

https://dspace.org/

When the skeletons escape the closet :managing the monsters in Izinyoka/Snakes

Stoykov, Stanimir

2019

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29527

Stoykov, Stanimir (2019) When the Skeletons Escape the Closet:managing the monsters in Izinyoka/Snakes, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/29527>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

WHEN THE SKELETONS ESCAPE THE CLOSET: MANAGING THE MONSTERS IN *IZINYOKA/SNAKES*



By: Stanimir Stoykov

9713225Y

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television.

WSOA FILM AND TELEVISION

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to critically examine the *Mzansi Bioskop* formula for story-telling, prescribed by the DSTV channel, and highlight its problematic nature in terms of predictable narratives which could arguably perpetuate negative societal stereotypes of women, children, and the queer community. This research combines a written dissertation and the production of the short film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018), which examines the Mzansi Bioskop channel melodrama formula of current South African made-for-television film-making practices. The dissertation further compares case studies like Mandla N's productions *Plastic Money* (2014) and *Jozi to Kapa* (2013) in order to analyse the impact of the formulaic approaches to cinematic representation. This dissertation and the film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) propose the possibility and value of these film-making practices being used to construct a "camp" and satirical film-narrative and aesthetic, which ultimately provides avenues for exploring a world which exists beneath and alongside the surface of predictable genre formulations, narrative styles, and character relations that are currently pursued by the channel. This position is debated through the reading of historic film genres and concepts and their adaptation to the South African popular film formulae.

Keywords: Mzansi Bioskop, DSTV, South African, melodrama, queer cinema, camp

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT I

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICAN MADE FOR TELEVISION CINEMATIC PRODUCTION 1

1.1. INTRODUCTION 1

1.2. THE MZANSI BIOSKOP CHANNEL 4

1.3. MANDLA N AND HIS FEMALE CHARACTERS 8

1.4. THE LOKSHIN BIOSKOP FORMULA (SEE APPENDIX 1) 10

CHAPTER TWO: CLASSIC MODES OF FILMIC REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN 12

2.1. WOMEN AND GENRE 12

2.2. MELODRAMA: THE FEMALE GENRE 14

2.3. THE UNRULY WOMAN 18

2.4. THE CASTRATING FEMALE 21

CHAPTER THREE: REPRESENTING QUEER IDENTITIES 23

3.1. THE MONSTROUS QUEER 23

3.2. COMEDY/SATIRE/PARODY 26

3.3. CAMP 29

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL REREADINGS 33

4.1. *PLASTIC MONEY* 33

4.2. IZINYOKA/SNAKES 44

4.2.1. PRODUCING THE CHARACTERS 44

5. CONCLUSION 55

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY 58

7. APPENDICES 63

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICAN MADE FOR TELEVISION CINEMATIC PRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

South African film and television commissioning bodies insist on formulaic adherence from producers and filmmakers. These recommended formulae are often based on Euro-American modes of cinematic story-telling. Whether it is through government funded organisations like the National Film and Video Foundation, or at private film schools, concepts like "the three act structure" (accredited to Aristotle and his definitions of tragedy, these days sometimes referred to as the "the four act" or "five act structure") "the hero's journey" (Campell, 2014), "seamless" continuity shooting and editing techniques (Katz, 1991; Nelmes, 2012; Cooke, 2017; Hayward, 2006) are continually and systematically instilled in potential or established filmmakers. Locally, these practices result in either the production of glossy Hollywood-lookalike films like Thabang Moleya's *Happiness is a Four Letter Word (2016)*[1], or low-budget Mzansi Bioskop made-for-television films, which are arguably populated with one-dimensional and stereotypical characters who function within predictable story-lines. This practice breeds a problematic representation in terms of identity politics, particularly when it comes to gender, race and sexuality. It can be argued from a filmmaker's point of view that this insistence on formulaic adherence leaves no room for creative experimentation, thus preventing the growth of a truly unique national cinema through trial and error, success and failure. This stifles potential development. Haseenah Ebrahim writes: "There is a strong argument to be made that the enduring legacy of whiteness in perspectives, and in notions of what constitutes value or professionalism does tint much of the choices regarding which stories are told, and how they are told cinematically. Consequently, many decision makers

[1] For further info on this hugely successful film in terms of box-office South African film adaptation http://nfvf.co.za/home/index.php?ipkArticleID=318.

who are not themselves white have internalised such perspectives as they function in a globalised economy of film production and circulation in which Euro-American models of filmmaking, notions of taste and aesthetics, etc., remain hegemonic" (Ebrahim, 2014 p. 5). It is against this backdrop that this dissertation and creative project propose the exploration, resistance and subversion of these cinematic norms to develop alternate possibilities for storytelling on-screen in South Africa.

Working from a queer filmmaker perspective, the intention is to produce a mainstream film which includes elements of "camp" comedy/satire using the Lokshin Bioskop DSTV formula as a basis, but also, to deviate from it. The short film *Izinyoka*[2]*/Snakes (2018)* produced as part of this project focuses on the conflict between a dominating, posing-as-religious, self-righteous mother/monster character and her victimised, long-suffering queer/transgender child. The characters in the film are constructed using elements and clichés from the classic Hollywood melodrama, horror and comedy genres, juxtaposed with elements inspired by the concepts of the unruly-woman (Rowe, 1995), monstrous-feminine (Creed, 2015) and monstrous-queer (Giffney, et al., 2009; Grant, 2015; Cooke, 2017; Hayward, 2006; Gage, 2003) developed by film and cultural theorists. Similarly, the plot-structure follows predictable generic melodrama, comedy and horror formulae (Hayward, 2006; Cooke, 2017; Metelmann, et al., 2015; Doane, 1987). This is done with the intention not of questioning the popular melodrama genre formula in terms of form and story-telling techniques, but rather to critically examine and further resist this formula in relation to thematic, aesthetic and stylistic choices, therefore attempting to produce original, engaging and compelling film-work within a current South African context. As this is jointly a practical

[2] Izinoyka is an Isizulu word meaning snakes. It is also used colloquially to refer to those who steal electricity – see https://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/08/izinyoka/ for more details of the phenomenon in the South African context.

project – having to produce a short film – and an investigation into practices derived from texts and written instructions, this paper is concerned with theory which follows a practical approach towards filmmaking technique, narrative and character construction and I will not be pursuing the psycho-analytical and philosophical approaches often associated with this specific format of popular story-telling like the work of Laura Mulvey (Mulvey, 1999) and Julia Kristeva (Kristeva, 1982).

This dissertation is written in a time when significant progress has been achieved in terms of identity politics in relation to popular public discussion. Some of the concepts which are relevant today have been addressed in film theory in the past. This dissertation cites some texts which use terms in their original socio-historic context like “gay” instead of “queer”, “sex” instead of “gender” and so forth.

The film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) is intended to work with, and against audience expectations of stereotypical gender representations and film-language clichés, thus subverting and critiquing these elements. *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) creates a thought-provoking narrative, which actively engages the audience in critical evaluation of the film’s subject matter and themes. Simply put, the idea was to demonstrate that gender-fluid characters, taboo subject matter like religion and “camp” aesthetics *can* exist within South African mainstream television. This would also allow marginalised characters, themes and styles “out of the closet” - so to speak - and into mainstream consciousness, without reverting to the use of a “Bad Straight Camp” sensibility - as per Bruce LaBruce’s definition (2012), which I discuss further. The film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) signals the feasibility of these ideas and this dissertation contextualizes, extends and critically positions these choices within the landscape of relevant film-theories and their purchase in the current local South African context. As such, this dissertation provides an analysis of various DSTV offerings, primarily focusing on the made-for-television film *Plastic Money* (2014), created and directed

by Mandla N through Black Brain Productions. The argument is pursued via the following chapters: chapter one deals with the histories and adaptation of the melodrama, comedy and horror genres and their relevance to the *Mzans*i *Lokshin Bioskop* formula, chapter two focuses on the use of classical narrative codes and conventions in filmmaking in relation to the depiction of South African stereotypes of female (and queer) characters and further offers an inquiry into the concepts of the ”unruly woman” and the “monstrous feminine” theory of the castrating female character in film theory, chapter three extends this and discusses the relationship between the “unruly woman” in comedy, the “monstrous feminine” and the “monstrous queer” in horror films and chapter four proposes an exploration of and practical application of a true “camp” sensibility in a South African film-project. The dissertation concludes that this can be achieved in practical terms, resisting predictable and generic character formulations, aesthetics and style, producing a film which does not ultimately challenge the popular melodrama formula which is favoured by the DSTV Mzansi Bioskop and Magic channels.

1.2. The Mzansi Bioskop Channel

In 2012 the DSTV Mzansi Magic channel launched the Saturday evening Lokshin Bioskop slot for new, locally produced, low-budget, fifty-four-minute-long films. These are commonly referred to as “bubble-gum movies”. These films tell local, township stories, which deal with themes relevant to South African, specifically black, family audiences (see a more detailed description of the Mzansi Bioskop guidelines further on). These made-for-television films have proven to be so successful, that in September 2014 Mzansi Magic launched an entire Lokshin Bioskop channel. This is the first television channel in South Africa which broadcasts only locally produced films around the clock. The high demand for content has had a positive impact on the local television and film industry in terms of job-creation. Many acting, as well

as producing careers, are launched through the Lokshin Bioskop commissions like the projects produced by Mandla N and Black Brain Productions, which are discussed below. An article, titled *SA's First Local Movie Channel Launches*, published on the 5th of September 2013 on screenafrica.com quotes Yolisa Phahle, director of M-Net local interest channels: "This groundbreaking 24/7 original movie channel was born out of viewers' love of the Lokshin Bioskop films on our channels, but it's also testament of our commitment to boost the local [film) industry like never before." (Screenafrica, 2013).

Through continuous trial and error, the Bioskop DSTV commissioning editors have attempted to identify the elements in these films which presumably their audiences find most desirable. Those elements are listed and described in a power point presentation document, which is made available throughout circles of aspiring Bioskop producers. This document contains the formula to the perfect Mzansi Bioskop television story (see Appendix 1).

One example of a perfect Mzansi production is the hugely successful drama series *Lockdown 2016/17/18.* Although this is an episodic drama produced for a different channel and not a stand-alone film, it does adhere to the recommended melodrama genre formula in terms of its treatment of female and queer characters. Further, it is produced by the same team as *Jozi To Kapa* (2013) and *Plastic Money* (2014) – Mandla N and Black Brain Productions – and features two actors who also appear in the *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) short film which is part of this project. *Lockdown* is an all-female and queer prison-drama, consisting of melodramatic story-lines and some strong, violent and dangerous characters, who live in an oppressive and claustrophobic prison. This is similar to the use of the family-home as a metaphoric "female prison" in the classic Hollywood melodrama films. These "unruly" and sometimes "mad" women have been punished for their transgressive/criminal behaviour by society and have been "locked-down" in isolation inside a prison.

Lockdown director and co-creator Mandla N entered the industry as an actor and after finding some success, he is now a director/producer for the sister channel to Mzansi Bioscope, Mzansi Magic, both on DSTV. Some of his earlier projects are Lokshin Bioskop channel commissions. Mandla's work often focuses on strong female characters who are given a certain amount of agency within the story as seen in his Bioskop films and Mzansi Magic series. This is itself a potentially positive development for the visibility in the representation of women on the South African screen and is commendable. However, these female characters are "punished" by the story itself for their transgressions, thus reinforcing the demands of the melodrama genre formula as explored later in this dissertation.

Upon closer examination in terms of character-types, themes and story-line progressions, Mandla's earlier Bisokop work does follow through into his more recent *Lockdown* series. As discussed in more detail later Mandla's Lokshin Bioskop drama *Plastic Money* (2014) tells the story of three women who, in their quest for independence within a tough patriarchal society, are forced by circumstance to become thieves/criminals. Presumably this drama film is popular with audiences, as it has been broadcast repeatedly over the years on the Lokshin Bioskop channel. In some ways the narrative of the *Plastic Money* (2014) drama can be viewed as a prequel to the *Lockdown* series which Mandla has been commissioned to produce currently for the DSTV Mzansi Magic channel. Mandla N's is arguably the career-path progression for an aspiring Lokshin Bioskop producer – after successfully completing a Lokshin Bioskop drama or two, the producer might be commissioned to work on bigger projects like a series. This is the context in which Mandla N is currently producing the *Lockdown* series. The *Plastic Money* (2014) drama also features Tumi Masomela who is Mandla N's *Lockdown* co-creator, as the main character in the film – the long-suffering female heroine, Neo. The relative success of the film and series, and the director/creator himself, is something to bear in mind when considering what the presumed

value is of the prescribed formulaic approaches to making films, as well as arguably what filmmakers might imagine they stand to lose if they resist or subvert the melodrama formula.

The conclusion of the narrative of *Plastic Money* (2014) shows the three female lead characters arrested and jailed for their crimes. The film features larger-than-life, Zulu comedienne, Nomsa Buthelezi, playing Busi, who is always costumed in tight, bright and super “sexy” outfits, very reminiscent of the unruly-woman archetype which is discussed further on. Nomsa Buthelezi also plays one of the lead characters in the more recent *Lockdown* series as the “crazy," and ironically named character, Slender. Both productions make strong references to her large body. An argument can be made that the character Slender from *Lockdown* is an incarnation of her earlier Busi character from *Plastic Money* (2014) as Busi ends up in prison, which is the setting for the Slender character in the *Lockdown* series. Finally, Nomsa Buthelezi also portrays Pastor Sheila in the film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) which supports this dissertation. This arguably predictable casting choice would presumably indicate generic adherence to a South African audience. The intention is to send a clear message to viewers that the film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) is a melodrama with elements of comedy and is recognizable as such in terms of their viewing expectations.

I want to suggest then that Mandla’s television work can be viewed as relatively progressive by comparison to other local content as his narratives focus on women and their desires, dreams, problems, allowing the characters a certain amount of limited agency within these stories. However, these fictional women are always punished for transgressive behavior – something that the film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) resists because of the way it treats the queer protagonist Maziya.

1.3. Mandla N and his female characters

One of South Africa's most transgressive female public figures is Khanyi Mbau. She is in control of her career and fame, originally gracing the tabloids as a South African "Paris Hilton"[3] type character – a glamorous party-goer. More recently, Mbau has established herself as an award-winning talk show host: *Katch it With Khanyi* has made waves on television screens since its debut in 2013 and was named South Africa's favourite Talk Show by the SA Audience Research Foundation - as seen on the official eTV website. She has become a successful actor, having appeared in series of hit productions like *Happiness is a Four Letter Word* (2016). Her on-screen performance was critically well received, and the Joburg Film Festival proclaimed her as one of the top ten South African actresses in film. In 2017 she received a nomination at the Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards for Best Supporting Actress for her character in the same film[4]. Mbau makes a tongue-in-cheek appearance "as herself" in Mandla N's early Bioskop production *Jozi to Kapa* (2013) – a sexy hitchhiker and thief on the run from the "Nigerians" whom she stole money from. Her character behaves similarly to the women in *Plastic Money* (2014) – the only way she can acquire wealth is through theft. Again, Mandla N casts a powerful real-life woman like Khanyi Mbau, who herself has resisted and defied stereotyping and marginalization in terms of her public persona, however, her character's agency is limited within the narrative of *Jozi to Kapa* (2013).

An assumption can thus be made that Mandla's Black Brain productions are very popular with Mzansi Bioskop and Magic audiences because they indeed adhere to the

[3] Paris Hilton is an American celebrity and heiress https://www.usmagazine.com/celebrities/paris-hilton/.

[4] Although Khanyi Mbau originally became a well-known public figure in South Africa because of her appearances at social events and gossip magazines, she is now recognised as a legitimate talent as an actor and talk-show host https://citizen.co.za/lifestyle/your-life-entertainment-your-life/entertainment-celebrities/1419979/things-didnt-know-khanyi-mbau/.

melodrama formula and the prescribed reductive representations of female and queer characters.

It is worth taking into consideration what the general attitudes of South African society towards women are. A survey published by Stats SA on their official government website www.statssa.gov.za in September 2017, titled *P031 Victims of Crime Survey 2016/2017*, "focuses on people's perceptions and experiences of crime..." (Stats SA, 2017 p. 2). Section 8.7 of this survey discusses "attitudes related to women and gender based violence":

> When asked whether they think that women should have the same constitutional rights as men, the majority of respondents (71%) answered in the affirmative. The view that 'women should have the same constitutional rights as men' tended to be higher among females (73%) than among males (68%)... The majority of respondents (97%) opposed the view that, in general it is acceptable for a man to hit a woman (Stats SA, 2017 p. 75).

It is important to note what is *not* explicitly stated in the above survey - presumably, 32% of South African men and 27% of women hold the view that women should *not* have the same constitutional rights as men. The study also shows that it is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife when: "she goes without telling him" (men 6,1%, women 5,2 %), "neglects the children" (men 7,6%, women 6,5%), "argues with the husband" (men 7,7%, women 6,8%), "refuses to have sex with the husband" (men 3,1%, women 2,6%), "burns the food" (men 1,3%, women 1,3% (Stats SA, 2017 p. 74). In other words, some South Africans believe that women should be punished for having opinions, seeking independence and not adhering to their "natural" duties as wives and nurturers. Although there is no evidence of any influence of the fictional characters in the television melodramas on real-life women and men, it is notable that some of the attitudes mirror each other and that these fictional narratives reflect some of the generalised views towards the ideas of women who seek agency and independence.

To further understand the context within which current melodramas are created and exist one has to look at the responses from South Africa's current major film critic, whose opinions are taken very seriously by production houses and channel alike – Twitter. These Twitter critics are responsible for getting series like *Lockdown* among the top trending topics and hashtags during the broadcast of an episode. These hashtags and topics are taken into consideration by the channel when assessing a television productions' success among viewers and "fans". Khanyi Mbau herself uses mainstream as well as social media like Twitter to shift and shape public opinion of her – she plays a variety of characters like a greedy gold-digger, pop-singer, glamourous party-goer, serious actor and the talk show host as noted above.

This entire project – including both the film and the dissertation – questions how female and queer characters can be successfully taken out of their "natural" habitat which traditionally is assumed to be the domestic sphere, the kitchen, the closet and they can be granted agency within a popular mainstream genre like the television melodrama. Further, it represents queer characters not as dangerous monsters or comical caricatures, but rather as ordinary people who have problems and desires of their own, which do not pose a threat to society at large.

1.4. The Lokshin Bioskop Formula (see Appendix 1)

The Mzansi Bioskop melodrama is undeniably a popular South African genre and is used as a basis for the *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) film, produced in conjunction with this dissertation. M-net and their umbrella Mzansi channels describe this genre in the above-mentioned power point document, which guides the aspiring filmmakers pitching potential projects to Bioskop as one that uses "melodrama as a base" with "other genres used as sub-genres, adding texture to the story".

According to the document the projects must revolve around “universal themes”, “love versus hate, good versus evil, betrayal, family conflict, ambition, revenge”, featuring “memorable, authentic characters” including “humorous characters”, exploring “social realism” and “the black experience”. Melodrama is further described here as: “a sensational piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events intended to appeal to the emotions” (Appendix 1). I want to suggest then that there seems to be a contradiction within this text, firstly describing characters as “authentic” which implies psychological well-roundedness in character development, and secondly, the text demands that the characters should be “exaggerated”, which implies stereotypical simplification.

According to the above-mentioned document, the following elements make up a good story:

> **Suspense:** Drama makes an audience feel a powerful sense of pity for the hero’s undeserved suffering.
> **Dramatic Suspense (Dramatic Irony):** Audience knows more about what is going to happen than the lead characters; extreme tension about whether the character will recognise what is going on in time to prevent a tragedy.
> **Increasing conflict:** Complications, surprise twists and unraveling in-between plots (source: Mzansi power point presentation/brief/guideline for producers, released in 2017 included in the Appendices as Appendix 1).

When examined in greater detail further on in this dissertation, it becomes apparent that melodrama is a complex genre which provides voices to those type of characters who are often voiceless in traditional cinematic narratives – women and children. In light of this I would like to suggest that the Bioskop channel formulaic recommendations appear reductive and simplistic and that the genre itself and the many adaptations that exist of it in other national cinema examples offer opportunities for more nuanced interpretations by filmmakers and the channel alike.

CHAPTER TWO: CLASSIC MODES OF FILMIC REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN

2.1. Women and genre

According to Susan Hayward in her definition of GENRE/SUB-GENRE in her seminal film-studies book which provides an overview of all major film-theory *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, the idea of "genre" became widely recognised as a key concept in Anglo-Saxon Film Theory in the 1960s, although films have always been categorised by type since the early days of cinema. Classic narrative cinema storytelling relies on using generic plot structures, as well as marketing strategies, which usually fit neatly within audience expectations. "The genres… each with its recognisable repertoire of conventions… enable the industry to predict audience expectations" (Gledhill, 2007 p. 252). As film-making technology and cultural norms within societies evolve with time, so do the definitions of the different genres.

As noted by Hayward (Hayward, 2006 pp. 185, 186), genre and classic narrative cinema are tied up to ideology as they closely reflect the popular societal beliefs at any given time-period. However, some narratives remain consistent throughout cinematic history and continue to dominate, such as the traditional representation of binary gender roles — the reductive representation of women as passive victims or, as the exact opposite — the (increasingly popular) stereotype of the "sexy" but "dangerous" female killer (*Atomic Blonde 2017, Wonder Woman 2017, Killing Eve 2018*). This is considered by Susan Hayward In *Cinema Studies, The Key Concepts:*

> Ideological inflections within film genre find representation through a series of binary oppositions which, among other hegemonic 'realities', reinforce gender distinctions. For example, constructs of sexuality are based around images of the active male versus the passive female, independence versus entrapment (that is, marriage and family). Sexuality is constructed also as good/bad, pure/perverse. Furthermore, these are attributes which are most commonly attached to women, thus reinforcing the virgin/whore myth of woman (Hayward, 2006 p. 186).

Although genre is not fixed as it continues to shift and change with time, failure to generic compliance can lead to box-office disaster. Susan Hayward (2006) explains this: "…some genre films 'fail' because the audience feels that they have not adhered to their generic conventions sufficiently, or because they are out of touch with contemporary times" (Hayward, 2006 p. 187). An example of this could be the 1995 release of Paul Verhoeven's notorious film *Showgirls,* which was met with an extremely negative critical and audience reaction. Elements of graphic sex, nudity, depictions of sexism and violence, representation of female sexual desire, together with an exaggerated overall style, including heightened, cartoon-like performances, led to the film's universal slam. As it has been already noted that female character representations across all genres remain consistently reductive and therefore problematic, it is not surprising that one of the most memorable aspects of the critical attack was the level of savagery which the film's *female* star was faced with. In an article published on nydailynews.com on October 18th, 2015, titled *EXCLUSIVE: 'Showgirls' director Paul Verhoeven opens up about how film ruined Elizabeth Berkley's career…"* — the legendary filmmaker discusses this. Verhoeven claims that "… Hollywood studio executives were angry that Berkley had pushed the boundaries and limits that female stars would go to — and so shunned her. Hollywood was [upset) with her because she went further than any actress has gone or will go, and I think they have never forgiven her. Her performance pushed the limits and that worried them" (James & Emma, 2015). This has serious implications about the societal expectations and limitations placed on female characters, actors, and women in general in terms of what defines culturally acceptable behaviour. In this case actor Elizabeth Berkley's entire career was compromised because she simply portrayed a fictional transgressive woman in a melodrama film, while the director Paul Verhoeven remains a

celebrated filmmaker[5]. Perhaps the one genre within which females are depicted with a degree of psychological roundness in terms of character development is the melodrama.

2.2. Melodrama: the female genre

The recommended basis for a Bioskop story is the melodrama genre. This section provides an overview of the Classic Hollywood version of melodrama films produced from the 1920s to the 1960s period. Melodrama is present and popular in virtually every national cinema – from Italian "melodramma" and Nollywood video films which use melodrama as a basis, combined with horror and fantasy, through to Hispanic telenovelas which are laced with highly dramatic plots and exaggerated characters, to the melodramatic Spanish films of Pedro Almodovar. This dissertation specifically focuses on Hollywood film as it remains the universally preferred – *albeit* problematic – "template" for global filmmaking techniques and modes of story-telling. Film-historian and critic, Christine Gledhill, discusses the global presence of melodrama and how it relates to global Hollywood dominance as well as colonialism, in an interview, published in the book *Melodrama After the Tears: New Perspectives on the Politics of Victimhood*,

> ... I concede that when practices are developed in one cultural context and then circulate in another, they are absorbed into their host cultures to which they offer resources: for example, melodrama travels into Indian popular culture and eventually cinema, through theatrical companies traveling along the routes of colonialism and later through imported Hollywood films. (Metelmann, et al., 2015 p. 305)

This dissertation examines the relationship of classic Hollywood melodramas to its current, local variations in the form of Lokshin Bioskop productions and suggests that they tend to rely on oversimplified story-lines and reductive gender stereotypes.

[5] Despite this filmmaker participating in the universally detested project *Showgirls* released in 1995, he is still described as a "distinguished director" whose career was not affected by the critical backlash https://www.filminquiry.com/beginners-guide-paul-verhoeven/.

In her chapter on melodrama Hayward notes that unlike other genres, it often, but not always, focuses on women's issues and desires. Classical Hollywood melodramas were mostly based on novels written by women, but the on-screen adaptations were directed by auteur men, like Vincent Minnelli. These films were successful with (mainly) female audiences. Feminist film theorists began critical analysis of the melodramas in the 1970s, although, initially "…early feminist investigation of Hollywood had dismissed much of the work … as enshrining a male viewpoint on the world that was oppressive to women" (Gledhill, 2007 p. 316).

A common setting for melodramas is the home, with a primary focus on family problems and conflicts. The characters become one-dimensional, despite the Classical Hollywood formula dictating psychological roundness, these characters remain static and are reduced to stereotypes. Therefore, melodrama tends to be plot-driven where: "Dramatic action takes place between and not within the characters" (Hayward, 2006 p. 238). Dramatic events seem to happen *to* the characters.

This is not only typical for the Hollywood melodrama. The Mexican telenovela *Maria La Del Barrio (1995)* is famous for its highly exaggerated and camp characters and situations. The telenovela is so over-the-top that it is often used by internet users as the basis for the creation of amusing memes, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook videos (see Appendix 2, Figures 1- 4). The main character Maria goes through several brutal situations which are beyond her control. Maria lives in utter poverty, picking up trash to make a modest living, her entire family dies, she is then poisoned by her rival Soraya, she falls pregnant and goes mad, gives birth on the streets and wonders around in a catatonic state with her baby, which then gets stolen. Maria ends up in jail but the prison catches on fire. She is then kidnapped by her rival Soraya and survives a second fire (in one day). Maria has no control of these dramatic events and is merely a victim of circumstances. As mentioned earlier South African audiences too are quick

and eager to respond with amusing memes and tweets while watching their favourite television like the *Lockdown* series which can be viewed under the various Twitter Lockdown hashtags like #LOCKDOWNS3 and #Lockdown[6].

In the case of classic Hollywood female melodramas, the male character in this sub-genre is taken out of the active "outside" environment and is brought into the domestic, home environment, typically represented as the "female" sphere. "In order for the conflict to be resolved, he has to come to understand the female character's point of view. Thus, the male becomes emasculated and "feminised": "…for 'family life' to survive, a compromise has to be reached, sexual difference softened, and the male brought to see the value of domestic life" (Hayward, 2006 p. 239). By focusing on the family and the home, Hayward argues that the melodrama further perpetuates the concept of marriage and motherhood as the only "natural" environment for a woman. This treatment of female characters is evident particularly with reference to Mzansi's melodrama *Plastic Money* (2014) which I discuss in detail in Chapter Four and provide a counter-interpretation in my own film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018).

Although the resolution is always unsatisfactory for the melodrama female characters, female audiences presumably can identify with the journey which the heroine/victim undertakes, as this journey mirrors their real-life experience of patriarchal oppression. After the initial dismissal "…feminists have drawn attention to the woman's film as a category of production aimed at women, about women, drawing on cultural forms produced for women, often by women" (Gledhill, 2007 p. 316). However, at the conclusion of the melodrama, the female is:

> … re-inscribed into her "Lawful" place as (m)other… In this respect, it comes as no surprise that women's films function ideologically as repression of female desire and reassertion of the woman's role as reproducer and nurturer. Or, if she is incapable of resuming or assuming that role, then she must stand aside, disappear, not be. (Hayward, 2006 p. 244)

[6] See the official Lockdown Twitter account https://twitter.com/LockDownMzansi.

In other words, like the *femme-fatale* figure in the film-noir genre, the female character in the melodrama is punished by the film itself for having "stepped out of line" and for acting "unnaturally" by having desires and ambitions. An extreme example of this is the above-mentioned case of actor Elizabeth Berkley from *Showgirls* (1995), who had to be "punished" *in real life* by Hollywood executives, who ended her career, for simply having *played* a transgressive character in the film *Showgirls.* The question to consider is what happens when one explores this simple formula from a local position?

In addition, through the use of an overall heightened style consisting of exaggerated characters and situations, the melodrama focuses on the oppressed victim:

> The melodrama is an oxymoronic product in that it has to produce dramatic action whilst staying firmly in place; this gives it an inherently circular thematic structure, hence often the recourse to flash-backs. This circularity also signals claustrophobia. Time is made to stand still, suffocating the child, teenager, young adult and especially women. Windows and objects function similarly to suffocate, entrap and oppress. The decor or mise-en-scene become an outer symbolisation of inner emotions, fragility or torment. (Hayward, 2006 p. 242)

Carla Marcantonio – author of *Global Melodrama* - describes the genre as "…associated with structures of interiority, be it the psyche or the home" and is "… concerned with the private sphere (home, family, gendered identity, sexuality, etc.) and with dramas dealing with the collision between public and private spheres." (Marcantonio, 2015 pp. 6-7). Like the literally imprisoned females and queers in the series *Lockdown*, the decor and shot-framing in the classic melodrama film serves to stifle and oppress the female/child/victim characters visually, as well as emotionally — the family home becomes a prison. In Mandla N's *Plastic Money* (2014), the township becomes the women's prison which they are unable to escape from. In *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018), Sheila is entrapped "in the closet" whereas her transgender child is out of the closet and escapes the oppressive-looking television production company offices. Marcantonio also points out the melodrama's preoccupation with morality, good and evil and justice. The audience must take the side of

the good and virtuous and against unnatural evil, thus nuance within the story is flattened and a clear-cut and a neat conclusion is delivered in the form of either a happy or unhappy ending:

> … it is essential to a given film's narrative resolution (the happy or unhappy ending), and thus to the moral judgment delivered. Through its recourse to the happy or unhappy ending, melodrama reveals its bent either for denouncing an unjust world or, alternately, for imagining a just one. And, in so doing, its stories labour to make sense of senseless suffering. (Marcantonio, 2015 p. 12).

This basic division between good and evil was employed in the *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) short film as characters who are badly behaved are punished by death at the conclusion of the narrative. As a filmmaker I am aware of the irony of such neat and easy story-telling conventions and used it with an intended comedic effect, aiming to spoof this practice of over-simplification.

2.3. The Unruly Woman

As mentioned earlier, the "perfect" Lokshin Bioskop film must contain some elements of comedy, usually in the form of secondary characters like the larger-than-life Busi (Nomsa Buthelezi) in *Plastic Money* (2014). The female lead character of the *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) short film produced in conjunction with this dissertation is also played by Mzansi's favourite "funny lady", Nomsa Buthelezi. The character is indeed "larger than" life, badly behaved and is constructed using the theory of the "unruly woman" in comedy. Pastor Sheila (Buthelezi) dominates, emasculates and she even castrates! Similar, to the female character in the melodrama, the funny "unruly woman" might get punished for her misbehaviours in the conclusion of the story, but her behaviour throughout is in sharp contrast to that of the suffering heroine of the melodrama. The "unruly woman" offers a different form of female empowerment. Like the independent thief Busi in Mandla N's *Plastic Money* (2014), she is

not a “Juliet” — a victim of circumstance like Maria from the telenovela *Maria La Del Barrio* waiting for her Romeo. Her primary focus is not romance, but independence. She takes action, defying patriarchy (although ultimately, still trapped in it). Put crudely, she can be referred to as “large and in charge”.

Like Buthelezi’s brightly costumed character Busi in *Plastic Money* (2014) (see Appendix 6) who must survive – or at least function within – patriarchy, these comical female characters put on a facade of ultra-femininity, exaggerating their female attributes and characteristics through make-up, costume, and gesture. They *choose* to give a heightened performance of their gender. When examining the feminist writings of Mary Ann Doane, Kathleen Rowe, author of *The Unruly Woman, Gender and the Genres of Laughter*, summarises Doane’s definition of this phenomenon as: “… a kind of mimicry or masquerade, a parodic performance of the feminine that “makes visible” what is supposed to remain concealed: the artifice of femininity, the gap between an impossible role and the woman playing it” (Rowe, 1995 pp. 16-17). This put-on “ultra-femininity” empowers the female characters, allowing them to dominate and manipulate the men around them. The fact that in this case gender is merely a performance also suggests that beneath the facade of the character lies a different person. In her *Female Masquerade* chapter, Hayward notes that:

> This putting on a mask has a … subversive effect, however. The knowledge of putting it on means also that there is knowledge of what lies beneath — that in fact the mask can be taken off. This suggests that there is a gap between the masquerading woman and the real woman underneath. So here the woman who knowingly masquerades is showing precisely through her ultra-feminine traits (be it through clothing or gestures) how patriarchy functions to position her (Hayward, 2006 p. 133).

In comedy, the female masquerade can be so exaggerated, that it borders on carnivalesque and it becomes grotesque. Through her critique of several popular “female-female impersonators” in comedy, such as Miss Piggy (modelled on the archetypal “female-

female impersonator", Mae West), Kathleen Rowe identifies a cluster of characteristics which she lists as follows which define the "unruly woman" character:

1. The unruly woman creates disorder by dominating or trying to dominate men. She is unable or unwilling to confine herself to her proper place.
2. Her body is excessive or fat, suggesting her unwillingness or inability to control her physical appetites.
3. Her speech is excessive, in quantity, content or tone.
4. She makes jokes or laughs at herself.
5. She may be androgynous or hermaphroditic, drawing attention to the social construction of gender.
6. She may be old or a masculinised crone, for old women who refuse to become invisible in our culture are often considered grotesque.
7. Her behaviour is associated with looseness and occasionally whorishness, but her sexuality is less narrowly and negatively defined than is that of the femme fatale. She may be pregnant.
8. She is associated with dirt, liminality (thresholds, borders, or margins), taboo, rendering her above all a figure of ambivalence (Rowe, 1995 pp. 41-42).

Rowe argues that the "unruly woman" character becomes transgressive "when she lays claim to her own desire". Rowe further critiques the "unruly woman's" body in relation to social structures and concludes that the "classical" or "bourgeois" body seeks to conceal its bodily functions, whereas the grotesque body seeks to expose and exaggerate them: "Whenever the body is engaged in the functions that bring it closest to the thresholds of life and death — being born, having intercourse, giving birth, and dying — it is grotesque." (Rowe, 1995 p. 44). The character of the voluptuous, grotesque-bodied, loud, outspoken, comical, sexual, rebellious, pregnant, "big woman", "pig woman" or "woman on top", uses humour and feminine excess to disrupt patriarcal societal norms.

The short comedy/drama film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) engages with these comical or melodramatic definitions in terms of female character formulations in relation to the Maziya and Sheila characters. Both characters are produced exploring the concept of everyday female gender practices as performances. The theory of gender as performance is discussed in Judith Butler's work. In her essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988) Butler argues that the everyday performance of gender itself creates a gender. She compares the

performativity of gender to that of the live performance of the actor in a play. She draws similarities between the two, such as the concept of each individual functioning as the actor of their gender. However, there is a distinction between the two types of performances as a theatrical presentation is understood as such by an audience and it is therefore safe and non-threatening (Butler, 1988). Presumably, this is the reason why dangerous women like the castrating female exist in fiction works like films.

2.4. The Castrating Female

Rowe's definitions of the "unruly woman" and her exaggerated, inside-out, maternal body – she menstruates, she gives birth, she lactates – are very similar to Barbara Creed's writings on the "monstrous feminine" in relation to the horror genre. As elements of both genres appear in *Snakes* (2018), it is worth considering the latter. Pastor Sheila's character in *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) was largely inspired by both the unruly woman and monstrous feminine in film theory. This analysis can be found in section 4.2 of this dissertation.

Although very often the antagonist in horror film is a male figure, Creed argues that the central figure of female monstrosity in the horror genre is the castrating woman. Creed uncovers the various aspects of woman as monster in her *Horror and The Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection*, an essay originally published in 1986 — the archaic mother (she gives birth without a father like "the Alien" in *Alien*) whose reproductive womb is monstrous (like the womb-like visual representation of the "Mother" space-ship in *Alien*), she is the vampire and the Medusa who represent the "toothed vagina", she is a witch who has supernatural powers (like the pubescent character in *Carrie* who can move inanimate objects using her mind), her body is possessed by demons (like the pre-pubescent, demon-possessed character of Regan in the original *The Exorcist*), she is the dangerous and deadly castrating mother and woman, like the Mother characters in *Psycho* and *Carrie*.

Creed writes about the myth of the "toothed vagina" and its presence in various ancient cultures. The myth universally suggests that women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas. The women must be tamed before intercourse can happen safely. Their teeth must somehow be removed by a male-hero figure. She further explains the Medusa's entire face is alive with images of toothed vaginas that are about to strike the male victim (Creed, 1993 pp. 105-121).

According to Creed, the male castration anxiety manifests as two different representations of the monstrous-feminine in horror films: firstly, woman as the castrator, and secondly, as the castrated woman. In horror slasher-films, with Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) widely accepted as its prototype, the female characters play both roles. In *Psycho*, the young, thieving woman, Marion Crane, represents the castrated woman: she is slashed by the faceless killer – the Mother. The real source of horror in this film is the castrating Mother, hidden in the shadows of the ominous house but who in effect, does not exist. It brings the question – who is in fact the real monster? It is worth noting that Marion's law-abiding, happily married, victim-like sister – dramatic events seem to occur *to* her, like to the melodrama victim – does not get knifed – she is spared, presumably, for her good behaviour – she is a faithful wife, she does not steal, she is not sexual (Creed, 1993 pp. 139-150).

CHAPTER THREE: REPRESENTING QUEER IDENTITIES

3.1. The Monstrous Queer

The term "queer" nowadays has come to represent all proudly marginalised "others". Anneke Smellik notes this when writing on *Queer Theory* in *The Cinema Book*:

> Away from the notions of oppression and liberation of earlier gay and lesbian criticism, queerness is associated with the playful self-definition in non-essentialist terms. Not unlike camp, but more self-assertive, queer readings are fully inflected with irony, transgressive gender parody and deconstructed subjectivities. (Smelik, 2007 p. 501).

The film *Izinyoka/Snakes* (2018), produced for this research also focuses on a gender non-conformist, or transgender character – Maziya, who is constructed using monstrous queer film theory as a reference point. We first meet Maziya as a transgender woman, but a series of flash-backs – often used in melodramas – show this character as a younger, homosexual male. Maziya's character changes gender throughout the film. Like the monstrous feminine, this type of character is also present in the horror genre.

The typical structure of a horror film[7] is as follows: firstly, it establishes an equilibrium, the "normal", secondly, it disrupts the equilibrium (antagonistic forces threaten the "normal"), lastly, a new equilibrium is established. Robin Wood writes about the antagonistic forces in horror films in his essay, *The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70's* (1986). He defines the monstrous "other," which threatens the hegemonic, heteronormative equilibrium – enter the "monster in the boudoir" or "the other". According to Wood, the other is the person(s), who are viewed by the group, which subscribes to the dominant ideology of their own society, as not belonging, as being different, in some fundamental and unnatural way. The "other" also

[7]This overall structure is followed by most classic narrative films.

stands for characteristics which an individual cannot accept within oneself, therefore the individual tries to suppress/repress them. The only way to resolve this difference between the group and the outsider is to attempt to destroy him/her/them by suppressing/repressing them, or, to assimilate and "normalise" them back as "acceptable". This is similar to the treatment of the transgressive female in the melodrama — she must be "normalised" or entirely eradicated. Wood creates a list of "other" characters in the horror genre:

> 1. **Quite simply, other people.** …
> 2. **Woman**. In a male-dominated culture … woman's autonomy and independence are denied; on to women men project their own innate, repressed femininity in order to disown it as inferior (to be called "unmanly" – i.e., like a woman – is the supreme insult) …
>
> 7. **Deviations from ideological sexual norms – notably bisexuality and homosexuality.** One of the clearest instances of the operation of the repression/projection mechanism, homophobia (the irrational hatred and fear of homosexuals) is only explicable as the product of the unsuccessful repression of bisexual tendencies: what is hated in others is what is rejected (but nonetheless continues to exist) within the self.
>
> 8. **Children**. When we have worked our way through all the other liberation movements, we may discover that children are the most oppressed section of the population (unfortunately, we cannot expect to liberate our children until we have successfully liberated ourselves). Most clearly of all, the otherness of children … is that which is repressed within ourselves, its expression is therefore hated in others. What the previous generation repressed in us, we, in turn, repress in our children, seeking to mould them into replicas of ourselves, perpetuators of a discredited tradition" (Wood, 2012).

As noted by Hayward (and others before her), generic Hollywood stories usually promote heterosexual romance, and any force that threatens to block this "natural" practice must be vilified and portrayed as horrific (or simplified and comical). That is why queer characters in the horror film are either overtly represented as monstrous killers such as "vampires" (*Daughters of Darkness, Interview with a Vampire, The Hunger, The Lost Boys, Cruising, The Talented Mister Ripley, Discopath*), or they are subtly coded as such (*Jason Goes to Hell*, *American Psycho, Fear no Evil, Jeepers Creepers 2*). "Gay" desire, similarly to "female desire", is punished – like the American backpacking character of Josh in *Hostel (2005*). Josh is clearly in love with his male best friend and therefore he soon falls victim to a

serial killer. Harry M. Benshoff writes in his essay *The Monster and the Homosexual,* published in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* collection: “For the better part of cinema’s history, homosexuality on screen has been more or less allusive: it lurks around the edges of texts, rather than announcing itself forthrightly … homosexuality becomes a subtle but undoubtedly present signifier that usually serves to characterise the villain or monster” (Benshoff, 2015 p. 128)**.**

Although mainstream films come with the “preferred reading” of the work, the fragility of concepts such as binary gender allow room for alternative and ironic readings of these texts. This is the intention with the short film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018). On the surface, it is a straight-forward Bioskop type story. Beneath the surface there are hidden, coded messages aimed at the queer audiences such as the use of the name Sheila (which stands for “shit” in South African gay slang).

Another example of this phenomenon is the “camp” or the closeted homosexual readings of films such as the melodramas (and musicals) of the 1940s and 1950s. The queer communities have always celebrated and continue to embrace “drag-queens” (male-female impersonators) and “drag-kings” (female-male impersonators). Like the unruly woman, these types of performances parody the gender-as-masquerade through over-simplified exaggeration. Once a more marginal practice throughout the twentieth century, this ironic cultural phenomenon has now entered the mainstream in a major way – *RuPaul's Drag Race* reality competition television series has enjoyed fourteen successful seasons to date. This suggests that larger sections of society are becoming aware of the fragility of the concept of gender in relation to culture as “natural” and may already be open to seeing and engaging with alternate forms of representations of these cultural experiences in the mainstream media, both internationally and locally.

3.2. Comedy/Satire/Parody

The short film *Izinyoka/Snakes* (2018) is intended as a camp satirical comedy. *Jozi to Kapa* (2013) is also a comedy film, whereas *Plastic Money* (2014) is a melodrama film with some elements of comedy, most notably with reference to Nomsa Buthelezi's over-the-top characterisation of Busi. Like the melodrama, comedy, and more specifically satire is hard to define in academic terms. Melodrama began as a theatrical practice in eighteenth century France and Germany, then spread all over Europe and becoming especially popular in the nineteenth century in Britain. In this section the definitions of comedy and satire are taken from the personal memoir/comedy-rule-book *Comedy Rules, From the Cambridge Footlights to Yes, Prime Minister* (2011) by award-winning British comedy writer, director and actor, Johnathan Lynn. Having spent a large portion of his life creating comedy for stage, television, film, and in literature form, his definitions of this genre are clear, succinct and well-informed. The book consists of a list (one hundred and fifty in total) of rules/ideas/suggestions for comedy-makers and serves as both a theoretical and practical guide. The "unruly" female character of the mother/monster in *Izinyoka/Snakes* (2018), as well as the tone and narrative structure of the film is created based on a selection of some of Lynn's comedy rules and as such in the next section I consider the rules and their implications for the narrative and character choices of the films under discussion.

Lynn's rule number two states that: "Tragedy and farce are two sides of the same coin" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 3-4). He further explains that:

> … tragedy is a drama in which the protagonist initiates a course of events that will lead inevitably to his own destruction. It is driven by the flaws in the protagonist's character. A farce has the same structure: in both genres events spin dangerously out of control, leading eventually to madness, usually followed by a measure of understanding and resolution. (Lynn, 2011 pp. 3-4)

This is similar to the melodrama structure – the conclusion of the story is neat, there is always a resolution, even an unhappy one. The ending of the film *Snakes*/*Izinyoka* (2018) offers a very happy resolution where good triumphs over evil.

Lynn further discusses that in tragedy audiences sympathise with the protagonist, but in comedy they laugh at him/her, as "comedy is objective" and "tragedy is subjective" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 3-4). In *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018), Sheila's character is comical, and the audience may choose to judge her objectively, but her transgender child is rather tragic, therefore, the audience might feel sympathy for her.

The driving force in the comedy story is a "hideous dilemma for one or more of the characters" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 4-5) – no matter how ordinary it may seem to the audience, the "events of the comedy are deadly serious and potentially tragic for the characters" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 5-6). Rule fifteen reads: "The audience laughs because it recognises something truthful", Lynn later elaborates: "within themselves" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 16-17). The short film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) dwells on a topical subject matter – popular religion – which the target audiences should be able to easily identify as familiar.

Lynn continues to say that "vanity, pomposity and hypocrisy are intrinsically funny" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 31-32). He describes satirical comedy as subversive, but also as angry and reactionary, "an outlet for rage", which, similarly to the "unruly woman" character, "attacks the institutions of society" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 42-43) (church, academia, police, politicians, marriage, family). This is the case with *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) – the film arguably critically "attacks" and exposes a certain type of corrupt religious institution and its practices. Lynn continues this thought: "Art is criticism of life, and comedy is criticism by (necessarily cruel) ridicule" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 42-43). There is a level of ridicule towards corrupt characters and acts in *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) – the film is intentionally crude and grotesque at times.

In rule seventy-two Johnathan Lynn identifies the Ten Commandments as the oldest source for comedy inspiration "… as comedy is about breaking of taboos" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 77-79). Therefore, it stands to reason that the "Seven Deadly Sins are present in all comedy" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 77-79). He also believes that being "an outsider" in relation to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, is a benefit to the comedy-maker as outsiders "see the hypocrisy, the lies, the cheating and therefore the comedy" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 96-97).

Sometimes the already-mentioned "hideous dilemma" in comedy can represent itself as fear of exposure: the character is hiding something and is fearful that others might find out what he/she is *really* like (Rule 86). This fear of being found out indeed is what motivates the mother character pastor Sheila in *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) – she shrewdly runs a business which masquerades as a "church".

Lynn also believes that being topical is not important, as human nature does not change, it is constantly topical. This links to his rule one hundred and twenty-nine - "if you want to write something universal, write something specific" (Lynn, 2011 pp. 176-177), implying that culturally specific, but truthfully told stories resonate with a variety of audiences. In *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) the subject matter is universal as it explores the relationship between a mother and her queer child.

Lynn identifies a certain amount of stigma associated with the word "satire" in terms of film and television production as a capitalist business practice – in his experience "satire" can lead to critical acclaim but reduces box-office earnings. This suggests that satire is difficult to define and thus clear academic and generic definitions of it are not easy to formulate. Lynn also debates the commonly held understanding that satire advocates social change through critical evaluation – he proposes that satire is a mere observation of social injustice. This is the intention with the film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) – the subject matter it addresses is social injustice in the form of corrupt religious practice.

When discussing “parody”, Lynn explains that there is no room for character development, as characters are one-dimensional. The mainstream Hollywood cinema rule which demands psychological roundness, or a character arc, does not apply here, as the emphasis is on plot-driven story-structure. This is similar to the melodrama characters who often are reduced to stereotypes, who simply carry out the narrative. This is carried out in *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) as most of the characters are static and purposefully one-dimensional.

Rule 120 states: “Comedies and horror films have something in common” (Lynn, 2011 pp. 160-161). Here Lynn observes how both genres strive to induce an intense and aggressive physical reaction from an audience – a laugh or a scream. *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) features elements of hammy-horror – the intention is to parody the genre with excessive acting and improbable scenarios which are discussed later. Comedy is also similar to the melodrama – both genres use dramatic irony – when the audience knows more than the characters, the funnier or more suspenseful the on-screen action becomes.

3.3. Camp

The comedy/horror *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) film is intended to vibrate on a “camp” frequency – a “sensibility” or “style” often associated with the melodrama, comedy and even horror genres. When not used with reference to the exploring the wilderness, the use of the word “camp” in everyday English describes something or someone as “exaggerated”, “effeminate” and “overly-theatrical”. The first text which attempts to provide a clear philosophical and academic definition of the difficult-to-define concept of “camp” style in the arts was Susan Sontag’s essay *Notes on “Camp”,* which was originally published in 1964.

In this ground-breaking essay, Sontag acknowledges the near impossibility of providing a clear definition of camp as it is a “sensibility” and not a clear-cut “idea” (Sontag,

1964 p. 1). For Sontag, “Camp” is, “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (Sontag, 1964 p. 1). Sontag boldly (and wrongfully) claims that camp is apolitical: “It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical” (Sontag, 1964 p. 1). Sontag suggests that because camp prioritises form, aesthetics and style of theatricality and exaggeration over content, works of art such as opera, furniture or films, which embrace the “camp” aesthetic, are merely frivolous and are produced without political motivation. This theory has been widely discredited by academics, film-theorists and filmmakers and will be discussed in more detail further on.

In terms of camp in relation to gender and sexuality, Sontag further discusses how “androgyny” goes “against the grain of one’s sex” (Sontag, 1964 p. 4) . She describes the beauty of “androgyny” as an exaggeration of the feminine in men and the masculine in women (Sontag, 1964 p. 4). Presumably, here Sontag suggests that “homosexuals” – gay men and lesbian women are the subcultures which eagerly embrace the camp “sensibility”. Sontag writes that “Camp” relishes in:

> … the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms. For obvious reasons, the best examples that can be cited are movie stars. The corny flamboyant female-ness of Jayne Mansfield, Gina Jane Russell, Virginia Mayo; the exaggerated he-man-ness of Steve Reeves, Victor Mature. The great stylists of temperament and mannerism, like Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck, Tallulah Bankhead, Edwige Feuillière. (Sontag, 1964 p. 4)

This could be read as an early version of the female masquerade in the unruly woman theory mentioned in this dissertation earlier.

Broadly speaking, all the afore-mentioned theory refers to the idea that through a combination of psychological identification and distanciation film-audiences are enabled to escape the bounds of reductive societal views of “natural” femininity and masculinity in the context of the discussed genres and stereotypical character portrayals. This enables the viewers to distance themselves from binary-gender stereotypes, allowing them to view

behaviours perceived as “natural” – such as women’s every-day roles merely as “female impersonations”.

Several theorists have attempted to explain the relationship between camp and queer culture, but Sontag acknowledges that while “Camp” is not necessarily “gay”, queer culture has been the most outspoken champion of “Camp”. Throughout her essay, Sontag describes “Camp” as a somewhat elitist and exclusive: “… a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques” (Sontag, 1964 p. 1) . Independent queer filmmaker and author Bruce LaBruce, best known for producing film-work which combines hard-core pornography, radical politics and “art house” style cinema vehemently disagrees with this and several other points made by Sontag. In his *Notes on Camp/Anti-Camp* essay he writes in response to Sontag: “My perhaps idealised conception of camp is that it is, or was, by its very nature political, subversive, even revolutionary, at least in its most pure and sophisticated manifestations … I will argue that now, in this moment, the whole goddamn world is camp.” He continues:

> Camp is now for the masses. It’s a sensibility that has been appropriated by the mainstream, fetishised, commoditised, turned into a commodity fetish, and exploited by a hypercapitalist system ... It still has many of the earmarks of “classic camp” – an emphasis on artifice and exaggeration and the unnatural, a spirit of extravagance, a kind of grand theatricality. It’s still based on a certain aestheticism and stylisation. But what’s lacking is the sophistication, and especially the notion of esotericism, something shared by a group of insiders, or rather, outsiders, a secret code shared among a certain “campiscenti”. Sadly, most of it falls under the category of “Bad Straight Camp. (LaBruce, 2012)

Bruce LaBruce continues to argue that the “Bad Straight Camp” is now normalised by pop-stars and mostly female celebrities like Rihana, Lady Gaga and Beyoncé who have adopted over-the-top visual and stylistic sensibilities but appear to have reduced “camp” to a mere “hooker” look-alike aesthetic which is accompanied by exhibitionistic antics. To LaBruce, these images appear anti-feminist and corporate at their core. It is a creative

challenge to attempt to create a piece of film work such as *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) which attempts to capture a true "camp'" sensibility and style.

For starters, it was imperative to get the casting of the film right. Nomsa Buthelezi is an actor who is not afraid to evoke over-the-top and almost grotesque versions of the female form in terms of both the physical and psychological portrayal of her characters. She is not afraid of showing off and using her sizeable body, adding broad gestures and larger-than-life comedic physicality in her acting work. This bravery as an actor is very much on display in her work playing Busi in *Plastic Money* (2014) (see Appendix 7).

Secondly, the entire visual aesthetic like costume, location and even the high contrast post-production colour grade of the *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) short film, seeks to exaggerate and heighten images, characters and scenarios. I also used some Gayle in the writing of the film – the South African secret gay language, which is only comprehensive to those who speak or understand it – which Ken Gage argues is an integral element of South African "Camp". In his study of the language, *Gayle The Language of Kinks and Queens*, Gage writes that "…Gayle, with its verbal practice of feminisation, parody of the gender system, exaggeration and creativity has always been an integral element of camp" (Gage, 2003 p. 9).

An argument can be made that both *Plastic Money* (2014) and *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) intentionally or unintentionally seek to exaggerate, but the excess in the first might be categorised as "bad straight camp" as per LaBruce's definitions as it feeds into reductive gender stereotypes of women as virgins or whores, men as active and abusive. Mandla N's main source of comedy seems to primarily be reliant on Nomsa Buthelezi's large breasts and body – thus the director relies on "body-shaming" one of the lead actors in his pursuit of easy comedy. A conclusion can be made that the DSTV commissioning bodies are therefore creating an environment which breeds reductive stereotyping in popular story-telling by placing certain rigid expectations on potential film-makers and producers.

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL REREADINGS

4.1. *Plastic Money*

In this chapter when discussing the film *Plastic Money* (2014) I have provided some detailed plot descriptions as the made-for-television production is not easily accessible for viewing, providing some context for the analysis of the work. Mandla N's 2014 Bioskop offering opens with a flash-back. This is a characteristic device of the melodrama genre as discussed earlier. We see two school-girls in uniform walking on a street in a township. Neo's voice over: "The best days of my life, even though Busi used to finish my lunch. But I didn't mind, we did everything together, she was my best friend". Right from the start director/writer Mandla N paints Busi as gluttonous, an eating machine who cannot control herself.

We see Neo's mother taking her by the hand and escorting her into the back of a vehicle with the help of an anonymous man. Mother is holding a blue suitcase, which she loads into the vehicle. She is wearing high-heels, bright yellow trousers and a colourful top. "That's my mother, and that is her ticket out. And as far as nice guys go, he was the worst. But it didn't matter to my mother. She just wanted to see herself out of the township". Mother and the man climb into the vehicle, the engine starts. "That's the day I left my best friend. I still remember the look in her eyes … Busi Dube". In a close-up, we see young Busi waving her friend, Neo, goodbye in slow motion as the car drives away. "My mom consoled me and said we're moving to a better life, a new big house, multi-racial school. I'll even have my own bedroom". The camera pans left and we see the small humble township houses from above. Neo's voice-over continues: "But the better life didn't last long and mama was not willing to move back to the township. So we moved to the next stepdad". In a wide shot, young Neo is led by her mother into a house. They are escorted by another anonymous man, who is carrying the blue suitcase. He opens the door, Mother and Neo enter. "He seemed promising but it all ended when his wife came back. We left as quick as we arrived. On to the next, my

mom was a fighter, determined to keep her new status". Another wide shot reveals young Neo and colourfully dressed mother who are led by yet another man down another suburban road. The man is carrying the suitcase. Neo's voice-over quotes her mother: "Shame they won't bring me down, God gave me beauty". A new wide shot shows a new suburban road, Neo, mother and a new man walking. "Every stepdad came with a new address. Mom got new shoes, and they put me into a new private school, where I just didn't fit in."

The screen dips to black, then an establishing shot reveals grown up Neo carrying the blue suitcase and mother now wearing simple clothes arriving at uncle's shabby looking, tiny house. "As, time went, so did her looks, and so did her better life. So here we are, back to the hood". Mother greets her brother reluctantly as the women walk into the house. The mean looking uncle takes a sip of his beer.

This opening sequence clearly establishes the film's stance in terms of the roles of, and the relationships between, women, men, children and setting. The township is a form of female prison, which women are desperate to escape from. This theme develops further in the story. As established in Hayward's definition of genre – there is a clear distinction/difference between men and women. Men are active – they drive cars, open doors, make choices. In this case they are also unreliable and abusive. Women need assistance from men – Neo's mother cannot get out of the township without a man, "her ticket out". Women do not earn a living – their primary roles are as wife/partner and mother/caregiver who stays at home. Neo's mother never attempts to find a job, rather she seduces men to secure the position of someone's wife/girlfriend/partner.

As per the melodrama definitions established above, women may attempt to escape from the home (prison/township) and seek a "better life", but this behaviour is '"unnatural", therefore they are forced to return (or they will be punished in some way). Neo's mother

attempts to stay out of the township countless times and tries to maintain “her new status”, but ultimately finds herself back in the “hood”, looking older, plain and defeated.

As the melodrama formula dictates, Neo is established as a suffering child/heroine, events occur to her, there are forces – her mother’s choices – and circumstances which she has no control over – “… they put me into a new private school, where I just didn’t fit in.” As per the female masquerade definitions by Hayward, some female characters put on an ultra-feminine, exaggerated female mask/persona in order to seduce/control the men around them. Neo’s mother is given “beauty” by God which she uses to manipulate every new “stepdad”, every time she meets a new man she “got new shoes”, she always wears colourful clothes and big hair in order to find her next man/partner. She finally loses all control/agency/power because “… as time went, so did her looks”.

Neo’s mother is also punished for acting “loose”, she is a “whore” and uses her sexuality to manipulate men. As punishment for this the narrative of the film forces her to return “home” to a very small house, her prison, which is shared with her abusive and drunk brother. There she returns to her “natural” role as caregiver as per the melodrama genre expectations. In the opening shot Busi takes Neo’s lunch and eats it. The film immediately establishes Busi’s character as a greedy glutton, she has a taste for excess, which will grow as the plot evolves. This out-of-control flaw in her character will lead to her own, and everyone else’s, downfall. Men have agency, but they are also deceitful liars who cheat, drink and abuse.

Next, we see Neo (Tumi Masemola) doing some washing outside her new humble home, her uncle sitting in the background, drunk, hurling abuse at her. Neo’s voice-over explains: “For the first time I understand why mom was so desperate to get out of the township. I’ve only been back one day, but I am also desperate”. Here the film establishes

this character as an oppressed melodrama victim. Her prison is the home and the township itself.

Hoping to find her long-lost friend Busi (Nomsa Buthelezi), Neo arrives at the house. Busi's mother tells Neo that Busi does not live there anymore "… and I don't want to see her … She must stay there".

"Hello … do you know where Busi lives?" Neo asks around. "Busi, the chubby lady? Around the corner", a random man says. "I guess she is still big", concludes Neo. Again, the character's body size is used in the pursuit of comedy.

Busi happily welcomes her long-lost friend into her neat and tidy shack: "Have a seat, I thought you were one of those ladies who come here to finish my food. Have some chips", says Busi as she takes out a foam-polystyrene box, which she has hidden under some decorative scatter-cushions. Although this is a minor incident, it is the first glimpse the film offers into Busi's darker side – she is sneaky, she can conceal the truth. She is also greedy as she does not want to share her "chips". This is also reminiscent of Nomsa Buthelezi's character in *Izinyoka/Snakes* (2018) who hides serious "skeletons" in her closet and she will stop at nothing to keep them locked-up in there.

Busi explains to Neo that she is getting physically bigger because her "stress" drives her to eating. She appears to be unable to control her appetite, her speech is "excessive in quantity" – she eagerly shows off her material possessions like the "Home choice" bed-linen and flat screen TV to the silent Neo. In this scene Busi is large and excessive, over-the-top and high-energy, unable to stop eating and talking, she makes jokes about herself – she is the funny unruly woman as per Kathleen Rowe's definitions. As Neo notices: "My friend hasn't changed. She still talks a lot and eats just as much". Busi is also a devoted and loving mother to the disabled Thabo. Her partner Douglas has left her because he refuses to believe that he fathered a disabled child, presumably this is causing her "stress". "Come let's go to town,

get our hair done". Neo agrees. Again, Busi wants to exaggerate her already over-the-top, eternally-pregnant, ultra-feminine appearance.

After Busi has done her hair, she takes Neo to visit the infamous car-wash owner Bra Oupa – "If there's anything one needs, he's the man with the plan", Neo's voice explains. While waiting for Bra Oupa at the car wash, Busi describes to an unnamed featured female character that she is wearing the same hair as Beyoncé. Again, she actively draws attention to her over-the-top physical appearance, in this case her new hairstyle. Bra Oupa appears to explain to Busi that the "things" she wishes to sell through him are not moving, people are not buying. He offers her two hundred rand – to buy herself "a snack". Busi is horrified, presumably because "a snack" is not enough. At this point it can be concluded that Busi cannot survive alone as a woman in the township, she needs men like her former boyfriend/partner, Douglas, or the Bra Oupa character to help her manage her life.

Next Busi and Neo are seen in a clothing store in a shopping mall. Busi is excited by all the bright "summer colours" and fashion styles, again displaying an insatiable appetite for all kinds of things, always eager to exaggerate and show off her physique. Neo runs into a former schoolmate at the store who comments on how "fat" Busi is. Again, I argue that this is another moment of "bad straight camp" as it is a cheap shot at humour with reference to Nomsa Buthelezi's "excessive" body and behaviour.

It turns out that Busi and the manager of the clothing store Claudine have been running an illegal scheme. Busi, with Claudine's help, has been stealing clothes from the store and then selling them through Bra Oupa to his many contacts. After they get caught Busi is thrown out of the shop followed by the innocent Neo. Claudine is fired on the spot.

Busi visits her boyfriend at work. Chipembe is a waiter in a coffee-shop/restaurant upstairs in the same mall. Busi is hysterical, she asks Chipembe for money. He attempts to chase her out, offering her five rand. Busi is offended: "What do you get from me? What do

you get from me?". This is the first time Busi's sexuality is overtly referenced. As Kathleen Rowe identifies in her cluster of characteristics which describe the unruly comical woman, she may be "loose" or "a whore". In this case Busi implies that what she "gives" Chipembe is worth more than five rand. Unable to control herself, she steals handfuls of free-of-charge sweets as Chipembe attempts to stop her.

Exhausted from walking on foot around town, the three women jump at the opportunity when offered a lift from a male stranger driving a vehicle. He requests that Claudine, who is coloured[8] , sits in front in the passenger seat next to him. "I learnt very quickly that men go gaga over Claudine's yellow skin", Neo's voice-over clarifies as the car drives on. "It explained why she was so rough and disrespectful. She always had to defend herself against these stupid vultures". After a few attempts from the driver to reach under Claudine's skirt, she grabs the man's fingers and twists them violently. He screams in pain and abruptly stops the vehicle. The women run out. "This idiot reminded me why I hate men, just because he gave us a lift he thinks he can take advantage", Neo's voice continues. Claudine hits the man's face with an empty water bottle. "Claudine, don't fight, be a lady", says Neo to the angry Claudine as she pulls her away from the driver. The three friends are left stranded in the township, they have no money, their characters have no agency within the parameters of the story. "The three of us were ordinary girls drawn together by our broken dreams", concludes Neo's voice.

In this scene Claudine's character can be analysed as a softer version of the castrating female – Bioskop films are aimed strictly at family audiences and graphic violence is not permitted on the channel. She becomes angry and performs an act of violence at the random male character. In Neo's words, when she is aggressive, Claudine is no longer a proper "lady", she has stepped out of line because she is aggressive, angry, she fights back, ready

[8] A common South African term used with reference to people of mixed race and origin

to break the man's fingers off. The scene again shows the fundamental differences between the male and female characters in the Bioskop melodrama: men are independent and have agency, money, houses, businesses, they drive cars, they openly express their sexual desires. Women are dependent on men, they are long suffering victims and if they act out of "character" they are somewhat negatively portrayed as ridiculous comical caricatures, or as violent and frightening.

The real turning point in the story is the moment when Neo confesses to Busi and Claudine that she has stolen the stranger's wallet. So far Neo's character has not taken any real actions to escape her personal symbolic prison. This finding kicks off an action-packed second act of the film. The wallet is the key to the women's freedom as this is their initial access to money. They buy good quality clothing, which they sell through Bra Oupa. This initial success leads them to develop a bigger appetite for stealing and they engage further in petty crime. They develop a complex system of "tricks" which allows them to steal many wallets from strangers who are always men. They further recruit a network of friends who assist them in figuring out the security pins of the credit cards found inside the wallets. These cards ultimately end up in Bra Oupa's possession.

Suddenly the three main characters are empowered and are given some agency within the story. They take action, even though it is criminal, they are happy, energetic and upbeat as they go about their "business". They are even able to borrow a vehicle from Bra Oupa and thus they can move around the township freely. Although ultimately the women need a man to succeed in their illicit business – Bra Oupa – they become relatively independent (see Appendix 2, Figure – 8).

As they gradually become more and more successful with their illicit business venture, their wardrobe and wig collections grow. They are presented visually as colourful, dressed in bright and "sexy" and over-the-top fashions. Their female personae are physically

exaggerated in terms of wardrobe design and styling. They also become bold in their actions, they are flirtatious, using sexual suggestion to charm, manipulate and control men like Bra Oupa.

But as the Lokshin Bioskop melodrama formula dictates these women can go on an exciting journey, but the fun must end. The women briefly enjoy the taste of relative freedom from the oppressive patriarchal society in which they live, but their behaviour is transgressive, unnatural, unladylike, and in this case criminal. Therefore, these female characters get severely punished in the third act of *Plastic Money* (2018).

Claudine's drug-addict boyfriend Errol, who is abusive and unemployed, finds out that she has lost her job awhile back. Furious, he beats her. She runs to safety but eventually Errol manages to get her arrested (see Appendix 2, Figure 9). Once in jail, Claudine is understandably distressed. She then tragically dies from a drug overdose. This is a jarring turn in the plot as it is inconsistent with the portrayal of Claudine's character so far – in this edit of *Plastic Money* (2014) it was never suggested that she used to use or currently uses drugs. Errol is also jailed for drug possession.

Unable to control her greed and insatiable appetites, Busi starts stealing from her friends too. Neo finds this out and this discovery puts tremendous strain on their friendship. Neo decides to distance herself from the relationship, although Busi promises to pay her friend back. Busi totally unravels when her beloved child Thabo is taken away from her – it is not made clear why or by whom – yet another plot-hole. Neo finds Busi in a terrible state – she is crying, she is drunk, she is screaming, she is out of control. Here she is seen as a different incarnation of the unruly woman – excessively emotional, hysterical, abusive, sweaty, dirty, unable to control her tears (bodily fluids), she has lost all sex-appeal, her feminine mask is down, she has become a repulsive monster, a hag (see Appendix 2, Figure 10).

A more extreme image of this out-of-control female body in a Mzansi Bioskop film is the case of Khanyi Mbau (as Khanyi Mbau) in Mandla N's earlier Bioskop offering *Jozi to Kapa* (2013). Khanyi finds herself on a long drive to Cape Town with two random strangers – a broke student and his "nerdy" friend from college. At some point the trio stop to get some food, in this case curry from an Indian owned shop. After the meal the three are back on the road. Suddenly all three urgently need to go to the toilet. They stop the car and defecate in a nearby field. The over-the-top scene is adorned with plenty of sound effects, as well as a stereotypical comical musical score, presumably to enhance the hilarity. The scene favours Khanyi – shots lovingly linger on her squatting in the grass. This rather extreme image shows an unruly woman who *"… is associated with dirt, liminality (thresholds, borders, or margins), taboo"* (Rowe, 1995 pp. 41-42) . As per Kathleen Rowe's definitions, Khanyi Mbau's body here becomes grotesque, as she is unable to conceal or control its bodily functions. If anything, those functions are highly exaggerated through the use of sound effects. It can further be speculated that the Khanyi Mbau real-life persona is somewhat of an unruly woman as she is able to make fun of her fictional self. This is yet another extreme example of "bad straight camp" – the crude image of a sophisticated glamour princess squatting in an open field (see Appendix 2, Figure 11 to 13).

The real beginning of the end in *Plastic Money* (2014) is when Busi, unable to control her grief, confesses to all crimes and she is arrested and thrown in prison. The evidence provided by Busi leads to more arrests and the eventual imprisonment of Bra Oupa. These narrative conclusions are stereotypical, neat and typical for the mainstream melodrama films. Good triumphs over evil as criminal behaviour is stopped and the guilty parties are punished, as per Marcantonio's afore-mentioned preoccupation of melodramas with convenient moral conclusions.

Neo is anxious and on the run. She is hitchhiking. She manages to hail down a random vehicle and jumps in it. The vehicle drives off into the distance in a long shot. In the foreground we see barbed-wire-fencing almost closing in on the getaway car in the distance. Neo's voice-over suggests that she will be caught too. "I didn't make it very far. As clichéd as it may sound, the law will always find you", she says, although we never see her get caught.

The image of the hitchhiker on the run in the last scene of *Plastic Money* (2014) is very similar to the image of another hitchhiking woman in a Mandla N's production - *Jozi to Kapa* (2013) where the lead female character of Khanyi Mbau who, as discussed above, is ironically played by Khanyi Mbau. Looking glamorous in a pink dress, high-heels, big hat, scarf, carrying a huge gold bag full of stolen money, she hails down a vehicle on a random, out-of-town road. She too is a thief on the run, chased by oppressive patriarchy in the form of a male policeman and a suspicious Nigerian man whose money she has stolen. It is almost as if Neo's exit in *Plastic Money* (2014) is Khanyi Mbau's entrance in *Jozi to Kapa* (2013). Similarly, Nomsa Buthelezi's character Busi in *Plastic Money* (2014) is jailed, but Nomsa appears in a female prison as Slender – referencing her large body again – in Mandla N's recent Mzansi series *Lockdown*. Similar to Busi's painful loss of her beloved son Thabo that drives her to unravel emotionally, the "crazy" Slender in *Lockdown* carries a blanket like an infant, believing it is a baby she once lost. These narrative examples show the progression and similarities in terms of themes which run through Mandla N's body of work.

The character of Tyson in Mandla's series *Lockdown* could be interpreted as Claudine's reincarnation after her death in *Plastic Money* (2014). Claudine is coloured, angry, aggressive and violent, not afraid to physically hurt a man. Tyson is an evolved and further developed version of Claudine. "Uncle" Tyson is a coloured hyper-masculine lesbian who is very aggressive, violent and dangerous. Tyson dominates and intimidates the rest of the inmates and even rapes several of the female prisoners.

It can be concluded that the Bioskop offering *Plastic Money* (2014) is a typical Mzansi Bioskop melodrama as it does adhere to the prescribed formula in various ways. The plot does "… revolve around universal themes, love versus hate, good versus evil, betrayal, family conflict, ambition, revenge", featuring "memorable, authentic characters, including humorous characters", exploring "social realism" and "the black experience". *Plastic Money* (2014) is "… a sensational piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events" which have an emotional appeal. The narrative is constructed around "complications, surprise twists and unraveling in-between plots". Both *Plastic Money* (2014) and *Jozi to Kapa* (2013) rely heavily on South African stereotypes in terms of plot structure and character construction. Both stories are populated by predictable and what some might find offensive and over-simplified characters – a deviant Zulu policeman, a criminal who is Nigerian, a "book-worm" student led astray by a street-wise friend who is broke, violent coloured people who use drugs, a big-bodied woman from the township who is "loose", single black mothers, drunk and abusive men, black men involved in crime, the greedy "gold-digger" Khanyi Mbau, the Indian man who owns a shop which only sells curry, religious Afrikaans farmers and so forth.

The Bioskop production *Plastic Money* (2014) is excessive in its visual style, comedy, characters and situations and therefore it can be viewed as camp. However, it lacks sophistication in its stereotypical character portrayal and predictable narrative construction and therefore a conclusion can be made that it fits into Bruce LaBruce's "bad straight camp" category as per the filmmaker's above discussed definitions.

4.2. Izinyoka/Snakes

As mentioned above the short film *Izinyoka/Snakes* (2018) was intentionally created using the formula prescribed by the Lokshin Bioskop DSTV channel. The film is also intended as a critical intervention into the Bioskop melodrama genre, resisting and challenging some existing narrative formulae and character stereotypes. The project was thus an attempt to illustrate how new and exciting local television stories may be told in ways which go beyond the existing formula. The film does adhere to the overall melodramatic and comedic narrative structure sought by the channel, but deviates dramatically in its use of a queer camp comedic style and over-the-top kitsch sensibilities, with a mixture of hammy mock-horror, using current but taboo subject matter like the critical examination of religious practices in South Africa. The film does not strictly adhere to generic and reductive gender stereotypes as it features weak men, a dominant woman and a queer/gender-fluid main character – Maziya. *Izinyoka/Snakes* (2018) can be further read as a deviation from the commissioning bodies prescriptions because it portrays gay sex somewhat explicitly. This does go directly against the channel's aim to produce television for family audiences only and is something that is further explored in the discussion below.

4.2.1. Producing the characters

The short film *Izinyoka/Snakes* (2018) produced for this research project is based on one of the more popular narratives covered by South African media in the past few years: the questionable methods used by some Christian pastors to fight demonic possession in their congregants. Another suspicious practice is the act of testing the congregants' faith through the performance of cruel and inhumane procedures. Regularly, the South African public is exposed to yet another image or news story of a pastor feeding congregants snakes, spraying insect poison in their faces, feeding them liquid soap or dog food, and even sexually

abusing them. An article published in 2017 on ewn.co.za titled *Commission calls for religious leader regulation* reads as follows: “Several pastors have made headlines in recent months for using dangerous methods, such as spraying Doom, [an insecticide], on congregants” (Kubheka, 2017). For me, the central debate is the question: who is the monster? The man spraying Doom in a person’s face, or the victim of the demonic possession? Not surprisingly, there have been recent calls for regulation of religious leaders, as stated in the same article:

> JOHANNESBURG - The CRL Rights Commission has recommended that all religious practitioners operating in South Africa either be registered or face prosecution. The commission has released its report into the commercialisations of religion and abuse of belief systems... The CRL Rights Commission says the religious sector must be regulated and operate within the law (Kubheka, 2017).

The character of pastor Sheila in the short film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018), produced for this dissertation is a fictional imagining of a villainous female pastor who is large, greedy, abusive and vile. This character is portrayed by the afore-mentioned Mzansi channel favourite actor, Nomsa Buthelezi. Sheila is initially introduced as the protagonist but as the narrative develops this character evolves into the antagonist. She embodies the characteristics of the funny female rebel, namely the carnivalesque, grotesque, excess and dominance. It is important to note that this representation relies on the tropes of comic relief based on these characteristics. The film does not attempt to challenge this but rather re-instates the status quo and the principles of the rebellious unruly woman, as defined by Kathleen Rowe above. However, a speculation can be made that as a comedic actor, Buthelezi prevents spectators from potentially “body-shaming” her. Like the popular Australian comedic actress Rebel Wilson, Buthelezi often uses her physicality as a source of comedy and thus signals to the viewer that she is in control of, as well as, the proud owner of this large body. In both the *Plastic Money* (2014) and *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) works she repeatedly makes specific choices when it comes to physical characterisation and comedy – she crudely grabs her

breasts – making spectators aware that she, the actor, understands the visual power of her own body on camera.

In terms of narrative, the film firstly establishes an equilibrium, detailing the world of the antagonist, Doctor pastor Sheila as a larger than life, in-charge and in-control character who runs a charismatic church and an evangelical television production company. Doctor pastor Sheila is both the unruly funny woman and a castrating female/mother – her personality and body are big, her speech is excessive, she dominates all other characters in the story. Aesthetically the production design constructs this excess: her clothes and styling are ultra-feminine, exaggerating her bosom through a revealing *décolletage*. She wears false nails, eyelashes, a wig and red lipstick. While she gives a sermon live during the broadcast of *The Sheila Hour*, a pair of anonymous hands jump into the frame and begin fixing up her wig, thus drawing attention to it. Always intending to control situations and people, Sheila barks in isiZulu to the owner of the hands who remains offscreen: "You must do your job!"

Referencing the broader social context and instances described earlier, pastor Sheila is a villainous and corrupt religious leader. She is greedy; her main interest is financial gain. Doctor pastor Sheila and her "toy-boy" or "Ben-ten[9]" partner run a charismatic church – The Sheila Ministry – and together they produce a television programme – *The Sheila Hour* – from their production company Sheila TV. The use of these names is intended as intentionally-ironic – aimed at queer viewers who have some knowledge of the secret gay South African language *Gayle*. This exclusive language was used by homosexual men in South Africa during times when gay men had to remain closeted and hidden in order to avoid persecution and punishment by law. The language consists of code words and phrases which represent something else other than their literal meaning. As mentioned above *Gayle* is also linked to the adjective or notion of camp in a uniquely South African context.

[9] South African slang term describing young male lovers or 'toy-boys'

The word “Sheila” in the *Gayle* language context is code for the word “shit”. Therefore, “Doctor pastor Sheila” becomes “Doctor pastor Shit”, “The Sheila Ministry” becomes “The shit Ministry” and so forth. Like the duality in Sheila’s personality – her angelic public persona verses her closeted and evil true-self – her name has a dual meaning – one is simply a common female name, but the other reveals the true nature of her character. This use of code-speak may enhance some in-the-know spectators experience, but it does not hinder the overall narrative reading for audiences who are not privy to this joke.

It is clear from the beginning of the film that it is not actually a real ministry, but rather a money-making scam. Using her celebrity status and her public presence as a television personality, pastor Sheila and her staff produce and sell a “healing”, “miracle” face cream, which is clinically tested on snakes and sold on mass to naïve congregants and fans. *The Sheila Hour* is not a straight-forward sermon, it is in fact an infomercial, produced to promote Sheila’s products and ultimately to make Sheila a very wealthy person. The version which pastor Sheila presents of herself publicly on television is in stark contrast with the “real” version of Sheila who is a shrewd and avaricious businesswoman. Unlike her child Maziya who is “out of the closet” and living as an openly queer individual, Sheila is “in the closet”. Like Busi in *Plastic Money* (2014), Sheila is a greedy glutton – she is greedy both financially as well in terms of the size of her fame and adoration. She rejoices when confronted with her own growing online following.

Sheila conceals the truth and closely guards her secrets. Maziya threatens to oust Sheila from this “closet” and expose her as a “self-obsessed blesser”[10] in the media. In turn, Sheila will stop at nothing to keep her skeletons in the closet. She is even willing to accept her queer child and “make a real family” by re-packaging Maziya as “a real woman”.

[10] “Blesser” within a South African slang context refers to a “sugar daddy” type character https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=blesser.

Sheila is a mother – the inciting incident is the moment when the narrative equilibrium is disturbed as her long-lost child Maziya appears unexpectedly. She offers Maziya the finances needed for gender re-orientation surgeries as a form of bribery, therefore enabling her child's castration and as such she becomes the castrating woman and mother.

Conceptually she embodies characteristics of the monstrous-feminine as her voluptuous, inside-out body is grotesque and out of control – she vomits when she realises her child is now a transgender woman, she passes gas when chasing Maziya into the snake pit, she engages in sexual intercourse with her business partner and eventually dies, foaming at the mouth. She often fails to control her bodily functions and her physical body. She is the extreme version of the unruly woman as her character and physicality are associated with liminality, dirt, filth. She is also an *Uber* Mother who seems to have conceived and birthed Maziya without a father, as no such is mentioned in the narrative.

Sheila is a Medusa as her cosmetics laboratory which produces a "miracle healing face cream" is populated by snakes, which she claims to use for clinical testing of the product. She is a woman, but she is the owner and manager of a den of aggressive phallic snakes. The inside of this mysterious laboratory or snake pit is never shown in the film. It is hidden behind a closed door, it is a secret, like the secret skeletons Sheila hides in her own closet – her "monstrous" queer child, her past history, her true motives, her "other" self. When the phallic snakes eventually escape from their closet which is the cosmetic laboratory, they conveniently attack, bite, penetrate, strangle and eventually kill all the characters who have performed villainous acts in the story. This is intentionally done as per the film's ironic formulaic adherence.

Doctor pastor Sheila can be read as the female "witch" – she claims that the lotions and potions concocted in her cosmetic department possess special magical and miracle healing powers. She wears a black dress, like the black cloak reminiscent of the traditional

image of an evil witch. It must be noted that witches are also associated with “unruly” ugly old hags, crones, she-devils, as Rowe mentions in her definition of the “unruly woman” already discussed.

With regards to the representation of queer identities and experiences in the film, dialogue assists in its development. For instance, in the dialogue between Sheila’s Partner and Maziya, it becomes clear that she was originally assigned as male at birth. In high-school Sheila discovers that Maziya (then “he”) is a homosexual – Sheila walks in on him engaging in anal sex with a male school-mate. Presently Maziya is living as a transgender woman who needs funding to complete her gender re-orientation surgeries. She threatens mother Sheila with blackmail. The filmic intention here is to initially present Maziya’s character as a deviant queer villain, as he/she disturbs the peace of Sheila’s orderly world. Maziya is Doctor pastor Sheila’s biggest skeleton hidden inside her closet and now the skeleton is out.

As the plot progresses however, this character will become the melodramatic suffering victim of Sheila’s cruelty as the audience is gradually manipulated to become increasingly more sympathetic towards Maziya as she develops into a well-rounded and multi-dimensional character. Maziya’s actions are motivated and justified, her character clearly psychologically complex. This is an attempt to engage with the narrative conventions of the genre as stipulated, whilst simultaneously promoting elements of resistance that allow audiences to renegotiate their expectations as spectators. Taking into consideration the order of the events as presented in the *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) narrative, Maziya’s character is gender-fluid: we first meet her, then in a series of flash-backs she becomes a homosexual male teenager. At the conclusion of the story Maziya becomes herself again. This is another instance in which aspects of queer theory, identity and politics are depicted on screen even though they are presented through the framework and demands of the genre.

As for representing female characters within the genre, the film further attempts to engage and experiment with the formulaic genre stereotypes available. Pastor Sheila is surrounded by various staff members at the Sheila Ministry production house who are at her beck and call. Her male lover – played by Luzuko Nteleko is also her personal assistant, accountant, staff-member, sex-toy or "Ben-ten", an all-round slave. This supporting character is not given a name, as he is dominated/emasculated/castrated by his boss and lover Sheila. Although he is a man, he does not propel the action of the film as per film clichè, rather, the story is driven by the women around him. Actor Luzuko Nteleko's silhouette is in contrast to Nomsa Buthelezi's. He is slender and reads slightly effeminate next to Nomsa's large presence and frame. He speaks gently and softly and this is in stark contrast with Sheila's need to speak excessively. This further underlines their character relations in terms of traditional reductive gender roles – she dominates him, he has been symbolically castrated by her. Throughout the film his actions only benefit pastor Sheila and her well-being. He sells the "miracle healing face cream" on the telephone to callers – the pastor's adoring public. When he announces to Sheila that she is making serious amounts of money through tele-sales she rewards him with sex. In other words, she controls his body, his penis, his erections, his "natural" bodily functions, ultimately the elements traditionally associated with masculinity on film.

He is also tasked with protecting Sheila's wealth. His conversation with the disgruntled – also unnamed – female singer who is to perform on Sheila's television programme reveals that she has not received her performance fees for previous appearances on *The Sheila Hour*. He "ducks and dives", avoiding making the due payment. Sheila is thus painted as an unfair employer, a cruel and exploitative capitalist who avoids making payment to employees. This scene is also a loving tribute to all those freelance professionals working in the South African film and television industries who have had a similar experience –

completing a job but somehow finding themselves unpaid by ruthless producers. Like the use of the *Gayle* language, this joke is exclusive, aimed at viewers who are in the know, however this does not hinder audience enjoyment for spectators who are not aware of this unfortunate industry practice.

Finally, when the viscous killer-serpents accidentally escape from the laboratory where Sheila's "miracle healing face cream" is produced and begin murdering everyone at the television studios, the Partner attempts to rescue Sheila. He tries grabbing and pulling at the snakes attacking her, but the film itself does not allow him any agency – even when he attempts to take action, he is brutally strangled by the out-of-control serpents. This was a deliberate choice, aiming to paint a male character who does not take any action at all, the story simply happens to and around him. In this way the film offers an alternative to the generic spectator expectations in terms of gender representations. This conclusion is neat and tidy as "evil" characters are punished, whereas the "good" character, the victim – Maziya – escapes, thus keeping the typical melodramatic structure firmly in place. The ending was intentionally over-simplified "tongue-in-cheek" style, spoofing this narrative tradition.

Another element of this experimentation is evidenced in the two lead female characters. The characters of Maziya and Sheila both demonstrate extreme duality – Maziya is female and male, good and bad; whilst Sheila puts on her angelic mask to conceal the ugly monster that she is. To further accentuate this theme of the societally enforced binary views on good and bad, innocent and evil, male and female, as well as the performativity aspects of identity, some of the actors in the film play two different roles. This was a carefully considered choice and is intended to confuse the spectator. Kevin Narain plays one of Sheila's assistants and herpetologist at the healing cream factory, but later-on he appears in a flash-back as Maziya's sexual and life-partner. Robert Whitehead appears as a smartly dressed "blesser" giving away gifts to the boys in the flash-back, but flash-forward he

becomes a stereotype of a "dirty old man" who attempts to buy sex from a distressed Maziya. Patricia Boyer initially appears as a frumpy floor manager at Sheila TV, but later-on becomes the posh and unsympathetic Advocate Diana who is on a telephone call to Maziya. The audience is not offered any indication of how to interpret this narrative and character development aspect. The actors who appear in dual roles are not very well disguised in the second part they play. These choices designed to alienate audiences further underline the theme that the film explores which suggests that people merely perform their roles and identities in society in terms of gender, profession, race, sexual orientation, age, family position[11] and so forth.

The film uses a queer camp aesthetic in terms of its overall heightened stylistic choices. Straight after the title "Izinyoka" disappears from the screen, the audience is thrown into a vortex of kitschy tributes to charismatic-style television, including images of "bad" chroma-key compositing, showing both Sheila and the gospel singer performing in front of flashy animations. Again, these jokes are somewhat exclusive – technically "bad" television might be more amusing to television and film practitioners who are "in the know" when it comes conventions and techniques. The film itself follows mainstream South African television conventions by subtitling all dialogue – including English – in English. I note that further discussions may be held on what constitutes "good" and "bad" visual conventions in television and these definitions may be challenged, but this is not the nature of discussion in this dissertation.

Like her portrayal of Busi in *Plastic Money* (2014), Nomsa Buthelezi's performance in *Izinyoka/Snakes* (2018) is heightened, over-the-top and it borders on excessive. Sheila is energetic and uses broad gestures and facial expressions. By comparison all other actors'

[11] German dramatist Bertolt Brecht is credited with employing a variety of alienation techniques in his plays which were aimed at destroying the illusion of "reality" for the audience, therefore enabling viewers to be critically engaged with the performance they are presented with https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bertolt-Brecht

performances are subtle and nuanced. Sheila constantly demands attention from the characters around her, she is immune to their feelings, needs, desires. Buthelezi's performance comes across as a spoof which slips into mockery of Mzansi melodrama conventions, perhaps even referencing the performance style she is typically expected to deliver for mainstream film and television.

WITS Film and Television Division is the perfect visual location for the *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) film. The multi-cam studio is equipped with dated-looking machinery like cameras and vision-mixing desks. This creates an-other-worldly atmosphere and it makes a cheeky reference to the theme of low-budget, technically "bad" television production practices, further suggesting that this is indeed "Sheila" TV.

As the melodrama formula dictates *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) is mostly set firmly in one location. The interior of the Sheila Studios and the Sheila Ministry Cosmetics Department – WITS Film and Television Department – is where the television programme is conceived and broadcast from. Sheila's miracle lotions and potions are also produced and sold from there. This is a place where conception, creation and birth occur. The space and its architecture – a long central passage and several spaces on either side of it – are visually reminiscent of the human female reproductive system as taught through diagrams to young people in school. This similarity between the television studios architecture and a diagram of the female reproductive system is over-emphasised in a scene in the film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) where the characters are seen chasing one another, screaming in panic, while the camera remains locked-off and dead-center in a wide shot observing the long passage. The characters run up and down, left and right, in and out of the frame like frantic sperm searching for an egg. Again, this is a tribute to the cinematic cliché of "slapstick" comic film-conventions – the scene can be either viewed for what it is – characters chasing and running away from something or someone, or a spoof of this visual convention.

The dark and stifling interior of the Sheila Studios visually oppresses the Maziya character. This is the space where mother Sheila keeps tight control over those around her and this is accentuated in the framing and composition of the film's shots. When Maziya finds him-or-herself in the outside world – depending on which state the character is in at that point in the plot – the character is granted more agency and freedom. This is representative of the typical melodramatic conflict between the interior world of repression and restriction of movement associated with the feminine world and the outside world which represents male freedom and ability to take action.

Although the film resists some formulaic representations it does not challenge classic cinematic narrative techniques – the shooting, editing and acting styles mostly adhere to the widely accepted continuity filmmaking practices of seamless story-telling. The narrative does follow a cause and effect logic. In terms of music, I intentionally used predictable and clichéd library music, emphasizing and spoofing the predictability of a formulaic narrative.

There is a recurring device used in the post-production of the film which is not in line with seamless continuity and is intended to alienate spectators, forcing them to actively engage with the subject matter they are confronted with. At several points in the narrative while a character is in frame the colour-grading switches from "normal" to x-ray vision. As the character is seen briefly in this jarring way, a snake-hissing sound can be heard. This implies that the character onscreen hides a different persona underneath the surface they are projecting outwardly – when x-rayed they reveal themselves as evil snakes. Characters continually hide their true intentions and real faces behind masks. The x-ray treatment is only applied to villainous characters and not to the melodramatic victim Maziya.

5. Conclusion

The melodrama is a popular genre around the world. It primarily focuses on the female, the marginalised, the family, the victims of patriarchy and their dreams, needs, desires. It is usually set within the domestic sphere, associated with women and children. This genre is found in every national cinema, reaching all corners of the world through Hollywood domination. In each region the melodrama has been adapted within different local cultures and infused with regional flavours, evolving into a country/region-specific unique version of itself.

In a South African context, the melodrama currently finds its home primarily on television in the form of episodic daily dramas, telenovelas, series or stand-alone films. The Mzansi Bioskop DSTV channel commissions and broadcasts local melodramas around the clock. These melodramas are produced following strict guide-lines which are enforced by the commissioning editors and channel. These guide-lines impose reductive stereotypical representations in terms of character and narrative constructions upon the filmmakers. This dissertation is a critical investigation into the Bioskop melodrama formula and its simplistic approach towards television story-telling. I argue that this "cookie-cutter" approach towards filmmaking could potentially stifle the growth of a truly unique national cinema, not allowing room for creative experimentation, failure and true success.

An analysis of the Bioskop melodrama *Plastic Money* (2014) originally broadcast on the channel in 2014 creates a platform for this discussion. Presumably this is a successful made-for-television film as it has been re-broadcast several times in the past few years. It was written and directed by Mandla N, whose television projects focus on female and even queer characters and their desires. These characters have some agency within their stories, but this agency is limited – these women end up in their "natural" place in society as mothers

and wives, or they are punished in conclusion for having expressed or acted upon their desires and dreams of independence and freedom.

A conclusion can be made that when filmmakers display a fair level of technical competency in terms of basic cinematic story-telling, as well as adherence to formulae prescribed by the various commissioning bodies, their career paths as acceptable and trusted television story-makers might be easier as opposed to the paths of producers who choose to allow a level of experimentation in their work.

The short film *Izinyoka*/*Snakes* (2018) contextualises how the melodrama formula can be used successfully when creating new work, but it can also be used as a platform for resistance when it comes to predictable and stereotypical representations of "natural" masculinity and femininity. The film is mostly concerned with queer themes and representations, including a central transgender character. Queer identity is often underrepresented on South African television, it is entirely absent, or when addressed, it is vilified or dismissed as comical. The film also explores current themes of religious practices and the misuse of these, resulting in oppression, abuse and criminal behavior on behalf of religious leaders. These societal issues are not normally addressed in South African popular entertainment fiction and religion is still treated as a taboo subject matter. In terms of style, the film juxtaposes different genres such as comedy and horror. The film concerns itself with a heightened visual aesthetic, intended to be received as camp, ironic and comedic by the audience.

For over a century of cinematic history mainstream cinema has subjected its female, queer and black characters to vilification and ridicule. These story-telling practices are deeply embedded and have been assimilated and accepted as "normal" within the post-colonial and post-apartheid South African film and television industries. Filmmakers, producers and commissioning bodies can take alternative paths in terms of popular story-telling through

critical examination of their own creative choices and expectations. Resistance to certain cinematic stereotypes and clichés in terms of representations based on gender, race and identity may begin to truly transform an industry which currently continues to limit itself.

6. Bibliography

Benshoff, Harry. 2015. *The Monster and The Homosexual*. [book auth.] Barry Keith Grant. The Dread of Difference. Texas: University of Texas Press.

Butler, Judith. 1988. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" in The Feminsm and Visual Culture Reader, edited by Amelia Jones, London and New York: Routledge

Campell, Joseph. 2014. The Hero's Journey. [ed.] Phil Cousineau. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Cooke, Pam. 2017. The Cinema Book. London: British Film Institute, 2017.

Creed, Barbara. 1993. The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis. London and New York: Routledge.

Creed, Barbara. 1993. The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis. London: Routledge, 1993.

Creed, Barbara. 2015. Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection. [book auth.] Barry Keith Grant. The Dread of Difference. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015, pp. 37-65.

Doane, Mary Ann. 1987. The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940's. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Ebrahim, Haseenah. 2014. Cinema and Film Culture in South Africa, post-1994: Scattered Speculations. 2014. Place, publisher, journal (?)

Gage, Ken. 2003. Gayle: The Language of Kinks and Queens; A History and Dictionary of Gay Language in South Africa. Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2003.

Giffney, Noreen and O'Rourke, Michael. 2009. The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory. [E-Book] Ireland: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009.

Gledhill, Christine. 2007. History of Genre Criticism. [book auth.] Pam Cook. The Cinema Book. London: British Film Institute.

Gledhill, Christine. 2007. Melodrama. [book auth.] Pam Cook. The Cinema Book. London: British Film Institute.

Grant, Barry Keith. 2015. The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2015.

Hayward, Susan. 2006. Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts. London and New York: Routledge, 2006. Vol. 3.

Hayward, Susan. 2006. Female Masquerade. Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts. London and New York: Routledge.

Hayward, Susan. 2006. GENRE/SUB-GENRE. Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts. London and New York: Routledge, Vol. III.

Hayward, Susan. 2006. Melodrama and Women's Films. Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts. London and New York: Routledge.

Hooks, Bell. 1989. Choosing The Margin as a Space of Radical Openness. The Journal of Cinema and Media. 36, pp. 15-23.

Katz, Steven D. 1991. Film Directing Shot by Shot: Visualising from Concept to Screen. Studio City, CA: Micheal Wiese Productions.

Kristeva, Julia. 1982. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Kubheka, Thando. 2017. Commision Calls For Religious Leader Regulation. Eye Witness News. [Online] 2017. [Cited: 20 11 2018.] https://ewn.co.za/2017/07/11/commission-calls-for-religious-leader-regulation.

LaBruce, Bruce. 2012. Notes on Camp/Anti Camp. brucelabruce.com. [Online] 03 2012. [Cited: 04 12 2018.] http://brucelabruce.com/2015/07/07/notes-on-camp-anti-camp/.

Luyt, Kathryn. 2014. Gay Language in Cape Town: A study of Gayle – attitudes, history and usage. Cape Town: UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN , 2014.

Lynn, Jonathan. 2011. Comedy Rules: From the Cambridge Footlights to Yes, Prime Minister. [E-book] London: Faber and Faber, 2011.

Marcantonio, Carla. 2015. Global Melodrama. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Metelmann, Jörg and Loren, Scott. 2015. Melodrama After the Tears. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Mulvey, Laura. 1999. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. [book auth.] Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Nelmes, Jill. 2012. Introduction to Film Studies. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. Vol. 5.

Railton, Diane and Watson, Paul. 2011. Music Video and the Politics of Representation. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

Rowe, Kathleen. 1995. The Unruly Woman. Texas: University of Texas Press.

Sakota-Kokot, Tanja. 2014. Everything but 'Ordinary': Representation of Africa in Film. Vol. 6, 2, p. 166.

SCREENAFRICA. 2013. SA's First Local Movie Channel Launches. Screenafrica. [Online]. [Cited: 01 05 2017.] http://www.screenafrica.com/page/news/television/1633898-SAs-first-local-movie-channel-launches#.WdDzFGiCxdi.

Smelik, Anneke. 2007. Feminist Film Theory. [book auth.] Pam Cook. The Cinema Book. London: British Film Institute.

Sontag, Susan. 1964. Notes on "Camp". [Online]. [Cited: 04 12 2018.] https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag_Susan_1964_Notes_on_Camp.pdf.

STATS SA. 2017. Victims of Crime Survey. STATS SA. [Online] 28 September 2017. http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0341/P03412016.pdf.

Wood, Robin. 2012. The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70's. Blue-Sunshine. [Online] 13 01 2012. [Cited: 04 12 2018.] http://www.blue-sunshine.com/tl_files/images/Week1-Wood-AmericanNightmare.pdf.

7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix 1



WELCOME

Wanda Sondiyazi – Commissioning Editor
wanda.Sondiyazi@mnet.co.za

Sanele Shibe – Jnr. Commissioning Editor
sanele.shibe@mnet.co.za



Our Melodrama Strategy

By Sanele Shibe – Jnr. Commissioning Editor
sanele.shibe@mnet.co.za



Current Drama Strategy

- Cater for the viewer experience
- Big ideas simply told (Complex vs. Complicated
- Melodrama as a base
  - other genres used as a subgenre that add texture to the story
- Stories must revolve around universal themes
  - love vs hate, good vs evil, betrayal, family conflict, ambition, revenge etc.
- Dramatic irony
  - the viewer must feel included and not excluded from the story
- Memorable, authentic characters including humorous characters
- Family-friendly content – but pushing boundaries, create talkability. Question moral fibre, the black experience
- Relatable world of the story
- Social realism

Drama Defined



- Drama is:
  - An exciting, emotional or unexpected event or circumstance
  - Real people confronting real and familiar life problems
- Melodrama is:
  - A sensational piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events intended to appeal to the emotions


Story
vs
Plot

STORY vs. PLOT

- STORY
  - An account of imaginary or real people, and events, told for entertainment
  - An account of events in someone's life or in the development of something
- PLOT
  - How narrative points are arranged to make a story understandable to the viewer

What Makes A Good Screen Story

- A lead character discovers he/she wants something
- S/he gets into trouble trying to get what they want
- S/he now has to get out of trouble to get what s/he wants
- At the end of the story, win or lose, the character usually realises that they now want something else instead
- …or need to change their attitude to other people in order to get what they want

Elements of a good story

- *In drama much of the enjoyment comes from sympathising with the undeserved suffering of the lead character who is better than us in some way*

- **Memorable Characters**
  - have qualities or attributes we admire
- **Big Ideas – Simply Told**
- **Why and How**
- **Pace**
  - Keep the audience in an almost continuous state of anticipation and expectation about what will happen next
- **Relevance**
- **Stakes**
- **World of story**

Elements of a good story

- *In drama much of the enjoyment comes from sympathising with the undeserved suffering of the lead character who is better than us in some way*

- **Suspense:**
  - Drama makes audience feel a powerful sense of pity for the hero's undeserved suffering

- **Dramatic Suspense (Dramatic Irony)**
  - Audience knows more about what is going to happen than the lead characters
  - Extreme tension about whether the character will recognise what is going on in time to prevent a tragedy

- **Increasing conflict**
- Complications, surprise twists and Unravelling in-between plots

7.2. Appendix 2

Mexican telenovela *Maria La Del Barrio (1995)* features the excessive villain Soraya, shown in Figure 1 – 4, who found unexpected fame on the internet long after the programme aired on Television.



FIGURE 1: SORAYA MEME 1

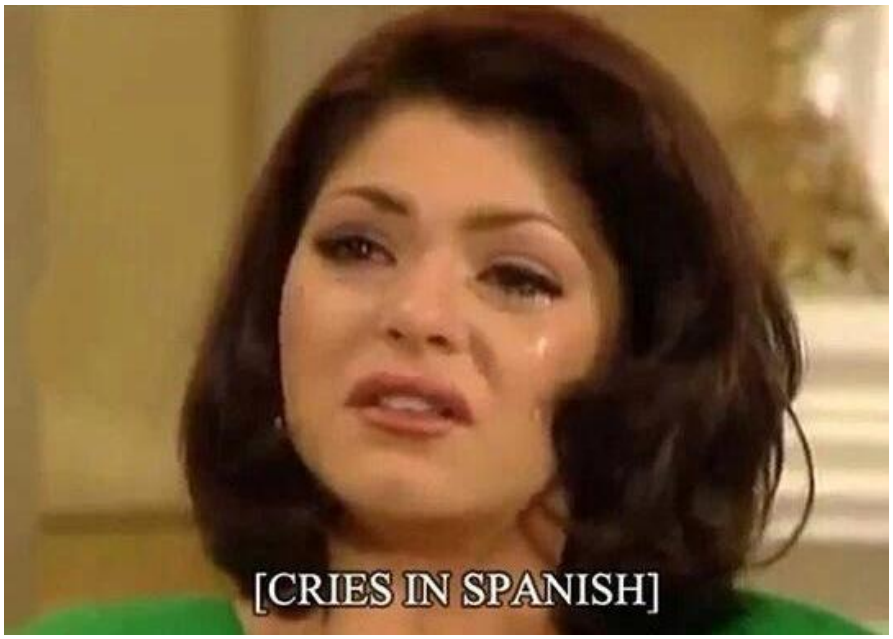

FIGURE 2: SORAYA MEME 2



FIGURE 3: SORAYA MEME 3



FIGURE 4: SORAYA MEME 4



FIGURE 5: NOMSA BUTHELEZI IN THE FILM ***PLASTIC MONEY*** (2014) DIRECTED BY MANDLA NO. 1



FIGURE 6: NOMSA BUTHELEZI IN THE FILM *PLASTIC MONEY* (2014) DIRECTED BY MANDLA NO. 2



FIGURE 7: NOMSA BUTHELEZI IN THE FILM *PLASTIC MONEY* (2014) DIRECTED BY MANDLA NO. 3



FIGURE 8: NOMSA BUTHELEZI IN THE FILM *PLASTIC MONEY* (2014) DIRECTED BY MANDLA NO. 4



FIGURE 9: CLAUDINE IS THROWN BEHIND BARS FOR HER TRANSGRESSIONS!



FIGURE 10: BUSI FALLS APART!



FIGURE 11: KHANYI MBAU LOSES CONTROL HER BODILY FUNCTIONS IN A FIELD.



FIGURE 12: KHANYI MBAU LOSES CONTROL OF HER BODILY FUNCTIONS IN A FIELD NO. 2



FIGURE 13: KHANYI MBAU LOSES CONTROL OF HER BODILY FUNCTIONS IN A FIELD NO. 3