

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE CONTEXT AND CREATION

### of *Hijack Stories* (2000)

This role of cinema in South Africa is being debated within a context of global dependency and general lack of institutional excellence, investment from abroad, media training, and audience (especially when it comes to an audience of colour).

(Saks 2003: 133)

This quote from Lucia Saks gives an accurate overview of the status quo of South Africa's film industry. The "general lack of institutional excellence" and lack of "audiences of colour" is a direct result of an industry deprived of an absolute freedom of expression and burdened by segregation and censorship under the previous government. In addition to these factors, film makers struggle to acquire local financial support, creating a vacuum to be filled by foreign investors to finance and co-produce South African films.

These are all factors which form part of the context in which *Hijack Stories* (2000) was created. For this reason, the point of departure of this research journey is the context of South Africa's film industry past and present. The social and political processes which influenced South Africa's film industry in the past have played a role in what kind of films are made, why, and for whom. An understanding of the country's film industry from the late apartheid years (the 1980s) to the present day provides insights into the factors and processes which influenced and helped shape *Hijack Stories* (2000).

During the apartheid years, the government succeeded in censoring and controlling the media both politically and socially. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was considered by many as the prime dispenser of propagandist government news and information, despite government claims of a free and independent media. The state's determination to control how South

Africa was portrayed and perceived on screen was of course extended to the film industry. During this period, film content was closely monitored and resulted in films which Kenyan Tomaselli (1989: 11) describes as mostly “bland” and “racist”, which seemed to legitimise apartheid by presenting it as “a natural way of life” and portraying Africans and, indeed, Africa in a stereotypical way, perhaps reinforcing the “*ancient cultural-racial hierarchy of ‘European’ superiority and ‘African’ inferiority*” (Annie Gagiano 2004: 38). The state also controlled the industry socially by segregating audiences and deciding which films were “suitable” for each audience – a decision made according to race.

But this was not the full extent of the censorship. Film makers were forced to submit their scripts to the police for inspection. The danger was real as non-adherence amounted to “*some erring film makers [being] arrested, intimidated and [having] their films intercepted by state security agents*” (Tomaselli 1989: 19). The apartheid government’s iron grip on the industry posed the greatest threat to film makers who dared to step out of the safety zone of apolitical, innocuous and mostly Afrikaans film content (Meyburgh 2005). These so-called “politically incorrect” films are what Martin Botha and Adri van Aswegen refer to as *alternative film* reflecting the South African reality:

The alternative film came into being because individuals and groups, who did not uphold the *status quo*, could not communicate with the existing mass media and found it necessary to establish their own mouthpiece.  
(1992: 133)

Many of these intrepid film makers were forced to take desperate measures in order to get their film made. Banned in South Africa for more than ten years, Schmitz’s first major feature film, the 1988 cult-hit *Mapantsula* (1988)<sup>1</sup>, was one

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<sup>1</sup> Because of the controversy of apartheid within the international community at the time, *Mapantsula* (1988) “*hit a nerve locally and internationally*” (Schmitz in SA Film 2005) and had screenings in almost fifty countries and was placed in the top ten of London’s cinema circuit (SA Film 2005).

such alternative film. Schmitz vividly recalls this reality faced by alternative film makers:

The censorship was so pervasive and the reality of punishment – of being jailed, of having problems, of being silenced – was so real. It was really hard to make movies at that time and I think the only way to do it was to adopt a devious attitude to film making and pretend to do something else to get your movie made.<sup>2</sup>

(2006)

Considering the restrictions imposed on the industry it is not surprising that some believe that there was no real industry during apartheid. In fact when asked about South African cinema, the director of the South African film, *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), Ramadan Suleman began by saying that “[b]efore the advent of democracy, there was no South African cinema in the real sense” (Mahmoud Jemni 2004)<sup>3</sup>.

This raises the question: how has the industry changed since the end of apartheid? This was a question put to people in the industry during the interviews conducted for this research, and it is interesting to note that there was a clear difference of opinion on whether the industry has in fact changed. It would seem logical to assume, given the dramatic change in the country’s political landscape, that the industry has changed. There is change as there are a lot more opportunities, according to Schmitz (2006) for the younger generation in the industry than never existed before. While most of the stories of apartheid film are

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<sup>2</sup> And a devious attitude was exactly what Schmitz adopted during the filming of *Mapantsula* (1988). In order to make his film, Schmitz submitted a dummy script to the authorities. However, the police remained close by during the shooting of the film and demanded to see the film during post-production. Schmitz feared the worst and even made plans to leave the country. But human error allowed *Mapantsula* (1988) to slip under the radar, as Schmitz explains: “*The strange thing is, as our lawyer later told us, the Police actually lost the copy we gave them and were too embarrassed to come back to us about it!*” (in Matt Arnoldi 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Quote translated from French.

considered unauthentic (Tilley 2006), post-apartheid film subject matter has changed substantially, as Catherine Meyburgh<sup>4</sup> explains:

The difference between apartheid and post-apartheid [in the film industry] is enormous [...]... it has changed the way we tell stories. Now you're telling personal stories, and there are many more documentaries. There were literally no documentaries in the 1980s, except for propaganda or anti-apartheid documentaries – but these were very few. And now documentaries is one of the biggest growing film genres in South Africa at the moment.

(2005)

But in other ways there has been little significant change in the industry. In an interview with the screenwriter and producer of *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), Bhekizizwe Peterson (2006), he expressed the opinion that the situation of the film industry has not improved since the advent of democracy. For instance, although no longer legislated, the apartheid legacy of segregated audiences thrives: “*there are probably all of five audiences in townships across South Africa*” (Peterson 2006). Moreover, South African films rarely reach these scattered audiences, as Botha & van Aswegen explain:

The majority of South African films are excluded by the mainstream distributors, Ster-Kinekor and Nu-Metro. When these films are marketed for mainstream distribution it is usually at the elite cinemas in the Rosebank Mall or the Constantia cinemas. The label of art film is attached to these films and they are ignored by the general public.

(1992: 138)

This difficulty was commonplace in the pre-democracy years and continues to this day. Johan Blignaut & Christian Metz write that:

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<sup>4</sup> Catherine Meyburgh, a South African director, editor and post-production supervisor, is best known for her film *The clay ox*, screened at the 1994 *Weekly MailGuardian* short film festival, which explores the role of White South Africans in a post-Apartheid South Africa.

Because of the ideological censorship in the past, limited distribution, minimal financial support and the lack of interest among the majority of film critics resulting in scant time being given to such films in the mass media, these films have been squeezed out of the mainstream.

(1990 in Botha & van Aswegen 1992: 138-9)

Although it was not labelled as an art film, *Hijack Stories* (2000) did not enjoy wide local distribution. Instead a few select cinemas were strategically chosen by the distributor (Ster Kinekor) for the screening of the film. Furthermore, both *Hijack Stories* (2000) and *Zulu Love Letter* (2004) were screened abroad before being screened locally in South Africa. This, it seems, is not a rarity as “*it is often easier to see South African alternative films on the commercial circuit in London, Paris and Amsterdam than it is to find them in any of the mainstream venues in South Africa*” (Botha and van Aswegen 1992: 138). Such was the case with Darrell Roodt’s film, *The stick* (1987). Selected from among 230 international films to open the 1988 Montreal Film Festival and shown in Moscow, *The stick* (1987) was put on the South African circuit at only one cinema – Hyde Park in Johannesburg – for just one week (Botha & van Aswegen 1992: 139). Sadly, as Peterson (2006) explains, “*South African cinema does not have the time or space. It is not such a great achievement that our films travel – they have no residency here!*”

The end of apartheid has also meant the end of film makers having to submit their scripts and films for state approval. Although Schmitz (2006) is an advocate for the positive changes that the end of apartheid has brought to the film industry, he feels that there is a new form of censorship, one which he experienced during the screening of *Hijack Stories* (2000) abroad. Schmitz believes that this censorship stems from a fear of portraying South Africa in a negative light. By way of indirect feedback, Schmitz learnt that some South African embassies had discouraged diplomats and embassy staff, as well as outsiders inquiring about the film, from seeing it. Although Schmitz (2006) understands the desire to show the positive aspects of South Africa, he believes that film makers have the right

to tell a story from whatever angle they chose and that the film maker's freedom of story telling should be kept apart from political objectives. Ultimately, the value lies in the story itself.

However, some may argue that this is *positive* censorship as the question of why these embassies *should* promote a film about violent crime and township gangsters is raised. One has to consider the possibility of the content of local (South African) films being commodified with certain audiences in mind – namely, foreign audiences. Arguably, the South Africa portrayed in *Hijack Stories* (2000) is the stereotype of what many – mostly outside of South Africa – have in mind, where only negatively stereotyped characters and situations are portrayed. One could therefore argue that the stance of South African embassies is not unjustified. This discussion is continued in chapter three with a theoretical consideration of *Hijack Stories* (2000).

The ironic lack of exposure of South African films within South Africa also stems from a real problem of distribution. When discussing these challenges, Meyburgh said:

It [local financing] is a huge problem! You have an industry which has no marketing [...]. It's like a product that we make and we have no marketing vehicle at all. It's all very slap-dash, little bit here, little bit there, there's no singular space where you can go to and market, such as an organisation or company, or someone who will take your film and go sell it [...]. If they [the distributors] don't buy into it – not money-wise – but if they don't say to you that they will definitely distribute it for you, the chances of you getting finance from anybody is almost zero - unless you're able to get foreign finance and a co-production deal [...]. But even then, most co-productions will insist that you have local distribution as well.

(2005)

*Hijack Stories* (2000) had a very limited local release - showing at only a few cinemas across the country (three of which were in Johannesburg) (Majola 2003) – which, together with insufficient promotion of the film, was a contributing factor

to its poor ratings at the local box office (Tilley 2006). Certain cinemas were chosen in order to attract a young, predominantly black crowd (Schmitz 2006). For example, Johannesburg's Southgate Mall was chosen with Sowetan audiences in mind. Although the positioning was good, Schmitz (2006) believes that more preparation could have been done beforehand to promote the film.

It is also difficult to buy *Hijack Stories* (2000) on DVD in South Africa. Although it is readily available from both the British and French online store, Amazon, the task of buying the DVD in South Africa to own proved somewhat difficult, although is available for hire from video shops.

The lack of commitment on the part of local investors and distributors meant that it would be easier for Schmitz to be based in Europe, where film funding is far more forthcoming, and after *Hijack Stories* (2000), Schmitz moved to Germany. Brian Tilley, *Hijack Stories* (2000) script editor and close friend of Schmitz explains:

But it [*Hijack Stories*] was driven from Europe. And I think that is one of the reasons that Oliver has actually moved to Germany – he found it so difficult initiating feature film projects from South Africa because everyone would argue for reasons against putting money into the film: the South Africans don't watch cinema, the budget is too high, the this and the that...  
(2006)

Schmitz's move to Europe seems to have been the right decision as he has since been busy with as many as eight projects – mostly in German - for both television and film.

The end of apartheid has nonetheless seen institutional change in the industry. Today there is the government initiative - the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) – which forms part of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST). As Schmitz (in SA Film 2005) says: "*It's been a long road.*

*Structures have developed and I think it's starting to pay off now*'. Indeed, the pay-off is remarkable with this department contributing R50 000 to the script writing of *Hijack Stories* (2000) in the late 1990s to contributing 45% of finances for *Tsotsi* (2005) in 2005.

The NFVF is responsible for providing finances for a wide range of areas of production: distribution, exhibition, training, promotion of locally-produced films, etc (Saks 2003: 133). There is also the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) which also footed the bill for a further 45% of *Tsotsi's* (2005) production costs. The NFVF and the IDC also provided 60% of the funding for *Zulu Love Letter* (2004) (Peterson 2006). There are also other institutional bodies, such as the South African Screen Federation (SASFED) which has the objective of pulling together the various sectors of South Africa's film industry – particularly distribution – in order to bring about coherence in the industry (Meyburgh 2005<sup>5</sup>).

But is institutional transformation enough? Much more is needed for actual change:

It [profound transformation] requires an immense act of imagination to develop a further set of articulations that bind people together (often provisionally) and place them in a shared time and space, a national habitus.

(Saks 2003: 132)

It goes without saying that there were no black shareholders in the film industry during apartheid. And today there continues to be an imbalance as the vast majority of the big guns in the industry are white. Local actress Moshidi Motshegwa (2006), who portrays the lead female character Grace in *Hijack Stories* (2000)<sup>6</sup>, strongly believes there can be no real industry while it belongs to a minority. Motshegwa adds that this problem is not helped by the fact that film

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<sup>5</sup> Meyburgh is currently the deputy chair of SASFED.

<sup>6</sup> Moshidi Motshegwa also portrayed a leading female role in the 2004 South African film *Drum* and is an actress on local television productions.

study is so expensive. This means that the playing fields in the film industry need to be levelled to make it possible to become what Lucia Saks refers to as a *national habitus* – a *shared time and space*. Because South Africa finds itself in a phase of political transition, this kind of stability is something to strive for, rather than a present-day reality.

However, none of these discrepancies seem to have curbed the interest of foreign parties in South African film as there are a great number of local films which have benefited from such involvement. Apart from *Hijack Stories* (2000) other films include *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), which was a French, German and South African co-production, and *Tsotsi* (2005), which was co-produced with a British production company. International co-production of local films is not a recent phenomenon as interest in South Africa has its roots in the apartheid years which saw a “*flurry of metropolitan interest in South Africa*” (Chrisman 2003: 109). This interest was also evident in the film industry:

[There was] international concern in South African affairs, more particularly, the political role of South African cinema. Origins of these debates traced to France: the Amiens Film Festival against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples, 1983.

(Tomaselli 1989: 10)

Instrumental in bringing apartheid to its knees was international intervention in the form of economic and other sanctions against South Africa. In the same way, international companies also exerted pressure on the country's film industry. For example, in the mid-1980s Kodak and two main exhibitor chains – which were responsible for most of the distribution of American films – closed their movie theatres to protest against audience segregation (Tomaselli 1989: 10). As a result of the actions of the international community, the apartheid government “*was pushed into acute and terminal crisis [...] and became the subject of considerable media interest...*” (Chrisman 2003: 10).

The apartheid policy of audience segregation worked against the development of a movie-going culture in South Africa. Furthermore, there is an obvious lack of local interest in South African films which, according to South African producer Anant Singh (in Saks 2003: 144), is due to a “*diet of American movies*” and, according to Saks (2003: 144) the mindset that movies are “*international commodities as opposed to national cultural products*”. Of course, South African films do not fit in with what South African audiences are used to watching and, therefore, expects to watch: “[*b*]ecause this product is not willing to conform to Hollywood, the film is not even marginalised, it is obliterated” (Peterson 2006).

It is therefore ironic that it should be foreign audiences who regard South African films to be valuable, cultural commodities. South African film makers are aware of this potential and set out to sell what outsiders will take as the *real South African story*, and what *insiders* may take as the *stereotyped South African story*. Motshegwa (2006) does not blame film makers for this and states that the reality is that these films take place within a global economy – in other words, these films need to make money. And seeing as the main stakeholders are foreign, it is non-South African audiences that they have in mind. This experience is par for the course in the film industry:

But there are a lot of constraints of whoever is putting money in. They might want a different ending. They might not like a certain character. All of those things are inevitable in this sort of industry, as once people are investing they want to influence the product they make.

(Tilley 2006)

Schmitz concurs:

Co-productions always come with certain conditions attached. They won't understand all the ins and outs of what you want to say. If you have to pander to international tastes on every production it changes the game.

(in SA Film 2005)

Motshegwa (2006) adds that this apparent stereotyping is also because most of the directors are white and do not have a finger on the pulse of real township life and present a “*diluted depiction, lacking the nuances of township life*”. This view differs dramatically to that of British film critic, Simon Wardell (2002), who praises Schmitz for his “*his long affinity with his country's black population*” which allows him to “*come up with a realistic take on the problems of township life*”. It is also Schmitz’s intention that local audiences should identify with the film: “[*for insiders it’s entertainment and a reflection of what they know*” (Schmitz in SA Film 2005). However, Motshegwa is full of praise for *Mapantsula* (1988) for which Schmitz worked in closely with the real-life protagonist.

South Africa’s apartheid years have resulted in many negative social and financial factors affecting the film. From a political perspective, the country’s turbulent political past influenced the film in two ways. Firstly, it shaped the country’s film industry in such a way that it was difficult for Schmitz to gain support – in terms of finance and distribution – for *Hijack Stories* (2000). Secondly, apartheid South Africa, and its aftermath, was the very inspiration for the theme of *Hijack Stories* (2000). In terms of the social factor, audiences segregated by race and the uneven distribution of movie cinemas to mostly white areas have much impeded the development of a movie-going culture in South Africa. Because audiences are far more interested in watching American movies, local investors cannot hope for any returns on their investment in South African film-making.

We continue the journey with an investigation of *Hijack Stories* (2000):

For me, *Hijack Stories* is a post-apartheid gangster film. But it is also the story of a generation of young black South Africans who try to create a future and to distance themselves from the turbulence of the past.  
(Schmitz in Allocine.fr 2005<sup>7</sup>)

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<sup>7</sup> Quote translated from French.

*Hijack Stories* (2000) is a story of South African youth identity – or the search for an identity - in the new South Africa. The protagonist, Sox Maroka, is a young black middle-class aspiring actor who is determined to be cast as a ruthless gangster for a television programme, *Bra Biza*. But Sox has lived a privileged life in the prosperous suburbs of Johannesburg, his family having moved out of the townships of Soweto with the advent of South Africa's democracy. After his dismal performance at the *Bra Biza* casting, Sox realises that he needs to find out more about where he comes from and returns to Soweto. There he sets out to become the understudy of a real live gangster, who happens to be a childhood friend who stayed in the townships and took on a life of crime. But soon lines are overstepped as Sox takes his "research" too far.

In the mid-1990s, after South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, Schmitz (2006) began to take note of the changes taking place around him in the film industry. He saw that the new generation of black film makers were now empowered and had so many more opportunities than those before them. According to Schmitz (2006), these new opportunities were not limited to the film industry, but reflected a growing trend in almost all aspects of South African life.

But Schmitz also noticed a growing gap – a "*cultural gap*" (Schmitz in SA Film 2005) - between the black youth benefiting from these opportunities and the black youth still living in townships without the same means or opportunities to improve their lives. With this gap, says Schmitz, came a distinct tension between the two groups of youths. While one group had access to what Schmitz describes as a "*nice middle-class existence*", the other group continued to live in just about the same conditions as those their parents had lived in. In *Hijack Stories* (2000), Schmitz raises the question of whether crime in South African society is out of anger for the past and, if so, how much of this crime is linked to the rebelliousness of young people.

Schmitz took further inspiration from an episode of the South African television youth drama *Yizo Yizo*: “[a] gritty, uncompromising television drama series set in a township school that has achieved record-breaking audiences and cult status amongst South Africa’s youth” (The Bomb Shelter 2006). In this particular episode a lead character, who is an actor, takes his on screen role as a ruthless gangster very seriously and emotionally, so much so that he begins to assume this role off-screen as well. Soon he gets into trouble with real gangsters who beat him up for pretending to be something that he was not.

It was while finishing the documentary *Joburg Stories* (1997) that Schmitz began to work on the early drafts of *Hijack Stories* (2000), according to Tilley (2006) who co-directed *Joburg Stories* (1997) with Schmitz. For the script-writing, Schmitz managed to obtain a R50 000 grant from the then Department of Arts and Culture: “[t]hat was very useful. Without that initial capital the script would never have been written” (Schmitz in SA Film 2005). But this was all of the South African financial support that Schmitz was able to rally. When asked why *Hijack Stories* (2000) was an international collaboration as opposed to a South African one, Schmitz (2006) said that he tried to raise money locally, but there was not enough interest and not enough commitment. In the words of South African film commentator Andrew Worsdale (2000): “[w]hat’s most interesting, however, is that this quintessentially South African story has no local financial backing”.

Although much has been said about the lack of South African financing for local films in general, it is important to acknowledge that multinational co-production and financing is not at all unique to South Africa (Peterson 2006). It is quite common for films, especially those which come from countries with a small film industry, to benefit from transnational participation. Nonetheless, this did not stop Schmitz from feeling somewhat disappointed at not gaining more South African financial support:

[this] is a pity, and quite strange when you think that it is such a South African story and a bunch of foreign producers are prepared to put faith in it, and there's not one single South African producer who's done so.

(Schmitz 2006)

Schmitz's success in lobbying international financing for *Hijack Stories* (2000) can be attributed to his favourable reputation following his first feature film, *Mapantsula* (1988) - an international success, described as "ground-breaking" (Malcolm 2001). Schmitz received a lot of interest for *Hijack Stories* (2000), particularly from French parties, at the Southern African International Film and Television Market Initiative (Sithengi) film festival (Tilley 2006). Here Schmitz was also able to secure script money for the writing of *Hijack Stories* (2000). Financing for filming was achieved through networking with German and French producers in Paris and in Cannes.

The making of *Hijack Stories* (2000) was a truly global ensemble with a French producer (Philippe Guez) and director of photography (Michel Amathieu), a German producer (Christoph Meyer-Wiel) and a British editor (Derek Trigg) and music producer (Howie B). In addition, the camera equipment was brought in from Munich, Germany, and post-production took place in Cologne – also in Germany (Worsdale 2000).

But gaining this kind of support was not always this easy as the years between *Mapantsula* (1988) and *Hijack Stories* (2000) proved to be a difficult period for Schmitz as a film maker. During this time, Tilley was sharing a house with Schmitz and describes the situation:

You would expect that if someone had done a film that did so well internationally [Mapantsula] that he would be able to make his next film quite soon. [...] But he spent years trying to get projects going and it was very difficult for him to get a follow-up feature [...]. So it was a really long hard time for Oliver in those ten years, from doing *Mapantsula*, which was well received, to eventually getting *Hijack Stories* [made].

(2006)

Although *Hijack Stories* (2000) was made in 1999 and screened abroad in 2000, it only made it to South African cinema screens in 2003. The British, French and German producers may not have considered screening *Hijack Stories* (2000) in South Africa a priority, but nothing could have been more important for Schmitz (2006), who was disappointed that his film was not marketed by the distributor, Ster Kinekor, in the same way that films from the United States and Europe are. This, Schmitz believes, would have got people more interested and aware of *Hijack Stories* (2000). Furthermore, instead of creating a new trailer specifically for the South African audience, the French subtitled trailer was used to advertise the film as it was the cheapest option. In Johannesburg, *Hijack Stories* (2000) only screened at The Zone @ Rosebank, Eastgate Mall, and Southgate Mall (Majola 2003) and a similar strategy was adopted for the rest of the major cities in South Africa (Tilley 2006). The main reason for this limited release was the costliness of the film itself for cinema screening, which had to be ordered from France at a cost of up to R70 000 per print (SA Film 2005).

But *Hijack Stories* (2000) received wider success among the foreign audiences – namely those in France, Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany – where it was more appropriately marketed. In 2000, *Hijack Stories* (2000) opened the Planet African series at the 2000 Toronto Film Festival (VH1) where it received “rave reviews” (Deming 2005). The film also received special mentions in the Official Selection, *Un certain regard*, at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival (Tracey 2004) and at The Festival of African Cinema in Milan in 2002. *Hijack Stories* (2000) was awarded a prize at the Carthage Film Festival in Tunisia and featured at the 2002 Rome Pan African Film Festival.

Reviews are useful in indicating the film's local and international success. There is theoretical evidence of the relevance of reviews. Andre Lefevere (2000) offers the notion of refractions – a systems approach to literature – emphasising the role of reviews. Aside from pointing out that translation is an “*obvious form*” of refraction, Lefevere also comments that it is to be found in the:

less obvious forms of criticism, commentary, historiography, teaching, the collection of works in anthologies, the production of plays. These refractions have been extremely influential in establishing the reputation of a writer and his or her work.

(2000: 235)

In a similar way to literature, film is “*contemplated, commented on, identified with, applied to life, in a number of essentially subjective ways*” (2000: 249). This legitimises the place of film reviews among refractions. Film reviews are significant in that they are “*designed to influence the way in which the reader receives the work, concretises it*” (2000: 249). In this case, it is the viewer's opinion which is influenced by the review.

The film review therefore plays an important role in a film's success, affecting the number of people who watch the film, whether in a cinema, on a hired release, or on television. Essentially, the film review forms part of the film's marketing. In South Africa, the film critic and film theoretician play a crucial role in introducing the general public to locally made films (Botha & van Aswegen 1992: 139). Poor distribution of local films means that very few reviews are written by film critics. The limited number of South African film reviews of *Hijack Stories* (2000) is evidence of the film's weak publicity and consequent lack of exposure in South Africa.

The few South African reviews for *Hijack Stories* (2000) are nonetheless positive: “[w]atch this movie for its excellent acting, its intensity of emotion, as well as for its wonderfully crafted script...”; “the strength of the film: it does not glorify

*criminality, nor does it attempt to moralise to the rest of the country about it*" (Majola 2003).

However, it is important to maintain a realistic perspective when looking at local reviews of South African films in order not to accept this feedback at face value. This was certainly the warning from people in the industry:

I think that although there have been significant strides made in terms of the number and quality of movies made locally, I think we have to be careful about how much of our own hype we believe. [...] There has been a feel-good moment in South African. But we must manage our delusions.  
(Peterson 2006)

This "feel-good moment" may have resulted in a degree of false praise on the basis of strong patriotism. This could also arise from a sense of obligation that any South African film that has done well enough to be accepted abroad is worthy of admiration. While there are a lot of good South African films, there are a lot of films which are not as good as they are made out to be in the press (Tilley 2006). This means that it is difficult to get a completely objective idea of how well *Hijack Stories* (2000) was received in South Africa. Although representing an entirely different audience, the international reviews will support or contradict the perceived positive local reception of the film.

While there were few local reviews of *Hijack Stories* (2000), the number of foreign reviews was substantial, with most originating from the United Kingdom, which could explain the success of the DVD release of *Hijack Stories* (2000) in the United Kingdom (Schmitz 2006). For the most part, the reviews are positive, saying that the film poses "*challenging questions about the social divide in the new South Africa*" (Wardell 2002), proving "*that even a white director can have a direct line into what's really happening on at ground level in a troubled and crime-ridden society*" (Malcolm 2001). Wolf (2000) describes the performances as "*fresh and exhilarating*". Again, the "exotic" appeal of South Africa to international

audiences is evident: “[t]he film touches upon what it means to be South African in this new, liberated, class-conscious country” (Wolf 2000).

Also evident from various reviews is the appeal of *Hijack Stories* (2000) because of the escapism it offers from conventional American films:

This interesting South African film is worth seeing if only to view a more realistic environment as opposed to hi-tech and over glossy Hollywood hokum! The characters are believable and the script depicts situations which are well meaning and certainly make a change to the usual cinematic drivel currently on offer [...]. I particularly enjoyed watching those numerous Soweto shantytowns!

(Hill 2002)

The film appealed to French viewers in the same way:

No high budget action, no pretences, just the minimum needed to support the plot that takes the audience on a journey across various aspects of contemporary South African society, most often in a humorous way [...]. I recommend it if you are looking for a simple and out of the ordinary movie.

(Liotier 2004)

The “out of the ordinary” appeal of *Hijack Stories* (2000) to foreign audiences forms part of the overall attraction of so-called exotic, non-Western cultural items. This is discussed theoretically in the following chapter within the bounds of commodity theory, Huggan’s writings on the postcolonial exotic and Liu’s circulation of ideas, followed by in-depth analysis of the commercial DVD presentation of *Hijack Stories* (2000).