

https://dspace.org/

'Suddenly the film scene is becoming our scene'! the making and public lives of black-centred films in South Africa (1959-2001)

Modisane, Litheko

2010-06-23T11:18:08Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8196

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

Chapter 1
OPENING SHOTS

Through an examination of the making and public lives of a selection of apartheid and post-apartheid black-centred films in South Africa: *Come Back, Africa* (1959), *u'Deliwe* (1975), *Mapantsula* (1988), and *Fools* (1997), their contexts of production, circulation, appropriation and engagement, I investigate the role of film in the public life of ideas. While my focus is chiefly on film, I introduce a brief comparator with the television series *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2001), where I deploy the same methodology. I have consciously identified the films as 'black-centred' and not as 'black', because blackness is the subject of their focus, and not an *a priori* and hermetically sealed category. The differences in the films' production circumstances, the diversity of their representations and genres precludes the homogeneity suggested by the category 'black'. The circulation of ideas and their extensive engagements beyond their points of inception constitute these films' public lives. The thesis asks how the selected films relate to historical and ongoing public discourses on black identity. The problem of the thesis is the public critical status of film particularly in relation to modernity, the very condition and discourse with which film is intractably linked. The link between film and modernity is manifest at various levels including the technological, cultural and social levels. Thus, not only is film a modern invention, but its social and cultural dimensions constitute the subjective experiences of modernity itself. The social convention of cinema-going, which is a notable part of urban modern life, and film's address of modern social relations, exemplify film's social and cultural relations to modernity. This study explores the concept of 'film' in relation to the concept of the 'public'. In the effort to understand the nature of film and its critical importance in modern public life, the thesis investigates film as a circulating text subject to many uses and interpretations. The thesis is motivated by provocations emanating from theories of the public sphere, film scholarship, African intellectual history, and the condition of modernity- especially as it relates to South Africa. The first task in the consideration of these provocations is to present a précis of the pre-history and then of the historical contexts of the selected films.

WitsETD

Overview of African Encounters with Film (Cinema and Television): 1908-2004

A lack of symbolic control and ownership of African images by Africans themselves marks Africans' historical encounter with the cinema. As part of colonial society and later racist settler capitalism in South Africa, film became one of the objects around and through which the power relations that typified these societies were buttressed symbolically and socially. Deeply ingrained in these relations was the very iconography of Africa on screen. According to the philosopher Sylvia Wynter, the continent through the object of film, among others, 'was submitted to the memory of the West' (cited in Givanni 2001: 29).[1] In South Africa in particular, film was founded on the construction of colonial history that was ultimately a celebration and validation of the violence that led to the subjugation of Africans. Arriving in Southern Africa in early 20th century 'when fundamental assumptions about the nature of African intellect, and the identity of white society were undergoing a process of reformulation' (Burns 2002: 2), film became an important instrument in the instating of the idea of white superiority, and therefore, the legitimacy of white people to rule over the black colonised.

Black people's participation in film overlapped with and was significantly informed by the repressive political framework of the colonial, and later, of the apartheid state. The apartheid system ceased to exist in 1994 when a new democratic dispensation came into being. The new political dispensation reversed the *status quo* and established a democratic culture in which black South Africans could participate and stake claims on the meanings of black identity and experience. Mapping the involvement of black people in South African film culture, at the level of filmmaking and in the employ of films for social engagements, provides a historical perspective of their changing social and political fortunes within and in relation to it. More importantly, it draws attention to the interface between social and political struggles and the terrain of filmic contestations of the social

[1]For a strictly philosophical attention to this observation, and on which Wynter ultimately relies, see Mudimbe V., 1990. *The Invention of Africa, Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, London: James Currey.

WiSER

and political imaginary of black identity and experience. By this move, I do not intend to confine public engagement of black identity to black South Africans per se. However, to locate the study strictly outside the actual historical challenges attendant on Africans' experiences of film risks losing the historical texture in the relations between film and discourses on black identity.

The imprint of black South Africans in film goes as far back as the turn of 20th century. In this early period, blacks were mainly constructed as 'noble savages', 'serving or killing white people' in movies that depicted frontier wars like *The Zulu's Heart* (1908) by D. W. Griffith, *De Voortrekkers* (*Winning a Continent*) (1916) by Harold Shaw, and *A Zulu's Devotion* (1916) directed by Joseph Albrecht (Peterson 2000: 130).[2] Other key fiction films of the period were *Symbol of Sacrifice*, (1918), and *Allan Quatermain* (1919). According to scholar and filmmaker, Bhekizizwe Peterson (2000: 130), with the emergence from 1927 of 'authentic African documentaries' filmed by Europeans, a 'deviation from the frontier features' occurred. For example, *Africa Today* (1927) by T. H. Baxter, 'explored the impact of Western civilization on the native' (Peterson 2000: 130). However, the mining recruitment film, *Native Life in the Cape Province*, later changed to *From Red Blanket to Civilization* (1925), by one Henry Taberer, the African Labour adviser for Native Recruiting Corporation, precedes *Africa Today*. *From Red Blanket* includes reconstructions of African encounters with industrialisation. In a recent study, the historian, Glenn Reynolds, has made an interesting observation that 'noticeably absent from the film are demeaning depictions of traditional life- what Rhodes once dismissed as the "life of sloth and laziness"' (Reynolds 2007: 136). However, its sequences are 'constructed through a decidedly teleological and Eurocentric perspective' (2007: 136). In this period, black-authored or assisted productions were practically non-existent.

[2] See also Davis P., 1996. *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa*: 127-141.

WitsETD

The African elite challenged the negative portrayals of Africans in cinema. Writer, Secretary-General of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC)[3], and its founding member, Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, registered his doubts about the cinema.

> I have since become suspicious of the veracity of the cinema and acquired a scepticism, which is not diminished by a gorgeous one exhibited in London which shows, side by side with the nobility of the white race, a highly coloured exaggeration of the depravity of blacks (Plaatje cited in Willan 1996: 212).[4]

Plaatje was responding to the racist film, *Birth of the Nation* (1915), particularly the crucifixion scene in which a black actor played the ill-famed biblical character, Judas Iscariot. According to his biographer, Brian Willan (1996), Plaatje and his collaborators successfully protested against the film's exhibition in South Africa. It can be intimated from these protests that the cinema's relations with colonial modernity were in this early period predicated upon contestations over black identity, particularly its role in the battle for ideological supremacy between African intellectuals and colonial ideologues. From the vantage point of his own efforts with the cinematograph, it seems that Plaatje's vigilance against *Birth* inspired in him the need for counter-narratives to white supremacist representations. In 1923, Plaatje brought films from his trips in the United States to black South African audiences (Balseiro and Masilela 2003: 19-20).[5] According to film scholar, Jacqueline Maingard, Plaatje's acquisition of part of his 'bioscope' apparatus, a portable generator, was not without irony. De Beers, the diamond mining company had donated it (Maingard 2007: 68). With his mobile biscope, Plaatje managed to reach remote parts of the country, and set in motion '… the entry of blak South Africans into the world of cinema audiences' (Maingard 2007: 68). Film scholar, Ntongela Masilela, writes that the idea behind Plaatje's efforts was to impress upon Africans, the achievements of America

[3] The SANNC is a forerunner of the present African National Congress (ANC), rulIng party of the Republic of South Africa post-1994.

[4] See also Peterson B., 2000. *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 132-134. Plaatje's protests appear as a contribution to a book written in homage to Shakespeare. See Plaatje S., 1916, in Gollanczs I., (Eds.) *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare,* London: Oxford University Press.

[5] See also Peterson, *Monarchs*, 128.

WiSER

Negroes in the areas of education, agriculture and industry. Masilela also ascribes Plaatje's bioscope to the vision of the New African Movement- intellectual elite of which he was a 'member' (Balseiro and Masilela 2003: 15-30).[6]

Plaatje showed features and shorts of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, drills at the Institute and Negro spirituals as well as footage of the weddings of Sir Seretse Khama and the Duke of Westminster.[7] Plaatje's mobile bioscope demonstrates that Africans' encounters with cinema were sometimes influenced by the exhibitionary practices of early American cinema.[8] These practices involved the showing of silent films to the accompaniment of a full music band, and a soloist (Plaatje's son St. Leger), as well as a lecture by Plaatje himself.[9] These exhibitionary practices are in keeping with the US-based film scholar Miriam Hansen's description of early cinema in the United States, which I will discuss in due course. Interestingly, she argues that these practices are central to the 'alternative public sphere' constituted by early cinema. Maingard observes, in a recent study, that Plaatje's bioscope constitutes the beginning of a national alternative film culture (2007: 5). Plaatje's introduction of cinematic ways of engagement with black identity was alternative because it was not in keeping with South Africa's mainstream cinematic culture. In South Africa, '....cinema, until the 1950s, was targeted, almost exclusively, at white audiences' (Peterson 2000: 127). Therefore, Plaatje's bioscope constituted a relatively autonomous space of construction of black identity, against the racially exclusionary colonial film culture.

[6] See also Maingard J., *South African National Cinema*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 5. According to Ntongela Masilela, the New African Movement emerged in the post-Anglo Boer War years and ended with the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. Influenced by the attainments of African Americans- the so-called New Negro Intelligentsia, its thinkers, Masilela observes, were generally preoccupied with the construction of modernity for Africans, and used outlets such as the newspaper *Umteteli wa Bantu* (the Mouthpiece of the People). See Balseiro I., and Masilela N., 2003. (Ed.) *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 15-30.

[7] For an account of Plaatje's bioscope, see his letters to the African American scholar, Dr R. R. Moton in Willan B., 1996. *Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings,* Witwatersrand University Press: Johannesburg, 329-333.

[8] Hansen presents a full account of these relations in her book, *Babel and Babylon*. 1991. See Hansen M., 1991. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 42-57.

[9] The exhibition practices in Plaatje's bioscope can be read off a poster of one of his shows in Bloemfontein in September 1924. See a copy of the poster in Willan B., *Selected Writings:* 332.

WiSER

Plaatje's efforts suggests that a rapport and identification with modernity lay at the centre of black people's early encounter with the cinema, as represented by the images of English and Tswana royal matrimonies, and the activities at Tuskegee (an African American college). Thus, the Africans' encounters with cinema coincided with their aspirations of accessing modernity and its promising fruits of 'progress'. From a historical perspective, the decade of the 1920s was formative in the intermittent participation of black people in cinema. It registered new tendencies in 'black experiences' of cinema and in their representations. In relation to cinematic culture in general, 'the spread and popularity of cinematic screenings among Africans can be traced to the early 1920's' (Peterson 2000: 127-8). However, a regime of heavy censorship attended the films shown to Africans, 'firstly by the Cape Town Board of Censors and secondly, by Dr Phillips and later a special board appointed by the Native Recruitment Agency' (Gustche 1972: 378-379). Low wages and low viewing charges prevented the development of cinemas among Africans, at least until the 1940s (Gutsche 1972: 379, 385). The condition of irregular or lack of African patronage of the cinema gave way to the intervention of corporations such as the Chamber of Mines. As part of these interventions, Plaatje's contemporary and ideological nemesis, the Reverend Ray Phillips, of the American Mission Board, introduced a well-funded and more sustained cinematic project.

Phillips and his senior colleague Dr. F.B. Bridgman, showed documentaries and short films to African mine workers.[10] *Safety First in the Mines*, *Dust that Kills*, *Lovedale Missionary Institution*, *The African Witchdoctor*, *From Kraal to Mine*, and *From Red Blanket to Civilization* were among the educational documentaries made by Phillips and Dr A. J. Orenstein (Peterson 2000: 131). The idea behind Phillips' efforts was to 'moralise the

[10] About European interventions in African experiences of cinema, like the Bantu Cinema Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit, see Diawara M., 1992. *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1-2. See also Burns J. M., 2002. *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 60-105. For a more recent study, see Reynolds G., 2005. *'Image and Empire': Cinema, Race and the Rise of Mass Spectatorship in Southern Africa*, 1920-1940 (South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe) (Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York at Stony Brook).

WiSER

leisure time of migrant workers living in mining compounds' (Maingard 2007: 68).[11] Phillips articulated this moralising crusade in the wake of the 1922 white miners' strike., which he assumed was fecund for seeds of discord among 'idle' Africans, with 'their animal energies accumulating day by day' (Phillips 1930: 149-50). However, over and above the moralising intentions, the desire to pre-empt potential 'racial' and class solidarity among African mineworkers appear to have informed Phillips's cinematic vision. Phillips' endeavours were also designed to counter the burgeoning commercial cinemas around the mining compounds, hence his presentation of censored material that he deemed suitable for African workers (Phillips 1930: 141). The pioneering South African film historian, Thelma Gutsche, credits Phillips' work with redeeming the value of cinema, 'the success of Dr Phillip's weekly exhibitions proved the direct value of the cinema in sublimating potential criminal tendencies' (Gutsche 1972: 378). Curiously, Gutsche does not reflect on the political implications of Phillips' work, and only succeeds in affirming its apolitical and moralising claims.

Maingard (2007: 70) argues that Phillips' moralizing intentions dovetailed with state censorship of films and that it 'related to the perceived otherness of these (black) particular audiences'. Indeed, increasing state use of film suggests that the colonial state found in the medium, an avenue for ideological control of black people:

> If Plato was right in saying that he who makes a nation's songs exerts a greater influence than he who makes a nation's laws, then it will certainly not be far wrong to say that he who controls a people's films exerts a greater influence for good or ill, than he who makes the country's laws (Interdepartmental Committee on Native Education in South Africa, 1936, cited in Reynolds 2007: 90).[12]

Maingard (2007: 69) sees in Phillips' writings the indication of the development of 'black migrant worker audiences positioned between their rural traditionalist homes and the

[11] See also Phillips R., 1930. *The Bantu Are Coming*: *Phases of South Africa's Race Problems*, London: Student Christian Movement, 124.

[12] Phillips endorses this belief in his work. See Phillips R., 1938. *The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustments on the Witwatersrand*, Alice: The Lovedale Press, 315.

WISETD

urban industrial space'. In tapping into Phillips' accounts of black experiences of the cinema in the period, Maingard alerts us to its colonial sensibilities and missionary perspectives of the time. Casting aspersions on Phillips' observation that the films shown, such as *A Zulu's Devotion* (1916), had 'fine appeal' for the workers, Maingard proposes that the workers' responses were likely to have contradicted such 'self-congratulatory' postures (2007: 69-70).

Among his most well known works, Phillips' *The Bantu Are Coming* (1930) captures the ominous overtones in settler anxieties about urbanization of Africans. Thus, his introduction of cinema among African workers was co-extensive with attempts at reversing the perceived threat embodied by large-scale entry of Africans into industrial modernity. Masilela characterized Phillips' project as 'a pre-occupation with policing the African imagination' (cited in Maingard 2007: 70). Ironically, the modernity of cinema suggests that such efforts were in vain. Not only was cinema poised to widen the loci of Africans' experience of industrial modernity- but the missionary zeal notwithstanding, it was fecund for the creation of new spaces for charting a new urban worker consciousness. The industrial context of cinematic encounter, coupled with the unpredictability of reception, as well as the inevitably conflictual interests of the workers and the management stratum of the mining industry, harboured the seeds for the destabilization of the ideological certainty behind such efforts. Noting the critical temper among African migrant labourers, Reynolds has argued that between the 1920s and 1940s,

> while the gold mining industry used films as a hegemonic strategy for expanding the industrial sector, the film shows conversely provided many villagers and potential recruits with a new venue for 'talking back to power' by contrasting the minutiae of working conditions, pay scales and the like (Reynolds 2007: 134).

In the 40s and 50s, cinemas for African audiences became available for the first time. For example, the South African History Online, an internet resource concerned with the history opf South Africa, describes some of the new moviehouses in Sophiatown, the Odin

and Balansky's in terms of their class distinctions and openness to various activities[13]. These cinemas served in part, as spaces where Africans' encounters of the city were negotiated. Political engagement and leisurely social interaction combined to generate a publicness, which though defined along class lines, contributed to Africans' opinion formation in the political sphere. Towards the close of the 40s and into the 50's, African artists and foreign white filmmakers collaborated in productions that markedly, brought Africans into the fold of urban cinematic modernity. A new product, black-centred films featuring local artists, instated a new African cinema audience, against the backdrop of Hollywood cultural influence. According to the anthropologist and music historian, David Coplan, 'the rapid development of the recording and cinema industries during the 1920s and 1930s brought American performance culture to many countries, including South Africa' (Coplan 1985: 121). However, it was only from 1949, with the production of *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* (1949), that American performance culture found a local resonance in local black-centred films.

Jim Comes to Jo'burg (aka *African Jim*), an independent film directed by Donald Swanson of Warrior Films, was the first film to extensively thematise blackness and urbanity in South African film culture. As the first film in South Africa with a blacks-only cast, *African Jim* was hailed as an important development. The film relies on a thin plot structure in which a rural 'boy' and a timid 'girl' make it in the city on terms set by a white patron of undependable character. Jim, the protagonist travels to Johannesburg to seek work. The city's petty gangsters rob him of his clothes and money. Fortunately, a night-watchman comes to his rescue and finds him a job as a domestic worker, but he is fired for not using a hosepipe properly. Later he finds work as a waiter-singer thanks to Dolly, the night-watchman's daughter. His former employer, who is in search for 'black talent' offers him a singing contract. Jim and Dolly, who is also a singer, become a successful duo and lovers.

[13] See *Sophiatown*, ‹http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/places/villages/gauteng/sophiatown/history3.htm›, (Accessed 5, March 2007).

WitsETD

Film scholar, Peter Davis, sees the film as valuable because 'it preserved a flavour of personalities who otherwise would have gone unrecorded' (1996: 21).[14]

African Jim introduced a new era of black and white collaboration in South African film culture. According to Maingard (2007: 67), the film inaugurated participation of black people at the level of production. She notes the casting role of one Dan Twala. Maingard (76) suggests that the film and others produced between the 40's and 50's 'represent a key 'moment' in South Africa's cinema history, a point where black modernity was cinematically represented in feature films for the first time…'. Yet, according to Masilela, *African Jim* and others such as *Zonk!* (1950) and *The Magic Garden* (1951)[15] did not elicit responses from African intellectuals because they were made by Europeans, and had a 'superficial coating of blackness' (Balseiro and Masilela 2003: 26). The lack of responses by the intellectual elite is however, a partial account of *African Jim*'s publicness because if Maingard's observation is anything to go by, the 'film's reception was far more complex than might otherwise be thought' (Maingard 2007: 79). Thus, 'despite the image of Africans as simple-hearted, dogged and irrepressible in the face of hardship that certainly falsified their experience....Africans were pleased to see their communities and performers represented in this prestigious medium' (Coplan cited in Maingard 2007: 79). A memorable acknowledgement by one of the film's African audiences, and which Maingard quotes, illustrates this appreciation: '....the fact that Dolly Rathebe was greeted by a crowd shouting the ANC slogan *Mayibuye iAfrika* (Come Back, Africa) at the Durban première of the film, reflects something of the film's value to African audiences' (Maingard 2007: 79).

Cry, *the Beloved Country* (1951) by Zoltan Korda marked yet another key point in the history of black people's involvement in film. It was an adaptation of a novel of the same title. *Cry*, *the Beloved Country*, by the anti-apartheid South African writer of liberal persuasion Alan Paton, was published in 1948. It is about the journey of Stephen Khumalo,

[14] Other commentators have highlighted the social implications of the manner in which this 'preservation' occurred. In an interview with Davis, author and critic Lewis Nkosi decried what he called 'the domestication' in the film of the singer beauty queen Dolly Rathebe's public persona. See Davis *Jungles*, 29.

[15] *Zonk* was a variety show adapted to film. The *Magic Garden* is a musical film about the theft of a church donation and the pursuit of the thief who stole it.

WitsETD

a priest from the countryside, to the city in search of his son Absalom Khumalo. Absalom is sentenced to death by hanging for killing a white man. At the end, Stephen Khumalo returns to the countryside, his son's pregnant girlfriend by his side, and continues his ecclesiastical duties. Journalist, Arthur Maimane, opined that *Cry*, *the Beloved Country* was 'the first professional film about what it was like to be black' (Davis 1993, 1996). However, the film, like its parent text, could not escape charges of white paternalistic liberalism.[16] It was also criticized for its heavy 'investment in an asocial Christian salvation' (Davis 1993, 1996: 41). Journalist and writer, Lewis Nkosi likened it to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1938) in the United States (in Davis 1993: 29).

Come Back, *Africa* (1959) was the most radical film in its time. This 'docu-drama'[17] focused on the lives of the black working class in 50's Sophiatown and Johannesburg, particularly the impact of apartheid on African rural migrants and urban intellectuals. By the beginning of the 1960s, black and white collaboration in film was virtually impossible. Something akin to a lull in the industry followed the political inactivity gripping the country in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre.[18] This inactivity stemmed from renewed state repression of political resistance. However, Henning Carlsen, a Danish filmmaker clandestinely directed *Dilemma* (1962), a fiction film based on the author and Nobel Prize Laureate, Nadine Gordimer's 1958 book called *A World of Strangers* (Maingard 2007: 139).

In the 1970s, the participation of black filmmakers in film production increased. White filmmakers who were in control of the production processes granted black filmmakers some technical leeway (Tomaselli 1989: 58). At the level of technology, this period proved auspicious for black filmmakers because of newly available lightweight hand-held cameras,

[16] For an example of this school of thought, see Ssali 1996, in Mbye Cham, (Ed) *African Experiences of Cinema*: 96-7. See also chapter three in this study.

[17] Commentators are not agreed about the film's genre. According to Balseiro, 'some critics have called the film documentary while others fit it squarely in the fictional category'. See Balseiro and Masilela, *To Change Reels,* 91.

[18] On the 21st March, 1960 police killed Africans in Sharpeville Township who were protesting against the 'pass' system in South Africa. Until the middle of the 1980s Africans in South Africa carried a 'pass', a form of identification through which the state could monitor their movement in the urban areas.

WitsETD

tape-recorders, and fast film stock, which had emerged in the preceding decade. In this period, the production of anti-apartheid films by foreign television producers also marked a new turn in global- South Africa film relations. These films included the documentaries *The Dumping Grounds* (1970) by John Sheperd, made for the UK's Granada Television, and *The Search of Sandra Laing* (1979) by Anthony Thomas and made for the British Broadcasting Corporation.

A group of five young black South African exiles, all members of the underground Pan Africanist Movement of Azania (PAC), among them Nana Mahomo, Vusi Maake, Rakhetla Tsehlana, and some British collaborators, secretly made a documentary film on the day to day effects of apartheid. It was called *Phela Ndaba- End of the Dialogue* (1970). The film exposes apartheid racial inequalities through a stark contrast of the quality of life of black and white people. *Phela Ndaba* was anonymously released under the aegis of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. Mahomo clandestinely made other documentaries, *The Dumping Grounds* (1973) and *The Last Grave at Dimbaza* (1974) which 'represented the genocidal effects of Bantustan policy' (Maingard 1998: 1).[19] Maingard hails *The Last Grave at Dimbaza* as revolutionary because of its use of unconventional stylistics. The 70's also saw black theatre professionals such as Gibson Kente independently embark on filmmaking, a bold but risky act given the state's hostile attitude towards openly critical cinema. In 1976, Kente directed and financed his own film, *How Long?*, an adaptation of his play of the same name. Regrettably, the state harassed Kente and impeded the wide circulation of *How Long?* According to film scholar, Keyan Tomaselli (1989: 57-8), the film was only distributed in the apartheid-created homeland of Transkei.

Tomaselli (1989: 58) also notes that in the late 1970s, there was a proliferation of films aimed at black audiences. This draws attention to the importance of film, for both the

[19] *The Last Grave at Dimbaza* is about the life-threatening conditions endured by black people who were banished to the unproductive reserves officially called Bantustans. These were designated regions for different black tribal groups in South Africa, the result of the apartheid state's policy of separate development.

WiSER

apartheid state and independent filmmakers. The realization of the extent of its reach and influence made film the state's ideological tool *par excellence*. The international impact of *The Dumping Grounds* and *The Last Grave at Dimbaza* for example, instigated counter representations by the state through such documentary films as *Solution to the Dilemma of a Plural Society* (1977), *To Act a Lie,* (1980), *A Place Called Soweto* (1979) and *Journey to the Sun* (1975). These films represent the state's policy of apartheid in a good light in general. Importantly, the state's concerns about the international image of South Africa motivated its ventures into film. This is corroborated by the events surrounding the showing of *Last Grave at Dimbaza* in England. Maingard (2007) gives an account of how in the wake of the intervention of the South African embassy in England, the British producers of the film changed its title to *Black Man Alive- the Facts* (1974), and subjected it to significant cuts. Maingard further observes that the film's showing on British television was also followed by a panel discussion. She argues that the focus of the discussion was 'on the BBC and its dogged commitment to "impartiality" and the facts about Dimbaza were lost' (2007: 141).

While other films had been available earlier, which do not reflect apartheid ideology, in the 70's there was a substantial increase in the availability of films for black South African audiences than before. These included African American films such as *Sweet Sweet Baaaadddd Ass-Song* (1971), *Shaft*, *Sounder* (1972), *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972), *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and *Brother John* (1971). Television was introduced in South Africa just before the 1976 uprisings,[20] necessitating the development of black expertise in television technology. Although at this stage television catered for the white population, moves were under way to introduce channels for black viewers. This became a reality in the early 1980's when the national broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)'s TV2 for Nguni speakers and later TV3 for Sotho languages were

[20] The South African play and its film adaptation, *Sarafina* (1992), were inspired by these uprisings. For the film, see *Sarafina* 1992. Roodt Darell, (South Africa). The 1976 events, and the disappearance of one of the schoolchildren, Mbuyisa Makhubo, are the subject of the post-apartheid documentary: *What happened to Mbuyisa*, 1998. Mamdoo Feizel, (South Africa).

WitsETD

launched. The advent of television in 1976 also points towards the emergence of a new avenue for the constructions and contestations of ideas and black identity.

Simon Sabela was the first black fiction director with *u'Deliwe* (1975), the film through which the thesis establishes the public dimension of films aimed at black audiences. These films were made through a state subsidy scheme, which required a minimum of 75 percent of the dialogue to be in an indigenous language. In the early 1980's, films featuring black people that were a part of the state's racial and ethnicist ideology continued to flood the 'black film circuit'.[21] Tomaselli observed that in the spirit of the government's gradual and conditional multi-racialism through such organs as the Tricameral Parliament[22], a new phase of 'Structured Integration' was born. The key themes in these films were popular culture such as sports (boxing) in Rod Hay's *Stoney the One and Only* (1983), (soccer) *A Way of Life* (1981) and *Will to Win* (1982) (1989: 77). Tomaselli noted the treatment of traditionalism in Ronnie Isaacs's *Umjuluko Negazi* (1982), and good against evil in *Johnny Tough* (1983).

A new cluster of overtly anti-apartheid films hit South African and international circuits in the mid-80's. Most of these were Hollywood films aimed at galvanizing international sympathy for the anti-apartheid cause. By Hollywood films, I refer to the films that emerge from the 'studio system'[23] in the United States, and which are essentially driven by the profit motive. They tend to have a formulaic structure and their narratives centre on heroic figures, usually white males, whose actions impel them towards the attainment of social and economic power, within a patriarchal and capitalist sphere of relations. Being palatable to Western audiences is a cardinal feature of Hollywood films. Hollywood anti-apartheid films include *Cry Freedom* (1987), and *A Dry White Season* (1989). These films

[21] The 'black circuit' refers to all the venues of film exhibition exclusively reserved for black people during apartheid.

[22] This was a parliamentary system which operated on three unequal levels: an Upper House of Assembly for whites, Middle House of Representatives for 'coloureds' and lastly a House of Delegates for Indians. Black local authorities who did not have any real power were appointed in the townships.

[23] In the United States, the film industry is dominated by a few powerful oligopolies or studios which control the production of films and dominate the country's film culture.

WiSER

and the independent ones such as *Mapantsula* (1988) changed the film landscape in the country[24].

Cry Freedom, a film about the life and death in prison of the Black Consciousness leader Steve Bantu Biko, was banned on its release in South Africa. Although *Cry Freedom* was hugely popular, the radical, black Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) criticized it for the centring of a white protagonist in its narrative. Commenting on its banning, AZAPO argued: 'We believe that government is not afraid of how Comrade Biko is portrayed. Rather it does not want to look itself in the mirror- that is Donald Woods and white society in general as portrayed in the film' (*Sowetan* 1988, 28 July). The organization also doubted the efficacy and legitimacy of the film to represent what it stood for: 'As to what Steve Biko says or depicts, we believe that is being said everyday by members of the movement he founded and all other people involved in the liberation struggle' (*Sowetan* 1988, 28 July).

Mapantsula registered the social and political consciousness among grassroots activists. It was made with the collaboration of local township residents. Made clandestinely like *Come Back, Africa*, its aesthetics and circulation marked its anti-Hollywood and pro-*Third Cinema* sensibilities. Third Cinema is a theory of cinema marked by a patently anti-Hollywood aesthetic and an overt political bias towards the perspectives of the marginalised.[25] The Hollywood anti-apartheid films as well as the home-grown *Mapantsula* and others in the form of documentaries, instated a new cinematic convention, which represented black people as political beings. In light of the challenges posed by political oppression, this shift in the representation of black identity meant that black people's agency became the subject of cinematic publicity and discursivity. Since *Come Back*, *Africa*, *Mapantsula* became one of the most explicit cinematic engagements with the social and political imaginary of blackness.

[24] *Cry Freedom* (1987), and *Cry*, *the Beloved Country* (1952, 1995) targeted overseas markets.
[25] For an extensive exposition of Third Cinema, see Chapter 5 in this work.

WitsETD

Parallel to the political changes of the 1990s, which ushered in democracy in South Africa, the film industry also entered a new era. For the first time, the SABC showed previously banned anti-apartheid documentary films installing as it did this, film as an object of public deliberation. The Department of Arts, Culture Science and Technology (DACST), newly established in 1994, supported film directly and later through a special statutory body for local film funding. Pursuant to policy directives of its Film Development Strategy (1996), the Department promulgated the National Film and Video Foundation Act 73 of 1997. This act established the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), a government body tasked with the development of the film industry in South Africa. According to Maingard (2007: 7), the NFVF is mandated to 'encourage the development and distribution of local film and video products and to redress the historical imbalances of the past especially in relation to disadvantaged communities'. However, the NFVF only became fully functional from 1999 onwards. The significance of the NFVF is in its reversal of the film subsidy system, which approved funding for films based on their ticket returns. On the contrary, the new film policy encouraged local film production regardless of profit value.

The widening of approaches to film, and registration of themes other than those dealing strictly with apartheid or the liberation movement, were notable tendencies in this period. For example, Michael Hamon's *Wheels and Deals* (1991) and Oliver Schmitz's *Hijack Stories* (2000), address post-apartheid crime. Another example is Ntshaveni wa Luruli's *Chickin Bizniz* (1998), a comedy about a small black entrepreneur. The film scene in post '94 South Africa evinces increased participation of black people in cinema and television. In 1999, *Yizo Yizo*, a highly controversial educational drama series, ushered in a new era in South African public television. It ended with a third season in 2004. The series was unprecedented in terms of both the use of television to forge public debate on matters of social and political importance, and its animation of public engagements. Feature films in this period include Ramadan Suleman's *Fools* (1997), a film about a township teacher's degeneration. *Fools* is an adaptation of author and critic Njabulo Ndebele's novella of the

WitsETD

same name. Like *Mapantsula*, *Fools* advances an *auteurist* aesthetic predicated on African cinematic conventions. Both formally and in terms of content, *Fools* engages its eponymous novella. As the first South African film to win a major international award, at the Locarno International Festival, *Fools* was a forerunner in the global independent circuit's recognition of post-apartheid black-centred South African films. Other black-centred films that emerged in this period, and that also won international recognition include *Chiken Biznis* (1998), *Drum* (2005), *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), and the Oscar-winning *Tsotsi* (2006).

Film and Critique

Several scholars (David Attwell 2005, Bhekizizwe Peterson 2000, Thandika Mkandawire 2005) show how African intellectual history is a paradigmatic instance of the history and role of texts other than film, in the generation of public intellectual culture. These works demonstrate the production of modernity that arises from black intellectuals' critiques and appropriations of trans-Atlantic texts, and Enlightenment values. However, these scholarly works tend to bypass the production of films and the ideas which films generate in public. They foreground the genres of poetry, novels, short stories, journalism and plays and their engagements with modernity. The thesis draws attention to the empirical pathways of the circulation of films, the texts linked to the films, and explores their significance for critical public engagements about black identity.

Although she focuses on African film adaptations of literature, film scholar Lindiwe Dovey's work is instructive with regard to the question of film and critical public engagements.[26] Through *Fools* and other African films, she reflects on the question of the

[26] Dovey's work on African film adaptation of literature, has appeared in a number of articles and was the subject of her Ph.D. It is also the theme of her most recent book, which is based on her Ph.D. While the book has only appeared in the last stages of my writing of this thesis, I have opted to use it to update as much as possible, some of the observations she has made in her earlier work. See Dovey L., 2009. *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence on the Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press. For her Ph.D. see also Dovey L., 2005. *African Film Adaptation of Literature: Mimesis and the Critique of Violence*, Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge.

WitsETD

formal attributes of filmic adaptation in the light of the question of 'whether African film adaptation as medium is able to achieve a critique of violence in a way that is not available to verbal, concept-bound rational critique' (Dovey 2005c: 3). She asks further whether African film adaptation as a form of performative literary criticism and cultural critique, presented through an audio-visual medium and in a fictional form, is able to avoid what she calls 'the uneven power relations in conventional critique' (2005c: 45). Situating her discussion in contemporary thought about mimesis, Dovey argues that 'African film adaptation offers a kind of alternative, counter-gnosis to Western critique' (Dovey 2005c: 45). For Dovey, the films in her work 'gesture towards alternate forms of knowledge, which are embodied rather than abstract and conceptual, and do not repress the identity of the object or Other' (Dovey 2005c: 68). In her most recent work, Dovey discusses the films' critique of violence in terms of their rehistoricisation of violence and engagement of the viewers:

> I discuss the kinds of meanings that are made out of the source texts and their historical moments in the new contexts. And I closely examine the way that these adaptations are able to rehistoricise violence and thereby engage viewers' capacity for rational analysis of the multifaceted sociohistorical forces of contemporary violence (Dovey 2009: 10).

Dovey's work is salutary because it argues for the authority and particularity of African film adaptations to revise Western conceptions of critique. Her conclusions give indications of the rapport between African filmic adaptations and their audiences. They signal that these films' embodiment of violence reaches the audiences at the level of affect. The effect, Dovey implies, is that African film adaptations guide empathetic identification with victims of violence, and in the process, dismantle the inequality wrought in occidental rationality. Here, Dovey intimates the question of the equal availability or the lack thereof, of the rational-critical modes of the public sphere to audiences of African films that adapt literature. Applying herself to African film adaptations and their audiences, Dovey argues that 'while African films cannot be located wholly outside of a culture industry, they can be located within a public sphere that is characterised by closeness rather than the

WiSETD

distance that has been associated with mass culture...' (Dovey 2009: 21). For Dovey 'this allows for a recuperation of the intentionality of both filmmaker and viewer, and it also enables a particular kind of engagement of filmmakers with their subject matter and of the viewers with the images on the screen, a relationship that makes critique possible' (Dovey 2009: 21). However, Dovey's work elides the relation between these films and their publics. There is a marked absence in its formulation of the question of how such critiques might be seen to reverse the exclusionary tendencies of the public sphere in Africa. In considering this question, the thesis is compelled to put to the test, the relation of black-centred films to critical public engagements on blackness.

Film in the Public Sphere

In the schema of contemporary concerns about the state of 'public intellectual life',[27] film does not feature significantly as a site of public intellectual engagement. Nor is it hailed as a contemporary redeemer of the rational-critical modes of what Jürgen Habermas ([1962] 1991) calls the public sphere. The Habermasian public sphere, suspended between the state and civil society, is a space of critical public activity, chiefly defined by the public use of reason. For Habermas (1991: 27), the public sphere is constituted by private individuals who come together to form a public. However, his focus is on a particular type of the public sphere: the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas locates the formative period of the bourgeois public sphere in 17th century Europe.[28]

[27] The coupling of the concept of 'public' and 'intellectual' originates in Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals*, a lament of the decline of intellectual life in the United States of America. See Townsely E., September 2006. The Trope of the Public Intellectual in the United States, *The American Sociologist*, V. 37. No3: 39-66. However, Edward Said has questioned the explicit ascription of 'public' to 'intellectual' thus: 'there is no such thing as a private intellectual, since the moment you set down words and publish them, you have entered the public world. Nor is there *only* a public intellectual, someone who exists just as a figurehead or spokesperson, or symbol of a cause, movement or position'. Said E., 1994. *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*, Vintage Press: London, 9.

[28] For discussions about the decline of the public sphere in contemporary societies, see the following works: Russell Jacoby., 1987. *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, New York: Basic Books. Richard Posner., 2001. *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. Frank Furedi., 2004. *Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone? Confronting 21st Century Philistinism*, London, New York: Continuum.

WiSETD

According to him, this public sphere[29] evolved out of historical circumstances related to the societal shifts and the changing economic and political fortunes of the aristocracy. Yet, from the middle of the 19th century, Habermas argues, the institutions of the public sphere were weakened.[30] 'The public sphere in the world of letters was replaced by a pseudo-public or sham-private world of culture consumption' (1991: 160). He explains this through what he sees as the increasingly individualized nature of leisure and reception, brought about by the mass media, and the compromised nature of debate that they make possible. In Habermas' view, 'the world fashioned by the mass-media is a public sphere in appearance only' (1991: 171). In the wake of the rise of the culture industry, Habermas argues, new forms of bourgeois civility took root that were not amenable to the cultivation of rational-critical public debate. Marked by the tendency to abstain from literary and political debate, these new forms of sociability 'lacked that specific institutional power that had once ensured the interconnectedness of sociable contacts as the substratum of public communication- no public was formed around group activities' (1991: 163). Even then, Habermas observes the continuation of a tendency towards rational-critical debate. However, the consumer logic that the practices of the mass media, publishers and associations established stifled the free public use of reason: 'Thus discussion seems to be carefully cultivated and there seems to be no barrier to its proliferation. But surreptitiously it has changed in a specific way: it assumes the form of a consumer item' (1991: 164). For Habermas (1991: 170), a further assault on conditions agreeable to the cultivation of the public use of reason is at play in the commercial packaging of the media for entertainment and impersonal indulgence by the reader, and

[29] Since the inexactness of the English translation of the German original '*öffentlichkeit*' has been noted and corrected to be 'publicness'; I shall use the 'public sphere' reservedly. See translator's note in Habermas J, (Trans) Burger T., 1991. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into A Category of Bourgeois Society* The Cambridge Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts: xv.

[30] Habermas wrote that in 17th century France, what would later be called the *salon*, 'replaced the Hôtel de Rambouillet the great hall at court in which the prince staged his festivities…' (Habermas, *Public Sphere*: 31). Coffee houses, also became the centre of exchanges among the bourgeoisie in France and Britain. 'In both countries, these were centres of criticism- literary at first and then political- in which began to emerge, between aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals, a certain parity of the educated' (Habermas, *Public Sphere*: 32).

WiSER

not for the public use of reason. According to Habermas, the new media (i.e. radio, film and television) also undermine the public use of reason.[31]

> Radio, film and television by degrees reduce to a minimum the distance that a reader is forced to maintain towards the printed letter- a distance that required the privacy of the appropriation as much as it made possible the publicity of a rational-critical exchange about what has been read (1991: 170).

Habermas (159) argues that the rise of 'culture-consuming' and the decline of 'culture-debating publics' characterizes the decline of the public sphere in contemporary societies.[32] However, Habermas recently reversed this view and recast the mass media, including film, as an adjunct to the contemporary political public sphere. He observes that: 'At the periphery of the political system, the public sphere is rooted in networks of wild flows of messages- news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes and images, shows and movies with an informative, polemical, educational, or entertaining content' (Habermas 2006: 11).

Habermas' characterization of film as a tangential fraction of the political public sphere reveals what Peters John Durham correctly observes as his distrust of the visual and aesthetic modes of representation, as normative vehicles for democratic culture and rational-critical deliberation in particular.[33] The rationale of Habermas' distrust of film as a significant site of the public sphere can be tested against the ways in which films relate to

[31] About what the historian Geoffrey Eley regards as the negative influence of the media on Habermas' model of the public sphere, see Eley G., 1993. Nations, Public and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the 19th Century, in Eley et al. *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, (Ed.), Princeton: Princeton UP, 297-335. See also Curran J., 1991. Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere, in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (Ed.) *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*, London and New York: Routledge, 27-57.

[32] Contrary to this lack of confidence in the media, Dana Polan questions the indistinction between culture and media in Habermas' *Öffentlichkeit*'. He shows that Habermas conflates culture with the media and therefore runs the risk of missing the ideological and cultural specificity of cultural production. For the full argument, see Polan D., 1990. The Public's Fear, or Media as Monster in Habermas, Negt, and Kluge. 'Jurgen Habermas The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society' in *Social Text*, No 25/26 Duke University Press: 260-66.

[33] See Peters Durham J., 1993. Distrust of Representation: Habermas on the Public Sphere, *Media, Culture and Society*, October, Vol. 15. No 4: 541-571 (562).

WISET

contemporary discourses. This study does this through the investigation of the relation between black-centred films and the unfolding public discourses on black identity.

The discussion of the public life of films in the context of apartheid South Africa, which forms part of the historical backdrop in this study, in terms that assume a classic Habermasian sense, might seem incongruous. To the extent that apartheid South Africa is different to 17th and 18th century Europe, any charge of inconsistency is well founded. This is chiefly because Habermas' public sphere assumes as a prerequisite, an open deliberative atmosphere among co-present equal actors, which in South Africa under colonial and apartheid rule was considerably disallowed on the basis of 'race' and gender. Yet, to deny the applicability of the concept to the study on the premise of state repression, risks positioning the state at the centre of the public sphere. By locating the public sphere outside institutional apparatus of the state, Habermas' work invalidates such thinking. Therefore, its subjection to state repression notwithstanding, the public sphere is conceptually autonomous from state authority. This makes possible its application to contexts other than egalitarian ones. Engaging the limits that repression places on the public sphere, the study examines the making and public lives of the films against its normative ideal of deliberation and the formation of opinion.

There are professional and scholarly precedents to this study's concerns about film's relations to the public sphere in general, and the early Habermas' marginalization of film from the public sphere in particular. These works, by author, filmmaker, and film scholar Alexander Kluge and Miriam Hansen respectively, are confined to 20th century Germany and the United States. The thesis engages these works, and applies some of their analyses to the South African context.

WitsETD

Film in the Public Sphere: New German Cinema

The first major attempt to conceptually articulate film in relation to the public sphere can be found in an intellectual tendency of the post- Second World War school of filmmaking in Germany called *New German Cinema*, and in particular, in the work of Alexander Kluge. *New German Cinema* sought to establish a convention of cinema in Germany in general, and a new kind of feature film specifically. It aimed at lessening commercial and political pressures on cinema.[34] According to Kluge, one of its principal lights, the capacity of film to inspire active reception by the spectators determines the actualization of *öffentlichkeit* and therefore the potential formation of an alternative or oppositional public sphere.

The notion of an oppositional public sphere, which Kluge employs, issues from his and philosopher and social theorist, Oskar Negt's critique of the Habermasian notion of the public sphere whose abstraction from the context of commodity and distribution they questioned (Negt and Kluge [1972] 1993).[35] They argued that Habermas celebrated the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere without questioning adequately its legitimacy as a regulative idea with a concealed bias to the interests of the ruling classes. While they accept the Habermasian thesis of the historical rise and decline of the bourgeois public sphere, Negt and Kluge question any attempt to salvage its ideality. They also question the private and public dichotomy in the public sphere of the bourgeoisie type because it tends to disregard human experience, which they define as a totality of productive relations, and which they argue, is ultimately public.

[34]For a brief introduction to the *New German Cinema* (*NGC*) and discussion of Kluge's films, see Pflaum Hans Günther., Prinzler Hans Helmut, 1983. *Cinema in the Federal Republic of Germany: A Handbook*, Trans. by T Nevill. Bonn: Inter Nationess, 5-12. The book also includes discussions of films within the school other than those of Kluge. See also Franklin J., 1983. *New German Cinema*: *From Oberhausen to Hamburg*, London: Columbus Book, 21-44. Franklin discusses the films from the *New German Cinema* collective and their reception in the United States. See also pages 59-73 for his analysis of Kluge's films. Thomas Elsaesser's contribution to the debates on *NGC* is probably the most comprehensive to date. See Elsaesser T., 1980. *New German Cinema: A History*, New Brunswick: New Jersey Rutgers University Press.

[35] Polan finds Kluge and Negt's conception of the media bleaker than Habermas'. He also argues that the myth of purity in Habermas' bourgeois public sphere recurs in their suggested alternative proletarian public sphere. However, he welcomes their appropriation of the media for an alternative public sphere. See Polan, *Media as Monster,* 260-66.

Working off their critique of Habermas, they suggest a new model in which a relatively 'autonomous, collective organization of the experience specific to workers' can be attained and whose intimate links to the marketplace is acknowledged (Hansen 1993: 28). They call this model the *proletarian* public sphere. Therefore, the *proletarian* public sphere is an alternative model to the bourgeois public sphere whose remnants, Negt and Kluge argue, are still traceable in the working class organizations such as the trade unions. However, the writers caution against the identification of the *proletarian* public sphere with what they call 'the public sphere of the workers' (1993: 33). Rather, they define the *proletarian* public sphere as 'an operative process' working within the public sphere of workers (1993: 33).[36] Although issuing from the concrete conditions of workers in relation to capital, Negt and Kluge conceptualize the *proletarian* public sphere discursively as a principle of negating 'hegemonic efforts to suppress, fragment, deligitimise, or assimilate any public formation that suggest an alternative, autonomous organization of experience' (1993: xxxii). Importantly, Hansen notes that Kluge has increasingly abandoned the epithet *proletarian* in his work, in favour of 'an emphatic notion of publicness, defined by such principles as openness, freedom of access, multiplicity of relations, communicative interaction and self-reflection' (Hansen 1988: 184). She also suggests that this marks Kluge's return to Habermas (Hansen 1991: 13.)[37] Following Hansen, this thesis treats Kluge's model as an attempt at founding an oppositional or alternative public sphere, not necessarily of a *proletarian* type.

WiSER

[36] Consider also the elucidation of the term in Negt and Kluge's second collaboration, which the Marxist scholar and cultural critic, Fredric Jameson, quotes: 'Proletarian, i.e., separated from the means of production, designates not merely the labour characteristics of the industrial proletariat, but all similarly restricted productive capacities'. See Jameson F., 1988. On Negt and Kluge in *October*, Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories, and an Interview, 151-177. (156).

[37] Kluge has also expressed doubts about the viability of a *proletarian* public sphere. For his original comments, see Liebmann S., and Kluge A., 1988. On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere: An Interview with Alexander Kluge, *October*, Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories, and an Interview, 23-59 [43].

In *On Film and the Public Sphere*, (1982)[38] Kluge and one of his collaborators, Günther Hörmann, define as their ultimate objective, the professional production of an oppositional public sphere which will replace what Kluge calls the 'pseudo-public sphere of the bourgeois type' (Kluge 1982: 212). Kluge finds in 'phantasy'[39] the basis for the filmic cultivation of an oppositional public sphere: 'In addition to language, which is public, the public sphere should grant phantasy the status of a communal medium, and this includes a stream of associations and the faculty of memory (the two main avenues of phantasy)' (Kluge in Klaus 1982: 215). For Kluge, (1982: 215) the tendency of phantasy to disregard 'real obstacles as a compensation for the reality principle ….', could be used to serve any cause pursued by the filmmaker. Therefore, he seeks to cultivate an oppositional public sphere, with a method that is analogous to what he argues, is the multi-perspectival tendency of phantasy. To this end, Kluge suggests the method of 'mixing forms' in film which he calls 'perspectivism'. The goal of this method is to produce phantasy in the viewer, followed by deepened understanding, and a redirection of phantasy 'to the real course of events' (1982: 216). For him, 'perspectivism', which he articulates clearly in relation to his treatment of history in film, 'permits radical change in perspective' (1982: 215). Kluge summarizes this method thus: 'One basically takes the standards according to which one composes the film image (framing, perspective, depth of field, contrast) and applies them to the dramaturgy of context' (1982: 216). Accordingly, 'perspectivism' is mustered by disrupting one-dimensional flow of events in the film with cuts and breaks.

Montage is a central strategy used by Kluge to build and encourage phantasy in the spectator. However, in the interests of encouraging the critical participation of the spectator, Kluge adopts a non-linear montage because he argues, it does not suggest the

[38] This short article is a collection of excerpts from Kluge's film *Die Patriotin* (Frankfurt/Main Zweitausendeins, 1979). See Kluge, A., Interview by Eder Klaus, Autumn 1981-Winter 1982. (*Trans*) Thomas Y. L., Hansen M., On Film and the Public Sphere, *New German Critique*, 206-220. The views pertaining strictly to film and the oppositional public sphere were originally published in Eder K. and Kluge A., 1980. *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser).

[39] The term 'phantasy' and not 'fantasy' is in the original translation.

WiSER

imposition of a structure of images in the spectator's mind (1982: 220). Kluge's use of montage retains connections between the images and texts depicted, ensuring the centrality of his notion of context (*Zusammenhang*).[40] The use of film to stimulate the oppositional public sphere is for Kluge also a matter of understanding how spectators deal with films. Kluge suggests that:

> …. the spectator never deals with single films but with clusters, with relationship between films- the films the spectator knows, his or her concept of cinema, and genre expectations. This is why only films in series have a proper influence and function in the public sphere (1982: 218).

In the light of this insight, Kluge suggests a strategy of producing films in series in order to establish a particular relationship with spectators, and therefore, sustain the production of an oppositional public sphere.

The conviction, clearly discernible in Kluge's reflections, that the ostensible correspondence of certain film aesthetics to phantasy guides the capacity of film to stimulate the public sphere, is ripe for questioning. Whatever the political aspirations behind this thinking, Kluge's analysis draws on an unstable assumption of causal relation between particular film aesthetics and states of spectators' minds, to the public sphere. In referring to the spectator's mind as a measuring field of *öffentlichkeit* through film, this thinking also stops short of explaining how the impression of film on the spectator manifests the public sphere. This has the undesired effect of theoretically reducing the public sphere generated by film to the strategies filmmakers employ and to the states of spectators' minds. Kluge's suggestion that producing films in a series is apposite for the production of an oppositional public sphere begs the question of whether films produced and circulated in other ways have any relation to the public sphere. Therefore, Kluge's approach presents an inadequate reflection on the public dimension of film. Kluge's work raises the question of what a more nuanced reflection on the public sphere might look

[40] Commentators on Kluge's films have frequently observed the disjunctive sense in his use of montage. See for instance, Bowie A., 1986. Alexander Kluge: An Introduction, *Cultural Critique*, No. 4: 111-118.

WISETD

like. While Hansen's interests lie in the public sphere of silent cinema spectatorship, and not on film per se, to date, her work offers what might be considered as a more comprehensive response to the question.

A Cinematic Public Sphere?

Hansen (1983) has examined early cinema and the public sphere in Germany, and in relation to American silent cinema (1988, 1991). Her major work *Babel and Babylon* (1991) is a comprehensive argument for a rethinking of theories of cinematic spectatorship and reception, in terms of the public sphere. Recognizing that theories of spectatorship lack 'a public dimension of cinematic reception', Hansen sets out to rethink the spectator in terms of 'the constitutive tension between … her inscription by the filmic text and the social viewer who is asked to assume certain positions …' (1991: 4-7). Following Kluge, Hansen's spectator is also 'a position addressed not to the empirical viewer as socially contingent individual, but to an audience endowed with historically concrete contours, conflicts and possibilities' (1991: 14).

The public dimension of Hansen's spectator is patterned after Negt and Kluge's concept of the public: 'a social horizon of experience, the experience in particular of those excluded from the dominant space of public opinion' (1991: 12). Hansen (1993: 201) has also noted that this public is marked by the articulation and contestation of social experience 'in an intersubjective, potentially collective and oppositional form'. Thus, Hansen's 'public' intimates discursiveness, and ideally, a potentially oppositional social consciousness. This implies that the potential of collective political solidarity is a central conceptual element of Hansen's public.

The attempt in *Babel* to show how cinema operates as an alternative public sphere is based on a reading of the relations of reception and exhibition practices in early American cinema. For Hansen, these relations 'provided the formal conditions for an alternative public sphere, a structural possibility of articulating experience (for particular social

WiSE ETD

groups, such as immigrant working class audiences and women across class and generational boundaries) in a communicative relatively autonomous form' (1991: 7, 17, 90).[41] These conditions, Hansen observes, were predicated upon the exhibitionary practices of early cinema and the situation of reception, which had more effect on the viewer than the film itself (1991: 93). She attributes this to the integration of the actual spatial distribution of viewers and the exhibitionary arrangement of the shows. Hansen makes an example of the variety show of early cinema, which provided a sense of continuity between a fictional space mediated through lectures, sound effects and music, and the theatre space itself (93). Consequently, 'the meanings transacted were contingent upon the local conditions and constellations, leaving reception at the mercy of relatively unpredictable, aleatory processes' (1991: 94).

Hansen's argument for the public sphere dimension of spectatorship in early cinema is also based upon what she argues, was a short-lived female subculture centred on the Italian actor, Rudolph Valentino, and his exoticism as an ethnic other (1991: 18, 248- 253, 292). According to Hansen (1991: 294), this subculture constituted a 'collective horizon of gender-specific experience'. Hansen interprets the subculture as an alternative public sphere because of its appropriation of Valentino into a function of discourse of female sexuality that contested the patriarchal discourse of gender in American public life.

Hansen's work is instructive because it draws attention to the potential of cinematic reception to constitute an alternative public under certain conditions. Her work is significant in another respect: after Negt and Kluge, it provides a critical substantiation of their model of the public sphere that is, its embedment within the domain of commodity exchange and distribution and not above this domain. However, in surfacing the public dimension of cinematic spectatorship through the conditions of reception, and what she

[41]See also Hansen M., 1983. Early Silent Film: Whose Public Sphere? *New German Critique*, Vol. 29, (1983), The Origins of Mass Culture: The Case of Imperial Germany (1871-1918), Spring-Summer, 147-184.
Consider Hansen M., 1988. Reinventing the Nickelodeon: Notes on Kluge and Early Cinema. *October,* Vol. 46, Alexander Kluge: Theoretical Writings, Stories and an Interview (Autumn), 178-198.

WitsETD

presents as an outcome of this spectatorship, the gender-specific star-cult, Hansen implies that spectatorship is an essential condition for the generation of the publicness of film. This notion of publicness also appears to guide her approach to contemporary forms of film reception. This has the effect of denying film the potential of generating publicness, over and above and even occasionally, without the requisite condition of spectatorship.

Admittedly, Hansen's earlier work is cognisant of the fact that contemporary experiences of film are not located in the classical institutional complex of the cinema and its attendant conventions (1983: 198). The implications for spectators other than cinema ones, is that the latter are more 'empowered' to control patterns of experiencing film and of displacing film as an integral part of the commodity of cinema,' in less regulated viewing situations (1983: 198). Even then, Hansen does not demonstrate how such control takes place and how it affects the ways in which film relates to the public sphere, over and above spectatorship. Hansen's interpretation of the public dimension of spectatorship in terms of a collective horizon of experience tends to ignore the possibility of disparate interpretations within such horizons. This absence of disparate interpretive world-views underplays what I have called the public critical potency of film. By public critical potency, I mean the capacity of film to stimulate critical engagements in public. Therefore, Hansen's approach misses aspects of the publicness of films and the conceptual bases of their public critical potency.

Further Reflections on Film

In addition to the explicit engagement of film and the public sphere, some independent cinema initiatives have explored the potential of film in contesting prevailing political ideas. These initiatives attest to the understanding of film as a tool for critical engagement. However, the extent and implications of the discursiveness of film is related often, and only, to its production, and to spaces of expert reflections on it. At the same time as film production and expert writings on film cannot be discounted, accepting them as constituting adequately, the discursive purview of film, presents a narrow and

WiSETD

problematic understanding of the relations between film as text and its publics. The operating assumption here seems to be that although film circulates beyond spaces of expert commentary, its critical potency rests exclusively within such spaces, or in its immediate effects on the seated audience. Considering that this assumption attenuates the discursive possibilities of film in public, this thesis examines the publicness of films both within and outside spaces of expert reflections about them. It pays attention to expert commentary in and of itself, and to the networks of circulation into which film enters, and how it shapes and it is shaped by other extra-expert forms of critical engagement.

Reception theory, which is concerned with how spectators actually interact with film, constitutes an attempt at understanding the role of film in society.[42] It foregrounds context and not text as the site of meaning making by spectators. To its credit, reception theory embraces the idea of active and not passive spectators. In doing so, the theory has contributed to the understanding of film as a site of the making of meaning within actual contexts of viewership. The conditions of these contexts also occasion a multiplicity of interpretations. However, the focus in reception theory, on spectatorial interactivity with film distinguishes it from the focal point of this thesis, which is on the publicness of film. Admittedly, this emphasis on publicness of film is alert to the idea of active spectators and the multiple interpretations of films but eclipses it. It does this by examining the critical role of film not only in relation to the scenes of engagement by a seated audience but also importantly, in relation to other scenes of engagement beyond viewership. The thesis recognises that the imprint of film in modern life, including but not restricted to physical sites of its viewership, and its relation to ongoing public discourses, strongly militates

[42] For a useful theoretical background to reception theory, see Holub R., 1984. *Reception Theory: a Critical Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge. Janet Staiger, offers an excellent historical materialist perspective of reception theory with a specific focus on American films. Her work incorporates a discussion of the theory's application to television. See Staiger J., 1992. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*, Princeton N, J.: Princeton University Press. See also Staiger J., 2000. *Perverse Spectators: the Practice of Film Reception*, New York and London: New York University Press. While its focus is on reception theory and television, David Morley's work is also pertinent for film studies. See Morley D., 1980. *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding*, London: British Film Institute.

WiSER

against 'reception' as a conceptual premise for the understanding of the role of film in critical public engagements. Therefore, the thesis goes beyond reception theory because it views films in terms of relations with public discourses, and is not limited to the actual readings of films by spectators. This approach widens the scope of the relation of film to modernity in general, and to the public sphere in particular.

South African Film Scholarship

Critical appreciation of South African films has shown extensively the hegemonic or counter-hegemonic tendencies at work in these films. Scholars have also highlighted the representations of identity, class and gender in South African films. While attention to the films' critical tendencies has driven many an analysis of their strategies and significance, their public dimension has frequently been ignored. This approach constitutes a failure to reflect critically on the dialectical demands engendered by the relation between the concepts of 'film' and 'public'. This thesis focuses on the critical public engagements that arise in relation to the films and their circulation. By focusing on their engagements of black identity, I hope to put into perspective the role of film in critical public engagements. Far from undermining the work that has already been done on black-centred South African films, this thesis encompasses such work in an attempt to explore conceptually, how film can be said to enhance critical public engagement.

The concern with the critical role of film is not new. However, in their considerations of film as a site through which modernity in South Africa may be critically apprehended in relation to questions of identity, and historically specific contexts, these analyses hardly deal with film as a material object that has a 'public life'. By public life I mean the totality of the events, and engagements in the films' circulation across time and space. Contemporary studies in South African cinema have documented historical nuances of black people's involvement in film. *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*: (Balseiro and Masilela 2003), includes discussions about the import of film in the forging of black identity and agency in modernity. In the book, Balseiro and Masilela mooted the idea

WiSER

of treating film in South Africa as a phenomenon of cultural history. They write against the backdrop of a film culture that 'reluctantly took black South Africans into account' and a scholarship that only 'takes account of the participation of black people as background figures' in South African film history (2003: 1-2). It is partly against the reluctant inclusion of black South Africans from film culture that this study fashions its exploration of South African films - with an eye on black participation and the problematic of black identity. However, the concepts of 'film' and 'public' do not brook neat relations with the question of black participation in film.

Balseiro and Masilela hail Gutsche's 1972 seminal work on South African films, namely: *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, as a precedent in terms of methodology because it placed film in its social context. Together, the works of Gutsche, Balseiro and Masilela embody an important, and distinctive but small area in South African film scholarship, which relates film to its cultural and social context.

Maingard's (2007) study of South African films in light of the question of national cinema is the most recent offering. Though the book's focus is on South African film culture in general, it gives considerable attention to black experiences of film from the 1920s to the present. An incisive discussion of modernity and identity forged through film is at the centre of Maingard's concerns. In its linking of modernity and identity to film, her work complements the present study. The consideration of film as a cultural phenomenon forms an important part of this thesis but my focus is on the public critical nature and significance of film.

In their attention to representations of black identity in South African films, and black experiences of film, Maingard, Balseiro, Masilela and others including Magogodi, have updated and significantly expanded earlier concerns with black experiences of film, undertaken by Tomaselli and Peter Davis. Tomaselli only devotes a brief chapter to 'black'

WitsETD

film in his 1989 work, *The Cinema of Apartheid*. In terms of its vision, Tomaselli's book is aimed at bringing to light and encouraging critical perspectives on South African film culture, particularly as part of the anti-apartheid struggles. His latest book, *Encountering Modernity* (2006) which is admittedly a collection of his works on South African films in general, does not give significant critical attention to black-centred films. Davis on the other hand commits a substantial part of his and Daniel Riesenfeld's documentary film: *In Darkest Hollywood*: *Cinema and Apartheid* (1993), and Davis' book *In Darkest Hollywood: The Jungles of Cinema's South Africa* (1996), to the history of the representation of black identity in South African cinema, and its meaningfulness for them. While these works are important in their foregrounding of the black experience of cinema, they have not attempted to discuss how film relates to critical public engagements.

Film, Modernity and History in South Africa

I undertake the thesis against the background of film's imbrication within modern capitalist relations. Film is a capital-intensive and primarily a commercially driven cultural object, and therefore exists within the realm of capitalist relations and consumption. In societies 'structured in dominance'[43] such as in colonial and apartheid South Africa, this meant exclusion or marginalisation of black people from film culture. It is important to consider how film enhances critical public engagements because its conditions of production and bias towards profitability may counteract its potential to engage what cultural theorist, Paul Gilroy (1993: 41-71), has called 'the antinomies of modernity'. By 'antinomies of modernity', Gilroy refers to white domination, racialised slavery, and by allusion, to exploitative and dehumanizing systems in the forms of colonialism, and neo-colonialism, all of which are significantly informed by the global capitalist enterprise. These practices are 'antinomies of modernity' because they are incongruent with the

[43] The formulation of 'societies structured in dominance' is from Stuart Hall. See Hall S., 1980. "Race", Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance, in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, Paris: UNESCO, 305-345.

WiSETD

rational claims underwriting the universalizing and dominant occidental versions of modernity, with which they are historically affiliated.

Hegel defines modernity historically as an epochal concept (Habermas 1987: 5). According to Habermas (1987: 5), the Renaissance, Reformation and discovery of the New World which happened around 1500, are for Hegel constitutive of the threshold between the Middle Ages and 'modern times'. For Hegel, the intellectual reawakening of Europe and exploration of the West form a genesis of a 'rupture' retrospectively called 'modernity'. In this study, modernity is understood to be the concept of society as a progressive aggregate founded on instrumental rationality. Technological or scientific inventions, the systematization of societal life, as well as economic and political organization, are manifestations of this rationality.[44] As one of the modern scientific inventions, film is intractably caught up within the logic of this new rationality. Not only is it a major economic enterprise but as apparatus, it stands witness to the logic of modernity as a progressive discourse. However, the history of South Africa throws into sharp relief the contradictions of modernity in colonial and neo-colonial societies. To understand modernity in South Africa, its relationship to black identity and its relation to the films under study, it will prove useful briefly to delineate the history of colonialism, and apartheid, and the meanings of blackness across time.

Imperial Britain occupied the Cape Colony in 1795 and seized it from the Dutch in 1806 (Simons and Simons 1983: 11). According to the historians, Ray and Jack Simons (1983: 15), the British victory 'led ultimately to the emancipation of slaves, the subjugation of

[44] According to Weber, modernity is marked both by the secularization of society and by its development from the viewpoint of rationalization. Rationalization is simply the formulation of economic, social and political activities with the aim of facilitating their management and therefore controllability. It is a feature of modernity to rationalize structures of society around capitalist enterprises and bureaucratic state apparatuses. The concatenation of life into a rationalized system presents many problems for philosophy, beginning with Hegel, whom Habermas credits with being the first philosopher of modernity. See Habermas J, 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press: 1, 43.

[44] For an instructive discussion of modernity within colonial settings, see Comaroff J.L., and Comaroff J., 1997. *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London.

WiSER

Africans and a cultural dualism among the whites that developed into rival nationalisms' (1983: 15). The racial tolerance of colonial liberalism gradually gave way to the rising tide of racial segregation among the British settlers, who by 1865, 'disenfranchised Africans and developed under the British rule a white supremacy state...' (1983: 20). Thus, a liberal spirit marked the formative years of colonialism in South Africa, that however tended to permit different forms of inequality over time. The onset of colonialism in South Africa unfolded against the background of the Industrial Revolution, a historical and economic phenomenon typified by a shift from a manual labour-based economy to a machine-based large-scale manufacturing mode of production. In effect, colonialism and its enterprising industrialisation supplanted the economic mode of production in the region. Thus, the Industrial Revolution lay at the root of modernisation in South Africa, and gave birth to new social and economic relations. The discoveries of diamonds in Kimberley in 1867-1871, and gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 fuelled the rapid industrialisation that forcibly brought Africans into a modernity marked by racial segregation, super-exploitation and dispossession.

In the period following the mineral discoveries, Britain embarked on a series of wars with the various African nations and the Afrikaner Republics (Simons and Simons 1983: 31). The establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 cemented the post Anglo-Boer war rapprochement between the British and the Dutch. The Union gave white supremacist politics a formidable legislative platform through which successive governments passed Acts that dispossessed Africans of political rights and whatever remained of their lands. The 1913 Land Act allocated Africans only seven percent of the remaining largely unproductive land. However, 'the Native Land Act had of course been preceded by a vast number of land laws in the British colonies and the Boer republics before 1910; laws regulating squatting, tenancies, imposing taxes and rents...but the 1913 Land Act while it echoed details from earlier legislation went much further' (Bundy 1990: 5). The effect of the Act was 'to drive the native peasant off the land....the only refuge that the native had

WitsETD

was the town' (Sir William Berry cited in Plaatje 1916: 48-50). However, the presence of Africans in the urban areas threatened white separatism.

In this period, new pseudo-scientific 'disciplines' such as physical anthropology and Bantu Studies that professed racial typologies and evolutionary difference, took root in South Africa. However, racial classificatory schemes, which originated in the European enlightenment, preceded these 'scientific' preoccupations in South Africa (Dubow 1995: 25). These so-called 'sciences' were underwritten by white supremacy: 'In charting the paths of evolutionary development they helped to confirm- by implicit analogy if not outright comparison- the intrinsic superiority of the white races and the inexorable progress of European civilization' (Dubow 1995: 39). Physical anthropology infantilised the 'bushmen' in particular, casting them as child races and in need of protection from Europeans (Dubow 1995: 50-51). An instructive example of the 'scientific' ascription of racial inferiority on Africans is the controversial depiction of the 'bushman diorama' still on display in the South African Museum (Dubow 1995: 36). The racial 'scientific' notions of the period percolated into the early twentieth century South African political scene. According to Dubow, the then Prime Minister of the Union, General Jan Christian Smuts, expressed sentiments for the preservation and celebration of the bushman as 'a childlike reminder of the noble innocence that Western civilization has long lost' (1995: 52). Ultimately, early racial 'sciences' gave a semblance of dignity to inherently racist attitudes that gave vent to colonial and later apartheid casting of Africans as existing outside history, and as having no claims to modernity. The cinema, being a marker of modern sophistication, became an instrument for ostensibly scientific scrutiny of the Africans' intellectual abilities. Although its primarily context is colonial Zimbabwe, historian, James Burns's work, *Flickering Shadows*: *Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe* (2002), offers some insights into the mobilization of cinema in pseudo-scientific colonial enterprises. Burns shows that from the late 1920's, white scholars began to do research that cast aspersions on Africans' ability to understand cinema. According to him, '...settler fears that Africans were incapable of understanding cinematic images became entangled in a

WitsETD

broader debate about African "difference", a discussion that held a crucial relevance for white politics in Southern Africa' (Burns 2002: 3).

In response to African urbanisation, the Transvaal Local Government Commission under the chairmanship of one C.F. Stallard, made recommendations which denied Africans permanent abode in the urban areas. The commission suggested that 'the native should only be allowed to enter the urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister' (cited in Baines 2003: 37). This line of thinking which was also allied to missionary and conservative African traditionalists' concerns about the moral implications of what they believed were the corrupting ways of the urban areas, played a significant role in giving content to official imaginations of African identity. Accordingly, Africans were traditional and only temporarily encountered industrial modernity at the behest of the white man. This ideology motivated government to pass the Native Urban Areas Act in 1923, which made provision for the accommodation of Africans in separate urban locations. However, by the 1940s, large numbers of Africans were urbanised and some owned property in freehold suburbs[45] which were also called 'black spots' because they were purportedly in white land. However, these 'black spots' were deemed unsafe for white residents and in time, were demolished and their residents removed by force of arms to 'locations' in the outskirts of the cities and towns.

The rise to power of the Nationalist Party in 1948 saw the establishment of the apartheid system. Based on an extreme form of Afrikaner nationalism, this system further entrenched white racial dominance in South Africa. No sooner was apartheid promulgated than its legislative machinery kicked in with laws that governed the social, political and even intimate lives of Africans. The restriction of African life in the urban areas was a cardinal goal in the Nationalist Party's ideology of separate development.

[45] These were areas in the city in which Africans were allowed to buy and own property.

WitsETD

> A stream of legislation emerged- the Population Registration Act (1950) which labelled every individual by race; the Group Areas Act (1950) which delimited living areas; the bantu Authorities Act (1951) which reinforced traditional African tribal structures; the Separate Amenities Act (1953) which divided the use of public amenities; and the Bantu Education Act (1953) which defined African education (Barber 1999: 141).

Apartheid led to the radicalisation of African opinion, and throughout the 50's, anti-apartheid activism intensified only to be rudely crushed by the state at the beginning of the 1960s. 'Following Sharpeville, Pretoria moved quickly – prohibiting public meetings, banning the PAC and ANC as unlawful organisations, declaring a state of emergency and rounding up political opponents' (Barber 1999: 169). State hostility to African political demands drove the latter into exile and a revolutionary method of operation- the armed struggle.

By the 1970s however, ideological rifts emerged from within the National Party, leading to a profound destabilization of apartheid, particularly the extreme Verwoerdean[46] interpretation of it. This inspired a reformist turn in the history of apartheid. While some of the reforms, for example the Wiehahn (1977) and Riekert Commissions (1979), did not necessarily suggest the erosion of apartheid, they were significant in areas such as labour- where black workers were recognized for the first time.[47]

In theatre scholar, Ian Steadman's reading of the work of the historian, Herman Giliomee, (1985: 346, 349), the reformist gestures were responsible for the creation of divisions within both black and white political ranks, and to the emergence of two opposing tendencies- the radicals and 'accommodationists'. Steadman argues that this was significant because it changed the political image of balkanization between whites and blacks. Importantly, the accomodationist stance was significant because it posed a

[46] The so-called architect of apartheid, H.F. Verwoerd (1901-1966), was the Prime Minister of South Africa from 1958 until his assassination in 1966. He refined the system of apartheid in a rigid and even extreme manner.

[47] These were state-appointed commissions, which came in the wake of the growth of trade unionism, the major expression of which was the unprecedented 1973 strike by black workers. For the Riekert Commission, see Republic of South Africa, 1979. *Riekert Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Legislation Affecting Utilization of Manpower* (Pretoria: Government Printer).

WiSETD

challenge to the Verwordean 'homelands' system in which black people were arbitrarily allocated separate rural territories along their so-called 'ethnic lines'.

Challenges from a resurgent black political activism also played a role in the weakening of apartheid. Towards the end of the 1960s and well into the 70's, black student leaders heralded a radical paradigm with regard to black identity and agency. This paradigm took the form of the political ideology of Black Consciousness. The custodians of Black Consciousness, the South African Students Organization (SASO), defined it as a mental attitude and a way of life that is primarily guided by a rejection of 'all value systems that seek to make the black man a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity' (cited in Steadman 1985: 111). SASO argued for black self-definition and accepted the premise that:

> .... before black people should join the open society, they should first close their ranks, to form themselves into a solid group to oppose the definite racism that is meted out by white society, to work out their direction clearly and bargain from a position of strength. SASO believes that a truly open society can only be achieved by blacks (cited in Steadman 1985: 111).[48]

The rise of Black Consciousness in South Africa in the post-Civil Rights era and in the wake of Black Power Movement in the United States, also point towards continued trans-Atlantic influences and exchanges regarding the local discourses of blackness. These had resonances in the local black press- *Drum* magazine, *The World* newspaper and others. Engagements of black identity gained a foothold in the public sphere in South Africa. Narratives of black redemption inspired theatre, poetry and music of the time.[49]

[48] For a comprehensive account of the philosophy of Black Consciousness, see Biko S., 1978. *I Write What I like*, London: Bowerdean. See also Biko S,. 1978. (Ed) Millard A., *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, New York: Random House. See also Fatton R., 1986. *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy*, New York: State University of New York. See especially the chapter: The Growth and Definition of Black Consciousness: 63-80.

[49] Steadman gives an extended account of the influence of Black Consciousness on black theatre in the 1970s. See Steadman I., 1985. *Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984*. See also Chapter three in this thesis.

WiSETD

The hiatus in political protest and resistance, which had begun with the brutal suppression of the 1960 uprising in Sharpeville, ended with yet another massacre in students uprising of 1976. In this year, schoolchildren in Soweto actively challenged the attempts by the state to institute Afrikaans forcibly as a medium of instruction in black schools.[50] A major crackdown by the state followed in which many schoolchildren were killed. Some of the children fled the country to join the armed forces of the exiled liberation movements. In the 1980's anti-apartheid activism gained more ground, culminating in the demise of apartheid by the beginning of the 1990s.

On the strength of the cited historical contradictions in the social and political relations in South Africa, the thesis treats modernity in that country as the historical cauldron and discursive arena in which colonialism, neo-colonialism and various guises of imperialism are played out. Subjection and resistance, negotiation and manoeuvre, as well as appropriations and expropriations of cultural and political resources to define 'new' African worldviews characterize modernity in South Africa. In the South African context modernity and the challenges it poses change over time. For instance, colonial and apartheid modernity significantly located blackness outside modernity because of the binary logic which put blackness in opposition to a progressive whiteness. Thus, if whites resided in the city and were modern, blacks were fixed to an archaic rural traditionalism and were, ostensibly, perpetually unsuited to industrial modernity and its attendant political and social life. The logical conclusion of this thinking was that blacks were to be held in trusteeship, as they were not capable of self-rule. Therefore, underlying colonial and apartheid modernity was a racial attitude that confined black people to an inferior social and economic status. Consequently, colonial and apartheid modernity significantly denied black people social and political agency. Through segregation, both colonialism and apartheid cast Africans as aberrations of modernity, the intent and effect of which was to

[50] For a rich historical discussion, see Hirson B., 1979. *Year of Fire, Year of Ash. The Soweto Re- volt: Roots of a Revolution?* London: Zed Press.

WISETD

exclude them from the public sphere. However, Africans repeatedly succeeded in resisting that exclusion and sometimes in creating public spheres.

The terms by which blackness was contested were affected by the rapid urbanisation of black people and the apartheid state's waning 'control' over their lives. As a result, other challenges, including class, gender, sexuality and intergenerational differences, have come to significantly define the problematic of blackness. These differences or issues constitute a discursive terrain in which the social and political assumptions about blackness unfold. For instance, as well as projecting the flexibility of their cultural identities, class relations in the urban setting draw attention to the social and economic status of black people in the city. Thus, in black people's encounter with urbanity, the question of what it meant to be black in the city is salient. Part of the challenge issuing from this encounter is the relation of political agency to blackness. This question is germane to those conditions of political resistance against apartheid, particularly those marked by political solidarity that foregrounded a homogenous black identity and political agency. With the attainment of independence in 1994, questions of sexuality and gender gained momentum; no longer could they be marginal subjects in the discourse of liberation especially in regard to its moral and ethical imperatives. By addressing themselves to these questions, some of the films in this study illuminate the complexities of blackness and modernity. If I appear to historicise the problematic of modernity in relation to blackness, it is because of the salience of the shifting discursive currents in the public sphere, which are greatly affected by the unfolding political and social relations in South Africa. The films are no less subject to these shifts, and their relations to the public discursive currents tend to surface their public engagements in those regards.

The films respond to problems that have defined modernity in South Africa including the migrant labour system, urban separate development, and the attendant problems of mass urbanisation and poverty manifest in tropes such as petty criminality and *lumpen* subjectivity. The post-apartheid films also address problems attendant on South Africa's

WiSER

post-repressive period namely: nation-building, gender and masculine violence, the crisis of public education and sexuality. Contemporary public deliberations and contestations of the cited issues have a bearing on the films' relations to critical public engagements on black identity. These deliberations constitute the discursive currents in the contexts of the films' initial and ongoing circulation. These discursive currents facilitate the study's exploration of the link between the concepts of 'public' and 'film'.

The problems that relate to colonial and apartheid history are relevant to the thesis insofar as they touch on historical and philosophical aspects of modernity namely, colonization, instrumental rationality and commodification. However, the thesis is not interested in the ideological questions about modernity per se, but in the question of how film, one of the objects of modernity, engages with many questions that are related to modernity, and the nature of the ideas themselves. Film, a thoroughly modern enterprise, runs across, (in no particular order), the many processes of modernization raised above as apparatus, it is a product of capital and labour; as form, it is a site of the production of values, and norms; and as culture, it is a locus of social relations. This raises the question of how its many manifestations across the economic, social and political spheres relate to each other because the norms of capital are not value-free, nor co-extensive with those of the publics that film calls into being. This is a question, not of political economy *qua* political economy, but of the possibilities, limits and nature of the sphere of engagement, within which film as form operates, including but not restricted to political economic contexts. The imbrication of film within the rationale of modernity raises the question of its critical potency- that is its capacity to bring into being critical public engagements of contemporary issues, which have a bearing on subjectivity and identity.

Conclusion

In the colonial and apartheid eras, attempts have been made to divert black identity from engagement with modernity, by confining it to the spaces of tradition and Bantustanism.

WiSETD

There have of course, been significant exceptions such as the rise of the *amakholwa* (educated and Christianized Africans), and the New African movement, as well as the establishment of the liberation movements. Historically, some of these exceptions recognized the intrinsic modernity of film, and the importance of engaging the medium as part of the project of realizing modern black subjectivities. Solomon Plaatje's bioscope exhibition project exemplifies this tendency, as does for example, the inter-war and post-war commentary by writer, and public intellectual H.I.E. Dhlomo. Partly in response to these kinds of engagements, and in the context of a rapidly mediating world, the apartheid government invested in films that envisioned black identity. The thesis takes up the 'project' of the exploration of black identity through and around film, when black-centred films began decisively to engage modernity. Cognizant of a handful of precursors, the thesis takes as its starting point *Come Back, Africa*, which was made clandestinely in 1959, and represents one of the first significant cinematic engagements with black identity and modernity in South Africa. The real rupture with the past however, occurred in the 1970s when internal apartheid certainties about tribal and rural identities ascribed to South African blacks were themselves beginning to collapse. This happened against the background of the assertive ideology of Black Consciousness that flourished in the 1970s, infusing the quest for new forms of black identity. The thesis tracks the efforts of these philosophical and ideological shifts through the political struggles of the 1980's to the post 1994 period of democracy.

WiSETD