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The success of Leon Schuster in a post-apartheid South Africa and what it says about blackness

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The Success of Leon Schuster in a Post-Apartheid South Africa - and What it Says About Blackness.

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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.

Wits University, Johannesburg, 2021

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of theMaster of Arts at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submittedbefore for any other degree or examination at any other university.



07/06/2021

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to break down Leon Schuster's formula for success and deconstructs how he effectively uses his formula to attract a wide diverse South African audience. The formula is broken down into four visual storytelling techniques, which include blackface, slapstick, candid camera and stereotypes. I also investigate how he gets away with his more controversial techniques (blackface and stereotypes). This research uses *There's a Zulu on my stoep (1993), Oh Schuks… I'm Gatvol (2004), Mama Jack (2005)* and *Schuks Tshabalala's Survival Guide to South Africa (2010)* as case studies to examine how he successfully implements his formula whilst highlighting its limitations. Although Schuster implements his techniques effectively, he however fails to deconstruct his more problematic techniques and presents them in an uncritical manner. My creative project, *Zwart (2021)* uses Schuster's techniques to critique his misrepresentation of blackness and follows a narrative that tackles racism, racial division and blackness through a critical lens.

DEDICATION

In memory of my friend

Refilwe Mokgatle

1995 - 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents for supporting me throughout both my post grad degree. Without their advice and support, I would not be here.

I would like to thank all the amazing people (actors and crew) that have helped me shoot and finish my creative project. Thank you for taking the out of your busy schedules to help me.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no other South African filmmaker that is as successful as Leon Schuster in mainstream cinema. Although the post-apartheid film industry is young; it is still surprising that no other filmmaker, especially a black filmmaker has managed to successfully attract a huge, dedicated audience like Schuster. Schuster is a controversial figure due to his use of blackface and black stereotypes[1]; however, this has not stopped his momentum. The aim of this research is to understand how someone as controversial as Schuster has managed to build such a successful career with films that attract a wide diverse audience. When one looks at Schuster's films especially within our contemporary world of political correctness, it seems like he represents a world of political incorrectness. One could argue that Schuster belongs to a long tradition of white filmic representations of blackness. Early films mostly targeted white audiences and white actors used blackface to represent a stereotypical and racist view of blackness. In popular films like *Birth of a Nation (1915)* black people are "depicted as lazy, ignorant, vicious, and rapacious. The few "good Negroes" in the film are those who faithfully serve their white masters" (Benshoff and Griffin 2004:77). Films like this worked to reinforce white fears of a black rebellion and used stereotypes and other dehumanizing factors to otherize blackness. *De Voortrekkers (1916)*, which is South Africa's version of *Birth of a Nation (1915)*, "used black people to represent the negative qualities against which whiteness and real civilization are defined" (Botha 2012:25). The film achieved this by depicting Africans as savages that want to destroy innocent white families. The only 'good' black character in *De Voortrekkers (1916)* is the one that is assimilated into white culture. For many years' blackness was viewed through this prism of inferiority when contrasted with whiteness.

Research on Leon Schuster has been done by many different scholars who have tackled the politics of his representations. Nina Harms (2015) focused on gender performativity in Schuster's films and how his representations of female characters maintain gender stereotypes and highlight gender inequality. Obakeng Kgongoane (2017) focused on how a film like *Mama Jack (2005)* works to maintain the ideology of white supremacy through the ridicule of blackness. Even though so much research has been done about the problematic politics of

[1] https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2018-08-04-leon-schuster-i-wont-go-blackface-now-its-just-racist/

Schuster's films, it does not take away from the fact that they are successful. His mastery of slapstick humour and candid camera has managed to entertain a wide diverse South African audience of all races and cultures. The intention of this research is to identify what makes Schuster successful and why audiences especially black audiences are drawn to his content. I believe that understanding Schuster's success through how he formulates his films to engage with audiences is an interesting angle to explore. I want to critically engage with his techniques to understand where he gets them from, how they work and their shortcomings. I also want to engage with how he successfully markets his films to appeal to black audiences. This research is not written to praise Schuster but to critically analyse how he has built a brand using controversial techniques that would get other white people into trouble.

What Schuster has effectively done is develop a successful formula that consistently attracts a wide audience. Kenyan Tomaselli notes that: "his formula, developed during the apartheid years, uses pranks, set-ups and slapstick that are likely to provoke offence, being as they are racially based and usually occurring in small-town social spaces" (Tomaselli 2006:46). This formula can be broken down into four techniques which include: blackface, stereotypes, candid camera and slapstick. He has used these techniques throughout his entire film career, and they have never failed him. Additionally, if one pays attention to Schuster's films, you can notice that he makes two types of films. The first is a traditional comedy that follows a linear structure with slapstick (e.g. *There's a Zulu on my stoep*) and the other being a comedy mixed with candid camera skits where he pranks unsuspecting South Africans (e.g. *Oh Schuks… I'm Gatvol*). These are the two different styles of filmmaking that he successfully employs to create highly profitable films. This research will use his more successful films as case studies to examine how he successfully implements his formula. In doing so I also want to understand and speculate why black audiences are unbothered about his representations. The films that will be analysed are *There's a Zulu on my Stoep (1993), Oh Schuks… I'm Gatvol (2004), Mama Jack (2005)* and *Schuks Tshabalala's Survival Guide to South Africa (2010)*. Schuster has made many films throughout his career, and it will be impossible to cover them all, so some will be referenced to get an overall understanding of his success.

The research will be split into four chapters; chapter one will focus on Schuster's career and pinpoint where he developed his formula. Chapter two will apply theory onto his techniques to get a clear understanding of how and why they are effective. In chapter three, I will use Schuster's films as case studies to analyse how he successfully implements these techniques. As part of my research, a creative project in the form of a short film has been created. *Zwart (2021)* uses elements of Schuster's formula through a deconstructive lens. It explicitly highlights racial tensions and power dynamics around controlling the black body. The character of the film is put in a world where she is instructed to abide to black stereotypes and allow herself to be used and controlled. The film shows a future where issues such as racism, racial tension and inequality are still prevalent and tasks the main character to navigate the absurdity of the world she inhabits. The film breaks away from Schuster's stereotypical representation of blackness, by following a character that refuses her prescribed stereotypes. In chapter four, I will do an in-depth analysis of my short film. I will focus on how the film effectively uses some of Schuster's techniques to critique his representation of blackness and black stereotypes.

Chapter 1:

Oh Schuks… Its Jamie Uys!

In this chapter, I aim to generate a broader understanding of Leon Schuster and his journey from the beginning of his career to his current position in the film industry. I will focus on how Schuster developed his formula by looking into a similar controversial South African filmmaker Jamie Uys, whose films have influenced Schuster's style of filmmaking and storytelling.

The Uys Influence

In order to understand Schuster's success in the industry one must look at his biggest influence Jamie Uys. Jamie Uys, born 30th of May 1921 was one of South Africa's most successful filmmakers with his films breaking box office records both locally and internationally. He was best known for his biggest film *The Gods Must Be Crazy (1980),* which became the most successful South African film on the international market. He was also recognized for his other projects like "In 1974 he became the first South African director to receive the Hollywood Foreign Press Association's Golden Globe Award for best documentary for *Beautiful People*" (Botha 2012:46). Uys was no stranger to controversy as it was reported that N!Xau who played the iconic character Xi: "was paid a mere pittance, 2000 Rand, then about US$1700, for *The Gods Must Be Crazy* - which made a fortune: the film cost US$5 million and earned US$90 million in its first four years" (Pfaff 2004:79). Uys, like Schuster after him, was also criticized for his depiction of blackness in his film, through his use of problematic black stereotypes. The depiction of black people in contrast to white people in *The Gods Must Be Crazy (1980)* is alarming; according to Josef Gugler there are four types of Africans in the film: "Traditional Africans who are happy and content until modern society intrudes; good Africans who are grateful for the help of white people; incompetent Africans who run their own governments;

and bad Africans who have been led astray by evil foreigners" (Gugler 2003:71). In contrast, the white characters are not limited to such basic stereotypes; they are portrayed as good people.

Uys's films were loved by many including a young Leon Schuster who in an interview revealed: "I've been a great fan of Jamie Uys my whole life and started following his films when I was six years old" (GFC, 2012). Schuster would grow up to work alongside Uys in *Funny People Too (1982)* where he pranks unsuspecting South Africans. Uys's work will forever be part of our cinematic history; he lived a life filled with success in his prime and he died of a heart attack in 1996. When one compares these two filmmakers, you can see how similar they are; they are both Afrikaner filmmakers who have made highly successful films that have been criticized for their depiction of blackness. Schuster's formula takes a lot of inspiration from Uys. We can attribute this inspiration from three of Uys's successful films which became the blueprint for Schuster's formula; these films include *Hans en die Rooinek (1961), Funny People (1976)* and *The Gods Must Be Crazy (1980).*

Funny People and Every Schuster Candid Skit Film

Funny People (1976) is Jamie Uys's first candid camera skit film where ordinary South Africans are put through extraordinary situations, whilst their reactions are being captured on hidden cameras. The film stars Joe Stewardson as the host who tells us about the skits and how they were performed, then we watch actors perform the pranks on unsuspecting civilians. Uys was not the first person to make the format work, that honour goes to the person who pioneered the format, Allen Funt who created *Candid Camera (1948 – 2014)*. Uys loved Funt's show and wanted to make his own version of it; his producer Boet Troskie "flew to New York to meet with Allen Funt, legendary creator of Candid Camera, to negotiate permission to use the premise" (Mimosa Film Group, 2020). Once *Funny People (1976)* was released, it became a huge success, according to the producers: "Nationwide theatres were sold out for days – even before its release. In some cities all sessions were sold out weeks in advance" (Mimosa Film Group, 2020).

After seeing the success of the film amongst South Africans, the producers took the film to Cannes Film Festival where they: "successfully sold the film for distribution in most countries worldwide. They bought the movie without having seen it – the name Jamie Uys clinched the deal" (Mimosa Film Group, 2020). The film was an easy sell to international distributors and audiences because the candid skit format was already popular around the world due to the success of *Candid Camera (1948-2014)*. Local audiences were attracted to the film because not many of them were exposed to the *Candid Camera* show. This was mainly because at the time, the apartheid government opposed the introduction of television in South Africa. This was mainly for political reasons: "Tv was seen as a moral danger to the family and youth" (Cros 1996:119). Dr Albert Herzog who was the minister of Posts and Telegraphs was the biggest opponent against television: "he did not have much of an innovative spirit and was little interested in technological advancement, unless it was of any good to Afrikanerdom" (Cros 1996:118). Thus, television in South Africa was only introduced in 1976. Uys's target audience was predominantly white Afrikaners because at the time mainstream cinema spaces were mainly occupied by white audiences due to apartheid laws. The Afrikaans and eventually the international community became Uys's biggest audience; even when Schuster began making films his fanbase was predominantly Afrikaans. Eventually Schuster broadened his audience to include more demographics in South Africa, especially the black audience who have for many years been his largest fanbase.

A sequel was made titled *Funny People Too (1982)*, which again follows the same formula. This is also the film where a young Schuster makes an appearance as one of the pranksters, who performs two candid skits. Years later after appearing in this film, Schuster made his first film titled *You Must Be Joking! (1986)* which is a candid camera skit film that has the same format as *Funny People*, with a narrator and multiple pranks being done on unsuspecting South Africans. After the success of *You Must Be Joking! (1986)*, Schuster immediately worked on a sequel titled *You Must Be Joking Too! (1987)*. This is where Schuster began to deviate from Uys's candid camera formula. He added a plot to the film and characters, even though he mostly played himself; in doing so he balanced the candid skits with a storyline. Through this film he fully developed his candid skit format, evolving it from its television roots and made it feel more like a film. The films plot follows Schuster who is making a candid skit film, only to find out that a rival film crew has stolen his idea and are making a similar film. The films plot is

ironic because Schuster himself essentially made a similar film to Jamie Uys's *Funny People (1976).*

In as much as Schuster added a plot in his candid skit films, he also breaks the 4th wall by playing a fictional version of himself. This allowed the film to be unique through combining fiction with reality. Unlike Jamie Uys, who only wrote and directed his candid films; Schuster also became part of the action. He used costumes and controversially wore blackface makeup which became the defining feature of his films. When we compare *Funny People (1976)* and the typical Schuster candid skit film the biggest differences are the pranks. Jamie Uys went for safe pranks where nobody got hurt or became violent. *Funny people (1976)* and its sequel were simple comedies that resembled the classic Candid Camera television show format that had no political subtext. Schuster went the extra mile to not only make people laugh but to also respond to the changing South African landscape; Schuster: "plays with the discourse of races, responding to new social shift, white anxieties and black expectations" (Tomaselli 2006:47). *Panic Mechanic (1996)* focused on the post-apartheid affirmative action and the anxiety that white people felt when they had to transfer power to Africans. *Oh Schuks…I'm Gatvol (2004)* focused on the increasing crime rate in South Africa and how it was affecting our citizens. These examples show how Schuster draws inspiration from events that are faced by everyday South Africans in our everchanging economic, political and social climate. He takes these serious situations and makes fun out of them. The core element of his films is racial tension between black and white people. He draws his comedy from how these two different races and cultures clash in a post-apartheid South Africa.

The Gods Must Be Crazy and Mr. Bones

The Gods Must Be Crazy (1980) made Jamie Uys a household name in the international film community, however the film's success was not planned. When asked about why the film was a huge success internationally, Uys said: "I wish I knew, because then I could do it again on my next movie" (Klemesrud, 1985). His misunderstanding of the film's success led him to make a sequel that was not as successful as the original. The first film was originally made for an Afrikaans audience, with all its dialogue being in Afrikaans. Once it became a hit and broke

local box office records, it was then dubbed into English so that it could have mass appeal to an international audience. The film became a big hit in America, Europe and especially in Japan. The film's success showed that comedy transcends language and cultural barriers, and its conventions alone are enough to gain a great response from a diverse audience. However, the film has been the subject of criticism from film critics and scholars: "Gods was also accused of recuperative neo-colonialism (of reasserting the superiority of the modern human) and the underhand reinforcement of the racial and ethnic stereotypes perpetuated by apartheid South Africa" (Mathijs and Mendik 2017:101). Uys defended himself against such criticism by stating that: "I've been making comedies most of my life, and I never put a message in - it's bad for business. It's arrogant to put messages in. You rob your audiences of putting in their own messages." (Klemesrud, 1985). This implies that the film is a simple comedy that should not be taken seriously. However, when one looks at the context around the film and the connotations that can be read, it becomes clear that there is more to the film than the simplistic comedic reading that Uys suggests.

In a review of the film, Barbara Moss notes that the films depiction of blackness especially during apartheid can easily be interpreted as: "non-whites are not capable of taking care of themselves in the modern world" (Moss 1985:6). Another piece of context to understand is that the film was released around the time of the South African Border War, where the apartheid government was fighting to integrate Namibia (South West Africa) into South Africa; whilst the Namibians were fighting for independence. It is then by no coincident that the films portrayal of black leadership, supports the apartheid governments assumptions about black people being incompetent and unable to lead a nation. The film was released during apartheid and was originally meant for an Afrikaans audience, so one can see why Uys chose to portray the white characters as the good guys and the Africans as incompetent buffoons. Even though Uys has said: "everybody's funny, whether white, black or brown. When you make a comedy, you like to see the funny side of the human condition, and you don't see their colour." (Klemesrud, 1985); the problem lies in the text and its "unintended" messaging. The 'I don't see colour' line that Uys uses is a familiar defence that fails to acknowledge the issue at hand. Which is the fact that the film uses comedy to camouflage subliminal racism: "racism that operates below the threshold of awareness" (Shabbir et al. 2014:421). The stereotypical representation and framing of Africans under the guise of comedy is evidence of subliminal racism. The black characters include a San man who believes a coke bottle is a gift from the

gods; an incompetent group of guerrilla fighters who fail to stage a coup and incompetent politicians who fail to run their own country. The white characters on the other hand include a shy but good-hearted biologist and a kind female journalist turned teacher. This extreme contrast in representation that limits Africans to dumb stereotypes is evidence of subliminal racism.

Mr Bones (2001) was directly influenced by *Gods Must Be Crazy (1980)*; both films' main characters have similar story beats, that follow the classic 'hero's journey' story structure. Where a man (Bones and Xi) who is from a society that is far from 'civilization', is tasked to leave his people and travel to the unknown world (Suncity and Gods Window respectively). Along the way they are introduced to "civilized" people; and the misunderstanding between the two societies leads to comedy. The film had an international market in mind like *Gods Must Be Crazy (1920)*; this led them to cast American actors that included David Ramsey, Faizon Love and Jane Benney. Although, the film did not reach the financial success that they had hoped for in the international market, it was still a huge financial success in South Africa and broke local box office records which were then surpassed by its sequel. The reasons for this are simple; firstly, Schuster is not well known in other parts of the world, so his films do not garner excitement from foreign nations as they do with South Africans. On top of that, the American actors that he hired were not big stars that could draw in large audiences in the international market. The second reason is, releasing a film internationally is costly; there are a lot of expenses that must be accounted for including marketing and securing a good number of theatres in those countries. Their budget was just not big enough to secure wider releases in foreign markets. Thirdly, the film reflects South African iconography, politics, society, and norms. This are things that South African audiences can understand and relate to, however when the film is exported internationally, it does not have the same impact. Comedy is subjective but context plays a role in people's reaction to the humour.

Mr. Bones (2001) was also heavily criticized for the same reasons as *Gods Must Be Crazy (1980)*, due to its representation of blackness and black culture through the use of stereotypes. In a generous interpretation of the film's deconstructive agency, Lucia Saks points out that the film is: "working to undermine the longstanding idea that racial and ethnic differences are articulated through biological markers such as skin colour and that what is being represented

is post-racial" (Saks 2010:9). This interpretation views the character of Bones as a reverse stereotype, that Schuster accomplishes through embodying the image of a sangoma, which is associated with African traditions and cultures. A more critical reading of the film is that: "the film constructs the new space of South Africa from the colonial archives, thus reanimating old racist ideas" (Saks 2010:9). These problems stem from the films use of a popular but controversial trope known as the white saviour. The white saviour trope was and is still highly utilized by Hollywood films, where the white character saves people of colour from their troubles. In the film, Bones who is the only white person in the tribe is somehow the only one who can accurately interpret the bones, whilst the black sangoma's fail. This leads to Bones being chosen by the King to go find his son. The white man has to save the black people; the problem with this trope is that it renders blackness as incompetent, even in its own 'limited' cultural zone.

Mad Buddies and Hans en die Rooinek

In 2012 Schuster's American dream came true when media giant Disney acquired the rights to fund and distribute his film titled *Mad Buddies (2012)*. Schuster recalls hearing the good news from one of South Africa's most successful producer Helena Spring: "I nearly fell on my back! It was like a dream come true" (GFC, 2012). However, it was only shown in South African cinemas where it became a box office hit, making more than R20 million. Schuster and Disney did not partner again for his next few films that were released. This was probably because the films box office results did not match his previous best record set by *Schuks Tshabalala's Survival Guide to South Africa (2010)* which made more than R30 million. *Mad Buddies (2012)* was inspired by another Jamie Uys film titled *Hans en die Rooinek (1961)*. The film follows an Afrikaner and an Englishman who do not get along and are forced to walk from Johannesburg to Cape Town on foot. Along the way they become friends. The film was part of a subgenre in South African comedy that focused on the conflict between the Afrikaner and the Englishman; according to Martin Botha: "these films based their humour on white ethnic difference, political rivalry and poked fun at English/Afrikaans intercultural taboos of the time" (Botha 2012:47). With *Mad Buddies (2012),* Schuster pokes fun at the rivalry between black and white people; we see Schuster's character (Boetie) and Kenneth Nkosi's character (Beast)

constantly at each other's throats, but they eventually decide to work together to achieve a common goal.

The Dream Team

It would be too simplistic to credit Schuster's success on his techniques alone, there are other factors that play a huge role in his success. He works with some of the biggest names in the industry on his films. This powerful team includes Helena Spring, Anant Singh and Gray Hofmeyr. Anant Singh is the biggest producer in Africa, he is also the founder of Videovision, which is a production company based in Durban. Videovision has produced and distributed multiple successful films including some of Schuster's highest grossing films. Singh works with Helena Spring as his producing partner in some of the biggest films produced both locally and internationally. Some of their notable credits include *Sarafina! (1992), Cry, the Beloved Country (1995)* and the Academy award nominated film *Yesterday (2004)*. Anant Singh also produced *Long Walk to Freedom (2013),* which not only had big British stars like Idris Elba and Naomi Harris, but it also had a production budget of $30 Million. This collaboration creates a mutually beneficial business relationship, where Schuster is able to acquire huge budgets that are required to make his films and the producers get to double their financial investment. Helena Spring was the one who finalised a deal with Disney to produce and distribute Mad Buddies (2012). Gray Hofmeyr is another key component in Schuster's success; he is a veteran South African producer, writer and director who created the popular SABC 3 series *Isidingo (1998 – 2020)*. He has also worked on international films like *Schweitzer (1990),* starring Malcolm McDowell who played the lead role in the Stanley Kubrick classic *A Clockwork Orange (1971)*. This is a powerful team that most South African filmmakers would feel privileged to work with.

Homegrown Marketing and Market-Orientation

Marketing plays a huge role in determining the success of a film. Most South African films receive little to no marketing, which makes it difficult for them to make any impact in cinemas like Hollywood films. According to the National Film and Video Foundation's (NFVF) funding policy, they offer South African filmmakers a marketing and distribution budget of R500 000 per film (NFVF 2020:54). That amount is not enough as marketing and distribution is expensive. Schuster on the other hand has mastered marketing; he has developed several clever marketing techniques. A smart strategy that Schuster uses is to work with local media to promote his films. During the production of his projects, local media announce them to the masses, which serves as free marketing[2]. This is the same strategy that Hollywood uses to get audiences excited about upcoming releases. When the film is a few months from releasing, he then conducts multiple interviews on all media platforms (television, newspapers, radio and social media). This serves to let people know what the film is about and when it is coming out. All these steps are important if one wants a wider audience. On top of that, because his films have high budgets, he is able to afford the expensive marketing that comes with filmmaking.

Schuster also casts some of the biggest South African celebrities in his films. The likes of Kenneth Nkosi, Desmond Dube and Khanyi Mbau who has more than 2 million followers on Instagram. These local celebrities are great marketing tools because of their status and large following. A simple tweet or Instagram post is enough to get their followers excited about the projects that they are working on. *Matwetwe (2019)* pulled off a similar marketing tactic by having the co-producer of the film Black Coffee to help market the film. The film's director said that: "The marketing that we did with Black Coffee was a huge contributor" (Langa, 2019). Black Coffee is a famous DJ both locally and internationally. He has a huge fanbase, especially amongst black people. He used his platforms to let his fans know about the film and this gave the film a lot of attention and positive press. Celebrities are highly influential and Black Coffee

[2] https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/mr-bones-2-reels-in-cash-for-durban-392098

got some of his celebrity friends to help promote the film. The film cost around R2 million[3] to produce and went on to make close to R7 million, on top of that it stayed in the top 5 at the box office for a few weeks, whilst Hollywood was releasing new films. This is a rare achievement for a South African film with a low budget and a relatively unknown cast.

The biggest cinema chains in South Africa are Ster-Kinekor and Nu-metro. Most South African films are screened in less than 40 theatres countrywide. This is unfortunate because we do have many screens to showcase local films, *Avengers: End Game (2019)*[4] for example was screened in 202 local cinema screens. However, these 202 screens are divided into 2D, 3D, 4DX, IMAX and D.BOX. 2D is the cheapest format in cinemas with the rest costing double and even triple the amount of a standard 2D ticket. Therefore, Hollywood films make a lot of money because of these platforms, whilst local films mainly opt for 2D. Schuster is the only South African filmmaker who can secure more than 100 standard theatre screens. This is mainly because he has a proven box office record of financially successful films. If Schuster utilized other big formats like 3D and IMAX, his films could have made bigger numbers at the box office. However, shooting in IMAX and 3D is not cheap, and it requires a high concept project that has a big budget that we cannot afford yet.

Using language as marketing device

Schuster's use of multiple languages plays a huge role in the success of his films. Firstly, he uses English to attract a wider audience and avoids isolating people who do not speak Afrikaans (his home language). He also attracts black audiences by speaking indigenous languages in his films. Black people have a fascination with white people who can speak indigenous languages. There are many examples of white entertainers who appeal to black audiences by speaking in

[3] https://www.news24.com/citypress/trending/how-matwetwe-slayed-the-box-office-20190216

[4] https://www.nfvf.co.za/home/22/files/2020/Research/NFVF%20Annual%20Box%20Office%20Report_2019.pdf

indigenous languages. These include music legend Johnny Clegg who has built a successful music career through singing in IsiZulu. Comedian Nicholas Welch, mostly known by his stage name Pule, has also carved a successful career by speaking in indigenous languages. Marietjie Bothma, is another example; she starred in a popular King Pie advertisement, where she speaks in Isizulu. In 2018, Coenie Strydom became an internet celebrity over night after a video of him speaking Tshivenda[5] went viral on social media. Due to his popularity, he got featured in a Romans Pizza advertisement. All these people became popular amongst black audiences because they could speak our languages. There is a small number of white people who can speak indigenous languages. Learning a new language takes time, practice and effort, so when a white person takes the time and effort to learn an indigenous language, it is appreciated by black people. Although Schuster's use of indigenous languages is limited in his films, the effort is still appreciated by his black audience because it makes them laugh.

Using indigenous languages to appeal to black audiences is a smart marketing strategy for white entertainers. White people are under no pressure to learn indigenous languages because most of our sectors are conducted in their home language (English and Afrikaans in some cases). This creates a market for white entertainers in black communities. These white entertainers are not being judged on their talents but in their ability to speak an indigenous language. There is nothing special about a black person speaking another black language because it is expected. We are raised in multi-cultural homes; our communities are a blend of different languages and cultures. A black artist must work twice as hard to attract the same audience as a white person who speaks an indigenous language.

[5] https://www.enca.com/life/watch-tshivenda-speaking-man-describes-a-day-with-his-mates

Success with Audiences

Schuster's films do not perform well internationally, they are critically panned by critics, and they are critically deconstructed by scholars. However, he has managed to get the public to love and support him even when he is being called out by critics. Local streaming giant Showmax recently made the decision to remove several of Leon Schuster's films from their platform due to racial insensitivity in his portrayal of blackness: "The removed films include *You Must BeJoking, You Must Be Joking Too, Oh Schuks… It's Schuster, Sweet 'n Short, Schucks! Pay Back the Money, Mr Bones, Mr Bones 2, Mama Jack* and *Frank and Fearless*." (Richardson, 2020). People were split into two groups; some supported the decision, but many were outraged. Black South Africans were the most vocal against Showmax's decision. Many took to Twitter to defend Schuster and argued against Schuster's films being labelled racist. The general argument was that Schuster exposes white racists even though he laughs with these racists that he is supposedly exposing when he points to the camera. Some pointed out that Schuster has worked with many black actors, so he cannot be racist. Some argued that people are too sensitive and should appreciate Schuster's work since it is comedy. Schuster has managed to create a successful relationship with his audience that cannot be broken. This shows that he is able to shape public discourse in his favour. This also shows how much of an influence he has in our society; many of us grew up watching his films. Schuster's films may not win awards or be critically acclaimed but they are able to win the love and respect of a diverse South African audience. The fact that a company's decision to remove content that they deemed insensitive to black people backfired shows the importance of Schuster in the eyes of many South Africans, especially black South Africans.

The Elephant in The Room

Schuster's most recent effort, *Frank & Fearless (2018)* became the lowest grossing Leon Schuster film of the 2000s, making a little under R8 Million. The film's budget has not been disclosed to the public, however in an interview with Mail & Guardian Schuster revealed that the budget for his film's is between R15 to 20 million (Krouse, 2006). The film's

underperformance contradicts the points that have been made about his formula and business tactics. It was screened in 95 cinemas across the country, it was heavily advertised, it also had Schuster's usual production team but somehow it underperformed at the box office compared to his previous films. What is interesting about *Frank and Fearless (2018)* is the fact that this is the first Schuster film that strays away from his techniques. It does not rely on stereotypes, blackface and racial tensions. One could argue that this may be the reason for the film's underperformance, however I argue that the films failure is due to two main reasons. Firstly, it is due to Schuster's overuse of the same slapstick gags as shown in the table below. Secondly, it is due to the change in audience taste over time.

Table 1: Slapstick gags from Schuster's films

 ***There's a Zulu on my Stoep (1993)***	
 ***Mr. Bones 2 (2008)***	

	
Mad Buddies (2012)	
	
Frank and Fearless (2018)	

The table above visualizes a problem with Schuster's films, especially his narrative driven films. The table shows Schuster's overreliance on the same comedy slapstick gags that he has been using for years. These gags on the table were funny when he did them the first time in 1993 because the audience did not know what was going to happen. Whether it is someone falling headfirst into a hole or someone being comically attacked by a gate. The problem is that the same gags are still being utilized in 2018; this repetition feels lazy because we have seen the same thing so many times. In a critical review of *Frank and Fearless (2018)* by Adriaan Roets of The Citizen, he points out that: "The Schuster formula is in full play. Slacker adult teams up with child to overcome the baddies. We've seen it – in almost every Schuster film. And that's the problem. It's not a badly made film, it just does nothing new" (Roets, 2018). This may have worked in his earlier films; however, competition is larger now than it has ever been with the rise of superhero films and streaming platforms. The second reason for the film's

failure is linked to audience change in film preferences. Every year Hollywood consistently produces high quality and bigger budget films, this leads to an influx of Hollywood films that local audiences consume on a yearly basis. Schuster takes time to work on a new project; it took Schuster 3 years to make and release *Frank and Fearless (2018)*. Within that period of time the superhero genre became a global phenomenon. Disney continuously released new and successful Marvel films in that timeline, with *Black Panther (2018)* becoming the first film to make over R100 million in South African cinemas. This change in trends and audience taste made it difficult for Schuster to compete with Hollywood like he used to at his peak. Audiences want new and exciting content; if he wants to keep up with the competition, he must come up with new gags or a fresh spin on his old gags.

Jamie Uys's influence is evident throughout Schuster's work; it was smart of Schuster to mirror Uys's formula since Uys was a highly successful filmmaker. However, in doing so he has also carried on the tradition of stereotypical representations of blackness, which has been a subject of controversy. Schuster's career has highly benefited from taking the candid camera skit format and making it his own by taking all the physical punishment from his victims. The only problem is his repetition of similar comedy gags which have worked against him, and it is evident in his ever-diminishing box office numbers. What has been made clear is Schuster's mastery of marketing and distribution, which are the most important part of filmmaking as they determine whether a film will be a success or failure. He achieves this by working with big name producers, casting local celebrities and using local media. His effective use of language to appeal to black audiences has also benefited his career as black audiences are drawn to white entertainers who speak their language. All these factors have allowed Schuster to carve a successful career spanning decades. Even at this moment he is actively working on his next project which will see him going back to his more popular character *Mr Bones*[6].

[6] https://briefly.co.za/70737-mzansi-mixed-reactions-announcement-mr-bones-movie.html

Chapter 2: Techniques

This chapter focuses on Schuster's four storytelling techniques, which include slapstick, blackface, candid camera and stereotypes. These are the techniques that Schuster has used throughout his successful career to tackle racial tension and our everchanging political system. Through toying with the public in his candid camera skits and race swapping in his narrative films, he is able to make people laugh. Two of these techniques (blackface and stereotypes) are highly controversial because they are not applied through a critical lens, this allows non-critical audiences to view them as normal. I want to understand where these techniques come from and why they are effective in generating humour for Schuster's audience, even the controversial ones.

Smile! You're on Candid Camera

Candid camera is a genre that combines surveillance with comedy, and it achieves this by putting ordinary people in bizarre and ridiculous situations to get a reaction out of them. Most of Schuster's films follow this format which has proven to be entertaining and profitable. The genre was pioneered by American television producer Allen Funt, who first experimented with the format on radio before transitioning it into a successful television show called *Candid Camera (1948 – 2014)*. In its early days "the show began on radio as *Candid Microphones* on August 10, 1948, on ABC and employed hidden microphones to capture people in humorous situations" (LoBrutto 2018:23). Through his experimentation with the format, Funt found that "everyday conversation was only truly interesting if people were given something to react to, a strange situation or everyday crisis that would test their responses" (Kavka 2012:16). This produced many funny reactions that his radio audience enjoyed.

Before Funt adapted the format for television, he first made a series of short films also titled *Candid Microphones*. The success of the radio show plus the short films is what eventually launched the television show. The show was so popular that "It reached an audience peak in

the United States from 1960 through 1964, when by Nielsen ratings it was among the top ten television programs" (Engle 1965:42). The shooting of the show came with its own difficulties, especially considering the time it was made, according to Jim Willis: "This was the age when television equipment was large and bulky, and hiding it from public view was no easy achievement" (Willis 2010:77). Even though modern candid camera shows and films are seen as lowbrow comedies, *Candid Camera (1948-2014)* was seen as more than that. During its popularity it was even seen as a social science tool: "the candid scenarios are not the settings for pranks, but for serious studies of human behaviour" (Kavka 2012:22). Allen Funt spent a lot of time with psychologists who were interested in the show's potential as an educational tool: "social scientist praised Candid Camera for the 'educational value' of placing people in an experimental situation to test their response" (Kavka 2012:22). Psychologists also found a lot of research value in the show that was beyond its comedic factor, "James Maas of Cornell University's psychology department persuaded Funt, an alumnus, to donate film segments from *Candid Camera* to the university for distribution to psychology departments across the country" (Murray and Ouellette 2004:28).

Modern reality television has been shaped by the innovations and experimentations of Allen Funt, according to Michael Essany: "The 1948 debut of *Candid Camera* is often hailed as the epic birth of reality television" (Essany 2013:17). Although Reality television has developed into multiple subgenres that have dominated the television landscape, it has kept the fundamental conventions that were first realised by Funt. These include the focus on ordinary everyday citizens instead of models and celebrities, even though ironically these ordinary people end up becoming celebrities due to this exposure. Funt also understood that people's lives were mundane and chose to manipulate scenarios to get a perfect reaction that would entertain audiences. This has bled over to other reality television shows where the use of editing and behind the scenes manipulation can add the right amount of tension and drama to capture audience interest.

Why is Candid Funny?

With so many successful candid camera skit shows from around the world, it is important to understand why this format works. Funt has some great insights to answer this question; he notes that: “at our best we are dealing with subjects closer to the real lives of our audience than almost any other show on television. The real ones - - I mean we're dealing with teachers and husbands and storekeepers - not a scriptwriter's version of them - but real people in real predicaments that have a very high degree of identification” (Engle 1965:47). The most important foundation of any show or film is the audience’s identification with the characters or people they are watching. It is through this identification that they can imagine how they would deal with the situation that the people they are watching find themselves in. Schuster is a master at this; in most of his skits he pranks ordinary South Africans, people that audiences can easily identify with. On top of that, Schuster goes out there and actively provokes and interacts with these people and gets them to react in a way that enhances the comedy for his audience.

Funt also argued that an integral part of the viewing pleasure of the candidly recorded event was the displeasure of the subject being watched: “the basic comedy of Candid Camera is the comedy of watching a man fall on the ice. It's someone else. You're happy it's not you. You have a moment of superiority” (Engle 1965:47). This can be linked to what is known as ‘schadenfreude’, which essentially means experiencing pleasure from seeing other people’s misfortunes. This is a human condition that all kinds of comedies use to get a reaction out of audiences. This aspect is well applied in contemporary candid shows like *Punk’d (2003-present),* which uses celebrities as the unlucky participants. It works in the sense that audiences feel superior over the celebrities that they admire. The most important aspect that Funt attributes to the effectiveness of the format is the reveal at the end. Funt notes that: “Crucially, the skits work only because the reveal at the end balances the unequal power relations between duped and duper, bringing the unwitting participants into the circle of the knowing and placing them on an equal footing with the ‘ordinary’ members of the audience” (Kavka 2012:18). It is important for the victim of the skit to react positively at the end and laugh along, because if they take it too seriously and refuse to calm down, then the audience will find it difficult to laugh at the skit.

In as much as the *Candid Camera* television show and the other variations of the format get a lot of praise and laughs from audiences, they have also become subject to criticism. The format has been criticized for its commercialization of ordinary people's misfortunes, that are staged and broadcasted for mass consumption. Harrison Engle points out that: "what has most disturbed critics is the apparent satisfaction that Funt derives from a peeping-tom format that turns the emotions, fears, and insecurities of people into a commodity that is easily packaged and sold" (Engle 1965:44). Candid camera shows profit off the humiliation of people on national television. There is some validity to this point as producers do make a lot of money from these shows and films, whilst the victims of the skits get little to no money for their "participation". The audience's entertainment is put above the victim's state of being. Funt has defended himself and the show by pointing out that people are not forced to be on the show and instead are given release forms to sign if they want to be on the show. However, critics have pointed out that "Because of the pressure of the situation and the be-a- good-sportsmanship that follows, it is doubtful that the people involved are really able to consider what the sketch has been like." (Engle 1965:44). An example of this is in *Schuks! Your Country Needs You (2013)*, where Schuster wears yellowface and pretends to be the head of the Japanese national rugby team who wants to interview the former springbok coach, Peter de Villiers for a potential job as the coach for the Japanese rugby team. The interview is a mess by design, but de Villiers plays along because he really wants to impress the 'Japanese representatives' so he can get the job. The uncomfortability of the scene is best described by a film reviewer who wrote that: "I even felt bad for Peter de Villiers, former SA Rugby coach, as he fell for a gag involving a job offer from Japan. Rather than bringing out that strangely delicious sublime feeling of laughing at someone else's misfortune, *Schuk's! Your Country Needs You* left me bored and a little uncomfortable" (Hawkins, 2013). By the time they expose the cameras, de Villiers tries to laugh along but you can sense his disappointment; he probably really needed the job only to find it was all a joke for a film. De Villiers signed to be featured in the film because it is a Leon Schuster film at the end of the day. It is moments like this where you question your laughter and begin to feel sorry for the prank victim.

The Danger of Stereotypes

Stuart Hall (1997) focuses on the concept of othering with regards to representation and stereotyping. In his definition of stereotypes, he adds that: "Stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature" (Hall 1997:257). Stereotyping is formed by racial difference and power; stereotyping: "divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and unacceptable" (Hall 1997:258). What this means is that in society there is a standard of what is acceptable and part of the norm, and anything that falls outside those beliefs or norms is automatically 'othered'. This othered group has historically been black people during colonialism, segregation and even in modern society. Stereotypes depend on extreme difference and oppositions "There is the powerful opposition between 'civilization' (white) and 'savagery' (black)" (Hall 1997:243). This creates conflict and division and makes it difficult for people to have meaningful discourses: "What is usually false about a stereotype is the systematic suggestion that all people of a group are this way, and this way by nature, and that we should feel superior to them, whether we despise, fear, or laugh at the stereotype" (Ouellette & Gray 2017:184). The people who create and maintain this divide in our modern society are people in the advertising and media sector. Filmmakers have the power to represent people, cultures and ideologies to a wide diverse audience. It is their responsibility to avoid representing people in negative stereotypes. If they do not exercise this responsibility and choose to not think of the consequences of their representations, then it shows a sense of ignorance. Schuster's filmography is filled with black stereotypes that he fails to critique. His black characters that are either played by him or hired actors normalize problematic stereotypes about blackness. Black characters in Schuster's films rarely play important figures in society, and even when they do play such roles, they are presented as either corrupt or incompetent. The outlier can be found in *Panic Mechanic (1996)* where the president of South Africa is portrayed as a black woman. Other black characters are presented is either maids, gangsters, corrupt politicians or sidekicks. These representations have been normalized in the eyes of his audience since he uses them in most of his films.

The problem with stereotypes is that they become normalized and fixed through a process known as naturalisation. Hall points out that: "'Naturalization' is therefore a representational strategy designed to fix 'difference', and thus secure it forever. It is an attempt to halt the

inevitable ‘slide’ of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological closure’.” (Hall 1997:245). Stereotypes of blacks being violent, muslins being terrorists and even more recently, Asians being the cause of the Corona virus has created a world where people are constantly being attacked, killed and victimized. The unfortunate thing is that it is difficult to reverse a stereotype once it is fixed and accepted as fact: “to reverse the stereotype is not to necessarily overturn or subvert it. Escaping the grip of one stereotypical extreme may simply mean being trapped into its stereotypical other” (Hall 1997:272). Blackface is a specific sub-type of stereotype; minstrel white performers in blackface would perform black stereotypes to entertain white audiences on stage and eventually on film. Stereotypes were used as a tool to dehumanize and mock blackness: “Not only were blacks represented in terms of their essential characteristics. They were reduced to their essence. Laziness, simple fidelity, mindless ‘cooning’, trickery, childishness belonged to blacks as a race, as a species” (Hall 1997:245). This made black people look and feel like subordinates in the eyes of white people who felt racially superior. This also eased their fears of a black rebellion; stereotypes thus: “are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening” (Hooks 1992:170). Such portrayals transitioned into film; however, the stereotypes went from mocking blackness to presenting blackness as a danger to white society. Notably in popular films like *Birth of a Nation (1915)* dangerous black stereotypes were heavily deployed. Those stereotypes have bled into modern society; African Americans still face racial discrimination because of stereotypes. Unarmed African Americans are being killed by the police because of stereotypes that have always promoted blackness as dangerous.

Gender Stereotypes

Stereotypes in Schuster’s films are not only present in his representation of race but also in his representation of gender, especially women. Women in Schuster’s films are either domesticated, eye candy for the male gaze, servants or irredeemable villains. An important thing to note is that Schuster does not mock white females through the use of prosthetic makeup. Schuster instead casts young, attractive white women to play either his love interest or villains. Even though these female characters do fall under basic female stereotypes, they are however treated with more respect than their black counterparts. Nina Harms found that:

"Rowena (*There's a Zulu on my Stoep*), Kelsey (*Mad Buddies*) and Angela (*Mama Jack*) perform their gender in ways that showcase them as confident, assertive and arrogant, especially towards their male counterparts" (Harms 2015:86). Gloria (*Panic Mechanic*) is the outlier who is portrayed as an extreme dumb blonde stereotype who is repeatedly degraded and mocked by her boyfriend/boss. Black women on the other hand, get the shorthand of the stick, since they are neither the love interest nor villains. Black women are mostly the butt of the joke. Schuster portrays some of the black females through the use of blackface makeup and a fat suit. Schuster's portrayals fit into the classic mammy stereotype; old, big, and unattractive. Black female characters that are not portrayed by Schuster usually play a maid, like Rosie (*There's a Zulu on my Stoep*), Precious (*Oh Schuks… I'm Gatvol*), Innocence (*Mama Jack*). Nina Harms also found that: "Laletu (Mr. Bones); Tinkie and Thandi (*There's a Zulu on my Stoep*), for example, are recognised as more emotional, affectionate, supportive and subservient" (Harms 2015:86). This shows that black females are not even allowed to be as confident and assertive as white women in Schuster films. Even though female characters from both races are portrayed as basic female stereotypes, the contrast between black and white females in his films are concerning since black females lack character and nuance.

Stereotypes in Comedy

It is easy to point out that Schuster's use of racial stereotypes is problematic, however one needs to understand the relationship between comedy and stereotypes. Many forms of comedies depend on stereotypes for humour: "stereotypes are important in comedy because not only do they help to establish instantly recognizable character types, but such character traits and stereotype-based jokes also constitute a source of humour" (Marx & Sienkiewicz 2018:185). Both black and white comedians use stereotypes of their respective race or other races in their films, sitcoms or stand-up specials. There are two differing arguments with regards to the use of stereotypes in comedies. On one hand it is argued that stereotypes should not be used: "racial stereotypes in comedy should be taken seriously because of their potential to naturalize racial differences through humour" (Marx & Sienkiewicz 2018:187). This allows audiences to take whatever stereotype they see in media as fact. Briana McKoy (2012) investigated the types of black stereotypes used in Tyler Perry films and their impact on how society views blackness

based on such representations. An important thing that she points out is that: “these representations are important because of their influence on consumer’s social construction of what is real” (Mckoy 2012:136). What she means is that stereotypes perpetuated by black filmmakers about black people can be as harmful as the ones perpetuated by white filmmakers.

A counter argument to the above perspective is that stereotypes can be effectively used to deconstruct and criticize problematic stereotypes. M. José Coperías Aguilar points out that: “it is, of course, equally possible to argue that the exaggerated reproduction of racialized stereotypes in comedy can work to deconstruct them, showing them to be absurd constructs rather than humorously distorted mirrors of real life” (Aguilar 2000:263). Comedian Dave Chappell uses black stereotypes in his stand-up shows and his television series *Chappell’s Show (2003-2006)*, he challenges his audience to look at how ridiculous these stereotypes are. Chappell plays stereotypes that some may view as extreme and offensive, however they are effective as Rick DesRochers points out that: “in Chappell’s comedy, being offensive becomes necessary to create meaningful conversations that cannot otherwise happen” (DesRochers 2014:123). A criticism of this positive view of the use of stereotypes in comedy is that “it is often difficult to distinguish social commentary and satire from the ideological reproduction of racial stereotypes in comedy” (Marx & Sienkiewicz 2018:185). At the hight of his popularity, Dave Chappell left the entertainment industry abruptly. When asked why he left by Oprah Winfrey, Chappell pointed to an incident on his set where he was performing a black stereotype sketch in blackface. He said that one of the white crew members laughed at him: “it was the first time I’d ever gotten a laugh that I was uncomfortable with” (OWN, 2019). Chappell felt that the white crew member viewed the stereotype as a fact and not as a critique like he intended. This realisation challenges the positive outlook on stereotypes. Bell Hooks challenges black audiences to engage more critically with media that stereotypes them: “most black folks do not want to think critically about why they can sit in the darkness of theatres and find pleasure in the images that cruelly mock and ridicule blackness” (Hooks 1992:5). The problem identified here is that most audiences do not take the time to deconstruct media and simply enjoy it from an entertainment point of view. This is especially true for comedies, which are not taken seriously. People mainly watch comedies to laugh; some laugh because they relate to the stereotype, or they know somebody who matches said stereotype.

Representation of Blackness in 'BLACKFACE' - As Old as Cinema

The most controversial technique that Schuster uses is blackface – but blackface, popular during the early years of cinema a century ago, should really be an 'extinct' practice. Blackface was popularized through minstrel shows where white performers would darken their skin and paint exaggerated large lips around their mouths. It was a racist practice that served to entertain white audiences by showing a version of blackness that was far from reality. Blackface transitioned from minstrel shows to film, where white actors in blackface where given lead roles that were created for black people. On the other hand, black people in films "were consigned to minor roles or characters that were consonant with prevailing stereotypes of primitive, buffoonish blacks" (Brundage 2011:5). It was mostly popular in American culture and led to a rise of many racist black stereotypes as "the blackface tradition had offered an endless stream of images of blacks as buffoons, as careless and carefree braggarts, as wanton women, as hot-tempered, ill-tempered, and intemperate lovers, as thieves and as fops" (Brundage 2011:54). Blackface played a huge role in shaping the American entertainment industry.

Blackface in American media was everywhere during its early days, and it worked to misinform white people about black life and experiences using problematic stereotypes. *The Birth of a Nation (1915),* for example, depicted black people as rapists, dumb and dangerous, whilst depicting the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as the good people who are going to save white America. Such depictions made it difficult for black Americans to gain equal rights and created racial tensions that further divided the country. The film was successful and was highly praised for its advancement of the film language and it was even screened at the White House for President Woodrow Wilson. The film popularised the KKK as "more Klan chapters formed, and membership reportedly reached into the millions. New Klansmen were shown *The Birth of a Nation* and the film continued to be a recruiting tool for decades to come." (Clark, 2018). Even though the film depicts the Klan as the heroes, the truth was far from that. The Klan became infamous not only for their white supremist and racist ideology but also for atrocities that they

committed against black bodies. This includes the lynching of Michael Donald by KKK members in 1981. This innocent black man was killed because "Klan members were furious that the second trial of Josephus Anderson, a black man accused of murdering a white policeman, had been declared a mistrial" (Blakemore, 2018). Donald was picked at random and killed as revenge; thankfully, the Klan members who committed the murder were sentenced, with one of them getting the death penalty.

Blackface in contemporary society is frowned upon and even banned in many countries around the world, especially in America where it was popularized. However, there are still incidents and traditions of blackface in different countries. The most notable country that still practices and celebrates the tradition of blackface is The Netherlands. It is celebrated in the form of Zwarte Piet (black Pete), who is a celebrated and controversial icon of the Dutch St. Nicholas holiday. According to Becky Little: "in Dutch tradition, Sinterklaas has a "helper" named Zwarte Piet, or "Black Pete," who usually appears as a blackface character with large gold earrings and exaggerated lips" (Little, 2018). For many years' activists and black people in The Netherlands have been fighting for the removal of Zwarte Piet with no success. It is alarming that a racist caricature like Zwarte Piet has become normalized and even defended by Dutch citizens whilst disregarding the outcries of their fellow black citizens. However, this is not surprising since The Netherlands has its own deep colonial history of global exploitation and oppression of black people.

Blackface in South Africa

Blackface in South Africa is mostly known from Schuster's popularization of it; however, it dates back to the colonial times of our history. Stephen Johnson notes that: "blackface in South Africa has for over a century been commonly performed among Cape Coloureds, a Creole population that includes Dutch, Indonesian, Malaysian, Bantu and Khoisan ancestry" (Johnson 2012:224). These enslaved people were celebrating what we know today as The Kaapse Klopse. The Kaapse Klopse is a minstrel festival that takes place in the city of Cape Town and

is celebrated yearly on the 2nd of January. It is full of dancing, music and people in colourful and bright costumes. Before it became known as Kaapse Klopse, it was called the Coon Carnival, Coon being a racial slur that was used to refer to black people. The festival got a lot of inspiration from blackface American minstrel shows: "The ingredients of disguise, parody and self-mockery in American minstrelsy were particularly influential in the long term in shaping the nature of the New Year Carnival" (Bickford-Smith 2016:101). The festival grew in popularity and became a yearly celebration. Its racist origins and use of blackface faded out and it became colourful and inclusive.

When it comes to the reception of blackface in South Africa there are two perspectives. There are people who have a problem with it and there are people who are not bothered by it. Even though Schuster has for many years received criticism for his use of blackface, it did not stop him or his films from being popular. When questioned on his use of blackface, Schuster has for most of his career refused to acknowledge the racist connotations and history associated with blackface. In an interview with Talk Radio 702 Schuster dismissed the fact that his content is offensive by saying: "I don't care about it because I don't think its offensive. Other people accept me doing that stuff and there is no feeling in their hearts that says this is racist or this is taking the whole thing too far" (Abbas, 2014). It is statements like this that fail to acknowledge that many people find it offensive. This denialism makes it difficult to engage in constructive discourse around the problematic use of blackface in contemporary society given its racist origins.

We need to closely look at cases of blackface in South Africa to unpick claims of 'innocent fun' and 'no offense intended'. The most well-known recent case happened in 2014 at the University of Pretoria, where two white girls dressed up as domestic workers with their faces painted black. Their picture went viral and began a huge debate online, and the university took disciplinary measures against the students. The university's spokesperson said: "the institution will not tolerate any form of promotional racist behaviour" (Bateman, 2014). The students were then expelled from the school's residence but were still allowed to attend classes. The matter was eventually brought to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), where the two students apologized for their actions stating that: "To those who were offended, angered, or humiliated by our actions, we offer our sincere apologies. We intended no harm and take

full responsibility for our actions" (Sapa, 2014). After the mediation process SAHRC said the students could return to their residence. When asked about this matter in an interview with Talk Radio 702, Schuster said: "they are students, so I don't think that these ladies went out there purposefully to be racist by putting pillows in their bums and making themselves black. I think it was part of a jollification" (Schuster, 2014). This response is insensitive because he is again denying the racist connotations and history of blackface and he sees it as nothing but innocent fun. The two students may have not known better because they see Schuster wearing blackface with no major backlash.

In 2013, an advertisement by the Cape Town Fish Market was the subject of outrage for its stereotypical and racist depiction of a "black" politician/dictator. It was banned by the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa (ASASA) based on complaints that they received from two viewers who found the advert offensive. The advertisement features a white man playing a variety of characters who are liars, with the overall message being that the companies' competitors may claim that they sell fresh fish, but it is probably a lie. All the characters are white, except for the dictator who is depicted as black through the use of blackface. ASASA concluded that "The message being relayed is that only black politicians or dictators are corrupt. This is in a way discriminatory as the blackened character is negatively portrayed as a typical black dictator or politician." (ASASA, 2013). They also added that "if the intention had only been to portray a corrupt government official or a corrupt dictator in general, the actor would still have been effective in his natural skin colour" (ASASA, 2013). An interesting fact about this controversy is that the black dictator in the advertisement is portrayed by Leon Schuster. From a marketing point of view one can understand why the creators of the advertisement thought that it would not cause controversy, since Schuster is well known for wearing blackface. The banning of the advertisement came as a surprise to everybody who worked on it, the managing director of the advertising company (Lowe and Partners) apologized and removed the controversial clip. What is also interesting is that in that same year Schuster released *Schuks! Your Country Needs You (2013)*, where he wears blackface in different skits. The film went on to make R 26 805 214 (NFVF 2014: 10); making it the highest grossing South African film of 2013. This brings to question as to why Schuster wearing blackface in a 3 second segment of an advertisement leads to a ban, whilst him wearing blackface in a feature length film leads to no major actions against the film.

The recent tragic death of George Floyd under the hands and knee of a white police officer sparked outrage from black communities around the world and has drawn attention to the link between mistreatment and misrepresentation. This has led to protests and important discourses about police brutality and racism. Black people have been speaking out and are even encouraging major companies to change brands that are seen as problematic in relation to their representations of blackness. In America, for example, a popular syrup and pancake mix brand called Aunt Jemima made the decision to change their brand: "it is changing its name and retiring its mascot, a black woman whose character was originally based on the stereotype of the enslaved "mammy" who raised her master's white children." (Heil, 2020). Streaming giant Netflix also decided to remove certain shows from their catalogue that have white actors in blackface, "popular sketch shows *The Mighty Boosh, Little Britain, The League of Gentlemen,* and *Come Fly with Me* are currently unavailable to stream due to the frequency of white actors portraying characters of colour" (Ivie, 2020). Such decisions have been met with praise from black people and the creators of these shows have even apologized for their use of blackface and problematic representations.

As pointed out earlier, when Showmax made the decision to remove Schuster's films due to their problematic representations. His audience defended him, especially black people. Schuster himself responded to the decision by saying: "I cannot believe that the content of my movies causes any harm. It is completely innocent" (Richardson, 2020). This is an interesting response, because in 2018, Schuster was asked about blackface and if he would ever use it again; Schuster said then, "I won't go blackface now; I can't do it. There's not one actor in the world that will. It's just racist" (Wagner, 2018). In this statement Schuster recognized that blackface is racist, which is what has been the debate for many years. However, when his films are removed for their use of blackface, he calls them innocent. It is a contradictory statement that seems to indicate that he still does not understand the outrage from his black audience, or he is cynically backstepping when his financial interests (the 'long tail' revenues on Showmax) are affected.

Now that I have brought to attention the differing but interesting receptions of blackface in our country, we can then answer the big question; why does Schuster get away with it whilst other

white South Africans face backlash? The South African education system does not teach young students at a primary and high school level about blackface as it did not have a major impact in our history. We are mostly taught about apartheid and the heroes that fought against the regime. Growing up in a post-apartheid South Africa, I did not know anything about blackface, and I too found Schuster's transformations funny. It was only when I came to university that I learnt about the negative history of blackface and why it should not be celebrated. This can be related back to the University of Pretoria blackface scandal. The reason why there was so much backlash against those students is because they were at an institution of higher education. An institution where students are taught about the history, connotations and negative impact of blackface. Schuster gets away with it because the majority of black South Africans are not educated about blackface; it is not in our curriculum. On top of that, issues of representation in media are mostly taught in a Batchelor of Arts degree, meaning that students from other faculties may also never know about the subliminal racism associated with blackface.

The Funny Side of Violence

Slapstick is in all of Schuster's films, when he falls or gets slapped audiences burst into laughter. When looking at the history of slapstick it is said that "Slapstick originally referred to a commedia dell'arte prop, a club consisting of wooden sticks that produced big noise but little damage when used to hit a fellow actor" (Bacon 2015:104). This form of comedy can be traced all the way back to ancient times "Egyptian tomb murals depict slapstick of those remote times. Slapstick played a role in the Greek theatre" (Fry 2011:15). It was popular in vaudevilles, minstrel shows and burlesque theatre, where performers perfected the physical comedy that is still practiced in modern times. When film was introduced in the late 1800's slapstick made an easy transition to the big screen. Louis Lumière made *L'arroseur Arrose (1895)*, simply translated as Tables Turned on the Gardner. The film has a simple plot of a gardener being pranked by a boy who steps on a garden hose to stop the water from coming out, the gardener then looks at the nozzle to see why the water stopped coming out. At this point the boy releases his foot and water sprays the gardener. After a short chase, the gardener eventually grabs the boy by his ear and whips him. According to Liam Burke: "the staged comedy, a novelty in an era of slice-of-life actualities, is often celebrated as the first narrative film" (Burke 2015:3). This 40 second clip with a single gag is also considered to be the first slapstick film.

The slapstick genre continued to grow in the early 1900's as slapstick geniuses like Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and Harry Langdon were experimenting with the genre in their films. Films like *The Tramp (1915)* and *The General (1926)* created some of the most memorable skits of all time. Even though slapstick was popular among the masses, it was still seen as low art by critics: "there was a great deal of adverse criticism of slapstick comedy in the press during the late 1910s and early 1920s, and concomitant demands for a type of comedy with greater capacities for narrative organization and feature-length development" (Neale and Krutnik 1990:110). This criticism did not stop people from enjoying slapstick films, however the biggest thing that stood in the way of slapstick was the introduction of sound. Sound in film brought about the death of silent cinema as a distinct form of visual storytelling that seamlessly blended with physical comedy. This forced artists who were comfortable with silent cinema to adapt. Slapstick had to not only rely on physical comedy but had to also incorporate dialogue into its comedy. Luckily, slapstick comedians managed to adapt and continue their success "silent comedy had become less associated with slapstick for slapstick's sake and was increasingly identified with the exploration of social attitudes and the nature of humanity as found in the works of artists like Chaplin and Keaton" (Horton & Rapf 2012:35). Chaplin used his most famous character, The Tramp to not only showcase slapstick routines but to also relate to the psychology and struggles that his audiences were dealing with "The way Chaplin incorporated tragedy into his comedies gave audiences someone they could truly identify with as they struggled to survive the Great Depression" (Renee, 2016). By the time that sound came into the picture, Chaplin continued this identification with audiences with the added benefit that his characters could now talk. During World War 2, he made his most famous sound film called *The Great Dictator (1940)*. The film was a critique of the Nazi party and fascism, which were taboo subjects to focus on in a comedy. However, Chaplin managed to blend slapstick with political satire to make this brilliant film.

Slapstick continued to grow in popularity and even became the main feature in popular animated shorts and films. Tom & Jerry and The Looney Toons have made generations of children and adults laugh and are still popular to this day. This shows the everlasting impact of this genre. Comedy greats like Mel brooks and the Monty Python team have also popularized the genre. In South Africa, Jamie Uys and Leon Schuster built their careers on displaying the

effectiveness of this genre to South African audiences. Slapstick is not slowing down and will continue to dominate for many years to come.

The appeal of slapstick

Alan Dale (2000) focuses on slapstick in American films, its rise and its appeal to audiences. Although he mostly pays attention to American cinema, it can be argued that all slapstick from any country follows a similar formula and appeal. Dale points out that: “the essence of a slapstick gag is a physical assault on, or collapse of, the hero's dignity; as a corollary, the loss of dignity by itself can result in our identifying with the victim.” (Dale 2000:3), Schuster’s characters all go through this loss of dignity for our entertainment. Schuster is constantly attacked and uses his pain to put a smile on other people’s faces, Dale notes that: “the clown suffers in our stead; everything from delay, frustration, and discomfort to humiliation and even on a few occasions death. All of which we laugh at—the worse it gets, the harder we may laugh.” (Dale 2000:14). Dale argues that the appeal of slapstick is through projecting our own embarrassing experiences onto the character “we can laugh at the kind of fiasco we know from experience but that's happening to somebody else for once, and in a more extreme form than we could perhaps survive” (Dale 2000:12). This is linked to schadenfreude. Schuster knows how to bring about schadenfreude, hence his films always employ a clash between him and unsuspecting victims who he pushes to act violently towards him. In his many roles and characters that he has played, Schuster gets physically punished for being bad at his job “Most often slapstick comedy centres on a performed incompetence” (Peacock 2014:8), whether he is an incompetent police officer or chef, he always gives people a reason to fight with him. Slapstick comedians go through pain to entertain us “the skilled performer of slapstick seeks our laughter and experiences it as a reward” (Peacock 2014:8).

Schuster is a master at staging violent encounters with his victims that are seemingly hilarious to his audience. Henry Bacon (2015) notes that: “we are also easily impressed by seeing someone experience great emotions and watching a person in a fit of extreme rage can be mesmerizing” (Bacon 2015:117). Schuster allows his victims to let out their frustration and when they reach a level where they become extremely violent, he points to the cameras and

makes these people feel foolish for their outbursts. They go from a level of violence to a calm state within seconds and audiences love this sense of resolution. If there was no hidden camera and a resolution after the confrontation, then people would be horrified. Schuster's films employ violence for entertainment and the violence is always directed towards himself for comic effect "when the context is playful, the character's caricatures, and the violence hyperbolic, the effect can only be comical" (Bacon 2015:104). Schuster always plays exaggerated stereotypes in his candid skits who are simply there to make white people angry and audiences laugh. This works for him because he portrays caricatures with no complex traits and a well-defined arc. Bacons warns that "it is much more difficult to make violence appear funny when the victim is a psychologically rounded character, who obviously fears and suffers" (Bacon 2015:105). The "You've been Schuksed" line then serves as a tension reliever and brings about equilibrium and joy to the victim and the audience.

What I find interesting in Schuster's films is white peoples' use of violence to destabilize an unfamiliar scenario. Schuster does not attack his victims, instead he chooses to annoy them. He contrives, provokes and specifically pushes white men to the point of near or actual physical violence, thereby 'revealing' their privileged social position as enactors of violence. This is a refreshing take because he rarely stages violent encounters with black people. Schuster uses certain key words to raise the tension: he tells them that they are racist and privileged, and when they try to defend themselves against the accusations, he keeps pressing until they start acting violently. There is a lot to unpack in such altercations, the intention of Schuster is to clearly get these people angry. He achieves this by using certain words that white people do not want to be associated with in a post-apartheid environment to trigger their violent outbursts. Even though we live in a post-apartheid society, racism, discrimination, white privilege and racial tensions are still present. Schuster puts these topics out on the table and throws them to his white victims who in turn retaliate. However, since Schuster is playing a basic black stereotype during these violent encounters with white people, it undermines the uncomfortable realities faced by black people. Schuster's ability to remove his black mask and laugh with his attackers who were ready to inflict harm on his "blackness" takes away any meaningful lessons and discourse. It is important to note that: "While comedians will make everyone uncomfortable at some point, good comics are playing an important function in society by holding up a mirror and forcing us to confront realities that we would often prefer to ignore." (Cohen & Richards, 2006). Schuster's blackface antics fail to put a mirror in front of his white

victims and alleviates them from any sense of self-reflection on their privilege and aggressive behaviour towards a “black” body.

The four storytelling techniques that Schuster has effectively utilized in his films have a lot of history behind them. Blackface and black stereotypes have been historically frowned upon due to their racist and bigoted use by white people. Stereotypes create room for easy comedy even though they are problematic, however under the right hands they can be deconstructed to create progressive discourse around race and representation. Blackface on the other hand is racially insensitive, but Schuster’s black audience still support him due to their limited knowledge of blackface. Schuster has mastered slapstick and candid camera which are deeply rooted in comedy. He has managed to add his own twist to the formats to make them his own and appeal to a local audience.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

In this chapter I will be analysing the four Schuster case studies which include *There's a Zulu on my Stoep (1993)* and *Mama Jack (2005),* which are his narrative driven comedies. On the other hand, I will also be analysing *Oh Schuks…I'm Gatvol (2004)* and *Schuks Tshabalala's Survival Guide to South Africa (2010),* which are his candid camera comedies. By analysing how he uses his techniques in these different films, I seek to understand why they are effective and what are their limitations when it comes to representation and audience reception.

Race Swapping in There's a Zulu on my Stoep!

There's a Zulu on my Stoep (1993) is set during apartheid where a young Rhino (Leon Schuster) and Zulu (John Matshikiza) are best friends who always get into trouble. One day an American girl named Rowena ends their friendship when she makes Rhino shoot a can off Zulu's head. Years later Zulu is in an American prison for grand theft auto, he is told that he will be deported back to South Africa to finish the rest of his sentence. Rhino on the other hand married and divorced Rowena; he struggles to keep his farm afloat due to the divorce settlement that he must pay to Rowena. He also has to raise a young black girl named Tinkie, who is Zulu's daughter. Upon arrival into South Africa, Zulu is being transported by Diehard who is the leader of a neo-Nazi organisation called T.I.R.D (Threatened Immigrants Right-Wing Defence) and he is Rowena's new boyfriend. Zulu manages to steal Diehard's scratch and win lotto ticket and with the help of Rhino they plan to go to Sun City to collect the jackpot and split the money 50/50. Whilst trying to escape from Die Hard and Rowena, Zulu and Rhino put on prosthetic makeup and switch races. The villains eventually capture them, and it is up to Tinkie with the help of her friend Prince Williams to work together to defeat the villains. But Diehard is as his name suggests difficult to kill; it is then up to Zulu to redeem himself and finally put an end to Diehard with his mud missile throwing skills.

The central concept of race swapping was an interesting idea to explore as South Africa was moving into democracy. The idea of different races going into each other's shoes for a moment to navigate how it is like to be in a different skin could have functioned to create discourse around racial conflict. However, the race swapping in the film mainly functions as a cheap comedy gimmick. The film deals with race conflict between black and white South Africans, as black people were coming into power, however it does not fully engage with this topic. The reason for this is because Schuster shies away from fully deconstructing the privilege of white South Africans. The main white villains are not even from South Africa; Rowena is American and Diehard is German. The choice to use racist foreigners instead of interrogating the racist white South Africans who benefited from apartheid is a missed opportunity and more importantly, an outright avoidance of a sense of guilt/complicity around 'whiteness' for white South African viewers. The film was a success amongst South Africans of all races, and it was even internationally released as *Yankee Zulu*. However, the film financially underperformed on the international market, according to Robin Crigler: "the film's failure in the US was unfortunate, since Schuster had hoped it would be a breakout hit along the lines of Jamie Uys's *The Gods Must Be Crazy (1980)*" (Crigler 2018:6).

The blackface and white face in the film is utilized to serve two functions; firstly, it hides Rhino and Zulu from Rowena and Diehard. It is a disguise that they both use to fool the villains. Secondly it functions as a culture swap between two people from different societies. Zulu becomes a "white" man who acts like he hates black people and Rhino becomes a "black" man who acts like a servant. From a comedic point of view, the humour of the characters in black and white face is drawn from the absurdity of the situation. There is a scene where Rhino and Zulu go to urinate whilst they are in their disguises. An old white man who stands in the middle of them gets confused when he takes a sneak peek at their penises and notices that they do not match their skin tones. Such scenes are used to create humour because they confuse the people around them. Even the T.I.R.D members look stupid because they proudly claim that they can detect black people but fail to detect that Zulu is a black person in white face. An important question to ask about the films use of blackface is: Does it serve a narrative purpose that would be lost if the blackface is not used or is it simply used for cheap comedy? Unfortunately for this film, the blackface is used for cheap comedy and to reinforce simplistic and problematic racial stereotypes. These blackface stereotypes fail to deconstruct race in a meaningful way and settles for basic humour that can be summarized as "it is funny because a white man is

pretending to be black and vice-versa". The makeup artist could have simply made Rhino look like a different white man and the same could have been done for Zulu to look like a different black man. You can remove the blackface, and nothing changes in the narrative of the film. The black characters in this film are one dimensional and are linked to popular black stereotypes. Zulu is a gangster, Lillian Dube's character is a mammy and Schuster is an obedient servant. It is unfortunate that these stereotypical representations are not being challenged or deconstructed. Hooks notes that "if the many non-black people who produce images or critical narratives about blackness and black people do not interrogate their perspective, then they may simply recreate the imperial gaze-the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and colonize" (Hooks 1992:7). In this film, Schuster consciously or unconsciously reproduces the imperial gaze. It is alarming that Schuster's default performance of blackness is one of a dumb and obedient servant who addresses 'white' Zulu as master. There is no complexity or nuance in the performance and it only functions to reaffirm black stereotypes. Lisa Bold (1994) argues that "the solution to the use of stereotypes is to invert them, in order to re-evaluate in a positive way what has historically been negatively valued by the dominant culture" (Bold, 1994). This is the stance that comedy should take when using stereotypes to avoid controversy and to add meaningful discourse about race and representation. The stereotypes used in this film are easily recognisable and create cheap comedy. This makes it easy for audiences to laugh at the stereotypes instead of engaging with them.

Towards the end of the film, Rhino and Zulu's true identities are discovered by the villains and they are imprisoned. In that scene Zulu expresses the hurt and fear he felt when his best friend pointed a gun at him to impress a girl, this moment was Zulu's first taste of racism. However, Rhino refuses to hold himself accountable for what he did to Zulu, and instead blames it on him being young back then. Rhinos' solution to Zulu's trauma is not to apologize but to let Zulu do the same thing to him. He gives Zulu a golf ball and golf club and tells Zulu to take a shot at him if it will make him feel better. Rhino sees Zulu's childhood trauma as childish fun that can solely be blamed on Rowena. Rhino does not see himself as racist even though he let a racist woman drive a drift between him and his black friend and he even chose to marry that same woman. The problem here is Schuster shies away from portraying white South African racism. The choice to make Rowena an American who is portrayed as the most stereotypical racist who has even named her dog 'nigger' is alarming. Diehard on the other hand is a racist German neo-Nazi. The villains could have been a local neo-Nazi group like the Afrikaner

Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) or even agents of the apartheid government but those are not present. He fails to portray a true reflection of South African racism within his own character and the supporting characters.

The most memorable part about this film is its effective use of slapstick; it has some of the funniest slapstick gags that Schuster has ever made. Most of the gags in this film have been repeatedly used by Schuster in his other films. What has been pointed out about the film is that: "The last half hour of the movie is an outrageous pastiche of the American comedy *Home Alone (1990)*" (Cringler 2018:7). It is a pastiche not in the fact that the slapstick is similar to the one used in *Home Alone (1990)* but in the fact that there are children who build traps to punish the villainous adults. The elaborate and torturous pranks that Tinkie and Prince William use on Die Hard and Rowena are smart and funny. In chapter 2, I pointed out that slapstick works when the audience identifies with the clown who is experiencing the pain, however in this film the people who experience the pain are the antagonists, so why is this still funny if we do not identify with the clowns. In such cases Louise Peacock points out that: "violence in performance, particularly comic violence, can be justified as a kind of morality lesson" (Peacock 2014:173). In other words, the villains are getting what they deserve; this can be linked to the Home Alone films: "in Home Alone, the victims are clearly in the wrong from the outset then laughing at their misfortune becomes much easier because it is possible to see the pain as a punishment for wrongdoing." (Peacock 2014:146). Diehard and Rowena are portrayed as evil racists so when they go through all the torture, it is satisfying. Another effective way that Schuster uses slapstick is through the fact that even though the villains are put through slapstick traps that would in real life get them killed, he makes sure that we do not see them suffering or bleeding. The film is full of cartoonish physics that only work in the world of the film: "Many slapstick stunts and performances involve performers in situations that the audience recognises as physically impossible for the average man or woman" (Peacock 2014:36). It is important that the audience sees the suffering of the comic as relatively unrealistic: "If the depiction of pain is realistic and occurs within a realistic setting then the response provoked is more likely to be sympathy than laughter" (Peacock 2014:35). A way that they achieve this is through the exaggerated performances of Diehard and Rowena.

The White Mammy: Mama Jack

Jack Theron (Leon Schuster) is a lonely man who works as a grip on a Nelson Mandela film titled "*Sweet Bird of Freedom*" which is directed by John Daragon, an American director. Jack causes trouble for John on set to a point where the annoyed director conjures a plan to humiliate and fire Jack from the film set. In an important function John drugs Jack with a drug called Mama Africa, which causes hallucinations and makes jack ruin the function and puts him in trouble with the law. Jack becomes a fugitive and asks his friend Shorty (Alfred Ntombela) for help. Shorty gives him a complete make over, turning him into Mama Bolo. After a misunderstanding, Jack ends up working as a maid in Angela's house (Mary-Anne Barlow), who he later finds out is John's fiancée. Jack uses this revelation to exact revenge on John and make his life miserable, he also overhears John confessing that he drugged him with the Mama Africa drug. Jack begins to fall in love with Angela, but he cannot reveal his identity to her. On one occasion Jack removes his mask and takes a bath when he believes that Angela has left the house, only for her to come back and find a naked Jack in the bathroom. To prevent Angela from calling the police, Jack changes his accent to sound Scottish and tells her that his name is Donald, a friend of Mama Bolo. Angela falls for it and begins to fall in love with Donald. Mama Bolo also secures a role as an Angel who frees Mandela in the Sweet Bird of Freedom film. During the films premier Jack clears his name when John publicly admits that he drugged Jack. Unfortunately for Jack, his clothes get torn on stage, revealing his true identity, this makes Angela upset. Weeks later Jack finds the courage to tell Angela that he loves her, she forgives him, and they get married.

Mama Jack (2005) is a film that obviously takes a lot of inspiration from successful gender swap films like *Tootsie (1982)*, *Mrs Doubtfire (1993)*, and more closely *Big Mamas House (2000)*. They all have similar story beats of a male protagonist putting on makeup and prosthetics to look like a woman; they fool everyone at the beginning, only to be discovered at the end. The film was a huge success at the box office, making around R26 Million. When Schuster made the unexpected announcement that he will no longer use blackface in his films, he admitted that he wanted to make a sequel to Mama Jack, but he will no longer make it because of its reliance on blackface. Schuster said that: "I'm so sorry that I can't make Mama Jack 2. If I had a dream come true, my next movie would be Mama Jack 2" (Wagner, 2018).

Blackface in this film is used as a way for Jack Theron to not be recognized by the police or the public. He later uses this newfound "black" identity to secure a role in the Nelson Mandela film. The use of blackface in the film becomes highly questionable because the film has a major plot hole. A plot hole occurs when filmmakers "Ignore or fail to notice logical inconsistencies that should normally prevent the progression of the plot towards its outcome" (Ryan 2009:66). In the film, Jack puts on blackface as a disguise because he is a fugitive. Jack's face is on newspapers and television, and even the US embassy wants him to be arrested. However, halfway through the film, Jack is caught without his makeup by Angela in her bathtub. Jack fakes a Scottish accent and tells Angela that he is friends with Mama Bolo. Angela falls for it and even keeps him around, and this is where the plot hole comes into play. Firstly, Angela's fiancée is the one who got Jack into trouble so she should know who Jack is and how he looks. On top of that his face is all over newspapers and television, so it makes no sense for her to not recognise his face. Secondly, Jack goes out with Angela and her daughter in public without wearing any disguise and nobody recognises him or even calls the police. So, if changing his accent makes other people to not recognise him then why does he need to wear the Mama Bolo disguise? One could argue that logic should not be applied into the film since it is a comedy. The humour is then drawn from the absurdity of a white man dressed as a fat black woman, and his incompetence at being a maid. *Big Mammas House (2000), Norbit (2007)* and the Madea films have managed to create comedy using a similar gimmick, however these were black men dressed as black women. However, in the film *White Chicks (2004)*, we find black men dressed as white women and they play the dumb blonde stereotype. Representation in comedy is not tailored for political correctness, it is through political incorrectness that makes comedy funny. A white man dressed as a black woman is funny to Schuster's audience because many of them are not educated about blackface.

Schuster portrays Mama Bolo as a mammy stereotype: "the traditional mammy was a slave or servant who worked for a white family. She was an unattractive, large, desexualized woman who lived to serve" (Larson 2006:26). The mammy was highly popular in American films; one of the most famous depiction of a mammy was in *Gone with the Wind (1939),* where Hattie McDaniel plays a maid called 'Mammy'. Hattie McDaniel ended up winning an academy award for her performance, becoming the first black woman in history to win an Oscar. The mammy is an othered character, there is a sense of extreme difference between her and the white female that she usually works for. This difference gives off a normal/abnormal dynamic.

In *Mama Jack (2005),* when you contrast the two female characters Mama Bolo (Leon Schuster in costume) and Angela (the romantic interest), Angela is the "normal", she is young, beautiful and has a kind heart whilst Mama Bolo can be seen as the "abnormal"; simplistic and stereotypical representation of a domestic worker, she is big, ugly, clumsy and nurturing. There is no nuance to the domestic worker that he represents and even the other domestic workers in the film fall under the same stereotype and are never fully developed. However, like I have pointed out, comedy and stereotypes work hand in hand. It is difficult to separate modern comedy from stereotypes. Stereotypes are easy to digest and laugh at, so when Schuster uses the mammy stereotype here, it is easy to see why people laugh at it. On top of that *Big Mammas House (2000)* had come out a few years earlier, and it too used the mammy stereotype for comedic effect. However, it is still important to flag and deconstruct stereotypical representations in popular media.

The slapstick punishment in the film is mostly inflicted on John Daragon who is the main antagonist. John is given irredeemable qualities; he is a terrible fiancé, he is an absent father, he is a bad director and he is also racist. When Jack gets his revenge on John, it is earned and the pain that John feels is justifiable, and audiences can easily laugh at him: "notions of morality – in particular the idea of whether or not the victim deserves to be hurt – will influence the laughter response." (Peacock 2014:79). Another effective use of slapstick in this film that can be connected to *There's a Zulu on my Stoep (1993)*, is the fact that the violence is exaggerated. This again allows audiences to not be traumatized by what they are seeing and enjoy the slapstick. Although the slapstick in this film does not live up to the crazy stunts used in *There's a Zulu on my Stoep (1993),* it is still effective enough for general audiences to enjoy and laugh.

A Candid View of South Africa

The last two case studies are candid camera skit films. What differentiates them are the plots; however, the plots tend to be irrelevant and mostly work to contextualize the story and the skits. The plots are added to make the films feel like cinematic experiences instead of a candid camera television show. Both films have generic plots that deal with issues that affected the

country at the time. Audiences are there to watch the skits and see people's crazy reactions and emotional outbursts. What is interesting about Schuster's candid camera films is that he always plays himself. The films have a sense of self-awareness, he is always complaining about being tired of getting slapped around but is always dragged back into action to make South Africans laugh. Schuster playing himself allows audiences to connect with him and to even identify with him.

Oh Schuks…I'm Gatvol (2004) dealt with the increase in crime in the early 2000's. At the beginning of the film Schuks gets hijacked and this frustrates him. His friend Alf on the other hand gets arrested after the police believe that he is breaking into his own house. Their frustrations lead them to taking the difficult decision of relocating to Australia. On their way to Australia Schuks, Alf and all the passengers get homesick when they remember the good things about South Africa, this nostalgia leads them to request for the plane to turn back. The film also has a subplot about a dwarf dictator named Samoosa Woestyn and his incompetent minion Ali Haque. They are trying to get a tape from Schuks that exposes their plans to kill President George W. Bush. This subplot is mainly there to add an antagonist and their choice to use the dictator may be due to Bush's war on terror against Saddam Hussein which began in 2003, a year before the film was released.

Schuks Tshabalala's Survival Guide to South Africa (2010) simply dealt with the 2010 FIFA World Cup, which was the first world cup to be hosted by an African country. Many foreign nations were concerned about South Africa being the host since it is a developing country with its own problems. This film was a response to those who felt that South Africa was not ready to host the World Cup. It follows Schuks Tshabalala (Leon Schuster) and his friend Shorty (Alfred Ntombela) who are commissioned to make a film that serves as a guide to foreigners about the uniqueness of South Africa.

Blackface in both films and all his other candid camera films is mainly used as a disguise from the public since Schuster's face is highly recognisable. It serves no narrative function, and it is just a way for Schuster to embody multiple different characters and stereotypes. Whether he is disguised as a homeless man or a police officer, the point of these disguises is to anger and

annoy white people who end up attacking him even if he is disguised as an authority figure. He does not really have to put on blackface because he has been able to fool people whilst disguised as a different white man. Schuster does disguise himself as other races however he gets the most extreme reactions when he is provoking white people in blackface. Phumlani Pikoli points out that: "His blackface exposed just how okay we are with all of it and how normalised race tensions are in South Africa. As long as it's white hitting on black it's funny, his comedy harks" (Pikoli, 2020). The main point here is the normalization of racial tension and white on 'black' violence. Schuster never disguises himself as a black person and go to provoke a violent encounter with another black person. He shows white people attacking a performed blackness that is far from the reality of real blackness. Once he has the perfect reaction, Schuster can easily de-escalate the situation by peeling the blackness off his face to reveal whiteness and a familiar face. If there was no mask to peel off; then it would not be as funny for Schuster's audience. As I have already pointed out, he said that he is going to stop using blackface. It will be interesting to see what new characters he is going to come up with, since the best way for him to annoy white people was to dress up as a black person.

When Candid goes Wrong

In terms of slapstick in *Oh Schuks…I'm Gatvol (2004)* Bill Flynn who plays Ali Haque (Samoosa's minion) takes all of the pain in this film, and his over-the-top reactions are what make all his torturous moments funny. He constantly gets abused by his leader for his incompetence and is beaten up multiple times by a coloured woman in the plane. Apart from Ali Haque providing us with funny slapstick, we also have Schuster being slapped by the public. In both films Schuster getting slapped, never gets old and there are moments where he even gets punched. It is only white people who attack him and get violent, even when Schuster is dressed as a police officer in both films. In such scenarios the slapstick is not scripted at all, the violence is real, but audiences still find laughter in how Schuster pushes his victim's buttons. The camera reveal at the end of the prank is the cherry on top, as the victims feel stupid for overreacting: "it is in that moment when participants discover the camera – and hence look directly into it - that the connection between the ordinary person on screen and ordinary viewers at home is made more strongly" (Kavka 2012:18). This year Schuster is 70 years old, at this age he can no longer take physical hits like he used to in his younger days. At his peak he could

provoke and even dodge being hit by his victims. He was agile and full of energy. Since the candid skits were not scripted, he had to do a lot of improvising, and he always knew how to get the perfect reactions out of his victims. He understands how far he can push people's buttons before letting them know that it is all a joke.

The most memorable skit from *Oh Schuks…I'm Gatvol (2004)* is towards the end of the film. We see Schuster disguised as a black traffic officer. He stops drivers and asks them for their licenses, after scanning it, he tells them that their licenses are fake and cuts them with scissors. This leads to a violent confrontation where Schuster gets beaten up by different white drivers. They are fighting with an "officer of the law"; if there was no candid setup, they could easily be arrested and face serious charges. One would assume that the drivers would be more cautious, but they are not. Schuster is clearly showing how violent his white victims are, to a point where they can assault an officer without thinking about consequences. These moments are funny to Schuster's audience because of the lengths that Schuster goes to, to provoke them; in one case he even slaps the driver. He does not unfortunately show reactions of black drivers; it would have been interesting to contrast the two. There is a moment when he rudely asks one driver to give him his licence and the driver seems to be ready to confront Schuster. Then suddenly a taxi speeds past Schuster and he uses a shotgun to shoot the taxis back window. When the driver sees Schuster firing the weapon, he becomes more cooperative instead of hostile. His white victims are less hostile when they see a weapon. The final white man who is stopped by Schuster elicits a different reaction from the audience. Unlike the previous violent encounters, this man does everything by the rules and does not try to be confrontational. Schuster even instructs the man to take a picture of his genitals to prove his identity and the man does so with no questions asked. Schuster eventually stops the prank and points the man to the direction of the cameras when he realises that he cannot get the expected reaction out of the man. He stops the prank because at that moment the audience is no longer laughing. They feel sympathy for the man because it looks and feels like a cruel joke. Schuster could have simply chosen to not include this segment just like many other pranks that do not go his way. It could be that the segments inclusion serves as a balancing act to show that not all the white people that he provokes turn violent. Another reason could be that Schuster is giving his audience a glimpse backstage look into how things do not always go according to plan. Either way, its inclusion is baffling since it makes him look bad.

Racial Recognition through Assimilation

Schuks Tshabalala's Survival Guide to South Africa (2010) has skits that are mainly centred around the FIFA World Cup; the memorable ones focus on the racial tensions that are still present even in a moment where we were going to welcome the rest of the world into our country. A skit that perfectly demonstrates this is one that does not follow the usual candid skit format that the rest of the film follows. In the scene we see a black musician in a mall full of white people. He is playing his guitar and singing a song in his indigenous language. He continues singing but no one notices his existence; all the white people pass him by without putting money in his collection hat. Then the musician decides to change the song and begins to play an Afrikaans song. It is only then that the white people who passed him finally acknowledge him, praise him, and even give him money. The song that he plays is called *De La Rey* by Bok van Blerk, a song that has a lot of political subtext that relates to Afrikaans nationalism. The song is named after Koos de la Rey, a Boer war general who led the Afrikaners in their war for independence against the British in the second Boer war. The song was a huge success and became a symbol of Afrikaans identity in a post-apartheid South Africa. However, it is also seen as a controversial song amongst other people, according to Chris McCreal of The Guardian: "Others view it as an attempt to rebrand Afrikaners from oppressors to victims by casting back to their suffering at the hands of the British as an analogy for the perceived injustices of life under black rule" (McGreal, 2007). Knowing this context, the politics of the scene become clear. Schuster uses this scene to expose the conflict that is still active between black and white South Africans. Schuster also shows that white Afrikaners will only recognize black people when they assimilate themselves into the Afrikaans culture.

A memorable skit in the same film, showed an interesting perspective in candid camera reactions. It poses a 'what if' question that I tend to ask myself when I watch these skits. What if the victim of the prank reacts in such a negative way that the presence of the camera does not calm them down? This was effectively explored in this film where Schuster is disguised as a Dutch reporter who is interviewing well known South African politicians and actors, about concerns of other countries on South Africa's preparations to host them. During the interview,

a man would pass by the camera and the gag would be that he would disturb the interview and eventually try to hijack a nearby car. Schuster will then intervene and attack the man before exposing his identity to the shocked interviewees. Local actor and comedian Rob Van Vuuren does not react the way Schuster expected, he reacts violently and says that he had been a victim of hijacking and he does not find it funny. Schuster removes his fat-suit and tries to calm him down and even apologises repeatedly. This was an unfamiliar moment for Schuster and his audience, it became awkward, and the audience began to feel bad for Rob. This is not a good feeling if you are trying to make people laugh. After a long moment of awkwardness, one of the crew members reveals to Schuster that he is being 'schuksed', this moment allowed Schuster and his audience to finally calm down and laugh. Schuster finally became the victim of his own pranks; I believe that this was a funny moment to close off the film because the joke was finally on Schuster.

The case studies were carefully chosen to highlight Schuster's techniques and how he applies them. A lot of emphasis was put on how he tackles race especially with his use of blackface and stereotypes. What is clear is that Schuster uses these controversial techniques within their basic comedic point of view and does not go deeper than that. This is unfortunate because there is a lot that he can say about race without limiting it to basic stereotypes. Slapstick and candid camera is where Schuster shines the most. He can bait and push the buttons of his victims to an extreme end that entertains his audience. He takes a lot of punishment before peeling the mask and revealing the cameras.

Chapter 4:

ZWART: Blackface/White Mask

In this chapter I will discuss my creative project *Zwart (2021)* in detail and highlight how it deconstructs Schuster's formula in tackling social issues that affect black South Africans. From the analysis of Schuster's films, it became clear that even though he effectively applies his techniques, he however tends to present some of these techniques in a simplified way with no depth. This obviously works for him since his films are mainly there to entertain more than engage. However, given that he tackles serious subject matters like racial tension and blackness, I believe that he should highlight these issues in a nuanced way. *Zwart (2021)* takes some elements from Schuster's formula to create a deconstructive work that does not simply perpetuate the more problematic elements of racial identity and South African 'race relations' but challenges them. It also focuses on racial tension, indoctrination, toxic masculinity, blackness and the black experience through the eye of a black filmmaker.

Concept

Zwart (2021) is a science fiction short film, made as part of my creative project for my Masters, it follows the journey of 53 (Zimkhitha Letlotlo), a lab-grown human with an artificially intelligent brain. 53 wakes up in a testing room of a company named A.D.A.M (Advanced Development of Artificial Machines) where she is greeted by E.V.E (Executive Vice Enforcer), an artificial intelligence that prepares her for the outside world. At first 53 believes that she was created to solve the world's problems, only to find out that she was created to be an obedient maid that must also satisfy her buyer's sexual needs. Initially 53 follows along the prescribed role that she is being given, but she eventually breaks away to follow her own path. The title of the film 'Zwart' is a Dutch word that means black. I intentionally chose Dutch because of the history of the Dutch with South Africa, starting all the way back in 1652 with

the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck. It is also a reference to the blackface Zwarte Piet character that is still being celebrated to this day by the Dutch. I chose science fiction for two reasons, the first being that it is a popular mainstream genre, the same way that Schuster uses comedy, which is also mainstream. Secondly, I chose it because it is a rarely used genre in South African media because it is expensive to produce.

Characters

53 is a human with an artificially intelligent brain, she is a blank slate with no identity or community. Due to her artificial intelligence, she can process new information in an instant and teach herself new things. 53 is instructed by E.V.E to play a black stereotype, more specifically the mammy stereotype. This stereotype is found in *Mama Jack (2005)*, where Mama Bolo is a stereotypical representation of a black woman. The mammy has simple attributes: "The mammy is the nurturer. She is not known for making waves; rather, she plays a supporting role in the lives of the folks tasked with maintaining the status quo" (Gammage and Alameen-Shavers 2019:169). The mammy stereotype is also accompanied by certain physical attributes, which include a darker skin tone and a big body size which serves as a contrast to the small white woman. With the character of 53, I stripped away the core attributes of this stereotype in terms of behaviour and appearance. 53 has a small body size, which is a far contrast to Mama Bolo, Big Mama or Mammy from *Gone with the Wind (1939)*. The mammy is also stripped off her sexuality to not intimidate her white counterpart; 53 on the other hand is designed to appeal to Jan's sexual fantasies, however she refuses his gaze and even physically fights against it. Unlike the traditional mammy, 53 does not bow down to authority figures, she is rebellious and refuses to follow the rules that are given to her. She questions things that she does not agree with and even confronts Jan when he tries to assert his control over her. She actively breaks away from her prescribed stereotype in order to realise her full potential as an instigator for change. I chose her prescribed occupation to be a maid; this is mainly due to the fact that Schuster uses this character type in his films *(Mama Jack* and *There's a Zulu on my Stoep*). He however portrays those characters using basic black stereotypes and shows them as incompetent. My aim with 53 was to break away from

Schuster's simplistic representation of blackness by presenting a smart, strong and rebellious black female character.

At the beginning when 53 is told to only speak in English and Afrikaans, she questions this instruction from E.V.E by speaking in Setswana, but she is told that other languages are irrelevant. It is after hearing this dismissal that 53 takes her first step of rebellion by choosing to speak in Dutch, which is the mother language of Afrikaans. This scene is a homage to a similar scene in *Mama Jack (2005)* where Mama Bolo (Schuster) is suspected to be an undocumented foreigner. In the scene Mama Bolo is stopped by two police officers and is questioned about where she is from. Mama Bolo says she is South African; however, the officers do not believe her and put her claims to the test by asking her to say some Afrikaans words. She passes the test when she successfully speaks in the language. I found this scene interesting because it consciously or unconsciously insinuates that a black South African national can be accurately identified if they can speak and understand Afrikaans instead of the multiple indigenous African languages.

When Jan tells 53 that she needs a name, she says she wants to be called 'Baboloki', which is a Setswana name that means Saviour. She sees herself as someone who can make a huge change in the world. However, Jan denounces her name because he cannot pronounce it and gives her a name that he is comfortable with, 'Sarah'. This was a tradition that was done during colonialism and apartheid, where black people were given white names and stripped of their identity so that they can be assimilated into white culture. 53 identifies as a black person; however, Jan dismisses her identity simply because she was created in a lab and has a mechanical brain. Jan argues that she is 'race fluid', meaning that her brain could have been placed in a different racial identity. Jan sees blackness as a lived experience; it is only when 53 does something that Jan identifies as a "black" trait that he finally acknowledges her blackness. His acknowledgement is however problematic and fully brings out his racist ideology. 53 does not take this laying down like she has been trained to do, she instead fights back and calls him out.

When 53 is at the lab and when she first meets Jan, her body movements are rigid and robotic because she is playing the naïve and obedient role that she was told to play. Even the way she speaks at the beginning sounds robotic. Once she begins resisting her orders, her movements and voice become more flexible and human to emphasise her freedom. 53's wardrobe change also matches her personality and feelings in the different scenes. She starts off wearing a long white dress which represents her "purity" and naivety. In the next scene where she accidentally breaks Jan's trophy, 53 is dressed in a red dress, which represents her fierceness when she challenges Jan's problematic views. At the end, 53 is in a black dress, the dress represents her true identity as a strong black woman.

53's journey and experiences are a candid look of black experiences during apartheid and even post-apartheid South Africa. She is stripped off her African name to be given a white name that white people can easily pronounce. She is stripped off her chosen language and is expected to speak English and Afrikaans. She is stripped off her voice and is expected to not question racism, stereotypes and toxic masculinity. However, 53 refuses her social conditioning and chooses a path of change. She sees what is wrong with society and makes it her mission and purpose to actively change the world for the better. The ending of the film is ambiguous and does not provide answers as to what 53 will do. Jan confidently tells her that she cannot change anything; he knows that the world is complex and full of never-ending conflicts. Even though she knows it will not be easy to make significant changes in the world, she is still determined to try.

Jan Botha represents white South African racism that Schuster rarely confronts in his films. He is the embodiment of bigotry and white privilege. At the beginning, he dismisses 53's African name and when she breaks something, he belittles her and refers to her as "you people". Jan dominates the frame at the beginning, his height helps him to tower over 53 and assert his power. When he first meets 53, she moves towards him and he shifts back, 53 assumes it is because of her blackness. Jan doubles down by saying, "I don't see colour; my former maid was black". I used this line as a ridicule to the "I can't be racist because I have black friends" statement that some white people tend to use when confronted about their privilege or racial insensitivities. It would have been too simplistic and stereotypical to solely portray Jan as an irredeemable racist, however I wanted to question the origin of racism and racial tension. In

order to achieve this, I chose to show a different and vulnerable side of him when he reveals why he chose 53's design. Jan reveals that 53 was designed to look like his childhood girlfriend (Sarah Tedu) who he was forced to breakup with due to his father's racist ideology. My attempt here was to show how one is not born racist, they are instead taught and indoctrinated from a young age to be racist by their families, peers, community or institutions.

A popular slapstick gag that I used in the film is the groin attack, where a male character is attacked in the groin area. Schuster uses this gag a lot throughout his filmography and gets audiences to laugh due to the over exaggerated facial expressions that his actors make. In my film, the groin attack happens when Jan tries to initiate his sexual advances towards 53. Jan takes 53's hand and places it in this groin area, 53 then reacts to this action by squeezing hard. Jan tries to break away from the grip, but it causes more pain. At first, he commands her to let him go and even insults her, but she continues inflicting pain, telling him that she will only stop if he asks her nicely. The groin attack in the film does not follow Schuster's route of extreme comic over reaction. Jan does give off an extreme performance of pain; however, I made sure that the performer does not pull a cartoonish/over the top reaction as it would have taken away from the importance of the moment. It is 53's moment; where she is asserting her dominance and takes back her power. She denies Jan his fetish fantasy and strips him of whatever power he thought he had.

E.V.E represents authority and "social order"; she asserts her power over 53 through psychology. Visually E.V.E takes the shape of a block that stands above 53 and looks down at her. 53 must look up when she talks to E.V.E, making her feel like a child who is speaking to a parent. E.V.E is the system of control and oppression and she silences 53 when she questions some of the things that she is being told to do. She paints a beautiful picture of 53's life outside the lab, and to some extent it works because 53 has never seen the outside world. E.V. E's role is to make sure that 53 follows the rules because she is a product that brings in a lot of money for the company. E.V.E instructs 53 to play to the stereotype that she is being assigned to and dismisses any ambitions that 53 may have. E.V.E and the company also have an idealized view of what a woman should look like. When 53 is transformed into a "modern civilized woman" she is given long European hair and is dressed in a long white dress. This is the reality that

black women go through with the cosmetic industry. They are constantly being pushed to spend a lot of money to look different, to have longer hair and to have lighter skin.

Visual Style

I wanted to create a unique visual style that captures the complexity of the script. This was accomplished by picking a good location to shoot and a talented crew. The testing lab at the beginning was realised through the use of visual effects which took time to make, but realism was the aim. The dull grey square walls were intentional to represent confinement and a sense of emptiness, which is what 53 is feeling at the beginning. Jan's house is bigger and more colourful, and she can move around easily, however 53 still feels trapped because it is another place where she is expected to be silent and follow rules. This leads to 53 making the decision to escape. The lighting at the lab is not complex or colourful because I envisioned the area to look and feel like an interrogation room where 53 cannot escape. We introduce colours when she gets to Jan's house, where the colours are more pronounced. This sharp contrast of colours works to show 53's slow break away from her confinement.

53's HUD (head up display) is a visual indicator of what she sees. I intentionally put the A.D.A.M name on top of her display to emphasize the ownership that the company has over her. They can easily mute her, electrocute her and shut her down without consent. The company even gives Jan this power to silence 53 with a click of a button on his phone. However, once 53 is out of the lab she is able to regain a sense of control and she hacks Jan's phone and disables it. When Jan tries to shut her down at the end, she tells him that she disabled any power he had over her.

There is a visual motif with the use of mirrors throughout the film. We shot the film in a way that shows characters being reflected in the environment. The mirrors are not just visual noise, they have a clear purpose. The mirrors reflect the characters dual identities. Jan presents himself as a confident and domineering figure who demands respect, whilst in reality he is

clumsy, scared and weak. 53 presents herself as naïve and obedient at the beginning, whilst in reality she is curious, smart, confident and independent.

The film accomplished my goal of critically deconstructing Schuster's techniques. However, I could not go deeper with the themes of racial tension, racism and stereotypes as they are complex subject matters that need a lot of build-up to be fully realised. Trying to fit those subject matters in a short film is challenging at best and impossible at worst due to the complexity of the topic. In a short film there is not enough time to build tension and character arcs, because things need to happen faster to move the story along. Due to this time constraint, it was impossible to give Jan a complex character arc. 53's character comes out more developed compared to Jan since she's the main character. Overall, the film serves as a blueprint for future projects that deal with race and representation.

CONCLUSION

Every filmmaker wants to make a good film, however the people who judge the quality of a film is the audience. As academics we may not agree with what general audiences connect with when it comes to the quality of a film. This is mainly due to the fact that academics have a theoretical and, in some cases, even practical grasp of filmmaking, whilst most audiences do not possess such insights. Audiences go to cinemas to have a good time and not to analyse the politics, history or philosophy of a film. Some audiences want escapist relief from the difficult socio-political and economic realities that plague them. There is a reason why most Oscar nominated films do not make a lot of money compared to the billions that blockbusters make. This is not to say that critical and casual audiences do not find common ground in certain films, with the ever-growing Marvel Cinematic Universe being one great example of that. This also does not dismiss the fact that critically acclaimed films do have their own niche audience, that give them support. However, in South Africa it is different; most of our audiences prefer Hollywood blockbusters over local films. Schuster has for many years managed to give Hollywood a run for their money in our local cinemas. Schuster's films attract a wide diverse audience and break box office numbers. I wanted to understand why and how he manages to dominate our local cinemas given that his films come with a lot of controversy due to his use of blackface and black stereotypes.

Schuster has managed to build his career off the foundation of Jamie Uys's work. He has taken some of Uys's popular films and adapted them into his own films that have generated a lot of profit. They are both controversial filmmakers who have profited off the poor depiction of blackness, which is unfortunate but most black audiences do not seem to care. Schuster's mastery of marketing and distribution should be a blueprint on how to successfully market a film. Through working with big name producers, casting black celebrities and using indigenous languages; he is able to attract a wide black audience. This audience has followed him throughout the years and even came to his defence when his films were removed off Showmax for their depiction of blackness.

The case studies show how Schuster has perfected his formula which is impressive. His effective use of slapstick to create memorable gags in films like *There's a Zulu on my Stoep (1993)* shows his dedication to entertain. Slapstick is not as easy as it looks, there is a lot of work that goes into making the stunts look good. The actors who are on the receiving end of the slapstick sell it well with their exaggerated reactions "In order for us to find slapstick comedy funny, it must be framed as such. Often this incorporates elements of absurdity or departures from reality" (Peacock 2014:171). Schuster's candid camera skits will always be a defining part of his career. He knows how to put people in uncomfortable and hilarious scenarios. What makes them even more effective is his personal involvement and improvisational skills that he applies to get angry reactions out of his victims. Schuster's more controversial techniques like blackface and stereotypes, do not push people away because he has normalized them to his audience. However, their use is not justified in his films, and they serve nothing more than cheap comedy. Stereotypes have been prominent in comedy and are an easier way to get a reaction from audiences. However, it is advised to use stereotypes as a critique and not as a fact; Schuster does not critique the stereotypes that he uses. Even though he denotatively presents them as harmless comedy, their presence harbours problematic connotations. He could have used these controversial techniques in a deconstructive manner to create critical discourse around race and representation. I am happy that he decided to move away from blackface since it is historically caught up in a deeply racist and harmful, othering mode of representing blackness through 'the black body'.

Zwart (2021) aims to deconstruct Schuster's techniques in a narrative that deals with racial tension, bigotry, racism and blackness. The film examines how black people are expected to embrace their given stereotypes. The film critiques Schuster's representation of blackness, black women and black stereotypes. The character of 53 refuses to be silenced and actively fights against the stereotypical box that she is being forced into. The film shows a nuanced depiction of blackness and it tackles racism directly by showing a future where such issues still exist. Due to time constraints, the characters could not be developed any further which is unfortunate as there is a lot to say around issues of race and representation.

Research around our film industry is important as it highlights where we can grow and develop. Looking at Schuster was one way for me to understand how he makes successful films that

resonate with a diverse audience. My research mainly focuses on his storytelling techniques with limited glimpses of marketing and distribution. Future research that is more focused on Schuster's marketing techniques or successful marketing in general will be beneficial to our industry.

Filmography

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