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Role of documentaries in the construction of national identity: Project 10 documentary series, South Africa

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CHAPTER 2

THE DOCUMENTARY IN NATION BUILDING

> *A vibrant film and video sector helps promote a more inquisitive, imaginative and thoughtful society, allowing us to explore what it means to be South African. It also provides a medium through which South Africa's creative talents are able to reach the world.*
>
> www.nfvf.co.za

The process of constructing a national identity inevitably involves building a nation and *vice versa*. Without first having a nation, it is impossible to talk of a national identity yet since a nation involves people who imagine themselves as having a common identity and who constitute its membership (Anderson, 1991), the two terms are constantly in consonance. In many instances, scholars define the two terms identically and this underlines their almost seamless connection. By constructing a nation, therefore, national identity is also constructed. This chapter discusses how the media generally, and the documentary mode specifically, contribute to the construction of a nation.

Media's potential power in (re)constructing and (re)shaping nations - and in the process (re)constructing and (re)shaping national identities - has been the subject of numerous recurrent discussions among scholars and critics. Epstein, like a number of other scholars writing on the theme of national identity states that,

> The truly revolutionary significance of modern mass communication is its broad public making ability i.e. the ability to form historically new bases for collective thought and actions quickly, continuously and pervasively across previous boundaries of time and space.
>
> (Epstein, 1995:17)

Andrew Higson concurs with Epstein. He writes,

> It is widely assumed that the rituals of mass communication play a central role in re-imagining the dispersed and incoherent populace as a tight knit, value-sharing collectivity, sustaining the experience of nationhood.
>
> (Higson, 2002:65)

While Sean Jacobs in writing about the political transition in South Africa from apartheid to the post-1994 era argues that,

> While media did not cause the former regime to break down or trigger the transition to democracy, they did play crucial roles in determining how, when and to what degree democratization took shape in both the transition and consolidation period.
>
> (Jacobs, 2003:30)

Ian Jarvie thinks differently. He insists,

> Movies (and television) are not sufficient for nation building. Indeed they are not necessary, for the obvious reason that nation building was accomplished long before the mass media were around …[16]
>
> (Jarvie, 2002:79)

Whereas Jarvie's assertion that movies and television are not sufficient for nation building is acceptable, his argument that they are not necessary is flawed in several ways. First, he misses the point in the debates on the media's potential role

[16] Ian Jarvie expressed these thoughts while writing about the development of a national cinema.

in nation building. The argument here is not whether media are the single most important factor in the process of nation building, or that they act as hypodermic needles that inject this sense of national identity into the members of a nation as he seems to suggest[17]. The point is that media play a significant role alongside other factors such as the public system of education, as pointed out by A. D. Smith (1991), in circulating the symbols, events, cultures, aspirations and setbacks experienced by members of a nation in their desire to imagine themselves as a community. Attempts here are not to rank these contributing factors in order of their impact or importance but to acknowledge that they play a role in the process of constructing a nation.

The second argument against Jarvie's assertions is that the media do not necessarily 'infect' the public with this sense of national identity because this notion would presume that the public is a blank platter that Raymond Williams (1995) would describe as fickle, unthinking, herd-like-mass[18]. The point is that the media play the vital role of circulating the elements and symbols of nation building and national identity to the members of the nation and they in turn have the opportunity to acknowledge them, think about them, discuss them, accept or reject them and to eventually come up with their own conclusions about them.

The other pertinent point that Jarvie misses is that nations are not static and that a sense of national identity is not a once off thing accomplished at any point in time. A. D. Smith (1991) rightly argues that the symbols and aspects of a nation and national identity have to be constantly re-generated and re-invented and then, even

[17] The expression 'hypodermic needle' is borrowed from the debates on 'effects of media on audiences' and 'the television and delinquency debates' of the 1960's, 70's and early 80's.

[18] The term infect is used here as used by the proponents of the hypodermic needle theory of effects of media on audiences who assumed that the audience have no control over what they view and have no capacity to decode the messages. See Hartley and Fiske (1978)

more importantly, constantly circulated among the members of that nation so as to keep the nation alive.

Jarvie, likewise, fails to acknowledge the fact that nations are in a constant state of rebirth and reinvention. Many nations, including those in Europe, have been reborn and reconstructed severally. These include the nations formerly in the Soviet Union and some in Africa.

Jarvie further writes that,

> … It is interesting that arguments for national cinema first arose not in emergent nations in the 1920's but somewhat earlier in the relatively stable western European nation-states: Scandinavia, the Low Countries, Britain, France, Germany and Italy.
>
> (Jarvie, 2002:80).

It is worth pointing out the irony in the statement above, which should have interested the writer. Jarvie should have noted that the potential power of the media in nation building was first advanced by the Western European nation-states, which he describes as [arguably] 'relatively stable'[19]. This should be a pointer to the fact that media's role in nation building is significant if not invaluable and that, as argued earlier, nation building is a continuous process that even the 'relatively stable' nation-states cannot ignore.

[19] Anthony D. Smith (1991) also writes that the *idea* of the nation-states originated from Western Europe mainly from England, France and Spain.

Cinema and (later) television, therefore, are believed to play a pivotal role in the continual re-imagining of many nations and the regeneration of symbols that bind the members of a nation together. Jane Gaines (2000) mentions early films such as D.W Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *De Voortrekkers* (Harold M. Shaw, 1916) as early examples of films that attempted to persuade certain members within those nations to embrace philosophies about their identities espoused by the above mentioned films and their filmmakers. In subsequent years, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (Germany, 1934), V.I. Pudovkin's *The End of St. Petersburg* (U.S.S.R, 1927), Sergei Eisenstein's *October* (U.S.S.R., 1927) and Dziga Vertov's *Kino Eye* and *Kino Pravda* series, among them *The Old and the New* (U.S.S.R., 1929), similarly attempted to persuade the German Nazi nation and the Soviet states respectively to embrace certain ideas about their national identities.[20]

Nation-states such as Britain and Canada have similarly gravitated towards the idea of establishing a national cinema which is believed to not only have the potential of playing the vital role of re-generating and sustaining national cultures, symbols, myths and events but also in empowering members of those nations economically through the promotion of the local film industry. This is believed to be achievable through the creation of domestic employment, acquisition of the relevant technical knowledge so as to compete with other nation's cinemas (especially Hollywood) and in marketing the nation abroad among other reasons.

Several other nations such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have, in addition to the national cinema policy, imposed local content quotas on broadcasters. This measure is aimed at, among other reasons, protecting the nation

[20] Noel Carroll and Sally Banes (2000) argue that the Soviet Union literally had to be invented and that cinema played a crucial role in the process. They cite the three Soviet filmmakers Pudovkin, Eisenstein and Vertov as having played a critical role in their nation building.

from infiltration and domination by other nation's cultures which lead to stifling these particular nations' growth.

From these measures, it is fair enough to argue that the media, since their inception, are perceived as playing an immensely significant role in contributing towards the construction of a nation. It is important, therefore, that nations and governments invest in this sector so as to exploit and explore this potential avenue that can contribute to the sustenance of national identity and ensure a coherent, peaceful, economically stable and self-sustaining nation-state.

In South Africa, the media have played a significant role in (re)constructing and (re)shaping a sense of national identity in the South African national landscape. This started way back in the early 20th Century with films such as *De Voortrekkers* (Harold M. Shaw, 1916) which strived to espouse the Afrikaner identity as the South African national identity, as Jane Gaines (2000) argues. In the pre-1994 era, as Molobi (1998) argues, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was run and controlled by the apartheid government which used it to sustain the Afrikaner/white identity as the South African national identity. Molobi says,

> The board of the SABC was comprised of people who were handpicked by the National Party government. TV 1 which was broadcast in Afrikaans and English and targeted at white viewers was launched in 1976. This marked the birth of apartheid TV.
>
> (Molobi, 1998:22)

During the agitation for the abolishment of apartheid in South Africa, films such as *Sarafina* (Darrell Roodt, 1992) and *Mapantsula* (Oliver Schmitz, 1988), and documentary series such as *Ulibambe Lingashoni: Hold up the Sun series* (Laurence Dworkin, 1993) played a pivotal role in exposing the atrocities committed by the apartheid regime in the nation. In the post apartheid era,

newspapers such as *The Mail and Guardian* are believed to play a pivotal role in checking the powers and the hegemonic structures of the ruling A.N.C. government (Ogola, 2002).

The current A.N.C. government and the policy makers in South Africa also acknowledge that the media play a significant role in nation building. This has led to constant and increased funding of the National Film and Video Foundation (N.F.V.F) and the Film Resource Unit (F.R.U.) to encourage the development, marketing and distribution of South African films and television programs both within and outside the country. In 2004, the N.F.V.F. either fully or partially funded the making of over 26 films. A number of these films were major hits both at the local and international scene. These included films such as *Forgiveness* (Ian Gabriel, 2004), *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George, 2004) and Yesterday (Darrell Roodt, 2004) which received unprecedented accolades at the Venice and Toronto International Film Festivals among several other festivals[21]. (www.nfvf.co.za)

In addition to these efforts, the South African broadcasting regulatory agency, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) has imposed local content broadcasting quotas on public broadcasters (SABC 1 and 2) as well as the "public commercial" (SABC 3) and "private commercial" broadcasters (E-TV and M-NET). ICASA's objective is to develop, protect and promote a national and provincial identity, culture and character [in South Africa]. (www.polity.org.za). Other initiatives such as 'The Proudly South African' campaign have also been launched to encourage production and consumption of South African products, among them films and television programs.

[21] *Yesterday* was nominated for the 2005 Oscar Award in the "Best Foreign Language Film category while *Hotel Rwanda* was nominated for "Best Actor in a Leading Role" (for Don Cheadle), "Best Actress in a Supporting Role" (Sophie Okonedo), and "Best Original Screenplay". (www.southafrica.info)

Why the Documentary?

Bill Nichols (2001) believes that constructing consensus along the lines of national identity, be it in affirmation of, or in opposition to, established governments, played a defining role in the first few decades of documentary. His argument is that the documentary mode has always played a significant role in relation to national identity since its inception. Nichols says,

> The politics of the documentary film and video addresses the way in which documentary helps give tangible expression to the values and beliefs that build or contest specific forms of social belonging or community at a given time or place.
>
> (Nichols, 2001:142)

Nichols' argument is that the documentary mode offers a platform through which members of a community find expression of their experiences, environment and circumstances. It offers them an opportunity to voice their concerns and challenge some of the dominant views and perceptions in their society. Nichols argument is especially apt in the African context and continent, which is in dire need of a means through which expression and sustenance of its traditions, cultures, values and beliefs can be preserved.

This chapter, therefore, argues for the documentary mode of film, video and television production as an appropriate, affordable and convenient avenue through which national identity can be (re)imagined, sustained and (re)invented in comparison to other genres of television and film especially in Africa. This argument bears in mind the historical and economic state of the countries in Africa

as well as the history and establishment of the film, video and television industry in the continent. The Project 10 documentary series will be used to illustrate and support the arguments made in this chapter.

Although South Africa has a comparatively more established television and, to some extent film industry, and a fairly strong economy as compared to many other African states, it will be used as the case study for the discussions in this chapter. In this regard, this chapter will address how the Project 10 documentaries have contributed, and still are contributing, to the construction of the South African nation not only in the content of the documentaries in the series, but also in the nature, form and concept behind the project.

From the days of the early documentaries such as Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) or even further back to the late 19th century productions of the Lumière brothers, documentaries have been associated with actuality.[22] Bill Nichols (2001) feels that the documentary tradition relies heavily on being able to convey to us the impression of actuality. John Grierson, believed to be one of the founding fathers of documentary in Britain, defined the documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality". Many subsequent definitions of the documentary by authoritative documentary scholars such as Bill Nichols, Carl Plantinga and Stella Bruzzi have had words such as "truth", "reality" and "actuality" incorporated in them. This even led to the cinema vérité school of thought, which purported to record truth, actuality and reality as it unfolded. Although these definitions that emphasize actuality and truth were challenged and opposed by subsequent scholars of documentaries who spent huge amounts of time theorizing and researching on the documentary genre, one thing that became clear was that

[22] *Nanook of the North* is cited by most film historians as the first feature length documentary though Erik Barnouw argues that the first documentary films were those made by the French Lumière brothers, Louis and Auguste.

documentary, whether rightly or wrongly, was and still is associated with truth, actuality and reality by many audiences all over the world.

The argument here is that the perception of the documentary as being more believable and factual to an audience even in the contemporary times cannot be dismissed entirely. Documentary films are perceived by many filmmakers and audiences as actual records and archival material for events that have occurred. A film such as *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, 1955), for instance, is believed to be a historical document on the Jewish Holocaust atrocities. This perception is more understandable especially when comparing the documentary genre to the other genres of film and television such as drama and comedy, which by their nature are entirely fictive although they may be based on, or drawn from actuality. The nature of their productions involves the rigours of scripting, rehearsals and several takes for one action and this makes them (arguably) less 'real' to the viewer. This makes a powerful case for the use of documentaries in the construction of a nation since members of a nation are more likely to accept what they see in the documentary films as actual and, therefore, believable. This is one invaluable and particularly essential ingredient necessary in bonding a nation together bearing in mind that what links these members together, as Anderson (1991) argues, is their imaginations. It is pertinent that members of a nation believe and accept the images disseminated to them as being "true".

Secondly, for small economies such as those in most African countries that cannot recoup the cost of producing big budget fictional films, the documentary is an ideal point to start from if they are to develop a viable film and television industry that can espouse the aspirations of their nation. This is because the cost of producing a documentary film is much lower than fictional features for several reasons.

First, the production of fiction films requires a large crew and this obviously translates to a bigger budget.[23] Crew such as teams of script writers and developers, directors of photography, stage managers, stuntmen/women, camera operators, floor managers, sound engineers, make up artists, e.t.c., are arguably essential for successful fiction films, while documentaries can be made successfully by just a two-person crew of the director and the camera person or even a one person crew who doubles up as both the director and camera person.

Many cinema vérité documentaries of the 1960's such as *Le Joli Mai* (1962) by Chris Marker were shot successfully by two-person crews and this is a trend embraced in a number of the Project 10 documentaries such as *Solly's Story* by Asivhanzhi Mathaba, *My Yeoville* by Sello Molefe and *Hot Wax* by Andrea Spitz. This would be a difficult feat to achieve in fiction film. In addition to these, it costs considerably more to train the crew for fiction films because of their sheer numbers as compared to documentaries which like Project 10, only trained the director, who was also the camera person and used a similar post production crew for a number of the documentaries.

Fiction films similarly require more funding in their production in terms of props, extras, the settings etc, unlike documentaries which can be shot spontaneously in natural settings, without any constructed props and using no extras. Fiction films also require more post-production attention such as editing and colour modification/correction so as to reconstruct them to appear as believable as possible while documentaries do not require the same amount of attention because things such as jump cuts are acceptable to the psyche of the viewer.

[23] "Production" as used here refers to all the filmmaking process before the post-production stage of filmmaking.

Given the low GDP of most African nations, and the low investments and economic interest in the still growing African cinema and television industries, it makes economic sense for the state and other investors to begin with the low budget but high quality productions that would spur growth and interest in the industry.

A recurrent counter argument on the documentary mode of film making is whether this genre has the potential of attracting audiences and whether documentaries can have the same commercial appeal as other genres of film. Michael Moore's documentaries such as *Roger and Me* (1989), *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) can respond to these arguments. *Fahrenheit 9/11* for instance, smashed the box office records in the United States of America earning over US $ 100 million with US $ 5 million earned in only its first weekend of its release. This was after *Bowling for Columbine* had earned around US $ 23 million. David Walsh in the World Socialists *website* writes,

> …American director Michael Moore's documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* set single-day records at its two New York City venues on its opening day June 23 [2004]. The film sold $49,000 worth of tickets at the Loew's Village 7 in Manhattan, beating the theater's single-day previous record set by Hollywood blockbuster *Men in Black*, and more than $30,000 at the Lincoln Plaza theater, topping the total established at that cinema by *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The success in New York was followed up nationwide over the weekend when Moore's film opened in 868 theaters in the US and Canada. Despite playing in a relatively small number of theaters (and many of them smaller, art-house venues), *Fahrenheit 9/11* outperformed all other films and was number one at the box office, grossing an estimated $21.8 million in three days.
>
> http://www.wsws.org

What these box office earnings illustrate is that whereas documentary films generally have lower returns as compared to fiction films, they can compete favourably with other genres of film in attracting audiences as well as in their commercial appeal if they are correctly marketed and made (produced).

Premised on these arguments, this research report acknowledges the documentary mode as apt for the continual generation of symbols that promote the sustenance of national identity in many African nation-states. The precedence set by the Project 10 series in South Africa could be emulated in other African nation-states as they learn from its successes and shortcomings. At this point then, this research report will examine the Project 10 documentaries and attempt to analyse their impact in the process of constructing a national identity in South Africa.

Project 10 documentaries in nation building.

In commissioning the Project 10 documentaries, SABC 1, a public broadcaster whose mandate is to invest in local content and the local film and television industry, hoped to encourage and develop a new generation of South African filmmakers who would make films specifically for the South African audience. Similarly, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) saw this project as key to their development of local talent and in line with their mission, which is to create an environment that develops and promotes the South African film and video industry both domestically and internationally (Project 10:2004).

This chapter will now attempt an examination on how and whether the project has contributed to the aspirations of SABC 1 and the NFVF, and whether it has achieved its desired mission.

Protecting and Promoting Local Industries

The ultimate goal of any nation is to ensure the promotion of the quality of its member's lives and to ensure that they are protected from (perceived or real) external forces. The Project 10 series has played a pivotal role in protecting and promoting the local industry. 'The local industry' as used in this chapter does not only imply the film, video and television industry in South Africa but draws the net wider to include other service and manufacturing industries within the state. As argued in the introduction, the project has offered a wider variety of genres for its audience in the country. This is in line with the mission of SABC 1 which is,

> To invest in local content and the local film and television industry. SABC 1 had to move from primarily being a soap channel, with predominantly foreign programming, to a more diverse channel.
>
> (Project 10:2004).

What this means is that more local programs are available for the local viewer both in their content and variety. This not only assists the broadcaster in meeting its quota on local content requirements but also protects the industry from domination by foreign content which, in many cases, ends up stifling the growth of the local industry. The local audience is also exposed to a variety of viewing experiences and aesthetics, which are often different in their form and execution from foreign programming by carving a niche for themselves in the psyche of the viewer.

The second way in which the Project 10 series protects and promotes the local film and television industry is through the creation of skilled domestic employment and the ripple effects emanating from this. All the 13 documentary filmmakers commissioned in the Project 10 series had to undergo training in filmmaking. The

'unique' training initiative that ran concurrently with the production of the documentaries was developed by the Maurits Binger Film Institute and supported by the Netherlands Culture Fund of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Social Science and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with additional funding from the National Film and Video Foundation and the Department of Communication, South Africa. (Project 10:2004)

Since the majority of the commissioned filmmakers had very little or - in most cases - no experience in filmmaking, the training was tailored to equip them with overall skills in film production. They were trained in film directing, lighting, the concepts and principles of camerawork and even in post-production work. What this implies is that the over 13 filmmakers were equipped with the necessary skilled knowledge to make even more films in future[24]. In this sense then, Project 10 was a multifunctional project in promoting the film and television industry in South Africa in that it not only generated 13 different South African documentary productions, but also equipped a similar number of South Africans with the necessary skilled knowledge in film production at a fairly affordable cost. What this implies is that in future, these filmmakers can then train other South African filmmakers to inculcate South African aesthetics in the films.

In addition to the discussed benefits towards the South African film and television industry, the project played an important role in empowering disadvantaged people and communities in the nation, bearing in mind how the eventual filmmakers were selected.

[24] A number of the directors in the project 10 series such as Andrea Spitz have already obtained contracts to make other films.

In the Project 10 website it is stated that,

> The filmmakers chosen were predominantly women and from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Their experience in making Project 10 a reality has led to the growth of a local community of filmmakers who strongly support one another.
>
> (Project 10: 2004)

Those accorded the opportunity to make the films had the potential to change not only their status professionally and economically, but also the social and economic status of the communities they lived in. At the end of the project, not only the 13 individuals were empowered but whole communities of people in the nation benefited from the project through, for instance, sensitization of the problems afflicting the communities in a film such as *Cinderella of the Cape Flats* (Jane Kennedy, 2004) which will be discussed shortly.

The documentaries also promoted the South African nation-state as a tourist destination especially where they were shown in international film festivals abroad or when they were aired on other nations broadcasting stations. This aspect will be revisited in this chapter when discussing the branding of the Project 10 documentaries as South African film productions.

The Project 10 series has also played a role in contributing to the building of the South African nation in several ways. This is manifested in themes explored in the documentaries. This chapter will analyze two documentaries in the series, *Cinderella of the Cape Flats* directed by Jane Kennedy and *The Devil Breaks My Heart – Ten Years Later* by Lederle Bosch.[25] These two documentaries will

[25] *Cinderella of the Cape Flats* is Jane Kennedy's first film although she studied film at John Hills film school in the 80's. See her interview after the documentary. Lederle Bosch like Jane Kennedy is also a first time film maker.

demonstrate how their themes have contributed to the promotion and protection of the South African industry and how this fosters a sense of national identity in South Africa. However, it has to be pointed out from the onset that there are certain aspects of the films' visual language that inadvertently disparage the film's impact as means of promotion and protection of South Africa. These will also be discussed in this chapter.

Cinderella of the Cape Flats is a story of the working class in the South African textile industry. Once a year, these textile workers who are mostly women, and the sole breadwinners in their families, get an opportunity for a much deserved break from their routine life of toiling the whole day in the textile factories. They participate in the annual Spring Queen pageant that brings together workers from several textile factories. The participants not only showcase their beauty and femininity but also get a chance to meet and mingle with workers from other factories. This offers them an opportunity to share happy moments together, and as one of the workers in the story comments, "It gives us the chance to let go, be free and enjoy our lives this one time in the year."

The story follows the lives of several contestants from their families to their workplace and into their brief moments of fame and glory on the catwalk parades. The film shows their experiences in the factories, the long hours they have to work and the meagre income they earn. The foreman in one of the factories says that most of them earn between R400 and R600 a week. One of the main characters in the story is Beverly, who is the sole breadwinner in an extended family of nine, which includes her 91-year-old grandmother and her son. The film chronicles her struggles and tribulations as she toils to sustain her extended family with her meagre earnings.

The subtext in this story, which is the main concern in this chapter, is the biting poverty experienced by the workers. *Cinderella of the Cape Flats* is an expose of the working class' condition of labour and life under the guise of a story about beauty pageants. It is quite ironical that many of the workers cannot afford to buy dresses for the pageants and end up either borrowing or using the same attire year after year even though they work in the textile industry where they make high quality garments that dress and uplift others. The pageant is only a brief and temporary joyous interlude in the otherwise incessant poverty and hardship experienced by the workers.

The poverty is so crippling that at certain points it seems to undermine certain aspects of people's humanity. Beverly lives with her uncle, her brother, several cousins and relatives most of whom are capable of working but for some reason do not work. She says that some of her dependants do not appreciate what she does for them and this really breaks her heart. She singles out her cousin, whom she took to court (although she does not say why), as one of the people who do not appreciate her efforts.

The dehumanising aspect of poverty is best exemplified in the documentary *The Devil Breaks My Heart – Ten Years Later* by Lederle Bosch[26]. The story is a sequel to the documentary *The Devil Breaks My Heart* (Zackie Achmat, 1993) which revolved around a racially diverse group of children from mainly disadvantaged poor families. This sequel revolves around four of these children now in their late teens and early 20's.

The first character is 19 year old Tshepo Mmola who has now lost his father. He lives and survives in South Africa's Northern Province, which is enduring one of

[26] *The Devil Breaks My Heart – Ten Years Later* is a sequel to a film made by Lederle Bosch's film company in 1994.

its worst droughts in history (Project 10:2004). Just as in the pre-1994 years, Tshepo still wallows in poverty and the dawn of the new political dispensation has not changed his socio-economic status. He still struggles to get the basic necessities in life especially since he has not obtained the all important identity book – a prerequisite to getting a job – which he has been trying to acquire. In the film, Tshepo feels that life for him (at the time of making the film) is more difficult than it was 10 years back.

Donovan Rhode, 21 years old, still lives in the same violent and crime prone neighbourhood of Bellville South in the Western Province of South Africa where he lived 10 years before. He now has two children who are growing up in a similar environment as he did and who are also predisposed to similar temptations i.e., lack of opportunity and a bleak future. Donovan has now drifted into a dangerous life of crime and has a criminal case pending against him. The cycle of poverty and despair seems imminent for his children.

Heino Benard, 16 years and from a working class white family, wants nothing to do with his family and spends all his time drinking and hanging out with his friends at their homes (Project 10:2004).

Bolla Conradie, now 24 years and a Springbok player, is the only inividual who has broken away from the chain of poverty, despair and hopelessness[27]. He has moved out of his old neighbourhood, a block away from Donovan's house, bought a house in a new neighbourhood where he now lives with his family and has managed to transform his socio-economic lifestyle.

The difference between Bolla and the other three young men, other than his talent and determination seems to be the ability to earn a decent income. The

[27] The Springbok is the South African national rugby team.

documentary's subtext is that many of the poor people in South Africa are condemned to a cycle of the same appalling conditions because of lack of a decent job, which translates to lack of a decent income. Other factors such as the choices they make in life could most certainly play a significant role in breaking this life cycle and changing their lifestyles. These choices, however, are still determined to a large extent by their economic capabilities. The surest way to assist these members of the South African nation is to provide them with decent job opportunities.

Still on the dehumanizing element of poverty, Donovan strips in front of camera as he is interviewed while he cleans himself. This shows some lost sense of touch with certain basic human instincts such that he is not conscious of his nakedness. Poverty has driven him to a level where he seems unconcerned about anything. Of course one would argue that he could be intoxicated – which he is, but a scene where his girlfriend forcefully dips her young baby in cold water further underlines what poverty erodes from human emotion. The action is subtle but the fact that she does not seem to register that the bathing water is too cold for the baby is disturbing. She might not be able to afford heating the water but that is the logic in bathing the child in the sun so that the water can be heated up. Someone mentions to her that the water is still too cold but she ignores this. Similarly, Tshepo enjoys sharing a meal with his friends oblivious of the fact that the food is on the ground and could be contaminated. The biting poverty has driven them to a point where certain basic human instincts do not seem to register anymore and the mere sight of food, which is obviously a rare commodity to him, overrides all other aspects of his humanity.

These stories implore South Africans to experience the lives of the working class and the unemployed and to empathize with them in the difficult conditions under which they survive. The documentaries play the very important role of informing

South African citizens, many of whom are not aware of the crippling extent of poverty in their nation. The images are splashed on television, in the comfort of average middle class South African living rooms and even if from a distance, the viewers have a glimpse of the situation under which many working class and unemployed South Africans live. These poor people, like all other South Africans, have hopes, dreams and ambitions in life and are also looking for opportune moments to better their lives - especially now after ten years of "democratic rule" and the optimism this has brought to South Africa.

A number of South Africans may feel that they are not in a position to help all the poor people change their lifestyles but that is not the case. Nelson Mandela in his speech made in London as he launched the Make Poverty History Campaign says,

> Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice.
>
> (Oriang': 2005)

The director of *Cinderella of the Cape Flats,* Jane Kennedy*,* comments during her interview after the film that many of the working class depend on industries such as the textile industry for their survival yet because of the liberalised market since 1994, and the influx of cheaper commodities from abroad, many of the industries have closed down and many of the workers have lost and continue losing their jobs.[28]

[28] At the time of writing this research report, Trueform, the company which Beverly was working for, was facing imminent closure after incurring losses for six years allegedly because of the cheap importation of textiles from China.

One of the appeals in the film - to South Africans - is to help the working class by buying what is made in South Africa rather than imported commodities. This has the potential of keeping the working class in their jobs and spurring the growth of the overall economy of the country and eventually putting more money into the pockets of the poor. Ultimately, this will not only protect South African industries but also promote a better South Africa by improving the lives of its citizenry. Since, as argued earlier, the documentary mode is perceived as being a representation of actual events and more believable to its viewers, the potential of a desired impact of the documentary on the South African citizenry is very high and this could be encouraged even more.

In the craft of filmmaking, however, it is not sufficient just to concentrate on the themes since there are many other aspects that contribute to the final reading of the film. Visual aspects of filmmaking when ignored or given little attention could have a counterproductive effect on the audience and the overall intention of the film. In film productions whose agenda are nation building - such as those in the Project 10 series - it is prudent to entice the viewer to empathize with the subjects and not portray them as deserving of their circumstances.

It would be difficult, for instance, for middle and upper middle class South Africans (for whom the Project 10 documentaries target) to empathise with characters such as Heino Benard or to some extent Donovan Rhode and his girlfriend. Heino, in the documentary, is framed as being unconcerned about his situation and environment. He is depicted as a teenager who makes no effort to improve his chances for a better life by doing anything that would impact positively on his circumstances. He is portrayed as spending his time idling with his friends, drinking alcohol or talking gibberish. The interviews selected for the documentary expose his ignorance and lack of nuance on pertinent and emotive issues in contemporary South Africa. He, for instance, argues that people from

different races in South Africa should not be involved in a relationship and that such relationships would not be right. When asked why, his response is that that is how he has been socialized to think and that things should remain that way. Such framing and composition by the director puts off potential empathy from the audience who might dismiss the character as an unconcerned, ignorant and indolent teenager who, maybe, deserves what he is getting in life.

Donovan, to an extent, is depicted as a victim of circumstances who cannot break away from his cycle of poverty and crime. This is done in the film through inter-cutting between scenes when he was young and juxtaposing these to his contemporary days. As a 14-year-old, he narrates a murder he witnessed in his neighbourhood and this is juxtaposed with his present life of crime. However, the documentary plays on certain stereotypes about the coloured community in South Africa. Donovan is portrayed as an unthinking, gullible person always quick to blame other things for his misdeeds and make excuses for the wrong decisions and choices he makes in life. The documentary shows him chronicling the crimes he has committed, and even pointing out the precise locations of his crimes although this could help convict him. He then gives all sorts of excuses for his involvement in crime and then turns back and blames the crime for his use of drugs and intoxicants. He is also arrogant and unrepentant about his criminal life and this makes it difficult for the audience to be sympathetic of his situation. His girlfriend is also framed as a cold, emotionless person and this, again, erodes any empathy for her from the viewers.

Compare the scenarios above to Beverly's in *Cinderella of the Cape Flats* who is portrayed as a very hardworking and determined person struggling against seemingly insurmountable odds. She is framed as a very caring person especially in the shots where she is with her 90-year-old grandmother or her son. She takes care of her grandmother, talks very fondly of her and tries to make her life as

comfortable as possible by providing her with most of her basic needs. She is also an extremely determined person and this is manifested in her courageous attempt to contest in the second round of the pageant after failing to make it in the top five in the first round. She eventually gets selected in her second attempt and goes ahead to win that stage of the pageant even though she hardly receives any support from Trueform, the textile company she represents in the pageant. She is also an ambitious person and works extremely hard towards fulfilling these ambitions. In the film, she is depicted an inspirational person to both her workmates and her family.

What these arguments stress is that in film, all the components of visual story telling should be well thought-out and none should be subordinated since they all contribute to telling the story.

Marketing South Africa both domestically and internationally

Branding the Project 10 documentaries as South African productions acts as a good marketing strategy not only for the films and the filmmakers but also for the South African nation. Most of the Project 10 documentary filmmakers were first time directors who were yet to get established in the profession and, therefore, needed a brand with which to associate themselves. South African nationals, both within the country and those in the Diaspora were more likely to be persuaded to watch and support the films by virtue of their 'South African-ness'. The films were also bound to attract wider audiences from non-South Africans who were either interested or just curious about South Africa or those who knew nothing about South Africa and wanted to learn about the nation.

A large number of the documentaries in the series have been invited to participate in international film festivals in Africa, Europe, the Americas and Asia. Many of

them have been invited because they were marketed as South African films and given an opportunity and, in some cases, preference to showcase South Africa. Examples of this include 'The Made in Series' festival held in Toronto, Canada in 2004 where four Project 10 documentaries were entered primarily because they were made in South Africa. The documentaries invited for the festival included *Ikhaya, The Devil Breaks my Heart, Hot Wax and Meaning of the Buffalo.* (www.hotdocs.ca). A notable number of the other Project 10 documentaries were also premiered in The Berlin Film Festival in 1994. These include *Umgidi, Mix, Nabantwa' Bam, Solly's Story, Being Pavarotti* and *Belonging.* (www.africaatthepictures.co.uk). This has enabled many of them to win several awards and accolades, some of which were in the African or Southern African category of the awards.

Encouraging long term investment from both within the nation and from overseas

South Africa, like many other African states, cannot claim to have a national cinema that serves the interests of the nation. What this means is that other cinemas are bound to dominate not only the cinema theatres and television stations within the country, but also stifle the growth of the sector. What the South African government and the players in the cinema and film sector in the nation need to do is to encourage investment from both within the country and from overseas. An initiative such as Project 10 has the potential of playing an integral part as an incentive in attracting these investments. When investors and business people within the country see the productions such as those in the Project 10 series, the chances of them being attracted to invest in the industry are increased. This is because they see the prospects of the growth of the industry and, therefore, a chance to explore that potential. This is unlike where there is nothing going on in the film industry and, therefore, no incentive of any kind to the financiers.

The Project 10 series, in this regard, has already achieved a major milestone. It managed to attract foreign investment from the Netherlands Culture Fund of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Project 10:2004).

During events such as international film festivals, a number of producers, financiers and investors get a chance to scout for potential production partners, talented professionals and possible stories that would be of interest to their businesses and markets. When they see some of the productions such as those in the Project 10 series, they may be attracted to invest in these countries or even use some of the directors and crew in their productions. This amounts to either direct or indirect investment to both the film industry in the country, and to the country's economy.

The Project 10 documentaries also have the potential of generating significant export revenues to the broadcasters and the country. This is through the sale of the films to other broadcasters outside South Africa, thereby earning foreign exchange. This is a trend that has been sustaining a number of productions around the world such as the soap operas (telenovelas) in the Latin American countries and films made in Hollywood, which make substantial revenue from sales abroad.