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

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CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Method entails the choice of the films to be studied, and the procedure of collecting research material that speaks to the films' relation to public engagements of issues concerned with black identity, gender, sexuality and violence. The methodology includes an analytical approach to the films; other materials collected and acknowledges the strengths and limits of the available evidence. It also describes the central concepts in the study, that is of film, circulation, and text, and how they inform my objectives. It also describes how these concepts illuminate the analysis of the evidence and other materials used.

Identification of the Films

My choice of the films was based on their particular historical locations and distinctions pertaining to 'black experiences' in general, and the problematic of black identity in particular. The films were made at different stages of the apartheid and post-apartheid period. *Come Back, Africa* (1959) was made at the height of Verwoedean-inspired apartheid. *u'Deliwe* (1975) emerged when apartheid was going through a political crisis because of the internal ideological rifts within the National Party, and when new challenges posed by the Black Consciousness movement emerged. Some apartheid ideologues in tandem with capital argued for the permanence of Black people in urban areas, thereby destabilising the notion of black people as essentially rural and traditional. When *Mapantsula* (1987) was made, overt political challenge to apartheid was at its peak. The production of the film was itself mired in underground alliances between grassroots political organisations and the exiled ANC and PAC. Both *Fools* (1997) and *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004) came about after the formal demise of apartheid. The atmosphere of national euphoria following political independence, defined the context of their making and initial

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circulation. The differences in the periods allow for a wide range of historical shifts and challenges with regard to black South Africans' encounters with film.

While I accept that blackness or African identity is a historical problematic, constructed and reconstructed in varied ways over time, I approach blackness or black identity in terms of heterogeneous cultural and political constructions with which people of African descent, and variously people of colour with generally similar historical experiences of modernity, identify. Such constructions are premised on a negotiation of modernity and a resistance of its contradictions- racial prejudice in particular and negative stereotypes in general. Thus, regardless of the different social and cultural particularities among black people the world over, I understand blackness as a cultural and political identity because of its coming into being in modernity, particularly in relation to the contradictions of modernity that are based on negative cultural assumptions about blackness. This understanding eschews essentialist approaches to identity and adopts instead, its cultural, social and political constructedness: 'the fact is "black" has never been just there either. It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically. It too is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found' (Hall 1996 (b): 116). In the context of the study, I use 'black' and 'African' interchangeably to refer primarily to the formerly politically oppressed South Africans and their descendants. I must point out however, that so-called Indians and coloureds were not excluded from a claim to modernity in the same way as Africans and their descendants.

The themes, circumstances of emergence, circulations and discursive contexts of the films allow for a wide range of questions and engagements with regard to the central objective of the thesis, which is to reflect on the critical status of film in relation to the challenges of modernity. Whatever their objectives, the films addressed a primarily black viewership. With the exception of *Come Back, Africa*, the selected films' actual circulation was projected in the main to black South African audiences. Alive to the historical circumstances in which they emerged, these films demonstrate different attempts at

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'authenticating' black South African images and their cultural milieu. The films invoke 'senses of blackness' in different ways.

The thesis divides the films in two categories, the early and later black-centred films. These categories are historical in that early black-centred films emerge in the colonial and apartheid periods. Early black-centred films include Plaatje's films of the 1920s but properly begin with *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* in 1949. Later black-centred films begin with *Mapantsula* in the late 80's and end with *Yizo Yizo* in 2004. The categories take into account the production conditions of the films and the circumstances of their circulation. The relation of early black-centred films to the contexts of their production and circulation was largely at the mercy of the historical context of apartheid. However, the effects of apartheid on the films were not homogenous. For example, earlier films such as *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* and *Zonk*, were made and circulated when apartheid had just been promulgated, making it impossible for the system to exercise absolute control on theor productions and circulation. The early black-centred films tend to be constrained aesthetically and sometimes thematically because of the circumstances influencing their production as well as the people producing and directing them. Later black-centred films display a degree of autonomy denied the earlier films, and are therefore more aesthetically adventurous and thematically diverse. The availability of advanced outlets of distribution such as video, DVD and television characterise the circulation of the later black-centred films. The thesis does not set out to provide a historical account of black-centred films across the period 1959-2001. It rather uses the 'punctuated moments' of focus on particular films across that period, as opportunities to reflect on the role of film in contemporary public engagements, in an effort to gain understanding of the contribution of film to what Habermas terms the public sphere.

Come Back, Africa (1959) was one of the first black-centred films. It engaged critically with apartheid, and the circumstances of its making and circulation establishes the background to the study. Produced clandestinely in the formative years of the apartheid state, *Come*

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Back, Africa entered the South African cinematic record by stealth, in a way that foreshadowed the challenges that significantly typified the relations between cinema and critical public engagements of black identity until 1988. Its narrative centres on black urban identities, apartheid and industrial society in the late 1950s. The film draws attention to the issue of migrant labour and black-intellectuals' contestations of black urban identity in particular. As such *Come Back, Africa* raises the question of how early black-centred films related to reflections on black identity.

In the 1950s, black South Africans accessed the cinematic apparatus largely at the mercy of white independent filmmakers. As such, the involvement of Africans in the making of independent black-centred films depended on white benevolence. Eschewing liberal tutelage, the American filmmaker, Lionel Rogosin collaborated with a group of Africans intellectuals in a film that engaged the apartheid system and exploitative industrial relations. Precisely because of its focus and circumstances of production, *Come Back, Africa* is a window into the nature of the publicness of black-centred films over-time. Unlike *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, *Zonk* and the *Magic Garden*, its constraints pose searching questions about the publicness of films without circulation in the countries of their making, or settings that they actually address. However, *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*, *Zonk* and *Magic Garden* may give an insightful glimpse into Africans' entry into South African cinematic culture, and publicness, and therefore deserve thorough attention on their own.

u'Deliwe (1975) was produced by the apartheid state's Department of Information. Directed by a black filmmaker, it was infused with a distinctively black sensibility. Because of the changes in the composition of its production team, that is in reversing the 'racial' composition of its principal filmmakers, and even in its circulation, *u'Deliwe* constitutes a distinct 'moment' in terms of the cinematic engagements of blackness in South Africa. The film reconstructs black encounters with urban modernity in Johannesburg in the 1970s. In the film, a middle class patriarchal privileging of familial stability and values is pitted against the independent forays of young women into the social scenes of the city. Being a

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state subsidy film focusing on black social life without direct reference to the political context of apartheid, *u'Deliwe* raises the question of the critical value to public engagements of black identity, of apartheid-era films that were heavily affiliated to the state. In particular, it throws into sharp relief class and gender in the engagements of black identity in the apartheid period.

Mapantsula (1987), an overtly anti-apartheid *engagé* film about a petty gangster in the context of the 1980's political unrest in the townships, constitutes a militant filmic idiom in the tradition of Third Cinema theory and practices. Through its narrative and visual tapestry of unrest and petty criminality, the film openly challenged apartheid hegemony. As a film that emerged in the heat of unrest in South African townships, it allows the thesis to explore the changing critical engagements of blackness in relation to equally dynamic historical continuities and discontinuities in the 1980's and beyond. The film provokes the examination of the problematic of blackness in relation to arguments that seek to define blackness in terms of a collective political agency. The film's political commitment constitutes a radical engagement of apartheid and enables the thesis to explore the critical tendencies of its commitment. The critical engagements in *Mapantsula* of class, gender and racial injustices, and its circulation within politically engaged contexts, enables the thesis to ask questions about the relation of film to the public sphere within the context of late, but still repressive, apartheid South Africa.

The post-apartheid film *Fools* (1997), reconstructs the historical wheel of the late apartheid era by representing a 1980's township in a manner that revealed levels of violence among the black township residents. The narrative of *Fools* revolves around the rape of a young woman by her teacher, and the injustice of patriarchal attitudes towards her ordeal. *Fools* is set in the 1980's, but its making in the 1990s, during the transition to democracy redirected the South African cinematic focus from overtly politicised violence to 'gendered' violence. It also eschewed, albeit critically, the euphoria of the new dispensation. Its metaphoric stylistics, and focus on gender- an issue of address that

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appears to be 'out of joint' with the local film culture and the euphoria of black independence set it apart from other films that I consider in this thesis. *Fools* is adapted from a novella of the same name, and therefore invites consideration of the public intellectual form that a film might assume in relation to its literary origins. This poses questions about how *auteurist* films generate critical public engagements on black identity from the perspective of gender. How these engagements related to the question of blackness is of paramount import because part of the colonial constructions of black identity was based on generic stereotyping of black sexuality.

Yizo Yizo (1999, 2001) is a state-commissioned three-season television series addressed at the problems in the township schools in South Africa. As an outcome of a campaign by the South African National Department of Education called Culture of Learning and Teaching, Teaching and Service (COLTS), it was part of the Departmental strategies for addressing problems besetting township schools. The film was charged with the development of positive role models, as well as 'modelling a process of restoration in a typical South African school serving urban Black South African community' (<http://www/southafrica-newyork.net/consulate/education.htm"> (accessed 2, July 2006). *Yizo Yizo* was aimed at high school and out-of-school youth.

The thesis premises its choice of *Yizo Yizo* on its wide audience reach, overt mandate to generate debate, and generic strategies such as the use of explicit language, and highly suggestive sex scenes. *Yizo Yizo* allows the thesis to explore the question of how film constitutes publicness from the perspective of its format (television series), platform (television) and its mandate. This question is significant in view of the different dynamics that shaped the distribution and production practices of the other films in the study, which were made primarily for cinematic viewing.

I have selected films which over-time have attracted a lot of attention, about which much has been written and researched; films that have been largely consecrated as significant.

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As a sequence, and in exception of *u'Deliwe*, each film has already attracted to it significant secondary literature. This literature is at various points in the thesis my object of study, as evidence of the publicness of the film concerned. At the same time, key texts within that literature are secondary texts of film scholarship on which I draw, both conceptually and as sources of information for my analysis. My methodological need to focus on films that have already garnered substantial scholarly attention means that the emphasis of the thesis is not on the location, and use of hitherto unknown archival sources, as well as fresh material, but on the application of a fresh analytical approach to a text-rich field.

The Concatenation of Texts through Time

In presenting and sustaining the conceptual foundations of the study, I draw on the social theorist Michael Warner's theoretical explanation of publics that come into being in relation to texts that circulate (Warner 2002). Warner delineates three senses of the concept of public. The first and the most common-sensical is of 'a people in general, a kind of social totality' (2002: 65). The second refers to a 'crowd witnessing itself in visible space such as a theatre audience' (2002: 66). The third sense is of 'a public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation' (2002: 66). It is largely in the third sense, which describes the relation between publics, texts and their circulation that the thesis bases its methodology.

> Without the idea of a text that can be picked up at different times and in different places by otherwise unrelated people, we would not imagine *a* public as an entity that embraces all the users of the text, whoever they might be. Often the texts themselves are not even recognized as texts […] but the publics they bring into being are still discursive in the same way (2002: 68).

It follows then, that circulation is essential to the publicness of texts. Following Warner, the thesis adopts circulation as a key concept that makes possible the publicness of the films. Thus, in the thesis circulation is important insofar as it facilitates the possibility of

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various encounters with the films, and secondarily, in the manner in which the films are engaged by their publics.

For Warner, 'a public is a space of discourse and is organized by nothing other than discourse itself' (2002: 67). It exists by virtue of being addressed. This means that as the end goal for which texts are published or other modes of address used- *a* public is 'conjured into being by discourse in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence' (2002: 67). Accordingly, a public is an infinite discursive space whose existence is made possible by the discourse that texts constitute. Thus, as an object of address *a* public is a *condition* of discourse as well as an *object* of address by discourse itself.

Warner's understanding of *a* public in relation to texts that circulate is useful for the thesis. Appropriating this insight and his argument that publics are discursive, permits me to consider films methodologically as texts that circulate and, through their circulation, engender publics. However, for Warner 'no single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, even a single medium. All are insufficient to create the kind of reflexivity that we call a public, since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse' (2002: 90). Thus, the approach of this thesis entails the consideration of film as a text whose circulation and interaction with, as well as generation of other texts, media and their concatenation through time, creates publics (2002: 90). It is precisely this circulation and intertextuality, which gives film the capacity of bringing publics into being. Examining publics in terms of their discursive tendencies in relation to the films in the thesis, allows me to arrive at some conclusions about their capacities or the lack thereof, to animate critical engagements.

> A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies just in this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence. A public in this sense is as much notional as it is empirical (2002: 67).

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Thus, the publics of the films in the thesis are not restricted to film viewing audiences, but include non-film viewing publics who might constitute discursive spaces that are not immediate to the exhibitions of the films. Such publics come into being in the wake of the public engagements into which the films enter or stimulate through their circulation. The extensiveness of publics differentiates the methodology in the study from the approaches of reception theory. The thesis is not about the reception of films; rather, it is about their public discursiveness.

Film

The thesis proceeds from the assumption that film satisfies the attributes of a text that circulates, and is open to varied uses, and engagements. I approach film as the object of the thesis as a specific instance of text. Methodologically therefore, the question of text arises at the very primary level of engaging with the research object. In the present context, the idea of text is grasped as a publicly apprehended object which obtains at the point of public engagement with its 'meanings' or significance. Therefore, text is an object that has complex effects- it both engenders and inherits discourse. However, these effects can only take place through circulation.

In tandem with its textuality and subjectivity to circulation, the thesis treats film as an impression of object relations and a constitution of their ontological statuses, assigned by cinematic or televisual apparatuses.[1] In other words, film is a sphere of representation of objects and their perceived nature. Thus, film exists as an object of human consciousness. It makes the engagements of ideas possible. However, as form, it facilitates engagement of ideas by appealing to the human senses, in a way that renders almost im-*mediate*-ly

[1] Increasingly however, cell phones challenge televisual and cinematic apparatuses such as 35mm cameras and the smaller digital editions as the traditional preserve for film production and experience. Recently, for example, a South African feature film was shot on cell phone cameras. The film, *SMS Sugarman* (1998), by Aryan Kaganof, was shot on Sony Ericcson W900i model. For more details, see Cinema Goes Cellular with *SMS Sugarman*, *Vodaworld Magazine*, (Ed. Rhoda Davis), Winter, 2006, Ravi Naidoo, Cape Town, 22-25.

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available, the world it depicts. It is necessary to explicate the link between film as form and the apparatuses through which it is made possible. Here are the basic features of the apparatus and that are relatively separable from film as form.

The impression of visual motion forms the basic attribute of the film apparatus in that the objects it organizes are always in flux through its illusionary 'space'. This sense of 'flux' encompasses film's impression of life and is eventuated in the relations of life recognizable to the world external to it- hence the assumption of the ontological attributes of objective 'reality'. Although not strictly essential to it, the auditory attribute of the apparatus is also important in the facilitation of the 'unity' of the experience of film and contemplation of its meaningfulness.

Critical Engagements

By critical engagements, I mean the public reflections- direct or indirect- that come into being in the wake of films or in anticipation of a film. The thesis examines such engagements in relation to the themes of black identity, gender, sexuality and violence, and in how they relate to the discursive sphere immediate to the films' making and circulation. A principal way in which the thesis examines the relation between film and critical public engagements is through their contextual affiliations. When a film resonates with its context, it has contextual affiliation- a key element in its capacity to generate critical engagements. The lack of contextual affiliation presents the tendency to narrow, at least in the first instance, a film's critical potency.

In the attempt to understand the status of film as an object that circulates within and in relation to the myriad intersections of technology, discourse, and social practices that encompass modern life, I have treated film as a dynamic site of complex discursive relations within the contexts of its production, circulation, appropriation and engagement. This approach entails firstly, analyzing the intratextual (internal to the film) elements such

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as narrative, narrative space, dialogue and titles according to how they orient films to their imagined publics. The thesis shows that, the films relate to the discursive dynamics of their contexts in different ways at different times. I have identified these differences in terms of the films' intratextual addresses, aesthetics (form), and themes. These differences and the films' historical circumstances and contexts coalesce around the issue of black identity as the principal theme and discursive motif in the thesis.

Secondarily, I focus on how the films are launched into public life. This includes giving attention to the films' paratexts, those texts associated with the films, which form part of their orchestration, and are designed to frame their public engagements. This approach has allowed me to begin to demarcate the publicness of the films. Where possible I focus on the relations at play in the films' production and give attention to issues of funding, that is who actually funds the productions and where possible, the distribution of the films and why.

Then, in tandem with the films' intra-textual foregrounding of issues and questions that have a bearing on public deliberations, I have surfaced the engagements and deliberations that flow from the films and extend beyond the reach of the cinema and formal outlets. These are what the thesis terms, the sites of film's 'public life'. While this approach is helpful, its reliance on secondary texts (reviews, scholarly critiques, newspaper commentary) means that I had to deal with data that was erratic at times, and that sometimes offered scanty information about the atmosphere in forming people's experiences of the films. In the thesis, publics are identified as the discursive spaces, which can only be encountered through texts that directly or indirectly flow from the films.

In the third leg of the methodological task, I focus on events, debates and engagements that are beyond the reach of the filmmakers, some anticipated (e.g. reviews) and others not. The filmmakers are alive to the predictability of reviews, and to some extent, they may try to ready their films in particular ways for anticipated developments in the

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reviewing process. Nevertheless, to some extent, the protocols and conventions of the 'field' (in the Bourdieu sense of the cultural field)[2] govern the reviewing process. The thesis shows that film can exceed the boundaries of that field, and enter into others such as the political and the familial. I point out that film festivals, and commentary on films, such as that by newspaper columnist Xolela Mangcu, are different from the reviews, which are governed by the rules and conventions of their field. The thesis shows that in taking discussions of the film out of the review field, forums, commentary and festivals often propel film into surprising twists in its public life. Thus, they turn film into the occasion for the engagement of the contemporary nature of black identity.

Academic engagement, itself a specific field, forms part of the public life of the films. Through the discussions around particular films, academic critique contributes to the construction and extension of film as a site of critical public engagements. My selection of the films was mindful of the role of academic critique. The selected films are subject to this form of engagement. In the methodology, academic critique is treated both as a part of the public life of the films and as primary data. At the same time, I am alert to the fact that as a form of raw data, academic critique is, in relation to each film, ancestral to my own scholarly analysis. In that sense, it is part of the secondary literature available to me.

Paratexts

Although its theoretical concerns are about the textuality of books, Gerard Gennete's (1997) concept of 'paratexts' is a useful tool for examining the films focussed on in the thesis. According to Genette (1997: xviii), paratexts are 'liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritexts) and outside it (epitexts), that mediate the book to the reader'. Thus, the role of the paratext is to define the nature of a text, it 'enables a text to

[2] By cultural field, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu denotes 'the cultural site of the production of the cultural goods that the different classes appropriate in their struggle for legitimating distinction'. See Gartmann D., 2002. Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Change: Explication, Application, Critique in *Sociological Theory,* Vol. 20. No. 2: 255-277.

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become a book and to be accepted as such by its readers and, more generally, to the public' (Genette 1997: 1). Genette (1997: xviii) cites as examples of paratexts, 'titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and aftewords….but also the elements in the private and public history of the book, its epitexts'. Genette (1997: 344) calls epitext 'any paratextual element not appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space'. The study's concerns with the public lives of the films guides its emphasis on Genette's notion of 'epitexts', itself a category of paratexts- in order to make explicit the changing discursive spheres in the films' circulation. As alluded to in the above quote, the sub-category of epitext, that is, the public epitext is even more germane to this study.

> The public epitext is always, by definition, directed at the public in general, even if it never actually reaches more than a limited portion of the public; but this directing may be autonomous and as it were spontaneous, as when an author publishes (in the form of an article or volume) a commentary on his work, or it may be mediated by the initiative and intervention of a questioner or interlocutor, as is the case in interviews and conversations…. (1997: 352).

The spatial flexibility of the paratexts, that is their presence within and outside the book, means that they operate between the world of the book and its circulation. Paratexts constitute the books' thresholds' which Genette (1997: 2) defines as

> an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text)…. Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies).

It is upon the tendency of the 'threshold' to manifest the lives of texts in terms of a 'negotiation' of 'meanings' and relations with their projected readers, that the thesis

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premises its exploration of the making and public lives of black-centred films in South Africa. While the thesis places stress on the public epitexts in their concrete facticity, it is equally cognizant of the film's thresholds- the contingencies in their circulations, and the relation of their internal elements to the discursive spheres which they enter. The paratexts, it must be noted, are not restricted to the written genres but also encompass the visual regime (pictures, paintings) through which the films' bills are made. The concept of paratexts allows the thesis to track film as text, not only through its actual pathways, but also through the conventions that mediate film to its publics. The thesis is especially interested in the processes by which certain paratexts and epitexts themselves come to enjoy significant public life, not only at the time of the films' initial circulation, but also over-time. Thus, I focus more on paratexts that appear and reappear in secondary literature than those which emerged only at the time of the films' circulation and then dropped wholly out of view. There is no doubt that such texts and their public demise could add a further dimension to my analysis. However, their investigation would entail an extensive archival investigation with its own specific theoretical and methodological implications, a research project in its own right. Methodologically, this is an exclusion that I was obliged to implement and hereby acknowledge.

Identification of Secondary Literature

The criteria for identifying the secondary literature, that is the core material on which this thesis is based, are informed by their engagements and relations to the films in the study and to South African and African film scholarship in general. I have organized these texts into two broad clusters, the expert and the popular. The expert cluster is made up of commentators with professional critical competence and knowledge of film. It includes but is not confined to extensive scholarly studies on South African films. Film criticism, for instance, belongs to this cluster. The popular cluster is made up of commentators with little or no professional competence and knowledge of film. The clusters are not strictly divided and they sometimes intersect such as when a film expert contributes to a political

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debate on a film in a newspaper. Thus, the blurring of the clusters also happens when commentators straddle both popular and academic spaces. This also happens in relation to conventions internal to the film industry itself, such as is characterized by paratextual conventions such as the production of film bills, previews and interviews in the popular press.

The expert cluster is dominated by commentaries, reviews and studies that are academic in nature and are found in theses, books, and journals and to a lesser extent web-based texts. Works by South African film scholars dominate the cluster and I extensively draw on them to illuminate the historical and discursive contexts of the films under study. Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid*, (1989) and Davis' *In Darkest Hollywood* (1996) and more latterly, Balseiro and Masilela's *Film and Film Culture in South Africa* (2003), as well as Maingard's *South African National Cinema* (2007) are dominant. Tomaselli and Davis focus more on films produced in the 80's while Balseiro, Masilela, and Maingard's works are more comprehensive. Over and above the South African specific books, I have also identified and used work by a scholar of African cinema, Frank Ukadike. His *Questioning African Cinema* (2002) includes an interview with Ramadan Suleman, the director of *Fools* and shows extensively the director's impressions on the film's engagements of post-apartheid South Africa. Though not academic, the book proffers an expert view.

Theses on *Fools* and other African films by film scholars, Lindiwe Dovey, (2005c), *Yizo Yizo* by René Smith (2001) and Muff Andersson (2004), are an important part of the academic cluster in the study. Most of the journals, which give space to extensive engagement of the films, are not local. The only local journal is *Critical Arts* and it has proven to be largely attuned to films that were produced in the 70's and 80's. In the study, Gavshon's contribution in *Critical Arts* (1980), about films aimed at black audiences, forms part of the discussion of *u'Deliwe*. The international journals that have a direct bearing on the films in the thesis include *Screen*, and to a lesser extent *Journal of Post-Colonial Writing* (2005), *Theatre Research International* (2002) and *NKA*- a journal of African art. These journals

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have published significant readings of *Mapantsula* and *Fools* by Maingard, Dovey and Magogodi. Another journal *Media, Culture and Society* (2004) includes work on *Yizo Yizo* by Clive Barnett, which this thesis engages. Among the journals are specialist ones such as *Screen*, *Film Quarterly*, *Film and History* and *African Arts*.

A small part of the textual pool investigated in the thesis is internet-based. Most of these are sites of the film festivals in which the films were exhibited. Web-based texts of the cited magazines such as *New Internationalist*, *Sechaba* and *NKA* are also used. However, these are not dominant in the thesis. There are no particular websites dedicated to deliberations on South African films and those used in the thesis are varied and have disparate objectives.

The popular cluster is constituted by non-expert commentaries on films by the readers of magazines and newspapers that appear in 'letters to the editor', columns, op-eds and review sections of the press in general. These commentaries, reactions, and sometimes complaints are found in popular magazines particularly in *Drum*, and in national newspapers such as the now-defunct *New Nation,* and in *the Sowetan*, *Weekly Mail* (later *Mail & Guardian*), *City Press* and to some extent the *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Independent*. The role of the *Mail & Guardian* in the use of film as a tool for engaging censorship and apartheid related problems in the late 80's and early 90's is especially important in the chapter on *Mapantsula.* This is due to its enduring attention to South African and international films through film festivals and supplements. The *Sowetan* and *New Nation* are also important in respect of their reviews of the anti-apartheid films *Mapantsula* and *Come Back, Africa*, and in relation to making space for popular commentary on the television series, *Yizo Yizo*. In the *Sowetan*, *City Press*, *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Independent*, letters and columns by non-expert as well as expert commentators on *Yizo Yizo* easily collapse the line between expertise and non-expertise. For instance, in relation to *Yizo Yizo*, the *Sunday Independent* sometimes published letters

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and columns, which though they do not show film expertise, are not strictly popular in their slant.

Atypical texts such as *Mapantsula*: *The Book*, traverse the popular and expert clusters. Through interviews of the directors of the film, commentary by the anti-apartheid Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) cultural activists, the book is co-extensive with the popular activism against apartheid in the 1980's. *Sechaba*, (1989, 1990) the political journal of the exiled African National Congress, as well as *Fighting Talk* (1960) a mouth-piece of the Congress Movement in the post- Second World War period, are other atypical texts in the thesis. In staging a debate around *Mapantsula*, *Sechaba* moved beyond its usual focus on politics. At the same time, it extended the film's capacity for setting in motion significant spaces of public engagements. In addition to *Sechaba*, the leftist and United Kingdom-based *New Internationalist* also forms part of the popular texts. However, unlike *Sechaba*, *New Internationalist* is renowned for its consistent attention to film, especially films that it views as advancing leftist causes.

Scope and Limits of the Thesis

The take up of the films is mostly in written texts. This means that the absence of and lack of access to oral texts particularly with regard to exchanges at film workshops, unrecorded public discussions and interviews, limits the conclusions of the study. In exception to the letters, other textual forms such as reviews, books, theses, and op-eds- suggest generic continuity with either the press, educational and publishing institutions. This means that most of the texts are not extensively reflective of voices outside conventional institutional arrangements, and only relatively (in terms of letters to the editors and talk shows such as the *Tim Modise Show*), are they extended to non-institutionalized voices.

At the same time, I made a conscious decision not to conduct oral interviews, partly because of a methodological consideration: what people remember is not necessarily

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what actually happened, and also because the thesis is not concerned with what that form of data shows, that is to say, what aspect of the public life of the film is remembered when a prompt is given. If I was trying to understand the impact of the films, that kind of data would be significant. I have, however conducted a limited number of interviews in order to trace as far as possible, the pathways of the texts under study.

The object of my focus is not confined to the circulation of the film object. I also attempt to track the ripples of discussion that flow out from the film object. Some of these happen in conversations between people in varied spaces, some of whom may not have seen the films. The conversations are hugely significant but for the most part ephemeral, and beyond my capacity to find any archival traces, except in the memories of people interviewed. Therefore, I have relied largely on traces in the media, other forms of publication, paratexts and in archival recoveries of films in later years, to build a picture of the public life of the films over time. In each instance, the nature of the particular medium, genre involved, has to be taken into account, as in distinguishing between commentaries, reviews and academic critiques. Consequently, the thesis, of necessity carves out only a slice of the infiniteness of enquiry into the publicness of the films.

A further limitation concerns the exclusive use of English-based texts. Attempts at gaining access to texts in languages other than English, especially isiZulu which has currency in the South African media industry, have proven difficult. Film commentary in the newspapers is predominantly in English. Admittedly, my own biases as a researcher trained mostly through the English language are apparent in the thesis. Thus, the issue of language is also applicable to the difficulty in accessing oral sources in local languages. The same applies to languages outside South Africa where most of the films in the thesis were also circulated.

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Structure of the Rest of the Thesis

Chapter 3 discusses the making and public life of *Come Back, Africa* (1959). Through the film, it focuses on the question of the nature and significance of the publicness of early black-centred films. It also examines how the film related to public engagements on the discourses of blackness at the time of its inception and circulation. *Chapter 4* ruminates on how *u'Deliwe* (1975) related to contemporary debates on black identity, including but not restricted to those expounded by the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. It considers the film's critical import against the backdrop of often-dismissive scholarly accounts of subsidy films aimed at black audiences. *Chapter 5* examines the making and public life of *Mapantsula* (1988) in the light of the question of the relations of film to the public sphere. It also observes the film's relations to discourses of blackness. The chapter tracks the manner in which the film, produced in an anti-apartheid context, continues to invite different kinds of engagement in a post-repressive regime era. *Chapter 6* deals with the archival reappropriations in the public engagement of *u'Deliwe* (1975), *Come Back, Africa* (1959) and *Mapantsula* (1988). It asks how the later public lives of the films unfolded.

In *Chapter 7*, the thesis explores the ways in which *Fools* (1998) animated public engagements of gender and gender relations, chiefly in relation to the changing discourses on black identity. The chapter draws attention to the setting of the film in the post-apartheid dispensation, its form and circulation. Alert to these factors, it arrives at some conclusions about the public critical potency of *auteurist* African cinema. Central to *Chapter 8* is the role of orchestration of debate about issues that films raise. The chapter examines the making and public life of *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2001) paying close attention to how through its strategies, and linked multi-media support, the film set out to orchestrate debate about educational issues. It explores these strategies against the actual public engagements of the series and notes the limits and strengths of orchestration particularly in relation to the series' public critical potency.

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Chapter 9 revisits the major objective of the thesis, which is to investigate the role of film in the public life of ideas. It gives an overview of black-centred films' relations to public engagements on black identity. It considers the circumstances under which black-centred films may stimulate critical engagements of blackness. Through its examination of these circumstances, and of the films' relation to public engagements on black identity, it arrives at some conclusions about the role of film in the public sphere.

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