



**Thesis**  
**By**  
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**The Department of  
Historical Studies  
UNIVERSITY OF  
CAPE TOWN**

**Creating a 'black film industry': State  
intervention and films for African  
audiences in South Africa, 1956-1990**

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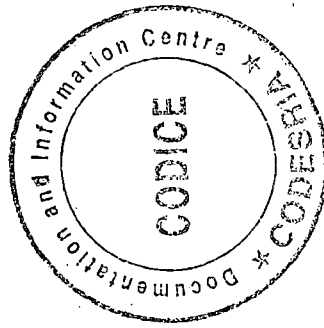
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**Gairoonisa Paleker**

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Gairoonisa Paleker

**Thesis Title: Creating a 'black film industry': State intervention and films for African audiences in South Africa, 1956-1990**

**Abstract**

This thesis examines one aspect of cinema in South Africa, namely, the historical construction of a 'black film industry' and the development of a 'black' cinema viewing audience. It does so by focusing on films produced specifically for an African audience using a state subsidy. This subsidy was introduced in 1972 and was separate from the general or A-Scheme subsidy that was introduced in 1956 for the production of English- and Afrikaans-language or 'white' films. This thesis is a critical assessment of the actual film products that the B-Scheme produced. The films are analysed within the broader political, economic and social context of their production and exhibition. The films are used as historical sources for the way in which African identities were constructed. Through critical analyses of the selected films, the thesis examines the manner in which African people, culture, gender and family relations, as well as class and/or political aspirations were represented in film. Africans had very little opportunity or power to represent themselves and where this had been possible, it was within the ideological and political boundaries set by the apartheid government.

The central argument is that state intervention in films for Africans has remained constant since colonial rule. The degree and forms of intervention have varied over the years, but the state – whether colonial, segregationist or apartheid – has played an important interventionist role in the development of a 'black film industry' and film viewing culture among Africans. This interventionist role has been guided and informed by political exigencies throughout the period of this study.

The interventionist role of the state has also impacted negatively on the organic emergence of an indigenous African film industry and film culture. These have instead been shaped by political, economic and social forces exerted by those in political power. Given the unique racial segregation of South African society and the oppressive nature of apartheid rule, opposition to this cultural manipulation has been limited.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Film shows in South Africa date back to the late nineteenth century. It has however not been possible to speak of a national South African cinema until the demise of apartheid. Historically, cinema has mirrored the racial divisions of South African society in which everything from social welfare services and education to leisure activities and amenities were strictly separated on the basis of race. State support for a national film industry was similarly separated with the introduction of differential state subsidies for film production. The first state subsidy which was introduced in 1956 was geared towards the promotion of a film industry and film culture for 'white films'. Within this there were distinctions between films in English and Afrikaans, with Afrikaans-language films predominating in the award of subsidies. A separate subsidy, known as the B-Scheme was introduced in 1972 specifically for what became known as 'black films'.<sup>1</sup> These were films in an African language with a predominantly African cast and aimed at an African audience.

This thesis examines one aspect of cinema in South Africa, namely, the historical construction of a 'black film industry' and the development of a 'black' cinema-viewing audience. It does so by focusing on films produced specifically for an African audience using a state subsidy. These films were produced and largely directed by white South Africans who were not all trained filmmakers.<sup>2</sup> There were two primary conditions under which the subsidy was awarded. Firstly, any film qualifying for funding under the B-

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<sup>1</sup> The terms white, black and African are used in very specific ways in this thesis. Unless indicated by the use of quotation marks, black is used in a general sense to indicate all non-white South Africans. These would include what were identified under apartheid as Indians, Coloureds, and Africans. In more specific instances I use African when speaking only of this specific group of South Africans.

<sup>2</sup> As it will become evident in later chapters, many of the people producing films for the African market came from various professional backgrounds that were far removed from filmmaking. Their film output under the B-Scheme subsidy was the first time any of them had attempted producing and directing films. There were also Africans such as Simon Sabela, who were directing some of the B-Scheme films but this under the patronage of white-owned production companies such as Heyns Films.

Scheme had to have three quarters of the dialogue in one or other African language and secondly, seventy-five percent of all actors had to be African. The state did not require submissions of a script or film treatment and the final arbiter of whether the films were suitable viewing material for Africans was the Censor Board. Here too censorship was politicised and operated on a differential basis with African audiences often being categorised with children or in some cases the feeble-minded.

The implication of this is that the state actively wished to control the ideological content of film products aimed at Africans. This thesis then constitutes a critical assessment of the actual film products that the B-Scheme produced. The films are analysed within the political, economic and social context of their production and exhibition. This is primarily a historical work that uses film as source material for the examination of how white South Africans, in some instances acting in loco parentis for the apartheid government, constructed African identities, represented African people, culture, gender and family relations as well as political and/or class aspirations.

While the history of cinema in South Africa, as well as South African cinema, has been extensively (though not exhaustively) researched and written about by individuals such as Thelma Gutsche, Keyan Tomaselli and most recently by Jacqueline Maingard<sup>3</sup>, among others, there has been little focus on the B-Scheme that spawned what became known as the 'black film industry'. This thesis has not been conceived as a corrective to this paucity of research but instead has its genesis in the aspiration to want to know where precisely and how significantly Africans featured in the history of cinema in South Africa and through this how Africans were envisioned to fit into the broader society. This research thus acknowledges a debt to these earlier studies and intends to build on existing works by providing, in cinematic terms, a close-up shot, of selected films which were produced for African audiences. By focusing on these selected films and the broader context of their production and exhibition history, this thesis sets out to explore broader

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<sup>3</sup> Thelma Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa 1895-1940*, Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1972, Keyan Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Reproduction in South African Cinema", PhD Thesis, Wits, 1983, *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film*, London: Routledge, 1989, and Jacqueline Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

issues around the creation of a 'black film industry', and the degree to which this 'black film industry' fits into the trope of a national cinema in South Africa.

Textual analyses of these selected films will endeavour to uncover how representations of African people and society functioned within the broader apartheid society. Some of the key questions this research raises are (i) what did these representations mean in terms of how Africans were viewed by both the apartheid state as well as white South African society, (ii) what degree of agency did Africans have in the construction of a self-image and self-identity through the medium of film, (iii) what degree of access did African people have to the means of film production as well as opportunities for the exhibition of films produced for the African market, and (iv) related to this is the question of the degree to which Africans were in any sense beneficiaries of the economic, professional, social, cultural and political opportunities provided by a 'black film industry'.

Existing studies of film in South Africa touch on aspects of all of the above questions to varying degrees but tend to gloss over the specificities of the 'black film industry' (its structure and function within the broader context of both a national film industry as well as apartheid society in general) in favour of the bigger picture of the history of a national film industry in South Africa. None of the studies available have undertaken detailed textual analyses of any of the film produced by the 'black film industry'. This does not include films like *Mapantsula* (1989) or *My Country My Hat* (1984) which have been considered by people like Lesley Marx and Keyan Tomaselli.<sup>4</sup>

These two films were funded by the B-Scheme<sup>5</sup> but cannot conceivably be considered on a par with the other films that constituted the 'black film industry'. There are two reasons which distinguish these two films from the general body of B-Scheme films. Firstly, both films are explicitly political in that they deal with and subvert different aspects of apartheid ideology. Secondly, both films do not subscribe to the general ethos of the

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<sup>4</sup> Lesley Marx, "Underworld RSA", *South African Theatre Journal*, 10, 2, September 1996, Keyan Tomaselli, "Popular Communication in South Africa: "Mapantsula" and its Context of Struggle", *South African Theatre Journal*, 5, 1, May 1991.

<sup>5</sup> According to Oliver Schmitz, *Mapantsula* was only partially funded by the B-Scheme subsidy and partially through the tax incentives that were introduced in the 1980s.

'black film industry' which was characterised by low production values. For these reasons, both *Mapantsula* and *My Country*, as well as other films by David Bensusan that are analysed in later chapters, have been identified as oppositional. They are oppositional to both apartheid ideology as well as the general ethos of the 'black film industry'. By focusing on 'black films' and the industry that was spawned by the B-Scheme subsidy, this thesis aims to contribute to a growing body of research on South African film in particular and African film in general.

Any research work focused on South African film has to pay due acknowledgement to Thelma Gutsche's monumental study of South African film, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa 1895-1940*.<sup>6</sup> This work provides meticulously researched information about cinema and film culture in South Africa up till 1940.

Tomaselli's 1989 publication *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Cinema*, has been an important and useful point of departure for this research. The focus of this book is wide-ranging and covers various aspects of the South African film industry from the two state subsidy schemes to censorship and independent and anti-apartheid cinema. The chapter on "Films for Blacks" has been the starting point for much of the present research and includes information about the subsidy for 'black films', effects of the subsidy, crewing policies and sources for themes as well as a useful categorization of some of the films under review. Included in this chapter are also very brief analyses of some of the films such as *iKati-Elimnyama* (1974), *Inkunzi* (1976), *Setipana* (1979) and *Mathata* (1984), among others. More importantly also, the filmography at the end of the book provides a list of some of the films produced as part of the B-Scheme subsidy.

Apart from numerous articles on different aspects of cinema in South Africa published primarily in the journal *Critical Arts* of which he is the editor, Tomselli's most recent

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<sup>6</sup> Published in Cape Town by Howard Timmins, 1972.

publication, *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinema*<sup>7</sup> is a valuable compilation and revision of many of his earlier published works. But as stated previously, there is the lack of a more comprehensive focus on what was known as the 'black film industry' which came into being as a direct consequence of the B-Scheme subsidy.

Martin Botha has also made a significant contribution to the growing body of research and writings on South African film. *Movies, Moguls and Mavericks: South African Cinema, 1979-1991*<sup>8</sup> which is co-edited by Botha and Johan Blignaut has been an additional starting point for this thesis. The volume comprises papers by academics, filmmakers and journalists and covers a wide range of issues pertaining to film. Of particular interest for this research has been the three papers on "ethnic cinema" written by Jim Murray, Gus Silber and Frank Meintjies which deal with the state subsidy for 'black films' (Murray and Silber respectively) and with township cinemas and audiences (by Meintjies). This book also provides a useful filmography which is far more comprehensive than that contained in Tomaselli's book. The films that have been selected for analysis in this thesis have been drawn from the combined filmographies in these two books. Botha's most recent publication, *Marginal Lives and Painful Pasts: South African Cinema After Apartheid*,<sup>9</sup> is an edited volume of scholarship on South African film post-apartheid.

A key text that begins to analyse the interventionist role of the apartheid state in films for Africans is Harriet Gavshon's 1983 article.<sup>10</sup> Through brief analyses of selected films, Gavshon argues that levels of government intervention in 'black' films were aimed at creating consensus. When repressive measures had failed government realised the potential of film as a "useful, if not essential acquisition for increasing its hegemony in a specific area."<sup>11</sup> While Gavshon's essay raises many crucial and critical issues its most

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<sup>7</sup> *The Cinema of Apartheid* was published in London by Routledge, 1989 and *Encountering Modernity* was published in Pretoria by Unisa Press, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Published in Cape Town by Showdata, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Published in Cape Town by Genugtig! Publishers, Parklands, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Harriet Gavshon, "Levels of Intervention in Films made for African Audiences in South Africa", *Critical Arts*, 2. 4, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.13.

significant limitation is its conciseness. In view of this, Gavshon is unable to explore the complex nature of the apartheid government's relationship with film for African audiences.

Representations of Africans on film is a key theme of Peter Davis' *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa*.<sup>12</sup> Davis examines various films produced in South Africa as well as overseas, in terms of their representations of African people. He locates these representations within the broader history of cinema in South Africa as well as the broader political and social context of South African society. But he provides little information about the B-Scheme subsidy and films that were produced as a part of this subsidy.

Contributing in significant measure to the growing field of scholarship on South African film are two, more recent publications, one by Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela and the other by Jacqueline Maingard.<sup>13</sup> The edited volume by Balseiro and Masilela covers a broad range of topics from the intellectual endeavours of the New African Movement<sup>14</sup> and its impact on the emergence of a film culture among African audiences to issues of what constitutes a national cinema. Of special interest for various sections of this thesis are the chapters which deal with "moralising leisure" (by Bhekizizwe Peterson), representations of "white cities" (by Isabel Balseiro), and Kgafela oa Magogodi's analysis of, especially *Mapantsula* (1989) in terms of the film's representations of sexuality and power. In spite of this however, the B-Scheme subsidy and the 'black film industry' as a product of this subsidy are not specific areas of concern in this work.

Maingard's *South African National Cinema* is an exploration of South Africa's cinematic history since its inception, its development over the years including an examination of post-apartheid cinema. This historical approach provides a framework for the

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<sup>12</sup> Jointly published by Ravan Press, Johannesburg and Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela (ed.) *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003 and Jacqueline Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> The New African Movement was established around 1905/6 and was modeled on the 'New Negroes' of the United States and its broad objective was the advancement and progress of Africans in South Africa along the same lines as the progress achieved by the New Negroes of America.

examination of what constitutes a national cinema and how identities are constructed and shaped through the medium of film. For Maingard, the early development of cinema in South Africa is inextricably linked to the “building of white identity” within a national paradigm especially from 1910 onwards when South Africa attained Union status.<sup>15</sup> The articulation of a national identity and what constituted nationhood, through the medium of film, was later closely linked to Afrikaner nationalist aspirations which received state support from 1948 onwards when the National Party came into power. A differential state subsidy for film production, on the basis of the two official languages (English and Afrikaans) gave further impetus to state involvement in South African cinema. The reach of the state was enhanced with a separate subsidy, the B-Scheme, in 1972 for the production of films in African languages. These historical developments, the construction of an African film-viewing audience between 1920 and 1950, and critical discussions of selected films are invaluable contributions Maingard makes.

These studies are further augmented by numerous articles, essays and monographs on different aspects of film in South Africa. Representations of landscapes and the dichotomies between the urban and the rural as imaged in films on South Africa are the focus of scholars such as Gary Baines, Vivian Bickford-Smith and Edwin Hees.<sup>16</sup> Educational films for African audiences are the focus of both Elaine Binedell and Alan Jeeves who provide valuable archival research into the propaganda use of film.<sup>17</sup> While Binedell’s MA thesis and a subsequent paper on ‘educational films for ‘Natives’ focuses on the general deployment of film for educational purposes, Jeeves’s focus is more specific and limited to films dealing with health issues.

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<sup>15</sup> Maingard, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Gary Baines, “On Location: Narratives of the South African City of the Late 1940s and 1950s in Film and Literature”, *South African Historical Journal*, 48, May 2003, Vivian Bickford-Smith, “How Urban South African Life was Represented in Film and Films Consumed in South African Cities in the 1950s”, *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads*, 3, 2, August 2006 and Edwin Hees, “Foregrounding the Background: Landscape and Ideology in South African Films”, *South African Theatre Journal*, 10, 2, 1996 and “Truly, the ways of the white man are strange”: Tribal Utopianism in two South African propaganda films”, *South African Theatre Journal*, 5, 1, May 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Elaine Binedell, “Film and the State: Control, Ideology and Space”, MA Thesis, University of KwaZulu Natal, 2001, and “Debating Educational Films for ‘Natives’: South African Film in the 1930s, *Limina*, vol. 8, [www.arts.uwa.edu.au/limina](http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/limina), and Alan Jeeves “The State, the Cinema and Health Propaganda for Africans in Pre-Apartheid South Africa 1932-1948”, *South African Journal of Historical Studies*, 48, May 2003.



An important motivating factor behind much of these earlier educational and propaganda films was the need to moralise the leisure time of Africans. In this respect, J. M. Burns and Rosaleen Smythe contribute significantly to our understanding of the use of film in southern colonial Africa.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, both Glen Reynolds and David Kerr focus on colonial interventions in cinema in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>19</sup> Colonial film policy not only reveals the parallels between South Africa and other African colonies, but also highlights the continuity between this early use of film and how film for African audiences during the apartheid era was conceived and constructed.

Gainer, Jeppie and Nasson explore aspects of leisure and popular culture in Cape Town, where, as Gainer indicates in his thesis title, there existed a particular form of “bioskoopbeskawing or bioscope culture”.<sup>20</sup> Film, according to these studies of leisure activities, was a crucial part of the cultural life in Cape Town. This focus on Cape Town, and particularly, District Six, excludes anything but a cursory mention of the impact of film on African communities in Cape Town. Gainer’s focus on the impact of American culture through cinema is especially relevant given both Tomaselli and Nixon’s contention that the apartheid government perceived a threat in the increasing popularity of Hollywood films. This raises the question of whether the apartheid government hoped to use both the general and B-Scheme subsidy to counter this increasing Americanisation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> J. M. Burns, *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002 and Rosaleen Smythe, “The Development of British Colonial Film Policy, 1927-1939, with Special Reference to East and Central Africa”, *The Journal of African History*, 20, 3, 1979.

<sup>19</sup> Glen Reynolds, “Image and Empire: Anglo-American Interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1921-1937”, *South African Journal of Historical Studies*, 48, May 2003 and David Kerr, “The Best of Both Worlds? Colonial Film Policy and Practice in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland”, *Critical Arts*, 7, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> David J. Gainer, “Hollywood, African Consolidated Films and “bioskoopbeskawing” or bioscope culture: Aspects of American Culture in Cape Town, 1945-1960”, MA Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2000, Shamil Jeppie, “Aspects of Popular Culture and Class Expression in Inner Cape Town, circa 1939-1959”, MA Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1990 and Bill Nasson, “She preferred living in a cave with Harry the Snake-Catcher: Towards an Oral History of Popular Leisure and Class Expression in District Six, Cape Town c.1920-1950s”, University of the Witwatersrand, History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid* and Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*, New York, Routledge, 1994.

## South African Film as part of an African Cinema

While Africans in other parts of Africa had a degree of autonomy and independence in the cinematic construction of a distinct African identity and self-image, Africans in South Africa had no such freedom under apartheid rule. Given this, comparisons between the cinema in South Africa and continental cinemas is necessarily limited mainly to developmental trends. Cinema in South Africa, due in large part to the ideological motivations behind films produced in the country, had historically been viewed with suspicion by the rest of the continent. Key historic moments which witnessed continent-wide meetings, resolutions and agreements are characterised by the exclusion of a South African presence. The Algiers Charter on African Cinema (1972), the Niamey Manifesto of African Film-Makers (1982) and the Final Communiqué of the First Frontline Film Festival and Workshop (Harare, 1990) have been attempts by African filmmakers to crystallise and formulate continental resolutions and declarations with regard to film. South Africa was not represented in any of these gatherings except for the presence of ANC delegates at the Harare festival.<sup>22</sup>

African filmmakers have however tried to make provision for individual South African filmmakers not ideologically aligned to the apartheid state. The Panafrican Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI) whose membership consisted of different African national film bodies rather than individual filmmakers made an exception for individuals from an “occupied country such as South Africa or from a colonised country such as Mozambique.”<sup>23</sup> Thus South Africans and Mozambicans could also join as members on an individual rather than an organisational level.

The political changes of the early 1990s brought changes to the film industry also. South Africa has been hosting the Sithengi Film and Television Market since the early 1990s. As the name suggests, Sithengi was established to create an international platform for

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<sup>22</sup> Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham, (ed.), *African Experiences of Cinema*, London: British Film Institute, 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992, p.40.

primarily South African, but also African and international film and television productions. Despite Sithengi's efforts to end the isolation of South African cinematic and television productions, the country's first official presence at a continental cinematic gathering beyond its own borders was in 2005 with the official entries of the two films *Drum* (2004) and *Zulu Love Letter* (2004) at the Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO).<sup>24</sup>

Despite the historic opprobrium and proscriptions faced by South African cinematic productions, for heuristic purposes, South African cinema has to be considered an integral part of continental cinematic trends and development. The recently published volume *Black and White in Colour: African History on Screen* makes a valuable contribution in this respect.<sup>25</sup> By drawing together a range of writings on films which represent various aspects of African history on film, this book clearly locates the tradition of South African filmic historiography as part of the wider continental tradition of filmic historiography.

Apart from the early parallels between cinema in South Africa and cinema in especially, other British colonial territories, one can make broader linkages between cinemas in other parts of Africa. As with Southern Africa, cinema was introduced in other parts of Africa by 1896, with film shows in Cairo and Alexandria. It soon spread to other parts of north and west Africa with shows in Tunis and Fez in 1897 and Dakar and Lagos in 1900 and 1903 respectively.<sup>26</sup> As with cinema in colonial southern Africa, cinema in North and West Africa also functioned to serve colonial interests and "... Its principal role was to supply a cultural and ideological justification for political domination and economic exploitation."<sup>27</sup> As Roy Armes outlines, this use of film as a handmaiden for political, cultural and economic hegemony extended beyond colonial rule with metropolitan centres such as London and Paris playing a crucial role in the development of post-

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<sup>24</sup> Jacqueline Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith and Richard Mendelsohn (ed.), *Black and White in Colour: African History of Screen*, Oxford, Athens, Ohio and Cape Town: James Curry, Ohio University Press and Double Storey, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Roy Armes, *African Filmmaking: North and South of the Sahara*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Ferid Boughedir, cited in Roy Armes, p. 21.

independence cinemas in large parts of Africa. The involvement of the former colonial powers extended beyond financial subsidisation and included technical assistance as well as education and training.

The outcome of this involvement by the metropolitan centres was a cinema that produced films which, in the words of Emmanuel Sama, were “foreigners in their own countries”.<sup>28</sup> This was at the level of cinema aesthetic, technology, culture and language. It was unsurprising then that the 1972 Algiers Charter began with a commitment to “a responsible, free and committed cinema”, which demanded of African filmmakers a “great vigilance ... with regard to imperialism’s attempts at ideological recuperation as it redoubled its efforts to maintain, renew and increase its cultural ascendancy.”<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding these interventions by the former colonial powers, cinema in other parts of Africa was able in some sense to form a coherent national cinema that was impossible in South Africa given the entrenchment of racial differentiation.

The debates within African cinema have historically centered on issues such as what precisely constitutes an “authentic” African cinema that embodies representations of Africa, Africans and African cultures and societies without European influences.<sup>30</sup> These debates took place in the immediate aftermath of independence and remain to a large degree unresolved mainly because it is highly problematic to talk of “authentic” African cinema in a global context.<sup>31</sup> While these debates are important they are not directly relevant to the case study of B-Scheme films under consideration here precisely because B-Scheme films do not constitute an African cinema by virtue of the fact that Africans

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<sup>28</sup> Emmanuel Sama, “African Films are Foreigners in their Own Countries”, in Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham, p. 148.

<sup>29</sup> “The Algiers Charter on African Cinema, 1975”, in Bakari and Cham, pp.25-26.

<sup>30</sup> Recent scholarship on these and other issues includes among others, Kenneth W. Harrow, *Postcolonial African Cinema*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007, Femi Okiremuete Shaka, *Modernity and the African Cinema: A Study in Colonialist Discourse, Postcoloniality and Modern African Identities*, Trenton, NJ & Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc., 2004 and Francoise Pfaff (ed.), *Focus on African Films*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004. For historical overviews of the development of African cinema, see for example, Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992 and Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, *Black African Cinema*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> See for example the article by David Murphy, “Africans Filming Africa: questioning theories of an authentic African cinema”, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13, 2, December 2000.

have had little or no say in cinematic representations of themselves. What is more directly relevant, as points of comparison, are critical readings of African films in respect of representations of race, ethnicity, gender, class aspirations and representations of landscape as well as encounters between tradition and modernity.

And despite the temporal dissonance, B-Scheme films provide a degree of comparative parallels with Nigerian video films which began to proliferate from the 1990s when the B-Scheme films ended production. Commonalities between B-Scheme films and the Nigerian video film industry are centred on production values, the sheer volume of films produced and to some degree, themes and stories. These commonalities exist despite the difference in technology. The majority of B-Scheme films were produced on 16mm, with some on 35mm, while the Nigerian films utilise video technology.

### **Debating Film and History**

The films that were produced as part of the B-Scheme subsidy are analysed in this thesis as sources of historical evidence. Film as historical source is analysed in three distinct ways. Firstly, film is considered a source of historical information about the specific era in which it was made. Films about 1960s America, for example, can provide historical evidence regarding the 'look' of the period or films about the Vietnam War can give a sense of the event of a war of that nature; how both combatants and non-combatants experience war, the kinds of uniforms soldiers wore or the types of weapons used. They are also able to provide the historian with evidence about the ideological motivations of both the US government as well as US society at the time.

Secondly, films as evidence can provide an understanding of the historical role of film in shaping public opinion, educating and informing. For example films about the Second World War made contemporaneously are able to provide information about not only the war but also the many ways in which film was used to shape public opinion and thus enlist support for the war effort. The films of Humphrey Jennings are a case in point.

Although films like *Listen to Britain* (1942) and *Diary for Timothy* (1943) are documentary films, they provide insight into the ways in which film was used to mobilise British society in support of the war effort. Thirdly, and closely correlating to the previous point, by focusing on audience reception, historians are able to gauge the success of films in shaping public opinions and tastes.<sup>32</sup> In this instance films are not only a source of historical information but are in fact placed *in* history, in that they are able to impact on historical processes.

Film as source material for historical investigation is much more readily acceptable to many historians than film as representations of history or film as historiography.<sup>33</sup> As both source material and historical representation, film has to be questioned and critiqued in much the same way as written sources and productions of history. As John Tosh argues, all sources of historical information have to be approached with the same critical attitude and in this respect there is no fundamental difference between written and filmic sources of history.<sup>34</sup> The crucial difference lies in the methodology of analysis which is conditional on the nature of the medium. Film calls for a greater visual literacy than has traditionally been required of historians.

While acknowledging these broader debates within the sub-discipline of film and history, and as stated previously, the research on which this thesis is based uses film as sources of historical information. The films analysed here are used as historical sources in two ways. Firstly, the selected films have been analysed as sources of historical information regarding the broader apartheid society; its structure and ideological configuration regarding the position of African people, the cultural and social values as represented in the films and the prevalent attitudes towards Africans as evident in the films.

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<sup>32</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film*, London: Routledge, 2007, provides a useful historical discussion of the increasing predominance of film in historical studies.

<sup>33</sup> For the seminal debate around film as historiography see the *American Journal of Historical Review*, 93, 5, 1988 which includes articles by among others Robert A. Rosenstone, Robert Brent Toplin and Hayden White. Further works by Rosenstone such as *History on Film / Film on History*, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2006, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995 and Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996, explore the debate on film as historiography in greater detail.

<sup>34</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, Harlow: Longman, 2000, esp., chapters 3 and 4.

Secondly, this research has also tried to place the films in history. This has been done in two ways. Firstly, by trying to assess the extent to which B-Scheme films have impacted on and influenced the intended audiences, namely African people. And secondly, the films have been placed in the historical context of film production and exhibition in South Africa. This is crucial if one is to understand the motivations behind the drive to begin producing the so-called 'black' films.

The first task, to assess audience reception and through this the impact of the films, has been admittedly difficult primarily because very little audience research has either been done or is available to gauge audience response. This lacuna is emblematic to some degree of the relative scholarly neglect of South African cinematic history, particularly with regard to Africans. Scholarly research on audiences and how audiences are constituted as well as how audiences receive performances – be it theatrical, cinematic or musical – is a relatively neglected area in South Africa. Karin Barber makes this point for the entire continent as a whole<sup>35</sup>, though in this regard, some preliminary work with regard to audience reception of Nigerian video films already exists.<sup>36</sup> Lawuyi for example writes of audiences for Nigerian video films, as “horizon(s) of consumption”, where consumption for Lawuyi is not merely the consumption of the films, but importantly also, consumption of the material wealth depicted in the films. One can enquire to what degree this was also the case with audiences for B-Scheme films. This question becomes especially pertinent when one bears in mind that financial opportunism was a key motivation behind the production of B-Scheme films. As with the Nigerian video films, consumption here would also include consumption of the material cultures and conspicuous lifestyles depicted in some of the films, especially those that are thematically concerned with social and economic mobility. But the kind of empirical

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<sup>35</sup> Karin Barber, “Preliminary Notes on Audiences in Africa”, in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 67, 3, 1997.

<sup>36</sup> See for example, Olatunde B. Lawuyi, “The Political Economy of Video Marketing in Ogbomoso, Nigeria”, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 67, 3, 1997, and Brian Larkin, “Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities”, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 6, 3, 1997.

data that informs both Lawuyi and Larkin's articles has simply not been available to this researcher in respect of the B-Scheme films.

A key indicator of audience reception is newspaper reviews. And again, this is lacking as far as the B-Scheme films are concerned. Where reviews have been available for selected films, these have been included in the chapters focusing on those particular films. The scarcity of both reviews and other material relating to the reception of these films one assumes has been due to the fact that the primary exhibition venues for B-Scheme films have been the mobile circuits in mainly rural areas and the former homeland towns. This means that the majority of the films were circulated outside urban centres and thus beyond the attention of newspapers and other publications which could have published reviews.

Those newspapers with a mainly African readership such as the *Ilanga Lase Natal* (The Sun of Natal) or the *Golden City Post* and *Imvo Zabantsundu* (African Opinion) do focus on film but in rather general terms and not at all on the B-Scheme films which are the focus of this thesis. H. I. E. Dhlomo's 'Busy Bee' column in the *Ilanga* for example often addresses issues of film but more as a constant harangue against the construction of African audiences as unsophisticated and visually illiterate. Dhlomo berates, especially those Africans who underestimate the intelligence of their fellow Africans with regard to visual literacy and cinematic sophistication.<sup>37</sup> In another column he takes issue with officialdom and members of civil society who "forbid Africans seeing several classes of films", and he is particularly scathing of the opinion that allowing Africans to see gangster films leads to the creation of the African criminal.<sup>38</sup> The scarcity of research material on audience reception of the B-Scheme films is an indication of the relative gaps in South African scholarship on films and film reception.

South African scholarship on film in general and film and history in particular is still relatively new compared with especially the United States and Britain. Film and history

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<sup>37</sup> H. I. E. Dhlomo, 'Busy Bee', *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 7 April 1951, p.14.

<sup>38</sup> *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 26 July 1947, p. 18.



as a sub-discipline of historical studies is fairly well established in the United States with regular articles and reviews of historical films appearing in journals such as the *American Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History*. In Britain, historian Jeffrey Richards in the mid-1970s was exhorting “moribund, Oxbridge-orientated university panjandrums” to pay greater attention to film as sources of social history.<sup>39</sup> In *Visions of Yesterday*, film is utilised as historical evidence for understanding how particular societies conceived and imagined myths and legends crucial to the formation of national identities. Richards focuses on films dealing with three myths as he calls them: the myth of the British Empire, American populism and German National Socialism. Similarly, Anthony Aldgate in *Cinema and History*, draws on British newsreels of the Spanish Civil War to understand how contemporary British society viewed the war and its contribution to it.<sup>40</sup>

In South Africa, the process of moving film and history into a more mainstream position in historical studies has been somewhat slower and to date only one edition of the *South African Historical Journal* has devoted a special edition to film and history.<sup>41</sup> The special edition was preceded by the ‘First International African Film and History Conference’ hosted by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in July 2002. This conference brought together scholars, researchers and film practitioners to debate the issue of film and history.

As regards film and history within South African academics, the UCT is arguably the leading institution in which film has slowly inched its way into a more central position within the Department of Historical Studies.<sup>42</sup> Apart from undergraduate courses focusing on film and history, a number of postgraduate theses have been produced dealing with film and history, the most recent being Lauren van Vuuren’s 2005 doctoral

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<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday*, London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1973, Introduction.

<sup>40</sup> Anthony Aldgate, *Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War*, London: Scolar Press, 1979.

<sup>41</sup> *South African Historical Journal*, 48, May 2003.

<sup>42</sup> See Vivian Bickford-Smith and Richard Mendelsohn’s “Introduction” to the special volume of the *South African Historical Journal*, 48, May 2003 which they edited.

thesis which also deals with documentary film as historical source and evidence.<sup>43</sup>

Through critical analyses of selected films Van Vuuren engages the debates around cinematic representations of Bushmen. Using film as evidence, she has brought to light not only how Bushmen were perceived but also what the films reveal about the overriding concerns and attitudes of the filmmakers themselves. Similarly, Dylan Craig's 2003 MA thesis focuses on South African Border War films and what these films reveal about the society, the political and ideological imperatives guiding the production of these films.<sup>44</sup>

### Theorising Film

This thesis, for the purposes of clarity of argument, adopts the functional definition of film posited by Toby Miller and Robert Stam who argue that film is three things at once. It is a "recorder of reality", a "manufacturer of reality and also a "part of reality".<sup>45</sup> Film is thus a part of the social and cultural reality of any society and an important contributing factor to the "creation of consciousness and systems of value which either bind society or show its divisions."<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, film is also important in the process of enculturation in that as a form of visual media it influences how people look, talk, act and dress. It plays a crucial role in the socialisation process by providing role models in the persons of film stars.

But film is more than a force in the processes of enculturation and socialisation. It is also both a tool of propaganda as well as education. As a propaganda tool, film arguably reached its apotheosis with political upheavals such as war and revolution. The examples of Humphrey Jennings have been mentioned earlier, but other notable examples of political propaganda on film include the films of Leni Riefenstahl and Sergei

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<sup>43</sup> Lauren van Vuuren, "The Great Dance: Myth, History and Identity in Documentary Film Representations of the Bushmen, 1925-2000", unpublished PhD Thesis, UCT, December 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Dylan Craig, "The Viewer as Conscript: Dynamic Struggles for Ideological Supremacy in South African Border War Films, 1971-1988", MA Thesis, UCT, 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Toby Miller and Robert Stam (ed.), *A Companion to Film Theory*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Eisenstein.<sup>47</sup> However, claiming their films as propaganda has not detracted from the power of the visual image as deployed by both Riefenstahl and Eisenstein, nor has it diminished the artistic and aesthetic value of the films. Indeed, most cinema studies courses make recourse to these films as examples of some of the finest moments in cinematic history, the propaganda intentions and value notwithstanding. The difference however, between these films of Riefenstahl and Eisenstein and the B-Scheme films under consideration here is that while the former were consciously propagandistic, the B-Scheme films were not all envisioned as overt propaganda.

While the majority of the B-Scheme films may not have been consciously produced as propaganda, the propaganda value of many of the films nonetheless is explicit and draws specifically on various aspects of the political, social and economic ideology of the National Party government. On one level the propaganda value is based on an uncritical reflection of different elements of apartheid structures and policies. But on another level, many of the films are propagandistic due to their active endorsements of various aspects of apartheid policies. Films such as those that fall within the category of 'back to the homeland' both reflect and propagate the apartheid government policy of separate development within the geopolitical borders of ethnic homelands such as the Transkei and Ciskei. Films such as *Inkunzi* and *Setipana* represent an urban-rural dichotomy which conforms to official government constructions of spaces designated for Africans and whites. These films are ideological in the sense that they do not challenge hegemonic constructions but rather are subsumed by and subscribe to these.

Film however, is also a commodity with a commercial value on the global market. This commercial value should not be underestimated and probably underpins most national film productions around the globe. Janet Wasko argues that given film's foundational premise as being commercial, it needs to be placed within its social, economic and political context and critiqued in terms of its contribution to maintaining and reproducing

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<sup>47</sup> Riefenstahl's two most notable films *Triumph of the Will* (1935) about the 1933 Nazi party rally in Nuremberg and *Olympia* about the 1936 Berlin Olympics are often referred to as examples of overt propaganda that served the political interests of the Nazi's in Germany. Eisenstein's films such as *Strike* (1925), *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1928) are similarly cited as examples of propaganda about the 1905 and 1917 revolutions in Russia.

structures of power.<sup>48</sup> This research similarly tries to establish the motivating factors behind the production of films for African audiences. The thesis attempts to determine to what extent this film production, and indeed the 'black film industry' was motivated by commercial interests and whose commercial interests. And did this commercial interest preclude any other motivations or could one argue for a synergy between commercial and other interests in South African 'black' film production?

Film as a cultural product has been extensively theorized by cultural theorists as part of the mass media. Stuart Hall has identified two phases within cultural media studies. The first phase he characterises as the "behavioural approach" which sought to study the effects of media forms on audiences. The second phase, which is more pertinent to this study is, what Hall calls the "critical paradigm".<sup>49</sup> He has identified two aspects to this critical paradigm: (1) how ideological processes work and (2) what its mechanisms are. Similarly, this study will explore how 'black films' function as ideological processes and what kinds of mechanisms they employ to disseminate the ideology, whether it is by means of appropriating African cultural and traditional symbols, or by other means. The task of cultural studies thus is to embed cinema (and indeed all media) within a cultural and historical context.

Ideology impacts on film in two distinct ways. Film is at once a product of ideology and a producer of ideology. Identifying film as a product of ideology is a relatively easy task as textual analysis will confirm ideological imperatives in one form or another. Film producing ideology is however another matter and requires a more sophisticated methodological approach and a greater visual literacy than is normally required from historians. For Bill Nichols, film as a form of communication and exchange is a "signifying act" producing meaning that represents dominant class interests.<sup>50</sup> Film, for Jeffrey Richards, is also explicitly ideological. His study of cinema and society in Britain

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<sup>48</sup> Janet Wasko, "The Political Economy of Films", in Toby Miller and Robert Stam (ed.), *A Companion to Film Theory*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1999, p. 227.

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies", in Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennet, James Curran and Janet Woollacott (ed.) *Society and the Media*, London: Methuen, 1985, p. 65.

<sup>50</sup> Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and other Media*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

in the 1930s explores the ways in which mass culture, and particularly film as one form of mass culture, is used to generate ideological consensus.<sup>51</sup> Richards investigates the ways in which film propagates and perpetuates dominant class interests in 1930s British society. Films conforming to ideological imperatives, he argues privilege narrative over cinematic style. In other words, the message is all important to the detriment of how it is visually narrated. While Richard's focus is on film as a form of mass culture his study provides points of parallel on two different levels with the present study on B-Scheme films. Firstly, the majority of B-Scheme films were conceived as a means to generate ideological consensus and secondly, in keeping with this ideological imperative tend to foreground the narrative at the expense of cinematic style.

Ideology functions in two ways in the B-Scheme films under consideration in this thesis. Firstly, the films are ideological in the broader sense of the term, in that they embody the general ideas and preoccupations of a dominant group in society. In this instance, it is white South Africans since they were the ones producing these films. While this is true for the majority of the B-Scheme films and their white filmmakers, one needs to draw a distinction between the majority of the filmmakers and individuals such as Oliver Schmitz and David Bensusan whose films, as stated earlier, are oppositional to dominant group interests.

Secondly, the films are ideological in that the majority of them implicitly or explicitly legitimate dominant apartheid policies with reference to African people.<sup>52</sup> Subsumed under these two broad meanings of ideology are other aspects that Eagleton has identified. These include among others, the notion that ideology assigns subject positions which further the aims of dominant social and political groups. The B-Scheme films inscribe Africans with social, political, economic and cultural meanings which to varying degrees conform to apartheid conceptions of their position in the broader context of South African society.

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<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939*, London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1984.

<sup>52</sup> See for example Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London: Verso, 1991 who provides a useful list of possible definitions and meanings of ideology.

If one accepts that a conception of film merely as the product of ideology, apartheid ideology in this instance, is too limiting then further questions arise as regards not only the films and their function within the society in which they were produced, but also about other crucial issues such as the nature of the broader society, social and political relations and representational politics. One can go further and discard the notion of ideology entirely as a thoroughly discredited paradigm for analysing how social and political entities organise and reproduce themselves; for the manner in which meanings are produced and communicated; how social, political and class interests are articulated; and how power and dominance is achieved and maintained.

But if film is not only a product of power, then what else is it? And more importantly what else is it within the context of a highly racialised and repressive society such as South Africa between the period 1956 when the state film subsidy was introduced and 1992 when it was finally discarded and reformulated in a different form? One way to answer these questions is to consider how the convergence of politics, culture, society and economy within the context of racial ideology and practice impact on the kinds of films produced for African audiences. Could these same films have been produced in any other society under a different set of conditions?

India provides one instructive example and parallel. M. Madhava Prasad in his study of Hindi film engages with one of the central problematics raised by this research, namely, the role of the state in cultural processes.<sup>53</sup> Hindi cinema, he argues provides a rich source for the study of the contestation of the form of the political state. Cinema itself is the site of struggle to reconstitute the state. This is as a result of the avowedly Hindu nationalist project of early Bombay cinema which sought to foster a sense of national identity and consensus centered on Hinduism and Hindu culture.<sup>54</sup> After independence from British colonial rule in 1947, the Indian state was simultaneously courted and

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<sup>53</sup> M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Ravi S. Vasudevan, "Addressing the Spectator of a 'Third World' National Cinema: The Bombay 'Social' Film of the 1940s and 1950s" in Robert Stam and Toby Miller (ed.) *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden, 2000.

rebuffed by the Indian film industry. Those wishing to forge closer ties to the state wished above all to attain recognition for the film industry on par with other national industries and thereby assure significant state funding. Opposed to this was another grouping comprising primarily of, what Prasad identifies as merchant capital, which sought to maintain independence from the state.<sup>55</sup> As was the case with South Africa, the Indian government also displayed a degree of ambivalence with regard to its precise role in fostering a national film industry and it was only in 1969 under Indira Gandhi, that the state took a more “interventionist” approach to film through the establishment of the Film Finance Corporation.<sup>56</sup> Government support in the form of a tax concession was conditional on the industry producing films with “progressive themes, to provide cultural support for the developmental goals of the (Gandhi) ‘socialist’ government”.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the various similarities between the South African case and the Indian example, to what extent can one draw parallels between the two, or indeed any other global context and South Africa? Can one argue that films for African audiences provided a similar site of struggle and contestation and if so to what degree of success? Did African people have the same opportunities and access to film production as did non-Hindu minorities in India? And is this access and opportunity a prerequisite for contestation or could contestation have taken a different form as regards film for African audiences? While the parallels between Indian and South African cinema for African audiences may be enticing, a cautionary note is struck by the fact that Hindu chauvinism and apartheid racism are different projections of ethnic and cultural superiority and were differently enacted and implemented.

This thesis tries to answer precisely this question; how did film for African audiences function within South African apartheid society? In other words, what were the purposes and meanings (based on close readings of the filmic texts) of films for African audiences and how and to what degree, if at all, were these tied to the apartheid project of the South African state?

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<sup>55</sup> Prasad, pp.32-34.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 121.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

## Selection of Material

In setting out to answer this question, this research has been based on textual analyses of selective films covering the period 1960-1990. The films have been selected on the basis of their qualification for the general government subsidy which was introduced in 1956 and the B-Scheme subsidy introduced in 1972/3. The 1956 subsidy covered film in general but the bulk of the money was spent on films for English- and Afrikaans-speaking audiences. A notable exception was the Jamie Uys film *Dingaka* (1964) which was aimed at an African as well as a broader South African and international audience.

The lack of sufficient state funding for films in African languages was addressed with the introduction of a separate, or B-Scheme subsidy, in 1972/3. The further selection of B-Scheme films has been determined by availability as well as genre. This research has tried to select films ranging in genre from drama/soap opera, action/adventure/martial arts to the magical/mythical. Many films often cross-over from one genre to another or present a combination of several generic conventions. The common feature however has been the use of one or other African language, most often Zulu followed by Xhosa. This was one of two qualifying criteria for claiming the state subsidy. The other criterion was that 75% of all actors had to be African. The predominance of Zulu could be due to the fact that this is the single largest linguistic African group in South Africa.

A total of thirty-five B-Scheme films (from a greater total of over four hundred)<sup>58</sup> have been viewed, apart from others such as *African Jim* (aka *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, 1949), *Zonk*, (1950), *Come Back Africa* (1960) and *Dingaka* (1964) which was produced as part of the general subsidy. The B-Scheme films were selected on the basis of two main criteria; date and language. In terms of dates, as far as possible, an average of three films per year spanning the crucial period from 1975 to 1990 have been selected in order to determine the changes over time in terms of content, themes and cinematic styles.

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<sup>58</sup> There is no accurate total and this approximation is based on the list of films cited in Blignaut and Botha's *Movies, Moguls and Mavericks* which in itself is not an exhaustive list. Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid* also provides a somewhat shorter list of films in African languages.



While Zulu has been the predominant language of B-Scheme films, the filmography includes Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana films as well. Of the thirty-five films, more than half have Zulu dialogues, eight have English dialogues and the remaining have Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana dialogues. Selection however has also been determined by the availability of films. While the holdings of the National Film, Video and Sound Archives in Pretoria are quite vast, a number of films that were initially selected have not been available either from the Archives or from individual filmmakers such as Tonie van der Merwe and David Bensusan, among others. A number of films in the Archive holdings are also incomplete or have been misplaced. The second reel of *Joe Bullet* for example could not be located on an initial visit to the Archives but somehow surfaced during a second visit so it has been possible to view this film in its entirety. A number of films produced by Heyns Films were made available on VHS but the vast majority of films viewed have been mostly on the 16mm and some on the 35mm format. This meant a series of protracted visits to the National Archives to view the material on site in Pretoria.

The non-availability of certain titles is especially limiting in the case of Bensusan for example. It would have been instructive to engage in a comprehensive comparative analysis of the dozen or more films Bensusan made from the B-Scheme subsidy, especially since he was one of the few filmmakers who tried to subvert the subsidy. As it is only three and a half of his films have been viewed, the better know *My Country, My Hat* (1983) and the less well know *The Chicken Man* (1990), *Midnite Rush* (1990) and *Molori* (1989). The National Film Archive has two copies of the first reel of *Molori* so it has not been possible to view this film in its entirety.

Equally limiting and frustrating has been the reluctance of interviewees, where they could be located, to speak openly and frankly about the film industry during the period this research covers. People like Andre Pieterse (and his brother Philo Pieterse), who during the 1970s was one of the leading producers in the country flatly refused to be interviewed. He has claimed that he has written the definitive history of 'black' cinema in South Africa, but this is unpublished and at this point, not for public consumption. Thus neither he nor whatever information is available to him was made accessible to this

researcher. Similarly, other prolific producers of B-Scheme films such as Ronnie Isaacs, remains an elusive figure, with many claiming he has left the country. Others like Steve Hand, the former teacher turned filmmaker, was eventually tracked down to Badplaas, a resort town in Mpumalanga and agreed to an interview but was most reticent to impart information, unless it was off the record.

Many of the actors such as Lucas Baloyi seem to have disappeared without a trace as no one to whom inquiries were directed had any information as to his whereabouts. Many have voiced the suspicion that he may in fact have died. The case of Baloyi, as David Bensusan pointed out, is most tragic: a talented actor who, because of the lack of structures such as an actors union or its equivalent for African actors, essentially was exploited and unable to realize his full potential. Others such as Japan Mthembu and Cynthia Shange (with whom a series of telephonic conversations have taken place but no formal interview as she has been unavailable or out of town whenever a visit to Johannesburg has taken place) have been more successful. Both are currently 'on-call' actors in the television drama series *Muvhango*.

This reluctance by those involved in producing B-Scheme films to either be interviewed or be less than forthcoming has been due to the allegations of impropriety with regard to subsidy claims submitted to the state. In 1989 the Department of Home Affairs took over the administration of the subsidy and discovered large scale fraud in the awarding of funds. The Department tried to prosecute some of the people alleged to have submitted fraudulent claims on the basis of inflated numbers of tickets sold, but met with little success. Of the filmmakers interviewed, only one, Tonie van der Merwe was prepared to speak openly about this aspect of the 'black' film industry and the awarding of B-Scheme funds.

While language could have been a serious impediment to close textual analyses of the films, it has been circumvented by the assistance of a research assistant specifically for translating the languages used in the films. However, despite the assistance with translation, the majority of the films viewed have employed cinematic and stylistic

devices and language that is simplistic at best and offensive to the intellect at worst, thus making the analytic task that much easier.

The chapters of this thesis have been chronologically and thematically organized. Chapters two and three provide a historical chronology and context to production and exhibition of films for African audiences. The history of film production and exhibition practices for African audiences is placed within a broader political, social and economic context. This context is essential for understanding not only the emergence of the 'black film industry' but also for the conceptions of Africans as cinema-viewing audiences within apartheid society. The introduction of the two subsidy schemes in 1956 and 1972 are key foci of these two chapters, as are issues of censorship and the introduction of television and its impact on the film production and exhibition industries. As attempts to build a national film industry, the introduction of the two state subsidies are historically located within the broader political, social and economic aims and policies of the apartheid state.

Chapter four examines films that broadly fall into, what Tomaselli refers to as, 'back to the homelands' category.<sup>59</sup> Films such as *Dingaka*, *Inkunzi*, *Setipana* and *uDeliwe* all focus on the urban-rural dichotomy, with sub-themes such as social mobility and tradition versus modernity where tradition is firmly located within the rural with modernity being a characteristic of the urban.

Chapter five will analyse the films that focus on the theme of 'crime doesn't pay'. These are action/adventure/crime films which all seek to moralise that crime does not pay and the way to social and economic mobility and success is through hard work. Films such as *iKati Elimnyama*, *Joe Bullet*, *Sky Full of Diamonds*, *Strikeback* and *The Gold Cup*, among others again construct a simplistic binary between good and evil where good eventually triumphs and evil is punished.

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<sup>59</sup> Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, p. 71.

Chapter six focuses on films that are oppositional to both the political ideology of the state as well as subversive of the subsidy scheme and its conditions. Films such as *My Country My Hat*, *Mapantsula* and *Mathata*, among others engage with and critique to varying degrees both the political and social context of South Africa. In doing so these films subvert not only the unstated but strongly implied condition to avoid political and social criticism, but they also manifestly subvert the dominant ethos of many of the other B-Scheme films which pander to the most common denominator.

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## Chapter Two

### Film Production and Exhibition for African Audiences: Historical continuities and parallels

This chapter provides a historical overview of film production and exhibition for African audiences in South Africa. More specifically, it provides a historical context to the nature of the interventionist role the state has played in films for Africans since the colonial era. This interventionist role has impacted negatively on the organic development of an indigenous African film industry and a culture of cinema viewing among Africans. Through archival evidence, this chapter aims to trace the historical parallels and continuities in film production and exhibition for Africans between the colonial era and the early segregationist and apartheid years. While the degree and method of intervention may have changed over the years, the one factor that has remained constant has been the interventionist role of the state, whether the state was colonial, segregationist or apartheid.

The interventionist role of the colonial government in film production and exhibition for African audiences has received considerable scholarly attention from among others, Glenn Reynolds, Rosaleen Smythe, James Burns and David Kerr.<sup>1</sup> This chapter builds on these existing works but maintains a more specific focus on South Africa and through archival evidence traces the historical continuities of state intervention in films for Africans. It also makes explicit the close and mutually beneficial role between the state and the private film industry in South Africa. Furthermore, it provides a more detailed analysis of the state's role through the various town councils and municipalities which

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Burns, *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe*, Athens: Ohio, Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 2002, David Kerr, "The Best of Both Worlds: Colonial Film Policy and Practice in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland", in *Critical Arts*, 7, 1993, Glenn Reynolds, "Image and Empire: Anglo-American Cinematic Interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1921-1937", *South African Historical Journal*, 48, May 2003 and Rosaleen Smythe, "The Development of British Colonial Film Policy, 1927-1939, with Special Reference to East and Central Africa", *The Journal of African History*, 20, 3, 1979.

were more directly responsible for the implementation of state policies. In this regard, archival evidence shows very little national agreement or coordination in the application of policies but rather that each locality seems to have operated on a semi-autonomous basis. In other words, the South African colonial government did not articulate an overall national policy with regard to film, as the later apartheid government would, but rather that each province enacted and implemented its own policy. Despite this however, the main point that needs to be stressed is that state intervention was a common-place regardless of differences and degrees in policy implementation.

The argument presented here is that state intervention in film production and exhibition for Africans in South Africa prior to the establishment of apartheid rule, is historically rooted in colonial attempts to control the kind of entertainment that was provided for Africans. This intervention took three interrelated forms. Firstly, intervention was at the level of the kinds of films produced and selected for exhibition. Secondly, intervention took place in the form of differential censorship. And thirdly, intervention took place in the control exercised over exhibition rights – who was awarded permission to exhibit to African audiences and who was not. In this regard, Africans were allowed limited opportunities for entrepreneurial exhibition rights whereas they had no opportunities to the means of film production. There were various motivations behind this intervention ranging from providing education and information to “moralising leisure time”.

State intervention before and after the establishment of the apartheid state in 1948 was both direct and indirect. Directly, the state through various departments such as Education and Railways and Harbours, intervened to commission films for publicity and propaganda purposes. Indirectly, the state sought to control the kinds of films that were exhibited to Africans through both censorship laws as well as the various channels which private firms had to negotiate in order to get the necessary permission.

There existed a close and mutually beneficial relationship between the state and private production companies. Through primary sources this chapter will bring to light this mutually beneficial relationship between the state and private production companies as

regards the production and exhibition of films for African audiences. In this regard, this chapter together with the one that follows traces the historical link between the state and entrepreneurial film production and exhibition for African audiences which reached its apogee with the production of the B-Scheme films which will be analysed in chapters four, five and six. This close association between the state and the private film industry was inextricably linked firstly to state aims as regards Africans and after 1948, to the apartheid project as will be evident through analyses of primary archival sources as well as the films produced as part of the B-Scheme state subsidy.

### **Films, Censorship and African audiences from 1910-1947**

State intervention in films for African audiences is historically rooted in colonial attempts to regulate the kinds of films screened to Africans. As previously stated, David Kerr, J M Burns and Rosaleen Smythe draw strong parallels between South African film policy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and colonial film policy operating in places like Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, as well as other parts of Anglo colonial Africa.<sup>2</sup> This policy had two overarching motivations, both emerging from a desire to censor what was shown to African audiences. It was both optimistic about the potential of film to educate the “native” and cautious of film’s ability to incite anti-social and anti-state behaviour. As a didactic tool film could be used to educate the “native” about modern agricultural methods, savings, agricultural credit, soil erosion, hygiene, and also respect for and loyalty to the Empire and its organs of governance such as the military and police.<sup>3</sup>

The “paternalistic arrogance of imperialism”<sup>4</sup> that Edward Said writes about in his analysis of the link between culture and imperialism, is evident in the manner in which film for Africans was conceived and constructed. It was considered a medium which needed to be cautiously approached and judiciously administered. Within this ideological framing, the colonial authorities therefore knew best what served African interests.

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<sup>2</sup> J. M. Burns, (2002), David Kerr, (1993) and Rosaleen Smythe, (1979).

<sup>3</sup> David Kerr, pp. 11-42.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage, 1994, p.xx.

Rosaleen Smythe identifies this as the “trusteeship approach”.<sup>5</sup> The colonial authorities approach to film was tempered by fears that the “native” should be protected from the dangerous images of commercial cinema.<sup>6</sup> These fears were linked to the social dislocation resulting from industrialisation which followed the discoveries of minerals in southern Africa. This dislocation was as a result of the changing patterns of social organisation in urban centres which now required greater numbers of African labourers. The colonial authorities responded with what Reynolds has called the “Social Gospel” which was essentially a transformation of the Christian civilising mission.<sup>7</sup> This “Social Gospel” was a re-thinking of the original civilisational mission of European settlers in Africa. Cinema, Reynolds argues, was “a cornerstone” of this transformed European mission and was utilised for the uplift and education of Africans. An important ingredient of this programme of uplift and education was the mitigation of what colonial authorities and the settler community believed to be the “corrosive influence” of foreign films which were bound to show the “least ennobling aspects of western culture.”<sup>8</sup>

The colonial settler community’s anxiety about the exposure of Africans to films was focused on issues of sexuality, loss of European prestige and violence, especially black on white violence. Cinema’s visual impact contributed to a sense of threat among settlers especially with regard to white women. It was believed that cinematic depictions of “lewdness” in the form of white women in various forms of conservative undress would incite black men to perpetrate acts of sexual violence on white women.

Early South African film policy for African audiences displays the same ambivalence as colonial film policy. The segregationist authorities in South Africa recognised the potential of film to both educate as well as to foster subversion. There is however also a deeper irony evident in how the early settler and later, segregationist and apartheid authorities viewed film in relation to African audiences. Despite the strongly voiced belief that Africans were gullible and unsophisticated viewers of film, there was also a

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<sup>5</sup> Rosaleen Smythe, p. 437.

<sup>6</sup> J.M. Burns, p.xv.

<sup>7</sup> Glenn Reynolds, “Image and Empire”, p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



fearful preoccupation with film's potential for subversion. Thus whilst African audiences were dismissed as lacking visual literacy, the authorities expressed simultaneous and contradictory fears that Africans would nonetheless learn too much from watching films. This fear was most explicitly linked to loss of European prestige in the eyes of Africans.<sup>9</sup> Policies on production, exhibition and censorship of films for Africans therefore tried to cover all possible contingencies.

Censorship was considered a key area in controlling the kinds of films exhibited to African audiences. One of the earliest instances of differential censorship in South Africa was the banning of the filmed Johnson-Jeffries fight of 1910 which had resulted in race riots in the United States. The banning raised an outcry among the white population which argued for differential censorship. The film was to be banned from African audiences while released for the general white viewership. Tomaselli argues that implicit in this protest from white South Africans is the belief that only Africans could be racist hence the call to have it banned from African audiences.<sup>10</sup> The role of South African white civil society in censorship went beyond protests to more assertive action with the formation of the Bioscope Advisory Committee (BAC) in Cape Town in 1913. The BAC was part of the larger Social Reform Association which had been established in 1900 to deal with the social fall-out of the 1899-1902 war.<sup>11</sup> The BAC's initial focus was more on the conditions of exhibition venues rather than the quality and content of film itself.

The promulgation of the Religious Performances Prevention Ordinance of 1913 by the Cape Provincial Council was the first attempt to bring censorship within the realm of political governance where before it had been spearheaded by private interest groups. This law was designed to "provide for the prohibition of certain performances and exhibitions of a religious character."<sup>12</sup> It followed a public outcry over the screening of the film *From Manger to Cross* in 1912. The same year saw further public demands for stricter censorship laws following a wave of assaults with intent to rape on white women.

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<sup>9</sup> Smythe, p. 438.

<sup>10</sup> Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.289

Referred to as the 'black peril' because the perpetrators of these violent acts were often African men, film was seen as a major cause for the incitement of this violence.<sup>13</sup>

Further government intervention followed another public outcry about the screening of the film *Dop Doctor* in Britain in 1916.<sup>14</sup> Afrikaner sentiments were ruffled because the film was purported to represent them in a negative light. Direct representations were made to Prime Minister Louis Botha whose intervention prevented the screening of the film. This episode highlighted the absence and the necessity for some form of government policy as regards film but still the central government did not adopt any measures. The Cape Provincial Council however adopted the Public Performance Control Ordinance of 1916 which sought to control "performances and exhibitions calculated to bring any section of the public into ridicule or contempt."<sup>15</sup> It was also the Cape Provincial Council who passed the Cinematograph Film Ordinance of 1917 which was designed to "regulate and control places of recreation and amusement by prohibiting the exhibition therein of any cinematograph film not approved and to provide for the granting or refusal of such approval."<sup>16</sup> This law allowed for the establishment of a Board of Inspectors which was empowered to certify films as either suitable or not for public consumption.

A key figure in both censorship and the "trusteeship approach" to film was the Reverend Ray Phillips of the American Mission Board (AMB) who in the 1920s was also screening films to African audiences, largely in the mine compounds of the Rand.<sup>17</sup> Phillips' concerns were mainly twofold. Firstly, as part of the AMB's civilising mission, Phillips sought to use films to educate Africans about European culture, values and codes of behaviour. Secondly, Phillips' concern centred on what has been identified as 'moralising the leisure time' of urban Africans, especially migrant workers in the mine

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 284.

<sup>14</sup> Gutsche, p. 291.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 292.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 293.

<sup>17</sup> Phillips played a central role in the development of a film culture among Africans and despite the numerous discussions of him in the works of a number of writers such as Burns, Reynolds, Smythe, and Jacqueline Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, a dedicated study of his contributions remains to be done.

compounds. In this regard he was contracted by mine owners to provide “wholesome” entertainment for miners in order to “distract them from more antisocial activities such as drinking and fighting.”<sup>18</sup> While various sporting and athletics activities provided a diversion in the daytime, Phillips’ dilemma was finding appropriate entertainment for the evenings. The film shows were highly successful and proved to be a stronger attraction than drunken violence and drew more workers to the South African mines.<sup>19</sup> The efficacy of film as a deterrent in alcohol abuse and violence “convinced Phillips that the medium (of film) held a powerful sway over Africans. He believed that carefully chosen films would have the effect of “sublimating potential criminal tendencies” among miners”<sup>20</sup>

This cinema of ‘pacification’ was aimed at keeping urban African out of mischief and counteracting the evil influences of modernity to which ‘innocent’ Africans were thought to be particularly susceptible.<sup>21</sup> Phillips’ endeavours were thus one aspect of a larger project to provide ‘wholesome’ leisure activities for urban Africans as an “antidote to degrading influences of the slum yards and liquor dens with vice and drink, where Natives drift in the absence of healthful leisure activities.”<sup>22</sup>

Phillips’ cinematic undertakings in the mine compounds were enthusiastically supported by the Chamber of Mines which agreed to provide five thousand pounds annually.<sup>23</sup> The mobile circuit operated by Phillips expanded beyond the mine compounds and included eighty exhibition venues for African in the urban centres. With this rapid expansion the need to produce and select suitable films was pressing and Phillips personally selected

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<sup>18</sup> J. M. Burns, *Flickering Shadows*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p.9.

<sup>21</sup> Ntongela Masilela, “The New African Movement and the Beginnings of Film Culture in South Africa”, in Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela (ed.) *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2003, p. 20. See also the chapter by Bhekizizwe Peterson in the same book as well as Tim Couzens’ essay “Moralising Leisure Time” in Richard Rathbone and Shula Marks (ed.) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness 1870-1930*, London, Longman, 1982 and also Mark Beittel’s paper “Mapantsula: Cinema, Crime and Politics on the Witwatersrand” for greater exposition of government thinking on the issue of cinema’s influence on criminal tendencies among urban Africans.

<sup>22</sup> Bhekizizwe Peterson, “The Politics of Leisure during the Early Days of South African Cinema”, in Balseiro and Masilela, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Beittel, “Mapantsula”, pp 752-3.

and edited the films to suit the educational and entertainment needs that were deemed necessary.<sup>24</sup> Apart from purchasing suitable films from overseas, Phillips was also working closely with Schlesinger's African Film Productions for the production of suitable films for screening to Africans.<sup>25</sup> Phillips' success in South Africa was exported to other parts of colonial Africa, especially Rhodesia where colonial authorities further censored Phillips' films.<sup>26</sup>

Ideologically opposed to the Reverend Phillips were the cinematic endeavours of Solomon T. Plaatje. He embarked on film exhibition shortly after his return from the United States in November 1923.<sup>27</sup> For Plaatje film was part of a broader mission that sought to transform African society along the line of the American Negroes. Film for Plaatje was also a pedagogical tool and formed part of the broader philosophy of the New African Movement which sought to bring modernity to Africans in much the same way that American Negroes had transformed themselves into the New Negro.<sup>28</sup> Plaatje travelled the country showing primarily documentary films which showcased the achievements of the American New Negro through education and skills development. In doing so he was forging explicit links between American and African blacks, exhorting the latter to use the former as an inspiration to overcome their oppressed and subjugated status. While the vast majority of the films Plaatje exhibited were documentaries, he also screened entertainment films for an audience that was largely African but also included "prominent Europeans".<sup>29</sup>

Thus while both Plaatje and the Reverend Phillips were motivated by a civilising mission the crucial difference was the ideological imperatives guiding the two men. Where Plaatje sought to educate and through that liberate Africans using film, Phillips was more concerned with educating Africans about Western culture. Where Phillips sought to import Western values and codes of behaviour and shape the way in which Africans

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Peterson, p.36. See also J.M. Burns, *Flickering Shadows*.

<sup>26</sup> Smythe, p. 439.

<sup>27</sup> Ntongela Masilela, "The New African Movement and the Beginnings of Film Culture in South Africa", Baseiro and Masilela, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Masilela, p. 20.

understood European civilisation, Plaatje was more concerned with Africans looking at parallels from the American Negroes with a view to enhancing the position of Africans in South Africa.

While the works of both Plaatje and Reverend Phillips have been discussed by other authors such as Maingard, Burns and others, what is relevant to the thesis and this chapter in particular is their attempts to develop among Africans a cinema-viewing culture. They approached this from very different ideological perspectives and given that economic, political and social power was aligned with Phillips, it is not surprising that his endeavours have had a much more lasting effect than that of Plaatje.

This effect is most evident in ideas about the function of film. Phillips thinking about the role of cinema resonates remarkably with the ideas of many B-Scheme filmmakers. Though B-Scheme filmmakers were not guided by a civilising mission as Phillips was, the idea that cinema could be used as a soporific has remained constant over the years. As discussed in a later chapter, B-Scheme filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s have expressed the same ideas about 'moralising the leisure' time of Africans that Phillips expressed in the 1920s. Suppressing and preventing crime and criminality among Africans has been as much a preoccupation of many B-Scheme filmmakers as it was of Phillips. But a critical difference is that while Phillips decried the portrayal of criminal violence on film, B-Scheme filmmakers often resort to depictions of criminality and violence in order to moralise on crime.

The cinematic endeavours of both Plaatje and Phillips are one piece in the tapestry of film exhibition and censorship in both South Africa as well British colonies in other parts of Africa. That South Africa provided crucial guidance to other African colonies in the matter of film censorship is evident in the query from the Colonial government of Kenya. The colonial authorities in Kenya wrote to the South African Board of Trade and Industries requesting information on how South Africa dealt with film censorship.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> TAB HEN 590 78/1/1, Letter from the Board of Trade and Industries to the Provincial Secretary, Cape Town, 25 June 1926.

matter was referred to the Cape Board of Administrators. In his reply, the Provincial Secretary for the Cape Board of Administrators confirmed the existence of the Cape Province Board of Film Inspectors which had been appointed by the Administrator and was reporting directly to him. Furthermore, in reply to questions regarding mixed audiences, the letter indicated that the general trend at the Cape, in keeping with its historical tradition of liberalism, was for mixed audiences without discrimination on the basis of either race or age. It does however concede that in cases where scenes might be thought objectionable on the grounds of race or age, it recommends censorship. The notable points here are firstly, the existence of mixed audiences (sitting in separate parts of the theatre), secondly, that censorship was not lawfully enforceable but only recommended by the Board of Inspectors and thirdly, race and age were key factors in censorship.<sup>31</sup> A further point of interest that is indicated by the correspondence from the Kenyan colonial government and emphasised by Smythe, is that South Africa provided the role model to many other colonies in the drafting of censorship legislation.<sup>32</sup>

The situation in Natal, in the 1920s, was somewhat different in that while a committee appointed by the Town Council exercised censorship for Pietermaritzburg, no such body existed in Durban where the Chief Constable viewed doubtful films. There appear to be no case of mixed audiences in this province as of the four 'European' cinemas only one seems to have had facilities for mixed audiences. There was one cinema patronised by both 'coloureds' and 'natives' while the Municipal Native Affairs Department operated another one in the location itself. While censorship appears to have been exercised on an ad hoc basis, there was the concern expressed that problems could arise if other than the "better educated Native" attended the cinemas indiscriminately. And in view of this stricter and better planned censorship would become an eventuality.<sup>33</sup>

The Transvaal at this time operated on a similar basis to Natal, with the exception of absolutely no mixed audiences. The Transvaal Administration had signed an agreement

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Letter from the Provincial Secretary of the Cape to the Board of Trade and Industries, 29 July 1926.

<sup>32</sup> Smythe, p. 439.

<sup>33</sup> TAB HEN 590 78/1/1, Letter from the Provincial Secretary of Natal to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 4 August 1926.

with African Consolidated Theatres “whereby native and coloured persons are not admitted to bioscopes at the same time as Europeans.”<sup>34</sup> As regards censorship, the police were responsible for all aspects thereof and according to the Provincial Secretary this was a satisfactory arrangement that they were in no hurry to change. The reason for this status quo remaining was expressed in terms of the political sensibility. Despite representations for the establishment of a Board of Censors, the Transvaal Administration believed that as far as ‘coloured persons’ and ‘natives’ were concerned a Board may not have the same political sensibility that the police would have and could therefore pass films for black audiences that may not be suitable.<sup>35</sup> This would indicate that the lack of a centralised policy in respect of censorship may have been deliberate and certainly for the Transvaal, a political necessity.

What is significant about this motivation for retaining control of censorship with the police is the degree to which the state, at least in the Transvaal, wished to intervene in film exhibition for “natives” and “coloured persons”. The police, as representatives of the state, could be trusted to ensure that black people in general would not be able to view films that could in any way pose a political threat to the power and legitimacy of the state. This important task could not be entrusted to private citizens who may or may not be able to appreciate the finer distinctions between what would be suitable and what could be potentially subversive. Private citizens would not have the same vested interests in protecting the state as would the police.

This lack of a centralised policy however did not mean that censorship was not considered important. On the contrary, in the Transvaal at least it was considered far too important to leave it to ordinary citizens even if they were carefully selected and groomed and even if the final veto lay with the Administration. Censorship in this province was taken so seriously that even films that were passed by the Cape Censors for exhibition to black audiences were re-censored by the Transvaal police. However, films for ‘European’ audiences that were passed by the Cape Censors were accepted and passed

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<sup>34</sup> TAB HEN 590 78/1/1, Letter from the Provincial Secretary of the Transvaal to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 6 July 1926.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

without scrutiny.<sup>36</sup> The Transvaal administration it seems took the matter of censorship for black audiences far more seriously than did either the Cape or Natal governments.

In keeping with its liberal attitudes the Cape Board of Censors included women while in the Transvaal the attitude seems to have been that women would not be allowed anywhere near viewing films that had not already been deemed suitable for feminine tastes.<sup>37</sup> The fact that three of the five members of the Cape Board were women was not enthusiastically welcomed by all and African Films Limited certainly had no scruples in expressing the view that there were too many women on the Board. This was an undesirable state of affairs according to the manager who felt that the male members of the Board could be unduly influenced by the women as the “average man is unwilling to argue or disagree with a woman.” Furthermore, women did not possess the “logical and moderate grip on public affairs possessed by men” and they were inclined to read far too much into a film or a title. This assertion is substantiated by the fact that the company had to change the title of the film *The First Night* because the Board passed the film but objected to its title.<sup>38</sup>

That each province and region acted independently as regards censorship is emphasised by the Cape Provincial Secretary who quite clearly stated that the Cape Province Board of Inspectors is not concerned in any way with what happens in the other provinces.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, it was only in 1930 that a centralised policy was introduced when the National government promulgated the Entertainment (Censorship) Bill which was also submitted to industry role players such as African Consolidated Theatres for their input.<sup>40</sup> A National Board of Censors was formed under the aegis of this law. This law however was not comprehensive enough to cover all aspects of exhibition. The increasing number

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> TAB HEN 590 78/1/1, Letter from the Provincial Secretary of the Transvaal to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 6 July 1926 as well as the letter from Cape Provincial Secretary, 29 July 1926.

<sup>38</sup> KAB PAS 3/58 Letter from the Branch Manager of African Films Limited to Acting Administrator, 5 September 1929.

<sup>39</sup> TAB HEN 590 78/1/1, Letter from the Cape Provincial Secretary to the Board of Trade and Industries, 29 July 1926.

<sup>40</sup> Gutsche, p 297.



of films societies which did not exhibit to the general public but only to a select membership, fell outside the strictures of this law and the films that were screened were thus exempt from the scrutiny of the Censor Board.

The Entertainments Censorship Amendment Bill was introduced in 1934 precisely with the aim of closing these loopholes in the previous law. The motive, according to the Minister of the Interior, J.H. Hofmeyer, was to close the door on “abuses” by private societies who could not be prevented from showing censorable material, especially Russian propaganda and ‘communistic’ films. Furthermore, the minister argued, the previous law could not have prevented “natives from forming themselves into such a society and thus becoming susceptible to subversive propaganda.”<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps it was this fear of the many avenues in which the production and exhibition of films for Africans could fall outside the control of the state which prompted greater state interest. During the 1920s and 1930s state intervention in films for Africans was confined primarily to the Native Affairs Department (NAD) which vociferously exercised its right to control and intervene in reserve areas. This intervention took the form of both producing state funded films as well as vetting or vetoing the production of private film projects.<sup>42</sup> Individuals and companies who wished to exhibit films to African audiences, especially in the rural areas had to apply to the NAD for permission to do so. This permission was most readily granted to a Mr. Nicholson who had applied to exhibit films in Potgietersrust.<sup>43</sup> The Secretary for Native Affairs personally wrote to the Native Commissioner for Potgietersrust to permit Nicholson to exhibit films in the “native locations” but not the town itself, provided he also had the permission of the local chief. Another condition was that all the films had to be “viseed” (vetted) before exhibition as it was “essential that no picture should be shown likely to disturb the relations between white and black or to lower the prestige of the Europeans in the eyes of the native or

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 300.

<sup>42</sup> Burns, *Flickering Shadows*, p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> KPT 2/2/26, Letters from Mr. Nicholson to the Native Commissioner dated 17 March 1931.

to excite their primitive passions....”<sup>44</sup> The letter continued with the positive sentiment that educational films could not be objected to as these would “tend to elevate the native mind.”<sup>45</sup>

Mr. Nicholson’s sentiments also would undoubtedly have weighed in his favour. In his letter of application he stated that “all reasonable care will be taken to prevent exposure of doubtful scenes which will have an unwholesome effect on the audience...”. What Mr. Nicholson considered unwholesome included crime, gun-fights and “sob stuff”.<sup>46</sup> This series of correspondence provides instructive insights on several points. Firstly, and most obviously it highlights the interventionist role of the segregationist South African state through the NAD in the exhibition of films for Africans. Secondly, it points to the collusion between individuals such as Mr. Nicholson and the state, represented by the NAD. And thirdly, it demonstrates that the “trusteeship approach” went beyond the state to include members of white civil society.

Other individuals such as a Mr. Breek and Mr. Rooseboom echo this “trusteeship approach” in their application to the Town Clerk in the Cape for permission to conduct film shows in the proposed town hall for Langa. Their objective was to provide entertainment in an area that had few such facilities for a populace that needed it. They believed that “as the native mind is such that if is not occupied in some form of healthy entertainment the probabilities are that it will find an outlet in some undesirable manner.”<sup>47</sup> The “trusteeship approach” here believes that, as with young children who need to be constructively occupied to prevent them from creating mischief, Africans too needed to have their minds occupied with wholesome activities in order to prevent mischief. In other words, moralising the leisure time of Africans with film as an effective means of preventing mischief.

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<sup>44</sup> KPT 2/2/26, Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Native Commissioner in Potgietersrust dated 17 April 1931.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Nicholson’s letter to the Native Commissioner dated 17 March 1931.

<sup>47</sup> KAB 3.CT 4/1/9/1/122, letter dated 10 October 1930.

Unlike the NAD though, the Town Clerk for Cape Town refused permission and was not prepared to recommend the introduction of cinema entertainment in Langa. There are no reasons given for this refusal and it is difficult to speculate given that other town councils took a different view. From the early 1930s the Johannesburg City Council assumed the role that the Chamber of Mines had played and was providing free film shows both in the mine compounds and outside. In 1933 the Council contracted Reverend Phillips to organise film shows in “native villages” at a cost of sixty pounds per annum. These shows proved to be highly popular and drew capacity crowds of up to three thousand at a time. Consequently, open air shows were introduced to accommodate the audiences.

By 1936 the Cape Town Council had changed its position with regards to film entertainment for township residents and was prepared to consider private applications where in 1930 they would not. The Council granted Mr. J.S. Phillips of Kenilworth permission in September 1936 to hold film shows in the Langa township.<sup>48</sup> It likewise granted permission to Mr. C.J. Nabe, a general dealer, to conduct ‘bioscope’ shows at the Market Hall.<sup>49</sup>

While the applications of the likes of Nicholson (mentioned above) received a favourable response, the applications of African entrepreneurs who also sought to establish film shows and cinemas in townships were not. The application by Harris Film Investments on behalf of a Mr. Deali, “a native trader”, to build a cinema in Orlando was categorically refused by the Johannesburg City Council. While the application was made to the Department of Native Affairs, the matter had been referred to the City Council for a decision. The Council’s refusal was based on the fact that the Council “itself is considering the provisioning of such facilities.”<sup>50</sup> The Council apparently operated bi-monthly shows in Orlando to which admission was free. It was thus concerned that a private enterprise within the township itself would exploit the entertainment needs of the people who were too poor to attend ‘non-European’ cinemas in other parts of the city. The refusal of the application was therefore argued to be in the interest of the population

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<sup>48</sup> KAB 3CT 4/1 9/1/122, Phillips’ letter of application dated 18 September 1936.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Letter of application dated, 13 August 1937.

<sup>50</sup> TAB KJB 495 N9/13/3 Letter from the Town Clerk to the Native Commissioner dated 25 January 1944.

of Orlando township. The Council was considering building a multi-purpose community hall wherein free film shows could also be held.<sup>51</sup> This consideration however did not materialise.

In Bloemfontein film shows for Africans were organised by the Bantu Benevolent Fund and the Bantu YMCA which were under the aegis of the Town Council.<sup>52</sup> What this series of correspondence presents is evidence of a growing awareness of the importance of film for both educational and entertainment purposes. Given this it was crucial that Africans should be exposed to the right kinds of films which would be wholesome to their development as argued by Rev. Phillips and echoed by at least one concerned citizen. Mr. Mears of Rondebosch in his letter to the Native Affairs Committee of Cape Town recommended film shows for Africans and advised that the films be acquired from Reverend Phillips who was censoring his own films for exhibition in the compounds.<sup>53</sup>

The inconsistency of the various town councils and municipalities with regards to both their own involvement and that of private enterprise in film exhibition in African townships is consistent with the lack of a coherent film policy for African audiences as has been argued elsewhere in this thesis. This inconsistency is apparent in the fact that while the town councils of places such as Johannesburg and Bloemfontein operated even an ad hoc system of film exhibition from as early as the 1930s, others such as Cape Town did not until much later. It is also apparent in the awarding and withholding of permission to private individuals to run film shows, apparently without racial discrimination. In March 1946 the Cape Town Council approved the application by Mr. P.R. Mphela, 'a successful tailor in Langa' to construct a hall for the purposes of film exhibition. Mr. Mphela was part of a syndicate which was involved in film shows in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, and this group was prepared to spend six thousand pounds on building a hall in Langa.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> KAB 3/CT 4/1/9/1/88 Memo from the Johannesburg City Council and a letter from the Bloemfontein Town Clerk to the Town Clerk of the Cape responding to Cape Town's query about film shows in the Bloemfontein locations, 1933.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Letter from Mr. Mears, dated 2 May 1933.

<sup>54</sup> KAB 3CT 4/1/9/1/122, Letter of application dated 20 March 1946.

Also in 1946, the Council refused permission to African Consolidated Theatres (ACT) which was part of the Schlesinger Group, to rent a hall and hold shows on “as many nights per week as (was) found payable.” ACT’s letter of application stated their long history in film exhibition to ‘natives’ which had enabled them to build up a stock of suitable films.<sup>55</sup> While ACT’s application was denied, the Council surprisingly granted permission to the South African Friends of the Soviet Union (SAFSU) to conduct film shows in the townships on the conditions that these would be free and that selected films were pre-approved by the Board of Censors.<sup>56</sup> As no reasons are given for either the withholding or granting of permission to these respective organisations, one can only speculate that ACT’s application was refused for the same reason that the Johannesburg City Council refused Harris Film Investment; the fear of commercial enterprises exploiting township audiences. SAFSU’s application in the meanwhile received a favourable outcome because it was not a commercial enterprise and the film shows would have been gratis to the public. A further reason for SAFSU’s success could possibly also have been the fact that in 1946 the Soviet Union was still favourably considered due to its role as an ally in the WW II and the ‘red peril’ had yet to grip South Africa as it would with the National Party government after 1948 and especially following the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950.

### **The Apartheid State and Film for Africans 1948-1955**

The 1948 electoral victory of the National Party in South Africa brought a myriad of changes in many areas. In 1949, the year following their election victory, the National Party government invited British documentary filmmaker John Grierson to investigate and make recommendations on state film services. As Controller of Films of the British Central Office, Grierson had also been involved in the establishment of the National Film Board of Canada.<sup>57</sup> As Tomaselli argues, Grierson’s thoughts on documentary film and

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<sup>55</sup> KAB 3CT 4/1/9/1/122, Letter of application dated 19 December 1946.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Letter of application dated 13 November 1946.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in Keyan Tomaselli and Edwin Hees, “John Grierson in South Africa: Afrikaner Nationalism and the National Film Board”, [www.labtrobe.edu.au/www.screeningthepast](http://www.labtrobe.edu.au/www.screeningthepast), p. 4.

its potential for 'realism' as opposed to the fantasy of fiction films, found positive resonance with Afrikaner ideologues such as Heinz du Preez of the Kerklike Afrikaanse Rolprent en Fotografiese Organisasie (KARFO- the Afrikaans Churches Film and Photographic Organisation) who would later become the director of the National Film Board. Like Grierson, KARFO as an organisation, believed that "cinema should adhere to the conditions of real life."<sup>58</sup> But despite this convergence of Grierson's views with that of apartheid ideologues, Grierson was motivated by an ideology which believed film to be an instrument of public service and therefore essential to the promotion of democracy.

Grierson's suggestions to the NP government were firstly that the state needed to be confident that the development of film could serve national policy interests, and that film should be viewed as part of a process of public information rather than mere commercial interest. Grierson's last suggestion included a plan of action which would utilise film in the service of various state departments to: inspire patriotism and unity; present the country internationally; present an opportunity for a coordinated effort at presenting a national image and finally, gather under one umbrella the various aspects that constituted the film industry so as to assure unity of vision and direction.<sup>59</sup>

The Nationalist Party government however had different agendas and failed to implement Grierson's recommendations. This failure to establish a Film Board at this point in time however did not mean an end to either state intervention in the film industry or the production of its own films especially by the Film Services of the Department of Education which was producing films for publicity and propaganda purposes aimed especially at African audiences.

Film Services worked closely with the Department of Native Affairs to produce films that were considered suitable for an African audience. In 1949 Film Services proposed to the NAD the production of a film to be titled 'Zwelitsha' which would be focused on the

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<sup>58</sup>Cited in Tomaselli and Hees, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

“Textile Developments and Close Settlement Schemes in the Ciskei Territory.” The Chief of Film Services submitted a “scenario” to NAD and drew its attention to the intended aim of the film. “The underlying motif is to indicate to audiences, particularly overseas, steps which the State has taken in its approach toward solving one aspect of the Native problem in the Union, i.e. employment of the landless Native in the Native Territories. It also attempts to show in true perspective the development of one section of the Bantu and his place in the community.”, the Chief of Film Services continued. Despite the full approval of the Department of Native Affairs, this particular film however was still not into production by the end of 1950.<sup>60</sup>

While government departments like Film Services could not meet the requirements of the NAD timeously, private companies certainly could. Two films that have been identified as part of an emerging “black cinema” in that they foregrounded African experiences, starring African actors, received considerable attention from the early apartheid state.<sup>61</sup> These were *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* (1949) and Korda's adaptation of Alan Paton's novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1952). The NAD responded favourably to a recommendation by Warrior Film Productions which wanted to screen *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*<sup>62</sup> to both urban and rural audiences.<sup>63</sup> The company envisaged a travelling show in which a mobile unit with a projector would tour firstly the urban and later the rural areas. The Department was extremely enthusiastic about the idea because it viewed the film as having “no strong moral bias” and considered it “somewhat sophisticated.”<sup>64</sup> Ironically though it was this same absence of a “moral purpose” which was thought to be unsuitable for rural audiences and the Department was not keen that it should be exhibited to them. According to Major Rodseth, “.. many of the rural people are still in a very

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<sup>60</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (28) Letter from Chief of Film Services to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 22 January 1949 and again on 6 December 1950.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, Johannesburg and Athens: Ravan Press and Ohio University Press, 1996, pp. 20-59.

<sup>62</sup> See Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, pp. 75-85, Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, pp. 21-31, and Lesley Marx, “Black and Blue in the City of Gold”, S. Nuttal & C. A. Michael (ed.) *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 for discussions of the this particular film.

<sup>63</sup> TAB NTS 9479 16/400 (21) Letter from Warrior Films to Major Rodseth, the Under-Secretary for the Department of Native Affairs, 16 November 1949.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs, 24 November 1949.

unsophisticated state and the absence of a moral purpose in the film, as for instance the success achieved by gambling after the failure to give satisfaction in ordinary employment, might be found undesirable.”<sup>65</sup> This later caution as far as rural audiences were concerned was in contradiction to the NAD’s earlier approval to have the film screened to both rural and urban Africans.

The Department advised the film company to inform local councils and municipalities of its unqualified support for the idea not only of the film show but also the advertising ‘filmlets’ that Warrior Films was proposing to include on the bill. These ‘filmlets’ would be produced or sponsored by the manufacturing company of the product, for example United Tobacco, and would be “films with some educational and moral value.”<sup>66</sup> The Department viewed these advertising ‘filmlets’ as providing extra entertainment and livening up the “rather serious” films produced by the official film services. In view of this it was “glad to assist in helping to bring the right kind of subject matter into advertisement films...”.<sup>67</sup> It also suggested that this could best be done by the production company either submitting “sketch scenarios for criticism” or by showing films “in the rough to a suitable official of the Department”. The degree of government intervention in moralising the leisure time of Africans thus went beyond entertainment films to include even advertising ‘filmlets’.

A key concern of this interventionist attitude was with the ‘true’ depiction of ‘Native’ life and government’s efforts to address the ‘Native problem’. This concern included films that were locally produced by the state as well as international films such as Zoltan Korda’s production of the Alan Paton novel, *Cry the Beloved Country*.<sup>68</sup> In a confidential letter dated 6 December 1950, the Secretary for Native Affairs raised the concern to the State Information Officer, that a film of this nature would have a wide distribution and would therefore give prominent publicity to whatever it depicted “whether true or false –

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<sup>65</sup> TAB NTS 9479 16/400 (21) Letter from Major Rodseth to Warrior Films, 23 November 1949.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. Letter from Warrior Films to Major Rodseth, 16 November 1949.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Major Rodseth’s letter.

<sup>68</sup> See Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, pp.38-47 and Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, pp. 106-111 for discussions of this particular film.



of Native conditions in the Union.”<sup>69</sup> In view of this he believed it was essential for the government to ensure that the film portrayed a “fair and balanced picture...(that would show) that while there were slums and some hardships for Natives to cope with, there are also model townships and a growing set of social services.” He further suggested that the producer be approached but “very circumspectly indeed” and not by the Department of Native Affairs which however would be most willing to assist “in making the picture authentic provided undue stress were not laid upon hardship and suffering.”<sup>70</sup> In his reply, the Director for the State Information Office noted that the “producer is very unlikely to agree to vary the story, as you (Secretary for Native Affairs) suggest, by including shots of model townships and social services.” His recommendation therefore was that the state produced its own films where they could portray this kind of positive image.”<sup>71</sup> This correspondence indicates the level of awareness among government officials regarding the importance of film in disseminating information regarding the country and its policy as regards African people.

The filming of Paton’s novel generated interest for another reason; the issuing of passports to three “native actors who are employed by the (sic) London Film Productions... who desire to proceed to England.”<sup>72</sup> The three individuals were Lionel Ngakane, Cyril Kwaza and Moses Kekana. In October 1950 the Secretary for Native Affairs gave permission for passports to be issued to the three men. This was followed by detailed investigations undertaken by the South African Police into the backgrounds of the men. While Lionel Ngakane was deemed to be employed, was anti-Communist and without any political affiliation, his father was discovered to have organised a mass rally in July 1950. Moses Kekana however was found to be an active member of the ANC and a “staunch supporter of Dr. J. S. Moroka.”<sup>73</sup> Despite these reports, the passports were issued. However, only Lionel Ngakane went to England and it is not clear why the other

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<sup>69</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (23) Letter from Secretary for Native Affairs to the State Information Officer, 11 February 1949.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Letter from the Director of State Information Office to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 14 February 1949.

<sup>72</sup> NTS 9479 16/400 (23), Letter from the Secretary for the Interior to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 9 October 1950.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Report of the Commissioner of the South African Police, 19 October 1950.

two did not accompany him. What is significant here is that even those limited opportunities that existed for African participation in film were even further circumscribed by the political necessities of the time. The investigations into the backgrounds of the three men are indicative of the degree of caution with which the apartheid authorities permitted international travel to Africans.

It is possible that this inability of the authorities to influence someone like Korda impacted on the NAD's attention now being focused on locally produced entertainment films for Africans. A memorandum from the Under-Secretary to the Secretary for Native Affairs drew the Secretary's attention to the need for entertainment films for Africans as "entertainment is the basis of the popularity of the cinema. The Native is particularly fond of broad humour and stirring drama" which the Under-Secretary believed were beyond the scope of the government film services. He further suggested that the Department of Native Affairs should subsidise film production or "deal with selected film interests on a business footing" since the department was always in need of suitable films which the government film services did not have the capacity to produce. It was especially important, he suggests, for the department to "be in at the birth of new commercial films for Natives so as to be able to influence their subject matter and method of presentations... (especially since)... The cinema is destined to have a profound effect upon the impressionable Native mind in the future....."<sup>74</sup>

This memorandum was written in response to a representation made by Swan Film Productions for Departmental funding for the production of an agricultural film with the working title 'Call of the Veld'. Producer Donald Swanson, who prior to this had been with Warrior Film Productions which had produced *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, believed that films such as the one proposed would "do much to dispel the incorrect but all-too-prevalent ideas current amongst a large section of the Native populace to-day."<sup>75</sup> He believed that a lack of proper information about the government's efforts on behalf of

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<sup>74</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (22) Memorandum from the Under-Secretary to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 23 June, 1951.

<sup>75</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (21) Warrior Film Productions communications with the Department of Native Affairs November – December 1949.

Africans was responsible for unrest and dissatisfaction which “Communist agitators and other subversive elements (were) quick to use....” “We feel that effective propaganda such as that which the film can promulgate, is one of the best ways of countering the activities of the political elements which can most endanger this country.”, he further continued.<sup>76</sup>

Mr Swanson’s previous works appear to have weighed in his favour as the Under-Secretary commented that “This company has made the two very popular Native films, “*Jim Comes to Jo’burg*” and “*The Magic Garden*”. Both of them are pure entertainment films and have no moral purpose, but the producers took the trouble to show the films to us in Pretoria in order to learn the Department’s reaction. They have been anxious from the start to obtain the Department’s support for their efforts and to avoid producing material repugnant to the Department.”<sup>77</sup> The Secretary’s recommendation to the Minister which is written at the bottom of this memo was that while there may not be funds to respond positively to this particular request for funding, the Department of Native Affairs should in future set aside funds for the purposes of funding film productions.<sup>78</sup>

What is evident in this series of correspondences between Swanson as an independent filmmaker and the state is the degree of cooperation and support there was for the state and its policies towards Africans. While both *Jim* and *The Magic Garden* were no doubt conceived as entertainment with a largely African cast, the fact that they did not challenge official policy attests to the degree of sympathy many white South Africans had with the apartheid state. Crucially what the memorandum cited above indicates is a conscious attempt by the state to be in a position to control filmed entertainment for African audiences either by producing their own films or dealing with individuals like Swanson whose support for the state and its policies is clearly stated and unquestioned. The role Swanson assumes here in the service of the state prefigures the role many of the

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<sup>76</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (22) Letter from Swan Film Productions Ltd. To the Under-Secretary for Native Affairs, 24 October 1950.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Memorandum from the Under-Secretary to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 23 June 1951.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

later filmmakers producing B-Scheme films would assume as surrogates of the apartheid state, speaking in 'his master's voice'.

The differences in the apartheid authorities approach to the filming of Paton's novel and the approach to Swanson and his suggestions are starkly contrasted. The degree of concern expressed at Korda's proposed film centred on the fact that he was an 'outsider' (non-South African) and would therefore both 'misunderstand' and consequently 'misrepresent' apartheid and its treatment of Africans. As an 'outsider' and a British subject Korda of course could not be prevailed upon to represent apartheid South Africa in a positive light. The same South African government would in later years have no similar compunctions in prevailing forcefully on foreign filmmakers and news reporters. At this point however, just years after its marginal victory in 1948, the National Party was still in the process of entrenching apartheid and lacked the political confidence it would acquire in subsequent years. Swanson, like Korda was also a non-South African but had already proven his credentials with two earlier films which in no way 'misrepresented' apartheid. The NAD therefore had no reservations in supporting the screening of his films.

Throughout the early 1950s and prior to the introduction of the subsidy in 1956, films for African audiences received considerable attention from the apartheid government. The Department of Education's Film Services Unit was producing films for the Department of Native Affairs that dealt with issues of 'Native' agriculture and housing. While the agricultural film was focused on issues of soil erosion and irrigation, the film *New Homes for the Bantu* (1953) was a specially requested documentary to "counter adverse propaganda on housing conditions in the Union."<sup>79</sup> A letter addressed to a Mr Kaufmann in Switzerland from the Secretary for Native Affairs reveals that this film was meant primarily for an overseas audience.<sup>80</sup> Apart from government efforts at film production, the private film industry was equally interested in the production of films for African

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<sup>79</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (29) Correspondence between the Secretary for Native Affairs and the Chief of Film Services dated May to August 1952 & SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (31) Correspondence regarding the film *New Homes for the Bantu*, dated August 1952 – January 1953.

<sup>80</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (31) Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Mr A.J. Kaufmann, Switzerland, 10 August 1952.

audiences. Springbok Pictures in September 1952 submitted to the Department of Native Affairs, a synopsis for a film on Shaka to be titled "Flame of Africa". The film, according to the production company, was conceived as "a straightforward entertainment story and in no way allows for any political construction which can be detrimental to the Union of South Africa and its policies."<sup>81</sup> While it may not have been detrimental to the policies of the state, and given the lack of further evidence one can only speculate to what extent it may in fact have furthered apartheid by promoting Zulu ethnicity.

Apart from the NAD the various town councils also continued to receive applications from various individuals for permission to screen films to African audiences. The Cape Town Council remained consistent in its refusal of applications from commercial enterprises while approving those that granted free entrance to film shows throughout the early 1950s.<sup>82</sup> This consistency however was not uniform throughout the Union as has been made clear earlier, as other areas appeared quite prepared to accept African initiatives to operate small-scale cinema shows in locations. The lack of a clear government policy in this regard is evident in the inquiry from the Native Commissioner of Sibasa, Pietersburg, who wrote to the Department requesting guidance in the matter of an application from a "native who wants to build a small cinema." In formulating a policy the Commissioner cautions the Department to bear in mind "that it will be difficult to exercise any form of control over the type of film which will be shewn, especially in Native areas where it is considered highly undesirable that the "gangster" type of film should reach the tribal Native".<sup>83</sup> In its response the Department was prepared to look favourably on this application provided that the owner be a 'native' as "initiative wherever it occurs in the Native areas should be stimulated." Another other condition was that films be previewed and approved by a departmental representative.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (32) Letter and synopsis from Springbok Pictures to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 18 September 1952.

<sup>82</sup> TAB NTS 9479 16/400 (21), An application from a Mr. E. Rahim to hold film shows in Langa was refused as was the application by a Mr. T. Mqhayi who wanted to form an African consortium to build and operate a cinema in Langa in September 1952. But the application from a Reverend Scheffler for open air shows at no charge was approved on the condition that the films were pre-approved by the Board of Censors.

<sup>83</sup> TAB HKN 1/1/162 Letter from the Commissioner dated 11 June 1954.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Response from the Secretary of the Dep. of Native Affairs, 5 November 1954.

This underscores firstly the lack of a coherent and consistent policy regarding the development of film exhibition and film culture among African audiences. The central government was content to allow local councils and municipalities to make their own decisions without necessarily consulting the Department of Native Affairs. But where it received direct applications from individuals or commercial enterprise it was enthusiastic in its support. Secondly, this correspondence again highlights the thinking among government officials about the kinds of films that were permissible for African audiences to view. The Commissioner of Sibasa's concern that the "gangster" type of film not be shown to the "tribal Native" is indicative of the desire to keep rural Africans isolated in order to preserve their 'ethnic culture'.<sup>85</sup> This concern to keep films depicting crime, violence and criminality away from African audiences is in marked contrast to many of the B-Scheme films of the later years, where the 'gangster' film was one of the most common genres produced.

Unlike the Cape Town Council, the City of Pietermaritzburg had few reservations about film shows for African audiences. Archival documents indicate that at least from 1954 until 1963 the city Council had contracted African Consolidated Films (ACF) to provide films for and organise a film show at least once a week. This contract was renewable on an annual basis up until 1963 when the Council was considering purchasing a 16mm projector as contracting a company for 35mm shows was proving unprofitable due to a drop in audience numbers. For at least another year from 1963-64, the contract with ACF was renewed on a monthly basis. The films shows were for the Municipal Compounds as well as Locations such as Imbali and Sobantu Village. Among the films included were titles such as *My Man Godfrey*, *Gun Fight at the O.K. Corral* and *Jamie Uys' Die Bosveld* (all 1956), among others.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See Elaine Binedell's MA thesis wherein she argues that early attempts at screening educational films to Africans was designed to keep them in reserve areas by focusing on subjects such as farming methods, soil conservation, etc. while simultaneously seeking to preserve 'Bantu culture'.

<sup>86</sup> NAB 3/PMB 4/5/544, Series of correspondence between the Pietermaritzburg Town Clerk and ACF dating from 25 February 1955 to 22 August 1964.

The Schlesinger Organisation was equally interested in film production for Africans and submitted a detailed plan to the government for the establishment of a 'Native Film Unit' which would operate as a unit of AFP. Schlesinger's recommendations centered specifically on five key points. These were firstly, the "desirability" of producing entertainment and educational films specifically for "natives", secondly, the establishment of a film production unit by African Film Productions Ltd., for the above purpose, thirdly, AFP would pay for the production of entertainment films and the State would defray the production costs of educational films, fourthly, a liaison officer was to be appointed to co-ordinate the contributions by the State and by AFP and lastly, the Schlesinger group would be responsible for the distribution of the films (a) to all "native houses (theatres) under control of African Theatres" – and (b) by "Travelling Van in the Native Territories."<sup>87</sup>

The state's response to these recommendations was positive on two main counts. Firstly, it was positive because of the advantages of producing state-approved entertainment films for Africans, especially in the urban centres. And secondly the state's response was positive because it would not involve any financial outlay on the part of the government. According to the State Information Office to whom the memorandum was forwarded, the crime rate especially among urban Africans was due to a lack of entertainment possibilities. "I feel sure that if a sustained output of specialized entertainment and educational films, designed essentially for the Bantu, could be made available, and exhibited extensively, surprising results would be achieved in a very short space of time.", commented Mr Hinds of the Information Office. He further suggested that "The Africans have a wealth of folk-lore and if this is exploited, through the medium of film, a series of features will result which should create a tremendous demand amongst Natives."<sup>88</sup> By 1953 however Schlesinger's suggestions were still not adopted by the government as indicated by a letter from the State Information Office to the Secretary for Native Affairs. The letter states that the Schlesinger Organisation was still interested in establishing a 'Native Film Unit' which the Information Office viewed in a favourable

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<sup>87</sup> SAB HEN 590 78/1/4 Schlesinger's Memorandum on Native Unit, 28 April 1950.

<sup>88</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (35) Confidential Memorandum, 24 April 1950.

light and would therefore be prepared to assist the Department of Native Affairs in negotiations with John Schlesinger.<sup>89</sup>

The Department of Native Affairs may not have taken up the Schlesinger offer but it certainly did not desist from insisting on the importance of film in the execution of its tasks. The Department was quite insistent that the Education Department's Film Services needed to produce at least three films a year for use by Native Affairs. These could be two short documentary films in black and white and one feature length film in colour. As the Secretary for Native Affairs wrote: "The standard of the two short films required need not be high, as they would be educational in nature and designed wholly for Native audiences..... The enlightenment of the Native population must be the objective in view rather than the production of superfine work. There is a serious gap to be filled."<sup>90</sup> The films produced would be on topics of relevance to the work of the Department and would include films on agriculture, housing and the work of the labour bureaus, among other subject matter. The function of these films was "to inform the public in this country and abroad on the Native problem generally and what is being done to solve it, but also to educate the Native people to play their part in the many schemes and undertakings framed for their benefit."<sup>91</sup>

The films on the labour bureaus for example can be understood to serve two different purposes. As a proposed film synopsis indicates, these two functions were firstly that of disseminating information about the labour bureaus, and secondly, reinforcing the message that those Africans who remained in the rural areas were better off than those who went off to the urban centres. The synopsis for the proposed film centres on three Africans who need to raise money for lobola. They approach their chief for advice who in turn sends them to the Native Commissioner who places two of them on a farm while the third is found employment with the municipality in the city. The urban worker earns £8 a month while the two rural workers each earn £3 a month. At the end of a six-month

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<sup>89</sup> SAB NTS 9479 16/400 (35) Letter dated 13 February 1953.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Secretary of the Department of Education, Arts and Science, August 1952.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.



period however, the two rural workers are in a financially stronger position as they each have been able to save a total of £13, while the urban worker could only manage to save a total of £6.<sup>92</sup> The intended message is clear: the place of the African is the rural and not the urban areas.

What these archival documents and correspondences between the various government departments as well those between government departments and private production companies suggest is that firstly film in general was an important preoccupation for both government and the private sector. This importance given to film was both for its entertainment value as well as the political function film could fulfil in the dissemination of official ideology. Secondly, film for African audiences was conceived and considered less in terms of its cultural value as in the case of the Afrikaans attempts of RARO discussed earlier, and more in terms of film's functionality as an extension and application of official state policy regarding Africans. Thirdly, and important to the general argument this thesis seeks to present in later chapters, is that the private, commercial film industry was in most cases a willing collaborator in the apartheid government's attempts to control film to suit official ideology particularly with regard to African audiences.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has tried to provide a broad overview of film production and exhibition practices for African audiences. These practices are historically rooted in colonial film policies which viewed film for African audiences as primarily instructional. This instructional value of film was deployed in various areas of colonial administration from education and health to agricultural and social issues.

The instructional nature of film at this time overshadowed its entertainment value which the Reverend Ray Phillips articulated as a soporific for Africans. Reverend Phillips was

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Film synopsis of 'Voorgestelde Rolprent' (Proposed film).

contracted by mine owners to organise film shows in the mine compounds on the Rand as a means of occupying off-duty miners and thereby neutralise any potential 'criminal tendencies'. Reverend Phillips went beyond organising film shows and other sporting activities for miners and provided what could possibly be considered a form of censorship by editing foreign films and thereby making it suitable viewing material for the miners. Phillips' cinematic endeavours provide a strong contrast to those of Sol Plaatje who also depended on film's instructional value but from a point of ideological difference. Plaatje's screenings of predominantly American films, to African audiences was a form of uplift. Through these films Plaatje sought to encourage Africans to endeavour towards their material, social and eventually, political progress.

Film shows for African audiences, as indicated by the series of archival documents discussed above, was a serious matter to both the segregationist and apartheid governments. There were several factors that were considered important in the provisioning of filmed entertainment for Africans. Pre-eminent among these factors were firstly the exploitation of the propaganda value of film and secondly, the need to moralise the leisure time of Africans. In terms of propaganda, state intervention was focused on disseminating information regarding various aspects of official policy from health and agricultural practices to the rural areas as the "natural" homes of Africans. But Africans could not be kept out of the cities as they were needed for labour and the problem was how to limit the evil influences of urban centres which impacted negatively on Africans most especially in the form of crime. Film was thus utilised to moralise on the evil of crime. But here too, most meticulous attention was paid to the right kind of films that could be showed to African audiences. Where these kinds of films could not be locally produced, censorship was strictly enforced to ensure that the 'right' kind of film did in fact reach the African audience.

It is however, the view of film as a tool of instruction, education and propaganda which predominates much of the official thinking and policy initiatives of the government since colonial rule. This view of film for African audiences receives greater attention under the National Party government from 1948 onwards when it came into power. The early years

of NP rule are characterised by an awareness of the importance of film as a medium for the dissemination of official apartheid ideology. This awareness translated into a series of interventionist measures which sought to regulate and censor the kinds of films exhibited to Africans. Despite the importance film was accorded the predominant characteristic of state policy is one of uncertainty as to how precisely this medium should be used. This uncertainty is evident in the lack of a centralised policy with regard to both film production and exhibition.

In attempting to formulate an official policy with regard to film in general as well as more specifically for an African audience, the apartheid government draws on both foreign expertise and examples of other countries such as Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, among others, which promoted national film industries through state funding. The result of this was the introduction of a state subsidy for film production in 1956 which will be the focus of the next chapter. This subsidy was geared in the first instance towards promoting a national film industry but importantly also, it was aimed at promoting Afrikaner cultural and political values through the medium of film.

## Chapter Three

### **Creating a “black film industry”: State subsidies and film production and exhibition for African audiences, 1956-1990**

The previous chapter focused on film production and exhibition opportunities in South Africa for African audiences until 1955. The chapter argued that state intervention in films for Africans impacted negatively on the emergence of an indigenous African film industry and film viewing culture. It also argued that though the degree and methods of intervention changed over the years, the one constant was the interventionist role of the state, whether this state was colonial, segregationist or apartheid. Furthermore this intervention was historically rooted in colonial attempts to control the production and exhibition of films for African audiences. These attempts were motivated by a broader imperative to control and shape an African worldview regarding firstly, colonial rule and all appendages of empire, and secondly, the place of Africans under colonial rule. Film was many things to the colonial government and later the South African segregationist state. It was undoubtedly entertainment, but it was also perceived to be an effective didactic tool which could be used to propagate anything from the virtues of western as opposed to traditional medicines, and agricultural practices based on western models to the virtues of drinking tea instead of alcohol and most importantly, staying within designated areas. A further and important preoccupation of the authorities was the need to utilise film in the suppression of African criminality. Control of the medium of film was thus essential though not always effective and consistent.

This chapter continues to focus on state intervention in film by focusing on the state subsidies that were introduced in 1956 and 1972. Both the general subsidy of 1956 as well as the B-Scheme introduced in 1972, have received considerable attention from

among others, Keyan Tomaselli, Jim Murray and Jacqueline Maingard.<sup>1</sup> A common element of this scholarly attention has been to read both subsidies, and especially the B-Scheme, predominantly within an apartheid, racist paradigm. In other words, state intervention in the film industry through these subsidies was informed by a racist, apartheid agenda. While the interests of the apartheid state and the necessities of apartheid policy implementation feature predominantly, primary evidence would suggest that this was not the only factor guiding the apartheid state. A key motivation, Tomaselli has also identified, was also the development of a national film industry, albeit along the racial divides of South African society. The promotion of Afrikaner culture through the medium of film also features as a strong motivation, especially in the early years of National Party rule. With regard to the B-Scheme subsidy, providing financial support to white entrepreneurs would appear to have been a strong motivation. Thus while this chapter acknowledges the apartheid basis to both subsidies, it would argue that this reductionism obscures other factors such as the economic, cultural and entertainment aspects of state intervention.

The present chapter then traces the historical continuities between the colonial, the South African segregationist and later, the apartheid state with regard to films for Africans. It focuses on the entrenchment of state control and intervention through the introduction of the two state subsidy schemes. The argument presented here is that as in previous years, state intervention through the state subsidy impacted negatively on the development of even a differential film industry for Africans. The chapter argues that the 'black film industry' that developed as a result of the B-Scheme subsidy cannot be considered indigenously African in character despite the presence of many Africans working within it, primarily as actors, but some also as technical crew members and even a few as directors. This is mainly due to the fact that African people had little power to control production or exhibition of these films. At best, this 'black film industry' was a group of

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<sup>1</sup> Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film*, London: Routledge, 1989, Jim Murray, "Statements on 'Ethnic' Cinema: How greed killed the industry", in Johan Blignaut and Martin Botha, (ed.) *Movies, Moguls and Mavericks*, Cape Town: Showdata, 1992 and Jacqueline Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, London & New York, Routledge, 2007.

white men exploiting an untapped market of African audiences, though there were some exceptions to this also.

Having said this however, the 'black film industry' that did develop as a result of the B-Scheme subsidy can be considered a parallel industry to that which was considered a 'national' industry and which received state support under the general subsidy. The 'black film industry' was not however, the outcome of a deliberate intention on the part of the apartheid state to develop a parallel industry but rather the unintended outcome of the B-Scheme. As will become evident through archival and oral sources, one can argue that the apartheid state had two motivations for the introduction of the B-Scheme subsidy. On one level the B-Scheme was a response to representations by numerous white South Africans for state assistance to produce films for an African market. And on another level, the state's positive response to these representations was informed by a desire to provide entertainment for urban Africans. Again, based on archival and oral sources as well as close analyses of some of the B-Scheme films, it can be argued that this desire to provide entertainment for Africans was informed by the same motivations that guided Reverend Phillips in earlier decades; the need to 'moralise leisure time'.

As with other aspects of apartheid policies such as housing, education or welfare, film also received differential treatment and attention from the South African state. This occurred at two levels. Firstly, at the level of state funding through the subsidy, films for white audiences received greater funding and were better administered. Comparatively, films for African audiences received much less funding and were at best haphazardly administered. Secondly, the apartheid state was comparatively more committed to developing and promoting film as art in respect of 'white films' in general but especially so in the case of Afrikaans-language films than it was with films for African audiences.

But even this commitment to developing and promoting 'white films' as art was not strongly enacted or articulated especially given the structure of the general or A-Scheme subsidy. Tomaselli argues that the introduction of the subsidy in 1956 was antithetical to the development of film as art because it rewarded box office success rather than artistic

or aesthetic merit.<sup>2</sup> This is not at all to argue that artistic and aesthetic merit in film and box office success are mutually exclusive. The point is that where gross profit through box office success is the key criteria for the awarding of the state subsidy, then experimentation with different film techniques and artistic styles are necessarily limited. This in turn inhibits the development of film as art. However, and despite the subsidy, there have been incidences of creative filmmaking from individuals such as Ross Devenish and Jans Rautenbach among others. Devenish's body of works was largely independently financed but Rautenbach for example, like Jamie Uys, was a leading figure of the mainstream film industry and tapped heavily into the state subsidy.<sup>3</sup>

If state commitment to developing film as art was limited in the case of 'white films', it could safely be argued that in the case of the 'black films' it was virtually non-existent. The B-Scheme subsidy, which made possible what became known as the 'black film industry', was structured similar to the general or A-Scheme subsidy. The crucial difference was the amounts awarded under each subsidy. And as with the 'white films' box office receipts were the major criteria for the awarding of state funds. The 'black film industry' was largely driven by the profit motive on the part of most of the white filmmakers and by ideological motives on the part of the apartheid state. Within this, a commitment to the development of film as art was at best completely unarticulated and at worst non-existent.

The profit motive and the lack of a commitment to artistic cinema is most patently evident in the majority of the B-Scheme films which will be analysed in later chapters. The majority of these films display very poor production values and other cost-cutting measures such as limited or no extras, few costume changes, minimal lighting, poor sound and recycling of shots.

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<sup>2</sup> Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid* p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> Very little scholarly works exist on people like Devenish, Rautenbach or even Uys or their complete body of works. Much of the information on these individuals is scattered throughout the numerous studies on South African film. In 2006 Martin Botha and Deborah Stenmair collaborated on a coffee-table format book on Rautenbach. Botha's section is titled *Jans Rautenbach: Dromer, Baanbreker en Auteur* and Stenmair's section is titled *Jans Droomsaaiers: Sy Memoirs*, Cape Town, Genugtig!, 2006. See also Keyan Tomaselli's "The Cinema of Jamie Uys: From Bushveld to Bushmen" in Johan Blynnaut and Martin Botha (ed.), *Movies, Moguls and Mavericks*, 1992.

By focusing on the two state subsidies and especially, the B-Scheme, this chapter will trace the development of what became known as the 'black film industry'. While the general subsidy was specifically aimed at fostering and developing a 'national' film (and given apartheid ideology, 'national' would imply 'white' English- and Afrikaans-language films) industry, there was no such state commitment to the development of the national 'black film industry'. The B-Scheme subsidy was not introduced to develop 'black films' but rather to provide finance for white entrepreneurs. A possible reason for this neglect of the 'black film industry' could be that the apartheid state viewed the development of a 'national black film industry' as falling within the domain of the various homelands rather than an aim of the South African government.

This self-conscious identity of a black film industry' then originated organically from among some of the people who were involved in producing, distributing and exhibiting films for African audiences. This industry had its genesis in the separate subsidy which the apartheid government introduced specifically for the production of films for African audiences in one of the African languages of South Africa. It is of course possible that this aspect of the film industry could have existed and even prospered without a state subsidy but research and interviews indicate that this would have been highly unlikely due in large part to factors impacting both production and exhibition of films for African audiences. Not least among these is the scarcity of both trained technicians and actors due to lack of opportunities, as well as the lack of exhibition venues which in turn impacted on African audience numbers. The B-Scheme subsidy was awarded on the basis of box office receipts with two specific criteria. Firstly, seventy-five percent of dialogues had to be in an African language and secondly, three quarters of all actors had to be African.

This chapter then traces the historical processes which gave rise to the introduction of this B-Scheme subsidy. It examines the production and exhibition practices of cinema for African audiences within the political, economic and social context of South Africa from the mid-1970s till the 1990s when the subsidy in its entirety was reformulated. Key



historical moments of this broader context include among others, the introduction of television in 1976 and the political upheavals which characterised much of the period from the mid-1970s onwards.

### **The State Subsidy for Film Production, 1956**

The introduction of the state subsidy for film production has to be understood within the broader context of counteracting foreign domination of the local industry and how this impacted on the status of film production within the country. Crucial to this understanding also is the political confidence of the National Party government. The general election of 1953 resulted in a far more decisive victory for the NP than was the case in the 1948 elections. This undoubtedly gave the NP government a greater degree of political confidence than it previously had to entrench and more confidently enact policies that were consonant with Afrikaner ideologies of racial differences, the place of Afrikaners and Afrikaner culture vis a vis both English and black South Africans. As Beinart comments, the dominant preoccupation of the Nationalists in these early years of rule was more on the formulation and clarification of Afrikaner nationhood and identity rather than on enforcing the kind of apartheid that would characterise Verwoerd's rule as Prime Minister.<sup>4</sup> State intervention in film production at this point has to be understood from these twin perspectives of foreign domination and the need to clarify and consolidate Afrikaner nationhood and power.

The foreign domination of the local film industry served not only to marginalize local producers but importantly also, it led to an increased diminishing of government's role in the production industry due to the increasing use of foreign co-production that accompanied this new phase of the local industry. According to Tomaselli, the British director, Bladon Peake who was contracted by AFP to direct *Hans die Skipper* in 1953, first approached the government with a proposal for the introduction of a state subsidy for

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<sup>4</sup> William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South African History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 143-145.

feature film production. Government however was reluctant to deal with an individual and Peake was told to establish an organization with which the government could negotiate. This led to the establishment of the Motion Picture Producers Association in July 1956 which was specifically tasked to negotiate a state subsidy for feature film production.<sup>5</sup> Jamie Uys was its first chairman and was to play a crucial role in subsequent years not only in the film industry generally but more specifically as 'advisor' and unofficial ideologue of the National Party government.<sup>6</sup>

Since the introduction of the subsidy for film production in 1956, government policy on film had undergone numerous revisions and rethinking. While the South African government appeared to recognise and appreciate the importance of film as a means of disseminating official ideology, the dithering on the exact form and amount of support to be given to the industry indicates uncertainty about a medium that historically had been beyond Afrikaner control. This control slipped even further beyond Afrikaner interests with the Fox buy-out of the Schlesinger group in 1956.

The state's wavering and indecision went beyond exact amounts to be awarded as part of the subsidy. As discussed in the earlier chapter, the lack of a centralised policy extended to the awarding of exhibition rights also, with various town councils as well as the NAD implementing very different and often times contradictory policies as to who could exhibit films to African audiences and who could not. It is possible that this uncertainty and lack of a centralised policy was linked to the political uncertainty of the NP government itself. Despite having won a second election by a greater margin than in 1948, it was still uncertain about how far it could go towards entrenching and enforcing apartheid.<sup>7</sup> However, what is certain is that the various town councils appear to have had a degree of autonomy when it came to awarding exhibition rights in African areas.

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<sup>5</sup> Keyan Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, p.32.

<sup>6</sup> The quotes and the word unofficial has been used because Uys has consistently claimed that his films were purely for entertainment and served no ideological function. Archival documents however depict quite a close relationship between Uys and the government.

<sup>7</sup> See Beinart, ch. 6.

Since the 1930s (as discussed in the earlier chapter) the Cape Town City Council had been consistently refusing permission to individuals wishing to operate film shows in African areas on a commercial basis. By 1957 however there were two cinemas operating in Langa on a private commercial basis. But due to the increasing population and increasing urbanisation of Africans, the Council was considering operating more of its own cinemas or alternatively conducting free open air shows.<sup>8</sup> By December of that year the Native Affairs Committee of the Cape Town Council had been granted permission to purchase two 16m projectors for the purposes of conducting free open air shows in Langa. There were to be two shows per week for men and one show on Saturday mornings for children. These shows, according to the Committee's report were quite popular and drew enthusiastic crowds.<sup>9</sup> The specific emphasis on men and children offers interesting points for conjecture and further research. Could this lack of a mention of women indicate that women were perhaps not a significant enough audience? And if that is the case, to what can this be attributed? Were women discouraged from attending public open air shows or were they simply too busy with domestic or other chores to bother with cinematic entertainment?

As with Cape Town, the cities of Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg were also not keen to have individuals or companies operate commercial film shows for profit. Instead both cities had contracted African Consolidated Films (ACF) to provide free film shows in the municipal compounds of each city. ACF was contracted from February 1958 till October 1964. Typically, these film shows included films with "plenty of action" but no "extreme violence or hooliganism". The reason for this was that the majority of the audiences viewing these films were children.<sup>10</sup>

Given this kind of uncertainty on the part of the apartheid government it was unsurprising that it would look towards individual filmmakers and companies for guidance. In this regard Jamie Uys arguably played a crucial role beyond getting the government to

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<sup>8</sup> KAB 3CT 4/1/9/1/122. Letter from the Town Clerk to Alexander Films inquiry about Council purchasing or hiring advertising filmlets, 4 February 1957.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Committee reported adopted by the Council on 23 December 1957.

<sup>10</sup> KAB 3CT 4/1/9/1/123 Letter from the Johannesburg Council to ACF dated 4 February 1961.

introduce the state subsidy. Uys argued in a letter to the Department of Information that America was able to export its culture through its films and provided an instructive example to South Africa.<sup>11</sup> He believed that film was an essential tool to sell apartheid, especially internationally and the state therefore had to pay greater attention to and devote state funds for the promotion of the South African film industry.

Beyond providing this kind of ideological support, Uys also provided very concrete suggestions about the subsidy itself. A memo titled "Finansiele steun vir Inheemse Filmbedryf"<sup>12</sup> of 1957 refers to suggestions put forward by Mr Jamie Uys. Mr Uys suggested that no entertainment tax on domestic film be levied before production costs had been recouped or alternatively that the portion of the entertainment tax on film be paid back to the producer. These suggestions appeared acceptable and the Provincial Authority had even reimbursed Jamie Uys Productions for an earlier film. The Provincial Authority seemed to agree with Mr Uys, as well as unnamed others, that the protection of the domestic industry should be a concern of central government, especially in view of the fact that: (a) all countries, even America support their local industries, (b) South Africa is ideal for film production, (c) the undoubted talent in South Africa, (d) will have great cultural value for the country, and (e) in the long run it will save money for the country. It was suggested therefore that cabinet still that year put aside an amount of fifty thousand pound sterling for support of the local industry.

Despite the suggestion put forward by people like Uys, archival documents indicate there was no fixed amount set aside and the department was very much working on estimates based on the amounts claimed by film producers. A letter from the Commercial Advisor to the Accountant of the Treasury assumed that a total of £80 000 would be required for the 1960/61 financial year.<sup>13</sup> The Department of Trade and Industries which was administering the subsidy, was sending letters to producers on an annual basis asking them to register films and submit claims for subsidy purposes. A number of conditions

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<sup>11</sup> TAB 78/1/4, the document has no official stamp or address to it other than Cape Town, 26 January 1957, but the references in the body of the text to the Provincial Authority presumably refers to the Cape Provincial Authority and it may have been addressed to the Finance Minister.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> SAB HEN 590 78/1/4 Letter dated 16 September 1959.

were attached to the subsidy at this point of its existence. Firstly, subsidy could only be claimed for 35mm films. Secondly, this subsidy would be in the form of a refund of the entertainment tax paid for exhibition and the amount to be refunded would not exceed £10 000 or fifty percent of the total production costs which could include the costs of printing six copies of the film. Thirdly, only South African films were eligible for funding. South African for the government meant that seventy-five percent of salaries and wages had to be paid to South African citizens and the production company as well as all partners had to be registered as South African companies for tax purposes. A fourth condition was that payments would only be made on a half-yearly basis and claims had to be submitted by the end of June and December of each year. Fifth, films had to be registered with the Department immediately after release. Applications for the registration of a film had to be accompanied by audited statements where the auditor had to certify that three-quarters of salaries had indeed been paid to South African citizens.<sup>14</sup> These application documents also needed to include an audited statement of the entertainment tax paid along with copies of daily returns from the exhibitors.

Due to the failure of film producers to notify the Department timeously of the amounts they would be claiming, a further set of conditions were applied from the 1960s onwards. These included firstly, the submission from producers of a report indicating their plans for the coming six months. This report had to indicate the names of films to be produced, estimated costs and expected date of release. Secondly, producers also had to indicate the total amounts to be claimed at the end of each financial year.<sup>15</sup>

It must be stressed that the state subsidy was exclusively for the production of 35mm film which was considered crucial to the development of a local film industry. The issue of awarding a state subsidy for 16mm films had been raised previously by, of all people, the Deputy Minister of Labour. The issue of a lack of subsidy for 16mm films had been

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<sup>14</sup> The condition of South African citizenship seems to have been taken quite seriously by the Department as indicated by a letter from the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Industry to the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, 27 September 1957. The letter requests the Commissioner to confirm whether a number of companies and individuals were indeed registered as South African taxpayers. Included in the list were AFP and Jamie Uys Filmproduksies Bpk. SAB HEN 590 78/1/4/1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Letter from Secretary of Commerce to Unique Films, "Financial Assistance to the Film Industry", 22 July 1960.

brought to the attention of the Deputy Minister by a Mr van Wyk of Vereenigde Afrikaanse Rolprente which was operating mobile units that serviced the little villages without fixed cinemas. In his response to this, the Secretary of Commerce stated that though the matter had received very serious and considerable attention from the Minister, 16mm could unfortunately not be considered for a state subsidy. The reasons were firstly, that it would be difficult to assess public opinion in the matter of 16mm films which were exhibited on mobile circuits and if a 16mm film failed in one area the mobile operator could simply move onto another area. Secondly, supporting 16mm would be conducive to the development of a successful national film industry. And thirdly, there were insufficient funds and the funds that were available needed to be spent on 35mm films in order to develop the local industry.<sup>16</sup>

The commitment to developing a national film industry became even more pronounced following the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960. Sixty-nine people were killed and many more wounded when police opened fire on the crowd participating in the anti-pass campaign organised by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). This was followed by the declaration of a state of emergency and the banning of the ANC and PAC. A further and immediate consequence of Sharpeville was international censure and disinvestment.<sup>17</sup> The necessity for a national film industry which could be used to not only to mitigate the immediate backlash of Sharpeville, but also to create positive propaganda, especially among Africans, was a pressing need. In view of this considerable attention was given to attempts to “fight subversive propaganda with positive propaganda.”<sup>18</sup> This sentiment expressed by the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner was accompanied by further suggestions to all Commissioners for the Transkei Territories to actively engage with local African leaders. The Commissioners were to hold regular meetings with “Tribal Authorities” as well as to “buttress the prestige of local leaders” and to give prominence to historical heroes and make “full use of Bantu superstition.”<sup>19</sup> The Commissioners

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Letter from Secretary of Commerce to Deputy Minister of Labour “Finasiele Hulp aan die Plaaslike Rolprentbedryf”, 5 September 1959.

<sup>17</sup> See William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>18</sup> KAB 1/BUT 88, Letter from the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner to all Commissioners in the Transkei Territories, dated 25 March 1963.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

were told to use the example of Nongqawuse and the cattle killings of 1856-57 as an example of the disasters that would befall a community who follows similar leaders.<sup>20</sup> The Chief Commissioner goes on to state that the use of pamphlets and particularly the cinema in this positive propaganda would be discussed at the highest level.

Despite the expressed urgency of using film to provide “positive propaganda, by 1962 the state had still not decided on how best to provide support for the industry. A press release on behalf of the Minister of Finance in November 1962 stated that the minister had requested the Board of Trade and Industries to investigate the matter and make recommendations.<sup>21</sup> A crucial concern at this point was the protection of the local industry by means of a quota system. In October 1962, the Minister approved the drafting of a bill that would guarantee exhibition quotas for local films. The draft bill obliged exhibitors to devote 25% of exhibition time to South African films, but it also acknowledged that this depended on the availability of suitable films for exhibition purposes. The bill also provided for the creation of a panel of experts who would select suitable films. This panel would be constituted by an independent chair and four other members, one each from the Departments of Trade and Industries, Education, Arts and Science, the Motion Picture Producers’ Association and the exhibitors. The draft bill was envisaged to be passed and become effective law as of January 1964.<sup>22</sup>

During December 1962 and February 1963, a series of correspondence between the Secretary of the Board of Trade and Industries (BTI) and Trade Secretaries at South African embassies in countries such as Britain, Ireland, the USA, Italy, Canada, and Australia indicate that the issue of a state subsidy was taken very seriously by the South African government. The letters and attached memos from SA Trade Secretaries at these foreign missions refer to very specific questions asked by the South African Secretary of the BTI. These ranged from how national film industries in these countries functioned, to the exact role of the state in encouraging a national film industries and whatever

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<sup>20</sup> See Christopher Saunders and Nicholas Southey, *A Dictionary of South African History*, Cape Town, David Philip, 1998, p.124 for a brief explanation of the Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse.

<sup>21</sup> SAB HEN 590 78/1/4 “Persverklaring deur sy Edele Die Minister van Ekonomiese Sake in verband met die ontwikkeling van ‘n Suid-Afrikaanse Rolprentbedryf:”, 1 November 1962.

<sup>22</sup> SAB HEN 590 78/1/4 Memo from the Secretary to the Minister of Department of Trade and Industries.

measures, such as quotas or import taxes, were in place in these countries.<sup>23</sup> Thus in trying to establish and formalise a policy on state support for film, the South African government was looking at other examples from around the world.

On 10 and 11 April 1963 a conference was held which brought together Bantu Affairs Commissioners, Inspectors of Bantu Education and representatives of the South African police. Part of the agenda was a report by a Major Pretorius on psychological warfare and the different methods available to the government to wage this warfare. Some of these methods included radio propaganda, the press, compiling pamphlets and of course, film.<sup>24</sup> This illustrates the degree of concern the apartheid government had for the political unrest of the early 1960s. A particular concern within this was that the unrest in the urban areas should be contained and not allowed to spread to the rural and reserve areas such as Transkei. The clear directive was to use whatever means possible to counter what was considered subversive propaganda in order to contain the increasing political resistance taking place in the city centres. Film figured prominently in the thoughts of these officials.

Despite the importance which the South African government attached to not only the existence of a national film industry, but also to how precisely government could assist it, government intervention seemed more a hindrance than a help as suggested by a letter from the managing director of SA Film Studios.<sup>25</sup> The letter specifically draws the Secretary's attention to negotiations between Britain, France, Germany and Italy in respect of agreements related to film production. The managing director suggests the South African BTI contact the British Trade Board with a view to participating in these negotiations. The letter suggests this is important especially following South Africa's exit from the Commonwealth which meant that South African films were no longer considered for British quotas.

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<sup>23</sup> SAB HEN 590 78/1/4.

<sup>24</sup> KAB 1/BUT 88, Letter from the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner to all Commissioners in the Transkei Territories, dated 25 March 1963.

<sup>25</sup> SAB HEN 590 78/1/4 Letter from the MD, R. Roper, of S.A. Film Studios to the Secretary, Board of Trade and Industries. The letter was accompanied by two memoranda, one on the Israeli national film industry and another titled, 'Notes on Film Production in South Africa', dated 19 November 1963.



South Africa's withdrawal from the British Commonwealth impacted negatively on the South African film industry. Not only did it mean that South African films were no longer considered for quotas, but also they did not qualify for a British subsidy, as is evident in a letter from Jamie Uys Productions. In a letter to the British Board of Trade, Jamie Uys Productions requested that one of its films still be considered for a British quota and funding as it had gone into production before 1960 when South African withdrew from the commonwealth.<sup>26</sup> It is unclear whether this appeal was successful or not.

The issue of quotas aside, the letter from SA Film Studios raises a number of issues which were considered serious hindrances to a flourishing film industry. Among these are the lack of a subsidy for foreign co-productions, the time taken for the vetting of scripts, policy decisions being made at a lower level and not the ministerial level and the lack of co-operation from government tourism. More importantly, SA Film Studios, a division of Rand Mines Ltd, positions itself as fulfilling two important functions. Firstly, by entering co-production agreements it was bringing foreign currency into the country, and secondly, it was trying to promote and generate publicity for the country and its policies. Given this the letter cautions the Secretary that the government needs to make a distinction between "genuine South African companies and individuals who have the interests of the country at heart from those who come into the country to make sensationalist, anti-South African films."<sup>27</sup>

The ambivalence of the South African government with regard to its role in respect of a national film industry is echoed by sectors of the industry with regard to the state of its own health. While a *Sunday Times* report in March 1963 shouted in bold type of a " 'Rand Hollywood' in Bryanston", *The Bulletin* in October and November 1962, offered a more sober assessment.<sup>28</sup> With scathing reference to S.A. Film Studios, mentioned

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<sup>26</sup> SAB HEN 590 78/1/4 ... Letter from Jamie Uys Film Productions, dated 1 August 1963.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from R Roper of S.A. Film Studios.

<sup>28</sup> *Sunday Times*, 3 March, 1963, " 'Rand Hollywood' in Bryanstan: Government Sympathetic Towards Planned R200m Film Centre" and *The Bulletin*, A South African Film Industry Newsletter published by

earlier, and its much vaunted co-productions and plans for a 'Rand Hollywood', *The Bulletin* commented that "All local producers are broke, local facilities are hardly able to make ends meet, the earning records of locally produced films in relation to budgets makes sorry reading. It is hardly the time to embark on new studio construction..."<sup>29</sup> This paints a dismal picture of the national film industry at the time, and is perhaps one explanation for the government's wavering with regard to its precise role in a national film industry.

Prior to an increase in the percentage for Afrikaans films in the late 1960s, the subsidy had undergone two amendments which modified the total amounts payable.<sup>30</sup> The Afrikaans subsidy was increased from 44 to 55 percent and in order for a film to qualify for this increased subsidy, 90 percent of the dialogue had to be in Afrikaans. This increase was an attempt to boost the production of Afrikaans language films which were believed to be disadvantaged in terms of subsidy payments. But more importantly according to Nationalist MPs like J.A. van Tonder, the Afrikaans language, especially in bilingual films, was depicted as "being subservient to English, as being the language of ridiculous "backvelders". Such films earn a great deal more in state subsidies, while purely unilingual Afrikaans films, with a cultural value..... will receive little or no subsidy..."<sup>31</sup> This attempt to encourage the Afrikaans industry coincided with the SANLAM takeover of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox's South African interests. This meant an effective dominance of the production, distribution and exhibition industries by Afrikaner capital. The next amendment to the subsidy was introduced in 1973 where the formula for subsidy payments was changed to read net box office earnings instead of gross box office earnings.<sup>32</sup> This was preceded by the introduction of a separate subsidy for African language films.

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Union Film Exchange, 25 October & 1 November 1962 in SAB HEN 590 78/1/1, *The Bulletin* was a weekly industry publication.

<sup>29</sup> SAB HEN 590 78/1/4 *The Bulletin*, 1 November 1962, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> See Tomaselli's (1989) chapter on 'The State Subsidy Scheme' for a comprehensive breakdown of the various amendments.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Tomaselli, 1989, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35.

## The B-Scheme subsidy and the 'black film industry'

The B-Scheme subsidy for film production was introduced in 1972 at the behest of (white) filmmakers. This was a separate subsidy to the one that was introduced in 1956 and which was reformulated and amended at various times throughout the years with increasing amounts of money being set aside annually for the production of films. This general subsidy was predominantly for the production of 'white' films in either English or Afrikaans though there were films such as *Dingaka* (1964) which were produced as part of this subsidy. With the majority of state funds being diverted to the production of English- and Afrikaans-language films, the production of African-language films was severely neglected and hence the introduction of a separate subsidy.

The B-Scheme film subsidy initially had a ceiling of R45 000, increased to R77 000 in 1977 and R80 000 in 1981.<sup>33</sup> Comparatively, in 1981 a white film could earn up to R1.2 million in subsidy funding. The only criteria, as stated previously, for the state subsidy was firstly, seventy-five percent of the actors had to be African and, secondly, three quarters of the dialogue had to be in an African language. There was no vetting of scripts and the final arbiter was the Censor Board. The subsidy was paid out on the basis of number of tickets sold. This meant that indirectly, the subsidy was controlled by the exhibitor and producers were assured of immediate income which could be considerable in cases of low budget productions. The 1977 amendment as mentioned earlier included not only the increase in subsidy funding but importantly also, films that were rented to mine compounds were now eligible for subsidy funding and the period during which a film could qualify for subsidy had been reduced from four to three years from the date of first release.<sup>34</sup>

In 1977 a Commission of Inquiry was instituted to investigate all subsidies awarded by government for the production of films. This Commission led to amendments in all the subsidies. Of importance to this thesis are the findings of this Commission as regards what was referred to as the "Bantu Film Industry." According to the *SA Film Weekly*,

<sup>33</sup> Tomaselli, 1989, p.40 and interview with Antonie van der Merwe, producer and director.

<sup>34</sup> *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 42/43, 28 October – 4 November 1977, p.1.

“the Board deems the existence of an independent Bantu film industry justified and in fact necessary, and concludes that this industry requires greater financial and technical assistance than is extended to it at present.”<sup>35</sup>

Tomaselli argues that the state subsidy, both in its general and B-Scheme formulations, did more harm than good to the establishment of a national film industry. His argument is based on two broad points; firstly, that state subsidization would lead to eventual state control and the production of films purely as propaganda, and secondly, that a subsidy aimed at commercial features would be detrimental to the standards of film as art. With regard to films produced as part of the B-Scheme, this thesis argues against his first point and in support of the latter.<sup>36</sup> Tomaselli’s second criticism of the subsidy system is valid in that a purely commercial objective was detrimental to film as art. In the case of the majority of B-Scheme films viewed, the production values and standards they display cannot be deemed artistic in even the broadest terms. The majority of films display low production values and standards and the profit motive is clearly evident in the cost-cutting measures that are apparent. These include among others, poor lighting and sound, poor editing, recycling of shots, excessive screen time given to one particular scene (most often either action or dancing and drinking scenes in shebeens or nightclubs), few extras and often no costume changes. The films that have been identified as oppositional in chapter six, do not fall into this category as these display production values of a high standard.

Tomaselli’s first criticism that the subsidy would lead to state control and eventually the production of propaganda films is not entirely valid for a number of reasons. Firstly, the state exercised little control in terms of the content or cinematic quality of the films produced either under the B-Scheme or the general subsidy. No scripts were vetted by any of the state departments responsible for administering the subsidies and the final authority was the Censor Board which either passed a film (with or without further cuts) or did not. Secondly, while the state wished to use film as one means of disseminating

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Vol. 16, No. 23, 17 June 1977, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, p. 50.

official policy, it did not explicitly dictate this in any way. Having said this though, many of the films that were produced, especially those by Heyns Films, were indeed reflective of official ideology to varying degrees. As it will become evident below, this was due in part to the infiltration of Heyns Films by the Department of Information. But more pertinently, it was largely as a result of the fact that white filmmakers often acted as surrogates for the apartheid government and promoted official state policy and apartheid ideology in the guise of entertainment. This was the case with most filmmakers producing films as part of the B-Scheme subsidy, excepting of course those filmmakers such as David Bensusan and Oliver Schmitz especially, but also those like Clive Scott who were producing what were identified as 'social films'.

There is a crucial difference in the degree of state intervention over the years. Whereas in previous years both the colonial and segregationist states had played a more direct interventionist role, most frequently through the Native Affairs Department (NAD), the apartheid state in the early 1970s played a less direct interventionist role.<sup>37</sup> Whereas the NAD had commissioned specific films from both the state Film Services attached to the Education Department, as well as from private production companies, the apartheid state neither suggested topics of particular interest to the B-Scheme filmmakers, nor did it vet scripts before production. It was sufficiently confident that filmmakers would steer clear of politically controversial areas and produce films that, if not actively supportive of the apartheid government, then at least not subversive either.

State control of the film industry at the best of times was never fully articulated or consolidated.<sup>38</sup> While the state realized the importance of controlling the medium of film for both its instructional and propaganda potential particularly with regard to African (indeed all black) audiences, it could never fully actualize this control except in the form of censorship. As has been discussed earlier, since the introduction of the state subsidy in

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<sup>37</sup> See chapter two for a more detailed discussion of the precise role of the NAD in film production and exhibition for African audiences.

<sup>38</sup> Elaine Binedell, 'Film and the State: Control, Ideology and Space, 1914 -1978', MA thesis, (2001) UKZN, argues that since the 1920s, both the segregationist and apartheid governments had fully realized the potential of film both as a medium of instruction and indoctrination but had never quite managed to exert total control.

1956, policy around intervention and the precise role of the government has undergone numerous changes and adaptations to suit the exigencies of the broader political, economic and social context in which the apartheid state operated. Given this, state ownership and absolute control of film could not have become a serious possibility. Furthermore, government need not have concerned itself with propaganda as filmmakers themselves assumed the surrogate role in this regard as will be discussed later.

This kind of state control and ownership was even less likely with films produced under the B-Scheme, if only due to government negligence and possibly corruption. According to Antonie (Tonie) van der Merwe, who by all accounts appears to have been one of the major role players in the 'black film industry' (as he refers to it), the apartheid government did not take 'black' film very seriously.<sup>39</sup> It is important to note here that for van der Merwe, government commitment equalled large sums of money, not the comparatively paltry amounts that were paid out under the B-Scheme subsidy. This chapter argues that the government did in fact take 'black films' seriously and the differential amounts paid out to 'white' and 'black' films were in keeping with the political and concomitant economic ideology of 'separate development'. According to this, the apartheid government saw no need to expend vast resources on Africans who were not South African 'citizens'. This kind of expenditure needed to come from each of the homelands to which Africans belonged. It is in this regard that the Bantu Investment Corporation (BIC) as a possible funding agency assumes a greater importance, but archival documents on the BIC have so far elicited no information with regard to film.

Apart from funding via the B-Scheme subsidy, further funding for films also came from the Bantu Investment Corporation (BIC).<sup>40</sup>

The BIC was established in 1959 as part of the broader plan of 'separate development' which in economic terms partly meant not only the decentralization of labour-intensive industry to the border areas of the homelands, but also the financing of entrepreneurs

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Antonie van der Merwe.

<sup>40</sup> Binedell, p. 59.

within the homelands itself.<sup>41</sup> Through financial assistance to approved individuals, the BIC aimed to promote not only the economic development (strictly along apartheid policies) of the homelands but also to stimulate a “Bantu film industry of their own”.<sup>42</sup> The BIC, according to the report in the *SA Film Weekly*, provided a sum of R500 000 towards the establishment of a Film Bank which was set up to finance film production. By 1977 eight films had been produced and five cinemas built in “Bantu” areas through funding from the Film Bank.<sup>43</sup>

The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 established a total of 10 ‘Bantu Homelands’ along ethnic lines. Of these Transkei was the first to receive self-government with the 1963 Transkei Constitution act which created a legislative assembly. Transkei became ‘independent’ in 1976.<sup>44</sup> Political dissent seems to have been a spur to these moves as political aspirations were to be channelled along ethnic lines to the homelands rather than along broadly nationalist lines. Beinart argues that “A central tenet of apartheid was to divert the ambitions of the African educated classes from major cities so that they would help guide the journey towards separate development.”<sup>45</sup> Within the framework of Bantustan ideology, Africans in ‘white’ South Africa were aliens whose proper place was within the geopolitical boundaries of the various reserve areas that were now being prepared for ‘statehood’ under South African tutelage. Given this, any form of discrimination could rightly be argued to be on the basis of nationality rather than race or colour.

The removal or resettlement of people from both the urban and rural areas where many of them had been tenant farmers continued apace within this ideological framing. It is estimated that the populations of the various homelands increased by 40-50% of the total

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<sup>41</sup> Best, Alan C. G., “South Africa’s Border Industries: The Tswana Example”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 61, 2, June 1971, <http://www.jstor.org>, & <http://www.anc.org.za/books/reich9.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Tomaselli, p. 59.

<sup>43</sup> *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 16, No.23, 17 June 1977, p.2.

<sup>44</sup> J. B. Peires, “The Implosion of Transkei and Ciskei”, *African Affairs*, 91, 1992, p. 367.

<sup>45</sup> William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Cape Town & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 208.

African population from the period 1960-1980.<sup>46</sup> This was achieved through stricter enforcing of influx control, 'endorsing out' of Africans from 'white areas' and other types of legislation such as Section 3 of the Physical Planning and Utilisation of Resources Act, No. 88 of 1967 which capped the ratio of Africans to whites in 'white' areas.<sup>47</sup>

As soon as they (Bantu) become, for some reason or another, no longer fit for work, superfluous in the labour market, they are expected to return to their country, the territory of their national unit where they fit in ethnically if they were not born or bred in the homeland... no stone is to be left unturned to achieve the settlement in the homelands of non-productive Bantu...<sup>48</sup>

As the above quote indicates, Africans considered superfluous were to be removed to the homeland areas. Africans who were considered redundant included among others, the aged, infirm, widows and women with dependent children, as well as those unfit for work on white farms. Also included were "Professional Bantu such as doctors, attorneys, agents, trader, industrialists, etc. All such persons are regarded as inessential for the European labour market and as such they must be settled in the homelands insofar as they are not essential for serving their compatriots in the European areas."<sup>49</sup> This ideological framing absolved the Nationalist government of all social welfare responsibility towards Africans in 'white' South Africa, responsibility which now fell on the homelands themselves.

One of the outcomes of this policy of removal to the ethnic homelands was the increasing unemployment and consequent poverty of homeland populations. The policy of decentralised or border industries was one response to the worsening economic deprivation of the homeland areas. Decentralisation policy effectively amounted to providing inducements to various sectors of the industry to relocate their operations to areas bordering the various homelands. Inducements included cash subsidies for wages, relocation and training allowances, low rentals on premises and low interest rates on

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<sup>46</sup> See for example: Fion de Vletter, "Recent Trends and Prospects of Black Migration to South Africa", *The Journal and Modern African Studies*, 23, 4, Dec. 1985, and Trevor Bell, "The Role of Regional Policy in South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12, 2, April 1986.

<sup>47</sup> Trevor Bell, p. 278.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Legassick, p.27.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



loans. A further inducement was the ready supply of cheap labour from the homelands. This labour was unregulated by trade unionism as trade union activity was prohibited in most homelands.<sup>50</sup> De Vletter concludes thus, that the “principal function of the homelands (was) to coercively retain a reserve army of labour.”<sup>51</sup>

Two further and interrelated consequences of separate development ideology was firstly, the entrenchment of ethnic identities and divisions which would find violent expression in the early 1990s in KwaZulu/Natal. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of KwaZulu and Zulu nationalism as typified by Inkatha. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, as leader of the KwaZulu homeland and Inkatha, refused independence, arguing instead an ideology not remarkably different to that of the National Party. Aiming for ‘reform’ of apartheid from within, Buthelezi supported development along ethnic and regional decentralization. This in turn would earn him support not only from the South African government but also importantly, from capitalists as well as foreign governments.<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, separate development created ethnically-based “systems of support, patronage, resource distribution and means of coercion and control.”<sup>53</sup> The creation of a class of petty bourgeoisie, the co-optation of local chiefs and class of homelands bureaucrats furthered the aim of separate development. The Nationalist government gave active support to the creation of an African homeland middle class through loans and grants to help establish capitalists and traders. This was given further impetus by the departure of white traders with established businesses in the homeland areas.

The threat of cultural hybridity and racial miscegenation was a pre-eminent preoccupation within this framework of separate development. The Bantustans were conceived not only as separate political and national entities, but importantly also, as

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<sup>50</sup> Mark Addleson & Richard Tomlinson, “Industrial Decentralisation Policy and the Prospects for the Development of South Africa’s Homelands”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24, 1, March 1986, p. 161.

<sup>51</sup> Fion De Vletter, p. 168.

<sup>52</sup> Chris Lowe, “Buthelezi, Inkatha and the Problem of Ethnic Nationalism in South Africa”, in Joshua Brown et al (ed) *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, p198.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p.195.

separate cultural entities. This total separation meant not only separation from white (Afrikaner) South Africa and culture, but also complete separation between various African ethnic groups. Nixon argues that apartheid in one sense was akin to cultural stasis because apartheid ideological conception of African ethnic culture and identity did not allow for dynamic change, interchange and exchange, but instead sought to fossilize this within the different boundaries of the homelands and numerous devices were employed to ensure this fossilisation.<sup>54</sup>

Many B-Scheme films either implicitly or explicitly supported this ideology of separate development and in this sense some of the white filmmakers assumed surrogate roles for the apartheid state. The B-Scheme was introduced at the behest of people like van der Merwe, who having approached Wynand Malan, a Member of Parliament, via his friend, the mayor of Randburg (who later also became a film producer), was told that they needed to get organized before government would pay any attention to their demands. He accordingly got together a group of people and so was born the "black film industry".<sup>55</sup> This industry was comprised largely of "butchers, bakers and candle-stick makers (who) were becoming filmmakers. There were many cases where farmers and bottle-store owners suddenly became film producers. Anybody who could read a basic Photographic How to... book or who managed to thumb through the pages of an Arriflex Instruction Manual became a lighting cameraman and so on..."<sup>56</sup>

This is borne out by the backgrounds of at least two of the filmmakers interviewed, namely van der Merwe himself and his friend and former partner Steve Hand. Van der Merwe came from a construction background and did some special effects for the Afrikaans filmmaker Elmo de Witt.

I was in construction blasting and I did a few special effects for Elmo de Witt in around 1969. I was always interested in the film industry and I became friends with Elmo and his brother Louis. Actually Louis convinced me to go into the film industry and I made a (film), because I have 200 black people working for me and I thought there is a market for black people, so I made *Joe Bullet* (1974), the first

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<sup>54</sup> Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.5.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with van der Merwe.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Keyan Tomaselli, "The South African and Australian Film Industries: A Comparison", *Critical Arts*, Monographs 1, 1981.

black movie with Ken Gampu and all the major players like Abigail Khubeka and others. Obviously there were not many theatres. Ster Kinekor did not want to release it so we went to all the individual theatres.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, van der Merwe's friend and former partner Steve Hand, also came from a background unrelated to filmmaking. Hand was a school teacher before he joined up with van der Merwe to start Tugela Films in 1978. He left his teaching profession and became a full time filmmaker with his wife and himself training the actors as well as writing the scripts. "We had about seventeen actors that we trained alone. My wife and me, we trained them."

Complementing this chaotically disparate composition of the 'black film industry' was the lack of any set of standards or criteria by government, other than those of African language and African actors, as mentioned earlier. No scripts were required for vetting by the department administering the subsidy (the Department of Information by the 1980s had taken over administration from Trade and Industries) and no limits were set as long as the film passed the censors. This appears to have been a sore point with van der Merwe who claims to have attempted on numerous occasions to have government pass some sort of regulatory conditions, or alternatively allow the industry to regulate itself. None of these met with any success and van der Merwe believes that this was due to the large-scale corruption that was characteristic of the B-Scheme. This corruption was both on the part of some of the filmmakers as well as some of the government officials.

Part of the problem according to van der Merwe was that the 'black film industry' became too big.

When I had a meeting once a month with the government because I'm the chairman (of the Association for Black Film Producers), they say, hey you guys are making too many movies, there's no money in this industry, you have to calm down you have to cut down and I go back to my people and I say listen, they say you must make less movies there's not enough budget money and I have to set an example and make less. I make probably the least movies of everybody. And they didn't even worry about it they just went on and produced like a factory. And the government officials were corrupt. They took bribes, they took presents, they took money and those people, a few companies involved, their claims went

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Van der Merwe.

through like... record time they got their checks, in record time and obviously the signs was there...<sup>58</sup>

If the industry was too big according to van der Merwe, then so too was his presence in this 'black film industry'. As chairman of the Association for Black Film Producers, van der Merwe was effectively chairman of twelve associated companies some of which spawned independent producers and distributors such as Steve Hand and Ronnie Isaacs of AIM Films.<sup>59</sup> This association was formed in the early 1980s along with another, competing body, Black Feature Film Producers Association (BFFPA), whose membership comprised of filmmakers working more broadly in the film industry. Whereas this latter organisation was aiming eventually for a more inclusive role for itself with the general film industry, van der Merwe's organisation wished to retain exclusive control of the 'black market'.<sup>60</sup>

The signs van der Merwe speaks of were obvious both in terms of the corruption involved and also in terms of the quality of films produced. As Tomaselli argues, the subsidy system by its very nature did not support film as art. This was especially true for the B-Scheme films where as van der Merwe points out, people were churning out movies at a rate of twelve per month.

.. we wanted to create a certain, a bit of standards because some people really made total rubbish. They took the film, load a camera magazine and it runs for 11 minutes and they shoot a scene for 11 minutes long and then they change the magazine and they shoot it like a show on a stage, that kind of movies which was very bad, I think for the industry.... Unfortunately, some producers... the quality did increase and improve with the higher subsidy, but most of them kept to this really bad movies to make maximum profit. If they made 10 or 12 movies a month, that's not uncommon. I think most of those returns was 'jipoed' (creatively manipulated) like that, so it was purely, purely... nothing to do about the art, or the film industry, it was purely about financial gain. We said let's submit a script, look at the script first before you pass it. Some people didn't even shoot with a script. The script was on a cigarette box, then they shoot like that.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with van der Merwe.

<sup>59</sup> Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, p. 61.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with van der Merwe.

A key role player in the 'black' film industry was Heyns Films which was identified as a front company for the Department of Information in the revelations which emerged around the Information Scandal in 1978-79. From the mid-1970s, the Department of Information under the leadership of Minister Connie Mulder and Secretary Eschel Rhoodie, instituted a number of secret projects broadly aimed at combating the "world-wide psychological and propaganda onslaught against South Africa".<sup>62</sup> The mass media was a vital part of their strategy which included bankrolling election campaigns in the United States and United Kingdom. Film did not escape these enterprising men and monies were set aside to, firstly, build cinemas for African audiences and secondly, produce films for Africans. The plan was not only to control the types of films that were distributed and exhibited to black people but also administer the production of films. The aim, according to Rhoodie was indoctrination and censorship.<sup>63</sup>

The thinking in the Department of Information was that African people were frequent film audiences and their exposure to American cinema was creating a strong sense of identification with Hollywood heroes, particularly of the B-movie variety. The plan was to counteract this Americanising influence on urban Africans through the creation of local superheroes such as *Joe Bullet* (1974, analysed in chapter five), who would be portrayed against their "ethnic background". This would improve not only the quality of films for Africans but simultaneously support the government ideology of separate ethnic development.<sup>64</sup> Film was seen as an ideal medium through which African cultural identity could be fostered. "... the rationalisation was that black films were essentially there to give people a cultural identity and to take their attention off other things."<sup>65</sup> This limitation to culture and tradition is similarly implicit in Simon Sabela's ideas of portraying 'actual life' in order to educate and inform people about those things that need to be "preserved – the traditions that are beautiful."<sup>66</sup> Sabela was one of the very few Africans directing films, for Heyns Films, as part of the B-Scheme subsidy. As an

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<sup>62</sup> Eschel Rhoodie, *The Real Information Scandal*, Pretoria: Orbis SA, 1983, p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> Mervyn Rees & Chris Day, *Muldergate*, Johannesburg: Macmillan Publishers, 1980, p. 190.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 190.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with David Bensusan.

<sup>66</sup> D. S. Deane, *Black South Africans: A Who's Who, 57 Profiles of Natal's Leading Blacks*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 162.

African though, he could not directly access the subsidy and worked for Heyns Films. He directed most of the Heyns Films that are analysed in later chapters. Apart from directing, he also stars in many of the films such as *uDeliwe* (1974), *iKati Elimnyama* (1975) and *The Advocate* (1978).

The only concern that government expressed with regard to these films was that they must avoid politics. Concerned with avoiding politics, the majority of 'black' films invariably turned to a variety of genres such as the crime thriller or action/adventure films, slapstick comedy or dramas which conformed to official policies such as separate development.

As part of the "total strategy", a sum of R825 000 was made available to Andre Pieterse, a filmmaker and one of the directors of an Information Department front company, Thor Communicators, to establish cinemas for black audiences. Pieterse however, invested the money in the production of the film *Golden Rendezvous*, starring Richard Harris and based on an Alistair Maclean novel.<sup>67</sup> The film was an international flop and was one of the first Information Department projects to surface in the investigations of journalists.<sup>68</sup>

Another front company, Heyns Films was the recipient of R78 000 in 1977. Heyns Films made a total of 13 films for Africans before being exposed as an Information front company. Johan van Zyl Alberts, a Rhodie associate, was the chairman of Heyns Films and both he and his wife acted as script consultants on many films made by Heyns. The concern was to ensure "ethnological accuracy in terms of the ideology of separate development."<sup>69</sup> But Heyns alleges he had no idea that Alberts had infiltrated the organisation at the behest of the Information Department or that the money he invested in 'black' film was sourced directly from them.<sup>70</sup> Thys Heyns and Paul Raleigh claim that

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<sup>67</sup> Mervyn Rees & Chris Day, p. 94.

<sup>68</sup> Andre Pieterse who is based in Stellenbosch and is Chairman of Ma-Afrika Films refused to be interviewed but revealed that he has written the definitive history of the "black film industry" which is in his library and not available for public scrutiny.

<sup>69</sup> Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, p. 67.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Thys Heyns and Paul Raleigh.

the relationship was established unbeknownst to them when Johan van Zyl Alberts joined the company.

... van Zyl Alberts came in and bought 50 percent of the company and he said he wanted to finance black films. We were very happy with this man coming in with lots of money. It is only in 1978 that it appeared that he was a representative of the Department of Information or whatever they call them.... He said, I want to finance making black language pictures... And then afterwards we made eighteen (films) with financial backing from Mr Alberts and stupid as we were we never thought the government was involved.<sup>71</sup>

Van Zyl Alberts was not the only government representative working on the films produced by Heyns. His wife, Betty Alberts is credited in numerous Heyns films as script consultant. Again according to Heyns and Raleigh: "There was never a sense of interference in the content. ... We just thought that Betty was there so that the husband could give her something to do. Frankly that is what we thought and we never... I am not saying that we never took her seriously; we listened to what she said but at the end of the day we made the decisions."<sup>72</sup> There was however one prescription which van Zyl Alberts insisted on and that was that the film had to be entirely in an African language. What Mr. Heyns and Mr. Raleigh could not clarify during the interview was whether this prescription extended beyond language to include all aspects of the various African cultures which were used.

Apart from all dialogue in an African language, both Heyns and Raleigh expressed pride in their accomplishment as forerunners of black empowerment. "... if ever there was affirmative action in the film industry it was thirty years ago. The director was black, we had continuity, the stories were largely black driven, the crew was fifty percent black... maybe not on the completely technical areas but sound... it was black", according to Raleigh. "And that was, as Paul says, long before anybody thought of black empowerment and all that nonsense..." Heyns continued.<sup>73</sup> Most of the films produced by Heyns that have been viewed as part of this research had been directed by Simon Sabela, who according to Raleigh was responsible for scripting in the African language

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Thys Heyns and Paul Raleigh.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Thys Heyns and Paul Raleigh.

utilized. "... we don't believe that Whites can either direct films or write scripts which would appeal to a Black audience. We tried once making a film based on a script written by a White author, and the experiment was not very successful."<sup>74</sup>

In one of its 1977 editions the *Film Weekly* praised Heyns as "the only worthwhile producer of Bantu language films" at the time. The company had been prolific since its first film *uDeliwe* which was produced in 1974. Since then Heyns had produced a total of six films during both 1975 and 1976 and two by July 1977. The company was also producing a "Black" newsreel for distribution with its feature films.<sup>75</sup>

As with van der Merwe and Ronnie Isaacs<sup>76</sup>, Heyns operated its own mobile circuit which was the key outlet for African language films given the scarcity of cinemas open to Africans at the time. "We had about ten or twelve units running all over the country. Panel vans with projectors and screens and speakers and an operator and they would go around and show the films."<sup>77</sup> According to a report in the *SA Film Weekly*, "Black" cinema consisted of five categories. Firstly, open air screenings; secondly, intermittent traveling shows in various halls; thirdly, regular shows in these halls; fourthly, fixed professional equipment set up in hall for regular shows; and fifthly, built cinemas. "The majority of Black cinemas.... are in the second (category), i.e. mobile units. There are possibly as many as 180 of these in the Republic..."<sup>78</sup> The question of cinemas for African audiences will be discussed in detail in later in this chapter, but suffice it to say at this point that the existence of the mobile units can be seen as being directly responsible for the abuse of the B-scheme subsidy. With the subsidy being paid on the basis of box office returns, the opportunity to submit falsified claims were greater with the mobile circuit where "bums on seats" as Paul Raleigh said, could not be verified.

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted in the *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 26, 8 July 1977, p.3.

<sup>75</sup> *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 26, 8 July 1977, pp.2-3.

<sup>76</sup> Ronnie Isaacs was the other key role player in this industry, not only in production, but distribution and exhibition also. Attempts to locate and interview him had not been successful as his whereabouts are currently unknown. According to some informants he is based in the USA but occasionally works from SA.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Thys Heyns and Paul Raleigh.

<sup>78</sup> *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 16, No.26, 8 July 1977, p..2.



The clandestine involvement of the apartheid state in films for Africans formed part of ideology of 'total strategy' as has been stated earlier. This was a response to what was perceived by the apartheid state as a 'total onslaught' on its rule from both within the country and internationally. There were numerous factors which fed this perception.

A key factor contributing to this sense of being under 'total onslaught' was increasing militancy of urban Africans and in particular urban African youth. This militancy eventually erupted into what became known as the Soweto uprising of 1976. The immediate spark for the Soweto riots of June 1976 was the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in African schools and the general inequalities of Bantu education. There were however, other factors which led to the build-up of frustrations culminating in the deaths of at least 176 people.<sup>79</sup> The economic recession of the mid 1970s led to deteriorating social and economic conditions in which the urban poor suffered the greatest. The unwillingness of government to sustain high subsidies on consumer goods such as maize and bread, rising unemployment, rent increases, poor service delivery and overcrowding all added flames to the fire of discontent. The uprising of June 16 was followed by protracted activism which lasted for well over a year and included boycotts, stayaways and attacks on government buildings, beer halls and police informers.<sup>80</sup> The stay-away following June 16 was arguably the most successful in South African history with approximately half a million workers staying away for three days.<sup>81</sup>

School students were at the vanguard of not only the 1976 uprising but also the protracted activism which followed. Inspired by the philosophy of black consciousness, which not only fostered a sense of pride in a black identity but also provided intellectual and ideological tools for claiming a black identity distinct from the ethnic and tribal identities conferred by apartheid, young scholars pushed the limits of activism not witnessed since Sharpeville in 1960. At the forefront of student activism was the South African Students Movement (SASM) which was actively engaged in student mobilisation and

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<sup>79</sup> John Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978, p.1.

<sup>80</sup> William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.237.

<sup>81</sup> Christopher Saunders & Nicholas Southey, *Dictionary of South African History*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1998, p.164.

politicisation in many Soweto schools. SASM established an Action Committee to organise the June 16 activities, but more importantly also, it was at the forefront of youth protest against liquor which was perceived as a negative factor in the destabilisation of family life and a disruption to education.<sup>82</sup>

The outcome of this political activism was severe. The Soweto uprising was followed by two contradictory impulses on the part of the apartheid state; pragmatic reform and increased repression. The pragmatic 'reforms' were aimed at stemming the tide of increasing political activism. This 'reform' strategy however was combined with increased repression in the form of the degree of power conferred on repressive agencies such as the police and the army. In fact, the extreme brutality of police response to the initial and subsequent outbursts is often cited as reason for the high number of deaths. Soweto in the immediate aftermath of June 16 is reported to have been like a "city after a bomb attack."<sup>83</sup> The army was on high alert and soldiers were posted around the township and the government was fully geared to "maintain law and order."<sup>84</sup> The police were given wide powers and detention without trial was one of the measures used to incarcerate those believed to be the main agitators. One of those detained at this point was Steve Biko, leader of the BC movement. His death in detention in September 1977 not only had a profound effect within the country but also elicited widespread condemnation from the international community. A month after his death, the South African government banned all BC activities and movements as well the Soweto SRC.<sup>85</sup> Many of the youths went into exile and while the suppression by government served to put a lid on the unrest, the Soweto uprisings had started an avalanche of resentment against the unjust laws of the apartheid state.

The increase in urban political activism from the mid-1970s is ascribed in some measure to the emergence of a strong African urban middle class which itself was encouraged by the apartheid state. A series of economic measures were introduced to facilitate this

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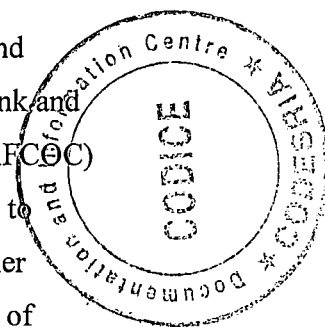
<sup>82</sup> Beinart, p.236-7.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Kane-Berman, p.2.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p.9.

growth and these included the granting of 99-year freeholds in urban townships and greater access to finance capital for African entrepreneurs through the African Bank and partnerships between the National African Federated Chamber of Commerce (NAFCOC) and white capital.<sup>86</sup> Political measures included the granting of limited autonomy to African townships in the form of local councils. This limited autonomy was further entrenched and extended with the introduction of the Black Local Authorities Act of 1982 which upgraded the community councils to the level of Town Councils, theoretically with the same legal status as white town councils. In practice however, these earlier community and later town councils were subject to white rule. As a result they were often perceived as maintaining the status quo and were frequent targets during the Soweto and subsequent unrest.<sup>87</sup>



The establishment of a cooperative petty bourgeoisie was essential both within urban 'white' South Africa as well as the homelands.<sup>88</sup> The South African government faced both increasing internal opposition and external threat posed by newly independent African states with socialist agendas. In view of this internal and external threat as well as the international opprobrium the NP government faced, both the apartheid state as well as white capital viewed the creation of a stable African middle class imperative for the maintenance of political stability and apartheid rule.

The South African government was increasingly feeling beleaguered due not only to this internal unrest but also the political changes occurring elsewhere on the continent. The independence movements in major neighbouring countries such as, especially Angola and Mozambique with the demise of fascist rule in Portugal in 1974, and Zimbabwe were gaining momentum. These independence movements were invariably socialist in orientation and the government feared that these would provide bases of operation to the South African liberation movements in exile. With a view to this potential threat the

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<sup>86</sup> Eidelberg, Phil, "Guerrilla Warfare and the Decline of Urban Apartheid: The Shaping of a New African Class and the Transformation of the African National Congress (1975-1985)", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 19, 1, 1999, p.54-5.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Roger Southall, "African Capitalism in Contemporary South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7, 1, October 1980.

South African government was actively involved in fostering and supporting rebel movements in both Angola and Mozambique. Neither South African force nor diplomacy however achieved much results and the region through the Southern African Development Coordination Conference, was committed to working outside the orbit of South African influence.<sup>89</sup> Given these factors the South African state was finding itself facing a 'total onslaught' to which it responded with a 'total strategy'. Film, and other forms of media, was a key ingredient in this 'total strategy'.

### **The introduction of television and its impact on the 'black film industry'**

Cultural fossilisation, or in the rhetoric of the National Party government, cultural protection, was the major factor behind the delayed introduction of television in South African. The eventual introduction of television in 1976 impacted profoundly not only on the broader society, but also on the film industry in general as well as on the "black film industry" in very specific ways. One of the major impacts on the local film industry was a further revision of the subsidy. According to a report in the *SA Film Weekly*, the subsidy scheme as last amended in 1973 came under severe criticism from the industry which considered it antiquated and not at all suited to the new conditions which prevailed after the introduction of television. The Department of Trade and Industries instituted an investigation and presented its findings in December 1976. The amendments proposed by the report were firstly, that the subsidy for Afrikaans films be raised from 55 to 65 percent and for English films from 44 to 52 percent, secondly, the ceiling for subsidy payments be set at 70 percent of the total production costs of a film and thirdly, that the period for eligibility of box office receipts be reduced from four to two years.

The report further recommended that producers concentrate on "making more sophisticated films, films of high enough quality to compete in a healthy manner with television." It also recognized that television's greatest impact would be on the drive-in

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<sup>89</sup> Beinart, pp. 243-44.

and family entertainment industries. The report's findings were based on a survey of eleven films produced during the last two years prior to television which made an excess of R300 000 at the box office. This excluded films which did very well as well as those from the drive-in circuits. These films were judged to average productions which could compete with television. Of the eleven films, only three were deemed to have shown a profit with the assistance of the subsidy while the balance would have shown a colossal financial loss.<sup>90</sup>

This report needless to say was not popular with the film industry practitioners. There were two points of contention; the number of films selected in the survey and the report's finding about the drop in cinema attendance due to television. The report had found that there would be a drop of 30 percent in cinema attendance whereas the South African Feature Film Producers Association estimated the decline in audience attendance to be as high as 45 percent. The Association had also conducted a similar survey but with approximately thirty films as opposed to the eleven of the Departmental investigation. Not surprisingly the Association's findings from their wider survey suggested a higher percentage raise in the subsidy for both language productions. Furthermore, it agreed with the report that there was a need for a ceiling, especially given the fact that Uys' 'People' films had exhausted subsidy funds, but that a 70 percent ceiling was unfair. The period during which a film could still be considered eligible for subsidy funding was also a point of dispute, with the Producers Association feeling that two years was too short a time period.<sup>91</sup>

As a result of negotiations between the Department and the Association, new changes to the subsidy were announced in late 1977. The minimum qualification was raised from R50 000 to R100 000 and only the first two years of box office takings would qualify. Afrikaans films would be subsidized at 70 percent of the initial R200 000 takings and at 60 percent from R200 001 to R300 000, at 50 percent from R300 001 to R400 000, 40

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<sup>90</sup> *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 22, 3 June 1977, p.2.

<sup>91</sup> *SA Film Weekly*, Vol 16, No. 25, 24 June – 1 July 1977 p. 2.

percent from R400 001 to R500 000 and 30 percent from R500 001 upwards. A similar sliding scale was applicable to films in languages other than African languages.

But while the introduction of television may have impacted negatively on the 'white' film industry due to a drop in white cinema audiences, it could be argued to have enhanced the 'black film industry' because Africans now became a viable target audience. Declining white audiences meant a consequent decline in the production of 'white films' which led to a moribund 'white film industry'. The 'black film industry' on the other hand experienced vigorous growth as more and more people (most without any formal training or experience in film production) entered this lucrative market for African audiences.<sup>92</sup> Tomaselli identifies the late 1970s until the mid-1980s as a boom period for the 'black film industry' fuelled partly by the introduction of television but also due in large measure to the 'quick profit' motive of the filmmakers and the lack of sufficient standards.

The advent of television in South Africa created a somewhat anomalous situation for Africans as potential cinema audiences. The cost of television immediately put it beyond the financial means of the vast majority of Africans while simultaneously positioning them as potential audiences for those exhibition venues that were most immediately negatively affected by television. The Satbel group who owned the Ster and Kinekor chain of cinemas was particularly severely affected in all major areas and their case was most persuasively argued by the various municipalities themselves. A ten page letter to the Minister for Community Development outlined the financial imperatives which necessitated a rethinking of separate amenities such as cinemas. Thomas Langley of the Cape Town Council argued that Satbel stood to lose a great deal of profit if their chain of cinemas in specifically white areas or reserved formerly for white audiences only, were not given permission to admit black audiences. He argued that while the company was making every effort to build more cinemas in specific race group areas, this was both a

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<sup>92</sup> See Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, p. 60.

costly and time-consuming venture and in view of this the company should be allowed to admit patrons of all race groups on different occasions.<sup>93</sup>

Another factor, as mentioned in the letter, contributing to this change was the increase not only in the urban presence of Africans but also the incremental growth of a black middle class (as mentioned above). Furthermore by the mid-1970s and particularly following the Soweto uprising in 1976, there was a reluctant acceptance of the African presence in the urban centres. Given this it was therefore important to exercise maximum control over this urban populace and film was a useful means of diverting attention away from political issues and controlling criminal tendencies.<sup>94</sup> This is evident from the kinds of films that were screened to African audiences and speaks to how the authorities and white South Africans conceived of the general black and in particular, the African audience.

The correspondence between various local municipalities and the central government as well as that between local Bantu Affairs officials and central government brings to light the kind of thinking that was pervasive throughout government departments. This thinking was in keeping with the broader political ambition of the time which sought to co-opt a black middle class into the structures of the ruling class and as a bulwark against the masses of disaffected Africans who sought political transformation of the apartheid system. By maintaining the same ticket prices for both black and white patrons of these formerly exclusively white cinemas and drive-ins, the government was hoping to keep

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<sup>93</sup> NAB DBN ABD 1/1/1/66 Letter to S.J.M. Steyn, Minister for Community Development, 6 October 1976.

<sup>94</sup> This idea of film as a soporific has been extensively examined in debates about 'moralising leisure time' but it interestingly is also voiced by individuals such as Japan Mthembu, an actor in some of the B-Scheme films, whose early exposure to films was limited to spaghetti western and martial arts films. On the other end of the spectrum are the views expressed by drive-in owners such as Mr Beckman reported in the *SA Film Weekly*. While Mr. Beckman was naturally concerned about the decline in white patrons at his drive in and wanted permission to admit "Africans on Monday and Wednesday nights and the local non-Europeans and Asians on Tuesdays and Fridays" he was also of the opinion that the lack of a television in black homes was leading to an increase in the crime rate and this could only be addressed by allowing black people to attend the drive-in theatre. *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 25, 2 July 1976, p. 7.

access limited to those of the “*hoer sosio-ekonomies ontwikkelde nie-blanke groep*”, thus excluding what was considered a lower class of black.<sup>95</sup>

As part of this drive to co-opt and strengthen this growing black middle class, the government was supportive of initiatives that promoted African and black entrepreneurship, particularly when there was no conflict with white interests and as long as a white patron could vouchsafe the good character of an African individual. For example, the Port Natal Administration Board had been managing and overseeing a cinema in Kwa Mashu since April 1977 on behalf of the Kwa Zulu Government. A year later it was unable to continue doing so due to a lack of resources and the Kwa Zulu government was faced with the problem of disposing of this burden. It was prepared to either lease or sell it outright as long as it was to “black entrepreneur”.<sup>96</sup> One of these entrepreneurs was Simon Sabela, the director of most B-Scheme films produced by Heyns Film and Television who made the application on his behalf.<sup>97</sup> It is unclear whether Sabela was merely fronting for Heyns or whether this application was really on his behalf. What is apparent though is that as was the case in other instances, Africans wanting to operate a business needed the patronage of a white benefactor who could testify on their behalf as to their good character, thrifty and hardworking nature.

But while the state was eager to co-opt this growing black middle class it was nonetheless determined to maintain strict apartheid not only by separating the different audiences but also through careful scrutiny of the precise location of these cinemas and drive-ins. Careful attention was paid to whether black people would have to travel through white residential areas or not in order to reach these places of recreation. Given this it is perhaps not surprising that the cinemas and drive-ins that were targeted for mixed

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<sup>95</sup> “Higher socio-economic developed non-white group”, see NAB DBN ABD 1/1/1/66, Letter from the Manager of the South Coast District (Natal) to the Chief Director of Bantu Affairs Administration Board, 1 June 1977.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. Letter from the Secretary for Co-operation and Development to the Chief Director of the Port Natal Administration Board, 17 July 1979. See also the report ‘West Rand Bantus to get new cinemas?’ in the *Sa Film Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 38/39, September/October 1977, wherein the West Rand Administration Board is reported to be considering building new cinemas to replace those that were destroyed in the 1976 uprising. Development rights were to be granted to African entrepreneurs among whom was the owner of the Eyethu in Soweto, Mr. Tshabalala.

<sup>97</sup> NAB DBN ABD 1/1/1/66, Application by Heyns Film and Television, 23 January 1978.



audiences were those that were on the borders of white residential areas. Location was important for another reason, so that the target black audiences could have easier access by means of public and other transport.<sup>98</sup>

State control of locations of cinemas was based on control of access as well as the desire to prevent Africans from congregating in large numbers within white residential areas or even areas of government offices as is evident in the state's refusal of a permit to Mr. J.A. Elliot of Natal. He made an application to open and operate a cinema in Pinetown. The state's refusal was based on the fact that the proposed site was next to a Labour Bureau office and the congregation of Africans near this site was highly objectionable especially if the Africans were "unemployed and workshy". This was a likely possibility given the operating hours of the cinema which would be between 10 am and 7 pm, a full working day. This meant that employed people would not benefit from this cinema and the only people who would be able to attend would be the "unemployed and workshy" element who would have a negative influence on those Africans seeking work at the Labour Office.<sup>99</sup> Directly and indirectly then through the various town councils and municipalities, the government was becoming a key role player in the establishment of a film culture among African audiences.

## Conclusion

The film subsidy scheme was introduced in 1956 with a separate B-Scheme subsidy for African-language films introduced in 1972. Both subsidies came under investigation in 1989 when the Department of Home Affairs took over the administration of the subsidies. According to former Director of the National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Johan de Lange an official in the department decided to verify claim submitted for 2000 tickets sold for a particular film. He visited the venue where the film was screened and

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. Letter from the Inspectorate of Port Natal Bantu Affairs Administration Board to the Chief Inspector, 10 June 1977.

<sup>99</sup> NAB DBN ABD 1/1/1/66, Letter from the Housing Welfare and Recreation Officer to the Chief Director of the Port Natal Administration Board, 17 October 1979.

discovered that it could not even seat 200 people at one time. This alerted the department to investigate other claims and this is how the fraud associated with box office returns on which the subsidy was awarded, was discovered.<sup>100</sup> De Lange was seconded to the department to assist with the investigation and claims that enough documentation exists which implicates a number of people with fraudulent claims. The bulk of these documents however have not been uncovered by this researcher either in the National Archives, the Department of Home Affairs or the Department of Arts and Culture which eventually took over the administration from Home Affairs.

A few files were inadvertently unearthed in the Department of Arts and Culture which detailed the amounts spent on film production under the two subsidy schemes and some of the companies under investigation.<sup>101</sup> The subsidies were officially reformulated in 1992 and eventually totally scrapped in 1995. The auditor general's report in 1995 revealed that R2 billion was spent on this scheme and 800 feature films were subsidized.<sup>102</sup> According to some of the documents in these files, a total of 850 films had been subsidised since the introduction of the film subsidy. More than R170 million or as the report claims "(R500 million in real terms)" has been paid out. Furthermore, "a massive fraudulent practice whereby subsidies were claimed during the year 1987 to 1989 was uncovered by the Department (of Home Affairs)."<sup>103</sup>

Another departmental circular lists some of the companies under police investigation for fraudulent practices. Among the twelve companies listed is Heyns Films, which as discussed earlier was also implicated in the Information Scandal in the late 1970s. Of the remaining eleven companies, four were owned by the same person though he or she

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Johan de Lange.

<sup>101</sup> The files were made available initially for scrutiny in the Pretoria office of the Department, however, when the documents were requested for further examination, this researcher was told that the files were still in the process of being transferred to the National Archives and therefore were not available for public scrutiny until this process was completed; that in fact giving initial access could have compromised the departmental official.

<sup>102</sup> Cultural Industries Growth Strategy: The South African Film and Television Industry Report to the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, November 1998.

<sup>103</sup> Report by the Director-General of the Department of Home Affairs, File No. 40/1/B, "Financial State Aid to the South African Film Industry", 20 June 1994.

remains unidentified in the circular.<sup>104</sup> The circular further states that the “objective of financial state aid to South African film producers was to encourage them to produce films for the cultural advancement, education and entertainment of the residents of South Africa and which reflect a South African character and way of life.”<sup>105</sup>

However, the Auditor-General’s report of 1995 found that the objective of creating a “viable and independent film industry in South Africa, could not be established” to have been achieved by means of the subsidy system.<sup>106</sup> There were a number of factors which the report cites for the failure of achieving this objective. Firstly, the report found that though the objective had remained constant despite cultural, political and technological factors, the requirements of the subsidy, concepts and definitions were not logically and adequately spelt out. And secondly, “the objectives of the (subsidy) Scheme as formulated by the former Commission for Administration, the Treasury and the Department respectively, did not tally in all respects.”<sup>107</sup> In other words, the report confirms what has already been stated elsewhere in this chapter, that the apartheid state was unable to form a coherent and consistent policy as regards the establishment of a national film industry. This also confirms a claim made by the SA Film Studio, cited in the previous chapter, that government departments and officials were often providing obstacles to the development and progress of a national film industry.

Given this inconsistent and incoherent approach to film by the apartheid state it was inevitable that a national film industry would be highly difficult to establish. This was compounded by the manner in which both the general and B-Scheme subsidies were administered. And given that financial reward was the only imperative of the two subsidy schemes, there could have been little commitment to artistic and technical standards or finesse. As regards the B-Scheme films, the South African History Online (SAHO) website in its chronology of South African cinema damns these as “bits of

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<sup>104</sup> Department of Home Affairs Circular No. 40/1/B, “Financial Aid to the South African Film Industry”, 10 March 1994.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Republic of South Africa, Report of the Auditor-General on the Performance Audits completed during the period 1 July 1994 – 30 June 1995”, 16 February 1996, p. 42. With kind thanks to the office of the Auditor-General for supplying relevant sections of the report.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

footage slapped together” and “visual diarrhoea” produced by individuals who wanted “to benefit financially from the scheme.”<sup>108</sup>

It can be argued, particularly in the case of the B-Scheme films, that films were produced less for entertainment or ideological purposes and more for financial gain by the filmmakers. This is not to say that these films did not have either entertainment or ideological value, but rather that in many instances these were incidental and not the primary intentions of filmmakers. Exceptions to these would surely be some of the films produced by people like Jamie Uys (who despite his protestations to the contrary emerges as a strong apartheid ideologue) and Heyns Films, especially in the 1970s when they were producing films financed by the Department of Information.

This chapter together with the previous one has traced the historical continuities, parallels and changes in state intervention in the general film industry, but more specifically in films for Africans. As such these two chapters provide the necessary historical context for the chapters which follow. These chapters focus more directly on the products of the B-Scheme and provide analyses of selected films, examining the degree to which they promoted, supported or subverted apartheid ideology and policies.

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<sup>108</sup> SAHO, [www.saho.org.za](http://www.saho.org.za).

## Chapter Four

### Representations of the urban and the rural in B-Scheme Films

This chapter provides close textual readings of selected B-Scheme films. The films are analysed as products of the broader historical context of state intervention discussed in the first two chapters. Thus the degree to which any of the films support, perpetuate or subvert any element of apartheid ideology and policies has been central to this textual analysis.

The five films that are discussed in this chapter deal with the common theme of the urban/rural dichotomy. This dichotomy is expressed in a number of ways and through various sub-themes ranging from the tensions between a modern, western lifestyle and a more traditional, 'tribal' way of living, to the conditions of single African women in urban spaces. Four of the five films under consideration here, were produced by Heyns Films which was implicated in the Information Scandal of 1978-79.<sup>1</sup> Of the four, three were directed by Simon Sabela who was one of the few Africans directing films for African audiences. The fifth film is Jamie Uys' *Dingaka* (1964). This was not a B-Scheme film and despite Peter Davis' extensive treatment of it in *In Darkest Hollywood*,<sup>2</sup> it has been included here for a number of reasons as it will become evident later in the discussion.

These films fall into the category or genre that Keyan Tomaselli has identified as the 'back to the homeland' and the 'conditional urban' films.<sup>3</sup> The 'back to the homeland' films for Tomaselli, are "explicit reflectors of "grand apartheid" which envisages a total separation of the races."<sup>4</sup> Though contradictions are apparent in that Africans are

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the association between Heyns Films and the Department of Information.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa*, Randburg: Ravan Press, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Keyan Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film*, London, Routledge, 1989, pp. 71-73.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

encouraged, on a strictly controlled basis through the pass laws and the labour bureaux<sup>5</sup>, to enter 'white' South Africa as temporary sojourners to offer their labour as a commodity, mixing is never encouraged. What is encouraged though is a return to the 'tribal homeland' as soon as the labour contract has expired. These films thus continue to represent Africans within the paradigm of the "tribal native" and the "rural innocent" who is displaced within an urban context.<sup>6</sup> These tropes are not unique to the B-Scheme films but rather echo representations of earlier films such as *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* (1949) and *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1952).

Among the films Tomaselli identifies as 'back to the homeland' are some of those included in this chapter such as *Inkunzi* and *Setipana*. Also included in Tomaselli's category are the films *Isiviko* (The Shield, 1979) and *Ngomopho*<sup>7</sup> (1974) among others. *Isiviko* relates the tale of a young migrant who returns home to find mayhem among his family in the form of bewitchment by witchdoctors and evil water spirits. This mayhem results from the discovery of a magical shield discovered in a cave near the village. The young man with a patina of urban sophistication and rational thought soon restores the normal order and all ends quite happily for everyone.

Films such as *uDeliwe* and *Inkedama* (1975) fall into the 'conditional urban' category where the urban status of the main character Deluwe is conditional on a number of factors such as patronage and guardianship by a man. *Inkedama* tells the story of a rural orphan boy who is taken into foster care in the city. It is the classic Cinderella story in which the orphan is made to sleep on the kitchen floor, is given cast-off clothes and generally mistreated by his foster mother who also has a son and daughter of her own. Despite the harsh circumstances of his life the orphan succeeds in life where his foster brother does not. His talent and intelligence win him a scholarship to study western medicine, his desire for this motivated by the fact that traditional medicine could not prevent his

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<sup>5</sup> The pass system and labour bureaux are discussed in detail in a later chapter which focuses on the film *My Country My Hat* (1983) which deals with these aspects of apartheid policy.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Isabel Balseiro's chapter, "Come Back, Africa: Black Claims on "White" Cities" in Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela (ed.) *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Tonie van der Merwe related that this was his first African language film and unfortunately neither he nor the Film Archives had a copy which could be viewed.

mother's death, and he goes on to become a successful doctor. His foster brother in the meantime has degenerated to the status of a petty criminal.

While Tomaselli's categories are useful they limit the thematic potentialities of the various films by suggesting rigid boundaries whereas the films in fact contain possibilities for greater permeability. Of the five films discussed below, Jamie Uys' *Dingaka* falls outside the qualifying category of the B-Scheme subsidy which was introduced nearly a decade after this film in 1972/3. And despite Peter Davis' analysis of the film it has been included here for three reasons. Firstly, it is significant as a rich source for the discussion of the urban/rural and tribal or traditional/modern binaries and secondly, it is a film by Jamie Uys. Finally, the film provides a convenient link between the general subsidy and the B-Scheme subsidy. Uys was one of the first and most instrumental filmmakers in petitioning the apartheid state to introduce a film subsidy. As such this film provides a rich vein of historical information about how African society was perceived, constructed and packaged through the medium of film during the 1960s. It also enables one to chart the degree of change, if any, in the representation of Africans and African society from the 1960s through to the late 1970s.

### **Tribal law versus "white" justice in Jamie Uys' *Dingaka* (1964)**

*Dingaka* is by no means the first film with African characters to introduce this binary between the urban and rural and traditional and modern. *Jim Comes to Joburg* (aka *African Jim*, 1949) and *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1952) were among the pre-1956 subsidy films to introduce this urban/rural and traditional/modern binary. Both of these early films focus on an African male, Jim and the Reverend Khumalo respectively, coming to the city for the first time. What happens to these characters, how they perceive and experience the urban is central to the plots of the two films. These films in one sense are the foundations on which some of the later films have been constructed especially as regards the protagonist and his/her experiences of the city.

Hailed by the South African media of the time as director Jamie Uys' greatest film, *Dingaka* (translated as *Witchdoctor*, 1964), is a problematic film in many ways, but also an example of some of the myths of South African society.<sup>8</sup> Among these myths is the belief that African society, traditions and culture are inimically alien and opposed to that of the Europeans' and as a result of these oppositions, African interests were best served if they remained geographically distant.

In broad sweeps<sup>9</sup>, the film details the trials and tribulations of Ntuku (Ken Gampu) who, in following tribal dictates, goes to the city after the murder of his little daughter. Like Jim and the Reverend Khumalo, Ntuku is conned in the city and is eventually imprisoned after killing Masaba the murderer. He is defended by the lawyer Davis (Stanley Baker) who has his own domestic problems with his wife (Juliet Prowse). Ntuku offers no assistance in his own defence and readily admits to killing Masaba according to the dictates of tribal law. In sentencing him, the white judge offers a sympathetic understanding of Ntuku's right to exact vengeance under tribal law, but acknowledges that this right conflicts with the laws of the country which demand that Ntuku be punished. Ntuku manages to escape from prison. He returns home and is followed by his lawyer Davis and his wife. Davis becomes a silent conspirator in Ntuku's killing of the witchdoctor Haqeba and agrees to provide further legal defence for Ntuku.

At one level, *Dingaka* can be viewed as an ethnographic film operating as entertainment (and as such could be argued to prefigure Uys' *The Gods Must Be Crazy* films). As ethnography, it offers a glimpse into 'traditional' African village life, customs and traditions and beliefs, except that it succeeds in mixing different African cultural forms and traditions<sup>10</sup> and thus essentialising it. In this sense it is entirely contrary to the notion of differentiating between African ethnicities as argued by apartheid ideologues and supporters of separate development. While Ntuku and his tribe and the village is

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<sup>8</sup> TAB MBP 2/2/881, Collage of newspaper headlines, eg.: "Most Important Motion Picture Ever Produced in South Africa", "Jamie behaal sy grootste triomf" (*Die Transvaaler*), "Dingaka – die duurste pronkstuk van ons eie rolprentbedryf" (*Die Huisgenoot*).

<sup>9</sup> Peter Davis provides a detailed analysis and the focus here is on the thematic concerns of this particular chapter.

<sup>10</sup> This mixing of different African cultural elements was pointed out by my research assistant Thandikile Nyembezi who was translating the films.



supposed to be Basotho, the women wear clothing that ranges from the tribal wear of the Pedi to the Venda. The shields that Ntuku and the other males carry are traditionally Zulu. Ntuku's wife and children sing a traditional Xhosa lullaby. This mixing of different cultural forms however also suggests that as far as white South Africans (and indeed white people in general as audiences) were concerned, all Africans were the same, an undifferentiated mass with no unique, differentiating qualities in dress, music, cultural symbols, etc.

This initial emphasis on the 'traditional' form of living in the village is later juxtaposed with the modernity of the city. Ntuku's obvious alienation in the city is as much due to the symbols of western modernity such as cars, as it is to the pace of modern urban living, a pace that is at variance with the calm routine and unchanging pace of village life. This, as well as the lawyer, Davis' astonishment at 'discovering' the village later in the film, suggest a form of living that has remained outside and isolated from the march of time that has moulded western civilisation. In this sense, the film renders African life and culture as being completely ahistorical. The white audience is taken right to the heart of the jungle when the lawyer and his wife follow Ntuku. That this is a different world is acknowledged by not only their wide-eyed stares at both the natural and tribal world they encounter, but also their final acknowledgement that Ntuku's right to follow tribal dictates must be granted. In claiming this right for Ntuku, the film supports the notion that the tribal African cannot be judged according to the laws and dictates of white society and white South Africa, that he is an entirely separate entity with his own set of laws.

Alternatively, it could also suggest a prescient role for Uys; that in mixing various cultural symbols, he was anticipating the later debates around cultural authenticity versus cultural invention that would characterise much of cultural anthropology.<sup>11</sup> To what extent was Uys inventing new cultural forms by mixing different elements and to what extent was he pandering to an international audience for the exotic? Given Uys' close

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<sup>11</sup> See for example, Jocelyn Linnekin, "Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity" in *American Anthropologist*, 93, 1991.

relationship with the state and his de facto role as apartheid ideologue as argued by Tomaselli, leads to a conclusion for the exotic rather than any progressive inter-mingling of cultural elements.

Uys has always claimed the status of an entertainer and is reported to have expressed amazement that his films could be considered to have a message.<sup>12</sup> But his close ties to the apartheid government and his support for state intervention in the film industry contradict these protestations. Furthermore, Uys produced *The Urgent Queue* (1958) for the Information Services as a government-sponsored project extolling the virtues of state housing for African people.<sup>13</sup> While one may argue that this relationship may have been purely for the sake of financial benefits, the use of his films by Afrikaner intellectuals and capital as argued by Tomaselli, once again provide a different image.

Furthermore, Uys' own views regarding the propaganda value of film are made patently clear in a document titled "Speelprente as Medium om die Buitelandse Gesindheid Teenoor die Republiek te Verbeeter".<sup>14</sup> The document commends the Department of Information for the excellent films that they produced, films which are very favourably comparable to those produced elsewhere in the world. It argues however, that while documentaries may provide the necessary facts and figures, it is only the feature film that is able to provide a more human face to a particular society. In this respect, the document cites the example of the United States which had been able to spread its cultural values most successfully through its "Shirley Temples and Charlie Chaplins". The feature film, it argues, is the best medium to influence overseas audiences to change their disposition towards the Republic.

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<sup>12</sup> Keyan Tomaselli, "The Cinema of Jamie Uys: From Bushveld to Bushment" in Botha & Blignaut, *Movies, Mavericks, Moguls*, p.192.

<sup>13</sup> Gary Baines, "Representing the Apartheid City: South African Cinema in the 1950s and Jamie Uys' *The Urgent Queue*" in Shiel, Mark & Tony Fitzmaurice, *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, Blackwell: Oxford, 2001, p. 187.

<sup>14</sup> TAB 78, Document from Jamie Uys Filmproduksies, undated and unaddressed, but presumably it was meant for the Department of Information especially since there was a response to this document from the Secretary for Information titled "Aantekening by Jamie Uys-Voorlegging" as discussed earlier in this thesis.

Viewed in light of this recommendation for the feature film, *Dingaka*, provides an altogether human face to apartheid ideology. The white lawyer, his wife and the judge are examples of white South Africans who understand and sympathise with the plight of the African who is lost and confused in the white world. Ntuku is imaged as a complete alien in the city. Draped in his tribal blanket, carrying his spear, unable to navigate the city streets, let alone the human and mechanical objects he encounters, attest to his being out of place. His lack of comprehension of white laws is further testimony to the 'natural' differences between white and African societies. This binary opposition between the rural and the urban or the traditional (tribal) and the modern represents Uys' subjective position as filmmaker. As one of the spokespersons for apartheid ideology, this representation of the modern / traditional (tribal) binary is consonant with state ideology which perceived Africans as completely 'different' and 'other', to the point where they had to live in their own ethnic geographical locations; the homelands. Uys' subjective position is also evident in the construction of the city as a place of evil. This construction has its roots in an Afrikaner identity which is inseparable from the land. The land is the idyllic with the city counterpoised as a place of evil.<sup>15</sup> This construction of the city as a cesspool reflects Uys' Afrikaner sense of not only the urban and the rural but also his own sense of the place of Africans within this country/city binary.

The irony that Kruger identifies relates to the "reversal of the classic modern paradigm where the city represents progress and the agency of citizens against the 'idiocy of rural life'".<sup>16</sup> For Afrikaners, the city with its millions of urban Africans was anything but the site of progress and civilisation. African presence in the cities of South Africa introduced a potential for hybridity that was seen to erode the basis of European modernity and civilisation and Afrikaner fears of this hybridity led to a two-fold approach. In the first approach, African presence in the urban centres had to be limited to the needs of labour and secondly, there was an idealisation of the rural as the idyllic. The contradictions of

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<sup>15</sup> See for example, Baines (2003) and Loren Kruger, "The Drama of Country and City: Tribalization, Urbanisation and Theatre under Apartheid", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23, 4, December 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Kruger, p. 565.

this conceptualisation of the rural and urban are glaringly obvious but appear irrelevant in the need to contain the 'swart gevaar'.<sup>17</sup>

Tomaselli argues that the theme of the film is the opposition between white and black justice and that the film seems to suggest that despite the inflexibility of the state it can take account of tribal law. He further points out that in the film "white justice is shown to rule, but black justice is portrayed as more humane."<sup>18</sup> This view ignores the particular in favour of the general in that while individuals within the apartheid justice system may have been sympathetic to the sensibilities and worldviews of others, the system itself was not. Viewed through a different lens than that used by Tomaselli, the judge's acknowledgement of tribal law is at best a patronizing gesture as Ntuku still has to serve the sentence meted out by the white court.

The film sets up and neatly executes the dichotomy of the civilised white and the uncivilized, superstitious tribal African. At a party attended by Davis and his wife, Davis is informed by the Native Commissioner that Haqeba has been under investigation but there is no proof against him as none of the tribe members will speak against him. Davis asks, 'what kind of hold does he have over them?' to which the Commissioner replies, "The usual, superstition." As the superstitious tribals, Ntuku and his fellow villagers have to be led to understand that the witchdoctor is nothing but a fraudulent human being claiming divine sanction. This task of exposing the witchdoctor falls to the white lawyer who thus becomes symbolic of the civilizing mission.

Peter Davis, in his analysis of the film goes further in reading Ntuku's murder of Haqeba, as symbolic of the broader political context of the 1960s in which the apartheid government was concerned with the establishment of puppet regimes in the homelands.<sup>19</sup> The lawyer Davis' urging of Ntuku to challenge Haqeba, who had threatened Davis and thus defied white authority, represents a challenge to traditional tribal leadership. His further promise to defend Ntuku, whom he addresses as 'chief', sets up a new leadership

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<sup>17</sup> Baines, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> Keyan Tomaselli, *Cinema of Apartheid*, p.203.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, p.67-68.

under the tutelage and patronage of a white man, a representative of white South African law and civilisation.

A movie poster for the film hails it as a “unique international film”.<sup>20</sup> In light of the above discussion, it would appear that the film was primarily aimed at firstly an international, and secondly a white local audience. Attempts were however made to bring it to ‘native’ audiences also, as indicated by a letter from Ster Films Ltd. to the Brakpan Town Clerk.<sup>21</sup> With the permission of the Bantu Affairs Department, Ster was acting as agent for the screening of *Dingaka* to the “African population in their townships”. The letter to the Brakpan Town Clerk was specifically requiring information regarding the facilities available either in the townships or on its periphery for the screening of the film.

While this film is manifestly about African tribal law as opposed to western justice, it is also about tradition and modernity in its broadest sense. Tradition in this film is African and encompasses not only a practical way of living but also a particular worldview and mindset as becomes evident in the tribal law Ntuku follows. Tradition as represented in this film is unchanging, or at best changing at a slow pace and needing a direct catalyst such as Ntuku and an indirect one such as the lawyer. Tradition is found in the jungle. Modernity on the other hand is found in the city which is the habitat of the sophisticated white people. Modernity is about constant change. Ntuku’s brief exposure to this modernity leads to a change in his thinking which leads eventually to his challenge to ‘tradition’.

Funding for the film came not only from the general subsidy, but according to *The Bulletin*, from overseas sources also.<sup>22</sup> It was a lavish production in terms of costume, extras, dramatic sequences, and of course stars such as Stanley Baker and Juliet Prowse. According to Murray, for ‘ethnic’ film to reach a wider audience, “key white people...

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<sup>20</sup> TAB MBP 2/2/881 *Dingaka* movie poster.

<sup>21</sup> TAB MBP 2/2/881, Letter from D.R. Bird, 16mm Department Manager at Ster Films Ltd. To Brakpan Town Clerk, 29 January 1965.

<sup>22</sup> TAB 78 *The Bulletin*, 25 October 1962, reported that Jamie Uys had been sourcing foreign funding to supplement his budget for *Dingaka* and that he had succeeded in raising R200 000 in New York.

around whom the story could be perceived to rotate” were essential to guarantee distribution and box-office success. Murray uses the ‘ethnic’ classification for films in a “black language and dealing exclusively with one or other black culture” according to categories assigned by the Department of Trade and Industries (DTI) which was administering the subsidy at this point.<sup>23</sup> The three categories of film the DTI recognised was English, Afrikaans and ethnic, the last category including also films in the Indian language Tamil.<sup>24</sup> Despite the use of English dialogues, *Dingaka* qualifies as an ‘ethnic’ film primarily because of the majority African cast.

### **African woman in the city – *uDeliwe* (1975)**

Apart from the “ethnic” label attached to *Dingaka* and its funding from the general subsidy scheme, it provides a degree of continuity between earlier films with African casts such as *Jim Comes to Jo’burg* and *Cry, The Beloved Country* mentioned earlier. The themes of these earlier films continue through to the B-Scheme films which arguably begin with *uDeliwe* wherein modernity and its impact on Africans is also an important theme. By the time Heyns Film Productions made *uDeliwe*, the B-scheme subsidy was in place and this is one of the earliest B-scheme films made for African audiences. The film follows the fortunes and misfortunes of a rural orphan girl, Deliwe who finds wealth and fame in the city and as quickly loses it.

As a cinematic adaptation of the radio serial, *uDeliwe*, starring Cynthia Shange in the title role is the story of a woman and her drive for success in a male dominated society. It is the story of a rural girl who achieves fame and success in the city, forgets her humble beginnings in her reach for the stars, irreparably scars herself and is forced by fate back to her humble origins. It is a moral tale of what befalls those who forget their station in life and over-reach their ambitions as Deliwe did in her search for fame, wealth and the easy life.

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<sup>23</sup> James Murray, “Ethnic Cinema” in Botha & Blignaut, *Movies, Mavericks, Moguls*, p.256.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

The Radio Bantu serial *uDeliwe* (Contented One) was broadcast in 24 episodes from March 1964. The popularity of the radio serial is attested to not only by the sequel *Khumbula Deliwe* (Remembering Deliwe) which followed in May of that same year, but also by the fact that the sequel ran to 59 episodes.<sup>25</sup> The film itself opens with a radio announcer, KM Masinga, who introduces himself and the story he is about to narrate. This opening sequence makes reference not only to the radio origins of the film, but also provides an interesting point of continuity between the two media, film and radio. A logical assumption would be to understand this point in terms of film, or rather, the moving visual image, succeeding radio. However, in South Africa and with particular reference to African mass audiences, film was not in fact a natural successor to radio. Economics did not permit film to succeed radio as the majority of African people, living in the homelands and rural areas found radio more affordable and more accessible than attending film shows when and where these were shown.

Both radio and film, with radio acquiring a pre-eminence due to its affordability and accessibility, were two forms of mass media that were most usefully employed by the state towards the programme of social control of the urban African and the promotion of the myth of separate nations. As Nixon argues, radio proved most amenable and cost effective for multi-linguistic broadcasting, important in apartheid ideology because language was one of the most important 'marker(s) of those irrefutable national differences.'<sup>26</sup> Regular broadcasts by the SABC to urban centres such as Orlando began as early as 1952 with the introduction of the rediffusion service.<sup>27</sup> The express aim of these broadcasts was to provide the "native with entertainment in his own home, and in this way to contribute towards the prevention of crime; and secondly, to contribute towards the education of the Bantu."<sup>28</sup> The content of these broadcasts was mainly music and predominantly in the following hierarchy; "traditional Bantu music; modern light

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<sup>25</sup> Liz Gunner, "Contemporary Zulu Radio Drama" p. 227.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Charles, Hamm, "The Constant Companion of Man: Separate Development, Radio Bantu and Music", in *Popular Music*, 10, 2, May 1991, p.149, <http://www.jstor.org>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.150.

Bantu music; choral music by Bantu composers, a surprisingly large number of whom have already produced work of a high standard; and European music.”<sup>29</sup>

The significance of radio as a means of disseminating ideology was clearly articulated in an annual SABC report for 1960, the crucial year in which Piet Meyer, a broederbond ideologue, became chairman of the SABC Board of Governors. “It is obvious that broadcasting, the constant companion of man in modern times in all his activities, moulds his intellect and his way of life.... Broadcasting can render a service to the whole community by expressing the unique South African way of life, both in its unity and great diversity.”<sup>30</sup> The introduction of FM transmission in 1966, gave both political and economic impetus to the growing use of radio. In its Annual Report for that year, the SABC stated, “it was the approval and loan facilities of the State that enabled the SABC to tackle the huge FM scheme by which good radio reception became possible for the entire population, and by which the technical equipment could be created to provide the Bantu population groups with radio services.”<sup>31</sup>

Radio Bantu, as a collectivity began broadcasting as of 1 January 1962 and by the end of the decade had reached a broadcast spectrum of seven different African languages from various regional centres. Radio Bantu’s political role was clearly articulated by SABC administrators who linked its programme policy to “national policy, based on the recognition of the diversity of language groups.”<sup>32</sup> This was consonant with the broader apartheid policy which conceived of different groups in South Africa as ethnically and nationally separate from each other, each with its own language. Radio Bantu was clearly meant to foster and “encourage language consciousness among each of the Bantu peoples, to encourage national consciousness.”<sup>33</sup> By the late 1970s, Radio Bantu had a listenership of over five million and all ten homeland regions were covered by the establishment of Radio Swazi and Radio Ndebele. Media policy advocating total

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.153.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p.157.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Liz Gunner, “Wrestling with the Present, Beckoning to the Past: Contemporary Zulu Radio Drama”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 2, June 2000, p, 224.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Ibid.



coverage of not only the homeland areas, but also select urban centres such as Johannesburg with its great concentration of African labourers was a complete success until the erosion of this monopoly from the late 1970s onwards. Competition to Radio Bantu came not only from radio services of neighbouring countries, but paradoxically also from newly established 'independent' radio services in the nominally independent homelands.<sup>34</sup>

Radio was also important for the broadcast of dramas and dramatic plays. Liz Gunner, in her analysis of the Zulu radio drama *uNokhwezi*, suggests that it could have been "conceived in response to a request by 'the government of the time' for more 'musicals and folk tales'".<sup>35</sup> Given this, Gunner further comments that these radio dramas represented a more "innocuous" form of entertainment compared to "freedom songs, township jazz with dangerous lyrics or overtly resistance writing".<sup>36</sup>

But contrary to the majority of the films analysed in this thesis, radio drama in the African languages was first and foremost African in conception and expression in that Africans were both the authors, producers and actors of radio drama. Radio thus provided a creative outlet for a group of Africans to explore their creativity, albeit within the ideological parameters of apartheid, that film simply did not and could not provide. One reason for this could be the commercial nature of film. The feature film industry was privately owned and controlled by white people, especially the 'black' film industry where it would be expected that Africans would have a degree of creative outlet while radio was from its inception state-controlled.

Radio was important in one other aspect as Gunner discusses, and this was in the creation of a community of listeners that were linked through the dramas they listened to on the radio. Firstly, film did not have quite the same reach as radio did across both urban and rural centres. With the introduction of the FM transmission as mentioned earlier, radio

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<sup>34</sup> See also Tomaselli et al, 1989 for a fuller history of broadcasting in South Africa.

<sup>35</sup> Liz Gunner, "Supping with the Devil: Radio Zulu Drama under Apartheid: The Case of Alexius Buthelezi", *Social Identities*, 11, 2, March 2005, p. 162.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

became accessible to poorer households in both urban and rural areas. Thus many more people were able to listen to radio thereby providing an enthusiastic and devoted listenership to radio dramas.<sup>37</sup> And secondly, one could argue that radio was far more successful in the creation of a community of listeners because the stories they were listening to were drawn from their own traditions and cultures without the mediation of white commercial interests as was the case with the B-films.

As a radio serial or radio soap opera *uDeliwe* and the other Zulu dramas for radio that Gunner examines, have a long history in broadcast media, particularly radio. Radio soap opera has been an entertainment staple since the early years of radio broadcasting in 1930s United States. The soap opera has its origin in what has been identified as the 'domestic novel' or alternatively, 'women's novel'.<sup>38</sup> This, together with women as the earliest target audience has given rise to the conception of soap operas as essentially dramas for women. And women in fact appeared to be the subject matter of the early soap operas with the drama of the narrative focusing on the lives of women within their domestic spheres first and later as women began to enter the labour force, on their professional lives also. *uDeliwe* is manifestly a woman's story told through a patriarchal lens in which Deliwe is represented as lacking agency. Her presence in urban South Africa is conditional upon the patronage of first the priest, then her boyfriend George. Though she is allowed a limited degree of success in her professional life as a model, this is heavily circumscribed by 'fate' in the form of the car accident. This act of 'fate' returns the natural order of things where Deliwe is once again returned to the domestic sphere where she belongs.

Narratively structured around the theme of social mobility, the film offers a glimpse of Deliwe's life of poverty with her ailing mother, as a contrast to her eventual rise to wealth and fame in the city of Johannesburg as a model. From the outset, Deliwe is depicted as somehow different. Her individuality, based perhaps on her good looks, charming rural naiveté bordering often on the foolish, sets her apart from those around

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<sup>37</sup> Liz Gunner, "Contemporary Zulu Radio Drama", p. 227.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Kilborn (1992) and Carol Traynor Williams, "*It's Time for my Story*": Soap Opera Sources, Structure and Response, Westport: Praeger, 1992.

her. As a child she lives with a sickly, blind mother and in circumstances of relative poverty to their neighbours in the village. The mother is seen in tattered clothes before she dies. The film shows groups of children in school uniform marching off to school while Deliwe watches them from her home. With what emotions she looks on we do not know because we are not offered a view of her face. With this the audience is led to believe that Deliwe has been forced to sacrifice her education and indeed her childhood in the service of a sickly and blind mother utterly dependent on her. Her adult prosperity is then doubly remarkable given her very humble and difficult beginnings.

Her singularity, as perhaps favoured by fate, is further emphasized when she arrives in the city and there is no one to meet her. She is assisted by a policeman (African) who takes her to the police station where a priest overhears her destitute plight and offers her a place in his home. In a city of millions, where thousands arrive to find a better life, Deliwe is the recipient of the generosity of a kindly priest and his wife whose home becomes hers in exchange for chores around the house. The film is emphatic that Deliwe's position in the priest's home is not one of a drudge. She is allowed access to his well-stocked library which would not have been out of place in a more stately home than that of a priest. She is given instruction by the priest and at tea-table assumes the role of a loving daughter, pouring him tea and milk, adding sugar and stirring while his wife looks on in amiable silence. These sequences provide a contrast for later events and the point the film seems to make is that in pursuing a more glamorous life and thus destroying her life, Deliwe is forsaking what was a good life in the home of good people.

The 'good life' for Deliwe is not the placid harmony of the priest's home and she is soon seduced away by the seeming glamour of a model's life, of course within the ideological parameters of race separation. While in a shebeen with new-found friends, Deliwe is approached by talent scouts. Deliwe initially seems reluctant to accept the offer as by this time she has met George, a respectable and relatively successful man (judging by his appearance) but we do not know what type of work he does, and seems to be waiting for him to arrive. His failure to keep his appointment with Deliwe seems to be the cause for her accepting the modelling offer. Deliwe and one of her new friends, Joyce, are signed

to a contract for fashion/catalogue modeling and Deliwe soon becomes a local celebrity. Both she and Joyce enter a beauty competition and Deliwe is crowned Miss Johannesburg. Her success as a fashion model leads to a movie part. However, with George's help, her uncle, who she has finally met in the city, tries to dissuade her from this and while he is trying to take her away from the location they have an accident and Deliwe is seriously injured with facial scars. George collects her from the hospital and she is taken to the priest's house. Deliwe is thus forced back by circumstances to a more 'respectable' life.

The central theme of social mobility is closely tied to one of 'no easy road to success' in life. Deliwe trades responsible work and respectable associations for the glamour of the easy life of the fashion model and the unsavoury characters which appear to be on the periphery of this life. She trades on her natural good looks to achieve success. Her 'easy' path to success is paralleled with the similar ease with which the trio of con-artists set themselves up in business. This is contrasted with the hard-working and respectable priest and the couple who own the shebeen/club.

Harriet Gavshon touches on what she calls "gaps, or structuring absences" within many of the films that were made for black audiences.<sup>39</sup> Some of these include, absence of political issues, poverty and importantly, given the South African context, a remarkable absence of white people "either as characters or extras. Even street scenes, for example, hardly ever show any white pedestrians."<sup>40</sup> There are no white characters or extras in *uDeliwe* and white people in general make a brief intrusion in the street sequence when Deliwe accompanies the priest from the police station. There are remarkably no white officers at the station either.

The absence of white people in the film, Gavshon argues, supports the cinematic construction (operative in most commercial films) of the freedom of the individual to negotiate his/her own existence, emphasizing the agency of the individual. The presence

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<sup>39</sup> Harriet Gavshon, "Levels of Intervention in Films made for African Audiences in South Africa", in *Critical Arts*, 2, 4, 1983, p.16.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

of whites in this manufactured black reality would “fracture the filmic reality and introduce a historical locus or context”<sup>41</sup> where African people did not have the political right or freedom to negotiate the terms and conditions of their lives.

Allied to this, the absence of political issues as a compelling force in the lives of the characters attests further to a lack of correspondence between the filmic world and the context of African lives in mid-1970s South Africa. The crises of Deliwe’s life are of her making and a part of the plot devices of narrative cinema with a clear beginning, middle and end. Deliwe’s naiveté often times borders on the foolish as when she accepts a date with a young man from the church. She gets into a car with an unknown man, is out late with him and when he makes sexual advances, she is affronted and runs away, getting lost in an unknown urban setting in the late hours of the night. Similarly, in all that happens to her she is depicted as a woman who lacks agency and is instead led by others. Her good fortune is less an outcome of her individual striving and more a result of the vagaries of fortune. As a result of this she is therefore not deserving of what she has achieved and has to lose it; she has not worked for it. And in a clear parallel, the con-artists are finally apprehended by the police thus putting an effective end to their ‘easy’ life. They too had come by their prosperity without hard work.

The city/country dichotomy is a continuation of representations of the city as a place of vice, the decay of society and the erosion of traditional African values and ways of life.<sup>42</sup> This degenerative impact of the city is especially ruinous for a single woman such as Deliwe. Both George and the priest are thus effective safeguards for her as a single woman. Deliwe’s essential corruption takes place after her move to the city. The urban/rural division as it operates within this film conforms to the ideological construction of the city as the ‘unnatural’ habitat of the African person. In the rural village of her birth, Deliwe had been cared for by neighbours, she seems to have been the ward of the entire community as we see them feasting before her departure. Her presence as an alien in the city is immediately apparent as she is jostled at the station and arrives

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> Gary Baines, “Representing the Apartheid City: South African Cinema in the 1950s and Jamie Uys’ *The Urgent Queue*”, p.186.

friendless. The intervention of the policeman at this point and the priest at the police station later, attest to the authority of the institutions they represent; law and order and the church.

Like *Deliwe*, the African women in this film are stereotypical representations; the wife, the neighbourhood gossips, the thug's moll and of course the beauty queens *Deliwe* and her friend *Joyce*. All are without agency and these representations operate within strict patriarchal boundaries. *Deliwe* is ultimately rescued by the respectable *George* and both her earthly and spiritual salvation is inextricably linked to her ties to *George* and the priest. *Sis Getty* who runs the shebeen is the exception with a degree of agency. She is a businesswoman who owns and operates her own business and perhaps because of this she is less servile towards her husband. Compared to *Sis Getty*, the priest's wife is represented as a model of what a priest's wife should be; serene, quiet, always with a piece of needlework in hand, living up to the maxim about idle hands.

Representations of African family and family life as evident in this film present contradictions. Firstly, the lack of a clear nuclear family operating within a broader network of familial relations can be read as representative of a reality where many African households operated without the presence of a father figure. Migrant labour dispossessed many children of a father, mother or both parental figures. In *uDeliwe*, it is *Deliwe* and her mother living in stark poverty. And secondly, the absence of a father figure and a broader network of relations is a plot device and a part of the narrative convention of the world of this particular film. For *Deliwe's* life to progress as it did, it was essential that she remain without ties in the city or elsewhere and therefore without the necessary support structures.

According to the *SA Film Weekly*, *uDeliwe* was screened in urban theatres for a cycle of three re-runs and the producers were optimistic of reaching a million viewers.<sup>43</sup> It was also screened at the Pretoria Film Festival in 1977.<sup>44</sup> After its successful run in the city

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<sup>43</sup> *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 40, 12 December 1975, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 33, 2 September, 1977, p. 6.

centres, Heyns was planning to circulate it in the homelands and other rural areas on the mobile circuit which it operated.<sup>45</sup> Many years later the SABC bought all the B-Scheme films produced by Heyns and *uDeliwe* was broadcast in March 2004.<sup>46</sup>

This was one of the first films directed by an African director, Simon Sabela who plays the part of the priest in the film. Compared to many of the B-Scheme films, films made by people like Simon Sabela and Matthews Monika (who directed *The Music Makers*) are vastly superior, both technically and in the narrative logic, continuity and flow of the plot. Importantly, also, these films project a degree of cultural 'authenticity'<sup>47</sup> or perhaps an integrity to visual representations of culture that films made by whites simply do not. According to Thys Heyns of Heyns Films "We have had the experience that the moment we involve a white scriptwriter we seem to miss the link somehow or other."<sup>48</sup> Implicit in this statement is the assertion that Africans had autonomy as regards scripts. This however was simply not the case as Sabela claimed in the 1978 biographical sketch provided by Deane.<sup>49</sup> The scripts were chosen for him and he had "to revise them, and bring them into touch with reality."<sup>50</sup>

Reality for Sabela was an integral aspect of the films he directed. As he explains, "I want to make films in the vernacular, so the grannies can understand and learn from them. If we portray actual life, if we bring reality before people, they recognise what must be preserved – the traditions that are beautiful – and what has to be changed."<sup>51</sup> What had to be changed was decidedly not the social and political status of African people within apartheid South Africa as the films themselves testify. Sabela's filmic reality was strictly within the parameters of the dictates of apartheid. These dictates permitted African

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Vol. 14, No. 40, 12 December 1975. p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Thys Heyns and Paul Raleigh.

<sup>47</sup> One uses the term 'cultural authenticity' guardedly knowing the anthropological minefield associated with it. But what is meant here is simply that being African, individuals such as Sabela would have had a greater understanding and knowledge of African cultures and would therefore have used cultural symbols based on this insider knowledge and understanding in ways that would be different from those used by non-African filmmakers.

<sup>48</sup> Keyan Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, p.67.

<sup>49</sup> D. S. Deane, *Black South Africans: A Who's Who, 57 Profiles of Natal's Leading Blacks*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1978, pp. 160-2.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 162.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

culture and tradition to be addressed through the medium of film, but not the political, social or economic status of Africans. Implicit in Sabela's statement is also the aim of changing those traditions which conflicted with European enlightened 'modernity' such as the 'superstitions' spoken about in *Dingaka*. While witchdoctors, magic and fantasy are not predominant motifs in Sabela's films, their presence in many other films are significant markers of this need for preserving 'the traditions that are beautiful' while changing others.

Whether Heyns Films productions were successful because of the involvement of someone like Sabela or whether it was due to the outlay of financial capital on the part of the production company, what remains indelibly true for these films is a higher degree of production values than many other B-Scheme films. The Heyns films viewed and discussed in this thesis, whether directed by Sabela (which was the case in most of the films) or not such as with *Inkunzi* discussed below, display a comparatively high degree of cinematic standards both in terms of technical and narrative quality.

### **An Honourable Man – *Inkunzi* (1976)**

As obvious as *uDeliwe* is in the construction of feminine gendered identities, so too is Heyns next film under review. Despite Thys Heyns claim to limit 'black' film production to four per year, during both 1975 and 1976, the company had produced six films for each year. One of those was *Inkunzi*, (translated as a man of stature) which was one of the very few B-Scheme films not directed by Simon Sabela. Directed by Sam Stretch Williams, the film stars Victor Mashibini and Executive Producers were once again Johan van Zyl Alberts and Thys Heyns with Bettie Alberts as script consultant. The film is centred on the theme of social mobility as in *uDeliwe*, but this time its central focus is Hargreaves, a resident of the Transkei 'homeland' who comes to South Africa as a migrant worker in the mines.

The film *Inkunzi* unfolds against the backdrop of the broader context of homeland development and policy. Hargreaves (Mashibini) is a gentle, honourable man who leaves



his family in the homeland to find work on the mines. He is hardworking and well liked by the majority of his fellow workers as well as the mine foreman played by Marius Weyers. There is an accident in the mine and Hargreaves leads some of the men to the rescue of those injured during the rock-fall. He is also injured and while convalescing he is approached by the owner of the mine store, Mr Levy, to sell some of the clothing merchandise in the compound. Hargreaves is a great success as a salesman and when he confesses to Levy that when his contract on the mine expires he would like to open his own store in the Transkei, Levy suggests that for the remaining two weeks of his convalescence, Hargreaves should work in the store so that Levy can teach him all aspects of the business. When Hargreaves asks how much it will cost for Levy to teach him, the store owner replies "one day when the Transkei gets its independence, you'll be a big man and maybe we can do a little import/export business". This exchange underscores the policy of separate development which was officially translated as the removal of African groups to various ethnic homelands.<sup>52</sup>

But everything is not rosy and the film's dramatic tension comes in the form of a fellow mineworker whose enmity Hargreaves has earned for seemingly no apparent reason. During a scuffle on the compound one day, Hargreaves spies a medallion around the man's neck, the same medallion which belonged to a long lost brother. Hargreaves suspects the thug of having murdered his brother and when the thug is dismissed after the rock fall, this enmity is hardened to hatred. Hargreaves and his brother-in-law who was also injured during the mine accident leave the mine and set up their own business in the Transkei in the form of a general store. Finance came from Hargreaves' cash reward for his heroism in the mine, his savings and a loan from the Transkei Development Corporation which also financed the film.<sup>53</sup> The store is essentially a family business as the film shows scenes of Hargreaves' wife and children helping not only to clean out the place but later also serving customers.

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<sup>52</sup> See Chapter three for a more detailed discussion of the homeland policy.

<sup>53</sup> Tomaselli, K, "Ideology and Cultural Production in South African Cinema", PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983, p. 454.

The thug together with an accomplice kidnap Hargreaves daughter Zoleka. While the accomplice goes to call Hargreaves, the thug ties Zoleka to a bush and waits. When Hargreaves arrives he is challenged to a stick fight while his legs are tied. Meanwhile the brother-in-law together with Zoleka's suitor has alerted the police who are hot on the trail of the two kidnapers. While the police give chase to the accomplice who has been sent on an errand, a knife is slipped to Hargreaves with which he cuts the bonds on his legs and thus unencumbered he is able to engage in the stick fight with the thug and is able to best him. The police arrive to arrest him and the film ends with a successful Hargreaves who has not only proven his worth in the business world, but also in his own culture by winning the stick-fight.

There are several aspects to the story that deserve closer analysis not only in terms of the stereotypes the film entrenches but also in terms of the ideology of the Bantustan as a separate country entirely. The obvious stereotype is that of the Jewish store owner. Levy is cast with a heavy Eastern European accent thus foregrounding his status as an immigrant and an outsider. Marcia Leveson's point that, historically, Jews have always been considered outsiders despite the degree of integration through marriages with both English- and Afrikaans-speakers, is amply borne out by the fact that Levy and Hargreaves find a ready amity. Analysing the Jewish presence in South African literature, Leveson contends that the cultural imagination of South African writers prior to 1948 especially, cast the Jew as a "potent symbol of the other" second only to blacks.<sup>54</sup> The character of Levy remains historically true to the kinds of occupations many early Jewish immigrants engaged in. These occupations ranged from selling liquor to migrant miners, running gambling houses to 'smousing' and running concession stores on or near mine compounds as Levy does. The Jew as trader is thus historically rooted.<sup>55</sup>

The exchange between Levy and Hargreaves also clearly indicates the apartheid ideology of the Bantustan as a completely separate geopolitical entity to South Africa. Both Levy and Hargreave thus share a similar status, that of the immigrant outsider. Levy's

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<sup>54</sup> Marcia Leveson, *People of the Book: Images of the Jew in South African English Fiction 1880-1992*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001, p. xi.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16

readiness to help Hargreaves, though motivated by personal gain in the long term, strengthens their bond as outsiders and the film's comment seems to be that both will be tolerated and even welcomed to a degree within South Africa because they have something to contribute to its success. That they are successful as a consequence is of secondary importance. What is important though is that while Levy is allowed to be a successful businessman in South Africa, after all he is a white man even if he is Jewish and an immigrant, Hargreaves can only realise his success within the boundaries of his 'homeland', the Transkei.

Hargreaves is a perfectly contented man because he realises that his home is the Transkei and his ambition thus is to open his business there rather than claim a space and resources in 'white' South Africa. He is however not complacent and dreams of a better future for his children outside the boundaries of the 'homeland'. Hargreaves comments to his future son-in-law, who had come to collect him at the station upon his return, that one day his children will live in Johannesburg. Ironically, it is the young man who will be his son-in-law, who expresses pride in the 'homeland'. His response to Hargreaves is "yes, Johannesburg is a lovely place, but one day our homeland will be as lovely." While he drives Hargreaves home, he points out all the obvious signs of development and the viewer follows the panning camera over the neat rows of box houses, the emerging industries belching smoke in the air and wide expanses of scrubland. The irony evident in this exchange is the role reversal with the younger man expressing a more politically conservative attitude in his acceptance of and pride in the homeland, while the older man expresses an ambition for his children to live beyond the confining boundaries of ethnic separatism.

This role reversal is at variance with the broader context in which it was the younger generation, school children and youth, who were at the vanguard of political activism and rebellion. This is most clearly evident with the Soweto uprising of 1976 (the same year in which this film was produced). That young people were at the vanguard of the political unrest of this time is borne out by the reported ages of those killed, detained or hospitalised. In 1976, 44 percent of the 1200 youths whose information was obtained in

this manner were aged between 13 to 16 years, 49 percent were between 17 to 23 years old, and only 7 percent were older than 24. In the Cape, of the 97 people who died as a result of the unrest, half were aged between 11 and 20 years. Reporting on deaths during this time, the Institute of Race Relations established that a vast majority were under 26 years old.<sup>56</sup> These figures have led to the assumption that the Soweto riots of 1976-77 was also an instance of generational conflict in which African youth, tired with the accommodating attitude of their elders decided to take matters into their own hands. *Inkunzi* counters this image of the African youth as activist by having the young man declare a more politically accommodating and conservative attitude as compared to the older man.

The propaganda intent is also patently obvious in the manner in which Hargreaves and his brother-in-law's sleeping quarters are depicted. Gone are the cold, bleak bunkers of most mine compounds as seen for example in *Come Back, Africa* (1959). Instead we have spacious two-roomed quarters with two single beds, spotless white linen, and bland but decorative pictures on the walls, reminiscent more of spartan but comfortable school dormitories rather than mine compounds for migrant workers. Similarly, scenes of leisure such as traditional dancing by one group of workers while another group plays football all convey the idea that claims of mine life being brutal for the migrant workers were nothing but subversive, anti-South African propaganda, part of the 'total onslaught'.

Despite his desire for his children to live in Johannesburg, Hargreaves is the ideal African man, in both the white and African world and cultures. His courage and masculinity has been proven not only on the mine where he is credited with heroic deeds in saving the lives of two men, but also within his own ethnic world and culture when he emerges victorious in the stick fight with the thug. The film opens with stills of sticks locked in battle as the opening credits roll. This creates in the viewer the anticipation that the subject matter of the film will be about a test of strength and indeed Hargreaves goes through a number of tests of strength before emerging successful and victorious. Stick fights traditionally are tests of strength and leadership and Hargreaves proves himself in

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<sup>56</sup> Kane-Berman, p.7.

the end. The importance of culture is further emphasised at a traditional ceremony before Hargreaves departure. Replete with bare-breasted singing and dancing women, men in traditional gear, a traditional praise poem, this ceremony is the occasion for Hargreaves to note that culture and tradition are important and that these should remain unchanged and unsullied, a sentiment that echoes much of the apartheid rhetoric about maintaining the purity of African ethnic and cultural traditions.

While the intended audience of the film is undoubtedly African, it is filled with enough of the kind of propaganda that was used to sell apartheid with international audiences as well. The most obvious propaganda is that of the industrious and honest African who has all the opportunities available to help him succeed in life. Hargreaves' antithesis is the thug who not only bullies the other mine workers and threatens Hargreaves success, but also turns out to have been the murderer of his brother as well. Crime does not pay and the criminal is always apprehended by a justice system that is at the service of Africans such as Hargreaves.

### **The corrupting influences of western modernity – *Setipana* (1979)**

Heyns' 1979 production *Setipana* (translated as something that tips things over), also known by the title *The Blanket Story* is once again a story of success and social mobility. Directed by Sabela, with Bettie Alberts as script consultant once more, the story moves between the urban and the rural as it charts the professional growth of its protagonist, Jacob, which is contrasted with his moral decay. As the eldest son of the chief it is Jacob's duty to follow in his father's footsteps and inherit the leadership role. However due to his intelligence and the intervention of the local white priest Jacob is given the opportunity to further his education in the city. He attends university where he qualifies as a medical doctor. His continued success in his field earns him the reward of continued studies overseas, once more through the intervention of the priest.

While the absence of white people in many of these films is remarkable, as discussed earlier in *uDeliwe*, where they do have a presence such as both this film and in *Inkunzi*,

they are represented as agents of positive change. Jacobs's intellectual abilities and talents are recognised by the white priest and he prevails on Jacob's father to send the boy away to be educated. The priest's intervention in the custom and tradition of leadership passing from father to first-born son, results in Jacob following a more modern occupation such as medical doctor. Similarly in *Inkunzi*, it is Levy's intervention that sets Hargreaves on the path to entrepreneurship and ultimate economic independence. If Levy had not given Hargreaves the opportunity to sell merchandise then taught him the rudiments of buying, selling, pricing, etc. then Hargreaves would not have learnt of his aptitude for and interest in commercial enterprise. Both Levy and the priest are thus directly responsible for the success of Hargreaves and Jacob respectively.

As with Deliwe for example, city life corrupts Jacob and he is a regular patron of night clubs. Furthermore, despite having chosen a wife from his village, he courts Diana in the city and succeeds in impregnating her as well as his wife back in the village. The film depicts his relationship with both women as a very loving and considerate one though the contrast in leisure time he spends with the two women is marked and again underscores the essential differences between urban and rural. With Diana, Jacob is the regular patron of night clubs and music halls whereas with his wife Palesa he is out and about in the countryside, taking long walks with her and dozing on the banks of the nearby stream. Both this film and *Inkunzi* employ cinematic devices such as lighting and music to further underscore differences between city and country. Scenes of the country are typically framed in soft light and include gently panning shots of large vistas accompanied by soft music. This is contrasted with scenes of the city framed in bright light and robust music.

Once again, the countryside is the idyllic as opposed to the morally bankrupt city where Jacob is led astray to commit adultery and live a life of leisure and pleasure. The urban/rural dichotomy is further underscored by the forms of dress each woman depicts. Diana is always dressed in dress and hat or trouser and hat whereas Palesa is more conservatively attired in more sober dresses and skirts, emphasising the virtue of the one as opposed to the seductive provocativeness of the other.

The moral judgement of the film is that Jacob eventually pays the price for his dissolute lifestyle. His wife and unborn second child are killed in a fire which destroys the new house and practice he was building in the village. These deaths are the result of the intrigues of his father, the chief's second wife who wanted to remove Jacob so that her own son Tau could become the next chief. Calling on the assistance of one of the local witchdoctors<sup>57</sup>, the unfinished house is set on fire while a pregnant Palesa and her eldest son are inside. The fire burns quickly, killing Palesa. Jacob, who was walking nearby runs to the house and despite the danger, manages to save his son. This reprieve seems to suggest that redemption is possible for Jacob. The film also does not grant reprieve to the villains and Jacob's step mother and the witchdoctor are killed in similar fashion by the good sangoma of the village.

The tension between urban and rural is further emphasised in the contrast between modern western medicine represented by Jacob and traditional medicine represented by the witchdoctor summoned by his stepmother. When Jacob's father is taken seriously ill, Palesa summons her husband to tend his father. Modern medicine succeeds in relieving the chief's distress whereas the attempts of the witchdoctor were fruitless and in vain. This exacerbates the tension between Jacob and his stepmother who under the influence of the witchdoctor remains suspicious of everything that is modern and sees Jacob as a threat to the traditional way of life. This threat is given greater force when Jacob decides to open his practice in the village rather than live in the city, hence the necessity to remove him.

Palesa is the virtuous wife who weans Jacob away not only from Diana but what she represents as well, urban moral decay and a licentious lifestyle. In deciding to practice his craft in the village rather than the city, Jacob has decided to choose a morally virtuous life away from the influence of the city lights and life. He also chooses his wife rather than his mistress leaving her and his unborn child in the care of a friend. As with Hargreaves, Jacob's salvation and success are not in 'white' South Africa but rather in his

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<sup>57</sup> The distinction between a sangoma and witchdoctor as I was informed at a colloquim organised by the Centre for African languages of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, is that the former is a healer and therefore someone good and virtuous whereas the latter is evil.

ethnic homeland. In the end, Jacob is seen to be wrapped in the traditional blanket of the Sesotho and thus assumes his rightful place as the leader of the community. Jacob in all respects is the ‘thing that tips things over’, in other words, his character is the catalyst that brings about change to his community in the form of modernity as exemplified by western medicine.

### **The rural pristine and the corrupt urban – *Ukhozi* (No date)**

The last film considered in this chapter is another Heyns Films production, *Ukhozi* (Eagle, no date)<sup>58</sup>. This film falls into Tomaselli’s ‘conditional urban’ category and it could as easily have been included in the chapter that follows dealing with the moral ‘crime does not pay’. It has been included here at the end of this chapter as a compromise and a link between the two chapters. It will become evident as the analysis progresses that while it fits easily into the ‘crime does not pay’ genre, it nonetheless displays the same urban/rural dichotomy that has informed the films discussed above. The film is thematically centred on ‘crime does not pay’, that ill-gotten gains do not ensure peace and security and that good will always triumph over evil. The main focus for the purposes of this chapter however, is the explicit construction of the urban as a location of African crime and moral decay juxtaposed against the goodness and virtue of the rural.

Fukile and Fuzile (both played by Victor Mashibini who plays the role of Hargreaves in *Inkunzi* discussed above) are twin brothers who epitomise good and evil, virtue and degeneracy as residents of the rural and the urban respectively. Fukile is the headmaster of a rural school, the Eagle’s Nest. He is a kind, considerate, soft-spoken man who has dedicated his life to teaching and working within his community. He is always neatly attired in tie and suit and has a suitably sombre and dignified bearing that goes with the office of the school principal. He keeps school in a low concrete building and everything about both his person and his environment is neat and respectable.

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<sup>58</sup> Unlike the other Heyns Films this film has no director credits or clear production/release date, though there are other credits such as actors, camera, sound and of course produced by Heyns Films.



Fuzile on the other hand is a man about town, the leader of a gang of criminals who engage in robberies, vehicle thefts and other misdemeanours. Like his brother he is also always neatly and respectably dressed but unlike the sober Fukile, Fuzile's clothes are flashy and display expensive tastes. He always wears a medallion around his neck, drives fast cars and commands the respect of his gang members, one of whom is Fukile's young son. During a police shootout at an attempted robbery, the young man is shot and mortally wounded. Fuzile, together with his nephew's girlfriend flee with him in the car which breaks down on a lonely stretch of road. Fuzile hails a passing car with a couple and their young daughter who is a nurse. Fuzile commandeers the couple's car, kidnaps the nurse and drives off with his wounded nephew and his girlfriend. He finds a doctor who treats the nephew but to no avail and he eventually dies. The police in the meanwhile have visited Fuzile's home where they find a photograph of his brother Fukile outside the Eagle's Nest school. They rush off to Eagle's Nest, correctly guessing that Fuzile would eventually find his way there which he does with the kidnapped nurse in tow. On seeing the police there, Fuzile rushes off into the surrounding mountains with the nurse as hostage. The police and his brother give chase. Shots are exchanged and Fuzile shoots Fukile in the leg. The nurse meanwhile manages to escape and Fuzile continues further up the mountains. He disturbs an eagle's nest which brings the eagle screeching to the attack. In warding off the eagle's claws, Fuzile loses his grip on the ledge and falls to his death, the money on him flying in the wind.

Of the films analysed in this chapter, this film is most explicit in linking the urban/rural binary to the dichotomy between good and evil. At the most obvious level, this is done through the location of characters with the good brother living in a rural community while the criminal brother lives in the city. The opening sequences of the film establish the urban as literal fleshpots with scantily clad men and women cavorting and flirting on the beach to a soundtrack of disco music. Fuzile arrives at the beach where his nephew is lying sunbathing with his girlfriend. They briefly discuss their next job which is the robbery of a factory warehouse and Fuzile walks off leaving the young couple.

Juxtaposed with this representation of the urban is the introductory sequence to the rural at a later point in the film. Sweeping choral music accompanies aerial shots of hills and valleys with an eagle soaring high in the sky. These sweeping shots are followed by medium shots which draw closer to the signboard identifying the Eagle's Nest Primary School where the viewer is introduced to the headmaster Fukile. These constructions of the urban and rural respectively are maintained throughout the film through devices such as the kind of camera work described here as well as background music. The urban scenes are all accompanied by fast music while the rural scenes are accompanied by a soundtrack that is either choral music or the sounds of the natural environment.

As with films such as *Setipana*, *Inkunzi* and *uDeliwe*, the representation of the rural in this film is of a place of idyll where the rhythm and pace of life closely follows that of the surrounding natural environment. The arrival of Fuzile (as representative of the urban) is both a disruption and an aberration of the natural order and it is nature, in the form of the eagle, which asserts itself to restore balance and order. Fuzile's death is a triumph of good over evil. Fukile as the symbol of good survives, limping off to his school amid running children and the sweeping choral music. The eagle soars in the sky and the film ends with panoramic shots of the hills and valleys.

## **Conclusion**

While all five films analysed in this chapter are very different in terms of the story and plot, they nonetheless exhibit certain commonalities which necessitates a closer examination. Firstly, four of the five films are thematically structured around social mobility which is explicitly linked to the oppositional binary of the urban and rural. Social mobility and economic uplift are further explicitly linked to hard work, thrift and honesty. Ill-gotten gains such as those of Fuzile in *Ukhozi* neither last nor ensure lasting peace and security as honest gains do for Hargreaves in *Inkunzi*. Nor can social and economic mobility come at the expense of disrupting the social order and hierarchy as *Deliwe* attempts to do as a single woman without male patronage.

The exception to this is *Dingaka*, where the central theme is the binary of modern versus tribal. Urban modernity is problematised to such a degree that Ntuku is clearly out of place even as a sojourner. His innocence is compromised more with his move to the city than it is with the murder he commits. Ntuku's act of violent murder is framed within the discourse of tribal law wherein a life for a life is both legally and morally sanctioned.

Four of the five films echo earlier films such as *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* (1949) and *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1952) which deal with an African protagonist in the city.<sup>59</sup> As with these two earlier films, both Ntuku and Deliwe experience the harsh realities of city life. Ntuku especially, in a direct echo of the earlier films where Jim is robbed as soon as he arrives in Johannesburg and the Reverend Kumalo is conned in the city, is similarly conned by a man dressed as a priest. Underlying this is the belief that Africans experience the city, and the urban modernity it represents, as an alien space, far removed from African culture and traditions.

This dichotomy between the urban/rural and modern/traditional is not as simple as it may seem however and the complexity of how the modern impacts on the traditional is most clearly evident in both *Inkunzi* and *Setipana*. While both films end with the respective protagonist going back to the rural homeland, they do so as radically changed men. Hargreaves in *Inkunzi* has acquired a measure of business acumen through the mediation of Levy which allows him to establish his own business in the Transkei. This is consistent with the homeland policy of the apartheid government whose aim was to develop the homelands sufficiently in order to contain African migration to South Africa. Similarly, Joseph in *Setipana*, returns to his rural home as a fully qualified medical doctor with all the accoutrements of modern western medical science. Modernity is thus transported from the urban to the rural by both Hargreaves and Joseph.

According to Bickford-Smith, both earlier films make the point that the African presence in the city is driven by necessity. The protagonists of all four films move to the city

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<sup>59</sup> See Vivian Bickford-Smith, "How Urban South African Life was Represented in Film and Films Consumed in South African Cities in the 1950s", *Journal of The Interdisciplinary Crossroads*, 3, 2, August 2006.

centre out of necessity.<sup>60</sup> Ntuku is driven by the need to fulfil tribal dictates and locate his enemy. Deliwe is driven to seek her only living relative, while both Hargreaves and Jacob leave their rural lives in search of better prospects for themselves and their families. While Ntuku, Hargreaves and Jacob are clearly sojourners in the city, Deliwe however has arrived to make a life for herself and thus represents a more permanent African presence in the urban centre. This permanence however is severely circumscribed, most notably by the idea that a single African woman can only exist in the urban under the patronage of a man.

While all five films have undoubtedly been conceived as entertainment, this entertainment is loaded with ideological implications which echo, support and reinforce many apartheid policies of the time, the most significant being the homeland policy and the ideology of separate development which underpinned it.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 438.

## Chapter Five

### **‘Crime doesn’t pay’: Moralising through the B-Scheme**

This chapter focuses on films that can generally be identified as the action/adventure/thriller genre. The films share many commonalities such as Hollywood borrowings, the urban locations and representations of African criminality. It is however, on the ‘message’ of the films that this chapter focuses most intensively and that is the moral that ‘crime doesn’t pay.’ Whether the story involves a murder, gang warfare, competitive sport or gambling and regardless of their setting either in urban townships or homeland capitals, the denouement is always a victory for good over the forces of evil and darkness.

With the exception of the cowboy film *Umbango*, most of the films considered in this chapter continue to develop the specious argument of the films discussed in an earlier chapter. According to this thesis the urban centres are unnatural to the African and lead to moral decay. As Isabel Balseiro argues for an earlier film like *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1952), the city, and in particular, Johannesburg, is imaged as a “cesspool eager to swallow up unknowing, detribalized “natives” .”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, many B-Scheme films represent urban Africans as easy prey for the temptations of modern, urban life. Among these temptations as represented in the films analysed in this chapter, are the opportunities for quick wealth, inevitably gained through some form of criminality. Hence, the films here moralise on the issue that “crime doesn’t pay”. Implicit in this conception of how Africans experience the urban, is the idea that Africans are unable to deal effectively with the challenges and temptations of urban life. That urban living is so far removed from the traditional African experience that when Africans are faced with it, they present a strong inclination to succumb in the most negative manner, through recourse to criminal behaviour.

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<sup>1</sup> Isabel Balseiro, “Black Claims on “White” Cities”, in Balseiro and Masilela (ed.), *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003, p. 100.

This conception of African urban experiences fails to consider the broader structural conditions Africans face in the cities. Balseiro's point about the failure of *Cry, The Beloved Country* to examine the forces of urban apartheid and their impact on how Africans experienced urban life is worth bearing in mind in relation to these B-Scheme films under consideration. She contrasts the representation of urban experiences in *Cry*, to urban representations in *Come Back, Africa* (1959) wherein urban Africans are provided an opportunity to explain the emergence of the tsotsi. Basing her analysis on Can Temba's explanation of the tsotsi Marumu, she draws a strong parallel between urban apartheid and a police state wherein every aspect of African life was repressively regulated and controlled.<sup>2</sup> The tsotsis as the archetypal criminals of urban apartheid South Africa, emerge not as simple criminals, but instead as outlaws who have chosen through their criminality, to defy the repressive laws of apartheid. The opportunities that a repressive apartheid state would not afford to urban Africans, were forcefully appropriated by the tsotsis and other criminals.

B-Scheme films in keeping with an ostensibly apolitical agenda, fail to examine the structural and repressive forces acting on urban Africans. These films create a simplistic binary between Africans who are law-abiding citizens and Africans who are criminals. According to these films, law-abiding Africans succeed in attaining a degree of material prosperity and success while those Africans who resort to crime always come to a bad end. In doing so, these films create the fiction of a normalised society in which good is recognised and rewarded and bad is punished.

Apart from encouraging criminality, urbanisation of Africans also led to the destruction of traditional African lifestyles and the erosion of African cultures through exposure to European modernity most especially in the form of Hollywood films. But while the apartheid government could not better control and legislate for the urban presence of Africans it could provide an antidote to this process of destruction and erosion of African ethnic lifestyles and cultures. B-Scheme films were thus meant to operate on two

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 102-3.

associated levels; provide a focus for ethnic identification and preach the moral that 'crime doesn't pay.'

Moralising the leisure time of African audiences has its genesis in the efforts of the American missionary Reverend Ray Phillips.<sup>3</sup> The imperative to moralise leisure time appears to have continued and filtered through the years to the B-films produced for African audiences, though not without some interruptions which for a while demonised film for inciting criminality and violence among Africans. The increase in crime during the 1940s was attributed to the bad influence of films, particularly the western, on urban African youth. Even the political disturbances of the late 1940s and early 1950s<sup>4</sup> were ultimately blamed on the negative influence of film.<sup>5</sup> This demonising of film was not unique to South Africa as James Burns shows for the case of Rhodesia where a special federal committee was appointed to investigate the impact of film, and especially the western, on African audiences.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these attempts to demonise film, the belief that film could address social issues such as crime, and even to a certain extent prevent it, appears to have been firmly entrenched, at least in the minds of some of the filmmakers examined in this chapter. For ex-school teacher-cum-film producer Steve Hand, the objective was quite clear: produce films with a clear and unambiguous message that crime does not pay and that good always triumphs. Hand started producing films in the late 1970s when he started Tugela Films in 1978 with his friend Tonie van der Merwe. After buying van der Merwe out he started Jaguar Films which was focused more on distribution. "Ja, and then Jaguar also started making movies and distribution, so I had about three to four movies a year and it

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Two which provides a more detailed discussion of the work of Phillips in promoting film both as entertainment as well as a method of suppressing and diverting potential African criminality which itself was a result of the ills of modernity that Africans were exposed to in the urban centres where they migrated to work.

<sup>4</sup> See William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, ch. 6 for an overview of the key pieces of legislation enacted by the apartheid government after its election in 1948 and the wave of protest actions which followed some of this legislation.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Beittel, "Mapantsula: Cinema, Crime and Politics on the Witwatersrand", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1, 4, December 1990, p.754.

<sup>6</sup> James Burns, "John Wayne on the Zambezi: Cinema, Empire and the American Western in British Central Africa", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35, 1, 2002, p.105.

took a lot of us hey, I promise, because most of the time I was away from home, shooting in the field and getting all the actors and train(ing) them. We had about seventeen actors that we trained alone. My wife and me, we trained them how to be actors and they enjoyed it tremendously.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Hand, his films had two objectives; to impart the moral message that crime does not pay and simultaneously uplift African people. “That’s the main theme, that crime does not pay, at the end of the story. But we also tried to uplift the people showing them staying in nice houses, driving nice cars.”<sup>8</sup> It is clear from his statements that Hand believed his films were contributing to the social and economic uplift of African people. “It doesn’t help to go on in life and be a crook where you will be caught at the end of the story. And I think that was to uplift the people, to show them. Look at our crime rate now. Since the black film industry disappeared, our crime rate (has) tripled at this stage.”<sup>9</sup> Clearly, Hand’s conviction echoes that of Reverend Phillips, in that ‘good, wholesome’ film entertainment proved an effective deterrent to crime by diverting the criminal tendencies and energies of African people. Furthermore, for Hand, the filmic representations of Africans living in ‘nice’ homes and driving ‘nice’ cars was meant to create aspirations among African people to strive for similar material comforts and the moral of the films was that this could only be achieved through hard work and not through criminality.

But what Hand considered ‘good, wholesome’ entertainment is a far cry from what the Reverend Philips was providing as entertainment. Where Philips decried the use of violence and criminality in the films he screened to Africans by taking great pains to edit the ‘unsavoury’ parts, the B-Scheme films analysed here glorify crime, criminality and violence in order to preach the deleterious effects of these on African people. Indeed Hand is not the only filmmaker to espouse this view as will become evident at later points. The idea that film could be used to moralise on the crime rate is spoken of by actors such as Peter Thage and the filmmaker Robert van de Coolwijk who acted in and

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Steve Hand.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



directed *The Gold Cup* (1990) respectively and which will be discussed later in the chapter. But Hand was most explicit in making the linkage between his films, and in fact the general body of B-Scheme films, and crime and criminality among African people.

### **The “Ethnic Hero” – *Joe Bullet* (1974)**

Crime, criminality, violence and the binary between good and evil is the central theme of the film *Joe Bullet*. While this film was not a B-Scheme film (the B-Scheme according to producer and writer, Tonie van der Merwe, was introduced after this film), it was specifically produced for the African market. It is an action film with a black hero. Joe Bullet (Gampu) is called in to train the Eagles Football Club (EFC) after the murder of the star player and coach, Lucas, by the Vultures Gang. It is not clear whether the Vultures Gang is a rival football club or whether the Lopez character who at the end is revealed as the mastermind crook, has a personal grudge against the owner of EFC or is simply motivated by the greed that is associated with sports gambling. The latter two motivations for criminality are more likely as there is no rival football club. The film however has no comment to make on what motivates criminality.

Joe as the coach has to prepare the team to win an important tournament; as a detective he has to discover who killed Lucas and who is trying to sabotage the team; as a protector and hero he has to bring the guilty to justice. He succeeds in all his objectives despite capture by the crooks and a hair-raising final encounter on top of a building site with the mastermind criminal.

He is a loner, has no love-interest and seems to be guided by a more honourable calling (to be hero to all). The singer in the club is clearly in love with him, has probably had a relationship with him, but he eludes her clutches. Joe Bullet is the prototypical mythical hero. He clearly has a formidable reputation as even the thug hired to assassinate him refuses the job initially until he is offered more money, and of course Joe beats and kills him. But we have no idea what this reputation is based on as we come to know Joe only in his present context, the context of the film. Joe clearly has a formidable reputation

based on earlier exploits but the film makes no mention of his history and how he came to have this reputation. This seems to support the notion that the filmic reality of this film is an enclosed, artificially constructed one that is at variance with the physical world.

Joe's hero status is underscored in a variety of ways: firstly, the song:

"He's the man to fight evil

He's the man to fight crime

He's the man that money can't buy

.....

You'll hear the fire in his voice

He rights the wrongs, he keeps it that way

Beware if he's looking for you.."

His physical presence (tall, baritone voice, etc.) all support the hero myth. He is always well presented and turned out, and he is clearly in great physical shape. In the tradition of Hollywood movies, Joe Bullet is a larger than life hero who is able to evade his enemies and through his ingenuity is able to escape very sticky situations, for example when both he and the club boss' wife are tied up and a snake is left loose. Joe gets them out of it. This film perhaps best executes the Department of Information's directive to provide African audiences with their own superheroes, portrayed against their "ethnic background". JB's hero status is confirmed throughout the film, not only in through the confidence shown him by the club boss when he reassures his wife that "Joe will get them" but also through the threat he poses for the criminals. If the measure of a hero lies in the amount of enemies he has among criminals and the extent to which they would go to eliminate him, then JB clearly ranks among the best heroes because the criminals expend vast amounts of time, energy and money to have him eliminated.

As van der Merwe's first foray into film production (he was in construction blasting before), Joe Bullet is the outcome of his perceptions of what African audiences wanted to see.

... I had 200 black (sic) people working for me and I thought there is a market for black people, so I made *Joe Bullet*.....It was very popular, *Joe Bullet*..... And then every Saturday night we showed a movie in the compound in Johannesburg for the black workers, the whole compound and everybody came there. And they liked westerns and they liked action and I saw them watching the movies, sit(ing) with their radios next to them. They couldn't follow the dialogue, most of them can't speak English, so then I got the idea, why don't I make a movie in their own language. That's when I made the first black, the first African language movie called *Ngomopho* with Ken Gampu.<sup>10</sup>

Van der Merwe's comments hint at two crucial characteristics of the 'black' film industry. Firstly, it hints at the opportunism that guided most individuals who decided to produce films for an African mass audience. And secondly, it points to what has been suggested elsewhere in this paper, that white South Africans perceived themselves to be in a position where they knew better what Africans wanted than Africans knew themselves. According to Ronnie Isaacs, he made "pictures about the way blacks wanna be, not the way they are... You have to give the blacks what they want. They want a picture to take them away from the humdrum of their daily existence. I've shot about twenty films, not one of them depicting the African way of life."<sup>11</sup> Isaacs does not clarify what he means by 'an African way of life' but based on some of the films he directed, wrote and produced such as *Strikeback* (1986, discussed later in this chapter) and others, the filmic world of the Africans in his films was centred on women, wine and dancing as in the comedies he produced and directed (*Biza Izintombi*, 1981 and the *Botsotso* trio of films, 1979, 1980, 1982) or it was focused on sport such as boxing (*Johnny Tough*, 1983) or the martial arts (*The Black Ninja*, 1990). Whatever the genre of films though, the African world of Isaacs' films is essentially male, middle-class, glamorous and materially successful and upwardly mobile.

Isaacs' comment about "giv(ing) the blacks what they want" echoes similar sentiments expressed by Hollywood executives who were accused of exploiting African Americans

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Tonie van der Merwe. Neither van der Merwe nor the South African National Film, Video and Sound Archives has a copy of *Ngomopho*. James Murray (1992) and others cite *Ngomopho* as the film that kick-started the 'black' film industry.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Gus Silber, "Dream Factory" in Blignaut & Botha, *Movies, Moguls, Mavericks*, p.267-8. Ronnie Isaacs was one of the most prolific B-scheme filmmakers who specialised in the action-movie genre.

through the spate of blaxploitation films produced in the 1970s. The term blaxploitation was used to categorise films for African American audiences with a Black cast and produced either by an African American such as Melvin van Peebles who directed *Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss Song* (1971) or later, by Hollywood studios. The key characteristics of these films according to William Lyne were, "low production values, cops and criminals action, funky soundtracks and big doses of sex that emphasize macho stud constructions of black masculinity."<sup>12</sup> Many blaxploitation films such as *Shaft* (1971, 2000) feature a policeman or detective hero in the mould of James Bond, as indeed does *Joe Bullet*.

The similarities between the blaxploitation films and many of the films analysed in this chapter are numerous and obvious and it would not be inaccurate to conclude that white South African filmmakers were influenced in large measure by this Hollywood phenomenon of the 1970s, though none of those interviewed have admitted as much. These similarities are at the level of production values, cinematic styles, stories and plots and even the structural conditions of production, with whites controlling the construction of black images, for black consumption. Having said this though, one has to point out that African Americans had some measure of agency in the production and construction of black images in that there were opportunities (however limited) to access the means of film production. Africans in South Africa had no similar agency and one cannot talk of a South African equivalent of a Melvin van Peebles during this era.

In terms of similarities in characterisations, plot and story, the character of Joe Bullet is arguably the South African John Shaft right down to the physical resemblance between the actor Ken Gampu and Samuel L. Jackson who plays the role of John Shaft in the 2000 version of the film. Both men are tall, with well-conditioned, imposing physiques, both sport a fashionable baldness, both are always impeccably dressed, most often in blazers and turtle-neck sweaters and both characters exude a mystique which attracts any number of attractive women. Both characters are strong individualists who follow their own

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<sup>12</sup> William Lyne, "No Accident: From Black Power to Black Box Office", *African American Review*, 34, 1, 2000, p. 44.

instincts and intuitions and rather than being of the pack, they lead the pack. The similarities between the film *Joe Bullet* and *Shaft* extend even to the opening song on the soundtrack. The lyrics from the film *Joe Bullet*, quoted above, echo the lyrics of this song: “who’s the man who’ll risk his neck for his brother, Shaft”. And as with JB the character, so too with John Shaft, the lyrics are a paean to a god among men. *Joe Bullet* is portrayed as a very suave hero in the mould of James Bond (even down to the initials JB) as is the case with many blaxploitation heroes.

*Joe Bullet* is an action film set in the world of soccer. This, according to van der Merwe, was designed to attract large African audiences to the film. His assessment of what would appeal to African audiences was not without basis as soccer has a devoted and passionate following among Africans especially, in South Africa. Indeed, so strong is the soccer support base among Africans in general and African men in particular, that as early as the 1930s, it was the “*sport*” for the “African working-class”.<sup>13</sup> Soccer, for the urbanised African men, replaced more traditional, yet competitively physical activities such as stick-fighting, tribal dancing and herding and hunting which were the predominant physical activities in the rural villages. Alegi argues that African men and youth coming into the urban centres as migrant workers were easily able to transfer the physicality, finesse and competitiveness of these more traditional activities to soccer. In this sense, the game provided a sense of continuity with traditional male pursuits.<sup>14</sup>

Soccer is big business locally, and globally. Corporate sponsorship of the game in South Africa for 2002 was R640 million. This is a staggering sum when one considers that nearly fifty years prior to this there were only approximately 600 teams with nearly 10 000 players.<sup>15</sup> As Alegi shows, the growth rate and popularity of the sport has been phenomenal in South Africa. But as big business, the sport is also open to criminal infiltration as is evident in this film. Because soccer is big business, a successful team is highly sought after and all means, fair and foul are often used in acquiring a successful

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in Peter Alegi, *Laduma! : Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa*, Scottsville, Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004, p. 21, italics in original.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

team or sabotaging it. The criminal in *Joe Bullet* wants to destroy the Eagles Football Club and uses every means possible, even murdering the star player, to achieve this end.

The film follows the pattern of Hollywood movies in the construction of both the hero and the criminal. Following the James Bond and other Hollywood action film conventions, the criminal mastermind is a shadowy figure who until the end, is a disembodied voice and smoking cigar. He maintains his authority through ruthless cruelty, intolerant of any failure on the part of his minions. As with Hollywood action heroes, JB is a man capable of honour and integrity as well as ruthless action when necessary. In the mould of heroes serving a larger cause, he spurns intimate affections and remains a solitary figure at the service of those who need him most.

The only significant women are the club boss' wife and the nightclub singer, neither of whom has any real screen presence or time. The wife is significant only in that she provides the target for the kidnapping which sets up the final encounter between Joe and the criminal. The singer is significant as a possible seductress of Joe who shows his true measure by evading her clutches. Through her pining we are led to believe that there is a romantic history between Joe and her. He is thus not immune to feminine charms, but is instead a virile man who, in the interests of serving all of humanity, will not be tied to one woman.

The absence of white people in the film was detrimental to its distribution in the United States where according to van der Merwe, the distributors liked the product but would not buy it because "it was a bit unrealistic because there were no whites involved."<sup>16</sup> Despite the importance of the sport as a background, there are in fact very few scenes depicting soccer, and this perhaps is testimony to van der Merwe's statement that given cost factors, these 'black' films had to be shot in a relatively short period of time with as little cost given over to extras as possible.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.270.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with van der Merwe. He claims to have perfected a system where he could shoot a movie in a week. "Lucky thing there's no union for blacks. We try to limit extras to a maximum of 50, and we pay

Tonie van der Merwe is widely credited as being instrumental in successfully lobbying the state for a separate subsidy for African language films.<sup>18</sup> Although this film did not qualify for the subsidy it nonetheless appears to have been a test case in a number of ways. The BBK<sup>19</sup> and Satbel launched a project known as Cine-Afrika in 1974. One of the aims of this project appears to have been audience research among Africans.<sup>20</sup> Cine-Afrika introduced an essay competition after screenings of *Joe Bullet* in the homeland towns. The competition was aimed at school children aged 18-24 years old and while Lombaard does not provide specifics about the conditions or rules of the essay competition, he does provide interesting data about the entries and the information distilled there from.

There were twenty-seven entries received (though there is no figure for the amount of children targeted) and all twenty-seven respondents identified the film as a suspense drama of the James Bond sort. All the entrants had difficulties with understanding the English dialogues. Five of the respondents clearly identified *Joe Bullet* as a hero while three identified him as a villain. A total of fifteen respondents identified him as the protagonist but could neither empathise with him nor categorise him as either hero or villain. Fourteen of the respondents said that soccer was the central theme while four thought the romance between JB and the club singer was the central theme. Three of the respondents condemned the violence in the film and twenty-one of them had difficulty understanding the film as a coherent whole, seeing the scenes rather as isolated incidents.<sup>21</sup> The most important conclusion drawn from this research study, as indicated by Lombaard, was the fact that Africans do not appear to understand cinematic language.

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them about R30 a day in the rural areas. You pay them too much and they don't want to do their work again. They want to be fillum stars." Quoted in Gus Silber, p.271-72.

<sup>18</sup> Most filmmakers that have been interviewed acknowledge van der Merwe's contribution to what was known as the 'Black film industry' and he was in fact chairman of what appears to have been a loosely structured organization known as the Black Film Industry, while Steve Hand was the secretary.

Unfortunately, Hand, in a fit of pique (and perhaps something else) destroyed all papers, documents and minutes of meetings pertaining to this body after the Department of Home Affairs started investigating irregularities and charged some people with corruption.

<sup>19</sup> The Bantoe Beleggings Korporasie.

<sup>20</sup> David H. J. Lombard, "Die Ontwikkeling van 'n Rolprentbedryf vir die Bantoe" unpublished MA thesis, UNISA, 1976, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

The research also found that Africans often walk out of the screening venues during the course of the screening and it was concluded that Africans were not able to sit still for longer than an hour.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it seems to have informed subsequent films aimed at African audiences. It is probable that many of the B-Scheme films are of poor cinematic and aesthetic quality not only because of the cost factors and a lack of integrity on the part of the filmmakers concerned but also due to the belief that African audiences would find it easier to comprehend and enjoy simplistic and unsophisticated films. Furthermore, given that 70% of audiences (as ascertained by this study)<sup>22</sup> were children, it therefore could not have been imperative to produce films of a reasonably high quality and standards. While this falls within the realm of conjecture its plausibility is borne out by the remarkable number of films that are simply sub-standard.

### **The criminal businessman – *iKati Elimnyama* (1975)**

The central theme of 'crime doesn't pay' receives a more nuanced treatment in the film *iKati Elimnyama* (The Black Cat). Produced by Heyns Film, directed by and starring Simon Sabela, *iKati* is a suspense thriller about a successful African businessman with a criminal past. It was the third Heyns production for the "black film market" and was hailed as a "police thriller full of action and drama."<sup>23</sup> From the opening shot of a car on the highway, the opening sequences establish Lefty's (Sabela) success in a number of ways; through his ownership of a car, wearing a suit and collecting his wife and daughter who have been having tea with a friend in her garden. This is a successful African middle class family with strong family values; Lefty kisses his wife's cheek when they get in the house, the dutiful daughter goes to make tea and throughout the film the wife is constantly with one or other piece of sewing in her hand. Their home-life is the epitome of cosy domesticity and middle-class comfort.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> *SA Film Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 40, 12 December 1975, p. 2.



The cosy domesticity is shattered one evening when a dead black cat is thrown through the window of the living room. This incident is followed by a series of occurrences which establish a conspiracy against Lefty; a stranger knocks into his car and leaves a calling card with the picture of a black cat, he receives mail with a similar card and the factotum at his furniture depot/factory tells him that the resident black cat has died. Lefty's reaction to all this is rather unbelievably nonchalant, even when it becomes evident that his wife has been raped. Lefty's comment to his family, that it was probably the act of some local pranksters is less an attempt at reassurance than a means to explain his own lack of concern. This initial nonchalance is taken to laughable extremes when a second black cat lands in their living room at a later point in the film. This time however the audience has no idea how it landed there.

Lefty's attempts to discover the mystery behind the black cat is parodied by the local police detectives who conform to every stereotype; smoking and drinking coffee, cleaning a gun with feet on the desk, except they do not appear as efficient as they should be, instead plodding along and stumbling onto clues by sheer luck rather than through inductive and deductive powers of reasoning. However, despite their bumbling attempts, they get to the bottom of the mystery and apprehend the criminals thus claiming a victory for law and order.

In view of the stereotypical casting of inept policemen, the producer's claim for the film as a "police thriller" with a setting "not necessarily limited to Soweto or South Africa" but one which could be in any other location such as New York or Los Angeles, is grandiose at best.<sup>24</sup> Soweto, and its environs, is clearly not New York or LA. The cinematic fiction created in the representation of Soweto as a peaceful suburb disturbed only by criminal violence, is completely at variance with the reality of township life in the mid-1970s. Townships in general, and Soweto especially were the politically volatile areas which witnessed political resistance such as the Soweto uprising which took place a

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

year after this film. None of the political discontent or ferment that would have preceded the 1976 uprising is evident in the few township scenes the film includes.

The kidnapping of Lefty's daughter Mary sets the scene for the final encounter not only between Lefty's friend Joe who appears to have been behind the black cat incidents, but ultimately also between Lefty and the police. As with the previous incidents that occur to him and his family, Lefty does not report Mary's kidnapping to the police. Instead through his own deductions he confronts Joe, beats him into revealing where Mary is being held and sets out to rescue her himself. Joe and his co-conspirators are apprehended by the police after a dramatic car chase on the highway. Police suspicions lead to Lefty's attempt to sneak off in the night. But he is apprehended and killed in front of his home. The film seems to offer two contiguous plots; Joe's attempts to extort money from Lefty by kidnapping his daughter and Lefty's own criminal past. The link between these two plots is tenuous and the film ends with more questions than answers.

Produced in the same year as *uDeliwe*, *iKati* lacks the narrative cohesion and continuity which is a strong feature of the former film. But unlike some of the other films under review in later chapters, Heyns Films appears to have spared little cost as becomes evident in the car chase where two cars are trashed. The editing is slick and the pace relatively fast. Heyns also had the assistance and cooperation of the West Rand Administration, the Johannesburg and Sandton Traffic Departments and the South African Police. White policemen form part of the contingent which sets up roadblocks to catch the fleeing Joe and his companions. Apart from these policemen, white people are entirely absent from this film.

On a general and most obvious level, *iKati* is simply an action thriller with an all-African cast, harmless entertainment for the African masses or, "simple family entertainment", as Sabela would have it.<sup>25</sup> As with most of the Heyns Film productions, Bettie Albert is credited as script consultant. She was the wife of Heyns Films chairman and associate of Secretary of Information Eschel Rhoodie, Johan van Zyl Alberts. Both Thys Heyns and

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007 p. 131.

Paul Raleigh claim they had no idea that Johan van Zyl Alberts was linked to the Department of Information or that he had bought a share of Heyns Film with money from the Department. "Van Zyl Alberts came in and bought 50% of the company and he said he wanted to finance black films. It is only in 1978 that it appeared that he was a representative of the Department of Information.....we thought that Mr Alberts was a genius and a financial wizard."<sup>26</sup>

Given this close link with the apartheid state, evident also in the cooperation received from the various law enforcement departments mentioned above, a closer analysis of the film reveals an encoded ideology that perpetuates the dominant views about African people. Lefty is a successful African businessman with a criminal past. It is possible that his criminal past provided the necessary capital to set him up as a successful businessman. This would suggest that while African people may achieve a modicum of success within the constraints of an apartheid capitalist society, they seem to be only able to achieve this through criminality. Or alternatively, that no matter how successful an African man can become he is never fully able to divest himself of a criminality which, according to this film, is deemed to be inherent to the African character. Similarly, his friend Joe is also cast as both an entrepreneur who has his own sidewalk business but is also a criminal.

The other significant characters Smoky, Lefty's general factotum at the factory, and the two detectives are buffoons. Smoky is introduced carrying a tea tray into Lefty's office. He stumbles and lands with his face in the spilled tea. Later when Lefty is attacked by masked men, Smoky is huddled behind boxes emerging only when Lefty is left hoisted on a forklift. Despite this lack of courage Lefty decides to leave him as protector of his wife and daughter while he and Joe follow up a lead at the Red Lantern Club. Needless to say, Smoky bungles this also as he is tricked into letting the thugs enter the house and trash it. The two detectives, though buffoons succeed in apprehending both Joe and Lefty. Their success however is due less to their abilities as detectives and is more an outcome of luck and coincidence. These comic characters provide the necessary foil for

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Thys Heyns and Paul Raleigh.

both Lefty and Joe who are calculating and intelligent men, capable of violence and ruthlessness.

Both Lefty's wife and daughter are marginal characters that remain undeveloped. The wife is the epitome of domestic bliss - always with a piece of sewing in her hand and ready to do Lefty's bidding. The daughter Mary is an only child who is an obedient and loving daughter and Lefty's only weakness, hence her kidnapping. Neither woman is considered competent enough to look after themselves and is left in the care of a man, even if it is the clownish Smoky. More importantly, the film strongly suggests that both women experienced rape but makes no explicit reference to it by having any of the characters addressing this issue. This underscores their marginality in the film and by extension it would suggest a general marginality of women in the broader society. It would suggest that the violence women experience is a common-place and not worth commenting on, certainly not in this film. As Maingard points out, the broader narrative is far more important, and this violence merely a minor event therein.<sup>27</sup>

The film does not suggest that Joe and his cohorts perpetrate violence against women in general. Lefty's fashion-conscious secretary for example, despite her short and sexy attire does not experience any violence. Thus his wife and daughter are specifically targeted because of their relationship to him. This however has no significance for Lefty as he is unrepentant and apparently unconcerned enough to not even offer a modicum of comfort to either daughter or wife.

Maingard's brief analysis draws a parallel between this film and the blaxploitation films of the 1970s.<sup>28</sup> This thesis would argue that the similarity with blaxploitation films applies less to this film than it does to *Joe Bullet* analysed above. A primary reason for this is that unlike Lefty, the hero of *Joe Bullet* and other blaxploitation films are unblemished and without an unsavoury past. Lefty is a more complex anti-hero who has tried hard to leave his criminal past behind, but without success as it eventually catches

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<sup>27</sup> Jacqueline Maingard, p.132.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 130.

up with him. The fact that Lefty is a married man and a father who has established a comfortable, middle-class life for himself and his family is another contrast with blaxploitation heroes who are often unmarried, suave, sophisticated and charming men without any strong emotional ties to women.

### **The triumph of the virtuous – *The Advocate* (1978)**

Returning to more serious issues in the 1978 film *The Advocate*, Heyns Films once again displays a degree of commitment to not only film aesthetics but also to the broader apartheid ideology and rhetoric. Whereas Hargreaves in *Inkunzi* could not be a successful African in white South Africa, Mr Simon Gumede, played by Simon Sabela who once again directs for Heyns, is a successful African in the urban context. He is a lawyer and therefore an upholder of 'white' justice, therefore he has to be successful. He is also a happily married man with two grown boys who are both obedient and well-adjusted. The family arrangement of the Gumedes is strictly patriarchal; the husband comes home from work and is presented with the comforts of life by his wife, but unlike the other Sabela film, *Ikati*, Mrs Gumede played by Abigail Khubeka is no shrinking violet and is instead represented as a strong woman. This is evident when an intruder tries to attack her in her home and she fights back. It is also evident in the role of investigator which she and her children assume to help out her husband. She is one of the most positive representations of women seen in many of these films.

Gumede is approached by the Attorney-General to prosecute Lucas, a crime boss who is apprehended following a robbery in which the thieves were caught by the police. Lucas' defence lawyer is Mr Bernstein, played by Dale Cutts. The Attorney-General, in making Gumede the offer to prosecute, evinces a tremendous amount of confidence in his ability to successfully prosecute Lucas. He expresses the belief that only Gumede can win this case. Simon Gumede gives serious and considerable thought to this offer as we see him sitting pensively back at his office or walking in thought at home that night. Images of him in serious thought are contrasted with the carefree domesticity of his two sons playing a card game while his wife looks on with indulgence. These scenes represent the

serious nature of the case and its impact on his family life as borne out by the later threats from Lucas. These include not only the attempt to burgle the Gumede home and harm Mrs Gumede, but also getting Gumede's secretary to eavesdrop and report all the actions of the attorney in the preparation of his case. Despite the threats to his family Gumede accepts the case and becoming aware of the traitor in his office uses her instead to feed false information.

The representation of the crime boss is a direct borrowing from Hollywood depictions of the mafia don. The stock-in-trade features include the big house with the pool and a rather rotund, cigar smoking figure able to command those around him. While Hollywood representations may have been based on some aspect of reality, this could hardly be the case in this film where in the late 1970s it would have been virtually impossible for any African to have owned vast, landscaped properties even within the bounds of the townships in the urban centres.

As with many of the 'black' films there are no significant white characters in this film. Despite the Attorney-General's confidence in his legal abilities, Gumede's success is not ascribed to any mediation or patronage by a white person unlike Heyns' 1979 production *Setipana*, discussed in an earlier chapter, wherein the success of the protagonist, Jacob, is assured through the direct intervention of a white priest. Gumede is already a successful lawyer with plush offices and a comfortable middle class lifestyle when we are introduced to him in the film. The film does not offer any context for Simon Gumede's success but it offers this success as a possibility open to any individual of ability, regardless of race. Race however is both implicit and absent. It is implicit in the Attorney-General's statement that Lucas Nhlobo, the crime boss, can only be prosecuted by Gumede. This statement can be understood on two different levels. Firstly, it could be understood to express absolute confidence in Gumede's ability to successfully prosecute a criminal who has successfully evaded the law before. Secondly, seen through the highly subjective lens of racial apartheid, it could be understood that only a black man would know the psyche of another black man to successfully prosecute him and bring him to justice.

The apparent absence of race in the film is achieved in a highly complex way. The defence lawyer and judge are white, the prosecutor, crime boss and all his minions are African, as are the lesser functionaries of the court such as the interpreter, the guards, etc. The languages employed in the court room are English and Zulu, with the court interpreter translating both languages for the benefit of those in the court room who do not understand either of the two languages. The court room scenes create the illusion however that the society represented therein is equal and multilingual. At one point, the judge dispenses with the services of the translator and the impression is that both the judge and the white defence lawyer, Bernstein are fluent in Zulu. This is neither remarkable nor unrealistic as many white South Africans have been able to converse and fully understand African languages, most commonly, Zulu and Xhosa. What is remarkable and unbelievable is the idea implicit in this, that the microcosm of the court room is representative of a society that is free of all racial and cultural discrimination.

The society the court room scenes represent have a normality that is at variance with the reality of late 1970s South Africa. South Africa in the late 1970s was still reeling from the aftermath of the Soweto uprising of June 16, 1976. This uprising was followed by protracted activism which lasted for well over a year and included boycotts, stay-aways and attacks on government buildings, beer halls and police informers.<sup>29</sup> The stay-away following June 16 was arguably the most successful in South African history with approximately half a million workers staying away for three days.<sup>30</sup>

As with the other films discussed thus far, the moral of the film is that crime does not pay and no matter how powerful the criminal, good, justice and law always triumph in the end. Simon Gumede is the essence of goodness and virtue and this has paid handsome dividends both personally and professionally. Personally, he is a happily married man with two teenage sons. The family structure is supportive to all its members and both wife and children step in to assist Gumede in his attempts to successfully prosecute Lucas

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<sup>29</sup> Beinart, William, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.237.

<sup>30</sup> Saunders, Christopher & Southey, Nicholas, *Dictionary of South African History*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1998, p.164.

Nhlobo. A martial arts competition in which one of the sons participates is attended by all family members. Professionally, Gumede has a successful law practice and he achieves greater success not only because the Attorney-General has the confidence to give him this case, but also because this confidence is justified when his prosecution case proves to be successful.

## **Opportunistic Filmmaking**

### ***Amasela* (1980)**

*Amasela* (Thieves) is the story of two men who foil criminals in their attempt to kidnap and rape a young woman they meet in, yet another, club or bar setting. Paul and Benny strike up a conversation with Maliqhi in the bar, flirting with her and plying her with drinks. She enlists their help in looking for her missing brother. While engaged in the search for her brother, Maliqhi is kidnapped by three men who, as it emerges later, were smuggling dagga and had also killed her brother. One of the kidnappers takes her into the bush in an attempt to rape and kill her. Paul and Benny however rush to her rescue and after much running and shooting from the criminal, they rescue her and kill the 'bad guys'. The message once more is the moral that 'crime doesn't pay' and those who do harm to others will come to a bad end themselves.

The film was directed by Tonie van der Merwe and unlike *Joe Bullet*, lacks both dramatic tension and narrative credibility. While van der Merwe attempts to employ techniques such as slow motion and numerous jump cuts, these neither convey the appropriate sense of dramatic tension and nor do they add value to the film generally. These techniques are sloppily executed and devalue the film rather than enhancing it in any way. It is significant however in that it provides an example of the opportunism which guided the filmmaking of some of the people involved in producing B-Scheme films.

### ***Impango* (1982)**

Steve Hand's film *Impango* (Kidnapped) exemplifies the moral that crime does not pay. Joyce, the wife of a successful and affluent businessman is kidnapped for a ransom of



R20 000. She is held in an isolated shack near the coast by the two henchmen of the mastermind criminal. But Joyce is not a simpering, passive and spoilt rich wife and manages to escape her captors through her own ingenuity. She is unfortunately recaptured but by that time her husband who has also acted independently of the authorities locates her whereabouts and tussles with the two thugs. This tussle ends in a nail biting finale on top of a rather unimpressive cliff from which the remaining thug falls to his death in the river below.

The moral that crime does not pay and that good will always triumph over evil is given greater poignancy by the film's emphasis on the essential goodness of Joyce and her husband. The film makes a great effort to represent this goodness through various means. It opens with a school choir singing in front of the principal and this wealthy couple. After the choir's singing they are congratulated and warmly applauded by Joyce and her husband who immediately writes out a check for the school. We thus learn that they are not only wealthy but have enough of a social conscience to share their wealth with others. Joyce is also not the typical middle class wealthy housewife as we see her doing her own domestic chores without the assistance of a domestic worker. They are a childless but happy and loving couple who strive to live unselfish lives and their becoming targets of selfish criminals is all the more heinous given their goodness.

As a contrast to the happy and simple life led by Joyce and her husband in comfortable surroundings is the unhappy life of the master crook who with his wife lives in a shack and is always on the look out for opportunities to enrich himself. He and his henchmen target Joyce as a kidnap victim after seeing her picture in the newspaper. He and his wife are clearly unhappy and where Joyce is the beloved of her husband, the criminal's wife is merely an accessory to pass on wine and keep quiet. Her lack of any animation in face or movements are contrasted with the jolly nature of Joyce who sings as she does her chores around the house. The juxtapositioning of scenes of Joyce in her home and the shack of the criminal and his wife are meant to convey the relative wealth and poverty of the two couples and are meant to suggest poverty as justification for criminality.

The script for the film was written by Hand's wife Alida and it was apparently their first all-Zulu film, (even the credit titles are all in Zulu). It was distributed on the mobile circuit by Hand's distribution company Jaguar Films and produced by the company he co-owned with Tonie van der Merwe, Tugela Films. The film was directed by van der Merwe. It begins and ends with advertisements for Peter Stuyvesant and Lexington cigarettes respectively. While Steve Hand could not remember the specific amounts paid for these advertisements he admits that the income from their placement at the beginning and end of films contributed towards production costs.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Lana Pirana* (1985)**

As a murder mystery, *Lana Pirana*, directed by Mark Graaf has very few redeeming qualities either in terms of narrative content or cinematic value but it does, as do other films with similar low production values, speak volumes about what some white filmmakers thought of their intended African audiences. The eponymous Lana is given some muti (magic potion) to drink by David who wants her to fall in love with him. David however does not take into account the potency of the muti and Lana falls obsessively in love with him. As a man about town, David soon tires of Lana and begins to cast his eyes around. Every other woman he dates somehow mysteriously ends up dead and he is forced to go back to Lana. Lana in the meantime is most accommodating of his infidelity, taking him back each time another of his lovers is found murdered. About midway through the film we begin to suspect that Lana is perhaps not as innocent as she seems. This thought had struck the two police detectives also who had been assigned to the murder cases. Their suspicion eventually leads them to Lana who is prevented from committing another heinous murder.

Throughout the film Lana is represented as being highly irrational. There is a constant glazed look in her eyes. This could be due to the substance she was induced into drinking. Despite this seeming rationale for her behaviour, the film in no way contributes any positive attributes to either African men or women. David is a philanderer who gets

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<sup>31</sup> To the best of his memory, Hand claims that he was paid approximately R250 for the placement of each advertisement.

by on his charms, swindling countless number of women. The women, if they are not piranhas like Lana, are either helpless victims or indiscriminating lovers. Although the police succeed in solving the mystery of the murders, they lack any kind of substantial depth as characters and the film does not consider it worthwhile showing viewers how they solve the murders. Poor editing and a lack of narrative continuity are additional factors which detract from the quality of this film.

### ***Witch Doctor (1985)***

*Witch Doctor* was produced by one of the van der Merwe clan, Gary, a nephew of Tonie van der Merwe, and displays very poor production values. The film is about a witchdoctor who is also a mass murderer. In between dispensing counsel under a tree, he lures young children to his residence where he brutally kills them. The parents of the missing children consult a private investigator who, without any kind of formal investigating eventually lands up under the tree where the witchdoctor sits and arrests him. Apart from this rather simplistic plot execution, the film is poorly edited with equally poor lighting, sound and continuity. At one point the clapper board makes an intrusion into the scene being filmed and at another, a young man waiting to consult the witchdoctor is seen on screen, going off and coming back on screen when his cue is eventually called. There is hardly any dialogue and certainly no rationale behind the murdering impulse of the man.

Witchcraft and witchdoctors are not inventions of white filmmakers, but instead have a complex history of existence in African cultures with witchdoctors being consulted in most matters of importance.<sup>32</sup> Filmic representations of this aspect of African culture draw on, stereotype and often also parody what is essentially an important component of the African worldview. While African people make a distinction between a witchdoctor

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<sup>32</sup> See for example Belinda Bozzoli's *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2004, in which she describes how witchcraft featured in the Alexandra uprising of 1986. Also see Peter Alegi, *Laduma! Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa*, Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004 where he discusses soccer players consulting sangomas before matches in order to ensure success on the field.

(evil) and a sangoma (good, a healer),<sup>33</sup> many of the films which use this aspect of African culture, blur or ignore this distinction. The 'witchdoctor' in this film is a diviner, as we see many people consulting him, but he is also a mass murderer who derives enormous pleasure from his evil deeds. There is no distinction made between those who divine for the good of the people who consult them and those who divine and practice evil.

Similarly, in *Lana Pirana*, the idea of muti is parodied to the extent that it becomes the cause of Lana's murderous impulses. Again, this is not an invention of white filmmakers but rather reflects, in a simplistic, shallow and rather offensive manner, an aspect of African culture not only in South Africa but elsewhere on the continent as well. Sembene Ousmane's *Xala* (The Curse, 1973) explores the curse of impotence on the main character El-Hadj Abdou Kader Beye. But in this instance Nigerian video films provide a useful comparison, despite the temporal disjuncture, on two levels. Firstly, the Nigerian video film industry, in terms of production values, time, etc. compares favourably with the B-Scheme films. While B-Scheme filmmakers, even at their most prolific have not and could not have achieved the large numbers, (because one simply cannot compare the Nigerian domestic market to the South African one), that Nigerian video productions run to per year, both share a profit motive that elevates quantity over quality.<sup>34</sup>

Secondly, and of immediate importance to this discussion is the comparison with cinematic preoccupations with the occult that characterise a vast majority of Nigerian video films. The film *Thunderbolt* (or *Magun*, 2001) by the young Nigerian filmmaker Tunde Kelani, for example, tells the story of a woman as bewitched as Lana. A magun (magic spell specifically for ensuring fidelity) is cast on her by her husband in order to prevent her from being unfaithful while he is away. She meets and falls in love with a man and as soon as she becomes intimate with him she begins to sicken and will

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<sup>33</sup> As explained to me by my translator, Thandikile Nyembezi.

<sup>34</sup> See for example, Olatunde B. Lawuyi, "The Political Economy of Video Marketing in Ogbomosho, Nigeria", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 67, 3, 1997, Mbye Cham, "African Cinema in the Nineties", *African Studies Quarterly*, 2002 and Jonathan Haynes (ed.), *Nigerian Video Films*, Ohio University Press, 2000.

eventually die if her husband does not free her from the spell. A crucial difference however between these films is that while *Lana Pirana* presents the use of muti for rather frivolous purposes (being able to charm a woman for a one night stand), *Thunderbolt* is more serious in exploring the issue of marital fidelity and its social ramifications.

Films such as *Witchdoctor*, *Lana Pirana* and *Amasela*<sup>35</sup> support the claim that many of the people involved in the B-Scheme industry were opportunists who were intent only on exploiting the financial incentive offered by the state. They were neither guided by any cinematic or artistic sensibility, nor by ideological imperatives, making a maximum profit with a minimum of capital investment being the only guiding motive. Tonie van der Merwe is particularly bitter about his brothers and his nephew and compares his current financial and living conditions unfavourably with theirs, implying that their current financial success is directly attributable to the opportunistic practices associated with the B-Scheme subsidy.<sup>36</sup> In pursuing this profit motive, these and other filmmakers offer narrow glimpses and shallow presentations of complex African traditions, all the while moralising that 'crime doesn't pay'

### **African Rambo – *Strikeback* (1986)**

The binary between good and evil and the moral that crime does not pay and good will always triumph is the central message of the film *Strikeback*, produced and directed by Ronnie Isaacs. The film is an African Rambo starring Japan Mthembu. Johnny (Mthembu) is a city boy who returns home to his parents' farm to discover that they and the community are being harassed by local thugs who want to take their land from them. Johnny decides to fight back on behalf of not only his parents but the broader community as well. This fight takes the form of a test of physical strength as Johnny continuously beats off the minions of the boss. It takes him into the surrounding jungle where he survives and triumphs by virtue of his physical prowess and his ability to out-think,

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<sup>35</sup> Some other notable examples of very poor quality films include, *Say Mama* (1985), the *Botsotso* series (197, 1980, 1982), *Biza Izintombi* (1980), *Umfana Wekarate* (1985) and *Madoda* (1987).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Tonie van der Merwe.

outrun and outfight his opponents. Johnny eventually succeeds and the thugs are all apprehended thus saving the livelihoods, homes and future of his parents and community. The dialogue in the film is sparse and it would seem that the film is purely a vehicle for displaying the physical prowess of Johnny.

Mthembu, as Johnny, comes from a background of training in the martial arts as well as dance and amateur theatre.<sup>37</sup> As a teenage student during Soweto 1976, his political conscientisation is a direct result of his detention following the uprising. His casting in the lead role for this, his first film, was purely coincidental. He had accompanied his friend to the auditions and was spotted by Ronnie Isaacs who without auditioning him cast him in the role and gave him a script to study. The script, as with all scripts for B-Scheme films, was in English and it was Mthembu's task to translate not only his lines, but those that were his cue also, into Zulu or any of the other African languages being used in the film. This practice, he says was quite common and oftentimes he would have to translate the lines of those who could not read or understand English either. None of the African cast members were ever paid for this service.<sup>38</sup>

The film makes full use of Mthembu's physical fitness and training in martial arts. Johnny is superbly physical and the film offers many opportunities for the viewers to see this physicality. While doing chores around his parents' smallholding, Johnny is often bare-chested; back, torso and forearms rippling with muscles, a glistening sheen of perspiration adding to this physicality and referencing countless images of the bare-chested, muscled African slaves. He is able to run for long distances as we see when he gives chase to some thugs on the road and again when he is pursued in the bush near his parents' property. This latter sequence has him again bare-chested, a bandana around his head, with a bow and arrow while his pursuers are threatening his life with modern, sophisticated weapons. This particular sequence lasts for well over ten minutes of screen

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<sup>37</sup> Mthembu currently has a role in the successful television drama *Mhuvango*, as a personal trainer and fitness instructor.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Japan Mthembu.

time, a common practice in many B-Scheme films where screen time is often filled with lengthy action or dance sequences.<sup>39</sup>

Most of Ronnie Isaacs' films were either action adventures which included martial arts or comedies as with the *Botsotso* series of films (1979, 1980, 1982) and *Biza Izintombi* (Call the Women, 1981). Mthembu is quite vocal about the fact that white filmmakers focused on action adventures and martial arts films as a form of soporific entertainment for African audiences. These films also followed the successful precedent of foreign martial arts films which were being screened to African audiences. "It is because some of the movies that were brought to black theatres... the black areas were Chinese martial (arts) films – Kung Fu and Bruce Lee and the likes and the reason for that was in order to distract blacks from watching anything of substance that we would talk about – current issues that would deal with political issues and socio-economic issues... you just want to fight and you want to vent your anger and you just want to show your machoism. It was just about that."<sup>40</sup> Perhaps as a consequence of his increased politicisation during the eighties, Mthembu heaps scorn and criticism on the films that were produced and exhibited to African audiences. While he acknowledged that the B-scheme films provided opportunities for aspiring African actors and directors, they were still "strictly about how stupid black people can be.... How to entertain them and how naïve they can be, that is why you will in every black movie there will always be a Sangoma thing, a witchcraft thing and there will be some churches you know and there will be some scandal in the church because of one thing or the other. But one thing that will obviously punctuate and characterise all black movies will be shebeens and hobos."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The film *Say Mama*, (1985) directed by one of the van der Merwe brothers, Japie van der Merwe, and which has not been analysed in this chapter, has two long sequences of very bad break-dancing with flashing traffic lights as substitutes presumably for disco lights. The film stars Matthews Monika as an aspirant musician whose dream is less for musical success and more for middle-class affluence and status. It is an example of the many very cheap, very shoddily filmed of the B-Scheme films. The very bad, very long break-dance sequences often vie for attention with badly lit interiors and very badly lip-synched musical concerts.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Japan Mthembu.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Japan Mthembu.

## The Wild West – *Umbango* (1987)

While Steve Hand's second film under consideration in this chapter, *Umbango* (Land Claim) falls into the ubiquitous category of 'crime doesn't pay' its uniqueness lies in the fact that Hand claims it to be the first African western made as part of the B-Scheme subsidy. Historically, the American western has enjoyed enormous popularity among African audiences, so much so that colonial administrators in Rhodesia set up a committee to investigate not only this popularity but also what were perceived as its negative influences. The opinion of colonial officials was that the western appealed to African audiences because of the predominance of violent action over dialogues.<sup>42</sup> This opinion seems to have supported what Burns identifies as a 'conventional wisdom' about African audiences and their preferences in film entertainment. This 'conventional wisdom' held that African audiences were akin to young children in that they could not follow lengthy dialogues and found violent action most easily comprehensible.<sup>43</sup> Here one might recall the findings of the Satbel survey cited earlier which found that African audiences could not sit still for long durations of time and that their attention span was limited.

A contrary and more positive view that Burns cites in his work, is provided by the anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker whose fieldwork among African audiences led her to conclude that westerns appealed to African audiences because it allowed them vicarious release for their own violent anger towards colonial administrators and white people in general.<sup>44</sup> She further found that language was a barrier to complete comprehension and thus films with more action than dialogue had a greater appeal.

Hand is not too sure about the exact date of the film and claims it was made during the early 1990s<sup>45</sup> against the backdrop of political changes in the country. Given this

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<sup>42</sup> James Burns, "John Wayne on the Zambezi: Cinema, Empire and the American Western in British Central Africa", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35, 1, 2002, p.108.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 103.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 108.

<sup>45</sup> While Steve Hand is uncertain about dating the film *Blignaut and Botha* in *Movies, Mavericks and Moguls* date it as 1987, p. F85.



changing broader context, he claims that he made the film to show that Africans were now in a position to own property and engaged in the kinds of conflicts around property issues this film explores. "We took the culture of the Zulu people and as well as the land and everything you know and that was the time you know in 91, 92, we know that there is going to be a change so we decided that the land that belongs to all the white people, we wanted to show that there is black people that can get in there and there is land grabbers who try and get the land."<sup>46</sup>

Produced by Hand and directed by Tonie van der Merwe, *Umbango* is the story of conflict over land. Set in an imaginary American West transposed to South Africa, the film's central theme is the binary between good and bad and the moral that crime does not pay. KK (Popo Gumede) is a wealthy landowner in this African 'wild west'. He comes into conflict with the younger, poorer Hector, over the same piece of land to which it appears they both have title deeds. The conflict between the two men transcends the property and becomes a conflict between the greed of KK and the simple honesty and thrift of Hector. KK has an immense ranch with a great number of horses and his greed sets him on a path of conflict wherein he is clearly not the favourite of the townspeople. Though both he and the young Hector lodge their respective claims with the local sheriff, the sheriff is unable to pronounce judgement on who the rightful owner is. This inevitably leads to the de rigeur gunfight between KK and Hector. As can be expected with this category of film, KK loses and is killed. Hector remains the uncontested owner of the contentious property.

Despite the simple plot and the ubiquitous theme of good versus evil, the film displays a greater degree of cinematic quality and aesthetics when compared to some of the other B-Scheme productions analysed in this chapter. It also keeps faith with the western genre in a number of ways. Despite the African setting characterised not only by a majority cast of African actors (there is one white man who makes a brief appearance in the local saloon before he is gunned down) and Zulu dialogues, the American West is recreated in the most obvious ways. Firstly, the physical structures of buildings and the layout of the

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Steve Hand.

street with the obligatory saloon and sheriff's office, water trough and even the kind of font used for building names all display a faithful verisimilitude to Hollywood westerns. The costumes, right down to the leggings, neck-kerchiefs and cowboy hats, the piano player in the saloon, scrubbed drinks tables and the horse drawn wagons all mimic the spaghetti western and the only discordant note is struck by the headgear of women who instead of the sun bonnet wear the traditional doek. Whether an oversight or a deliberate attempt to infuse a non-western element, the doek introduces a more jarring element of Africanisation than the African cast or the Zulu dialogues.

The ironies of the B-Scheme film subsidy are varied and this film signifies one of the most cogent of these ironies. As part of its mission to fight 'total onslaught' with a 'total strategy' the Department of Information in the 1970s had argued for more films aimed at an African audience as a counterbalance to increasing Americanisation among Africans. While some filmmakers appear to have adhered to the directive to provide 'ethnic' heroes for Africans (as discussed earlier), many others appear to have ignored it completely and in striving for profits seem to have provided watered-down versions of Hollywood heroes, villains and settings. The 'Americanisation' of South Africa, especially with regards to cultural borrowings and affiliations arguably began with the introduction of film itself<sup>47</sup> and reached its apotheosis in 1950s Sophiatown.<sup>48</sup> This 'Americanisation' in its most blatant form found expression in music, theatre, dress, gangsterism and literary output, among others.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Thelma Gutsche's monumental study, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa* is less about the production and exhibition history and more about the consumption of foreign film and its impact on South African cultural life.

<sup>48</sup> See for example Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, (1994). This does not mean that American cultural influences began to wane post-Sophiatown but rather that the forms of expression they found have been unique to that epoch.

<sup>49</sup> Rob Nixon (1994), David Coplan, "The African Musician and the Development of the Johannesburg Entertainment Industry, 1900-1060", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 5, 2, April 1979 and Jim Bailey and Adam Seftel (ed.), *Shebeens Take a Bow: A Celebration of South Africa's Shebeen Lifestyle*, Bailey's African History Archives, Johannesburg, 1994.

## **Being buddies in apartheid South Africa – *Sky Full of Diamonds* (1989)**

Film was no less significant in the spread of American culture as is shown by Gutsche and argued by Jamie Uys. Uys argued in a letter to the Department of Information that America was able to export its culture through its films and provided an instructive example to South Africa.<sup>50</sup> He believed that film was an essential tool to sell apartheid, especially internationally and the state therefore had to pay greater attention to and devote state funds for the promotion of the South African film industry. Uys was instrumental in the introduction of the film subsidy in 1956.<sup>51</sup> American influence and borrowings feature prominently in films aimed at the African audiences.

The 1989 film *Sky Full of Diamonds*, directed by Thomas Rothig, is a South African take of the Hollywood franchise *Lethal Weapon*, and released in the same year as *Lethal Weapon 2*, for an African market. As with the Hollywood films, the central characters are a black and white police detective who team up to investigate crimes, diamond smuggling in this instance. As with the Glover and Gibson characters, the black detective is both older and wiser than the white detective. Not only are they professional partners, but they are also friends and the older, black detective is cast as a mentor to the younger white one. But whereas the Gibson character in *Lethal Weapon* was portrayed as crazed and trigger happy, the white detective is a bumbling idiot who misses vital clues and looks to his older black partner for guidance and intelligence. This role reversal in a South African context is perhaps the biggest clue to the changing social and political context of the late 1980s when the unbanning of political organisations such as the ANC and PAC and the release of Nelson Mandela was just months away.

This changing context is evident also in the fact that white and black socialise on equal terms. The black detective appears to be comfortably at home in his white partner's home, with his wife serving them both beers. The camaraderie between the two police officers gives no inkling of the historical racial tensions and differences between black and white South Africans. As a buddy film in the South African, and particularly the B-

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<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter 1.

film, context this film has at least one other precedent, *Face to Face* (1987)<sup>52</sup> in which black and white team up through circumstances to face life's challenges. But while other buddy films that Davis<sup>53</sup> has identified either consciously suppress or focus on racial discrimination and apartheid, *Sky Full of Diamonds* in the tradition of other B-Scheme films, completely avoids issues of politics and racial discrimination. The mythic world it creates is one in which black police officers have always had equal opportunities with their white counterparts. In casting the white officer as somewhat of a buffoon it is in fact reversing racial stereotyping in which black people were considered naturally inferior to white people and therefore in need of guidance and assistance.

This is an action film with a comedic element provided by the buffoonery of the white officer. The action involves the investigation of a diamond smuggler named Mr. Voltaire. The representation of the criminal once again follows Hollywood convention in that the gangster is represented as the stereotypical African American 'hood with a fast car and packing a mean-looking machine'. Tall, lanky, with a thick gold chain around his neck, dressed in a long black leather coat and black hat, Mr. Voltaire could as easily be placed in a New York inner city slum and the only marker to his South Africanness is his accent. In fact what distinguishes this film from other Hollywood B-movies are the South African accents of the characters. Voltaire's mission is to smuggle diamonds from South Africa to a neighbouring African country and he charts a small plane to do so, hence the title *Sky Full of Diamonds*. The chase after Voltaire typically leads the two detectives from seedy hangouts of the criminal underworld to the more upmarket and plush bars and restaurants where more affluent wheelers and dealers hang out. Following all Hollywood conventions of high speed chases and shoot-outs Voltaire is eventually apprehended at the last minute, thus guaranteeing police success.

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<sup>52</sup> This film, scripted by Ronnie Isaacs, teams a white policeman and an African criminal he pursues into a neighbouring country. They are both imprisoned for illegal entry and while shackled together they manage to break out. The rest of the film centres on their survival, while still shackled together, in the wild and their eventual safe passage back to South Africa and a successful apprehension of the master criminal. Through the trials and tribulations they face together, they come to know and understand one another and build a camaraderie which enables them to eventually work together.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Davis' classification of the buddy film is used here. His use of 'buddy' in this form seems to acknowledge that he is somewhat stretching the definition given the South African context of these films. See the chapter 'Buddies' in *Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the jungles of cinema's South Africa*.

What distinguishes this film from the preceding films is both the content and style. Whereas many of the earlier films may have drawn on Hollywood conventions such as the slapstick humour of the *Botsotso* series and *Biza Izintombi*, or the kung fu of Hong Kong films, they have nonetheless retained a peculiarly South African identity. This has primarily been at the level of the films' content rather than any specific cinematic aesthetic and style. This film however relies entirely on Hollywood conventions both in terms of plot devices as well as cinematic technique and style. Also unlike many of the earlier films this film has higher production values. Rapid editing and smooth transitions between scenes build a credible plot of dramatic suspense with a successful denouement.

### **Changing representations in changing times – *The Gold Cup* (1990)**

Robert van der Coolwijk's 1990 film *The Gold Cup* is an action drama that could only have been made during the late 1980s when South African society was moving towards a relatively greater tolerance and acceptance of African people as residents of white South Africa, with agency and ambition. The film tells the story of Peter (Peter Thage), a successful dealer in car parts with a passion for the martial arts. His wife Ruth, is equally successful in her general store. They are the middle class success story of urban Africans who have made it good through thrift and hard work. Their home is quite modest and not located in an affluent suburb. Despite this however they are among the wealthiest people in the neighbourhood. Contrasted with them is the equally successful magistrate, Mr Jonas. He holds office in a plush study and Mrs Jonas is a frequent customer at Ruth's shop. The unemployed Mrs Jonas is a spendthrift who shops and wears expensive clothes. She is seen to harangue her husband for more money which Mr Jonas duly supplies to keep the marital peace.

The audience learns something of how Mr Jonas may be able keep his wife supplied with ready cash when he and Mr Dlamini, a businessman interested in sport meet and talk on the telephone about fixing games and matches. They employ a local thug, played by Lucas Baloyi who usually does the leg work of threatening possible contenders in sports

events. The gold cup of the title is on offer in the national martial arts championship which Peter enters after winning the regional trials. Learning of Peter's prowess, the conspirators send Baloyi to give Peter some friendly advice not to enter the championship. When this attempt fails, Mr Dlamini invites Peter for a friendly chat about playing to lose and Peter's response is that he is "first of all a sportsman, not a gambler." More drastic measures follow when Peter continues to train and enters the championship. Ruth is kidnapped. Peter now not only has to rescue his wife, which he does with the assistance of some friends, but also has to make it in time for the championship game. The conspirators and their thugs smirk with satisfaction when they realise that Peter has not made it to the venue and are duly angered when he does and goes onto win the gold cup.

The most important theme of the film is the triumph of good over evil. The link between the filmic moral that crime does not pay and the sociological reality of crime in South Africa which Steve Hand raised is echoed by Peter Thage who provided creative input with regards to the martial arts aspects of the story. Thage, a 5<sup>th</sup> Dan Black Belt, started in the film business in 1980. "My wish (was) to do something which will inspire black kids to take the sport and educate our people..... who experienced township struggle of (living a) daily life of threats by so called people who thinks that having money you can control everybody."<sup>54</sup> While the intended audience was both young and old, drawing a younger generation of audiences was more important for Thage because they liked "action films due to high rate of crime in our society."<sup>55</sup>

The moral 'crime does not pay' was equally important to director and script writer, Robert van de Coolwijk who had directed a number of B-Scheme films prior to this one both in English and various African languages. For van de Coolwyk, the important thing was to make a film that was both interesting and entertaining and he is candid about the fact that working in the film industry at the time was about earning a living. For "anybody with ideologies of art and hectic statements would have been living in a poor

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<sup>54</sup> Peter Thage, email correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Thage, email correspondence.

man's dreamworld..”<sup>56</sup> In the case of this film, the binary between good versus evil as embodied in the business of match fixing and the message that ‘crime does not pay’ provided the ideal combination of interesting and entertaining according to the director. It was a message that the censors would pass and therefore make the film accessible to all age groups as van de Coolwyk affirms. “In order to not (lose) your investment your movie had to get past the censorship board, i.e. no age restriction, if it had one it could not be shown at schools or church halls. It had to comply with the laws of the land at the time.”<sup>57</sup> The film was screened on the mobile circuit in areas such as Polokwane (the then Pietersburg) and the Bophuthatswana homeland. As van de Coolwyk confirms, a film would be exhibited until it could recoup the maximum allowable in terms of the subsidy and/or until the print lasted. It was not unknown for prints to be in tatters after it had been screened on the mobile circuit as both van de Coolwyk and Steve Hand attest.

The theme of social mobility and success through hard work echoes those of countless other B-Scheme films such as *uDeliwe*, *iKati*, *Inkunzi* and others, which end with the moral that hard work pays while laziness and crime does not. The crucial difference with earlier films however lies in the representation of urban Africans. Peter and his wife Ruth, have a successful marriage as equals. They are equally successful in their respective spheres of work which seems to complement and contribute to their connubial bliss. Though childless this does not appear to bother them too much as they are rather more concerned with achieving material success and assuring a comfortable life for themselves and the family they may have in the future. This would indicate that family planning was an acceptable practice within a changing society and no longer perceived as a measure introduced by the apartheid government to limit the African population for their own nefarious ends.<sup>58</sup> The Jonas’ too are childless but this seems to be due less to a need for family planning and more to the vacuous and selfish lifestyle of Mrs Jonas.

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<sup>56</sup> Robert van de Coolwijk, email correspondence.

<sup>57</sup> Robert van de Coolwijk, email correspondence.

<sup>58</sup> See Brown, Barbara B. “Facing the ‘Black Peril’: The Politics of Population Control in South Africa”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1987, 13, 2, pp. 256-273.

A marked contrast between Peter's marriage and that of the Jonas' is the degree of affection the partners share in their marriage. It is most apparent that Mr and Mrs Jonas share very little love and that the marriage is one of convenience. Mrs Jonas gets to live a lifestyle of luxury and pampering while Mr Jonas gets a trophy wife. Peter and his wife on the other hand share deep affection and mutual respect. For the first time also, this film depicts quite clearly that African marriages operate on the same norms as those in other societies. This is clearly signified by the inclusion of an intimate shower scene between Peter and his wife witnessed through a suitably opaque curtain. While this echoes Hollywood sensationalism in other films, it does accord an intimacy and affection to African marriages that is perhaps more consonant with reality than has been the case in previous films.

Furthermore, the contrast in the lifestyles and marriages of the two couples and the values these symbolise appears to signify that Africans are no longer the undifferentiated mass they were perceived to be. There are crucial differences within African communities that go beyond simplistic differences between good and bad or lazy and hardworking. The film takes great pains to paint the details of these separate and intertwined lives and the differences among them. References to the martial arts championship and the gold cup come about two thirds into the film when Peter begins his training and since the bulk of screen time is devoted to the details of the characters' lives this film is less an action film and more a family drama in the general mould of a soap opera. Whether this temporal disjuncture is a deliberate plot device or not it does however serve to mystify the viewer as to the significance of the title and its referent. It also serves to increase audience anticipation for the moment of clarity when all will be revealed.

As a story of social mobility and success it offers hope that through hard work, respect and a life of balanced probity, even the underdog can succeed against great odds. Both Mr Jonas and Mr Dlamini are wealthier and far more powerful than the hardworking Peter. They are able to command and others follow these commands. Yet nothing deters Peter from achieving his goals and ambitions. This film, like *The Advocate*, presents an African middle class that was suited to the needs of the apartheid state; stable, apolitical,



economically successful with all excess energies diverted into harmless non-political activities such as the martial arts.

## Conclusion

The films that have been analysed in this chapter have many common elements over and above the ubiquitous moral 'crime doesn't pay'. All the films excepting the cowboy film *Umbango*, have an urban setting and the representations of urban Africans in these films is a rich source of evidence for the manner in which white South Africans viewed Africans. The urban setting is not significant in these films in the same manner as it is in the films that contrast the urban to the rural (analysed in an earlier chapter). In the films under focus in this chapter, the urban context is not foregrounded and therefore does not use up much screen time and thus has little narrative significance.<sup>59</sup> Despite this however, one can argue a significance based on its very obscurity. This significance lies in the fact that the urban has now become, if not as 'natural' to the African as to the white, then at least not alien either.

With the Rieckert Commission's official recognition in 1979, that Africans were a permanent urban fixture, films no longer needed to construct narrative binaries between the urban and rural in which the rural was epitomised as the 'natural' home of the African. Some of the films analysed in this chapter pre-date the Rieckert Commission but nonetheless dispense with the urban/rural dichotomy. But in doing so they do not construct the urban as narratively significant to the existence of Africans. The urban is merely common place in these films and neither adds to nor detracts from the entertainment and profit motive of the films. While films such as *iKati*, *The Advocate*, *Sky Full of Diamonds* and *The Gold Cup* show urban scenes, these are too brief and cursory for them to be narratively significant.

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<sup>59</sup> See Edwin Hees, "Foregrounding the background: Landscape and ideology in South African films", *South African Theatre Journal*, 10, 2, September 1996 for further discussion of the use of landscape in South African films.

Increasing African urbanisation led to the recognition of the importance of a stable middle class which would act as a buffer zone between the white ruling class and the discontented masses. The appeal to an increasing urban African middle class is apparent in films such as *The Advocate* as well as *iKati* and *The Gold Cup* in which the lifestyles of the protagonists and occupations are distinctly petty bourgeoisie. In *iKati*, Lefty's wife and daughter are introduced to audiences having a garden tea with a friend. The domestic life of Lefty's family as well as the Gumede's is middle class in every respect; the husband is the sole breadwinner so there is no apparent financial need for the wife to earn an income, the children attend school as well as extra-curricular activities such as karate classes and despite the lack of domestic help, the wives have ample time to engage in social and other activities. Other markers of middle class distinction include the cars the men drive, invariably a Mercedes Benz, the suits they wear and the clothes their wives and children wear as well as home décor which shows distinctive Anglophile aspirations. These include antimacassars on the sofas, wood panelled studies and offices.

Changes in the broader society are reflected in these films through the acceptance of the urban presence of Africans and indeed through the active promotion and wooing of an African middle class. This is perhaps most apparent in advertising, which though not a frequent feature of many B-Scheme films, nonetheless signals shifting mindsets and paradigms. The cigarette advertisements at the beginning and end of *Impango*<sup>60</sup>, are high quality, stylish productions associated with the brands Peter Stuyvesant and Lexington. These advertisements depict a lifestyle of leisure, wealth and pleasure in lush tropical settings which are the playgrounds of the rich and famous.

The appeal to material aspirations is blatant in these advertisements and echo broader appeals. By 1980, *The Marketing Mix*, an advertising industry publication was arguing for the recognition of consumers divided on the basis of a "metropolitan and a non-

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<sup>60</sup> Some other films with either beginning and/or end advertisements or product placements include films such as *Biza Izintombi* (1981) which opens with the character of Lucas Baloyi surrounded by dancing girls wearing Cameo Pantihose, *Midnite Rush* (1990) which begins with a Rothmans ad, and *The Chicken Man* (1990) which begins with an ad for 'Education Alive' sponsored by 'One-Step' floor polish.

metropolitan sector”<sup>61</sup>, as opposed to earlier divisions based on race as well as further distinctions between rural and urban Africans. It was now argued that advertising faced the challenge “of a new situation which in effect was one where the black metropolitan consumer shows strong similarities to the white consumer sector.”<sup>62</sup> This revised conception of African consumers identified African consumers as “a young, and rapidly emerging, African middle class of clerks, salesmen, teachers, skilled-workers, journalists, entertainers, businessmen and women and professionals...’ who were “urban through and through and have no direct ties with tribal homelands.”<sup>63</sup> As a group, African urban consumers were thought to be “materialistic” and aspiring to “a white lifestyle” with a quest for money their “basic motivation”. Once more, the influence of American culture, in particular, the American Negro, was acknowledged as a strong factor but, the article argues, Africans are sufficiently proud of their African heritage and still consider themselves ‘true Africans’.

The films discussed in this chapter in one way or another, reflect a changing society. While these films avoid any form of political comment, politics is not absent. It is present in its effacement by the social and economic aspirations that are encouraged among Africans. The irony though is that a young urban audience was largely bypassed by the exhibition and distribution channels for most B-Scheme films which were exhibited on the mobile circuit in the rural areas and homeland towns.

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<sup>61</sup> *The Marketing Mix*, October 1980, p. 38.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Six

### Oppositional filmmaking: subverting the subsidy

This chapter focuses on films that were made as part of the B-Scheme subsidy but which subvert the subsidy in a variety of ways, most often through engagement with issues which were politically taboo. The term 'oppositional' is used in both a very broad and more specific way. The films that have been chosen are oppositional in two important respects; politically oppositional as well as opposed to the general trend of B-Scheme productions which favoured low production values.<sup>1</sup>

By including these films, this chapter aims to illustrate that not all filmmaking under the B-Scheme subsidy was opportunistic or purely guided by the profit motive as was the general trend characteristic of the 'black film industry'. Through analyses of these selected films the chapter argues that possibilities for subverting not only the broad terms of the subsidy, but more importantly, engaging critically with elements of apartheid policy was possible. In view of these two possibilities, state intervention through the B-Scheme subsidy is far more complex and less rigid than it would appear at first glance.

Of the six film featured in this chapter, two of them are overtly political while the other four are less so. The two films *My Country, My Hat* and *Mapantsula* engage explicitly with political issues of the day while Bensusan's other two films, *Chicken Man* and *Midnite Rush* are less explicit about the political issues which are nonetheless thematic features of the films. Clive Scott's *Mathata* has been included not because it is political in the sense that Bensusan's films or *Mapantsula* are, but rather because it attempts to address some of the social issues pertaining to the urban African condition. All the films,

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to qualify however that not all B-Scheme films display qualities of low production values, but the Heyns Film productions for example have not been included as oppositional films because many of these films favour the apartheid political status quo, especially given Heyns' rather 'special' relationship with the Department of Information.

however display a higher standard of production values as compared to most other B-Scheme films excepting a notable few such as those produced by Heyns Film.

Oppositional filmmaking in South Africa is inextricably linked to films which offer a critical response to racial prejudice and inequality. While a vast majority of oppositional films have been documentaries detailing apartheid injustices and repression, a number of fictional films have also emerged in the late 1980s which critically engage with and critique the broader social and political context. These include both internationally and locally produced films. The oppositional films of the 1980s, according to Prinsloo are an inevitable outcome of engagement with the broad debates of Third Cinema which emerged in the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Inspired by the Cuban Revolution and the Brazilian Cinema Novo, Third Cinema is conceived as “participatory and contributive to the struggles of the liberation of the peoples of the Third World.”<sup>3</sup> For Gabriel, Third Cinema is the artistic equivalent of a gun, that is, a tool of revolution. Within this conception of film as a revolutionary tool, Third Cinema according to Ukadike, seeks to: “(1) decolonize the mind, (2) contribute to the development of a radical consciousness (3) lead to a revolutionary transformation of society and (4) develop new film language with which to accomplish these tasks.”<sup>4</sup> Third Cinema fulfils these objectives through a conscious rejection of dominant Hollywood generic conventions and styles. It seeks to create a cinema which “fulfil(s) ideological and revolutionary purposes.....(and) to assist the decolonization process by transforming the unchanged individual to the “new man” exemplified by revolutionary objectives and revolutionary culture.”<sup>5</sup>

But as Prinsloo correctly points out, Third Cinema in South Africa has not been able to fulfil all its objectives. The participatory aspect of Third Cinema, which draws audiences as active participants in meaning production, is somewhat blunted by the constraints of

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<sup>2</sup> Jeannie Prinsloo, “South African Films in flux: Thoughts on changes in the politics of identity in recent film productions”, *South African Theatre Journal*, 10, 2, September 1996, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Teshome H. Gabriel, “Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory: Towards a Third Aesthetics” in Jim Pines & Paul Willemen (ed.), *Questions of Third Cinema*, London: British Film Institute, 1989, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, *Black African Cinema*, Berkely: University of California Press, 1994, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 98.

“economic viability and access to distribution and production finance.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, not all of the films discussed in this chapter strictly exhibit all the elements of Third Cinema but the majority of them certainly offer sufficient resistance and opposition to apartheid hegemony and propose a counter-narrative to both the dominant political ideology of the state as well as the rest of the B-Scheme films reviewed in this thesis.

### Critiquing pass laws – *My Country My Hat* (1983)

The first of the films discussed in this chapter is David Bensusan’s *My Countr, My Hat*. The film is a critique of one of the most oppressive tools of apartheid; the pass law system which required Africans, especially African men to carry a pass book which allowed them entry into ‘white’ South Africa. It is explicitly oppositional in that it defies the unwritten condition of the B-Scheme that films for African audiences avoid political issues of the day. In the first instance though, Bensusan did not intend the film for an African audience only and it classified for the B-Scheme subsidy because of the mix-race cast. “I showed it personally at the Labia and at the Piccadilly (white cinemas) and the Department of Trade and Industry did not like it and they didn’t allow it to be registered as a white movie. One of the reasons was because there were black actors in it.... Then Ronnie (Isaacs) said to me, ‘let’s put it in under the black subsidy system. It has to be one or the other.’”<sup>7</sup>

Despite the film’s subject matter of pass laws, historically the pass book system was weakening at the time of production in 1983 and would eventually be repealed by 1986.<sup>8</sup> Pass laws as measures of controlling the movement of Africans was not a specifically apartheid invention. It had been a part of the South African landscape since the eighteenth century. It was articulated in terms of the need to ensure and maintain social order, prevent crime, control over-urbanisation and channel black labour into urban

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<sup>6</sup> Prinsloo, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with David Bensusan.

<sup>8</sup> See William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.256.

areas.<sup>9</sup> These imperatives had undergone little change through the centuries though it may have been articulated in different terms and enforced much more rigorously than before.

In the twentieth century, pass laws went through three distinct phases beginning with Stallardism which argued that only the demands of labour could justify the presence of Africans in urban areas. All other Africans who did not fulfil a specific labour need were superfluous and therefore undesirable as urban residents.<sup>10</sup> These recommendations of the Stallard Commission of 1921 served as the basis for the promulgation of the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 which, as Frankel argues, formed the “legislative foundation” for the pass law system.<sup>11</sup> The 1940s, especially following the boom years of the war and immediate post-war period were characterised by a re-thinking of the Stallard doctrines. It was argued that African urbanisation was inevitable and the needs of the market necessitated a re-formulation of the African urban presence. This was the second phase of the pass law system.<sup>12</sup>

The 1948 election and the victory of the National Party ushered in the third phase with Stallardism once again providing the basis on which African urbanisation was premised. In 1952 amendments to the Urban Areas Act further entrenched pass laws restricting permanent urban residence for all African except those with Section 10 rights. Section 10 of the 1952 Urban Areas Act conferred certain privileges on those born and living in urban centres. Those who had entered ‘white’ centres legally and had been residing there continuously for fifteen years or who had been employed with the same employer for ten years were also exempt from some of the restrictions governing the lives of those considered ‘migrants’ in South Africa.<sup>13</sup> An African man with Section 10 rights could automatically have his wife and children living with him in the urban areas. While these rights did not exempt those Africans with Section 10 status from having to carry a

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Frankel, “The Politics of Passes: Control and Change in South Africa”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 17, 2, June 1979, p. 200.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Savage, “The Imposition of Pass Laws on the African Population in South Africa 1916-1984”, *African Affairs*, 85, 339, April 1986, p. 193.

<sup>11</sup> Frankel, p.201.

<sup>12</sup> Savage, p.194.

<sup>13</sup> Savage, p. 195. Also William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, pp. 122-160.

reference book, it did guarantee some form of stability. James, the African protagonist of the film, falls within this category of Section 10 as his wife lives with him in Johannesburg. But he is still an alien until he has a valid pass book.

Other Africans not falling within this category of Section 10 were subjected to numerous measures designed to control freedom of movement. The pass book however not only limited freedom of movement but also restricted the ability of Africans to find employment and through that a measure of financial security and stability, if only at the most basic level of securing food and shelter on a daily basis. This is presented in stark terms in the film *My Country My Hat*. James' attempts to find employment are dependent on this document and he employs various methods to get one, eventually paying someone who deals in forged pass books. At a garage where he tries to find employment he is told that if you speak Xhosa "then you belong to the homelands". Similar attempts to find employment first elicit the question whether he has a pass book or not. Each day he returns home to his wife (who is employed as a domestic worker), with the news that he has both failed to find a job as well as secure a pass book. He is caught in a vicious cycle where without some employment he doesn't have sufficient funds with which to pay for a forged document and without this document he cannot find employment. He finally finds employment with an Afrikaner family whose head, Piet (Regardt van den Berg) is a refuse driver with a number of 'boys' working on his refuse truck.

The pass laws, as indicated above, were in the process of being phased out by the time this film was produced. But the broader context of political opposition is clearly evident in the film. The early 1980s were characterised by strong protests, especially in schools and among workers. These protests were fuelled by an economic recession and rising African unemployment in urban areas, as is evident in the film. The protests culminated in the formation of the United Democratic Front in August 1983 as a means to better co-ordinate and mobilise mass action. 1984 is also notable for the whites-only referendum in which white South Africans voted in large numbers for the creation of a tri-cameral parliament with separate houses for white, coloured and indian South Africans.



*My Country My Hat*, filmed within this broader context of political opposition, provides two parallel stories; that of an African man looking for both employment as well as the passport to life and employment in South Africa; a pass book, and the story of a white man who tries to hide a crime. These two stories merge when circumstances draw the white family and the African man together in a microcosm of the greater South African society and its relations among black and white. James (Peter Se-Puma) is an illegal in the country, even though he was born and has always lived in Johannesburg, because he does not have a pass book.

Piet's home is burgled one evening and the burglar takes off with a bundle of clothing including Piet's favourite hat which had come from America. While driving his refuse route one day, Piet spies an African man on a bicycle wearing his hat. He gives chase in his truck, knocks and kills the man. Dumping the corpse and bicycle in his truck, he picks up the man's pass book, forgetting the hat in the road. James' wife in the meantime has witnessed all this from the street corner and when Piet drives off, she picks up the hat which she takes home to give to James. When James arrives at Piet's house wearing the hat, Sarah, Piet's wife is immediately suspicious that he is the burglar and where before she had shown a degree of kindness and sympathy towards him she now displays nothing but cold suspicion. This burglary sets Piet's life on a course which brings him into conflict with his wife Sarah to whom he constantly has to lie in order to cover his criminal deed and with James whom he also eventually begins to suspect.

Piet in the meanwhile thinks that he has solved his problem by dumping the corpse at the municipal dump. When he returns home one evening, Sarah tells him of her suspicion and the fear of having James working for them. To ease her mind, Piet tells her that the burglar has been apprehended by the police so James cannot be the guilty man. Her suspicion lingers though because of the hat which is not available in the country as Piet learns on attempting to replace his stolen hat. The web of lies that Piet builds begin to tear at the fabric of his family life and in an attempt to find resolution to her problem, Sarah consults Piet's employer not about a possible burglar but rather about her suspicion that James is an illegal, without a pass book.

Throughout this ordeal of trying to find a job and/or secure a pass book, James maintains a level of good humour and equanimity and the film's comment appears to be that despite the rigours facing a 'passless' African man his basic humanity remains inviolate. James seldom displays anger or bitterness except on one occasion when on his return home he parodies a conversation with an official, presumably at the labour bureau. Posing as both the official and himself, asking questions and providing the answers, James recounts for his wife the difficulties of merely existing in 'white' South Africa. This little skit gives the viewer an insight into the kind of interrogation Africans routinely faced in their attempts to forge some kind of existence in South Africa. In Afrikaans James, impersonating the official, asks about his date of birth, where he was born, his birth certificate and which language he speaks. The answers, James provides in English.

This skit is also highly evocative of much of the protest theatre which emerged post Soweto 1976. Black performance theatre from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, writes Bhekizizwe Petersen, "represent a response and a challenge to the apartheid policies of the South African government".<sup>14</sup> Key themes of protest theatre during this time were issues such as the pass laws, police brutality, detentions and the prison conditions of detainees, the struggles of migrant workers and the conditions of the migrant housing compounds. James' enactment for his wife has a theatrical quality due not only to his performance but also the physical surroundings in which this scene takes place. The interior of their home is dimly lit which confines the space yet simultaneously hints at shadowed space beyond the reach of the paraffin lamp. This, as well as James' acting out his interaction with apartheid officials evokes a strong sense of the theatrical stage.

The duality of languages, English and Afrikaans, and the cultures attached to these, acts in several different ways in the film. Firstly, by virtue of the fact that James does not lay claim to either language (despite being able to speak both fluently) he is set apart and excluded. When he informs the labour bureau official, as well as the garage owner where

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<sup>14</sup> Bhekizizwe Peterson, "Apartheid and the Political Imagination in Black South African Theatre", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, 2, June 1990, p. 237.

he inquires about employment, that his native language is Xhosa, he is routinely told that he belongs in the homelands. Language in this instance signals identity. If one speaks either English or Afrikaans then one is South African, if however one speaks any of the African languages then one belongs in the homeland.

The pass book confers a temporary South African identity, necessary to enable the African individual to earn a living in South Africa. The film however parodies this conferring of identities through the pass book and points out the arbitrariness and absurdity of the system. James assumes a set of multiple identities and names depending on the situation he faces and this seems to be the only way for him to negotiate his existence within South Africa, with or without a pass book. Names here and historically, have a significant importance in the construction of identities. The white madam's naming of Zachariah in *Come Back, Africa* (1959) to Jake is emblematic of the kind of liberties taken with African names which are shortened or distorted. What is implicit in the white madam's response to Zachariah's name, "No, that won't do, I'll call you Jake", is the need to efface any form of African self-identity. This madam has to name Zachariah in order to make sense of him and his difference. But as Patrick Harries shows for migrant workers on the Kimberley goldfields, assuming anglicised names by Africans was also a marker of distinction particularly between those migrants who were already established and 'old hands' on the mines and the newcomers.<sup>15</sup> This implies that Africans were not without agency and were able to subvert this historically missionary practice of naming, into a more positive form of self-identification and distinction.

In one sense James exemplifies the kind of African Steve Biko writes about; outwardly passive and acquiescent but in the meantime the inner anger at the injustices he faces continues to build and foment.<sup>16</sup> As with Biko's African, James agrees readily, is seemingly accepting and acquiescent yet displays a keen awareness of his rights and how these rights are infringed upon. Ultimately at the end where he does indeed acquire a pass book (and with it another apartheid 'identity'), James has the last laugh in that he

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c.1860-1910*, Johannesburg and London: Heineman, 1994, p.59.

<sup>16</sup> Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*, Northlands: Johannesburg, Picador Africa, 2007, pp. 83-4.

has beat the system, has an identity acceptable to the South African authorities and is thus able to live and work in South Africa.

The language duality is important in another sense in that it sets the struggle (and here one is speaking of the grand Struggle against apartheid as well as the minor daily struggle of African individuals such as James) between Afrikaner and Africans. While the English language was given an equal co-existence with Afrikaans as the two official languages, in this film it is Afrikaans, Afrikaners and Afrikaner culture which dominate and by means of this dominance deny Africans a presence in urban South Africa. James' antagonist, Piet, is an Afrikaner as are all the state functionaries the viewer encounters in the film. The only native English-speaking (despite the fact that all the characters speak English in the film) people are the two white madams who make brief appearances. The first woman James encounters in his search for a job when he enters an enclosed garden to find a white woman in a bikini, sunbathing on her lawn. The second woman is encountered by Piet when he attempts to find more information about the African man he killed, suspecting him of having burgled his home.

These women are marginalised and isolated. They are marginal to the narrative and by extension to the broader political drama. They add nothing of value either to James' search for employment or to Piet's search for information. This marginality and isolation is both physical and emotional/intellectual. Physically they are cocooned behind high fences and walled-in gardens. Intellectually and emotionally they remain ignorant of the lives of the African people who serve their most intimate and personal needs.

The 'lazy and ignorant' white madam is a recurring stereotype in many films from the screeching housewife of *Come Back, Africa*, to the suburban madam in *Mapantsula* (discussed below) who threatens and eventually fires Panic's girlfriend Pat. These white madams are invariably English-speaking, (whereas Piet's wife is a working domestic woman who does her own cooking and cleaning without the services of an African servant), middle class and remain ignorant of the lives of the African people who minister to their most intimate needs at times.

The film caricatures the 'white madam' who while living in proximity to African domestic help remains entirely ignorant of their lives. Piet tries to find out the identity and some information about the man he killed. Enquiries at the labour bureau office lead him to the residence of a white woman who had employed him as a general worker. To Piet's questions about where this man lived, whether or not he had a family, the woman expresses only ignorance. Taking issue with specific South African stereotypes appears to have been the intention of the filmmaker. "In the film I take issue with the Houghton wife, mother, the sunbather, the black-exploiting black, Regardt van den Berg the white guy exploiting the guy at the dump."<sup>17</sup> The stereotypes in the film extend further with the representations of both Piet and his wife Sarah. While Sarah is the neurotic housewife who is petrified of the African domestic help, Piet is more amiable, due probably to the fact of his working alongside Africans. He appears to have no prejudices in sitting alongside his 'boys' on the pavement while they eat lunch. He is however the epitome of the transplanted Afrikaner with his safari shorts, bakkie and chauvinistic manner towards his wife.

The complex nature of the relationship white South Africans have with Africans is made apparent in the antipathy and suspicion adult whites feel towards Africans. In a caricature that sums up white attitudes, Sarah's friend and neighbour when advising her to get domestic help warns her though that "these blacks are bleddy lazy". While there is contempt and fear, there is also a sense of dependence. One of Piet's 'boys' drops and picks him up for work each evening, perhaps because the rubbish truck could not be left parked outside a white man's residence in a white neighbourhood. Piet's routine is to drop his daughter at school on his way to work and when he calls in sick on the day the corpse is discovered at the dump, Piet considers his 'boys' trustworthy enough to drop his daughter at school, though Sarah does not trust them and she eventually takes the child.

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<sup>17</sup> Keyan Tomaselli interviews David Bensusan, [www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/amps/interviews](http://www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/amps/interviews).

This complex relationship adults have is contrasted with the simplicity and trust with which white children accept Africans. Piet's daughter displays none of the mistrust and fear that her mother and her friend display and strikes a firm friendship with James who plays with her during his workday in the absence of her mother. At her birthday party, both she and her friends approach James with utmost courtesy, even taking him the cold drink meant for them.

James is eventually fired by Piet and picks up the dead man's pass book which had fallen out of Piet's pocket during a tussle with James. The film ends with James walking in the street where he is stopped by two white policemen in a van. They ask for his papers and he presents the dead man's pass book. They let him go accepting the validity of the pass book. There are two comments the film appears to make in this final sequence. Firstly, it seems to underscore the arbitrariness of the pass system itself where despite the fierceness with which the system was administered it was no proof of actual identity. It highlights the absurdity of the system that sought to control and regulate African movement in urban centres. Secondly, the film seems to comment on the common 'white' perception that one African man was like another with no distinct identity. James' attempts throughout the film had been to find employment despite the lack of a pass book. In doing so he had assumed a number of different names and experiences and assuming one more identity, which of the dead man, mattered little in the white world which did not imbue him with any distinguishing or unique characteristics in any event.

The film was independently financed and only qualified for the B-scheme subsidy after failing to qualify under the general subsidy. "... when I came back from overseas the first person that got hold of me was Ronnie Isaacs. He said that he had heard about my movie and this and this and he wanted to distribute it and I said to him fine and he said that we should go for the white circuit."<sup>18</sup> The Department of Trade and Industries however did not like the film and would not qualify it for the white circuit. Bensusan cites as main reason, the presence of African people in the film. On the question of whether the DTI objected to the subject matter of the film, Bensusan is quite unequivocal

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with David Bensusan.

that what mattered in respect of his film was not at all the content but the need to maintain racial separation. “The people in government never really had interest in the content. In fact the stuff that people were making then was basically slapstick or they were never really worried about it.... But they were concerned about basically the formalities or ... giving effect to the rules and regulations that one movie went to the right place and the other movie went to the other place. So white movies would go to this circuit and black movies would go... So they wanted to keep that clear and separate.”<sup>19</sup>

The initiative to register the film for the B-scheme came from Ronnie Isaacs who made the application through Tonie van der Merwe. The refusal to register the film for the general subsidy was made despite its screening at the Piccadilly which was a white cinema. Apart from festival screenings at the Labia and Baxter theatres, the film’s main distribution was via the mobile units operated by Ronnie Isaacs and Tonie van der Merwe. The film had also been screened internationally in a number of countries such as Australia with Besusan managing to sell it to the Germanic countries as well as to Holland.

In South Africa, the film has had mixed reception. While a major distributor such as Ster-Kinekor turned it down because it was “not economical” and the DTI refused to register it for a white subsidy, it has received critical appreciation from diverse groups such as the Progressive Federal Party which screened it as part of a fundraising event with some of the proceeds accruing to Besusan. It has also been screened at a family planning and therapy workshop organised by Wits.<sup>20</sup> The film was passed for general release through indirect means. Besusan submitted the film to the Censor Board for screening at the Cape Town film festival. The film was given an ‘A’ clearance for the festival and was extended for general release.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the majority of B-Scheme filmmakers (other exceptions being Oliver Schmitz, Clive Scott and Simon Sabela among others) Besusan came to B-Scheme production

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with David Besusan.

<sup>20</sup> “Keyan Tomaselli interviews David Besusan”, [www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/amps/interviews](http://www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/amps/interviews).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

with training in film. "I trained overseas (at the Central London Polytechnic Film School) and came back and I worked on some foreign productions and I decided then to make *My Country My Hat*."<sup>22</sup> He wrote the script (he drafted 90% of his own scripts and then had them translated), and often did the camerawork and sound as well for most of his other films. Among the filmmakers interviewed, Bensusan is unique in that the opportunity the B-Scheme offered was not to make money but rather to hone his skills as a filmmaker. "It wasn't an easy situation to work in but it was a wonderful situation for someone who wanted to gain experience." He qualifies this however by noting that producing B-Scheme films provided invaluable work experience for the documentary filmmaker rather than the fiction filmmaker because of the tight shooting schedules. "You shoot a movie in two weeks (which) is very quick. Some people have been known to shoot a movie in a week. I don't know how they do it. (If) You shoot a movie in two weeks you basically have to have very good planning, very good organisation. You then have to edit the movie, you have to put a soundtrack on it etc. etc. I think that my levels of confidence were pretty good at the end of that."<sup>23</sup>

### **Addressing social problems – *Mathata* (1984)**

*Mathata: A Hard Life* stars and is directed by the veteran South African actor Clive Scott.<sup>24</sup> As with Bensusan's film this film can not justifiably be identified as Third Cinema and nor is it overtly political in the same sense as the previous film. Despite this however, it has been included in this chapter because it does offer a social critique of 'white' South African society, albeit from Scott's liberal perspective. The film is about a street child befriended by a white man who helps him find a home and family. After a night out, Scott and his wife (Elize Cawood) are mugged on their way home. Scott gives chase to the black boy and eventually finds him holed up in a deserted alleyway sniffing glue. Overcome by compassion for the homeless boy, he takes him home much to the annoyance of his wife who is quite vocal about her reluctance to welcome the boy into her home. She objects to the child's presence, Scott bathing him in their bath, letting him

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with David Bensusan.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with David Bensusan.

<sup>24</sup> Scott is perhaps best known for his roles in the 1980s television dramas *The Villagers* and *Oh George*.



sleep on their couch, feeding him and in general assuming any kind of responsibility towards him.

The rest of the film follows Scott's quest to locate the boy's family who would assume responsibility for him. This quest takes him from police and welfare offices right into the heart of the township, accompanied by the bewildered boy who from the outset had resisted any form of assistance. They locate an uncle who refuses to accept responsibility for him. After many misadventures a grandmother is eventually found who joyously welcomes the little boy to her bosom. Scott is thus relieved of his responsibility and becomes a local hero in the press. This external validation of his humanitarian and compassionate nature finally reconciles his wife to his deed and indeed when we see the press reporter interviewing them in their home, she assumes responsibility for taking in the homeless boy.

As two of the B-scheme films with strong white characterisations, this film and *My Country My Hat* share a degree of commonality in the representation of white women as racist and neurotic as opposed to white men who are more sympathetic and tolerant towards Africans. In both instances however, the films seem to provide some form of justification for the women's reactions. In this film an African boy had mugged her husband while in *My Country*, an African man had burgled the home of the white couple. The white men act as counterfoils to the oftentimes racist hysteria of the women. While Scott is compelled by a sense of social responsibility to extend a helping hand to the African boy, Piet's tolerance in *My Country*, is based on his daily contact with Africans at work. Whatever the origins of their dispositions though, both men display a degree of tolerance, understanding and deep sympathy with Africans, their class and cultural differences notwithstanding.

Piet and his wife were obviously working class Afrikaners, while Scott and his wife are as obviously English-speaking middle class whites. Scott is a white collar office worker while his wife is a housewife. This class and cultural difference is most obvious in what motivates their relationship with Africans. Scott's sense of social justice and

responsibility towards those less fortunate can be placed within a liberal discourse as evidenced not only by his actions but also when he shouts "It's always someone else's responsibility, when will we take responsibility" to the rather unhelpful welfare officer. Implicit in this statement is not only the social responsibility of the individual towards the less fortunate of society, but unintentionally also, a criticism of the official position as regards urban Africans. The welfare officer's unhelpfulness can be understood as the official apartheid position in which the welfare of urban Africans was not the responsibility of the South African authorities.

Thus while *My Country* is intentionally a political film, *Mathata* as consciously and despite this implicit criticism, is non-political in the sense that the film raises no questions regarding the role of the state in the welfare of urban Africans, nor does it even pretend to examine (critically or otherwise) the structural factors impacting on urban Africans. Despite the theme of social responsibility the film makes no comment on the link between apartheid racial policies and the plight of African people, in this case African street children. The film subscribes to what Tomaselli cites as "structured absences", in this case the absence of politics and the underlying social and political structures which impact on the condition of urban Africans.<sup>25</sup> This obviates the necessity for either a collective cause or a collective response to the problem of street children. Because the broader social and political context is not responsible for the problem of glue-sniffing street children in the first place, it therefore cannot be responsible for providing a solution. This creates the narrative device for individual action as represented by Scott.

A key difference between the two films is that while *My Country* represents English-speaking white South Africans as somewhat marginal to the struggle between African and Afrikaner, in *Mathata*, English-speaking South Africans are rather more central. This centrality however is outside the realm of political power as is evident in Scott's failure to get any assistance from the state welfare department. Both films however seem

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<sup>25</sup> See Keyan Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Practice in South African Cinema" PhD Thesis, Wits, 1983, p.451 and also Harriet Gavshon, "Levels of Intervention in Films Made for African Audiences", *Critical Arts*, 2, 4, 1983, p.16.

to represent English-speaking white South Africans as politically impotent. This representation in *My Country* is constructed in rather more negative terms than in *Mathata*. The English-speaking South Africans in the former film are selfish and ignorant, foolish in their extreme ignorance while in the latter film, they are more positive and the imperative to contribute positively to the lives of Africans comes from an inner moral code.

The role and civic responsibility of the individual is underscored by the fact that Scott's quest to find the boy's family is a solo quest. He has no assistance either from his family or the broader society and most definitely not the authorities in the form of the welfare officer. As the only person in the film who seems to be compelled by a sense of social responsibility, Scott's determination to help the child is heroic given the many obstacles and dangers he faces. With only the boy as companion, Scott journeys into the townships, braving not only the hostile stares of the township residents but ultimately also, an attack on his person and possessions. Scott is chased by thugs, has his shoes and car stolen but this neither demoralises him nor prevents him from helping the African boy. He eventually discovers the grandmother who accepts responsibility for boy, thus helping Scott fulfil his mission successfully. Scott's civic sense of social responsibility is vindicated not only by the final success of his mission but ultimately through the external validation of the broader society. As stated earlier, he is hailed as a local hero by the press and as all mythic heroes his modesty does not allow him to contradict his wife who claims the glory for herself.

The film envisions the township in rather shallow but stereotypical ways. As a white man venturing into a black township, Scott is suitably nervous and his fears are soon realised when he is mugged and his car is stolen. Furthermore, the township residents are largely hostile towards him and he receives little help from them other than basic directions. Although he is accompanied by the boy, these negative experiences signal Scott as an alien presence in the township, the recipient of hostile behaviour and looks.

Notwithstanding his liberal views and a strongly motivating sense of civic social responsibility, Scott is unable to understand either the boy or the structural factors which forced him onto the streets. The lack of any rationale for his choice of lifestyle could suggest an absence of evil which would therefore make him intrinsically good but rather misguided and therefore needing to be rescued by Scott. At no point is the child consulted about his wishes and desires. Nor is Scott interested in finding out how or why he landed up living on the streets. In fact the boy remains virtually mute throughout the film, speaking only when pressed by a direct question. He is completely bewildered by the white man and his efforts to help him and recoils in fear at the open hostility of the white woman who refuses to acknowledge his humanity.

Regardless of the presence of African people, this film is not about Africans in the sense that they are not the main characters. Instead, the film is about a white man whose conscience prods him enough to take an interest in one African child and help him find his family. In this sense the film is entirely about Scott, his morality, his angst and his desire to 'do the right thing'. The African boy, his grandmother, when she is eventually located and all the other African characters remain marginal and one-dimensional. They are neither agents of change and nor are they people with significant wishes and hopes. They are like the boy, helpless victims and objects of paternal guidance from a white man.

Scott had a specific aim with many of the films which he directed for the "African market". "I wanted to bring in stories that would create better human relations through humour."<sup>26</sup> Though there is no humour in this film, it is explicitly about human relations. What Scott did not perhaps perceive at the time is the skewed nature of the human relations he set out to create. Despite a liberal humanist perspective which nonetheless operated within the strict boundaries of racial apartheid, Scott is unable to step entirely outside the social political context. White peoples' fear of the township as a haven of crime becomes a reality when he is attacked and robbed. Africans need the assistance and guidance of white people in order to succeed and safeguard family. Where an

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<sup>26</sup> Clive Scott, email correspondence.

Afrikaner Nationalist government does not have the political will to look after the interests of Africans, an English-speaking white liberal humanist must therefore fill this breach and fulfil a civic responsibility.

The film was initially financed through loans from Scott's mother and sister. He readily admits that the film did not cost much at the time and with a maximum subsidy payout of R80 000 he was able to repay his investors "by doubling their investment."<sup>27</sup> The film was shot in two weeks with perhaps the same amount of time spent on editing. It was screened on the mobile circuit at various schools and in church halls. While "Black audiences loved" the film(s), very few white people apart from family and friends, watched it. Scott attributes this to the fact that "perhaps our quality and finish was not up to the general "white" standard." Or it could also be due to the fact, as he implies in his next statement that "in those days everything was considered separate and there were films for "whites" and those for "blacks"."<sup>28</sup>

### **Awakening political consciousness – *Mapantsula* (1989)**

*Mapantsula*, though not entirely a B-Scheme film, was produced through investment funding raised in terms of the tax incentive scheme as well as some funding through the state subsidy.<sup>29</sup> The finances for the film were raised under false pretences in that a dummy script was submitted in which all traces of the political complexities of the film were removed and it was presented as a "nice, clean harmonious little gangster movie set anywhere in the world".<sup>30</sup> For subsidy purposes the film was also registered as a "township 'gangster' movie" with the Directorate of Publications.<sup>31</sup> Much of the film was shot on the production set of Heyns Films as access to townships was limited due to

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<sup>27</sup> Clive Scott, email correspondence.

<sup>28</sup> Clive Scott, email correspondence.

<sup>29</sup> Email correspondence with Oliver Schmitz. Though not completely funded by the B-Scheme, it has been included here not least because it heralded a shift in South African filmmaking, but also because it acts as a useful counterfoil to the other B-scheme films. It speaks of what can be possible despite the constraints of apartheid politics which governed state funding for films.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Gugler, *African Film: Reimagining a Continent*, David Philip, Cape Town, 2003, p. 91.

<sup>31</sup> Keyan Tomaselli, "Popular Communication in South Africa: "Mapantsula" and its Context of Struggle" in *South African Theatre Journal*, 5, 1, May 1991, p.46.

the 1986 state of emergency.<sup>32</sup> The film was directed by Oliver Schmitz and scripted by Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane who also stars as the main protagonist Panic. The film is indeed about a gangster called Themba or Panic as he is known to his friends who leads a dissolute life of petty crime. He boards with Ma Modise (played by Dolly Rathebe) and is often behind with rent. This together with his life of crime constantly raises Ma Modise's ire. Apart from crime his only other source of income is from his girlfriend Pat who is a domestic worker in the white suburbs.

Explicitly political and of all the films discussed in this chapter, possibly the strongest contender for the label Third Cinema, the film explores the nexus between cinema, crime and politics which has historical antecedents in South Africa. In the 1950s, film was viewed as a major aggravating factor in the initiation of criminality among African township youths who were exposed to films depicting cowboys and crooks.<sup>33</sup>

Amapantsula is a slang word for the slightly flared trousers worn by Panic, and tsotsis in general whose sartorial pride<sup>34</sup> echoed the style and panache of American gangsters of the 1950s. Panic is no less proud of being well turned-out as is evidenced by the scene where he steals clothes and dons them immediately thereafter. "What you wear is who you are, mama", he declares to the woman watching his antics. Where historically gangsters were romanticised figures in the townships, the increasing politicisation of the 1980s has made them exile figures living on the margins of their communities as is evident in the film. Panic has no friends. He is tolerated by his landlady, Ma Modise, disdained by the men he is imprisoned with and contemptuously tolerated by the police for the information he can provide them with. His girlfriend Pat loses her job after Panic throws a stone through the madam's window. This results in Panics' loss not only of his girlfriend, but also of the only other source of income he has apart from crime. Panic is entirely friendless in his community especially once they learn that he has informed to the police in order to save himself.

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<sup>32</sup> Prinsloo, p. 40.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> See Clive Glaser, " 'We must infiltrate the Tsotsis': School Politics and Youth Gangs in Soweto, 1968-1976" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 2, June 1988.

Collusion between tsotsis and political activists was considered a real possibility and threat by the apartheid security forces especially during and after the Soweto riots of 1976. But as Glaser argues the complexities of differing identities, imperatives and agendas between politicised youth and the tsotsi element precluded any sustained links and collaboration between the two. Youth activists in fact very often assumed a policing role in curbing criminal elements within the townships that frequently used the unrest as cover for their criminal activities.<sup>35</sup> While attempts had been made by local youth and political organisations such as SASM to co-opt the tsotsis and harness their criminal energies towards a political outcome these remained largely unsuccessful due in large part to differing agendas and levels of political consciousness. The tsotsis' involvement in the looting of beerhalls, and destruction and robbery of municipal offices among other activities at the time earned them community admiration for a while but this changed to opprobrium when their criminal behaviour targeted townships residents themselves.

These historical tensions between political activists and tsotsis form one subtext in the film as it charts Panic's selfish criminality which through a gradual process of politicisation is transformed into more redeemable qualities which finally destroy his marginality in the community. "Gangster films bring to the centre those marginalised, exploited and abused by a capitalist system. They expose the inequities and the frustration and violence bred by social, political and economic inequality."<sup>36</sup> In the South African context these inequities are exacerbated by racial discrimination and Panic as a black man in urban South Africa has limited opportunities for employment and the opportunities to acquire material wealth and luxuries. Crime is the only way in which he will get the money and clothes he needs and wants. Panic's process of change from a common mapantsula to a more politically and community conscious black man is heralded by a number of factors beginning with the brick he throws through Pat's employer's home. As a gesture of defiance it represents not only Panic's anger and frustration which identifies its target as white, but is also the iconic image of youth protestors hurling stones and small rocks at authorities. Despite his conscious choice as

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Lesley Marx, "Underworld RSA" in *South African Theatre Journal*, 10, 2, September 1996, p.11-12.

an apolitical outcast of his community, this gesture places him squarely among the multitude of black youth whose frustrations were being voiced in a similar fashion throughout urban townships. This defiance costs Pat her job and she in turn rejects Panic which begins to chip away at his confidence and identity as a mapantsula who is also a ladies man. The fact that she later enjoys a close relationship with union organiser Duma further erodes his confidence and identity. A visit to a sangoma who warns him that his actions will have consequences gives him pause for further thought.

But the actual moment of transformation occurs during his interrogation by the police. His presence at (rather than participation in) a protest march had landed him in jail where again sharing a jail cell with UDF activists, he is faced with contempt for who he is and what he has done in the past. During the police interrogation Panic is faced with not only the stark reality of his position, friendless both within and outside his community, but also with the question about his identity. His given name is Themba, his mapantsula street name is Panic and his name as a police informant is Johannes and he is addressed as such during his interrogation. This perhaps more than anything else brings about the complete dissolution of whatever conception Panic has had about himself. His multiple identities argues Tomaselli is inextricably linked to his survival<sup>37</sup> but they cannot guarantee this survival as he discovers during the interrogation. As Johannes he is only useful to the police as long as he can help them spy on the comrades. Panic's bewilderment during this interrogation scene is both feigned and genuine. He feigns incomprehension of Afrikaans but is genuinely bewildered at what his response should be to the immunity that is offered in exchange for collaboration.

His life of selfish individualism has left him unprepared for the kind of community solidarity he witnessed among the comrades in the cell, or as expressed by Duma in the union offices or as displayed during the protest march. But it is a solidarity that is essential to his continued existence and which he had started to appreciate before his incarceration but which appears to crystallise to a certainty only during that interrogation

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<sup>37</sup> Keyan Tomaselli. "Popular Communication in South Africa: "Mapantsula" and its Context of Struggle", p. 53.



which is ironic as it was meant to scare him but in the end leads to a greater consciousness of not only his individual but also his community's subject position within apartheid South Africa. Panic's redemption begins with his search for Sam, Ma Modise's son who goes missing following the protest march and culminates in his refusal to collaborate with the police for which he suffers the consequences.

The film is a product of apartheid South Africa not only due to its Machiavellian production history and the post-production obstacles encountered by the filmmakers, but importantly also in the broader context the film represents. As with other B-Scheme films discussed thus far, which all speak to the broader apartheid context in one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, this film too speaks to that context but in a markedly different way. This difference is both at the level of cinematic style and aesthetic, content and intention. Often described as an anti-apartheid, or according to Gugler, "the first *militant* anti-apartheid" film<sup>38</sup>, *Mapantsula* is certainly that but goes beyond this simplistic label and examines not only the structural links between apartheid and urban African communities but also explores the role of individuals both within and on the margins of these communities. Panic is a product of the inequities of the apartheid system which is visible throughout the film. It is apparent in the protest march, in the detention of activists, in the union offices, in the seclusion of white suburbia which both Panic and Pat enter on sufferance and it is most visibly represented by the policemen themselves. Similarly, Panic's community is also a product of the apartheid system as are the local African councillors who as surrogates of the Nationalist government, not unnaturally become the target of frustrations over rent increases and the like.

On release the film was restricted to festivals and the video format because the Directorate of Publications felt that the film "has the power to incite probable viewers and that the "large screen amplifies the dangerous political effects".<sup>39</sup> Other reasons cited by the censors included "friction between blacks and whites", the encouragement of "confrontation with the police" and the fact that the film's final message of non-

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Gugler, *African Film: Reimagining a Continent*, p.91, my emphasis on the word militant.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Mark Beittel, "Mapantsula: Cinema, Crime and Politics on the Witwatersrand" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 1990, p752.

cooperation with the police would render the state “powerless to act against subversive organisations.”<sup>40</sup> Despite its anti-apartheid themes and content the film won numerous AA Life/M-Net Vita awards for best film, best script, best original music score, best actor, and best supporting actress.<sup>41</sup>

### **Challenging cultural codes – *The Chicken Man* (1990)**

*The Chicken Man* was an attempt at challenging cultural codes, such as parental authority, according to director, producer and scriptwriter David Bensusan.<sup>42</sup> The story is about Eliwe, a young man played by Lucas Baloyi<sup>43</sup>, who works on a chicken farm run by his father. He is a quiet, sensitive “pacifist”<sup>44</sup> who has developed a fondness for the chickens and he can’t bear to see them killed. The chickens are his best friends and his failure to perform the duties assigned to him often create problems. He is regularly chastised by his father and often violently beaten. None of this however deters him and he continues to regard the chickens as his friends whom he would rather set free than harm. His only support is his mother who often intervenes on his behalf.

After a particularly severe beating from his father which leaves him insensible, the young man decides to leave home with two chicks in a wire cage. He wanders into an abandoned house which houses a local gang. They apprehend him but the police, including Eliwe’s older brother who is an officer, arrive while they are still questioning him. There is a shoot-out and Eliwe’s brother is injured. Caught with the gangsters

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, p.121.

<sup>41</sup> Gugler, p. 91.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with David Bensusan.

<sup>43</sup> Lucas Baloyi is one of the most talented actors to have worked in this B-Scheme industry as can be assessed by the variety of roles he played in films such as the *Botsotso* series which required him to play the role of a simple buffoon. This can be contrasted with more serious roles such as in this film as well as *The Gold Cup* which is analysed in another chapter. According to Bensusan, the lack of any kind of unionisation for African actors during these years allowed for the exploitation of talented people like Baloi. Bensusan comments, “He was used by the system. People would say come and make the movie for us. Here is half the script, interpret it as you want.... So he worked from one movie to the other and there wasn’t a black acting fraternity then..... So he never got into the books of a reputable agent so he was stuck within the system for the next twenty years.” Attempts to locate Baloi were not successful as no one had any idea what had become of him or whether in fact he was still alive or not.

<sup>44</sup> Bensusan identifies this character as being pacifist in nature.

Eliwe is eventually returned home in the company of a doctor and a district nurse. His parents are informed that he needs special care, preferably institutionalised care but his father however refuses to listen and accept that there is anything wrong with his son other than laziness. Eliwe withdraws even further into himself which brings further wrath on him and the physical beatings continue despite the intervention of the mother and older brother. A particularly brutal dunking in a water trough leaves Eliwe severely injured and insensible and the father eventually agrees to his institutionalisation. He leaves with the district nurse amid the tears of his mother and brother and the mocking laughter of his father.

As with Bensusan's other film discussed earlier in the chapter, this film breaks with the conventions of the B-Scheme films in that it neither panders to the lowest common denominator nor does it entrench prevalent stereotypes about African people. As a film that challenges cultural codes, the most obvious one is the young man's constant and consistent refusal to obey his father as head of the family and farm. His refusal is in marked contrast to the pride the father has in his elder son who as a policeman is vested with his own authority but still acknowledges his father's authority in matters of family and work and often acts as mediator between his father and brother. Nothing however works and the young chicken man is in constant conflict with his father and elder.

His entire philosophy and regard for chickens is a challenge to the traditional authority represented by a father. For Bensusan the "aim of the movie was to try and show how the traditional black cultural values were being slowly undermined from within and to show how the static relationships between parents and children were capable of basically being rethought through this particular narrative. So that is really what the movie tried to do, was to try to challenge the dominance of the father figure.... as a key cultural player within society and to challenge that dominance not through political moves... but certainly through this particular conception of pacifism and love for chickens which really has never had a kind of strong role to play within traditional cultures."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with David Bensusan.

Apart from the challenge to parental authority, the film is a graphic and poignant representation of the persecution of those who are different. Eliwe stands as a figure of innocence amid the brutality and gore of the chicken farm. Scenes of the slaughter and plucking of chickens are simultaneously watched in horror by Eliwe and brutal glee by his father. As though to emphasise the nature of the farm and by metaphoric extension, the nature of life, upon his return home Eliwe is forced to look upon a floor littered with chicken corpses and bloodied feathers. Despite the strength and dominance of his father and all his attempts to elicit some reaction from his son, Eliwe remains withdrawn and seemingly impervious.

The challenge to traditional parental authority had taken a decisive turn since Soweto 1976 in which school students and youth had taken the lead in opposing apartheid because of the fearful complacency of the older generation. Echoes of this are clearly evident in *Mapantsula* where Ma Modise gets actively drawn into the marches because of her son Sam's disappearance.

But for Bensusan it was imperative that his films avoid overt political issues despite his earlier film *My Country, My Hat* which dealt with the pass laws in an interesting and innovative way. "I knew I was working under difficult circumstances because the minute I started making political movies I knew that either they would close the system or they would limit the possibility."<sup>46</sup> What was important for him though was the potential for experience that the B-Scheme system offered with tight shooting schedules of two weeks.

Despite this cautious approach regarding political issues, *The Chicken Man*, could at one level be analysed as an allegory of the position of Africans in South African society. Both the young chicken lover and his chickens represent the marginalised in society who are at the mercy of those more powerful than themselves. The chicken man remains mute in the face of constant criticism and violence from his father. He is entirely powerless to defend himself or make his position understood and his only act of active defiance results in his eventual removal from his family. This act of walking out of the home signifies an

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with David Bensusan.

act of courage as well as defiance. His courage lies not only in his strength to defy his father but also in taking a decisive and bold step into an unknown future especially given his 'oddities'. This subverts the accepted notion of 'chicken' which in everyday use is understood to mean cowardly.

His passive defiance is evident throughout the film and is constituted by his consistent refusal to harm his friends the chickens. Instead we often see him entering the chicken enclosure to commune in silence with creatures who not only cause him no harm, but who also presumably offer a measure of comfort and friendship. This passive defiance can be understood to reflect the myriad ways in which Africans defied and negotiated the oppressive laws governing their everyday lives in South African society while attempting to avoid direct punishment and coercion.

Similarly marginalised is his mother both due to her gender and her stoic support of this sensitive and unusual son. While she gives comfort and nurses him whenever he is severely beaten by his father, she never voices any opposition to her husband's treatment of her son. She represents the state of helplessness that women experienced both within the home and broader society. She is the nurturer and comforter while the father is the dictator within the home and family.

When questioned about audience response to this film which is in marked contrast to most B-Scheme films which followed the conventions of either the slapstick comedy, murder mystery or action adventure, Bensusan offers interesting insights into the distribution and exhibition aspects of this industry. Distribution according to Bensusan was tightly controlled by Tonie van der Merwe and Ronnie Isaacs in Natal and the Transvaal respectively. They had agents who went out with vans equipped with projectors and screened these films at schools, church and community halls. They swapped films and in this manner a film was able to reach greater distribution. Feedback for Bensusan was not crucial since it consisted of the guidelines from the distributor for films dealing in the main with action/adventure, guidelines which he appeared not to follow. "You would get feedback from a distributor and the distributor would say go and

make a movie like King Kong or something, or go and make a movie like an American slapstick or whatever, so they provided the guidelines but it was never of any great difference because people got their subsidy so it did not make a difference whether you made a movie of this genre or that genre or a good movie or a bad movie relatively speaking, you got your subsidy.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Guerrilla filmmaking – *Midnite Rush* (1990)**

Despite Bensusan’s desire to avoid political issues, politics make an interesting but insistent intrusion in his second production for 1990, *Midnite Rush*. The film centres on Billy (Lucas Baloyi), a newspaper vendor with musical aspirations. He composes a song called ‘Midnite Rush’ which is eventually stolen by the music company where he records a demo tape. The company records and markets the song in the name of one of its established artists. Billy confronts the owner of the company and is told to bring a lawyer to prove a case of theft. In desperation he breaks into the owner’s house, finds the demo tape but is caught. He is eventually killed and his body disappears without a trace.

This seemingly simplistic narrative is deceptive on a number of levels. At one obvious level it is the story of the ‘small guy’, a ‘David’ who faces his ‘Goliath’ in the form of the record company owner. But unlike David who beats Goliath, Billy is unsuccessful and eventually faces the ultimate defeat; loss of his creativity and then his life. Billy’s girlfriend Lucy, who works as a receptionist for the record company, acquires the recording of a conversation between the company boss and Johnny, the more established musician, in which they discuss Billy’s composition and how to deal with Billy. But while this may provide the evidence needed, the film fails to offer the conventional closure wherein good would have triumphed over evil. Instead, the film consistently maintains its thematic concern with power and how it manifests and affects the lives of those who are powerless. Lucy is powerless to use the tape recording to prove Billy’s ownership of the music and nor is she in a position to ensure that justice is served and the

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with David Bensusan.

evil brought to account for their misdeeds. But beyond this obvious level are narrative subtexts that speak directly to the broader issues facing South African society.

Firstly, Billy can be understood to represent the thousands of African youths who disappeared without a trace following Soweto 1976. His death is neither remarked upon by anyone and nor is he missed. He is killed with impunity by those with greater power than he has in the same way that apartheid security forces were enforcing state policies without any thought of retributive consequences. Billy is entirely alone and friendless and this renders him powerless to the degree that he is unable to assert ownership of his creativity. As with many other characters in most B-Scheme films, Billy has no background, no context within a wider network of family or friends. We have no idea where he lives or spends his nights sleeping. We only ever see him either on the streets where he sells newspapers or in the studio where his musician friend rehearses. The difference however with other B-Scheme films is that Billy's solitary existence is supported by the subtext which emerges through most especially the newspaper headlines.

Bensusan's treatment of the political issues of the time is both deft and subtle. By casting his protagonist as a newspaper vendor, Bensusan is able to give prominence to political news by means of focusing on the bold headlines and posters on walls and bridges. "Pupil dies" is part of a headline on the newspaper Billy holds as he tries to sell it. This supports the idea that Billy can be understood as being representative of the thousands of young students and youth who either disappeared (in detention or exile) or were killed during and after the Soweto uprisings of 1976 as well as the later unrest of the early and mid-1980s. Furthermore, the headline of a *Sowetan* (newspaper) which Billy holds screams in bold typeface, "The Shame of Soweto".

While these two headlines would appear to signal the period of the film as immediately post-Soweto 1976, other headlines however signal the period of the film as being sometime during the late 1980s. Headlines such as "Wolpe calls for new sanctions", "World Reception Planned for Mandela" and especially the headline "Gatting here this

week – Bacher” signals the period 1990. The last headline refers to the English ‘rebel’ cricket tour, captained by Mike Gatting, which was scheduled for January 1990.<sup>48</sup> The reference to Soweto however underscores the earlier point that the film signals a clear link between Billy’s fate and the fate of countless other youths who simply disappeared in the aftermath of Soweto 1976.

These headlines were on the masthead of the historically propaganda tabloid *The Citizen*. The newspaper’s ignominious origins lie in the period of ‘total strategy’ of the mid-1970s.<sup>49</sup> Investigations by the *Sunday Express* and the *Rand Daily Mail* into the propaganda activities of the Department of Information uncovered the precise role of *The Citizen* in what became known as the ‘Info Scandal’ or ‘Muldersgate’ of the late 1970s. These investigations revealed that the idea of a newspaper was first proposed to then Prime Minister John Vorster as a means for the National Party government to have on its payroll its own mouthpiece for the English market.<sup>50</sup> It was specifically aimed at providing a pro-government English newspaper as a counterbalance to the more critical *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express*. A commission of inquiry confirmed that *The Citizen* had received an initial start-up sum of R12 million from the government and Louis Luyt was personally chosen by Vorster to head the project.<sup>51</sup> Eschel Rhoodi, the former Secretary for the Department of Information was Luyt’s political boss which made the link between the newspaper and the state irrefutable.

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<sup>48</sup> Following both local and international calls for sport sanctions against all-white South African sports teams, the SA Cricket board sponsored a number of ‘rebel’ tours in order to give local white players the opportunity to compete against international teams. The 1990 tour was one such event and it provoked protest and mass demonstrations throughout the country. Furthermore, the tour coincided with political events such as the unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations. The tour was a dismal failure and was cut short after just twenty-five days. See Douglas Booth, “Hitting Apartheid for Six? The Politics of the South African Sports Boycott”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38, 3, July 2003, Peter Hain, *Sing the Beloved Country: The Struggle for the New South Africa*, Pluto Press, London, 1996 and Rob Nixon, “Apartheid on the Run: The South African Sports Boycott”, *Transition*, 58, 1992 for South African sport during the apartheid years and the sports boycott of the country.

<sup>49</sup> *The Citizen* made its publishing debut on 7 September 1976 as a morning daily. It was owned by the Afrikaner businessman Louis Luyt and was the focus of controversy since its inception.

<sup>50</sup> Adam Jones, “From Rightest to ‘Brightest’? The Strange Tale of South Africa’s Citizen”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 2, June 1998, p. 329.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 330.



One of the biggest ironies is that where while *The Citizen* has continued publishing, its nemeses, and the more established papers such as the *Sunday Express* and the *Rand Daily Mail* have ceased existence. Jones ascribes this success to the successful takeover of the newspaper by the Perskor group who continued to inject capital despite the lack of returns throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.<sup>52</sup>

The other astonishing irony, given its propaganda origins, is that *The Citizen's* biggest readership is from among the black market, with Africans comprising the largest of this black sector. Again, Jones ascribes this to a number of reasons. Firstly, the price of *The Citizen* makes it far more affordable to the general black, and specifically African, readership. Secondly, the newspaper's tabloid format makes it easier and less unwieldy to read than the broadsheet format of other dailies, especially for readers travelling to work on trains, buses and taxis. And thirdly, *The Citizen* acquired the 'The Punter's Friend' from the Mail on its demise in 1985, which was hugely popular with African readers.<sup>53</sup> This popularity among African readers is borne out by the appearance of headlines from the newspaper in the film *Midnite Rush*. Of the headlines which Bensusan flashes across the screen, those originating from *The Citizen* masthead far outnumber headlines from the *Sowetan* or the *Star* newspapers. The appearances of these headlines throughout the film keep the viewer keenly conscious of the political issues of the time. This is a form of guerrilla filmmaking which best exemplifies some of the objectives of Third Cinema.

## Conclusion

As stated earlier, not all of the films analysed in this chapter display all of the elements that inform Third Cinema, however some of them offer a strong critique of apartheid policies. The three films by David Bensusan indicate a clear political objective, however subtle and implicit this may be. While *My Country My Hat* is explicit in dealing with the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 332.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 334.

pass system, the other two films are more subtle in the manner in which they represent the broader political context and its effects on African people. All three of Bensusan's films however are structured around issues of power and its impact on African people. While *My Country* explores the manifestation of power and its dynamic on a political level, the other two films are more concerned with power on domestic and personal levels. In *Chicken Man* the power is vested in the figure of the father and the traditional authority he represents while *Midnite Rush* constructs the power dynamic in terms of the David and Goliath archetype. In all instances though, the power is unrestricted and unaccountable. It is the enemy of the 'little' people, who face great odds but remain unbowed, surrendering life (Billy in *Midnite Rush*) rather than compromising an intrinsic sense of self-worth and personal dignity.

*Mapantsula* comes nearest to fulfilling all the criteria of Third Cinema. It is explicitly and intentionally political in content if not entirely revolutionary in its application of cinematic techniques and style. (In fact none of the films discussed in this chapter fulfil the revolutionary mandate of Third Cinema in terms of the cinematic techniques. Even *Mapantsula's* flash-back technique and the parallel narratives this creates do not entirely rupture Hollywood conventions and styles.) Using Ukadike's list of key elements, then *Mapantsula* certainly contributes to "decolonize the mind, contribute to the development of a radical consciousness (and) lead to a revolutionary transformation of society."<sup>54</sup> This decolonisation and transformation occurs both diagetically and non-diagetically. In other words, it is both inside the filmic world among the characters and outside among audiences. This is most apparent in Panic's transformation from a selfish, self-serving criminal to a politically conscientised youth who eventually finds redemption.

In varying degrees this decolonisation and transformation, at an individual level, is the one element of Third Cinema that is common to all the films featured in this chapter. James and Piet reach a degree of transformation as a result of their individual actions as well as due to their contact with and eventual antipathy towards each other. Scott's transformation is equally significant if only in the fact that his perceptions about street

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<sup>54</sup> Ukadike, p. 7.

children change. His desire to help the African boy propels him out of his safe, comfortable middle class life into the streets of the townships in search of the boy's family. His sense of civic responsibility is justifiably rewarded when he eventually succeeds in his mission and wins the esteem of the broader society.

All the films analysed in this chapter are products of personal courage on the part of the respective filmmakers. This courage is evident in the aspirations of the filmmakers to not only address one or other element of apartheid ideology and policy, but to critique it. This critique is both explicit as in the case of *My Country My Hat* and *Mapantsula*, and subtle in the case of the other films. This ability to critically engage with political issues illustrates that despite political suppression and control, as well as strict censorship filmmakers did have opportunities to venture beyond the bounds of what was politically correct under apartheid rule. That not all filmmakers were able to do so confirms a key argument of this thesis; that the majority of the white filmmakers producing 'black films' assumed surrogate roles for the apartheid government.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

This research set out to trace the historical changes that have informed state thinking about film in general but more specifically, film for African audiences in South Africa. Though the specific focus has been on the period from 1956, when the first state subsidy was introduced, until 1990 when it was reformulated, this thesis has taken a broad historical context into account. A motivating factor for this broad historical approach has been the argument that the intervention of the apartheid state in film production and exhibition built on, modified and continued the interventionist practices of both the colonial and segregationist governments. While methods, reasons for and the degree of state intervention may have changed over the years, what has remained constant from the colonial to the apartheid government has been the interventionist role of the state in films for Africans.

The apartheid government's preoccupation with film and its intended uses was not unique to either the National Party government or South Africa. Nor was government thinking, policy formulation or execution original in the least. It drew extensively on precedents set by colonial governments in South Africa as well as other British colonies in the rest of Africa. The interventionist role of the colonial government was informed by the desire to control the kinds of visual images Africans were exposed to. This desire was motivated by two, interrelated fears. Firstly, the colonial authorities feared that Africans would be corrupted by uncensored exposure to the ills of modernity as evident in film. Secondly, it was feared that the accouterments of modernity would create political and social-economic aspirations among Africans which would undermine the hierarchical structure of colonial society.

This was a colonial paternalistic discourse which sought to not only preserve African cultural traditions but also maintain the 'child-like' innocence of "natives". Rosaleen

Smythe's studies of colonial film policy have identified this as the "trusteeship approach" which sought to regulate and control filmed entertainment for Africans.<sup>1</sup> Thus implicit in this desire to regulate filmed entertainment were concerns about maintaining the power dynamics of colonial settler society.

Explicitly linked to this concern for the preservation of African culture and morality, was the fear that negative cinematic portrayals of Europeans would lead to Africans losing their respect for and awe of Europeans. Thus films depicting boxing matches in which a black boxer defeated a white boxer, or films that showed Europeans as criminals or base characters, were strongly opposed as entertainment for Africans. This opposition, it must be stated, came from both the colonial authorities as well as the settler community.

Colonial authorities also believed that films, especially those representing criminal violence, gangsterism and general crime, were a bad influence on the morals of Africans. This was linked to the idea that Africans were not sophisticated enough to adapt to modernity without imbibing the evils that came with modernity. These collective fears thus boiled down to the idea that film had the potential to subvert Africans' beliefs in the superiority of Europeans, their culture and their claim to political, economic and social dominance.

The irony apparent in this is that Africans were conceived as unsophisticated viewers who were not able to properly understand and interpret visual images and lifestyles represented in films. Despite this however, the influence of film in creating and nurturing aspirations which could potentially be subversive was strongly feared and objected to. This kind of categorisation of Africans as uninformed and unsophisticated film audiences is most evident in the differential censorship which was structured along racial lines. Censorship ratings often either left Africans out entirely or grouped them with children. Thus films were passed as either completely unsuitable for African audiences or with cuts that made it suitable viewing material for Africans and children. While this conception

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Two, p. 30.

of African audiences changed over the years what remained the same was the government's preoccupation with intervention in films for Africans.

A key figure in the construction of African audiences has been the American missionary Reverend Ray Phillips. In the 1920s Phillips began operating a mobile cinema unit, initially on the Rand mines, providing cinematic entertainment for the migrant miners housed in the compounds. While he was initially contented to censor foreign and locally produced films for African audiences, he later broadened his activities to begin producing what he considered was suitable viewing material. He had been instrumental in the development of a particular kind of film viewing culture among African audiences, or rather shaping a particular kind of taste for specific genres of film. Comedy and 'wholesome' drama were the main genres that Phillips screened to his audience. Phillips used film to 'moralise the leisure time' of Africans and hence was critical of certain kinds of film. Violence, crime and criminality as well as films which may lead to loss of European prestige in the eyes of Africans were strongly condemned. These sentiments were not unique to Phillips but rather part of the colonial sensibility.

Ideologically opposed to Phillips were the cinematic endeavours of Solomon Plaatje who also started screening films to African audiences. But where Phillips sought to control and shape the African worldview in order to maintain the colonial status quo, Plaatje sought to educate and shape an African consciousness that would strive for freedom and dignity. Plaatje drew his inspiration from the 'New Negro' in America and believed that Africans could emulate the achievements of the American 'New Negroes'. Plaatje's endeavours did not last long due in large part to the competition he faced from Phillips. This was both at the level of resources as well as the kinds of films the two exhibited. Plaatje focused more on documentary films as a didactic tool whereas Phillips provided entertainment features.

With greater resources to draw on, it is not surprising that Phillips endeavours not only lasted longer but also were emulated in other parts of Anglo Africa. More importantly though, it is Phillips legacy, in the form of 'moralising the leisure time' of Africans, that

has endured and resurfaced with the B-Scheme films. This sentiment to moralise through the use of film has been a dominant theme among a number of individuals producing films as part of the B-Scheme subsidy. This provides one strand of continuity between the colonial era and later years. A more dominant strand of continuity however has been the interventionist role of the state, whether that state has been colonial, segregationist or apartheid.

Since coming to power in 1948, the National Party government's formulation of a state policy on a national film industry drew on parallels from other countries such as Australia, Ireland, Israel and the United Kingdom. The difference however was that while it sought guidance and inspiration from these countries it articulated its own policy within the framework of racial segregation. State intervention after the National Party's electoral victory in 1948 assumed a much more concrete form through the introduction of a state subsidy for film production in 1956. Race and concerns for the development and preservation of Afrikaner culture impacted significantly on state policy around financial support for the film industry. An important factor in the introduction of this state subsidy was also the protection of the local film industry from international competition. Allied to this protectionism was the development of a national film industry.

Within South Africa's paradigm of racial segregation, a national cinema by implication was a 'white cinema' which included both English- and Afrikaans-language films. A 'black cinema' was patently not envisaged to be a part of this discourse of 'national' cinema. Given the ideological formulations of racial segregation with its emphasis on a strict separation of all aspects of society based on race, a 'black cinema' by logical implication was the putative responsibility of each of the separate ethnic homelands or Bantustans to which Africans were assigned. Based on this, financial responsibility for the development of a 'black cinema' was therefore the responsibility of the African governments of each of the ethnic homelands. Thus while the apartheid government was willing to invest in the development of a national film industry by means of the subsidy introduced in 1956, it was less willing to invest in a 'black film industry'. Having said this though, how does one then make sense of the introduction of a separate subsidy,

known as the B-Scheme in 1972, specifically for the production of African-language films?

This thesis has argued that the B-Scheme subsidy was less aimed at developing a 'black film industry' and more at providing economic assistance to white entrepreneurs who saw a gap in the market. The oral testimonies of some of the white people involved in producing films for the African market has revealed that financial opportunism guided many of the film production and exhibition endeavours of a number of individuals. These individuals realised the untapped potential that an African audience constituted and set out to exploit that market with the financial assistance of the apartheid government. The emergence of a 'black film industry' was thus motivated by financial gain for numerous white individuals.

Thus, the parallel 'black film industry' that developed was a direct consequence of the B-Scheme rather than a primary objective of the apartheid government. It mirrored other aspects of apartheid South African society where race was the line of demarcation. Thus there were parallel state departments and institutions that catered for education, housing, health and welfare on the basis of 'black' and 'white'. But, while the apartheid government may have wished to provide state support to white individuals in the first instance, the 'black film industry' also provided an important opportunity for the state.

This opportunity lay in the realisation that film was a medium for the apartheid government to exploit in furthering its own aims as far as Africans were concerned. One of these aims was to provide entertainment that would simultaneously occupy urban Africans while moralising and building a sense of 'ethnic identity'. This 'ethnic identity' was to be centred on the 'ethnic heroes' that the 'black film industry' would spawn.<sup>2</sup> The objective to provide 'ethnic heroes' as points of identification was articulated within the context of increasing 'Americanisation' of Africans, primarily through Hollywood films. The apartheid government feared that Americanisation had within it the potential for political subversion. In other words, identification with American heroes and American

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Three, p. 84.



lifestyles was feared because of the potential political, economic and social aspirations it could create among Africans. In this respect at least, the National Party government echoed the sentiments of colonial authorities. It justified state intervention in film production and exhibition as a means of suppressing African political aspirations. But film could safely be used to create other aspirations such as economic and class mobility as long as these did not lead to political aspirations. This is perhaps best reflected in the concerted efforts of the apartheid government to create and woo an African middle class who could act as a buffer between white South Africans and the masses of dispossessed and exploited Africans. Film was thus meant to channel African energies and aspirations along guided tracks which would not conflict with apartheid policies. This is most evident in the films analysed in Chapter Four.

There were however a number of filmmakers who were seriously intent on producing 'black films' that could be counted as serious cinematic endeavours. Two individuals in particular stand out in this respect: Oliver Schmitz and David Bensusan. These filmmakers set out to produce what this thesis has identified as oppositional films. These films were oppositional in two crucial ways. They were firstly oppositional to the pervading ethos of the 'black film industry' in that their films did not conform to the low production values and simplistic narrative techniques of the majority of 'black films'. Instead their films display a high degree of aesthetic and production value. And secondly, their films were oppositional to apartheid ideology in that they sought to criticise, subvert and seriously engage with political issues which escaped the notice of most other producers of 'black films'.

While the profit motive seems to have guided many of the individuals producing films in African languages, a positive spin-off for the apartheid state was that many of these films affirmed various aspects of apartheid policy as regards African people. Though there was no official directive for filmmakers to propagate apartheid and its policies on film, many filmmakers nonetheless ended up producing films that supported and promoted apartheid. One can argue that most filmmakers did not challenge many of the tenets of apartheid because of censorship which would have effectively prevented distribution and exhibition

possibilities. But this argument loses credibility when one considers the work of especially a filmmaker like David Bensusan. Bensusan, and to a lesser degree Oliver Schmitz because his film *Mapantsula* was initially banned, succeeded in engaging critically with political issues of the day without incurring the wrath of the censor board. In view of this, this thesis has argued that most B-Scheme filmmakers did not engage critically with political issues because they did not want to. For many of them apartheid was an accepted part of life, not to be questioned or challenged. It was what they lived as Tomaselli has argued for Jamie Uys.<sup>3</sup> Given this, most of the filmmakers assumed surrogate roles for the apartheid state.

While many of the filmmakers may have been unconscious of this role, at least one production company, Heyns Films, enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with the apartheid state through the Department of Information. Thys Heyns has alleged that he had no idea Van Zyl Alberts was fronting for the department when he sold fifty percent of his company to Alberts. But Heyns has also claimed that Alberts was well known to him and given this, Heyns claim to ignorance seems rather implausible. What is significant however is that whether knowingly or unknowingly, Heyns' films produced from the mid-1970s to the early-1980s display significant support for elements of apartheid ideology. Predominant among these is the ideology of separate development within ethnic geopolitical borders. This ideology was manifest in the creation of Bantustans or ethnic homelands for Africans. Many of the Heyns films analysed in this thesis support this Bantustan policy by creating a dichotomy between the urban and rural centres along racial lines. Within this paradigmatic binary, the urban space is intrinsically alien to the African whose 'natural' element is the rural and homeland area.

Films such as *Inkunzi*, *Ukhozi* and *Setipana*, among others, create the rural and homeland space as something both idyllic and intrinsic to Africans. This is where Africans are able to fulfill their dreams and actualize their potential. They however are not able to do this without the intervention and assistance of white people. Nor are they able to do this without venturing out of their traditional spaces and acquiring the skills that modern,

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Four, p. 105.

urban society is able to impart to them. Hargreaves in *Inkunzi* is only able to set himself up as a successful businessman after his encounter with both urban modernity and the Jewish businessman, Levy. Having ventured outside the Transkei, Hargreaves has acquired a degree of modern business sensibility which he is able to transport back to the Transkei. In this way he is able to assist in the development of his homeland with the assistance of 'white South Africa'. This provides explicit support for the homeland policy. The apartheid government sought to ensure economic development of the homeland areas as a means of curbing African migration to South Africa.

Similarly, Jacob in *Setipana* achieves success in modern medicine, qualifying as a doctor through the intervention of the white priest. In achieving success as a doctor trained in western medicine, Jacob, as his father's eldest son, sacrifices his cultural tradition by giving up his succession of the tribe. The film is emphatic about the pernicious influence of urban modernity on the rural African. Jacob succumbs to all the lures of city living. He frequents nightclubs, acquires a city girlfriend whom he impregnates and ends up losing his traditions and cultural sensibility. His redemption lies in the death of his legal wife who has remained in the rural homeland. This death forces him to question his place in society and in the end he chooses to go back home. But, he goes back home armed with the skills of modern western medicine.

The representations of western modernity are cast in complex ways in these films. While the impact of modernity, which is characteristic of the urban setting, is decried, the films nonetheless laud the progress associated with modernity. And while the films would keep Africans in some sort of 'pristine' and idealised rural idyll, they would also have western modernity imported to this rural idyll. The final message appears to be that Africans are unable to negotiate modernity without white interventions and the patronage of white mentors as is the case with both Hargreaves and Joseph.

Where Africans had successfully integrated into urban areas, the films that Tomaselli identifies as 'conditional urban' provide a representation that fulfils all the fears of colonial authorities. That is, Africans were represented as succumbing to the evils of

modernity which characterised urban development. Many of the films produced from the 1980s onwards, including some of those produced by Heyns, transform the urban/rural binary into one between good and evil. While the presence of Africans in urban centres is recognized and accepted, this presence is framed within a binary of good and evil. Good is equivalent to hard work, thrift and maintaining due respect for the political, social and legal structures of modern urban society. Evil on the other hand is equated with achieving social and economic mobility through crime and violence. What these films do not consider or engage with is that the good and evil binary operate in structures that are politically, economically and socially repressive and exploitative.

The fiction thus created is that urban South Africa is an egalitarian society which presents all individuals with an equal opportunity for social and economic mobility. Furthermore, this mobility is not conditional on race but rather on hard work and thrift. This is apparent in films such as *uDeliwe*, *iKati Elimnyama*, *The Advocate* and even later films such as *The Gold Cup*. Success in these films is not achieved through the mediation of white mentors as with those films mentioned above, but rather through subscription to the work ethic and moral values of the dominant society. This also underscores the sense of a normalized society in which all individuals, regardless of race, are afforded equal opportunities.

*The Gold Cup*, for example offers a glimpse of this egalitarian society in which the only distinction between people is the principled values, or lack of values, by which they live. The two couples in the film are contrasted as diametrically opposite. Peter and his wife Ruth are a successful middle class couple, each with their respective sphere of professional success. Both are business people. Peter runs a car spare parts shop while Ruth owns and manages her own retail store. They are childless but happy. The Jonas' on the other hand, despite greater wealth and status, are also childless but unhappy. They do not have a successful marriage. Mr Jonas is a magistrate who operates an illegal betting syndicate on the side, earning an extra income which his socialite wife fritters away on clothes and other fripperies. Peter and Ruth's success – personal and professional – is founded on the obvious goodness they embody while the Jonas' failure

is founded on lies, deceit and acquisitiveness. This normalisation of society obscures the underlying tensions and stresses operating within South African society in 1990 when this film was made.

But, while this film, as well as many others, may not engage with the political issues fermenting within the broader society, it does signal change. This change is at the level of representations of Africans and their place in urban South Africa. Peter and Ruth are represented as complex beings with a degree of agency over their lives. At the most obvious level this agency is translated as their indomitable spirit which will not allow them to succumb to external pressures from the betting syndicate which wanted Peter to withdraw from the martial arts championship. Despite all the harassment they endure culminating eventually in Ruth's kidnapping, they remain steadfast in their belief and confidence that Peter could win the championship. They are thus prepared to stand steadfast in the achievement of personal goals no matter what pressures they face.

At another level, their childless marriage also speaks of personal choices. As a young middle class couple they are contented with each other's company and assisting one another to attain professional success. Their childlessness is also indicative of changing mindsets. Birth control during the apartheid years was perceived as a measure by the state to control black population growth. Peter and Ruth however show no such suspicions and present no angst at their childless state. Furthermore, as representatives of an urban African middle class, they are portrayed as complex and multi-dimensional characters. The film displaces earlier representations of urban Africans stereotyped as either virtuous, criminal or country bumpkins. Peter and Ruth are sophisticated city dwellers who are assigned a rich and complex personal and professional life. They are not two-dimensional characters.

Other films produced in the late 1980s also signal significant changes. The 1989 film *Sky Full of Diamonds*, though an obvious imitation of the Hollywood *Lethal Weapon* franchise, suggests the changes taking place in the broader society. The film pairs black and white police detectives as partners in the same way that the *Lethal Weapon* films do,

except that the white detective is somewhat of a buffoon and looks often to his black partner for sensible direction. The black detective is obviously the more sensible, intelligent and dominant partner. This is remarkable given that South Africa in the late 1980s was still a racially divided society and that black police officers would not have enjoyed the respect and status accorded to the character in the film. But, while the social and political reality of South African society in 1989 may not have been a precise fit, the film certainly augurs the changes that were looming on the horizon.

This thesis has consistently tried to distinguish between the general body of B-Scheme films and those films which have been identified as oppositional. The distinctions can be carried further in terms of the changes that have been addressed above. In this respect, the oppositional films once again cannot be grouped with the majority of B-Scheme films. The changing representations of Africans as apparent in the films discussed thus far are not apparent in those films that are considered oppositional simply because these latter films are oppositional for that precise reason. In other words, films such as *My Country My Hat*, *Chicken Man*, *Mapantsula* and the others that have been identified as oppositional are oppositional mainly because they do not subscribe to the simplistic and vacuous representations of Africans, African culture and life to which most B-Scheme films subscribe.

In 1983, David Bensusan for example, created the character of James in *My Country* as a multi-faceted and complex man caught up in the apartheid web. The manner in which James negotiates the many laws that govern his every move leads to his growth. Similarly, there is personal growth for the other characters such as Piet and his wife. Films such as *Mapantsula* and *Mathata* also chart the inner growth and development of the main characters. Comparatively, other B-Scheme films of the early to mid-1980s (such as *Amasela*, 1980, *Impango*, 1982, *Lana Pirana* 1985 and *Witchdoctor*, 1985) present Africans in stereotypical ways. They are irrational like Lana or the witchdoctor or opportunistic criminals as in *Amasela* and *Impango*. Despite the fact that some these films, especially the latter two, portray African characters that are good and virtuous, these are two-dimensional figures that exist outside the fabric of the social and political

reality. There is no sense of the imperatives that move these characters, no sense of a personality that leaps out of the celluloid image in the same way that James does in *My Country* or Panic in *Mapantsula*.

The changes that are observable in the majority of B-Scheme films from the mid-1970s until 1990 reflect the changing political, social and economic context of the broader South African society. The films reflect how these changes have impacted on the changing representations of Africans in B-Scheme films. These filmic representations have changed from depicting Africans as rural dwellers, to Africans as urban criminals to finally, Africans as sophisticated and professional urbanites. While these categories may be broad and over-simplified they do encompass a variety of complex and nuanced portrayals. Based on these observable changing representations, one can make explicit links between the B-Scheme films and both the apartheid state and apartheid society. The links with the apartheid state are most explicit in the awarding of the state subsidy. They are also apparent in the alleged relationship between a state department like the erstwhile Department of Information and a commercial production company like Heyns Films. At a more implicit level, these links are most apparent in the failure of most of the films to address the political, social and economic reality of apartheid South Africa as it impacted on Africans. In this sense, the majority of B-Scheme films (and not only the 'back to the homelands genre that Tomaselli talks about) are reflectors of "grand apartheid".<sup>4</sup>

However, it has to be noted that film for African audiences encompassed more than simply apartheid ideology. And these films are more than simply reflectors of apartheid policy. They are undeniably entertainment also. Archival documents testify to a degree of concern expressed by both the segregationist and apartheid state to provide some form of entertainment, primarily for those Africans on sufferance in urban centres for their labour utility. Film was one source of entertainment. However, as with other amenities and utility services that were provided for Africans in urban centres, film also received differential attention and funding. The extremely poor production values exhibited by the

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Four, p.101.

majority of B-Scheme films is a direct indictment of the poor attention the B-Scheme subsidy received from the apartheid government. The various departments that administered the subsidy had no clear mandate from the central government to act in an oversight capacity. There were thus no criteria or conditions on scripts other than that the film should not oppose any aspect of apartheid rule.

This lack of direct oversight created the conditions for exploitation on two levels. Firstly, audiences were exploited in that they were provided with entertainment at the expense of the apartheid government that was at best mind-numbing and at worst offensive to the intellect. At another level, exploitation became evident in the fraudulence perpetrated by some of the filmmakers. The lack of stringent government oversight coupled with a lack of formal exhibition venues such as cinemas led to some filmmakers inflating tickets sold and claiming a larger subsidy. It was also not unknown for some filmmakers to recycle films under different titles and claim separate subsidies for these. The Department of Home Affairs, which took over the administration of the subsidy in 1989, accidentally discovered this fraudulence but was unable to successfully prosecute any individual or production company. Nor was the state able to recover the millions that had been fraudulently claimed by some of the people making B-Scheme films. The investigations however effectively ended the B-Scheme subsidy and also led to a reviewing and reformulation of the general or A-Scheme subsidy.

The films examined in this thesis have been utilised as sources of historical information. As historical sources they have provided information about how successive South African governments, from the colonial to the apartheid era, have viewed and used film for African audiences. Allied to this, the films analysed in this thesis have provided an understanding of their historical role in shaping public opinion, educating and creating consensus. Close textual analyses of selected films have focused on how these films represent African people, culture and traditions within the broader context of their production and exhibition history. These representations reflect not only the state's conception of Africans and their position in South Africa, but also how broader society



either conformed to or subverted the apartheid state's conception and construction of African people.

But these films do more than simply reflect, they also impact on historical processes through the construction of new meanings, identities and new patterns of consumption. That these meanings and identities are created top-down goes without saying. African people have had virtually no active role to play in the construction of representations and meanings. The B-Scheme films, excepting the few that are oppositional or those directed by someone like Simon Sabela, have provided no opportunity for African self-expression or self-representation. Even in the case of someone like Sabela, the choices he faced were severely circumscribed by the dominant political ideology and by apartheid repression.

The 'black film industry' that emerged as a direct outcome of the B-Scheme subsidy had very little to do with African people. It provided opportunities for the development of Africans in specific job spheres such as acting, sound, lighting and editing. But it did not provide unrestricted opportunity for African self-expression and self-representation. Thus unlike other cultural forms of expression such as literature, art or music, which could distinctly be identified as African even under apartheid rule, filmic expression was distinctly non-African.

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Flip Bezuidenhout, (Filmmaker, Johannesburg, 20 April 2006).  
Johan de Lange, (Former Director of the National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria, 20 April 2007).  
Ross Devenish, (Filmmaker, Barrydale, 22 March 2006).  
Dirk de Villiers, (Filmmaker, Cape Town, 26 October 2005).  
Steve Hand, (Filmmaker, Badplaas, Mpumalanga, 17 April 2007).  
Katinka Heyns, (Actress, Filmmaker, 12 April 2006).  
Thys Heyns, (Filmmaker, Pretoria, 20 April 2007).  
Japan Mthembu, (Actor, Johannesburg, 19 April 2007).  
Paul Raleigh, (Editor, Producer, Pretoria, 20 April 2007).  
Koos Roets, (Camera, 12 April 2006).  
Tony Stubbs, (Writer, Cape Town, 12 March 2008).  
Tonie van der Merwe, (Filmmaker, Cape Town, 25 January 2006).

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Oliver Schmitz, (Filmmaker, 10 and 11 June 2006).  
Clive Scott, (Actor, Filmmaker, 11 and 13 June 2006).  
Peter Thage, (Actor, 26 July 2007).  
Robert van der Coolwijk, (Filmmaker, 3 July 2007 and 4 August 2007).

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## APPENDIX 1

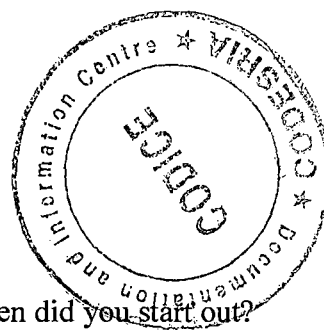
### Interview Questions for Filmmakers

1. How long have you been involved in the film industry? When did you start out? Doing what?
2. Did you have your own production company or did you work for someone else?
3. Can you describe what it was like being a part of the national film industry, especially in the years from 1956 to 1990?
4. Can you describe what it was like working in the “black film industry”?
5. How was the industry structured and how did it operate?
6. How was the industry structured in terms of distribution and exhibition?
7. Where were the “black films” screened?
8. What kind of opportunities were there for African people to participate in the film industry?
9. What were the typical roles or jobs Africans filled?
10. Where could one get funding for films?
11. What were typical criteria to get access to funding?
12. How did government funding operate? And what criteria did the state set before it gave funding?
13. Did the government for example want to see scripts before they were filmed?
14. Did the government specify what kind of topics the film should deal with?
15. How did censorship work?
16. What were the differences between the subsidies for English, Afrikaans and African-language films?
17. How did you decide on the topics to film? How did you know what would appeal to African audiences?

18. Who wrote your scripts?
19. Did you have Africans assisting with scripts or giving input on aspects of African culture or traditions?
20. How did you overcome language difficulties?
21. Can you describe a typical working day on the set of one of your films?
22. How long did it take you to film?
23. How were your films received by African audiences?
24. How would you describe the African film-viewing audience?
25. Were there other commercial interests involved? For example, the music or advertising industry?
26. What was the nature of this involvement? Did you receive payments for advertising or product placement in the films? What were the general amounts that were paid for this?
27. How would you compare your films with those made by others?
28. Do you know about the allegations of fraud in the film industry?
29. How did the state uncover these fraudulent practices?
30. Do you know if anything was done about it? Was anyone ever charged or prosecuted?

## APPENDIX 2

### Interview Questions for Actors



1. How long have you been involved in the film industry? When did you start out?  
Doing what?
2. Can you describe what it was like being a part of the film industry, (especially in the years from 1956 to 1990) since you started?
3. Can you describe what it was like working in the “black film industry”?
4. How was the industry structured and how did it operate?
5. How was the industry structured in terms of distribution and exhibition?
6. Where were the “black films” screened?
7. What kind of opportunities were there for African people to participate in the film industry?
8. What were the typical roles or jobs Africans filled?
9. Were you involved at all in assisting with the script or perhaps giving advice to the filmmaker?
10. Can you describe a typical working day on set?
11. Did you ever attend the screenings of any of your films?
12. Do you know whether your films were liked by the audiences?
13. What kinds of films were popular among audiences?
14. Were you known in your community because of your films?
15. What kinds of films do you enjoy watching?
16. What do you do now?