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Challenges Confronting the Production of Indigenous Language Films in South Africa

by

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Dissertation

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Master of Arts

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Declaration

I, Samuel Ntsanwisi, declare that this research is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted towards the Degree of Master of Film and Television by creative project and dissertation at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree, or examination at any other University.



_____ (Signature of candidate)

On this 29th day of April 2022 at Nkowankowa

Dedication

To all the young people trying to break into the film industry, and individuals seeking to promote, preserve and celebrate their indigenous African language.

Abstract

Framed upon the low number of indigenous African language films geared for cinema release in the last decade, this dissertation investigates the challenges confronting the production of indigenous language films in South Africa. A two-pronged methodology is used. The first employs a film services approach founded upon the value chain analysis developed by Porter (2008). In focusing on the South African film value chain, the research examines skills, infrastructure, and organisational arrangements from conception to output, and how they relate to indigenous language film production. Two indigenous African language films produced in South Africa over the past five years, *Matwetwe* (Lediga, 2019) and *Inxeba* (Trengrove, 2017), are used as case studies in consideration for the commercial viability of indigenous African language films in South Africa. Interviews with the producers of the two films were conducted, highlighting the challenges they faced in producing and distributing these indigenous language films. This research further engages with the implications and debates around producing a non-English, local indigenous African language film through a creative research component in the form of a short film entitled *Rirhandzu*. The obstacles faced in accessing funding within South Africa are raised, and an alternative private funding model is proposed along with increased government funding for indigenous language films; based on the case argued for its viability.

Key words: Indigenous, Language, African, Film services, Value chain, South Africa

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ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

DAC	Department of Arts and Culture
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
etv	Independent free-to-air South African TV broadcast channel
GFC	Gauteng Film Commission
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
IP	Intellectual Property
NFVF	National Film and Video Foundation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
UIP	United International Pictures

Chapter One: Contextualising Indigenous Language Cinema in South Africa

1.1 Research Objectives and Questions

Interest in this research topic of feature film production was prompted by the low number of indigenous South African language feature films made for the local and international marketplace.

Considering the low number of indigenous language films produced for cinema release in South Africa, this study examines the South African film value chain (from conception to output) using the Film Services approach which this study considers a useful alternative to conventional understanding of a 'film industry' when considering the film services available in South Africa which are defined by skills, infrastructure, and organisational arrangements which determine nature of these inputs.

The objectives of the study are:

- To establish the configuration of the South African film value chain concerning indigenous language production.
- To identify the support required by South African producers in the production of indigenous language feature films.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered in the production of indigenous language films?
2. What support is required by producers in the production of indigenous language films?

This study references *Matwetwe* (Lediga, 2019) and *Inxeba* (Trengrove, 2017), which was produced by Elias Ribeiro and co-written by novelist Thando Mgqolozana, in consideration of the commercial viability of indigenous African language films in South Africa. The qualitative inquiry is twofold. Firstly, the films are used to examine aspects of the South African film industry value chain as it relates to films made in South African languages other than English. Secondly, interviews with the producers of the films were conducted to understand the

challenges they faced in producing and distributing these indigenous language films. This research further engaged with the implications and debates around producing a non-English, local indigenous African language film through a creative research component in the form of a short film entitled *Rirhandzu*. The language used in the film is Xitsonga, an indigenous language primarily spoken in the Limpopo province of South Africa by approximately two million people. Xitsonga is also one of the eleven official South African languages (Mabaso, 2018). The language was a useful apparatus to explore how the value chain relates to indigenous African language films, since it is a marginalised language that has been given low attention within the South African media landscape (Ndlovu, Mushwana & Mathevula, 2020).

This exploration intends to deepen our understanding of indigenous language films in South Africa. I argue that the increased production of such films encourages a sense of belonging and social cohesion, which positively contributes to the country's economic growth and aids in the reduction of its high unemployment rate [1].

1.2. Scope and delimitations of the study

The scope of this study is limited to theatrical feature films, which in terms of format exceeds 70 minutes in length, is targeted at the cinema box office and followed by release on digital streaming platforms (Greenberg, 2021; Bhorat, Asmal, Lilenstein & Vander Zee, 2018). Thus, in keeping with the focus on feature film production, the study excludes content made for Television, such as episodic dramas. Most indigenous language Television programs produced for national broadcast channels such as e.tv, SABC and Multichoice, equates to many of the most popular national shows (The Broadcast Research Council of South Africa, 2022; Mckane, 2021). Currently leading the South African charts, with over 10 million viewers in June 2019, is *Uzalo*, an Isizulu drama series that airs on SABC 1 (South African Broadcasting Corporation, 2020). It is worth mentioning that TAMS reports, produced by the Broadcast Research Council of South Africa, also show that the high audiences for *Uzalo* is not an exception when it comes to indigenous

[1] In 2021 the youth unemployment rate amongst South African youth reached 57,47% (O'Neil, 2021) and this is projected to rise to 68% in 2023 (Trading Economics).

language TV drama, since shows like *Skeem Saam*, *Imbewu*, *Generations The Legacy*, among others, consistently accounts for the ten most viewed series nationally (The Broadcast Research Council of South Africa, 2022).

The success of indigenous language production in South African Television firstly highlights that there is an audience in the country for screen content produced in indigenous languages, and thus provides a useful foundation from which the South African film industry can build on. This research probes how theatrical feature film production can build on the foundation laid by the Television industry in further contributing to the lack of scholarly work carried out in this field.

1.3. Background

There has been a relatively low number of indigenous language films produced for commercial release in South Africa compared to the number of films produced for the English language market. From the 22 locally produced films that received a theatrical release in 2019, only five qualified as indigenous language films (NFVF 2019/20 Annual Report, 2019). This low number of indigenous language production has been a trend observed in the first half of 2018, indicating that from the nine South African films released, six were in Afrikaans, two in English, and one in both IsiXhosa and English (NFVF, 2018). The criteria for defining indigenous language films requires further clarification. In addition, some of the films reported as indigenous languages on the (NFVF, 2019), include other languages such as English and Afrikaans.

Chapter Two examines the indigenous language cinema in South Africa in the context of Film Services, and how it reconfigures the idea of ‘film industry’ as a system of inputs and services, which includes marketing and exhibition and not only the film text. Chapter Two begins by confronting the lack of consistency in the definition of indigenous language flowing from the South African constitution to government departments, and the subsequent agencies such as the National Film and Video Foundation. For example, the Box Office Report (NFVF, 2018) of the National Film and Video Foundation of South Africa (NFVF) and Amaechi (2013) use the term ‘indigenous’ to describe all South African languages other than English and Afrikaans. However, the Ministry of Education refers to Section 6 of

the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), which notes nine indigenous African languages, thereby excluding Afrikaans and English (Department of HIgher Education and Training, 2003). The remaining nine official languages are isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, siSwati, Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, Tshivenda and Xitsonga (Department of Arts and Culture, 2003). Although not a central feature of this study, the intention is to contribute to the discussion and classification of what qualifies a South African film as an indigenous language film for better reporting purposes. It is anticipated that this outcome might assist policymakers and stakeholders in better understanding how the South African film industry is organised in as far as the production of indigenous language films is concerned.

Chapter Two then reveals that the pursuit of an indigenous language production is framed by social redress and transformation perspectives considering that, embedded within a language, are deeper issues significant to different groups of individuals. The above is important in a country that is still healing from a segregated past, where people were divided along racially divided lines during Apartheid (Saks, 2010). Post-apartheid, South Africa has been grappling with the subject of representation (Ureke & Tomaselli, 2017; Saks, 2010; Modisane, 2010; Dovey, 2009; Maingard, 2007). Milstein (2014) notes that, following the overthrow of the oppressive state of rule by whites over black people post-1994, film has become a storytelling tool fostering nation-building and social cohesion. This research also considers the influence of transformational challenges on the production of indigenous language films.

I have chosen language as a prism through which to look at South African film considering that, embedded within a language, are issues of identity, culture, and the language's ability to foster social cohesion (Ebrahim & Ellapen, 2018; Milstein 2014). Amaechi (2013) takes this a step further in promoting a discussion on national growth, insisting this cannot occur without language's inclusion as it is crucial in the way people form identities; both on a personal level, and within groupings. Amaechi also claims that people can recognise, affiliate, and promote their identity and culture through language. Furthermore, Akporherhe and Oghenerioborue (2021) consider the reliance on indigenous languages necessary for transmitting knowledge through stories and folklore belonging to a particular group.

On this basis, the research argues that the use of indigenous languages offers a unique selling proposition to different groups in relation to the making and marketing of films. Potentially, different groups can bring unique stories within indigenous languages to the fore. My interest is in the potential of indigenous language films to communicate unique stories best told in the languages from which it originates. Considering existing research into feature films as a powerful medium of communication (Cloete, 2017), I argue that they can also be a valuable tool to preserve and promote indigenous African languages.

Reference to language within the film industry has predominantly considered the language of filmic text as opposed to the spoken language of speech (Baka, 2017; Edgar, Marland, & Rawle, 2015; Jaeckle, 2013; Arijon, 1991; Tomasselli, 1979). Jaeckle (2013) uses the terms dialogue, film speech and ideological dimensions interchangeably in highlighting that language in cinema is underexplored. While, attention to dialogue and its subtextual meaning is understood to contribute to the overall experience of the visuals (Kazakeviciute, 2019). Baka (2017) claims that dialogue shapes visuals. Azab , Noriyuki, Jia & Rada (2022) contribute in their view that conversations between characters in a film are essential due to the values they promote, such as mood, attitudes and personality. The above may be considered relevant to this study considering the focus on the challenges indigenous language cinema confronts in South Africa, however this avoids an analysis of dialogue but rather intends to understand how social and economic conditions relating to film impact the production of indigenous language film in South Africa. In pursuing this line of inquiry the research differentiates between the cinematic fact and the filmic fact as first introduced by Christian Metz (1974). Metz distinguishes between filmic fact which is commonly understood to mean the film text with its layers of representation and meaning and the cinematic fact which, he explains, comprises all parts that make up the film process including pre-filmic events such as pre-production and production and post-production which includes the post-filmic stages of distribution of the film. This does not argue against the filmic text as a valuable area for considering indigenous language film in South Africa, but rather chooses cinematic fact as the best suited approach for this study in order to understand the entire system that makes up the whole instead of just one element of the value chain.

Indigenous language film production is also explored in terms of contributing to the government's efforts for economic growth. Thus, the third area of interest addressed in Chapter Two is the government's role in developing the local film industry in South Africa as a driver of economic and social transformation. This is framed upon the high youth unemployment rate of 57,47% in 2021 (O'Neil, 2021), which is expected to rise to 68% in 2023 (Trading Economics, 2022). Through its agencies overseen by the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, such as the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), the South African government encourages "the development and distribution of local film and video products" (Saks, 2010:38). Economic development, job creation, foreign investment, social cohesion, and nation-building, are reasons the government gives for funding the local industry (Observatory, 2018). Thus, indigenous language production and the viability of increased production contributes to this economic growth trajectory. Although local feature films have underperformed (Observatory, 2018), the NFVF regards South Africa as having great potential to "produce films that can attract more audiences and perform better at the box office" (NFVF, 2018:5). This research posits that increased profits are essential in creating financially viable films, and developing a more sustainable local film industry that also helps in reducing South Africa's unemployment rate. International research endorses the film industry as a critical driver of economic growth (Observatory, 2018; Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2017; Silver, 2007, Eliashberg, Elberse & Leenders, 2006).

Despite all government plans and efforts, as outlined earlier, there is still a low number of indigenous language films produced. Using the two case study films of *Matwetwe* (Lediga, 2019) and *Inxeba* (Trengove, 2017), this research attempts to understand the existing constraints limiting indigenous language film production compared to the number of feature films produced in English and Afrikaans. This is also considered in light of South Africa arguably having the most developed government funding when compared to a number of African film industries.

Chapter Two develops the value chain analysis as part of the Film Services framework used by Oswelled Ureke (2016) building on the original work of Ben Goldsmith and Tim O'Regan (2005), and Goldsmith, O'Regan and Susan Ward

(2010), who prior explored the role of film worldwide, including both the ‘local’ and international production environment. Their mainstay was examining the political economy, that is, the relationships between individuals, governments and film services (Goldsmith & O’Regan, 2005; Goldsmith, Ward & O’Regan, 2010). The Film Services approach looks at the organisational arrangements, skills and infrastructure, and how it relates to indigenous language production. Without ignoring textual readings, which Ureke refers to as the “filmic fact” following Metz, he advocates the Film Services framework for its more inclusive understanding of industry relations and economics. Along with this approach, the value chain analysis concept, introduced by Porter (2008), is used to assess how different components employed in developing a product can help add value, and subsequently aid such a product to gain a competitive advantage. The primary focus is on industry forces and how it influences the choice of language in South African films, as well as how economic factors constrain the production of indigenous African language films. This study argues that a viable, increased production of indigenous language films, strengthened by all the elements inherent within a language proposed as a unique selling proposition, could form part of the South African film industry's competitive advantage.

Chapter Three establishes the approach to data collection and the overarching paradigms. The methodology employed by this study was qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews with the producers of the two films, Kagiso Lediga (*Matwetwe*) and Elias Ribeiro (*Inxeba*). Flowing from Chapter Two, the data mined from the interviews together with secondary sources, was thematically coded into three categories informed by the value chain approaches of Naidoo (2011), Bloore (2009), and its application to the field of the film industry analysis as applied by Ureke (2016). The three categories of (1) Ideation, Development and Production; (2) Finance and Funding; and (3) Distribution, both in South Africa and at an international level, are deliberated in terms of indigenous language film production in South Africa, referencing the two case study films as examples.

Assumptions in this qualitative study include that the participants will provide honest answers to questions during interviews. The participants signed consent forms to participate in the project to adhere to the University of the Witwatersrand ethics regulations. The participants were also notified that confidentiality and

anonymity could not be guaranteed, since people would know who the producers of the films under the spotlight are. Participation in the research was voluntary.

Chapter Four analyses information mined from the interviews with the producers of the case study films, along with the three thematically coded categories mentioned above in relation to indigenous language production in South Africa. The chapter concludes by determining the viability of the case study films employing a value chain analysis approach using a framework adapted from The South African Cultural Observatory (date), which offers a detailed breakdown of key success indicators. It presents a holistic perspective of the film industry from its conception to the completion stage in the form of a table view, considering the financial viability and performance of films. Although viability refers to profitability (Rey, 2011), the research adopts Saks's (2010:40) definition, which expands our understanding beyond commercial gain, and considers a project holistically from conception to its intended target audience.

Informed by data unearthed from this study, Chapter Five details my experiences in producing an indigenous language short film. This self-reflective chapter engages with the challenges experienced in the production of a short 15-minute film, *Rirhandzu*, filmed in Nkowankowa Township of the Limpopo province, South Africa. The film centres around two individuals, male and female, from different social class groups who fall in love when they accidentally meet at a busy junction in town. Themes explored in the film include the juxtaposition between the rich and poor, and themes of hope concerning triumph and love. Promoting and escalating the beauty of the Xitsonga traditional attire and language, is at the core of the film. The chapter adopts the use of a "shooting diary" to report on the three categories of ideation, funding and distribution as already mentioned, whilst comparing the outcomes of the artistic research component with the theoretical component of this study.

Chapter Six rounds up the discussions and formulates a conclusion. In wrapping up the argument and substantiating the argument for increased production of indigenous language films, the study also identifies stumbling blocks and challenges in producing indigenous language films. In addition, the study endeavours to provide possible solutions.

1.4. Case studies

Matwetwe (2019) is a South African film produced in the Setswana language, which presents an excellent opportunity to test how local language films fit into the economics of the market and, further, how the value chain relates to such films. *Matwetwe* was developed with a low budget of below R2 million (NFVF Box Office Report, 2019). *Matwetwe* was created and directed by Kagiso Lediga, with the financial backing of DJ Black Coffee (Zeeman, 2019). Since the film was produced without government incentives, it opens valuable areas to investigate how this funding model might be viable for other filmmakers. *Matwetwe (2019)* will be compared to *Inxeba (2017),* which uses IsiXhosa as a language (SA History, 2017). *Inxeba* was surrounded by many controversies (Kekana, 2018) and received strong condemnation in South Africa - especially from the Xhosa community - due to its public portrayal of the traditional secret practice of Ukwaluko (SA History, 2017).

Notwithstanding, *Inxeba* won several international awards, including the Best Foreign film award from the African-American Film Critics Association, and the Best First Feature Award from the British Film Institute (Khoabane, 2018). The international success and awards accumulated by *Inxeba* offer a precedent to assess the impact of awards for an indigenous language film. In addition, *Inxeba* only amassed R2 million at the local box office, compared to the amount of R6,6 million earned by *Matwetwe* (NFVF, 2018).

Of interest to this research is that both films were made in the last five years, and both used indigenous African languages. In addition, the language portrayed in *Matwetwe* is colloquially known as 'Pitori slang', a non-formal version of the Setswana language mostly spoken in Pretoria (Langa, 2019b). The focal point of comparison will consider the commercial viability of indigenous African language films in South Africa, and the challenges faced in producing and distributing the films, with *Inxeba* offering further insight into the international distribution opportunities for indigenous African language films.

1.5. Conclusion

At the forefront of the inquiry is the intention to assist policymakers and stakeholders with information on the configuration of the South African film industry, with the aim of creating a deeper understanding into aspects of indigenous language feature film production in this context.

The next chapter expands on the Film services approach and its deployment within this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Framework

2.1. Introduction

Keyan Tomaselli (1979) noted that an indigenous cinema was growing in South Africa, albeit at a slow pace (Tomasselli, 1979). In this instance, the term 'indigenous cinema' does not refer to indigenous language films but instead to films made by South African filmmakers, inclusive of all diverse groups, notably black Africans. To put the above into perspective, Rouch (1975) also raised concerns in 1960 that up to that point, not a single feature film had been produced by a black African using an indigenous African language. This was notable, since cinema in South Africa traces its beginnings back to 1896[2] (Botha, 2012). It can thus be argued that the inclusivity around an indigenous cinema lends itself to making indigenous language films since the South African black Africans possess nine of the eleven official languages. Over and above language production, also of concern to the authors is that black Africans have not taken the initiative to spearhead the production of indigenous films. Thus, extrapolated from the authors is beyond an indigenous language cinema is also the issue of low production of films by black people, who comprise most of the South African population. To align the possible relationship between an indigenous cinema and indigenous language films, fast forward 43 years from when Tomaselli identified the low indigenous film growth in 1979, there is still a low number of indigenous African language films in production. The proposal is not that all South African films must be indigenous language films, but that some of the films produced be in indigenous African languages, and where possible, produced by Black African film makers. Considering that in 2018, of the nine films made in the first half of the year (January - June), six films were in Afrikaans, two in English, and one in IsiXhosa (NFVF, 2018). Out of the 22 locally produced films that received a theatrical release in 2019, only five qualified as indigenous language films (NFVF 2019/20 Annual Report, 2019). This research questions the reasons for this lengthy period of slow

[2] The South African film industry is one of the oldest globally, and the first picture was screened in May 1896. (Botha, 2012)

growth of indigenous language cinema in South Africa to better understand the challenges that have hindered its expansion.

This literature review explores current and historical debates around indigenous language definitions, and how the term is applied to find a clearer understanding of the existing state of indigenous language cinema in South Africa. This chapter goes deeper into Film Services as a theoretical approach, and its rationale within the central argument around investigating the market forces impacting indigenous language film production in South Africa. This is necessary to advance the objectives of this study to determine the current configuration of the South African film value chain concerning indigenous language film production, and understand the support required for the production of indigenous language films. Arguments are framed within the school of thought that increased production of indigenous language films aids government efforts to improve the profitability of the South African film and television industry to the benefit of the South African economy.

Xitsonga is used as a case study within the artistic research component of this thesis, as it is an example of a marginalised language that receives little attention in the production of popular media in South Africa. Xitsonga is one of the eleven official languages, primarily spoken in the Limpopo province of South Africa by approximately two million people (Mabaso, 2018). Ndlovu, Mushwana and Mathevula (2020) examined the status of Xitsonga in various genres of drama on SABC TV Channels. It was concluded that Xitsonga fares poorly, and that speakers of the language are denied access to information and entertainment in their mother tongue. Thus, this review also looks at discussions around representation - or lack thereof - for different groups, and its importance. Also arising from the review is a more profound understanding of verbal spoken language, and the meaning attached to it by different groups.

2.2. Film Services Approach and Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. Introduction

Although it could be considered unorthodox to place a theoretical framework at the beginning of the literature review, some scholars promote it within the perimeters that it presents scholarly foundations through which to make meaning of the research data contained within the research (Kivunja, 2018; Adom, Hussein, Agyem, 2018). Kivunja (2018) provides that establishing the theoretical framework allows for a sustainable argument, and helps to justify the research findings and recommendations. Adom et al. (2018) offer that the theoretical framework guides the research path, and is formulated from the research problem and questions. In essence, the theoretical framework can be placed early on in the paper to develop from the research problem, objectives, and questions. It can be argued that this is justified within the context of this research, which seeks from the outset to analyse the South African film industry to establish the challenges encountered in the production of indigenous language films, and subsequently identify the support required by such producers. The theoretical framework guides this research in gathering important information, and acts as a lens through which a set of outcomes are realised.

The introspection regarding the production of indigenous language films is framed against the backdrop of a historical imbalance in the study of films, with research being highly concentrated on visual imagery and aesthetics (Tan, 2018; Frisch, 2019). These film studies have focused on representational issues within the meaning of the film text, which is priveleged over other elements involved in producing the film, such as the economic and industrial relationships that are an essential part of filmmaking. However, the latter cannot be ignored, as Mboti and Tomaselli (2015:1) point out that "texts arise out of contexts", or simply put, films are not made in isolation; they are made within a production environment that entails many production elements. It can be argued that considerations such as the decision to produce a film in an indigenous language, or use English in terms of access to different markets, both profoundly and subtly influence the final film.

This research is less interested in explaining the meaning of the films or analysing the texts (shots, performance, editing, story structure, lighting). This approach does not demean the importance thereof; it rather considers the value chain analysis as an equally valuable area of study from which to understand the obstacles pertaining to the production and market performance of indigenous language films.

2.2.2. Value Chain Analysis

The value chain analysis employed in this study relies on the work of Ureke (2016), who adopts the approach used by Piva, Perez, Perez & Montoya (2011) in his Doctoral thesis entitled: *Cinematic fact and the film services industry: production contexts and contexts of production in Zimbabwe (1980-2016).* As highlighted earlier, this study acknowledges prior research by Ben Goldsmith and Tim O'Regan (2005), later joined by Susan Ward (2010), that precedes the work of Ureke and Porter, who explored the role of film worldwide, including both the 'local' and international production environment. Their mainstay was examining the political economy, that is, the relationships between individuals, governments and film services (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005; Goldsmith, Ward & O'Regan, 2010). In applying the Film Services approach to the South African context, Ureke (2016) offers useful examples given the relevance of his analysis carried out in the neighbouring country of Zimbabwe.

Michael Porter (2008) formulated the value chain concept to assess how different components employed in developing a product can help add value, and subsequently aid a product to gain a competitive advantage. Porter established this with reference to a product within a business firm (Porter, 2008), however this study finds it applicable to the film industry, which comprises of a production value chain in the production of a feature film. Porter's view is supported by Dubey et al (2020), who argue that the aim of the value chain analysis is a better understanding of how a product or service is delivered to the market. Within the context of this study, thus, the approach is useful for examining various industrial relations involved in the production of an indigenous language film to help it gain a profitable market advantage.

Ureke (2016) uses a film services framework to explore Zimbabwean film making, using four films as case studies to investigate aspects of the industry value chain and how they influence the films. Ureke's study, situated in a neighbouring African country, also engages in understanding the importance of revitalising indigenous language film production, and is therefore relevant to this study. His thesis is focused on "the nature of skills, infrastructure and organisational networks exploited in the production of film and video" (ibid: 2). Thus, the exploration looks at all aspects of making a film - from conception to audience reception. This exploration into the components of the industry is consistent with the definition of the film value chain, which includes all aspects - creative and financial - of the film industry, from conception to distribution (Grunenwald, 2013). Therefore, the film services approach is useful for this study in offering an understanding of the South African film industry infrastructure, and in assessing whether it is suitable for supporting the development and production of indigenous South African language films.

To further unpack the Film Services approach, it considers all the supporting relationships such as distribution and financial structures, within the film production environment (O'Regan, 2010). This demonstrates the ability of the film services approach to look at a broader context of the film creation environment, allowing for a variety of perspectives and possibilities to interpret complex links across the spectrum. Ureke (2016:46) unpacks the processes within film services as the "skills, infrastructure and intermediate services exploited in the production of films". These are taken to mean all the processes and elements involved in producing a film. Hence, Tomaselli and Mboti (2013) surmise this, noting that film texts cannot be read in isolation of the context from which they arise. These authors tabulate the context as "political economy, industry, marketing, state policy, structures, support, historical conditions and ideological assumptions" (ibid:1). This provides an essential foundation for a model to understand how market forces impact indigenous language production in South Africa.

Considering the value chain concept, Ureke (2016) identifies three components as follows: Production (pre-production, production, and post-production), Distribution and Exhibition. Heatlie (2011) argues that the value chain approach fails to include the development stage where the idea is conceptualised or generated. Heatlie

(2011) further highlights that the development of a film does not take place at the pre-production stage as, by that stage, the concept has already been developed. Contrastingly, the Cultural Observatory includes development and conceptualisation in the pre-production stage of the production value chain (Observatory, 2018:xii). Congruently, Naidoo (2011) includes elements such as scriptwriters and producers at the beginning of the value chain approach, which are found in the pre-production stage of the value chain approach used by Ureke (2016). A common thread highlighted by Grunenwald (2013), is that the production process, be it development or conceptualisation, starts at the beginning of an idea. Essential to this research is the view that the development stage is the first element of the value chain, and therefore critical in the process of production. Consequently, within this thinking, the development stage is a critical component in the value chain approach. Ideation is relevant, as it must begin in the indigenous language of the film rather than the current industry practice where scripts are usually developed and written in English, then translated into indigenous languages.

Furthermore, the development stage is also where financial procurement (funding or financing) for a film takes place. The relevant stakeholders, be it institutions, broadcast channels or organisations involved as a source of funding, could have control over the film depending on the funding arrangement. To put this into perspective, the Department of Trade and Industry of South Africa guidelines for the film incentive programs refers to commissioning and licensing. The broadcaster owns commissioned projects, whilst licensed programs are owned by the producer who allows the broadcaster to use the product at a fee for a period of time (Department of Trade and Industry, 2018). At the heart of financing discussions is control and ownership, which, over and above the ability to affect development and distribution, also arguably affects how much the producers will profit. Zoellner (2020) escalates the economic conflict to a power struggle, posing a serious challenge for independent producers in taking control of or effecting a return on investment.

Also equally essential, is the distribution stage. Grunewald (2013:7) advances the distribution stage as "the most commercial link in the film value chain", therefore crucial to the development and sustainability of the industry. Although Grunewald's

research focused on documentary films, the research is specific to South Africa and relevant to my understanding of the distribution stage, which is analysed in the next chapter concerning the case study films.

To bring together all the different elements brought forward by the preceding authors on the value chain analysis, this study adopts elements in the production value chain, and groups the different parts thematically. Thematic analysis is the foundation of qualitative analysis, and operates by looking for ‘themes or patterns’ arising out of, in this case, value chain analysis, and as a basis for cataloguing information arising from interviews with the film producers (Kampira, 2021; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). These authors consider the process a flexible yet organised information management system that caters for both small and significant information. The above authors go on to explain that the information management framework allows for coding, which is utilised to group information with similar meanings under topic words or sentences that can even be abbreviated (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016). Ideation is noted as an essential element to consider; thus, this study will group all the elements from the different authors as follows: Ideation, Development and Production, Finance and Funding, and Distribution at both a local and an international level. It will then be applied to indigenous African language films in general, specifically, the case study films as well as the creative research aspect. Both Finance and Funding are important, since the literature review has highlighted these challenges within the South African landscape. The Distribution stage is chosen on the grounds of Grunewald (2013) indicating the importance thereof.

2.2.3. Film Services Approach and the South African Film Industry

The Film Services approach is situated within the South African local production unit to strengthen its overall offering and viability. To elaborate, the description of film services in South Africa is primarily limited to ‘runaway productions’ which seek cost effective film production services and locations outside of the industrialized film centers of the global North (Observatory, 2018). Thus, within the South African context, the film services approach refers to one of two parts of the South African film industry. One part services international ‘runaway’ productions, while the other part services local productions (Tomaselli & Mboti, 2013). The film

services unit provides crew, equipment, locations, cast and infrastructure to runaway productions from Hollywood, whilst the local, termed ‘SA films’ are usually made for local markets, and the Intellectual Property (IP) ownership is originated and held by South Africans (ibid).

The South African Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has incentives for foreign-based film production units producing films in South Africa, which provides employment opportunities for the local industry (Department of Trade and Industry, 2018). The film services aspect relies on non-South African producers attracted to the financial incentives offered by the DTI’s Foreign Film Incentive Scheme (Gauteng Film Commission, 2011). The producers of these runaway productions come to South Africa to produce films mainly intended for non-African audiences outside of the continent (ibid). Growth and development of these parts of the industry are interrelated. In addition, it could prove useful for the South African film industry to adopt the stance taken by the Cultural Observatory, which is working on a united framework for a South African "Sallywood" (Observatory, 2018).

I return to the suitability of “Sallywood" for describing the film production environment and its economy of exchanges in South Africa later on. Here I am interested in the Gauteng Film Commission (GFC), and its focus on strengthening certain aspects of the industry (Gauteng Film Commission, 2011). Informed by international research, their strategy has two components. The first is outward focused, and the second directed inward (ibid). The outer part of the industry is the international production unit, whilst the inward strategy looks at growing local productions (ibid: 2). This study further examines how the local production industry value chain plays a role in locally produced indigenous African language films. In sync with the GFC, this could help build on local talent with stories that relate to a local audience, and later for a wider audience outside of the country (Gauteng Film Commission, 2011). This approach supports film services as a useful tool in providing a holistic overview of the South African film industry in relation to indigenous language film production in identifying challenges and opportunities, offering subsequent solutions to growing an indigenous language film production base.

This study becomes even more critical as, supplementary to understanding how one part of the South African industry relates to indigenous language production, the study aids in providing a 'bird's eye view' of the entire foundation of the South African film industry. Given the above, an introspection into the South African industry is important, since its viability, or lack thereof, has been questioned. The Cultural Observatory (2018), a research unit assembled by the Department of Arts and Culture and NFVF to produce a framework for the growth of the South African industry, notes that the local film and television industry underperforms compared to its possible potential. The Cultural Observatory highlights that the majority of films, not only indigenous language films, do not fare well at the box office. In effect, it highlights more significant challenges within the South African film industry separate from this inquiry.

In corroboration, Ureke and Tomaselli (2017) are of the view that, in its current form, the South African film industry does not qualify to be called an 'industry'. The disqualification of the South African film industry from being afforded industry status is framed by the narrative that the South African industry relies heavily on government funding, and in its current state, the industry is not sustainable on its own (Observatory, 2018). This study proposes that one way to build the South African industry is through an increased production of viable African indigenous language films. This proposal is based on the linkages and interconnection that the Film Services approach yields in its understanding of the production of a film and how production exchanges, financing and distribution interact (Yeh, Pai & Wu, 2020).

In deepening our understanding of how the word 'industry' is used when referring to the local film production sector, Ureke and Tomaselli (2017) propose the use of the suffix "wood" as a way of naming film services aspects. In their view, it forms a central part of film production outputs in South Africa and frees discussion of these production arrangements from prescriptions associated with the term "industry". These scholars caution against film service units, or local production units in this instance, adopting Hollywood dictation when formulating a vision suitable to local environments. Thus, the stance taken by the South African Cultural Observatory (2018:26) is in line with these authors in using the terms

“Sallywood" in the title of the proposed plan for the success of the South African film industry.

The South African Cultural Observatory study entitled *Sallywood* (2018) was drafted as part of a business plan for a way forward for the South African film industry. Some of the key points from the plan include information that most South Africans would appreciate such as high quality, local content (Observatory, 2018). Here, quality refers to productions emulating the standards of Hollywood films made for the box office, since the South African media landscape is framed mainly by international products. Furthermore, the Cultural Observatory (2018) also notes that the content 'hunger' extends to cinemas. However, access to films is complicated by the dominance of the major distributors being Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro, and a lack of access by potential consumers due to long distances from the screening venues of local films. This study contributes to the efforts of the Cultural Observatory by providing information on the potential of African indigenous language films to succeed, and how the industry is set up to aid production efforts. However, this does not shy away from the information highlighted above regarding challenges or market forces impacting the production of indigenous language films in South Africa.

2.3. An Indigenous Language Cinema

2.3.1. Introduction

Building on the foundation laid in the previous section, this section employs the Film Services approach to review literature on an indigenous African cinema, and provides a clearer understanding of the limitations confronting indigenous language film production in South Africa. Thus, it looks at the “intermediate inputs, organisational arrangements and expertise associated with processes involved in developing film projects” (Frisch, 2019; O’Regan, 2018). The outcomes of this approach adds value to the current body of literature, and intends to highlight how indigenous language production might gain a competitive advantage. Its value lies in the assertion of Mukerjee (2016), who states that the key to the survival and sustainability of the industry is managing the elements contributing to its competitive advantage.

2.3.2. Success, Opportunities and Supply & Demand of Indigenous Language Films

As raised in Chapter One, indigenous languages are well established in the South African Television landscape. *Uzalo*, made in IsiZulu for SABC 1, has been the number one television program since 2016 (Kwazulu Natal Film Commission, 2017). *Muvhango* (SABC 2), made in the Tshivenda language, has been leading the charts on this channel, whilst *Skeem Saam* (SABC 1), a drama series made in the Limpopo province of South Africa using the Sepedi language, also received high audience ratings on television. In essence, the indigenous language landscape on South African television paints a positive image for its film industry counterpart. The previous section already alluded to the fact that the Cultural Observatory (2018) asserts there is an audience waiting to receive this content, save for challenges such as long travel distances for potential audiences in accessing cinemas, and films not being afforded widespread distribution opportunities across the existing cinemas in the country. The requisite is that the films must be produced in high-quality (Observatory, 2018), incorporating both high-end production equipment and well-written scripts (ibid).

Furthermore, of great potential for the indigenous language production is the growth of the digital platforms such as video-on-demand, which allows accessibility for people watching on their cell phone (Kwazulu Natal Film Commission, 2017). This will allow for increased platforms of distribution, and access to indigenous African language films, as discussed later.

To explore avenues that have worked for other countries, in a comparative study on the South African and Nigerian film industries, Barnard & Tuomi (2008) examined both the South African and Nigerian service industries, noting that the strategies employed are different. Nigeria's industry predominantly produces low-cost films geared for the DVD market, which have to sell quickly before copyright piracy attacks. On the other hand, the South African industry relies heavily on funding, striving to produce films for the international market within Hollywood guidelines (Barnard and Tuomi, 2008). Ebekue (2018) investigates the digital internet platform as an alternative distribution model for Nigerian films, and finds it a viable alternative platform - if challenges relating to piracy can be resolved.

At the core of the research is advocacy for a match in supply and demand. To this end, Nigerian audiences are receptive of poor-quality films, whilst the South African audience expects Hollywood standards that are often not met by local South African producers (Barnard and Tuomi, 2008). Deduced from this discussion is that, in addition to high-quality films that tell stories South African audiences identify with, arguably in local indigenous African languages, South Africa could also adopt the Nigerian model of low-cost production. Understood and taken from the Nigerian strategy is extensive audience reach, the ability to produce large quantities of work regularly, and distributing it timeously. This could decrease the high unemployment rate elaborated upon below, as South Africans would produce and sell their work regularly. It must be noted that the Nigerian film industry quality has improved drastically, and what further aids the industry's growth is the use of the Igbo indigenous Nigerian language (Okpara, 2020). In essence, the supply versus demand discussion does not take away from the intended primary outcome of producing high-quality films in indigenous African languages to meet the high standards in South Africa, Nigeria, and the rest of the world.

2.3.3. Economics of an Indigenous Cinema

Complicating the high-quality production trajectory, are issues around funding within South Africa. Although the South African government provides funding through the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), it is not without challenges. The Cultural Observatory did a SWOT analysis and discovered that funding is available, however there is insufficient access and a limitation to resources, or simply put, "demand always exceeds supply" (Observatory, 2018:80). This is supported by Vanderberg (2011), who found that most filmmakers are unhappy about the NFVF process. The concerns are levelled at the low budget available to assist a few filmmakers, whilst their policies are future goal-orientated deficient (Vanderberg, 2011). Damon Heatlie (2011) notes that in South Africa, access to funding, be it governmental or private, is a complex process. To put this into perspective, Heatlie looks at public funding institutions such as the NFVF, and a government ministry such as the Department of Trade and Industry. His findings concluded that the DTI is always able to help, yet the NFVF processes are complicated by their overriding executive producer tendencies, that is, they have processes in place to guide scripts towards a specific

direction before being approved (Heatlie, 2011). This is corroborated by Bloore (2009), who views film financing as the most complex stage of the value chain, since producers or creators of films have to obtain funding for their films; arguably not always easy in South Africa. More than the funding outcry, it could be argued that complaints levelled against the NFVF mainly stem from the application process, which the Cultural Observatory (2018:80) notes "needs to be simpler and clear". The view of these authors is that funding is essential in developing local films, and the process for application needs to be more accessible.

In addition, government support for the film industry of South Africa is justified due to its potential for job creation, encouraging tourism trade between countries, and fostering social cohesion (Albornoz & Leiva, 2020). As mentioned earlier, job creation in South Africa is important in view of the high unemployment rate. This job creation imperative is essential, considering the 2021 unemployment rate amongst South African youth is very high at 57,47% (O'Neil, 2021), indicating a severe youth unemployment problem (Ebrahim & Pirttilä, 2019). Of this number, 39% are black South Africans (Galal, 2021). A solution could be to support young black filmmakers to produce indigenous African films, which would aid government efforts to empower such filmmakers (Cloete, 2017).

In post-apartheid South Africa, the development of young black filmmakers is essential, since black people were not permitted to produce films during apartheid (Saks, 2010). It can be argued that this can work as observed with the white Afrikaans-speaking community, which was previously well supported by the Nationalist Party government (Saks, 2010). To this day, there is still a high production of Afrikaans language films, with six being produced in 2018, each amassing R3 million on average at the box office (NFVF, 2018). During apartheid, the white Afrikaner film community enjoyed great government support through organisations such as the "Rescue League Amateur Film Organisation", which was established to propel Afrikaans films (Saks, 2010:12). Snail (2011) contributes that Afrikaners used their language to build their nationalism, advance their policies through their state power, and manipulate the linguistic differences to create nations called "multi nationalisms". Snail adds that this environment rendered the African languages of South Africa to be collectively called "the Bantu languages". Adopting the model implemented by the Nationalist Party government

to support the development of Afrikaans films, could also prove profitable for South African indigenous language films in the long run.

It is argued that aiding black filmmakers helps government resolve most of the challenges outlined in this review. These include the development of black filmmakers, stories told in indigenous African languages, unique scripts that are not bound by Hollywood conventions and films that can travel the world. However, this depends on funding. It is further argued that increased funding of indigenous language cinema, as outlined in this chapter, could promote indigenous African filmmakers to make their films alongside other filmmakers telling their stories.

2.3.4. Contested Definitions of Indigenous Languages

The film industry can duplicate the success of the television industry. However, at the helm of an indigenous African language cinema, are contested definitions around the term ‘indigenous’ and how it is understood in relation to language in South Africa (Munyai and Phooko, 2021). Central to what constitutes an indigenous language, is the debate over whether Afrikaans should be included or excluded as an indigenous language in South Africa.

English is outright excluded from consideration, as it is a language with origins outside of South Africa (Munyai & Phooko, 2021; Oliver & Oliver, 2017; Giliomee, 2004). The question of indigenous recognition for Afrikaans based on claims to its local origin by some speakers of the language, has led to divided opinions from scholars writing in the field. Van Heerden (2019) points out a forgotten history of Afrikaans: that it was formed in 1600 in the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. Van Heerden's article responded to the 2015 “Fees Must Fall” activism by South African youth calling for free and decolonised quality education. Articles on both sides of the debate, some defending Afrikaans and others not, represent a broad range of South Africans highlighting the significance of Afrikaans throughout different parts of the country.

Contrastingly, there are other views and complications to the origins of Afrikaans as a language. In looking at the colonisation of South Africa, Oliver and Oliver (2017) point out that Afrikaans has its roots in Europe, like English, unlike other South African spoken languages. This approach draws from the definition of indigenous languages as those "naturally existing in a place or country rather than

arriving from another place", and "handed down from generation to generation" (Owunbie, 2016:231). Countering this argument is that all South African languages may not have originated in South Africa, while English and Afrikaans are the only two of European descent, and the remaining nine are of African descent (Khokhlova, 2015; Snail, 2011). This claim could even be supported in the context of languages spoken by the Southern San, now extinct, that arose with earlier hunter-gatherer societies and even pre-date the arrival of the African languages (McKenna, 2011). When they arrived in the Cape of Good Hope, the Europeans found pastoral populations and called them the Hottentots, whilst those populations identified themselves as Khoekhoe people (ibid). Although the Khoikhoi and Southern San are different linguistic groups and cultures, further information reveals that the Khoi and San languages originated in one of the hunter-gatherer languages of the north (ibid: 2). It can be argued that, with reference to indigeneity and language in South Africa, these claims to first nation status cannot be ignored. More importantly, this supports the claim that the nine African indigenous languages developed outside of South Africa, yet have traces within the geographic borders of Africa. This paper acknowledges the debate about Afrikaans as a creole language. This history, tensions and conundrum of Afrikaans as a creole language is well explored by Dylan Valley (2010) in his documentary titled *Afrikaaps* which focuses on the exploration of the origins of the current language of Afrikaans.

In view of the above, it can be argued that a solution could be to include Afrikaans in the definition of "indigenous South African languages", yet exclude it from the definition of indigenous African languages. The Ministry of Education's report as mentioned above, can be argued as a bold step in excluding Afrikaans and English in their definition of nine African indigenous languages, by offering clarification in the face of the usual vagueness on the issue expressed by most other government departments (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2003). This seems entirely correct within the South African context, considering that any meaningful definition of indigenous language within the local context must exclude English and Afrikaans, considering the historical association with Colonialism and Apartheid. This view allows the government to empower the nine formerly disadvantaged indigenous African languages as a cohort whilst maintaining and growing English

and Afrikaans together. Therefore, this study suggests that over and above the NFVF and South African government departments, the constitution of South Africa needs to be amended to clarify which of the eleven official languages are indigenous African languages.

Complicating the language debate in South Africa, is the elevated status of the English language. Within this debate, it is also worth noting that English remains elevated in the minds of black South Africans, conferring upon it a system of hegemony that privileges access to jobs and education (Ntombela, 2016). Supporting this view is the ministerial committee employed by the Department of Education in 2003, which advances the idea that, at the heart of the colonial period, was the establishment of European culture over African culture; hence today, the two are forced to reside side-by-side as it would prove challenging to isolate one culture from the other. This study notes that historical colonial domination appears to still weigh heavily on the minds of South African black people since they are still contending with whether or not to accept the language of the ‘oppressor’.

Vuyisile Msila (2019) weighs in on the search for social justice in Africa through language debates. In resolving the English versus indigenous languages debate, the author quotes two pioneers of indigenous languages: Eskia Mphahlele, and Ngugi wa Thiongo. Eskia Mphahlele advises that it is mischievous for black Africans to avoid using English based on its international footprint. On the other hand, Ngugi wa Thiongo offers that indigenous languages can redeem Africans from the legacy of colonialism. In the main, the article argues for positioning South Africa's official languages on an equal footing on the pretext that multilingualism and bilingualism will build better citizens. That is to say, all of the languages should be supported equally, as they need each other to advance a well-balanced society.

Abari, Oyetola, & Okunuga (2013) caution in pursuing and promoting indigenous African languages over English as a preferred language. They realise that preserving indigenous African languages comes at the risk of being left behind by the rest of the world by not conforming to international language trends (ibid). Amaechi (2013) counteracts this argument by promoting language as people's 'identity card'. This idea understands that through language, people can be recognised, affiliate and promote their identity, and subsequently, culture and

language. It follows that recognition underscores all calls for promoting and preserving indigenous African languages.

In support of this pursuit is the view that a growing cinema audience could arguably be receptive to indigenous African language films (Cultural Observatory, 2018). Thus, supporting an indigenous cinema based on indigenous language is justified, as it will firstly offer recognition to different groups, and access an audience receptive to the scripts that will arise from the indigenous community, translating to income and growth for the film industry.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter offers introspection into an indigenous cinema situated within a film services analysis of the South African film production landscape. This approach reveals that indigenous language films should not be studied in isolation, but understood within the entire film production value chain and the economic, social and historical context within which they arise. Through the value chain analysis which identify certain interventions for the transformation of the industry, this film services approach explains how indigenous African language cinema might develop its competitive advantage. The literature reviewed in this chapter highlights particular challenges confronting an indigenous language cinema in South Africa. These include contestation around which languages qualify to be called indigenous, elevation of the English language, scripts conforming to commercial Hollywood formulae, and funding availability - or lack thereof - for developing young black filmmakers, along with questions around who tells the indigenous story. The chapter also offers suggestions that different stakeholders, especially government institutions such as the NFVF, could adopt in growing the film industry in South Africa. These include supporting young black filmmakers to make indigenous language films, which in turn will aid the transformation plan. However, this segregation does not exclude other races from making indigenous language films. Furthermore, this funding injection will contribute to economic growth, and tackle the high unemployment rate in the country.

In the next chapter, I consider the data collection and analysis methods, the research methodology, and offer more details on the films under study. Included are also interviews with the producers of the two films understudy, being Kagiso Lediga (*Matwetwe*), and Elias Ribeiro (*Inxeba*).

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter critically engaged with various published texts to establish the theoretical basis for the methodology section that follows in this chapter. This opens up a more detailed investigation of the challenges encountered by producers in the production of African indigenous language films, utilising the methodology to interpret the interviews with the producers of *Matwetwe* and *Inxeba*.

3.2. Research Methodology

Overarching the study are assumptions that there are challenges within the indigenous language film production, since only a few indigenous African language films have been made for cinema release in South Africa over the last few years. It can be argued that the assumptions relate to a perceived truth or something without any proof, which lends itself to a research paradigm (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The utilisation of the term ‘truth’ and the researcher’s worldview permeates the researcher's ontological and epistemological stances. Ontology refers to how reality is formulated and understood, whilst epistemology looks at how knowledge is attained and gained (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Al-Ababneh (2020) notes a link between ontology, epistemology, and research methodology.

This study flows from an interpretivism design to a qualitative methodology. Interpretivism, also known as interpretive research, is founded upon knowledge that problems exist within a social context with many elements that cannot be tabulated quantitatively or using measurement, and focuses on humans making sense of their world (Tombs and Pugsley, 2020). The methodology utilised in this study was qualitative research in semi-structured interviews with the producers of two films, Kagiso Lediga (*Matwetwe*), and Elias Ribeiro (*Inxeba*). The qualitative research methodology is employed, as it allows participants to express their views and reveal information that would otherwise not be possible through quantitative analysis (Kabir, 2016). Supporting the decision to employ this methodology is

information that the identified interview method requires access to the participants' inner world, and the interview allows for talking and listening to people (Croix, Barret and Stenfers, 2018).

Kagiso Lediga is the producer and director of the film *Matwetwe*, officially released in local cinemas in 2019 (Langa, 2019b). Kagiso has a rich history as a stand-up comedian, actor, director and producer on shows such as the *Pure Monate* television comedy show, and the film *Bunny Chow* (Barker, 2006). He is the creator and executive producer of the drama series *Queen Sono* on Netflix, and was nominated for Best Director of a TV comedy series at the South African Film and Television Awards in 2014 (Ibanga, 2021). Elias Ribeiro is one of the producers of the film *Inxeba*, The Wound, released in 2017 (Realness Institute, 2019). Elias is a well-travelled producer, having worked in more than ten countries, producing many documentaries and fiction films that have been screened in film festivals such as Sundance, Berlinale and Tribeca (ibid). The two producers are essential role players in the production of the case films used in this study, and their interviews together with their local and international experiences, will advance the study.

The interview with Kagiso Lediga took place at his offices, whilst the interview with Elias Ribeiro took place by means of a video call, since he travels most of the time. Both interviews were recorded and later transcribed. As is consistent with semi-structured interviews, there was a list of questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016) informed by the value chain analysis. However, there were follow-up questions that arose from the interviews in order to better understand or elaborate on the information disseminated.

Concerning interviews, Anne de la Croix, Aileen Barret and Terese Stenfers (2018) offer that a good interview should address the research question, and can also be guided by established themes. The dialogue between participants and researcher, aided by some pre-formulated questions, lends itself to semi-structured, in-depth interviews (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). To substantiate this, Olasile Babatunde Adedoyin (2020) offers that semi-structured interviews arise from the point of some prepared questions, allowing the interviewer to adjust as the interview proceeds and new information unravels. This study had prepared

questions flowing from the film services framework. However, to gain more insight from the producers, follow-up questions beneficial for this study into the indigenous language value chain, were asked.

Thematic coding, which began by including information from the value chain analysis of Naidoo (2011) and Bloore (2009) into the Film Services approach used by Ureke (2016), helped group together questions, and subsequently, the information from the interviews. As outlined in Chapter Two, this study seeks to determine the challenges encountered in the production of indigenous language films focusing on the ideation and development stage, financing for the films, production concerning indigenous languages, and distribution (local and international) stages of the value chain. Thematic analysis is the foundation of qualitative analysis, and operates by looking for "themes or patterns" arising out of, in this case, value chain analysis, and later from interviews with film producers (Kampira, 2021; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016:579). The trio adds that the process offers a flexible yet organised information management system that caters to small and significant information.

The two producers were selected using purposive sampling primarily based on their films' relatively strong market performance: one internationally, and the other locally. Purposive sampling refers to the intentional selection of individuals based on identified characteristics and qualities that fit the study. The criteria may vary, and qualifying elements may include the experience with a phenomenon (Casteel and Bridier, 2021).

Matwetwe and *Inxeba* are used due to being recently produced South African films speaking to the aims of this research. *Matwetwe*, created in Setswana, and *Inxeba* (IsiXhosa), presents relevant case studies to test how local language films fit into the economics of the market, and how the value chain relates to these films. Of aid to this study, which will be used to examine and compare the films, are the components inherent within the above-discussed film value chain analysis, as well as indicators of success inherent within the South African Cultural Observatory framework.

Regarding reliability and validity, a drawback to the qualitative research methodology is that the findings cannot be generalised to participants external to

the inquiry. In addition, concerns arise from the thinking that the researcher interacts with participants (Moser and Korstjens, 2018), suggesting that the researcher has an adverse effect on the research. However, to counteract this, the researcher must be transparent in the choices and strategy employed in the research, which is an accepted stance by researchers (ibid). Collins & Stockton (2018) explain the above by contributing that a balanced and well-centred theoretical framework can bolster the qualitative approach, hence utilising the film services approach in this study.

3.3. About the Two Case Study Films

Matwetwe (Lediga, 2019) is about the rite of passage of two young men, Lefa and Papi, who have just completed high school and are preparing for tertiary studies (Langa, 2019b). However, during the festive season, they get embroiled with the wrong crowd after using their botany skills to produce weed, or to be specific, Marijuana, which puts their lives under threat (ibid). *Matwetwe* received good press publicity pre- and post-release of the film. Isaacs (2019), from the channel Media24, describes *Matwetwe* as an "incredible local film". However, a very general comment is that the film is well made, both aesthetically and from a storyline perspective.

Inxeba (Trengove, 2017) was co-written by novelist Thando Mgqolozana, Malusi Bengu and John Trengove. Elias Ribeiro is part of the research, as he is one of the producers of the film *Inxeba*. The story follows the coming of age of a young man, Xolani, who goes to initiation school, Ulwaluko, where his sexual preferences are exposed after coming into contact with another initiate (Inxeba The Wound team, 2018). Centred in the Eastern Cape, the film *Inxeba* received strong condemnation in South Africa, especially from the Xhosa community, due to its public portrayal of the secret traditional practise of Ulwaluko (SA History, 2017). *Inxeba,* The Wound, was selected by the NFVF as South Africa's entry for an Oscar for Best Foreign-language film. Although it did not result in a nomination, it sold in over 50 countries, winning more than 28 international awards (ibid).

Of common interest to this research is that both films were made in the last five years (2017, 2019), and they both used indigenous African Languages: Setswana (*Matwetwe*) and IsiXhosa (*Inxeba*). In addition, the Setswana used in *Matwetwe* is colloquially known as 'Pitori slang', which is a form of non-formal ‘Sesotho’ mostly spoken in Pretoria (Langa, 2019b).

3.4. Interviews

Questions mainly sought to explore the producers’ experience with producing an indigenous South African language film, examined how the industry structure relates to the films, and lastly, the film's local and international audience perceptions. Industry structure includes elements such as "political economy, industry, marketing and genres, state policy, structures and support, ideological assumptions, and historical conditions" (Keyan G Tomaselli & Mboti, 2013:1). The three overarching categories were: (1) Ideation, Development and Production; (2) Finance and Funding; and (3) Distribution. In addition, there are instances where secondary information from articles were used to put things into perspective. The same questions were posed to both producers, and their responses were transcribed. However, there are instances where the answers were paraphrased and edited for clarity.

3.4.1. Ideation, Development and Production concerning Indigenous Language Films.

Since this stage is identified as the beginning of the film value chain (Naidoo, 2011). Questions in this section establish the stakeholders involved in the two films under study and their outlook concerning indigenous language films. This is important as the financial procurement (funding or financing) takes place at this stage.

Questions in this section include questions such as: Who were the players involved in the creation, development of the project? and What support did you find from the industry at large, especially in the development of an indigenous language film?

The questions were also trying to establish if the political economy was ‘supportive’ in the development of the films under study?

3.4.1.1. Role Players involved in the Production of the Film

The interview commenced with a question to establish the role players involved in the production of the indigenous language films. The aim was to strategically ask a follow-up question on how those role players and the general individuals involved in the production of the case study films, responded to the idea of making an indigenous African language film.

The questions posed to the producers were: Who were the role players involved in the creation and production of the films? Beyond trying to establish the stakeholders involved in the films' production, the question was trying to establish the interests such role players have if they funded the film.

Kagiso explained that his business partner (Luke Henkeman), and later, DJ Black Coffee, backed him. "Initially, we produced and financed the film independently in-house through Diprente production, then after making the film, we approached Black Coffee to assist with finance for post-production and to be our marketing partner" (Lediga, 2022). Ribeiro explained that *Inxeba* was initially conceptualised by John Trengove and Batana Vundla, informed by Thando Mgqolozana's book, *A man who is not a Man* (2009), and mainly supported by Urucu Media's internal producers, including Ribeiro himself (Ribeiro, 2022).

3.4.1.2. Indigenous Language vs English Debate

Flowing from the discussions in the literature review of whether to utilise English or an indigenous language in a film, the questions in this section sought to establish the respondents' views around this argument. The literature review chapter noted contestations around which languages qualify to be called indigenous, elevation of the English language, scripts conforming to commercial Hollywood formulae, and funding availability - or lack thereof - for developing young black filmmakers, along with questions around who tells the indigenous story.

Lediga raises concern for constantly telling stories in English. In Lediga's words: "The problem is when you have to translate an indigenous language film into

English, or the script is read by an American educated individual who works at the NFVF or Wits University to say this is what this part of the script is saying. They would agree, but according to what they teach, they would suggest it should do something else, and there would be conflict because of language" (Lediga, 2022).

Using *Matwetwe* as an example, Lediga (2022) says: "In the film, *Matwetwe*, you would have to understand Atteridgeville for you to understand me pitching that story to you. Otherwise, you would maybe suggest that the story be set in Soweto". In addition to the above, Lediga (2022) shares the following information: "It was a second film for me as a director, but the first indigenous language film". This led to my following question: So telling stories cuts across language?

Lediga believes that the focus should be on telling a good story, and people will watch it no matter in what language it is made. "If it resonates with the people, then it is going to be watched. I think we transcended language" (Lediga, 2022). "English should not serve as a deterrent to non-English speakers. For me, it is about what is the comfortable language to you. If you speak English, that is fine, cast people who speak that English that we can relate to. Do not use the English that is a block to the expression" (Lediga, 2022). Lediga further indicates that diversity is good for South Africa as there are many films that can be made in those languages. For example, "Afrikaans people are making films that are successful in Afrikaans" (Lediga, 2022). Deduced is that Kagiso is more interested in telling universal stories that make it worldwide, for example, the IsiZulu movie that makes it all over the world, which is not bounded by the language.

Using our languages has also helped some actors get into the spotlight. A case in point is Presley Chweneyagae (lead actor in *Tsotsi*). "Would he have been that great had he been speaking English? Not to suggest he would not, but using his language, he was able to access certain parts of himself because that is how he grew up and that is how he was raised" (Lediga, 2022). He continues, "English is a language we mostly use just to communicate". However, when it comes to venting frustration, people resort to using their indigenous home languages as he explains, "they are making pieces of content that communicate emotions".

3.4.1.3. Indigenous Language Production

This section sought to establish interactions with the indigenous languages used in the films once production was under way. This would include the reactions or the crew and cast to identify how these participants contribute to the indigenous language discussion.

Once production was underway, how was the reception and support from those directly and indirectly associated with the film/s?

Ribeiro did not give a lengthy response here. In his view, storytelling cuts across language, especially within film festivals (Ribeiro, 2022).

Why did you, as producers, choose to make an indigenous language film, considering that South African films do not do well at the box office?

Both respondents indicated that language was not at the heart of their decision. Instead, they both just wanted to tell a good story.

Over and above telling a good story, Kagiso and Elias dispute that South African films are not successful. Elias and Kagiso mentioned the success of *Tsotsi* on an international scale (Ribeiro, 2022; Kagiso, 2022). Furthermore, Kagiso mentioned the success of *Inxeba (2017),* which he claimed was “shortlisted for an Oscar, and it was well awarded in its year” (Lediga, 2022). Kagiso returned to his film: *"Matwetwe (2019)* was made in three weeks, and we made all our money and made a profit, so it does not get better than that" (Lediga, 2022).

A follow-up question asked why the producers only made an indigenous African language film now after being in the industry for years?

Elias: "It was just that the writers felt it was the opportune time to release (Ribeiro, 2022). Kagiso responded as follows: "This was a story that I developed when I was in my first year of varsity. Now when the idea resurfaced and the film could be made quickly, financed and independently. So, it was time" (Lediga, 2022). Furthermore, "it was an impulsive process; there was only a three-week period between deciding to shoot and finally doing so”.

Newspaper articles support Kagiso's view of *Matwetwe* being a good story. Concerning the storyline employed, *Matwetwe* is exalted as "some of the best work our industry has to offer" (Isaacs, 2019). Moreover, the story is also audience-friendly in that it uses comedy to tackle dark moments in the film, which it seems is something the South African audience identifies with (Langa, 2019b). Langa (2019) from *City Press,* summarises the film as "fresh, funny and fierce", something new that the local audience has been waiting for.

What was the crews' reaction that worked on the indigenous language films with you?

The language was not an issue for the crews working on the film. Both producers indicated that they used the same crews they always worked with, so there were no questions or critiques of the language utilised in the films. As Elias puts it: "The language issue was the least of anyone's concerns" (Ribeiro, 2022). His standpoint is that people watch subtitled language films and are used to it; even in other countries where the film was shown. Since the intended space for *Inxeba* was art house cinema, language was never an issue. However, Elias did indicate that, from the commercial side of the film industry, maybe language could be an issue. Elias shared: "The cinematographer in *Inxeba* is of Dutch descent, but never had an issue with the language whilst on set" (ibid).

Kagiso (2022) added: "Many of the main people are those I always work with, so it is a cultivated relationship". The concern was the time frame for the crew, since the film had to be made in 8 days. The crew was under the impression it was short film. However, once the process was underway, they realised it was an entire feature film. Of aid to the film, the cinematographer is from Atteridgeville. Kagiso's sister managed the costumes, as she was available and therefore in a position to do so. This assisted in terms of cost, and in his own words, "I believe that if you have a 'family' that you are always working with, then I promote that you carry on working with them".

3.4.2. Financing and Funding for the films

At the centre of the financing and funding theme was establishing the current state of funding in South Africa concerning indigenous language films. This could be

from government state parastatals or independent funding from other avenues. Questions in this section included:

What process did you follow to source funding for your film? This was followed up by: What support did you get from the industry at large, especially in developing an indigenous language film, or did you outright source an alternative funding model, and if yes, then why?

The film *Matwetwe* was self-funded. In his own words: “I put in some money, and I then asked my business partner to invest in the film. Black Coffee came to watch the movie when it was already shot, and then I convinced him to assist” (Lediga, 2022). *Inxeba* sought funding from international funders, as they could not get funding in South Africa. They looked to receive two-thirds of the funding from Europe (Germany, France, Italy and Holland), and later in South Africa from M-Net, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and subsequently, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) (Ribeiro, 2022).

The Sowetan newspaper reports that the *Inxeba* team tried to get funding from the NFVF on more than four occasions, including inviting the NFVF to watch the film in post-production, yet there was no interest (Zeeman, 2018).

Kagiso specified two reasons for going the self-funding route. Firstly, it is a lengthy process to apply for funding, and secondly, funders dictate the script outcome. Kagiso appreciates the funding for his previous film, *Catching Feelings (2017)*, funded by Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). They also produced the film *Blitz Patrollie* (2013), which the NFVF partly funded. For the latter film, Kagiso went through a whole application process "I would not want to repeat" (Lediga, 2022). Elias was concerned that the NFVF would not fund the film until it attained international success (Ribiero, 2022).

Kagiso does understand the need for the funder to get involved in the script; however, Kagiso believes that "if you are going to hone your skills as a filmmaker and develop a voice, you have to be allowed to do so. You do not always want to have people that are 'mentors' dictating to you what to do, because that is putting their taste into your work since it is an art, which is an abstract thing" (Lediga, 2022).

Kagiso feels that "at these low budget films, you need to have faith in the tellers. So, the gatekeeping process must be restructured so that it is more about a certain level of competence that you have to ascertain; then, once that is done, you let the people do what the people need to do instead of being over their shoulder all the time" (ibid).

In addition to the above, self-funding for films allows producers to use raw talent. Kagiso further highlighted that the use of raw talent is an excellent feature for his film. Although this might seem to deviate from the questions relating to language, Kagiso explains his insistence on using raw talent. Raw talent is people who are not in mainstream television or film, which relieve costs and provide the benefit of availability compared to the mainstream cast.

Another rationale for using raw talent was to keep the film's authenticity, that is, people who are not on television. That meant less in terms of cast cost, although when the movie made profits, they participated in the profits. Using the raw talent would otherwise not be possible if the film were funded, as the funder would advocate that a well-known cast be featured in the film in order for it to be successful.

Another question sought answers as to how the producers funded their entries into film festivals. Kagiso's company funded their entry into the film festivals, as they did not view this to be an expensive effort (Lediga, 2022). *Inxeba* obtained international funding from various private sponsors, and added their own finance to fund their entries into film festivals (Ribiero, 2022).

3.4.3. Distribution

The questions to the producers sought to determine the distribution method employed at the local or international level and to further identify how far the films ‘travelled’ in reaching the audience.

3.4.3.1. Distribution strategy employed

The first question sought to explore the distribution strategy employed by the producers of the two films: Please share with me the process and strategy pursued

in the film's distribution? This was followed by a question that sought to ascertain if the distribution avenue followed was a traditional one, or whether they explored other avenues.

Inxeba went the film festival route since they could not get funding in South Africa for the cinema release distribution costs (Zeeman, 2018). Kagiso characterises the distribution methodology as the ‘traditional’ approach of cinema box office, television, and social media (Lediga, 2022). He continues: “Initially when making the film, the goal was to go to film festivals then sell the film to broadcasters and streamers as a risk-free approach which would help recoup costs. However, after people saw the film and approved it, we started believing that this could go big and approached DJ Black Coffee”.

When asked about access to local cinemas, Kagiso responded positively. "In South Africa the release of *Matwetwe* was conservative, because we did not want to go 50 screens then when it does not do well there is a drop in theatres and the film receives bad publicity" (Lediga, 2022). The film was first released in 17 theatres, then expanded to 43 theatres due to popular demand.

Inxeba had distribution challenges in South Africa ascribed to the way in which it depicted an initiation practice, and received criticism of its openly gay themes in relation to traditional African custom (Ribeiro, 2022). As a result, the film was only released in selected cinemas in South Africa, mainly to certify the requirement to enter the Best Foreign Film category for the Oscars (SA History, 2017). However, Elias took the opportunity to correct criticism levelled against the film, as he has been informed that many people were of the view that, in his words, "white producers hijacked an African tradition and sold it to Europeans" (Ribiero, 2022). For him, this was about telling another African or South African story, just like Europe has its own stories to tell.

3.4.3.2. International Distribution

The next question sought to understand the international distribution strategy of the two films, should it gain access to international distribution.

Kagiso Lediga (2022) points out that *Matwetwe* was shown in America, Asia, and Europe. *Inxeba* was shown in over 20 countries, and later distributed on Netflix for a global reach (Ribiero, 2022). For international distribution, they worked with a leading art-house distributor, Pyramid International. Since this was a different distributor to the South African space, Elias is of the view that different distributors should be used for different locations, as they are well versed with the conditions of their environment.

A follow-up question sought to determine the producers' opinions on the international distribution of indigenous language films, and audience reception at large. What is your opinion regarding the international distribution of indigenous language films?

Both Elias and Kagiso are of the opinion that telling universal, authentic stories cut across language. Kagiso said: "The audience laughed at the same places, and in general, they say they enjoyed the authenticity of the story" (Lediga, 2022). Elias promotes preserving language and culture, and is of the view that that telling universal stories and worlds in authentic forms of expression will always receive attention (Ribeiro, 2022). Elias added that Africa has many stories not yet told, and they should be told.

To justify his answer, Kagiso adds: "The universality of the story is there, and the authenticity of where the story is from made it popular in other countries" (Lediga, 2022). Elevated by word of mouth from those who watched it, increased attendance to follow up screenings. In his own words, Kagiso says: "When we showed it at the Fantastic Festival in Texas, which is the biggest genre festival in The United States of America, it was received as a coming-of-age story, and people did not know what to expect because the title is 'wizard'; that is foreign to the audience. However, when they walked in there and watched it, people were excited, telling me that they would tell everyone to come and watch it" (ibid). The film received similar attention at the Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival in South Korea.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the data collection procedure and the subsequent data collected from the producers of two films, Kagiso Lediga (*Matwetwe),* and Elias Ribeiro (*Inxeba*). Since this research sought to understand participants in indigenous language films, the epistemology, interpretivism paradigm and qualitative methodology were identified. In addition, the case study research design and subsequent methods of interviews and the experimental film were chosen. The frameworks identified in Chapter 2 by the Cultural Observatory was used to identify the themes discussed. Through thematic coding of the questions, this was applied to the study's methodology.

Interviews with the film producers focused on Ideation & Development, Financing & Funding, Production concerning indigenous languages, and the Distribution (local and international) stages of the value chain. Underpinning the questions was how the value chain relates to indigenous language film, and whether these films are viable. Deduced, is that the indigenous language films under study were both quality productions (received international recognition and awards in the case of *Inxeba*). Furthermore, the highlights from the interviews indicate that film production cuts across languages, and that there is potential for indigenous language films to do well at the box office. Getting film funding is not easy, especially from institutions such as the NFVF. The relevance of the methodology was successful in bringing to the fore information sought from the producers of the films.

The next chapter applies the value chain analysis to the case studies relying on the information mined from the interviews and secondary sources.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Results

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter established the approach to data collection and the overarching paradigms. The methodology utilised was qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews with the producers of two films, Kagiso Lediga (*Matwetwe*) and Elias Ribeiro (*Inxeba*). This chapter intends applying the value chain analysis to the case studies, relying on the information mined from the interviews and secondary sources. The three categories of (1) Ideation, Development and Production; (2) Finance and Funding; and (3) Distribution, are applied.

4.2. Ideation, Development and Production

Earlier, the development stage was identified as the beginning of the film value chain (Naidoo, 2011), and mainly includes all stakeholders involved in putting together the concept (Bloore, 2009), It is also where conceptualisation and financial procurement (funding or financing) of the film takes place. Stakeholders include institutions, broadcast channels, or organisations involved as a source of funding, and in putting together the concept or idea of the film (Naidoo, 2011). To put this into perspective, the Department of Trade and Industry of South Africa's guidelines for the film incentive programs refers to commissioning and licensing, where the broadcaster owns commissioned projects. Licensed programs are owned by the producer, who allows the broadcaster to use the product at a fee for a period of time (Department of Trade and Industry, 2018).

At the heart of financing discussions is control and ownership, which, beyond the ability to affect development and distribution, arguably affects how much producers profit. Zoellner (2020) escalates the economic conflict to a power struggle, posing a serious challenge for independent producers in taking control of or effecting a return on investment. This is relevant in the questions seeking to identify if the role players independently funded the case study films, or whether it were funded by institutions, which arguably determines who benefitted the most. This chapter

explores this dynamic in more detail within the viability determination stage, that is to say the funder, be it the producer or an external company, will collect the profits after retrieving their initial investment. However, it must be understood that the revenue share also extends to other stakeholders such as distributors and exhibitors, depending on the distribution strategy pursued (ibid). From the discussion above, ownership affords producers the avenue to invest, earn, and make a profit.

Commencing the interview questioning with establishing the role players involved in the production of the indigenous language films, was also strategically placed to ask a follow-up question on how those role players and the general individuals involved in the production of the case study films, responded to the idea of making an indigenous African language film. Beneath the surface, the question sought to establish why the producers created an indigenous African language film against the backdrop of the low success rate of locally produced South African films (Observatory, 2018; Kloete, 2018). In the interview answers from the producers under study, there were no general disapproval of producing an indigenous African language film, since "telling stories cuts across language" (Lediga, 2022). This acceptance of indigenous language films by producers and different stakeholders responsible for funding, supports the potential viability for increased production of indigenous language films, as long as such films tell a good story.

Kagiso explains that a good story resonates with the target audience, since it is authentic stories that the audiences can identify with (Lediga, 2022). It can be argued that within the South African context, the above refers to a story arising from the different languages and cultures in the country, yet framed upon Hollywood quality production standards (Barnard and Tuomi, 2008), using professional equipment and filming techniques set by the USA. This is due to the fact that South African audiences are used to watching Hollywood productions at local cinemas (Saks, 2010). Furthermore, increased production of authentic local stories could emerge as a tool by which the South African film industry gains a competitive advantage, and subsequently, economic growth. It could ultimately address the high youth unemployment rate in the country, which stood at 57,47% in 2021 (O'Neil, 2021), and could rise to 68% in 2023 (Trading Economics, 2022).

Here, the unique selling proposition is founded on an authentic story told in an indigenous African language intertwined with local culture, as embedded within a language, are issues of identity, culture and the potential to foster cohesion (Ebrahim & Ellapen, 2018). This will be to the advantage of the South African film industry, which will slowly become viable and able to create increased employment as more productions take place. This view is supported by both Kagiso and Elias, who dispute that South African films are not successful. Both the producers mentioned the success of *Tsotsi (Hood, 2005)* on an international scale. In Kagiso's words: "It is the most successful South African film because it won an Oscar, right?" (Lediga, 2022). Their assertions about the success of previous indigenous language exports is also validated by research. Both *Tsotsi* and *Yesterday* (Roodt, 2004) won international acclaim and awards (Vanderberg, 2011). In terms of budget, *Tsotsi* cost $3 000 000 (R43 350 000), and the total gross income across the world was $9 879 971 (R142 765 580.95). Although Kagiso and Ellias hail *Tsotsi* as a success, the producer, Peter Fudakowski, head of the United Kingdom and Television foundation, indicated in an interview with the *Mail & Guardian* that the film did not generate a profit (Staff Reporter, 2006). The view is that the film would need to make ten times it production cost in order to make a return on investment, as large distributors receive 40% of that amount (ibid). However, Fudakowski concedes that there was no loss, since the funders received their initial investment (ibid:2). From the response it is possible for indigenous language films to recover their investment for the funders. This arguably supports the call for increased funding for indigenous language films. The profitability thereof will be determined later in this chapter.

In resembling Elias Ribeiro's experiences, the film *Tsotsi* was funded by the United Kingdom film and Television foundation in partnership with the South African Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) as equal partners, with the NFVF also contributing (Staff Reporter, 2006). Again, this highlights that there is international support available for locally produced indigenous language films. However, international investors appear to be more willing to fund indigenous language films than local institutions, therefore the local government should take note and invest in locally produced indigenous language films from the outset. Also emerging from the *Tsotsi* inquiry, is that the film was initially rejected by the SABC and NFVF

(Reddy, 2006). Although the institutions warmed to the film eventually, especially following its Oscar-winning success (ibid), the emphasis is on early identification of potential successful indigenous language scripts, and subsequently funding locally produced indigenous language films.

Kagiso mentions the success of *Inxeba (2017). Inxeba* came close to being nominated for an Oscar when it was shortlisted at number nine in the Foreign Language category, and was well awarded in its year of release (Lediga, 2022*)*. *Inxeba* received more than 20 awards worldwide, and at the South African Film and Television Awards (Zeeman, 2018). Awards include two awards at the 38th Durban International Film Festival for best director (John Trengrove) and best actor (Nakhane Touré), and an award at the Valencia International Film Festival in Spain (ibid). In Taiwan, at the Taipei Film Festival, it won the best film award in the International New Talent Competition (South African History Online, 2017). Finally, Kagiso turned to his own film: *"Matwetwe,* made in three weeks, and we made all our money and made a profit, so it does not get better than that" (Lediga, 2022). The film cost R2 Million to produce, and made a return on investment of R 6 695 841 (NFVF 2019/20 Annual Report, 2019).

To further cement the success of indigenous African language films, Langa notes that MultiChoice licensed *Matwetwe* after its theatrical run, so it made more money than mentioned above (Langa, 2019a). Kagiso affirms that the box office is ready for this type of content: “Although *Matwetwe* opened at 16 cinemas, the film was extended to 40 cinemas because of growing ticket sales”. However, Langa contends that the film could have done even better if it had access to screens in the townships, or received more total screens comparable to those enjoyed by Hollywood and Afrikaans films (ibid). The Cultural Observatory (2018) supports the view that there is an audience for locally produced content, and notes challenges with access to films being complicated by the dominance of the major distributors, SterKinekor and Nu Metro, and a lack of access due to potential consumers of local films being too far away from such screening venues. The above highlights that the distribution part of the value chain needs to support indigenous African language films in order to increase the return on investment.

Although language itself was not considered a challenge by the producers of the case study films, a challenge highlighted by Kagiso was that there could be a misunderstanding and loss in translation when an indigenous language film is translated into English, for funders to evaluate the case of investment. Kagiso further asserts: “Depending on who assesses the script, they might not understand the different elements inherent within the indigenous African language culture” (Lediga, 2022). Amaechi (2013) notes the challenge raised by Kagiso relating to the potential loss in meaning when making films in English, or translating South African indigenous African languages into English. The challenge is that non-English speakers have to confront knowledge and information in a foreign language. The argument is that good scripts might come from the freedom of expression originating from writing scripts in indigenous African languages. In Kagiso’s words: “People are better able to express themselves in their mother tongue” (Lediga, 2022).

A counterargument could be made that, as expressed throughout this study, script analysis is founded upon the quality of the story rather than the language used. Therefore, it is understood that the loss in meaning highlighted by Kagiso must mean something else beyond just the language, at a basic level. It can be argued that it is more about allowing for an increased production of narratives that incorporate the diverse South African languages and associated cultures. This is framed upon the knowledge that, embedded within a language are issues of identity, culture and the potential to foster social cohesion (Ebrahim & Ellapen, 2018). Tomaselli (2006) adds race to make it a tri-alliance of identity, culture and race. Ultimately, there are complex, ethical considerations that cannot be ignored, yet need to be promoted and preserved within a culture.

From this perspective, language is essential in transforming storytelling and redressing past imbalances due to the important ideas it contains, such as identity and culture. An increased production of indigenous language films will allow formerly disenfranchised groups to transmit, promote and preserve their languages. This does not insinuate that scripts must be undermined to promote indigenous languages. However, the argument is that scripts should not be disqualified based on the choice to utilise an indigenous language. Furthermore, the suggestion is that funders need to understand the diversity inherent within

indigenous language films. Addressing this concern could ultimately aid the script evaluation processes to significant effect.

Also understood from the interviews with producers of the case study films is that, at the centre of the English versus indigenous language debate, is understanding and comprehending the diversity that comes with the variety of indigenous African languages. For example, Kagiso says: "In the film *Matwetwe,* you would have to understand Atteridgeville to understand me pitching that story to you; otherwise, you would maybe suggest that the story be set in Soweto" (Lediga, 2022). His argument is hinged on the notion that well-written scripts might have a better chance of success when written in indigenous languages by people who would better express themselves in their own language, rather than being reliant on English translations. Literature supports this view, as calls to promote and preserve indigenous African languages arise out of concern for English dominance as a preferred language, both in South Africa (Modisane, 2010) and globally (Crystal, 2003). It is clear from Kagiso's answers that he has no problem with English speakers using English, or with English being a preferred language in general, as long as people use what is comfortable to them. Thus, Kagiso's promotion of indigenous African languages is not to the detriment of English, rather to mainly promote the use of various languages and produce more indigenous African language films. At the core of the English versus indigenous language debate, is the need for stakeholders to support the diverse indigenous languages in South Africa. This support can be extended to include the acceptance of indigenous language scripts, and to subsequently offer funding for the production thereof.

4.3. Finance and Funding

Questions grouped within this theme (or category) sought to establish the current state of funding within the South African landscape concerning the production of indigenous African language films. Unfortunately, the two producers do not paint a great picture of funding access within South Africa; hence Kagiso went the self-funding route. Taking this route led to success, as his film made a return on investment at the box office.

Kagiso's film was funded by his friend, DJ Black Coffee. Although the details of the agreement between the two friends are not available, the assumption is that the funder, as explained in the preceding section, wants their initial investment back, as well as some profit over and above that. This fits the definition of private domestic investment where a domestic funder is sought, and a partnership is formed where the producer retains creative and financial control; as long as the funder is paid back their initial investment (Goodell, 2003). It could be argued that the positive result of this funding is that Kagiso had complete creative and distribution control. Furthermore, another critical takeaway is that the independent funder was willing to take a chance on an indigenous language film produced by his friend, without necessarily taking the script through a rigorous approval process. Thus, self-funding, or funding received from individuals, creates opportunities away from the broadcasters, distributors or traditional companies that fund films, which allows for more creative and distributive control of the product. In addition, following in the footsteps of DJ Black Coffee, different stakeholders such as the government, should also be encouraged to take risks and support indigenous language films. Furthermore, increased creative control regarding the script, which is something Kagiso felt strongly about, should be entrusted to the producer. Alternatively, the creative input stemming from a cultural perspective, should not be easily dismissed.

Isaacs (2019) promotes independent films after watching *Matwetwe*, and advocates for more independently made films to advance South African cinema to the next level. The author argues that privately funded films of this nature will improve the film industry's ability to become self-sustainable. This addresses the concern, as initially raised in Chapter Two, about its heavy reliance on government funding (Observatory, 2018). The South African film industry's financial outlook and funding landscape is questioned based on its reliance on government funding, and thus perceived as unviable in the long run (Ureke and Tomaselli, 2017; Observatory, 2018). The counter argument made is that films seeking private funding will bolster the viability of the South African film industry. However, it should be noted that government funding is still required within South Africa, as not many people have access to friends such as DJ Black Coffee, who have the means to assist with funding.

The call is for the government to increase funding to the NFVF, and for the institution itself to develop a suitable application and adjudication process for films in indigenous African languages. It can be argued that within the South African context, both sources of funding need to be employed currently. However, a more balanced approach to viewing smaller national film making industries as being privy to financial support is required (Heatlie, 2011). Important to this study is Kagiso's view that *Matwetwe* and *Tsotsi* made a return on investment, which highlights their significance for other indigenous language films in South Africa seeking to build a more sustainable local industry.

Elias and his team failed initially to receive funding from the NFVF. This led producers of the film to seek funding internationally, which they did to significant effect. Elias reports that the production budget was R14 500 000, with 31% coming from Germany, 10% from Holland, and South African funding making up the balance of 59% of the budget. The NFVF only provided support once the film had gone the film festival route and demonstrated its ability to do well, which, as it would appear, is what most local films have to endure in order to receive recognition (Goodell, 2003). Challenges to acquiring funding for a film are well documented by Heatlie (2011) and Bloore (2009), highlighting that access to funding at both private and governmental levels is challenging in South Africa. The international funding of this South African indigenous language film validates the need for the local government to believe in the ability of indigenous language films to do well, and thus subsequently fund them. Heatlie made this point with reference to institutions like the Department of Trade and Industry, whose processes are more efficient than the NFVF, who are deemed to be controlling in relation to scripts submitted.

4.4. Distribution Locally and Internationally

The questions to the producers sought to determine the distribution method employed. The Cultural Observatory notes that for South African films to be successful, they either use the formal theatrical network (SterKinekor/Nu Metro) and/or international film festivals (Observatory, 2018:123). However, the Cultural Observatory paints a bleak picture around both platforms, since none provides

enough return on investment due to the fact that access to screens within the South African cinema is negotiated for a short period of time only; for example, a week on the circuit (ibid).

Since theatrical release is the gold standard of distribution, it poses the question: why would filmmakers go the festival route if theatrical release were favoured? When filmmakers do not have theatrical releases, they usually have to go to film festivals in an attempt to gain sufficient marketing and publicity to convince distributors of the financial viability for theatrical release(Observatory, 2018). In addition, firstly, the number of screens given to South African cinemas is limited. Secondly, films that have done well locally like *Tsotsi* and *Inxeba,* as outlined in this chapter, only received local recognition after winning international awards. Thus, a lack of funding and support for the distribution of indigenous language films, or a method identifying the potential success of the films from the outset, is lacking.

Kagiso surmised his distribution method as the "traditional way" of theatrical box office, television, and social media (Lediga, 2022). Although this is quoted verbatim, to align his statement, the traditional distribution method is the cinema, then DVD, followed by pay-per-view, and rounded off with distribution on television (Observatory, 2018; Crisp, 2015). Although this pattern has changed due to technology to include exclusive premium subscription services in the second phase, the common thread is that distribution mostly starts in the cinema. Social media, in this instance, was a marketing tool that Kagiso used to significant effect. It definitely received interest, especially since both he as well as DJ Black Coffee are well-known names. Kagiso stresses that he and Black Coffee did most of the marketing themselves (Langa, 2019a). This raised the question of their agreement with the distributor if the duo did in-house marketing. Useful to this study is information that international filmmakers spend around 30% of the production budget on marketing and advertising (Crisp, 2015). Although different from the distribution methods discussed above, Kagiso had a private screening for Black Coffee and a small contingent, including the media, to raise awareness of the film before getting a distributor (Lediga, 2022). It can be argued that such private screenings with potential private funders could aid the fundraising efforts of the independent film sector in South Africa.

Inxeba went the film festival route, as they could not initially raise theatrical distribution in South Africa (Zeeman, 2018). African filmmakers prefer this distribution method (Dovey, 2015), which Langa (2019) attributes to the suffering experienced by indigenous language films at the cinema, compared to the large number of screens enjoyed by Hollywood and Afrikaans films. However, Kagiso seems to see the restriction on access to cinema screens in a positive light. In his view, "the release of *Matwetwe* was conservative because we did not want to go 50 screens, then when it does not do well, there is a drop in theatres and the film receives bad publicity" (Lediga, 2022). It is a known challenge that indigenous language South African films receive less screens than Hollywood or Afrikaans films in local theatres, since they are generally not well received (Saks, 2010).

From Kagiso's perspective, it is a strategy of epicentre marketing; where the film starts in a few cinemas, then grows exponentially. For example, the film *Matwetwe* started in 17 theatres then grew to 43 theatres due to popular demand. What did not surface from the interviews is the method applied by *Matwetwe* to theatrical release. This study notes that there are various methods to theatrical release, such as four-wall distribution, which entails renting the theatres for several weeks at a flat rate (Goodell, 2003). The rental fee is used to pay for all operating expenses, whilst the producer receives the total income (ibid). However, based on the information that *Matwetwe* was distributed by UIP, the distributor/film producers would have shared the box office earnings with the cinema owners. Revealing this information is important in the build-up to testing the viability of the case study films, as the information will allow the study to determine how the earnings were shared. From the producers' responses, it is clear that distribution for independent producers entails an initial screening, be it at a local level or the international film festival circuit, in order to promote and market local films to wider audiences, and attract local and international distribution.

The South African film industry appreciates films that first demonstrate their success on the international front. As a result of this study, the South African industry should thus appreciate and support indigenous African languages from the outset. As highlighted in the above discussions, international funders have warmed to them, and films such as *Matwetwe*, *Inxeba* and *Tsotsi* have received awards on the international film festival circuit.

From a local perspective, *Inxeba* had distribution challenges in South Africa due to criticism of its depiction and questioning of an African traditional practice that transforms young boys into men, otherwise known as Ulwaluko (Kiguwa and Siswana, 2018; SA History, 2017). Mostly coming from the Xhosa community, the controversy was centred around exposing a practice that is kept private for those who undergo the journey (Kiguwa and Siswana, 2018). To this end, the film received limited cinema release only in South Africa, mainly to certify the requirement to enter the Best Foreign Film category for the Oscars (SA History, 2017). Elias took the opportunity to correct criticism levelled against the film, that "white producers hijacked an African tradition and sold it to Europeans" (Ribeiro, 2022). For him, this was about telling another African or South African story, just like Europe has its own stories to tell. Since culture and language are intertwined and there are calls to tell the South African story, it would be interesting for future research to examine how far people can go to tell stories, as *Inxeba* received criticism for the representation of the Ulwaluko practice. Further research could probe who controls the storytelling within this environment.

From an international distribution perspective, Kagiso explains that *Matwetwe* was released in America, Asia and Europe. Elias points out that *Inxeba* was released in over 20 countries, and distributed via Showmax and Netflix for a global reach. For international distribution, they worked with a distributor best suited to handling art-house releases, Pyramid International, since this was a different distributor to the South African space. Elias is of the view that different distributors should be used for different locations, as they are well-versed with the conditions of their own environment. *Inxeba* received international appreciation, as it won several international awards. Both films received international screening in different countries, and *Inxeba* won numerous awards. Thus, the films were successful since they received global recognition (Observatory, 2018). Kagiso quickly pointed out that the people in the different areas where the film was shown speak different languages, "the Dutch speak Dutch, and South Koreans speak South Korean," yet they all received the film well (Lediga, 2022). By and large, the responses and experiences from around the world corroborate that the world is ready to receive and watch a diverse array of films (UCLA College social sciences, 2018).

Within the value chain discussion and the resulting competitive advantage, the international reception of *Matwetwe* and *Inxeba* at film festivals, is testament that there is less risk involved in pursuing indigenous language production than might have previously been believed. On this foundation, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) proposes that "South Africa's culture and people's creativity can offer unique stories, voices, and products to the world" (Arts and Culture, 2013). It is this unique selling proposition combined with the authentic story and the use of indigenous language intertwined with culture, that offer local films a competitive advantage.

4.5. Indicators of Success

4.5.1. Introduction

A central focus of this study is the viability of indigenous language films in South Africa. The Cultural Observatory (2018) suggests a concoction of success indicators that can be used to determine the success of a film. This study adopts financial and quality indicators from their set, frequently featuring on various lists, founded on non-commonality amongst scholars on which such indicators should be precedented (Schmidt, 2021; Swami, Batlaw, phogat & Goyal, 2021; Lu, 2019; Pangarker & Smit, 2013). Quality relates to the success of a film in terms of awards obtained. Schmidt (2021) advances that awards aid to encourage film audiences to watch a film upon its release. Thus, awards are important since beyond distinction, it offers approval within the industry.

Synonymous to the two key indicators identified by this study, Pangarker and Smit (2013) include production cost and award nominations in determining box office performance within the film industry. The financial information indicates statistical information on past and present details (Anđelić and Vesic, 2017). This study examines financial performance on two fronts: firstly, in terms of return on investment, and secondly, in terms of the profit made by producers. Discovered during the data gathering stage of the study, is that companies and producers alike are not comfortable with easily sharing information, especially data that can be useful in calculating viability. For this reason, there was incomplete data to determine the total funds generated by the case study films. The data available here is collected from sources available to the public, and can be easily retrieved.

The table (4.1) below offers an overview of the critical elements contributing to the profitability calculation for the case study films, presented in an organised and concise view for easy navigation. The financial indicators are important inputs in calculating the viability of the case study films. The awards complement and strengthen the argument for non-financial success and viability of the film.

Table 4.1

Name of Film	**Matwetwe (Wizard)**	**Inxeba (The Wound)**
Release date	2019	2017
Financial Indicators		
Production budget	R 2 000 000 (Lediga,2022)	R14 500 000 (Ribeiro, 2022)
Worldwide Total made in $	$463 380.00	$54, 874 (The Numbers, 2018)
Worldwide Gross Revenue excl SA. (ZAR/US$)	R6 542 925,60 (ZAR/US$ exchange rate = R14,14 December 2019)	R6 809 86.34 (ZAR/US$ exchange rate = R12,41 January 2018)
Estimated Gross Revenue (South Africa)	R 6 695 841 (NFVF 2019/20 Annual Report, 2019)	R1 950 353 (NFVF, 2018)
Quality Indicators		
Local reach	Showmax - this is only the premium streaming release.	Showmax
International reach	Showmax and Netflix	Over 19 Film Festivals and Netflix North America

Awards	N/A (The film was shown at different film festivals but no awards).	More than 20 awards worldwide, with the 20th at the South African Film and Television Awards (Zeeman, 2018). Other awards include two awards at the 38th Durban International Film Festival for best director (John Trengrove) and best actor (Nakhane Touré), in Spain at the Valencia International Film Festival

4.5.2. Financial Indicators and Viability of the Case Study Films

A disclaimer to this section is that assessing the financial ROI (return on investment) is compromised due to limited access to information such as licensing agreements, audience numbers, downloads and actual statements from distributors. Confidentiality clauses usually protect this information in distribution contracts, and the market performance of films is sensitive business information not publicly available. As quantified in table (4.1) above, public data is obtained from sources such as Box Office Mojo. These numbers don't reflect the complete financial performance of the film, since a large portion of film revenue is generated from broadcast and streaming fees, as well as other distribution rights; information which is not readily available to the public.

To put the above into better perspective, the standard financial recoupment model with independent films is that distributions take their fee, usually 25%, before investors recoup their claim from what is called the 'Distribution Net revenue'. Thereafter the relevant investors derive profit share, which is usually participated in with the film producers. Gross Box Office receipts (total ticket sales) are split between the exhibitors (cinema owners) who take an agreed percentage, usually 50-55% of the total box office receipts (Lucini, 2010; Goodell, 2003), and the remainder is reimbursed to the film owners (producers). Further complicating the viability calculation is that Kagiso revealed he and DJ Black Coffee did most of the marketing, which goes against the norm where marketing would be expected from the distributor end.

Despite the information deficit in terms of viability, what is useful to this study for calculation purposes is information that a film needs to make at least three times the original investment amount for investors to profit (Goodell, 2003). Information from Kagiso Lediga is that they invested R2 million into making *Matwetwe* (Lediga, 2022). The film earned R6 542 925,60 (NFVF 2019/20 Annual Report, 2019), which is more than three times the initial invested amount and thus, profit was derived. In the case of *Inxeba,* the producer indicated they spent R14 500 000, making a return of R6 809 86.34, which would render it not viable. It can be argued that *Inxeba* proves challenging to derive information from due to the previously highlighted challenges the film experienced. However, the ability to make more than R6 million internationally in different countries, is paving the way for South African indigenous language films. It shows an audience awaiting such films within an international arena. To validate and support Kagiso's assertion on increased production of indigenous language films in high quantities, if more of these low budgets were made available to producers in high numbers, both the producer and government would make a return on investment. It would allow funders such as the government to support more films, thereby creating more employment for individuals. Although the government might not directly share in the profit, the investment return would be available to fund more films. More funding for the government would be generated in the form of tax collection on film revenues and payroll taxes.

4.5.5. Quality Indicators

As outlined above, quality relates to the success of a film in terms of awards obtained. This study argues that acceptance into film festivals is an achievement of quality, as many films from around the world are submitted to different festivals, yet only the best are selected (Goodell, 2003). The awards won by *Inxeba* around the world indicates that indigenous language films have a worldwide reach, and beyond this, it further demonstrates the quality of the film from a technical perspective. Despite its success on the international stage in South Africa, it was compromised due to the film's controversy. In addition to the financial outlook, the films were released on digital streaming platforms such as Showmax and Netflix. Although the Cultural Observatory does not provide a measurement barometer concerning what scale films need to reach to claim success, the case study films satisfy most requirements.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter analyses the data collected from the producers of two films, *Matwetwe* (Kagiso Lediga) and *Inxeba* (Elias Ribiero). The value chain analysis was employed to examine the development, financing and distribution (local and international) stages of the value chain. Underpinning the analysis was how the value chain relates to indigenous language films, and whether these films are viable. Deduced is that the indigenous language films under study were both quality productions (received international recognition and awards for *Inxeba*), and *Matwetwe* was viable (it made more than the initial return on investment). However, *Inxeba* cannot be quickly disqualified from being viable, as not all information was available to the study. The outstanding information include licensing fees and agreements. Over and above the films studied, information from *Tsotsi (2005)*, an award-winning indigenous language film, strengthened this inquiry by showing that indigenous language films can do well, since it made a return on investment and won an Oscar award. Kagiso surmises that "in terms of prestige, the most successful films in South Africa are local indigenous language films". Although research has not been done on other local films distributed around the world, the argument can be that indigenous language films are in a position to compete with most films in terms of accolades received. This is strengthened by the numerous awards received by *Inxeba,* and the Oscar received for *Tsotsi*. The international reception of *Matwetwe* and *Inxeba* at film festivals is testament to the fact that there is a ready audience and acceptance for such films at an international level. This argument is strengthened by the international investments received for both *Inxeba* and *Tsotsi*. Gathered from the analysis and in sync with the vision of the Cultural Observatory (2018), the South African government needs to increase the budget for films, in this case, indigenous language films, as they can be viable locally and potentially on the international circuit. Increased funding will further allow individuals of different groups to affiliate and find the opportunity to promote and preserve their languages, thereby transforming and redressing the past injustices in post-apartheid South Africa.

The next chapter reflects on the artistic research I conducted, and how it influences the theoretical analysis of the marketplace and the case study films alike.

Chapter Five: Reflexive Consideration of *Rirhandzu* (Love)

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter applied a value chain analysis to *Matwetwe* (Lediga, 2019) and *Inxeba* (Trengove, 2017), to better understand the production of these films within the context of indigenous language films in South Africa. Ascertained was that *Matwetwe* made a return on investment, and *Inxeba* scooped numerous awards locally and internationally. It can therefore be concluded that an indigenous language cinema should be supported in order to increase the production of indigenous language films, since they are viable. This will yield greater returns for the South African economy; thus more jobs, and a reduced youth unemployment rate.

This chapter reflects on the short film, *Rirhandzu* (2021), that I produced as part of my creative research, and how it influenced the theoretical analysis of the marketplace and the case study films alike. Reflexivity allows the researcher to engage with the creative work, which aids the validity and reliability of the research (Lumsden, 2018). A further argument is that doing this practical undertaking will help understand the value chain in local film production, which will aid in better understanding the obstacles relevant to production, and the market performance of indigenous language films.

5.2. Ideation, Development and Production

Rirhandzu (Love) is a 15minutes film conceptualised and directed by the researcher.

Synopsis: An instant encounter inspired by unpronounced love between two young people from different social class groups snowballs into an incredible need to find each other despite uncertainty, prejudice, and technological challenges.

Several themes are explored in this film. The juxtaposition between the rich and poor, and themes of hope concerning triumph and love, are at the centre of the

film. Promoting and escalating the beauty of the Xitsonga traditional attire and language is at the root of the film.

Production background: The film was conceptualised as part of this research towards a master's in film and Television degree, which includes creative research aligned with the theoretical component of this dissertation. This was an adventure for me as, unlike other films I have previously written, it did not primarily arise as being a composition, but rather something I created to fulfil a degree requirement.

The film was produced by my company, *Samsrec Productions.* Nduduzo Ncwane and Cliff Lambane contributed to the script writing. In contrast to the scene painted by Lediga and Ribeiro in their films, I had to convince the stakeholders to create a film in Xitsonga. The experiences of the case study film producers are relevant, confirming that despite negative reactions to indigenous language films, there are also positive ones. Concerns from the script contributors in my short film were that a short film in Xitsonga might not be well received, let alone be distributed. This is against the backdrop of there being no Xitsonga film created for the box office in history. In addition, programs created in the Xitsonga language perform poorly on local television (Ndlovu, Mushwana, & Mathevula, 2020). Thus, creating a Xitsonga film was always going to prove a challenge, since it is a marginalised language that does fare well within the relevant media circles. Nevertheless, I had to alleviate their fears and pursue the goal, since language, as Amaechi (2013) suggests, is the 'identity card' of people. Through language, the Tsonga people can be recognised, affiliate and promote their identity, and subsequently, their culture and language.

Although the sentiments of the study are that recognition underscores all calls for promoting and preserving indigenous African languages, in line with sentiments echoed by Ribeiro and Lediga, the aim of producing my short film was to nevertheless relay a good story. Furthermore, it could be argued that this pursuit fits into the economics of growing the indigenous cinema database receptive to indigenous language films (Observatory, 2018). Invariably, supporting an indigenous cinema would offer an audience receptive to such films; an increased audience accessible to watch indigenous language films. As argued, gaining a

market advantage for African indigenous language films increases profitability, which in turn aids to grow the local industry.

The film was scripted over a period of four months, and filmed in three days in Nkowankowa Township of the Limpopo province: home to the researcher. Part of the aim of making a film in the Limpopo province was to share the beauty that is often underexplored, since films and television programs are mostly centred around the three major provinces of Gauteng, the Western Cape, and Kwazulu-Natal (Observatory, 2018). It must also be borne in mind that unlike other short films developed for film festivals rooted in art house drama, avant-garde styles, or experimental films, *Rirhandzu* was created to be a simple, short fiction film, using a conventional narrative structure in the Xitsonga language. Despite the focus on language, an investment was made in the quality of the cinematography with Kevin Khumalo, an experienced director of photography employed as a crew member.

As with Kagiso's film, the role players in *Rirhandzu*, which includes University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the NFVF, did not have any control over the story. The above is framed on earlier knowledge that the ideation and development stage is included to derive if any of the role players had control of the story, based on its financial injection into the film (Naidoo, 2011; Bloore, 2009). Although the equipment was made available by Wits, the funds used to make the film came from the NFVF. Both stakeholders did not attempt to control the story. Under the Presidential Employment stimulus fund, the NFVF had the additional budget, over and above their available annual budget, to aid filmmakers under the rubric of creating jobs during the Covid-19 period (SABC RADIO, 2020). It can be argued that during this period, the NFVF was able to assist more filmmakers than they usually would have, which supports the argument of this study that the government needs to increase funding given to the NFVF so they can fund more products and, in this context, indigenous language films. Furthermore, this initiative was able to aid young black filmmakers in making films and creating employment simultaneously, which is precisely what the government seeks to achieve. This is against the backdrop of the high unemployment rate amongst South African youth, which stood at 57,47% in 2021 (O'Neil, 2021), signifying a severe youth unemployment challenge (Ebrahim & Pirttilä, 2019:1). The argument is that, since indigenous African language films have been proven to be viable, funding them

will always yield a return of some kind, whether it be cultural, social, job creation or on investment. These productions also provide sustainable jobs, contributing to the country's economic growth. However, this all depends on funding. Details of the funding and the application process will be dealt with later under the Finance and Funding discussion.

One key element that surfaces in the previous chapters and during interviews with Kagiso Lediga and Elias Ribeiro, is the English versus indigenous language debate. While co-writing the film *Rirhandzu* (Love), the script flowed from the Xitsonga language, even though I write in both English and Xitsonga. Although Xitsonga is my home language, I never studied the language at school, since I attended schools where English was the first language, with Afrikaans being the second language. Ntombela (2016) notes the problem whereby English is 'worshipped' by black South Africans, based on the belief that you have better access to jobs and education through this language. When I write scripts, I mostly need to consult to perfect the Xitsonga language. The script submitted to Wits and subsequently to the NFVF, had to be in English; a language which they understand. Kagiso raises similar concerns in his interview that, in order to get through this language access point, you have to write the script in a way that the script assessors will understand. Amaechi (2013) introduces a challenge of a loss in meaning when making films in English, or when translating South African indigenous languages into English. More than anything, the challenge is that non-English speakers must confront knowledge and information in a foreign language. Vuyisile Msila (2019) already weighed in on this debate, referencing two authors of issues around indigenous languages, with the outcome being a call for a balance to not discard English due to its international footprint, whilst simultaneously pursuing the indigenous African language agenda. The call is to create an environment allowing indigenous African language writers to write in their indigenous African languages, therefore permitting producers and writers to better express themselves.

5.3. Finance and Funding

Submitting applications to the NFVF has not been my favourite pastime. In 2016, I submitted a script for an entire feature film in the Xitsonga language under the Emerging Young Black Filmmaker initiative. The scheme empowers young black filmmakers to undertake larger-scale productions (Department of Trade, no date). The submission was taken through its paces over a period of 12 months. When the NFVF were due to announce the recipients of the funds, the organisation went through a restructuring process, and the initiative was postponed. However, encouraged by friends, I submitted the funding request, especially as the root core of the presidential stimulus fund was job creation; something that is at the heart of my goal for the Limpopo province. This background supports the experiences of Kagiso Lediga and Elias Ribeiro, who found it challenging to access funds for their films due to the NFVFs application process. The Cultural Observatory (2018) highlights challenges to the funding distribution within the NFVF after carrying out a SWOT analysis, which points to the need for increased funding and an improved applications process. Despite these setbacks, I successfully managed to acquire funds for the film. Further complicating the NFVF application process was that the applications closed in December of 2020, while the adjudication process only concluded in March of 2021, with funds being released in April 2021. Without taking away from the triumph of an indigenous Xitsonga language receiving funding, it is unfortunately not possible to determine whether the proposed creation of 37 jobs over a period of four months during the production of the film, was a main contributing factor to the film receiving the grant.

The funding made a huge difference, since I was in a position to acquire the services of a good, well-established, and experienced crew. I was able to hire the best equipment, and pay the cast and crew. As was the case with Kagiso Lediga, I used a relatively unknown cast hailing from developmental efforts undertaken by *Samsrec Productions* over a number of years. The goal was to ensure that a quality Xitsonga cast would be available to join the bandwagon when required to perform good quality scripts. Unfortunately, I did not apply for funding elsewhere, however the funding received from the NFVF made a massive difference. The Limpopo province has no readily available equipment rental companies having left

no alternative but for all equipment to be imported from Johannesburg. In addition, the crew required sufficient accommodations whilst in Limpopo. Over and above the film, the project aided in providing jobs to more than 37 individuals over a period of four months, of which 15 of those jobs are still being sustained by *Samsrec Productions*.

It is the view of the author that funding is essential in developing local films, and the processes to be followed in application for funding support needs to be made more accessible.

5.4. Distribution Locally and Internationally

The distribution method employed for the film *Rirhandzu*, partly conforms to what Lediga (2022) refers to as “the traditional way”. As earlier explained, this approach consists of a theatrical release, DVD then broadcast. The goal was to take the *Rirhandzu* to film festivals, then later selling it to broadcast platforms. Since it is a short film, it could never go the cinema route. Although, on a personal level, I have wondered if ever short films can be played before feature films at cinemas, it remains a discussion for future research. I must also highlight that I never thought the film would be successful at film festivals as, in my view, films reaching the film festival environment are more of an experimental type. Notwithstanding the fact that there are different types of festivals for different types of films (Goodell, 2003), in my view, the films I have always seen being accepted at festivals, especially those that win awards, are the experimental type. It was the motivation from my supervisor and a local distributor, Rudzani Muthambi Properties (based in the Limpopo province), that encouraged me to submit the film to various film festivals. Taking their advice, I submitted the film to 50 film festivals, 10 of which were free entries. However, since it was my first time distributing to different film festivals, I ultimately sent it everywhere, including to genre-specific festivals. Needless to say, some festivals were never going to accept the film, as it did not meet their eligibility requirements.

Again, the funds received from the NFVF was beneficial in sending the film to the different festivals, since costs are high, specifically considering the foreign

exchange costs. A note to share in relation to language: when sending the film to different festivals available through the Film Freeway portal, which is the preferred and primarily widely used gateway entry portal to different festivals, Xitsonga does not feature as a language. When completing their form, you have to indicate in what language your film is. Other South African languages are featured; not Xitsonga. I therefore had no other option but to state that the film is in English. Once again, it validates the argument to have clarity in the definition of indigenous African languages in South Africa due to the fact that when films are reported, some might indicate English when arguably English was the only option available, or the film contained English subtitles, or since 20% of the language used is English. Secondly, this demonstrated the marginalisation of the language, and the fact that it might not be known on an international scale, thereby presenting the perfect opportunity to have it recognised.

Rirhandzu was accepted at over 27 film festivals, receiving more than 12 awards in different countries worldwide. A list of the awards is provided in the next section. At some film festivals, although held online as a result of travelling restrictions associated with Covid-19, I was invited for post-screening discussions and interviews at the African Film Festival in Atlanta, USA. Across an international scale, no one complained about the language; they mostly praised and hailed the good story. In addition, the film received publicity and reviews within South Africa and across its borders, so it safe to say it fared well. However, the creative work could not test the return on investment or financial viability. Without release in cinemas, a short film is limited in its commercial distribution phase. Secondly, the funds were primarily geared towards creating jobs. However, a takeaway from the international film festival distribution is that there is a demand and interest for indigenous African language films worldwide.

5.5. Indicators of Success

Table 5.1

Name of Film	**Rirhandzu (Love)**
Release date	2021 August

Financial Indicators	
Money used to make the film.	R 750 000
Worldwide Total made	N/A
Worldwide Total made in $	N/A
Total made in South Africa	N/A
Quality Indicators	
Local reach	The distributor is working on getting the film into local digital streaming platforms.
International reach	Festival in areas such as Atlanta, Prague and India.
Awards	1. Ediplay International Film Festival (France) - Best Women's film 2. IndieX Film Festival (Los Angeles/ Hollywood) - Outstanding Achievement Award (Women short) -Best Ensemble Cast 3. Multi Dimension Independent Film Festival (California) 4. International Independent Film Awards (Encino, CA United States) -Gold Winner Narrative Short 2021 - Gold Winner Student Film 2021 5. Bright International Film Festival -Best Women's film 6. African Emerging Film Makers Awards -Best supporting Actor-Vukosi Mashele 7. Airflix Film Festival -Best women's Film -Best Indie Film

	-Best Student Film 8. Dream Catcher International Film Festival -Best Drama -Best Women's film 9. Krimson Horizon International Film Festival -Best short film -Best women's film

Key outcomes reflected in the above table is the local and international reach of the film, which, like the two case study films, performed well. The film also won many awards around the world, supporting the argument for indigenous African language productions when measured against a broad range of indicators over and above financial performance only.

5.6. Conclusion

Rirhandzu (Love), a short film made in the marginalised Xitsonga language, received funding from the NFVF and received many awards from different film festivals around the world. The production of the Xitsonga film further strengthens the call for increased funding from the NFVF and government, since the rest of the world is ready to receive indigenous language films.

Based on the research of this study, the next chapter brings closure to the arguments made around the viability of indigenous language film production in South Africa.

Chapter Six: It's a Wrap

Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Overview of the study

This chapter reflects on and summarises the findings from previous chapters, and offer subsequent recommendations.

Based on a low number of indigenous African films produced for the box office, this study investigates the challenges encountered in producing indigenous language films. First, the film services framework was used to determine the current arrangements of the South African film industry concerning indigenous language films. Secondly, it was used to establish the support required by producers in the production of such indigenous language films. The discussions around the challenges encountered in the production of indigenous African language films were carried out along the three thematically coded categories of (1) Ideation, Development and Production; (2) Finance and Funding, and (3) Distribution; both in South Africa and at an international level.

In Chapter One, indigenous language cinema in South Africa was contextualised and the statement of the problem presented, followed by the objectives of the research. In addition, the research questions were introduced. Configured is that the low number of indigenous language films geared for the box office highlights there could be challenges within the South African industry in relation to indigenous language production.

Chapter Two introduced the film services value chain analysis approach, which led to establishing the three categories employed throughout the study. Finally, the chapter examined the indigenous language cinema in South Africa in the context of film services, and how it reconfigures the idea of 'film industry' as a system of inputs and services, including marketing and exhibition, and not only the film text.

Chapter Three presented the research methodology, which was qualitative in nature, using the interview format as a method of data collection. The producers of the two case study films, Kagiso Lediga (*Matwetwe*) and Elias Ribeiro (*Inxeba*), were interviewed to establish challenges they encountered in the production of their indigenous African language films. The films were chosen due to the fact that

they are indigenous language films produced within the last five years, namely *Matwetwe* (2019) and *Inxeba* (2017).

Chapter Four employed the value chain's thematically coded categories to analyse the interviews conducted with Kagiso Lediga (*Matwetwe*) and Elias Ribeiro (*Inxeba*). Two key Indicators of success, being financial and quality, were used to determine the viability of the two case study films. Quality refers to the awards won by the films.

Chapter Five shares the artistic process followed in producing a short 15-minute film; the creative component of this research. The resultant practical experience is revealed within the identified methodological categories, and in relation to the production of indigenous African language films.

6.2. Findings and Conclusion

The key finding for this research is that indigenous language films are viable, with an audience both locally and internationally at film festivals, through cinema release, and other distribution networks. Included below are the obstacles and benefits to an indigenous African language cinema in South Africa.

It came to the fore that the previously underexplored topic of language in films is important to investigate. Endogenous to language, are important elements of identity, culture and race inherent to different groups of people (Ebrahim & Ellapen, 2018; Amaechi, 2013). The above highlights the value of language for understanding both individual and community identity. Over and above identity and belonging, exploring the indigenous African language cinema proved important to address historical injustices, contributing to the transformation of the South African film and television industry across the value chain. Although not a central feature of the study, the definition of indigenous, especially within the South African context, was found to warrant clarity from a constitutional level flowing down to the government agencies overseeing the film and television sector. This will aid better reporting of indigenous African language films, and could allow for formerly marginalised groups to be collectively supported.

Issues around marginalisation necessitated exploration, as Xitsonga, the home language of the researcher, is a marginalised language in the South African media landscape (Ndlovu, Mushwana & Mathevula, 2020). In the same vein, the Limpopo province, home to the researcher, is underexplored in terms of the beauty and infrastructure it has to offer to the South African film and television industry. The findings of this study will aid the researcher's cause to work in the Limpopo province, producing films in Xitsonga in order to explore the culture, and develop screen storytelling for a wider audience. Over and above the researcher's cause, the outcomes will aid different groups of people in South Africa residing in provinces outside of the three main film and television production centres of the Western Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng (Observatory, 2018), to also produce indigenous language films in large quantities.

A large number of indigenous African language films will serve the South African government well. Beyond addressing the transformation agenda, it will render further aid from an economic growth perspective. Furthermore, since the indigenous language films have demonstrated an ability to be viable, an increased production of such films will provide jobs to the South African youth, as well as realise a return on investment for the government. Government can subsequently utilise the 'profit' to fund more indigenous language productions, thus offering sustainability. However, a challenge discovered in this study complicating the current sustainability trajectory, is a lack of funding within the South African film and television industry. Therefore, an increased indigenous African language film production, aided with funding from government and private equity, promotes cross-cultural understanding, deepens social cohesion, and supports job creation; especially in rural areas. In addition, it adds to the potential of filmmakers to address the unemployment crisis amongst young South Africans, which are all indicators of success. Although the above-mentioned lack of funding might appear on the surface not to inspire confidence, it does in fact hold great potential and promise when understood from a deeper analysis point of view of the industry, as this dissertation attempts to achieve. This is evident through the two case study films in question, as well as other films mentioned, such as *Tsotsi* (2005), and the reception of the short film *Rirhandzu*, specifically undertaken for the comprehension of this study. Thus, the future for South African young African

filmmakers is positive. What is required to aid growth within the industry is a funding injection, support from government and private equity.

6.3. Recommendations

6.3.1. Recommendations relating to the study

Framed on the foundation that indigenous African language films are viable, producers and companies should be encouraged to produce more indigenous language films. For this to take place fluidly, the government should increase funding given to the National Film and Video foundation, as they did during the Presidential Employment Support program, for the agency to fund more indigenous language films. Increased production of indigenous language films will yield the creation of more jobs, and arguably, sustainable jobs. Furthermore, the National Film and Video Foundation should fund indigenous language films, since they are viable. The government agency can release funds at different levels and amounts to cater for both low budget and large budget indigenous language films. In addition, since its viability has been demonstrated, distributors must warm to indigenous language films, which should in turn encourage cinemas to make more screens available at the local box office. Finally, as suggested throughout the study, to improve the reporting of indigenous African language films and offer support to indigenous language groups as a collective, government and those in charge of policies must arrive at a clear definition of indigenous language films.

6.3.2. Recommendations for further studies

South Africa is a country still grappling with the injustices of the past, and mention of increased support for black filmmakers might falsely imply segregation based on race. However, a film such as *Inxeba* came under fire, with critics alluding to the western director disrespecting the IsiXhosa tradition. Further studies can explore who gets to hold the camera when filming an indigenous African language film. Furthermore, since language has been advanced as being important due to its inherent elements such as identity and culture, an additional area worth exploring is the role of verbal language, or language in terms of speech within a film.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Ntsanwisi

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/01/21**
PROJECT TITLE	Challenges confronting the production of indigenous language films in South Africa
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mr S Ntsanwisi
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Wits School of Arts/
DATE CONSIDERED	28 January 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Minimal
EXPIRY DATE	07 March 2025
DATE 08 March 2022	**CHAIRPERSON**

(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Professor K Kaplan

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Participant information sheet

Title: The challenges confronting the production and distribution of indigenous African language films in South Africa

Wits University
1 Jan Smuts
Avenue
Johannesburg
2000

Dear Sir

My name is Samuel Ntsanwisi, and I am a Masters in Film and Television student at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and using the films *Matwetwe* (Kagiso Lediga, 2019) and *Inxeba* (co- written by novelist Thando Mgqolozana and directed by John Trengove, 2017) as case studies. This proposal considers the commercial viability of indigenous African language films in South Africa. The films will be used to examine aspects of the South African film industry value chain as it relates to films made in South African languages other than English.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in a semi- structured interview. This activity will involve meeting at a location convenient to you and will take around 30minutes to 60 minutes. Please kindly find attached the questions. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. Unfortunately due to the possibility that people will know who the producers of the two films are, I cannot guarantee confidentiality or anonymity, however; the information you give to me will be held securely and not released to anyone else. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you (optional). If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact

the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Student no: 505425Masters in Film and Television Samuel Ntsanwisi, 505425@students.wits.ac.za, 0791948023

A FINAL WORD

Your co-operation and participation in the study will be greatly appreciated. Please sign the underneath informed consent if you agree to participate in the study. In such a case, you will

receive a copy of the signed informed consent from the researcher.

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Challenges confronting the production of indigenous language films in South Africa

Consent Form

Name of researcher: Samuel Ntsanwisi

I hereby confirm that I have been adequately informed by the researcher about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of the study. I have also received, read and understood the above written information. I am aware that the results of the study will be processed into a research report. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study. I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and of my own free will declare myself prepared to participate in the study. I agree that the information I provide may be used after this project has ended, for academic purposes, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation cannot remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used after this project has ended, for academic purposes	YES	NO

Research participant's name:_____ (Please print)

Research participant's signature:_____

Date: _____

Researcher's name: _____ Please print)

Researcher's signature: _____

Date:_____

Appendix 4: Questions for Interviews

Name: Samuel Ntsanwisi
Student no: 505425
Research proposal:
Masters in Film and Television
Title: The challenges confronting the production and distribution of indigenous African language films in South Africa

The exploration looks at all aspects of making a film from conception to audience reception. There are two parts to this inquiry. The first is a semi-structured interview and the second requires "success" indicators (secondary sources or information) to be furnished.

- At the primary level, the value chain analysis uses Peter Bloore's independent film value chain analysis and inherent within the questions is an inquest into the support activities as proposed by Tomasell & Mboti (2013). Different parts of Bloore's value chain include: "Element, Development, Financing & pre-sales, Exhibition & Exploitation, International Distribution, International Sales and Licensing, Production: Shoot & Post and Consumption" (Bloore, 2009)
- The supporting structures considered are: Political economy, Industry, Marketing and genres state policy, Structures and support, Ideological assumptions and historical conditions (Tomaselli & Mboti, 2013). These elements are referred to as supporting structures because they are external to the actual film making process but have a direct impact in the development, or lack thereof, of films.

Interview Questions

1. Element
    a. Who are the players involved in the creation, development of the project?
2. Development, Financing and pre-sales
    a. What support did you find from the industry at large, especially in the development of an indigenous language film?
    b. Was the political economy 'supportive' in the development of your film? I.e.> government support or government parastatals like the NFVF and their policies?
    c. What is your view on the structures and support in general for indigenous language films?
    d. Would you advocate for more production of indigenous language films and if yes why?
    e. What process did you follow to source funding for your film?
    f. What support did you get from the industry at large, especially in the development of an indigenous language film, or did you outright source an alternative funding model, and if yes, then why?
    g. Also please discuss the Ideological assumptions and historical conditions in relation to the production of indigenous language films and as they relate to your film.

3. Production: Shoot & Post and Consumption
    a. Once production was underway how was the reception and support from those directly and indirectly associated with the film/s?

Please explain the structures and support that were used in the production of the film.

4. Exhibition & Exploitation International Distribution, International Sales and Licensing,
    a. Please share with me the process and strategy pursued in the distribution of the film.
        i. Was the film marketed differently in South Africa compared to overseas?
        ii. Did you utilise normal avenues for distribution, or did you develop new approaches and what were they?
    b. Was the 'political' economy supportive in this regard?
    c. Did the film receive international distribution?
    d. If so, can you share the territories in which is sold and provide an estimate of the advances that were paid?
    e. How did international sales of your film compare with the revenue received in South Africa?
    f. What is your opinion with regards to international distribution in relation to indigenous language films?

B. May you please kindly provide me with the following information where applicable to your film

Adopted by this research are the following indicators of success inherent within the framework offered by the South African Cultural Observatory (Observatory, 2018).

1. "Financial indicators
    a. such as box office revenues
    b. online sales
    c. distribution deals
    d. the size of the industry and its contribution to GDP
    e. export earnings
2. Development indicators
    a. audience diversity and numbers
    b. transformation of the industry
    c. job creation
3. Market indicators
    a. audience numbers
    b. number of downloads
    c. distribution deals in other territories
    d. shareability
    e. trending on social media
4. Quality indicators
    a. critical acclaim
    b. local reach
    c. international reach
    d. awards

Appendix 5: Language Editing Certificate



CERTIFICATE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITING

TransExecutive confirms that the document listed below was edited by a professional editor. The following issues were corrected: grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and phrasing. The editor did not alter the ideas and aim of the researcher.

DISSERTATION
Challenges Confronting the Production of Indigenous Language Films in South Africa

AUTHOR(S)
S. Ntsanwisi

DATE
28 April 2022

Appendix 6: Turnitin Report

Turnitin Originality Report

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