

## Chapter 6

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

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

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

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

Given the long time it took to be shown in South Africa, the return of *Come Back, Africa* to that country on May 1, 1988 at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg and also in Cape Town was momentous.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the film has been given a new lease of life through festivals and other events. These constitute the third phase of the film's circulation, which continued well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Come Back, Africa* re-entered the film events and festival circuits of South Africa, via the *Weekly Mail* Festival in August 1988, and then the Workers' Library Books Fair in November of the same year (*New Nation* October 1988, 20-26).<sup>2</sup> The festival anchored *Come Back, Africa* alongside *Mapantsula* firmly within an anti-censorship critical space. This is because the screening of the films took place in the anti-censorship section of the festival. Thus, *Come Back, Africa's* explicitly anti-apartheid vision, and its biography as a film made under onerous circumstances, gave historical perspective to the festival. This perspective underwrote the salience of *Come Back, Africa* as an archive of the early apartheid public sphere, the contemporary residues of which *Mapantsula* laid bare.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Its first showing on May Day, an important day in the worker's calendar- appears to have been a calculated move to complement the theme of labour struggle.

<sup>2</sup> In 2004, it was screened in Venice, Italy. In 2005, the film was also restored by the *Cineteca di Bologna* a film restoration centre in Bologna, Italy and by the laboratory *I'Immagine Ritrovata*. In the same year, it traversed a number of film festivals including Sithengi, Cape Town South Africa; Bologna Italy; Tribeca, New York USA; and Chiasso, Italy. In 2006, it was shown at Austrian Film Museum, Vienna Austria; Svenka Filminstitutet, Stockholm Sweden; National Film and Sound Archive, Acton, Australia; and at the Batik Film Festival, Bari Italy.

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

For the first time, the film was permitted to circulate within an essentially 'workerist' forum in the form of the Workers' Library Book Fair in South Africa. That the censorship authorities allowed *Come Back, Africa* to be viewed suggests that it no longer posed a serious threat to the status quo, coming as it did when the apartheid system was shifting towards its decline. Yet, this did not mean that the authorities were wont to endorse all anti-apartheid films, as the conditional banning of *Mapantsula* at the *Weekly Mail* film festival showed.<sup>3</sup> The circulation of the film at the *Book Fair* constitutes a notable moment in its archival reappropriations. The History Workshop project, a social history formation based at the University of the Witwatersrand, was involved in the establishment of the Workers' Library. That *Come Back, Africa* was used in the library's launch is noteworthy. The significance here seems to be that the movement's intellectuals viewed the film as a critical 'source material' about social life under apartheid, and to conjure up workers' historical agency. Such a view marks *Come Back, Africa* as an intellectual intervention. The examples of the *Weekly Mail* festival and the launch of the Workers' Library reveal that in the period towards political reform in South Africa, intellectuals deployed film across various points of social engagement. *Come Back, Africa* owed part of its archival status significantly to the role of intellectuals in the form of engaged scholars.

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

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<sup>3</sup> Other films that were banned at the festival include *A World Apart* (1988), an anti-apartheid Hollywood film and *La battaglia di Algeri* (*Battle of Algiers*), (1966) - a film about the Algerian Revolution.

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

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

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

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

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

### **The Post-Apartheid Turn**

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

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

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

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

In addition to the book *Come Back, Africa: A Man Possessed*, in 2005, Daniel and Michael Rogosin launched a website dedicated to their father's work.<sup>4</sup> It is a multimedia forum for people interested in Rogosin's work. The website catalogues discussions and references to *Come Back, Africa*. In terms of circulation of the film, the website is a far cry from the

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<sup>4</sup> The address is <<http://www.lionelrogosin.com>>.

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

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

....thirty years ago a film was shot in South Africa which, with the passage of time, has prefigured what an authentic national cinema in our country could possibly be. COME BACK AFRICA, by the independent U.S. film director, Lionel Rogosin, is undoubtedly the highest achievement in film culture in South Africa..... The true significance of COME BACK AFRICA is that since its making thirty years ago, and its first appearance on the public screens today back at home, it poses a fundamental question: What ought to be the nature and structure of an authentic South African national cinema?

⟨<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC36folder/ComeBackAfrica.html>⟩ (Accessed 18 April 2008)

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

cinema is an important part.<sup>5</sup> Such a construction, Masilela's observations indicate, flows from the film's framing around historical challenges that have a bearing on national identity. Masilela's efforts give a glimpse of expert voices in the film's archival reappropriations. Occurring just a few years before the instituting of democracy in South Africa, this expert intervention relied on the film to give content to the looming dispensation. The intervention effectively brings national considerations into the fold of public reflections about black identity. That Masilela's focus on national cinema occurs through the lens of *Come Back, Africa* further serves to make it an academic sourcepoint for contemporary public deliberation. Instructive in the discussion by Masilela is the fact that *Come Back, Africa's* archival role unfolds among others, through the mediation of expert voices. In these interventions, the themes of black identity and modernity are aligned.

In an essay that juxtaposed the film with Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) and in less detail with Bloke Modisane's *Blame me on History* (1963), Isabel Balseiro argued that *Come Back, Africa* was significant because of its 'affirmation of a new black identity irrevocably severed from its rural origins' (2003: 88). For Balseiro, while *Cry, the Beloved Country* planted its two main black characters in the countryside, *Come Back, Africa* puts Zacharia in the transitional space between his rural background and the new urban landscape (2003: 100). Balseiro sees this move as an indictment of discourses around black identity, whether stemming from the apartheid state's penchant for fixing Africans in the rural outback, or in the urban black intellectuals' silence on the role of rural migrants in the city.<sup>6</sup> Based as it is on an intertextual dialogue between *Come Back, Africa*, and *Cry, the*

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<sup>5</sup> Maingard takes note of the involvement of the black writers in the making of *Come Back, Africa*, and others around its time, as well as of the 'growing market of black cinema audiences'. In light of these observations, she observes that: 'this was a comment about what was then the possibility of a national cinema and a national film culture located in urban black experience, that could not be realized under apartheid' (*National Cinema*: 122).

<sup>6</sup> Reiterating Balseiro's contrast of *Come Back, Africa* with *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Maingard finds the complexity with which Rogosin's film treats black identity compelling (*National Cinema*: 112, 117). However, Maingard widens the visual lens to include other black-centred films of the 40's and 50's such as *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, *Zonk*, and *Song of Africa*. She suggests that because of their preoccupation with the theme of black urban identity, these films should be viewed as a cluster: 'Together these films represent a key

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yet another poster of *u'Deliwe* appeared at the 2006 *Three Continent Festival*.<sup>7</sup> In the poster, a colourful screen grab from the film, a beaming Deliwe and her equally radiant love interest George share a romantic moment in the park. Here, the questions around gender and morality give way to a patently commercial intent *a la* Hollywood. This change in the projection of the film's subject is a significant detour from the film's content, and an indication of the malleability of its public life. The two posters notably show that the film did not always operate as an archival sourcepoint, but as a text that addressed contemporary issues.

The construction of blackness in *u'Deliwe* was the subject of the 2004 Fort West Heritage and Cultural Festival. The event takes place annually at the Fort West village, which is a partnership of the City of Tshwane and the Embassy of France. The film section of the festival was organized with the collaboration of the National Film, Video and Sound Archives, a statutory body. In this appropriation, the function of *u'Deliwe* as an archival sourcepoint is demonstrated. According to the organizers, the inclusion of *u'Deliwe* stemmed from the fact that as a film with a South African jazz score, it documented 'the question of Jazz and the construction of South African black identity'.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the organizers registered a perspective that marked the film as an archival 'document' of black identity. This attention to jazz as one cultural form within another (film) reveals the

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<sup>7</sup> See <<http://www.3continents.com>>, Retrieved 12 July 2006.

<sup>8</sup> See the programme of the festival for details: Fort West Film Festival: Roots of South African Jazz (online) available from: <<http://www.alliance.org.za>> (accessed 31, Jan 2005). The score for *u'Deliwe* was arranged by the Jazz Preachers.

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

We had Jazz; [...] Jazz spoke to us of an imaginary land where Blacks were achieving things we could only dream of. [...] Jazz also grounded us deeper in our Black experience because we did sense its other dimension: a state of mind rooted in a life that knew slave ships, whips, back-breaking labour, break-up of family life, alienation and so on (Mphahlele cited in Attwell 2005: 130).<sup>9</sup>

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

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

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<sup>9</sup> See the original comments in Mphahlele, E., 1962 (1974). *The African Image*, London, Faber.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In addition to Maingard's decisive highlighting of the gender perspective in the public engagements of the film, part of the more recent commentary on *Mapantsula* was far-reaching in its foregrounding of sexuality and gender issues. Academic and performance poet Kgafela oa Magogodi (1999) examined 'the representation of the black body' in *Mapantsula*.<sup>10</sup> Magogodi engaged the film across three platforms, in his Master's thesis submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand, in *Theatre Research International* (2002) and in the book *To Change Reels* by Balseiro and Masilela. Magogodi's attention to the film in his Master's thesis, which was supervised by scholar and filmmaker Bhekizizwe Peterson, and later in genres with a wider circulation, multiplied *Mapantsula's* spaces of engagement. Magogodi's work forms part of a loose network of work around South African film, of which Maingard, Peterson, (and myself) form a part. Through Magogodi and other scholars' efforts, *Mapantsula* increasingly gained a foothold in the local and international scholarly domain. According to its website, *Theatre Research International*

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<sup>10</sup> He did this as part of a comparative exercise with *Fools*.

‘publishes articles on theatre practices in their social, cultural, and historical contexts, their relationship to other media of representation, and to other fields of inquiry. The journal seeks to reflect the evolving diversity of critical idioms prevalent in the scholarship of differing world contexts’.<sup>11</sup> The appearance of the article on *Mapantsula* in this journal necessarily admits that, the film is a critical text with significance not only in relation to domestic South African issues, but internationally. Its entrance into a scholarly domain imbued *Mapantsula* with a public role wider than its intervention in South African politics suggests.

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

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

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<sup>11</sup> See the journal’s official website: <<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=TRI>> (Accessed June 12, 2007).

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

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

## **Conclusions**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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