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The absence of pariah femininity in contemporary South African film and television

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University of Witwatersrand

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MA Dissertation

TITLE:

The absence of pariah femininity in contemporary South African film and television.

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892469

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Art in Film and Television

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television by Dissertation to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other university.

Signed:Date:___11 November 2020_____

Abstract

This research examines the representation of pariah femininities, as a concept, in mainstream film and television, against the backdrop of South Africa's segregated past and the homophobia still prevalent. Homophobia presents itself in the form of fetishization and subjugation. It is evident in the lack of representation of queer women in South African mainstream cinema and the overt rejection of films representing queer men. I investigate how South Africa's attitudes towards female sexuality have influenced its film and television industry and how the media approaches the representation of queer images. My main study area involves exploring what the absence in female queer images tells us about the gender biases in the South African film industry. It is appropriate and efficient to analyse selected films from the cinema circuit, but to also analyse soap operas and local dramas as these are most commonly watched in South Africa compared to local films. As a starting point, I will examine existing research on how viewers in South Africa interpret media messages which focuses on issues of homosexuality by first probing on the perceptions that have shaped this shared view on homosexuality.

The process is affected by the meanings people make about homosexuality which is why I look at different film examples, local dramas and soap operas to explore content and expand my understanding of whether viewers are able to watch beyond the dominant homophobic ideology that exists in South Africa. By analysing the thematic attributes of following three films; *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) and *Kanarie* (2018), as well as the discussion of popular South African television programmes such as *Generations* (1994-2014), *Generations: The Legacy* (2014-) and *Umlilo* (2015-2016), I demonstrate that while the LGBTQI+ community remains a marginalised group in society, lesbian women have been further side-lined when it comes to their representation in the media.

Key words

Fetishization, homophobia, pariah femininities, mainstream cinema, South African

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. Outline

South Africa became the first country in the world to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation which was approved in its Constitution in 1996 (Gunkel 2010, p. 25). Yet in 2019 the LGBTQI+ community are still part of the marginalised population that places them at risk of targeted victimisation. Inspired by the new Constitution, Nodi Murphy and Jack Lewis introduced South Africa's first key queer film festival, the *Out In Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*, in 1994. This festival was created in an effort to develop and maintain a queer public sphere to foster further legal and social change. The *Out In Africa Film Festival* was instrumental because it encouraged inclusivity in the representation of queer people within South Africa, but many of these films were not shown beyond the festival. This meant that the majority of the country did not see these films.

In this thesis I propose interrogating the reason for the lacuna of pariah femininities in South African mainstream cinema. My dissertation presents a textual analysis of the following films: *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) and *Kanarie* (2018). These films each explore issues of sexuality differently and the themes explored in these films also determined the distribution of the films, the box office figures as well as the audience reception. By analysing the thematic attributes of each film, as well as a discussion of the selection of popular South African television programmes, I demonstrate that while the LGBTQI+ community remains a marginalised group in society, lesbian women, non-binary[1]

[1] Non-binary are the gender identities that do not subscribe to masculinity or femininity (Richards et al., 2016, p. 95).

and transpersons in South Africa have been further side-lined when it comes to their representation.

Research demonstrates that throughout history mainstream media treats the representation of homosexuality in one of two ways; characters are either represented stereotypically or they are not represented at all (Harrington, 2003). From 2003 when Harrington's research was conducted to 2019 there have been extensive changes in the representation of person's that form part of the LGBTQI+[2] community. However, in the current climate of South African mainstream media, it is lesbian women, trans and non-binary persons, I refer to when I use the concept of pariah femininities (which will be defined, later in my introduction), whose representation in the media remains on the side-lines. Mainstream programming here refers to the prominent stories of interest to the general South African audience population.

While there have been attempts at representing lesbian women in television, there are strategies put in place to ensure that these inclusive images do not threaten heteronormativity (De Lauretis 1994, p. 122). In the process of demonstrating this I discovered that the mainstream representation of queer men in South Africa has not been accepted either but it does exist, unlike that of pariah femininities. In fact, images of gay men are vigorously rejected which is evident by the reception the film *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) received when it was released in South African cinemas, which I explore further in my dissertation.

This study also reveals important information on how sexual minorities in South Africa have dealt with and continues to deal with long standing queer cinematic oppression that has left them voiceless in the media. This helps forming the conclusion that while anything outside of heteronormativity will encounter resistance, one absolutely cannot deny the platform that gay

[2] The acronym letters for LGBTQI+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and the plus includes all the other sexualities, sexes and genders that are not included in these few letters. It is, however, important to note that there are other ways to index and express this formulation.

men have created and continue creating for themselves is a product of patriarchy that privileges them while simultaneously being oppressive through homophobia.

1.1 A personal note

I came to write this paper as a result of significant debates that have taken place on social media, to which definitions of what womanhood and manhood are constantly contested against. In my exploration of the lack of representation of pariah femininities in South African mainstream cinema, I could not exclude an investigation into why audiences reject films representing queer men. Wang (2007, p. 237) defines queer as a non-identity that refers to no stable categories and is thus subversive to dominant gender, sexual and racial discourses. Wang (2007) continues, "The term queer includes the various marginal or transgressive gender, sexual and racial identities that have emerged in opposition to the dominant social discourses" (2007, p. 237).

The inception of this topic came when an old classmate of mine came back from shooting a film which he said was something close to his heart at the time. He did not reveal any information about the film, except for the fact that, according to him, it was a revolutionary film that he believed was told beautifully. He was very excited. He left South Africa to attend the Berlin Film Festival and the Sundance Film Festival and that is when I knew that this film was going to be something big. About two months before the official release of the film *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) in South African theatres, my classmate began to fear for his life. He was being intimidated by people who recognised him from the posters and trailers. When the film was finally released he hardly attended classes. He was in danger because he was cast in a film that explored homosexuality. He feared for his life because of the homophobia in South Africa.

1.1.1 Background of study

Attitudes to sexuality in South Africa have affected the course of representation in film and television. On 14 November 2006 Parliament passed the Civil Union Bill into law, by a vote of 230 to 41, which made South Africa become the fifth country in the world, and the first in Africa to allow legal marriages between same-sex couples[3] (*Brand South Africa*, 2006). However, in 2019 the acts of homophobia and transphobia are still widespread in South Africa, where lesbian, gay and trans-persons are being attacked and killed. The release of the film *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) offers an alternative representation of South African Xhosa men whereas the film *Kanarie* (2018) uncovers how homosexuality was dealt with, amongst Afrikaans men in the army. Audiences are given the opportunity to see how masculinity operates in the spaces that men claim and how they react to anything outside of it. This made both films important, yet they were greeted with homophobic resistance, especially *Inxeba: The* Wound (2017). However, there has been little discussion on why films representing queer women are not present in the South African mainstream cinema.

On the 20th of March 2019, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) launched the 13th edition of its flagship publication, *State-Sponsored Homophobia.* The report states, "SA's high rates of rape and homophobic crime, perpetrated disproportionately against lesbians of colour in poorer townships, demonstrate that robust legislation does not necessarily translate to societal acceptance" (Mendos 2019, p. 93). Queer women are attacked at a high rate in South Africa which makes representing them and seeing their realities a matter of importance.

What propelled me to centre my research on the lacuna in the representation of pariah femininities in South African mainstream film and television is focused on how the media

[3] In *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, Gunkel (2010, p. 3) goes into detail about South Africa's Constitution and how it affected the lives of gays and lesbians in South Africa.

can be used as an intervention to question and challenge heteronormativity as the only accepted mode of gender normativity. Film and television has the ability to enable audiences to see and evaluate their social positioning when it comes to gender non-conforming people. Through using a visual discourse further that engages audiences while simultaneously challenging heteronormativity through documenting the experiences of queer people (Tyali, 2014). Reed (2005) argues that television is the most appropriate medium from which heterosexual viewers can learn about the LGBTQI+ community.

1.1.2 Objectives

By changing representation in cinema through making more films that include or are based on pariah femininities, it could have an influence on societal attitudes of female sexuality, that are currently mainly based on misogynistic values. This study is aimed to understand why the South African film industry does not explore female sexuality beyond heteronormativity. In my qualitative analysis I consider how audiences in South Africa decode media messages which explore issues of homosexuality by firstly examining the perceptions that have shaped this shared view on homosexuality. Secondly, I look at different film examples, local dramas and soap operas to determine whether viewers are able to go beyond the prevailing homophobic ideology that exists in South Africa. The process of reception is affected by the meanings people make about homosexuality. I will analyse selected South African films and television shows and study their public reception as well as box office statistics to reach my objective.

In my film analysis I reflect on the screening of *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), a film representing black gay South African men, and how its release unleashed a moral panic that characterised the public debate of the film. I also analyse the festival release *While You*

Weren't Looking (2015), a film representing queer women of different generations and backgrounds; *Kanarie* (2018), a film that explores the budding romance between two men in the army during apartheid and the success behind this film. I also use television examples with queer storylines such as *Generations* (1994-2014), *Generations: The Legacy* (2014-) and *Umlilo* (2015-2016), to highlight how audience members received the messages coded in those images to understand how these audiences' process queer images. In order to do all of this it is imperative to understand South Africa's standpoint on the LGBTQI+ community and the country's relationship with the media. To begin chapter one, I explore patriarchy and how it gave birth to hegemonic masculinity, as well as how homophobia stemmed from it.

The central questions of this dissertation focus on how the politics of representation in the South African film industry are influenced by the concern for film and television revenue but also by a concern to perpetuate gender norms. Funders' decision not to develop screenplays about (or at least featuring) pariah femininity is primarily driven by box-office prospects. Importantly, pariah femininity is mostly absent from various world cinemas, not just South African cinema. The three main questions I address in this paper are firstly what the absence of lesbian films can teach us about South Africa in terms of gender biases in the film industry; secondly what are the factors in the South African society that create this gap and thirdly, how the South African film industry can cultivate an inclusive and prosperous lesbian film market.

1.1.3 Overview of conceptual and theoretical framework

This section is grounded in Schippers' (2007) article on '*Recovering the feminine other'*, which is based on Connell's (1995) seminal work on hegemonic masculinity. Schippers' (2007) analysis is largely informed by theories of patriarchy that explain how hegemonic masculinity becomes a direct result of the marginalisation of femininity in men, or the lack

thereof in women. South African mainstream films continue to silence the voices of queer women, whereas there exists a somewhat bigger representation of queer men. However, this argument does not mean to reduce the importance of the representation of homosexual men nor does it mean to disregard the marginalisation of homosexual men.

1.2 Queer theory

The terms queer and queer theory are not synonymous. Queer is used as an overarching term that includes the entire LGBTQI+ community. Queer theory on the other hand includes the plight of the LGBTQI+ community in feminist thought on sex, gender, identity and correlated problems in lesbian and gay studies, which until the development of queer theory were understood within the frame of a biological definition of sex (Jagose, 1996; Butler, 1990). In her work on queer theory, Butler (1990) challenges the use of binaries by rejecting the constructs of gender. Representation is an issue worth mentioning in identity politics. Arguably, queer visibility acknowledges the LGBTQI+ community which is crucial for social change. Therefore, how the media portrays their representation of queer women in mainstream film and television has to be reconsidered in South Africa. In 2019 queer persons are still being represented as a subculture which is why the existing power structures that dominate their representation should be challenged to present positive and queer portrayals to South African audiences.

Homosexual identities struggle against heterosexual dominance but this fight becomes two-fold when it involves the identity of a homosexual woman as well as non-binary and transgender persons because it inevitably becomes a battle against homophobia, transphobia and one for gender equality. Queer theory has been important in challenging the status quo about gender and sexualities. Halperin (1995) defines queer as ‘by definition whatever is at

odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant' (1995, p. 62). Using Halperin's definition would then warrant the use of queer as a positioning of all the sexual minorities.

I argue that queer theory is fitting in this research because the representation of the LGBTQI+ community in the South African film and television industry is shaped by the cultural and social dichotomies influenced by the country's patriarchal nature. Suggesting that there should be representation of queer persons in mainstream film and television is, therefore, a policy for empowerment. Dyer (2002, p. 90) explains how media critique not only highlights the importance of being represented, it also denounces the long lasting and highly stereotyped representation of gay and lesbian identities. Sehlabi (2012) points out:

> Queer theory is beneficial for understanding the construction of notions of sexuality that go beyond 'the natural' ideas of a genetic and fixed set of sexual groupings in opposition and for understanding and actively opposing notions of sexuality (2012, p. 42).

However, it has been through a series of queer theoretical concerns that the sociology of men has been introduced to array of cultural studies interventions, theorizing masculinity as social praxis (Wright 2005, p. 243).

1.3 Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has considerably influenced recent thinking about men and patriarchy. Outside academia a movement began, called #MenAreTrash, critiquing men for displaying forms of hegemonic masculinity and privileging from it. Hegemonic masculinity is used to describe "conventional and stereotypical" forms of masculinity (Davies and Eagle 2007, p. 66). These expected norms of masculine behaviour are often culturally informed or culturally bound (Morrell, Jewkes and Lindegger 2012, p. 24). The traditional norms associated with masculinity include physical toughness and sexual prowess and these

still carry resonance in society today. For these norms to exist they assert themselves in relation to ‘femininity’ to assume dominance over those who display forms of it (women and homosexual men). This is because it is generally accepted that masculinity is a relational construct as long as it is defined in contradiction to femininity (Connell 1995).These displays of masculinity occupy a privileged space which is why from a young age men are socialised to adhere to this form of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity allows the dominance of men over women to continue whereas toxic masculinity aggressively imposes it.

Kupers (2005, p. 716) identifies the term toxic masculinity as useful in discussions about gender and forms of masculinity as it delineates those aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are socially destructive, such as misogyny, homophobia, greed, and violent domination; and those that are culturally accepted and valued. Hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity are not interchangeable concepts. Toxic masculinity is defined by violence and bigotry. This concept is meant to emphasize what the harmful effects of adhering to hegemonic masculinity in society are.

Hall (1997) argues, “representation is the production of the meaning, of the concepts in our minds through language” (1997, p. 13). The meaning behind concepts can only be made when people can identify with the language, which is why the principles of similarity and difference are used to establish relationships between concepts or to distinguish them from one another (Hall 1997, p. 13). Masculinity is defined with femininity as its opposite and in this way the stereotypes are formed and reinforced.

Men that fall outside of heteronormativity are the unaccepted form of masculinity which is what Connell (1995, p. 79) refers to as subordinate masculinities. Subordinate and marginalized masculinities also uphold patriarchy as they still benefit from it even when they do not embody hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity is defined in contrast to femininity,

however Butler (1990) highlights that heteronormativity is what ensures the hierarchy between masculinity and femininity.

How do young men establish a masculine identity for themselves in relation to other young men and women? Morrell et al. (2012, p. 23) suggest that the majority of boys attempt to position themselves using hegemonic standards to establish their masculine identity, either consciously or unconsciously. Although hegemonic masculinity has become normalised, only a minority of men are able to benefit from it. Men who receive the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832). The concept of hegemony is most powerful in relation to the compliance of women without which it has no meaning. Toxic masculinity uses the concept of hegemony for control.

Martino (1995) uses the concept of hegemonic masculinity to understand the dynamics of classroom life, including patterns of resistance and bullying among boys. Messerschmidt (1993) highlights hegemonic masculinity to theorize the relationship between masculinities and a variety of crimes. In my dissertation, the concept of hegemonic masculinity will be useful in studying media representations of gay men and why they supersede representations of lesbian women and transmen.

Morrell (2012, p. 12) identifies hegemonic masculinity in a South African context in which he concludes that there is not just one masculinity that is hegemonic, but at least three. Firstly, there is a white masculinity, which during the apartheid regime was associated with the ruling class that politically and economically dominated South Africa. Secondly, there is an African, rurally based masculinity that resided in and was perpetuated through indigenous institutions such as chieftainship, communal land tenure, and customary law. Thirdly, there exists a black masculinity that has emerged in the context of urbanization and the

development of geographically separate and culturally distinct African townships (Morrell et al. 2012, p. 12).

In 2019 there is still a growing concern about the impact of masculine identities and associated behaviours on the lives of girls and women as well as the lives of boys and young men in South Africa. Davies and Eagle (2007, p. 56) draw our attention to the extremely high rates of gendered violence and the observation that the vast majority of such acts are perpetrated by men against women. The concept of toxic masculinity is based on practice that permits men's collective dominance over women to continue, therefore it is not surprising that in some contexts, toxic masculinity actually does refer to men engaging in physical violence to stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005 p. 840). The *Crime Against Women in South Africa Report* (2019) by Statistics SA shows that femicide (the murder of women on the basis of their gender) is five times higher than the global average, which means that in South Africa, women are five times more likely to be killed due to gender-based violence committed by men.

In reality the forms of masculinity that do not match the hegemonic norm are subject to stigmatization and marginalization (Bird, 1996). These are masculinities that present possibilities other than the hegemonic ideal, for example, gay and transgender men. The marginalization of these masculinities is an act of toxic masculinity. Kupers (2005) adds, 'there is nothing especially toxic in a man's pride in his ability to win at sports or to provide for his family' (2005, p. 716). Kupers fails to fully acknowledge that having a different set of accepted practices for men and women is already a destructive notion.

1.3.1 Negotiating femininity around hegemonic masculinity

Arguably the inception of patriarchy is closely related to the existence of gender binaries which created gender roles. These gender roles informed behavioural norms that became

appropriate for the different sexes. The social hierarchy that was formed as a product of patriarchy resulted in men holding positions of authority in households, countries, religions and other institutions which created a system that has oppressed women. Within this social hierarchy even smaller hierarchies exist. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 848) draw our attention to how the concept of 'emphasized femininity' is at the top when it comes to the female gender hierarchy because of its compliance with patriarchy. Hegemonic masculinity is a product of patriarchy. Its power is based on the belief that femininity complements masculinity. There are normative views of femininity and masculinity presented as gender binaries. This means that the subordination of women according to hegemonic masculinity is establishing the correct way to behave as a woman; the essence of 'womanly characteristics' is to make men feel better about themselves.

Hegemonic femininities, as Finley (2010, p. 360) explains is a term that does not exist because the concept of hegemony deals with power. Women only have a limited amount of power over other women, which is why the concept of emphasized femininity is best to describe the femininity that complies with constructed gender relations. For gender hegemony to work, Schippers (2007, p. 91) explains that the behavioural norms that were created for each gender needed to become rules by consent to validate the authority of men. This is why characteristics such as women being aggressive, women having sexual desire for other women as well as women practising sexual liberation threaten masculinity. Schippers (2007, p. 94) writes that women being sexually inaccessible to men threatens masculinity because this does not dignify men. These types of behaviours diverge from what is known as femininity and should therefore be controlled when women inhabit them.

Heterosexuality is central within hegemonic masculinity because it accommodates the interests and desires of men through the emphasis on female vulnerability, fragility, acceptance of marriage, sexual receptivity, and motherhood (Connell 1987, p. 188). Most

importantly, within hegemonic masculinity, women were not given the freedom of choice as to whether they wanted marriage or not or whether they wanted to be mothers are not. It became the accepted norms for women to fulfil these roles. Here Bowden and Mummery (2009) argue that patriarchy has worked to normalize the relationships of females with males (2009, p. 16). They further argue that patriarchal assumptions include such notions as:

> Women requiring the protection of men, women being better suited than men to caring professions (teaching, nursing) and less suited to high level high stress professions. Mothers naturally wanting to – or being expected to want to – stay at home with young children and that all women will want to have children (Bowden and Mummery 2009, p. 16).

These characteristics are essential to preserve 'compulsory heterosexuality', a term coined by Adrienne Rich in *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality defines a system in which heterosexuality is the natural way in which sexual desire should be instilled. Lesbian desire and sexuality challenge compulsory heterosexuality because they demonstrate how women construct their own sexual meanings. The film *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) depicts transgressions of female sexuality. Hegemonic masculinity requires the desire of the feminine object, physical strength, and authority to maintain dominance (Connell 1987, p. 188). However, these above qualities must not be inhabited by women. In line with the discourses of femininity, there are socially sanctioned linguistic dichotomies that regulate the ways girls and women inhabit their bodies, from the prevalent tomboy/girly girl dichotomy which implies that being a powerful girl with the freedom to act with agency in the physical territory involves being boy-like whereas being a girly requires embodying being soft and coy, traits synonymous with femininity (Piran and Teall 2012, p. 169).

1.4 Pariah femininities

How is femininity impacted by misogyny? This question provides the opportunity to explore the predicament of queer male misogyny in relation to queer femininities. For that reason, I interrogate queer femininity as a concept, as a starting point to exploring what femininity does when it is conceptualised as something not attached to specific bodies (cis-gendered women) and identity markers (heterosexuality). Emphasized femininity embodies the accepted way to keep the gender hierarchy and sustain male power whereas women who assert their power in shared spaces, women who do not conform to heteronormativity and women who claim autonomy over their bodies through sexual liberation which can range from having multiple sexual partners to having none, are revolting against hegemonic masculinity. For this reason, they are marginalised in order to ensure their containment. Schippers (2007, p. 95) proposes the concept of pariah femininities instead of subordinate femininities because this is a concept outside of masculinity and femininity.

Schippers (2002) introduces gender manoeuvring as strategies that actively negotiate the meanings and rules of gender to redefine the hegemonic relationship between masculinity and femininity in the normative structure of a specific context. These strategies alter what has come to be known as gender norms by challenging the status quo through changing meanings of gender and defying concepts to transform gender hegemonies. According to claims made by Finley (2010, p. 362) these strategies will produce ‘alternative’ gender relations. Through employing Schippers’ (2002) strategies in the film context, ways can be created in which the South African film industry can cultivate an inclusive lesbian film market. Therefore the concept of pariah femininities informs my exploration of, and attempt to uncover the reasons for the gap in queer representation in South African mainstream films.

Women are in lower social positions than men in the gender hierarchy, thus the strategies that need to be employed in gender manoeuvring would have to be different from those men use to navigate around gay representation in film. This raises the question of how people in lowly positions in the social hierarchy navigate their way around society. Thus, femininities are responses not just to masculinities but to other femininities, and the internal dynamics of femininity have importance in the gender order (Finley 2010, p. 363).

1.4.1 Lesbian depiction in mainstream media

In her ground-breaking article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey (1989) draws from Freud the notion of scopophilia[4] to explain the fascination of cinema, particularly Hollywood cinema. To add visual pleasure, filmmakers incorporate structures of voyeurism into a screen play. Mulvey's (1989) analysis demonstrates how gendered voyeurism is. Usually in films, whenever male characters direct their gaze toward female characters the spectator is made to identify with the male look because the camera films from the male character's point of view or perspective. There are three levels of the cinematic gaze that Mayne (2002) points out: the camera, the character, and the spectator gaze which all work together to objectify the female character and turn her into an object for display.

Smelik (2016, p. 2) describes how the voyeuristic gaze relies on the controlling power of the male character as well as on the objectified representation of the female character for meanings to be produced. The male gaze leaves no room for the female spectator or for a female gaze which means that the female viewer can only identify with the male gaze. Arguably female spectatorship and the female gaze have been reduced to subjectivity and

[4]Scopophilia refers to the pleasure of looking as well as the pleasure of being looked at. It therefore has both voyeuristic and exhibitionistic, as well as narcissistic, overtones (Jackson and Hogg 2010, p. 661).

male desire. Subjectivity is understood as a constant process of self-production rather than as a fixed entity (Jefferson 1994, p. 13). Therefore cinema has the power to contest the positions of female spectatorship and the female gaze by inscribing opposing messages of male desire into the codes and conventions of the imagery and the narrative. Hollinger (1998) writes;

> Until very recently, lesbianism was either barred from mainstream cinema entirely or, when it was infrequently portrayed, was portrayed as sordid and deviant behaviour resulting either from a hereditary deformity or pathological gender reversal (Hollinger 1998, p. 10).

When writing about queer representations in films, Dyer (1993, p. 31) suggests certain formulaic gay plots such as childlessness, a man's interests in arts or domestic crafts, and a woman's interests in mechanics or sports. Homosexuality is often referenced by the characters' 'out of the ordinary' gender performance.

1.5 Research review

Having contextualised how hegemonic masculinity inevitably affects queer female representation, in order to formulate a comparative analysis, it is important to outline the information-gathering process and the methodological approaches I take to uncover and theorise the lacuna of pariah femininities in South African mainstream films. The research review is a fundamental part of this research as it notes previous research conducted in this field and in other fields related to the topic understudy and the review focuses on previous studies of the representation of queer people in the South African media and their reception. Although my dissertation focuses specifically on the lack of representation of queer women in mainstream films, an examination of the South African film and television industry is useful in order to better understand why pariah femininities have been grossly underrepresented. Compared to the representation of gay men, the representation of lesbian

women in mainstream television is limited and arguably nearly non-existent in mainstream cinema.

Numerous sources have been collected to map out the information on how the patriarchal ideals in South Africa incite homophobia which has led to this gap in representation. Sources such as newspapers (*News24, Mamba Online, City Press*) and journal articles have been consulted. The articles chosen were used for the following reasons: Gairoonisa Paleker's (2010) *The B-Scheme subsidy and the 'black film industry' in apartheid South Africa, 1972–1990* contextualises the South African film industry's attempts to fill the gap in films representing black South Africans. I use Reddy's (2001) *Homophobia, human rights and gay and lesbian equality in Africa* and Engel's (2018) *Gender and Race in the South African Film Industry: A Comparative Analysis of the Representation in South African Film Festivals* to explore how South Africa's social climate has and still is affecting the film industry. Jagessar and Msibi's (2015) *"It's not that bad": Homophobia in the residences of a university in KwaZulu-Natal* is a more contemporary scholarship that updates Reddy's (2001) content.

Wang Yong's (2009) *The Homosexual Subject: Coming-out as a Political Act* (2007), and Dana Rosenfeld's *Heteronormativity and Homonormativity as Practical and Moral Resources: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Elders* prove how heteronormativity forced the politicisation of homosexuality. Barker's (2006) *I Have Seen the Future and It Is Not Here Yet …; or, On Being Ambitious for Audience Research* outlines contemporary audience culture whereas Fourie's (2005) *Towards linking normative theory, communication policy and audiences in South African communication research* is focused on audience research in a South African context. Livingstone's (2013) *The Participation Paradigm in Audience Research* updates Barker's (2006) article. To examine female representation and spectatorship I use Patrice Petro's (1986) *Mass Culture and the Feminine: The "Place" of*

Television in Film Studies and Karen Hollinger's (1998) *Theorizing Mainstream Female Spectatorship: The Case of the Popular Lesbian Film.*

The gap in black queer female representation is directly linked to what Engel (2018) discusses in *Gender and Race in the South African Film Industry: A Comparative Analysis of the Representation in South African Film Festivals* which articulates the gender disparity of women working as directors in the film industry. South African film festivals such as the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) and Encounters South African International Film Festival enable female filmmakers by giving them the platform to showcase their work and gain more recognition. However, South African box office reports indicate that the film industry is still dominated by white male directors. Engel (2018) explains how the disparity is a result of industry stakeholders thinking males are more competent directors because female filmmakers create stories that are 'too feminine' and not universal. Although more black filmmakers emerged after 1994, these filmmakers are struggling to find funding for their work and, in many cases, an audience for their films. Engels describes the restraints as a direct result of the lack of access to financial resources. However, there have been quite a few woman directed local films made and released in recent years such as *Ayanda* (2015), *Dis Ek Anna* (2015), *Tess* (2016), *Mayfair* (2018), *Baby Mamas* (2018), and coming soon *Seriously Single* (2020). These films are varied in genres and each explore a different subject matter but none are rooted in female, queer representation.

Paleker's (2010) *The B-Scheme subsidy and the 'black film industry' in apartheid South Africa, 1972–1990* describes how the emergence of a funding scheme for the 'black film industry,' known as the B-scheme subsidy, came into being in apartheid South Africa. I use this journal article to contextualise how the 'black film industry' under apartheid used stereotypical images to represent of black South Africans. The B-Scheme was for the production of films for black audiences, featuring black actors speaking in their native

languages. Although this was the case these productions were run by white South Africans. Paleker (2010) writes that this subsidy was an opportunity to make money by producing African-language films starring Africans for mass African audiences. However, white filmmakers pushed the government's apartheid ideology with these films. The majority of the films either explicitly or implicitly supported or promoted various aspects of apartheid ideology, such as the homeland policy and were poorly made. This is with the exception of one film, *Joe Bullet* (1973), which was classified as a B-scheme film[5].

In an article on EBL News (2020), it is mentioned that Tonie van der Merwe, the writer and producer of *Joe Bullet* (1973), explains how the apartheid censors banned the film after just two screenings. The censors listed the reasons for their decision which included: the main character, a black action man, carrying a gun, driving a sports car, living in a white neighbourhood, said Van der Merwe (EBLNews, 2020).

Yong's (2007) *The Homosexual Subject: Coming-out as a Political Act* symbolizes coming out as a momentous act in forming homosexual subjectivity. Yong discusses two paradigms, social construction studies and queer theory that have dominated the construction of homosexual subjectivity. Social constructionist theory maintains that people are born homosexual however their identities are shaped by social factors. Queer theory rejects any form of binaries as they are sustained through performativity. However the act of coming out differs in both paradigms. Social constructionist works treat coming out as a position in which subjects need to negotiate a certain identity whereas queer theory refuses any positioning of subjects. I use this reading to justify the behaviours of Xolani and Kwanda, the two homosexual characters in *Inxeba: The Wound* (2018).

[5]The B-Scheme was specifically for the production of films in an African language with a majority African cast and intended for a mass African audience (Paleker 2010, p. 91).

Rosenfeld's (2009) *Heteronormativity and Homonormativity as Practical and Moral Resources: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Elders* argues that the heteronormative binaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality as well as gender and sexuality have created the idea of a gender-conforming homosexual, a category of homosexual person that conforms to heteronormativity. The act of performing heteronormativity was a response to the oppressive strategies imposed on homosexual persons to retain heterosexuality as the norm by excluding homosexuality from public life. As a result, being a closeted homosexual became the norm, turning homosexuality into a double life. Gay liberation not only enabled homosexuality to be displayed publicly, it also redefined 'coming out'.

In Reddy's (2001) *Homophobia, human rights and gay and lesbian equality in Africa*, he points out how African leaders identifying homosexuality as 'un-African' reveals the internalised homophobia stemming from a fear of the other. He brings up six issues that arise from the 'fear of the other' that I use in my research. These six issues include: fear of difference, homosexuality being considered a disorder, the hatred leading to violence, internalised homophobia, homophobia as a tool to control and lastly homophobia as a form of gender violence. Reddy (2001) makes references to press reports that illustrate homophobia in Africa as a brutal and symbolic expression of intolerance. Despite the South African Constitution banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, violent homophobia is still prevalent. Jagessar and Msibi's (2015) *"It's not that bad": Homophobia in the residences of a university in KwaZulu-Natal* demonstrates how university students experience homophobia, using heteronormativity as a theoretical framework and a case study as methodology.

In the article 'Recovering the feminine other: Masculinity, femininity and gender hegemony' in *Theory and society*, Schippers (2007) uses Connell's (1995) understanding of hegemonic masculinity and contrasts it with an alternative 'hegemonic femininity'. She summarizes how

hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity are involved in systems of inequality. This article is useful in my research because Schippers (2007, p. 86) places the feminine other – pariah femininity - in the centre of the theory of gender hegemony by offering an alternative conceptual framework for how gender hegemony operates through masculinities and femininities. In terms of my case study, *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) explores the world of lesbian women and how they redefine femininity, which is the alternative 'hegemonic femininity' that Schippers writes about.

Patrice Petro's (1986) *Mass Culture and the Feminine: The "Place" of Television in Film Studies* speaks on how the digitization of the mass media has affected audience participation. New production tools and distribution channels are enabling the masses to speak instead of only those selected individuals who have had access. This has given citizens opportunities to participate in public debate and for self-representation in the public spheres. Seminal studies of mass communication are based on the premise that the media largely affects both active and passive audiences. Petro provides a history of mass communication and perpetuates the belief that the mass media had an overwhelming influence on behavioural and attitudinal change.

Barker's (2006) *I Have Seen the Future and It Is Not Here Yet …; or, On Being Ambitious for Audience Research* gives suggestions on conducting audience studies in a globalized and converged contemporary society. Barker emphasizes the need to consider who the text will reach before disseminating it. Researchers need to explore and explain the relations between and among the 'reading positions' of different interpretative communities (Barker 2006, p. 130). 'Reading positions', Barker (2006, p. 130) explains are usually influenced by the assessment of other people in the same community which is why researchers need to explore how such communities are formed. On the other hand, Fourie's (2005) *Towards linking normative theory, communication policy and audiences in South African communication*

research explores audience research in a South African context and media landscape. Livingstone's (2013) *The Participation Paradigm in Audience Research* is a contemporary article that investigates how audiences should be researched in a digital, networked age.

Lesbian representations in mainstream international films are approached in different ways to create mass market appeal. It is important to understand such strategies to introduce the relevant methods to South African films. Hollinger's (1998) *Theorizing Mainstream Female Spectatorship: The Case of the Popular Lesbian Film* explains some of the strategies. Popular lesbian films are usually ambiguous in their lesbian representation as they aim to attract audience attention through adding hints of lesbianism between the two principal characters, to allow lesbian spectators to see the two women as lovers while simultaneously providing heterosexual viewers with reassurance that the characters could be just friends.

I also draw on Ricardo Peach's (2005) PhD dissertation titled *Queer Cinema as a Fifth Cinema in South Africa and Australia* as well as Tumelo Sehlabi's (2012) PhD dissertation on *The representation of homosexual men in the soap opera Generations.* Senizwani Khumalo's (2015) Masters Dissertation on viewers negotiating the gay storyline in *Generations* is particularly helpful. Films *(Inxeba: The Wound*, *Kanarie* and *While You Weren't Looking*) and television programmes (*Generations, Generations: The Legacy* (2014-), *Umlilo* (2015-2016), *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004), *Isidingo (*1998-2020*), 7de Laan* (2000-), *Society* (2007-2010), *Rhythm City* (2007-)) are used to create a narrative around the South African film industry today. In addition to these sources I use several key texts including Henriette Gunkel's (2010) book *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, Martin Botha's (2012)*South African Cinema*, Sylvia Tamale's (2011) *African Sexualities: A reader*, Karen Ross and Virginia Nightingale's (2003) *Critical readings: Media and audiences* and another Virginia Nightingale (2011) book, *The handbook of media audiences.*

Gunkel's (2010) *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* is useful for my research because it covers most of the South African context related to sexuality. Gunkel contextualises the South African Constitution and how it does not protect the LGBTQI+ community because homophobia is related to gender-based violence, homophobia and racism. I draw on three chapters in particular that separately justify certain aspects of my research. Firstly, the chapter *'Homosexuality is un-African'* focuses on how, during apartheid, homosexuality was read as un-Afrikaans and un-African by both black and white cultural and religious organisations. Secondly, the chapter *'Sexuality and the apparatus of colonialism'* uses the responses to visual artist, Zanele Muholi's exhibitions to highlight the dislike audiences have of the portrayal of the black body that uses nudity and provocation to rebel against the normative constructions of gender and sexuality. Thirdly, the chapter *'Homosociality – a definition'* gives a background as to how the apartheid military defined gender identities of South African men.

South African Cinema by Martin Botha (2012) includes a section on the South African film industry post-apartheid in reference to the inclusion of homosexual persons in films. According to Botha homosexuality is almost non-existent in South African cinema up till 1985 due to Afrikaners wanting their ideals visualised in their films and homosexuality was not part of their vision. Botha references Astrid Treffry-Goatly's (2010) doctoral study on South African cinema which concludes that while the South African government's development of the South Africa film industry is informed by a vision of cultural diversity and an intention to empower the previously disadvantaged it still has not achieved those intentions. South African filmmakers' efforts to appeal to the international film market result in the voices of the historically suppressed black majority being constrained to meet the commercial demands of the market. This has added to the lack of representation of queer black women in the South African mainstream circuit.

Sylvia Tamale's (2011) *African Sexualities: A reader* explores African sexuality and how it has been perceived in an African society. The author eloquently explains why mainstream films exploring female sexuality in South Africa are only presented to smaller markets which would also address the reception of film *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017). I use Tamale's analysis of colonial and racist assumptions about African sexuality as it provides a perspective on the notion of homosexuality being 'un-African' and how homophobia has negated aspects African people's sexual desires. Tamale explains how masculinity being reduced to sexuality is a result of toxic masculinity as it pushes the dominant masculinity narrative by associating 'real sex' with the penis. This, as a result, has created a violent intolerance towards women's sexual and gender freedom. *African sexualities* (2011) also speaks to how patriarchy only tolerates 'ugly women' if they keep their heads down and are content to be seen as ugly, which substantiates my argument on pariah femininities and how their representation has been something of lesser importance.

In an attempt to understand audience reception, Ross and Virginia Nightingale's (2003) *Critical readings: Media and audiences* was an important book in my research because it examines past modes of media engagement and how these have shaped contemporary modes of modern media engagement. I use Nightingale's (2011) book *The handbook of media audiences* on the other hand to clarify audience perspectives. Nightingale points out that, when looking into audiences, it is important to consider that they have specific and defining attributes as well. Viewing in relation to new media technologies has significantly changed where audiences can now use these technologies to interact and search while watching films or television shows.

In combination with other sources dealing more generally with gender theory, queer theory, film theory, film history, cultural studies, modernity and political theory, these texts allow for the examination of South African queer cinema. In *Understanding Feminism*, specifically the

chapter titled ‘Sexuality and Desire’, Bowden and Mummery (2009, p. 16) argue that patriarchy has worked to normalize the relationships between members of the opposite sex as the status quo. This is known as ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, for it defines a system in which heterosexuality is the natural way in which sexual desire should happen. This book assists me in my research because it delves into the ideologies around sexuality that many people in South Africa have around compulsory heterosexuality’. Bowden and Mummery (2009, p. 27) mention that lesbian desire and sexuality challenge compulsory heterosexuality because they demonstrate women constructing their own sexual meanings. The film *While You Weren’t Looking* (2015) depicts this transgression of gender.

The chapter, ‘Lesbian and gay cinema’ in *An introduction to film studies* (Jones, 1999) explains how films use stereotypes to depict characters according to how they are perceived socially. Jones (1999, p. 280) states, ‘this is a form of shorthand; a few visual or sound cues give the audience a view of a certain type of person which is widely accepted’. The lead character, Xolani, in the film *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) is a complex character. He is a homosexual man that lives a doubled ‘closeted’ life by conforming to heteronormativity and is in a relationship with a hyper-masculine man who is also living a double life. The film also represents a homosexual man who embodies hyper-masculinity. The film deters from using stereotypes to depict characters in this film. This is how New Queer Cinema aims to embody their characters. Romantic scenes however, are still portrayed with caution.

Babuscio (1977, p. 40) defines the application of this shooting/editing technique as gay sensibility, which reflects a heightened awareness that is different from mainstream, heteronormative films and it reveals the social oppression of gay men. As a result film production that represents members of the LGBTQI+ community takes place mainly within the structures of alternative or art cinema. The mainstream premier of *Inxeba: The Wound* in South Africa was an attempt to appeal to more audiences but instead was met with rejection.

Mulvey (1989, p. 59-60) writes, in the chapter, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', that the cinema proposes a number of possible pleasures, one of them being the act of looking. The pleasure in looking stems from the idea that the male who holds the gaze is the one who is active and the female who is being looked at is passive as she has no control over how she will be looked at. The director usually pleases the spectator by representing heteronormative characters. Mulvey (1980, p. 63) clarifies that the bearer of the look is the spectator and when it is a heterosexual man he will control how women will be represented as it must accord with what he likes to see.

1.5.1 Methodology

Before beginning to work on this dissertation I examined the various research models that had been adopted by other researchers in the field of media and representation. This study uses a qualitative research methodology within which the discourse analysis method is positioned. The study provides a qualitative analysis of selected films related specifically to modern female representation and homosexual women's and men's representation. It was convenient and efficient to also analyse soap operas and local dramas as these are most commonly watched in South Africa compared to films.

To understand how South African film constructs race, gender, and national identity, I employed a discourse and content analysis of the films *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) and *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017). To understand the specific visual images in South African films, and thus the images that audiences are tuning in for and reacting to, I employed a discourse and content analysis of *Kanarie* (2018) as well as a selection of popular South African soap operas and local dramas. Through a discussion of this examination, I hope to show the productivity of a feminist epistemological approach that Ives (2009, p. 249)

introduces to visual methodologies. According to Cope (2002), a feminist epistemology requires thinking about how socially constructed gender roles, norms, and relations influence the production of knowledge' (2002, p. 44), supporting the idea that the production of knowledge is influenced by identity, cultural and societal norms.

By using the discourse analysis method, this study provides a qualitative analysis of selected case studies that are centred on issues directly relevant to homosexual (*Inxeba: The Wound, Kanarie, Generations* and *Umlilo*) and transgender (*While You Weren't Looking, Generations: The Legacy*) representation. This methodological approach is also a useful and efficient approach as the films received various reactions, ranging from praise to condemnation as well as the selected soap opera chosen, *Generations* (1994-2014), which was the most viewed soap opera on South Africa television throughout its run, with over seven million viewers (Ndlovu, 2014, p. 96). However, after being rebranded as *Generations: The Legacy* (2014-), ratings dropped to three million viewers. Fairclough (2000) employs discourse analysis in order to identify the recurring themes, images and dominating discussions that guide the construction of identities of homosexual men. Applying this method assisted me in identifying recurring themes, images and ideological approaches in these texts and, most importantly, to consider the reactions to these case studies, to point out reasons for the lack of queer female representation in South Africa.

The primary focus of this discourse analysis is on acknowledging the social environment in which these texts were released to identify the challenges in order to overcome them and create a thriving industry of films promoting inclusivity. Van Dijk (1991, p. 108) comments that an advantage of discourse analysis is that it is able to look at 'the structures of media messages' while also locating them within a 'socio-cultural context'. It is important to note that not all homosexual representation is empowering. Therefore applying a discourse

analysis to the film and television texts that are used in my case, enables me to detect false images of empowerment.

Both *Inxeba: The Wound* and *Kanarie* received considerable critical acclaim, however both films elicited some heightened moralistic responses in online spaces which forms an important part of this research. In addition, the reasons behind why the film, *While You Weren't Looking* was only screened at festivals is another central part of this research. This analysis considers the ideologies of gender roles, archetypes of masculinities, homophobia and gender violence. In the three filmic case studies, *While You Weren't Looking, Inxeba: The Wound* and *Kanarie*, I specifically focused, firstly, on applying a thematic investigation to the films; secondly, on conducting a character analysis; thirdly, on considering the politics of representation and, lastly, on reviewing the policy regarding regulation and funding of these films. Research questions are included during the process of data collection in order to establish connections between these texts.

1.5.2 Chapter Outline

In chapter two I begin by defining pariah femininity and how the term came into being and show how it is treated in film. The buying power in films is in audience selection. Funders' decision not to develop screenplays and feature films about, or at least featuring pariah femininity is, unfortunately, primarily driven by box-office prospects. As a result, once a filmmaker identifies their audience they carefully curate the film to fit the said heteronormative market. This results in the fetishization of lesbian characters (Hollinger 1998, p. 11). However, pariah femininities cannot be fetishized because they do not speak to the interests of men. Same-sex relationships are represented as transgressive as it is believed that femininity complements masculinity therefore same-sex relationships contaminate

heteronormativity. I would argue that although the depiction of a gay relationship on screen often results in outrage due to homophobia, queer men still have their own platforms in which they are given a space for representation whereas queer women are denied any leeway.

Homophobia is still an issue in South Africa despite it being against the Constitution. According to Chapter Two of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (2017):

> The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 2017*).

As a result of this constant homophobia, homosexual people as well as transgender people are constantly under attack. This completely goes against the Constitution, with the result that members of society have taken it upon themselves to devise strategies to create awareness around the issues of homophobia. Zanele Muholi has successfully done this through photography. I analyse three of her photographs from her 2006 *Only Half The Picture* series. Two of these photographs are of gender non-binary persons and the third is a photograph of a female[6] who has been violated. In South Africa, these incidents happen more often than not. Lesbian women and transmen are violated through being attacked, raped or even killed because they do not conform to femininity or accept the advances of men and as a result they threaten the base that patriarchy stands on.

Young boys are socialised to perform masculinity through heterosexuality and when they do not do that they are considered effeminate. While there are different racial hegemonies in South Africa, there are also differences in how each ethnographic group see masculinity.

[6] Here, I used the sex of the person in the photograph, not to reduce them to their biological sex but to show that the abuse here was due to this person not conforming to their gender norms (being a woman) that society imposes on people.

Nguni[7] people conform to cultural practices that have existed for centuries that promote patriarchy in men such as polygamy and the male circumcision ceremony. Our colonial and apartheid history further amplified toxic masculinity amongst black men because, through infantilising black men, the system created men who sought to prove their masculinity in their home as that was the only place where they could perform their maleness (Gunkel 2010, p. 89).

By representing these oppressed minorities visually and audio-visually, filmmakers are actively defying the bigoted behaviour that have been normalized. However, this representation seems to be in favour of gay men, even with the opposition that their films receive. In South Africa, especially with its history of segregation and apartheid, the fight for gender equality will always come second to the fight for racial equality which is why it is so important to empower black people from the LGBTQI+ community. This can be achieved by examining why treatment is different across genders (including non-binary persons).

Chapter three opens by explaining why creating queer visibility in films through the conception of New Queer Cinema is important. New Queer Cinema not only gives voice to homosexual people but to the whole LGBTQI+ community. However, when it began it was heavily Eurocentric until it was revised so that it promoted inclusivity across different races and genders. The representation of the LGBTQI+ community has become politicised which necessitated overcoming many barriers. Searle (1997) in *Queer-ing the Screen: Sexuality and Australian Film and Television*, lists eight strategies to improve the normalization of representing members of the LGBTQI+ community. These are visibility, documentation, positive versus negative images, mobilisation, access, critical space, and self-recognition. Approaches I will expand in this chapter.

[7] The Nguni people are a group of Bantu people who primarily speak Nguni languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, Ndebele and Siswazi and reside predominantly in Southern Africa (Wilson 1969, p. 75).

Homosexual men have created a base for visibility that has been augmented by the virtue of the patriarchal system being in favour of men. Lesbians and transwomen have more difficulties navigating their way to find such a platform for visibility. Although queer cinema has a strong voice as it challenges sexist, misogynist, homophobic and transphobic ideologies, the absence of women in this political revision still calls for more work towards change especially in South Africa. The *Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* (1994-2018) was an introduction to creating queer support through film festivals and conversations surrounding the work produced around queer politics. The *Durban Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* (2011-) remains the oldest operational city-based LGBTIQ+ film festival in Africa, and one of only a few on the entire continent, without it there would be an even greater silence on LGBTIQ+ stories from Africa (*Screen Africa*, 2018). Unfortunately, these conversations (surrounding queer film) begin and end at these festivals as well as in a number of specifically organised events where these issues are addressed. This is because the representation of sexuality in films impacts the mechanics of film language, funding and reception and the course of distribution which I expand on in chapter three.

Queer Cinema actively defies film conventions specifically when analysing the arc of the story and the journey of the protagonist (hero's journey). The endings to *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) and *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) are very different to audience expectations, forcing audiences to form their own conclusions. These two films also deviate from the typical stereotypes that are often used when portraying homosexual people. The argument here though is that more often than not, films depicting lesbian couples often cater for the heterosexual male gaze while films depicting gay couples seldom attempt to satisfy this gaze.

There are processes in place when it comes to applying for funding at the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF). Fewer than 16.9 per cent of fiction filmmakers are female (Engel 2018, p. 20), meaning it is white-male producers who are usually the majority that fall into

tier one which is the category that enables filmmakers to receive funding for feature films. In recent times the NFVF introduced slate funding which aims at giving funding to the previously disadvantaged filmmakers – women, black producers, small production companies (FilmContact, 2019). Successes produced by these programmes includes box-office hit *Happiness is a Four Letter Word* (2016). However, both directors of *Happiness is a Four Letter* Word, Thabang Moleya and *Inxeba: The Wound,* John Trengove are male. Festivals such as the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) and the Encounters South African International Film Festival strive to change this and while it is taking time, shifts are happening.

Chapter four outlines the films *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), *Kanarie* (2018) and *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) by drawing parallels between them that are revealed by carrying out a thematic analysis by discussing the politics of representations these films explore, in order to develop an understanding on how the history of gender and sexuality in South Africa affected the release and reception of these films. *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), directed by John Trengove, explores how Xolani, an initiate caregiver who has a sexual affair with another caregiver, navigates himself around this hyper-masculine space, *entabeni* (the mountain), where the sacred Xhosa coming of age ceremony takes place. The film garnered success internationally and locally to an extent. *Inxeba: The Wound* received a 2018 South African Film and Television Award (SAFTA). Despite the accolades the film was not well received by some South African spectators which led to its banning and eventual unbanning after a court case. The backlash against the film was caused by a number of factors which I explore in chapter four.

Homophobia within the South African visual and audio-visual context is prevalent in how local broadcasting channels and films approach the inclusivity of the LGBTQI+ community. The criticism *Inxeba: The Wound* received and the big lack of queer women's representation

highlights that. Women's constant fight against their subordination is connected to other systems of oppression that are prevalent in South Africa. *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), directed by directed by Catherine Stewart, portrays the lives of a diverse group of lesbian women and the complexities they face. This film was only released on the film festival circuit. *Kanarie* (2018) is a film exploring sexuality in the military and was more successful at the box office as well as the reception of the film from critics and audiences, making it an important film to include in my analysis.

Chapter five question show South African audiences construct meaning when watching *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) and *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) within the framework of homophobia. This chapter also focuses on South African audiences and works towards understanding how they receive media messages that promote inclusivity by analysing their responses while watching gay and lesbian characters on popular television shows. I refer to a number of South African soap operas and local dramas, particularly the soap opera *Generations* (1994-2014). I analyse the local drama *Umlilo* (2015-2016) because the programme's lesbian depiction was fetishized and I explore why that is the case.

Language is another factor that could influence audience reception. In an article published by Lars Kamer (2020), as of 2018, the languages most commonly spoken by individuals inside of South African households were isiZulu at 25.3 percent, isiXhosa at 14.8 percent and Afrikaans at 12.2 percent respectively. While English only accounts for the sixth most common language spoken inside of South African households at 8.1 percent, it is the second-most prevalent language spoken outside of homes, at 16.6 percent (Kamer 2020). In looking at audiences and attempting to understand how they contextualise South African media messages it is important to note that these speakers of isiZulu and isiXhosa form the majority of South African audiences. Nightingale (2011) proposes that audience reception research has evolved from the following three theories (2011, p. 20). These are, firstly, the hypodermic

needle theory which is a communication theory that suggests that media messages are absorbed by passive audiences without any rational thought; Secondly, the uses and gratifications theory which suggest that how audiences use media changes the way it is consumed and finally Hall's encoding/decoding model which is important in understanding why not all audiences receive media messages the same way (Nightingale 2011, p. 20).

The South African media has come a long way, from international programmes being dominantly televised on subscription based DSTV channels to the introduction of local channels such as Mzansi Magic, Mzansi Wethu and 1Magic. The rise of these channels was rapid as they promote the telling of authentic and modern African stories. However, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), which is a free to air public broadcaster, still dominates in terms of viewership which relies heavily on how the different Living Standard Measures (LSM) affect the number of South Africans who can have DSTV.

The SABC has endorsed inclusivity in their shows. Modisane (2017) writes that the first homosexual storyline first appeared on the youth series *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004). The channel received backlash but this paved the way for the future representation of the LGBTQI+ community on these channels as well as on e.tv and the DSTV local channels. In the few instances that South African television includes lesbian representation, the relationships are constructed in a way that will often not offend the male gaze.

CHAPTER TWO

Gender Politics in South Africa: Pariah Femininities

2. Outline

The South African Constitution (*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa,* 1996) makes provision for human rights, equality and the inherent dignity of all citizens and through this it protects the rights of the general public. This was promulgated by President Nelson Mandela on 18 December 1996 and came into effect on 4 February 1997. Nonetheless, the lived reality is still different and difficult for the LGBTQI+ community. Verbal and physical attacks on gay and lesbian persons still take place. Lesbians are often victims of corrective rape. Corrective rape refers to an instance when a woman is raped in order to 'cure' her of her lesbianism, in fact in the last 15 years there have been at least 31 murders linked with lesbianism and an average of 10 lesbians are raped per week to 'correct' their sexual preferences (Koraan and Geduld 2015, p. 1931).

Sanger and Clowes (2006, p. 41) argue that heterosexuality in South Africa remains strongly entrenched in its day-to-day praxis because homophobia is tolerated and not accepted. Homophobia is a form of social discrimination that is rooted in socially and culturally learned prejudices. Attempts at challenging heteronormativity are often met with resistance. Research also shows that heteronormativity is upheld through promoting heterosexuality as the only natural pattern of human behaviour (Henderson, 2015).

Anything outside of heteronormativity is perceived as deviant and un-African. Non-heteronormative identities in this regard are understood to be produced through genetic abnormality, personal choice or socio-psychological caused from trauma and abuse inherent in certain kinds of heterosexual encounters (Sanger and Clowes 2006, p. 41). Film and

television can be used as creative outputs that can challenge heteronormativity. According to Ngidi and Dlamini (2017, p. 269) the use of film creates a dialogic space as a method of identifying, addressing and responding to homophobia. Film enables individuals to personalise their experiences with people of different sexualities or gender identities as well as to develop deeper understandings of their experiences. Tyali (2014) explains that watching films provides different ways of seeing and evaluating your own position in relation to gender non-conforming people. In this chapter I expound on aspects of South Africa's history of sexuality which will lead me to interrogate, in upcoming chapters, why films representing the LGBTQI+ community, with a specific focus on pariah femininities, have not been screened in cinemas.

2.1 The 'Other' woman

The term, 'feminine other,' describes a femininity that has characteristics that deviate from what has become the status quo of the feminine. Schippers (2007, p. 95) calls them pariah femininities as they are the opposite of what Connell (1995) refers to as emphasized femininity. This latter kind of femininity is oriented towards accommodating the interests and desires of men (Connell 1995, p.77). I make this argument, particularly on the lacuna of pariah femininities in mainstream South African film, because many South African and international cinematic representations sexualise female cast members by forcing viewers to look at women's bodies through specific editing and camera angles, mainly close ups.

Mainstream cinema, in my understanding, consists of films produced for a wide distribution with films confirming to cinematic conventions, such as having a protagonist or main character who is an attractive heterosexual woman. Conversely, films that do not conform to these filmmaking elements are very often films that only screen at film festivals. The term,

pariah femininities, does not only apply to lesbian women but also to intersexed women, transgender and non-binary persons, and often throughout my dissertation I refer to them as queer women, with the exception of non-binary persons and transmen.

Hegemonic masculinity along with its heteronormative and predominantly homophobic gaze, to which homosexuals are subjected in society, have guaranteed that same-sex relationships are represented as transgressive in mainstream cinema, instead of using the representation of minority groups to being empowering to them. Hegemonic masculinity is a product of patriarchy. Its power is based on the belief that femininity complements masculinity. This means that the subordination of women, according to hegemonic masculinity, predicates the correct way to behave as a woman; the essence of womanly behaviour being to make men feel better about themselves. Characteristics such as being aggressive, women having sexual desire for other women as well as women practicing sexual liberation threaten masculinity. Schippers (2007, p. 94) states, women being sexually inaccessible threatens masculinity too as this does not dignify men.

Pariah femininities threaten the relationship between masculinity and femininity because they are considered socially undesirable. Defying the societal norms of how women should behave and making men uncomfortable in their masculinity is what makes pariah femininities undesirable because these women challenge hegemonic masculinity. In its essence this is what feminism strives to do with the hopes of emancipating women from a patriarchal system. Female sexuality is known to be reactive and normalized, especially when it comes to having sex for reproduction as opposed to males whose sexual desire beyond reproduction is more acceptable. Pariah femininities remain marginal in South African film, television and even in LGBTQI+ organisations. The Constitutional rights of all LGBTQI+ persons in post-apartheid South Africa versus their living reality are completely different.

2.2 Homosexuality in Africa

There are several thinkers who are adamant that homosexuality was non-existent among indigenous Africans, despite the range of available data showing at least one conflicting view. Homosexuality existed in African societies before the arrival of European settlers. Dlamini (2006, p. 132) uses Lee's (1969) documentation of homosexuality among amaZulu[8], who make up South Africa's majority ethnic group. Dlamini's (2006, p. 132) research supports the existence of homosexuality amongst Zulu Africans as Lee documents what appears to have been the occasional substitution of boys for women when establishing the potency of men seeking recognition as adult warriors. Dlamini (2006, p. 132) maintains that Shaka Zulu, the great isiZulu warrior for most of his reign, had no wives, sired no children and preferred the company of the young men. However, according Mthembu (2005) the current Zulu monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini, described homosexuality as unZulu at the 2005 annual reed dance[9].

The most interesting finding was that rock paintings found in Zimbabwe depicting male-to-male sexual acts dates back to a time before white settlers arrived which Epprecht (1998) argues could be used as an indication that colonisers did not introduce homosexuality into Africa. However, there is no certainty that these rock paintings are of male-to-male sexual acts. The fact of the matter is that a history exists of African people in same-sex relationships. In, fact evidence suggests that it was the historical processes of colonization that consistently altered African sexual practices[10]. Western perversion has contributed to the dangerous homophobia in Africa. In June 2020, Botswana overturned colonial-era laws which

[8] Zulu people (plural).
[9]Umhlanga or the Reed Dance ceremony, is an annual Swazi and Zulu event where tens of thousands of unmarried and childless Swazi girls and women participate in the eight-day event as a means to encourage young Zulu girls to delay sexual activity until marriage. All girls are required to undergo a virginity test before they are allowed to participate in this royal dance (Masango 2008, p. 37).
[10] Beth Maina Ahlberg makes this point in her discussion of Kikuyu sexual practices; see "Is There a Distinct African Sexuality? A Critical Response to Caldwell," Africa 64(2):220- 41, 1994.

criminalised homosexuality, with the judge Michael Leburu declaring that “anti sodomy laws are a British import” and “were developed without the consultation of local people” (Buckle, 2020).

However, in countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, anything outside of the heteronormative binaries are causes for political persecution and personal violence. According to Finerty (2013, p. 434) in 2011, the Kenyan Human Rights Commission interviewed LGBTQ+ Kenyans in regions known to have a considerable LGBTQ+ presence to document the current discrimination and abuses that these Kenyans face. The findings indicate that Kenyans who form part of the LGBTQ+ community are harassed by state officials, subjected to physical violence and death threats, and generally stigmatized by their families and society at large as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Finerty 2013, p. 434).

Wanuri Kahiu’s *Rafki* (2018) is an understated portrayal on the reality of the lives of homosexual identities living in the country. The film goes beyond depicting a queer love; it also reveals the political and religious tensions that shape the couple’s relationship. *Rafiki* (2018) tells the story of Kena (Samantha Mugatsia) and Ziki (Sheila Munyiva), two young women from opposing political families who fall in love in the midst of all these forces against their relationship. *Rafiki* (2018) offers queer Kenyans a visual affirmation of a queer world which exists counter to the hegemonic heteronormative practices in the country (Johnstone 2020, p. 1).

While the film makes an important contribution to queer cinema in Africa, which has resulted in it being the first Kenyan film ever to premiere at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival (MacArthur 2019, p. 54), the film was banned in Kenya. *Rafiki* (2018) was banned by the Kenyan Film Classification Board as it contains homosexual scenes that are against the law and is said to ‘promote lesbianism’ (Peralta, 2019). However, Kenya's high court issued a

temporary injunction, allowing *Rafiki* to be screened for seven days, from the 23rd to 29th of September 2018, to be eligible for the 2019 Academy Awards (Peralta, 2018). Given this context, South Africa then provides a particularly important site of research when it comes to homosexuality in Africa because of the broader liberation struggle and how gay and lesbian issues are addressed in the country (Amory 1997, p. 6).

Homosexual characters did not exist in South African film narratives until 1987 (Ukadike 2014, p.75). The National Party, which was the ruling party of South Africa during the apartheid regime had very strict censorship laws and used their films to visualise their ideals. These ideals meant that South Africa could only produce films that would only promote the Afrikaner principles which were linguistic and racial purity, religious and moral norms (Ukadike 2014, p. 75). It was only in 1988, where the release of Cedric Sundstrom's thriller *The Shadowed Mind* (1988) and Helena Nogueira's lesbian love story *Quest for Love* (1988) promulgated the representation of homosexual characters in South Africa.

These films were the first of their kind in South Africa, however, the premise of *The Shadowed Mind* (1988) is centred on patients who suffer from sexual dysfunction which perpetuates harmful ideologies around homosexuality. On the other hand *Quest for Love* (1987) portrays cinematic visualizations of South African queer identities against the political backdrop of the country which provide powerful, complex themes that had to be explored unlike the portrayals in *The Shadowed Mind* (1988). Nevertheless, both were pivotal in challenging the hegemonic status quo that had been dictating the narratives allowed for South African films. They were banned for general release and festival screenings due to the politic climate of South Africa (Ukadike 2014, p. 76).

2.2.1 History of South African politics and governance

In order to understand the broader liberation struggle in South Africa, it is important to assess the context in which it got to that point. While the initial part of land dispossession began with annexation and division of territory, over time laws were enacted by both the Afrikaners and the British to remove African people from their land while merging areas of White settlement (Lambert 1995, p. 20). Thus, by the time the Land Act of 1913 was enacted, South Africa was already moving in the direction of spatial segregation through land dispossession. From 1856, the British South African politician, Theophilus Shepstone's imposition of hut tax brought in an average of £10,000 per annum for an otherwise weak colonial national treasury (Lambert 1995, p. 20). This meant that by the early 1870s, direct and indirect taxes charged to Africans were contributing towards this treasury, in fact Africans were contributing about three-quarters of the operating budget of the colonial government (Lambert 1995, p. 20).

In South Africa, the 1913 Land Act resulted in a forced change for black people due to the policy of separate development. The objective of the 1913 Land Act was in part to continue a process of adding land to the reserves, which the Natives Affairs Commission had begun (Smith 1992, p. 16). Here the bigger reserves made it possible for segregated living. Smith (1992) explains, "For most of the period since 1913, outside the reserves, much of the African population occupied land as tenants or squatters" (Smith 1992, p. 16). The 1913 Land Act was devastating in terms of the loss of land belonging to black South Africans. Farming could no longer sustain families so men had to look for alternate ways to support their families. With Paul Kruger continuing with the imposition of hut tax on locals, after kicking the British out of the Transvaal in the late nineteenth century, black men were forced to work on the gold mines as they did not have money to pay these taxes (Maloka 1997, p. 218).

At the gold mines, men stayed within close proximity to one another for extended periods of time, some were local and others were from neighbouring countries. Swidler (1993) points out that mine homosexuality existed as a result of male migrant labour to the mines, to which men were not permitted to bring their wives. Senior miners would take new miners as wives and teach them the ways of the mine and the nature of its work, and offer them protection in exchange for cooking and sexual favours. Social pressures and the threat of physical force did compel some young men to enter into such compound marriages (Swidler 1993).

Swidler (1993) maintains that the apartheid government was intolerant of homosexuality amongst whites as the practice was perceived as a threat to Afrikaner values and impacted negatively on procreation, essential for expanding the white race to maintain political dominance. South Africa's history and politics have influenced how hegemonic masculinity has shaped the country as a society. The country is extremely patriarchal because of cultural practices which have informed societal status quos. Everything is racialized due to the effects of segregation and apartheid as well as the wide split in gender disparities all of which, including cultural practices, have arguably normalised crime and violence in South Africa. All of these aspects have influenced the expression of homophobia and transphobia in this country and how these have impacted on pariah femininities.

In 1997, when the new Constitution came into effect, gay, lesbians and transgender people could finally practice their right to express their sexuality publicly, a freedom which was previously denied. Consequently, more and more people began to be open about announcing their sexual identities. It has been over twenty years into the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation yet homophobia is still rife in South Africa. Homosexuality, as Gunkel (2010, p. 25) mentions, has been considered as a western phenomenon. Since Karl-Maria Kertbeny, an Austrian born gay rights activist and journalist, coined the phrase 'homosexuality' in 1869, the term has been interpreted in

many different ways (Peron, 2016). The word being published in the West does not mean that homosexuality did not exist in other parts of the world. Gunkel (2010) quotes Foucault (1987) who points out, "the emergence of the 'homosexual' as a category of identity only became available through modern regimes of knowledge, constituted at the end of the 19th century in the West" (2010, p. 27).

In *African Sexualities: A Reader,* Sylvia Tamale (2011) offers an alternative reading as to why homosexuality has always been considered to come from the West.

> Part of colonial and racist assumptions about African sexuality involved defining Africans as 'natural' beings, whose instincts, it was felt, were wholly different from the sophisticated desires of Westerners. The colonialists called Africans less than human and uncivilised meaning they could not possibly be anything but heterosexual (Tamale 2011, p.207).

These assumptions were created to maintain white supremacy and they thrived because they demeaned Africans and created the notion that they were inferior to Westerners. The colonial misconception that Africans only mate for reproduction contributes to the misunderstanding that homosexuality exists only in the western world.

Reddy (2001) discusses the issues that arise from homophobia. Reddy (2001) writes, "First, the most common relates to fear of difference, of change and of variation" (2001, p. 83). Heteronormativity is not just a personal value system; it is used as a tool to maintain gender binaries. Any male who refuses to conform to the dominant masculine behaviour is labelled early on as effeminate. Similarly, women who oppose male dominance and control are seen as trying to be men and attacked. Secondly, Reddy (2001) mentions that, "Homosexuality was always considered a disorder. When 'discomfort' becomes hatred and an obsession, it leads to irrational acts of violence and exclusion" (2001, p. 83). This is done to maintain and reinforce our society's hierarchical gender structure. Thirdly, drawing on Alfred Kinsey

(Pomeroy et al, 1998) who stated that the majority of people have to some extent same-sex desire as sexuality is fluid and if that is correct then homophobia stands as a double fear. “It is the fear of the other, something outside of the ‘norm’ and secondly, the fear of oneself being the other” (Reddy 2001, p. 83). This could also be described as internalised homophobia.

These three reasons have been used to justify homophobic violence as a rejection of homosexuality as well as sexual fluidity that is not heterosexuality. It is through violence that homophobic attacks are used as a means to ‘control the spread’ by punishing - through corrective measures such as rape or even death - those that step out of the heterosexual norm, this despite the fact that the Constitution bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Gunkel (2010, p. 3) argues that this has not changed the bigoted part of society who are against people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI+). The plus ‘+’ is important because this acronym is inclusive of the fluidity of sexuality. Solely relying on the Constitution is not enough. To protect these members of society, strategies have to be created to develop agency amongst members of society, particularly those who can use their platforms (social media influencers, filmmakers and politicians) to educate and inform civil society to create intolerance of this discrimination (Reddy 2001, p. 86).

2.3 National Crisis

One such strategy to raise awareness and develop agency has been created by photographer and documentary filmmaker Zanele Muholi. The artist ensures black lesbian visibility by centring on love and loss, to suggest another way of seeing and perceiving the black

LGBTQI+ community, thereby disrupting the conventions of the male gaze (Bissonauth 2014, p. 241).



*Figure 1.*Muholi, Z. (2003) *'ID Crisis'*. Copyright 2006 by Tate Gallery.



*Figure 2.*Muholi, Z. (2003). *'Bra'*. Copyright 2006 by Tate Gallery.



Figure 3. Muholi, Z. (2004). *'Aftermath'*. Copyright 2006 by Tate Gallery.

2.3.1 Zanele Muholi

Muholi is a South African visual artist who explores gender, identity and sexual politics through the black lesbian, gay transgender and intersexed bodies. Muholi has taken more than 500 black and white portraits of members of the LGBTQI+ community and recorded their stories as part of an ongoing and probably life-long project to ensure that the marginalised are firmly kept in the public consciousness (Smith, 2019). The photographs above are drawn from Muholi's series *Only Half the Picture* (2006). *Only Half the Picture* is one of the many projects that the self-described visual activist has developed and exhibited that focuses on re-imagining the way we look at lesbian, bisexual and trans bodies. It is a body of work acclaimed for its simple but effective assertion of the identity of an often ignored, abused and fatally attacked group, within the LGBTQI+ community. Corrective rape discourse continues to shape the perspectives of Black South African lesbians thus in documenting African female and trans masculinity, Muholi attempts to

redefine lesbian and trans representations (Imma 2017, p. 221). These photographs are a starting point for my argument about gender politics in South Africa as they explore pariah femininities as a concept, through the gross marginalisation of black lesbian women and transgender persons.

In South Africa, black lesbian women are still denied entry into the public spaces and are punished for their same-sex desires and relationships. In *Thinking Through Lesbian Rape* (2004) Zanele Muholi shares why raising awareness about the realities of black South African queer women became her sole agenda. Muholi (2004) points out;

> The lived realities and experiences of lesbian-identified women, such as those living in and around urban townships, are still overwhelmingly dominated by a set of intersecting raced, classed and hetero-gendered politics that blur the lines between our apartheid past and our new Constitutional democracy (2004, p. 117).

2.3.2 Analyses

For purposes of describing the images above, I will define the people in the photos according to their sex assigned at birth and then proceed to use gender neutral pronouns. Figure 1 titled *ID Crisis* (2003) shows a young, black female standing in a room, next to a window. The window is a source of light coming into the room. They hold bandages in their[11] hands and have also wrapped the bandages around their breasts to press their breasts down. This is called binding. Binding is a technique used to minimize the appearance of a person's breast. Rowan Hepps Keeney explains on YouTube how some gender non-conforming individuals use compression under garments, known as binders, to create a flatter chest (*Here's the truth about binding* 2017, 00:00:13).

[11]Non-binary applies to a person who does not identify as "male" or "female". It is an identity outside of the gender binaries of masculinity and femininity. To refer to the female in figure 1 by the correct pronoun, I will refer to this person as *their/them/they*.

The individual in figure 2.1 is using a bandage instead of using a binding bra which indicates that they may not have the correct binding bra. I argue that this could be attributed the economic disparity that exists in South Africa which is not in favour of black South Africans. Bandages are also something associated with wounds and pain. The pain in figure 2.1 is associated with feeling alien in their own body, trying to hide their physiological realities and pain from not being accepted. The wounds on the other hands could have been inflicted by violent homophobia or the healing wounds. This individual is trying to disguise their anatomy because they are either a gender non-conforming individual or they are transgender. Either way, this person has to go through such extreme measures to express their gender identity.

Figure 2 titled *Bra* (2003) is framed to exclude the head and prompts the viewer to focus on the hairy chest and white lace bra. This person is not conforming to a binary regime of gender because they have broad shoulders, with a hairy chest but they are wearing a bra. Why do broad shoulders and a hairy chest have to signify masculinity? Why does a bra, long hair and breasts mean femininity? The gendering of body parts and bodily functions is a heteronormative binary— heterosexuality/homosexuality, and gender/sexuality – which erases transmen and intersex persons. The gender/sexuality binary made way for the normalising of a gender-conforming homosexual and anything outside that is atypical. There is gender conformity and a public privileging of heterosexuality that exists and demands that homosexuals pass as heterosexual (Rosenfeld 2009, p. 621). Figure 2 completely rejects this notion through its non-conformity.

Figure 3 titled *Aftermath* (2004) shows the body of a black female from just above the belly button down to their knees. There is a long scar underneath the hands on the right thigh. This woman wears underwear whose ‘Jockey’ logo (traditionally a range of men’s underwear, now with a women’s line) is clearly visible, a badge that might be read as

signifying lesbian identity (Van der Vlies 2012, p. 143). Their hands are clasped over their genitals. Although the scar is healed, it is a big scar which could indicate violence and it is especially evident in the way this person's hands are clasped over their genitals. The individual seems to be protecting themselves by shielding their genitalia. This individual appears vulnerable. This image speaks volumes about the reality black pariah femininities face in South Africa. There is targeted violence against those who display pariah femininities because they are experiencing violence not only as a form of gender-based violence, but also as a form of homophobia.

2.3.3 Statistics

Patriarchy functions on the persistence of fixed binaries – heterosexual versus homosexual, women versus men and femininity versus masculinity. It functions this way in order to combine masculine dominance within colonial and capitalist processes. The rape of black South African queer women relates to the disruption of these fixed binaries and the challenges posed by black queer women to the defining aspects of what makes an African woman. The rape of black lesbians reinforces African women's identity as heterosexuals, as mothers, and as women. Muholi (2004) recounts:

> Of the 47 women I have interviewed so far, 20 were raped explicitly because of their sexual and gender non-conformity, 4 experienced attempted rape, 17 were physically assaulted (3 with a weapon), 8 were verbally abused, and 2 were abducted. Twenty-nine women knew their attackers and only 16 survivors reported these hate crimes to the police. Many of these women experienced these hate crimes more than once (2004, p. 118).

The silence in many communities over the issue of hate crime has meant that it has at times been difficult to access women who experience gender based violence and homophobia.

The same violent acts that took place almost ten years ago are still taking place today. *Mamba Online* (2018) mentions, Noxolo Mabona, was stabbed to death during an altercation, allegedly related to her sexuality, at a party on the 1st of January. She allegedly became the focus of anti-LGBT comments from one of the male guests. He is alleged to have told her to "stop this [lesbian] business" and that she needed "to take a penis" (*Mamba Online*, 2018). An argument ensued and the man is alleged to have taken out a knife and stabbed Noxolo three times. Gunkel (2010) writes about an incident that took place in June 2009, where 37 year old Girly 'S'gelane' Nkosi was stabbed by two men in KwaThema and passed away a couple of days later due to internal bleeding. All these women were openly non-heteronormative.

These incidents reveal how Constitutional rights in post-apartheid South Africa do not protect persons inhabiting black pariah femininities. Media reports do not reveal accurate statistics because many of these cases go unreported, but these are not isolated cases. There have been many other incidents from the time gay and lesbian rights were added in the Constitution until now (Gunkel, 2010, p. 5). The publicised events that take place cannot compare to the many are not shown by the media. Gender-based violence is based on the desire to maintain power; heteronormativity maintaining its dominant position even in public, 'ungendered' spaces. The violence applies when women do not embody femininity correctly.

Tamale (2011, p. 407) explains how patriarchy can only stomach 'ugly' women if they keep their heads down and are content to be seen as ugly. She states that the reason women, unlike men, cannot be allowed to embrace their bodies and faces in all forms and shapes or even look however they do or want to look, is because if women are allowed to be 'ugly' and still think of themselves as wonderful, what is the use of patriarchy?

2.4 A masculine ideal

How does patriarchy affect men and how are they expected to perform their gender identities? The existence of a single, dominant masculine ideal implies that certain masculinities are privileged over others, leading to the marginalising of individuals that do not subscribe to that masculine ideal (Viljoen 2008, p. 314). From a young age boys are taught to abide by hegemonic standards to maintain an effective masculine identity as that is considered normal (Joseph and Lindegger, 2007). The concept of gender is still socialized into young children from the moment they are born which informs their behaviour growing up.

Masculinity is valued differently by various social groupings. Even within a single society, there are opposing ideas from one group of men to another about what it means to be a man. These opposing ideas are generated through the different ethnicities, cultures, religions, political affiliations and times (Ratele, Swart and Seedat, 2009). Whitehead (2002, p. 45) points out that studying gender or masculinity in the South African context is a doubly charged endeavour because of the history of racial inequality that defines this country. The racial hegemonies of South Africa led to multiple hierarchies of masculinity (Morrell et al., 2012, p. 21). Apartheid shaped the gender identities of men amongst the different races in South Africa. White men were put in compulsory national military service at the age of sixteen and in this space they were taught a collective masculine identity (Phillips, 2005). Du Pisani (2001) argues “Afrikaner nationalist governments used their political power to popularise new conceptions of masculinity which challenged English-capitalist versions which had previously dominated” (2001, p. 158). These ideals about masculinity that dominated among white, Afrikaner men differed from the ideals that black men had during apartheid. Masculine identity in South Africa is affected by the political shift from a patriarchal regime of oppression to a system that attempts to represent and

valorise the disenfranchised. In effect, white men have become the poster children for a past of infamous hostility and domination (Viljoen, 2008, p. 336).

The historically constructed social position of black males is accurately described by Mercer (1994) when he writes;

> Whereas prevailing definitions of masculinity imply power, control and authority, these attributes have been historically denied to black men since slavery. The centrally dominant role of the white male slave master in eighteenth and nineteenth century plantation societies debarred black males from patriarchal privileges ascribed to the masculine role(1994, pp. 142-143).

Black masculinity, in particular, is shaped by the history of black men having to remain subordinate to the white slave master, where they did not have access to any positions of power. During slavery and apartheid black men were viewed in very contradictory ways to dehumanise them. They were constructed as hyper masculine and as a potential threat to the white race and were simultaneously infantilised. This allowed the government to justify why African men and women should not have citizenship, and the ability to possess and use firearms during apartheid to weaken African men legally (Gunkel, 2010, p. 89). Although African traditions are inherently patriarchal and require black men to embody a masculinity that is sexist and patriarchal, the colonial and apartheid rhetoric imposed on black South African men was degrading so that they had to show their power in other places. This masculinity promotes violence all in the name of being a ‘real’ man, and values ideas of male sexual entitlement through polygamy and having multiple sexual partners who are women (Morrell et al, 2012. p. 17).

The former president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, epitomized this masculinity within his marriages and the charges against him. The Zuma rape case was an important reminder of the extent to which gender inequality in South Africa is rooted in class inequality and the

historical legacies of apartheid. Hassim (2009, p. 58) mentions Zuma said, the fact that she wore only a *kanga*[12] and sat in an immodest way led him to believe that she was willing to have sex. In his view, she was bringing the case as part of a political conspiracy against him. The court found that Khwezi was an unreliable witness and found Zuma not guilty (Hassim, 2009, p. 58).The trial held up a mirror to South African society. Former president Zuma had a large number of supporters who were outside the court dressed in traditional Zulu clothing and many men carried sticks, while women held up banners saying 'burn the bitch' as well as 'Zuma for President' (Hassim, 2009, p. 59), A president, who is a leader of a country, symbolised this problematic form of masculinity that has since been continued even after his presidency. However, it is important to note that this masculinity, especially polygamy, existed before apartheid, as a cultural norm and became even worse during and after in order to redeem South African black men from the infantilization they experienced before and during apartheid.

The mere existence of homophobia makes gay men, lesbian women and transgender people live in fear because they are outsiders within the dominant heteronormative system. At the root of homophobia is the perception that gay men allow themselves to be passive as they are on the receiving end of penetration (Gunkel, 2011, p. 93). Penetration is associated with heterosexuality and the sexual desire for women, 'through which potential to subordinate and control women is made apparent' (Maddison, 2000, 75). This then means that according to hegemonic masculinity the ability to penetrate is a signifier of dominance. Passivity being used as a marker of femininity and therefore deeming it as inappropriate gender behaviour for men just as the ability to penetrate is inappropriate for women.

[12]Printed fabric worn by both men and women in African regions.

The film *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), analysed in chapter four, explores homosexuality in homosocial settings. This takes place in a very hyper-masculine environment, the traditional initiation in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. According to Sedgewick (1985, p.1) homosocial refers to 'social bonds between persons of the same sex' be it a friendship or an acquaintanceship. These are therefore not necessarily sexual. Gevisser (1995) argues that homosexuality was common in particular male homosocial settings in South Africa. Gevisser (1995) uses the well-documented cases of sexual acts between mine workers, particularly during the apartheid era, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. According to Patron (1995), the miners lived in all-male compounds where it was very common for male sex-workers to visit the compounds. Also, relationships among the miners themselves were quite common. Patron (1995) calls this circumstantial homosexuality as it is based on the extenuating circumstances of an all-male setting. *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) exposes a different perspective in this homosocial environment. The outrage around the film is based on the fact that it exposes what takes place in the masculine cultural homosocial setting as well as homophobia against the subject matter, and will be further discussed.

First it is important to separate sexuality from gender, so that a person's gender does not assume what their sexuality is (Butler 2004, p. 55). There are variations in sex characterisations, which makes gender unstable. This is evident when we look at transgender people as they break down gender-determining sexuality and sexuality-determining gender. Intersex[13] also disrupts the 'natural' binary sex system. Therefore desire is deeply marked by sex and gender, and central to an analysis of sexuality and power (Steyn and Van Zyl 2009, p. 7).

[13]Intersex is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male (Preves, 2003).

Representation for minorities is always viewed as an act of defiance against the norm when all it is meant to do is to reveal that different kinds of people exist and not only what has been relayed to audiences over and over again by society, as the ‘norm’. Representation matters to show people that there are others just like them in society.

In the South African film industry, white males benefitted from the opportunities created during the repressive apartheid system that favoured the ruling class and as a result, the stories that were told favoured heteronormative practices. This chapter reviews why gender has been normalised for black people the way it has been in South Africa and in the next chapter I explore how this has affected the representation of black pariah femininities by exploring gender biases in the South African film industry.

Chapter Three

(Re)Presentation of Gender in the South African Film industry

3. Gendered background

Arguably, in the South African film industry a gender disparity exists, on screen and off-screen. The disparity is far more common on screen when it comes to the representation of queer women. One of its root causes stems from South Africa's history of segregation and apartheid. This complex history has affected the film industry in ways that resulted in the participation of certain groups from ethnic, gender and sexual orientation remaining minor, under represented and voiceless. According to the NFVF *Gender Matters Handbook* (2018, p. 7) a report done by the NFVF in 2009 shows that out of 55 feature films released in South Africa between 2000 and 2007, only six were directed by women, none written by women and only six were produced by women. African film researcher Dr. Lizelle Bisschoff also supports this by stating that, despite the fact that there are now as few women directors in the South African film and television industry their professional credibility is still undermined (Bisschoff and Van de Peer, 2019).

According to *Table 1* below, from the 9 South African films released in the first half of 2018, only two of them were directed by women and those films are *Nommer 37* (2017) by Nosipho Dumisa and *Meerkat Maantuig* (2018) by Hannake Schutte. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that the numbers for even smaller minority groups such as the LGBTQI+ community, are limited if not non-existent leaving room for the representation of sexuality to be grossly stereotypical as it is usually designed by heterosexual men.

Discourses on female sexuality asserted that a 'normal' woman had at best a reactive heterosexual desire, while female sexual deviancy was marked by increasing masculinity.

Thus to practice sexual liberation, women had to enter the male world, either as a heterosexual on male terms (a flapper[14]) or as a 'butch' lesbian (Newton 1984, p. 572). Newton (1984, p. 572) further argues that the butch lesbian represented what may be called, in Foucault's phrase, a 'reverse discourse' which is the declaration of sexual agency and feelings, but autonomous from men. As a result, queer representation was often coupled with weighted stereotypes of the deviant woman.

Dyer (1993) links representation and stereotyping by asserting that "how we are seen determines in part how we are treated, how we treat others is based on how we see us; such a view comes from representation" (1993, p. 1). According to Hall (1997) representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images that stand for or represent objects, events, ideas and people (1997, p. 17). Hall (1997) offers further useful considerations when he defines representation as "the process by which members of a culture use language to provide meaning" (1997, p. 61). From this articulation, he argues that representation cannot possibly be a fixed, unchangeable notion. While culture and language evolve and grow with human society, the same must be said of the perceptions of representations that are established within these cultures and languages.

[14] Flappers were independent American women who pushed barriers in economic, political and sexual freedom (Reinsch, 2013).

Table 1: Performance of SA produced films (2018)

Gross Box Office = Cumulative gross up to 27 July 2018

Movie (2018)	No. of weeks	No. of screens	GBO at release	Cumulative GBO
1. *Susters*	10	37	R1 012 632	R4 141 651
2. *Thys En Trix*	6	43	R604 343	R2 738 908
3. *Inxeba: The Wound*	10	19	R598 571	R1 950 353
4. *Raaiselkind*	4	33	R397 413	R1 978 783
5. *Five Fingers for Marseilles*	9	28	R501 866	R1 730 353
6. *Catching Feelings*	11	31	R307 012	R1 488 892
7. *Nommer 37*	6	42	R465 538	R1 408 967
8. *Wonderlus*	6	41	R442 553	R1 055 210
9. *Meerkat Maantuig*	3	33	R206 796	R713 195

Note. Adapted from

http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/SA%20Box%20Office%20Report%20_H1%202018_Final.pdf

Copyright (2018) NFVF, Ster-Kinekor, Box Office Mojo

3.1 Queer Visibility

Representations of queer people in film and television come with political, historical and social objectives. The main objective would be to create visibility as it impacts society overall with more awareness being created with diverse and balanced representations. Inclusive films that represent the LGBTQI+ community play a vital role in changing the under representation of this community. Rich (2013) explains how the inception of New Queer Cinema gave voice to the marginalised not simply in terms of focusing on the lesbian and gay community, but also on the sub-groups contained within it (2013, p. 99). These films

do not only defy the homophobic past but also frequently defy cinematic convention in terms of form, content and genre (Rich 2013, p. 100).

While giving voice to the marginalised, the unrevised form of New Queer Cinema was Eurocentric in its representation of queer people but has now journeyed from exclusivity to targeting an all-inclusive, new queer audience. In *Queer-ing the Screen: Sexuality and Australian Film and Television*, Searle (1997) mentions eight strategies of how to represent queer people. The first strategy would be visibility through acknowledging their lives on film as this has been historically absent due to censorship and social discrimination. The second would be documenting queer people's lives to show that queer people are present in society. Thirdly, what you present to the public is important therefore it is imperative to show everything in its purest form, from positive to negative images. The fourth strategy would be to study the impact of organised queer film cultures on the formation of identities and politics, this strategy requires mobilisation. Fifthly, access to the exhibition of queer films is important in order to promote the mainstream release of these films. The sixth would be a critical space created by queer cinematic cultures where communities and individuals can be exposed to texts that challenge and critique current queer cultural practices and offer images in which the audiences can recognise themselves and their lives. This offers self-recognition. The seventh strategy would be opening up these spaces to heterosexuals to familiarise and eventually diversify representation within queer communities and lastly films should offer pleasure to people; not everything should be produced with the intent of creating activists.

While these strategies have been employed by filmmakers, there is a hierarchy which favours gay men (Jones 1999, p. 280). Although a hierarchy of masculinities exists that resists and challenges homosexual men, one cannot deny that the platform that homosexual men have created for themselves was advanced by the fact that men are able to navigate their identity without the system of patriarchy hindering them. There is a noticeable lack of representation

of pariah femininities in the South African media and this has further marginalised this group. Images of lesbian women on screens could eliminate alienation to an extent, and to use real lesbian women instead of heterosexual actresses makes more of an impact. Peach (2005, p. 64) mentions how the cinema as a social institution has been seen by many activists and liberation theorists since the beginning of the gay and lesbian movements as a significant place of mobilisation and social formation that should not be ignored.

3.2 Creating queer spaces

Queer cinema is a powerful intervention when it comes to mass media as it challenges sexist, misogynist, homophobic and transphobic ideologies. In a 2011interview (Kriedemann, 2011) with Nodi Murphy, she mentions how in South Africa, the first *Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* (1994-2018) was used as a forum where the South African National Police outlined their new policies of protection for the queer communities as well as creating an atmosphere conducive to the establishment of the National Gay and Lesbian Coalition. On the other hand the *Durban Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* (2011-) festival programme continues to embrace and celebrate short film as powerful means of telling a diversity of stories, with high production values. Like the PRIDE[15] festival, the *Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* and the *Durban Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* became safe spaces that celebrate the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex + communities, by giving filmmakers and audience's access and exposure through these inclusive films.

Access to queer texts sounds simple enough, but in societies where there is no support for the existence of queer texts, often active policies to destroy them and negative attitudes towards queer texts, queer cinematic cultures are frequently fractured or forced underground (Peach

[15] A festival that celebrates the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex + communities.

2018, p. 67). The development of these queer film festivals meant a space was created for the presentation and support of more queer films. However, if no one outside of the LGBTQI+ community supports these films then it is as good as falling on deaf ears. There is no use teaching or exposing people to something they already know. Gender inequality seminars attended by women only does not change society. The same applies for Queer film festivals. Ruby Rich (1999, p. 82) suggests that between 80-90% of all the films shown in the queer film festivals globally are never seen anywhere else. There are three factors that I believe impact the representation of sexuality that filmmakers consider when making queer films. These are the mechanics of film language, funding and reception and the course of distribution.

3.3 Mechanics of film language

In specific genres, the arc of the story will follow a similar pattern which makes certain genres predictable. Although there will be differences in each film, the true essence of the story will remain similar; for example, the violent climaxes of war films and westerns and the happy endings of romantic comedies (Schatz, 1981). Schatz (1981) mentions how the world of genre films is predetermined by convention. Story arcs, character archetypes and cultural settings for each film are fixed in advance. Although there is the possibility of differences and changes, these are only ever treated as exceptions. Schatz's theory is mainly applicable to Classical Hollywood Cinema as film theory has evolved since the 1980s. This is important when it comes to art films or alternative cinema (New Queer Cinema) as the stories deviate from conventions especially in their depiction of the protagonist.

In *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), Xolani (Nakane Toure), the protagonist, ends up killing the real hero of the story, Kwanda (Niza Jay). *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), is ambiguous

as to how Des and Terry, who were once a happy couple, will move forward in their marriage while Shado and Asanda have to deal with the outcome of almost being ‘correctively’ raped, a reality many lesbians and transgender persons constantly face in South Africa. The trauma experienced by the characters in this event, without attaching a happy ending to the film, holds a mirror up to audiences about the gross inequalities that the LGBTQI+ community face in our society.

According to French film theorist Christian Metz (1974, p. 4), one of the important problems in film theory is the impression of reality experienced by the spectator. Films are not only lenses to other worlds; for some audiences it is almost as if they are experiencing what is happening in the film because they experience no disruptions in the story world. This is known as suspension of disbelief. It's that moment when a person who's consuming a piece of entertainment puts logic and reality aside for the sake of enjoyment (Ferri, 2007, p. 9). The concept of the willing suspension of disbelief lies at the foundation of the process of reception, for the audience.

An integral part of the process of reading a film is the use of stereotyping, the depiction of a character according to their perceived membership of a certain social group (Jones 1999, p. 280). Characters portray a certain type of person through behavioural patterns that are widely accepted. Rich (2013, p. 100) mentions that AIDS and death were always used as key signifiers for gay men in films as well as the portrayal of the androgynous gay man or lesbian woman. It is worth mentioning that even though they are marginalised, gay men are still at the forefront of New Queer Cinema because they have, on average, more spending power than women, despite equal opportunity legislation in many countries (Jones 1999, p. 280). Gay men have more products marketed for them. Since the seventies when the Gay Pride movement began, the gay community has become more visible by running their own safe spaces such as bars, cafes, shops, villages and events (Bömkes 2011, p. 187). As a result,

more film and television shows are aimed at them. Jones (1999) explains that lesbian film has only developed with the emerging women's movement and even so those films were less well-funded compared to films of gay men (1999, p. 280).

Dyer (2013, p. 89) argues that homosexuality is predominantly seen from a heterosexual viewpoint in most mainstream films. That is, lesbian couples are made to appease the male gaze in films. On the other hand, films representing homosexual men cater directly to homosexual men and are not meant to be appease heteronormativity except they are shot in a way that is palatable to heterosexual audiences and even so, these films are still only marketed to small audiences in South Africa. The production of these queer, inclusive films continue to take place mainly within the structures of alternative or art cinema (Jones 1999, p. 285). This is why *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) is such a revolutionary film for the South African LGBTQI+ community. However, *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) being one of the few mainstream queer inclusive films in South Africa reinforces the impression that gay men are at the forefront of New Queer Cinema.

3.4 Funding

South African box office reports indicate that the film industry is dominated by white male directors and that not enough films are produced locally to counter the number of international films that are screened at local cinemas, which is a further indication that both gender and race discrepancies are prevalent (Engel 2018, p. 16). There are processes that filmmakers need to follow in order to obtain funding for their films. The NFVF uses the tiered approach to funding 'to ensure that all levels of filmmakers, from emerging to experienced; benefit equitably from funding and programmes of the organisation' (NFVF 2017, p. 6). The three tiers are categorised as follows: Tier one is for filmmakers who have a

proven track record for developing and producing three to five feature films set to be released in theatres. Tier two are filmmakers with limited experience but who have developed and produced one to two theatrical feature films, television fiction, documentaries, two to three short films and/or commercials seeking to venture into feature film development and production. Tier three are the new entrants into the industry, particularly recent film school graduates from historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

This third tier funding approach is geared towards first time filmmakers being provided with a 'calling card' in the film industry. However, as white producers and directors were the majority that fell into tiers one and two as they had more experience in the South African film industry and, as a result, the NFVF introduced slate funding which is exclusively targeting previously disadvantaged groups. Black owned and managed companies or female owned and managed companies are most eligible with the exception of any small company with a proven track record of delivery (NFVF, 2015). The National Film and Video Foundation and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) launched the Emerging Black Filmmakers Transformation Fund (EBFTF) in 2014, inviting emerging black filmmakers to submit proposals for consideration. The EBFTF provides financial, marketing and other related support to emerging black filmmakers. The fund is specifically established for black filmmakers with limited experience, but who have developed and produced one to two theatrical feature films, television fiction and/or non-fiction, two to three short films and/or commercials seeking to venture into feature film development and production (NFVF 2018). The EBFTF also aims to develop and increase the number of films produced by emerging black filmmakers, as well as create a sustainable funding model with commercially viability films that get a return on investment (NFVF, 2019).

Bisschoff (2009, p. 38) describes the "limitation imposed by lack of access to financial resources" as one of the key reasons why there are fewer female directors, particularly black

female directors, who make fiction feature films in South Africa. With the absence of black female directors comes the gap in representation of black women as protagonists in South African mainstream films because, debatably, as an artist it is easier create authentic work that relates to you in some form or another. *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) and *Happiness is a Four Letter Word* (2016) raised questions as to why they would have a white man (John Trengove) directing a film about Xhosa culture and a black man (Thabang Moleya) directing a film about three black women. The lack of access to financial resources results in local filmmakers seeking funding abroad and this, in turn, impacts on the content of South African films and also on who directs them. I argue that South African film festivals aim to be more representative of female filmmakers with stories that represent the marginalised groups while local distribution companies like Ster-Kinekor and NuMetro as well as independent distributors such as Videovision Entertainment and Indigenous Film Distribution select films that will appeal to a certain audience from a specific marketing demographic.

Pugsley (2012, p. 8) states that the audiences have the assumption that the topics female directors focus on are, "often dealing with issues central to women's lives" and are not deemed as interesting as the films made by men. Film festivals like The Durban International Film Festival and Encounters International Film Festival are also trying to help build audiences for post-apartheid cinema, but Engel (2018, p. 21) mentions that the largely white, middle to upper-middle class demographic that can afford the film tickets and that has easy access to the venues where these film festivals are being held does not allow for an inclusive South African audience experience. Female directors receive funding for films addressing specific 'female themes', such as polygamy, domestic abuse or female genital mutilation (Pugsley 2012, p. 8). The NFVF (2018, p. 11) claims that many female African filmmakers have ended up directing projects that are sponsored by international bodies, such as NGOs

and aid agencies, where they do not have much control over the content and artistic interpretation over the films.

3.5 Reception and course of distribution

Astrid-Treffry-Goatly (2010) argues that South African feature films are produced with the intention of appealing to an international market. Our mainstream films will therefore include international actors and actresses to attract audiences and, most importantly, investors across the board. The South African film industry has a vision of empowering the previously disadvantaged (i.e. black people) and being culturally diverse but it becomes difficult to fulfil that when trying to appease international markets. Treffry-Goatley's (2010) thesis illustrates that this need to gain international audiences impacts the production, distribution and consumption of South African cinema. While this is still true, one has to consider that Treffry-Goatley's thesis was written ten years ago.

South African films that are meant to cater to an international market are far more expensive to produce than those targeting local audiences. With large budgets, one would expect the films to make even larger returns in the box office but in South Africa it is much more difficult. This is because when it comes to distributing the films, South African film makers need to meet international standards with casting, the narrative structure, the production design, and the crew needed to produce the films (Botha 2012, p. 249). This becomes evident when it comes to the actual storyline, locations and wardrobe because a very stereotypical representation of an African will be represented as that is the world's perception on Africa. Botha (2012, p. 250) argues that the NFVF might preach a discourse of diversity and freedom but in practice they tend to support a rather fixed, corrective paradigm of multiculturalism that steers away from experimentation and freedom in cinematic production. According to

their mandate the NFVF encourages filmmakers to tell authentic South African films but those that have universal themes that will appeal to global audiences as well and in that way the industry will grow internationally (NFVF, 2017).

In an attempt to increase the amount of women in key positions in the South African film and television industry, as well as focusing exclusively on the common concerns and shared experiences of women within this industry came the inception of non-profit organization Sisters Working in Film and Television (SWIFT). There is a strong need for uniting women within the South African film and television industry as well as gender diversity and this is where SWIFT has come in (NFVF, 2018).

3.6 Empowering women in film

A report produced in 2014 by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in the Media reveals that the percentage of female speaking characters in top grossing films has not meaningfully changed in roughly half a century (NFVF 2018, p. 4). In these top-grossing films women (heterosexual, homosexual, cis-gendered and transgender) are often stereotyped or sexualised when they are depicted in mainstream films. The Report on Gender Equality for Directors in the European Film Industry (NFVF, 2018) shows that inequality is being maintained by a combination of factors, including the competitive habits of the marketplace, contemporary industry structures, the impact of new technologies and false assumptions about women's abilities and business risk (NFVF 2018, p. 5). The obstacles preventing women from thriving both on-screen and off-screen according to the NFVF include gender bias in the industry, the struggle for funding (as mentioned above), risk aversion on the part of investors, lower share of broadcasting funds for female directors and low representation of women on commission and funding panels.

In an attempt to achieve its mandate (in Section3b of the National Film and Video Foundation Act 1997) “to provide, and encourage the provision of opportunities for persons, especially from disadvantaged communities, to get involved in the film and video industry” the NFVF introduced a Female Filmmaker Slate project in 2014 (NFVF 2018, p. 5). The programme is an effort by the Foundation to correct the disparity between men and women in the film industry. The project, three years after its inception, has yielded 26 short films written and directed by females that have been broadcast on SABC 1, as licensed by the South African Broadcasting Service.

In addition to the Female Filmmaker Slate project there have been a number of interventions at different levels that have begun to address gender inequality in the South African film industry. Some of those interventions include the establishment of Sisters Working in Film and Television (SWIFT). SWIFT aims to protect and advance the development of women in South African Film and Television. The organisation was created by women, for women. Other interventions include Women of the Sun, a South African advocacy group which committed itself to making it possible for the female filmmakers to participate, and Women in Film and Television South Africa, founded at the end of 2005 as a Section 21 organisation. This is to focus on networking and skills development in its aim to improve women’s rankings in the industry (NVFV 2018, p. 6).

Of the four organisations and their initiatives mentioned (Female Filmmaker Slate Project, SWIFT, Women of the Sun and Women in Film and Television South Africa), the SWIFT organisation is the only one that continues to make its mark in the industry. Another initiative developed by the NFVF is the Female Filmmaker Project which is a programme established to increase opportunities for emerging writers and directors to have their work developed by reputable production companies (NFVF 2018, p. 9). The female filmmaker project provides women from historically disadvantaged backgrounds with an opportunity to make a film in

collaboration with other mentors. The aim of the project is to nurture, support and promote female filmmakers in South Africa through strategically developed training laboratories and workshops and to seek out remarkable storytellers and develop regionally based filmmaking talent, which will bring a new perspective to the South African and ultimately all African audiences. This initiative is a valuable intervention because it also assists production companies in identifying and producing films that could impact audience awareness in South African and international markets. According to the NVFV (2018, p. 9) it is currently the only programme with the aim of correcting the disparity between men and women within the film industry through the up skilling of female filmmakers, particularly writers and directors from a previously disadvantaged background, and mentoring them through their first short films. Building on the insights presented in this chapter, the next chapter will analyse the films *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) and *Kanarie* (2018) as well as the politics surrounding the release of these films.

CHAPTER 4

Analysing the Case Studies

4. Film analysis

Petrie and Boggs (2011, p. 4) point out that a film can focus on the surface realities and the purely sensual, or it can delve into the intellectual and philosophical. These properties that make film the most powerful and realistic of the arts also make the analysis challenging. Film moves continuously in time and space. Therefore, film analysis requires us to respond simultaneously to the different images presented, through sound and movement on the screen. In this chapter I do a reading of the following films, *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) and *Kanarie* (2018). Comparing and contrasting the chosen case studies through the lens of thematic concerns and the politics of representation provides a contextual analysis on how the history of gender and sexuality in South Africa affected the release and reception of these films. These case studies also demonstrate how manhood compared to womanhood is seen as a state requiring continuous social validation.

4.1 *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017)

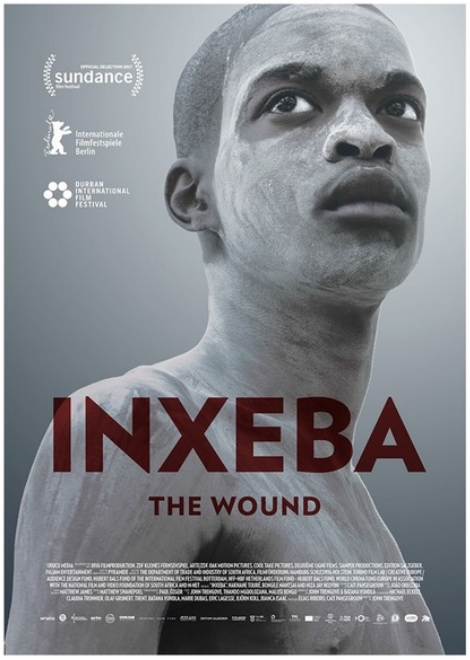


Figure 4. Inxeba: The Wound film poster.

4.1.1. Thematic investigation

Inxeba: The Wound (2017), directed by John Trengove, is a critically acclaimed South African film. The film received a number of accolades including Best Film at the following international film festivals; Sarasota, Taipei, Outfest, World Cinema Amsterdam, Valencia International and the Torino LGBTQI Film Festival (The Wound, 2019). *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) also received a South African Film and Television Award (SAFTA) for Best Feature Film, Best Achievement in Scriptwriting, Best Achievement in Directing and Best Actor. John Trengove's feature film directorial debut explores the ideas of masculinity and repressed sexuality at a South African isiXhosa initiation ritual. For the 90th Academy Awards (the Oscars), *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) was one of 92 films that was submitted for the Best International Feature Film, formerly known as the Best Foreign Language Film category prior to 2020 (Killday 2017; Wilkonson 2020). In order for the film to become a

potential Best Foreign Language Film nominee, *Inxeba: The Wound* was required to play for at least one week in South African theatres.

However, the public screening of the film drew severe criticism, and this mainly came from audiences from the Eastern Cape which is a historically Xhosa speaking province. The film, being centred on a sacred Xhosa tradition along with its depiction of homosexual characters, subjected it to heavy criticism in South Africa, resulting in the eventual banning of the film. Yet, following a court ruling the film was later re-released. A hierarchy of masculinities exists, originating from the violence and prejudice that straight men impose on homosexual men (Connell and James 2005, p. 831), which formed part of the resistance to *Inxeba: The Wound.* The hierarchy places cis-genderered[16], heterosexual men at the top then homosexual and transmen/non-binary persons at the bottom. However, while this hierarchy of masculinities exists, one cannot deny the platform that homosexual men created for themselves was facilitated by the fact that men are able to freely negotiate an identity for themselves without the system of patriarchy greatly holding them back compared to lesbian women. Homosexual men embody what Connell (2000) refers to as subordinate masculinities. When held up against hegemonic masculinity as the ideal, subordinate masculinities serve as the inferior 'other'.

Inxeba: The Wound (2017) examines masculinity through its focus on Xolani, an initiate caregiver,[17] and how he navigates his life *entabeni* (the mountain), where the sacred Xhosa initiation ceremony *ulwalukho* takes place. For the Xhosa nation, *ulwaluko* has been and still is regarded as a sacred and necessary step toward real 'manhood' (Manona and Hurst 2018,

[16]A person whose personal identity and gender is directly related to their birth sex.
[17] A person with a medical background who is assigned to look after the young men during this period of seclusion, in order for them to heal successfully after circumcision.

p. 3). Here, the young boys are taken to the mountains where they are taught how to be a man, according to Xhosa tradition.

Xolani has been having an affair with his fellow caregiver, Vija, who is now married to a woman. When Xolani's initiate, Kwanda discovers this, he pressurizes Xolani to live his truth instead of constantly hiding. Vija becomes intimidated by Kwanda's open display of his sexuality and begins to feel even more threatened when he finds out that Kwanda wants to reveal his and Xolani's affair. As a result he resorts to violently attacking Kwanda, forcing him to go into hiding. When Xolani finds Kwanda, he discovers that Kwanda is still insistent on telling the truth and this then ends up with Xolani pushing Kwanda off a cliff which kills him.

One of the main themes of the film draws on a cultural interpretation of manhood in the Xhosa tradition and because it is cultural practice, manhood rests on specific reproductions which perpetuate and maintain violent masculinities through ascribing to notions of virility and sexual prowess (Schneider, Cockroft and Hook 2008). In the film, an incident that displays the effects of toxic masculinity takes place when Vija wants to kill Kwanda for asking if his wife knows about his affair with Xolani. Another incident is the final exchange between Xolani and Kwanda. Xolani pleads with Kwanda not to speak about what he discovered at the mountain, which leads to him to kill Kwanda as he fears being exposed. Throughout the film we witness the conflict Xolani and Vija experience as their only opportunity to be together is during the initiation ceremony, but everything about the space that they are in, known as *entabeni*, strongly enforces heteronormativity.

For the Xhosa nation, the transition to manhood for boys is marked by a ritual called *ulwaluko*, also known as traditional male initiation for boys between the ages of 16 and 26 and takes place in the *entabeni* space (Ntozini and Ngqangweni 2016, p. 1309). *Ulwaluko* is

regarded as a sacred and necessary step toward proper or real ‘manhood’. In this ritual, Manona and Hurst (2018, p. 3) explain, the male child must undergo the circumcision rite as a transitional period into manhood, and the expectation thereafter is to become a father. This ceremony acts as preparation for the young Xhosa boy to begin adult and family responsibilities as a man. In Xhosa culture, the idea that men are made, not born, is taken quite literally. These boys are trained in the traditions and customs of their forefathers, in order to accept power within their communities and broader society (Manona and Hurst 2018, p. 3).

How the film explores the culture of the Xhosa initiation ceremony is what makes the film appeal to an international market. According to the Gauteng Film Commission (GFC, 2017), *Inxeba: The Wound* was described by Variety magazine, an American media company, as a milestone in South African cinema. Part of the film’s success is evident in this exploration of multiple and intersecting spaces, of representative stories – stories that reveal the possibilities as well as the impediments to freeing up sexuality as a black gay man. Kiguwa and Siswana (2018, p. 3) describe how the film envisions the effects of holding a heteronormative society in place – whether it is in the constant sense of surveillance and threat of being found out, or in the emotional economies of shame and fear that are part of “non-normative” sexual practice. *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) reveals the patriarchal and heteronormative society to audiences as a false one. Kwanda’s constant refusal to conform to societal standards sets him up as the character who represents gay men with an established identity.

4.1.2 Semiotic analysis

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been helpful in explaining gender power structure inequalities as well as the ways in which social, racial and class differentiation produces

different forms of masculinity. In this instance, black masculinity, especially in poor township settings is based power on violent gender relations. *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) signifies these power gender relations by portraying aspects from the lives of men, who like Xolani (Nakhane Touré), Vija (Bongile Mantsai) and Kwanda (Niza Jay Ncoyini) live in a society where non-heterosexual sexual desire is not only taboo, but governed as part of the disciplinary and regulatory practice of sexuality and masculinity. There is a rural versus city dichotomy that all these characters display, especially regarding how they navigate around their sexuality at the mountain. Xolani's character in particular lives a very dormant life in the city, which is portrayed in the silence of the entire first sequence. All the character does is go to work, comes back, sleeps, and repeats this pattern until he goes *entabeni*. Society has imprisoned Xolani into this state of silence and a manifestation of that silence shows itself in the final scene when he kills Kwanda.

The attack on gays is often accompanied by their social visibility. It is because of this that Vija and Xolani decide to live a closeted life. Closet refers to a life shaping pattern of homosexual concealment, where individuals hide their sexuality in the most important areas of life (Seidman 2004, p. 25), because the system of patriarchy favours heteronormative gender performativity. On the other hand, Kwanda is seen as defiant because of his visibility and as a result he is subjected to discrimination and violent acts, which is a reality for the LGBTQI+ community in South Africa. The idea of being able to follow tradition against choosing your own path something that comes through very strongly in *Inxeba: The Wound.*

4.1.3 Politics of representation

We learn early in our particular society that to be a 'man' is not to be homosexual. Male homosexuality has been stigmatized for several centuries as effeminate, an inversion of

gender and ‘unmanly’ (Weeks 2009, p. 58). This stigmatization has made the act of coming out a very significant and brave act for the LGBTQI+ community. Wang (2007, p. 235) describes how, in social sciences and humanities, the constructionist approach and queer theory have dominated when it comes to homosexuality because, while the social constructionist approach rejects the notion of being born homosexual, queer theory claims that sexuality is inborn. Seidman (1996, p. 9) sheds light on the fact that social constructionist studies of homosexuality claim that it is social factors and influences that shape homosexual identity whereas Butler (1993) uses queer theory to argue how gender has been shaped and influenced by society but not sexuality. Butler (1993) demonstrates how anything that includes binary social categories such as man/woman, male/female and homosexual/heterosexual, has been sustained through gender performativity. The difficulty for social constructionism lies in its treatment of the coming-out individual as already homosexual who needs to negotiate a certain identity, while for the queer theorist the trouble comes with being out as a homosexual in a heteronormative environment. Queer theory can be invoked to accurately unpack how Xolani navigated around the mountain as a gay man.

Even if *Inxeba: The Wound* fails in its representation of *ulwaluko,* the rich cultural practice and the complexities it comes with, the film is successful in its exploration of the deeply entrenched, hyper-masculine space of *entabeni* and the practice of *ulwaluko* in itself. In this cultural practice the process of ‘becoming a man’ is shown to be a process of constant surveillance and punishment of those who fail to adhere to heteronormative behaviours (Kiguwa and Siswana 2018, p. 6).

Heteronormativity has been used to engage those practices producing subjects/subjectivities centred on binary assumptions of sex and gender. Such binary assumptions reinforce the view of (exclusively) two sexes and two genders; with romantic and sexual attraction pertaining to

opposition between these two genders and sexes. Any configuration of gender, sex and sexual attraction that fails to meet this binary mode is considered to be unnatural and deviant.

4.1.4 Policy regarding regulation and funding of films

South African English and Xhosa-language films are usually about the former president of South Africa Nelson Mandela, who grew up in a small village in the Eastern Cape where isiXhosa is one of the main languages spoken in this province, which itself provides the viewer with one ideal of 'Xhosa masculinity'. However, *Inxeba: The Wound* deviates from this ideal and depicts the experience of a homosexual Xhosa man during the initiation period. In the *Mail and Guardian* (2014) a review for another Trengove film *iBhokwe*, Ngubane (2014) mentions the stories of young men who live double lives as out-of-the-closet gays in Johannesburg, but are completely closeted in their communities back home in the Eastern Cape.

The story told in *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) is not an isolated one, but one that has been experienced by a number of gay Xhosa men. These experiences go untold, thus making this film a first of its kind in that it showcases the stories of the largely under-represented LGBTQIA+ community. Responses to the film varied with the queer community embracing this particular narrative while the Xhosa nation's cultural leaders felt that the film disregarded their tradition by revealing the sacred practices of *ulwaluko*. This is one of the main reasons, along with homophobia, why there were objections to the film with a major uproar including nationwide protests and cinema shutdowns (Williams 2017).

The *Cape Argus* reported that, a week after the film was released in theatres, traditional leaders called for the film to be banned and for film-makers to issue a public apology for portraying their traditions as 'barbaric' (Lepule 2018). This resulted in screenings of the film being cancelled at some cinemas and film festivals, and threats of violence against those who

went to watch the film. When the Film and Publication Board[18], a board that was created to fulfil the role of screening and rating films, took the decision to ban *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), it left many marginalised people in South Africa voiceless. In an online article for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), Williams (2017) writes, "The FPB has banned the film saying that it contains 'classifiable elements of sex, language, nudity, violence and prejudice'. The film has now been classified as an X-rated film with an age restriction of 18" (Williams, 2017).

For one, the restriction of access to the film limits queer voices, experiences and narratives that are already under-represented within mainstream media. This move suggests an unbalanced culture of censorship that threatens the Constitutional laws that have been put in place to recognise and protect the LGBTQIA+ community. Williams (2017) claims the reasons cited for the banning of the film were also indicative of its "pornographic nature", which begs the question whether the Board is not selective in its application of what constitutes pornography. When compared to other recent releases that contain explicit heterosexual sex scenes, this is a double standard applied by the board as those films were never banned from being screened in local cinemas. If the Board's decision is solely being informed by the fact that this is a gay love story, then it exposes deep-seated homophobia that will continue to inform our ideas around masculinity and, subsequently, deny queers their humanity (Williams 2017).

Censorship was one of the strategies used by the apartheid government to control the content of films and television shows and it made a comeback in South Africa with the X18 classification of the film, a rating which is usually reserved for hard core porn (Maasdorp

[18]The purpose of the FPB is to regulate the creation, production, possession and distribution of certain publications, games and films by means of classification, the imposition of age restrictions, and giving of consumer advice, and further makes the use of children in and the exposure of children to pornography punishable (FPB, 2019).

2018). *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) is not pornographic as it did not contain explicit sex scenes and shots of genitalia. The decision to ban the film, in my opinion, had more to do with pressure from homophobic Xhosa cultural leaders.

However, once the film was only screened at selected and limited South African cinemas, traditional leaders said they would only be happy if the film was completely banned. In a *Cape Argus* interview, Chief Lungelo Nokwaza, the Chairperson of the Council of Nguni People, said, while they condemn any threats of violence against the film-makers, they will not change their stance on the film (Lepule 2018). Chief Lungelo Nokwaza mentions;

> If our culture was portrayed the right way, there would not be so much outrage; the depiction of some practices in there also portrays us to the world as barbaric people who beat up young boys; all sorts of things that are not true. When all of this is over, it should serve as an example to anyone else who would want to ridicule our culture for popularity. It will be dealt with (Lepule, 2018).

As a result, the limited screening of *Inxeba: The Wound* impacted the release of the film and its box office earnings. Aside from the outrage caused by homophobia and the depiction of a sacred ceremony many of the complaints were because, according to Manona and Hurst (2018, p. 8), it was said that *Inxeba: The Wound* was told from a European perspective which is an infringement on a cultural issue that many hold as one of the last remaining traditional practices that Xhosa people can claim as their own. This was especially in reference to the film being directed and co-written by John Trengove, a white man.

While the cultural practice of *ulwaluko* has taken place over many years, due to *iingcibi*[19] not being medical professionals, it has led to the deaths and hospitalisation of initiates due to botched circumcisions (Zuzile, 2019).

> Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital head of urology Dr. Mbuyiselo Madiba has called for traditional circumcision in the Eastern Cape to be banned for a year and replaced with medical circumcision. With just three weeks into the summer circumcision season, 18 boys have died, compared to the 17 deaths during the winter season (Zuzile, 2019).

The same kind of urgency traditional leaders had when they rallied for the ban of the film *Inxeba: The Wound*, should be the same energy they employ to conduct safe circumcision for their initiates. However, it is arguably the homophobia of traditional leaders that motivated them to go to these extents just to ban a film.

[19] Traditional surgeons

4.2 *While You Weren't Looking* (2015)



Figure 5. While You Weren't Looking film poster.

4.2.1 Thematic investigation

While You Weren't Looking (2015) is not subtle in its representation of queer politics among lesbian women, from the sex scene at the beginning of the film, to images of how Zanele Muholi's work challenges binaries of sexuality in gender. The film makes it apparent that the aim is to challenge the lack of representation of South African lesbian women in films. Its representations of sexuality, women and womanhood create room for these new voices and present a deviation from South Africa's usual feature film narrative expressing South Africa's political and social past.

The film *While You Weren't* Looking, directed by Catherine Stewart, follows an affluent lesbian couple Dez (Sandi Schultz) and Terri (Camilla Waldmon) and how they navigate around infidelity in their relationship while simultaneously dealing with their rebellious daughter, Asanda (Petronella Tshuma). Asanda ends up getting into a relationship with Shado (Thishiwe Ziqubu), a non-binary person, who comes from a very humble background. While this film attempts to break barriers by portraying a much underrepresented group in South

African film, it was only seen at a smaller scale compared to *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), as it only screened at festivals such as *Out in Africa* (1994-2018) and the *Durban Gay and Lesbian* (2011-).

Although the *Out in Africa* and the *Durban Gay and Lesbian* film festivals promote filmic representation of the LGBTQI+ community, it is important to note that the *Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian* film festival no longer exists. The *Durban Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* director Jason Fiddler mentions that the main aim of this festival is to showcase well-made all-inclusive films (Pillay, 2017). However, there still remains a lack of representation of lesbian women in South African films.

It could be argued that lesbian films are made to satisfy both the female and male audiences as these films are made to look desirable to both heterosexual men through the male gaze and to homosexual women, by creating characters who act as ambiguous lesbian representations that allows them to be fetishized. Film theorist Laura Mulvey (1989, p. 62) discusses how women's appearances are coded with strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness'. In looking at the sex scenes between both couples (Dez and Terri; Asanda and Shado) and comparing them to how Vija and Xolani were depicted in the film *Inxeba: The Wound*, the lesbian scenes have a higher erotic value to heterosexual viewers. This is achieved by the way in which these scenes are blocked, as well as the shots used and the editing. In *While You Weren't Looking* the first sex scene of the film takes place during the day time in a well-lit room. The women's bodies, particularly Terri, who is the 'feminine presenting' partner in her relationship with Dez, is fully revealed in the wide shots. The close ups are of her breasts and Dez's hands moving around her body. While Asanda and Shado's sex scene solely focuses on Shado's vulnerability around their[20] body.

[20] Gender neutral term to refer to the character of Shado.

On the other hand, while the first sex scene in *Inxeba: The Wound* also takes place in day time, Vija and Xolani are in a very dark cave in which audiences can only see a silhouette of their bodies together, in wide shots. Close up shots are of their arms and legs, which could either play as an aesthetic choice that refers to the narrative of their secret relationship or a gay sensibility tactic that the filmmakers deliberately used to ensure it is palatable to a heteronormative audience (Jones, 1999).

4.2.2 Politics of representation

While You Weren't Looking (2015) involves an exploration of life within the lesbian community. Although it centres on Asanda and Shado's romance, the story is placed firmly within the context of an exploration of lesbian lifestyles and friendship networks. As a result, this film is not only a lesbian love story but also a celebration of the queer community. *While You Weren't Looking* is presented to the female spectator, who is offered empowerment as an active desiring female subject, because it challenges the male gaze by presenting a new female relationship to desire. Hollinger (1998, p. 12) refers to this as the "lesbian look" which requires an exchange; he explains that the lesbian look seeks for a returning look, not just a receiving look, by setting up two-directional sexual activity.

Shado's complexities lie within their gender as they never explicitly define their gender, but is constantly referred to as woman, by their neighbours despite Shado's efforts at binding their breasts and covering up in loose fitting clothing. *While You Weren't Looking* does not go further than displaying her relationship with Asanda and their class differences. However, in the beginning of the film Shado's brother warns them about men in the community plotting to attack them with regards to their gender ambiguity. Shado is eventually attacked when two men break into their home to get her brother to pay his debt to them. One of the men

threatens to rape Shado and just as he is about to his partner reprimands him to remind him that their purpose for this break in is to get the money that is owed to them.

Rosenfeld (2009, p. 621) explains how the gender/sexuality binary paved the way to normalise a gender-conforming homosexual, something that Shado does not follow. Their choice is to be gender 'transgressive' and as a result she is in danger. There exists a construction of an acceptable homosexual, based on their adherence to heteronormativity, specifically, gender conformity that allows homosexuals to pass as heterosexual. According to Wang (2007, p. 237) the term queer occupies a position that integrates the various marginal or transgressive - in this case – gender and sexual identities. I argue that Wang is correct in saying that this concept of queer serves as a master signifier[21] as it is fully inclusive.

4.2.3 Gender theory

It is important to locate homophobia within the context and understanding of how South African feminism navigates around the cultures and politics of the country. Women's constant fight against their subordination is connected to other systems of oppression that are prevalent in South Africa. Homophobia, as a form of gender oppression, poses a threat to hegemonic masculinities (Reddy 2001, p. 84). In South Africa the terms lesbian and gay are much more popular than the term queer – which is an umbrella term - because South Africa does not have a historically visible queer community as it is still in the process of identity formation within the LGBTQI+ community (Peach 2005, p. 45).

[21] Semiotics is concerned with signs and their relationship with objects and meaning. Signs are composed of a signifier and a signified in which the signifier is the sound associated with or image of something (e.g., a shoes), the signified is the idea or concept of the thing (e.g., the idea of a shoe). The sign is the relationship between the concept and the representation of that concept (Barthes 1968).

4.2.4 Policy regarding regulation and funding of films

According to IMDb (2015), the film *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) was funded by the NLDTF (National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund) and rebated by the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry). *While You Weren't Looking* is categorized as an art film for four of the following reasons. Firstly, it was given a limited released as it was only screened at the Durban International Film Festival and the *Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*. Secondly, the content and style of the film is the director, Catherine Stewart's individual creative vision[22]. Thirdly, the film has a dark edge through its portrayal of the attempted rape of Shado, shown in the final act of the film. The idea behind this dark edge comes from the opinion that "good independent films should make the viewer uncomfortable, disturbed and destabilized" (Ortner 2013, p. 62) and, especially, because the rape of all women, specifically the 'corrective' rape of lesbian women is a reality in South Africa. According to the WHO[23], South Africa has the fourth highest femicide[24] rate. In an article in *The South African*, Head (2019) writes;

> The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 12.1 in every 100 000 women are victims of femicide in SA each year – a figure which is over 100 times worse than Italy in their newly-announced "state of crisis", and five times worse than the global average of 2.6 (Head, 2019).

In another article by *News24* (2019), widely shared online, it was reported that a woman is murdered every four hours in South Africa. That statistic was correct between April and

[22] On the SABC 2, Morning Live news interview, film director Catherine Stewart talks about telling a story that has not being seen on mainstream cinema and wanting the diversity of the country (South Africa) to be evident in the film.
[23] World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations that is concerned with international public health.
[24] StatisticsSA (2019) defines femicide as: "The intentional killing of females (women or girls) because they are females."

December 2016 and according to the most recent data from 2017/18, a woman is murdered every three hours in South Africa (Wilkinson, 2019).

Lastly, the film is diverse in representations of race, sexuality and class. In South African films a diverse cast is normal as this accurately represents the demographics of the country with the exception of films based on a specific group. For example, *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) is a film based on the Xhosa culture therefore it only has isiXhosa speaking characters. *Kanarie* (2018) is a film set in 1985, where diverse spaces were illegal. Even though independent filmmakers hope, and they certainly have to persuade their financial backers, that their films will find an audience they are finally ready to forget about the audience if necessary (Ortner 2013, p. 51).

4.3.*Kanarie* (2018)



Figure 6. Kanarie film poster.

4.3.1 Representation of the heterosexualization of the military

Although *Kanarie* (2018) explores Johan Niemand's (Schalk Bezuidenhout) journey of self-acceptance, it remains the story of an Afrikaner, homosexual, young man who ends up in the army's choir division where he experiences suffering to gain acceptance. Johan Niemand tries to keep his head down and not draw attention to himself, while battling with his feelings for a fellow soldier (Hannes Otto).The film takes place in 1985 South Africa, when the apartheid regime was still sending young conscripts to the Border War. The choir division fulfilled their duties by travelling around the country to boost morale through music. It was also a way for young men to not end up fighting on the border (SAHA 2019).

Shefer and Mankayi (2007, p. 192) point out that the military as an institution reflects and reproduces the global system of patriarchy. Although, overtime, women have been allowed to enlist, the emphasis on obtaining physical strength is key to hegemonic masculinities. The military is highly masculinist, not because the institution remains dominated by men but because it creates a space for the construction of masculine identities and plays a primary role in shaping images of masculinity and traditional male sexuality and practices (Barrett, 1996; Connell, 1995). There is also the notion that the military foregrounds traditional male principles of competition, aggression, power and control (Shefer and Mankayi 2007, p. 192).

4.3.2 Reception

Kanarie (2018) has managed to reach international audiences and, eventually, to acquire a foreign distributor by following a 'film festival-oriented distribution campaign'(Binge, 2019). According to an article in the *Vrye Week blaad* the producers of the film decided to first target smaller festivals to screen *Kanarie* and then to eventually find a sales agent who could sell the film to a distributor. After about ten festivals, *Kanarie* built up enough of a reputation

to compete for a sales agent, which eventually led to small-scale distribution in North America (Binge, 2019). Box offices figures alone cannot measure the success of a film because popular streaming services in South Africa such Netflix, DStv Now and Showmax must also be included. The decline in box office numbers is not just a South African phenomenon, it is a global reality.

According to Channel24 (2019) *Kanarie* hit the R1.4m mark at the South African box office when the film's run at local cinemas extended due to popular demand. The article references the distributors of the film, Filmfinity, in which they mention that *Kanarie* has raked in an impressive R1 404 290.08 to date. This surpasses the usual benchmark of R1.2m for South African commercial films. Although *Inxeba: The Wound* explored similar themes of homosexuality, the film, being having a very limited screening local cinemas, calls for introspection of why such moral panic surrounded *Inxeba: The Wound* specifically.

The scale of the outrage evoked by the film *Inxeba: The Wound* must be understood in relation to the sensitivity of the film's content. In Xhosa culture going to the mountain means attaining masculinity. The military symbolises the concept of 'going in a boy and leaving a man' these two instances are similar but are in completely different contexts. There are multiple interlinked issues around who has the power to determine what masculinity is when it comes to men joining the army as well as the practice of *ulwaluko*. There are cultural matters that make the *ulwaluko* practice extremely sacred which is the reason why it cannot be compared to young boys being forced into the military, as they are separate practices. Both the military and *entabeni* are spaces that promote the construction of multiple masculinities but the fact that *Inxeba: The Wound* involves the *ulwaluko* practice, the depiction of a homosexual relationship and the film being directed by a white man are reasons why this film was heavily criticised.

The outrage caused by *Inxeba: The Wound* versus the acclaim *Kanarie* received reveals how great the cultural differences amongst white South Africans and black South Africans are. It is said that *Inxeba: The Wound* challenges the power base of traditional cultural leaders by opening private rites to general public scrutiny, and that the film depicts an entrenched cultural tradition in a way that subjects its heteronormative ideal of manliness to controversial critique from the perspective of more diverse masculinities (Manona and Hurst, 2018, p. 1).

4.4 For consideration

This chapter provides some keen insights on the public responses to the case studies above. In portraying characters and plots that encompass the complexities of a gendered subjectivity, the outward rejection of queer films, particularly seen with *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) as there was mass public debate surrounding the film, highlights the heteronormative social and cultural orders of life in contemporary South Africa. The characters discussed here confront personal, interpersonal and social struggles against a heteronormative social order that denies them a sense of belonging and self-identification as sexual beings. *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) and *Kanarie* (2018) employs this by presenting multiple and intersecting layers of the disempowerment the characters feel that confirm the hegemonic heteronormative ideal in South Africa. It is in how these relationships are unravelled as well as the different intersections with race, class, gender and sexuality that these films most succeed in their critique of the heteronormative.

CHAPTER 5

Addressing the inclusion of queer characters in South African television

5. Outline

To understand the meanings that South African viewers made when watching *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) and the smaller audience that watched *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), in this chapter I evaluate the context that frames how homophobia in South Africa has affected the release of these films. In order to do this, I explore some of the socio-historical factors of South African audience-reception through looking at popular local television shows such as *Generations* (1994-2014), *Generations: The Legacy* (2014-), *Umlilo* (2015-2016) and a few other local shows which introduced gay, lesbian and transgender characters. On SABC 1[25] the popular television soap opera *Generations,* which was once South Africa's most watched and biggest soap opera, introduced their first gay character in 2009 while e.tv's *Umlilo* introduced a lesbian character in 2016 and *Generations: The Legacy* introduced a transgender character in that same year.

Out of the three filmic case studies used for this research, the nationwide screening of the films *Kanarie* (2018) and *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) garnered success. However, the negative reception *Inxeba: The Wound* received was from audiences, mainly comprised of Xhosa men, who felt that their traditions were not respected due to firstly, the film being directed by a white man and secondly, the film exploring homosexuality within the cultural space of the mountains and thirdly, the film allegedly revealing the sacred practices of

[25] The SABC which stands for the South African Broadcasting Corporation is the public broadcaster of South Africa and SABC 1 is one of the broadcasting corporation's channels.

ulwalukho. On the other hand, the film *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) was only screened on a small scale and was well received which is why in this chapter I will mainly refer to *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017).

5.1 The Traditional Revolution

It is important to create modern understandings in conjunction with the reality of South Africa's social politics, using open debate and exchange through media as Taylor (1995, p. 30) points out. The practices of going *entabeni,* (the mountain), has been known for years before *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) was even made. Young boys going to the mountain and dying or losing their penises due to circumcision rituals being carried out using unsterilized tools by untrained traditional nurses caused outrage across the country (Zuzile, 2019). During this outrage there were necessary, open dialogues promoting the safety of these boys and creating a modern understanding of *ulwalukho.*

Taylor (1995) defines modernity as the following:

> A form of life toward which all cultures converge and in these changes there is a loss of traditional beliefs, either because they are undermined by the growth of reason, or because they are marginalized by institutional change (1995, p. 30).

The sacred practice of *ulwalukho* should remain sacred, however proper health measures need to be put in place to protect the lives of the young boys due to the deaths and hospitalization of initiates that happen from botched circumcisions (Zuzile, 2019). This means that traditional nurses need to be trained. Zuzile (2019) mentions that urology doctors made it a point to go out there and conduct male medical circumcision without even claiming

for overtime because the situation is no longer just a problem but a crisis. Here lies the vital role the convergence of cultures plays.

The transformations that have taken place in modern society gave rise to the integration of new notions to existing practices. Through seeing, ideas become material and thus influence cultures. Seeing black characters conquering television screens in post-apartheid South Africa changed the course of media history in South Africa. Seeing women in powerful positions, such as Olivia Pope played by Kerry Washington in *Scandal* (2012-2018) and Annalise Keating played by Viola Davis in *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-), has been instrumental in constructing new forms of understanding and knowledge. This includes local soap opera characters such as Harriet Khoza, played by Connie Ferguson, in the South African television soap opera *The Queen* Mzansi (2016-) as well as Lindiwe Dlamini, played by Sindi Dlathu, in the soap opera *The River* Mzansi (2018-).

All four lead characters mentioned above, debatably changed the status quo on television. Thus I argue for the importance of including queer women in our South African mainstream narratives to move beyond this position of constantly satisfying the masculine gaze. In contextualizing South African audiences my aim is to understand what these particular audiences have been socialised to accept in South African film, in order to propose a new dawn in which we will see films that include queer women also generating good box office returns. In South Africa, the majority of people use visual media, television in particular, in preference to most other media forms. Television reaches 80–90% of the population in a given week while local films in the cinema has an attendance of 37,214 people per annum (SAARF 2017). Television thus permeates the everyday lives of the majority of South Africans.

I argue that lesbian and gay images in primetime television have been strategically placed in order to make them palatable to heteronormativity, similar to the ways in which the shots and editing in *Inxeba: The Wound* were deliberately composed and compiled. The representation of minorities on primetime television and mainstream films has revolutionized the South African media industry, which has enabled these minorities to develop an inclusive and successful film and television industry that considers all South Africa's realities. However, the gatekeeping of images to make them look 'palatable' reinforces the notion of heteronormativity. The realities of South Africa in 2019 is very different to what it was as ideas that were completely rejected are now accepted or tolerated, and it is evident when one considers the changes that have taken place in South Africa since 1948 when apartheid was implemented to 1994 when it was abolished. We can also consider the rise of the rainbow nation after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to where we are right now in 2019. Taylor (1995, p. 29) identifies changes in contemporary society as the demise of a traditional society and the rise of the modern.

5.2 Audience Reception

Audience engagement continually changes as the introduction of new technologies changes how films are brought to audiences. In the broadcast era, audiences were characterized as masses which changed overtime but the rise of the internet has redefined the nature of audiences in accordance with new situations of engagement. The entire study of mass communication, according to Mcquail (1983, p. 175), is based on the premise that audiences derive long term effects from the media, though what precisely these effects are and the means by which they can be identified and measured has been the subject of extensive debate.

Audience reception has come a long way since its initial seminal work. Nightingale and Ross (2003, p. 11) explain that by the late 1940s, two approaches to audience research had been firmly established. Details given by Nightingale and Ross (2003, p. 11) further explain how the work by Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld pioneered the 'content and response' analysis in which they maintained that content should be created with the understanding that audiences are likely to bring to their own ideas, related to their social status and peers group, to their interpretation of media messages. The alternative approach Nightingale and Ross (2003, p. 11) clarify, was audience measurement and campaign research. This paved the way for the first media effects research, where the information required by researchers consisted only of how many people were viewing media messages. According to Neuman (1991, p. 82) how people interpreted the message was of less interest and this lack of interest in what audiences do with media messages created the view that audiences are passive.

The hypodermic needle model of media effects assumed the mass media were so powerful that they could inject their messages into the audience. Nightingale (2011, p. 323) explains how mass communication techniques of the interwar[26] period had an overwhelming influence on behavioural and attitudinal change. Why the media had such a powerful and persuasive influence in this particular period of history has been explained in a number of different ways. For one, the rise of new media systems, including the press, radio broadcasting and cinema, applied new technologies and techniques to reach mass audiences on an unprecedented scale (Gurevitch and Bennet, 1990, p. 12).

By the 1970s a new generation of researchers began to question these negative evaluations of audience passivity and this gave rise to the uses and gratifications theory (Nightingale and Ross, 2003, p. 12). The uses and gratifications theory saw audiences as active because their

[26] The period between the end of the First World War in November 1918 and the beginning of the Second World War in September 1939 (Miles and Smith, 2013).

consumption of media is affected by their individual needs and wants. Although this theory proposed that audiences were active in choosing the media that interested them, it failed to acknowledge that when audiences engage with media they are informed by their social, political and economic context. Nightingale and Ross (2003, p. 13) conclude their history of audience reception with Hall's encoding/decoding theory which proposed that "Both textual production and audience interpretation are part of the same cultural process – the production of discourses and ideas." The encoding and decoding model maintained that the media produce three types of discourses: dominant, negotiated and resistant. This meant that when audiences look at media messages, they could either accept them, negotiate them or they could resist them completely. However, most of these theories have assisted in acquiring our present day understanding of audience reception research. Katz (1980) characterises the history of communications theory as an alternation between theories of active and of passive audiences, and between theories of minimal and of powerful effects. Later, Lowery and DeFleur (1995, p. 380) proposed the preeminent question of communications research as "What do mass communications actually do to us, both individually and collectively?"

Audience reception does not end there. Receiving a media message is part of the production process because the production and reception of the television message are related. Hall (1997) explains that before a media message can have an effect, satisfy a need or be put to a use, it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings which can have an influence on audiences. Nightingale (2011, p. 20) explains that readers, as audience members, may share socioeconomic and/or demographic characteristics. Therefore as a collective they will influence one another through interaction or because of a shared identification.

The social inequality between men and women is a controlling force in the cinematic representations of the sexes, which resulted in depicting women characters from a male,

heterosexual perspective becoming the norm. According to Mulvey (1986, p. 201) this plays on an audience's voyeuristic fantasy in which the position of the spectators in the cinema is one of control as they project their repressed desire onto the performer. Mulvey draws on analogies to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to describe how the spectator is positioned as an 'all-perceiving subject', whose viewing entailed an all-encompassing 'gaze' upon the projected filmic narrative that characterized the subject under these kinds of conditions (Mulvey 1986, p. 201). Initially for Mulvey, this gaze was gendered, a specifically male gaze imposed by the cinematic viewing experience causing all spectators to identify voyeuristically with a masculinist gaze at a woman (Mulvey 1986).

The position of the spectator changes for the television viewer. Petro (1986) once characterised perceptions of the difference by noting;

> When viewing a film, the spectator centres attention on the screen, becoming absorbed in the narrative and with the characters. When watching television, however, viewing seems to be marked by discontinuous attention, by the spectator's participation in several activities at once in which televiewing may not even rank as third in importance (1986, p. 5).

Nightingale (2011, p. 77) notes that there is an assumption that the new media viewer is no longer positioned as he/she was in relation to earlier forms of viewing. The author (2011) claims that viewing in relation to new media technologies, characterised by digital forms of content, mobility of use and increased direct interaction, is now reconceived as using, interacting and searching (2011, p. 77). In the days of mass broadcasting and publishing, audiences found text on television and radio as well as buying print media or visiting the cinema (Nightingale 2011, p. 86). Today many of these institutions have become digitized and as a result current users have online access to their collections and to independent internet businesses. The rise of Netflix and other online streaming platforms resulted in them becoming one of many alternative distributors of content. Shatz et al. (2007) explain the term

'social television', which refers to the way in which recommendations, commentary, links, feedback, file-sharing, friendship groups, micro blogging, status updates and various apparatuses of social media actually provide the connective tissue and the content for television. The idea of social television is that the audience is not only participatory, but rather that the audience is much more diverse than it has ever been. Livingstone (2013) explains;

> The concept of the participatory audience is more social than that of the active audience. To be sure, audiences have always and necessarily been active, for otherwise no textual interpretations could ever be actualized but there are now new possibilities for interaction and participation (2013, p. 24).

Still, to identify with the process of decoding that influence South African audiences when receiving media texts, a far better understanding of South Africa's different media publics is needed, and this requires fundamental audience research based on the theories and methods of social and cognitive psychology, anthropology and cultural studies (Fourie 2005, p, 28). These theories and methods allow an adequate investigation on the attitudes and behaviours of South African audiences. In this regard, the need for fundamental audience research for South African audiences is needed, however in this research a contextual analysis is done to create a broad overview on isiZulu and specially isiXhosa speaking audiences.

5.3 Xhosa and Zulu ethnic groups

Internationally *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) was well received while locally it had to be removed from the mainstream circuit after the Film and Publication Board (FPB) overturned their 16SL rating and reclassified *Inxeba: The Wound* to X18 (Masinga 2018). Thus it is imperative to emphasize the need to analyse the complexities of meanings that people make

at the point of reception and not on a generalised one. The South African demographic comprises of mostly black people. The current population of South Africa is 58,073,978 as of Monday, July 8, 2019, based on the latest United Nations' estimates. The South African population is equivalent to 0.75% of the total world population (*Worldometer,* 2019).

South Africa has nine provinces and 11 official languages. IsiZulu is the most spoken language with 11.6 million speakers (*Worldometer*, 2019). The languages most commonly spoken by individuals inside of South African households are isiZulu at 25.3 percent, isiXhosa at 14.8 percent and Afrikaans at 12.2 percent (Kamer, 2020). Zulu and Xhosa are South Africa's major ethnic groups and they form the majority of the population. The Xhosa ethnic group holds conservative views when it comes to the liberation of women and members of the LGBTQI+ community (Kumalo and Gama 2018, p. 9). When Xhosa cultural leaders felt that the film disregarded their tradition by revealing the sacred practices of *ulwaluko* they called for the banning of the film and rallied against the film resulting in nationwide protests.

But how do film and television shows in South Africa bring discourse to populations and individuals? As Da Costa (2003) argues, film is a medium in which the world attains 'life,' and thus can undergo analysis. In South Africa, television and soap operas in particular play an even greater role than film because they become part of people's daily routine (Ives 2009, p. 247). Television, from broadcasting channels to online streaming, has the ability to reach people of different races, genders, classes, and ages. Through its ability to depict or visually recreate images of the world, visual media has the power to reinforce and authenticate the destabilizing of heteronormativity. This influence can become so great that "people's perceptions of reality based on the mass media" can supersede all other stimuli (Lowry et al. 2003, p. 17).

Although mass media has this much power, one cannot assume all South African audiences present a uniform patriarchal and heteronormative gaze. Audiences have multiple and situated positions. Each person may interpret an image differently depending on their context which directly affects their position but despite this the images often contain a "preferred meaning" that the majority of people may absorb (Hall 1980). Ives (2009 p. 248) claims that visual media relies on a conversation between the audience and media to construct meaning. Fiske (1987) explains that ethnographic audience studies focus on how audiences make meanings to texts through acknowledging differences between people as well as paying attention to "meanings and pleasures they find when watching television" (1987, p. 63). Ethnographic audience research is concerned with the subjectivities people use to interpret the world around them (Silverman, 2004).

According to Khumalo (2015, p. 33) class positioning and privileges accorded by one's economic conditions also influence people's choice of media. The e.tv and SABC channels are free to air[27] making them more accessible to audiences, provided they have television licenses, unlike DSTV[28] which is satellite television that requires subscription. It is only now, within the last five years that DSTV has gained the majority of the SABC's viewership, as seen in *Table 2* below, a result of MultiChoice making less expensive packages available.

[27] The SABC and e.tv are free-to-air television services that are broadcast to any person with the appropriate receiving equipment to receive the signal and view the content without requiring a subscription
[28] DStv is a broadcast satellite service owned by MultiChoice.

5.4 South Africa's broadcasting landscape

Table 2. Most-watched shows in South Africa in April 2019.

Most-Watched TV Shows		
Channel	**Show**	**Peak Viewers**
Top 5		
SABC 1	Uzalo	9,084,947
SABC 1	Generations: The Legacy	8,440,205
SABC 1	Skeem Saam	7,918,501
Etv	Scandal	5,883,937
SABC 2	Muvhango	5,237,053
Top per channel		
SABC 1	Uzalo	9,084,947
SABC 1	Generations: The Legacy	8,440,205
SABC 2	Muvhango	5,237,053
SABC 2	7De Laan	2,581,668
SABC 3	Isidingo: The Need	844,226
Etv	Scandal	5,883,937
DStv	The Queen	1,565,700
DStv	Isibaya	1,080,625

Note. Adapted from https://mybroadband.co.za/news/broadcasting/306740-most-watched-tv-shows-in-south-africa-9.html. Copyright (2019) My Broadband.

Adejunmobi (2011) states that South Africa is Africa's dominant media producer. He further explains that this is through the pay television satellite service, DSTV, offered by Multichoice Africa in about 49 countries where English is the official language and so far no

other country has been able to provide such an extensive service in Africa, accordingly it may be called Africa's regional media (Adejunmobi, 2011). MultiChoice has also placed significant focus on ensuring the provision of high quality language content for their French and Portuguese speaking subscribers which has resulted in Angola having the largest and fastest growing subscriber base in Africa, outside of South Africa.(*Multichoice*, 2020). When I was growing up programs on DSTV were predominantly international films and television programs. It is only recently that local South African content has been prioritised through the introduction of the Africa Magic channels in 2003 (Adejunmobi 2011, p. 68). Adejunmobi (2011, p. 68) continues that by 2007 DSTV further entrenched its focus on African productions by launching Africa Magic Yoruba and Africa Magic Hausa in Nigeria.

The majority of Mzansi Magic, Mzansi Wethu, Mzansi Bioskop and KykNet's programming is produced by a South African cast and crew and tell local stories. M-Net introduced 1Magic in 2017 which screens a mixture of local and international premium content. DSTV maintains that formats showcasing local stories like Lokshin Bioscope are very popular and they have about 150 productions that they will beam on the newly established Mzansi Bioskop channel (*Multichoice*, 2020). The Broadcast Research Council of South Africa (BRCSA) released its television audience measurements for April 2019. According to *Table 2*, while DSTV has gained majority of SABC channel viewership numbers, the SABC channels are still the most watched broadcasting channels in South Africa with an audience of 9 084 947 who tunes into SABC to watch the soap opera *Uzalo* (2015-).I would argue that looking at SABC channels since the early 2000's that the channels became ground-breaking in introducing non-heteronormative characters. Despite drawing the biggest viewership the Public Broadcaster has arguably not been forthcoming in addressing matters relating to the LGBTQI+ community and only started representing them in a limited capacity in the early 2000s.

5.4.1 Homosexual storylines on South African television

An article on *News24,* Modisane (2017) lists the history of South African television's introduction of homosexual characters. This began in March 2001 with the second season of *Yizo Yizo* (1999-2004) a multi-award winning educational youth drama that aired on SABC 1. The show often pushed boundaries resulting in controversy. During the second season of *Yizo Yizo* the producers introduced the character Chester (Dumisani Dlamini) who was raped by a fellow jail inmate. The amount of controversy that the scene caused, ended in politicians calling for the series to be banned. There was a huge uproar in South Africa about the SABC showing two men having sex (though this was rape, as it was not consensual), on prime time television. In June 2004 in the third season of *Yizo Yizo,* Thiza, played by Tshepo Ngwane and Thabang, played by Makhaola Ndebele, engaged in a passionate on-screen kiss, which was a first for South African television, Modisane (2017) states, there was, of course, a very polarising debate around the country as this show aired during prime time.

Many people make the mistake of thinking that *Isidingo* (1998-) was the first local drama in South Africa to air a male to male kiss on national television. It was in fact *Yizo Yizo* which attracted over five million viewers at the time on SABC 1. In December 2006, on *Isidingo,* an openly gay man Steve Stethakis, played by Emmanuel Castis, and the bisexual Len Cooper, played Chris Beasley, kissed on the show. Then in May, 2008 *Rhythm City* (2007-) which aired on e.tv had a character Stone, played by Zenzo Ngqobe, who had been fighting his gay feelings for a long time with no luck. Stone discovered he was gay when he kissed Thula, played by Wright Ngubeni. Stone hated himself for kissing another man and went to the extent of beating up Thula for kissing him.

5.4.2 *Generations* (1994-2014)

As the focus of this chapter is on understanding how South African viewers process a homosexual story-line that they view in a homophobic environment, it is imperative to trace the general representation of homosexual storylines in the media. In this section I highlight how the South African soap opera *Generations* (1994-2014) introduced their homosexual storyline. When *Generations* began, it showcased an image of South Africa that differed greatly from the reality of a population that is mostly poor, especially the black South African public. Characters on this soap opera were wealthy and powerful and lived in a world in which diverse South Africans freely coexisted in all aspects of their lives, not just in school and at work in 1994. Ives (2009, p. 249) explains that *Generations* when it first screened, provided a compelling medium for examining the national identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

Generations is the first program in South Africa produced, directed, and written by a black South African man, Mfundi Vundla (Ives 2009, p. 250). I argue that it follows a classic soap opera formula, greatly emulating United States' soap operas but here the majority of South African soap stars are black, coloured, or Indian to highlight the diversity of the country. Ives (2009) describes her experience of watching *Generations:*

> In Generations the idea of race remains largely untroubled. Interracial relationships and friendships go unquestioned in the episodes that I analysed. White and Black South Africans regularly dine together in restaurants and drink together in bars without commentary or mention (2009, p. 250).

Generations aired every weekday which meant that the ideas the South African soap opera portrayed of our national identity were recurring. *Generations* became more inclusive of all identities with the introduction of its first gay character in 2009.

5.4.3 Homosexual Representation on *Generations* (1994-2014)

The storyline representing a homosexual man aired 15 years after the soap opera began. This was also when *Generations* was the most watched soap opera on South African television, with a rating of between seven million to ten million viewers per episode (Modisane, 2017). Audiences were introduced to Senzo Dlomo (Thami Mngqolo), who was the son of Sibusiso Dlomo (Menzi Ngubane). Senzo's sexuality was not part of his storyline sexuality until Jason Malinga (Zolisa Xaluva) revealed that he was a bisexual man and the two then began a relationship. In her doctoral research, Khumalo (2015, p. 44) explores audiences' subjective and personal interpretations of the homosexual story line in *Generations*. She conducted an ethnographic audience study, which lies within the boundaries of qualitative methodology. Khumalo (2015, p. 66) explains that contrary to Buckman's (1984) assertion that soap operas ease their viewers into a controversial storyline so they are not shocked when it unfolds, most respondents stated that they were stunned when gay characters were introduced in *Generations*. This further unravelled when the two male characters kissed as viewers found this shocking and unsettling as they had never seen it before on television (Mambaonline, 2010).

Khumalo (2015) asked her respondents about their views on *Generations*. One of her respondents, Blessing, stated that it only served to reinforce negative sentiments about the LGBTQI+ community:

> Personally Senzo and Jason are a portrayal of dysfunctional sexuality and deviant behaviour. Alcoholics can find solace in the thought that 'flesh is weak but the spirit is willing' in struggling to quit drinking. Gays and lesbians have no similar consolation. There seems to be no struggle between spirit and flesh. It would appear that there is total absence of control and their world is one in which no boundaries exist (Khumalo 2015, p. 73).

On the other hand, one of Khumalo's (2015) other respondents Duduzani was conflicted about his sentiments towards homosexuality.

> I was brought up in a conservative Ndebele culture and Catholic religion that regards homosexuality as a sin. My understanding of their relationship is likely that it is something unacceptable and strange. I find the political environment intolerant and I struggle daily against it at work. President Mugabe and his sentiments about gays to me is nothing but an exhibition of intolerance […] (Khumalo 2015, p. 75).

Another one of Khumalo's (2015) respondents, Siphiwe, contended that although she is aware of biblical rejection of homosexuality, this does not impact on meanings she makes about gays in the soap opera:

> On religion of course the bible does not allow homosexuality but really when I am watching that is not at the top of my mind. I felt it was ok for Generations to show gays so people would be aware and accept it. I just want the government to leave them alone and stop beating them up, they are just happy people (Khumalo 2015, p. 73).

Khumalo (2015, p. 75) draws on the fact that most respondents reduced homosexuality to "biological sex equals male or female equals sexual desire directed towards the opposite sex" (Rahman and Jackson 2010, p. 17), which has been reinforced by culture, society and religion. Fiske (1987) notes, "The reader produces meanings that derive from the intersection of his/her social history with the social forces structured into the text" (1987, p. 82).

Khumalo (2010) expresses her findings:

> Educations levels influenced disparities on meanings made, particularly expressions, by respondents in the research. I noted that interviewees with a lower level of education, particularly at the salon, were not thoroughly expressive of their sentiments about homosexuality […] (Khumalo 2015, p. 75).

Although the above scenario dwells more on the educational background and social profile of audiences it is noteworthy that culture also influences audience perceptions. There was a public outcry on social media and some threatened to boycott the show if they continued to show same-sex love on *Generations* (Modisane 2017). *Generations* began to display the couple's love affair more strategically after this. When it comes to soap operas, camera angles such as close-ups and extreme close-ups are used extensively because, as Timberg (1983, p. 76) points out, technological aspects such as camera angles, shot size and editing play a determining role in story-telling. He states that camera usage in soap opera is an 'expressive one' as it tells a version of life from a determined vantage point (Timberg 1983, p. 76). Close-ups are particularly useful when projecting intimate scenes, to frame out anything 'uncomfortable'. *Generations* did include romantic scenes between the gay couple, however they were censored. The couple was rarely shown kissing, cuddling, talking intimately or flirting.

5.4.4 Other examples of inclusive representation on South African television post 2000

There have been other South African drama series that showed homosexual relationships. The SABC 1 series *Society* (2007-2010) featured a female character named Beth (played by Sibulele Gcilitshana) who was in a romantic relationship with a woman. According to Modisane (2017), this was the first lesbian kiss that aired on South African television. In the same year *After Nine* (2007-2013) on SABC 1 was about a love triangle between China (Lucky Khoza) who had a pregnant girlfriend Bokang (Matshepo Maleme) and a romantic interest in Hector (Aaron Moloisi). In 2013 *InterSEXions* (2010-2013) male soccer players had an interest in one another and in 2015 when Mzansi Magic aired a lesbian kiss in the series *Zabalaza* (2015). In 2016 Mzansi Magic's *Igazi* (2017-2018) had two men kiss and in

the same year local popular e.tv drama series *Umlilo* (2015-2016) aired a lesbian kiss. The shower sex scene between Thembi played by Nomzamo Mbatha and Palesa played by Khanyi Mbau was labelled 'steamy' and according to Modisane (2017) only received criticism because children also watch primetime television. The response this scene received, as Mulvey (1975) points out, is because the power of the look is said to be male, and the female is typically positioned as the object rather than the subject of desire. The subversive potential of the lesbian is coupled with a subjective position and as De Lauretis (1991, p. 256) explains, resides ultimately in its evocation of the lesbian look and in the investment of this look in two desiring women. The coupled lesbian protagonists of the film, are simultaneously both the subject, the object of the look and consequently of female desire.

In 2013 it was speculated that *Generations* production teams were pressurised to write out the homosexual characters, which did not happen. Instead the soap opera was put on hiatus when most of the actors and actresses were fired after going on a strike (City Press 2013). However the soap opera returned as *Generations – the Legacy* (2014-) and in September 2016, introduced Wandile Radebe (Chiedza Mhende) a young man who undergoes a sex change during the program. This was particularly important in educating the South African public about some of challenges that transgender people have to go through especially in the black community (Modisane 2017). As her story progressed Wandi began to want children through artificial insemination and the character paid a woman to be the surrogate mother. *Generations – The Legacy* contributed greatly by shedding light on the issues that affect South African transgender women from the violent attacks they endure, their transformation and having and raising children.

5.5 Lesbian sensibility

The characters of Thembi (Nomzamo Mbatha) and Palesa (Khanyi Mbau) are played by two South African actresses who are seen as sex symbols for their good looks which is why the (lesbian) sex scene in *Umlilo* can be characterised in a number of ways. This scene aroused its viewers with hints of lesbianism between the two characters because Thembi, in previous episodes before this particular scene, was characterized as heterosexual whereas Palesa was a homosexual from the time her character was introduced. This allows lesbian spectators to see the two women as lovers while simultaneously enabling a heterosexual male gaze. Drawing on Hollinger (1998, p. 7) I argue that this scene offers audiences the voyeuristic satisfaction of seeing two beautiful women interacting in sexually provocative ways on the screen without overtly challenging heterosexist norms.

In order to not challenge the heteronormative sexual relationship by having a sex scene between two women, the creators of *Umlilo* approached it cleverly. Holmlund (1991, p. 145) points out three specific strategies used to foster a diversity of audience responses. The first strategy is: "making the female lead a femme[29], which allows both heterosexual and lesbian responses and identifications" (Holmlund 1991, p. 145). Palesa and Thembi are both very attractive, feminine women. Palesa, in this instance is a femme who is a lesbian and who is conventionally attractive and feminine in appearance, so that at first glance she is interpreted as heterosexual. The second strategy is: "focusing on the exchange of female looks that can be variously read as erotic (especially when the looking turns into a love scene) or just friendly, although allusive references to lesbianism or to alternative lifestyle choices may be made" (Holmlund, 1991, p. 145). The focus is clearly placed on the passionate bond between the women, as Palesa helps Thembi to get out of the asylum which makes Thembi grateful.

[29]A lesbian woman who performs femininity both in her appearance and behaviour.

The third strategy is “referring ambiguously and allusively to what may or may not be lesbianism and/or lesbianism lifestyles” (Holmlund 1991, p. 145). There is a constant exchange of long, loving looks between Palesa and Thembi which can be read ambiguously as either erotic or friendly as Holmlund (1991, p. 145) explains. In later episodes, Palesa develops an intimate relationship with another man despite being in a relationship with her assistant. There is a clear power disparity between Palesa and her assistant, Brenda, and yet Palesa, who identifies as a lesbian, still cheats on Brenda with this man. Palesa, who is unwilling at first when he kisses her, ends up giving in which can be a dangerous exploration of the fluidity of sexuality because there is no mutual consent between the two. As Miller (1991) warns, ambiguous portrayals of homosexuality construct “homosexual subjects doubtful of the validity and even of the reality of their desire” (Miller 1991, p. 125).

Palesa and Thembi’s sex scene can have both negative and positive effects on queer viewers, however it is important to recognize that queer audiences, lesbian viewers to be specific, are not a singular homogenous group whose responses to visual media can be wholly anticipated and predicted, especially in the absence of a qualitative research analysis on queer content that had appeared on South African television. Nonetheless, *Umlilo* reducing their sexual encounter to friendship diminishes the very existence of lesbian identity in the program and this has a negative impact on the validity of their sexuality. There are positive aspects that derive from the introduction of Palesa. *Umlilo,* at least, avoids the overt homophobia that has for so long characterized mainstream representations of homosexuality. Palesa is presented as open and caring rather than predatory. She is also not punished in the end by death or separation from her loved ones which should be looked at positively despite the other problems with the development of her character.

There is a clear disparity in the representation of lesbian characters versus the representation of gay characters in the South African broadcasting platforms. The inclusive representation of

lesbian characters in South African soap operas serves an important social function for lesbian audiences. De Lauretis (1994, p. 121) asserts that representations of clear lesbian relationships offer moments of "discursive consent" because they allow lesbian viewers to engage in lesbian cinematic fantasies made available within a homophobic society. The lesbian images of *Umlilo* are safe because they are not homophobic, but are inherently heteronormative. This safety is bought at a significant cost to lesbian subjectivity (Hollinger 1998, p. 8). De Lauretis (1994) points out that, "Ambiguous lesbian representations act to de-authorize cinematic representations of actual lesbianism in its instinctual and social complexity" (1994, p. 122). While the South African drama series *Umlilo* refuses to make the sexual identity of their characters explicit, the film *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) is clearly presenting their central female relationship as an erotic one, which makes it unfortunate that the film was only screened at festivals. Arguably this seems to be the price to pay for producing a lesbian-centred film not made to fulfil the male gaze.

One reason for the lack of mainstream lesbian representations clearly relates to marketing strategies that prompt South African media producers to direct their content toward multiple audience groups. Lesbian films are perceived as risky ventures with limited appeal to a targeted audience. Another proposed explanation for the lacuna of mainstream lesbian portrayals is the potentially subversive effect lesbian representations can have on their female viewers (Hollinger 1998, p. 11). Hollinger (1998) provides an analysis of how the open portrayal of lesbianism has been theorized as posing a significant threat to the heterosexist, patriarchal status quo. The portrayal of a lesbian couple shows an autonomous female sexuality in which men play no part which challenges patriarchy and heteronormativity because it is seen as a rejection of the male. Lesbian sexuality offers a substitute for the female dependence on men for romantic and sexual fulfilment which, arguably, is seen as unconventional.

As Judith Mayne (1991) claims that by providing women with the space to exercise self-determined pleasure, they threaten mainstream cinema's "unproblematic fit between the hierarchies of masculinity and femininity on the one hand, and activity and passivity on the other" (1991, p. 127). Straayer (1990) argues as well that the lesbian film "deconstructs male/female sexual dichotomies, sex/gender conflation, and the universality of the male Oedipal narrative" (1990, p. 50). The visibility of lesbianism on South African film and television disturbs the maintenance of patriarchy. It is undeniable that the ambiguous lesbian representation of *Umlilo* was produced to cater to a wide audience but it appears to affirm heterosexuality. What happens between Palesa and Thembi can be understood by drawing from Hollinger (1998) who argues:

> The potentially subversive effects of lesbian representation on mainstream audiences can also be counteracted by identifying lesbianism with traditional derogatory forms of female friendship that involve female rivalry and antagonism (Hollinger 1998, p. 13).

5.6 The evolving landscape

Ives (2009, p. 252) identifies that a danger exists in simply relying on discourse analysis of visual media since a significant part of the dialogical nature of media involves the way in which audiences react to and understand them. Rose (2001) argues that formalist analyses pay "too much attention to the formal qualities of the visual image and not enough attention to the ways actual audiences [make] sense of it" (2001, p. 192). One cannot assume that audiences are passive, voiceless, uniform subjects. Interviews and ethnographies of film audiences would allow for an examination of how South African audiences both absorb and contest images.

A brief examination of the South African response to *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) and *Kanarie* (2018) provides an incomplete opportunity to address

audience reception. News articles and cinema trends alone do not incorporate voices outside of the mainstream media, which includes the large population that responded to the films in non-textual ways. Despite these clear methodological limitations, I argue that questioning the text–audience relation at the centre of my research in some ways clarifies the means in which the visual media introduces a platform for exchanging agreement or contestation about the messages coded in films. I propose other possibilities for methodologies in the conclusion.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6. Outline

This chapter assesses key issues explored in this research. Some conclusive recommendations are made following the results of the study. I use the film *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) to explore lesbian identities in films as it addresses some of the multiple narratives of lesbian women in South Africa. My investigation of the critically acclaimed *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) and *Kanarie* (2018) explores the audience reaction to the film. Additionally, by reviewing popular South African local dramas such as *Generations* (1994-2014) and *Umlilo* (2015-2016) and soap operas I conclude the following: when analysing filmic texts, consider those who it reaches.

Barker (2006, p. 125) describes audiences as communal because they not only 'audience' in groups but they also carry with them a sense of belonging to different discursive communities. Moreover, one should not approach audience research by looking at a group of people as one, especially if they share similar backgrounds, but rather, consider the variety of audience members within those similar backgrounds who have different contexts that influence how they perceive media messages. These histories that audiences bring with them when they decode media messages continue after the 'event' which is why the screening of inclusive films such as *While You Weren't Looking* take place at festivals as those spaces are considered safe. Barker (2006, p. 125) mentions how the notion of the "vulnerable audience", deriving from the mass communications tradition, has been so dominant for so long, despite the endlessly demonstrated failure of its research program, and despite the repeated exposure

of the deeply ideological purpose that has inspired it, it is still referred to when conducting audience research.

Bordwell and Thompson (2011, p. 24) emphasize the need to take into account the mental processes of audiences and how it has put a focus on what is required of them if they are able to coherently decode a film, its events, characters, and what the narrative is about. However it is important to note that this model is not based on audience research but on audience 'understanding'. This led Barker (2006) to argue for a new concept, the "viewing strategy."

> The concept conceives viewing (or, by natural extension, reading, listening, participating in other ways) as a motivated activity. It therefore focuses on, first, why people go to see a film—with what hopes, fears, expectations, based on what prior knowledge, with what sense of (and what kind of) importance attached to the event, in what company and why (and "company" here includes real, possible, and imaginary companions) (2006, p. 134).

The reason for questioning all of these aspects is because they are seen as providing the circumstances from which a person goes about "making sense" of a film. Thus to create a queer (specifically pariah femininities) subject position in a film, takes more than simply replacing a heterosexual couple with a lesbian one, as many mainstream lesbian representations do. This emphasis on creating queer images that should not create a challenge to heteronormativity often inadequately recognizes the embodied experiences and implications of compulsory gender performance. Here, the representation of lesbian or trans-desire should be engaged with and in the same breath there is a need to create texts that would produce new meanings or disrupt traditional meanings (De Lauretis 1988, p. 170). The presumption of a unified lesbian viewer exists where texts become generalized and universal reduces lesbianism to them having only one definition of desire. Thus redefining the modes of representation cannot be predicated on a single, undivided identity of performer and audience.

In redefining the modes of representation, I suggest a cinematic practice dealing with a type of 'decolonization' that seeks to withdraw discriminatory and dominating representations. Using film to counter cultural oppressions like homophobia, advocates for, and brings about more diverse representations to audiences. These redefining modes of representation actively seek to bring about social change not just through representation, but also through different exhibition, distribution and reception strategies. The *Durban Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* has become an activist platform that fosters inclusivity in South African films. The heteronormative identity has become the default character to represent which is why the *Out of Africa* was and *Durban Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* is so important. Mainstream films representing pariah femininities in South Africa would be significant as they could create social spaces where queer representations can be accessed and enjoyed by a range of audience members.

Attitudes to sexuality in South Africa have affected the course of representation in film and television. The release of the film *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) offers an alternative representation of Xhosa men. Audiences are given the opportunity to see how masculinity operates in the spaces men claim and how they react to anything outside of it. This made it an important film, yet *Inxeba: The Wound* was greeted with homophobic resistance. However, there has been little discussion on why films representing queer women are not available in the South African mainstream cinema.

Increasing the number of inclusive South African-produced films can challenge heteronormativity as they would create a platform that can be used to identify, address and respond to homophobia. Film also enables individuals to personalise their experiences with people of different sexualities or gender identities which develops deeper understandings of their experiences. They provide different ways of seeing and evaluating a position in relation to gender non-conforming people.

Upon discovering that while there have been attempts at representing lesbian women in television, there are strategies put in place to ensure that these inclusive images do not threaten heteronormativity. Pariah femininities as a concept, is the kind of femininity that is not oriented towards accommodating the interests and desires of men which is mainly why representations of queer people in film and television come with political, historical and social objectives.

Local television programmes are much more accessible to audiences which means, in order to achieve a greater impact in normalising of the representation of queer women, it requires South African broadcasting channels to commission more shows that promote inclusivity. Creating queer visibility impacts society overall with more awareness being created with diverse and balanced representations. Nonetheless, there is a hierarchy which favours gay men. The lack of visibility of pariah femininities in the South African media has further marginalised them. By commissioning local films and television programmes, not only does this promote inclusivity within the industry but it also challenges sexist, misogynist, homophobic and transphobic ideologies.

6.1 Scope for further research

There is definitely need for more mainstream visual media that explores homonormative societies. There is a dearth of films and television shows about African perspectives, on the LGBTQI+ community and their life stories. Further research may explore the group's representation on local broadcasting platforms and how these portrayals can be normalised on mainstream film and television programmes.

The film *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) points to a number of issues: It suggests the need for South African queer cinema studies outside the vantage positions of homosexual males, to

strengthen the sense of emerging lesbian, trans and non-binary person representations. This challenge becomes important when we consider that *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017) was banned from mainstream cinema which meant that at some point the film was not available to South African audiences, despite the fact that it circulated globally and gained recognition at international film festivals. Given these contradictions, this is why it was crucial to inquire about the social context in which these films were released in order to understand the forces that shape production and reception.

However, without consulting the different publics constituting the South African society about their views concerning the role of the media in society and in their lives, and about policy issues, research will require more analysis to contribute to the development of South African queer cinema. The study of same-sex relations and the fight for the LGBTQI+ community's rights in South Africa make up important challenges. If nothing else, this research will hopefully emphasize the obvious the lacuna of representation of pariah femininity. That said, we also need to learn from the histories of queer theory, New Queer Cinema and feminist studies. Nonetheless, this analysis is informed by an awareness of how patriarchy has shaped what society deems as normal.

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