mediums, individually and simultaneously, explore issues of theory and practice, and personal and political experience within historical and contemporary South African contexts. I have made a conscious decision to intertwine personal family histories with the collective political histories of liberation. Combining the personal and political in this way poses a series of challenges related to narrative structure, voice, objectivity and subjectivity, and addressed within my documentary practice. These will be discussed further in this paper.

Anecdotal accounts of history, where written material is not available, can also be considered as testimony to lived experiences. My childhood experiences of cinema are examples of this. In the section that follows, I give an account of these, and how the personal and political circumstances we lived under during Apartheid shaped much of my imagination and my understanding of masculinity. The tagline "some days are just a memory of a memory" on the poster for the short film I scripted, called *Waiting for Valdez*, reflects the memorialisation of childhood experience and cinema.
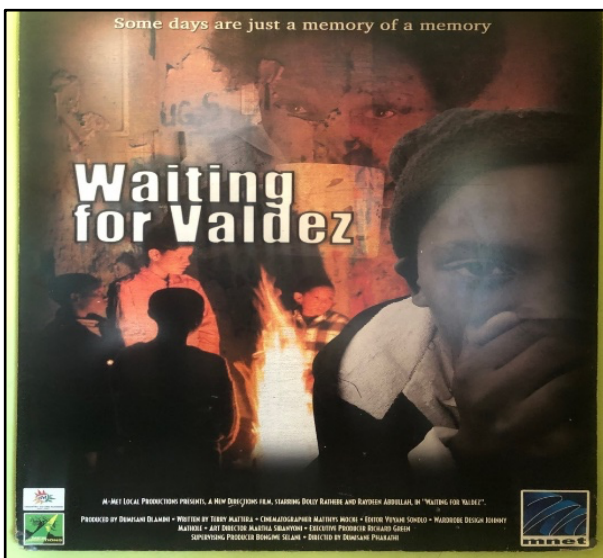
Poster for Waiting for Valdez (2003)

CHAPTER ONE—THE BIRTH OF FILM IN THE MAKER: A SELFIE OF MY INTRODUCTION TO CINEMA

"Whatever you end up doing, love it. The way you loved the projection booth when you were a little squirt."—Cinema Paradiso

Johannesburg's Western "Coloured" Township[7], where I grew up, was aptly named the "Wild West", because of the gun-slinging gangsters and violence endemic to this densely populated and economically impoverished community, which mirrored many other urban South African townships. As the residents of these locations[8], under the watchful eye of successive Apartheid administrations, we were permitted bursts of anarchy, whereby we could reap the destruction of internecine violence or participate in non-threatening demonstrations of joy, so long as neither act negatively impacted the relative ease and comfort in which our white counterparts lived, just a short distance away.

As children, life for us was simple; we knew nothing else, nothing better. We lived a seemingly happy existence in poverty, its ravages disguised for the most part by the charm of childhood endeavours: soccer in the dusty streets, daring games between on-coming cars in the peak hour traffic, stealing from Chinese traders and gorging on ripe peaches from white people's summer gardens—a welcome relief from dodging the pellets they fired at us from their guns, as we ran away with our share of the fruit. Yet, beneath the veneer of seemingly harmless frivolity hung the ever-present shroud of impending doom or danger.

Going to the cinema was no different to what happened on the streets. The same fate awaited us before, during and after the Saturday double-feature matinee at the local

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[7] Historically part of the Western Areas, made up of Sophiatown, Martindale and Western Native Township on the west side of Johannesburg, it was later re-named Western Coloured Township, and housed South Africans classified as "Coloured" under the Group Areas Act. See sahistory.org.za/article/growing-urban-african-population

[8] General term the 19th century colonial and apartheid South African government used when referring to urban black townships. It became common practice later.

bioscope, where gangsters and rats preyed on our pockets and food respectively. Rats and gangster life were synonymous in the township, so much so that you could not often distinguish one from the other. While gangsters gnawed at our very existence on the streets, the rats in the cinema nibbled away at our favourite sandwiches made with oily mango pickle (Atchaar) and sloppy chips layered between thick slices of fresh white bread. Inside the cinema, row upon row of boys and girls sat awestruck—their arms half-stretched near their mouths gaping, with eyes glued to the exhilarating action on the screen. In the bioscope life was magical: there was no Apartheid, no grumpy parents and certainly no school. Just us, the hero and some bad guys caught in a realm of light and sound; and the rats of course, who sometimes took a moment from our meals to look at the screen too.

Life, however, was not always rosy. In the lean times, which were often, there was no money to eat, much less go to the cinema. To watch the popular films, such as *Valdez is Coming,* starring Burt Lancaster, or *Enter the Dragon* with the inimitable Bruce Lee, we would pool our pennies and send two of the older boys from our street gang to watch the film in exchange for Atchaar on bread and a drink. They would return, and around a-fire-drum, re-tell the film to us in hour-long episodes over a week. It was just like the being at the bioscope and sometimes even better because we could ask the storytellers to rewind or fast-forward depending on how well they related the tale, with all the sounds and visual effects added at our request. After all, we had paid for the service!

The hierarchy was clear and accepted: the oldest boy narrated the action with exaggerated animation and embellished storylines, while the younger one mouthed the soundtrack simultaneously, drumming his tummy, or plucking his taught cheeks, or whistling accordingly during the tense moments. As we grew older, each of us would get a chance to practice this artful skill. We narrated the films in a unique urban street language—a colourful and spicy mixture of English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Sesotho, which added a local flavour to filmic moments, such as Valdez's flashy gun-draw or Bruce Lee's spectacular roundhouse kick. Indeed, it was this very practice and orality that I used as one of the key points of inspiration for my 2003 short-film screenplay, *Waiting for Valdez*, which I refer to directly in my documentary, *Cinema from Within*.

To *re-tell* these films was, therefore, to *re-make* them and implicate ourselves in them— with our own impressions of look, feel and sound. We sometimes went even further and

took on the names of the screen characters, "Valdez" or "China"—referring to Bruce Lee's racial identity—or some other screen hero from that era. Villain or hero, it did not matter. Looking back, I question why we so easily took to those onscreen characters when we were so obviously missing in the visual and aural narratives that they played out. Absent were characters that looked like us or spoke in the way we did. Perhaps we identified with them because the characters in those films in some ways represented the absent and all-powerful heroes and heroines in our immediate experience. After all, the men and women who lived like we did, or fought for justice, were either banned or under house arrest,[9] imprisoned or killed. Others were simply absent in the lives of their children.

Although I accept that we were mainly driven by childhood fancy, I believe the subconscious identification with our screen heroes/heroines spoke quite pointedly to a desire to find ourselves and our experience in the film narratives. It is a desire that lingers to today and is at the core of a creative struggle to give agency to black identities onscreen. The designated spaces in which we were forced to live and engage with cinema at the time, spoke very pointedly to the experience of Apartheid racial segregation, and how it shaped our personal, social, and political identities.

It was in Western Coloured township, under Apartheid, where three significant markers of my identity were shaped. Stuart Hall refers to these as "…the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall 70). Within the system of racial classification, I was confined to a meaningless category titled "Coloured". From birth to the age of about 13, along with members of my family, the state identified us by the Race Classification Act of 1950 as "Coloured", "Other Coloured", even "Cape Coloured"[10] and, sometimes, as "Bantu" or "Black". These latter categories were normally ascribed to those who had darker complexions. We often scoffed at the idea of being called "Cape Coloured(s)" since none of us at that time had seen the shores of Cape Town.

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[9] House arrest was a legal tool used by the Apartheid regime to severely restrict the movement of activists who were vocal and visible in their opposition to the system. In most cases it amounted to a "banning" from day-to-day activities, such as communicating with other activists, participating in meetings, receiving visits from family and/or friends or travelling or working outside the jurisdiction of the order. It also placed the person under intense scrutiny by police. In 1962, Helen Joseph was the first person in South Africa to be placed under house arrest for her activism in trade unions and women's movements. My father, Don Mattera, was banned from 1973 to 1982 for his political activism. He spent three years under house arrest. See overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/sidebar.php?id=65-258-1&page=2

[10] A specific reference to "Coloured" people from the Western Cape province of South Africa.

Racial classification could be randomly decided on by a Home Affairs official, and other state officials or random white people would often address us using expletives, followed by "black" or "bastard" or "boesman"—the latter a derogatory Afrikaans term used to describe black people who were of mixed heritage. Indeed, white people could refer to black people by any name, colour or ethnic group, because the law gave them carte blanche.

A common sign of legislated racial segregation in Apartheid South Africa.
Source: YouTube

There were exceptions, as in the case of people like my grandmother, a woman with very fair complexion and long, straight black hair, who could easily have passed as a white person. The light-skinned black people who could and chose to escape the sharp edge of Apartheid were called "play whites".[11] They lived in the warm sunshine of white privilege— some for brief moments, others for a lifetime—and would make clandestine visits to the township to visit their darker-skinned relatives.

I would argue that none of us escaped the horror of separation and division enforced by the system of racial classification. One way or another, carrying the disguise of being white or living the painful reality of being black, created fractures in our lives and in our selves. It was no surprise, therefore, that some of us, especially as children, found solace

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[11] During the Apartheid era, a "Coloured" person, indeed any light-skinned black person who succeeded at being accepted or classified as a white person, was often referred to as a "play white" or "vensterkie" in Afrikaans. See dsae.co.za/entry/playwhite/e05686

in watching Hollywood films and importing these new identities into our many broken spaces. Indeed, the combinations of these Apartheid identities—being black, male and South African, brother, son, friend—and those forged from the screen, have had a lingering effect on how my identities as a child and young adult were constructed.

Though the identities above were primarily constructed under Apartheid rule, they were deeply rooted in the colonial constructions of race—based on erroneous scientific theory and religious dogma. They served to fulfil colonial ambitions and later became the cornerstones on which Apartheid in South Africa was framed, implemented and justified by the white minority.

The late South African author and academic, Lewis Nkosi, in an clip from the Peter Davis' documentary film, *In Darkest Hollywood: Cinema and Apartheid*, featured in *Cinema from Within* comments how the Apartheid regime effectively tore families apart through its racist policies: "During the 50s they had these lunatic attempts to separate races…for example, people had to be separated out in terms of their ethnic groups…whether they were coloured or whether they were indigenous Africans or whites…" (*Cinema from Within* 00:48:02).

For many of us who grew up black in South Africa, there is an innate understanding and a direct experience of how these fractures in our communities—social, economic and psychological—were and remain as a consequence of the undoing of African culture and traditions by colonial and Apartheid ideologies and legislation.

CHAPTER TWO—COLONIALISM AND APARTHEID: THE GREAT UNDOING

> "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity."—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

From the mid-1600s until the late 1800s, the Atlantic Slave Trade served as a critical imperative of colonial enterprise for many European countries. The Europeans built their empires through violent and often fatal acts of land seizure and slavery, leaving much of the African continent underdeveloped. The slave trade underpinned the power relations between the economies of Europe and Africa and set the determining factors of "development" and "underdevelopment" in both the colonial and post-colonial eras as Walter Rodney in his seminal work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, explained:

> A second and even more indispensable component of modern underdevelopment is that it expresses a particular relationship of exploitation: namely, the exploitation of one country by another. All of the countries named as "underdeveloped" in the world are exploited by others; and the underdevelopment with which the world is now preoccupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist, and colonialist exploitation. African and Asian societies were developing independently until they were taken over directly or indirectly by the capitalist powers. (Rodney 74)

I argue that colonialism and its offspring Apartheid, both pernicious and enduring frameworks, came to sever, almost irreparably, the consanguineous relationship between a colonised people and the land they lived on, from and shared life with. The experience of this amputation resulted in fractured identities for the majority of black people.

The ideology and psychology of the colonial conquest and Apartheid later became synonymous with how Africans specifically and black people in general would be treated cinematically by Europeans. The inciting event of this tragic narrative was when the camera, like its predecessor, the pen, captured history from the victor's point of view.

The arrival of Edison's Kinetoscope (film camera) in South Africa (as early as 1896) coincided with the discovery of gold and diamonds by Europeans. It is no surprise therefore that when the first images of Africans were captured on film, they were depicted in servitude--as mineworkers and/or labourers, noble savages and, at worst, threatening, cannibalistic menaces (Callender 36-37).

In these frames and many other canvases of propaganda, the message of colonialism and Apartheid poisoned the legislation and permeated its manifestation in society at the time. White against black and (for a long time) nothing in between existed.

Colonial cinema as a vehicle to transmit and justifying racial superiority and inferiority between Europeans and Africans pervaded most of the African continent. Ferid Boughedir, the Tunisian filmmaker and film scholar confirms, in Roy Armes' *African Filmmaking North and South of the Sahara* that "Cinema reached Africa with colonialism. Its principal role was to supply a cultural and ideological justification for political and economic exploitation" (Armes 21). According to Manthia Diawara, the introduction of cinema to the colonial programme further imprinted the reality that the colonialists "….were not interested in African cultures except to show their inferiority to European cultures" (Diawara 88).

Although Africans shared the common experience of European colonisation,[12] which included the policies and practice of racism, they also endured the varying strategies deployed by the colonising Empires to introduce and establish their particular cinema practices.

As early as 1896 British colonies, such as Egypt and South Africa, were making and screening films through the Lumière cinematograph. South Africa began with productions in the early 1900s as discussed later in this chapter.

Contrarily, within Lusophone colonies, infrastructure to sustain film production was limited. Mozambican filmmaking for example, was confined to monthly newsreels used for

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[12] European countries had different approaches to governance in African colonies. In Francophone countries the policy of "indirect rule" advocated working with indigenous authorities while the British preferred direct rule, where day-to-day control was maintained by colonial officials under the directive of the ruling empire.

"…colonialist propaganda and pornographic films produced in the colonies by Portugal and South Africa" (Diawara 88).

Edwin Hees quotes Peter Davis to highlight the treatment of Africans by the British and Boers, both politically and in the film(s) on the Anglo-Boer War:

> The invention of the movie camera began the second conquest of Africa, not merely in the acquisition of images, but in a way these images were represented… This war [the Anglo-Boer], after all, was about the soil of Africa, but in it the principal inhabitants of the land have been reduced to worse than irrelevance - if they participate at all, they do so as servants of the white combatants on both sides. The camera casually reveals a significant fact: by 1900, the political decisions about South Africa were being made by whites, shutting out the African majority. (Hees 51)

The realisation on film of the Afrikaner myth of a chosen people helped them to justify a racist nationalism. Their persecution complex, which arose from experiences of oppression under British rule, ultimately resulted in their exodus from British-held areas. They made their way across the African hinterland in what is known as the Great Trek. The historian Fransjohan Pretorius, in an online article titled "The Boer Wars" writes:

> Between 1835 and 1845, about 15,000 Voortrekkers (people of Dutch extract) moved out of the (British) Cape Colony across the Gariep (Orange) River into the interior of South Africa. Their 'Great Trek' was a rejection of the British philanthropic policy with its equalisation of black and white at the Cape, and of the political marginalisation they experienced on the eastern Cape frontier. (Pretorius 1)

The Great Trek is often equated with the biblical story of Moses leading the Israelites across the Red Sea, and "has been referred to as the central constitutive myth of Afrikaner nationalism" (Hees 49). Preserved by Afrikaner ideologues, it was translated to films for propaganda purposes. Around the time of the First World War, film production in South Africa came into full swing. One of the more significant productions of the time was Harold Shaw's epic film *De Voortrekkers—Winning a Continent.* The Afrikaans historian and writer Gustav Preller, who was commissioned by African Film Productions to develop the screenplay, was afforded license to promote and legitimise Afrikaner nationalism by

demonising indigenous Africans and criticising the perfidious nature of the British in the Afrikaner/Boer struggle for autonomy (Hees 56)

According to Hees (50), *De Voortrekkers* is analogous to its predecessor, *The Birth of a Nation* by D.W. Griffith. Both films would burn an imprint on future (racialised) cinema, theory and practice, distribution and viewership, as the film was screened in the United States, Britain and South Africa. It is no surprise, therefore, that with the exception of a co-opted Christianised, character named Sobuza, all Africans featured in *De Voortrekkers* are portrayed as barbarous villains, primitive savages or as typified in the character of Dingaan, a Zulu warrior. The film exemplifies how racist attitudes destroyed any possibility for proper human interaction between white and indigenous peoples. More damaging was to see how far some Africans (for example, the character Sobuza) internalised their conditioning to a point of becoming colonial sympathisers:

> When he sits outside the church of the Covenant at the end of the film, Sobuza is once again neatly dressed in European clothes, ecstatically pointing to the simple wooden cross built into the wall of the cross… [while] the whites occupying the sacred space inside the church of the Covenant and Sobuza worshipping the same God [from] outside. (Hees 58)

De Voortrekkers became a representational template for the production of white films and film culture of the colonial period—a critical influence on the power relations that would characterise and control the content of the frames and narratives of South African cinema for decades to come. Comparing *De Voortrekkers* to *The Birth of a Nation*, Hees comments: "Perhaps the overriding feature that the two films have in common, and which provides them their particular dynamism—is that they both use black people to represent the negative qualities against which whiteness and true civilization is defined" (Hees 55).

Violence became the measure used by colonial ideologues and filmmakers to decide and define how the presence of Africans would be determined in history and on celluloid. I will examine in greater detail later in this thesis how colonial laws and cinematic practice worked hand-in-glove to further the unjust treatment of African people, playing a critical role in advancing the colonial mission of conquest through the screen.

Yet, as Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela argue, resistance to these divisive and abhorrent racist views on black audiences was imminent, if not ongoing, especially amongst the more scholarly and intellectual Africans from the New African Movement,[13] such as Pixley ka Seme and I.E. Dhlomo, who both "had a deep sensibility for drama, theatre, opera European classical music and poetry" (Balseiro & Masilela 22). Dhlomo's first scripted utterances on cinema came as early as 1943, when he expressed his outrage when Indians, Europeans and Coloureds could see films to the exclusion of Africans:

> One day you will arrive with your lady friend, all spick and span or accompanied by many visitors, whom you are entertaining, only to find that 'No Natives' are allowed to see the picture that night….as you stand helpless and humiliated, the disdainful glances and even sarcastic smiles of non-Africans will drive you mad. (Balseiro & Masilela 23)

Violence and rape are major signifiers in the characterisation of black men and women in colonial European/White South African cinema. This trait seems to carry the DNA of racialised cinema from the colonial through the Apartheid era and into our current cinema in South Africa in different and varying forms. Later in this thesis I discuss how slavery, colonialism and Apartheid served as the template upon which the narrative tropes of black people were constructed. Since the first recorded images in colonial cinema violence has been a key feature that has characterised black men on screen. Evidence thereof is visible from early, fictionalised historical film narratives such as *De Voortrekkers*, to the contemporary South African Oscar award-winning film *Tsotsi*. After two decades of a democratic dispensation, one would expect a change in the (mis)representation of black people, yet with few exceptions it seems we may have underestimated the powerful, lingering effect of colonial objectification.

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13 The New African Movement spawned in the early 20th century following the publication "Regeneration of Africa" by Pixley Ka Seme in 1906. The movement included public intellectuals, scientists, teachers, artists and politicians, who espoused African modernity (liberation and decolonization) as opposed to the perceived compliance of more traditional ways of thinking. The writer Sol Plaatje was one of its founding members. See Masilela (2014) in Works Cited.

Film appreciation and criticism have been seen as the domain of white audiences. Balseiro and Masilela quote Reverend Ray Phillips and Dr F.B. Bridgman, two leading ideologues of the American Mission Board,[14] who claimed:

> …Africans lacked the sophistication to interpret appropriately what they saw on the screen. Their primary concern, since they did not possess the intelligence of Europeans, was to control the way Africans understood European civilization: only the good side of this civilisation should be shown, so that Africans would admit and submit to its superiority. (Balseiro & Masilela 20)

Thus, identity and representation were further complicated by discriminatory practices and claims with regards to African viewership/audiences and visual literacy. Yet, my childhood experience of re-telling and re-defining characters and contexts of films, such as *Valdez is Coming* or *Enter the Dragon*, through our own traditions, languages, and social codes, demonstrated an understanding of cinematic narrative well beyond our years. As we became more politically informed and engaged in the struggle for freedom, we were obviously drawn to films which not only entertained us in a more sophisticated manner, but also related narratives that were common to our cause. This was in contrast to popular South Africa feature films, such as the Jamie Uys blockbuster, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, which relied on demeaning images of black people and perpetuated racist, colonial tropes.

THE COLONIAL IMAGE AND RESISTANCE

In this section I interrogate how colonial law and the production of cinema coupled to disseminate Apartheid policies. I also examine how cinema was used to advance the construction of racial hierarchies, wherein white Europeans were at the helm and Africans in servitude and ignorance, as Fanon expounds in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> Colonialism is not merely satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it

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14 The American Mission Board was particularly invested in making films for the "leisure entertainment" of Africans, especially in mining compounds, but it also understood the power of film as an instrument of control and the perpetuation of "western moral education" of black Africans.

turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. (Fanon 169)

Myriad British colonial newsreels and Afrikaans-language films of the early 20th century, expose the harsh political and economic climate Africans faced during the colonial period and up to the formal introduction of Apartheid in 1948. Amongst the harshest laws promulgated in this period was The Native Land Act of 1913,[15] which severely restricted Africans' access to and ownership of land. Other laws would follow, including the infamous Group Areas Act, which restricted the movement of Africans and confined them to Bantustans,[16] and locations categorised per racial "group", effectively denying them access to family, land, cultural traditions and resources.

While the British and the Dutch went about the business of land expropriation and exploitation of black labour, Africans became increasingly disaffected. Many wars over land were fought amongst indigenous and settler colonial populations in South Africa.[17] The introduction of the Gatling gun and its descendant the Maxim gun, gave the colonisers the edge to initiate fear and commit great acts of genocide during conquest. Davis argues that the introduction of cinema as part of the colonial project, had equally persuasive impact to change the balance of power as the imperialism of the time:

> It was, however, part of the technological advancement and industrial development, which had also produced the maxim gun. The invention of motion pictures towards the end of the nineteenth century had impact more subtle, but arguably no less profound, than imperialism itself, since the impact of cinema— followed by television—is ongoing, and, moreover, the numbers touched by these mass media in a single day can be compared with the numbers of those touched by imperialism over three centuries. (Davis 1)

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[15] Amongst the most pernicious laws in the history of South Africa, the Native Land Act (No 27 of 1913) set the stage for wholesale expropriation of land by White settlers. Only 7% of arable land was left to the majority and indigenous black Africans. See sahistory.org.za/dated-event/native-land-act-passed

[16] The creation of the homelands or Bantustans was a central pillar of the Land Act and the Group Areas legislation. The long-term goal was to make the Bantustans "independent". As a result, blacks would lose their South African citizenship and voting rights, allowing whites to remain in control of the country. The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 was passed, which made blacks living throughout South Africa legal citizens in the homeland designated for their particular ethnic group. See sahistory.org.za/article/homelands

[17] For example, in the Eastern Cape, battles between British and Boer occupiers and the indigenous Xhosa peoples were fought for a century (1779-1878)—earning the moniker The Eastern Cape Wars of Dispossession. See sahistory.org.za/article/eastern-cape-wars-dispossession-1779-1878

After gold was discovered in Johannesburg and diamonds in Kimberly, Africans soon found themselves without land again! The ghost of the colonial land grab revisited them, and the nightmare was to be relived far into the future. The situation worsened, when white colonials settled their differences in the interest of land occupation and profit, as explained by Christi van der Westhuizen:

> …while the British presented themselves as the liberal alternative to the Boers, the racism prevalent in the attitude and practice of both Briton and Boer differed in rhetoric but little in substance. Nor did it vary in regard to the actions that such racism was meant to justify, ranging from murder and land grabbing to forced labour and cattle theft. (Van der Westhuizen 15)

The merging of settler interests made it increasingly difficult for Africans to sustain themselves. The loss of land had a domino effect on African survival and therefore identity. Estrangement from land, community, and ultimately self, resulted in a "fractured identity", which affected Africans collectively and as individuals. Moreover, this estrangement was underpinned by Apartheid legislation governing every aspect of black life. Sol Plaatje, the writer, philosopher, cultural activist and filmmaker, captured the essence of that estrangement in the opening lines of his book *Native Life in South Africa,* first published in 1916: "…the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth" (Plaatje 1).

Plaatje played a critical role in promoting social change in the early to mid-1900s. He was a founding member of the New African Movement and became politically active in the Native Congress Movement (later the South African National Congress), founded in 1912, and was its first secretary-general. Plaatje travelled to the United Kingdom and North America in attempts to raise awareness and advocate for racial equality and against land dispossession in South Africa. During his travels through the United States he developed important connections with African American activists and intellectuals, who were involved in combatting racism on their own soil, including Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois.[18]

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[18] Plaatje developed a close friendship with the pan-Africanist Du Bois. He shared a stage in New York City with black nationalist Garvey during a tour in the early 1920s, though their political outlooks on

In South Africa Plaatjie published his own newspaper, *Koranta ea Becoana, (The Bechuana Gazette)*, which along with other African language publications, such as *Umteteli Wa Bantu, (Voice of the People)*, exposed the plight of Africans under white colonial rule, and challenged racist opinion and cinematic tropes that were the staple of white-owned media. Plaatje was one of the first Africans to challenge the screening of films, such as *The Birth of a Nation*, which perpetuated these tropes:

> Aware of the power of film to enlighten and inform, Solomon T. Plaatje (Umteteli wa Bantu, 18 July 1931) was equally aware of its possible detrimental effect. Vigorously protesting the showing of D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) at the Johannesburg Town Hall, he asked why South Africa should show a film that was so hateful toward black people when in many parts of the United States, including certain southern states it had been banned." (Balseiro & Masilela 21*)*

Plaatjie understood the intention of the broader colonial project and how it translated to film through simplistic, dehumanizing depictions of black people. These not only fed white curiosity and ignorance about Africans in particular but entrenched the perceptions that served the intent of conquest and control, exploitation and oppression. Plaatjie was critical of the power of cinema to distort and destroy the lives of black people. It was therefore no surprise therefore that Plaatje reacted quite pointedly to the racism in *The Birth of a Nation*. In a telephonic interview,[19] Brian Willan, an expert on Plaatjie, noted Plaatjie's response to the screening thus:

> … he got together with a group of sympathisers…white sympathisers, and particularly a white woman called Georgiana Solomon, a feminist, a suffragist…member of the Aborigines Protection Society…she went where the film was being showed in London and harangued the audience about what a terrible film this (*Birth of a Nation)* was…and how could they misrepresent black people in

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nationalism were at odds. See black.ozy.com/flashback/when-mandelas-predecessor-toured-the-us-to-expose-segregation-back-home/86852

[19] Telelphonic interview on March 16, 2017 with scholar Dr. Brian Willan, author of *Sol Plaatje: A life of Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje 1876-1932*.

this way. Especially when the Empire was at war…so Plaatje was involved with her in that protest.

Plaatje took his activism a step further and established a roving bioscope, which toured to audiences across South Africa. The screenings aimed to introduce black people as intelligent, productive and independent, contrary to the visual and narrative tropes perpetuated in colonial cinema. Plaatje saw great similarities in the African American experience, and that of black South Africans. The two constituencies, despite their differing socio-cultural spaces and demographics, shared common interests in terms of the franchise for the vote and land ownership issues. Therefore, acquiring and screening films about the Negro experience, Plaatje saw how culture could be used as a vehicle for change.

Willan added:

> …the focal point of his (Plaatje's) Bioscope was when he was travelling around the country especially when he was addressing black audiences…it was Booker T. Washington, it was the African American community in the U.S....how they built themselves up and overcame the disabilities and didn't despair. It was a positive message of progress of African Americans and of their rise from slavery to freedom…

What resonates are Plaatje's attempts to restore and redeem the minds and dignity of black African people from the relentless banter and beating of oppression. His focus on land restoration, equality under law and representation of Africans—especially in the media industries where print, radio, film and photographic depictions were part of the state's psycho-political arsenal—are still relevant in South Africa almost 150 years after his birth. His fight with the colonial mission is reflected in mine (ours) with Apartheid, as I discuss further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE—THE GRAND DESIGN, OR THE 'APARTHEID AESTHETIC'[20]

As newly independent African states were grappling with the transition from colonialised entities, Roy Armes in his book *African Filmmaking North and South of the Sahara* notes how many of the leaders of the continent's leaders:

> … saw themselves as the enemies of colonialism and its tyrannies and, as Roland Oliver observes, like most educated Africans, 'virtually all were, in European and American terms, people of the left'.[14] Most of them sought – and many claimed to have found – 'a kind of indigenous socialism inherent in African tradition'.[15] The political tool to be used as the instrument of 'African social-ism' was the 'party', 'seen not as a contender for power at successive elections, when its record and programme was presented to the people for approval, but as the animating mind and purpose of the whole nation, established and irreplaceable.'[16] (Armes 5)

Despite the ambiguities of creating new nation states, like establishing a one-party state with limited opposition permitted, Richard W. Hull, quoted in Armes, states that "most African nationalists were interested in building a modern nation state" to unite their countries' people for the most part and wherever possible" (Armes 4)

However, in South Africa, under the system of Apartheid, race classification was used as a socio-political construct to create, enforce and uphold white supremacy. Hendrick Verwoerd, the architect of the system, based his thinking on racial profiling and division, which he learned in Germany. Apartheid, as he saw it, was a socio-political and economic framework designed for the different races; a system of separate development wherein "the solution is sought by openly retaining the white man's guiding hand; which elsewhere is the hidden guarantee of industrial development, and even good

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[20] I choose the word aesthetic to mean a regime of ideas or a set of principles developed by Afrikaners, the descendants of Dutch colonisers, which they used to uphold their racist ideology.

administration,"[21] couched further in guise of white civility, as "a policy of good neighbourliness."[22]

Van der Westhuizen tracks the cartography of the Apartheid aesthetic as primarily informed through a religious-political and socio-cultural paradigm based on discrimination through conformity. This aesthetic was founded upon, first and foremost, a Calvinist response to perceived persecution suffered under British Anglicisation:

> The drivers behind this process were a self-conscious intelligentsia of dominees, academics, journalists, lawyers and others. The goal: self-determination for the volk in other words, to capture political power. Language as communicator of the 'common' volkskultuur is integral to nationalist aspirations thus Afrikaans was standardised and became a powerful ethnic and cultural mobiliser. (Van der Westhuizen 12)

Writing in the context of French colonial rule, Fanon, in his seminal work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, argues that language is a critical imperative of the colonial arsenal to impose and maintain control over indigenous peoples:

> Every colonized people - in other words, people in whose soul an inferior complex has been created by death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face-to-face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of mother culture… (Fanon 9)

The Afrikaans language was indeed a powerful tool of education and manipulation, used across various media and through legislation as a means to further indoctrinate South Africans, regardless of colour. From the 1940s onward, radio was the most common means of transmitting the state's message, until television was introduced in the late 1970s. Television broadcasts brought the segregated media onslaught full circle,

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[21] Verwoerd quoted at https://fabryhistory.com/2015/05/11/apartheid-a-policy-of-good-neighborliness/
[22] Prime Minister of South Africa 1958-61 defines Apartheid
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPCln9czoys

establishing distinct visual programming based on racial and tribal profiles of the various population groups delineated by Apartheid. English and Afrikaans viewers got the lion's share of the content.

In his preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Jean Paul Sartre describes the conditioning of indigenous peoples by European settlers as follows: "…they picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, the principles of western culture, they stuffed their mouths full of high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to their teeth" (Fanon 7). Sartre's observation stands true in the context of South Africa under Apartheid. As black children, across the townships of South Africa, we spoke our colloquial Afrikaans rather than that which was forced upon on us by our oppressors. Yet, we also performed Afrikaans poetry and other writing by cultural icons of the Boer.

The point is visually demonstrated in a scene from Dumisani Phakathi's filmic rendering of my script entitled *Waiting for Valdez*. It features an overzealous, pubescent learner performing the iconic Afrikaner *Muskietejag* (Mosquito Hunt), a poem by A.D. Brink, published in 1909. As he recites, he is ominously monitored by a white teacher, the guardian of Afrikaner culture. Her look dares him to make a mistake knowing that he will suffer her wrath. The young learner stands nervously in front of the class. Gripped by fear and desperation he tries his best to deliver a good performance of this sacred dirge. He wants to impress his white teacher and speaks eloquently hoping that he can win her favour.

Indeed, parroting was a way to impress the representatives of the state, in these cases white and mainly Afrikaans teachers, by showing them how well we knew and loved their language—with the hope that they would, at minimum, tolerate us. It is embarrassing, in hindsight, to remember our desperation for recognition from the very people who oppressed us.

Language was, therefore, an integral part of the Afrikaner/ Apartheid regime's intent to erase African presence not only from the country's memory and history, but also most painfully from black people themselves. The great irony is that Afrikaans was later discovered to be the language of slaves…our very ancestors. Their Afrikaans is really *our*

Afrikaans[23]. This argument is supported by Teshome H. Gabriel in his article "Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory". Gabriel explains how European colonial history attempted to deny the contribution of indigenous language and culture:

> Official history tends to arrest the future by means of the past. Historians privilege the written word of the text – it serves as their rule of law. It claims a 'centre', which continuously marginalises others. In this way its ideology inhibits people from constructing their own history or histories. (Gabriel 53)

Unlike the Apartheid government, which used film and later television to further divide the South African population along racial lines, many independent Africans states sought to use the mediums in more meaningful ways, ironically in the language of the colonising empire. Diawara explains:

> Films about liberation movements as in the P.A.I.G. in Guinea-Bissau, the MPLA in Angola, and the Frelimo in Mozambique are the first films in which Lusophone Africans selected the image, the ideology of the film's discourse, and the audience for whom films were made. Although the filmmakers were foreigners, the film were used as weapons against the oppressors. (Diawara 89)

Many of the films that were made during and immediately after independence came to inform the world about the anti-colonial struggles, educate people about the progress of the revolutions and to keep their organisations in check politically. Other formats, such as the series produced under Kuxa Kenema, or "Birth of the Image" programme in Mozambique, served to "… create a new kind of cinema that would reflect reality in Mozambique, a cinema that was a "freedom tool" that made people ask "questions about themselves and the world, about all situations" (Diawara 95).

In South Africa at the time, black people, especially those in urban areas, engaged in the social, political and economic activities that redefined their reality and thwarted the onslaught of Apartheid cultural dominance. Influenced by American movies, music and

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fashion, they invented their own street culture and with it a new language to express that culture—*Tsotsi-taal*. Spoken by gangsters and intellectuals alike, it was the lingua-franca created by streetwise people from different inner-city communities and ethnicities. It was on the streets of Sophiatown where people found new ways of seeing and new ways of being together in a divided country.

CHAPTER FOUR—A NEW WAY OF SEEING, A NEW WAY OF BEING

Sophiatown—a fortress of resistance, a cradle for creativity, a dome of debauchery—Teddy Mattera

Sophiatown in the 1950s was not only multi-ethnic neighbourhood, but one in which the majority black population was crosscut by divisions in social class, with doctors, writers, tsotsis (thugs/gangsters) and [political activists and] the lumpen proletariat all vying for a place in the fledgling black urban South Africa—Isabel Balseiro, *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*

Sophiatown, the city of many faces; kind, cruel, pagan, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu, and the face of what was called Law and what was made criminal. Each face told its own story; held its own secrets and added to the book that was Kofifi, the little Chicago of Johannesburg. —Don Mattera, *Memory is the Weapon*

Sophiatown[24] in Johannesburg, like District Six[25] in Cape Town, set the precedent for black South Africans to enjoy the space to re-imagine and re-present themselves. It was hardly surprising then that Sophiatown was one of the most vibrant and diverse enclaves of Johannesburg during the 1940s and 1950s, where those caught in the urban realm engaged in a potent mix of nihilism sported in culture[26], social conduct and politics. Celebrities and socialites who emerged from its cradle of creativity included Hugh

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[24] Sophiatown, (Sof'town or Kofifi), is a western suburb of Johannesburg. Historically, it was home to a wide cross-section of South Africans, but under the National Party's Apartheid regime, it was slated for forced removals and reconstitution as a white's only area. Once a hub of black cultural life, it was destroyed, renamed Triomf ("Triumph") and became synonymous with white Afrikaner privilege. In 2006, the city council of Johannesburg officially returned the suburb to its original name. See also sahistory.org.za/place/sophiatown

[25] District Six was a famous working class inner-city neighbourhood of Cape Town. In 1966, as a result of promulgation under the pernicious Group Areas Act of 1950, more than 60,000 people began to be forcibly removed from District Six to townships on the Cape Flats, and the area was renamed Zonnebloem and declared for "whites only". See also sahistory.org.za/article/district-six-declared-white-area

[26] The gangsters and socialites lived by slogan "live fast, die young and have a good-looking corpse", taken from the 1949 Nicholas Ray film, *Knock on Any Door*, signified the nihilist culture and fast and dangerous Johannesburg lifestyle in areas like Sophiatown.

Masekela[27], Abdullah Ibrahim[28], Miriam Makeba[29], Gerard Sekoto[30] and the gangster-turned-author Don Mattera. They set the trends that many people followed—trading in their old clothes and rural beginnings for new fashions from New York and London—and so promoted new ways of being and seeing themselves and the world in which they lived, despite what Apartheid forced upon them. The slogan "live fast, die young and have a good-looking corpse", from the 1949 Nicholas Ray film, *Knock on Any Door*, became a fashionable motto. People wanted to emulate and "own" the characters of American movies as a way to defy and deny Apartheid's demeaning political and economic limitations. Stuart Hall in a paper titled "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation" asserts that:

> We cannot and should not, for a moment underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative re-discovery. Hidden stories have played a critical role in the emergence of some of the most important social movements of our time. (Hall 69)

In the context of South Africa, Hall explores how a migration from an identity constructed under Apartheid oppression changed into a new identity by the people from free settlements, such as Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town. The impact of this change was evident in the streets, where a new language of defining and being emerged, to challenge the official colonial constructs of English and Dutch or Afrikaans as it developed in South Africa.

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[27] Masekela was one of South Africa most famous jazz musicians—a trumpeter, composer, singer and anti-Apartheid activist, who lived many years in exile. He died in 2018.
[28] Ibrahim, formerly known as Dollar Brand, is another world-renowned South African musician, a pianist who fuses traditional African rhythms with modern jazz influences. He grew up the port areas of Cape Town and like his contemporary, Hugh Masekela, spent years living outside South Africa during Apartheid.
[29] Zenzile Miriam Makeba, was arguably South Africa's most famous musical export. Known as "Mama Africa", her repertoire spanned genres from Afropop to traditional African to modern jazz. She was also an outspoken opponent of Apartheid and a supporter of civil rights.
[30] Gerard Sekoto was a South African painter and musician, who spent much of his adult years in Paris. His painting work is renowned for its social realism and urban black life and is in collections around the world. Despite his artistic prominence, Sekoto died in relative poverty in France in 1993.

Amongst the gangsters and socialites, the street language, Tsotsi-taal emerged—melding the experiences of young and old in a uniquely Johannesburg *patois*. My father, Don Mattera, is one of the last living masters of that language. A leader of the infamous Vultures[31] gang in the heydays of Sophiatown, he explains in his book, *Memory is the Weapon,* how Tsotsi-taal was "…the colloquial lingo of thugs and won't-work layabouts who preyed first on whites, and later attacked and robbed their own people" (Mattera 4).

While the gangsters like my father and others fought for territory on the streets, Sophiatown also boasted a pride of African intellectuals; Lewis Nkosi, Nat Nakasa, Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, as well as white literati—the renowned author Nadine Gordimer amongst them. They made Sophiatown their intellectual and social playground for a new discourse of what Hall refers to as the "…production of identity." (Hall 69) [32] Political discourse, and social gatherings/entertainment often fused in Sophiatown spaces, as a scene from *Cinema from Within* (34:39:20)*,* featuring lively political discussion and engaging performance by several of the above-mentioned, demonstrates.

The texts produced by the African intellectuals and their cohorts, or social innovations in language such as *Tsotsi-taal*, informed concepts of Black Consciousness and black identity in oppressed communities like Sophiatown and within broader Apartheid South Africa. Hall expands:

> Such texts restore an imaginary fullness or plenitude, to set against the broken rubric of our past. They are resources of resistance and identity, with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation. (Hall 70)

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[31] The Vultures gang was amongst the many in Sophiatown—the Berliners, the Americans and the Gestapo were others—who fought turf wars to control contraband and gains made from looting local business and community members.

[32] Hall, in his paper "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*"* questions notions of "rediscovery" of identity in the archive to that process of how identities are consistently under construction.

Ironically, while social and political movements inspired by Black Consciousness were gaining ground during this period, it is critical to recognise that these transformations emerged mainly if not solely from the "traumatic character of the colonial experience" (Hall 70). Developing this observation, Hall further argues that:

> The way we have been positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation, precisely because they were not superficial. They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as "Other". (Hall 71)

It is within this experience that the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) led by Steve Biko, challenged the colonial and apartheid/psycho-political regime's construction of "power/knowledge" (Hall 71), which dominated South African society. For more on this point, see also Hook on the psychological effects of Apartheid, which will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

THE POLITICAL IN THE PERSONAL PERFORMED IN LEGISLATED "SPACE'—PERSONAL AND ORAL TESTIMONY

The personal backdrop to the political and social renaissance in Sophiatown, was my paternal ancestral family home, in which Paolo Francesco Mattera was the "don" and his Khoi-San wife Minnie, the midwife. A few blocks away lived my mother's people, in a household headed by the matriarch who feared no-one—Katie Williams. She ruled the roost while caring for her bed-ridden husband, Donald, and six children.

My grandfather, Paolo Mattera, and his Khoi wife Minnie.
Source: Mattera Archive

My father lived a nomadic childhood between boarding schools and his paternal and maternal homes. In *Cinema from Within,* he explains how he found comfort and belonging in gang life, becoming the leader of the infamous Vultures (00:47:15). The triangular motif of personal circumstance, influenced by divisive politics of the Apartheid state, entrenched the alienation of young men like my father from family and belonging. His experiences were similar to countless other men who lived in that time and space. After incarceration and near-death experiences on the streets, his life shifted profoundly and he re-emerged as a poet and espouser of Black Consciousness, establishing community organisations across Johannesburg. His practice as a writer became pivotal to his world view and his commitment to political and social change. In his book, *Memory is the Weapon* (1987), he recounts his journey from gangster to renowned author:

> My metamorphosis from veritable violent beast to human being began in 1955 when the first seeds of political awareness were sown at that historic anti-removals campaign mass meeting…And so, a new and exciting world revealed itself to me and a few of my friends who had also grown tired of bloodshed, We took our scars and wounds with us to the debating societies and political education classrooms…(128)

My mother, Judith Mary Mattera, was of a strict Catholic upbringing, but also very much a product of the Sophiatown era. One of six children, she and her sisters quit high school to work in the sewing factories in Johannesburg, making barely one pound a day. At night, they wore samples of the haute couture dresses they had made to all-night dance balls and returned the "borrowed" items to the rails at the factory the next day. Being streetwise was an essential attribute for survival in the face of the poverty that most black people faced. My mother's experience was no different.[33] Today, at 80 years of age, she has great wisdom, a fierce independence and a sharp eye for style. These traits were tempered on the streets of Sophiatown.

Sophiatown was many different spaces to many different people. For the Apartheid government it represented unacceptable idea of a South Africa where their laws would one day be nil. For gangsters like my father, it started off as a playground to test his machismo and virility until the dawn of his political awakening. For more seasoned political activists, such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Robert Sobukwe and the many faceless others, it was a space to mobilise the masses and give the government of the day notice of a better South Africa to come.

For the Apartheid state racial integration, sex across the colour lines, rigorous intellectual discourse and political activism amounted to treason of one kind or another. Sophiatown was an enclave of progressive, cosmopolitan culture, until the state decided otherwise. The government soon had enough of defiant blacks and their white liberal allies. Sophiatown, its culture, its people and the threat they posed to the Apartheid state were to be crushed. Under the draconian Group Areas Act, the state declared Sophiatown for whites only. Between 1955-1960, despite massive resistance from the community and outcry from anti-Apartheid activists inside and beyond the borders of the country, the state

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[33] Given that a primary objective of my research is to foreground marginalised black female voices in South African history and cinema, it was important that my mother feature in equal measure to my father in my documentary submission. Unfortunately, she fell seriously ill during the course of my PhD, so could not share her experiences on camera. I was, however, able to incorporate her memories and testimony, based on my conversations with her over years and, more recently. Hence, although she does not appear or speak directly in the film, her thoughts, ideas and testimony implicitly mark the film.

eventually triumphed and forcibly removed tens of thousands of people from their homes and their land, to locations/townships bordering the city.[34]

Sophiatown circa 1960. Source: Baileys Archives.

In *Memory is the Weapon*, my father relives the trauma of those forced removals:[35]

> The time of execution had come for our homes like it had for so many thousands before ours.…The vehicles were driven by two Boers… who each had an African attendant sitting behind them, as if they were apprentice bulldozers. Job reservation was not whittling away, this was just Verwoerd's policy of letting the African do his own dirty work. The machines began their destruction. My eyes were fixed on my grandparents' house. One of the killers attacked the kitchen, leaving a gaping hole in its side. Beaten and battered, the kitchen collapsed and died. One machine stopped; it appeared to be bracing itself for another onslaught. It revved incessantly, its teeth and jaws locked. Then, in one mad rush, it rammed viciously into the old folks' bedroom, so that the walls collapsed and raised a blinding cloud of dust. The room was flattened… A strange indescribable sadness came over me, like the sensation that comes to the skin when an insect crawls over it; or the sudden shudder at the sight of a decaying corpse. (Mattera 16-17)

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[34] In the case of African residents, removal was mainly to Meadowlands, a section of Soweto (south-western township). Many people ended up in ramshackle housing with no piped water or electricity—a far cry from their homes in Sophiatown. Soweto became a dormitory township, a place to house African workers who serviced Johannesburg. Sophiatown was levelled, re-built as Triomf (Triumph) and reserved for white residency. Historian Tom Lodge expands on this in his article "The destruction of Sophiatown in the Journal of Modern African Studies. See Works Cited.

[35] See also Mattera's poem, "The Day They Came for Our House", from the collection *Azanian Love Song* (2007), which further captures the devastation wrought upon the Sophiatown community.

A photograph featured in Cinema from Within *shows Sophiatown residents (circa 1960) being forcibly removed from Sophiatown under the watch of the police. Source: Bailey's Archives*

There was a constant exodus, a removal of black people from everywhere to nowhere, filled with anguish and trepidation of what lay ahead. The forced removals from Sophiatown were but one of many across the country—violent upheavals by a bullying state apparatus. Apartheid race classification dictated where and how people lived, worked, and loved—a legacy engrained in the personal/social/structural dynamics of engagement and representation in South Africa to the current day.

In response to the imposed political, social and economic systems, inner-city communities emulated international patterns of resistance, such as the Harlem Renaissance and the civil rights movement in the United States, which included artistic and creative engagement with oneself and the world.[36] My experience was no different. For example, the bond between my father and I had one rather special feature to it: cinema. The culture

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[36] For more detailed discussion of the Harlem Renaissance and its impact on modes of resistance to dominant white culture, the later civil rights movements, and black artists within and beyond the United States see https://www.humanitiestexas.org/news/articles/harlem-renaissance-what-was-it-and-why-does-it-matter

of urban life had entrenched a love of the silver screen firmly into our respective hearts and minds. He could tell a film like no-one could. Well, so he thought until my gang of storytellers took the platform.

Through interviews for this PhD project with my father, the musician Hugh Masekela and other Sophiatown veterans, I learnt that part of being black and male in that community was also being a part of the culture of cinema. The movies added the groom of street-smart—the language, dress code, the body language—what youngsters today call the "swag."[37] Most of it, of course was invested in and through the American films of the time. But something new was waiting.

While our own *Drum* magazine [38] boasted the flare of everything associated with Sophiatown, a new trend emerged onscreen—film stars born and bred in the same Sophiatown, where my father and his friends and enemies roamed the streets. Within a decade three films, namely *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, *Cry the Beloved Country* and *Come Back Africa*, shifted the status quo. The making of *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* marked a breakthrough for black representation in South African cinema. It was the first fictionalised film in which Africans were not only cast in leading roles, but roles with agency and purpose. The actor John Kani confirms this in Davis' *In Darkest Hollywood: Cinema and Apartheid*: "We've never ever seen a black on the screen. That was a whites-only affair. And when *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* was shown, it was like a miracle! We saw black people in this movie" (00:22:00)

Cinema until the 1950s was targeted almost exclusively at white audiences and not since Sol Plaatje's bioscope had there been thinking divergent from the mainstream representation of black identity. Litheko Modisane notes:

> Maingard observes, in a recent study, that Plaatjie's bioscope constitutes the beginning of a national alternative film culture. Plaatjie's introduction of

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[37] From the word swagger, meaning a confident, arrogant gait or manner.
[38] Drum Magazine was arguably the most popular and successful publication featuring work by some of South Africa's most famous black journalists, photographers and storytellers, such as Can Themba, Bloke Modisane and Lewis Nkosi. From the 1950s onwards, under often difficult conditions, it provided a platform through which urban black life in all its facets could be exposed, critiqued and celebrated. See https://black.sahistory.org.za/topic/drum-magazine

cinematic ways of engagement with black identity was alternative, because it was not in keeping with South Africa's mainstream cinematic culture. (Modisane 6)

Ten years after the release of Donald Swanson's *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, Lionel Rogosin's *Come Back Africa* went further to reflect believable accounts of black daily life, gaining widespread approval from black audiences, who recognised themselves and their stories onscreen. In between these two films was *Cry the Beloved Country* directed by Zoltan Korda in 1952. Based on a book by South African author Alan Paton, the film traces the journey of a black preacher, whose son is accused of killing a white man.

While these three films offer a multitude of perspectives on black life, more compelling in my opinion are the representations of Africans in relation to their real-lived experiences, and to what extent these films offer a view beyond the prescribed roles designated by the system of Apartheid. Looking critically at both *Cry the Beloved Country* and *Come Back Africa,* we can discern two different practices of filmmaking—respectively mainstream Hollywood scripted fiction and independent neo-realist storytelling—and how these impact narratives and characterisation. Equally important, is how well they serve the communities or people whose stories they tell. Examining *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, I consider how context and/or "space", or "location" in cinematic terms, is depicted, and how identities are performed or realised. I use "space" intentionally because it offers up greater engagements with character and history.

Though the constructed reality of Africans in the urban locations was driven by white capitalist interests during the colonial and Apartheid eras, *Jim Comes to Joburg,* presents an alternative view—in which the creators of the film turn the very same environments into spaces where creativity and ambition thrive and black people—commonly seen only on the periphery / as peripheral to the living narrative of the city— are brought to life. They are characters with ambition and desire and ability.

When Jim first arrives in Johannesburg his naivety endangers him, as the thugs he first encounters prey on him. Here we are reminded of the influence of Hollywood gangster films, and this is expanded upon by writer Lewis Nkosi in a clip from Peter Davis' *In Darkest Hollywood*: *Cinema and Apartheid*:

> Gangster films provided certain models for people who felt trapped in this situation of oppression but Hollywood also suggested certain options even if they were not realistic options for example, but options which would temporarily provide escape from the roles of victims and make the gangster…the person, in charge of the situation. (00:09:37)

Rural Jim, who is a classical representation of innocence and naivety, comes face-to-face with urbanisation and its accompaniments: displacement, the daunting architecture, busy streets filled with roaring motor vehicles, vast numbers of unfamiliar people, and crime, un/employment and debauchery and gangsters.

Outside the petty acts of paternalism in the narrative of *Jim Comes to Joburg*, spaces of unrealised ambition and foiled aspiration in cinema for black people are opened in films produced by foreign filmmakers respectful of black talent beyond token gestures. Through the efforts of the foreign (white) filmmakers, black talent quickly undoes the myth and false theories of inferiority and excellence as the preserve of white people. As Erica Rutherford, the producer of *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, comments in Davis' *In Darkest Hollywood:*

> We saw this situation where the African population were being fed these miserable films…they were full of violence, they were full of trivial lives…they were the cheapest film you could get out of Hollywood…we started talking about why can't we make a really good film about Africans, with African actors…a full length entertainment film. (00:10:17)

Furthermore, these filmmakers had a vision: to help black people make their own productions and build an industry that would cater for black audiences by being sensitive and representative to their needs. For its time and location, *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* was a visionary production, which many films thereafter—made by independent filmmakers and strangely the Apartheid cinema machinery—sought to emulate.

Films such as *Zonk*—a more commercial South African production, directed by Hyman Kirstein in 1950 and financed through Apartheid state coffers—were made to thwart films like *Jim Comes to Joburg.* Such productions sought to make money without paying any consideration to representation and, as a result, were fraught with demeaning

impersonations and stereotypes that mirrored similar tropes in American cinema at the time.

A scene in my documentary, *Cinema from Within,* provides archival evidence from Davis' *In Darkest Hollywood*, of a black character made up as a minstrel, typical of the theatrical spectre of the time: "A darkie impersonating a white man impersonating the darkie" (*Cinema from Within* 00:26:57).

Released ten years after *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, it can be argued that *Come Back Africa* was built on the success of the earlier film, but with a much more informed and calculated production strategy. Not only did the filmmaker, Rogosin, have experience with making critical left-wing films, but he also moved amongst Sophiatown's erudite and artistic elite, which helped him craft the narrative with thorough and careful deliberation to reflect the lived experiences of black people. Modisane quotes Davis confirming how Rogosin worked collaboratively with his actors:

> Drawing on the intimate experience of [Bloke] Modisane, Themba and Nkosi of township life, Rogosin gave us the first, and most probably the greatest, depiction of the confrontation between unskilled labour and the industrial society, the breakdown of tradition values, and the trauma of apartheid. (Modisane 31)

Having co-written the script, the Sophiatown intellectuals and *Drum* journalists Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi and Can Themba gave pointed performances demonstrating more than just amity between friends, but genuine mutual co-operation and creative endeavour with the filmmaker, as Modisane continues:

> In addition to its challenge of the racial complacency of the cinema of the 1950s, Rogosin's collaboration with the intellectuals is salutary, in that it extended African challenges of the apartheid state, from literary realm to the cinematic. (Modisane 31)

In casting for the film Rogosin, Nkosi and Modisane often spent time exploring the lived experiences of non-actors/community members, in order to authenticate the narrative. Remembering that this film was shot clandestinely, it featured the feel of old-fashioned

journalism and documentary film ethic. Naturally, the film began to take on Rogosin's neo-realist style which was characterised by his ability to move between factual and fictional storytelling. According to Lewis Nkosi, quoted in Modisane:

> 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. (Modisane 34)

Modisane also observes Rogosin's commitment, which challenged the violent erasure of black South Africans in the media of the period:

> …importantly, Rogosin wanted to interpret Apartheid, and to represent its horrors through the eyes of black South Africans themselves, an unconventional tendency in South African film culture at that time. 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. (Modisane 30)

Rogosin's film also reflects a continuing trend in gender representation, wherein women characters were objectified for their beauty and rendered faceless and voiceless, as props for the more dominant male leads. An exemplary scene in *Come Back Africa* is when white policemen raid the room where Zacharia, the lead character, is asleep in bed with his partner Vinah, a domestic worker. They arrest Zacharia quite violently, pulling the sheets from the bed and near exposing the naked bodies of the bedfellows. Yet, Vinah appears to be ignored—again the typical treatment of most women, particularly black women—rendering her mute both in lived experience and on screen; the recipient of violence, in the context of both patriarchy and Apartheid.

Vinah however, speaks back to the policemen quite vociferously in this scene. Her image is highly sexualised and at the same time largely ignored by the invading policemen when questioned about her partner, who they deem is there illegally. Vinah's presence according to Gilbert Motsaathebe, in his paper on black female representation in South African cinema, "…derived from the concept of voyeurism, limits the black woman figure

to sexual objectification, as the previously invisible black women suddenly becomes visible, parading herself half naked to male patrons" (Motsaathebe 386). The scene is also a sore reminder of my personal experience, almost 45 years ago, when I witnessed the police do the same to my mother and father. I reflect on this incident in *Cinema from Within* (00:58:06).

Interesting to note is the added complexity of the white filmmakers (Rogosin et al), who, as I have discussed previously, were committed to African agency in their films, yet failed to make respectful choices in their creative interpretations of black female characters. Vinah 's presence is used a device to enhance the film's appeal to men. We see the pattern repeated in a later scene in which Miriam Makeba is introduced as sexy songstress for the pleasure of the men in the scene, rather than an active participant in the heady political discussions ongoing amongst her colleagues/fellow artists. The unspoken presence or palpable absence of black women on screen, in the relations of power and labour between white men and black men, speaks to the silenced or muted violence of erasure from the (cinematic) narrative of South Africa.

As many film scholars[39] have observed, the making of *Come Back Africa*, from the development of the original screen idea through to the finished film, was probably one of the most important cinematic ruptures in the history of South African filmmaking. The great irony was that the film could not be screened in South Africa, due to Apartheid censorship. Therefore, many of the participants did not see the film in its completed state. According to Modisane, despite winning the Italian Critics award in Venice in 1959, years would pass before Rogosin was finally able to screen the film in the United States. The significance of the film in the canon of South African cinema practice and theory should not be underestimated.

In Davis' *In Darkest Hollywood: Cinema and Apartheid*, Lewis Nkosi speaks about *Cry the Beloved Country* as a counterpoint to what we later see in *Come Back Africa*:

> *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

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[39] See Tomaselli 1988; Balseiro and Masilela 2003; Botha 2012; Modisane 2013

black community itself, had reservations about *Cry the beloved Country* because of what they thought was a paternalistic tone. (00:27:23)

Nkosi identifies a critical distinction in his work with Rogosin on *Come Back Africa* compared to how *Cry the Beloved Country* was made nine years earlier, where there was hardly without any meaningful consultation with black South Africans in the latter production. Nkosi, quoted in Balseiro and Masilela, spoke to the issue of paternalism thus:

> Well, I'm telling you, the (White) 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 luck, someday you'll be a grown man, fully civilized'. He wants the African from the country, from his natural environment, unspoilt. (Balseiro and Masilela 93)

Nkosi's critique of the South African white liberal's patronising conduct towards black people foreshadowed black consciousness leader Steve Biko's comments in his book, *I Write What I Like*. Biko pointed white liberals to how and where their contribution could be made in the national freedom struggle:

> The liberal must understand that the days of the Noble Savage are gone; that the blacks do not need a go-between in this struggle for their own emancipation. No true liberal should feel any resentment at the growth of black consciousness. Rather, all true liberals should realise that the place for their fight for justice is within their white society. The liberals must realise that they themselves are oppressed if they are true liberals and therefore they must fight for their own freedom and not that of the nebulous "they" with whom they can hardly claim identification. (Biko 27)

Nkosi quoted above, was Paton's inflexible Christian morality first in the narrative of the novel *Cry the Beloved Country*, and, the rather monotone or formulaic filmic dramatisation by Korda of the political condition of the black characters in South African experience, left Nkosi intolerant of the creative intentions of both author and filmmaker.

He criticised the hardened Christian morality of "an eye for an eye" or '"do the crime…do the time" mentality, which shapes the paternalistic attitude of the writing in both the book and the film. Much of the film, Lewis Nkosi argues—in his interview in Davis' *In Darkest Hollywood*—reflects how obsessed the makers of the film were with the crime committed by young Absolom. They considered little the circumstances under which black people lived in Apartheid South Africa, conditions that may have pushed Absolom towards criminality and led him to being sentenced to death by hanging.

It was also a reflection of the author Alan Paton's ideological outlook, which sought to redeem black people through religion at the expense of their personal and political oppression. Ironically, Paton gives warns of an apocalyptic outcome awaiting South Africa should the governments t fail to deliver real freedom to the people.

I propose to take Nkosi's critique a step further. I believe Paton and Korda also shied away from the obvious discontent in the political dispensation that black people demonstrated. Unlike the criminal/victim mentality of Absolom—and by association, black people—portrayed in Korda's *Cry the Beloved Country,* there was increasing militancy against Apartheid laws and the evidence thereof was demonstrated in the ongoing protests, and the steps the Nationalist government of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd would take against this resistance—resulting in decades of repression and crimes against humanity.

THE 1960S—APARTHEID'S GOLDEN ERA

The 1960s was probably Apartheid South Africa's most successful decade. Under the National Party, led by its architect, Hendrik Verwoerd, the Boers won a resounding victory in the whites-only elections in 1961.

After 1961 election victory, the Nationalist Party embarked on a programme to assert its political agenda across the country. Resistance organisations, such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned. The destruction by government of the freehold settlements of Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town gave notice to the anti-Apartheid opposition that integration and equality were not on the agenda and that any resistance would be crushed. The

Sharpeville Massacre of 1960[40] was a particularly ominous example of the power of the state to do just that.

Police officers seen attacking protesters during the Sharpeville massacre. Photo: uhuruspirit.org

Many artists, such as Miriam Makeba and others critical of the regime, eluded prosecution and went into exile. The final straw was the infamous Rivonia Treason Trial of 1963, in which Nelson Mandela and various other stalwarts of the anti-Apartheid movement and senior leaders of the ANC were convicted of high treason and sentenced to life imprisonment.[41] The consequent vacuum in leadership prompted a new way of fighting for change in South Africa.

The experience for most whites in this racial paradise was reflected in the cinema of the 1960s, the glory days of Apartheid nationalism. White South Africa boasted films which were emblematic of the political triumph over black dissent, and in turn were translated

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[40] The killing of 69 unarmed people by police, during a protest against pass laws on March 21, 1960, in Sharpeville, a township south of Johannesburg, sparked outrage in South Africa and around the world. The majority of the dead were confirmed to have been shot in the back. See https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/sharpeville-massacre-21-march-1960

[41] For more on the Rivonia Trial see https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/rivonia-trial-1963-1964

into socio-cultural expressions. One of the few films that featured black actors was *Dingaka* made by the pied piper of Boer/Afrikaner cinema, Jamie Uys, in 1963. Uys received grants and money form the Apartheid government's coffers to make his films and positioned himself as the voice for the Afrikaners and the government of the day. *Dingaka* was yet another film wherein black characters were denigrated, cowering in the face of white paternalism. *In Darkest Hollywood*: *Exploring the Jungles of South African Cinema* Davis provides a plot summary to demonstrate how Africans were characterised:

> …set in some vague native area, the film opens with a choreographed stick fight, with women watching and cheering. The winner, Temba is lauded and stroked by adoring women. The vanquished man, Masaba, looks vengeful. Frantic, frenetic dancing, with much wagging of and joggling of sticks. Mpudi the comic element, gets drunk and performs a funny dance. Loud, insistent drums all through—very much a staged presentation. (Davis 62)

The title, *Dingaka*, which Uys translates as "witchdoctor" is already insulting to African cultural traditions because Africans would normally refer to spiritual mediums as "traditional healers" or other names which describe their designation or function in relation to the needs of people in their community. Using Ken Gampu, at the time one of South Africa's best-known black actors, in the role of Ntuku, who attacks and destroys the "witch doctor", Uys, according to Davis was working in a "dream world" and:

> The problem with dream worlds is that they can draw attention to precisely what they are designed to hide…the real world of the dreamer…What exactly is happening in the South Africa of the early 1960 was a government scheme called Bantu Authorities was a plot cooked up by Apartheid's ideologues to substitute traditional South Arica is again traditional leaders in the homelands with puppets who would dance on the government strings. (Davis 67)

Such films were almost always furthering the aims of Apartheid because they received support from the state and therefore their producers felt obliged to defend its laws. As South African/British film director Antony Thomas reflects, he was "used" by the South African government to sugar-coat Apartheid in his film *The Anatomy of Apartheid*. Thomas

confesses to his complicity at the time, in an extract from Peter Davis's film *In Darkest Hollywood: Cinema and Apartheid,* which I have included in *Cinema from Within*:

> My first documentary was made for the Department of Information…there were those of who wanted to believe there was a benevolent aspect to Apartheid…that film was a bit of extraordinary wishful thinking. I went through a complete political conversion…when I was there as propagandist for the right believing what we were doing for black people and finding through the evidence on the ground that everything I stood for was crap. (*Cinema from Within* 00:26:00)

Equally, films and filmmaking—in fact almost all expressions of meaningful and relevant creative work—suffered. As the world became more exposed to the atrocities committed by the Apartheid government, many African states and some countries internationally opened their doors to South Africans who sought exile.

The flight of many artists like Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba, and the arrest and incarceration of many of the leaders of the resistance movement, left a political vacuum until a resurgent militancy took hold in the late 1960s and 1970s. Under the leadership of Steve Biko, Strini Moodley and Saths Cooper amongst others, a black consciousness organisation—the South African Students Association (SASO)—was established on primarily university campuses where black students were in the majority. It filled the political gap left by the banned organisations and also ignited a revolutionary culture within the oppressed collective of black people, a new sense of being and consciousness amongst the youth especially, including myself.

THE 1970S—BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS: THE PERSONAL IN THE POLITICAL

My political awakening began in the mid-1970s, on the eve of the historic Soweto students' protest of 16 June 1976. Cinema took a backseat with the onset of teenage life. I was grappling with the overwhelming, chemical onslaught of hormones changing my body, wrought with indecisions and misdirected exploration in a tumultuous country gripped by repression. Sometimes it felt like the political upheavals in the country echoed the raging alchemy erupting in my mind and body, colliding in my very being.

My desperation for balance in my life was troubling. I had left Western Township where I spent most of my childhood with my beloved maternal grandmother, to live with my parents in a suburb called Eldorado Park, near Soweto. Through the government's policy of Group Areas, Soweto was built to exclusively accommodate Africans according to their ethnic affiliations—Zulu, Tswana, Venda or Shangaan—while Eldorado Park was demarcated specifically for housing only so-called Coloured people. Both areas were built to keep black people of different ethnic backgrounds separated from each other generally, but more specifically from the cities and suburbs where white people lived. Though various communities of black people lived under similar economic conditions in most instances, the Apartheid government deliberately chose select areas, such as Eldorado Park, to build slightly better homes for so-called Coloureds. With the four nations racial categories developed under Apartheid—white, Coloured, Indian and indigenous Africans /Natives—whites were always placed at the top and at the expense of everyone else, with indigenous Africans at the very bottom. So-called Coloureds and Indians remained in the middle as a buffer between the Whites and Africans, thus further exacerbating tensions and divisions between the various "groups". Steve Biko noted:

> There have been in the past a lot of suggestions that there can be no viable unity amongst blacks because they hold each other in contempt. Coloureds despise Africans because they, (the former) by their proximity to the Africans, may lose the chances of assimilation into the white world. Africans despise the Coloureds and Indians for a variety of reasons. Indians not only despise Africans, but in many instances also exploit the Africans in job and shop situations. All these stereotype attitudes have led to mountainous inter-group suspicions amongst the blacks. (Biko 49)

Due to the harsh laws and brutalisation—physical, emotional and psychological—the internal fractures manifested in the lives of individuals and communities, as many people across the black collective succumbed to this humiliation. The denialism or acceptance of themselves as black featured almost everywhere on the racial scale. The double insult of being rendered Coloured is not only for its label as less-threatening category, but because it also stripped people, like my multi-ethnic family with very clear and identifiable lineages, of any cultural or ethnic ancestry. The government however, through the Homeland's policies, used ethnicity to entrench division amongst South Africa's people to keep them

under their control. rather than to recognise the ancestry respectfully.

Some so-called Coloureds applied to the government to pass as "white" based on the straightness and colour of their hair and the fairness of their skins. On the other hand, indigenous Africans who preferred to be so-called Coloured could apply to the state to migrate across the racial line. Those who 'qualified' or migrated often anglicised or changed their name to a Dutch/Afrikaans equivalent. For example, an Nguni surname like Mtimkhulu, which in isiZulu or isiXhosa means "big tree," was translated into the Dutch/Afrikaans as "Grootboom"; Ndlovu which in isiZulu or isiXhosa means elephant, was changed to the Dutch/Afrikaans "Oliphant". Therefore, someone originally named James Mtimkhulu would be called James Grootboom and Nomsa Ndlovu became Nomsa Oliphant.

While upscaling your name or racial identity may have helped materially, it belied the deep scars people suffered because of the multiplicities of events and situations of trauma or the neurosis caused by these experiences. Derek Hook furthers Fanon's assertion on how alienation from self was aided by the colonial constructs of race, which placed whites, and whiteness/European at the helm:

> Whiteness here functions as a moral category, as the basis, the template of all that is positive. This provides me one way of explaining how I can be black and still divorce myself from my blackness… (Hook 110)

Hook also corroborates the assertion earlier in this paper that South African film productions designed racial tropes on the foundation of colonial constructs. It was evident that Apartheid laws and their enforcement had a pathogenic effect on South Africans generally. Many black people remained severely traumatised by the vicious colonial and Apartheid experience to the point where some ultimately developed an inferiority complex—corporeal and psychic—about their blackness, themselves. Hook explains the neuroses many black people suffered trying to navigate their racial identities/blackness in a white world:

> …I can be black and still divorce myself from blackness; once the above logic is in place, I may be someone who is black yet who has detached himself or herself

from all the derogatory values that have been associated with being black. I can perhaps even provisionally recognise my physical blackness without admitting my socially designated blackness, avoid my blackness because of the whiteness of my soul. (Hook 110)

This sense of inward brokenness or fractured identity is what Fanon referred to as an "inborn complex":

> What! When it was I who had every reason to hate, to despise, I was rejected? When I should have been begged, implored, I was denied the slightest recognition? I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from my inborn complex, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognise me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known. (Fanon 94)

Hook, reflecting on the psychological effects of colonialism, emphasises: "...that the colonial encounter is unprecedented; the epistemic, cultural, psychic and physical violence of colonialism [and Apartheid] makes for a unique historical trauma" (p. 17). The consequences of this trauma are also evident in present-day South Africa, where many people, especially the youth, are reluctant to engage with their history because of the trauma associated with it on one hand and, surprisingly, also because of what they perceive to be the over-indulgence of issues of historicity, or the past.

This amnesiac state of our youth, or the "fragmented identity" suffered by South Africans generally impacted cinema practice—and how the current generation of filmmakers display a resistance towards that which confronts or reflects our past struggles and, more importantly, an acknowledgement of the toxic nature of race politics in South Africa. Arguably we, the generation who came before, seem equally reluctant to let go of the past, for fear that without it, we may be rendered invisible or forgotten.

Black Consciousness came as a panacea to heal these states of amnesia and the mental enslavement that resulted from Apartheid and colonial indoctrination. It was a catalyst to bring black people into appreciation and acceptance of themselves, especially to the youth who took to the streets in their thousands on June 16, 1976. In *Cinema from Within*, Nthatho Motlana, an activist in the 1960s-1970s, with respect to a Victor Hugo quote, confirms the inevitability of black consciousness rising in the oppressed black masses:

"Somebody said, there is no greater force in this whole world…than an idea who time has arrived…Motlana then added: "…and that idea ladies and gentlemen, is black consciousness" (00:36:43). The vision for this "…inward-looking process" Biko refers to in *I Write What I Like* was to redefine black and blackness as the illustrated in the policy manifesto of the Black Consciousness Movement, more specifically:

> 1. Being black is not a matter of pigmentation—being black is a reflection of a mental attitude. 2. merely describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces, that seek to use your blackness a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being. (Biko 46)

Phumla Gqola argues the Black Consciousness Movement revolutionised the way in which black people expressed their presence through creative engagement with the world:

> …art should be produced in the service of freedom…they don't mean...you should talk about race all the time…which you do…they mean something about how you produce art…they mean something about the actual contact…has to be transformative…they say for the first time…what black people feel about ourselves, about the world, about anything…what we think, what we imagine…what we desire matters! (*Cinema from Within* 00:37:26)

In South Africa, apart from the propaganda films made by the state apparatus or white filmmakers who supported Apartheid, meaningful productions featuring black people were sorely absent. There were rarely were fictional films made, which represented alternative/independent South African, views except a few international productions that offered token roles, but even these continued to perpetuate the standard tropes. Notably *Gold*! made in 1974 by Michael Klinger. It featured the co-opted black screen star, Simon Sabela, in the role of a miner John Nkulu—yet another sacrificial native who gives his life to save his white, liberal master Slater, played by Roger Moore.

Davis expands on the characterisation:

It is a classical Faithful Servant situation. The two men have acted like buddies to save the mine. Slater supplying brain, Nkulu the brawn. But tradition demands the sacrifice of the Faithful Servant, for this enhances the stature of the white hero…The Faithful Servant thinks highly of the hero to save his life at the cost of his own…it is reported over the mine loudspeaker that 'Slater has saved the mine'…as a bonus, Slater gets the girl, an option never opened to the Faithful Servant. (Davis 71)

Not since the prolific 1950s examples of *Come Back Africa*, *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, and *Cry the Beloved Country* were films produced in which black people had agency and some authenticity of character. In the 1970s the black South African struggle was often filmed in documentaries, such as *Last Grave at Dimbaza*, produced by black South African Nana Mahome, who was living in exile. South African news emerged largely from international film companies and broadcasters. To be inspired, Black South Africans often watched foreign films that dealt with the themes of oppression and freedom, or films which would entertainment them away from the mundane situation we found ourselves living under Apartheid.

Deconstructing foreign film narratives and placing them into the South African context under Apartheid, gave us insights into how we could apply these filmic ideas to analyse and conduct our own struggle. In an interview in *Cinema from Within* (00:38:56), Saths Cooper, the 1970s Black Consciousness activist, refers to the film *Spartacus*, directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1960. Cooper highlights a scene in which the slaves rise up in defence of their leader Spartacus, sought by the authorities of the Greek Empire for insurrection. Refusing to reveal the identity they all claim to be him: "I am Spartacus, I am Spartacus…" they say until a host of soldiers stand tall in an impressive show of solidarity and loyalty. With reference to how the slave protest in the film resonated with and impacted on the South African struggle for freedom, Cooper states: "…it gave you a sense that if the slaves then could do it…what are we about…" (*Cinema from Within* 00:39:37). He questions our morality and our action towards living out that morality in our struggle for freedom.

Comparing Cooper's account of watching *Spartacus* with my childhood account of watching films such as *Valdez is Coming* points to the impact of cinema in our lives across the generations. More specifically, as Cooper expounds, "…you walked out of the movie house and into the streets and carried with you a little bit of the heroes' and heroines'

success and victory" (*Cinema from Within* 00:40:40). Cooper, here, demonstrates the importance of cinema as a vehicle through which acts of resistance can be transmitted to those who are apparently powerless. It illustrates precisely the process of applying foreign filmic narratives to the context of the South African struggle against Apartheid. Under Apartheid, films depicting struggles that resonated with black South African struggles, such as *Spartacus*, were often censored if not banned.

Amongst those banned were films from the US, such as *A Raisin in the Sun* or *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, which had very obvious racial themes that resonated with the black South African struggle against Apartheid. Ironically, However, Martin Ritt's film, *Sounder*—the story of a black share-cropper family struggling to make ends meet during the Depression—was screened in my local cinema. It had escaped the guillotine of the South African Censorship Board despite its critique of Jim Crow and its stellar black cast, including the iconic Cecily Tyson, and music by legends Taj Mahal and Lightning Hopkins.

Peter Davis makes a comparative note with the civil rights movement and the South African struggle—how Hollywood depictions of these injustices often needed and used actors like Paul Robeson and Sydney Poitier as box-office attractions. Rodney Amateau and Harold Nebenzal, the screenwriters of *The Wilby Conspiracy* comment on the film and Poitier's character, supposedly a freedom fighter, loosely based on Nelson Mandela: "Think Shane, think Shane a minute. The guy (i.e., Keogh) comes through town, wants to mind his own business…cannot mind his own business, is forced into the life of the town, and eventually leaves the town, leaving it better than when he found it…" (Davis 74)

Davis further notes that there was an attempt by screenwriters and producers to make these films appear more complex and sophisticated: "Reflecting recognition of a deeper geopolitical complexity, *Gold!* (1974) and *The Wilby Conspiracy* (1975) are no longer about simple theft" (Davis 18). Although the narratives were suave and sophisticated, to suit to the high-ranked film stars, the trajectories of the black characters almost always resulted in either early demise, or the black character's life being sacrificed for veneration of the white men. As a disclaimer to these disingenuous creations, Amateau stated that: "We went to it from a filmic rather than a, you know, geopolitical experience..." (Davis 75)

For these producers, it was merely business. Their inability to directly challenge the Apartheid narrative, left a vacuum which by necessity could only be filled by South Africans in terms of direct experience. While the works of literary artists, authors,

playwrights and stage performers reflected the freedom struggle through their work, there was no existing film independent/alternative industry in the country to compliment the revolutionary political trajectory that blossomed under black consciousness. It would come only a decade later when both international productions and local filmmakers sought to address the issues of justice and redress, for black people especially.

With the growing crises the Apartheid regime faced internally and internationally, a flurry of documentary films and news features were made to reflect the changing realities in the country. Feature film production began much later in the decade when international and local filmmakers began to make content which represented the realities of South African urban societies and the realities of living black, male and urban.

One of the first home-made, break-through films that brought a lethal cocktail of toxic masculinity and heated politics together was *Mapantsula* (1988*)*, directed by Oliver Schmitz and co-written by Thomas Mogotlane. Through the characters of Panic (Mogotlane) and his "crew", was brewed an alchemy of criminality and politically activism aptly depicted the realities of urban mayhem which defined the 1980s in South Africa. Martin Botha reflects on the environment that the main character, Panic, must negotiate:

> It is a bleak universe of which vividly captures the mood of the late 1980s under the state of emergency in South Africa…Panic is a complex character. He is not only a product of the apartheid system but also of the other social factors and personal flaws (self-centredness, impulsiveness, conformity to the system for his own advantage and at the cost of the community interest of blacks). (Botha 33)

The characterisation of the urban, young, black South African male in *Mapantsula* (1987) fore-shadowed some of the many films, for example: *Hi-Jack Stories (2000),* another feature film by Schmitz, co-scripted with Lesego Rampolokeng; the Oscar-winning *Tsotsi*, and *Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema*, which followed and emulated the American "hood" films. The similarities between the latter and those films made in South Africa point to the how to urban social space has the almost identical representational trends of black males, who are portrayed as film-noir-esque-characters, social misfits or criminals whose lives are heading towards disaster because of their unbearable circumstances and sometimes fatal actions—such as gang violence, run-ins with the police, or a fed-up community that

exercises mob justice.

Outside of the South African state's propaganda films, such as *Dingaka* and *Ikati Elimnyama*, Schmitz's *Mapantsula* afforded a critical role to a black South African male. Like the films of the 1950s, it marked a new entry for black representation in an industry that was either tarnished by stereotypes or awash with propaganda. While Mogotlane delivered a gripping performance, Dolly Rathebe—as Ma Modise, Panic's mother—was a strong character who challenged common representations of black women on screen.

When heightened militancy of the struggle, coupled with international sanctions in the late 1980's forced the South African government to capitulate, it was met with great interest from foreign filmmakers, especially those from Hollywood. Film productions soon depicted the struggle through established names, such as Marlon Brando and Donald Sutherland in *A Dry White Season*, notable for its director Euzhan Palcy, the first black female to direct a Hollywood studio film. Others were *Cry Freedom* by Richard Attenborough, and *A World Apart*—directed by Chris Menges and based on the autobiographical work of Shawn Slovo, the daughter of communist party stalwarts Ruth First and Joe Slovo.

Despite the seemingly benevolent considerations from Hollywood's producers for the suffering of black South Africans and their white supporters, one could not help wondering whether these companies were driven more by capital incentives than noble intentions.

I have given examples of and discussed these films and their merits at length in earlier sections of this paper (see pp 31-37), as well as in *Cinema from Within* (00:23:25–00:35:26). Locally there were very few films produced where black South Africans performed major roles. With the exception of a few local and international documentaries films depicting of the lives of black people under Apartheid, most television dramas or films were made by the state. The South African Broadcasting Commission (SABC) catered mainly for the television dramas that supported Apartheid and its myriad colonial and racist tropes. Although, as Martin Botha notes, "many South African documentaries were made with an international audience in mind in order to get support for the anti-apartheid movement and to educate an international audience about the horrors of apartheid" (Botha 148), such films, or television programmes that were critical of Apartheid were often censored or simply banned from broadcast.

The enigmatic influence of *Mapantsula*, on *Hijack Stories*, which in turn influenced *Tsotsi*

and later *Gangsters Paradise: Jerusalema,* reflects the elastic effect of the changing social and political reality in South Africa. Incidentally they were all directed by white male directors. Young people, especially young black men get transformed being criminals to spearheading the struggle as "young lions" in the 1980s as the film *Mapantsula* demonstrates: then back into criminality in the films made after our negotiated democracy. Jeremy Seekings confirms in his article "The 'Lost Generation': South Africa's youth problem in the early 1990s":

> They boycotted school classes, demonstrated, built barricades and fought street battles against the state's security forces, and took action against alleged collaborators. The 'comrades' rendered whole areas 'ungovernable' and helped to build structures of 'people's power'. For this, they were celebrated by opponents of apartheid. The president of the banned African National Congress (ANC), the late Oliver Tambo, declared in January 1985 that the 'youth' had earned for themselves the honour of being called the Young Lions. (Seekings 104)

After being at the forefront of the liberation struggle and having boycotted and protested against the Apartheid government, many black youth, especially young men, found themselves marginalised, without any meaningful education to either seek work or enter tertiary studies, as South Africa transformed from Apartheid to democracy.

This "lost generation"—a name flouted around in the media around 1990-92—were caught in a vicious cycle of political and economic struggle. There were many debates about the toxic masculinities that pervaded the society and how these could be attributed to violent experiences under Apartheid. White South Africans generally regarded and reflected young, angry black men in the township within the typical colonial frames—savages. Ken Owen, a powerful media figure, and editor of the *Sunday Times*, in this period put it bluntly, as quoted in Seekings:

> ...the immediate threat' to South Africa 'lies in the social disintegration of the townships, which has produced marauding cohorts of youngsters'. Their 'behaviour is so savage as to arouse the impulse towards counter-violence'; 'they are truly lost..., ineducable... There is nothing anybody can do about it. (Seekings 107)

As Seekings confirms: "For white newspaper editors and journalists, young black urban men symbolised disorder and barbarism. The concept of the 'lost generation' was generally invested with deeply racist imagery" (Seekings 107). Although Owen as a white male, dignified and protected by race and patriarchy, has a narrow view of the complexities of black male experience in South Africa, it is important to acknowledge that cinema can reflect reality as in the case study of the African-American hood cinema by Robin Coleman and Jasmine Cobbs. They argue that black women and children subsequently became the main victims of the toxic and hyper masculinities portrayed in such films. Coleman and Cobbs analyse Denzel Washington's deeply troubling cop character, Alonzo Harris, in Antoine Fuqua's *Training Day* (2001) to make the point:

> In *Training Day*, Alonzo is defined not only by his remorseless savagery but also by an equally volcanic sexual identity. In one scene, Alonzo stops by his mistress' house for a midday tryst. He never asks for sex; rather, he expects she be at the ready whenever he stops in. Alonzo's sexual appetite seems insatiable, as his sexual encounter is depicted as lasting for such a long period that Jake, who is waiting for Alonzo in the living room with Alonzo's son, eats a meal and watches Alonzito complete a video game and exhaust a television show before eventually falling asleep. (Coleman & Cobbs 108)

> Thus, 'the brutal buck stereotype is characterised by specific, identifiable tropes. The brutal buck is innately savage, animalistic, hyper-sexual destructive, and criminal. Alonzo Harris can be defined by this quintet of interrelate dis-positions … it is the fear of the brutal buck's violence that is enough to make others dread him and ultimately hunger for his demise. (Coleman & Cobbs 105)

While Alonzo is a policeman in *Training Day*, he, like the youth of South African during the 1980s and even post-transition to democracy, live similar states of existence. They believe that the accumulation of money, virility and firepower are virtues that will guarantee the social status they want, rather than the acceptance they so desperately need. It is important to mention here that the critique by Coleman and Cobbs of *Training Day* and the character of Denzel Washington, the character of Alonzo Harris is also juxtaposed in the article against the representation of white and whiteness and class in

the character of Vic Mackey played by Michael Chiklis in *The Shield* (2002). They examine how differently white cops are represented in American films and television.

Whereas the "hood" films noted were directed by African Americans, South African gangster films have been primarily directed by white filmmakers. This highlights serious questions about legitimacy and agency, and whether or not white people, and white men for that matter, can tell black stories or reflect issues of race or gender, respectively. The same holds true for LGBT stories and those about people with who are physically or mentally challenged. I have given examples of such films above on page 59.

Jyoti Mistry, in *Cinema from Within,* critically points out a how the reality of gender and race representation was often skewed in favour of white directors by virtue of their race: "…A lot of [white) filmmakers made very wealthy and very generous careers of making films that they could say 'look what's going on with black people in South Africa, look I'm telling that story..." (00:25:46).

It is in this regard that I decided to interview black filmmakers specifically and exclusively, to understand how their work has been affected by this legacy of Apartheid and colonialism, how they are telling their stories after democracy was negotiated in 1994, and, how they believe they can engage differently with issues of race and gender in the contemporary South Africa. *Cinema from Within* is purposely titled to consider a "new" cinema for South Africa, one that is not burdened by the past, but neither forgets it; one that is mindful of the external material conditions that define us and the intellectual/theoretical space within which we discern or determine different outcomes for our society and how we "see" ourselves in it and in each other per the concept of ubuntu.[42]

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[42] ubuntu, from the Zulu, recognizes the universal bond between people, the existence and humanity of each individual as directly linked or dependent on the existence of others: "I am because you are…"

CHAPTER FIVE—CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE MAKING OF CINEMA FROM WITHIN

Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter" —Chinua Achebe. *Anthills of the Savannah.*

Having interrogated the issues posed in the key research questions using post-colonial, cinema and political theories, it was imperative that I test these theories against the lived experiences of male and female black filmmakers. I conducted interviews with select filmmakers around Johannesburg. The interviews were conducted to unpack issues of race and gender in film and film production. I wanted to better understand the challenges they faced when depicting black identities in their works. Also central to the theoretical research and the documentary film is how my personal relationship with cinema evolved from avid consumer to maker of films during and post-Apartheid.

PRODUCING AND DIRECTING *CINEMA FROM WITHIN*

I produced and directed the feature documentary film *Cinema from Within* under discussion in this paper. Filming commenced in March 2016 and was staggered due to funding issues and the availability of interviewees and post-production challenges.

In attempting to describe my approach to narrating the subject matter of this documentary film, I have chosen the triangular prism as an audio-visual motif through which the issues of the personal, the political and the theoretical are explored. In a simple scientific experiment, repeated to schoolchildren in classrooms across the world, passing white light through a prism causes the light to bend. The different colours that make up the white light entering the prism become separated because each colour has a different wavelength and therefore bends at a slightly different angle as it passes through the prism. What we perceive as a single beam of light is, in fact, made of multiple, constituent spectral colours. I take this function of the dispersal prism and apply it (in reverse) to describe the exploration of identity in my film.

The soundscape of the documentary is as important as the visualisation. Much attention was given before and during and after the film-making process to design a soundscape that evokes a sense of nostalgia and foreboding at one extreme, and on the other celebration and hope for our struggling country. In between are the audio inflections that reflect how intertwined filmic, personal and political experiences are in a country where there are no strangers to controversy, upheaval and triumph.

The three approaches (the personal, the political and the theoretical) under discussion are sometimes dealt with separately, yet I recognise that they also exist simultaneously and in unison and through the application of film practice in my research. Thus, I bring elements of critical cinema theory, post-colonial studies and filmmaking into discourse, to make a contribution—primarily as a director and a writer—to the existing literary canon and to the practice of the craft. There is much to explore to better understand what informs(ed) my cinema practice past and present.

My introduction to filmmaking began in the late 1980s at a film collective in Chicago, Illinois. As an intern at Kartemquin Films, I worked on the American basketball documentary *Hoop Dreams,* directed by Steve James. The film traced the journey of two aspiring young African American basketball players, their hopes pinned on turning professional. Raised in impoverished neighbourhoods in Chicago, the film's characters and surroundings were reminiscent of the townships where I grew up in Johannesburg. Although the futures of these two young men hung from dreams made through their abilities on a basketball court, my hopes were pitched on a football field, after I was scouted as a possible recruit to a major English football team. The multi-million-dollar contracts and global impact of leagues such as the Premiership were still many years away and my parents did not hesitate to remind me that football was a hobby and not a profession. Like most parents of their time, school education was their preferred pursuit for me. A few years later, *Hoop Dreams* was released to great success. It won many international awards, including an Oscar nomination in 1995.

After many years outside the country (at the insistence of my parents), I returned to South Africa in 1990. A short stint as a trainee futures producer for American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) News left me creatively and politically unfulfilled, and I soon I joined a left-wing film collective, Video News Services (VNS), as a researcher and assistant director. The name of the collective belied the important overt and covert political work

the film unit produced for trade unions and community organisations to promote the anti-Apartheid struggle, both locally and internationally. In preparation for our first-ever democratic elections in 1994, Video News Service was commissioned to make a five-part series *Ulibambe Lingashoni—Hold Up the Sun*. The series focused on the role of the liberation movements, more specifically the African National Congress (ANC) in the popular struggle for freedom. It featured legendary struggle icons and also offered a platform to many unsung South Africans whose invaluable contributions had brought us into a post-Apartheid era.

Analysing the significance of documentaries made by small independent collectives such as VNS, which grappled with the notion of a national identity in South African cinema and the struggle against Apartheid, Jacqueline Maingard writes in Balseiro and Masilela's *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*: "In VNS documentaries, the filmmakers work on the basis of an ideologically derived political framework that proposes a symbiotic interconnection between the fight for the rights of workers….and the national campaign for political freedom and democracy in South Africa"(Balseiro & Masilela 118).

Martin Botha observes that filmmakers saw themselves first and foremost as political activists and as the "interface with international anti-Apartheid movements" (Botha 149). Working on *Hoop Dreams* and *Ulibambe Lingashoni—Hold Up the Sun* foregrounded my professional and political aspirations respectively. What I have explored in this study is how I connected my personal experience to the political situation and my practice as a to form a triangular prism through which I could interrogate what constitutes my South African identity.

BACKGROUND TO THE SLAVERY MONTAGE IN *CINEMA FROM WITHIN*

Critical to my identity is how it was influenced by Apartheid and, later, by challenges in the democratic dispensation. Considering that South Africa was one of the first countries where cinema began, it also set the tone for how black people would be represented in cinema. It is important to understand that these modes of representation found space during the slave trade, where the bodies of black men and women and children served as commodities for European gain.

The aesthetic approach to the montage on slavery in my film, *Cinema from Within*, was inspired by my visit in 2006 to Gorée Island, Senegal. Gorée Island was a main gateway to ship African slaves in their millions to a life of brutal servitude in the Americas. Wading through the thick air of memories, my encounter with the past resurrected the harrowing experiences of the millions of African men and women shackled in leg and neck chains as they passed through the infamous Door of No Return. I recalled Haile Gerima's celebrated film, *Sankofa*, and I had an almost "doubled experience", as I witnessed it both through memorialised spaces in the architecture and my memory of the film.

The Door of No Return—Gorée Island. Source: Getty Images

Later in 2007, while shooting a music video in Jamaica about the legendary South African reggae artist, Lucky Dube, we visited St. Thomas, where chained slaves were brought through the dungeons and doused with louse powder before being sold off. As part of our commemoration of the slave trade and Lucky Dube's venture in Jamaica to bring exiled Africans home, we symbolically set his posters adrift off the Jamaican coastline and filmed "receiving" them back on a beach in South Africa. The music video is a tribute to Dube, who was murdered in Johannesburg in 2007. The song "*Chance*" by artist, Prophecy, reflects how deeply the experiences of Africans trapped in the slave trade resides in our

memory. It is evocation of how we address issue of redress and restoration through creative interventions. It opens perspectives of resistance and memory of that painful history, to counter the dominant narrative of forgetting. As a filmmaker, I revisit an ancient, painful archive and bring myself into the picture(s) of the past.

I attempt, in the slavery sequence in *Cinema from Within*, to show how deeply the slave trade impacted past and contemporary black identities/identification, and how these have played out in cinematic form. Featured in the film are feminist scholar and activist Pumla Gqola and filmmaker Mmabatho Montsho. Their reflections reinforce both the impact of a painful history and my approach to the slavery sequence in the film. As Gqola notes: "If you think about the long history of white supremacy, black people are bodies…at best. Property at worst, but bodies at best" (00: 38:31). Montsho speaks to the need to address and redress: "Sometimes we do our work retrospectively. So, years ago you watched a show that represented people like you badly…as soon you get an opportunity the first thing you do, is fix that" (00:36:06).

Montsho's comment, in particular, resonated with my efforts to (re-) construct the slavery sequence in *Cinema from Within* (00:18:41) and the impact that the slave trade, overall colonialism and Apartheid had on the constructions of race and gender identity. The sequence begins with a scene where I am walking in a meditative stroll along a beach in Durban, South Africa. I use Hugh Masekela's signature tune, *Stimela,* as an audio backdrop, because song highlights the dangerous and sometimes fatal experiences of hundreds of thousands of black men, recruited to work underground in inhuman conditions in the gold and diamond mines in South Africa. It also evokes the memory of the African slave trade where captured slaves, were stacked into European slave ships and transported to work in the cotton, and sugar cane plantations in the Americas. In both instances the consanguineous relationship between land, family and culture is ruptured by the violence of capture, forced migration and hard labour.

The slavery sequence is an active response to how artists and filmmakers in particular grapple with issues of historicity through the filmic archive. As accomplished British-Ghanaian born filmmaker John Akomfrah, quoted in Dara Waldron, notes:

> The archive, especially the moving image archive, comes to us with a set of Janus-faced possibilities. It says, 'I existed at one point and it's possible that I could exist differently'. But in order to find that you need something else, which is not in the archive, which is the philosophy of montage. Montage allows the possibility of reengagement, of the return to the image with renewed purpose, a different ambition. (Waldron 2)

Akomfrah argues that this form of inscription into the past allows for "the possibility of re-engagement" (Waldron 1) with the historical, the archive. Further, Aboubaker Sanogo, the scholar of African film, addressing an audience during his introduction to "Sankofa—a Haile Gerima filmography", at the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival, spoke of the relevance of *Sankofa* and its implications on the recreation/reconstruction of an archive:

> *Sankofa* may be read as a metaphor for the archive…the archive, inside Sankofa… is a condition or possibility of self and common reconstruction. It seems to be an ultimate technology of permanent identity of production…it takes a multiplicity of forms in the film…the archive is conceived as a place…the slave dungeon for example… a portal into other spaces… (Sanogo)

Just as Gerima used the slave dungeon as a portal into the past, I also chose the mesmerising effects of the Indian ocean as my entry point, a site of transition from which the montage of the slavery sequence in my documentary flows. The montage is edited as a combination of stills and sketches dissolved over moving archival images of the brutal and often fatal abuse of African slaves.

The soundscape was developed collaboratively between the audio and visual editors and me. Our intention is to create the montage to interpret and capture the horror of the genocide, the psychologically disturbing underlay of industrial sound of metal against metal. The soundscape is an attempt to create a feeling of confinement through the sound of protests of African abductees smothered by their overzealous and inhumane abductors. The song, *Oluwa (Many Rains Ago)* composed by Caiphus Semenya and Quincy Jones, featuring the legendary South African singer Letta Mbulu, is woven into the montage and serves as a musical artery, which feeds the picture to enhance the trauma.

It is important to note how previous installations of archival memory create a lineage of narrative. The slavery sequence also pays homage to a pre-existing archive made by some of the pioneers of African cinema. Med Hondo's *Soleil O*, Ousmane Sembène's *Ceddo*, and Gerima's aforementioned *Sankofa* are films that have delivered highly artistic constructions of the African slave narrative and the post-colonial condition in Africa and the diaspora. In the montage I have used their archive in myriad ways to memorialise the same subject material through my creative vision.

I found the slave sequence especially difficult to create. I came frustratingly close to understanding that visual and aural metaphor can be quite paradoxical in its application. It was an important learning curve in the making of *Cinema from Within*. I was met with stimulating challenges about how to memorialise deeply emotional and sometimes unbearable conditions, which reduce human being to "bodies… or properties", in the words of Gqola, complicated by displacement, brutalisation and death.

Visual analogy can elicit very strong feelings about a subject—in our case about the past. On the other hand, it can also be limiting as means to capture the scope and depth of human emotion and experience. Creative reconstructions like montage, I would argue, seem better suited to interpret experiences, rather than duplicating reality in a (new) archive. In creating these interpretations, the filmmaker causes a disruption(s) in the intended course, the artist brings to bear a different epistemological function and understanding of the archive. Jean Fischer, cited in Waldron, describes how the diasporic artist inverts meaning and intention: "for the diasporic artists to disarticulate this archive is, then, a subversive act insofar as it usurps the power of authority to control meaning". (Waldron 5)

This creative or "poetic" re-construction, as Waldron describes the approach to this form of documentary filmmaking "…tallies with Bill Nichols' instantiation of the poetic documentary" (Waldron 3). Waldron confirms that a creative or poetic insertion or intrusion/rupture into an archive "… is rested on the conviction that the duty of the artist is to elicit the promise of the virtual and to make it actual: whether contained in actual memory or the memory contained in the images". (Waldron 3)

Applying Waldron's observations to *Cinema from Within*, the sequence of my son Amilcar and I perched on a rock overlooking the ocean serves to emphasise how we are able to restore the absence of those omitted by a biased account of history. While recalling the

horrific experiences that occurred during the slave trade to my son, I realised that both myself as storyteller and my son as recipient/audience would relive a measure of that experience.

The greatest gesture I believe is that in remembering our ancestors we have restored their dignity and given a different account of a history that too many have been oblivious to. The oral account of 'our' history also creates an inter-generational link and lineage in which, as Paul Gilroy reminds us, histories are shared: "The idea of tradition gets understandably invoked to underscore the historical continuities, subcultural conversation, intertextual and intercultural cross-fertilisation which make notion of a distinctive sand self-conscious black culture appear plausible" (Gilroy 88).

In *Cinema from Within* I use a conversational approach, rather than formal and highly stylised interviews, to reflect the "historical continuities" that illuminate how black filmmakers, artists and authors address the political through our work. We are creating new ways of seeing, of looking back in time to bring a different account of history to bear in the archive.

The role of cinema in the context of the African continent and its diasporic communities can be seen as a means to memorialise the black experience/gaze differently from the Eurocentric mainstream narratives that tend to control its production. As Mistry and Schuman describe: "Film is a vehicle for releasing the repressed and the silenced, for remembering, altering and transforming narratives that might otherwise be forgotten" (Mistry & Schuman x).

Re-theorising and devising new ways of seeing, experiencing and re-presenting the archive falls within resistance against or rupture of a western cinematic paradigm, which primarily focusses on white European ideals and ideologies thereby separating Africans including those in the diasporic communities.

The goal of re-visiting or re-engaging with the archive in the cinematic montage is synonymous with the theoretical discourse and practice of "decolonisation" as proposed by Kenyan academic, author and activist Ngugi Wa Thiongo in his book *Decolonising the Mind*. Similarly, in *De-Westernizing Film Studies*, Bâ and Higbee highlight—through their own analysis and that of a cross-section of international contributors to the publication, as well as in their practice as filmmakers and scholars—the necessity to unshackle film

studies from existing only in the western paradigms that have defined it for too long. Sheila J. Petty, a contributor to the publication shares her ideas on this subject:

> "the goal of de Westernizing theory (cinema) when analysing African and African diasporic works is not to restrict the application of Western theory but rather to broaden such analysis by bringing to the fore imperatives within such artworks that may be overlooked or minimized through the use of purely Western standards. (Bâ & Higbee 68)

The montage within the sequence in *Cinema from Within* serves simultaneously as an exposition and an interrogation of the scientific and religious apologia that surfaced during the Enlightenment and culminated in the Berlin Conference[43] of 1884. In this conference notions of scientific racism were developed as a means to justify colonial expansion and slavery. Tayyub Mahmud, in his inquiry on race as a construction of colonialism argues:

> European 'race-science' consolidated the double binary of fair/dark and civilized/savage, by positing the anatomical investigations of Europeans and Africans as establishing the top and bottom of a progressive series of human races with comparable mental endowments and civilizational achievements… colonialism, as a project of bringing the backward races into the universal History, bridged Enlightenment with modern constructions of race. (Mahmud 1222)

The consecutive regimes of colonialism, slavery around the world, and later Apartheid in South Africa, legitimised the defective scientific theories and flawed religious revisionism on which constructions of race were developed. As Graham Leach notes: "The church did

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[43] A meeting in Berlin in which European imperial powers, including Britain, Germany, France and Portugal essentially divided up the African continent, regulating resource extraction and trade for their respective benefits. See https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195337709.001.0001/acref-9780195337709-e-0467

only support Apartheid theoretically, it gave the policy a biblical and ethical justification. The church provided Apartheid's theology" (Leach 178).

Using religion and science as a justification not only held great economic imperatives for the colonial forces but also came at an irreparable cost to Africans. Economically Africa was and has been stripped from its resources both implicitly and explicitly. Politically, the continent has suffered the categorisation of "third world" and "basket case"—with the global power dynamics inherent to that status. Finally, and most psychologically damaging, is how the "alienation" of Africans and their descendants from their land, culture and means of production, emerges as a final stage of the colonial project.

The psychological impact of fragmented identity is also discussed in W.E.B. Dubois' *Souls of Black Folk*, which unpacks the multi-faceted identities that displaced African Americans rotate to define themselves:

> "it is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on at amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder." (Du Bois 15)

Du Bois' description of "double consciousness" as experienced by African Americans in a racist society is reminiscent of the fragmented identity of black South Africans, to which I have eluded throughout this paper. This fragmentation was enhanced in cinema, which in the context of the South African state, became a tool through which all identities were defined and managed to uphold and advance psychological, social and political oppression. Modisane, in his book *South Africa's Renegade Reels*, notes: "The representation of black identity was key to the colonial apparatus of political legitimation." (Modisane 7)

Yet, the films that resonated with our struggle for freedom, were generally films that dealt with the themes of oppression. Deconstructing foreign film narratives and placing them into the South African context under Apartheid, gave us insights into how we could apply these filmic ideas to analyse and conduct our own struggle.

THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL—CINEMA IN THE CARTOGRAPHY OF MY CHILDHOOD

The account of my personal narrative in the documentary film brings to the fore the way in which cinema shaped my notions of self, family and community. It is also within the milieu of self, family and community where I believe Apartheid had some its most damaging effects. It may seem that my childhood experience of cinema was magical—as presented in *Cinema from Within* and my bio-pic *Waiting for Valdez*—there is no question that growing up under Apartheid underscored enduring painful and haunting experiences.
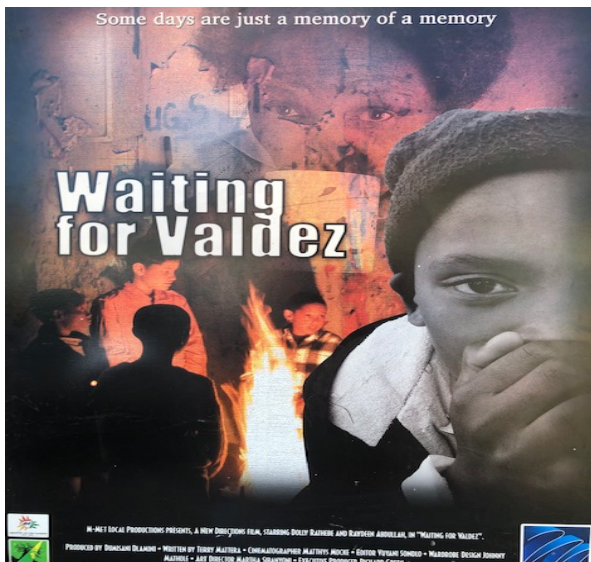
Poster of the film *Waiting for Valdez* (2003)

More often than not we were forced to thwart the limitations imposed on us through innovative means. Over weekends, my grandmother, like millions of black women in the townships, sold home-made brews, culinary favourites and edibles to the residents on our street to bring in extra income. The money she made working in domestic service in Johannesburg's white suburbs was never enough.

As children we were never far from home, making up games, rolling downhill at dangerously high speeds inside huge, discarded truck tyres. We made toys from wire and

broken cloth. Of these pastimes nothing was more exciting for me than going to the cinema or hearing my favourite film re-versioned by the members of my street gang of boys. The re-telling of the film was always embellished in our own languages matched with a home-grown soundtrack, over a fire-drum, sometimes in the bitter cold of a Johannesburg winter.

This creative invention as kids, I believe, pointed directly to the poverty inherent to our communities. It also explains how we learnt through the art of the imagination, not only to survive the debilitating effects of Apartheid poverty, but also to resist its very intention to paralyze our young minds. It may not have come as a conscious intention as a child, but I believe that we knew that something was missing and we needed to find out what it was, and we needed to change it! *Waiting for Valdez* illustrates this quite profoundly, as filmmaker and academic Jyoti Mistry explains in *Cinema from Within*:

> The importance of a film like *Valdez* [is], that actually it connects very beautifully the dots of what the notion of the bioscope means as opposed to cinema in this grand scale and extra-ordinary terms… I love that film very much because it also shows the way in which cinema created community. (00:17:28)

On reflection, I realise that we were obstructed as children by fantasy and the spectacle of cinema. Our innovation as film storytellers couldn't take us much further than what was on the screen. We saw mainly American movies with white male movie stars and re-created their narratives and screen stature respectively into our own lives and own experiences…we made them our own! Only later did I begin to understand what the impact of white, and black representation meant in terms of its psychological impact. Being white and male was synonymous with God, authority, perfection and the ultimate definition of masculinity. Being white and female was associated with fertility and beauty—the epitome of racial purity.

Being black, on the other hand, meant that you were expected to show obeisance to white authority and purity respectively. "White" was emblematic of this racial construct. The Apartheid categorization of "non-white" made white people visible and existent in and under the law, and black people "otherwise" and invisible. John Kani, the playwright, actor and director recalls in *Cinema from Within* the lines of a song popular amongst black

people during Apartheid that epitomized the privilege and comfort white people enjoyed at the time and how black people, suffering under the yoke of oppression, actually aspired to this racial privilege: "everything had to be white… khu betere umlungu…khumtu umnyama uzokhuwenzela… loosely translated as "it's better to be white because things go right." (00:23:08)

My father, Don Mattera, explains later in the film how the destruction of Sophiatown, for example, was emblematic of the Apartheid state's unwavering intent to psychologically distort and destroy black identity and experience:

> They create the tumour in your mind. That you are not human… you are sub-human. You are nothing. They are the best thing, they are God's creation. And they are white. They take the who you are out of you and put them that they are inside you. (00:49:52)

Going back to my childhood, I realise that perhaps we as children knew this feeling of invisibility. We countered that by adopting filmic identities of white men as victors and making their stories our own. There was, in my experience, sheer exhilaration deny the sheer exhilaration and pleasure in re-enacting Clint Eastwood, the powerful white male shooting at liberty anyone who made him angry.

In *Cinema from Within*, I return to the site of a memory. A township rebuilt over the razed residence of my childhood—renamed Westbury. Not so ironically, I later discovered this name ascribed to a small English village on the train line between London and Exeter in the UK, where I undertook my PhD studies. In my conspiratorial filmmaker's mind, I visualised that infamous Berlin Conference in 1885 where European nations haggled over territories and renamed them in the name of conquest and occupation. The colonial imprint has been memorialized over and again in the geography and lexicon from childhood to present day.

The Westbury of my childhood is the site of several scenes in *Cinema from Within* (2018). One, in particular, features a gathering of excited children around me in a park; I choose to remember each of their names in quite a playful way. I believe that sub-consciously I had lived to return and memorialise that space and that time of my childhood. By

remembering the children's names, I remembered myself in that very space, almost 50 years ago. I had returned to restore what was broken—memories, friends, family and the desire/nostalgia of being in that fantastical world of childhood. It was a restorative act of resistance.

THE TOWNSHIP AND THE CITY AS MEMORIALISED SPACES

> This is Johannesburg…the epicentre of our beloved South Africa…With its imbalanced economy and its very, very troubled history. This is the City of Gold…the city of dreams…baptized in fire! These streets curate the memory of my childhood where I strolled in dream-like states kicking cans and watching myself and the world disfigured in bubbled reflections in shop windows. And somewhere in the space between the streets and my mind was the soundtrack of my favourite films neatly tracked on the vinyl of my memories.—Audio clip V/O, *Cinema from Within* (00:01:48)

At various times during my documentary film, including a few moments following the above clip, I revisit the township of my childhood and speak to the painful consequences of racial classification—how Apartheid and colonial constructs of race divided and ruled South African physically, geographically, socially and psychologically.

In neighbourhoods like mine, state violence was meted out, contributing to the internecine violence that imploded our communities. Such violence was also responsible for making black folk—mostly from dispossessed and poverty-stricken communities—pawns in their own demise through the system designed for that very purpose. My immediate family was legally classified as "Coloured" and thus confined, under the draconian Group Areas Act, to decaying and under-resourced locations such as Westbury. Reflecting on the conditions under which my family and countless other black people in South Africa were forced to live, led me to consider black identity and notions of blackness that would spark lines of enquiry in *Cinema from Within*.

To understand how race policies defined space, I chose to demonstrate its implication on black life through the organic resistance and ingenuity shown by black women like my grandmother, who could have easily passed for white in South Africa but remained

steadfast in her resolve to not capitulate when things got rough for us. Being raised by a grandmother is common to many South Africans. Taking charge of a host of other siblings and children from the extended family speaks to a mental fortitude and was a response to social and political malaise—gangsterism, poverty, teen pregnancy and limited education—that threatened most black women and their offspring. I recall emotionally turbulent feelings and times of disquiet, because we rarely had dedicated time or space with our parents, exclusively as a family. The "match-box" four-room homes we lived in could never accommodate everyone—we were just too many kids, and there was no guarantee of dedicated intimacy or moments of privacy. Though I could not articulate this as a child, I believe that my feelings of disquiet were as a result of the socio-economic violence of scarcity and social malaise that the Apartheid system guaranteed.

In the preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes similar feelings of "disquiet" as a "nervous condition" (Fanon 17). This condition is akin to what I described in the beginning of this paper as the "fractured identity" within the embodiment of the colonised African—an experience Don Mattera qualified when he described the destruction of Sophiatown and the forced removal of its inhabitants—an event that dislocated, displaced and humiliated more than 200,000 people.

The violent destruction of Sophiatown wrought equally traumatic psychological consequences.
Source: Baileys Archives

Fear and loathing of the African dominated public space in Apartheid South Africa.
Source: YouTube.

The memorialisation of painful childhood experiences through my film project and this paper serves as much a restoration of space as redemption of the past. Returning to Western Township of my childhood after it was razed to the ground and renamed Westbury, was also a moment of triumph, an emotional and psychological response to the Apartheid system that left many of us nameless in meaning, place and space. It was a gesture of resistance—a deliberate attempt to return to *that* time more powerfully than when I was as a child, a black child. I returned empowered as a filmmaker, not only a consumer of other people's stories, but also the creator of my own narrative.

In this regard, I have emulated my father, who, as journalist and author, did the same as he revisited his past through *Memory is the Weapon*—his memoir about growing up in Sophiatown, and his political awakening and transformation from gangster to poet, author, political activist and humanitarian. The creative inspiration for my films, especially my first feature, *Max and Mona*, comes from my father's experience and that of his mother, my grandmother Dinkie Lebakeng, a Tswana woman who had a reservoir overflowing with stories from her rural beginnings in rural Limpopo—a province to the north of Johannesburg.

I drew extensively from this archive while scripting *Max and Mona*—a coming-of-age comedy about a young, rural man and his abusive uncle, who takes advantage of his nephew's penchant as a professional mourner to gain traction in the big city. This abuse of a traditional custom results in rather comic karmic outcomes from which both Max and his uncle learn invaluable lessons about life and respect. Indeed, the story arc is similar to one my grandmother told me about the roles different people played in the rural areas where she grew up, and is also drawn from my father's stories of his two friends who had no desire to work, so would go out to strangers' funerals so that they could take advantage of the free food and drinks on offer. They often got too drunk and cried out the wrong names and would eventually be thrown out of the proceedings.

The process of writing and directing *Max and Mona* involved melding anecdotal experiences and cultural practices. I re-wrote a history and created a comic and often tender memorial to a social history—a cinematic archive free of the offensive tropes that rendered black people like Max as objects of ridicule, or as invisible and mute. It was a film that offered the black audience a window on themselves, through characters with agency, an opportunity to laugh at themselves rather than be derided by others. It was a departure of cinematic offerings by Apartheid ideologues, such as Jamie Uys, whose *The Gods Must Be Crazy* enjoyed enormous international success, despite it being predicated on offensive, mocking depictions of the nomadic and hunter clans of the San of southern Africa and their cultural practices. My work on *Max and Mona* illustrated the intersection of the personal, the political and the practice—a fusion that created a narrative in which our presence was inscribed and celebrated. This theme is also present in my documentary project, *Cinema from Within*.

GENDER, SPACE, AND RACE

However well-meaning the intentions of foreign filmmakers to bring African images to the screen in films such as *Jim Comes to Joburg* or *Come Back Africa*, they were often challenged by the circumstances and experiences under which black people lived; racism and gender prejudice were common experiences for black actors and they often played out on set and on screen as they did in daily life.

Dolly Rathebe, a screen star in the Sophiatown era and featured in *Cinema from Within*, recounts how she was arrested for travelling without the infamous "dompass", an identity document that black people were forced to carry to prove their right to reside, traverse or visit urban areas zoned for whites only (00:28:60). Gender prejudice ran even deeper, with black women suffering patriarchy in its most subtle and pernicious forms.

An archival clip in *Cinema from Within* illustrates this well. It is a scene from the film *Come Back Africa*, wherein a group of black men—including Casey Montsitsi, Bloke Modisane, Can Themba and Lewis Nkosi, considered Sophiatown's intellectual elite—are seated in a typical South African township "shebeen" (speakeasy). In animated discussion they decry the condescending and racist white liberal attitude and the cultural products that emanated from such, in this case *Cry the Beloved Country*. In the scene in question, a shy Miriam Makeba enters the shebeen and delivers a sterling performance of the song *Into Yam'* (*My Thing*—as in *her man*) in the presence of these men, who are all her friends.

Miriam Makeba, in a scene from *Come Back Africa* (1959)
Source: screengrab *Cinema from Within*

Although the men venerate Makeba as she sings, it is hard to overlook the fact that apart from the shebeen's host, who appears later in the scene, Makeba is the only woman in this male-dominated space. It is a fact that social and traditional culture define myriad social spaces like these and women are seen and treated as primarily for the pleasure of men. It is not difficult to see how the moment is a complex cocktail: alcohol, lust and the intent of their gaze turns Makeba into an object of desire, rather than a woman with agency.

This led to further reflection about my own directing work—specifically my first feature, *Max and Mona.* My thinking at the time as writer, and later as director, was to deploy the seductive features of a strong and beautiful black woman called Nozipho, played by Tumi Melamu, and give her agency by having her own a business. She would appear as an interesting character to impact a narrative that revolved around a young man who wants to advance his career in the big city, but who ends up falling in love. Yet, despite my good intentions to position an empowered female protagonist within the narrative as a love interest, I realise the shortcomings of my sexist conditioning in such characterisation. Nozipho, in fact, served mainly to enhance the character of the leading man, Max, and also as an object of desire for the male, heterosexual viewers in the audience.

Although the male gaze pervades across cinematic forms, women are challenging the lens through which they are objectified on and off screen. In the South African context, a rising cadre of black women filmmakers are vocal and actively critiquing the ways in which black women, in particular, are represented.

Mmabatho Montsho, a filmmaker and feminist featured in *Cinema from Within* echoes the critique. She explains how she feels compelled to engage and challenge work that dehumanises or lacks depth in its representations of black women. She notes that "Sometimes we do our work retrospectively. So, ten years ago you watched a show that represented people like you badly. As soon as you get an opportunity…the first thing you want to do…is fix that!" (00:36:05). Montsho speaks about returning to the archive to fix the past, as an act of defiance, an act of resistance, to reconstitute history and firmly implicate and place ourselves into it: "Your point of view is influenced by something…And you either have those politics or you don't. And personally, I want to live with the politics" (00:36:21).

Montsho comments on how the process of her practice as a filmmaker, grappling with the political content, affects her personal wellbeing. Particularly thought provoking are her insights about the online series she created called *Women on Sex*—exploring how the female body as a presence in society is constantly under threat in South Africa, one of the most violent places on Earth for women to live. Here we see the triangular motif at play, where the Montsho, the filmmaker, engages with the personal and the political through her practice:

> It told me that there is serious conflict. That there is a war and one half (men) of people have come to accept that this is the way it goes. And another half who feel they have a right, more of a right to exist in the world, more of a right to walk down the road, they have more of a right to say something. They have rights not only to their bodies but to other people's (women) bodies too. I mean to get women to talk about their bodies as if they belong to them. First and foremost. I mean, it's a difficult thing, it's always in relation to a lover, a parent but just to talk about this body as mine, it's mine. It's difficult. (*Cinema from Within* 01:16:41*)*

With these toxic masculinities at play in South Africa it is important to understand how black masculinities are implicated in the violence that is inherent to the experiences and representations of black women on and off screen. In an interview in *Cinema from Within*, South African actor Khulu Skenjana speaks about how black masculinity is translated in film. He notes his role as a drug dealer and pimp in *Gangsters Paradise*: *Jerusalema*:

> That role, I mean I'm played a big black bad man—you know the bad guy. He is a drug dealer, he is a pimp, he is absolutely street…I am playing that guy…I am playing the guy the media, ever since I grew up actually…I am playing the guy who the media says, who black men are! …There has been something inside me that says this is not who you are. (*Cinema from Within* 01:18:1)

"You, go and make some money!" A screengrab from *Gangsters Paradise: Jerusalema*,
featuring Khulu Skenjana in the role of the pimp, Tony Ngu. Source: Screengrab, *Cinema from Within*

Our discussion went further to explore if there was a way to shift the current narratives, the stereotypes of black men, to rethink how we project black masculinity in order to shift the way we objectify, and ultimately violate, black women on and offscreen. Skenjana emphasised:

> …We are at a crisis point as a people, where we need to rethink African masculinity but African femininity as well. I am also so tired of seeing the black female constantly crying, traumatised on film. You know on film, what makes a great female actress, is how good she can cry. You know, its sick, its twisted man. (*Cinema from Within* 01:18:35)

Asked if he could see a future as an actor beyond the struggle narrative and pervading violent tropes, Skenjana acknowledged the importance of being an ally to women struggling in an oppressive patriarchal environment: "…I'd certainly like to take roles…be offered roles where I am fighting for the black women, a whole lot more…" (01:18:47)

Skenjana's critical observation and advocacy for change regarding the identification and representations of black women in South African society generally and its cinema in particularly, offers another way of being male and black in contemporary South African

society. Furthermore, it raises the possibility that not all black men share the view and practice of patriarchal society.

hooks, in her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, supports this observation when she states that "any critique of 'black macho' of black male sexism, that does not acknowledge the actions of black men who subvert and challenge the status quo cannot be an effective critical intervention". (hooks 100)

hooks further warns that:

> Absolute portraits that imply that all black men are irredeemably sexist, inherently supportive of male domination, make it appear that there is way to change, no alternative, no other way to be. When attention is focussed on those black men who oppose sexism, who are disloyal to patriarchy, even if they are exceptions, the possibility for change, for resistance is affirmed. (hooks 100).

The concept of Black Consciousness, as espoused by Steve Biko, resonates with hooks' belief that, "spaces exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, at one another, naming what we see. The gaze has been a site of resistance for colonised black people globally." (hooks 199)

To understand how these roles and role-play men are involved in both in society and in films respectively, it is important to return again to the legacy of colonialism and Apartheid and its impact on the black psyche. In *Cinema from Within*, I highlight a childhood experience of trying to access a "whites only" beach with an uncle in Durban.

I was no more than seven years old when this occurred, and it was only later in my life that I realised how much my uncle had suffered at the time—humiliated for his skin colour, and denied a basic right to leisure and fun with a child. The long-term psychological impact of these power dynamics and crimes against humanity persist. I have depicted this experience as a vignette in *Cinema from Within* (01:24:19). I cast my son Amilcar into my childhood experience and me as my uncle, allowing us passage into the past. Though simulated, it left my son with many questions about the experience of racism. He learnt about our past, our country and the black experience of life under Apartheid and the enduring scars that racism leaves.

A simulated scene (in *Cinema from Within,* in which I cast my son
Amilcar and myself into a racist past.

The racist violence enacted upon black men in the past has resulted in our painful
insecurity, which contributes to the varied ways we enact violence up black women in
particular. The tragedy often quadruples where many of the men who have been
marginalised are either reluctant to seek help or are unaware of their condition(ing). As
hooks points out in her analysis of the African American context:

> Most black men remain in a state of denial, refusing to acknowledge the pain in
> their lives that is caused by sexist thinking and patriarchal, phallocentric violence
> that is not only expressed by male domination over women but by internecine
> conflict among black men. (hooks 102)

Although her critique focuses mainly on the experiences of African American men, it is
applicable to the South African context and particularly to films that narrate the lives of
black people. For example, the American genre of 'hood' films, such as *Boyz 'n the Hood*,
directed by John Singleton, and *Menace II Society*, directed by the Hughes brothers,
reflect to a large the extent the conditions, experiences and vulnerabilities of black people
living under oppressive conditions. The South African "gangster" genre emulates the
American "hood" film in the depiction of black lives—with misogynist, gun-toting black men
caught in the spiral of urban decay and political and economic emasculation. hooks further

articulates that white men too have an unfair share of access into representation (of all identities) with little reprimand because they are protected by their class and race status:

> …more than any other group white men are able to make films without being subjected to a constant demand that their work does not perpetuate systems of domination based on race, class, and gender. As a consequence, it is this work that is usually the most unthinking and careless in its depictions of groups that are marginalised by these institutionalized structures of exploitation and oppression." (hooks 70)

Following on the discussion of black female representation, Gilbert Motsaathebe's inquiry *Portrayals of Black Women in Post-Apartheid South African Film* raises some compelling ideas on how the previous roles of black women in films have mutated into more modern forms of representation or caricatures. He differentiates between the roles of women into five categories through his examination of three South African films made after the country's negotiated transition to democracy in 1994: *Yesterday* (2004), *Tsotsi* (2005) and *Gangster's Paradise*: *Jerusalema* (2008). I have summarised these categories below:

1. the single, unemployed mother raising her children without fathers,
2. the mother who is constantly in the background sacrifices her own dreams by busy helping others in the family to realise the best in themselves,
3. the solidarity of sisterhood or women in antagonistic situations in film,
4. the more recognisable domestic woman and caregiver.
5. the black woman as a figure for sexual objectification

Arguably, these categories have been in existence well before the designated period of Motsaathebe's study—in films previously discussed in this paper, such as *Jim Comes to Joburg*, *Cry the Beloved Country*, and *Come Back Africa.* The differences lie in the examination of these categories or roles that black women perform within the context of a democracy rather than that of Apartheid.

What seems to be the more constant denominator of all these characters, is the sexual inuendo attributed to his fifth category by especially male filmmakers; black and/or white which I argue preys upon the presence of black women as "bodies" performing for

pleasure and entertainment rather than their agency as actors and self-determining women. The women are sexualised and commodified to determine success for a select part of the audience, mainly men. By my own admission, I made the same misjudgement in how I characterised Nozipho in my debut feature, *Max and Mona*. This study has driven me into making deeper and more critical considerations of gender representation in my own practice as screenwriter and director. Motsaathebe explains how this characterisation of disempowered black females operates:

> In this context, the roles of black female characters rise to prominence only when they drive the story that serves to elevate other groups. The presence of their absence is therefore both revealing and symbolic. The most frequent image orchestrated in these films is the constantly busy woman who is always occupied with something in the background. (Motsaathebe 389)

Mmabatho Montsho, in an interview for *Cinema from Within*, expressed a desire to move away from the limited way in which (male) scriptwriters, producers and directors have generally chosen to represent women in South Africa: "I always wanted to do work that has a little more substance…that has a little bit more to offer than just: "here are hot people on a screen and here's something sensational…let's do something with it" (00:14:28).

A clip of Khosi Jiyane—a clinical psychologist interviewed by Mmabatho Montsho in the web-series *Women on Sex*—included in *Cinema from Within* pushes the point further: "We have zoned in on a tiny space in the body of a female and used that to define totality who she is." (01:15:04). To elucidate the fetishization of female bodies Motsaathebe quotes Annette Khun: "fetishism functions in two ways: it allows the women to be objectified for sexual pleasure at a physical level, and it allows the image to be packaged in a saleable form, such as film and sold as a commodity" (Khun 392). Indeed, a double commodification of women—first as sexual objects for male pleasure and second as the objects that drive the film's financial viability—is at play.

My analysis in this PhD into how these attributes are ascribed to black women generally in South African cinema could not be divorced from how women are objectified and denigrated in society. This led me to discuss further with Mmabatho Monthso in *Cinema*

from Within about the kinds of relationships that black women were having, in terms of being in the same society and living in the same spaces as men. She noted:

> It told me that there is serious conflict. That there is a war. And one half of people have come to accept this as the way it goes….and another half who feel…they have a right. They have more of a right to exist in the world. They have more of a right to walk down the road. They have more of a right to say something. They have rights not only to their bodies, but other people's bodies too. (*Cinema from Within* 01:16:35)

This indictment of South African society, and men in particular, points to the how our society is constructed through patriarchal structures and organisations, cultural traditions and societal conventions that marginalise female voices and experiences. The economy and religion are under the dictatorship of men and therefore shape society to suit male demands. Looking at the statistics on violence against women in South Africa, the evidence incriminates South African men and the patriarchal society in which they operate. A Statistics South Africa 2018 report reviewing crimes against women showed that the murder rate of women in South Africa is five times higher than the global average and the number of women raped is estimated at 138 per 100,000. "For this reason, some have labelled South Africa as the 'rape capital of the world'" (Stats SA 3).

An article by Nomathamsanqa Masiko, an advocacy officer at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) in Johannesburg, points to the brutal and often fatal reality of violence conducted against women by South African men. In summary, Masiko suggests that gender-based violence is not an isolated incident perpetuated by the criminally insane, but rather a systemic social problem addresses the issues of gender inequalities, violent masculinities and patriarchy. Furthermore, the characterisation of perpetrators of violence against women as monsters takes away their agency, their ability to discern right from wrong, and to be held to account for their actions. Finally, male violence needs to be seen as a power and control technique that is ingrained and reinforced by South Africa's patriarchal society. (Masiko 1-2)

Mmbatho Montsho believes that change and justice can only be realised when black women make films about themselves, and through access to or ownership of the means

of production. The two aspects are co-joined and interchangeable: without access/ownership there is no justice, and without justice there is no access/ownership. In a telephonic interview in July 2019—to clarify some of the thoughts on black female representation she expressed in *Cinema from Within*—Montsho confirmed that: "First of all, it's the lens…on South African cinema, you see black women through whose lens? It will be written and directed by either a white man or a man…or written by a white woman."

Montsho's assertion is upheld by Gilbert Motsaathebe, in his article, "Portrayals of Black Women in Post-Apartheid South African Film". In particular, he addresses the question of context and relevance with respect to how narratives are written and directed by white people, who generally enjoy the privilege of their skin colour and unlimited access to black people's lives. Motsaathebe reflects on three films: *Yesterday*, *Tsotsi,* and *Gangsters Paradise: Jerusalema*. He interrogates the representation of white female characters in these films, against that of black women's roles. Contrary to bell hooks' construct of "The Oppositional Gaze" (hooks 117), also the title of a chapter in her 1992 collection of essays *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, the three films mentioned above, on closer examination, instead denigrate the images of black women. On the other hand, the constructs of white women, Motsaathebe argues, enjoy much more tolerance if not reverence in their characterisations, which far exceed considerations made for black female actors/characters:

> All three films feature characters who are portrayed in positive and inspiring way…. Such dynamic portrayals of white female characters are evident in many post-Apartheid films. These characters hold positions in different professional fields such as medicine and banking; they are well-dressed, neat, and sophisticated, which provides a stark contrast to many of the black female characters. (Motsaathebe 13)

Regarding the status of black women versus that of white women on screen, Motsaathebe quotes Nicole Richter: "The ability of women to create themselves as subject on the screen is not equally shared among women" (Motsaathebe 7) further noting that "while it is true that white women have had the ability to find a voice on the screen as speaking subjects, black women have had a more difficult time". (Motsaathebe 9)

Black women filmmakers adopt differing perspectives around how race identity is constructed. In a scene in *Cinema from Within*, Monthso emphasises the importance of that skin tone as a critical marker of identity. An example, she explains, is in the making of films written by black women, such as *Happiness is a Four-Letter Word*, a film scripted by Busisiwe Ntintili. For Monthso it means dispensing with many of the "explanations" in understanding the nuances of black identity, as opposed to working with males and white directors as she articulated in a telephonic interview in July 2019:

> They were conversations we didn't need to have. We didn't need to explain ourselves as performers…generally when you're working with men, Black, white you name it…you first have to explain the female experience…the Black female experience…the black woman experience in South Africa. […] You first have to explain before you can work. And, having a black woman write the story cut that explanation out. You could come playing a role without first having to justify, qualify, explain yourself, explain the nuances, they were already there on the page! Also, because it was an adaptation of a novel by another black woman. […] I can't tell you how liberating it is to not have to explain yourself first. Like your existence in the world. Before you can even interpret the existence [of the character].

Jyoti Mistry, a South African filmmaker, of Indian descent, who qualifies as 'black' by my earlier definition, is not seen as such by Montsho's definition. Within the racial classification of black, Montsho remains emphatic about the need for black African (pointing §emphatically to her skin in the film) women to be recognised and developed in the industry: "We still haven't seen a film that's directed by a black woman, as in an African woman […] so we're good for display, but we're not good for the vision." (*Cinema from Within* 1:21:49)

This points to the very layered divisions and complicated racial identities that fissured in the collective black identities under Apartheid, and how these were effectively exploited to create division and disunity amongst the oppressed. The disunity is entrenched by the ignorance of the other's work, as, for example in the case of Montsho and Mistry, and it therefore demarcates the validity of one black female filmmaker over the other. The caveat, according to Monthso, is there are still levels of discrimination that emerge from the Apartheid racial classification system, wherein Africans like Mistry, who is of Indian origin, were given preferential treatment. These divisions still exist in our current

democratic dispensation, demonstrating that even amongst black women, there are, rightfully, differing ideas around how race identity is constructed.

Of equal importance are the notions of 'womanhood' according to Mistry and Schuman in relation to Gayatri Spivak's theory of strategic essentialism, where no "over-determined marginality" (XXIV) controls definitions and experiences of women across political social, religious and gender definitions. Mistry believes that these female identities seek:

> to ground political agency in a universal understanding (culturally, socially, biologically) of 'womanhood'. But acknowledging that the political, theoretical and/or personal preferences that 'we' as women have, are informed by our different socio-political positions means acknowledging that such preferences amongst women do differ. (Mistry & Schuman XXIV)

Writing from an African American perspective, bell hooks argues that constructs of race or gender may confine or limit the scope of the filmmaker who identifies herself or himself as black or woman only. This could read as a response also to John Akomfrah, who labels himself "…a black filmmaker". hooks states that it has been an accepted tradition in the United States that black filmmakers must construct black images that will "focus on the narrative content that highlights black experience, and that the images or she creates will necessarily work against the stereotypically negative ones represented" (hooks 71). She further argues that while it might be exciting to deal with material that suffers any great exposure, like issues in the black experience, racism, sexism or pure fantasy within that racial/political realm: "at some point in the distant future blackness will be overlooked, overdone" (hooks 71).

Ramadan Suleman is a black South African filmmaker whose films, like those of John Akomfrah, focus is primarily on black/African politics of race and gender. Questioned in *Cinema from Within* about when African filmmakers will be making science fiction movies, he responded thus: "An African filmmaker or an African child cannot dream fiction because the African child dreams food" (*Cinema from Within* 01:11:43). For Suleman, seeing black people on screen away from only their skin colour and/or economic strife is not only an anomaly but unrealistic.

Essentialising black characters to only their skin tones or race identity limits the experience of black people in the imaginary of the filmmaker, argues Zola Maseko, another South African filmmaker who appears in *Cinema from Within*. Maseko refers to the making of his most recent film *The Whale Caller*, based on the novel by South African author/academic Zakes Mda:

> I didn't want to get stuck in being a black filmmaker…I jumped out of that with *The Whale Caller*, and it was a very conscious decision that I wanted to choose something that goes back to my childhood and that is magical and fantasy…it's not correcting history, you're not telling it from a perspective…you're just telling a story full stop! (*Cinema from Within* 01:12:10)

These differing views on issues of race and gender expressed through and within the realm of cinematic creativity, speak not only to the differing generations of filmmakers, but also to contradicting values that define constructions of race and gender in South African cinema. As in any imagined community of nation or national cinema, there are tensions and differences of opinion. In the introduction, I indicated what some of these contradictions are and how they impact on what would inform a national cinema in South Africa; those are primarily constructions of race and gender, issues of amnesiac tendencies versus those of attachments to historical narratives and of course the creative interpretations thereof.

While I have attempted to include myriad voices that reflect the scope of our political, personal and artistic/professional filmmaking endeavours, it must be acknowledged that there are blind spots with regard to gender in contemporary South African cinema. Bringing critical film theory and the practice of filmmaking together serves as a platform to redress this imbalance or marginalizing of female perspectives on screen. Evidence of this multiplicity of voices is seen towards the end of *Cinema from Within*, where I explore the struggle of young black South African women, who have shown great leadership in the education arenas: fighting struggles of representation, access and identity. Many of them challenge notions of gender representation and refuse to conform to the status quo.
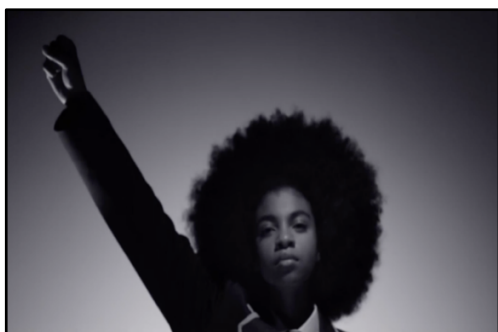
Zuleika Patel, student activist, circa 2016.

Source; YouTube

Angela Davis, Black Panther, circa 1966.

Source: Pinterest

Young South African women, such as high school student Zuleika Patel, have protested vehemently against policies that police black identity and expression in schools across South Africa. Patel, for example launched, with the support of other girls at her school, a protest against a policy that limited the way that students could "wear" their hair. Particularly targeted for sanction were hair styles common among black women, such as corn rows and Afros. Patel became an icon for the struggles of young Black women in a supposedly free and democratic South Africa emulating internationally respected activists, such as former Black panther Angela Davis and South African liberation fighter Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

For this reason, I chose the Nina Simone song *Four Women* (released in 1966 on her album *Wild is the Wind*) as the music that would accompany the final montage in my film. The song reflects a genealogy of Black women from slavery to present day. It embodies the struggles of women on the African continent and the diaspora to be recognised and respected. I chose stanzas from the lyrics, which are pertinent to the personal, political and the practice of creative expression and productions in relation to identity and representation:

> *My skin is black*
> *My arms are long*
> *My hair is woolly*
> *My back is strong*
> *Strong enough to take the pain*

inflicted again and again
What do they call me
My name is AUNT SARAH
My name is Aunt Sarah

(Simone 1966)

The imposition of the facial mage of Sara Baartman in the film was conjured by mention of the name "Sarah" in Simone's song. "Sarah" is reminiscent of the tragic and fatal story of Sara Baartman who was captured in the year 1789 and taken to Europe. Baartman obtained celebrity during this period, in the libertine salons of 19th-century Paris, where she "performed" privately in salons for rich European socialite audiences.

Higbee quotes Rachel Holmes, who explains how Baartman became the subject and object of scientific observation; white curiosity and fetishization while she was in France: "Depictions of Baartman are found in scientific and anatomical drawings from the period as well as playbills and aquatint posters, cartoons, paintings and sculptures produced both before and after her death" (Higbee 120)

In London, she was celebrated as the original 'Venus Hottentot': an object of curiosity, fear and prohibited (sexual) desire, first sold to a bourgeois consumer culture of the exotic in the freak shows due to her physical appearance. The debate, although short-lived, moved further to some claims that Sara Baartman was complicit in her objectification because, as Higbee explains in his analysis of the film *Venus noire,* directed by Abdellatif Kechiche in 2010:

> The role of such ephemera in constructing the image of Baartman is alluded to in the Venus noire by the newspaper cuttings announcing the 'Venus Hottentot' that Sara Baartman (Yahima Torres) pins to the wall of her bedroom in London – an act that suggests a degree of agency as well as a self-reflexivity regarding her status as both performer and object of fascination. (Higbee 120)

I had ethical problems in my practice as a filmmaker to 'display' the demeaning images of Baartman, again! For me, the repetition of these gruesome images becomes a re-casting

or repetition of that painful history and episode in Baartman's life., "…along with the modelled casting of her body, until 1974, in the Parisian Musee de l'homme…" (Higbee 120), of the inhumane experience she suffered.

Filmmaker Zola Maseko, in a telephonic interview, speaks to witnessing the exhumation of the remains of Sara Baartman in Paris as part of the process of making his documentary, *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* (2004):

> …a plaster cast is a mould…here is this woman… (the cast) and here is her skeleton. What it said to me is" Could you imagine if someone had to cut a hole in your head and pull out your skeleton and then sew back the hole in your head? The remains of your body would be blown up and your skeleton would be next to it. This is the essence of what happened… to this woman. They literally separated her from her being. (Maseko 2019)

Although European scientists argued that Baartman's anatomy supposedly reinforced the scientific theories of race hierarchy that underlined European colonial ideology, there was little consideration of how such objectification would impact on the image and/or representation of her body as public spectacle/scrutiny and the subject of scientific curiosity. Yvette Abrahams, the South African feminist and scholar, argues in an article about Sara Baartman in the *South African Historical Journal*:

> The effect is one of voyeurism rather than conceptual analysis. It is hard to find a study of Sara Baartman which does not display salacious illustrations. It is equally hard to find a study which relates such illustrations to the history of the Khoisan. That such an approach is Eurocentric, in a situation where both the observer and his or her audience are white, goes without saying. In addition, it deprives the Khoisan of the respect due to any human being. The historiographical focus on Sara Baartman's anatomy rather than her conditions of labour underlines this point. As in colonial anthropology, the effect of this myopia has been to provide Europeans with a metaphor of savagery (noble or otherwise) which underpins the European self-image of civilisation. (Abrahams 98)

Sara Baartman's experience raises many questions in relation to my study on issues of identification and the narratives of representational modes in these slave trades,

colonialism, and later on Apartheid in South Africa. Most importantly is how the black/African female body is not only traded for its utilitarian/productive value, but also how it is sexualised through capture.

In order to restore Baartman's dignity and by extension the millions of Africans in who died and suffered in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the South African government under Nelson Mandela, reclaimed her remains from France in 1994. They were finally re-buried in 2002 in her birthplace in the Eastern Cape Province. Baartman was posthumously acknowledged with national honour.

Simone, in her song entitled *Four Women* removes the lid from that painful history of the slave trade mentioned above, and exposes it to the world for us to witness the inhumanity to African and black people over the centuries:

> My skin is yellow
> My hair is long
> Between two worlds
> I do belong
> My father was rich and white
> He forced my mother late one night
> What do they call me
> My name is SAFFRONIA
> My name is Saffronia
>
> (Simone 1996)

The name Saffronia, was a common slave name for those born of black and white parents. This relates to my family identity of mixed-heritage and culture – paternally to Italian and African and maternally to the African and English. Black people like myself, are colloquially described as "yellow-bones" because of our lighter pigmentation. In South Africa, so-called Coloured people—the offspring of white settlers and indigenous Africans were often referred to as "hot-nots", as shortened version of the derogatory term "Hottentot" ascribed to Sara Baartman.

> My skin is tan
> My hair is fine
> My hips invite you

my mouth like wine
Who's little girl am I?
Anyone who has money to buy
What do they call me
My name is SWEET THING
My name is Sweet Thing

My skin is brown
my manner is tough
I'll kill the first mother I see
my life has been too rough
I'm awfully bitter these days
because my parents were slaves
What do they call me
My name is PEACHES

(Simone 1996)

If I have offered an extended contextualization and analysis as to the historical meanings contained within Nina Simone's song *Four Women,* it is to emphasise how apposite this song is to my film *Cinema from Within*, and why I chose to include it as the accompanying soundtrack to the final montage of images. Although the song must be read in the specific context of African American history in which it was written, it also references wider themes of oppression, historical omission, marginalisation and resistance, framed in the context of an intersection between race and gender. These factors, combined with direct references in one verse to Sara Baartman, mean that it is an entirely appropriate choice of song to accompany images of the latest generation of black female activists from South Africa, who appear at the end of my documentary

It is important to recognise both the iconographic stance on both her physical appearance and the social and political impetus which Zuleika Patel and the young black women depicted in the montage featured at the end of *Cinema from Within*. Patel, through her iconographic raised fist salute and Afro emulates the Black Panthers of the 1960s and 1970s. In adopting such iconography, we observe how her identification with the generation of activists who came before her generates a sense of purpose and belonging, and the power of unity in both look and activation of gender struggles. The image of a young female student standing face-to-face with police (and later shot in the back with

rubber bullets at Wits University) in *Cinema from Within* (1:29:19)*,* is reminiscent of another image, also featured in the film, of a woman confronting troops in a 1980s township.

Fees Must Fall protest at Wits University in Johannesburg
Source: YouTube

Elderly woman confronting SADF soldiers in a 1980s township
Photo credit: Peter Magubane

The two screenshots from the film show from the montage serves to illuminate the lineage of women's struggles underway at schools and universities to the workplace; from younger women to the stalwarts. Nina Simone's *Four Women* here seems to match the different generations of women depicted in the montage. Zuleika Patel and the young black women fighting against the racist schooling systems, along with university "sisters", who led the Fees Must Fall Movements for free and decolonized tertiary education in South Africa. Patel and these other young women disrupt the slavery narrative of victimisation and capture by making creating transnational linkages, which led to active struggles for freedom of expression in both gender and racial identification.

GENERATIONAL MASCULINITIES

The narrative of generational masculinities is further explored through the introduction of my son, Amilcar Mattera, into the narrative in *Cinema from Within*. His appearance through a series of meditative vignettes in the film reflects how an identity is presented or performed in multiple ways. Put differently, Amilcar appears in the film as a child, as my son and an individual in his own right. My intention is to explore the possibility of these multiple identity positionings appearing as simultaneously distinct and overlapping. I explore and experiment on how contemporary gender identities like his, affect the meaning and use of space in South Africa today.

Where previously access was denied or sanctioned in certain spaces, under certain political and economic conditions like that of the Apartheid experience, today it is confronted by mainly by issues of class. Amilcar is not defined by the struggles of race and class which defined my personal and political identity throughout my childhood and early adulthood. And he is not compelled to qualify himself solely in terms of our relationship as father and son. Impressed by the filmmaking process and his own aspirations, when I ask Amilcar: "What do you want to do [when you grow up]?" He responds: "When I grow up I also want to film like my dad…" I press him further: You want to film?! Aren't you gonna be a pilot anymore?" (00:43:06)

Amilcar can dream unlike so many of us who were caught in that spiral of oppression under Apartheid, where our dreams existed only in our minds. Emerging from a more middle-class position unlike my working-class beginnings Amilcar, can move freely and experience a different sense of freedom and mobility.

Amilcar is ever present in the documentary even when he is not seen, or featured in the narrative. Telling the stories of our family, political life and bringing his presence into the film and taking him onto film shoots, is a way in which I can expose and demonstrate how to memorialise our relationship, my skills and my desire to restore the black image especially on screen. In doing this Amilcar has come to appreciate and engage with cinema in more critical way. He has noted, for example, how his father and his father's father are all in the film.

Through depicting three generations of masculinities; Amilcar's presence in the film, my own, and that of my father, the filming process or practice has created a continuum or an

'arterial line' of a consanguineous relationship, where our lives have been interwoven or intertwined through time. In particular, a sequence from *Cinema from Within*, entitled Meeting the Don" (00:40:55) in which Amilcar engages with his grandfather, creates a sense of lineage, legacy and belonging. My film thus presents notions of race, gender and generation differently, by viewing them through the space and agency of the individual subjects featured. For example, Amilcar is sometimes defined as my son, but also with his own agency, or other moments as an individual through his silence. His silence permits him to engage with the filming process and his presence is further understood in the documentary by my presence as his father and by the presence of his grandfather.

The final montage of my son Amilcar and I, in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa near the aptly named "God's Window" purposefully points to the hope of a more responsible and meaningful father-son relationship. We can be seen etching our names on a rock to seal our bond simultaneously reclaiming our space, in our country, and an identity that speaks to positive change. We walk side by side along the railway line, but singularly, until we finally hold hands to maintain our balance. The scene visually embeds both our individuality and unity as we journey through our lives, respectively, as single black father and son of the past, and young, black boy walking his own path into the future.

CHAPTER SIX—CONCLUSION

…and somewhere in the space between the streets and my mind was the soundtrack of my favourite films neatly tracked on the vinyl of my memories. -- Teddy Mattera*, V/O Cinema from Within* 02:19:15*)*

Through co-joined written and filmic works, I have interrogated how the representation of race and gender, since colonialism and apartheid, have defined the template on which South African cinema was realised. The intention of this PhD project was to focus on how this template continues to inform representations in a post-Apartheid South African cinema. It interrogates the amnesia practice, or selective historical approach, to present day filmmaking, particularly amongst the generation born post-1994. It also gives voice to a cadre of emerging filmmakers, particularly black women, who are challenging the status quo.

Looking into the archive and exploring issues of space(s) and histories revealed how the psychology of violence and misrepresentation of myriad African identities translated through a cinematic practice that is still bearing the weight of pernicious racism and gender bias. In my exploration about how the first cinematic images of Africans recorded on film appeared, I exposed how the two industries of cinema and mining constructed some of the first representations of Africans on screen—manifestations of the Eurocentric paradigm of scientific racism and religious revisionism at the core of colonial expansion and control.

Considering spaces as locations—psychological and physical—in which identities are performed, is a key feature of my documentary film submission, *Cinema from Within*. I looked into South African cinema histories, archives, print, visual, audio and personal testimonies/memories as a way to understand how we got to where we are in relation to identity and representation. An example in *Cinema from Within* reveals how the inner-city streets of Johannesburg take on different forms—as a playground for whites during Apartheid, and as a magical corridor for me as a young boy, "where I strolled in dream-like states, kicking cans and watching the world disfigured in bubbled reflections on shop windows" (00:02:21).

The film used locations and space as arenas wherein the featured people 'performed' their identities while simultaneously having a relationship with the space and or location.

Exploring the issues of black masculinity brought into stark contrast how we are "…in context, positioned" (Hall 68)—continuously influenced by and exerting influence on our environment. My inclusion, in *Cinema from Within*, of generations of my family (my father, myself, my son), and the shifting and inter-locking identities within our intimate and sometimes fractured structure, made for not only a visual backdrop, but a visual discourse on identity.

Acknowledging the challenge of representing black identity and gender more meaningfully and transcending the limitations of how these race and gender identities are currently (re)presented was also a key pillar of the research. Whereas much of my previous work as a director and writer, was grounded in fictional storytelling, it was also immersed in the politics of my country. My current research engages with numerous cultural and post-colonial theorists and thinkers who have published work on the politics, culture and cinema of South Africa.

Embedded in the research are issues of historicity. In addition to funding challenges that plague the film industry in South Africa, is the imbalance between the narratives of our painful history and the pitfalls and exciting potential of our current and future dispensation. "Before and after Apartheid" have become the two identifiable episodes, or colloquial speak, by which we characterise our country in terms of its political history. We have yet to realise ourselves beyond that identity. I believe that filmically we can illuminate a national identity that is not only bound by our painful history, but also emerges from the depths of our imagination, wherein multi-cultural experience lives. This will be our challenge over the coming decades.

Amongst the many issues asserted in the documentary film *Cinema from Within*, race and gender representation, in film practice is the most critical. It reflects how South African cinema culture exits as a complex and contended space with regards to production, distribution and exhibition. It sorely exposes the disparities within an industry where black film practice falls in direct competition with the imagery and practice of a more commercial and divisive industry.

Although there are certain measures in place that favour production for black and women filmmakers, and those from other marginalised communities, I contend that these are not stringent and equitable enough to thwart the great influence of financially powerful American studio productions.

It is therefore imperative and incumbent upon the South African government to level the playing field through more stringent legislation, such as greater taxation on international films made and screened in the country.

Through this research project, I have tested my practice in both theoretical discourse and filmmaking and grappled with the challenge to interrogate and represent black identities differently, more engagingly and more thoughtfully—to promote a restoration of dignity, particularly in the representation of black people on film.

To create a more robust engagement of theory and practice, creative practitioners should be interrogating more deeply the issues of identity/identification and representation as an integral part of their filmmaking process. Looking at narrative structures and technical interventions between documentary genres and fiction, we should be encouraged to explore the spaces 'between', as a way to create new dialogues for the medium to engage with. There are new/different possibilities that arise where soundscapes and cinematography can be re-explored as locations for interrogating the transformation of gender, race and class bias in South African society.

The late Hugh Masekela in his final words in the documentary *Cinema from Within*, captures the essence and intention of this research: "If we can find out really…who we really are… we would be too dangerous and unpalatable for them" (01:33:13). Masekela's reminder is pertinent to the power dynamics of both the past and present, across political, cultural and sociological spectrums. It is also an invitation to those who are in the throes of discovering themselves to begin the quest and reach their full potential. For those working in the creative industries, it should inspire us to embrace the synergy of theory and practice and, for filmmakers in particular, to bring cinema discourse into action for self-realisation and empowerment.

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