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# Presence as absence: A black feminist analysis of the depiction of black woman in three post-apartheid South African films (2004-2008)

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

This study examines and problematises the portrayal of Black women in three post-apartheid films made in South Africa between 2004 and 2008. Since the study focuses on the representation of a specific gender and racial group, it draws on theories of representation and feminist film theory and criticism, particularly on Black feminist approaches and intersectionality. In spite of some of the challenges associated with the notion of intersectionality (which the study acknowledges), the concept is deemed to be crucial given the complexity of the position of Black women and the multiple oppressions that they often face.

The years between 1994 and 2004 were epoch-making. This was the first decade of democracy in South Africa, which marked a crucial period in the history of the country's political struggle against inequalities and all forms of oppression, including those of gender, class and race. This study has consequently identified a five-year period after the first decade of democracy as representing an important indicator of how the country has fared in tackling post-apartheid issues. The period is significant in the sense that – although the country began investing in film after the official ending of apartheid in 1994 through funding, subsidies and training from the National and Film and Video Foundation, the Industrial Development

Corporation, and the Department of Trade and Industry – it was only from 2004 onwards that the investment began bearing fruit.

The success of the new waves of films produced during this time was illustrated by the international recognition and wide acclaim that they received. Many of these films were nominated for major awards such as the Golden Bear Award, the Etalon de Yennenga and the Oscar. There was also, during this time, a remarkable increase in the number of co-productions in South Africa. For that reason I identified the five-year period that marks the first half of the second decade of democracy in South Africa as significant and worthy of investigation, because of a notable shift in film production in South Africa and the country's consequent increased international visibility in the world of cinema. It was important therefore to examine the trend in filmic work ten years after the advent of democracy in South Africa.

The study concentrates on three of the most popular films, namely *Yesterday* (Roodt, 2004), *Tsotsi* (Hood, 2005) and *Jerusalema* (Ziman, 2008), that seem to afford significant narrative space for Black women and provide a lens through which to view post-apartheid issues in South Africa. Since the period during which these films were made represents an important phase in the history of South Africa, an investigation of these films seeks to facilitate an understanding of how gender, class and race relations and the complexity of contemporary South African society

are re-envisioned cinematically against the framework of a violent past of colonialism and apartheid.

The depiction of Black women as housewives, house servants and/or as being incompetent, ugly, funny, dull, immoral, uncivilised, flighty, moody, lazy, indolent, voluptuous, promiscuous or docile and dependent on the male head of the household for survival has a long history (Courvelle, 1993; Ukadike, 1994; Kaplan, 1997; hooks, 1999; Ndlela, 2005; Ogunleye, 2005; Vambe, Chikonzo & Khan, 2007). Films produced during the times of colonialism and apartheid – *The Zulu's Heart* (Griffith, 1908), *The Great Kimberley Diamond Robbery* (Leonard, 1910), *De Voortrekkers* (Shaw, 1916) and *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (Uys, 1980) – are especially conspicuous in their problematic representation of Black people.

However, according to Botha (2003), the new wave of films (post-apartheid films) has been progressive in terms of their portrayal and reflection of South Africa. From this vantage point, one would thus assume that these new films would challenge the stereotypical images of Black women that colonialism and apartheid appear to have entrenched. Nonetheless, one cannot rule out the possibility that some of the stereotypes might have survived the rupture brought about by the 1994 democratic dispensation in South Africa, and that may be further consolidated in these films.

Another persistent representation that this study identifies as problematic is that of a passive Black woman, who is usually in the background when important activities take place, for example, when important issues are decided upon and where she does not feature as an active participant. For instance, in *Red Dust* (Hooper, 2005), not one of the films considered as a key text for this study, Black women feature in the background as part of the mob which *toyi-toyis*[1] outside the courts where the case involving apartheid activists (all males) is argued by lawyers (White woman and White men). This may be unsurprising, considering the context of White/male superiority and male patriarchy in Black society. Given the fact that the film revolves around the Truth and Reconciliation amnesty hearing involving an assassinated anti-apartheid activist, Steve Sizela, whose mother we see briefly in various scenes sobbing or listening to the Commission's deliberations, there is a basis for questioning why Black women are marginalised in this film. In this instance, Black women are present but only in a facilitating role, which takes place in the background, as opposed to other groups such as Black males, White women and White males, who are given significant narrative space in the film. Thus, the kind of portrayal referred to above becomes problematic in the sense that it is likely to entrench rather than challenge gendered and racist stereotypes and hegemonic notions such as Black women not being suitable for any meaningful role other than as housekeepers or domestic workers.

[1] *Toyi toyi* is a kind of demonstration characterised by chanting, clapping and dancing, popular in public protests and marches in South Africa, particularly during the apartheid years.

At one level this study seeks to examine how post-apartheid films have advanced in terms of the portrayal of Black womanhood, particularly in terms of the multiple injustices they habitually had to suffer. There is a consensus amongst mass media scholars that media representation plays a major role in the production and reproduction of stereotypes and in affirming hegemonic attitudes, and that when audiences are constantly exposed to a particular image or narrative, they are more likely to start believing it (McQuail, 1993; DeFleur & Dennis, 1996; Lueck, 2006; Motsaathebe, 2009; 2011a; 2011b). This means that the image popularised by the media is more likely to become a reference point against which reality is interpreted. It must be noted, however, that this does not necessarily imply that all audiences turn out to be passive consumers of media information absorbing everything that the media present without questioning and decoding it in line with their previous experience, knowledge and attitude (as proponents of the magic bullet and agenda-setting theories would like us to believe). Nonetheless, previous studies suggest that the media can influence popular thinking and reproduce stereotypes (McQuail, 1993; DeFleur & Dennis, 1996; Lueck, 2006; Motsaathebe, 2009; 2011a; 2011b).

This study also hopes to contribute to explicating the position of Black women in South Africa so that South African Black women are not simply perceived as strictly synonymous with American Black women. In that sense, the study endeavours to provide a theoretical account of Black South African feminism as distinct from other feminisms. This conceptualisation is crucial given that South

Africa experienced the double tragedy of both colonialism and apartheid, in addition to the fact that women in developed countries such as the United States of America have different privileges compared to women in least developed countries such as South Africa, and could therefore have different preoccupations and boundaries. For this reason some of the crucial literature on American Black women referred to in this study is used circumspectly only to draw parallels where they exist, and even then with due regard for the merits and demerits of each case. This is to ensure that South African women examined in this study are not simply equated with their American counterparts in spite of their different socio-political contexts.

### 1.1 Aims of the study

In summary, this study focuses on cinema, feminism and related issues of classism and racism, and thus explores the intersection of these sets of practices and issues. In terms of mapping its specific parameters, the study:

1) evaluates how Black women are represented in contemporary films which have been hailed as "progressive texts" (Botha, 2003). Thus, the aim is to see if the films made in the post-apartheid era have advanced in terms of their portrayal of Black women, or whether some stereotypes still persist;

2) advances the use of a multiperspectival analysis that draws from semiology as opposed to the traditional content analysis that tends to focus on the

text as self-contained and autonomous. Hence this study takes context into account as also generating the meaning of the text. It is argued in this study that the application of an intersectional approach that concentrates on the simultaneous operation of gender, race and class is well suited to an analysis of the depiction of a group as complex as Black women. This particular approach also brings into focus the attribute of class, which is increasingly neglected in media analysis. The study demonstrates the usefulness of such an approach in gaining an insightful and holistic understanding of Black women's conditions, experiences, identities, needs and aspirations, especially as envisioned in the media; and

3) contributes to the existing body of literature on Black women in South Africa in terms of explicating the complexity of this group, both within society and in its media representation, and offers a clear understanding of the subtleties and nuances of Black women's lives.

## 1.2 Rationale and disciplinary origin of the study

South African cinema from 1906 to the 1990s seems to have established a multiform, racist narrative (to use Foucauldian terms), while cinema since 1994 seems to have struggled to provide an equally multiform, anti-racist counter-narrative. Of course, the issue of gender in this dialectic is particularly ambiguous and complex, given the intersectionality of the gendered groups themselves. The study was prompted by what I see as a continued stereotypical representation of

Black women in the medium of film in South Africa. I argue that the presence of Black Female characters in the films analysed denotes an absence of some sort since it restricts them to roles that are generally regarded as insignificant in society, hence I use the phrase "presence as absence. Apart from studies on literary texts, there is currently no detailed study that has exclusively examined the filmic portrayal of Black women in an intersectional manner as attempted by this study.

The study focuses on the representation of Black women because historically Black women have experienced a triple oppression: firstly as women; secondly as Blacks and thirdly as the economically dispossessed. I argue that this triple oppression is both reflected and further entrenched by the media, including films. Generally, the medium of film has stereotyped Blacks (hooks, 1992; Baker-Kimmons, 2003; Vambe et al., 2007) and its portrayal of Black women has been even more disparaging, hence the imperative to see how this group is depicted in post-apartheid films ten years after the advent of a supposedly non-racial and non-sexist democracy in South Africa. As Baker-Kimmons (2003:2) observes: "A major component in the maintenance of Black female subordination is the perpetuation of racialized stereotypes produced and disseminated through the mass media." In her study *Urban Working-Class Black Women's Resistance to Stereotypes*, Baker-Kimmons (2003) examines the relationship of Black female domestic workers and ideological control, as manifested through racial stereotyping and notes that Black women do resist the racialised images that proliferate in the mass media as methods of ideological control. This finding supports the fact that while the media have the potential to influence audiences, audiences are not simply passive consumers of

mass media messages, as they do bring into play their own perceptions and ideas about what is presented in the media.

In the broadest sense this study examines and describes the varying depictions of Black women in South African cinema, at once attending to signs of stereotypes, objectification and misrepresentations, improvements (if any) and continuities. Since the study looks at Black women in South Africa, a key aspect of this work is to interrogate the complexities and subtleties of this group in a transforming South African society, highlighting its race, gender and class concerns and thereby enriching the literature on Black women beyond what has been theorised, particularly by Black American feminist scholars such as Bobo (1982); Hill-Collins (1990) and hooks (1992, 1999, 2000). Unravelling Black womanhood in different contexts is crucial in ensuring that Black women in different locations are not seen as strictly homogeneous. In this sense the study looks at the notion of Black womanhood within the emergent debates as theorised by African scholars such as Lewis (1992)**;** Ukadike (1994); de la Rey (1991; 1997); Gqola (2001a; 2001b) and Essof (2001), among others. As Gqola (2001a:15) puts it, "The task of representing Black women in post-colonialism is challenging since it demands from us that we create and re-fashion forms of representation which continue to break new grounds."

Gqola's observation reverberates with the concerns raised in this study, which, at one level, endeavours to explicate Black womanhood in a way that attempts to break away from the kind of theorisation that simply sets up Black women against

other gender and racial groups. I see this divergent approach as crucial as it deconstructs what Crenshaw (1993:209) refers to as a "single-axis framework, which contributes to further marginalisation of Black women in feminist theory and in anti-racist politics".

In terms of disciplinary origins, this study is primarily situated within feminist media studies, although it draws from other intersecting areas in its explication of the notion of Black womanhood. Mainstream feminist film theory had previously been conspicuous in its failure to deal with filmic representation of Black women. The deafening silence on the subject of Blackness in the filmic media prompted hooks (1999:315) to pose the question: "Why is it that feminist film criticism, which has most claimed the terrain of women's identity, representation, and subjectivity as its field of analysis, remains aggressively silent on the subject of Blackness and specifically representation of Black womanhood?" In terms of theoretical framing, it is hoped that the major contribution of this study will be its attempt to present a new perspective on the notion of Black women within the South African context, which was afflicted with the double tragedy of both colonialism and apartheid. I deem such a perspective critical in informing film criticism from a Black feminist point of view.

### 1.3 A brief plot summary of selected films

For the sake of clarity, this section provides a brief synopsis of the films selected as case studies in order to place the discussions in this study within a comprehensible context. I essentially provide a sense of the key characters' main stories and the thematic concerns of the films. Otherwise, the detailed descriptions are provided in Chapter 3. In choosing these films, I was interested in those that appear to provide a lens into some of the issues that women in general, but especially Black women, grapple with. I was further intrigued by the way in which these films seem to accord a brief but significant narrative space to Black women at certain critical moments, as well as the way in which they offer commentary on the plight of women.

Thematically the films analysed in this study allude to a number of strands denoting social injustices, unemployment, hope, women abuse, male-female relationships, master-servant relations, tradition versus modernity and the socioeconomic struggle within a bleak environment of poverty. The present study will examine, in particular, the portrayal of the following key Black female characters: Yesterday (Leleti Khumalo) in *Yesterday*, Miriam (Terry Pheto) and Pumla Dube (Nambitha Mpumlwana) in *Tsotsi,* and Lucky's mother Mama Kunene (Gladys Mahlangu) in *Jerusalema.*

Written and directed by Darrell Roodt, *Yesterday* (2004) tells the story of a married

mother living alone with a young child in a remote village. It deals with the difficulties of raising children in a poverty-stricken environment; the challenges of getting proper health care; an absent husband (because of the migrant labour system) who denies his culpability in infecting Yesterday with HIV but is the first to succumb to the illness; the social ostracising she experiences; and the strength and dignity with which she bears increasingly difficult odds.

Directed by Gavin Hood, *Tsotsi* (2006) explores topical issues of crime, HIV/AIDS, child and spousal abuse. The film focuses on the fast-lane life of a young Black boy who runs away from his abusive father after his mother dies of HIV/AIDS. In his new life in the streets, the boy acquires a new name 'Tsotsi', which means a thug or gangster. When he is introduced to the viewer at the beginning of the film, he is a fierce leader of a small group of thugs which goes around robbing people, often viciously hurting them. Tsotsi's sensitive side is revealed when he decides to look after the child that he discovers in the car he hijacks. A young unemployed mother, whom Tsotsi coerces to breastfeed the baby, ultimately convinces him to return the child to its parents.

Set against the backdrop of violence, *Jerusalema* (2008) is based on a screenplay written and directed by Ralph Ziman. It renders commentary on the frustrations of the dream deferred and what happens when the dream of liberation fails to materialise. It is about a promising student who has university admission but experiences financial constraints and therefore sees increasingly risky (illegal) jobs

as his only option for survival. He is raised by his unemployed mother who struggles on a daily basis to provide for the boy and her other siblings. The story is told from the perspective of the main character, initially portrayed as an honest and good boy, who dreams of furthering his studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. We get to know the young man when he is about to complete his high school studies. He is offered admission to the University of the Witwatersrand but fails to secure a bursary, which means that he will not be able to study as his single mother is unable to support him financially. His only alternative is to find a job, but with the high employment rate, it seems unlikely that a young and inexperienced boy from the township will get any decent job. He is enticed by his friend's brother whom he looks up to as a role model because he owns flashy cars and carries cash around with him. As a result of this and his circumstances, he gets involved in a host of illegal activities.

### 1.4. A brief overview of the cinematic history of South Africa

Since this thesis is based on the convergence of two perspectives – the diachronic (South African cinema history) and synchronic (the critical insights arising from the analysis of selected post-apartheid films) – it is crucial to establish the salient features of South Africa's cinema history that informs the subsequent analysis of the films made from 2004 to 2008. In addition to a brief history of cinema, this section also presents a clear periodisation of South African cinema and the filmic

activities during and after the interregnum period from 1989 to 1994, which forms a brief but important transition to the democratic period. The section provides a succinct articulation of the dominant phases of South African cinematic history, while also highlighting the political context in which these films were made and the historical influence of other art forms. For example, Black Consciousness had virtually no direct influence on South African cinema of the 1970s, but had a significant impact on drama, literature and music, which, in turn, has influenced the counter-narrative of post-1994 cinema (D. Kerr, personal interview, 2009). It is widely acknowledged that one of the significant developments that the Black Consciousness Movement accorded South African theatre was identity. For instance, Steadman (1994:13) argues that:

> Black consciousness enabled the practitioners of Black theatre to create a 'structure of feeling' within their plays and performances commensurate with the larger mythology of Blackness prevailing amongst audiences during the groundswell of consciousness-raising in the formative years of Black Consciousness Movement.

This section provides a nuanced history of film under apartheid highlighting the fact that there was also a significant anti-apartheid film tradition, which was of course suppressed inside South Africa. This is important to discuss so that an impression is not created that there was only one kind of film tradition in South

Africa during the apartheid years. One of the key questions addressed in this section is: how does the medium of film influence our understanding of the South African political and socio-cultural landscape as well as the country's hetero-normative tendencies throughout these years? In my discussions of the films during these particular periods, I am as much interested in what is not represented as in what is actually represented. As Kuhn (1985) observes, silences, absences and repressions are crucial in structuring the ideology operating within the text. I argue that these films reflect aspects of the political, cultural and social dynamics of South African society, but they are all laden with the stereotypes of these periods and express a version of the South African political situation inherent during that time. There is a clear indication of the interplay of political control and cultural representation present in these films, as well as a long lineage of colonial representation and its continuing resonance throughout the phases of the political epoch that I have periodised.

For a long time the media in South Africa were used as a tool to promote colonialism. After 1948 the apartheid government also used the media to further apartheid ideals and consolidate its hegemony. Films, in particular, were used to convey sentiments and themes which manifested as a symbol of the apartheid government's supremacy. According to Maingard (2007:117), "films render the national visible or meaningful for viewers through the inscription of ideology by the filmmakers". Maingard's view here reiterates the claim I make in this study that filmmakers play a critical role in helping to either construct or deconstruct a certain

ideological position. The history of film production in South Africa reveals that most films that attempted to challenge the status quo were banned and the filmmakers of such films were harassed by agents of the apartheid government (Tomaselli, 1989; Botha, 2003). A brief history of cinema in South Africa helps to understand some of the issues that will be raised in this study. I suggest that the history of cinema in South Africa can be divided into four dominant phases, namely: (1) the colonial phase (pre-1948), (2) the apartheid phase (1948–1989), (3) the pre-democratic phase or transitional period (1989–1994) and (4) the post-apartheid phase (from 1994 onwards).

### 1.4.1 The colonial phase (1652–1948)

South Africa was colonised by the Dutch and British during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although most film studies state that the first films were viewed in South Africa in 1896, Neil Parsons (2002) maintains that South Africa was certainly one of the first countries in the world to see sound motion pictures when the first kinetoscopes were opened to the public in Herwood's Arcade on the corner of Pritchard and President Streets in Johannesburg in 1895. While the kinetoscopes did not allow for group viewing, as is the case with cinema, the moment nonetheless reflects South Africa's early involvement in the experimentation with moving pictures, which led to the development of cinema. Thus, kinetoscope was an imported British technology.

One of the early films about South Africa that followed this moment was *The Zulu's Heart* (1908) directed in the United States by D.W. Griffith (Peterson, 2003). This was followed by Robert Z. Leonard's *The Great Kimberley Diamond Robbery* in 1910. According to Gutsche (1972:108), *The Great Kimberley Diamond Robbery* was so well received that "by the middle of 1910, the importance of cinema as a popular amusement was such that the press throughout South Africa daily dedicated columns to the opening of new theatres, the changing of programmes in established pictures, the advent of new films". *The Great Kimberley Diamond Robbery* was followed in the same year by *The Cape Town Pageant* (1910), which was "filmed and screened extensively all over the country to celebrate the Act of Union". This was followed in 1913 by the production of film snippets of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), which had been fought between the British government and the two Boer Republics (Transvaal and the Free State) in South Africa. Many of these were fake propaganda films. The war was the culmination of a protest by the Boers against British rule.

During that time Black South Africans and Black women in particular did not play any central role either as filmmakers or as actors. Highlighting one of the factors that limited the participation of Black South Africans, Peterson (2003:44) puts it this way: "Despite its potential to reach a larger audience than theatre, cinema's expense and its preoccupation with consecrating White supremacy and fixing Africans as primitive pastoral people meant that it was actually less accessible to the African intelligentsia." The first weekly cinema newsreel, *African Mirror*, was

also screened in 1913 (Gutsche, 1972). While a number of Black South Africans also participated in the war as "non-enlisted soldiers, trench diggers, scouts, dispatch runners, cattle-raiders, drivers, labourers and trackers, and they were used in the construction of forts, the transportation of balloons that were used for reconnaissance work, and also as *agterryers* and auxiliaries", their involvement is not often documented (Nkuna, 2009: no pagination).

According to Masilela (1991), the use of film as a new medium for propaganda was particularly exploited during the Anglo-Boer War. In 1912 the African National Congress (ANC) was formed under the name South African Native National Congress (SANNC) with a view to uniting all Africans and mobilising them in a strong front to fight racial discrimination and oppression. While the ANC had nothing to do with the film industry per se, its formation highlighted a disgruntlement with the injustices that accompanied colonialism, most of which later became manifest in various filmic themes, for example, oppression, racism, social injustice and the struggle for liberation.

In 1916 Isidore Schlesinger built the Killarney studios which began producing a series of films about South Africa. One of the major films made during this time was *De Voortrekkers* (1916). Hees (2003) describes this film as the most significant film of this period. He notes that prior to the making of this film most films shot in South Africa were "shot from an exclusively British point of view (Hees, 2003: 51). According to Masilela (1991), the making of this film was shaped

by the historical conditions of the First World War. Masilela's observation affirms the assertion that the medium of film is influenced by its socio-political environment. Typical of the racist mainstream discourse, the film depicted Blacks as primitive, brutal and barbaric, while Whites were portrayed as kind and compassionate. This portrayal is confirmed by van Zyl (1980:27), who observes that the film had in terms of characters, "the trekkers and the missionaries, who are White, Protestant, honest, loyal, concerned with the goodwill of their families and society and Dingane[2] and his tribe, who are Black, bloodthirsty, and barbaric". This resonates with colonial historiography which downplayed the role of Blacks and included them only for the purposes of vilification, portraying them for example as savages, dull and uncivilised creatures (Peterson, 2003; Vambe et al., 2007). This point also highlights the problem of racial and gendered exclusion in the film industry which resulted in the majority of South African films being made largely by White, middle-class men.

According to Peterson (2003), other key films produced during this time included: *A Zulu's Devotion* (1916), *Symbol of Sacrifice, Lost City of Gold, King Solomon's Mines* (all 1918) and *Prester John* (1920). However, these films were mainly produced from a White perspective and generally denigrated Blacks. Peterson (2003:41) likens these films to the "reconstructions of frontier history, representations of the onward march of civilization under the unlikely alliance of the British and Afrikaner". Several factors accounted for the limited involvement

[2] Dingane, also spelt Dingaan, succeeded King Shaka as king of the Zulu people from 1828 to 1840, following Shaka's assassination, which Dingane orchestrated.

of Africans in filmmaking during this time. One of these factors relates to the economic imperative governing the production of films:

> Since the making of motion pictures required extensive capital and because the technology was beyond the means and control of Africans, the ultimate effect was to locate Africans on the margins in all areas of filmmaking. Screenplays produced in South Africa celebrated the adventures of the empire or the post-Union oligarchy (Peterson, 2003: 44).

Even in terms of cinema viewing, ticket pricing meant that Blacks, who generally earned low salaries, could not afford to go to the cinemas. Furthermore, movie theatres were concentrated in the cities where Blacks were sojourners as they were not permitted to live there. However, around the 1920s, there was some minimal activity by Black people in the field of film, even though most studies on the sociology and history of film in South Africa often do not mention the role of Blacks during the early days of film in the country. For instance, Sol Plaatje – political activist, journalist and author – used the medium of film to educate and mobilise African communities. On his return from America in 1923, he ran and operated a mobile cinema (Peterson 2003:39).

Plaatje's film distribution reached as far afield as Bechuanaland (Botswana), where he used local chiefs to expand his distribution networks (Parsons, 2002). For this

reason, Masilela (2003) attributes film culture in South Africa in general particularly among Blacks to the New African Movement, which emerged after the Anglo-Boer War. As one of the founders of the movement, Plaatje showed documentary films in South Africa and Bechuanaland about the achievement of a similar movement by the name of the New Negroes in the United States. According to Masilela, the New African Movement leaders were impressed with the achievement of their counterparts in the United States and wanted to emulate their actions in the liberation and cultural struggle. However, Masilela's observation has been questioned for ignoring the dialogical nature of the intellectual exchanges between African intellectuals on the continent and their African-American counterparts.

An important exception to films that disparaged Blacks was *Africa Today* (1927), which was a series of documentaries on the impact of colonialism on Africans. The series was not funded by the government. It was commissioned by European missionaries. Peterson (2003) has commended *Africa Today* as comprised of "authentic African documentaries," because the stories were a genuine exploration of the lives of ordinary South Africans during colonialism. In the same year there was a production of another important film, *Zeliv* (1927). According to Peterson, the impetus for this film lies in an ethnographic study of the Zulus that was conducted by Lidio Cipriani, an academic from the University of Florence. *Zeliv* premiered in Johannesburg in 1929 under the title *Witchcraft,* and later under the title, *Siliwa the Zulu.* The 1930s saw the production of a series of films including

*They Built a Nation/Die Bou van 'n Nasie* (1938). Commissioned to coincide with the celebration of the centenary of the Great Trek[3], the film renders commentary on the White settlement in South Africa. The representation of women in this film is overly problematic as women are not accorded any significant narrative space in the film.

### 1.4.2 The apartheid phase (1948–1986)

When the National Party came to power in 1948, apartheid – identified by Derrida (1985: 281) as "the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world" – was officially legislated. By then South Africa was already beset by racial oppression, discrimination and vast inequalities in wealth. In spite of the pervasiveness of the racial discrimination, a milestone was reached in 1949 when the first South African film with an all-Black cast, *Jim Comes to Joburg* (director Donald Swanson), was released. Dolly Rathebe featured in this film as a singer. In the 1950s the Afrikaners aggressively began investing in the film industry, a move which continued up until the 1970s, when the government started taking control of cinema and funding the film industry.

Serious censorship was a feature of the Nationalist government's cultural policy as it began clamping down increasingly on any opposition. Censorship was enforced by the Censor Board through the National Censorship Act, which had been passed

[3] The mass exodus (1835/1836) of Boers from the Cape colony into the interior of South Africa due to their dissatisfaction with the British colonial authorities. They were particularly disgruntled about the Emancipation Act of 1833 which prohibited slavery.

earlier in 1931 before the National Party took over. The Nationalist government used this Act extremely effectively, banning an array of anti-apartheid films which included *Come Back, Africa* (Lionel Rogosin, 1959), described by Masilela (1991: para.15) as "undoubtedly the highest achievement of film culture in South Africa". *Come Back, Africa* was banned the same year it was made and was only unbanned in South Africa during the pre-democratic phase in 1988. This particular film was shot in Sophiatown, a place that was a vibrant intellectual and cultural hub in the face of a repressive apartheid regime. Explaining why Sophiatown was such an important site of the South African struggle and popular culture, Baines (2003:42) puts in it this way: "The mythology of Sophiatown was constructed primarily by the so-called Sophiatown set – a small group of journalists and writers who formed the township's intelligentsia." Baines is referring here mainly to journalists such as Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba and Bloke Modisane, who wrote for *Drum, a* leading anti-apartheid publication. Through their writings in a variety of genres, which featured in magazines, novels, short stories, the "Sophiatown set" constructed a New Urban African identity (Baines (2003: 5). Although the writings that came of out of Sophiatown during this time was critical of oppression, it contained gendered stereotypes that seem to reflect the Black patriarchal attitude. For example, Rorich (1989) singles out the representation of women as cover girls and beauty queens in *Drum* as some of the gender stereotyping of the hetero-normative society that sees women as sexual objects.

According to Tomaselli (1989), the fact that Blacks were not represented on the

censorship board meant that many films that were critical of apartheid, especially those whose themes were galvanised from the Black perspective, were not approved. Nonetheless, some of the critical films escaped censorship. This can be ascribed, in part, to the Appeal Board, which was more tolerant of the Black voice. Subsequently, the number of critical films passed by the board increased as the government realised that it was necessary to consolidate its position to encompass the broader South African society. According to Tomaselli (1989:26), "the greater Black-White interaction was allowed to reflect itself in the media as a means of socialising the wider society into accepting political change."

Generally, the tendency of film in key political moments, such as the women's anti-pass march of 1956 and the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960, has been to underplay the role of women. The 1956 march was especially important in that it defied the perception that women were not active in the political struggle and that they were not brave enough to confront the oppressive political system of the time. The pass law had required Black men to carry identity books, called a 'pass', at all times, and this was later extended to include women. This incident is one of many instances indicative of the role that women, in general, and Black women, in particular, played in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. The role of women is generally not accorded the same narrative space in mainstream films in South Africa compared to independent films, especially those produced by women including films such as *You Have Struck a Rock* (May, 2004). This woman-produced film documents the role of women in the struggle against racial

discrimination in South Africa, focussing on the women's campaign of the 1950s against the pass law system. The film bears testimony to the strength and resolve of South African women, qualities which were also required for their day-to-day struggle as wives, mothers and daughters. The fact that it is a woman-produced film is also significant, in that women filmmakers approach issues differently with regard to highlighting women's contributions in the political struggle compared to male producers, particularly those operating within the mainstream/malestream audiovisual media (Motsaathebe, 2010a).

Furthermore, critical moments in the struggle were captured and re-lived through films. For example, the arrest of Nelson Mandela in 1962 was captured in the films *Rivonia Trial* (1966), *Mandela* (Angus Gibson & Jo Menell, 1996) and the *Colour of Freedom* (Bille August, 2007), while the film *Cry Freedom* (Richard Attenborough, 1987) is based on the 1977 death in detention of Steve Biko, a founder of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). With multi-award winner African-American actor Denzel Washington starring as Steve Biko, this film attempts to expose the apartheid police's involvement in the murder. The film shows how the apartheid government ferociously tried to deny that Biko was killed by the police, claiming instead that he had committed suicide. In this way, the film helps viewers to understand what happened and thus supports the argument that the medium of film influences our understanding of history.

Although *Cry Freedom* was well received for its attempt to expose the atrocities of apartheid, one of the key concerns regarding the issues of representation in *Cry Freedom* is the way in which women are only used in the films as facilitators of the events in the story. Woods' wife Wendy (Penelope Wilton) and Biko's wife Ntsiki (Juanita Waterman) together with the young Black female doctor Mamphela Ramphele (Josette Simon) are not accorded any significant narrative space in the film. This also applies to the Black female nurse (Xoliswa Sithole) and Woods's receptionist (Shelley Borkum), and is typical of the kind of representation that has a tendency to show Black women in supporting roles only or as background 'material' (see Bogle, 2003; Motsaathebe, 2009).

*Cry Freedom* has also been criticised for what some people see as an attempt to tell the story of Black people in South Africa through the prism of a White perspective by portraying Black characters in the films as being dependent on Whites. For instance, Bogle (2003) characterises the film (*Cry Freedom*) as a "mess." He criticises it for focusing more on Biko's friendship with Woods "rather than telling enough about Biko or his wife or the beautiful young activist black doctor we meet early in the film" (Bogle, 2003: 301). Another critic, Davis (1996:103), argues that, "by making Biko look reliant on Donald Woods (a white South African journalist) for help, the film betrays the central tenet of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) which Biko passionately espoused."

The key objective of the BCM was to restore Black pride, identity and self-reliance, and this was encapsulated in the slogan "Black man you are on your own" (Moodley, 1993a; Gqola, 2001b). The slogan reinforced resistance to White supremacy. However, Bickford-Smith (2003) takes issue with the concerns about Blacks being dependent on White characters as highlighted in the above paragraph. Disputing the claim that Black characters in *Cry Freedom* are given minor roles compared to White actors, he argues that "Black roles may be smaller [in the film], but Black characters rather than elite ones possess the authoritative voice on Africa/apartheid" (Bickford-Smith, 2003:28).

Thus for Bickford-Smith, the film depicts apartheid through the injustices and inequalities that characterised the life of Steve Biko (Denzel Washington) and not that much of Donald Woods's (Kevin Kline) life. Although the events of Woods's life are also reflected in the film, he learns about the extent to which apartheid affects Blacks through interacting with Biko, a move that grants an authoritative tenor to Biko's views and experiences. For example, when "Biko wanted to show Woods what a true township life was like he took him to one" (Brucker, 2003: 3). In reality, Woods was subsequently banned from South Africa for his attempt to expose the apartheid police's involvement in Biko's death, and his family was intimidated as was customary with apartheid security forces. This illustrates the point made earlier that the apartheid government suppressed films, and threatened filmmakers and anyone who attempted to expose the true state of affairs of apartheid in South Africa.

During the 1970s a small number of films critical of apartheid were made by filmmakers such as Ross Devenish who directed *Boesman and Lena* (1973) based on Athol Fugard's play. *Boesman and Lena* deals with the forced removals of Blacks/Coloureds by the National Party government. One of the early Black South African filmmakers, Simon Sabela, made history with his film *uDeliwe* (1974), which was the first locally produced film to be directed by a Black person. An archetypal journey of self-discovery, *uDeliwe* tells the story of a young Black girl adopted by a local teacher after her parents died. In Johannesburg, she ends up staying with a cleric until she finds a job as a domestic worker, and later finds a job in the fashion industry and gets married. Sabela's film was pivotal in that many films had been made by White directors telling Black people's stories and now, for the first time, a film was produced by a Black South African. The Publications Appeal Board which was, according Tomaselli (1989), sympathetic to the Black voice, was established in the same year (1974). Headed by Kobus van Rooyen, the Appeal Board allowed the screening of some of the films that would normally have been censored or banned. A South African online encyclopaedia attributes the Board's sympathy with the Black voice "mainly due to van Rooyen's more enlightened approach as head of the Appeal Board". Due to his efforts, some anti-apartheid films such as *Cry Freedom* (1987) which focused on the life and death of Steve Biko were released. Van Rooyen had his house bombed as a result (Pretorius, n.d.).

Notable anti-apartheid films made in the 1970s include the *Last Grave at Dimbaza* (Nana Mahomo, 1974). This was a documentary to provide commentary on apartheid South Africa with its inequalities and repressive laws, such as the pass laws and Bantu education[4] legislation, which ensured that Blacks received inferior education compared to Whites. It reflects the living conditions and the political and socioeconomic relationship between the Black and White populations in South Africa, underlining the stark contrast in their living circumstances, with Whites being extremely rich and Blacks extremely poor. This film also highlights the unhappiness of the oppressed Blacks through scenes depicting strikes and mass demonstrations. Usually this film would have been banned, but fortunately the newly established Appeal Board was determined to ban the film as it was important for the board to appear to be more 'liberal' to deflect criticism.

*How Long Must We Suffer* (1975) was directed by Black filmmaker Gibson Kente during that time. However, unlike *Last Grave* and *uDeliwe*, this film was banned and its creator arrested. *How Long* revolves around a refuse collector who struggles against the odds to educate his son Africa at a time when educational opportunities for Black children were subjected to restrictions by the government, which was determined to deny Black children quality education that would have made them

[4] The 1953 Bantu Education Act was one of the racist laws which brought the education of Blacks under the control of the government and subsequently extended apartheid to Black schools. Previously, most of these schools had been run by missionaries. Bantu education ended the relative autonomy of these schools and the government funding of Black schools became conditional on acceptance of a racially discriminatory curriculum administered by a new Department of Bantu Education.

equal with their White counterparts. The film reflects the way the government attempted to impose Afrikaans as a medium of school instruction.

These kinds of films were significant in two ways: firstly, in terms of their critical commentary against the apartheid system in South Africa and, secondly, in terms of their importance as the first films produced by Black people. This was crucial in presenting a different perspective from that of White directors, who, in many ways, were telling the stories from the margins of Black life. This is particularly relevant if we agree that the medium of film reflect prevailing conditions in direct and indirect ways. At that time, South African history was generally told from the perspective of the group in power, which asymmetrically imposed its ideas, its worldviews and perspectives as universal. This was worrying, especially in the context of South Africa which was a contested terrain in terms of the racial struggle that had dominated the history of this country for almost three centuries.

In the main, the suppression of critical films produced from the Blacks' point of view continued unabated until the 1980s, when the government started funding low-budget feature films for Black audiences. During that period, many film-makers experimented with new ideas, and in the process learned the necessary skills that they would later use to produce films that were critical of apartheid. The 1980s also saw the release of one of South Africa's internationally acclaimed comedies, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, directed by Jamie Uys in 1980. The film is a comical depiction of life in southern Africa and uses voice-over narration. One

conspicuous feature of *The Gods* is that it stereotypically portrays the San people as 'uncivilised creatures' who think that they are the only people on earth. The film industry remained virtually homogeneous and one-dimensional in its depiction of South Africa until the mid-1980s. Blacks were also conspicuously absent from the industry's regulatory bodies.

The exclusion of Blacks was strategic because Blacks were discouraged from making the films in the way they wanted to and from telling stories they would liked to have told, as evidenced by the harassment and arrests of filmmakers who tackled themes critical of apartheid. Blacks were also generally discouraged from taking any job that had some degree of authority, and their presence in the film industry was usually limited to menial jobs. This resulted in what Masilela (2007:14) calls "apartheid black cinema", which is "made by white South Africans (directors, cameramen, editors) on the basis of the dominant ideology of apartheid and fed to the black public sphere".

*A World Apart* (Christopher Menges, 1988) is another important film that tackles the political situation during apartheid in South Africa. The script for this film was written by Shawn Slovo, whose parents Ruth First[5] and Joe Slovo are well known for their role during the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Shawn Slovo reflects on the life of her family and the mayhem that they suffered at the hands of the apartheid government as a result of their support for the liberation struggle. In the film she looks at apartheid South Africa through her experience as a teenager

[5] Ruth First was killed by a parcel bomb while living in exile in Mozambique.

whose White parents are harassed by apartheid government police because of their conviction that apartheid was wrong.

The main character in *A World Apart* is a teenager who finds herself at odds with the world around her. She does not understand why her White friends turn against her and her White family becomes friends with Blacks and not with Whites. Again, she has to figure out why her family life in South Africa has to be disrupted as her father goes into exile and her mother is repeatedly arrested and harassed by police. Because of its rigour in tackling apartheid issues, the film won several awards – for best screenplay (BAFTA Film Award), best foreign film (Guldbagge; Independent Spirit Award) and sensitising viewers about human rights (PFS Award). What is interesting about this film is that it shows that Whites who did not support apartheid suffered the same fate as Blacks. The Slovos were harassed in the same way as Blacks whose anti-apartheid stance they supported.

### 1.4.3 The pre-democratic phase (1986–1993)

It is important to note that most critical films that escaped censorship had another problem – distribution. Major distribution companies such as Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro completely ignored such films, meaning that those films were seen by only a few South Africans. Skewed distribution patterns could also be linked to the patriarchal values of society, since the male-owned studios and companies

controlled film distribution. However, this changed in 1986, when the Film Resource Unit (FRU) was established to distribute African films across southern African countries with a view "to develop an audience for locally produced film in South Africa" (Ruigrok, n.d., para.1). The unit played a major role in showing and distributing critical films that were banned during apartheid, and it has continued to play a major role in the democratic South Africa as an alternative means of distribution. The fact that the unit was established during apartheid and continues to play a crucial role today could be seen as one of the continuities highlighted in this study.

Some of the critical films depicting the South African apartheid situation are films such as *Mapantsula* (Oliver Schimitz & Thomas Mogotlane, 1988), defined by Botha as "one of the first truly South African films made from a Black point of view" (2003:94). This film is another example of films that highlight the issues of gender, race and class raised in this study. The film deals with the apartheid struggle and daily activities and bleak environments of ordinary South Africans in the cities and townships, and the various acts of police brutality meted out to them, having been shot in the guise of a gangster film. Interestingly, in the film Pat (Thembi Mtshali), a domestic worker, is depicted as being doubly oppressed by both her boyfriend Panic (Thomas Mogotlane) and her employer. She tries to get Panic out of her life, but fails to keep him away. Her employer dismisses her and refuses to pay her last wage, which also frustrates her.

The way Pat deals with her problem offers perceptive insights into the problem highlighted in this study. For instance, Pat only manages to deal with her labour issue and her harassing ex-boyfriend effectively only after getting sexually involved with labour union leader Duma (Peter Sephuma). Seen against the backdrop of feminist film criticism, this could suggest that Pat is forced by a patriarchal and racist system to resort to sex as a bargaining tool, on the one hand. This could also be seen as representing the level of complete disempowerment of women in apartheid South Africa. On the other hand, this could be read as suggesting that Black female characters are incapable of solving their problems on their own. For this reason, Magogodi (2003:100) suggests that women in *Mapantsula* are "credited with nothing beyond their sexual power(lessness) or partnership in an African nationalism that is defined in masculine terms". Thus, although *Mapantsula* is often hailed as progressive in terms of its representation of Black characters, it failed to deliver a dynamic portrayal of Black women.

Other noteworthy films of the 1980s include *Place of Weeping* (1986) and *A Dry White Season* (1989). Directed by acclaimed South African director, Darrell Roodt, *Place of Weeping* deals with inequality and oppression during apartheid South Africa. Most importantly, the film addresses the contribution of women and the church in the fight against injustices. When a murder case involving a White farmer, who killed a Black worker, is swept under the carpet, it is the determination of a brave woman, Gracie (Gcina Mhlophe), and a local pastor that helps bring the perpetrator to book. Seen this way, this film represents a vital departure from the

habitual themes of colonial and apartheid cinema that generally celebrated male hegemony.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating (in the context of this study) films of the late 1980s was *A Dry White Season.* Directed by Euzhan Palcy, *A Dry White Season* (1989) is an adaptation of André Brink's novel which looks at police brutality and the violence that broke out during 1976. After his gardener Gordon (Winston Ntshona) and his entire family are killed by police, a White South African history teacher Ben du Toit (Donald Sutherland) decides to expose the security police for their obnoxious brutality, but he meets the same fate as his gardener at the hands of the police. However, like *Cry Freedom* (discussed earlier), *A Dry White Season* has been faced with the same criticism for portraying the Black condition from a White perspective. Davis asserts that "the film's director, Palcy, a Black filmmaker herself, had wanted to make a film from a Black point of view but found that Hollywood producers were not interested in films with Black characters playing leading roles" (1996: 109). So again, the system was a big obstacle that restricted the way stories are to be told.

Nonetheless, Bickford-Smith (2003) suggests that *Cry Freedom* and *A Dry White Season* remain two of the most influential films in terms of popularising apartheid history. Perhaps the most fascinating feature about the making of *A Dry White Season* is the manner in which the director framed some of the events described in the original text. For instance, some of the personal relationships such as the love

affair between the main character and the journalist are downplayed in favour of the broader political issues that are accorded more space in the film. As Bogle (2003: 309) found, "the film attempted to make the black characters more pivotal to the story than simply as backdrops."

*A Dry White Season* film is also very important in the context of this study in that it is one of the only few films directed by a 'Black woman.' Bogle (2003: 309) thinks that by making this film Palcy became "the first black woman to direct a major studio production and also the first black director to shoot a mainstream production dramatizing the violence of South Africa's apartheid system." The fact that Palcy wanted "to make a film from a Black point of view but found that Hollywood producers were not interested" as highlighted by Davis (1996: 109), supports the point that is made in this study regarding the mainstream film industry being undergirded by certain colonial and racist narrative that privileges certain representations that hark back to colonial stereotypes.

In the same year that *A Dry White Season* (1989) was released, the Nationalist government began making serious commitments to liberal reforms. Under then president FW de Klerk, who took over from PW Botha in 1989, the government introduced inclusive liberal reforms, which included the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela (who had been in prison for over 25 years). Mandela's release subsequently became a subject of various films such as *Death of Apartheid* (Stephen Clarke, 1995), *Mandela* (Angus Gibson, 1996), *Invictus* (Clint

Eastwood, 2009), and *Goodbye Bafana* (Bille August, 2007) which I will discuss later. De Klerk and Mandela jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 for laying a firm foundation in the making of a new democratic South Africa. The brief period between 1989 and 1993 can be seen as a transitional phase because apartheid was slowly being dismantled and the grounds for the new democratic government firmly being laid.

### 1.4.4 The post-apartheid phase (1994 onwards)

Finally, in 1994 all South Africans voted in the first free and democratic election and Nelson Mandela became president. After 1994 there were a number of new and interesting developments in the film industry as the country realised the need to support the industry because of the potential role it could play in its representation of the South African experience. The year 1994 was subsequently hailed by Botha (2003:186) as "a landmark for the South African film industry". The mid-1990s saw the government taking more steps to revive the film industry, with more resources being allocated to help the industry stand on its own feet. Subsequently a number of platforms and networking opportunities were created for the local film industry. For instance, from 2002 to 2008 the country was host to the annual Cape Town World Cinema Festival and the Sithengi Film and Television Market.

The government has also recognised the film industry as one of the major earners of foreign currency and has put in place incentives to provide support for it. The

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) are all committed to capacity building and funding, among other things. Other measures include a rebate scheme for high-budget films of up to 25 per cent and other tax incentives for the film industry. One of these initiatives is the establishment of the NFVF, a statutory body mandated by Parliament to assist with funding, training and broader transformation in the film and video industry.

At the moment South Africa's film industry is a burgeoning one. This can be attributed to a variety of factors such as government support, which has resulted in more resources being allocated to revitalise the industry and making it competitive in the international market. This industry is increasing the international profile of South Africa as well as bringing in much-needed foreign exchange. Outside film companies are increasingly using South Africa as a filming destination, which is evidently cheaper in terms of production costs and also in terms of how much it has to offer owing to its imposing scenery, cosmopolitan culture, skills and resources (Film Commission). It now has three film bodies, namely the Cape Film Commission, the Gauteng Film Office and the Durban Film Office, which are meant to support the interests of this growing film industry.

Accordingly, these initiatives to support the film industry have begun to bear fruit with the production of some major films which have been garnering international awards in recognition of their qualities including the relevant issues that they highlight and the way in which they deal with them. Examples of these major films

include: *Yesterday* (nominated for an Oscar), *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* which won the Golden Bear Award, *Drum* which won the Etalon de Yennenga award, *Jerusalema* which was well received when it premiered in cinemas in 2008 and subsequently selected for consideration in the category of Best Foreign Film at the 2009 Oscars, and *Tsotsi* which won an Oscar in 2005 for Best Foreign Language Film and was nominated for the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film in 2006. *Tsotsi* also won the People's Choice Award at the Toronto Film Festival and a Truly Moving Picture Award at the Heartland Film Festival in Indianapolis in 2006.

There were other important films such as *God is African* (Akin Omotoso, 2003) which is about a Nigerian student who drums up support from South Africa to protest the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa, a popular Nigerian author and activist who was executed in 1995. Another important film, *Drum* (2004), was directed by one of South Africa's young Black directors and producers, Zola Maseko. *Drum* revolves around the lives and work of the early *Drum* journalists like Henry Nxumalo (American actor Taye Diggs), Can Themba (Tumisho Masha), Todd Matshikiza (Fezile Mpela) and Jim Bailey (British actor Jason Flemyng) in the historical Sophiatown known for its sophisticated youth culture in South Africa in the 1950s.

*Zulu Love Letter* (2004) is another significant film that captures the complexities of the post-apartheid society. Written by Bheki Peterson and Ramadan Suleman, and

directed by Suleman, the film centres on the life of journalist Thandeka Khumalo (Pamela Nomvete) and deals with the ambivalent feelings evoked by the effect of apartheid and the hopes for the new South Africa. It also highlights the way in which South Africa has attempted to become reconciled to its violent and traumatic past through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is depicted in the film as a quick-fix solution rather than a restorative one. Thandeka, who spent most of her life fighting apartheid, tries to reconnect with her deaf teenage daughter Simangaliso (Mpumi Malatsi), who was raised by her grandmother during Thandeka's absence. The film highlights the uncertainties of the future and the emotional and physical wounds inflicted by apartheid. It also raises the serious issue of people reflecting about what happened, but not how they were really affected by the events. For instance, Thandeka realises that as a journalist she has always distanced herself from her own story and this is reflected when she says: "I've written and said so much about what is happening around me, now I need to write about what happened to me." I find this film very refreshing in terms of its major character, Thandeka, who is a multidimensional character and seems to challenge the stereotypical portrayal of Black women in terms of nuance and complexity.

The year 2005 saw the production of films such as *34 South*, which is directed by one of South Africa's few Black (Indian) woman directors, Maganthrie Pillay. *34 South* is an archetypal journey of self-discovery that sees a group of Coloured people from Cape Town – considered an island owing to its vast distance from the

rest of the country – embarking on a journey to Johannesburg, a city synonymous with opportunities. After getting lost, the group ends up in Elim, a village inhabited by slave descendants. They decide to stay in order to discover more about their roots and aspirations in life.

*Straight Outta Benoni* (2005) is a comedy set in the small Gauteng town of Benoni. The storyline revolves around two friends who strive to make end meets to achieve their goal, namely fame and international recognition. *Son of Man* (2006) directed by Mark Dornford-May takes a different look at the story of Jesus Christ with a completely different theme and storyline. In the film Jesus (played by Andile Kosi) is portrayed as Black in contrast to conventional films which typically portray Jesus as White. The year 2007 saw the production of films such as *Big Fellas*. Directed by Phillip Roberts, *Big Fellas* is a comedy which deals with issues of entrepreneurship and Black Economic Empowerment. *Goodbye Bafana* (Bille August) is another 2007 film and deals with the life of Nelson Mandela (Dennis Haysbert) during his time in prison. *Footskating 101* (2007) features an enthusiastic youngster who becomes obsessed with skating as a form of sporting activity, which he takes to new levels.

From an ‘authorship’ and ‘intersectionality’ point of view as used in this study, perhaps one of the most important films produced in 2007 was *The World Unseen*, written and directed by Shamim Sarif. The film is also important in the context of this study because it focuses on issues of race, sexism and classism. It is about two

Indian-South African women who fell in love during the apartheid era, which was characterised by strong racist, sexist and homophobic sentiments. This film renders a clear case of the multiple oppression and intersectionality as used in this study, because the main characters are oppressed in three fronts firstly as women, secondly as non-white, and thirdly as lesbians. Their status also affects them economically, for example, they are not allowed to own business. Their relationship is deemed unlawful according to the laws in that patriarchal hetero-normative system. In addition one of the characters in the film marries a white man against the law that prohibited mixed marriages.

Another important film produced in 2009 that is worth mentioning is *Invictus* (Clint Eastwood, 2009) although it is not exactly a South African-made film if one looks at the companies involved in its production. This film's intrinsic importance lies in the fact that it tells a South African story in the new post-1994 dispensation. The film is centred on the so-called 'Madiba magic' during the early days of Nelson Mandela (played by US actor Morgan Freeman) as the South African President and the way he used the unifying ability of sports to unite Black and White South Africas during the 1995 Rugby World Cup that South Africa hosted, and ultimately won. *District 9* (Neil Blomkamp) is another fascinating film produced in 2009. This science fiction thriller focuses on the forced removals and segregation during apartheid. It is clear that the film was inspired by the forced removals, especially those from District 6 in Cape Town.

Also made in 2009 was *White Wedding*, a romantic comedy that deals in a comical way with the themes of love and the unexplained fear of Blacks held by Whites ('swart gevaar'). In the film this fear is confronted when Elvis (Kenneth Nkosi) and Tumi (Rapulana Seiphemo) experience a mechanical problem with their vehicle on their way to Elvis's wedding in Cape Town and wind up seeking help in a remote White conservative town in the Karoo. They end up in the company of Whites who, at first, are uneasy about their presence but later are more accepting and undertake to help them reach their destination. Eventually they have a good time together as they realise that their fear, cultivated through years of racism and socialisation, is unreasonable. Elvis manages to reach Cape Town for his wedding, but he arrives late. The bride Ayanda (Zandile Msutwana) meanwhile has been waiting impatiently for many hours and calls off the wedding. However, when Elvis finally arrives, she changes her mind and they get married in the Cape Town township of Gugulethu.

The year 2010 saw the release of another important film, *Life, Above All*. Directed by Oliver Schmitz, the film renders a critical perspective on life at the margins. It tells a story of a young girl (Khomotso Manyaka) who overcomes personal difficulties in a community that is not so supportive. Other films that have made an impact are the controversial comedies of South African filmmaker Leon Schuster, such as *Mr Bones* (2001), *Mr Bones 2* (2002), *Mama Jack* (2005) and *Schuks Tshabalala's Survival Guide to South Africa* (2010). At one level, these witty films appear to laugh back at the nation, something that was almost impossible for artists

to accomplish during apartheid because the situation did not permit it. Protest poet Mzwakhe Mbuli (1989) of United Democratic Front (UDF) fame highlighted this in his poem *Crocodiles* in which he wished for South Africa to gain freedom so that artists could explore themes other than oppression and discrimination.

## 1.5 CURRENT LITERATURE

Whereas there has been notable work done on post-apartheid films in South Africa, the representation of Black women in these films has not been extensively explored, particularly in an intersectional manner, which this study attempts. There are of course a few important efforts in the form of sections in monographs or chapters in edited books such as those by Balseiro and Masilela (2003), Tomaselli (2006), Botha (2007, 2012), Maingard (2007), Dovey (2009), and Ebrahim and Ellapen (forthcoming). For instance, Balseiro and Masilela's edited collection *To Change Reels: Film and Culture in South Africa,* consists of insightful articles that touch on the nerve of the present study such as Laura Twigs's analysis of racist/feminist nexus in the film *Jump the Gun* (Les Blair, 1996), which is especially insightful in the way that it takes issue with the male gaze as conceptualised by Laura Mulvey (1999). She finds that the representation in the film negates Mulvey's assertion that film was constructed for male pleasure.

According to Twigs (2003: 165), issues of "gender, race and economic class figure concurrently" with regard to the representation of the Black female character, Gugu

(Baby Cele). In another chapter Lucia Saks highlights an important issue regarding the fact that the South African film industry is struggling to attract local audience. She speculates that this could be ascribed to inadequate marketing and distribution strategies together with the fact that South Africans grew up on "a diet of American movies" (Saks, 2003: 144). I grapple with the issue of distribution later in this study when attempting to account for the popularity of the films analysed in this study. Another important chapter in this book is penned by wa Magogodi (2003) and deals with gender and masculinity in *Mapantsula* (Oliver Schimitz & Thomas Mogotlane, 1988).

Dovey's book *Adapting Violence to the Screen* (2009) explores post-apartheid films and how they reflect on contemporary South African society through themes of social injustice such as violence against women and children. Dovey maintains that African filmmakers are increasingly producing films which are distinctly different from other films produced elsewhere. She also questions whether "contemporary African adaptations are making positive, critical intervention in society" (2009:91). The book explicates moments of contradiction in these films, and Dovey's own personal experience in South Africa seems potent in enabling her to address the issues she raises from a more realistic perspective.

Tomaselli's *Encountering Modernity* (2006) is a diachronic and synchronic scrutiny of South African cinema and renders a fresh and thought-provoking perspective on post-apartheid cinema. The impetus for the book seems to lie in

Tomaselli's illustrious professional experience as one of the leading South African film scholars. As such, it is both a retrospective and progressive text, as Tomaselli (2006:2) himself puts it, the book "negotiates my experiences during the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, from modernism to postmodernism". As its title suggests, the book charts the way forward for film theory, interpretation and cultural studies. Interestingly, the author adopts a more Africanist stance suggesting that film theory and other lenses of analysis must be premised on African thought. Tomaselli candidly addresses critics of his earlier works, calling on filmmakers to correct Africa's image which has been distorted in the medium of film.

*Marginal Lives and Painful Pasts: South African Cinema after Apartheid* is a collection of articles by some of the prominent film scholars and filmmakers on "policy, structures, themes and new aesthetics" that abound in post-apartheid cinema (Botha, 2007:7). The book addresses sexuality issues, gender and racial stereotyping, marginalisation and exclusion. Further, this volume deals with documentary filmmaking and the way that genre portrays contemporary South Africa and the legacy of apartheid that continues to manifest in the film industry. Issues of representation, identity and marginalisation, social justice, post-apartheid realities, reconciliation and its related problems and opportunities are discussed.

Botha's latest book, *South African Cinema 1896-2010,* was published in 2012 and provides a periodisation of South African cinema, discussing the work of some of the South African filmmakers such as Jans Rautenbach, Manie van Rensburg and

Ross Devenish. The book further looks at filmmaking activities in South Africa throughout the 1980s until the present, highlighting the range of themes and salient aesthetics in these films. Lucia Saks (2010) contributes to the debates on race representation in her book *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa*. The book provides a critical appraisal of South African cinematic culture, paying particular attention to some of the key moments in the South African political history.

In *South African National Cinema* (2007) Maingard looks at the production context of selected key films in South African history ranging from the colonial era to the present times. Films such as *De Voortrekkers* (1916); *They Built a Nation/Die Bou van 'n Nasie* (1938); *Jim Comes to Joburg* (1949); *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1951); *Come Back, Africa* (1959); *Mapantsula* (1988) and *Tsotsi* (2004) are critically reviewed for their representation of race, identity and the notion of social realism. The forthcoming publication edited by Haseenah Ebrahim and Jordache Ellapen, sponsored by the NFVF and tentatively entitled *Cinema in South Africa, post-1994*, is a collection of critical essays on the film industry encompassing issues, debates and developments pertaining to cinema in South Africa in the post-apartheid period.

Another book worth mentioning is Sarah Yehle's *Perceptions of South Africa through Film* (2008). Written from an outsider's perspective, this book is a combined critical analysis and reception study of anti-apartheid films such as *Cry Freedom, A Dry White Season* and *Catch a Fire.* Yehle maintains that these films

were successful in exposing the devastation of apartheid to the outside world. I will not go into details about all these texts as I invariably refer to them under appropriate sections later on in the study. For now it suffices to say that overall these texts look at the disjuncture, continuities, realism and ingenuity in respect of themes, convention and structure, as well as the setting of these films, with important chapters that offer perceptive insights into the issues of race, media and gender which I investigate in this study.

## 1.6 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF STUDY

The research for this study explores the intersection of race, class and gender in the medium of film with special reference to three post-apartheid films as the primary focus of analysis. I find that theories of representation provide useful insights into why a particular group may be represented in a particular way in the media, while the history of South African cinema helps to provide a comprehensible context in terms of the background, the research problem, the socioeconomic conditions in which these films were made and the political landscape that shaped their production. As Botha (2002) notes, it is necessary that the new wave of South African films be examined for their representation of South Africa and its people. This study is significant, not only for revealing how feminist media studies have generally neglected to tackle Black womanhood within a range of contexts, which could contribute to a more nuanced exposition of this multifaceted group, but also

for examining how gender and class intersect in this medium.

Furthermore, I see this work as fundamental in that it is located at the centre of two sets of practices, namely feminism and cinema, and therefore combines what I deem to be two streams of scholarship. This presupposes a certain methodological tension linked to disciplinary clashes arising from the way that feminist film theory evolved, from literature to the arts, and the kind of multidimensional approach I use in this study. From this vantage point, this study posits that by applying this multiperspectival approach, it is essentially responding to what film scholars such as Ukadike (1995:4) characterise as "sterile theoretical frameworks that have impeded understanding of film works as pluralistic cultural art that demands a reassessment of critical canons and approaches".

## 1.7 Definition of Key Concepts

One of the important aspects of any critical study such as this one is the definition of key concepts. As Lather (1991:5) points out, "definition domesticates, analytically fixes, and mobilises pro and contra positions". To domesticate in this instance means to specify the meaning of a particular terminology that may have different meanings in different contexts. Failure to define some of the key concepts as applied in a study could pose problems if the concepts are open to other interpretations which may not make sense in the context of the study. It is therefore

crucial to specify from the start what is meant by potentially contentious concepts. The following section represents some of the key concepts considered as deserving special attention, as they are used constantly throughout the study.

*Black women:* In the context of this study the term 'Black women' refers particularly to African women in South Africa, and generally also to Indian and Coloured women. All these groups were classified as non-Whites but were accorded different privileges and statuses during the apartheid era. The term non-White is also tricky in that it presupposed that White was a standard against which all other racial groups had to be judged. Defining what is meant by 'Black women' is therefore crucial, as racial identity in South Africa is very porous and sometimes contested.

*Continuities:* This term is used in this study to refer to those cultural trends, images, sensibilities and motifs that survive from the apartheid period, for example, in the slapstick Afrikaans comedies, but also in the films that reprise the critiques of apartheid rarely found in apartheid-era films (outside the exile documentary tradition), but very importantly were present in the literature and performances based on the Black Consciousness novels of Alex La Guma and in magazines such as *Staffrider*.

*Intersectionality* generally refers to a kind of multidimensional analysis that examines complex relationships involving variables that function simultaneously. It

is used in this study from a feminist perspective to unravel the problems of race, gender and class that are often experienced simultaneously by Black women.

*South African films*: Some films about South Africa are made by non-South Africans, and often the question arises whether these films can be referred to as South African films. The same can be said of films made by South African exiles (Masilela & Balseiro, 2003). For the purposes of this study, however, a South African film is understood to be any film made about South Africa, but with a strong presence of South African actors and directors or producers, and this may include films made by South African exiles and some of the co-productions with the above characteristics.

*Post-apartheid films*: By post-apartheid films I refer to those films about South Africa made after the demise of apartheid, which officially ended with the democratic elections in 1994. In this study I focus in particular on those post-apartheid films made from 2004 by South Africans, that is, films set in South Africa, directed by local directors, and having local actors as the majority in the cast. I propose that these films might provide a lens into post-apartheid issues in contemporary South African society, since they were made at the end of a crucial decade marking South Africa's democracy after nearly 400 years of colonialism and apartheid.

## 1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This thesis is set out in six chapters. Chapter 1 provides a broad introduction to the study based on a brief but careful examination of the research problem and specific aims of the study. The chapter then proceeds to give a brief overview of the films analysed for this study before rendering a historical account of filmmaking in South Africa, providing periodisation for key films produced in South Africa since the inception of cinema in the early 1900s throughout the century until the present. The social, economic and political changes during this period are also described, particularly in relation to their centrality in Black women's lives in South Africa during both colonialism and apartheid. The chapter ends by providing an overview of the key concepts used throughout the study.

Chapter 2 discusses Black feminism and from that vantage point attempts to theorise Black womanhood in the context of South Africa. The discussion in this chapter provides a launch pad into the subsequent discussions, which deal with methodology and analysis of the selected films in subsequent chapters (Chapters 3 to 5) which render an extensive analysis of the films that form the focus of this thesis. The key focus of this chapter is to provide the kind of information that helps us to re-imagine Black womanhood in a transforming context such as South Africa. It also serves as a platform for discussing representation and stereotypes, together with semiology and intersectionality, as a way to create the critical framework used in the subsequent analysis of the selected films.

Chapter 3 elaborates on methodology based on the critical framework arising from Chapter 2, specifying key characters, specific scenes and elements that will form the focus of analysis. The chapter then provides some remarks about the selected films and justification for their selection. Included in these discussions are issues relating to genres, their conventions and iconography.

Chapter 4 examines gendered modes of representation linked to Black female characters. The question of looking relations is also discussed here in relation to Black female characters appearing in these films as prostitutes and strippers. Further, the chapter attempts to unravel the contested terrain of the male/female gaze, especially in the light of the homosexual masculinity/femininity dichotomy, which the Mulvian analysis seems to have ignored.

Chapter 5 examines portrayal of class and status as well as occupations and behavioural characteristics ascribed to Black women in the selected films. The main objective in this chapter is to see how much has changed or been carried over from colonial and apartheid cinemas in terms of the portrayal of this group. In other words, the chapter evaluates the extent to which the embodied practice of filmmakers signifies the conventions by which Black women are depicted, and how this remains an historical legacy of both colonialism and apartheid. In applying critical insights arising from the theoretical framework, the chapter mines categories that can be applied to survey film (and perhaps television) content as a

way of unravelling inequitable representation.

Chapter 6 provides a conclusion to the study by briefly reflecting on the challenges and opportunities in the South African film industry that became pertinent during the research. Essentially, the chapter provides grounds for the work that must be done to rehabilitate problematic signifying modes of representation as a way to transcend the *doxa* in which the representation is predicated on a certain logic which, in Grewal and Kaplan's view, "satisfies the demands of Western subjectivity and the ethnographic tradition" (2001:70).

# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Having provided a broad introduction to the study in Chapter 1, I now turn to the theoretical framework. In order to construct the critical lens that I use to analyse post-apartheid films I draw on Black feminism, theorisation of representation and stereotypes, filmic codes, and genres and their iconography. These aspects represent the key theoretical underpinnings that inform this study. I begin by providing an overview of Black feminism in order to foreground major issues that Black women grapple with. I then proceed to discuss the concept of representation, providing a sense of how representation is understood in this thesis and how it interlinks with stereotyping. In the process I take up the issue of the concept of intersectionality which has often been privileged in studies such as this one, and which is employed to examine a complex group such as Black women. From this vantage point, the chapter proceeds to discuss how this study of representation, with its exploration of the intersection of class and gender, fits into the broader field of feminist media studies.

Furthermore, I discuss the concept of hegemony, highlighting how certain images and patriarchal attitudes become an important part of hegemonic ideology in South Africa. I also highlight filmic codes focusing on genres and their iconography in terms of the way they inform the subsequent analysis of the selected films. Finally,

a summary of key feminist media studies research, chiefly film studies which have explored the representation of Black women, is provided.

## 2.1 Black Feminist Epistemology

It will be impossible to discuss Black women and their portrayal in film in any depth without making reference to Black feminism. In this section I trace the origins of Black feminism, its emergence in the context of the United States of America (USA) and proceed by discussing the key assumptions of the Black women's movement and the way in which it resonated with the condition of Black women in South Africa. I use this overview as a launch pad to investigate the problems experienced by Black women within mainstream liberation movements, particularly the experiences of the Black Women's Federation (BWF) within the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa as a way to draw attention to common issues that Black women grapple with in different geographical locations. In doing so, I acknowledge that while the struggle for Black women living and operating in various locations such as Africa, the USA, South America and the Caribbean are fundamentally undergirded by a shared historical legacy of patriarchy, racism and colonial exploitation, essentially they have faced different sets of challenges. Even the common issues that confront them are also not necessarily experienced in the same way, as Caribbean feminist scholar Barriteau (2010:1) points out: "As a black Caribbean woman and feminist, race and racism

do not enter my life and the lives of most Caribbean women in the identical trajectories that they do for minority women in racist societies."

For years the mainstream feminist movement was criticised for its perceived exclusion of Black women and homosexual women. These women felt that the movement did not address their unique issues and instead supported a classist White supremacy. For Black women in general, the feminist movement was not their only quarrel; they also had issues with the Black Liberation Movement (BLM), which they felt oppressed them on the basis of gender. They felt marginalised in terms of race by the feminist movement and in terms of gender by the liberation movement. In the context of America, this discontent resulted in the formation of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) in 1973, which aimed to address the multifaceted problem of race, gender, class and sexism. In what follows, I explore the NBFO, highlighting its central concerns, challenges and achievements. The key question I address relates to the legitimacy of the body of work such as Black feminist theory which emerged primarily in the context of the USA and its application to contexts such as that of South Africa, especially its bearing on the ever-changing roles of Black women in the latter country.

Therefore, I look at the commonalities of the struggle of Black women in America and those in South Africa as well as some of the notable absences which deserve attention. I want to see if there are any significant differences which may be obliterated by common labels as in the usage of a term as general as 'Black

women'. Thus, rather than engage with Black feminism in generalised terms, I theorise the position of South African Black women, which I proffer is informed by a different set of historical events and challenges compared to that of Black women in more developed countries, for example. In that sense I discuss the Black Consciousness Movement (whose discourse centred on the creed of Blackness in South Africa) in relation to the way it enabled or constrained Black women operating within this movement. Furthermore, I explore how the evolution of that discourse both challenged and reinforced some of the stereotypical connotations about Black women.

The Black Feminist Movement grew out of discontent with both the mainstream feminist movement of the 1960s and the Black liberation movement in the United States (Smith, 1983). This group felt that Black women were racially oppressed in the women's movement and sexually oppressed in the Black Liberation Movement. One of the founding members puts it this way: "The Black Movement was unable to provide me with the language I needed to discuss these matters [issues affecting Black women], I had no alternative but to become a feminist" (Powell, 1983: 277). Thus, as was popularly maintained, 'Black' was equated with Black men, while the notion 'woman' was equated with White women, a phrase which Hall, Smith and Scott (1986) adopted as the title of their edited collection, *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave.* As stated, this dissatisfaction led to the formation of the NBFO in 1973 (hooks, 1999).

The NBFO was significant in two ways. Firstly, it was the first time that Black women had come together with a formalised and organised voice. Secondly, the mere formation of such an organisation highlighted the seriousness of the multi-layered oppression experienced by this group and the fact that they would not sit back and allow oppression through an institutionalised mechanism. These women focused on the interconnectedness of the many prejudices that faced African-American women such as racism, sexism, classism, and lesbophobia. However, the lesbian community were not completely satisfied and, according to Burrell (2004), they believed that the NBFO had abandoned the movement's initial goals. This dissatisfaction, together with a series of unresolved murders of Black women, led to the formation of the Combahee River Collective (CRC) in 1974, which was hailed as one of the most important Black socialist feminist organisations of all time.

As Smith puts it, "The name 'Combahee River' was of historical significance, as it refers to the campaign led by Harriet Tubman who freed 750 slaves near the Combahee River in South Carolina in 1863" (Smith, 1983: 264). According to the collective's leader, Barbara Smith, they used the name as "a way of talking about ourselves being on a continuum of Black struggle, of Black women's struggle" (Smith, 1983: 264). The objective of this collective is perhaps best captured in the following paragraph from the statement issued by the collective in April 1977:

> We are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions. We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any one of these types of privilege have. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the White male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of White women, and anti-sexist, unlike those of Black and White men (Smith, 1983: 265).

The statement outlines the actual oppression of these women and the struggles they face both as individual women and as an organisation, and concludes by endorsing Black feminism as a political interest group fighting against the multiple and simultaneous oppressions facing all women of colour. From that vantage point, the Combahee River Collective clearly reflects the fundamental premise of Black feminism as the struggle against the simultaneous manifestation of race, class and gender in Black women's everyday lives. According to Brewer (1993:16), the key position of Black feminism includes the following propositions:

- critiquing dichotomous oppositional thinking by employing both/and rather than either/or categorisations;

- allowing for simultaneity of oppression and struggle;
- eschewing addictive analysis: race + class + gender;
- understanding the embeddedness and rationality of race, class and gender, and the multiplicative nature of these relationships: race × class × gender;
- reconstructing the lived experiences, historical positioning, cultural perceptions and social construction of Black women who are enmeshed in and whose ideas emerge out of that experience; and
- developing a feminism rooted in class, culture, gender and race interaction as its organising principle.

As can be seen from the above propositions, especially the third and the last, there is a resonance with the concept of intersection which will be discussed in detail later when I argue that intersectionality becomes instructive in unpacking the position of Black women in terms of race, gender, class and sexuality. The salient issues examined in this study, which arise from the portrayal of Black women in post-apartheid films, clearly resonate with Black feminism. While identifying male domination as a problem, Black feminism highlights racism as a major problem for Black women (Kitunga & Mbilinyi, 2006), who are not only oppressed by men (on the basis of their gender), but also exploited on the basis of their colour, class and economic status.

The foregoing concern is echoed by hooks, who notes that the "recent focus on the issues of racism has generated discourse but has had little impact on the behaviour of White feminists towards Black women" (2000:141). Thus, Black feminists support the argument that the production and reproduction of stereotypical images of Black women in the media stem from the deep-seated twin problem of race and gender, and that the images manifesting in the media are simply an outward expression of the dual oppression of Black women. Black feminism is thus well tailored to help examine the stereotypical images that may be present in the films under study. Another issue that is often neglected is that of sexuality. The reality of this issue represents one of the sites of oppression and violence for those women who may belong to the category of homosexual. Often these women may even face oppression from other women within the Black women's movements.

Black women have also grappled with similar problems within mainstream feminist movements and forums. For instance, De la Rey (1997:6) recalls her experiences as a Black woman in forums such as the Natal Women's and Gender Studies Network and the Africa Gender Institute colloquia: "One of the questions I as a Black feminist pondered in 1991 was: why were the White sisters so shocked, hurt and defensive when Black women voiced our anger, hurt and pain?" In saying this, De la Rey problematises the notion of shared understanding of racism in terms of the various experiences of different racial groups. She raises a very important issue of diversity which must be acknowledged to ensure that no group claims authority to speak for another.

### 2.1.1 Black feminism defined and common issues facing Black women

Since Black women themselves are not a homogeneous group, sometimes the terms 'Black woman' and/or 'Black feminist' pose a problem of definition. The disparities make it impossible to make sweeping statements about Black women, or Black feminists for that matter. For instance, elsewhere in their work Hendricks and Lewis (1994: 61) look at the class differences among Black women and speculate whether these disparities are "important enough to discredit the category, 'Black woman'". According to Gqola, "a Black feminist can be a feminist of any persuasion who is Black, one who espouses the tenets of Black feminism, or both" (2001a: 18).

I see a Black feminist essentially in the same way as described by Gqola above, that is, one who is both Black and adopts the tenets of Black feminism. In this study, however, I refer to Black feminism as rooted in the African context and only refer to the Black American experience in specific instances and with a thorough knowledge of the merits and demerits of such comparison when applied to contexts outside the United States. Notwithstanding this, it would be unwise to examine Black womanhood in South Africa in a one-dimensional fashion without looking at how other Black women from different backgrounds struggled against their oppression. In that sense, I attempt to foreground the commonalities of the struggle

of Black women and use the work of Black women in South Africa and Africa to reflect on the specifics of the subtleties of their multiple struggles. In this context the work of academics, activists and artists becomes central in theorising about the position of Black women within their immediate environment.

In South Africa the term Black women is invariably used to refer to African, Coloured (mixed race) and Indian women. All the aforementioned groups were classified as non-Whites during apartheid. However, the term 'Black' remains contested in South Africa as evidenced by a recent case referred to earlier in which South African Chinese successfully argued that they be classified as 'Blacks' in the new South Africa. (The term 'Black women' in America is often narrowly defined to refer only to women of African descent.)

According to Smith (1983), the specific issues confronted by the Black feminist movement in the context of the United States included reproductive rights, domestic abuse, equal access to abortion, health care, child care, the rights of the disabled, violence against women, rape, battering, sexual harassment, welfare rights, lesbian and gay rights, aging, police brutality, labour organising, anti-imperialist struggles, anti-racist organising, nuclear disarmament and preserving the environment. In South Africa the Black Women's Movement essentially aimed at the reclamation of power and selfhood for Black women. Within the Black communities in South Africa the status of women has generally been low, which makes them vulnerable to spousal abuse, marginalisation and sexually transmitted

infections, as they often have no power to negotiate safer sex with their partners because of a strong cultural belief that a man is the initiator in sexual matters. Furthermore, their financial dependence on their partners makes them vulnerable to power control and male oppression. Thus, the Black Women's Movement sought to liberate Black women by speaking out on these issues and putting in place mechanisms to try to address them.

Whereas issues relating to reproductive rights, for example, appeared to have been amongst the key issues in America, women in developing countries, including South Africa, appeared to have had different preoccupations and priorities as a result of their distinctive circumstances. For instance, Moodley (1995: 9) finds that "many factors influence the perception of what reproductive rights are, their significance and their prioritization". Furthermore, Moodley identifies race, class, religion, sexuality, nationality, culture and marital status as some of the 'factors' that she refers to. She notes further that there were suspicions regarding contraception and abortion amongst the Black communities because of the apartheid government's position on Black fertility, lack of systematic health care for women and worsening economic conditions. In the same vein, Lewis and Salo (1993) found that contraceptive services in South Africa have largely affected Black women's health and ignored their needs for education and personal choice. They observe that the government invariably attempted to control Black population growth in order to protect White hegemony: "[T]he anxiety of overpopulation usually stems from the dominant group's concern with protecting their privileges

and the draining of their resources by growing and needy dominated classes" (Lewis & Salo, 1993: 63). These factors could have had an impact on the manner in which issues of reproductive health were prioritised by South African Black women.

> Because birth control in South Africa has had blatantly racist underpinnings, birth control debates were constrained by preoccupation with the needs of the apartheid state, and the perceptions and rights of women were subordinated to other issues and emphases (Lewis & Salo, 1993: 68).

This highlights the unique situation of Black South African women, which makes their struggle distinctive. According to Mikell (1997: 48), "the feminism that is slowly emerging in Africa is distinctly heterosexual, prenatal and concerned with bread, butter and power issues". Furthermore, African women have often argued that they are more concerned about humanity rather than about specific issues, that is, their struggle is more inclusive and hence they often prefer terms such as 'motherism' (Acholonu, 1995) rather than feminism, which they see as exclusive and therefore contra-indicated to African humanity articulated in the notion of *ubuntu*, which espouses inclusivity and respect as some of its key tenets. Motherism in this sense is thus distinct from 'Womanism' inaugurated by Alice Walker or Africana Womanism as explicated by Verner (1994:1) below:

> Africana Womanism in essence says: We love men. We like being women. We love children. We like being mothers. We value life… We want families and harmonious relationships. We are not at war with our men seeking money, power and influence through confrontation.

Motherism is also distinct from what Ogundipe-Leslie referred to as Stiwanism, which is derived from the acronym STIWA - Social Transformations in Africa Including Women. According to Ogundipe-Leslie, the reason for the acronym was to indicate a "move away from defining feminism and feminisms in relation to Euro-America or elsewhere, and from declaiming loyalties or disloyalties. I felt that as concerned African women we needed to focus on our areas of concern, socially and geographically" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994: 6). For Acholonu (2000:2), Motherism is more encompassing than any other feminist theory. As she puts it:

> A Motherist loves and respects all men and women irrespective of colour, race, religion, ethnicity; a motherist respects all cultures and religions, he/she is a traditionalist, a motherist loves God, loves nature, loves and strives for purity and perfection; a motherist protects the child, protects the environment, shows understanding and respect for differences in, and weaknesses of, others.

According to Acholonu (2000), motherism evokes a connection between mothers and earth because they both give life. For this reasons, she sees Motherism as a melting pot for all people, men and women, even feminists who are concerned about the menace of wars around the globe, racism, malnutrition, political and economic exploitation, hunger and starvation, child abuse and mortality, drug addiction, proliferation of broken homes and homelessness around the world, the degradation of the environment and depletion of the ozone layer through pollution (Acholonu, 2000: 2). Seen this way, a motherist has strong affinity with family values, notions of equality, liberation, empowerment and transformation of all humanity, irrespective of sex, gender, race or creed.

### 2.1.2 Black South African women and the Black Consciousness Movement

In South Africa the initiative to establish a strong women's organisation can be traced to 1918, when women were organised for the first time in such great numbers in the African National Congress's (ANC) Bantu Women's League. Yet these women operated under the auspices of the ANC, meaning that their autonomy was still limited. The operation of these women under the male-dominated ANC is not surprising, considering that "Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation" (Smith, 1983: 265). The point of this observation is that it resonates with Black women's struggles in all locations including those within the ANC Bantu Women's League. In 1943 a milestone was

reached when these women were granted full membership of the ANC and the ANC Women's League was formed in the same year (Giesler, 2004). However, the activities of the League were dealt a heavy blow when major political parties were banned in South Africa in the 1960s.

In response to the political vacuum left by the banning of political parties by the apartheid government, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was formed in 1960. For many people BCM is synonymous with the name Steve Biko, who appealed to Black people to be proud of their own identity and their skin colour, Black pride, conscientisation, decolonisation of the mind as radical points of departure to liberate themselves from any form of oppression. Widely hailed as the father of Black consciousness, Biko described the organising principle of Black Consciousness at a South African Student Organisation (SASO) trial in 1976 this way: "Black Consciousness Movement is not anti-white. It is important that we all understand this, both blacks and whites. The basic tenet of Black Consciousness is that the Black man must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity" (Biko, 1978: 24). Seen this way, Biko's assertion dovetails with the statement made by Plaatje in relation to the Native Land Act of 1913, which forbade Blacks to buy or rent land, when he said that the Blacks had become pariahs in their own land (Plaatje, 1913). In his book *I write what I like* Biko (1978: 91-92) summarised Black Consciousness as follows:

> Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the Black world for a long time. Its essence is the realisation by the Black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression – the Blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them.

According to Moodley, BCM's definition of Blackness was inclusive of African, Indian and Coloured. "Its aim was to achieve unity of the African, Coloured and Indian communities, based on their political, social and economic oppression and exploitation through a system of race and class discrimination" (Moodley, 1993b: 14). This view is echoed by Ratele (1998: 60), who finds the definition of Blackness from the Black consciousness perspective significant in that it explicated "us Blacks as those who by law or tradition are politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a unit in the struggle towards realising their aspirations".

However, with regard to sexism, for many Black South African women of the time, BCM represented an important formation, which nonetheless represented only one aspect of their broader struggle, namely the struggle against race, and not the other aspects such as the struggle against gender and class. For that reason, parallels can be drawn between the position of Black women in America and those in South Africa in terms of the treatment received under the Black Liberation Movement by

Black women in the United States and that received by Black women within South African liberation movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement.

By discussing the role and apprehension of Black women in political organisations such as BCM, ANC and AZAPO (Azanian People's Organisation), I seek to demonstrate not only the role they played but also the gender struggle they faced within these movements, and thus highlight their multiple struggles of race, gender and class. This is significant in that it demonstrates that liberation movements did not necessarily speak for Black women in terms of sexism and classism just as the mainstream feminist movement did not speak for them in terms of racism and class.

According to Gqola (2001b), BCM "avoided self-critical examination that privileges the heterogeneity of Black people and their experiences in different locations". This is clear from Biko's articulation of the movement's objective: "We are looking forward to a non-racial, just and egalitarian society in which colour, creed and race shall form no point of reference" (Biko, 1997:139). In this way, just as in the Black Liberation Movement in the US, gender was not the focus of the Black Consciousness Movement. As a result, even its lexicon remained strictly masculine, as evident in their slogan, 'Black man, you are on your own.' There is no need to go into detail about this here as this issue has been highlighted in previous studies; for instance, in her article on "Black women and the Discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement," Gqola interrogates this issue in more detail (2001b).

Black South African women operating within the BCM did, however, establish the Black Women's Federation (BWF) in 1975, but operated within the BCM. Thus, BWF was formed not as an off-shoot but as a wing of the BCM, and they chose to operate within the movement in spite of its perceived sexism. Seen this way, it could be surmised that the Black Women's Federation was not necessarily a forum to tackle problems experienced by Black women per se, but merely a rallying vehicle for BCM. As Mamphela Ramphele (1992: 216), one of the Black women activists involved in the activities of BCM, puts it:

> There is no evidence to suggest that the BWF [Black Women's Federation] was concerned with the special problems women experienced as a result of sexism both in the private and public sphere. Women were important as wives, mothers, girlfriends and sisters, in fighting a common struggle against a common enemy – namely White racism. Scant regard was given to their position as individuals in their own right.

Nonetheless, women within the movement seemed unhappy with the patriarchal attitudes of men in the movement and the way they seemed to obliterate the issues women wanted to address. For instance, Geisler (2004: 69) notes that one former member of the BWF, Cheryl Carolus, who later became active within the ANC as its Secretary-General, recalled that "Black men felt that asserting their Blackness

meant asserting their maleness towards women." In this sense, women were still oppressed within the BCM.

The same problem has been highlighted with regard to other liberation movements in South Africa. For instance, Moodley observed a similar trend in another Black liberation movement, AZAPO. She recounted an incident at the party's 11th National Congress held in Port Elizabeth in 1993, in which women attending the congress resolved to elect a Secretary for Women to serve in the organisation's Central Committee "in order to prioritise and promote women's interests at the highest decision-making level" (Moodley, 1993a:48). Notably, the conference made the following two observations:

1. that within the current political, social and economic dispensation which subjugates Black people in general, Black women are, further, specifically oppressed organisationally and in society at large through patriarchy and its expression in sexist attitudes and practices;
2. that the philosophy of Black Consciousness, through its various organisations, formations and structures has not consciously addressed itself to an analysis of patriarchal attitudes and practices which militate against the development and emancipation of Black women generally (Moodley, 1993a: 48).

What is clear from these observations is that Black women in South Africa did not initially disentangle themselves from the mainstream liberation movements and instead decided to operate within the auxiliaries of these movements. Of course, it will be complacent to merely accept that Black women in South Africa did not vigorously champion the course of women from a feminist point of view, as did their counterparts in America. This prompts the symptomatic question regarding the extent to which issues of sexism and classism were pressing compared to the issue of racism, for instance. Here three possible explanations can be advanced. The first is that gender may have taken a back seat as there was a common understanding that apartheid was the root problem of all types of oppression experienced by non-Whites in South Africa. This can be deduced from Mandela's first speech to parliament in 1994 in which he said now that apartheid was over, it was important to focus on gender equality, since freedom cannot be achieved if women are not emancipated from all forms of oppression.

However, Ramphele (1992) points to lack of access to resources as one of the problems that contributed to South African women's perceived soft stance in championing women's rights within the movement. This illustrates the point made earlier that although Black women in developed countries and least developed countries faced similar sets of oppressions, they essentially faced different challenges in terms of resources and access to services. The other factor could be that perhaps Black women in South Africa were not as oppressed by their male counterparts as feminists might want us to believe. As we have seen, the literature

on the position of women in early African society suggests that women and men enjoyed equal rights to a certain degree on the home front. There is a growing body of research that suggests that this normal stability on the family front was disrupted by colonialism and apartheid, and especially the forced removals and the job structure that made men wage earners, with staggering wage disparities relative to women (Ocholonu, 1995; Ngobeni, 2006) as well as the psychological impact resulting from the way in which the status of Black men was reduced because of the power relationship with their White employers. The third and last point I want to make in relation to this dialectic relates to the argument that Black women on the continent see their struggle not in isolation but in its multiplicity and as such they fight for justice for women, men and children (Ocholonu, 1995).

In order to fully understand why Black women in South Africa initially chose to stay within the mainstream political organisations, one must understand the vehemence and pervasiveness of racism in South Africa at the time. Racism in South Africa during both colonialism and apartheid was so intense that it is not an exaggeration for Derrida (1989) to conceptualise South African racism as the supreme form of discrimination in the contemporary world. In this sense, it was necessary for Black South African women to prioritise the struggle against racism by building coalitions with men, or by remaining within those political organisations such as the BCM as a strategy for survival in an unequal society and as a way of educating men from within these organisations about their (women's) rights.

The difference between Black women in America and those in South Africa is that Black women in America broke off from the BLM and formed their own feminist movements to confront the issues typical of their situation, whereas South African Black women initially remained within the BCM and the ANC to fight against racial oppression. However, this changed with the formation of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and the Women's Coalition, which remained in force until the 1990s. According to Geisler, the FSAW was significant because "it was a women's organisation that was not conceived as an auxiliary to a male-dominated body" (2004: 69), as we have seen with the ANCWL and BWF. Thus, the FSAW was able to represent "a real and serious attempt to incorporate women into the political programme of the national liberation movement on an equal footing with men," to use Alice Walker's phrasing (1983: 276). The fact that Black women in South Africa faced a different set of challenges compared to their American counterparts prompts us to think about them differently.

### 2.1.3 Problems encountered within the Black women's movements

Like the mainstream feminist movement, the Black feminist movement was neither monolithic nor homogeneous. As mentioned, Black women themselves are not a homogeneous group, and such divergence has necessitated other subtle forms of feminism such as African feminism. African feminists argue from the perspective

that African women have a unique experience rooted in Africa, as opposed to Black feminism, for instance, which tends to equate all Black women irrespective of their geography. Akatsa-Bukachi (2005:12) describes an African feminist as follows:

> She is not just fighting for political space or social space; she is fighting for justice that goes right to the core of male egocentrism, the fallacy of male superiority and female subordination. She is fighting to eliminate the root cause of women's oppression. The African feminist must be ready to endure criticism, humiliation, even pain, in order to overcome.

Although much of the gender development in South Africa seems to be undergirded by liberal feminism, a thorough analysis of liberal feminism indicates that it is too limited to adequately deal with the gender issues in South Africa. Liberal feminism in itself does not acknowledge the diversity of South Africa as a multiracial country and tends to treat women as if they are of the same background, same experience and same status within their respective communities.

While this section is not exhaustive with regard to feminism, it would nonetheless be remiss of me not to focus on the mainstream categories without discussing those branches of feminism which are central to the broader feminist project. According to Akatsa-Bukachi (2005), African feminists are unique in that they "see themselves performing traditional roles ... without traditional resources ... while at

the same time undertaking modern activities ... while being denied access to modern support systems" (2005: 6). This seems to be speaking more for urban-based African women who are now entering the traditionally 'male' world, and does not seem to account for women in the rural areas. Again, this also seems to speak against the liberal feminists' standpoint, which has largely sought to level the playing field without giving women special treatment or resources to help them get on a par with men.

However, even African women themselves are not a homogeneous group and of single mind. Some people often speak about Africa as if they are referring to a single country or province. Africa itself is a diverse continent of fifty-four countries and each of these countries has women of different colours, cultures and classes. Nonetheless, the cultural gap in Africa is minimal. As highlighted by Scott (1996: no pagination):

> Feminism in Africa is not as stratified as feminism in the United States because cultural similarities among African women, in spite of their particular groupings, create a standard agenda, although specifics often differ white feminists in Africa, who are descendants of exploitative European settlers, separate themselves from the large African feminists' consciousness because of their privileged position in society … their ideology is rooted in the liberation of Western Europe, and this Eurocentrism makes global feminism inconceivable.

Ultimately, when all is said and done, it remains a basic point to note that feminism itself is a contested terrain. For instance, Gledhill (1999:175) posits that "a problem for feminist analysis is that it enters critical negotiation from a specific political

position, often beginning with the aim of distinguishing ‘progressive’ from ‘reactionary’ texts”.

A further issue about feminist analysis is raised by hooks who posits that “despite feminist critical interventions aimed at deconstructing the category ‘woman’ which highlights the significance of race, many feminist film critics continue to structure their discourse as though it speaks about ‘women’ when in actuality it speaks only about White women” (1999:314). Hooks’s point reiterates the centrality of the application of Black feminism in this study.

### 2.1.4 (Re)-Theorising the Black Woman in South Africa

#### *2.1.4.1 The pre-colonial context*

Having looked at Black women in the political context that ensued from colonialism and apartheid, I now look at Black women in the primordial and cultural context. I take this detour because there is a need to look at the position of women prior to colonialism, since most studies often consider this issue from the moment of colonisation as if women did not exist before. I proffer that we need to look at the types of societies that Africans had built prior to contact with foreigners, especially Europeans. For instance, African societies did not have retirement homes because the elderly lived with their children and attained special status as elders in

the family and in society. Thus, in explaining Black women and theorising their position in society, I draw on the sociological, historical and anthropological work on Black women in Africa in general and South Africa in particular.

As mentioned, most studies tend to focus on Africa from the moment of colonialism as if there were no activities in Africa before the colonial encroachment. I feel that there is a need to transcend the colonial moment in tracing the genealogy of Black womanhood and the kinds of issues that Black women grappled with. In so doing, the present study also taps into the activities and practices of Black women as a way of theorisation. Gqola has convincingly demonstrated the importance of what she refers to as "the interconnections between theory and the everyday in Blackwomen-centric work" in her article entitled "Blackwomen, feminisms and focussesity in Africa" (2001a:12). This approach is echoed by Woodard and Mastin (2005) and further exemplified in the classic works of South African women such as Sindiwe Magona. For instance, in her short story collection *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* Magona (1991) portrays Black women who are sturdy and resolute in providing for their starving children by working as domestic workers for White employers. These women are given a voice through the narration of their individual stories which reveal the kinds of problems they deal with. Typically, some of the concerns these women raise in their conversation have to do with conditions of their work, low wages and exploitation as well as issues of race, class and gender.

As alluded to in Chapter 4, Black women, through their domestic work**,** relieve other gender and racial groups of their responsibilities around the house, giving them freedom to pursue activities outside the domestic sphere. The position of Black women with regard to men is also illuminated in the way in which these women view all men as irresponsible, using the colloquial term ‘dogs’ to refer to them and the fact that some men father children but neglect to take responsibility to provide for them, leaving the entire burden to these women. I see these points as relevant because the position of women in society today is defined by their historical reality and their experience both in the past and present. James (1993: 2) puts it succinctly by noting that “Black feminism’s theorising is rooted in Black communities and nourished by them even as it challenges those very communities to address issues of internal oppression”.

According to African mythology, the woman is the primary locus of creation; she is therefore a natural leader, a decision maker and that is why there were women leaders (Motshekga, 2010). Many Africanist scholars such as Acholonu (1995) argue that because women in many parts of Africa were in positions that are today associated with men, there were no feminist movements in Africa because the society was structured in such a way that men and women were equals. According to this view, African women did not have to fight to be recognised as equal human beings as they were already recognised as such. Although the abovementioned point is well taken, I argue that it must be treated carefully as it could give an

impression that women who were not in a position of power did not face any gender-related problems.

Again, a point must be made here that Africa as a continent was never homogenous and its social, political and economic history has been shifting over the years. As Zeleza (2006: 14) argues, "Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct whose boundaries – geographical, historical, cultural, and representational – have shifted according to the prevailing conceptions and configurations of global racial identities and power, and African nationalism." Nonetheless, there are some conceptions that are generally believed to constitute the innermost virtues of many African communities, despite their vastness and complexity. For instance, African thought espouses an understanding that the community is more important than the individual, and thus it is believed that the individual exists because of others. Proverbs such as *Motho ke motho ka batho/umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (meaning a person is a person through others) are common to all traditional African communities and attest to the general belief in the notion of collectivism in which the individual is seen as an integral part of the community.

Within the community, the family is recognised as an important unit. It is within the family that the power structure of the society is introduced in which social submission, which Nyasani (1997) refers to as "benign natural docility", is reinforced. According to Nyasani, this docility is regarded as "positive, legitimate and virtuous strictly within the context of a traditional social regime" (1997:113).

Thus, within the family women and men enjoyed varying privileges and compliance was unquestioned since it was regarded as legitimate. Feminists recognise the operation of the family as crucial to understanding power relations in society. Stanley and Wise (2002:75) posit that the family defines gendered roles in two ways:

> The first concerns women in our roles as wives and mothers. These relationships, it is argued, fix women in a service and domestic mode of behaviour. Such relationships are highly routinized, privatized and influenced by a range of stereotyped 'ideals' exemplified in images presented through the media. The second concerns the family's role as the main means of 'socializing' children. This involves getting children to learn and enact what are seen as desirable attributes. In particular, it involves socializing them into sexually stereotyped 'feminine' and 'masculine' attributes, so that they themselves will later engage in the same behaviours and so perpetuate sexism.

The family therefore plays a crucial role in reinforcing societal expectations with regard to gender. In many parts of Africa, as in many parts of the world, women played a vital role in holding the family unit together. This can also be illustrated by idiomatic expressions common to many African communities such as *Mosadi o aga lapa* (a woman holds the family together). Although adages like this may often

be seen as merely idealistic pronouncements that have little bearing or influence on everyday life, for many scholars such as Mbiti (1988), proverbs are expressions of wisdom acquired through reflection, experience, observation and general knowledge. They are fundamental in the sense that they put many thoughts, ideas, reflections, experiences, observations, knowledge and even worldviews, into a few words. As such, they can be seen as expressing truths or realities for which history does not supply a full explanation.

Various activities that women performed in African societies bolstered their position in the family and in society, although men remained ceremonial heads of the family. There were numerous examples of women as sole breadwinners and wage earners in the family, ploughing the fields and selling produce at the market, for example. What is clear is that colonialism reconfigured the familial situation for Africans so that men became primary wage earners in the family.

South Africa is also replete with many similar examples of female dynasties, regents and rulers who took up positions of leadership in pre-colonial times and through the periods of wars of resistance, for instance, Queen Mantatise of the Batlokwa, Queen Mother Nandi of the Zulus and Queen Modjadji of the Balobedu (Yawa, 2009; Motshekga 2012). However, as I mentioned, it is crucial to recognise that the assumption of power by these women did not necessarily mean lack of gender-related problems for those women who were not in power.

The preceding elaboration on the position of women in African societies is echoed by Acholonu (1995). In her book *Motherism – An Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* Acholonu (1995) looks at the traditional lifestyle of African women and observes that the status of women included, inter alia, matriarchy, leadership and priesthood. In the same vein, writing in the 1950s, Marxist feminist Evelyn Reed noted that the division of labour in primitive society was very simple, with men as hunters of big game, while women were collectors of fruits, nuts and vegetables around dwelling places and hunters of small animals such as hares.

Furthermore, Reed (1954) states that most of these small animals were brought home alive and consequently this led to the domestication of big animals such as cattle. The same applies to the plants they dug in the forest, leading to the practice of agriculture – they planted fields and grew enough for the family, and as the society advanced, they sold produce on the market, an activity that is still carried out in many African countries. Thus, argues Reed (1954:7), the most reliable sources of food supplies for the family were not the large animals supplied by men, but the vegetables provided by women:

> The discovery of agriculture and the domestication of animals made it possible for mankind [sic] to pass beyond the food-gathering epoch into the food-producing epoch, and this combination represented humanity's first conquest over its food supplies. This conquest was achieved by the women.

For the abovementioned reasons, Reed argues further that women directly brought about the emancipation and empowerment of men due to the fact that agriculture and livestock farming relieved men of their hunting expeditions, which was a full-time occupation that took them away from home for prolonged periods, and this allowed men more time to indulge in recreational activities. Also linked to women's achievements was the formation of villages and towns which brought about the end of nomadic life (linked to hunting): "Through the increase in food supplies, populations grew and nomadic campsites were transformed into settled village centers, later evolving into towns and cities" (Reed, 1954:10).

However, this is not to say that women were completely independent. They still faced subtle oppressions in some sense, as they also had to endure some of the societal norms that gave certain privileges to men. For instance, it appears that women in general were conditioned, one could argue, not to see anything sinister in cheating spouses, as society seems to condone such misdemeanours when men are involved. This can be illustrated by idiomatic expressions such as *Monna ke selepe o ratha kwa le kwa*. This is a Setswana idiom, common to many African communities, which expresses the notion that men, unlike women, are like axes and can be used all over the place. The fact that idioms which describe the full nuance of meaning and controlling views of society are so slanted in favour of men also highlights the point that society has largely been patriarchal and therefore such idioms reflect the power relations of that patriarchy.

Sometimes the oppression of women is enforced through institutions such as religion, of which women are often a majority in terms of membership. A case in point is an incident in Nigeria where a Muslim woman, Amina Lawal, was sentenced to death by stoning in 2002 because she had a child out of wedlock (*Afrol News*, 2002). The sentence was given in accordance with a religious guideline as interpreted and applied by the jurisprudence in that part of Nigeria. The Sharia law applied in this case forbids adultery. Yet although the child's father was identified, he was not punished. According to the court ruling, he had not committed a criminal act and only she was to face criminal charges. The gender-biased attitude of the court in this case is quite clear, and the result was that only the woman was to be punished, a move which highlighted what some Islamic feminists often criticise as patriarchal interpretations of Islamic teachings (Furman, 2010).

It is important to note how vigorously many Muslim human rights groups opposed this sentencing deemed as unfair, inhumane and inconsistent with human rights' standards. The sentence was questioned instead of being seen as simply legitimate, and the woman was subsequently acquitted in 2003. What is also interesting about the case is that the appeal that led to her acquittal was lodged within the Sharia legal system without resorting to non-Sharia or a Western legal framework, a move which could potentially perpetuate the impression that Western legal systems are superior to non-Western legal systems.

Another factor that often compromises the position of women in African societies is that the family name is highly valued in these societies. Since women change their surnames when they get married, parents place high value on their sons as they are regarded as the ones who will carry over the family name and ensure that it lives on. This brought about certain imbalances in the way children are raised, with girls merely being raised to be good wives. This point is illustrated by Martineau (1997:385) in trying to explain one of the reasons why Black women in South Africa were seldom as well educated as their male counterparts:

> In many African societies, South Africa being no exception, the expectations of parents for their daughters are often not as high as those for their sons. Parents see in their sons the perpetuation of the family name, whereas they look ahead to a daughter being married off into some other family that will reap the rewards of her education. Thus, the education of girls is seen as a less worthwhile investment.

Of course, this may not necessarily be the case at the present moment as women continue to claim their space in society by fighting for equal rights and opportunities. A factor that also continues to limit women's potential is the increase in crime and violence, and as a result families are often more protective of their daughters and frequently unwilling to expose them to potential dangers outside the

home, such as rape and assault. As Bourque and Warren (1990) note, it is understandable that parents may be unwilling to expose their daughters to such a hostile world. To say this is not to say that parents have resorted to keeping their daughters strictly at home. They do send them to school or to run errands outside the home, but by restricting the girl children's movements, they are essentially concerned about the unsafe environment that they inhabit and the struggles they face in it on a daily basis as part of the multiple oppressions that continue to affect women. This can inhibit them from realising their potential outside the home in a too dangerous external world.

Furthermore, Martineau examines factors influencing women's educational progress and their entry into traditionally male-dominated fields and finds that "although many African men may prefer to marry women who can obtain salaried employment and contribute to the household budget, very few actually marry women who are more educated or who earn more money than themselves" (1997:387). She finds instead that Black men have generally preferred to marry women whose jobs leave them with ample time to attend to children and the household. Martineau suggests that this directly encourages women who prefer to get married to avoid more lucrative jobs and instead choose careers like nursing and teaching. However, the increasing number of Black women in leadership or managerial positions across the board, including jobs that were traditionally deemed as male-only occupations, suggests that Martineau's assertions above are no longer valid, at least for the majority of Black women.

Writing about the position of Black women in South Africa and the way they continue to suffer the legacy of apartheid long after its official ending, Pregs Govender of the South African Human Rights Commission states: “Black women and girls in the former homelands and in the informal settlements of South Africa were economically, politically and socially the most powerless, due largely to the social engineering of apartheid” (2010: no pagination). To illustrate the immense scale of the oppressions suffered by Black women, even in unsuspected places, Govender cites the 2008 incident in which “White male Afrikaner students at the Free State University videoed themselves urinating into food that they then forced Black women workers to eat”, as she puts it. The workers were also degraded by being forced to perform some gymnastics while the students recorded the activity for their amusement. This incident sparked nationwide anti-racism demonstrations when the tape surfaced.

Religion, as mentioned, also has a tendency to eschew equality and instead promote the view that women are subject to male authority. At the same time women in rural villages have historically carried the responsibility of sustaining the family in the absence of their male members, who spent long periods of time away from their families chiefly as a result of the migrant labour system introduced by colonialism and apartheid. Anthropological studies show that when the European explorers encountered Africans they also imposed their own narrow interpretations to judge them. For instance, because Africans were different they were considered to be

backward. Thus, the difference was seen in terms of good and evil, couched within limited and culturally imposed thinking in which anything that is considered different from the normative of the dominant discourse was deemed peculiar and consequently construed as threatening. For instance, Pilgrim (2002) argues that the European explorers misinterpreted the African women's way of dressing as lewd and indicative of their promiscuity and unrestrained libidinous drives. They photographed these women in their scanty clothing and sent these photographs back home endorsing the stereotypes.

The Dutch settlement and English colonisation from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries produced racial legislation aimed at bolstering the position and hegemony of the European powers, forcing Blacks into labour-production patterns where they worked to produce comfortable livelihoods for colonisers. This immediately affected the Black women's position, as Black men were humiliated by their White masters leaving them with a single sphere of control, the home, where they had become currency earners, in turn giving them economic power over their spouses. The discovery of minerals further exacerbated the problem for Black South African women and altered their cultural foundations, as it created a situation where Black men had to work away from home for months at a time, leaving their families behind. These drastic changes in the economic coordinates disrupted the normal stability of Black South African families and resulted in much of the disintegrated familial structures that we have today.

However, the effects of these settlements were even more pronounced; as Masilela (1991) states, they "altered the country's cultural coordinates immeasurably". The men were generally ill-treated at work by their White employers, and the only sanctuary they had was the home where they could exercise some authority, often relieving their frustrations, carried from their workplaces, by ill-treating their women, who were wholly dependent on their wage-earning husbands. Those women who went to the cities could only do domestic work and either travel between home and their place of work, or stay with their employers.

During the colonial period filmic images generally established a racist narrative that denigrated Black South Africans. Imperialist British film iconography from 1910 (the date of the political formation of present-day South Africa) developed a complex at whose centre Blacks (Africans, Indians and Coloureds) were depicted as demons (Masilela, 1991:17). In general, the early South Africa from colonialism to apartheid was largely characterised by media propaganda. Hence Masilela's observation that "South African film iconography was constructed on lies and falsehoods, and not on authentic representations" (Masilela, 1991:18). This is a well-known fact, as the colonial masters desperately sought to use any art form as a hegemonic tool to assert their supremacy over Black Africa. A recent project of the UNESCO General History of Africa aimed at rewriting African history is an example of Africans' dissatisfaction with the falsification of the mainstream history which vilify, fragment and objectify them (see UNESCO International Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa).

Apartheid further exacerbated the position of Black women, especially with the introduction of Bantu Education, which increased the number of African workers who could take up the growing number of semi-skilled jobs open to them under apartheid but whose skills would not threaten the White working class. A number of dampening limitations were imposed on Black females, who were frequently relegated to making a living as domestic workers, beer brewers and prostitutes (Martineau, 1997). After the end of apartheid the government tried to improve the position of Black women and facilitate their access to jobs which had traditionally been reserved for males. Since 1994 South Africa has been committed to normalising gender relations as equality between women and men is regarded as a central part of the broader struggle for liberation in the country. The country has since introduced legislation that aims to empower women in the form of the termination of pregnancy bill and gender-specific affirmative action. It has also increased the number of women in Parliament as well as in other senior government positions.

Yet these developments are hardly reflected in the mass media and this has led to a number of debates on the representation of women in the media – a concern which provides an impetus for this study. In fact mass media research and women's organisations continue to decry the perceived preponderance of misrepresentation of women in media content. Since communication, including film production, has largely been constructed by White males (Knight, 1995) from a perspective

premised on subservience, and patriarchal and cultural domination, feminist scholars believe that films in general offer texts that are orchestrated to please male spectators. They argue that pleasing the male audience comes at the expense of the female who is objectified, often demeaned as a sex object and portrayed as dull, dependent and emotional. For instance, Mulvey (1999:63) observes that "traditionally the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the spectator within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks and on either side of the screen". Mulvey's observation is echoed by Gledhill who finds that "the subject of mainstream narratives [in cinema] is the patriarchal, bourgeois individual; that unified, centred point from which the world is organized and given meaning" (1999:167). An analysis of the selected films in the context of a feminist perspective could bring about two things: firstly, exemplifying issues of gender stereotyping, class and race, and inequitable representations of females and males in these films; secondly, suggesting ways which will account for improved or fair portrayal.

Gledhill argues that "narrative organization is patriarchal; the spectator constructed by the text is masculine" (1999:167). A cursory look reveals that this concern is evident in the post-apartheid films selected for this study. In these films there are scenes with semi-nude women presented as sexual objects for the pleasure of male actors within the film world, and most probably also for the male spectators. Such portrayals have been the predilection of Hollywood, which one hoped would have

been deconstructed in the post-apartheid films (arguably made by people who ought to know more about prejudicial stereotypes). In response to the increased tendency by the mainstream media to misrepresent women, there has also been an increase in the number of women-produced films both within the mainstream media and as independent media producers. This is in line with the radical feminists' standpoint that women need to create their own media so that they can present themselves, and not simply be juxtaposed to men as if men are the centre of gravity, a move that further entrenches the stereotypes that men are the measure of all things and the master of destinies.

Nonetheless, the trend postulated by feminists seems to be receiving some attention in the media in general and, if anything, this requires a new theory or an adjustment of the old ones to explain this novel development. This point is made explicit by Gledhill who observes that "recent work suggests that the textual possibilities of resistant or deconstructive reading exist in the process of the mainstream text" (1999:169). For instance, a brief look at the films selected for this study indicates that women are silenced, but not as much as had previously been postulated by feminist communication scholars. Thus, in spite of attempts to pander to the new feminist consciousness, to borrow Ogunleye's (2005) phrasing, muted stereotyping as far as the representation of women is concerned still lingers in the media, both covertly and overtly.

### *2.1.4.2 Contemporary Black South African Women*

A discussion about Black women in South African society without looking at how their roles have changed over the years, especially after the rupture brought about the 1994 dispensation, would be a story only half told. Since 1994 the government has introduced legislation, specifically the termination of pregnancy bill and gender-specific affirmative action, that aims to empower women. It has also increased the number of women in Parliament and other senior government positions. The country has also introduced a new ministry called the Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities. Although the inauguration of this ministry was seen by some as re-infantilising women in the same way as during the colonial and apartheid eras, as well as the patriarchal African traditions did, others saw it as an important step in terms of prioritising specific issues that affect this group. Thus the idea to introduce such a ministry was seen by others as one way of "othering" women, children and people with disabilities as special groups or "special cases".

Nonetheless, there is at the moment a notable presence of women in the national life of post-apartheid South Africa. The overall progress of women looks impressive judging by the visibility of women in high-profile positions such as politics, government, business and education. As a country that wanted to be seen as leading by example, the South African government's first target was to have 30 per cent representation of women in parliament. By 2009, 45 per cent of

parliamentarians were women, making South Africa the country with the third highest number of women in Parliament worldwide, after Rwanda and Sweden.

The increase in the number of women in Parliament was a remarkable achievement from the 2.7 per cent prior to the 1994 democratic elections (Bathembu, 2009). This move "puts the country firmly on course to achieve the Southern African Development Community (SADC) target of 50 per cent representation of women in political decision-making by 2015" (Kubi Rama cited in Bathembu, 2009). At the moment five of the nine premiers governing the country's nine provinces are women. This is a clear indication of the country's commitment to gender equality. The election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2005 as president of Liberia, and Joyce Banda in 2012 as Malawi's president, is likely to influence South Africa to aspire to have a female president.

Despite all this progress, women in South Africa still lag behind men in terms of economic empowerment when compared to men. Several indicators of social change, such as pregnancy bills, maintenance acts and so forth, are noted in the way they aim to alleviate some of the burdens that are borne by women. In this regard, bodies such as People Opposed to Women Abuse (POWA), the Gender Commission (GC) and more recently the creation of the Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities noted above, together with enabling legalisation, are noted for their contribution to normalising gender relations in South Africa. That Black women are always at the bottom of the ladder in terms of

marginalisation and oppression may soon be a thing of the past, if the current momentum is maintained.

A massive shift has taken place in conscientising the whole of South Africa society about what women's specific problems are and what constitutes gender justice. A recent example of the conscientisation that has taken place is the way in which individuals and organisations strongly condemned an incident in which a young woman was humiliated and sexually assaulted by a rowdy group of men because she was wearing a mini-skirt. Several associations advocating for the rights of women and gender equality have since taken a firm stance against this kind of behaviour. In this sense, women are incontrovertibly making themselves visible through their demands and challenges to the prevailing order. The battle is only half won as some women, especially those in rural areas, often do not have resources and dedicated support services they need to fight for their rights. This problem is further compounded by poor service delivery, particularly in terms of access to essential services such as basic health care.

The issue of culture versus individual rights remains a problem, as many women are still restricted by the cultural coordinates of the communities they live in. These issues have come to the fore in recent years in several incidents. One such incident was the case of *Tumane and the Human Rights Commission* v *Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela and Kgosi Nyalala Pilane* [No. 618 of 1998] in which a woman from the Mononono village in the North West province challenged the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela

tribal authority for violating her rights. The woman, Elizabeth Tumane, had lost her husband and was expected to observe a mourning custom that required her either not to leave her home for a particular period (usually three months) or to sprinkle a certain herb called *mogaga*[6] on her pathway if she had to leave her home. She refused to perform the ritual even though it was compulsory for members of the Bakgatla community. Although this practice was expected from both males and females, it was reported that it is more stringently applied when it comes to women. Tumane was subsequently summoned to appear before the tribal authority where she was sentenced to a twelve-month confinement to her yard. As a result of this, she took the matter to the constitutional court on the basis that the Bakgatla were violating her individual rights and the court ultimately ruled in her favour.

This case demonstrates an instance of an increasingly empowered and assertive Black woman who can speak the language of rights, and challenges those who she feels violates them. This is especially interesting because this unusual stance was taken by a rural woman, despite the perception that rural women are often more submissive compared to their urban counterparts. I contend that this stance represents Black women's condition as a site upon which to propose antidotes to contain issues of multiple oppressions. Thus, rather than always seeing a Black woman as a disempowered subject, ready to be exploited and victimised by other groups, it is important that she becomes a catalyst, a springboard of action to bring about more empowering means, not only for Black women as a group but also for

[6] A ritual observed after the death of a spouse. It requires widows to wear black clothes for three months and not to leave their home during this period. It also requires the sprinkling of a certain herb.

humanity as a whole because her position is situated at the intersection of all forms of oppression.

Other issues that prevail include violence against women, the patriarchal basis of law that claims to protect women, the hegemony of men in education and economy, and the ever-presence imbalance in male/female relations. It is true, however, that family structures, and household work have been increasingly questioned in the last few years. As a result we have begun to see some improvements in terms of more recognition being accorded the position of Black women within families and marriages, improved wages for women, especially those at the lower strata of the job market. For instance, the government has now established a minimum wage and certain conditions for domestic workers with which all employers have to comply. The question of economic liberation is especially important, since no representation of Black women can be complete without reference to the material and ideological factors that form the basis of her daily struggles. In other words, the effects of negative cultural representations of Black women are no less important than the constraints of the economy. The biological nature of women is not in question here, but rather the 'cultural construction' of their biology. This cultural construction serves as an instrument by which Black women's experiences are limited, conditioned and controlled.

From the above, it is clear that Black women in South Africa continue to navigate their struggles which have evolved through different phases, each with its own

challenges. Therefore, I contend that it is essential to recognise that:

- Black women in South Africa are increasingly claiming their rights and independence, and have become more assertive in fighting for those rights in an environment which is both enabling and constraining;
- They continue to break the barriers to bring about more liberating opportunities, as witnessed by the various struggles that they have waged and won within the enabling legal framework that stems from their work and activism;
- Black South African women prioritised the race struggle in order to build a coalition with men for survival in a racist South Africa during the onslaught of both colonialism and apartheid;
- The struggle for Black women has evolved and Black women from various cultures can now claim their rights as a collective and also as individuals;
- The successes that these women have gained over the years represent a milestone that must not be rendered invisible in both our conceptualisation and filmic discourse, as it is essential in sharpening our understanding of the nature of their struggles and the milestones they have gained;
- In spite of noticeable improvement, Black women are still oppressed organisationally and in society at large through patriarchy and its

expression in sexist attitudes and practices and through other public discourses and institutions such as the media;

- The broader feminist concerns that "narrative organization is patriarchal; [and that] the spectator constructed by the text is masculine" (see Gledhill, 1999:167), still strikes a chord with regard to the representation of Black women;
- The constant portrayal of women in their roles as wives and mothers tends to fix them in a service and domestic mode of behaviour (see Stanley and Wise, 2002);
- Black women reject the status that makes men the primary wage earners.

I argue that these represent important developments which must be embraced within our own conceptualisation and 'refashioning' of Black women in South Africa, as they continue to reach for their aspirations. It is my contention that such developments constitute key indices in Black feminist theorising and therefore should be embraced and incorporated into the politics of generating knowledge about Black feminism to mark the onward progression of Black women's struggle.

## 2.2 Intersectionality

The intersectionality paradigm is important for this study in that it "enables media scholars to analyse stereotypical patterns in contrast to multi-dimensional identities" (Gerwin, 2009: 5), and thus allows media scholars to address the lack of multiple dimensions in the representation of groups such as that of Black women. Intersectionality suggests that power structures based on gender, race, ethnicity and class are interdependent, and this interdependence forms multiple oppressions such as those experienced by Black women. This approach sits comfortably with Black women's multiple oppressions as highlighted by Black feminists. Originally conceived by Crenshaw in 1989 as a tool for the analysis of the ways in which different forms of social inequality, oppression and discrimination interact and overlap in multidimensional ways, the concept of intersectionality has attracted much attention in international feminist debates over the last decade. The approach takes as its point of departure, the fact that Black women face discrimination on several fronts or intersections, notably those of gender, race and class. According to Crenshaw (1993), intersectionality refers to various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's experiences.

Crenshaw suggests that, "[a]ny analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (1993:209). The discussion in this study will feed into the theme of how post-apartheid films perpetuate some of the ideological assumptions

inculcated during colonialism and apartheid, or how they attempt to deconstruct the multiform racist narrative constructed during colonialism and apartheid. In the other words, intersectionality refers to "various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political and representational aspects of violence against women of colour" (Crenshaw, 1994:1244). Therefore, the concept of intersectionality is suited to analysing media texts and images in representations that take into account critical issues of race, gender and class. The importance of intersectionality in a study such as this one is further supported by Gerwin (2009), who argues that non-intersectional approaches struggle to indicate differences, while intersectional approaches allow media practitioners and scholars to address the lack of multiple dimensions in the representation of other groups.

However, while lauded for its strengths, the intersectionality paradigm is not without problems. As such I acknowledge some of its limitations and use it circumspectly to complement my semiotic analyses rather than applying it *in toto* in spite of its problems. For instance, Nash (2008) complains that intersectionality has the potential to raise false expectations in that it claims to capture all factors that simultaneously affect Black women, while it in fact fails to capture other factors beyond race and gender that shape Black women's sheer diversity of experiences.

Furthermore, Nash argues that intersectionality has a tendency to pretend to offer a brand new analytical tool, while it in fact rehearses what Black feminism has

highlighted all along: “While intersectionality positions itself as a theoretical advance from Black feminism, its work continues in the tradition of Black feminism with the addition of a new name for conceptualizing the workings of identity. If, in fact, intersectionality purports to theorise identity in a way that departs from or adds to Black feminism, a more explicit engagement with the nature (and distinctiveness) of its theoretical contribution would be useful” (Nash, 2008:9). Another problem that is often highlighted is that intersectionality’s concern with marginalised subjects or groups tends to overshadow the fact that any group, whether marginalised or not, has its own peculiar intersections.

Other concerns that have been raised centre on methodological problems. For instance, McCall (2005) bemoans what she sees as obsession with convoluted methodological canons. She argues that an inclination to reject methodologies that are considered too simplistic or reductionist in favour of complex methodologies “may restrict the scope of knowledge that can be produced on intersectionality” (2005:1772). Although the above points of concern are well taken, I continue to see intersectionality as important in looking at a group as complex as Black women even as I acknowledge the validity of some of the issues raised by critique of its precepts.

It is significant to point out that intersectionality’s critics are not rejecting it as a useful framework, but point to some of the areas that require attention to make it more nuanced. In this sense, I agree with Lewis (1992: 35) that, “while White-

centred theories must be resisted, it needs to be shown exactly how gender and racial ideologies interact". Thus, instead of seeing intersectional analysis as obsolete or contradictory, I see it as complementary to Black feminist analysis and criticism in terms of how 'otherness' is constructed in terms of its multiple oppressions. In this regard, Gerwin is right in arguing that intersectionality research must deal with the "absence of intersectionality than with the concept itself," since it "questions the creation of otherness and indifference of social groups" (2009:4).

Hence, the present study seeks to advance the application of an intersectional approach, premised on a semiology that focuses on the simultaneous operation of gender, race and sexuality in the analysis of representation in audiovisual media, not only for the sake of the present study but also as a way to deepen and extend intersectionality analysis. In so doing, the study responds to some of the limitations of intersectionality and contributes ideas that may improve its effectiveness as an analytical tool. I deem this as potentially offering a more insightful and penetrating analysis than traditional content analysis usually privileged in mass communication can do. The approach used for this study is important for understanding the gamut of oppressions faced by Black women and the way the media entrenches some of the stereotypes behind much of the social relations that justify the manifold oppressions of Black women. Thus, as I argue, the position of Black women is better understood within the framework constructed for this study, which considers multiple oppressions and departs from a one-dimensional approach.

## 2.3 The notion of representation and the concept of stereotyping

Having provided a brief appraisal of Black feminism, I now turn to the notion of representation which is equally important since this is a study of the representation of a particular group (Black women). Representation refers to the idea that aspects of a reality (gender, race, class) can be represented by media practitioners (writers, producers and directors) to construct a text which creates meaning for the audience. (In the subsequent analyses I will attempt to decipher the kind of meaning that the selected films create for audiences.) Such meaning could be constructed through language and other signifiers such as images. In this sense, a film becomes a site in which some aspects of reality may be rendered. Hall (1997) sees representation essentially as the production of meaning through signifying systems such as language and images. For Hall, representation is a process that takes place at two levels; for instance, the images that we carry in our heads (our own world) render meaning to the text that we come across as a "referent point" as Hall (1997) puts it. The "referent" point then becomes the first level, and the second level becomes the interpretation we attach to that which represents the world around us. The signifier renders messages to the receivers who, in turn, rely on their referent points to derive meaning. Hence, Hall (1997) refers to the concepts of encoding and decoding with the sender (filmmakers) encoding the message that will ultimately be decoded by the receiver (viewers).

The most critical point, however, is that in their construction of meaning, media practitioners select certain aspects of reality, which they orchestrate to convey meaning through a process of framing. Ndlela (2005:72) defines framing as "the manner in which an issue is presented and this influences the way in which issues or problems can be understood". Through framing and representation the media have the power through selection and reinforcement to construct influential imagery of a whole range of groups, situations and ideas. (In my analysis I will be unravelling the kind of imagery used to construct Black women.)

According to McQuail (1993), the media often give us a kind of social barometer of changing representations of social groups and trends. The fundamental point here is that the media are not always able to present everything about the object of representation, hence the need to select and frame some aspects of the object of representation. Seen that way, 'representation' works hand-in-glove with 'framing.' It is crucial to note that the audience may understand the images, behaviours and ideas represented by the media in different ways in accordance with their individual values and assumptions of the world around them. Thus, representation is not just about the way the world is presented to us, but also about how we engage with media texts in order to interpret and assimilate such portrayals. Representation is therefore just as much about audience interpretation as it is about the portrayals that are offered to us by the media. The point is that producers construct all representations, irrespective of how natural they may look, through the process of selection.

I see representation as a process taking place on a continuum where media practitioners construct meaning at one end (production level) of the continuum based on their own views, background and understanding of the object/subject being represented, and, at the opposite end, the audiences who react to the meaning created by media practitioners in various ways based on their different views, contexts and experiences. The different views I refer to here could for instance, explain why some people may find certain aspects of a media programme offensive, while others may find the same aspects gratifying or humorous. This also means that the meaning of objects of representation may differ depending on the context and the experiences of the receivers/audiences. This may also pose a problem for the critic. For instance, Tinkcom and Villarejo (2001:8) find that "a film that might seem to some critics as the embodiment of all that is most reprehensible in the forms of popular entertainment could be the central and sole critical engagement with the popular that is available to spectators", or that "one critic's poison is another viewer's manna" (2001:9). For this reason, in this study I place equal emphasis on the overt and the covert, that is the explicit/manifest and the latent meanings, as well as the arbitrary relationship of the signifier and the signified, hence the allusion to semiotics in my analysis.

A key concern about representation in this study is that if certain representations are used constantly, they tend to become familiar and in the end look more natural (leading to the creation of stereotypes or buttressing and exacerbating prevailing

stereotypes), and this is a key issue in the present study. This should, however, not be misconstrued to imply that the audiences are passive viewers, as proponents of the magic-bullet theory would like to believe, but that the more the representation looks natural or authentic, the less the chances of it being vigorously challenged. This may explain why one finds some people watching films which they view as less frank in their representation of certain aspects of reality yet still continuing to enjoy them instead of challenging their assumptions. A good example would be the contentious comedies of Leon Schuster, mentioned earlier, which appear to be disparaging about the way they portray South Africans in general in a non-flattering manner, nonetheless they continue to be popular with South Africans.

According to Hall (1997:65), "[r]epresentation implies the active work of selecting, and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of already existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean". This implies that representation is more than presenting aspects of reality and is also about conveying meaning using those aspects of reality. The meaning conveyed may be straightforward or ideological. It may also be covert or overt, meaning that the text being presented can have an obvious meaning or a hidden one, which is uncovered when looked at with a critical eye.

I argue that recurrently portraying a particular group in a certain one-dimensional manner amounts to stereotyping since an individual's identity is constituted by an array of different dimensions, not one. As Ndlela (2005:73) notes, "[m]edia

representations reduce, shrink, condense, and select/reject aspects of intricate social relations in order to represent them as fixed, natural, obvious and ready to consume". Of course, both framing and representation are not free of stereotypes and the subjective judgements of those involved in producing media texts, as noted earlier. For Ndlela, one way of making things meaningful is through stereotyping: a process of selection, magnification and reduction (2005:73). In this regard, Kilpatrick's (1999:1) assertion that "Films have been around for only a century, but the stereotypes within them have their origins in over five centuries of perceptions – and misrepresentations," makes sense. Because meaning is created based on our own understanding (attitude, mental images, convictions) it may not always be free of stereotypes. Stereotypes can be understood as generalisations that we make about other people often based on our attitude, prejudice, ignorance and lack of knowledge, or reluctance to acquire the facts. Stereotyping reflects a judgement about another person, group or entity that is often unfounded since it relies only on beliefs, attitude or prejudice. Mitra (1999: 21) defines stereotype as "an attempt to pigeonhole people into well recognised categories that can be used as a construct to predict the behaviour and characteristics of the people who fall into specific stereotypes".

As Shohat and Stam (1994:21) found, stereotypes also tend to reproduce themselves and a particular stereotype reveals more about the *stereotyper* "than about the objects of its fascination". For instance, when you approach a person with a certain attitude, what actually transpires may tend to reveal more about your

own insecurities than the person who is presumably the object of your typecasting. That is why in her remarks about stereotypical representation of Africa on colonial films, Thackway (2003:33) remarks that "these films' African settings, dreamed up by people who more often than not had never set foot on the continent, said more about the West's exotic fantasies than they did about Africa". Thus the settings referred to in the above quote, as the product of imagination, just like stereotypes, will say more about the thoughts, attitudes and views of the person conceiving them. However, the most crucial aspect of this that is troubling for this study is that stereotypes have the potential to shape reality and their social consequences are of course very real.

One of the questions to be investigated in the subsequent analyses is: if stereotypes can shape reality, what kind of reality will the salient stereotypes in the selected films potentially sanction for Black women? According to Prell (2009: para. 2), the psychological and power dimensions of stereotypes are considerable in that they are widely circulated and repeated, and in the process become confused with accurate information for both their objects and perpetrators. Furthermore, Prell finds that stereotypes "play a crucial role in rationalizing the rights of the powerful over the powerless and in justifying why a group is despised" (2009: para. 6). According to this source, women are more likely to be stereotyped than men. Stereotypes are extremely powerful in that they circulate much faster and occur in conversation, jokes and comedy, film, literature and in the news media, as Prell observes. DeFleur and Dennis (1996:221) found that "a film will have combined

functions, seeking to amuse while it enriches, informs, or persuades". It is therefore imperative that the depictions it carries are not stereotypical in any way because of the damage that often results from stereotyping.

Stereotypes may lead to divisions, marginalisation, stigmatisation and vilification, among other problems, which often serve as a justification for systematic oppressions. For instance, weaker groups are more likely to be highly stereotyped by dominant groups who inevitably oppress the weaker ones. Thus stereotypes have hegemonic tendencies as can be adduced from the way in which colonialists stereotyped the colonised who were economically and politically weaker (Vambe et al., 2006). Because of the power dimension of stereotypes, especially in the way that they manifest in the public discourse, including the media, it becomes crucial to evaluate the filmic representation of Black women, and to see if there is any shift from the habitually stereotypical images carried by the media, particularly in film and television. From a semiotics point of view, there are two kinds of meaning that can be deduced from a represented image, namely denotative and connotative meanings. Denotative refers to the overt/literal meaning; connotative refers to the covert associations connected to the image (object of representation) or the ideological implication. Hence this study uses a semiotics-based analysis to unravel the ideological meaning of the way Black women are represented.

The notion of representation is therefore central to a feminist analysis such as the current study, which is anchored in race and gender studies. In order to appreciate

how representation relates to feminist media studies, one must recognise that the person making the representation commences from a subjective position. In previous studies, this position has been identified as emanating from a racialist, patriarchal society. Since it was men, mainly White males, who made films, they reproduced images that resonated with their socio-cultural and political views. The films then positioned women in relation to the power relationship of the society. Hence feminist research generally points to the mass media as reinforcing patriarchal authority through certain valences such as misrepresentation, sexual objectification and stereotypical representation or under-representation (Motsaathebe, 2009; 2011a; 2011b). In that dialectic, males generally looked down on women as inferior, or as sexual objects, while colonialists looked down at Blacks as inferior to Whites and as objects of cheap labour. Again, these attitudes are reflected in how social, economic, political and cultural spheres operate.

In that sense, the colonisers positioned the colonised, using public institutions such as the media, as a source of cheap labour, amusement and exploitation, and had a clear intention to degrade them so that Blacks become amenable to all sorts of exploitation geared to satisfy the needs and amusement of the colonial masters (see Masilela, 2003; Peterson, 2003; Vambe et al., 2006). The media orchestrated in this way therefore become an important part of sustaining hegemonic ideology.

## 2.4 The theory of hegemony

According to Antonio Gramsci (1971), a society is often ruled or dominated by one of its social groups. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is useful in this study in the sense that he argued for the necessity of the dominant class or group gaining some level of consent from the dominated through ideological manipulation. Gramsci's theory includes the idea of gaining limited consent of the dominated. Patriarchalism is therefore an important part of hegemonic ideology in most societies. To remain unchallenged, the ideas of the dominant have to be seen as a norm by the oppressed. In the Gramscian sense, then, the media are often used by those in power to further oppress the marginalised through messages and representations that attempt to desensitise the oppressed groups in order to ensure that they do not question the injustice of their position. The media orchestrated in this way therefore become an important part of hegemonic ideology and control.

I argue that the problem of hegemony in the context of South Africa is being counteracted by "progressive" texts, legislations and some filmic work within the current wave of contemporary films, although there are still a fair number of continuities from previous hegemonic apparatuses. The problematic portrayal of Black women highlighted in this study could be seen as an example of such continuities.

The medium of film has been used as an instrument of patriarchy for a long time, helping to hegemonise male superiority. According to Kluge (1953:129), "this [tendency] is largely because men have been behind and in control of the movie camera in more ways than one—physically, economically and ideologically". It is for this reason that Kluge regards filmmakers as media politicians. Furthermore, Knight (1995:30) echoes Kluge's sentiments, adding that middle-aged White men have always dominated the media. Thus, the media have been used as a hegemonic device for racial and gendered oppression. In this respect the representation of Black people, and particularly Black women, was especially disparaging due to the racial politics that dominated much of the world. This was especially true during colonialism, where males in general looked down on women as inferior to men, while colonialists generally looked down on Blacks as inferior to Whites. This attitude accounted for modes of filmic representations generally referred to as embodying the colonial gaze and the male gaze.

According to Baker-Kimmons (2003), "[t]he use of Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony supports the argument that negative Black images, as the expression of ideological hegemony, aid in the justification and reinforcement of Blacks occupying the lowest strata of society, as well as impede the development of class consciousness". This implies that the media could be used by those in power to further oppress the marginalised, so that marginalised groups such as Black women remain in the lowest-paying jobs, since this might be portrayed as the norm in the media. However, Baker-Kimmons points out that marginalised groups often create

their own power relations, thereby directly challenging the dominant hegemonic structure.

This is a very important point as it indicates that viewers may not always function merely as passive spectators, but that they do challenge what they see as unjust in the media. For example, audiences may complain about a particular issue in the media and they may then take a more serious stand by mobilising and demonstrating against the media, which carry images, or messages that are seen as expressing hate speech or ridiculing a particular race group, for instance. It will be posited in the course of this study that the problem of hegemony in the context of South Africa is to a certain extent being counteracted by progressive texts, legislation and some filmic work within the current wave of contemporary films, although there is still a fair degree of continuity from previous hegemonic apparatuses as noted earlier. The problematic portrayal of Black women already highlighted could be seen as an example of such continuities.

## 2.5 The colonial gaze and the male gaze

A preliminary reading of contemporary South African films reveals, arguably, that these films are still obsessed with the gendered and racist discourse referred to above, which Kaplan (1997) refers to as “the colonial gaze”. According to Yancy (2008:1), the colonial gaze, as structured through the White/European imaginary,

"functions at the discursive and ideological level of engaging in various disciplinary strategies that fix the colonized as savage, fit to be ruled, and animal-like". In the same vein, the colonial gaze is seen by Kaplan as "looking relation that carries its own semiotics, such that certain common features recur in images of non-Western peoples in Hollywood and British film" (1997:79-80).

The male gaze, on the other hand, positions women's bodies as erotic images to satisfy male fantasies. Thus, there seems to be a relationship between the two looking relations in terms of the way in which they both position their 'subjects'. Hence Kaplan concludes that the colonial gaze, like the male gaze, is an objectifying gaze, and that they are both laden with stereotypes. Indeed, film is more than an instrument of representation; it is also the object of representation (Kilpatrick, 1999). Early South African films were made by directors who demonstrated no critical capacity for portraying their social reality with the result that it was portrayed stereotypically, with the target Black audiences not realising that they were actually the victims of the films (Botha, 2003:17). This kind of portrayal reflects a positioning typically rooted in the colonial gaze.

Tomaselli (1989) observes that during the apartheid era most films produced in South Africa were made by filmmakers with very little emphasis on grass-roots problems. Any film that attempted to deal with "the lives and the struggle of the people" (Botha, 2003:185) was banned and the producers or authors were often threatened because the everyday life of Black South Africans and their trauma and

sufferings were directly linked to apartheid. Gibson Kente, for example, a Black filmmaker and producer of *How Long Must We Suffer*, was arrested in 1976 and the film was subsequently banned in the country (Tomaselli, 1989). Films produced by Blacks were deliberately banned, as was the case with films such as *Mapantsula* which, in Botha's words, was "one of the first truly South African films made from a Black point of view" (2003:94). The discouragement of an active Black film industry in favour of films produced by Whites for Black audiences (Tomaselli, 1989; Botha, 2003) was one of the significant strategies used to restrict any form of content that challenged the supremacy of apartheid.

## 2.6 Synopsis of key findings of research on representation of Black women

In her work, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* Bobo (1982:33) concludes that "[r]epresentations of Black women in mainstream media constitute a venerable tradition of distorted and limited imagery". This observation supports the claim made in the present study that the portrayal of Black women in the media needs to be critically scrutinised. In another study Gaines (1999) echoes the ever-present concern of Black feminists who decry the absence of Black women role models in films, which she blames on the tendency by mainstream feminism to ignore the fact that women of colour experience oppression, firstly, in terms of racism rather than gender or classism.

Commenting on the constant invisibility of Black role models on the screen, Gaines argues that Black women find themselves being forced to identify with images of White women on screen, since bodies that look like theirs are absent in most cinematographic screenings. This observation again has a bearing on the notion of representation and the agenda-setting nature of the media, which suggests that people construct their views about the world around them on the basis of what they get from the media. There is, however, another view with regard to this, which stresses that audiences are not merely passive consumers of media messages who ingest the content of the media without questioning its truthfulness and latent meaning and stereotypes. In concluding her study Gaines reiterates that "[f]eminist scholars must move beyond their single focus on gender as the root of oppression and expand their analysis to take seriously the differences between women" (1999:294).

Richter (2008) echoes the same concern: "The ability of women to create themselves as subjects on the screen is not equally shared among women", noting that "while it is true that White women have had the ability to find a voice on the screen as speaking subjects, Black women have had a more difficult time". In her work *A History of Black Women Voices in Filmmaking* she argues that "[f]eminist film theorists, in paying particular attention to gender, have generally failed to recognize the racial dimension of oppression" Richter (2008 :6). She further observes that "[w]hile Black male directors have had wide commercial success and are being taken seriously as auteurs within film studies, Black female directors are

still struggling for visibility and recognition" (2008:6). This observation resonates with current studies which reveal that Black women filmmakers are still facing problems that include funding as well as patriarchal and racist stereotypes, among other challenges stemming from the intersection of their gender and race (Motsaathebe, 2010a). Of course, this is not to suggest that White women face no problems in the film industry. However, their problems are mainly patriarchalism, since filmmaking has largely been seen as a man's domain. This point is bluntly captured by Lemish (2002: 89), who finds that as a woman, "People always look at you with a question mark – what are you doing in a man's field?" Furthermore, Lemish finds that, "Even your own crew are not looking at you as their director, but as a woman who happens to be there and they know better than you" (2002: 91).

The above concerns are further supported by hooks, who observed that "[w]ith the possible exception of early race movies, Black female spectators have had to develop looking relations within a cinematic context that constructs our presence as absence, that denies the 'body' of the Black female so as to perpetuate White supremacy and with it a phallocentric spectatorship where the woman to be looked at and desired is 'White'" (1999:310). A cursory review of contemporary South African films will reveal some of the above concerns. Such films could be termed the "New Black Male Cinema", as Lane (2000) notes of similar films in the USA. This implies that these films address the racial stereotypes pertaining to Black men – those that have undergirded much of the filmic history – but still fail to question

those that typify the portrayal of Black women, being gender, class and race stereotypes.

Diawara (2003) also decries the increasing attempts to correct the stereotypes as being racialised in themselves in the sense that Blacks are now being set up vis-à-vis Whites who are used as a reference point for the kind of portrayal regarded as acceptable or unproblematic. Diawara instead sees independent films by Africans as more germane and authentic in terms of their approach to the whole question of representation, as the producers are under no obligation to comply with some norms, but naturally apply their art without any pressure to construct or deconstruct a particular image.

Another important contribution with regard to the presentation of Blackness in cinema is the work of Donald Bogle (2003). Of great importance to this study is a revised edition of his book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* in which he explores the representation of blackness in Hollywood films. The most preferred character types for Blacks in American films identified in this book include the "toms" who are always "chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved, and insulted. They keep the faith, never turn against their white massas, and remain hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless and oh-so-kind" (2003:5-6). (Bogle, 2003: 7). The "tragic mulattoes" are presented as fair skinned, sexually attractive women of mixed race. They are likeable but their privileges end disastrously often as a result of their race.

Their roles in these films always end tragically For example, their relationship with white men always ends disastrously because their race. The "brutal bad bucks" are presented as "over-sexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh" (2003: 10). They are usually big and muscular men involved in criminal activities, leading to clashes with the legal authorities.

Then there are the "coons" who provide amusement to the audience and are usually depicted as "little screwball creations whose eyes popped, whose hair stood on end with the least excitement" A version of the coons can be found mostly in the films of Leon Schuster and Jamie Uys such as *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (Jamie Uys) and *Mama Jack, Mr Bones 1* and *Mr Bones 2* (all by Leon Schuster). It is possible to argue that the toms have been largely deconstructed in contemporary South African films. Films such as *Mapantsula* and *Hijack Stories* are some of the memorable films that present a departure from this archetype through themes of resistance against political oppression and unfair labour practices. Films such as this present Black workers as assertive and defiant when they feel exploited compared to the toms who were always submissive and loyal.

Among the archetypes that Bogle identifies with regard to the depiction of Black women are the mammies and the servants. A further version of the mammies is the supermama who fiercely runs the household often singlehandedly. The servants on the other hand "were always around when the boss needed them, they were always ready to lend a helping hand when times were tough" (Bogle, 2003: 36). He finds

that the Black servants were "repeatedly exploited and mistreated, and the black servants performers themselves were often criticized by the civil rights organizations for accepting such demeaning roles." According to Bogle, these kinds of representations are mere "filmic reproductions of black stereotypes that had existed since the days of slavery and were already popularized in American life and arts" (2003: 4). He suggests that such stereotypes emphasise Black inferiority in order to amuse White audiences. I find his comments on the servants and the mammies stereotypes particularly insightful with regard to the depiction of Black women in South African cinema, although there are variations which I discuss in detail in the appropriate section of my analysis of the films selected for this study.

I find Bogle's work useful with regard to some of the stereotypes that he identifies in the American films particularly the archetype of the mammies (as I indicated), a version of which is very much present (albeit slightly differently) in much of the post-apartheid films. However, his work focuses largely on African-Americans in Hollywood cinema, and since the history and social context of that ethnic group as well as the film industry under discussion are different from those of cinema in South Africa and Black women's history and social context in South Africa, the most insightful analysis of the representation of Black women in South African cinema would emerge from the perspective of authors that focus on the African and South African context.

Also important is the work of Ukadike (1994), which looks at the images of Black women in films and concludes that African women involved in filmmaking are facing the challenge of regaining the power of self-definition and self-representation. This observation makes sense in the light of the demeaning images of Black women that have proliferated in mainstream films. Ukadike reiterates the need for the new social and political currents in Africa and the Black diasporas that involve new levels of critical awareness and new challenges to Western intellectual hierarchies. This line of thinking seems to resonate with Shohat and Stam's call for the pressing need to confront what they call the "single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as the world centre of gravity, as ontological reality to the world's shadow" (1994:2). Shohat and Stam's research culminated in the book *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, which critiques the issues of Eurocentrism and racism in the media. They also raise the issue of representation and question stereotypes and distortions evident in much of the ethnic/racial depiction in the majority of the films.

Ogunleye (2005) conducted a study on feminist appraisals of African films and concluded that the current portrayal of women was still too superficial. An extremely optimistic portrayal of a superwoman who does not have any weaknesses and is able to handle all difficulties she encounters is an example of the type of portrayal that Ogunleye decries. The films examined for this study are replete with such examples. He concludes that "[t]he class dichotomy and unequal status which have made the African woman poorer, less educated and disempowered, have also

made her a victim in film portrayals. She has no means of drawing a portrait of herself through film. What she sees on film is an image she cannot recognise – a figment of the imagination of the male" (Ogunleye, 2005:134).

One of only a few authors to focus on South African women is Shireen Hassim; in her book *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa* (2007) she explores the involvement of South African women in the struggle for liberation and reflects on the intersection of the women's movement, political formations and the repressive state, and how the latter shaped the socio-political history and struggle for Black South African women. This work is important as it points to those factors that are peculiar to feminists operating in the context of South Africa.

In general, the problematic portrayal of Black women is attributed to the racialised Eurocentric/Western views alluded to by Ukadike (1994), Shohat and Stam (1994) and Diawara (2003). Correspondingly, in Crenshaw's essay entitled "Demarginalising the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics," she examines the multidimensionality of Black women's experiences and concludes that "feminist theory remains White, and its potential to broaden and deepen its analysis by addressing non-privileged women remains unrealized" (1993:221). Although there have been improvements in terms of a broader analysis, such improvements are not significant enough to permeate the Black women's experience.

Analysing the work of Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers, Ebrahim (1998:41) observes that "little attempt has been made to identify an appropriate critical framework that is cognizant of the Black women's cultural, social and political positionings, or of the multiple nature of Black women's oppressions or marginalizations". Ultimately, she proposes what she terms a "pan-African feminist" framework which recognises, among other things, the complexity of Black women's oppression, collectivity over individualism, alternative ways of knowing as well as the need to stress "male-female complementarity" as opposed to much of the discourse which tends to set up women against men (1998:73). The present study sees some of these indicators as vital also for the examination of Black women in South Africa.

Overall, the above observations provide a good starting point for this study to interrogate the notion of 'Black womanhood' and the way this category is being re-envisioned on the big screen.

In summary, this chapter has discussed four aspects relating to the literature that undergirds the present study. I started by discussing the formation of the Black Women's Movement, outlining the issues they struggled against and the freedom they imagined for Black women. Principally, I noted that the movement recognised the multiple oppressions of Black women and fought to liberate them from these oppressions by influencing debates, policies and theorising in such a way that their realities become a form of theorisation and not the other way round. I have also

noted the parallels between liberation movements operating in various contexts such as the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa and the Black Liberation Movement in America, highlighting the plight of Black women who were part of these movements. In addition to challenges within the 'malestream' liberation movements and mainstream feminist movements, I have also reflected on some of the challenges posed by the use of a common label, since Black women are not a monolithic homogeneous group.

Importantly, I explicated Black womanhood in the context of Africa in general and South Africa in particular, especially the way Black women continue to permeate public discourse and transform the political landscape in this country. I argued that the gamut of issues postulated by Black feminism together with the theorisation of Black South African women needs to go beyond the moment of colonialism and post-apartheid. In doing so, I assembled critical information that may help us to contextually historicise and perhaps theorise the experience of Black women in transforming contexts such as South Africa, or to put it another way, to re-imagine the category Black womanhood anew, given women's changing roles in the ever-transforming South Africa.

Furthermore, the notion of representation and its centrality to feminist media studies was explicated. Here Kaplan's (1997) position that the colonial gaze derives from a racist discourse which goes in tandem with the male gaze was restated. Both kinds of gazes objectify, with the colonial objectifying Blacks in general and the

male gaze objectifying Black women as an object of their desires, but also as an object that can be packaged as a commodity to be sold. The concept of intersectionality and its centrality and usefulness to the study of Black women was also critically discussed.

This chapter has appropriated a critical lens derived from Black feminism and theorisation of representation drawing on the previous representations of Black women as they became salient in previous studies discussed above. Chapter 3 will elaborate on this framework which is deemed useful in evaluating Black women from a multiperpectival standpoint, taking into consideration their struggle, current concerns, their current position in society, cultural impediments, politics and an array of their needs and aspirations that signal that work still needs to be done. As will become clear, in terms of this framework, the portrayal of women will be critically examined in terms of the gendered themes, activities and ascribed behaviour, status and occupations that emerge as pervasive modes of portrayal in these films.

# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY AND BROAD ANALYSIS

Based on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, I have constructed a critical framework that I use to 'read' the films selected for analysis, which I will explain in this chapter. Essentially the broad and scientific methodology used in this study is quantitative in approach since the study is interested in an in-depth analysis of the portrayal of Black women in the identified films. Because the study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the nature of roles, images and behavioural patterns ascribed to Black females characters in three high-profile South African films, the critical framework used draws from Black feminist film criticism, the theory of hegemony as well as critical insights arising from Bourdieu's (1979) theorisation of class and his concept of symbolic violence. As Vambe et al. (2007) highlighted, any analysis of films is not complete without an understanding of the semiotics of the films. I therefore incorporate semiotics, in my analysis, which I find useful in looking at the question of representation, or in other words, what the images represent and how this is signified. The question of "what ideas and values the people, places and things represented in those images stand for" is also investigated (Van Leeuwen, 2001: 92). My discussions in this chapter focus on the following key aspects:

- exposition of semiotics;
- brief plot summaries;

- the concept of genre and a few remarks about its key conventions;
- specification of the primary Black female characters in each case study;
- identification of major scenes in each film to be used as the focus of detailed analysis;
- specific elements that will be looked at, including narrative elements and codes (dress, gestures) which function as signs; also cinematic genre codes, iconic and indexical signs; questions of representation, for example, social roles assigned to Black women; characterisation and depiction of their narrative roles.

## 3.1 Semiotics

The semiotic analysis used in this study focuses on both sociological dimensions and cinematic sign systems. Although I draw on Saussure (1966), my analysis essentially takes inspiration from the method used by Rose (2001), Berger (2012), and Mendelson and Smith (2006), first providing a broad interpretation in order to identify the signs in the images, then determining what the signs signify, and lastly exploring the meanings of the signs in the social context. Semiotics is generally known to be a study of signs, or signifying practices. According to Mendelson and Smith (2006: 192), "signs are representations of some entity or concept, composed of two parts: *the signifier*, which stands for something else and *the signified*, the 'thing' for which the sign stands" (emphasis mine). Semiotics is essentially concerned with the way in which meaning is created through 'signs' in a text or any form of communication. According to Elam (1988: 1):

> Semiotics can best be defined as a science dedicated to the study of the production of meaning in society. As such it is equally concerned with processes of signification and with those of communication, i.e. the means whereby meanings are both generated and exchanged.

Meaning arises from the producer's perspective, from the image itself, and from a set of ideological, political, social and cultural attributes of the community where the meaning is constructed and contested (see Berger, 2012; Rose, 2001). This is supported by Elam who notes that semiotics uses "sign systems and codes at work in society and the cultural messages and texts produced" (1998: 1). These sign systems produce messages that essentially have connotative and denotative meanings, and thus the message may have a straightforward/manifest (overt) meaning or a latent (covert) one. For Gorny (1994:2) semiotics is "a way of viewing anything as constructed and functioning similarly to language". Some of the things semiotics can help 'decode' include behaviour, gesture, taste, which may generally reveal a particular meaning about the subject being analysed. These features are known in semiotics as codes because they can reveal more beyond what is presented at face value. For instance, someone's behavioural patterns or taste in clothing and food can reveal a great deal about one's class (Bourdieu 1979). This means that the text creates a certain reality beyond what is immediately presented.

Hence I use semiotics to unravel the multi-layered meanings in the selected films. In that sense, the concepts of denotation and connotation, which have been used by film scholars such as Metz (1985) and Hall (1980), become very important. According to Berger (2012:18-19), connotation refers to "the cultural meanings that become attached to any form of communication; it involves the symbolic, historic, and emotional matters connected to it. Denotation, on the other hand, refers to the literal or explicit meanings". In semiotics, recurring patterns are seen as key indicators of the latent meaning contained in the representation or conveyed message.

Thus, I start with a general analysis and then move on to a more specific evaluation that attempts to understand the presentation of Black female characters by exploring the range and depth of their depiction. Where relevant, I also address the technical aspects in terms of cinematography such as camera work, lighting and editing, as well as the aesthetics and conventions that may restrict or dictate the manner of representation in the respective filmic genres. This is absolutely important because film needs to be analysed in terms of its specific and unique narrative and textual qualities that attend to the unique characteristics of the film medium such as framing, camera movement and editing, all of which play a role in the production of meaning (see Metz (1985). Looking at the technical aspects highlighted above enables us to determine the kinds of signs used and how they are combined to make meaning and communicate a hegemonic, patriarchal ideology

Furthermore, I draw from Bourdieu's (1979) theorisation of class in terms of social, economic and cultural capital, which I expand upon in Chapter 5. I argue that although filmmakers are aware that their work may be open to different interpretations, they always have an intended meaning in mind, or a major issue that they see their work addressing. For instance, an interview with Darrell Roodt reveals that it was his intention to address certain specific issues in the film *Yesterday*. Mitra supports this by saying that, "Needless to say, a movie-maker does always have an ideal viewer in mind who would share the preferred meaning of the text" (1999:33). A clear case in point is the way film directors who work on adaptations often frame issues differently from the way in which these issues are presented in the original text. *A Dry White Season* and *Tsotsi* are clear examples of such diverse signification. For instance, in *Tsotsi* the director seems to have replaced the oppressive apartheid system evident in the novel with a silent oppressor in the form of HIV/Aids, which is signified in the film through billboards/signposts and Tsotsi's personal life particularly the death of his mother.

The three films selected for analysis were all released between 2004 and 2008, a period deemed significant for reasons mentioned in Chapter 1. These are commercial films and have all been screened internationally and nominated for major international awards. One of these films has won an Oscar. Their directors are popular South African directors. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the most vital information about the films selected as case studies for this thesis.

**Table 1: Films, directors, key characters and year of production**

| **FILM** | *Yesterday* | *Tsotsi* | *Jerusalema* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **YEAR** | 2004 | 2005 | 2008 |
| **DIRECTOR** | Darrell James Roodt | Gavin Hood | Ralph Ziman |
| **SETTING** | Rural (geographical) Post-apartheid (historical moment) | Urban Post-apartheid (historical moment | Urban(geographical) Post-apartheid (historical moment |
| **GENRE** | Social realist drama | Gangster | Gangster |
| **SYNOPSIS** | A married mother living with her 5-year-old daughter in their rural village and has difficulty getting proper health care | A violent teenage gangster whose sense of humanity rekindles after discovering a baby in the car he hijacks. | A promising scholar, with university admission but financial constraints, who sees his only option being to work at increasingly risky/illegal jobs. |
| **STARRING** | Leleti Khumalo, Kenneth Khambula | Terry Pheto, Nambitha Mpumlwana Presley Chueneyagae | Gladys Mahlangu Rapulana Seiphemo Jafta Mamabolo |

In considering the selection, I primarily looked for films that accord significant narrative space to Black women and whose premiere generated a lot of publicity and wide circulation. I began by drawing a list with the names of all the major films produced between 2004 and 2008 and asked the Mass Media class of 2010 at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (where I was teaching at the time) to identify the top three films they regarded as their favourites from the list. Some of the key films that I had included in the list were *Red Dust, Zulu Love Letter* and

*Forgiveness*. Ultimately, the films that featured predominantly in the students' selection were: *Jerusalema, Tsotsi* and *Yesterday.*

As stated in terms of my criteria, I wanted to focus on the high-profile films of the last decade and these three films fit the bill perfectly. I believe that one of the unintended consequences of focusing on high-profile films in this way was the exclusion of films such as *The World Unseen* and *Zulu Love Letter.* A question need to be posed as to why films such as *The World Unseen* and *Zulu Love Letter* and many others which have a critical esteem that appears to challenge the Hollywood cinematic paradigm do not seem to achieve high-profile status in terms of mass audience(viewership) compared to films such as *Jerusalema* and *Tsotsi* whose convention revolves very close to that of Hollywood. I argue that films (e.g. *Zulu Love Letter*) that challenge Hollywood conventions will struggle with distribution because of the hegemonic imperatives of the mainstream Hollywood films and their distribution structures.

The asymmetrical way in which films are distributed ensures that film audience are fed on "a diet of American movies", to borrow a point from Saks (2003: 144). Hence Modisane's observation: "Though censorship is no longer a major problem in the new dispensation, the challenge of distribution still burdens South African films, especially those that are independent of Hollywood conventions and aesthetics" (2010: 159). During the course of this study this researcher went to over twenty DVD rental outlets and none of them had a copy of *Zulu Love Letter*. It

is possible therefore to argue that those films which major distributors prefer pander to Hollywood conventions, while those films that seem to challenge this convention have to battle to reach wide audience.

The three films identified were all directed by white, middle-class men, a fact which could be seen as challenging, especially in the context of the notion of spectatorship, which argues that the male director's gaze is seen as the "controlling gaze" largely responsible for the representation of female bodies. Hence Gaines's (1999:300) suggestion that "race could be a factor in the construction of cinematic language." In this sense she doubts if "mainstream cinema can offer the male spectator the pleasure of looking at a white female character via the gaze of a black male character" (Gaines, 1999 :3002).

Although one could argue that an overemphasise of race as a factor in the representation and signifying practices may be misleading, it nonetheless raises a basic point about the need for people across the racial and gender divide to get involved in the production of films. In the context of South Africa, the preceding point raises the need for Black women to get involved in film production, as a way to bring about more realistic and nuanced portrayal of Black women.

Of course, this argument harks back to the issue of authorship, which some film scholars dismiss as the long-standing topic that will not go away (Sellors, 2007). According to Fischer (2004: 65), some of the major theories of cinema authorship were produced by the French auteurist critics. Scholars working within the auteurist

paradigm recognise authorship as important in filmic work. For instance, David Bordwell regards the author (i.e. the director) as "the source of the film, as the unique creative temperament and as the narrator in film" (1984: 4). However, there are those who question the suggestion that the director must be regarded as the author, given the collaborative nature of filmmaking. As Phillips puts it "To write, costume, direct, light, perform film, edit, score, finance, and promote a movie is beyond the powers of one mortal. Nonetheless, many film reviewers and critics credit and blame a single person, usually the director" (2002:4). For Phillips it is not right to give all the credit to the director, as it is difficult to know which one of the film's makers contributed which aspect to the finished product. To support his point, Phillips cites an example about the American director Frank Capra and his colleague Robert Riskin:

> In a lengthy interview Capra expounded on 'the Capra touch' but made no mention of Riskin. After the interview appeared, Riskin sent Capra a manuscript with the note 'Frank, let's see you put the Capra touch on this.' Inside were all blank pages (Phillips, 2002:5).

Nonetheless, as Bordwell and Thompson point out: "it is the director who makes crucial decisions about performance, staging, lighting, framing, cutting, and sound" (2008:33). Thus, the fact that the directors have the authorial voice as they have the final say on how the final product looks is well taken, although it must be acknowledged that they work with many other people who influence them. This is a very important point to note especially because all the directors of the three films analysed had a hand in writing the screenplays and therefore exerted a great deal of

influence over the look, sound and events depicted in the films.

On the other hand, the fact that the directors of the three films selected were all White, middle-class men could also point to who still gets to make films in South Africa. In this sense it is absolutely important that greater access is promoted to ensure diversity in terms of race and gender. Therefore, I believe that fostering racial and gendered diversity, inclusion and access within the South African film-making industry could go a long way in advancing a progressive agenda in this media form.

It is also important to reiterate that although *Zulu Love Letter* would have been interesting to analyse for this study as the female protagonist of the film is a complex character and worthy of examination, the film was nonetheless excluded because it did not exactly fit the criteria of selection (i.e. I was interested in how Black women were represented in "popular" South African films). Even though the film (*Zulu Love Letter*) has subsequently become recognised amongst film critics and scholars as an important film, it is still not widely known amongst ordinary people. Thus, except for its art-house reputation, it is still limited as the present study set out to evaluate films that were widely known. In terms of my criteria, I simply wanted to see how women are represented in those films that seem to reach the majority of viewers. I refer to the kind of films that reach a wide audience as having "popular appeal". The criteria was motivated in part by assertions that the mass media are sexist modes of communication that often objectify, commodify, fetishise and stereotype women for entertainment, and that media products that draw on a fair number of stereotypes are more likely to become popular with the majority of audiences than those with critical astuteness.

Importantly, the popular appeal and validation of the corpus of films selected were further evidenced by critical reviews, nominations and awards, and the high numbers that they drew on their opening weekends. Most of the locally produced films have traditionally struggled to recoup the money spent on production during their premiere (Internet Movie Database, 2010; *Mail & Guardian*, 2006; Dovey, 2008). The information pertaining to the box-office success of these films attests to their popular appeal. For instance, Ster Kinekor was quoted as saying that *Tsotsi* broke box-office records in its opening weekend in South Africa, earning R526 676 (*Mail & Guardian*, 2006).

According to Dovey, *Tsotsi* "outperformed Hollywood blockbusters in South Africa, where it brought in US$70,000 in its opening weekend (2008:145). Furthermore, *Tsotsi* later won an Oscar. *Yesterday* was nominated for an Oscar. As Borges puts it, "*Yesterday* was the first national film to compete for the best foreign film Oscar. *Tsotsi*, meanwhile, was the first South African production to win this award in 2006. The two films are emblematic of a new cinema born in post-apartheid South Africa, the outcome of a radical turnaround in the film industry, diverging from the earlier cinema tradition" (2012: 249). Similarly, *Jerusalema* was equally well received when it premiered in 2008, having been released on the same day in multiple international locations such as Germany, USA and the United Kingdom (Olivier, 2009). Although validation by the Academy raises a separate issue, it nonetheless says something about the film's popular recognition. This is an important point to highlight because "popular appeal" was one of the main criteria that I used to select the films analysed for this study.

It is also important not to accept at face value the fact that films are high profile or popular. In that sense, one could also say that the audience's exposure to Hollywood blockbusters conditions them to have certain plot and character expectations and this is likely to affect directors who may want to take a different approach in terms of plot, characters and themes. I suggest that these expectations also place limitations on what filmmakers who have to consider commercial success as well as recognition from the American Academy can do. The fact that some of the actors are icons or celebrities might also account (at least partially) for the films' popularity) and that *Tsotsi*'s script is based on a novel by Athol Fugard and the fact that the filmmakers were dealing with the vision of a famous White liberal may also be significant in catapulting the film to reach a wider audience and in Fugard's case an American audience as he is very popular there. Similarly, the fact that the directors are well-known in the film industry with impeccable credentials, having made several films before, could also be a factor in contributing to the success of these films at the box-office.

Perhaps another important aspect that accounted for the success of the three films was the economic imperatives governing film production. Films do not reach audiences by a process of osmosis. Hence the film's success with regard to reaching wide-audience depends on marketing and distribution. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2008: 34), "distribution companies form the core of economic power in the commercial film industry." These authors single out Warner Bros., Paramount Pictures, Walt Disney/Buena Vista, Sony/Colombia, Twentieth Century Fox, and Universal as the world's major distributers. The exhibitors and

distributors receive their share and split it further, then there are printing and advertising costs and the author gets whatever, if anything, that remains, which is further distributed between workers' salaries. Once they have been paid from the little that remains, the producer and other players must then wait to receive their share (see Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 34-35).

The fact that major distributers are owned by conglomerates makes it very difficult for smaller filmmakers to penetrate the international market. Hence *Tsotsi* reached worldwide audience only after its North American rights were bought by Buena Vista (one of the major distributers identified by Bordwell and Thompson above) after the film won the People's Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2005. Being part of a multinational conglomerate meant that *Tsotsi* was able to reach worldwide markets, an advantage that other local films do not always get (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). According to this source, distributing a film can cost as much as $35 million and because of this escalating cost, major companies often use two distribution strategies, namely *platforming* and *wide release.* With platforming, a film opens in some of the major cities at about the same time to accumulate support and generate reviews. In wide release, the film opens at the same time in almost all major cities and towns, and thus wide release is more intensive and expansive. Established filmmakers attached to big studios can also afford to use these marketing strategies for their films. Both *Jerusalema* and *Yesterday* exploited platforming when they were each released in multiple locations simultaneously.

## 3.2 Broad interpretation of the films

As Bordwell and Thompson point out, "if we want to understand how the various scenes work together, it is helpful to have a sense of the film's overall shape (2008: 432). As such, I provide here a broad interpretation of the selected films, highlighting the gender dimension where appropriate, in order to provide a firm basis for a detailed analysis which I undertake in the next two chapters.

### 3.2.1 *Yesterday*

The film *Yesterday* (2004) was written and directed by Darrell Roodt, an accomplished South African film director, who has directed some of the most internationally acclaimed South African films such as *Sarafina* (1992) and *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1995). *Yesterday* was nominated for an Oscar in 2005, becoming the country's first film to be nominated for this award. The film received positive reviews, commending it as a powerful portrayal of Black women. Botha (2011) praises the film as an important progressive addition to the post-apartheid cinematic repertoire. The main character in *Yesterday* is played by Leleti Khumalo, who is one of the country's best-known actresses, having previously starred in various films such as *Sarafina* (1992) alongside Whoopi Goldberg and Miriam Makeba, as well as in television series and productions such as *Generations* – South Africa's top soap opera in terms of viewership (Motsaathebe, 2009).

*Yesterday* tells a story about a married mother in a remote village living alone with her young child. It deals with the difficulties of raising children in a poverty-

stricken environment, and the challenges of getting proper health care due to long distances and the overwhelming numbers of patients who need health care. The film also highlights the absence of Yesterday's husband (because of the migrant labour system) and the challenge this causes, as well as the social ostracism (because of her HIV status) and increasingly difficult odds that Yesterday bears with strength and dignity.

Set against the backdrop of abject poverty, poor service delivery, lack of medical services and general hardships in rural villages, the film tells a story of Yesterday (Leleti Khumalo) who is raising her young daughter Beauty (Lihle Mvelase) in a remote village in the Natal midlands in Kwazulu-Natal province while her absent and unfaithful husband (Kenneth Khambula) works in a mine in Johannesburg, South Africa's economic powerhouse. Her husband infects her with HIV, yet Yesterday remains strong, solid and resilient in spite of her condition and the situation.

Cinematographically, the film opens with a long shot of Yesterday walking with her young daughter Beauty, probably five, in an arid and desolate landscape. From the perspective of the viewer as tourist this beautiful setting has enormous beauty but for characters in the story this represents a harsh environment which enters the narrative action as the signification of the characters' daily realities. By capturing Yesterday and Beauty at a distance as diminutive subjects in a sprawling land that unfolds before them, this long shot is strategically deployed to draw attention to Black women's struggle against the bleak environment of poverty as represented by the vastness of this arid land which women such as Yesterday inhabit.

A brief exchange with two women that Yesterday and Beauty meet along the way reveals that they have been walking for at least two hours:

> The women: How far is it to get to the village?
>
> Yesterday : Not too far, we've been walking over two hours.

When Yesterday and Beauty finally arrive at the clinic, they have to get into a queue to see a doctor who comes to the clinic once a week. A long shot of the long and meandering queue reveals that there are at least thirty people ahead of Yesterday and Beauty. This shot is effective in conveying the fact that it will take a long time and concerted effort for Yesterday to finally see the doctor, and thus it renders an important commentary about the problem of access to services together with the quality of service available to women and children such as Yesterday and Beauty.

The setting of the story influences how we understand the story and so when Yesterday does not get to see the doctor on this day because there are too many people needing to see the doctor, we are not surprised. They are simply told to come back the following week, despite the fact that she had walked for over two hours that day. This she does, and again the queue is stopped just in front of her, and once more she is told to return the following week. We see her trying to convince the queue marshal to allow her to see the doctor as her condition has deteriorated. She explains that she has travelled a long distance and that she has been turned away several times. However, the man informs her that there is nothing he can do. Interestingly, all the people in the queue are Black women, some with

small children. The only man that we get to see is the Black man who comes to the queue to tell the waiting patients that the doctor will not be able to see them.

The realistic perspective of the story is authenticated by the young Beauty who keeps on asking questions as young people do, some of them very difficult to answer: “Mommy, when is Daddy coming home?” The child asks the painful question as they walk back many miles to the village from the clinic where Yesterday is not helped, yet again. Female camaraderie is depicted in this film through vital moments in which we see Yesterday and neighbours busy with their daily chores fetching water from the wells, sweeping the yards, washing clothes at the river. Here these women get a chance to exchange pleasantries and talk about their problems and developments around the village, giving them the opportunity to catch up. It is their way of going to a friend’s house to have tea, only that for these women time is a luxury they do not have as their daily chores preoccupy a large part of their day.

The support of other women is also conveyed through Yesterday’s connection with a local schoolteacher (Harriet Lenabe) who pays for her taxi fare so that she can reach the clinic on time. She also offers to look after Beauty so that Yesterday can go to the doctor. This illustrates a rare quality of solidarity amongst women. The support from other women is also evoked in one of the most painful emotions is evoked in the scene where Yesterday has fainted and the only person around her is her daughter Beauty. In this scene when the traumatised girl’s attempt to revive her

mother fails, she instinctively runs across the village for help. There are moments in the film where these women seem to be amused by simple things that seem frivolous to say the least. An example of this can be seen in the way Yesterday and her neighbour talk about the lotto and a woman who played four winning numbers.

The appalling state of the health-care system in rural areas is bluntly depicted in the film in the clinic scene where we see a compassionate doctor (Camilla Walker), strapped for resources, as she tries her best to help hundreds of patients. Yesterday's revelation that her health started deteriorating a long time ago (before Christmas) and that it was always difficult to see a doctor, exemplifies the problem of the acute shortage of resources and the unequal distribution of resources in which women like Yesterday are the hardest hit.

Chauvinistic male attitudes towards women are perceptible at the mining compound where Yesterday attempts to speak to an uncooperative guard. His reluctance to assist Yesterday is signified by the dirty look that he gives her. Perhaps one of the most unforgettable scenes is that in which Yesterday receives a beating from John while the mine clerk/guard looks on, depicting a perverse situation of careless and heartless men whose perception of family violence is always justified as the norm, or a necessary process to discipline the woman who is always getting out of line. More disturbing is the fact that this takes place while the guard looks on, but does nothing about it. Instead, he just peeps through the window from his cubicle evoking what Mulvey (1999) refers to as the spectator's

privilege of ‘invisibility’, or to put it another way, looking without being looked at. This could be seen as an example of the callousness with which men in the films treat women.

The director’s usage of flashbacks helps us see the quality of the relationship Yesterday had with her husband before being diagnosed with HIV. Through a flashback we see a caring and loving man who spoils her with gifts. Seemingly, it is the memories that Yesterday chooses to hold onto, and not those of the vicious husband who assaults her. As a result, his abusiveness does not break her spirit. This is illustrated in the scene when John comes home seriously ill and begs for forgiveness. Yesterday welcomes him and takes care of him in spite of the way he has treated her. I argue that this portrayal becomes a problematic stereotype that entrenches Yesterday’s plight as a caring wife who will take anything thrown at her, be it abuse or negligence.

The brutal scene where Yesterday’s husband beats her when she visits him where he works is important also from the point of view of the genre that *Yesterday* represents (brutality is usually a convention used in violent genres such as gangster films.) From the vantage point of this scene, the depiction of the men in *Yesterday* suggests some hegemonic understanding regarding Black masculinity and femininity in South Africa. The masculinity of Black men becomes hegemonic in the representation of violence, irresponsibility and promiscuity that the movie renders, while the femininity of Black women becomes connoted in the imagery of

defencelessness and victimisation. Here, Black masculinity is defined not only in terms of the aggressiveness and 'madness' of Yesterday's husband who brutally beats her, but also in the heartlessness of the mine clerk who watches passively while she is being treated in this way.

### *3.2.2 Jerusalema*

Set against the backdrop of violence, *Jerusalema* is based on a screenplay written and directed by Ralph Ziman. The film opened simultaneously in various locations in 2008 receiving excellent reviews. It renders commentary on the disillusionment of Struggle veterans, although the veterans have lambasted the movie as misrepresenting the struggle, labelling it an insult. MKhonto We Sizwe Military Veterans Association (MKMVA) criticised it as a gross injustice and insult to those who made sacrifices for South Africa. MKMVA chairperson, Kebby Maphatsoe, said in a newspaper report (Media24, 2008-09-13) that "in any society you find scavengers and social misfits but it would be wrong to say that South Africans are generally by their very nature criminals and that this is a general South African culture."

The story is told from the perspective of young Lucky Kunene (Rapulana Seiphemo), who is portrayed as an honest and good boy who so far has listened to his single mother and dreams of furthering his studies at the University of the

Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. We get to know the young Lucky Kunene at the time he is about to complete his high school studies, but his single mother has no money to send him to university. Although he is offered admission at the University of the Witwatersrand, he does not secure a bursary and this means that he will not be able to study there. His only alternative is to find a job, but with high unemployment rate in the country, it seems unlikely that a young boy from the township with no experience will get a decent job. He is enticed by his friend's brother, Nazareth, (Jeffrey Zekele) whom they look up to as a role model because he owns flashy cars and carries cash around with him. Nazareth, who trained in Moscow as part of the ANC armed struggle during the struggle for liberation, is the main agent of violence in *Jerusalema*. He returned to South Africa after the 1994 dispensation and put his training into practice through illegal activities. In a nutshell, the film reflects the frustrations of a dream deferred.

An interesting gender dimension in the film revolves around the depiction of the three women in Lucky's life, namely his mother Mama Kunene, his ex-girlfriend Nomsa and his White girlfriend Leah. Lucky's mother is depicted as a religious and overwhelmed by her daily responsibilities of fending for her children and keeping Lucky on track by constantly giving him advice and asking him to read the bible. Nomsa is depicted as being irresponsible, immature and this is reflected by her decision to quite university and follow Lucky to Johannesberg where she becomes involved in criminal activities. Leah on the other hand is depicted as a responsible and career-minded person.

Cinematographically, the film opens with an establishing panoramic shot showing tall buildings and other infrastructures such as trains and a hive of activity taking place as residents of fast-paced Hillbrow continue with their daily activities. The remarkable buildings include the 270-metre-high Hillbrow Tower which dominates the Johannesburg city skyline. From this building breath-taking scenes are shown, and the camera pans through to show another remarkable building in Hillbrow synonymous with Johannesburg – Ponte City. At fifty-four storeys high, it is amongst the tallest residential buildings in Johannesburg and has become one of the city's most striking urban landmarks. I interpret these tall buildings as a metaphorical measure for the protagonist's dreams and aspirations. When the camera takes us into the buildings where residents live in dilapidated flats, we notice the decay in one of the buildings that was once a sought-after address in this city. This background sets the tone for the story that is about to unfold and which takes place in or near these remarkable landscapes. The use of these building also serves to contrast modern life in the city as represented by these buildings and ordinary life in the townships, and which becomes part of the geographical setting in which the events unfold.

There are other interesting props especially those that signify the kind of genre and the convention in which the filmic work is premised. The director uses several

props to signal violence and lawlessness. The camera work is used expertly to capture important indicators that signal violence. For instance, the camera zooms in on a brutal and unforgettable scene showing Lucky lying half dead in a pool of his own blood with a gun next to him, to prepare us for chaotic violence that is about to unfold. The visible gun injuries that riddled Lucky's body and the gun suggest that he had been involved in an exchange of gunfire, probably with other criminals, but at that moment in the film we can only speculate. Thus the film opens *in medias res* leading us to speculate on possible cause of events. This kind of opening "raises our expectation by setting up a specific range of possible causes for and effects of what we see" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 86).

The powerful opening of panoramic shots of buildings and the hype of activities in the background performs various functions such as suggesting what kind of narrative the viewer might expect. We know from a narrative analysis point of view that anything that is used in the narrative performs a certain function or facilitates a particular event or its interpretation. The narrative technique used at this point is voice-over narration by the main character Lucky Kunene (Rapulana Seiphemo). We know it is a character narration because the main character uses first person narration to refer to himself. Like the compelling shots accompanying it, the voice-over narration is equally powerful, citing quotes by philosopher Karl Marx: "All property is theft." This serves as a useful tool connecting the symbolism of the buildings and the actions that we are about to witness. It is a powerful metaphor and foreshadows Lucky's plan to hijack buildings later on in the film.

The use of the newscast is another fascinating technique that is used by the filmmakers to as an exposition to give the viewer another view of Lucky's story. The remarkable thing about this is that, as journalistic reportage the newscast gives brief and careful 'facts' about Lucky's life at that point in the film. The timing of the bulletin is also well positioned as it broadcasts just as Lucky regains consciousness to the sound of police officers who descend on the building from a helicopter in a massive raid. The timely use of the newscast serves to give us critical information which we need to understand Lucky's complex character, criminal tendencies and the charges he faces. For instance, we learn that the raid is aimed at arresting criminal gangs who have illegally taken up ownership of buildings such as flats and other dwelling units in Hillbrow, and that those arrested face charges including murder, robbery and rapes. Here Lucky is referred to as "the notorious crime boss, also known as the Hoodlum of Hillbrow. In this way the use of a newscast serves as a useful technique providing details not only about what had just happened, but also about the activities that will occupy much of the action of the film.

One of the most striking aspects of cinematography in this film is the flashback technique combined with skilful dialogue that the film uses to take us to the beginning. This is evident in the interview scene in which Loretta Dlamini a young female Black journalist from the *Sowetan* newspaper (played by Lerato Moloi) approaches Lucky in prison with this request:

Journalist: This time, I think you must tell me the whole truth.

Lucky: What do you want?

Journalist: The real story. Take us back to the beginning.

Here the stern voice of the journalist and her poise shows that she is a candid woman who will not budge until she gets what she wants, the truth. The representation of this woman is interesting in the context of this study that looks at the depiction of Black women in terms of complexity and nuance. Here we are assured by her (Loretta Dlamini) poise, and that even the man dubbed the most notorious crime boss of Hillbrow does not intimidate her. The camera shot here begins with a point of view shot that makes us see Lucky from Dlamini's point of view, before cutting to a wide shot of both Lucky and Dlamini. Even in this two-shot Lucky's stature appears less imperious while Dlamini appears more commanding. It is unfortunate that this journalist appears in the film only briefly as it would have been interesting to see how the director depicts other aspects of her life and traits.

From the first question that Loretta Dlamini posed, it is clear that it is not for the first time that Lucky has been in trouble with the law and that he has previously not told her the whole truth. Then, a narrative flashback takes us to the beginning. The beginning, as it turns out, is the 1994 democratic dispensation in South Africa. This

is illustrated in Lucky's voice-over narration, which sets the scene for the events that unfold in the film:

*The beginning*

*Soweto, 1994*

*Freedom*

*the new South Africa*

*a new dawn*

*a new day*

*a fresh start*

*a clean page*

*a new beginning*

*and I had a dream*

It is clear that the flashback is used as a reification of memories while music is used adeptly to evoke the religious theme that dominates the film. Gospel tunes such as *Jerusalema e khaya lami* (Jerusalem my home) are used both as background and foreground music during key moments in the film. The importance of this hymn is highlighted by Hees who remarks that the hymn is "one of several which recur throughout the film and so act as unobtrusive but highly suggestive signifiers, especially if taken with the other allusions to Jerusalem in the film (2009:91). The use of Nkosi *sikelel'iAfrika* – God bless Africa, a freedom song which is now (post-

1994) South Africa's national anthem becomes a marker for the audience signifying the post-apartheid moment.

The title of the film itself is indicative of the religious theme that the filmmakers have adopted in their navigation of issues confronting contemporary South African society, particularly by those citizens whose circumstances have pushed them beyond the margins. Religiosity as a moral (religious morality) thermostat is pitted against the prevailing situation (of poverty, unemployment, crime and spousal abuse) in which hopes are fast diminished.

Young Lucky's dream is to see his life improve. Lucky as a teenager is played by Jafta Mamabolo, while the adult Lucky, whom we meet before the flashback, is played by Rapulana Seiphemo. Similarly, Motlatsi Mahloko plays young Zakes, Lucky's childhood friend, while Ronnie Nyakale plays the adult Zakes. Their childhood life is spent in the violent and crime-infested Hillbrow in Johannesburg, South Africa's economic megacity. The next scene that we see is that of young Lucky with his high school friend Zakes Mbolelo (Motlatsi Mahloko) on a train. They sell sweets and peanuts trying to raise money for survival to help their unemployed single mothers. However, free economic enterprising activities by Black people was widely discouraged during apartheid, and this is illustrated by the way the unsympathetic train guard, who spots the two boys selling sweets, charges at them with a knobkerrie, forcing them to jump off the moving train. *"Hey nina phumani la!* — hey you, what are you doing here … get off here!" The manner in

which these youngsters respond to the guard shows that they are used to such kinds of harassment.

On their way home, Lucky and his best friend reminisce about their dreams. Lucky wants a 7-series BMW and a beach house in Durban. However, his friend reminds him that, "You will have to win the lottery to get that kind of car!" In the next scene, we see Lucky meeting his high school sweetheart who gives him the good news about her being accepted to study Computer Science at the Pretoria Technikon. Then her big brother appears, and orders her to go home. This scene is also very interesting in the context of this study because the macho way in which he acts raises serious issues attendant to girlhood, where the stronger and wiser male looks out for the 'weaker' and 'unwise' female. While this may appear to be laudable, it can be perceived to be denying the young girl the distinct space within which to articulate her femininity, ingenuity, independence and aspirations as a human being, not only rendering her defenceless but also leading to her 'invisibilisation' and 'erasure'.

Fascinating cinematography, superbly combined with dialogue, is presented in a scene involving a cash-in-transit heist in which we see that the robbery is inspired by a scene from the Hollywood movie that Nazareth watched the previous night. After a spate of such heists the banks upgrade their security. However, with inside jobs, criminals are always ahead. Realising the potential danger, Lucky decides to quit before it is too late. He gets a job as a petrol attendant. But Nazareth comes to

haunt him, disparaging him. This is illustrated in this exchange: “I hear you are going to university. What will you eat … books?” At this point, Lucky who clearly wants nothing to do with crime anymore reflects on how Nazareth had helped him over the years and feels that he owes him a favour. Finally, Lucky gives in to Nazareth’s request, but insists, “Do you promise me that it will be the last job?” Nazareth nods his head in agreement. Not knowing how this will eventually turn out, Lucky gets involved, hoping only to commit one last crime as a favour to Nazareth for being good to him while he was suffering. That night they embark on what was probably going to be the largest robbery, but the armed security officials swiftly respond, foiling their plains. The police join in for reinforcement and in the exchange of fire many of Nazareth’s men get killed and the rest get arrested except for Lucky and Zakes who miraculously escape with Lucky sustaining a gun wound to the leg. They manage to escape through a toilet window and steal an old VW beetle which they use to flee the scene. Later when they are safe, we see them discarding the vehicle and setting it alight to destroy any evidence that could link them to the crime. Because the vehicle is old and slow it becomes a remarkable prop used to signal an escape from a fast and flashy lifestyle that puts the two boys in trouble, nearly costing them their lives.

The theme of separation and loss is a strong one. Moments of anguish are depicted in the film, particularly in a heart-breaking scene where Lucky has come to say goodbye to his mother. This distressing scene reflects a troubled family which lives in limbo. First, it was Lucky’s father whom we do not know because of his

absence, and now Lucky embarks on his own departure, leaving behind his mother and younger siblings. At this point Lucky's mother is overwhelmed with sorrow as a result of his departure as it becomes clear to her attempt to have a stable and happy family is constantly under threat. It is very clear that her only source of strength is her faith and as Hees appropriately observes: "For her [Lucky's mother], memory is a constant source of sorrow and regret, and the hymns associated with Jerusalem – almost invariably associated with her on the soundtrack – express in fairly simple terms the need for a safer 'home' (2009:94).

The loss and instability described above also evince the intergenerational nature of these kinds of "departures, waitings and returns" (Ndebele, 2003). Thus the boys' graduation to manhood is signified by this type of departure as they leave home following in the footsteps of their fathers, who have left the women with all the responsibilities of raising the young offspring.

The theme of misused opportunities is a continuous one throughout the film. An example is the depiction of Lucky's high school sweetheart, Nomsa, who drops out of Pretoria Technikon and follows him to Hillbrow where she finds a job as a bank-teller. Manipulated by her own brother, she becomes an insider supplying reliable information to criminals about people who withdraw cash. When she wanted to spend more time with Lucky, his reply is quick and straightforward: "I have a taxi business to run." Nomsa's situation is ironically juxtaposed to Lucky's in the sense that unlike him, she had the opportunity to further her studies, which she however

wasted by blindly following Lucky to Johannesburg she, too, becomes a criminal.

Her naiveté is further shown in the next scene in which Lucky warns her of such a dangerous life: "How long do you think this game of yours will last?" Here the narrative constructs the Black female as synonymous with irresponsibility, cunning, ignorance, short-sightedness and inability to perceive danger. On the other hand, Lucky is re-inventing himself and Nomsa now portrayed as small-time crookedness does not fit with his plans. He detests her after bailing her from jail.

An important meta-filmic feature that I find significant is the way the power of the film medium is highlighted at specific moments in *Jerusalem*a. For instance, we hear the narrator acknowledging, in a subtle way, the influence that cinematic messages can have on viewers: "If Hollywood can teach us how to rob a bank, then organising a cash-in-transit heist is nothing." This point is expertly communicated in a prelude to the scene that is about to unfold where Lucky and his friends launch a cash-in-transit heist. This is a clear indication of conscious intertextuality in the film. According to Berger, 2005: 11), "conscious intertextuality takes place when screenwriters or film directors create scenes that are recognisable as quotations from other films". In the abovementioned scene, the characters get the idea for a crime from watching a Hollywood movie. The scenes in question are evident in Michael Mann's film *Heat* (1995) starring Al Pacino in the leading role.

The film also uses lots of props and signifiers that indicate the film's dominant

convention as a gangster film. The compelling statement in the opening of the film ("If you are going to steal, steal big and hope like hell that you do not get caught") is an allusion to the lawlessness that is evident through the film, which is a major feature of this type of genre. Many criminal activities are grounded on the same sort of principle, which they use to justify their criminal actions, such as the belief that they do crime as a form of social justice because the rich have stolen from them in the first place. This can be adduced in phrases used in some of these films such as referring to shoplifting as 'affirmative shopping'. Although, Lucky's mother appears to be a "silent" character in the film, her significance in Lucky's life is emphasised covertly in various scenes where she is depicted as the "voice of reason" that speaks against his criminal behaviour.

### 3.2.3 *Tsotsi*

*Tsotsi,* the Oscar award-winning film, is an adaptation of South African writer Athol Fugard's novel *Tsotsi.* The film became one of the few local films to break box-office records in its opening weekend in the country, earning R526 676 (*Mail & Guardian,* 2006). The fact that the film deals with the vision of a well-known white liberal is significant because the story was written during the apartheid era, but has been updated in the film to reflect post-apartheid issues. Although the novel was written in the 1960s it was only published two decades later in 1980.

The novel focuses on a young Black boy who hustles in the streets and goes by the name Tsotsi, which means a thug or gangster. He is the leader of a small group of gangsters which goes around robbing people, often viciously hurting them. Tsotsi's softer side is revealed when he decides to look after the child that he discovers in the car he just hijacked. As an artistic work, *Tsotsi,* like its eponymous character, has undergone many transitions. The original manuscript was first updated and published in the 1980s. One of the first (of few) people to read the manuscript was author/academic Stephen Gray, who recounts how he stumbled on the manuscript when one of his students was working on the topic, 'Fugard's first decade as a writer,' and was granted permission to read it. He describes how he struggled to convince Fugard to have the manuscript published. Gray was told that he "could proceed provided that he [Fugard] would not be called upon to revise or rewrite or even read the novel, and that he would have the final power of veto over its public circulation" (Gray, 1981: 57). It was updated again in 2005 when it was adapted into a film.

Since the novel had been written in 1962, it meant that extensive updating had to take place. As Gray (1981) explains, "a climactic scene, which featured a lurid and melodramatic confrontation between the troubled Father Ransome and Tsotsi, the Black gangster, culminating in the latter gruesomely impaling the former on a crucifix," was finally left out. The film version also had to be extensively updated and the scene in question seemed to have posed a significant challenge for the producers. For instance, the filmmakers prepared two endings for the film with the

first one emerging in the Black market of the pirated copy. In the pirated copy Tsotsi is killed by police while he survives in the released version (Dovey, 2009).

Like *Jerusalema, Tsotsi* probes the social roots of crime through an archetypical journey of self-discovery based of the life of Tsotsi who hijacks a car belonging to Pumla with her child tucked in the car seat. At first the hijacker does not notice the child and when he does, he contemplates leaving him after taking the money from the wallet left by the unsuspecting mother. Then he feels sorry for the child, changes his mind and undertakes to look after the child. In the process a bond develops between them, and the thug's sensitive side is shown on several occasions.

One of the most remarkable features of the film is those brief but significant instinctive moments of moral transformation where characters gradually become conscious of their wrongdoing and seem to regret their way of life although they do nothing to reform. For example, Tsotsi's friend Boston (Mothusi Magano) suddenly comes to his senses and reprimands his gang about their lack of decency.

In terms of the gender dimension, Pumla is portrayed throughout the film as being too emotional compared to John Dube who is able to contain his emotions throughout the film until the safe return of their baby. Tsotsi's mother dies of HIV/AIDS related illness and she never really becomes the focus of the film. However her constant presence in Tsotsi's mind is revealed through flashbacks in

the film. The flashbacks also highlight the abuse she suffers at the hands of her drunkard husband.

### 3.3 Setting and classification according to genre

Films generally belong to specific types or genres which have their own individual styles or conventions. According to Mercer and Shingler (2004:5), "as a concept, genre allows a film to be identified as belonging to a larger body of work with shared themes, styles, attitudes and values." Many films often contain aspects which overlap into different genres and therefore do not just fit into one specific genre. Each genre presupposes certain tendencies typical of the convention which reinforces itself from film to film in what is generally referred to as genre effect. According to Aumont, Bergala, Marie and Vernet (1983: 118), the genre effect has a double impact:

> First, the permanence of the same "diegetic referent and the recurrence of typical scenes allow the plausible to reinforce itself. Second, the genre effect allows the establishment of the plausible that is specific to a given genre. For instance, what is plausible in a soap opera may be implausible or not seen as realistic in an action film.

Furthermore, genre effects mediate between industry practices and audience expectations in that audiences expect something familiar in a genre that a specific film may represent. This is not to suggest that the audiences are fixated on a particular convention, or that filmmakers may not introduce certain aspects into a particular genre for fear of breaking away from the convention. In fact, filmmakers routinely experiment with new possibilities that may either challenge or affirm societal attitudes and values. Because an audience identifies easily with genres, filmmakers make use of genres to offer commentary on particular issues affecting society. For instance, South African filmmaker Leon Schuster uses his slapstick films to offer commentary on some of the issues affecting the South African society, such as race and social cohesion. Thus, categorising films according to their specific genres is necessary for any serious film analysis as this helps in unravelling features specific to the genre within which a particular film is located. These features feed back to the question of representation discussed earlier in terms of how a specific genre privileges certain forms of representation, as a maker for its convention.

In terms of genre, then, *Tsotsi* and *Jerusalema* can be classified as gangster films. , The most important element of gangster films is that the protagonists are criminals. Thus, violence, lawlessness, and the proliferation of alcohol and drugs that we see in both *Tsotsi* and *Jerusalema* are some of the features of gangster films. The storyline in both films revolves around the rampant crime gripping much of contemporary South African society. For instance, in *Tsotsi*, the Dube family

experiences two violent crimes, one after the other within a short space of time. They have armed intruders breaking into their house, and while they are still reeling from the effect of the first attack, a car-hijacking incident leaves John Dube's wife wheelchair-bound.

According to Horsley (2002: 1) gangster films "use the rebellious figure and the hierarchical structure of the criminal organisation both to challenge and to ironise capitalism and the business ethic". Horsley (2002) singles out one of the most notorious American gangster of the 20th century Al Capone as one of the major historical figures who influenced the conception of "the big-time gangster." Interestingly the main character in *Jerusalema* Lucky Kunene mentions Al Capone and Karl Marx early in the film as the two people that he idolises. This is how he puts it: "I have two heroes, Karl Marx and Al Capone." Al Capone's influence on Lucky's life is made clear by his affirmation at the beginning of the film: "Al Capone says: If you're going to steal ... steal big, and hope like hell you get away with it!" This highlights lawlessness that is associated with this genre (gangster films). From a gender point of view it is interesting that both people that Lucky looks up to are men.

*Yesterday*, on the other hand, is a social realist drama in that it deals with themes and concerns that are very much part of the challenges faced by poor Black women in South Africa – poverty, separation from their husbands/partners, raising their children as single parents, susceptibility to diseases such as TB and HIV/AIDs,

domestic/physical abuse and spousal promiscuity, and little or no access to medical care. However, this social realist genre is also well suited to the addition of melodrama genre elements, which include the unfair suffering of innocent protagonists especially women, the evocation of pathos, and the use of music to heighten the audience's feelings of pity or sympathy.

According to Mercer and Shingler (2004), the term melodrama has been understood differently over the years. It had been used, for example, to refer to a range of films and styles particularly "action thrillers with fast-paced narratives, episodic story-lines featuring violence, suspense and death-defying stunts" (Mercer & Shingler, 2004: 6). These authors note that some of the films that were once classified as melodrama have since been re-assigned under new categories such as film noir, the western, suspense thriller and the horror movie. Nowadays, however, melodramas generally refer to "those films with more words than action, inactive male protagonists, active and even domineering female characters, and anything but clear-cut and easily identifiable villains" (Mercer & Shingler, 2004: 6). Melodramas are sometimes referred to as "tearjerkers," because of their emotive plots (Dirks, 2002). The melodrama genre allows its protagonist(s) to work through difficulties or surmount the problems with resolute endurance, sacrificial acts and steadfast bravery.

Therefore, one can say that there is a link between genre and gendered representation. Given the different classifications of the films selected for this

study, it is crucial to examine how their conventions shape or impede them in their presentation of Black women. This is explored as part of my analysis in the next two chapters. In the international market, the films selected for this study can further be classified, from a language point of view, as foreign language films because they use South African languages, including *tsotsi taal* (a pidgin often spoken in the streets by South African youths) with English subtitles. However, from a South African point of view, it would be implausible to classify films that are made in South Africa using indigenous languages as foreign language films within the country.

At another level, *Tsotsi* and *Jerusalema* can also be classified as township films in the South African context. The township flavour in the film is reinforced through the township music in the background, for instance one can hear tunes of *mbaqanga*[7] by Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens, township jazz, and tunes by the late Black pop star Brenda Fassie. Traditional Gospel tunes such as *Jerusalema Ikhaya Lami* are also played in the film *Jerusalema.* According to Hees, the significance of religious themes as reflected in the film's title film and by the gospel tunes in the film expresses "a longing for an ideal – embodied in the city of Jerusalem – that is lost or absent (2003: 92). This ideal is one that women such as Lucky's mother yearn for in their personal lives that is characterised by constant anguish and suffering.

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[7] *Mbaqanga* is one of South Africa's most popular indigenous music styles, originating in the Black townships in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It is a fusion of South African jazz and two other indigenous South African music styles, namely *marabi* and *kwela*.

Typical of township life, the boys play dice, gamble and hustle in the streets where the girl-child's life is increasingly in danger. Through all these scenes, the filmmakers take the viewers on an archetypal journey of discovery through township streets. By depicting daily activities in the township, the film authenticates and makes the township settings vivid in the imagination of the viewer.

Geographically, *Jerusalema* and *Tsotsi* are set in the townships around Johannesburg, while *Yesterday* is set in rural KwaZulu-Natal. As Baines (2003: 36) found, "South African cinematic and literary texts invariably have a local setting and storyline which resonates with the experience of its peoples." This is evidenced in the corpus of films analysed by themes of poverty, unemployment, crime which continue characterise life in the margins in much of South Africa, particularly in townships and rural areas. Most of the scenes are so vivid that one feels that viewers are witnessing what is transpiring before them, helping to transport them to the imaginary world of the film. Judging by the events that unfold in these films, it is clear that the films are set in an historical moment and time-space of post-apartheid South Africa. The context is signified by stories that tackle issues that South Africans still grapple with in the post-1994 political dispensation.

Despite their main geographical location in the townships and a rural area, the protagonists travel to other parts outside their neighbourhood, taking us, for

example, to the mines, the city centre and some of the suburbs. Perhaps one of the distinguishing features of these films is the fact that there is very little glamour in the background. Often glamour is a major feature that characterises mainstream commercial films. Instead, the films analysed for this study focus on activities in remote parts, dilapidated buildings and deprived living conditions. This squalor is also evoked in the scene from *Jerusalema* where Lucky asks Leah Freidlander, who has come to look for her drug-addict brother: "You have nice houses, nice cars, what keeps bringing you to stinky places like these?" It is my contention that the filmmakers' strategy to desist from using glamour (that most commercial films use) is indicative of their intention to focus on the everyday lives of ordinary people.

In *Yesterday* the arid land signifies the bleak environment that women like Yesterday struggle against every day, together with an array of daunting chores such as fetching water and fire wood from vast distances and fending for children while their husbands are absent, many of them in the mines, and often for months. Yesterday has to walk a long distance along a desolate road to get basic health care. The barren landscape along the road on which she and her daughter walk could be seen as symbolising the struggle against the tough conditions that characterise Black women's lives in general.

Because the films are set in an historical moment, they strongly reflect evolving socioeconomic trends. Yesterday comes to Johannesburg for one day to see her husband, who is there for work only and who must return to his village at some

point. This is reminiscent of the apartheid years when Black people's movement in urban areas were restricted. Films are open to multiple readings, and thus it can be argued that this scene also directs our attention to one of the issues that have continued since 1994. As Baines observes, "Government policy towards Africans was informed by segregationism which articulated the view that the Black man's place was in the countryside and that he was only a sojourner in 'the White man's city'" (2003: 37). In *Jerusalema* Lucky lives in the dirty and dilapidated block of flats in Hilbrow. He goes to suburbia to see a property owner to complain about the dilapidation of the block of flats in Hillbrow, and when he visits his White girlfriend's family. While the identification of Blacks with dirty, overpopulated and unattractive places provide commentary on their social condition, this could also be read as "an attempt to culturally devalue the position of the African in the social stratum (see Vambe et al., 2007: 126).

The tendency by filmmakers not to use rural areas (where the majority of Black women lives) as settings for their films can also be adduced as a common problem of exclusion not by filmmakers per se, but in society generally as evidenced, for example, by the unequal distribution of resources and services, lack of roads, and other basic infrastructure. Recently, the current government seems to be trying to address this anomaly and has now created the Ministry of Rural Development. This could be seen as a step in the right direction since South Africa is seventy per cent rural, which means that the majority of the people reside there, a fact that often becomes obvious to politicians only during election campaigns. During

electioneering campaigns, politicians suddenly remember these places, which they then visit with lots of promises to poor people who live there, only to forget about them as soon as they safely move into their respective offices on the basis of the rural votes. It seems therefore that there is a need for more films such as *Yesterday,* which offers commentary based on challenges in rural areas.

### 3.4 A brief background of the directors of the key films examined

Perhaps it is important at this point to briefly discuss the three directors of the selected films as well as some of the key actors/actresses, particularly because most of them are iconic in terms of their status and the roles that they have played in previous films, which might also account (at least partially) for the films' popularity. As we shall see, their lives seem to have taken the same trajectory.

**Darrell James Roodt** is perhaps one of the most high profile film directors in South Africa, having directed over twenty films. He was born in Johannesburg in 1962 and attended the King Edward School. He enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand to study drama, but left after just one week (Botha, 2011). In 1986, he made the first anti-apartheid film to be shot in South Africa, *Place of Weeping.* This film was followed by *Sarafina* (1992) which starred Whoopi Goldberg and Leleti Khumalo. He directed Hollywood film *Father Hood* (1993), starring Halle Berry and Patrick Swayze. In 1995 he directed a remake of *Cry, The Beloved*

*Country*. His latest project *Winnie* (2011) is based on the life of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Starring Jennifer Hudson as Winnie and Terrence Howard as Mandela, the film was not very well received when it was released in Toronto in 2011 and as a result it has failed to reach wide audience due to the negative reviews it generated. Linda Bernard (2012) of the *Toronto Star* criticised the film as "flawed," adding that "it will have trouble finding an audience; it won't satisfy history students curious about this polarizing figure." Bernard and Ed Gibbs (2011) of the *Guardian* criticise the casting with Gibbs saying, "Hudson is impressive when things get grim...but to have her play the woman formerly known as the "mother of a nation", barely aged 30? The meeting of minds simply isn't there." While Bernard (2012) posits: "Those who are curious to see how Hudson does playing the Mother of the Nation — whose dramatic fall from grace has made her a much-debated figure — will wonder how she ended up in a role that's so clearly over her head." The most important point for our purpose however is the representation of Winnie as a Black woman in this film and in this regard I find that the portrayal of Winnie is somewhat overshadowed by that of Mandela despite the title of the film which gives the impression that the focus is more on Winnie rather than on Mandela. Hence Gibbs's (2011) observation: "Those expecting the wife to be the centre of attention will be left bemused. Winnie & Nelson would have been a more apt title. Or simply, The Mandelas".

**Gavin Hood** was born in Johannesburg in 1962. He studied law at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 1991 he went to study screenwriting and directing at the

University of California in Los Angeles, where he wrote his first screenplay, *A Reasonable Man*. Hood was awarded the Diane Thomas Screenwriting Award for this script in 1993. Upon his return to South Africa, he wrote and directed educational dramas for the Department of Health, for which he won the Artes Award. Hood made his film-directing debut in 1998 with a 22-minute short called *The Storekeeper* (1998). The film went on to win thirteen international film festival awards including the Grand Prize at the Melbourne International Film Festival in Australia, which qualified the film for Academy Award consideration during the same year.

Subsequently, Hood turned his attention to directing, and starring in *A Reasonable Man* in the year 2000, for which he won Best Actor, Best Screenwriter and Best Director at the Sundance Film Festival in 2001. As a result, he was named by Variety as one of the "Ten directors to watch." In the same year, he was commissioned to adapt and direct an epic children's African adventure story based on a novel, *In Desert and Wilderness*, by Polish Nobel Prize-winning author, Henryk Sienkiewicz. The film became the highest grossing film in Poland and won Best of the Fest at the Chicago International Children's Film Festival in 2002.

**Ralph Ziman** was born in Johannesburg in 1963. He began his career as a news and documentary camera operator in South Africa at the age of eighteen. In 1984, he moved to the United Kingdom where he established himself as one of the most sought after directors of music videos. Ziman worked extensively in Europe,

Australia and America, directing music videos, commercials and short films for a diverse group of musical artists including Michael Jackson, Ozzy Osborne, Vanessa Williams, Alice Cooper, Toni Braxton, Rod Stewart, Elton John, Donna Summer, Iron Maiden, Fine Young Cannibals and Living Colour. He returned to South Africa in 1993 and directed his first feature film *Hearts and Minds* (1993), for which he won the Grand Jury Prize for Best Screenplay and Best Cinematography. He has also directed the film *The Zookeeper* (2001). In 2013 he was approached to replace director David R. Ellis who had been found dead in his Johannesburg hotel room where he was staying while working on *Kite*, a remake of the 1998 Japanese anime film.

**3.5 The main characters**

Leleti Khumalo (Yesterday) is an icon having starred alongside celebrities such as Whoopi Goldberg and Miriam Makeba in *Sarafina* (1992) and also in the local soap opera, *Generations* (Motsaathebe, 2009). Khumalo's character is often associated with strong women, an iconography based on the audience's knowledge and previous encounters with her as a strong woman who always overcome all odds against her. This is a very important semiotics point because as her image Presupposes the ideas and values that we associate with her previous depiction (see Van Leeuwen, 2004). As an actress, Khumalo has garnered several awards and nominations, including an Image Award alongside Angela Bassett, Whoopi

Goldberg and Janet Jackson, and the Tony Award nomination for Best Actress in *Sarafina* (1992), which was distributed worldwide and became "the biggest film production to be released on the African continent" (see TVSA) at the time. Apart from numerous television series and other films such as *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), she also features in other notable films by Roodt namely, *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1995) and *Faith's Corner* (2005).

Rapulana Seiphemo, *Jerusalema*'s leading actor, is an award-winning (Duku Duku award 2002) South African actor who has starred in a range of notable films such as *Jump the Gun* (Les Blair, 1996), *Tarzan* (Carl Schenkel, 1997), *Hijack Stories* (Oliver Schmitz, 2000), *God is African* (Akin Omotoso, 2003). He is perhaps best known for his leading roles in South Africa's major soap operas such as *Generations,* where he starred as media mogul Tau Mogale; *Muvhango,* where he played the charming Pheko Mokoena; and *Isidingo,* where he played Godlieb Mofokeng. He also had a stint in theatre, and performed in a number of plays such as *My Children, My Africa* (1989*)*, directed and written by Athol Fugard which toured South Africa and England, as well as appearing in *The Merchant of Venice* (1991) and *The Piano Lesson* (1996), among others.

Nambitha Mpumlwana is another award-winning South African actress with a very long history in the limelight, having started as a continuity presenter in the 1980s. She stars alongside Seiphemo in *Tsotsi* as Miriam. She has starred in a number of films and major television series and soap operas, such as *Generations*, *Yizo Yizo*,

*Justice For All*, *Interrogation Room*, *Shado's* and *The Lab*. She also acted in the mini-series *Saints, Sinners and Settlers* (1999) in addition to numerous theatre productions which include *The Dead Wait*, *Black Age, Whale, In Search of Dragon's Mountain*, *Love and Other Strange Things*, *Beauty and the Beast of Oracle, Apart,* and *It's Africa and the Caribbean.*

Unlike the makers of *Yesterday* and *Jerusalema,* it seems that *Tsotsi'*s directors did something different by placing virtually unknown performers Presley Chueneyagae and Terry Pheto in the leading roles. I find this move intriguing as it works against an established convention of casting popular stars in leading roles. This is akin to what the director of *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997*)* did with his casting of Leonardo DiCaprio who was not particularly famous at the time. In my previous work I investigated the reason why filmmakers have a penchant to cast major stars in leading roles in the light of empirical evidence suggesting that stars do not add economic value to the film but to themselves (Elberse, 2005; Motsaathebe 2011c) since the bulk of the money goes towards their appearance fees. For example, Elberse finds that "high profile stars including Jim Carrey, Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks, Brad Pitt and Julia Roberts have been paid salaries as high as $25 million per picture" (2005:1), which most films often struggle to recoup. After looking at some of the films that have failed at the box office worldwide, despite starring major international actors, I suggested that the traditional model guiding film finance and the logic ascribed to it need to be looked at afresh. Hence I find *Tsotsi*'s approach in casting little- known stars very interesting because casting the

big stars increases the production budget significantly, but with very little guarantee for return on the investment. While this point is not exactly pertinent to the present study, it is worth noting as it highlights a departure from a particular convention which could *possibly* be emulated to challenge stereotypic representations of women highlighted in this study.

Presely Cheuneyagae, who plays Tsotsi, had no discernible record in the big screen except for a brief stint in theatre, particularly the productions of Mmabana Cultural Centre. Similarly, Pheto had very little experience prior to her casting in *Tsotsi*, but both, like DiCaprio, have since become big stars following the success of the film. Here one can see the power of the media to confer status at work. Pheto, for example, has since starred in films such as *Catch a Fire* (2006), *Goodbye Bafana* (2007) and *Mafrika* (2008), and has been enlisted to appear in the American soap opera, *The Bold and The Beautiful*.

### 3.6 The symbolism of naming as a filmic device

Another important aspect that one cannot overlook when analysing these films is the names of the characters. Naming is generally considered symbolic, especially in the African culture, and is shown in several expressions and tales, for example, in the idiomatic expressions: *Leina lebe seromo*. Loosely translated this means one takes after his or her name. Naming an individual may be informed by the

circumstances in which a child is intractably linked to the experiences of the parents. It may also be used to express what the parents desire for the child in its future endeavour. For example, it is believed that if your name is Lesego (Lucky), you will be very fortunate and therefore very successful in life because of your good fortune.

As mentioned *Tsotsi* refers to a street hustler or thug and it suits the genre of gangster films. In that sense the name Tsotsi expresses the life and character of the protagonist while Yesterday conjures up memories about the past. In *Yesterday,* the past is used as a useful device to critique the present and speculate about the future. There is also a tendency to romanticise the past. As Yesterday reveals when she visits the clinic – she was named Yesterday by her father because he thought things were better yesterday. However, as Botha remarks: "there is considerable irony in Yesterday's father's belief that the world of yesterday was better than the world of the present, since the tragic turn his daughter's life takes is directly linked to events of the past" (2011: 4). The names of several characters in the film can be seen to reflect this sort of thinking (that the name is symbolic). The character of Butcher for instance epitomises his brutality which we see when he stabs to death the people that he robs. In this way, Lucky's feat in surviving the odds can be seen as a sign that luck is on his side.

The name of Lucky's mother Mama Kunene is also interesting. Mama means mother and Mama Kunene's role in this regard is clear in various scenes where she

constantly attempt to guide Lucky, encouraging him to be responsible. Another interesting aspect relating to naming is the title of the film "Jerusalema," the historical city regarded as "one of the holiest sites for three of the world's major religions" although it is in reality marred by violence (see Hees 2009: 92). Hees suggests that the naming (title) of this films which is set in one of the violent cities in South Africa signifies despair, alienation and hope at the same time.

## 3.7 Everyday life

The three films under discussion essentially deal with the everyday struggle of ordinary South Africans against the bleak environments they face as a result of poverty, unemployment and all sorts of discrimination relating to race, class, gender and ethnicity. It could be argued that the inclination by filmmakers to focus on a certain trend or certain issues such poverty, unemployment and others as described above indicates a particular moment within the South African film culture. Major themes underpinning many recent films concern the issues of poverty, crime, unemployment, disintegration of the family, and to certain extent xenophobia. The themes are closely related and one major feature of these films is that there are many overlaps between them, for instance, male-female relations, child and spousal abuse, unemployment, importance of education, HIV/AIDS, poverty and single parenting. With the exception of *Yesterday*, which addresses the plight of rural women and people in general, the recent wave of films, like many of the films made under apartheid, shows an obsession with urban and township life.

As a result, the difficulty of life in rural areas in general and the plight of women in particular remain somewhat invisible.

All three films depict how people manage against the odds which are largely the consequence of the system of apartheid. The plight of ordinary people in rural areas and the unequal distribution of resources and services that characterises contemporary South African society are depicted in *Yesterday*. The scene in which the ailing Yesterday walks kilometres to the clinic only to be told to come back the following day serves as clear testimony that some people die because of lack of proper services. In his anthropological book, *Three Letter Plague,* Steinberg (2008) reveals the multiple problems in rural areas which resonate with the issues that *Yesterday* highlights. In the three films under study, South Africa is also depicted as a two-world nation, one rich and privileged, another poor and neglected.

Both *Jerusalema* and *Tsotsi* probe the roots of crime and essentially depict South Africa as a crime-ridden country. The storylines emphasise that the crime is not a phenomenon that occurs in a vacuum, but stems from an array of factors such as the socioeconomic conditions, both from the past and in the present. In *Tsotsi* the lead character Tsotsi, played by Presley Chueneyagae, comes to his senses and returns the child to its mother. This suggests that even criminals are people with emotions in spite of the situation that overwhelms them, and they have the potential to reform.

## 3.8 Focus of inquiry: scenes, characters and elements of analysis

I focus on the following primary Black female characters: Yesterday (Leleti Khumalo) in *Yesterday*, Miriam (Terry Pheto) and Pumla (Nambitha Mpumlwana) in *Tsotsi,* and Lucky's mother Mama Kunene in *Jerusalema.* The major scenes I concentrate on for a detailed analysis include:

- In *Yesterday*, 1) a scene in which Yesterday visits her husband in the mines and he viciously assaults her in full view of one of his colleagues; 2) the camaraderie scene where the teacher offers to help Yesterday enabling her to go to the hospital and finally to the mines to see her husband, and the arrival of Yesterday's husband from the mines;
- In *Tsotsi*, I look at one of the two breast feeding scenes in my analysis. There are two breastfeeding scenes. The first is where Tsotsi forces Miriam to feed the abducted baby at gunpoint. The second one is when Miriam unbuttons the rest of her blouse fully showing her upper body almost seductively while Tsotsi looks on. The latter is the scene that I refer to when I discuss the questions of the gaze and voyeurism in *Tsotsi*. I also look at the scene where Fela, Aap, Boston and Butcher are drinking and playing cards while a scantily dressed woman is busy massaging and fondling Fela, and lastly the hijacking scene where Tsotsi hijacks Pumla's car;

- In *Jerusalema* I look at the striptease scene where the young black women dance for the amusement of their male spectators, the scene where Lucky visits his White girlfriend's parents, the scene where Lucky visits the owner of one of the dilapidated buildings in Hillbrow, the interview scene where a bold female journalist asks Lucky to start his story from the beginning, and the parting scene where Lucky says goodbye to his mother on his way to start a new life in Johannesburg.

Some of the specific elements that I look at in each scene include narrative elements, codes (dress, gestures, colour), use of music, shots/cinematography, props, which function as signs, as well as cinematic genre codes, social roles and statuses assigned to Black women), amount of screen space given to them, characterisation, depiction of their narrative roles such as relationships to other characters, and their roles in furthering the plot. These elements are crucial as they carry denotative and connotative meanings for the viewers, hence Elam's assertion that "every aspect of the performance is governed by the denotation-connotation dialectic" (2002: 7).

This chapter discussed the procedure for the selection of films under study as well as providing justification for their selection and clarifying the methods used to analyse the data. Then, the chapter provided an expansive analysis of the selected films and explained how the research was executed. In terms of the broad analysis, while women are limited to domesticity men can leave home and seek for jobs

elsewhere. Increasingly Black men in these films are associated with violence and criminal activities. Thus, Black men seem to be portrayed in relation to hegemonic understanding of violence while the hegemonic masculinity of White manhood is made peripheral. For instance, the role played by the White consumer of drugs, Josh (Daniel Buckland), is defined in opposition to the selfish and aggressive masculinity of Black men as depicted by the drug dealer, Eugene Khumanyiwa in *Jerusalema* who is just interested in recouping the money Josh owes him in spite of the possibility that Josh may die. He had given Josh a drug overdose and held him hostage until the money he owed was fully paid. Similarly, Lucky's ex-girlfriend Nomsa drops her studies to follow him to Johannesburg can be defined in opposition to his white girlfriend Leah who is depicted as a considerate, mature and responsible person.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## MODES OF REPRESENTATION

In this chapter I discuss modes of representation for gendered themes in the selected films. Representation operates at a number of levels: firstly, at the level where the filmmakers make the representation, and secondly, where the spectators interpret the work being represented. Furthermore, interpreting representational images entails denotation and connotation in terms of the represented message's overt and covert expressions, with the former being somewhat straightforward and the latter less explicit and not easily discernible from the text at face value.

When looking at representation from a Black feminist perspective linked to the critical framework of this study, the key question that must be answered is whether these films present Black women in a dynamic manner that does not further demean or stereotype them**.** For this chapter I focus specifically on the dominant modes of representation that the selected films seem to use to convey stories about Black women, which I then problematise using the critical insights arising from the theoretical framework of the study.

## 4.1 Delineation of Gendered Themes

According to my own reading of these films, the portrayal of Black women falls into the following broad categories, namely: (1) single parenthood /motherhood – a single mother, usually unemployed, who tries to fend for her offspring in the midst of a bleak environment as in the case of Yesterday (*Yesterday*), Miriam (*Tsotsi*) and Mama Kunene (*Jerusalema*), all of whom raise their children in the absence of their spouses; (2) invisibilisation/present but absent figure – as in the increasingly used depiction where we see an ever-busy Black woman cutting a lonely figure in the background as she goes on with domestic chores while the family she works for are having quality time or doing something that is depicted as exciting, enjoyable or valuable. In some instances, we see these women in the background as part of the mob that helps to advance the action of the male or White protagonists; (3) women's solidarity/sisterhood in which women stand together or work against each other; (4) domestication – the home as the place of work for Black women; and (5) voyeurism/male gaze and sexual objectification – the invisible Black woman in the film suddenly becomes visible half-naked and parading herself for male patrons. In Mulvey's (1999) terms, the women in these types of roles provide sexual pleasure for the characters within the film and for the gazing eyes of the spectator as in the scene in *Jerusalema,* where half-naked women fondle their bosses while other women are portrayed as strippers and prostitutes.

The representation of single parenthood discernible in these films depicts a lone mother, usually unemployed and raising children singlehandedly in her husband's absence. Mama Kunene (Gladys Mahlangu), who is raising her offspring on her own, exemplifies this mode of representation in *Jerusalema*. She is not depicted through her actions and utterances as working hard to provide for her family, but we suspect that she must have been doing so. It is actually Lucky whom we see hustling, first selling sweets in the train, refusing to gamble his money in a game of dice as his friend does, getting involved in the car hijacking business, reverting back to safer work as a petrol attendant, trying one last score in breaking into a shop, and then leaving for the city (Hillbrow). There he tries to make inroads into the taxi business, but that fails and he decides to hijack buildings. Property mogul Donald Trump's book lying in the car that Lucky drives away is used as a prop to signify Lucky's entrepreneurial streak evident throughout the film. We cannot make the same claim about his mother. She is a silent presence, and she appears suspicious when suddenly Lucky makes money and the family lives comfortably. When she confronts Lucky about the source of his income, he lies about it and she never pursues the truth of Lucky's words. The gospel music associated with her is also very important in signifying her values.

In *Tsotsi* single parenthood is portrayed in the representation of Miriam, a mother of an infant baby, whose husband had been killed, apparently in a crime-related incident. Then there is Yesterday in the eponymous film whose husband is absent due to work commitments which take him away from the family for months,

leaving her with the responsibility to look after their five-year-old daughter Beauty on her own. Several significations are at work within this single-parenting mode. The first is the favourable orientation of the sturdy single woman in Yesterday, who is working around the clock to care for her child by herself amid the bleak environment of abject poverty and deprivation. Then in *Tsotsi* there is the resolute Miriam caring for her child whose father has been killed by thugs. She is also portrayed as a resourceful entrepreneur who makes ornaments and merchandise which she sells. Her resourcefulness contests the notion of men as providers, at once deconstructing the image of a hopeless woman whose survival is threatened once her main source of income (her husband) is absent.

Tsotsi makes plenty of money, which he offers Miriam as payment for caring for the stolen baby, but she refuses to take it. Again, this could be seen as the reverse of the convention that depicts women who must have sex with men to solve their problems, or subsist on the hand-outs they receive from them, often at the expense of their independence. In this way Miriam's refusal to take money from Tsotsi can be seen as resonating with feminists' concerns that women's financial dependency on their male partners makes them vulnerable to power control, cohesion and male oppression, and thus by refusing the money from Tsotsi she resists his controlling power and asserts her virtue as an independent woman.

On the other hand, the proliferation of the single-parenting mode of portrayal may raise concerns because of certain stereotypes in that it may inadvertently cultivate

the consistent image of a Black super-woman who is able to survive all the difficulties confronting her. This becomes complicated in the light of mass communication's assertions that when people are constantly exposed to certain images, those depictions end up appearing as 'normal', and this then becomes a problematic portrayal, notwithstanding the fact that there are millions of Black women who raise their children on their own. This may also endorse the stereotype that caring for children is the primary responsibility of these women. As Gunter (1986) argues, "stereotype divides neatly into two types; gender-role stereotyping and gender-trait stereotyping."

Gender role is described by Reber (1985: 296) as "the overt expression of behaviour or attitude that indicates to others the degree of one's affiliation to maleness or femaleness." Thus, it is the public expression of gender identity and roles. Gender-role stereotyping therefore emanates from the perception society has about a particular gendered group and the attendant attitude towards the activities performed by this group. According to Richmond-Abbott (1992: 7), "gender-role stereotypes are beliefs that men possess certain traits and should do certain things and that women possess other traits and should do other things". Seen this way, a depiction that constantly places women within the home environment in terms of their roles and occupation harks back to gender-role stereotyping that makes women suited for roles around the home while men succeeds outside the home.

Another issue linked to the challenge of single parenthood is the problem of absent fathers. There are props and significations that prompt us to see the absence of fathers as a problem. For instance, there are frequent questions relating to absent fathers, in which characters keep asking about the whereabouts of the father. An example of this is in a shebeen scene where Tsotsi brutally assaults his friend Boston (Mothusi Magano) leaving him lying in a pool of his own blood, after he asks about his father and makes some comments about his lack of decency:

> "Boston: What happened to your father?"

It is interesting that Boston raises this question in relation to Tsotsi's life as a thug. The fact that this question is raised when he talks about Tsotsi's lack of respect for humanity could indirectly connote that his lack of decency has something to do with the absence of his parents in his life. Tsotsi's reaction would be unexpected in a normal situation, yet within the gangster filmic convention that callousness is a vital element of this genre of entertainment. Nonetheless, a deeper reading of the scene indicates that Boston has noticed an important sore point – a wounded soul (perhaps the result of abuse and/or neglect during childhood), a painful chapter of Tsotsi's life that he would rather close. He masks it through his callousness. Moreover, when Tsotsi comes to see Miriam he asks her where the baby's father is.

The same question arises in a scene in *Yesterday* where Yesterday and Beauty walk back home from the clinic. As they walk, Beauty asks, "Mommy, when is Daddy

coming home?" From a psychological point of view fathers play an important role, not only as the so-called ATM fathers. Research suggests that children who do not have fathers who are present in their lives tend to be more aggressive, while girls tend to indulge in more risky sexual behaviour (Bronte-Tinkew & Moore, 2006; Carlson 2006; Jensen, 1972). This sentiment is echoed by Rosenberg and Wilcox (2006), who point out that children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally secure, relate better to their peers and keep out of trouble.

There are many complex reasons for absent fathers, some of which have their roots into the socio-political and economic conditions. For instance, Yesterday's husband is absent because he works far away in the mines (because of the migrant labour system), while Miriam's husband has been killed by thugs. The revelation that Miriam's husband died because of crime is a commentary on how violence in the streets, together with its underlying causes, destroys families. The dire situation of these single mothers is crystallised by the bleak environment in which they live, characterised by poverty, unemployment and crime.

Generally, the discourse of absent fathers in Black families in South Africa can be categorised into five instances, namely: work, political exile, death, irresponsibility, acquisition of education. Ndebele (2003) in his novel, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, captures four of these instances poignantly. The four kinds of absent fathers that Ndebele identifies are: those in exile, those studying abroad, those who work in

faraway places and those who have died for one reason or the other. This is discernible in the book's opening scene: (2003: 1)

> So what does a woman do in the absence of her husband, who is in jail, in the mines, in exile, or is dead, or away studying, or spends most of the time on the road as a salesman, who, while not having gone anywhere in particular, is never at home because he's just busy fooling around?

This model is signified as a permanent feature of South African society. The characters in the selected films keep on holding the fort and breaking new grounds to sustain their families, perhaps with the exception of Mama Kunene (Gladys Mahlangu) whose powerlessness, one could say, is evoked in the memorable scene where she rushes to Lucky with the letter from Wits University. "Lucky *potlaka, lengoala la hao la Wits ke le* – hurry, here is your letter from Witwatersrand University." Lucky opens the letter and enthusiastically reads the first line: "It is our sincere pleasure to offer you a place at our school of business studies." As he completes the sentence, he pauses and shakes the hand of his friend, saying, "*Mfowethu, Ndigenile* – my brother, I am in!" However, as he continues reading his face soon turns sombre when he realises that he has not been offered a bursary. This means he will not be going to university although he has been accepted, an unpleasant experience that diminishes his dreams. The silence and sad expression of Mama Kunene signifies her hopelessness in the situation. As Berger (2012)

reminds us, semiotics is concerned not only with what characters do (syntagmatic/manifest meaning) but it is also concerned with what their actions imply (paradigmatic/ latent meaning). For Lucky, this means that he will have to find a job, and bearing in mind the high unemployment rate in the country, the chances of someone like him getting a job, fresh from school and no experience, are very slim.

Lucky's inability to enter into university results in a state of "disrupted development sequence" to use Lowenthal and Lowenthal's (1997) terminology. I find the concept of disrupted developmental sequence relevant in this scenario where the natural progression of teenagers from school to university, employment, marriage and so on, is disrupted. At this age Lucky cannot afford to sit at home because his already over-burdened single mother is struggling to put food on the table for the entire family. We are not told where his father is or why he is absent in their lives, but in South Africa, as mentioned, the absence of fathers in Black families has become something of a norm. This is the result of a confluence of factors including many years of forced removals and other migrant policies. People were moved from places closer to their work and placed far away on the outskirts. The result was that many men had to stay in the hostels closer to their place of work, leaving their families behind. This has accounted for much of the nuclear familial structures characterising many of South Africa's Black communities today. Thus Lucky will now have to assume adulthood prematurely.

We are not shown in the film what Mama Kunene does for a living, but we get to know her as a God-fearing and responsible parent who is trying to raise Lucky according to Christian principles. However, Lucky's failure to go to university and his subsequent departure to Hillbrow disrupts this dynamic portrayal of his mother that the film has achieved up to that point. Thus her parental skills are rendered invisible in a subtle way by her perceived failure to prevent Lucky from becoming a criminal, despite her earnest attempts. Again this could be seen as implicitly validating the notion of the presence of the strong male in the family as the only way to bring up children properly. This is because she tries very hard, but fails, to ensure that Lucky is well-behaved in order to make a success of his life. Yet, on the other hand this could signal that many poor young Black people fail to further their studies or pursue other fundamental training as a result of poverty since the family has to subsist on a single income, or even no income at all. I argue therefore that in spite of obvious flaws, in some instances, the character of Mama Kunene (Lucky's mother) is complex. Despite perceived challenges, her portrayal as a victim of the situation beyond her control is fairly nuanced and does not establish what Ogunleye calls the "unsuccessful and biased attempt to pander to the new feminist consciousness … [which] attempts to present the woman as quite able to hold her own in a male-dominated world" (2005:134). Thus, while motherhood is problematised in this single-parenting mode of portrayal in which Black female characters are generally dependable and therefore redeem the absence of male characters and the system that fails to touch their lives in an empowering way to alleviate their suffering, it is argued that the portrayal of Mama Kunene

deconstructs this filmic strategy. Seen in this way, then, the kind of representation discussed above shows that these films have moments of depicting a dynamic Black woman who is strong, solid and determined, despite her numerous challenges in life.

Pumla Dube in *Tsotsi* represents an interesting shift in the representation of Black women. As a middle-class Black female, she provides another interesting vantage point through which to examine the characterisation of Black women in the reviewed films. Like Miriam, she is accosted by a gun-toting Tsotsi. Her ordeal of being shot and crippled by Tsotsi, who also steals her infant baby, shows that even her middle-class status does not protect her from the victimisation suffered by women of a lower socioeconomic status such as Miriam, whom Tsotsi has spotted as a soft target to coerce into breastfeeding the stolen baby. Despite her injuries, she refuses to see herself merely as victim, constantly seeking to engage confrontationally with Tsotsi. This determination to refuse to be trapped in fear as a crime victim is poignantly captured in the scene where she tells the police officer who had come to update them on the case to relay a message to Tsotsi: "When you find him, tell him that I will kill him with my bare hands."

Another persistent representation that is especially noticeable in *Jerusalema* and *Tsotsi* is that Black female characters are mainly seen in the background, away from the main activities. They are not the focus of the camera but become part of the background of the subjects that the camera captures. This 'invisibilisation'

represents a critical technique used to portray these women as secondary citizens or "silentothers," leading to what Sandra Harding (1987) refers to as "the presence of their absence." According to Littlejohn (1992: 240), "the silencing of women leads to women's inability to express themselves eloquently in the male parlance." This kind of annihilation of women by the media, to borrow a formulation from Tuchman (1978), resonates with concerns by muted group theorists about the way the male-dominated society has silenced women through different forms of communication. They postulate that men had, for years, exerted control over women and forced them to abandon their own views and aspirations, and subsequently made them think like men.

Muted group theories criticise the portrayal of woman as silent others as a way to keep women from decision-making processes, keeping them in their (perceived) place. Richter (2008: 7) echoes this concern by saying that: "The ability of women to create themselves as subjects on the screen is not equally shared among women", noting that "while it is true that White women have had the ability to find a voice on the screen as speaking subjects, Black women have had a more difficult time". This observation is further supported by hooks who observed: "[w]ith the possible exception of early race movies, Black female spectators have had to develop looking relations within a cinematic context that constructs our presence as absence" (1999:310). In this representation, their role is only illuminated when they drive the story that serves to elevate other groups in the film. In this context the presence of their absence is both revealing and symbolic. The most frequent image

orchestrated this way is that of an ever-busy woman who is always occupied with something in the background. Curiously enough, we are never really shown what they are doing except in passing when they hang out the laundry, wash dishes or make tea, with the camera positioning them in the farthest distance away from the central activity. On the one hand, this can also be read as devaluing the type of work that these women do, and on the other hand, it could be argued that it shows Black women as constantly at work so that they are depicted as selfless, always labouring for the good of others. This is also a problematic stereotype because it could potentially suggest that women can endure almost anything.

Apart from Pumla Dube in *Tsotsi*, the only woman constantly present is the Black domestic servant, at her home busy, either with domestic chores, or at her work where she is a maid. These women are clearly invisible in terms of being represented in various professions. This does not seem to reflect, for example, the changing role of women in general, and Black women in particular, in modern South African society, although one must also concede that this has so far only happened for a minority since the vast majority of black women in South Africa are still poor, marginalised and doing unskilled work. Nonetheless, one would still expect to see the positive changes that are taking place reflected in filmic work because of their intrinsic importance to inspire confidence, action and do work that is more constructive. For instance, the country has been intensifying its efforts to level the playing field with regard to careers and as a result we now have many women who are CEOs and directors of multinational companies, bus drivers,

engineers and so on. Yet these developments do not seem to manifest in images constructed by contemporary films.

Women appear in cutaway shots as a facilitating mechanism of the plot, not as central characters except in the domestic sphere where their work is also devalued. Their presence exists only as a way of confirming their 'own' inferiority in relation to the abundance of virtues ascribed to other groups. Their presence is also illuminated in the way that they seem to provide freedom for other groups they appear alongside, for example, by taking care of errands and an array of other chores while their husbands and their bosses have the time for leisure and to do whatever they want to. For instance, in the car-hijacking scene in *Jerusalema*, the background scene shows Black women doing laundry. Again, in a scene where Lucky visits his girlfriend's parents, there is a Black woman working in the background. This constant trope of oppression is evident in the majority of films in South Africa. From the hegemonic theory point of view, such images are deployed to obtain consent from women in these positions so that they see that kind of role as their natural place, which they do not have to challenge. It is this constant "presence of their absence" (to use Harding's phrase) in more serious issues and again in terms of profession or status that this study deems as problematic. It is therefore essential that we question and challenge the persistence of negative and damaging stereotypes based on race, gender and class as their persistence has serious social consequences.

Ironically, the ubiquitous presence of Black women in supporting roles or as background material on its own makes us notice their absence as worthwhile and dynamic characters in these films. Thus, the presence of marginalised Black female characters evokes the underlying overtones that these women are insignificant compared to other gendered and racial groups. This does not only reinforces traditional sex-role stereotypes, but also class and racial stereotypes, especially when compared to Black male and White female characters in these films.

The kind of orientation referred to in the above paragraph can be adduced again in *Jerusalema* in the scene where Lucky Kunene goes to see one of the property owners about the dilapidated condition of his Hillbrow building. A female employee, who is busy in the yard, greets him at the gate. She then goes off to alert her employer. The framing of the shot here is interesting, showing the woman standing at the table while the rest of the family is seated. The way she addresses her boss also reveals a lot about the master-servant relationship they have: "Master, there are men to see you at the gate."

In *Jerusalema* this kind of representation is epitomised in the scene where the family is seated and having coffee, while the Black woman is hard at work, which shows the home as the place of work for Black women while for others it is the place of comfort, security and family. Taken as a whole, it is tempting to dismiss the films considered here as lacking dominant Black female characters as they are mainly portrayed in subtle ways, relegated to the periphery, beyond the margins of

citizenship. However, I argue that Lucky's mother's perceived invisibilisation, while constraining and problematic in some areas, can actually be seen as departing from the portrayal of a super-woman who can take it all. Her depiction is also orchestrated to draw attention to the disrupted development of children's normal development as shown by the way in which Lucky has to take responsibility at a young age – a duty which would ordinarily lie with parents.

According to de Beauvoir (1993), women must work as a collective if they hope to make difference in all areas of their lives. We see brief moments of that kind of engagement in the film *Yesterday*, when women come together to help each other clear the shrubs along the road in what is referred to as *letsema* in Setswana. *Letsema* can be understood to mean the kind of volunteerism based on the notion that more hands make light work. Baboum describes this kind of women's labour collective as "a form of indigenous community mobilising and organising rooted in the ancestral culture of solidarity that has driven endogenous development of African societies in the past" (2005:333-334). This makes it possible for women to establish solidarity, assist each other, share information, share food, share conversational spaces. Unfortunately, this kind of relationship is short-lived as the women desert Yesterday as soon as they learn about her HIV status, but this is reversed later on in the film when one of the female teachers helps her get to the clinic.

The notion of *ibandla labafazi* (women's collective) that Ndebele describes in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* could be seen as reminiscent of this kind of relationship and women's solidarity. The idea that there should be any kind of female solidarity is something that is so succinctly explored in a recent feminist novel *Basadi lwa Reng* (Motsaathebe, 2010b). In the novel I attempt to render female characters that are complex, proactive, resilient and sturdy, and who form partnerships, associations and alliances with their multiple challenges, and chart liberating ways for themselves. The protagonist is a successful businesswoman who emerges as a champion of women's rights after her unsuccessful relationships with men. She conceives the idea of *Basadi lwa reng* (Womanhood) after her fallout with Basinyi, a womaniser, drug dealer and a trickster. Kedibone then takes on the responsibility of educating women in open discussions. In *Yesterday* this is reflected when the group of women who had previously shunned Yesterday after learning of her HIV status ultimately embrace her. This upholds fervently 'feminist' notions of female solidarity.

In *Tsotsi* the idea of sisterhood is discernible to a degree but perhaps not as cogently as it could have been, and what we see is the tendency to depict women in competition with one another. On the other hand, it is important that the idea of sisterhood is not merely seen in instrumentalist terms, because one should imagine that it would be hard to stand together when you are poor, competing for resources, and when HIV/AIDS is still stigmatised. This point has been raised by feminist scholars such Ebrahim (1998), particularly with regard to the fact that women's

solidarity may be hindered by various factors including issues of class which inevitably ensure that the inequalities are reproduced amongst these women even as they attempt to work together, rendering any form of cohesion both impossible and irrelevant.

In terms of characterisation, women appear to be debased as sex objects, strippers in nightclubs to appease a male audience. The representation of Black women as strippers for their male tycoons and as prostitutes in *Jerusalema* supports the notion that women are objectified and paraded for the pleasure of men (the male gaze). In *Jerusalema* women are not only 'fetishized' as icons displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, but are also the object of fetishes to be used in cinema, and packaged into saleable products, resulting in the valuation of women's bodies being, to use Marxist terminology. Marxists use the term valuation in the sense that once women's bodies are commodified they become goods or services that can be offered as products for sale. Thus they can be traded as a commodity with an economic value.

It can be argued that some of the Black women are problematically portrayed as having an insatiable sex drive which, as we shall see, forces them to solicit sex from men who are portrayed as victims of these women's lewdness. The point being made here can be adduced in the following scene from *Jerusalema,* in which a scantily dressed woman tries to entice Lucky:

Female: Hey Mr, please take me with you to your room?

Lucky: *Hayi suka* – [hey get off] you want to search me and steal all my money while I am asleep.

On the one hand, we can view this interaction as men's resistance to being tricked by wicked women. In that sense, Lucky is represented as a victim of the rampant sexuality of this woman. What is depicted therefore is the notion of good and evil, one character (male) refusing to succumb to another character (female) who is trying to tempt him to commit an inappropriate act. This could be seen as reinforcing certain stereotypes. It could also be seen as signifying that the environment that the male characters inhabit is sordid and sleazy.

The callous manner in which the male character treats women in *Jerusalema* is reflected in the scene where a male character rudely gets rid of the half-naked woman, who had been fondling him: "Hey fuck off; go and make money." This happens when Lucky Kunene arrives, as they (Lucky and the drug dealer) apparently have 'important' business to discuss. Although it is to be expected that in this type of genre the gangster boss will be bullish and callous when it comes to women, seen from another vantage point, this scene could be taken to imply that women should not be around when important business is discussed, and, in this context, reducing women to mere appendages whose presence is deemed to be a distraction when serious matters are considered. This suggests that their presence is required purely for the pleasure of the males. Thus, it is clear that when it comes to

important matters, even the supposed ‘power of seduction’ of women is weakened, putting men firmly in control, which enables them to have power over women and control them for business and pleasure. Seen this way, this kind of representation is the reverse of the conventional mode of representation in which women portrayed in these kinds of roles often use their seductive power to usurp power and exert control over men.

On the other hand, one must also see this representation in the context of the fact that prostitution is a complex world tied to very difficult circumstances, and most women are in it to earn a living. In some instances there are men who own and control these women and take a significant portion of their earnings. Some of these women are forced to do this kind of work, some having been recruited under false pretences, ultimately finding themselves tied up in shady contracts enforced through intimidation, brutality and blackmail. In this world women must be lewd to attract clients; it is simply part of the job. Seen this way, the films offer a commentary on the patriarchal society which relegates women to the margins, forcing them to take up these positions. Thus, the way the society is structured means that women have limited opportunities. In this respect, an interesting background story might be to look at the life story of the woman who attempts to solicit Lucky and unravel questions such as how does she end up being a prostitute in Hillbrow, notwithstanding that this kind of construction might not go down very well with Hollywood conventions and the American Academy.

It is also important to note the tone of voice used by the male characters when speaking to female characters. They use the language that is both denigrating and riddled with insinuations. To tell a woman to "fuck off and go and make money," for example, reflects the sordid world in which men own women not only as recreational objects for their pleasure but also as material objects to be exchanged for money**.** Similarly, when the woman approaches a male client she is dismissed as a masquerading thief who just wants to steal his wallet. As Sharon Smith (1999: 16) observes, such a woman "seems to be cast as a castrating woman by the men on whom she makes demands." This representation as described could also be seen as a comment on the callousness of the men in the film rather than on the filmmaker's adoption of stereotypes. This is an important point to make here since every film is likely to have multiple readings. The problem however comes with the preponderance of the same image, as highlighted in the literature review for this study, is likely to be internalised by the viewers.

Furthermore, the propensity to fetishism in these films evokes the notion of the male gaze. The male gaze positions a woman's body as an erotic image to satisfy male fantasies. Thus, there seems to be a relationship between the two looking relations in terms of the manner in which they both position their 'subjects'. Hence Kaplan (1997:79-80) concludes that the colonial gaze, like the male gaze, is an objectifying gaze and they are laden with stereotypes. Indeed, the medium of film is not only the instrument of representation, but is also the object of representation (Kilpatrick, 1999).

In both *Tsotsi* and *Jerusalema* the gaze at a woman's body is instigated as pleasure for male spectators; for instance, in *Jerusalema* there are close-up shots of naked women, while the cameras in *Tsotsi* zoom in to focus on Miriam's breasts in one of the unforgettable scenes in the film. In this sense, breasts may be seen to symbolise life in terms of showing Miriam as a nurturer, sustaining life. However, it is not clear why she is shown with the whole of her blouse unbuttoned exposing her entire upper body as opposed to the normal practice of exposing only the part closer to the breast. For a brief period in this scene the camera reveals to us, the spectators as audience, and Tsotsi, the spectator in the film, as well as those spectators behind the camera, including the director, far more than just the breasts. I find that Miriam's instant metamorphosis from a respectable mother to a sexual object for the male gaze detracts from the narrative trajectory of the film itself. I argue that this portrayal signifies the filmmakers' emphasis on Miriam's sexuality over her capability. Thus, the longstanding assumption that film and television are the products of a sexist society and that they frequently present eroticised images and stereotyped depictions of women, is validated. It is therefore not far-fetched to argue that this explicit shot of the woman's entire upper body is orchestrated to titillate the spectator, particularly the male spectator.

| **Shots** | | **Description** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | MS (Waist up) | Miriam looking at the window while she slowly |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | unbuttons her colourful blouse. She has turned her back on him. (He is pacing around the room trying to soothe the crying baby. (Hurry up, hurry up please!) |
| 2 | Medium shot | She turns to face Tsotsi and this time her blouse is wide open, exposing her entire upper body. |
| 3 | Medium close up | She stood briefly looking at Tsotsi, not saying a word. |
| 4 | Close up | Tsotsi seems disconcerted why she exposed the rest of her body. The gaze in his eyes is illuminated by the close up shot. |
| 5 | Medium close up | Tsotsi gives her the baby, but she does not take the baby right away and instead looks deeply into Tsotsi's eyes, as if she is protesting. She finally takes the baby from his arms. |
| 6 | Medium close up | Tsotsi retrieves the chair from the kitchen table and places it in a spot, almost in the middle of the room, that offers him a direct view Miriam, and watches as Miriam feeds the baby. |
| 7 | Medium close up | Miriam, feeding the baby, appears alone in the frame. Tsotsi is left out of the shot. |
| 8 | Medium close up | Tsotsi looks at Miriam. |
| 9 | Zoom-in to Close up | The camera zooms in on his face revealing a full close up. His eyes are starring and he has a hand on his mouth. |

In terms of balancing the shot, the director emphasises Miriam's body firstly by allocating more space on the frame and putting her on the right side of the shot and then balancing her in the middle of the frame, while alternating from medium close up and close up shots, highlighting details of her face and body. Lighting is also used expertly with a bright light illuminating her body, which marks a contrast with Tsotsi's region, which is not so well illuminated. The colourful blouse she is wearing is attention grabbing and this could be seen as directing the focus of the gaze because "colours in the red-orange-yellow range tend to attract attention" as Bordwell and Thompson (2008:144) maintain. When she turns from looking at the window and moves towards Tsotsi, the movement creates depth. The final and interesting aspect about this scene is when Tsotsi takes the chair from the kitchen table. He does not sit at the table but instead puts the chair in the middle of the room, positioning it directly towards Miriam before sitting and gazing at Miriam without saying anything.

Semiotics draws our attention to the fact that in society there are certain codes that are used to convey meaning. These codes can also be used to interpret signs in the media. According to Berger (2012: 32), codes are highly complex patterns of associations that all members of a given society and culture learn. These codes, or "secret structures" in people's minds, affect the ways that individuals interpret the signs and symbols they find in the media and the ways they live. From this vantage point, in South Africa generally women do not expose the rest of their upper bodies

when breastfeeding their children. They only expose the necessary part (the breast) as Miriam did in the first encounter with Tsotsi. A semiotic analysis requires that we relate the image represented in the media to the social context, and in this context such a depiction suggests a sexual connotation. This highlights what Berger refers to as "codification systems that play an important (although often unperceived) role in people's lives" (2012: 33). Seen this way, one could therefore argue that the camera shots here serves the purpose of magnifying Miriam's upper body, which is exposed for no apparent reason, since breastfeeding usually does not require a woman to strip and expose her body in that way.

The looking relation that makes Miriam the object of the gaze in this scene is also evidenced by the cinematic language found in the scene which suggests that the portrayal here is primarily one of erotic objectification. The sequence that focuses lingeringly on Miriam as she slowly unbuttons her entire blouse cuts to Tsotsi's face revealing his expression at that moment. According to Mulvey (1999), "The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly." The gaze on Tsotsi's eyes is further reiterated through the camera shot where Miriam turns away from Tsotsi as she continues to unbutton the blouse while looking at herself in the mirror. Here Miriam's body is clearly the object of Tsotsi's gaze as this shot gives Tsotsi the controlling or active gaze over Miriam whose passivity is now reified as she turns away from him. This gives the spectator the privilege of 'invisibility' in which he looks without being looked at. Thus,

Miriam at this point is subordinated to the spectator through the male protagonist's point of view.

For the filmic tradition deeply rooted in the patriarchal system this kind of portrayal of woman as an object becomes significant in the manner in which it underscores her sex appeal that, according to Mulvey (1999), is intended for the male eye. Here Miriam immediately becomes a sexual spectacle as the viewer is absorbed in marvelling at her body. At this moment in the film, this kind of gaze transforms her from the innocent hardworking, single mother that we have come to know into a sexually appealing spectacle.

Miriam undresses of her own volition and one could also argue that she acts this way as an attempt to rebel against what could easily be seen as an abuse, or to put it another way, prostitution of her body. One could say that this action is a way to confront her own fears as to whether this thug (Tsotsi) who invaded her private space and forced her at gunpoint to feed the baby that is not hers also wants to take advantage of her (rape her). It is like making a statement: "I know what you want to do ultimately, why don't you just get on with it, once and for all?" In South Africa many women in Miriam's position are raped every day. Elam reminds us that "the sign inevitably acquires secondary meanings for the audience, relating it to the social, moral and ideological values operative in the community of which performers and spectators are part" (2002:8). However, as things turn out, it appears Miriam had completely misinterpreted Tsotsi's intentions.

Therefore, this study argues that the scene described above is one of erotic objectification for the audience. The director creates suspense by attempting to deceive the audience into thinking that Tsotsi's intentions may be dangerous, and then undermines this appearance by revealing that his interest in her is in fact as a mother who can provide breast milk. It becomes clear that Tsotsi simply wanted Miriam to feed the baby as she had done in their previous encounters.

Despite his actions, Tsotsi appears to see Miriam as a sister and a mother, and it is therefore not surprising that it is Miriam who ultimately encourages him to return the baby to its mother. It seems she reminds him of his own mother, while the stolen child makes Tsotsi reflect on his own life. In this way the child represents Tsotsi's own troubled life, metaphorically. Tsotsi's mother died when he was very young and so his encounter with Miriam and the stolen child presents an important moment for him to enter into a mode of reflexivity and self-introspection, a constant oscillation between the self, inner world and the external world represented by the events of his life.

The use of women's bodies as erotic objects of desire for male spectators is also discernible in *Jerusalema* particularly in the scene where the drug kingpin (Eugene Khumbanyiwa) is being fondled by Black women scantily dressed in G-string panties. The fetishized image of Black women like this reduces women to mere sexual objects for the pleasure of male eyes. Images such as these are examples of

the media representing Black women as sexual commodities. According to Kahn (1982), fetishism functions in two ways: first, it allows the woman to be objectified for sexual pleasure at a physical level; second, it makes it possible for this image to be packaged in a saleable form such as a film and to be sold as a commodity.

With representations such as those mentioned above, it is not surprising that the stereotypical representation of Black women is still prevalent. This stereotypical representation has the potential to exacerbate both the oppression of women and the violence against them. Yesterday is treated badly by her husband but she forgives him without asking questions. It is this forgiving, selfless portrayal of women in Yesterday's situation that is worrying as it depicts them as not rejecting this type of treatment. This entrenches Yesterday's plight as a caring wife and mother, which may connote that women will tolerate any treatment meted out to them no matter how much they resent it.

From the point of view of this portrayal, the depiction of Black males in *Yesterday* suggests some hegemonic understanding regarding Black masculinity and femininity in South Africa. This film has moments were it is clearly critical of this understanding. For instance, the masculinity of Black men becomes hegemonic in the representations of violence, irresponsibility and promiscuity that the film renders, while the femininity of Black women is connoted in the imagery of defencelessness, victimisation. Black masculinity is defined not only in the aggressiveness and madness of Yesterday's husband, John Khumalo (Kenneth

Khambula), who savagely punches her, but also in the passivity and insensitivity of the mine clerk/guard who watches (peeping through the window) while she is being brutally beaten. However, in the scene where he returns home at the end, this type of aggression is put under the spotlight as being futile as he has returned home to a deathbed. In addition to the issues of the gaze and spousal abuse, the film also comments on the futility of Black masculinity through that scene.

The vast distance from the village to the clinic also seems to say something about the challenges that lie ahead for the people living in deprived areas where they struggle against poor service delivery, inadequate basic health care and meagre resources. This signification is achieved by having Yesterday and her daughter walking such a long distance, almost the whole day, along the desolate road only to be turned back when they reach the clinic because there are too many patients for one doctor to attend to. The fact that there is only one doctor for the entire area, which includes several villages is also indicative of the inadequate number of health professionals, particularly in rural areas, where the majority of Black women are often at the receiving end of poor service delivery. It is not surprising therefore that in the long and meandering queue all the patients we see are Black women, except for a few ailing old men whom some of these women probably look after. The issues raised in these films provide a lens into real-life issues as can be adduced, for example, in Steinberg's (2008) work, mentioned in the previous chapter, in which he documents marginal lives in Lusikisiki (one of South Africa's ravished rural areas). This book captures issues of unemployment, crime, problems

of HIV/AIDS stigmatisation, lack of basic health care services that people in the position of the characters in our stories experience.

## 4.2 Disjunctures and Signs of Dynamic Images

It is difficult to say that the selected films represent an advance in terms of deconstructing the stereotypical narrative of Black women in films. It is important to note how the portrayal of Black women compares to the representation of other groups. In these films White female characters are sparsely represented compared to Black women, but their portrayal is inspiring in terms of its positivity. We get to adore especially Yesterday's compassionate doctor (Camilla Walker) and Lucky's girlfriend, Leah Freidlander (Shelley Meskin), a nutritionist by profession, because of their humility. There is also Anna-Marie van Rensberg (Louise Saint-Claire), a professional who helps Lucky to open a trust account. They are very friendly and helpful in all situations. Camilla even speaks to Yesterday in proper Zulu. Camilla's dynamic portrayal can be compared to that of Sarah Barcant (Hilary Swank), who stars as a kind-hearted and intelligent lawyer in *Red Dust*, mentioned earlier. They hold positions in different professional fields such as medicine and banking. They are well dressed, neat and professional, which makes a stark contrast to most/many of the Black female characters, who appear in ragged clothing, and scanty dresses in some cases.

There is, however, a hint of the strong Black woman. The depiction of strong female figures, such as Mama Kunene (Lucky's mother) in *Jerusalema,* suggests some understanding of women's ingenuity, their spirituality and resolution to stay away from crime. Unfortunately, this appears more like an exception rather than the norm. Mama Kunene represents the silent voice and wisdom of the elders which resonates in the background throughout *Jerusalema,* as we see her constantly reproachful of the actions of her son whose main weaknesses like that of most youths, it seems, lie in his inexperience, naiveté, haste and failure to explore situations more realistically before getting involved. In that context Mama Kunene is the moral embodiment in the story and through her portrayal the film salvages its indictment of Black women.

Despite her hard work and endless advice to young Lucky not to get involved in any criminal activities and her desire to have her children educated, she is nonetheless limited by her inability to provide for them. This reflects the frustrations of the dream deferred. The same can also be said of Yesterday, whose absent husband returns home dying, dealing a blow to a dream of a happy family envisaged in the conversation where Beauty asks Yesterday about her father's return home, and if he is going to buy a car. Their long wait and hopes for a united family are dashed. Here we witness some of the jeopardies of what Ndebele calls the "three pillars of a South African woman's life," namely "departures, waitings and returns" (2003: 87).

Ultimately, what the above exposition illustrates is that there are multiple readings possible of filmic representations, hence the need to survey these films using the type of multiperspectival analysis that is adopted in this study. The interesting aspect about these films is that they reflect some of the current realities of South Africa. The issues highlighted in this chapter reflect some of the shifts in the filmic representation of Black women, while at the same time pointing to the problematic manner in which these women are being re-inscribed as subservient on the big screen. I find that the portrayal of Black female characters resonates with the traditional depiction that confines them to roles that limit the range of their experiences and capabilities, by confining them to the home, for example. Here, these women raise children with very little at their disposal in terms of basic provisions as a result of their precarious position in a society that has made them a source of cheap labour and their complex relationships with men, who do not seem to think twice before abandoning them, together with their children, according to these films.

The issues of sexual objectification, voyeurism through the scopic pleasure which glimpses of naked female bodies evoke, and the question of looking relations are all illuminated with Black female characters appearing in these films as prostitutes and strippers**.** The juxtaposition of this study with previous research shows there has not been much advancement in terms of a shift in the representation of Black women in these films, as the ‘mummy’, the ‘Jezebel’ and the Black matriarch images are being recycled.

I recap by restating the point made earlier that South African cinema from 1906 to the early 1990s established a multiform, racist narrative, while cinema since 1994 seems to be struggling to provide an equally multiform, anti-racist counter-narrative. Instead, it seems to update the racialist gendered stereotyping inscribed in the racial and gendered structure of domination from the colonial era all the way through the apartheid years. It is clear that the embodied practice of these filmmakers in terms of signifying practices by which Black women are portrayed remains a historical legacy of both colonialism and apartheid which, in Grewal and Kaplan's words, "satisfies the demands of Western subjectivity and the ethnographic tradition" (2001:70).

# CHAPTER FIVE

## PORTRAYAL OF STATUS, OCCUPATION AND BEHAVIOUR

This chapter explores the portrayal of status and occupation and behavioural characteristics ascribed to Black women in the reviewed films (*Jerusalema, Tsotsi* and *Yesterday*). As in the previous chapter, the key Black women characters that I look at are: Miriam in *Tsotsi*, Yesterday in *Yesterday*, Pumla and Lucky's mother *in Jerusalema.* The first part of the chapter looks at status, in particular economic or occupational status, from a Black feminist standpoint, which is based on Marxist-feminism, and attempts to explain the oppression of women in terms of class and economic conditions. As mentioned, the analysis in this chapter also draws on Bourdieu's (1979) theorisation of class in terms of the social, economic and cultural capitals in which he looks at the interplay of the material and the symbolic realms of class as reflected in lifestyle choices, leisure and aesthetic preferences.

The second part of the chapter examines subtle areas of denigration and other negative connotations in the speech, emotions and habits of the characters that are highlighted as displaying behavioural characteristics that may be seen as characteristic of the Black female from the point of view of traditional patriarchal notions of a gender, racist and classist narrative. The behaviour of individuals can say much about them, for instance, in terms of their qualities, class and status. This

section attempts to establish whether or not Black female characters featured in these films display the same level of positive behavioural patterns relative to other groups portrayed in these films.

## 5.1 Status and occupation

In broad terms status may be described as a state, condition or situation that determines class or position in a given society. According to Andersen and Taylor (2001), there are two types of status, namely achieved status and ascribed status. For instance, someone who is born into royalty will naturally have ascribed status that determines his or her high standing in the society, whereas someone from a poor background may educate himself/herself and end up having a level of sophistication that results in an achieved status. As Andersen and Taylor state: "social class may be determined by occupation, education and annual income" (2001:101). Furthermore, they note that "statuses are occupied while roles are acted or played", and they define roles as the behaviour others expect of a person associated with a particular status (2001:101). A person's status invokes expectations, for instance, doctors are expected to save lives in their roles as doctors. An individual can have more than one type of status at the same time but there is always one dominant status, also known as the master status. In this section, I attempt to look at the master status ascribed to Black women in film.

As suggested by Bailey (1969), Loughlin (1983) and Peirce (1997), the position of Black female characters can be explored under the following rubrics: economic status, housing, marital status, place of residence, occupation, goal in life and female solidarity. I find these categories useful in analysing the portrayal of Black women in films in terms of the positions ascribed to these women. In the films under study the majority of Black women are restricted to very few professional roles, if any. Looking at these films, it immediately becomes clear that male roles together with those roles ascribed to White women are far more nuanced, elevated and more exciting relative to those attributed to Black women; this is especially the case in respect of occupation. Black women are largely homemakers, shebeen owners, teachers, strippers or sex workers.

In my previous research I found that women in audiovisual media are more often shown in 'traditional' roles such as housekeepers, homemakers, mothers, secretaries and nurses, while men are represented not only in relation to their roles as husbands and fathers, but also as athletes, celebrities and business moguls (Motsaathebe, 2009). It would be interesting to see more Black women also presented in such a dynamic way. In the selected films men are more often portrayed in positions that tend to have higher status in terms of the type of employment, and are less likely to be shown in the home, compared to women. When women are shown as successful outside the domestic sphere they are often portrayed as unhappy in their personal lives which invariably renders their success or achieved status invisible. In this way, "working-class Black women experience

antagonistic capitalist relations more intensely as a result of the ideological relations arising from race acting upon the oppressive relations arising from gender"(Barriteau, 2010:5). Such a distribution of occupational roles lags behind current realities in the workplace, however limited these may be (Motsaathebe, 2009). The latter is perceptible especially with regard to Pumla in *Tsotsi*, who seems to be living a comfortable middle-class life when we first meet her. She is elegantly dressed and in spite of her perceived character flaws, she is depicted as respectable. Although her economic situation does not change, her happiness is diminished almost instantaneously when she is shot and crippled by Tsotsi. With the snatching of her child and her spinal injuries resulting from the shooting that leaves her wheelchair-bound, she becomes emotionally labile and her outbursts almost compromise the safe return of her baby at the end.

Pumla's emotionalism is captured in several scenes, including one in the hospital where she tells the police to find Tsotsi and tell him that: "I will kill him with my bare hands." Although it may be easy to dismiss this expression for what it is – unrealistic and possibly wishful thinking – it nonetheless conveys her instinctive motherly feelings and love for her child and, most importantly, a refusal to be violated, oppressed and constrained by criminal elements. In this way, she can be seen as fighting to the bitter end to claim her rightful place in spite of the multiple challenges entrapping her generally as a woman and particularly as a Black woman. Several studies have highlighted crime as one of the many factors that accounts for why women in general and Black women in particular are often not as prosperous

outside the home as men (Bourque & Warren, 1990; Martineau, 1997). Of course, there are many women who are successful outside the home environment, but perhaps this number would be higher if it were not for the multiple obstacles that limit these women's potential in the external world that is not only hostile but also dangerous for them. By speaking her mind, expressing her anger and disapproval of Tsotsi, Pumla resists intimidation and oppression. As Martin Luther King reminds us, "There comes a time when silence is betrayal" (in Massingale, 2007: 46). Massingale takes this further, suggesting that "The cost of silence is betrayal – the betrayal of one's convictions, one's values, one's beliefs, one's very self" (2007: 46).

In *Jerusalema* no Black woman is portrayed as successful outside the domestic sphere and those within the domestic sphere, like Lucky's mother, are generally unhappy as they are unable to fulfil their aspirations. Her excitement when Lucky receives a letter of admission from Wits shows us that she is looking forward to seeing him go to university. This is shown by the way she rushes to him with the letter from Wits University, catching up with him before he can even enter the gate as she cannot wait to hear the good news she has anticipated: "Lucky *potlaka, lengoala la hao la Wits ke le* – hurry, here is your letter from Witwatersrand University." This is supposed to be a big moment that is immediately diminished when it becomes clear that Lucky did not qualify for a bursary. His mother's exasperated facial expression tells us of her disappointments. But for Lucky life must go on.

Motherhood can be exciting and empowering, but it can be daunting, draining and diminishing when you are a single parent with little or no income at all. According to Hallam and Marshment (2000: 185), social realist films "offer a perspective from which it is possible to understand the broader social mechanisms that generate conflict between individual desire and what can be achieved within a given situation … characters are often victims of circumstance, unable to extricate themselves from situations that trap them in the poverty of unemployment and redundancy, the emotional prison of domestic violence/or socio-spatial-psychological confines of racism".

Yesterday, who struggles to bring up her child Beauty in a poverty-stricken environment, conveys many of the same sentiments captured in the above paragraph, as her goal is to put Beauty through school. As if her hardships are not overwhelming enough, she becomes infected with HIV/AIDS. This makes her increasingly unhappy. Although she is determined to live long enough to see that Beauty enters the first grade at school, her joy is negated by the knowledge that at some stage before Beauty completes school she could die. The same applies to Miriam in *Tsotsi*. She has just lost her husband and she has an infant to raise. She makes ends meet through beadwork and selling the merchandise on the streets.

Traditionally female characters in audiovisual media were given occupations that were typically assigned to females, for example, those that are deemed less

complicated and that demand less thinking, while men are given occupations that are deemed more prestigious and earn them more money. Inevitably working women will be dependent on their husbands, because their salaries are not sufficient to sustain them. This accounts for their poor economic status. In that portrayal a single woman would typically be poor and living in an undesirable environment. This was seen to reflect a general pattern in the society. However, the status of women in society has since changed, especially in a country like South Africa, where the government has put in place a number of measures to advance the status of women and address some of the gender stereotypes, especially of those women relegated to manual and domestic work.

It is not being argued in this study that contemporary films must reflect this reality, but it is important to see whether these films still pander to the old stereotypical portrayals which Marxist feminists have seen as strategically designed to benefit men, entrenching their dominant position in the work environment and in society in general at the expense of women. *Tsotsi,* for example, is based on an old text written during the apartheid era; however, it is clear that the filmmakers have updated the text to comment on the post-apartheid context.

In that sense, Bourdieu's conceptualisation of class in relation to what he calls social, economic and cultural capitals becomes relevant here. I argue that the material wealth or economic capital in Bourdieu's (1979) conceptualisation is inevitably the key signifier of one's class position in a given society or community.

According to Calhoun, LiPuma and Postone (1993:05), economic capital can be more easily and efficiently converted into symbolic (social and cultural) capital than vice versa, although symbolic capital can ultimately be transferred to economic capital. Bourdieu uses the notion of capital to refer to one's "capacity to exercise control over one's own future and that of others" (see Calhoun et al., 1993: 4). Bourdieu, like Karl Marx, explains class in relation to material conditions, emphasising the relationship between the material and the symbolic or the non-material realms of class as reflected in one's lifestyle, leisure activities and aesthetic preferences for example. Here one's preference or choice becomes a key indicator of class status, for instance, one's taste in food, taste for high-quality clothing and furniture. This concept of capital helps in exploring the "othering" process across the social stratification. Bourdieu believes that one's taste is nurtured from birth, and thus people growing up in opulent families will have a certain taste associated with highbrow culture, while those from less affluent families will have a different taste, which may be perceived as inferior by the higher class. Therefore, the kinds of clothes, furniture and even the food associated with film characters may be seen as reflecting their status, which is inevitably linked to their material conditions.

The problem is that the powerful class tends to impose on the lower class its own thinking, tastes and preferences, which they regard as superior or the finest. Whereas Gramsci sees this imposition of the ideas of the dominant class as the problem of hegemony, Bourdieu (1979) sees it as symbolic violence (also see

Calhoun et al., 1993). Symbolic violence is fundamentally the imposition of certain aspects of thought and perception upon dominated social agents, who then take the social order to be just. It is the incorporation of unconscious structures that justify the actions of the dominant groups. Once these ideas are embedded in their cognition, the dominated take their position to be just. Symbolic violence is in some senses much more powerful than physical violence in that it is embedded in the very modes of action and structures of cognition of individuals, making it more germane to imposing the legitimacy of the social order. Seen this way, Black women portrayed in these films continue to suffer from the symbolic violence inflicted on them in a portrayal that reduces them to the lower strata in terms of class and citizenry, pushing them beyond the margins.

Linked to the issue of symbolic violence as a product of a patriarchal racialist society, audiovisual media usually convey an image of a devalued, inferior and economically and emotionally dependent woman as a way of 'othering'. Thus the depiction of Black women lies in marking their otherness through various strategies such as their portrayal as secondary characters, or as the socioeconomically dispossessed, or as the vulnerable 'other' in familial relationships. Even in instances where she features as a central character, in most cases the pressures that she has to cope with are so immense that she would usually buckle under them, or lean on a male character for support. The image of devalued women remains a ubiquitous concern. The devalued woman's lack of economic capital, according to Bourdieu (1979), prevents her from negotiating her place or resisting any form of

domination; hence, economic capital features strongly in Bourdieu's and Marx's analysis of class.

The only Black woman portrayed as successful in terms of her middle-class lifestyle (in terms of status, her economic position and class) is Pumla in *Tsotsi*, although she is subjected to mental and emotional anguish and physical harm through her traumatic experience with Tsotsi. I proffer that the nature of roles, conversation, vanity in speech and mannerisms ascribed to Black female characters signifies their status and class. Their status is also signified by the environment in which they appear, be it their place of work or their residence, which is mainly a filthy corrugated tin or mud shack. For instance, when we look at Miriam in *Tsotsi*, Yesterday in *Yesterday* and Lucky's mother in *Jerusalema,* the narrative suggests that they are unemployed. They all have children to raise and the daily activities they perform around the house do not seem to be valued in any way except for confining them squarely to the domestic sphere.

From a semiotics point of view, clothing functions as a code that signals the person's class and status. The clothes of lower-class individuals are markedly different to those of the upper class. The women of our films wear aprons. This is meant to signal their position or class in society. They are portrayed as such so that they must accept their role as domestic servants as natural. From the perspective of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this kind of portrayal is meant to generate consent that would enable those who oppress these women to do so without having to

justify it explicitly, because the woman would simply see this as her natural place in society.

The social position of women is also conveyed through the depiction in which men are daring and go into the world to hustle while women remain in the home to look after children. There is an asymmetrical way in which men and women are portrayed, for instance in *Yesterday* women had to queue for services, while men and other racial groups are in control of the women in the queue telling them when to go home and when to come again to queue for service. In *Tsotsi*, it is the woman who must be hijacked to signify that she is not safe in the world outside the home and therefore must stay in the house 'where she safely belongs'. Thus, a legitimisation of their position is reinstated. There is a basis to question why some of the very few films that seem to challenge this kind of representation, such as *The World Unseen* (2007) and *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), seem to struggle to reach wide audience.

Within the Black communities in South Africa the economic status of women has generally been low, which makes them vulnerable to spousal abuse and marginalisation. Economic status in Marxist terms remains a major source of oppression. Marx argues that society has two classes: the exploited (working class) and the exploiters (owners/employers) who control the means of production. He further stresses that one class will ultimately overpower the other using any means necessary. South Africa was a typical example of what Marx postulated in that

Whites used the power at their disposal to exploit Blacks through cheap labour, political oppression and economic dispossession with the result that the country ended up with carefully divided and rigidly maintained classes, one White, rich and controlling, the other Black, poor and controlled. Apartheid legislation ensured that this status quo remained in place. Apartheid, as stated elsewhere in this study, used the media to endorse its hegemony by consistently representing Blacks stereotypically to entrench the notion of a superior White race. In that stereotypical representation Black women were portrayed as maids to White women, and the 'mummy' and the 'Jezebel' images proliferated.

Other important theories that attempt to explain racial oppression from the economic point of view are the conflict theory and segmentation theory. Developed by Reich in 1980, segmentation theory attempts to explain racism from an economic point of view. According to segmentation theory, the elite often create stereotypes and racial and gendered prejudices that they use to divide and rule Black communities. According to Reich (1980), by cultivating these stereotypes the elite maximise their profits by means of exploiting the working class. In this sense, the segmentation of the exploited group helps to weaken their bargaining power and ensure that the elite remains untouchable.

Seen from a conflict theory point of view, Black women are eliminated from high-paying, respectable and responsible jobs, with the result that there is no competition between them, which means that they will then be available to take on menial work

as domestic workers and familial responsibility that no one else wants to take on. Apart from the arena of occupational competition, Black women are further eliminated from other forms of competition, for instance, through depictions that make them less attractive to White men. For example, the mummy image is seen as unappealing and unattractive, while the Jezebel is seen as licentious and sensual. As the Black women who gathered at Combahee River to thrash out the issues of Black women noted: "We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any one of these types of privilege have" (Combahee River Collective Statement, cited in Smith, 1983). Hence, Black feminists support an argument that the production and reproduction of stereotypical images of Black women in the media stem from the deep-seated twin problems of race and gender, and that the images manifesting in the media are simply an outward expression of the dual oppression of Black women.

With regard to economic status, Black women portrayed in the reviewed films generally work as maids or servants to families in the suburbs, meaning that they earn very low wages. With little or no income, Black women still bring up children in disintegrated families as single parents. For instance, Yesterday has to bring up her child alone in the village, while her husband toils in the mines and finally dies of Aids.

It is important, however, to note that apart from the elaborate portrayal of women as maids, whores and housewives, *Jerusalema* has a feisty woman who owns a property (albeit dilapidated and filthy) and rents out extra rooms on her property, while *Tsotsi* has an equally assertive woman who runs a shebeen. Therefore, these films have Black women who run some form of business. Thus, Soeki (Thembi Nyandeni) in *Tsotsi* runs a shebeen, while *Jerusalema* has a fierce proprietor whom we meet when she unswervingly demands the rent from Lucky. These images suggest a depiction of Black women who do not have to depend on their spouses for a livelihood. This is a point that has been raised by Black feminists in terms of the way women's financial dependency on their partners makes them vulnerable to power control, coercion and male oppression. Women who have their own money do not have to be controlled by men, as we see Soeki always asserting herself; for example, when Butcher asks her to serve them drinks quickly, she refuses telling him that she will attend to them when she wants. Similarly, Lucky's landlady is able to assert her authority over her male tenants because of her financial independence.

At another level, however, the images here suggest, in terms of behavioural patterns, the depiction of Black matriarchy, especially if one considers the representation of Soekie and Lucky's landlady. According to Pilgrim (2002), the Black matriarch is the traditional good mother: nurturing and caring towards her children, but at the same time she is considered unfeminine, strong willed and too domineering. Like Lucky's landlady, Soekie is equally fierce and is portrayed as

controlling as she pushes the patrons around, putting them in their place, as is evident in the following conversation:

| | |
|---|---|
| Butcher: | Hey, Soekie, *komaan man* [hurry up!] |
| | *Ons is droog hierso* [We are dry here]. |
| Soekie: | Hey *wena, Voetsek* [Hey you, get lost!] |
| | *Ke tla atla ka nako ya ka, okay?* [I will come when I am ready, okay?] |

Soekie is not afraid of the thugs who terrorise people in the streets. Later we see her warning them not to cause any problem at her shebeen: "Just remember, I will have no trouble in my place!" However, when one considers the convention, this is quite in order for the conventions of the gangster film, in which such a stern demeanour is required to put problematic patrons in their place. On the other hand, Soekie is equally "nurturing and caring" (Pilgrim, 2002), virtues that we infer from the shebeen scene where she dresses Boston's wounds and nurses him back to health, following his fight with Tsotsi. This naturalist frame presents the women in this film as naturally equipped to take care of others and nursing them, while the men are depicted as being naturally unable to cope on the home front; they cannot successfully take care of others and this is illustrated again in the scene where Tsotsi attempts to look after the stolen baby but fails. Miriam, on the other hand, enjoys looking after this baby and does an exceptional job. She is a single unemployed mother who has to raise her infant child all by herself after criminals

killed her husband. Thus, single parenthood accounts for a huge percentage of the widespread images of a Black woman who is not only generally neglected, but also has the 'burden' of raising children and holding the family unit together.

On the one hand, the fact that women such as Miriam cope very well with the challenges in their lives renders them as people who are naturally equipped to deal with difficulties. In this way men are presented as not suitable for domestically oriented activities such as raising children but are portrayed as being most suited for activities outside the home, where they are able to succeed in hustling for money. For example, Tsotsi leaves the baby with Miriam while he goes out to make money, which he tries to offer to Miriam when he returns. From media effects theory point of view, such presentation has the potential to complicate the position of women in society who may struggle to cope with, or complain about the difficulties of their lives. Such women may be seen as being weak, irresponsible, and narcissistic because they do not conform to societal expectations that expect women to bear such difficulties. On the other hand, this kind of representation can be seen as making an important comment on the position of women. In this sense, such images speak volumes about the economic status of Black women and their class relations in one of the most unequal societies in the world, where the state system struggles to make any meaningful impact on the lives of millions of destitute people, a two-world country characterised by sections of the population diametrically opposed in terms of wealth and deprivation.

It appears that in confining Black female actors to family roles these films exclude the women from the public roles/sphere, characterised by Barriteau (2010) as the world of liberation. Hochschild (1997) found that the family role often conflicts with the work role, resulting in role strain. Andersen and Taylor explain role strain as a "condition wherein a single role brings conflicting expectations" and they note that "the parental role demands extensive time and commitment; so does the job role. Time given to one role is time taken away from the other" (2001:101). Women are more likely to be held responsible for minding the family when job and family conflict, which they describe as a traditional role.

It is obvious that a woman may do poorly at work, or may not be able to work at all if she is overwhelmed with such responsibilities at home. This is evident in the film *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Muccino, 2006) in which Will Smith plays a single parent by the name of Chris Gardner. He has to juggle work while caring for his son Christopher (Jaden Smith), a responsibility that ultimately affects his performance at work. At one stage he is unemployed and he has to make sure that the child is provided for while looking for work at the same time. At the end Chris Gardner (Will Smith) is our hero, having successfully managed to juggle single parenting, fatherhood and work. Yet women, especially Black women, juggle those roles on a daily basis, sometimes having to look after not one child, but many, including extended families in most instances. This has been described by Hochschild as the second shift. Thus, a working mother spends time and energy on the job, only to come home to the second shift of family and home responsibilities.

For Hochschild "a role is the expected behaviour others have for a person associated with a particular status, [while] statuses are occupied; roles are acted or played" (1997:101).

The locality and place of residence are important indicators of an individual's class and economic status. As Berger (2012:12) reminds us: "Where people are located tells us a great deal about them. If they are in a room, we scrutinize the furniture and other objects in the room, the color of the walls, and any paintings or drawings on the walls." This also dovetails with what Bourdieu (1979) refers to when he remarks that one's taste reflects one's class status. Indeed, in these films, the location reveals a great deal about some of the Black women who live in shanty houses, like Miriam in *Tsotsi,* and others like Yesterday in *Yesterday* who live in mud huts in impoverished villages. Most of these women are unemployed and suffering, and they live in crime-infested areas. There is no glamour. In *Jerusalema,* the main character asks Leah Freidlander, a White woman who is looking for her drug-addicted brother:

> What's it with you White people?
> You have nice houses, smart cars, fancy clothes …
> What keeps bringing you to stinky places like these?

From this vantage point, the film reflects a stark contrast between White suburbs, which are spacious, clean, and affluent, and Black areas, which are cramped, dirty

and impoverished. Leah responds: “I guess, when you are rich poverty seems glamorous. A certain charm.” Freidlander’s answer conjures up Joan Armatrading’s song *Poverty can be Romantic.* This scene exemplifies the comments the filmmakers make about poverty and race relations in South Africa. Although Leah’s comment is very unusual, as very few rich people will see poverty as being romantic, it can be seen as a narrative strategy deployed by filmmakers to debunk stereotypes and attitude in which poverty is associated with grime and anything unappealing.

In the film *Yesterday,* set in a village in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands, Yesterday lives in a mud hut and struggles with activities such as fetching water and firewood from vast distances. This is typical of the hardships often experienced by rural women. Yesterday also has to walk great distances to get to basic health care. Again, the place of residence raises another important theme, that of the home as the place of work for Black women**.** While for some the home generally represents a place for leisure, a place where they can reclaim their privacy, find tranquillity and warmth, and feel homely, for Black women the home remains largely the place of work. As such, representations of the home offer a host of insights into the differences in privilege between Black women and other gendered and racial groups in terms of the way in which they relate, work or spend leisure time. Thus, the home provides us with a lens into social roles and power relations within the family unit.

For many Black women there is no difference between the home as a place of work and as a place where they relax and connect with family. In both instances the home remains a place of work. This is captured in the scene from *Jerusalema* where Lucky visits his White girlfriend, Leah Freidlander. The camera pans to reflect Lucky, Leah and her parents seated around the table. Here the camera remains tellingly static, briefly, to show a Black female domestic worker in the background in her overalls and apron busy at work. Within seconds, she approaches the table with a tray in her hands. Once at the table the camera zooms in until we see her facial expression. It is not clear why she is frowning when she looks at Lucky, whether this signifies her disapproval of Lucky's interracial relationship can only be a matter of speculation. While it is true that what she does (domestic work) is precisely what she is employed to do, I see the signification of this shot as restating the fact that while the home may remain a place of leisure for many people, for the majority of Black women it remains largely the place of work. Of course, this is not to deny the fact that some Black women have their own homes where they rest and are pampered by their children, husbands and their own helpers, but it is necessary to stress the fact that for the majority of these women they have to work "double shifts"– at their paid jobs and at home. For these women "work becomes home and home becomes work", in Hochschild's (1997) phrasing.

It would have been interesting to see films that portray Black women in more exciting and nuanced roles, and as multifaceted characters. This approach may clash with

mainstream Hollywood convention and economic logic. Ebrahim (1998) alluded to this kind of problem with reference to Palcy's *Dry White Season.* She notes that "the context within which Palcy was working, that is, the Hollywood mode of production, required her to negotiate between the potential to reach a worldwide audience with an anti-apartheid message and the limitations imposed by an ideological/economic logic that refuses to see any value in themes that portray blacks as agents of their own history" (Ebrahim, 1998:256). The same sentiment is expressed by Davies and Smith: "films are subjects to all the pressures of a crossover cultural form: financial, institutional, and the requirement to be readable by audiences used to Hollywood conventions" (1997: 55). One could argue that these expectations also place limitations on what filmmakers who have to consider commercial success as well as recognition from the American Academy can do.

With regard to occupations, notable Black women are mostly portrayed as being homemakers and/or unemployed or as domestic workers. This kind of representation concurs with an assertion by Black feminists that within the current political, social and economic dispensation, which subjugates Black people in general, Black women are further specifically oppressed organisationally and in society through patriarchy and its expression in sexist attitudes and practices (Moodley, 1993b). This kind of representation can be seen dovetailing with the assertion made earlier by Black feminists that within the Black communities in South Africa the status of women has generally been low, which makes them vulnerable to spousal abuse, marginalisation and sexually transmitted infections.

However, there are a few exceptions such as the portrayal of Lucky's landlady in *Jerusalema,* and the shebeen queen and the enterprising Miriam in *Tsotsi*. There is also Yesterday's friend who is a teacher in *Yesterday.*

Women are depicted as maids in two important scenes in *Jerusalema.* The first time a maid is depicted is when Lucky goes to a leafy suburb in search of the owner of a building he is interested in. This is the point at which Lucky is embarking on a serious change in the direction of his life. Thus, thematically the portrayal of these women helps to facilitate the story and comment on other issues other than themselves. Hence, at this point we are able to say a lot about Lucky, but not so much about the maid. She is an incidental character whose depiction also highlights the owner of the building as a man of means – it is a big house, big yard, and there is domestic help. That moment is not about her, but about other characters with regard to the way in which her presence is used to make an indirect comment on the middle class, to which she does not belong.

The other scene with an unspeaking maid is when the Black woman serves her employers at the dinner table, and she takes part in the action indirectly by disapproving of Lucky, which we notice through her facial expression. Vambe et al. (2007) note that filmmakers deliberately select what to use in a frame in order to create meaning. According to muted group theory, a woman portrayed this way is an unspeaking servant, a working machine. This kind of depiction is evident in

many South African films, for instance it can be seen in *Cry Freedom* (1987), *Red Dust* (2004), *Mapantsula* (1988), *How to Steal 2 million* (2009).

Miriam's depiction is also used to comment on the master/servant relationship she has with her employer. This is most sharply revealed in the scene where she calls out to her employer to alert him to Lucky's arrival: "Master, there is a man here to see you." This is the only time that we have this woman, speak despite her constant presence in the film. Feminist film critics argue that this kind of depiction is by no means accidental and that it is used to create identities and social values in society.

According to Stanley and Wise (2002), the concern around women in their roles as wives and mothers is that these positions have the potential to fix women in a service and domestic mode of behaviour which is highly routinised, privatised and influenced by a range of stereotyped 'ideals' exemplified in images presented through the media. In *Jerusalema* Black women are portrayed as prostitutes. In this film we see a female sex worker trying to solicit Lucky Kunene (Rapulana Seiphemo). Generally, in the films that form the focus of this study, sex workers are Black women. One would expect these films, often regarded as progressive, to deal with this kind of stereotyping in a more nuanced manner.

We see Black women portrayed as sex objects stripping for the pleasure of a drug kingpin, who happens to be Nigerian – a move that also panders to stereotyping Nigerians as drug dealers. This kind of portrayal is problematic since it is rooted in

a narrative of the past that fails to reflect adequately on Black women in the transforming context. In one scene the drug dealer tells the naked woman who has been fondling him, "Go and make the money," implying that she must go and either sell or parade her body to male clientele.

In terms of her social and marital status, Miriam (in *Tsotsi*) is a widow raising an infant and, although she appears to be unemployed, she is depicted as talented and creative. Tsotsi shows interest in some of her artistic work, which she sells in the market. This includes baby mobiles of different colours. Here colour is also used in the film to construct meaning. For instance, one of the mobiles that Miriam made is rusty while the other is colourful. The different colours that she uses are thus symbolic and serve as props for the different emotions that she experiences. For instance, she reveals to Tsotsi that when she made the rusty baby mobiles, she was sad. The rusty mobiles can also be read from a semiotic point of view in which colour symbolises light and hope (see Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). This becomes clear when Tsotsi walks across the room and the colourful mobiles reflect on his face, illuminating it for a moment. One of them is made of pieces of colourful glass. These seem to fascinate Tsotsi and for a moment he looks at the ornament admiringly. At this stage, he asks Miriam what she sells them for, and when she replies that she sells them for R50 each, he is astonished that she would ask that much money for pieces of shattered glass:

Tsotsi: Fifty! For broken glass?

Miriam: You see only the broken glass?

Tsotsi: What do you see?

Miriam: Colour. Light. On you.

At this time the colourful light from the mobiles illuminates Tsotsi's face and he seems to marvel at their elegant beauty. Seen in its social context, this scene reflects Miriam's enterprising skills, which can be seen as indicative of a dynamic representation employed by the filmmakers.

Throughout the film she is depicted as wary but calm and is dressed in a manner that is both contemporary and gracefully African. Vambe, Chikonzo and Khan (2007:126) believe that clothing or the "vestimentary code" is one of the key semiotic sign systems. This is supported by Berger (2012:31):

> When we "read" people, either in real life or in mass-mediated texts such as films, we pay a great deal of attention to things like their hairstyles, the clothing and the shoes they wear, and their body ornaments. All of these objects are signs meant to convey certain notions about what these people are like.

Miriam's dress depicts a clean, self-respecting contemporary woman. This is a stark contrast to the majority of the Black women we see in all the three films, who are depicted in dirty overalls and aprons. In her interaction with Tsotsi, Miriam

displays remarkable poise and strength and so she is able to confront him and finally convince him to return the baby to its rightful mother.

Pumla in *Tsotsi* is part of the new Black middle class, although we are not told what her occupation is. What she displays when her baby is taken from her during the car hijack scene is a quite remarkable strength of character and courage. Although this daring move results in her getting shot and crippled, she shows great fortitude when she runs after the gun-toting Tsotsi, who then drives away with her baby, asleep in the back seat of the hijacked vehicle. The simultaneous operation of challenges facing Black women is again at play through the simultaneous loss of her baby and her paralysis resulting from the gunshot. Although her position and status as a middle-class woman separates her from the other women from poorer backgrounds, they are equal in terms of some of their struggles. Not even her class protects her from victimization by criminals, the violent attacks and the insults that the majority of Black women in South Africa routinely experience on a daily basis.

The majority of the major Black women characters are mothers who, like Lucky's mother in *Jerusalema*, are raising a family in the absence of a male figure in the house. In the film we are not told if she has a job or not, but a scene where they have a simple supper of bread and coffee gives us a clear idea of what difficulties she faces in providing for the family. This could be a problematic stereotype which re-inscribes the existing typecasting of Black women as "natural mothers" (Ebrahim, personal interview, 2012) in a country in which, historically, Black

women were tasked with raising the children of their oppressors, often at the expense of time spent with their own. This representation in which Black women are always tied to raising children has also been decried by Simons (1998). Drawing on the work of Shulamith Firestone, Simons maintains that such women "will not be liberated until they have been liberated from their children, and by the same token until children have also been liberated from their parents"(1998: 69). According to Knight, "Naturalist characters cannot bring about changes for the betterment of their own circumstances or those around them because their circumstances are profoundly circumscribed" (1997: 60-81).

The Black woman's muddled relationships with men are the centre of the narrative discourse in which the women become entrapped in a series of events that they cannot control. Thus in *Yesterday* the marriage is depicted as nightmarish because the couple does not live together. John beats Yesterday and he is probably promiscuous in the light of the fact that he is HIV positive. (HIV is not only transmitted through sex, but sexual transmission is the commonest for the majority of cases especially for migrant workers.) Eventually Yesterday does become a single parent after her husband dies. In *Tsotsi* Miriam is widowed after her husband is killed in a crime-related incident, while in *Jerusalema* Lucky's mother is also a single parent who strives unsuccessfully to instil a sense of discipline, respect and fear of God in him. This resonates with images evident in previous films in which a Black single woman's only choice in terms of survival is to find work as a maid or to sell her body.

Conversely, the fact that these women lose their husbands says more about other things than about them, for example, their husbands' negligence and other social factors. These films connote women as people who will survive it all, and thus an impression is given that that you can throw anything at them – neglect, abuse, exploitation – and they will just live with it as if it is just part of their normal life. In that sense, this kind of presentation becomes a troubling stereotype.

Traditionally, in many communities being a single woman was not viewed favourably, with single women often perceived as if they were social failures. Single women were commonly viewed stereotypically, believed to have done something which prevented them from being married – perhaps being disrespectful, too clever, too independent, too headstrong. These views are shared strongly amongst women themselves and this is still the case today in some African communities, especially in rural areas, and in many Asian communities. However, this inconsiderate view has begun to change as society continues to transform, become more understanding and educated about gender issues and the plight of women.

As Ogundipe-Leslie puts it, "women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Women react with fear, dependency complexes and attitudes to please where more self-assertive actions are needed" (1993: 114). Thus, a portrayal of

women that is overly stereotypical serves as a hegemonic device of the old form of representation at an ideological level. Such filmic portrayal is reminiscent of what Haskell found many years ago: "[T]he closer women come to claiming their rights and achieving independence in real life, the more loudly and stridently films tell us it's a man's world" (Haskell, 1975:365). Hence, I argue that the current wave of post-apartheid films in South Africa needs to reflect an opposite trend by challenging this problematic representation of gross stereotypes.

Generally, in these films Black women are not portrayed as people with aspirations for themselves; rather we see them as people trying just to survive, and living from hand to mouth. Lucky's mother's wish is to raise her children to be honest and responsible citizens while giving them a religious upbringing to achieve this. But her desire is restricted as there is little she can do to effect the changes she wants for her family. The portrait drawn of Miriam is different. She indicates that she wishes to be independent, but her endeavour is set against the desolate environment of the township where there are no prospects for jobs or any viable means of survival and prosperity. In spite of being shown as better off in terms of lifestyle, Pumla is in due course crippled and bound to a wheelchair after being shot by criminals who hijack her car with her child. One can argue here, then, that these women's lives are intertwined with their children's in a world where they are, as natural mothers, naturally equipped to deal with all the hardships. I argue this is a problematic representation which makes their perceived "endowed mothering skills" (de Beauvoir) a tool by which the society inflicts violence on them.

The films define women in relation to their poor economic status, humble occupations or unemployment, and particular behavioural patterns such as emotionalism and adaptability. By this is meant that these women are shown as people who can adapt to any hardship or difficulty that their circumstances force on them and because of this resilience the society might be conditioned to think that there is no need to do anything to alleviate the poor conditions of the lives that they lead. In this way women who express qualms about their situation like Tumane cited earlier in *Tumane* v *Bakgatla-ba-kgafela* [No. 618 of 1998] are more likely to be regarded as being troublesome by their communities.

Although Yesterday can be seen as a conformist in many respects she nonetheless defies a kind of ordering in which attributes of helplessness and emotionalism are conjured up. Looking at the clinic scene, where she is told to go back home and return to the clinic in the next week, she does not throw any tantrums, despite the fact that it is not the first time that she has been sent back. She goes home quietly and soberly, and this happens again when she is told that she is HIV positive; all she says is that she does not understand how that happened because she only has one partner. Juxtaposed to this is the reaction of her husband when she reveals her HIV status; his response is one of denial. He relieves his exasperation by assaulting her and, in this context, Yesterday, as the weaker sex, becomes the object on which takes out his frustrations.

By forgiving him for this abuse, Yesterday is portrayed as an exemplary model of forgiveness and reconciliation, on the one hand. In this way women like Yesterday can also be seen as having great inner strength. Her ability to forgive is empowering and it strengthens her emotionally. On the other hand, the way she deals with this ill-treatment can also be seen as a problematic stereotype, because women like her are portrayed filmically as selfless madonnas – understanding no matter what the situation – their patience and tolerance serving to redeem the male characters in these stories.

Importantly, in some instances *Yesterday* appears to reflect Alfred Hitchcock's (1956) sadistic aphorism: "Torture the women". However, Yesterday is finally a proactive heroine even under her extremely difficult circumstances. As victim-hero she mediates complex issues of class, gender and race as a result of the socioeconomic background around her which led to her challenging situation in the first place.

All the above-mentioned films appear to conform to the traditional image of defining a Black woman in relation to a concern with a family, thereby domesticating her. This domesticity is defined in terms of the 'other'; the othering of Black women becomes synonymous with family responsibilities. Except for Pumla, all the Black women in these films are raising families on their own; hence the prominent theme of single parenting. Ultimately, these images reflect traditional patriarchal notions of gender, racist and classist narrative. Stereotypical

masculinity, for instance, is portrayed as natural, normal and universal, but it is in fact a particular construction. It is largely a White, middle-class heterosexual masculinity – a masculinity within which any suggestion of femininity or homosexuality is denied. I reiterate the importance of deconstructing the institutional and epistemological structures that sustain this kind of representation. Traditionally female characters in audiovisual media were given occupations that were typically female, that were deemed less complicated and demanded less thinking, while men were given occupations that are deemed more prestigious and earn them higher wages.

## 5.2 Behavioural characteristics ascribed to Black female characters

Broadly speaking, the status, behavior, appearance and conversational attributes of Black female characters in these films appear to be problematic. In order to unravel this assertion, I looked at gendered images as manifested in behaviour, gesture, conversation content, grooming, mannerisms, and general depiction of gender in various roles including the non-traditional ones. The behaviour emerging from the films differs since we have signs connoting behaviours which tend to portray Black women as being promiscuous. An example of this could be seen in the manner in which a young Black woman tries to solicit sex from Lucky.

Lucky refuses to succumb to the sleazy world of prostitution represented by this Black woman. This kind of portrayal could also signal to the audience that the places that Lucky visits are repugnant. This evokes old stereotypes like that of the Jezebel depicted as a seductive Black woman with a ravenous sexual appetite. This may demonstrate the harshness with which women are treated by men with impunity. On the other hand, just because a character is portrayed in a certain way does not necessarily mean that it is gross portrayal. Hence, it is often important to look beyond "what is being portrayed" and focus instead on what the portrayal could mean or trigger.

There is a great deal that is persuasive about the argument that the kind of portrayal depicted in the above-mentioned scene could also give rise to stereotypes that Black women are lascivious. According to Pilgrim (2002), the belief that Blacks are sexually lewd can be traced back to the early days when European explorers found scantily clad Africans and misinterpreted this semi-nudity as lewdness. Coupled with their belief that Blacks were semi-human beings and underdeveloped, Whites used racist and sexist ideologies to argue that they alone were civilised and rational, whereas Blacks were barbaric and deserved to be subjugated. According to Pilgrim, White women were portrayed as "models of self-respect, self-control, and modesty – even sexual purity, but Black women were often portrayed as innately promiscuous, even predatory" (2002: no pagination). Furthermore, in addition to saying something about one's character, the use of vulgar/crude language could also signal one's class.

There are moments of anguish and despair in these films when women lose their composure. According to Shields, constructions of emotions out of control are used to disempower people (2007:106). She finds that "In its feminine form, emotion was [traditionally] portrayed as a somewhat unstable sensitivity of feelings" (2007: 97). According to Gunter (1986), "the emotional woman is believed to become flustered in the most minor crisis, she is seen as sensitive, often fearful and anxious, and generally dependent on male help and support in all kinds of personal and professional situations". Therefore, when Lucky leaves the township to start a life in the city, his mother falls apart and weeps, evoking the notion of the emotional woman. Of course, a child leaving his family is by no means a minor event and is sure to evoke an emotional response. The problem is that such situations are only presented in relation to women, and are perpetuated, resulting in scenarios where the women in the reviewed films are generally portrayed as over-emotional individuals who fail to contain themselves. For instance, in *Tsotsi* Pumla, the mother of the hijacked child, becomes too emotional when the gangster, Tsotsi, returns her child. This outburst nearly compromises the child's safety at the crucial moment. It can be said that the filmmaker deploys the 'torture-the-women' strategy to heighten tension in the film.

These films generally fail to deconstruct the stereotypical narrative of Black women in films which was created during the colonial and apartheid era. In both *Tsotsi* and *Jerusalema* the gaze on woman's body can be seen as a signification

aimed at pleasing male spectators. For instance, *Jerusalema* has close-up shots of naked women, while in *Tsotsi* the camera zooms in on the breasts of a young Black woman while breastfeeding, although there are no explicitly naked scenes. According to Ogunleye, "Traditionally, a woman's role is that of a subordinate to man, and women are restricted to a very narrow domain. This is reflected in the film media by means of a portrayal and projection of negative female stereotypes, which furthers the wrong socialization of the female in society" (2005:125). To some extent such a portrayal alluded to above is evident in some post-apartheid films such as *Yesterday* which, on the one hand, presents itself as a progressive feminist film but, on the other, still struggles with residual patriarchal values and subtle images of gender stereotyping.

Family intimacy and female solidarity seem to be at stake in these films as stated elsewhere in this study. In her work, Ebrahim (1998) has firmly established that class differences among women often prevent them from working together as equals, as women of different classes face different sets of issues. In the films analysed, we do not see women standing together against the common problem of chauvinistic males but instead we see them becoming part of the problem. For example, when Yesterday needed support after realising that both she and her husband were HIV positive, she had no one to turn to for support and this isolated her from the rest of the community. This situation changes later in the film when one of the female school teachers offers to help her. In terms of appearance, most of the Black female characters (with the exception of Pumla and Miriam) appear

wearing ragged clothes or aprons most of the time, compared to other women who appear all the time in neat and stylish clothing that also reflects their professional position.

Films made by men tend to portray women as being in competition with each other. In this sense, Gledhill's (1999:167) assertions over a decade ago that "narrative organization is patriarchal; the spectator constructed by the text is masculine" still strikes a chord. By deconstructing the decontextualised and misleading representational image, the filmmakers as politicians (Kluge, 1953) or "night school" teachers (Sembene as cited in Diop, 2006) contribute to a more progressive, empowering image which is long overdue. This should not be construed as dictating to the artist what should be done other than to simply suggest an alternative mode which is divergent, empowering and more in sync with the condition of Black women generally. If filmmakers were to move away from a stagnant narrativisation of Blackness as the other, this will go a long way to stop stereotypical 'othering' and in this way, when Black women distinguish themselves, I suggest, they will do so on the basis of a new course they chart into the future.

This sentiment represents a progressive diversion from a gross representation that I call an 'image trap' that depicts a woman in a one-dimensional mode, in which she does not change with the times, although countless studies prove that human beings are not static; they evolve and develop, and so does their culture. The Black woman

presented this way remains stagnant despite the changes taking place around her and in her own life in reality. An example of the positive advancement that I refer to is the gendered transformation that we have seen in post-apartheid South Africa, as mentioned elsewhere in this study. I argue that public institutions ought to be receptive to accepting shifts and employ a corresponding discourse to account for the change that has taken place. I argue that, given South Africa's past of racial and class discrimination, and the way in which the media were used as an apparatus to entrench hegemonic imperatives, it is unfair to keep on rehashing the same images that were used or constructed within the understanding of multiform, racist discourse aimed at entrenching apartheid and its hegemony.

Nonetheless, I think the film *Yesterday* must be commended for its progressive portrayal of women in general and rural Black women in particular. This film breaks away from the filmic stereotypes of women as incompetent and inferior compared to men. Thus I find that Yesterday's character epitomises a powerful Black woman who is not easily discouraged, and who is able to withstand her problems and make a success of her life, thereby eschewing in some sense the dogmatic representation in which characters remain trapped in their situation. Although marginalised by her situation, her tenacity in defying all the odds and emerge victorious at the end represents the kind of portrayal that seems to deconstruct the gendered image popularised during colonialism and the apartheid era. Hence *Yesterday*, as a post-apartheid film more attuned to gender issues, seems

to be one of the more progressive films among the current wave which portray Black women positively, rather than as defenceless, weak and abused.

Generally, there is an inclination in the filmic texts analysed for this thesis to portray female characters as being unable to thrive on all fronts including work, relationships, business or politics. This gives rise to erroneous conceptions of women as people who are unable to do anything worth commenting on, except in instances where they function as subordinates or appendages to men, who are in this case regarded as credible leaders who take the future in their own hands. Such depiction has the potential to breed, entrench and sustain inappropriate socialisation which perpetuates gender inequality, discrimination and gender-based violence. Chauvinistic aphorisms such as 'Behind every successful man there is a woman' reflect a typical attitude that the society has about women as being only good for playing supportive roles to men, while men are seen as naturally 'successful' people provided that they do not align themselves with 'bad women.' Thus when a man fails it is often the woman who is the first to be blamed. The depiction of women in this way represents a particular stereotype, especially if seen in the context of mass media research that reveals that media-depicted behaviour can be imitated by the audience. For instance, DeFleur and Dennis (1996) maintain that under certain circumstances members of an audience may imitate or reproduce behaviour they see modelled in media sources. McQuail supports this view by stating that, "by virtue of their popular appeal, the media are largely responsible for the creation of public opinion, for the speed and volume of the flow of information

in modern societies, and for the stimulus to consumption provided by modern advertising"(1969: 46). It is therefore clear that the media are very effective in entrenching particular viewpoints and that their effects can have unintentional consequences. McQuail has identified a tacit distinction between the effects and the effectiveness of the media. He says the effects are the results of mass media operation, while effectiveness entails how capable the media are in achieving a given objective.

One central feature of the media as articulated by Barrat (1990) is that they are designed to allow a one-way flow of information: "A small group of media professionals transmit messages to a much larger audience which has a very little opportunity to reply." This could mean that even though certain audiences may feel that a certain depiction is dangerous, they have little chance of raising the matter with the producers; in cases where they are able to do that, it is often through channels and procedures which make the process a delayed one. Nonetheless, Baker-Kimmons (2003) finds that stereotyped groups are often galvanised to adopt certain strategies to resist the stereotyped messages, while Shohat and Stam (1994) note that the stereotyped group may respond with stereotypes of their own when confronted with such stereotypes.

Black women in these films cannot be said to be successful save for Yesterday in *Yesterday*. A character may be successful in the domain of work, but unsuccessful in private or personal relationships, or on the home front. Black women in the films

are less successful than men (both Black and White) and White women. For example, White women portrayed in *Jerusalema* and *Tsotsi* are represented in a multidimensional and dynamic way as professional in their respective fields such as medicine, banking and so on, but we do not see Black women featuring anywhere in any prominent role worth commenting on in these films. In *Yesterday* the main character Yesterday, like the majority of rural women, remains at home to raise her child in the challenged environment of poverty and hardships while her husband goes to the mine. However, unlike the typical Black women of the big screen (dull, dependent, irresponsible), she is able to take quick and credible decisions and has a developed sense of discretion and responsibility, as seen when she decides to look after her ailing husband and convinces him to take medication. She builds a home for him in the face of disapproval from the community, who want him expelled from the village.

Black female characters appear to be more neglected compared to males, who appear to be negligent themselves. *Yesterday* has in the main character, Yesterday, a responsible Black woman who takes care of her family under desperate circumstances. *Jerusalema* does seem to show Black women to be responsible – Lucky's mother continually guides him and warns him against the danger of crime. Despite the fact that this brief moment of dynamic portrayal is ruptured by the failures of these women as a result of circumstances around their lives, most of which they could do nothing about, I posit that these films offer a divergent discourse.

*Yesterday* portrays a strong Black woman with a range of complexities and fulfilling various roles. In *Yesterday* characters get roles in which they can express themselves and talk about their fears and frustrations without being seen as inferior to anybody. In *Yesterday* the storyline does not seem to negate Black women's ability to operate independently. Looking at the way the protagonist is depicted in shifting roles as a strong, sturdy, focused and responsible mother, one can argue that Black female characters are portrayed as distinct people who are more attuned to multi-tasking and are portrayed as breadwinners who run the family and hold it intact as conveyed by the main character Yesterday.

The Black female archetype in *Yesterday* is that of "the nurturing woman" (see Place, 1990). When Yesterday finds that she is HIV positive, she appears much stronger than her husband does. She is more open and ready to confront the illness, unlike her husband, who relieves his frustration by beating her and refusing to accept the reality of their situation. As a character Yesterday is clever, tolerant and resourceful as opposed to typical traditional storylines that portray women as being dull, weak, irrational and ignorant (see Courvelle, 1993; Ukadike, 1994; Kaplan, 1997; hooks, 1999; Ndlela, 2005; Ogunleye, 2005; Vambe, Chikonzo & Khan, 2007). In the film *Tsotsi* there are brief moments of equitable representation; for instance, Pumla, who is in a wheelchair after being shot, and John Dube, her husband, are shown as equally emotional when the hijacker returns their child. This

signals a shift in representation that traditionally desists from portraying men in situations where they have to cry, as we see John cry in this scene.

To summarise, this chapter set out to evaluate the portrayal of Black women in contemporary South African films in terms of the portrayal of status, occupation and behavioural characteristics. In general, Black women in the films reviewed here are portrayed as lower class compared to other groups represented. For instance, they are primarily depicted as caregivers, whose primary task is to raise children and look after the home, or to work as domestic servants in households owned by White people. With regard to portrayal of status, the Black women depicted are working mostly as servants or as housemothers, and they live in tin houses (shacks), servants' quarters or in mud houses. Prestigious occupational positions were shown to be the preserve of other groups, but not of Black women. Compared to White women, Black women are not portrayed in positions of responsibilities or in those roles that are traditionally deemed as male-oriented. From the analysis in this chapter it can be asserted that the medium of film, as part of the broader mass media, still functions in the same traditional way, which affirms Ogunleye's observation that a Black woman remains a victim in film portrayals that only represent "a figment of the imagination of the male" (Ogunleye, 2005: 129). This chapter has mapped out the oppressive tropes that can be used to survey filmic representation as a way of unravelling one-dimensional representation.

# CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSION

## □□□□ The study in retrospect

This study set out to evaluate the representation of Black women in three South African films produced between 2004 and 2008, and to examine how race, gender and class intersect in these films. An examination of this sort was essential in the light of South Africa's racial past and gendered inequalities. Because the study focused on the representation of a specific gender and racial group, it was premised on theories of representation and feminist film theory and criticism, particularly on Black feminist approaches and intersectionality.

The study focused on three of the most popular films of the time, namely *Yesterday* (Roodt, 2004*)* *Tsotsi* (Hood, 2005), and *Jerusalema* (Ziman, 2008), which seem to provide the lens for investigating post-apartheid issues in South Africa and afford significant narrative space to Black women. The study concentrated particularly on the portrayal of the following key Black female characters: Yesterday (Leleti Khumalo) in *Yesterday*, Miriam (Terry Pheto) and Pumla (Nambitha Mpumlwana) in *Tsotsi*, and Lucky's mother in *Jerusalema.*

The years between 1994 and 2004 are pivotal as they mark the first decade of democracy in South Africa, coming after the country's political struggle against inequality and all forms of oppression, including those of gender, class and race. The study identified a five-year period from 2004 to 2008 as representing an important indicator of how the country has fared in addressing post-apartheid issues. Because the period during which these films were made represents an important phase in the history of South Africa, an investigation of how they sought to facilitate an understanding of the way that gender, class and race relations and the complexity of contemporary South African society have been re-envisioned cinematically in the light of a violent colonial and apartheid past. In addition, the study considered the concept of Black womanhood in the South African context in order to expand on the emergent scholarship that attempts to theorise Black women in various contexts, especially in the light of the gendered/political transformations that have taken place in South Africa.

The key objective of the study was therefore to evaluate the representation of Black women in order to see if there is any indication of stereotypical portrayals, or any shift in terms of the traditional and disturbing forms of representation that have beset this group for many years. Chapter 1 introduced the study through a discussion of its aims and rationale. The chapter also provided a brief discussion of the historical origin of films in South Africa. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on the theoretical underpinnings, which included discussions of Black feminism, stereotypes and the notion of representation, and the concept of intesectionality in

order to foreground issues facing Black women, the semiotic range of these issues, and the critical lens through which they can be discerned. Chapter 3 discussed the methodology in terms of which the research was executed. The chapter further elaborated on the semiotics undergirding the critical framework, which I find useful in looking at the question of representation: what images represent and how this is signified, and the question of what ideas and values the people, places and things represented in images stand for (Van Leeuwen, 2001).

In Chapter 4, I delineated gendered themes using the critical insights arising from Chapter 2 to critique the representation of Black women. The issues of sexual objectification, voyeurism through the scopic pleasure that glimpses of naked female bodies evoke, and the question of the male gaze are all illuminated with Black female characters appearing in these films as prostitutes and strippers. I argued that nothing much has changed, as the 'mummy', 'Jezebel' and the Black matriarch images are still being recycled. This was corroborated through juxtaposition with previous research. Chapter 5 looked at the portrayal of status of Black women in these films. The eroticization of their bodies was found to be especially unsettling. With regard to class, Black women were not represented in a diverse way, compared to other groups.

Importantly, the framework devised for this study enabled a detailed and insightful reading of these films. In terms of this critical lens, the portrayal of Black women was analysed under the following categories as the dominant modes of portrayal of

Black female characters in the reviewed films: (1) *single parenthood* – a single mother, usually unemployed, who tries to fend for her offspring in a bleak environment as depicted in *Yesterday* and in *Tsotsi*; (2) *voyeurism and sexual objectification* – the invisible Black woman in the film suddenly becomes visible, half-naked and parading her body for male patrons. According to assertions linked to Mulvey, the woman in this type of role provides sexual pleasure for the characters within the film and for the gazing eyes of the spectator, for example, in the film *Jerusalema,* where half-naked women fondle their bosses while other women operate as prostitutes; (3) *domestic work / present but absent figure* – as in the widespread depiction of an ever-busy Black woman cutting a lonely figure in the background as she carries on with her domestic chores while the family she works for are enjoying quality time, or doing something that is depicted as valuable in the film. In some instances, one sees these women as part of the group in the background that helps to advance the action of the male or white protagonists; (4) *the nurturing woman* who labours for the good of others and is naturally equipped to deal with any sort of challenge coming her way; and (5) *women's solidarity/sisterhood*, where women stand together.

### *6.1.1 Single parenthood/Motherhood*

Several tropes seem to be at work in these films. The first is the favourable orientation of a strong, single woman in Yesterday, who is working around the

clock to fend for her child all by herself. In *Tsotsi,* Miriam is resolute in caring for her baby whose father had just been killed. The context of the storylines suggests that these women are struggling because their main source of income, their husbands, is not available. For instance, Yesterday's husband is away in the mines, while Miriam's husband has been killed by thugs. The seriousness of their situation is crystallised by the bleak environment in which they live. Miriam survives by making and selling merchandise such as baby mobiles. Lucky's mother in *Jerusalema* is raising a family in the absence of a male figure in the house, although we are not told or shown what she does for a living or if she has a job, but sometimes the narrative leads us to infer other things that are left out in the story; as Bordwell and Thompson (2008: 82) suggest, "often much of the scene's emotional power depends on using our imagination" to fill what is left out.

Motherhood is problematised in this portrayal of single-parenting. For instance, while Lucky's mother appears solid and sturdy, his failure to go to university, finally having to leave home for greener pastures, disrupts the successful positive image that the film has up to that point built around her character. Her commendable achievements are rendered invisible in a subtle way in her failed attempts to send Lucky to university or prevent him from going to Hillbrow and finally from becoming a criminal. Seen in this way, it can be argued, on the one hand, that Lucky's mother's parenting endeavours are rendered inadequate, conjuring up the traditional view that the presence of a strong male in the family is the only way to bring up children properly. This is further supported by recurrent

questions in all the films about fathers. For example, in *Tsotsi* Boston asks Tsotsi where his father is, while Beauty in *Yesterday* asks her mother when her father is coming to visit. Linked to this, the films show that many young people fail to prepare thoroughly for the future by attending school or pursuing further training because the family has to subsist on a single income.

The women in this situation are loving and tolerant despite their circumstances. In this sense women such as Lucky's mother, Yesterday and Miriam are portrayed filmically as superwomen – self-sacrificing, loving no matter what the situation, and thus are often able to redeem the male characters. The presence of women in raising children may also give rise to stereotypes of Black women as being suited to raising children, a label which further restricts them to this role in a home where they live, and in the work place where they are relegated to domestic work and/or to care for children. I find this kind of representation rather akin to the supermama stereotype that Bogle (2003) identifies in early American films. According to Bogle, the supermama "ran not simply a household but a world unto itself … often they were out to clean up the ghetto of drug pushers, protecting the black hearth from corrupt infiltrators" (Bogle, 2003: 251). The supermama and the servant stereotypes are also particularly applicable to the representation of Black women in South African cinema. However, the version of the supermama we see in South African cinema is slightly different from the one identified by Bogle in that she fights in silence, she looks after the kids, she is concerned about crime that corrupts her offspring and robs her and limits her freedom, but she is almost powerless to fight

it. She is not necessarily big and fat. She lacks resources to alleviate her situation. Her distinguishing feature, however, is that she does not give up the fight; she is selfless, she fights for the entire family and she cares about the husband who had wronged her.

### *6.1.2 Domestic/Presence as absence*

With the exception of Yesterday, Black female characters are mainly seen in the background. At work, their presence is highly visible in the background and this represents a critical technique to undermine these women as secondary citizens and secondary characters. Their role is only illuminated when they drive the story that serves to elevate the White people in the film. In this case, the presence of their absence is both revealing and symbolic. The most frequent image is that of an ever-busy woman who is always occupied with something in the background. Curiously enough, we are never really shown what they are doing except in passing when they hang up the laundry, wash dishes or make tea with the camera positioning them in the farthest distance from the central activity that other people are involved in. This point of reference can also be read as devaluing the type of work that these women do, in one sense. In another sense it might be argued that it shows Black women as constantly at work so that they are depicted as selfless, always labouring for the good of others. This is also stereotypical, because it suggests that women can endure almost anything and that society depends on them for its improvement.

The depiction of women as maids is shown in *Jerusalema*, for example, where there are two scenes with domestic workers. The first time a maid is depicted is when Lucky goes to a leafy suburb in search of the owner of a building he's interested in. This is the point at which Lucky is embarking on a serious change in the direction of his life. Here the maid is an incidental character; she is not the centre of the action and is used merely to comment on other characters in the film. Her presence, together with the big house and large garden, indicates that the owner is a man of means. She is being used simply to make a comment on the owner of the property, and in this case, an indirect comment on the middle class of which is not a member. In the scene with the family at the dinner table, she looks disapprovingly at Lucky, which is made clear in her facial expression. The framing of the shot here is interesting, showing the Black woman standing at the table where the rest of the family is seated. The way she addresses her boss also reveals a lot about the kind of relationship they have. The depiction of Black women in working roles within the home environment, such as this, picks up a very important nuance, namely the home as the place of work for Black women, while for others it is the place of comfort and leisure, security and family.

Seen this way, Black women are not given significant parts as other characters and, as can be seen, the only woman who is constantly present is the Black domestic servant, either at home busy with domestic chores, or at work where she works as a maid. I argue that Black women are for the best part clearly invisible in terms of

being represented in various professions. This kind of portrayal does not seem to reflect, for example, the changing role of women and particularly Black women in modern South African society, although one must also concede that the changing role of Black women so far only applies to a minority since the vast majority of Black women in South Africa are still poor and doing unskilled work. To say this is not to suggest that films must reflect realistically on society; nonetheless, one would still expect to see the changes that are taking place reflected in filmic productions because of their intrinsic importance to inspire confidence, action and work that is more constructive. Thus hegemonic attitudes must be challenged and changed.

In the current mode of representation, Black women appear in cutaway shots as facilitating mechanisms for the plot, not as nuanced and central characters who can draw attention to the subtleties of their lives, except in the domestic sphere where their work is trivialised and devalued. Their presence is only a way of confirming their perceived inferiority in relation to the abundance of features ascribed to other groups. Their presence is also illuminated in the way that they seem to provide freedom for other groups they appear alongside, for example, by taking care of errands and performing an array of other chores while their husbands and their bosses have the time for luxuries and leisure. It is this dearth of Black women in roles that portray them as characters with wide-ranging professions and other roles and traits that go beyond the oppressive tropes identified in this study which is disquieting. Because South African society has changed quite remarkably since

1994, it becomes difficult to label these films as progressive from a feminist standpoint. I find that the presence of marginalised Black female characters evokes the underlying overtones that these women are insignificant, especially when compared to Black males and White female characters in these films.

### *6.1.3 Sisterhood/women solidarity*

One clear concern about these films is the difficulty of establishing female solidarity and the tendency to depict women in competition with one another. We do not see women standing together against the common problem of chauvinistic males; instead we see them becoming part of the problem. We see a brief moment of a kind of camaraderie in the film *Yesterday*, when women come together to help each other build houses in what is referred to as *letsema* in Setswana, understood to mean volunteerism but it goes beyond mere volunteerism. This makes it possible for women to establish solidarity, share information, share food, share conversational spaces. However, this kind of relationship is short-lived as the women desert Yesterday as soon as they learn that she is HIV positive.

This lack of mutual support highlights fervently feminist notions of woman solidarity, especially the radical feminist argument that women need to stand together against patriarchy, instead of being in competition with one another. We can view this relationship of female characters who take on 'masculine' roles in the

absence of their husbands as indicative of unity inspired by shared experiences, love and compassion for one another. In one of the scenes in *Tsotsi,* Miriam confronts Tsotsi about the child he has stolen. Ultimately, she asks Tsotsi to let her have the child. While this reflects Miriam's decency, which Tsotsi clearly lacks, it also highlights the fact that Miriam, a mother herself, feels the pain of another mother and is forced to confront the fierce hoodlum.

### *6.1.4 The nurturing woman*

According to Janey Place (1990: 165), the nurturing woman "gives love, and understanding (or at least forgiveness), asks very little in return, and is generally visually passive and static." All the leading Black women characters in the films examined fit this archetype. This is most sharply revealed in the characters of Miriam and Yesterday. Miriam is happy to comply with Tsotsi's demand; she gladly feeds the stolen baby and wants nothing in return. Yesterday welcomes her abusive husband when he returns home and nurses him without asking questions despite how he treated her when she visited him in Johannesburg. Lucky's mother also fits this kind of representation, particularly because she is generally 'visually passive' and gives love to her offspring.

### *6.1.5 Voyeurism, fetishism and the male gaze*

In terms of characterisation, both male and female characters in these films do not seem to display the same level of affirmative behavioural patterns, as women appear to be debased as sex objects or strippers in nightclubs to titillate the male audience. Yet it also shows that the environment that the male characters inhabit is sordid and sleazy – it's a kind of marker for the audience. The representation of Black women as strippers for their male tycoons and prostitutes in *Jerusalema* can be seen to support the notion that women are objectified and paraded for the pleasure of men (the male gaze) and that the filmmakers do not approve of and are trying to probe its roots. In *Jerusalema,* women are not only fetishised as icons displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men both in the film and in the audience, but are also presented as an object of a fetish to be used in cinema which is then packaged as a saleable product.

Black women are portrayed as having an insatiable sex drive which, as we see, forces them to solicit sex from men who are clearly portrayed as victims of these women's lewdness. Whereas this could be seen as demeaning the women portrayed in these roles, it actually makes an important commentary about society because the way the society is structured leaves women with very few opportunities. Thus hetero-normative society relegates women to those types of positions. The point I am making here can be adduced in various scenes in *Jerusalema* and *Tsotsi* such as the scene where Fela is being fondled by a blond woman while he and his friends

play card games. The woman is dressed in a scanty pink dress, colourful earrings and bangles. At one stage in this scene the woman appears in a shot with Soekie, the shebeen owner. The two women appear standing over the table where Fela and his friends enjoy drinks and the card game. As they play, Soekie serves them drinks while the young woman caresses Fela. There are many more scenes like this in *Jerusalema* that I have highlighted throughout the study. It would have been interesting to see films that focus on the life story of women such as these to see how they wind up being in these positions.

The propensity to fetishism in these films evokes the notion of the male gaze. The male gaze positions a woman's body as an erotic image to satisfy male fantasies. Both the audience and the male spectators participating in these scenarios are arguably titillated. Thus, there seems to be a relationship between the two looking relations in terms of the way in which they both position their 'subjects'. Kaplan (1997:79-80) concludes that the male gaze, like the colonial gaze, is an objectifying gaze and they are oth laden with stereotypes. Indeed, the medium of film is not only the instrument of representation, but is also the object of representation (Kilpatrick, 1999). In both *Tsotsi* and *Jerusalema* the gaze over a woman's body is orchestrated as a source of pleasure for male spectators, for instance, close-up shots of naked women in *Jerusalema* and one on Miriam's breasts in *Tsotsi.*

However, for the filmic tradition, deeply rooted in the patriarchal system, this graphic portrayal becomes vital in the manner that it underscores Miriam's sex

appeal that is, according to Mulvey, intended for the male eye. Here she immediately becomes a sexual spectacle, as 'we' are absorbed in marvelling at her beautiful body. This moment transforms her from the innocent, hardworking single mother we have come to know into a sexually appealing spectacle. I find that her instant metamorphosis from a respectable mother to a sexual object for the male gaze deviates from the narrative trajectory of the film itself. That the portrayal orchestrated in this manner is telling of the filmmakers' emphasis on Miriam's sexuality over her capabilities and everything else in their quest to promote the film. As I see it, this reinforces the longstanding assumption that film and television are the products of a sexist society, and that they frequently present an eroticised, biased and stereotyped depiction of women in general, and Black women in particular.

As Mulvey's analysis of the operations of voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia in narrative cinema maintains, women are typically constituted as spectacles for the male spectator who positions the woman as an object of the gaze, as we have seen. According to Mulvey (1999), this gaze or looking relation operates at three levels. The first takes place at the camera level where the person operating the camera, usually a male, positions women as the object of his gaze. The second takes place on the set amongst actors themselves, where the woman becomes the subject of the gaze for male co-actors. The third takes place at the level of the audience in which the male viewer derives pleasure by watching naked women on screen. As stated, this kind of gaze is discernible in *Jerusalema* and *Tsotsi*, and suggests that the

spectator is male. However, it seems that Mulvey's looking relations advance masculine subjectivity as the only subjectivity available. For instance, women are spectators too and surely they do not watch as men.

The fetishised image of Black women in the various scenes that I referred to in this study reduces women to mere sexual objects for the pleasure of male eyes. Images such as these are examples of the media representing Black women as sexual commodities. According to Kahn (1982), fetishism functions in two ways: first, it allows the woman to be objectified for sexual pleasure at a physical level; second, it makes it possible for this image to be packaged into a saleable form such as a film to be sold as a commodity.

Yesterday's sympathetic nature in dealing with her abusive husband endorses the image of a caring wife and mother. The masculinity of Black men becomes hegemonic in the representations of violence, irresponsibility and promiscuity that the films render, while the femininity of Black women is connoted in the imagery of defencelessness or victimisation. Black masculinity is defined not only in the aggression and madness of Yesterday's husband when he punches her, but also in the passivity of the mine clerk/guard who watches on while she is being beaten.

## 6.2 Class, status and occupation

In addition, the films reflect women in a lower-class status as evidenced by their place of residence and their occupational status, amongst other features. This remains an issue in the light of the debate on the power of the media to set agendas and influence popular thinking. In terms of status, particularly economic or occupational status, Black women in the reviewed films are still relegated to the more insignificant roles and occupy a lower status. Looking at these films, it immediately becomes clear that Black male roles and those roles ascribed to men in general, as well as White women, are far more nuanced and more exciting relative to those given to Black women; this is especially the case in respect of occupation. They are largely homemakers, shebeen owners, teachers, strippers or sex workers.

In the three films that were reviewed men were in general more often portrayed in positions that tend to have a higher status in terms of type of employment, and they appeared less frequently in the home, compared to women. I contend that the nature of roles, conversation and mannerisms ascribed to Black female characters signify their status and class. This goes for the environments in which they appear, be it their place of work or their residence, which is mainly a derelict corrugated tin or mud house. For instance, when we look at Miriam in *Tsotsi*, Yesterday in *Yesterday* and Lucky's mother *in Jerusalema*, the narrative suggests that they are unemployed and confined to the domestic sphere. They all have children to raise and the daily activities they perform around the house do not seem to be valued in any way. I contend that the current stereotypical portrayal of Black women in the media may

lead to further marginalisation of women through the promotion of negative stereotypes. For example, the absence of Black women in different roles other than domesticity in these narratives fails to provide an insight into the positioning of Black women in a transforming South African society, and thereby excludes them from being recorded in history, since the medium of film is often regarded as capturing the concerns of a given society in a particular time period.

## 6.3 Final conclusion

A one-dimensional representation of Black women does not capture the full gamut of the Black woman's experiences and challenges. Films that seem to tackle this one-dimensional paradigm such as the *Zulu Love Letter* (2004) are rare and they do not seem to reach wide audiences compared to the key films analysed in this study. In this sense, South African cinema from 1994 cannot be commended in respect of the portrayal of Black women, because it fails to provide a counter-narrative to the gendered and racist narrative established during colonialism and apartheid. Instead, the majority of post-apartheid films seem to update the racialist gendered stereotyping inscribed in the racial and gendered structure of domination from the colonial era all the way through the apartheid years. In that sense, it is clear that the embodied practice of these filmmakers in terms of signifying practices by which Black women are portrayed remains embedded in the historical legacy of both colonialism and apartheid, which in Grewal and Kaplan's words, "satisfies the

demands of Western subjectivity and the ethnographic tradition" (2001:70). This is especially an issue because repeated portrayals of certain representations that we have discussed currently function to erase Black women's worth and nuance, rendering them instead as people accustomed to suffering and contented with menial jobs. Thus, the films examined function to legitimize the position of these women in society through representation of images that support and reinforce traditional gender role and racist stereotyping. In this sense, the preponderance of the problematic representation of Black women in the films analysed highlights the need to chart new ground and break away from certain pre-1994 representations in order to create a more dynamic and nuanced representation of this group. It would be interesting to see some of these women being presented as dynamic and complex characters. As Bordwell and Thompson (2008: 63) put it: "a complex character engages our interest on many levels, creates multiplicity of relations among many separate elements, and creates intriguing patterns of feelings and meanings".

It is clear that television serials and soap operas have provided a greater diversity of Black women characters, including those who are active, successful, vulnerable and ambitious. Of course, one has to bear in mind that these serials have more space to play the character in her multiple dimensions as opposed to film, which may have certain spatial and commercial constraints. One could argue that these expectations may also place limitations on what filmmakers, who have to consider commercial

success as well as recognition from bodies such as the American Academy, can do. An example of a dynamic character whose portrayal touched so many people was soap character, Zoleka (S'thandiwe Kgoroge), who featured (1999-2005) in *Generations.* She was deeply traditional and spiritual, and yet she blended well with modern life. Both her weaknesses and strengths were captured in a way that neither marginalises her nor makes her a superwoman. Other programmes that are currently foregrounding issues relevant to women and which present them as whole multi-dimensional characters include television soaps and serials such as *Home Affairs, Muvhango, Scandal* and *Sex Tips 4 Women,* among others.

The main problem with the representation of Black women in the films reviewed is that it shows them being naturally equipped to deal with all their hardships and difficulties, in part because of their biologically endowed nurturing skills (de Beauvoir, 1952). In films such as *Yesterday* and *Tsotsi* women are stereotyped through a naturalistic-frame (i.e. they are 'naturally' caring), providing the model for reconciliation and forgiveness whether on a family level (e.g. eventually getting abusive men to see the error of their ways merely through being good and tolerant) or on the national level (e.g. Black and White women coming together because they are all mothers). In that case, one could say the impression is created that there is no need to do anything to improve the lives that these women lead, because they are resilient and can cope with anything.

Going beyond this kind of representation could provide the basis for interesting and exciting filmic narratives that would challenge the prevailing patriarchalist hegemony. There is, in particular, a need for films that capture the complexity and contributions of Black women. This kind of films could see women in general, and Black women in particular, being given meaningful roles on the screen as complex characters who reveal the subtleties and nuances of their lives. It would be illuminating to see more films that present women as central, complex characters with life stories that are worth telling. It would be an impressive achievement if some of these films were to deal with the demanding and often conflictual lives of professional women.

# FILMOGRAPHY

## Reviewed Films

*Jerusalema,* 2008. [Film] Directed by Ralph Ziman. South Africa: Muti Films.

*Tsotsi,* 2005. [Film] Directed by Gavin Hood. South Africa/UK: UK Film &TV Co, PLC, The Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa, National Film and Video Foundation of South Africa.

*Yesterday,* 2004. [Film] Directed by Darrell James Roodt. South Africa: Distant Horizon, HBO Films.

## General Films

*34 South,* 2005. [Film] Directed by Maganthrie Pillay. South Africa: Distant Horizon, HBO Films.

*4play: Sex Tips 4 Girls.* 2010. [TV Drama series] Directed by Amanda Lane. South Africa: Curious Pictures.

*A Dry White Season,* 1989. [Film] Directed by Euzhan Palcy. USA: MGM.

*A Reasonable Man,* 1999. [Film] Directed by Gavin Hood. South Africa/France: African Media Entertainment (AME), M-Net, Moviworld.

*A World Apart,* 1988. [Film] Directed by Christopher Menges. UK/Zimbabwe: Working Title.

*A Zulu's Devotion,* 1916. [Film] Directed by Joseph Albrecht and Lorrimer Johnston. South Africa: I.V.T.A. African Film.

*African Mirror,* 1913. [Newsreel] Produced by Isidore William Schlesinger. South Africa: African Film Productions.

*Big Fellas*. 2007. [Film] Directed by Phillip Roberts. South Africa: Rogue Star Films.

*Boesman and Lena*, 1973. [Film] Directed by Ross Devenish. South Africa: Blue Water Productions.

*Bold and Beautiful*. [TV soap opera] Created by Lee Phillip Bell and William Bell. USA: Bell-Phillip Television Productions, Big Chief Films, BellaSwartz Productions.

*Catch a Fire*, 2006. [Film] Directed by Phillip Noyce. France/UK/South Africa/USA/: Focus Features, Studio Canal, Working Title Films.

*Come Back, Africa*, 1959. [Film] Directed by Lionel Rogosin. South Africa/USA: Cineteca di Bologna.

*Cry Freedom,* 1987. [Film] Directed by Richard Attenborough. UK/Zimbabwe/USA: Warner Brothers.

*Cry, The Beloved Country*, 1995. [Film] Directed by Darrel James Roodt. South Africa: Anant Singh/Swank Motion Pictures.

*Death of Apartheid* aka *Mandela's Fight for Freedom*, 1995. [Documentary] Directed by Stephen Clarke. UK: Brian Lapping Associates

*De Voortrekkers*, 1916. [Film] Directed by Harold Shaw. South Africa: African Film Production.

*District 9*, 2009. [Film] Directed by Neil Blomkamp. South Africa/USA/NZ/Canada: TriStar Pictures, Block / Hanson, WingNut Films

*Drum,* 2004. [Film] Directed by Zola Maseko. South Africa/USA: Armada Pictures

*Father Hood*, 1993. [Film] Directed by Darrell James Roodt. USA: Hollywood Pictures

*Footskating 10*, 2007. [Film] Directed by Thomas Ferreira and Brenda Jack. RSA: Footskating Productions.

*Forgiveness*, 2004. [Film] Directed by Ian Gabriel. South Africa: Giant film Production, Wendywood.

*Generations*, 1994. [Soap opera] Directed by Danie Joubert, Maynard Kraak. With Leon Clingman, Jose, Antonio David Lyons, Cedwyn Joel. South Africa: Morula Pictures. Entertainment

*God is African*, 2003. [Film] Directed by Akin Omotoso. South Africa: Tranxafrica Film and TV.

*Goodbye Bafana*, 2007. [Film] Directed by Bille August. Germany / France / Belgium / Italy / South Africa: Banana Films, Arsam International, Film Afrika Worldwide.

*Hearts and Minds*, 1993. [Film] Directed by Ralph Ziman. South Africa: Teleduction.

*Heat*, 1995. [Film] Directed by Michael Mann. USA: Warner Bros, Regency Enterprises.

*Hijack Stories*, 2000. [Film] Directed by Oliver Schmitz, South Africa/UK: British Screen Productions.

*Home Affairs*, 2005. [Television drama series] Directed by Minky Schlesinger, Natalie Haarhof, Nurma Anne Dippenaar and Catherine Stewart. South Africa: Penguin Films. South Africa: Penguin Films.

*Hotel Rwanda*, 2004. [Film] Directed by Terry George. USA/South Africa: Lions Gate Films, Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa.

*How Long Must We Suffer?*, 1975. [Film] Directed by Gibson Kente, South Africa: African Film Productions.

*How to Steal 2 Million*, 2009. [Film] Directed by Charlie Vundla. South Africa: Morula Pictures

*In Desert and Wilderness*, 2000. [Film] Directed by Gavin Hood. Poland: Kemps

*Interrogation Room*, 2005. [Television drama] Matthew Kalil, Tim Spring. South Africa/USA: Michael Hoff Productions, Fremantle Media.

*Invictus*, 2009. [Film] Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Warner Brothers.

*Isidingo*, 1998. [TV series/soap opera] Directed by Christopher Beasley, Sthembiso Mathenjwa, Raymond Sargent. South Africa: Endemol Entertainment

*Jim Comes to Joburg*, 1948. [Film] Directed by Donald Swanson. South Africa: African Film.

*Jump the Gun*, 1996. [Film] Directed by Les Blair. South Africa/UK: Channel Four Film, Parallax Zencat Pictures.

*Justice For All*, 1918. [Film] Directed by Norman Jewison. USA: Colombia Pictures Corporation.

*King Solomon's Mines*, 1918. [Film] Directed by Horace Lisle Lucoque. South Africa: African Film Productions.

*Kite*, (filming). [Film] Directed by Ralph Ziman. USA/Mexico: Detalle Films, Distant Horizons.

*Mafrika*, 2008. [Film] Directed by Paul Ruven. Netherlands: Dutch Mountain Movies.

*Mama Jack*, 2005. [Film] Directed by Gray Hofmeyer, South Africa/India: Videovision Entertainment.

*Mandela*, 1996. [Documentary] Directed by Angus Gibson and Jo Menell. South Africa/USA: Clinica Estetico, Island Pictures.

*Mapantsula*, 1988. [Film] Directed by Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane. South Africa: One Look Productions.

*Mr Bones 2*, 2008. [Film] Directed by Gray Hofmeyer, South Africa/India: Videovision Entertainment.

*Mr Bones*, 2001. [Film] Directed by Gray Hofmeyr. South Africa: Distant Horizons

*Muvhango*, 1997. [TV drama series] Created by Duma Ndlovu and directed by Brenda Mukwevho et al. South Africa: Word of Mouth.

*My Children, My Africa*, 1989. [Play]. Directed by Athol Fugard. South Africa: Signature Theatre Company.

*Place of Weeping*, 1986. [Film] Directed by Darrell James Roodt. South Africa: Place of Weeping Productions.

*Prester John*, 1920. [Film] Directed by Dick Cruishanks. South Africa: African Film Productions.

*Red Dust*, 2004. [Film] Directed by Tom Hooper. South Africa/UK: BBC.

*Rivonia Trial*, 1966. [Film] Directed by Jurgen Goslar. West Germany: Karat-Film, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen.

*Saints, Sinners and Settlers*, 1999. [TV mini-series]. Directed by Mickey Madoda Dube and John Matshikiza. South Africa: Pakathi Films.

*Sarafina*, 1992. [Film] Directed by Darrel James Roodt. South Africa/UK: BBC.

*Scandal*, 2005. [Soap opera] Directed by Hlomla Dandala; Heleni Handt; Joshua Rous & Welile Nzuza. South Africa: Ochre Moving Pictures.

*Schuks Tshabalala's Survival Guide to South Africa*, 2010. [Film] Directed by Gray Hofmeyer. South Africa: Out of Africa Entertainment.

*Siliwa the Zulu* (aka *Witchcraft*), 1928. [Documentary] Directed by Attilio Gatti. South Africa/Italy: Explorator Films

*Society*, 2007. [Television drama series] Created by Makgano Mamabolo and Lodi Matsetela. South Africa: Puo Pha Productions.

*Son of Man*, 2006. [Film] Directed by Mark Dornford-May. South Africa: Spier Films.

*Straight Outta Benoni*, 2005. [Film] Directed by Trevor Clarence. South Africa: IMG Productions.

*Symbol of Sacrifice, Lost City of Gold*, 1918. [Film] Directed by Dick Cruikshanks. South Africa: African Film Productions

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**Law Reports**

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# VITA

After matriculation in 1992, Gilbert Motsaathebe enrolled for a BA degree in Communication (with specialisation in Broadcast Journalism, English and Psychology) at the University of Bophuthatswana. In 1996 he joined Bop Broadcasting Corporation as News Producer/Sub-Editor for the English channel, Bop TV, which subsequently merged with SABC. He completed his BA (Honours) in Communication in 1997. He was recruited to join South Africa's first free-to-air commercial television station, ETV, as News Producer in Cape Town in 1999. During this time, he also lectured Broadcast Journalism at the Allenby Campus in Cape Town and worked as a Writing Consultant for the Cape Technikon on a freelance basis. In 2001, he enrolled for a BA (Honours) in English at the University of Cape Town. He moved to London on a working holiday visa at the end of 2001 and returned to Cape Town in 2003 to take up a lecturing post in the department of Journalism at the Peninsula Technikon, now the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. He completed his MA in Communication (with distinction) in 2004. Between 2005 and 2006 he taught English at various educational institutions in the Nagasaki Prefecture, Japan. He moved to India at the end of 2010 on a SEPHIS fellowship and spent a year at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society in Bangalore, where he read for a Postgraduate Diploma in Cultural Studies, before joining the Chief Directorate of Communication in the Office of the Premier, North West Provincial Government. His research interests

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