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Representing the 'Black' Male Gangster:

A Comparative Analysis of Stereotypes in Three South African Films – *Mapantsula* (1988), *Jerusalema* (2008), and *KZN Ruins* (2011).

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the representations of the 'black' South African male in the gangster genre and to focus on the representation of the 'black' male gangster role in the following case studies: *Mapantsula* (1988), *Jerusalema* (2008), and *KZN Ruins* (2011). In a South African context, the genre is embedded in social reform and 're-generation', 'dynamic anti-heroes' or rebels pitted against the establishment, and transferred identities dependent on 'gritty urban locales', where the 'black' male characters escape social confines. A comparative analysis between three South African films: *Mapantsula* (1988), *Jerusalema* (2008) and my research film *KZN Ruins* (2011) evaluates the representation of the 'black' male gangster in terms of the stereotypical nature from which these cinematic representations derive their foci. This research report studies the representations evident in stereotyping the 'black' male gangster and examines how the terms 'black' gangster is contextualized within the medium of film. The representation of the 'black' male gangster in South Africa as subject matter constructs discourse around representations of 'blackness' spurred on by concretely identifiable contexts evident in the South African gangster genre. I have sectionalized the information surrounding this debate into three main categories that I felt would be most relevant and useful in the deconstruction: whether there has been a repositioning of the genre, whether this shift is evident in the representation of the 'black' male gangster and whether this representation of the 'black' male gangster in the medium of screen presentation in the South African case studies under scrutiny is contextually informed. Through genre, stereotyping, and South African film history I argue that there has been a shift in the representation of the 'black' male gangster within *Mapantsula* (1988), *Jerusalema* (2008), and my research film *KZN Ruins* (2011).

DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own unaided work, save insofar as indicated in the acknowledgements and references. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of Arts in Film and Television, in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination.



Lance R. Lütge

10th day of August 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Has the representation of the 'black' male gangster shifted over the past twenty-five years and if so how is this change evident in the following case studies: *Mapantsula* (1988), *Jerusalema* (2008) and *KZN Ruins* (2011)?

While this research report acknowledges and interrogates all past and present films it does not allow for all the representational shifts to be accounted for. This report examines this shift over twenty-five years (1988-2011) in relation to the black stereotypes found in South African gangster films.

This research sets out to examine a shift in the representation of the 'black' male gangster from *Mapantsula* (1988) to *Jerusalema* (2008) to *KZN Ruins* (2011). This report argues that the shift in the representation of the 'black' male gangster is evident in many respects. It occurs from township to inner city to suburb, from uneducated to educated and through inter-racial relationships. These representational shifts emerge from the 'black' male gangster being portrayed as intellectual, suburb dwelling, and educated men who are not bound by the colour of a person's skin. Apposed to the 'black' male gangster who used to be portrayed as township based, uneducated and segregated due to the colour of their skin, this research report intends to identify these shifts in the representation of the 'black' male gangster.

The scope of this research does not allow for an in depth discussion of political movements, but in terms of examining the gangster genre with relation to its stereotypes and context, it is invaluable to note the consequential shift in South Africa from apartheid to democracy. Revisiting race in the shifting political context of each film allows this report to explore, analyse and determine a shift in the representation of the 'black' male gangster.

Kenneth Chan in "*The Construction of Black Male Identity in Black Action Films of the Nineties*" attributes "capitalism and the drug trade, racial self-hatred, and the geopolitics of ghetto space" as influences constructing cinematic black male identity (Chan, 1998, p.35). Chan cites Guerrero.

> [T]he Blaxploitation boom emerged from a period of militant political activism fuelled by the rising identity consciousness and social expectations […], the black movie boom of the 90s has materialized out of a climate of long-muted black frustration and anger over worsening political and economic conditions that African Americans continue to endure in the nation's decaying urban centres (Chan, 1998:35).

The Blaxploitation boom in America inspired the 'black' community to confront, challenge, own and empower their own identities. In South Africa during the struggle for democracy many 'blacks' sought to empower their own identity and free their own notion of 'blackness'.

In the films in question *Mapantsula* (1988), *Jerusalema* (2008) and *KZN Ruins* (2011), the context or period in which the films are shot is most definitely and clearly referenced. This referencing happens through locations or sets, costumes and props, the socio-political contexts, the exploration of the economics of an emerging market, as well as the director/producer's point of view. The chosen perspective attempts to steer opinions, formulate arguments, and negotiate reception. Oliver Schmitz' *Mapantsula* (set in Soweto 1988) consists of a storyline centred on the character Panic. Panic is a small time gangster who becomes inescapably wedged in the increasing anti-apartheid struggle. Panic has to choose between his own individual gain and a united stand against racial policies and the government in power. The character is passive rather than active, and is played by Thomas Mogotlane.

Along with Panic most of the characters are caught between surviving an oppressive system and finding tactics to resist and revolutionise that system e.g. Pat (Panic's girlfriend), Panic's landlady and Duma (Unionist). The story is told through the eyes of Panic while he is in prison by using the flashback technique. These flashbacks reveal Panic's story in episodes.

The film follows Panic's life as a petty gangster and shows how he adopts a variety of identities in order to secure survival. Through Panic we see how each character makes individual sacrifices in favour of the mass anti-apartheid movement. Despite each

character's differences the story portrays how they struggle forward together. The film illuminates the contradictions raging within Soweto, not only through Panic, but also through characters like Pat, who just wants a decent job. As denoted by what is mentioned above, the representational positioning is grounded in the director/producer's political objectives. *Mapantsula* (1988) was shot as a political protest narrative under the guise of a generic crime movie suitable for the overbearing eyes of the white censors, while also appealing as a festival art film geared for oversees consumers (Schmitz and Mogotlane, 1991: 39-40).

The feature film *Jerusalema* (2008) manifests itself around its main protagonist Lucky Kunene, who starts his life off as a young 'black' delinquent living in a rural township. In this film the flashbacks reflect past episodes prompted by memory recall and reflections of Lucky's youth. The flashbacks are not progressive but are non-linearly presented because of the association.

Jerusalema's (2008) lead character Lucky comes from a good home run by a caring mother. He gets involved with an older gentleman who shows him the ropes and introduces him to crime. This is where Lucky develops a taste for money. After a store robbery goes wrong, Lucky and his best friend Zakes (Ronnie Nyakale) decide to move to Johannesburg where Lucky can go to university. Several years later we see Lucky driving a taxi. Lucky has dropped out of university and is living in a block of flats inhabited by prostitutes and drug dealers. After he is hijacked, he decides to take control of the situation and begins his empire by convincing the residents to pay all their rent to him and, in turn, he assumes responsibility for cleaning up the drugs, the prostitution and keeping up the maintenance of the building. It is at this moment that Lucky becomes the 'Robin Hood' of Hillbrow. Lucky 'hijacks' buildings from the rich and gives provides to the poor community cheap and safe accommodation. Lucky makes educated moral decisions even though he takes on a vigilante presence. He instantly becomes popular with the people as he keeps his promises and cleans up the buildings. However this poses a problem with the drug dealers and pimps. Lucky is precariously balanced between worlds. Eventually everything comes to an end when Lucky's 'father-like' figure sells him out to a Nigerian drug dealer. The Nigerian tries to kill Lucky in a drive by shooting but kills Zakes instead. This pushes Lucky over the edge and he gathers his men and they proceed to slaughter the Nigerian and his gang.

The case study fiction film *KZN Ruins* (2011) attempts to debunk the South African 'black' hoodlum myth. The work is centred on an inter-racial relationship between two lifetime friends that have grown up as 'brothers'. Both are gangsters. The film follows their personal struggles to negotiate the growth of their friendship; a relationship informed by a society derived from discrimination and hatred to one positioned on acceptance and realisation. The representational shift is constructed and fuelled by brotherly love.

KZN Ruins (2011) positions the dilemma within racial constrictions; the individual is juxtaposed against a haunting past contextualized by racial prejudice, fear and hatred. In the flashback scenes the two children sleeping in the streets and being dragged from one another's company motivates the plot against racism. The twist lies in the audiences' discovery that Brody and Nhlanhla (childhood friends) have been in cahoots from the commencement of the film. Mr Dlamini's attempts to break their enduring bond have merely strengthened their affiliation.

The treatment of *KZN Ruins* (2011) is directly invested with the notion of racial signifiers or connotations of difference. Even the selected culturally affiliated names and colour-coded costumes create racial signifiers. Brody is English and Nhlanhla is from an isiZulu background. In South Africa English is perceived as a colonising language as opposed to isiZulu, an indigenous African language. The costume design also reflects racial connotations; black gangs are dressed in white suits and white gangs in black suits as a form of juxtaposition to invert racial stereotypes. The central characters transcend these colour-coded gang uniforms by wearing grey and brown pinstripe suits. The gang-alignment is driven by the manipulation of power. This power is based in cocaine ownership and distribution.

REPRESENTING 'BLACK' GANGSTERISM

For the purpose of this research report I have segmented my theoretical framework and literature review into four main fields of investigation:

1. The Historical Background of South African Film;

2. The Gangster Genre;

3. Stereotypes and

4. Analysing the Films.

Through these niche areas this research report analyses aspects of the South African gangster genre and establishes a definition of the 'black' male 'gangster' stereotype.

1. The Historical Background of South African Film

In order to interrogate the 'black' gangster it is necessary to understand aspects of the history that informs the South African film industry. This section touches briefly on the history of the South African film industry in regard to the gangster genre as well as contextualising the genre within past racial premises.

> The mainstream film industry in South Africa is one of the oldest in the world but unfortunately it does not rank among the finest. Films have been made in South Africa since 1910 (Botha, 1992:9).

The South African film industry has an intriguing background. Martin Botha states that South African film industry has been around since the early nineteen hundreds. This would rank South Africa as one of the earliest film industries worldwide.

The South African film industry manifests itself from a history informed by different social influences. These influences derive from a diverse cultural background. The film *De Voortrekkers* was one of the first locally produced films. It is seen as national film depicting the Afrikaners, British and Zulu's. Jacqueline Maingard reinforces what Botha states when she mentions that *De Voortrekkers* was the first film in South Africa to use cinema as a technique to represent a nation.

> The first appropriation of the cinema as an instrument for representing nation in South Africa must surely be the making of *De Voortrekkers* in 1916 (Maingard, 2007:1).

From the beginning of the South African film industry there has been a struggle in the representation of South Africa as a nation. *De Voortrekkers* was told mainly from the Afrikaners point of view and had very little to do with the representation of 'blacks' or 'blackness'.

South Africans have only recently commenced addressing 'black' experiences freely. The treatment of agency is visible when reflecting on 'blackness' in the first feature film that dealt with actual 'black' experiences. The film titled *African Jim*, sometimes known as *Jim comes to Joburg* and was directed by Donald Swanson in 1949.

> Made by an ex expatriate white director, Donald Swanson, the film plots the problem faced by a naïve ruralite in the city, and features the unique shots of legendary Jazz Maniacs before they were forced out of business in the late '50s by a combination of violence in the township halls and the discriminatory actions of the white musicians' union, which resented black competition (Tomaselli, 1989:56-57).

African Jim is a film centred on a 'black' community. The visuals depict poor living conditions, township violence and the discriminatory actions of the 'white' community. *African Jim* is considered the first film produced in South Africa to fit the gangster genre profile. This film tells the story of a law abiding rural 'black' man who through his move to the big city of Johannesburg becomes embroiled in a life of crime. *African Jim* led the way for films like *Mapantsula* (1988), *Hijack Stories (2000), Tsotsi (2005)* and *Jerusalema* (2008). These types of films where used to try to convince the viewer into believing that a criminals life was hard. This was propaganda to steer the viewer away from a life of crime and towards the life of a hard working employee earning an honest living, no matter how disproportionate and exploitative the pay. "The moral of these films is that "hard work ensures success" (Tomaselli, 1989:73).

South Africa's past and in turn the history of its film industry has been predicated by past governmental laws restricting race. These laws restricted filmmakers in varying degrees in the industry in terms of 'blackness', representations of 'blackness' and multi-cultural relationships. Therefore the South African film industry has a racially informed past that foreshadows more modern practices.

> The South African case is analogous, though further complicated by a domestic colonial system where cinema is a reflection of the balance of power (Tomaselli, 1979:3).

This unavoidably meant that films produced, imported, or exported were either pro-apartheid, not on the topic of race at all, or not in conflict with Nationalist racial policy or else they were banned. (Tomaselli, K. 1989: 14). The South African film history centres on the segregation of blacks and whites, apartheid and, more recently, democratisation.

Martin Botha suggests that since the coming of democracy, South African filmmakers have had the freedom to express themselves more liberally without the prior restrictions that were inflicted upon them "Post apartheid cinema is characterised by the emergence of new voices and a diversification of themes" (Botha, 2007: 34). Post-apartheid South African cinema is on the rise and has established itself at an international level due to the talent of its emerging new voices. Thus Botha ascribes these changes to a reactionary adjustment of dramatic socio-political changes (Botha, 2007: 37). Ironically class and race as a direct derivative of the apartheid system remains locked into notions of racial identity. He reinforces this contention by his proclamations that post-apartheid cinema deals with South Africa's discriminatory past as well as establishing how South Africa is dealing with the repercussions of its past in today's society.

2. THE GANGSTER GENRE

An interrogation of the 'black' male gangster requires an examination of the gangster genre. In this section of this research report I argue that certain codes and conventions establish a genre and that specific codes and conventions define the gangster genre.

In Neale's *Teaching Through Genre* in *Screen Education* he states:

> The master image for genre criticism is the triangle composed of artist/film/audience. Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the filmmaker, and their reading by an audience (Neale, 1980: 7).

Ryall argues that what makes a film conform to a genre is determined by many different aspects. Genre consists of many different codes and conventions that inform audience expectations. These codes and conventions run across visual imagery, plot, character, setting, modes of narrative development and music (Cook, 1985:58). A genre therefore has a ready-made audience for which the constructed artefact is made. It is created by the artist for audience consumption and therefore aligned with the requirements of the genre. While each genre has different codes and conventions that define it as a specific entity, it is these codes and conventions that allow films to be categorised. Pam Cook concurs with Ryall when she advocates that genre through these codes and conventions are the industry's way of regulating what the audience expects from each genre. The artist, the structure and the viewer align their expectations based on the following criteria. A common patterning informs the locale of the characters, their clichéd but clearly identifiable traits, their lingo, their clothing choices, their lifestyles, as well as influencing their perspectives and ethics with a need to glamorise choices.

The black gangster in South African gangster genre repeats the juxtaposition of white and black by creating in the 'black' central protagonist an empowered individual pitted against the brutal in *Mapantsula* (1988), corrupt in *Jerusalema* (2008), or reprehensible in *KZN Ruins* (2011). The South African gangster genre differs from its American counterpart. This shift is not evident in the two-tone, flotsam shoes, fedora hats or sharp three piece suits, nor in the weaponry employed; the knives, the guns, but in the context within which the individual anti-hero defines himself. Our anti-hero

conjures not only our admiration but also a small degree of condemnation. He is glamorized and flamboyant and speaks to the 'man in action' principle that drives the plot forward in rapid spurts. As a South African gangster, he's an extreme character living on the societal fringe. In each of the case studies the protagonists gather perspective by equipping themselves on two essential levels: growth and transformation. They learn to shift the moral codes by which they live. Panic finds his identity in acknowledging the liberation movement and Lucky redefines himself by taking from the wealthy and protecting the downtrodden and the poor.

Marx citing Warshow asserts that the gangster's whole life revolves around this "effort to assert" individuality and separate himself from the group frequently translating into his death in a hail of bullets (Marx, 2010: 262). Marx further cites Don Mattera's affirmation that individualism is a gangster signature achieved through aggression and the imposition of the gangster's will, a resolve imprinted with the gangster ethic:

> We loved corrupt and crooked lawmen like the one Dana Andrews played in *Where the Sidewalk Ends.* We hated the straight ones and we chewed gum like Richard Widmark's 'Styles' character in *Street With No Name.* Our gangs were named after some of the killers in the movies (Marx, 2010: 262).

Mattera's comments signal the gangster's position as anti-establishment rebel, ruthless individual, with aspirations beyond the normal mortal, conjuring both escapism and idealism. Marx contends that the gangster genre offers a modern tragedy:

> A man of the city, with the city's language and knowledge, with its queer and dishonest skills and its terrible daring, carrying his life in his hands like a placard, like a club, an image that captures the ruthless self-assertion with which the gangster must "make his life and impose it on others". Drawing attention to himself, to his individualism, becoming a success, are acts of aggression and outlawry that must, finally, be punished by the crowd who hate

> such success - the gangster, … must be forced back into anonymity (Marx, 2010: 262).

This trickster figure representation is agile and suave, with a stylish disposition. The trickster figure is a deft dresser, motivated by self awareness and takes pride in his appearance. His word is his bond and there is no second guessing allowed. He is highly calculating, opportunistic, impulsive even, and always self assured or confident. The trickster figure takes risks because he has nothing further to loose.

3. STEREOTYPES

In order to unpack the 'black' male gangster further and identify the shift in representation, it is imperative to locate how the 'black' male gangster stereotype has evolved. Throughout this section this report will define what constitutes a stereotype, how a stereotype is understood and conveyed and more specifically how the 'black' male gangster is stereotyped.

Richard Dyer distinguishes between stereotypical characters and character types. Dyer elaborates on his understanding that a viewer easily identifies with characters by using familiar traits and patterns that people can relate to and identify with:

> The type is any character constructed through the use of a few immediately-recognizable and defining traits, which do not change or 'develop' through the course of the narrative and which point to general, recurrent features of the human world (whether these features are conceptualized as universal and eternal, the 'archetype', or historically and culturally specific, 'social types' and 'stereotypes' (Dyer, 1993:13).

Words ascribe meaning. Associations affect meanings. A certain person or group of people is therefore defined by establishing common patterns. These traits ascribe a certain power to a particular fixed identity. This identity once conjured, shared and accepted, confirms the stereotypical referencing. This in

turn creates a fixed identity for that person or group of people. Homi Bhabha concurs with Dyer (Dyer, 1993:13):

> The stereotype is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known and something that must be anxiously repeated (Bhabha, 1994: 94-95).

These repetitions should be accepted in a cultural context. It is understood that an audience identifies with stereotypes as a form of recognisable knowledge as if that stereotype was already there and already recognised. It must be 'anxiously' repeated to ensure its validity:

> The effectiveness of stereotypes resides in the way they invoke a consensus. Stereotypes proclaim, "This is what everyone - you, me and us - thinks members of such-and-such a social group are like", as if all members of society spontaneously arrived at these concepts of these social groups independently and in isolation. The stereotype is taken to express a general agreement about a social group, as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype. Yet for the most part it is from stereotypes that we get our ideas about social groups (Dyer, 1993:14).

Dyer demonstrates here that stereotypes rely heavily on common social associations for acceptance, recognition or defamation and mean little if there is no ideological connection. The representation does not exist in a vacuum but belongs within an ideological framework filled with agendas and motives that require careful attention or deconstruction. Williams advocates "specificity of medium, specificity of historical context, and specificity of representational practices" (Williams as cited in Torres, 1998: 12). Williams states that attention to detail prevents racist representation and disallows the misuse of 'blackness' contextualised within dubious ideological frameworks.

The interrogation of the black male necessitates an interrogation of the white male, as "blackness" *defines* "whiteness" and "whiteness" *defines* "blackness". Richard Dyer concurs when he states, "While these two representations of colour define and interrogate one another, it is how they are stereotypically represented on screen that gives the public eye an insight into these stereotypes" (Dyer, 1993:14). What Dyer accentuates here is that while 'black' defines and examines 'white' and 'white' defines and examines 'black', in film they can only be defined as represented on screen. Dyer's contention relates to Homi Bhabha who continues to affirm that through oblige of ambivalence the colonial stereotype gains its prevalence:

> [I]t is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency, ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalisation; produces the effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically constructed (Bhabha, 1994: 95).

Just like Dyer accentuates that 'blackness' defines 'whiteness' and vice versa, Bhabha suggests that the 'black' stereotype gives the 'white' stereotype its currency and the 'white' stereotype gives the 'black' stereotype is currency. Through ambivalence they give and take from one another. Stereotypes are initiated by members of society and profess some sort of consensus whether negative or positive, discriminating or legitimising, closed or open-minded.

4. ANALYSIS OF FILMS

In order to determine a shift in the representation of the 'black' male gangster it is necessary to analyse *Mapantsula* (1988), *Jerusalema* (2008), and *KZN Ruins* (2011) in relation to how the 'black' male gangster is represented in each film. Through the representation of the 'black' male gangster in each film this research report sheds light on a shift in the representation of the 'black' male gangster.

In an interview conducted by Jeremy Nathan, Thomas Mogotlane who plays the role of Panic in *Mapantsula* (1988), comments on the lack of black filmmakers, who are role models and he notes: "The film was made with the political structure in the background. Panic is living in such a politicized society, in South Africa that you simply cannot separate crime and politics. […] The situation created by apartheid has made this so" (Schmitz and Mogotlane, 1991: 22-28).

Mapantsula (1988), *Jerusalema* (2008), and *KZN Ruins* (2011) all provide examples of representations of black male gangsters and all the criminals are positioned outside accepted social 'norms'. In these South African films the protagonists are rebels rather than merely by-products of society. These representations of criminals are trying to evoke a response or comment on society in some way. Therefore they provide an alternative perspective. In the gangster genre:

> Our ambiguous attitude to criminals, figures both of menace and glamour, has formed the basic gangster film character, the urban wolf. He is a product of his harsh environment, violent, laconic and tough, but his involvement in crime seems a matter of chance rather than choice. An urban wolf can equally well be killer or detective, warden or prisoner. The ethics are similar, and all speak the same discursive language (Baxter, 1970: 7).

Both *Jerusalema* (2008) and my research film *KZN Ruins* (2011) reflect "the urban wolf" by positioning the characters as what Fenwick refers to as the 'intellectual tsotsi' (Fenwick, 2010: 617). Lucky, the protagonist in *Jerusalema* (2008), appears as educated, calculating, and business oriented. The character driven plot revolves

around Lucky as a University 'drop-out'. Lucky manipulates tenants in order to generate income from rundown blocks of flats. This income enables Lucky to purchase these buildings and establish a cost effective portfolio of rent-controlled properties. Lucky is seen as a man of action, a man of few words who does not make idle threats but speaks with astute economy. His directness is discernable in his laconic response when asked his vocation by Leah's parents, "I'm a gangster" (*Jerusalema,* 2008). In *KZN Ruins* (2011) Nhlanhla plots to usurp power by pitting two gangs (Mr Dlamini's gang and Mr Du Preez's gang) against each other. The Mr Du Preez gang (consisting of white males) and Mr Dlamini's gang (composed of black males) are driven by power, money and racial allegiance. Nhlanhla relies on the racial enclaves of the two separatist gangs as a catalyst for inevitable destruction. He manipulates the gangs by mapping out a plan centred on racial intolerance and gang mentality. He uses their tribal animosity and gang allegiances to maximize the dissention and distrust in turn creating an opportunity for the gangs to destroy one another. To achieve this he relies on their mutual animosity and enclave mentality. This animosity and racial enclaving comment on a history of racial aggression, dispute and segregation. Nhlanhla aims to control the drug industry justifying his antics by feelings of entitlement and his impatience to fill dead men's shoes.

In *Mapantsula* (1988), Panic is in constant trouble with the police against a backdrop of protest. His character is juxtaposed against liberation fighters also falling foul of the law. Eventually the politics of the times touches him personally and he turns from anti-hero to tragic hero recognising the injustice of the apartheid scale of brutality. In *Jerusalema* (2008) Lucky is seen as a rebel with a cause, a man of action, slick, suave, and a man of few words who has real business savvy. This is the proverbial self-made man. Lucky does not make idle threats but speaks with astute economy. His dialogue is direct, endorsing a quiet determination, nobility of purpose, and a brave and powerful honesty, all suggesting he never promises what he cannot deliver.

The three protagonists each assert their quintessential masculinity with their own individual voices. Lucky's (*Jerusalema*) directness is discernable in his laconic response when questioned by Leah's parents. Conversely the character Nhlanhla (*KZN Ruins*) demonstrates this approach when he declares, "I've set up the board and the white pawn is ready and waiting" (Lütge, 2011:6). The innuendos associated with

a game of chess posit an economic and social class through the naming of chess pieces from Kings to Pawns. This approach asserts hegemonic practices by assigning limitations in the movement patterns allowed for different chess pieces. The division of pieces on a chessboard establishes two archenemies. Furthermore this juxtaposition could attribute racial power mongering in acknowledging the strategic game played by black versus white while white always initiates the game. In *Mapantsula* (1988) communication occurs via the flamboyant mix of languages evident in the boastful tsotsi taal (language) of the character, Panic when he exclaims, "Nie ek nie my laaitie. Ek is 'n tiger" (Schmitz and Mogotlane, 1991:58). Furthermore the positioning of the alpha 'male' as 'tiger' inscribes 'male' as aligned with the 'king of the jungle' idea.

The gangster character remains focused on a slick, stylish, brand conscious image defined by outward affiliations, including *The Americans*, *The Egyptians* and *The Russians*, all expressing strength in their communal identity and unafraid of challenging authority (Schmitz and Mogotlane, 1991:38). Panic conveys this image by his dress and two-tone flotsam shoes, Lucky in his BMW, Nhlanhla, in driving his coupé. All characters wear leather jackets or suits and fedoras or pinstripe suits. In each case the central protagonists manifests as sharply dressed anti-heroes positioned against systems that are racially entrenched. Panic set against a legally entrenched apartheid system, Lucky is pitted against a historically biased capitalist system and Nhlanhla who favours brotherhood rather than ethnic gangland affiliations entrenched in historical racial affiliations.

This research report argues that the notion of the 'black' male gangster is therefore reconstructed in *Mapantsula* (1988) and *Jerusalema* (2008) within a changing historical context informed by white police counterparts portrayed by Stander and Detective Swart respectively. *Mapantsula* (1988), perceived by the censors as inciting "audiences to act violently", was originally banned by the Directorate of Publications in 1988 as unsuitable for "black South African audiences" (Schmitz and Mogotlane, 1991: 39).

The degree of political contextual change is palpable in *Jerusalema* (2008) in the latent reflection of police authority. Police authority appears legally ineffectual when the black policemen experience a moral dilemma: identifying themselves by social status and aligning themselves with Detective Swart a 'white' colleague or affiliating

themselves by race with the 'black' Lucky. Their dilemma is even more acute in identifying with Lucky's racially constructed polar attitudes. Lucky represents a lawless renegade, one with whom a policeman would not identify. He removes a police file to prevent the police from carrying out their duty; takes the law into his own hands by punishing drug lords personally and may generally be perceived as resorting to vigilante tactics. Yet instead of the police brutality portrayed in *Mapantsula* (1988), the policemen of *Jerusalema* (2008) identify with the 'black' underprivileged experience. These policemen empathise with the motives of the protagonist, and feel confusion when faced with choosing between allegiance to Detective Swart and the protagonist. Detective Swart who harkens back to a system of brutality or Lucky's bravado in challenging the system configured by antiquated property laws and the 'Red Ants' units (removal units activated by the law to ensure owners property rights in evicting squatters.).

The polar attitudes of *Mapantsula (1988)* and *Jerusalema* (2008) further derive from the contrasting attitudes of the black policemen. Those working for the apartheid regime with Stander emulate his racial prejudices and contrast with Panic's later heroic stand. Conversely, the policemen under Detective Swart no longer feel obliged to blindly follow a white superior, identifying with authority rather than brutality. The catalyst of the dichotomy invoked in this latter choice is represented by Lucky who exits the police quarters having accused Detective Swart of assault. In *KZN Ruins* (2011) Jannie's (an older white male and the middle man who introduces dealer to seller) first piece of dialogue is representative of racial discrimination when he is "looking for a white face" (Lütge, 2011:1). The script is packed with racial awareness. Lamina in Scene fifty-six says of Brody, "He's not your brother my boy! Remember that!" (Lütge, 2011:8) Nhlanhla in Scene twenty-six declares, "You're white. I'm black. They won't deal with me. That's why I have you!" (Lütge, 2011:3). The suggested tokenism suggesting that he is using Brody as the white face ironically forms part of a scam set up by Brody and Nhlanhla. This ploy relies on racial mistrust. Jannie acknowledges Mr Du Preez's prejudice and racial distrust implying he will not trust anyone that is not white. Mr Dlamini is shown to resent the inter-racial relationship of the boys perceiving brotherhood as racially bound and allegiances as racially embedded. He shows distrust when he pulls Brody and Nhlanhla apart as young boys. Knowing the prejudices involved and the distrust this

prejudice conjures; Nhlanhla and Brody plan to outwit both Mr Du Preez and Mr Dlamini. Brody arrives at a carefully calculated point in time to fire the shot that kills Dlamini.

In *KZN Ruins* (2011) Nhlanhla manipulates Mr Dlamini and Mr du Preez by acknowledging racially driven mistrust. Mr Dlamini trusts Nhlanhla assuming the separation from his childhood white friend Brody has instilled cultural allegiance, racial prejudice and a permanent basis for ethnic mistrust. Nhlanhla has worked for Mr Dlamini in the past and earned his trust by hiding his continued friendship with Brody. Mr Du Preez trusts Brody on the basis of a smooth transfer in the previous deal. Mr Du Preez assumes Brody is in control of the money and that Nhlanhla is merely one of his black henchmen. This confirms his natural affinity for power in Mr Du Preez' eyes and makes him worthy of trust. In both cases their racially entrenched trust is misplaced. Mr Dlamini trusts Nhlanhla but Brody and Nhlanhla are plotting against him. Mr Du Preez trusts the 'white face' is in control however Mr Dlamini is the 'boss' with the money, and Nhlanhla and Brody are setting up Mr Du Preez. Through this play on racial prejudice, Mr Dlamini and Mr Du Preez represent an old order pitted against each other. The film ultimately posits the notion that eradicating racial prejudice is only possible by removing the racists, prefacing a brave new racially tolerant world where brotherhood is more reflective of cultural diversity than racial difference. *KZN Ruins* (2011) demonstrates this new racially colour-blind world by eliminating all the racist characters and leaving behind the only two characters that are driven by a universal humanism – the brotherhood of Brody and Nhlanhla. This is a metaphor that all racism should be eliminated. Contextually the film reflects a changing environment with a new democracy inviting a new political dispensation.

In *Jerusalema* (2008) the relationship between Lucky and Leah with the alliteration implied in the names each beginning with the letter 'L', appears to signal a pre-destined suitable bond. The inter-racial nature of the relationship implies Leah's dependence on Lucky even though she comes from a position of affluence and he hails from the townships. The degree of change in the representation of inter-racial relationships rests in Lucky's ability to change his life and take on the alpha male characteristics of the 'self-made man'. During apartheid scenes of inter-racial relationships were censored to ensure there was no scenes depicting inter-racial

coupling: "The entertainment act … called for the censorship of "scenes of intermingling of Europeans and non-Europeans" (Tomaselli, 1989:14).

The filmic context locks *Mapantsula* (1988) into apartheid assumptions, of a South Africa in an era of white 'supremacy' resulting in discrimination against persons of colour. This, in turn, meant that the making of the film was subject to strict laws on race. The cell is filled with only black South Africans, albeit that few are actual criminals. Guards in these prisons too are black. Stander, the white policeman, is perceived as both in charge, the only officer with an office of his own, of knowing the route or direction better as he walks ahead of his black cohorts rather than alongside them through the corridors signifying authority or rank. The 'black' township scenes feature black sub-economic housing, shacks, squatter or shanty town dwellings, and one room outhouses without proper ablution facilities or electricity and army trucks known as 'buffels', harbouring the uniformed enemy; the police and the military. The white targets for pick pocketing are placed in areas signifying one racial group as dominant; depressed black shopping areas where a white businessman in a suit looks out of place; main city streets and shopping malls reinforce the affluence of 'white' areas. The suburban existence of Pat's (Thembi Mtshali) white employer is juxtaposed against Ma Mobise's single room dwelling sans servants and additional amenities that include luscious gardens, security gates, garaging, outside perimeter intercoms, swimming pool, or garage.

In *Jerusalema* (2008) the white body is split between two representations. Firstly Swart who represents the debunked hegemonic agency of the apartheid era, with an obscured agenda and a transparent mission that smacks of petty personal vendetta rather than political grand design. Secondly, Lucky's temporary 'white' partnership with Leah that proves unsustainable once the social veneer cracks. The dysfunctional social addictions of Zakes juxtaposed against Leah's drug-addicted brother, signal reduced moral values in the white suburbs. In *KZN Ruins* (2011) the white body relies on black agency for survival and is in fact defined by black agency. Nhlanhla orchestrates the action and functions as catalyst. Brody pulls the fateful trigger at Nhanhla's behest. The world is Nhanhla's and Brody inhabits this world, shares power and acts as cohort, as politically inept benefactor rather than as coloniser, possessor, and owner.

This report argues that there is a clear repositioning of the 'black' male gangster in regard to agency from *Mapantsula* (1988) to *Jerusalema* (2008) and thence to" *KZN Ruin's* (2011). In the film *Mapantsula* (1988) the relationship between 'black' and 'white' is authoritarian-based and politically orientated. This is apparent through the relationship between the 'white' authority posited in the interrogating officer and the 'black' gangster (Panic). This inter-racial relationship between policeman (Stander played by Marcel van Heerden) and prisoner (Panic played by Thomas Mogotlane) signifies coercion, brutality, the propaganda rhetoric contained in the term 'terrorist' and the role of the 'impimpi' or informer in the fight for liberation. In the film the viewer is initially led to believe that Panic is arrested for being a petty criminal for whom we are told he has a long track record, then for appearing in the wrong place at the wrong time in search of a sibling.

In *Mapantsula* (1988) Stander only offers coffee amidst veiled threats of bodily harm, initially in exchange for information while Panic attempts to use the system by betraying his political brothers in the hope of his own freedom. The relationship shifts the balance of power when Panic refuses to cooperate, thus terminating the relationship. Johannes Themba Mzolo aka Panic's final "No" asserts his determination to refuse Stander further information. Ironically the negative answer is a resoundingly affirmative response in terms of the liberation struggle: No to 'whites' means yes to 'blacks', no to police intimidation means yes to asserting individual rights, no to cooperation with the system means revolutionary action.

In *Jerusalema* (2008) Lucky a 'Karl Marx, Al Capone and Dale Carnegie mix' offers his love and affection to the 'white' women with no social, economic or moral conditions. Conversely Leah offers her love to the 'black' gangster only as long as he maintains the social veneer of a highly powered businessman. The relationship is terminated when the 'white' female discovers that Lucky's criminal activity is on going. Additionally, Lucky no longer serves as Leah's brother's protector. The film here centres more on class division rather than on racial constructs. *Jerusalema* (2008) contradicts most other gangster films in relation to the resolution. The police do not catch Lucky. He manages to escape to a new life in Durban.

The inter-racial relationship in the film KZN Ruins (2011) rests on a different approach to the representational norm of the 'black' male gangster. The film

constructs an inter-racial relationship based on "brotherhood" and trust rather than sexual nuance used in *Jerusalema* (2008). Following democratisation South Africans have worked to shift the alignment from race to class. This relationship between the two men embraces a friendship not based on exploitation or sexual attraction but on 'universal humanism' and common life experiences. In *KZN Ruins* (2011) the brotherly bond transcends ethnic and racial affiliations and this is epitomised in the journey or character arch of the young boys. The boys in the flashbacks are presented without family ties or homes, which may explain their devotion to each other. Their ages during the flashback allow the audience to understand some of the factors that drives these two protagonists. This willingness to excuse adolescent behaviour allows our youthful pair the benefit of the doubt. The bond created between these boys is familiar and associates itself with the concept of sibling candour i.e. brothers. Their gangster code is one of survival and their isolation ensures their interdependence, an independence condoned by the viewer in lieu of their circumstances. Culture, language, and discrimination are transcended for the audience in the application of a common understanding.

Nhlanhla and Brody's relationship transcends the margins of colour, even though Nhlanhla was dragged from Brody as a boy, he remains uninfluenced by Mr Dlamini's racist diatribe while Brody plays to Mr du Preez's racist expectations in true con-man style. This in turn reflects that Nhlanhla and Brody's allegiances are not governed by race, but by their common experience in the final moments of the film. The work establishes clear racist agendas in the older characters and the discrimination is contrasted with the friendly dialogue shared by Nhlanhla and Brody and implied in Nhlanhla's address to Brody, "Heita, my man" (Lütge, 2010: 5). The bond between these two characters remains strong and indeterminate. It survives the gun slinging and vying for gangland power without being terminated, even rising above the aggression signified in the former generational preoccupation with racial difference, seen through the depictions of the gangsters Mr Dlamini (played by Thomas Mpoeleng) and Mr Du Preez (played by Hylton Lütge). These characters remain entrenched in old representational stereotypes.

KZN RUINS (2011)

CONCEPT

As part of the investigation my fiction film *KZN Ruins* (2011) sets out to examine racial anxieties. These anxieties are contained in racial discrimination governed by past experiences (Mr Dlamini's admonishment to Nhlanhla and Mr Du Preez's xenophobic reaction to Nigerian business dealings). The film portrays disempowered and disenfranchised 'white' identity and fears derived from past distrust evidenced in the generational stances adopted. Furthermore the film establishes the enclave identities of gang affiliations by race and the perceptions that racial sameness establishes commonalities.

KZN Ruins (2011) conceptualises two worlds; the affluent, stimulating, world of diverse metaphors and social veneer, mentally constructed in the calculated attempts to reposition power and the world of brutal physicality where power is to be had by force. In terms of the conceptualisation of characters, the film *KZN Ruins* (2011) slightly shifts some of the stereotypical representations of the 'black' male gangster perceived in *Mapantsula* (1988) and *Jerusalema* (2008) by positioning the gangsters as scam artists who are active catalysts right from the start.

Gone are the poor, small time, township-based, oppressed 'black' male gangsters and the rich, well dressed, authoritarian 'white' males. These representations are reversed as shown in Nhlanhla's flashy sports car. The stereotypes as well as the anxieties of former expectations have been deconstructed from a race informed system to an economic informed system in an attempt to construct, an opposing depiction of 'white' and 'black' male gangster types today. This was achieved by placing the 'black' male gangster in a position of wealth and power while locating the 'white' male as a 'side-kick'. The film shows both 'white' and 'black' as homeless. Race becomes an indeterminate factor in assigning wealth, employment or authority. The new generation is seen as seeking and expecting empowerment. The youth are unafraid to take what they desire and challenge the old cadres. They no longer respect old money or old authority. The youth are in pin stripes, Brody in brown and Nhlanhla in grey contrasting the older gangsters who are still racially divided by the colour of their black and white suits. Additionally suggesting they wear their colours on their

sleeves. The film seeks to create a cinematic meta-language full of metaphoric references.

The locations crisscross the landscape from cocaine factories, to lavish suburbs, from business offices to apartments, from warehouses to busy city streets. The representations attempt to indicate through the subtext that the new regime no longer foregrounds race but lobbies for identity by gang affiliations. These sequences traverse an arc from gangs delineated by race or culture to the 'rainbow' diversity of the new order figured in Nhlanhla and Brody's past experience and mutual trust.

The new way forward signifies a diversity of perspectives that includes the effects of historical clamping where experience, memory and upbringing stamp the residue of racial distrust into those whose background contexts predate the passage to independence.

DIRECTORS VISION

As the producer and my parents being the executive producers of the research film, my budget was extremely tight. This was one of the deciding factors when the locations were chosen. It was cheaper to shoot in Durban. Despite these economic considerations Durban and Kwa-Zulu-Natal have a lot to offer visually. Along with this I had to purchase all the suits that were going to get blood on them and hire the one's that were not. I used mostly student actors from the drama department at the Durban University of Technology. One of the major factors impeding execution of the film was the lack of assistance from a cinematography point of view. I did not have help on set with the make up, costumes, lighting, sound, camera operation or direction, so I did it myself and in terms of equipment I did not have access to preferred lighting kits, specialised equipment and operators. Whilst in the post-production there was no budget for an editor or animators so once again this was done by myself.

The narrative of my fiction film manifests itself around two main characters and how their lives inter-mingle, react and reflect on one another. The main character Nhlanhla is a 25-year-old 'black' male gangster whose extreme wealth derives from his criminal

background. Nhlanhla hails from a background of poverty and oppression. The flashbacks suggest an abandoned child exploited by Mr Dlamini.

The supporting character Brody purports to be a 25-year-old "homeless" 'white' male. Although Brody's homelessness is a part of the scam it adds associated meanings. Positioned without ownership, Brody represents disenfranchised white fears. These fears are subconsciously linked to the notion of ownership, employment, and displaced identity. Furthermore it raises questions around constructed African-ness, and alludes to the poverty implied in this 'white' dislocation or anxiety over the transference of power. Brody's 'whiteness' no longer privileges him nor protects him from impending poverty.

The inter-racial relationship is contextualised as in constant flux. The locations shift through intermittent flashbacks, where lighting and special effect techniques assist the forward action. The intimacy of close-up cutaways is juxtaposed against the flashing succession of frames. These shots are focused on a small, intimate cast of gangsters rather than embracing the diverse crowd scenes of *Mapantsula* (1988) or the expansive casting of the police platoons and over-crowded buildings as shown in *Jerusalema (2008).*

In the research film the containment and the duality of the characters are re-enforced by showing them divided by trestle tables, by long distance phone calls, and motor vehicle choices (sedan versus sports coupé). By comparison the intimacy of the Brody/ Nhlanhla relationship is emphasised in the attention given to their attire. The commonalities are evident in the similarities manifested by Nhlanhla and Brody. This occurs in shots inscribing the intricacies of their socks and is re-enforced when the young men sleep in a cardboard box, a gesture that signals togetherness.

The pair is both behind the trestle table in the Du Preez-sting set up. In fact the only time there is an interjection in their space, it is in the form of the 'white' motorist distributing bread; Mr Dlamini pulling the boys apart, and during the final shoot out. Therefore it is significant that at the end they remove the only remaining obstacle between them; Mr Dlamini. This cinematic sub-text or meta-language signals the stability of their relationship and gives credence to the firmness of the bond of brotherly love. The film deliberately creates a deception by placing the 'black' male

(Nhlanhla) in a gangster role where he uses a 'white' homeless male (Brody) as a front man for a drug deal. This is a deliberate scam directed at the audience. Through the narrative the relationship between these two characters unfolds from a series of childhood flashbacks and the subterfuge of metaphorically witty dialogue. *KZN Ruins* (2011) uses racial signifiers to reposition the relationship as one where allegiances are based on age rather than colour.

EXECUTION

The stereotypical projections in *Mapantsula* (1988) and *Jerusalema* (2008) initially position their 'black' male characters as underprivileged and these characters rest on hot headed aggression and physical brutality as a means to identify and relate the macho image of the self-made man within particular political contexts. *KZN Ruins* (2011) finds negotiations, allusions to chess, manipulation and conniving in order to express the brutality of the plot, thereby evolving the work around intellectual planning and calculated, constructed executions.

The film begins with an older 'white' male explaining through racial innuendoes, constructed identities, xenophobic preconceptions and racial alignments that the 'white' drug dealer will not deal with anyone who are 'black'. This places the audience in a world of 'black' and 'white' and reinforces the representations constructed during the apartheid era. The film then cuts to the streets of Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal using the montage filmic device to focus on the contrast between money and poverty, comfort and discomfort, safety and danger, 'black' and 'white'. The film follows the relationship of these two characters motivating their similarities through flashbacks to their childhood. The film hopes to transcend some of the politically defined boundaries of race by positioning similar anxieties within 'black' and 'white' identity. The film follows the personal struggles of the boys to negotiate the journey of their relationship informed by a society still preoccupied with discrimination and hatred as it travels to a position based on acceptance and realisation that racism can be overcome/suspended in certain circumstances.

CONCLUSION

This research report set out to determine whether there had been a shift in the representation of the 'black' male gangster from *Mapantsula* (1988), *Jerusalema* (2008) to *KZN Ruins* (2011). South Africa has been through some radical socio-cultural changes. This has empowered members of the 'black' community to rise above many of the impositions of racial discrimination and create his or her conventions and formations of 'blackness'.

As the case study fiction film *KZN Ruins* (2011) was a creative process, it is imperative to note that from first conceptualisation to the final production of the film, necessary adaptions were made.

This report argues from an academic point of view that through investigations of the historical background of South African film industry, the gangster genre and local stereotypes, there has been a definite shift in the representation of the 'black' male gangster. The representation of the 'black' male gangster has shifted from the Afrikaner nationalism of *De Voortrekkers* (1916) to the first imagined 'black' experience film *'African Jim'* (1949); and from Mapantsula (1988) which depicted poor living conditions, township violence and the discriminatory actions of the 'white' community, to *Jerusalema*(2008) that depicted wealthy suburban living, a sexual inter-racial relationship and a new-aged Robin Hood to *KZN Ruins* (2011), a film showing wealthy life styles, inter-racial relationships, big time drug-dealing, suburban living and educated 'black' male gangsters.

While the movement in the representation and authenticity of the 'black' male gangster has been gradual from *African Jim* (1949) to *KZN Ruins* (2011), it is evident that there has been a shift. Conversely since independence, South Africa has seen a rise in new filmmakers pushing new boundaries. "Post apartheid cinema is characterised by the emergence of new voices and a diversification of themes". (Botha, 2007: 34).

The inter-racial relationships in *Jerusalema* (2008), and *KZN Ruins* (2011) acknowledge a shift not only in the representation of 'black' male gangster, but also in

signifying a change in socio-economic and formerly entrenched legal boundaries. The inter-racial relationships in the films centre on a 'white' female from the suburbs and a 'black' male gangster from the townships who fall in 'love' *Jerusalema* (2008) and a wealthy 'black' male gangster and a poor 'white' male gangster who have a brotherly bond in *KZN Ruins* (2011). Lucky's relationship is founded on sexual attraction, while the inter-racial relationship between Nhlanhla and Brody transcends the boundaries of race and sexual nuances, to depict a shared past and a brotherly bond.

The shift in the representation of the 'black' male gangster is evident on many levels. Firstly, the character is perceived as changing location from township to inner city to suburb. Secondly, the high school dropout graduating to the tertiary dropout and finally to a higher education graduate, demonstrate a shift in the educational prowess of the protagonist. Thirdly, there is a shift in the historical context from romanticised tragic anti-hero to Robin Hood escapist idealism to the calculated lawless pursuit of power. Fourthly, transformation occurs in the movement from Tsotsi-taal (Tsotsi language) and a regenerative process, to the jargon contained in business economics and a Marxist approach to the subtle metaphors of the final work with its capitalist free market system. Therefore my research report and film manifests the shifts of the stereotypical representation of the 'black' male gangster in *Mapantsula* (1988), to the protagonist of *Jerusalema* (2008), and those in *KZN Ruins* (2011) in order to track the changes in racial and socio-political contextualising and representation. This deconstruction of 'black' male gangster representation argues for and confirms a paradigm shift by portraying alternative representations of the 'black' male gangster.

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Filmography

African Jim. (1949) [Film] Directed by Donald Swanson. South Africa: Eric Rutherford. (58 Min).

Come Back Africa. (1959) [Film] Directed by Lionel Rogosin. South Africa: Lionel Rogosin. (95 Min).

Hijack Stories. (2000) [Film] Directed by Oliver Schmitz. South Africa: Black Forest Films. (94 Min).

Jerusalema. (2008) [Film] Directed by Ralph Ziman. South Africa: Multi Films. (119 Min).

Mapantsula. (1988) [Film] Directed by Oliver Schmitz. South Africa: Haverbeam. (104 Min).

Stander. (2003) [Film] Directed by Bronwen Hughes. South Africa: ApolloProMedia. (111 Min).

Tsotsi. (2005) [Film] Directed by Gavin Hood. South Africa: National Film and Video Foundation of South Africa. (94 Min).

KZN Ruins. (2011) [Film] Directed by Lance Lütge. South Africa: University of the Witwatersrand. (15min).