

**SPACE, BODY AND SUBJECTIVITY: SHIFTING  
CONCEPTIONS OF BLACK AFRICAN  
MASCULINITIES IN FOUR AUDIO-VISUAL  
TEXTS**

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## Abstract

Research in constructions of masculinities in South Africa is already an established field, having in part developed out of the need to contextualise global theories in the social, economic and cultural realities of African subjects. In its turn, this research has engendered a number of focused studies which have sought to depart from the traditional ‘men’s studies’ paradigm. Needless to say, studies in constructions of masculinities have infused the traditional paradigm with a new vitality.

This thesis proceeds from the premise that to be a man in (South) Africa and elsewhere is contingent upon a diversity of social, economic, political, generational and cultural expectations. I argue that these expectations, which are linked variously to status, sexual orientation and choice, mean that recognition of gender subjectivity as *performed* must take precedence over the idea of a stable gender role. And, at times, this applies with more force in African societies, traditional and modern (or, as is often the case, a confluence of both), than it does in western ones where class, rather than the complex intersection of tradition and modernity, tends to set gender identities on a more stable platform. I then propose the view that a nuanced conceptualisation of masculinities in South Africa needs to inform analysis of representations of men and women, and I do so by means of an in-depth critical analysis of the shifting conceptions of black African men and women in Shaka Zulu (1986), Mapantsula (1988), Fools (1998) and Yizo Yizo 1 (1999).

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Aim of thesis

The aim of this thesis is to provide an in-depth analysis of the nature and degree of the shifts that occur in the *conceptions* of black African masculinities in the four South African audio-visual texts that I have selected, namely, Shaka Zulu (1986), Mapantsula (1988), Fools (1998) and Yizo Yizo 1 (1999).<sup>1</sup> I am of the view that while general critical-theoretical scholarship in the field of heterosexual masculinities has grown rapidly in (South) Africa and elsewhere, it has not found consistent application in more situated studies of visual culture in South Africa. Moreover, research that takes into account the production of gender subjectivities in ideological apprehensions of space and corporeality is virtually non-existent. For these two basic reasons and others that this study will explore, I believe that this thesis makes a contribution to the understanding of how heterosexual masculine subjects come to occupy such a central place in every society yet remain largely ‘invisible’ in discussions of popular culture.

I carry out my investigation by examining the four audio-visual texts’ portrayal of black African heterosexual masculinities against the background of the significant shifts in the understanding of male and female gender and sexuality in contemporary (South) African and global theories. By gender I mean the social constructions and practices of male and female subjectivities and, by association, the social roles that

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<sup>1</sup> Except for Mapantsula, which has a published filmscript, to my knowledge the other three audio-visual texts do not have published scripts. This means that I shall transcribe the speeches of the characters directly and/or from the subtitles.

men and women play that are subject to change along with the unstable nature of the concept of gender. Where I use the term sexuality, it is to refer to the fluidity of sexual identifications and practices which always confound biological manhood and womanhood. In this context, then, the concept of masculinities does not necessarily refer to biological manhood nor for that matter, does it function as the binary opposite of the concept of femininities.<sup>2</sup> Rather, while I acknowledge the fact that, historically, certain categories of heterosexual men have enjoyed the prestige and privileges associated with the concept and practices of masculinity – as husbands, fathers, sole providers, warriors, gangsters, scholars, teachers, political leaders and other similar positions and roles that heterosexual men have occupied and played which have carried ‘value’ and ‘clout’<sup>3</sup> – and have used these to assert their power over certain categories of women and men, I contend that these subject positions and the prestige and privileges associated with them have become, and in some contexts<sup>4</sup> have always been, non-gender and non-sex specific.

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<sup>2</sup> As Robert Connell points out, “[m]asculinity *refers to* male bodies (sometimes directly, sometimes symbolically and indirectly), but is not *determined* by male biology. It is, thus, perfectly logical to talk about masculine women or masculinity in women’s lives, as well as masculinity in men’s lives” (The Men and the Boys 29).

<sup>3</sup> I place these terms in scare quotes because it is heterosexual men who have had the privilege to determine what is of value and also what carries clout. The significance of this point lies in the fact that these roles are not necessarily tied to biological manhood but, more properly, to class, including in the case of gangsterism where poverty, commodity culture and glamorous images that link violence to wealth produce desire in and among subjects of different genders and sexualities. In this sense, it would be naïve to talk about men and women as insular categories because each of these terms, that is, ‘man’ and ‘woman’, is riven with class, generational, racial, spatial, ethnic and other stratifications that make certain demands on it and grant certain privileges to it. A man in prison and in open society may become another’s ‘woman’ for a variety of reasons, including the fact that sex is currency in the prison context or that he is socially inclined in this way. Also, in open society there are other material reasons for making choices about one’s sexual orientation. Similarly, a woman may become another’s ‘girlfriend’.

<sup>4</sup> In some indigenous African societies women have ruled as chiefs, married other women as husbands, declared and took part in wars and generally occupied positions that in other contexts would be considered strictly for men. King Hatshepsut who ruled as Pharaoh of Egypt in the sixteenth century was a woman who had started out as regent to her late husband’s young son, but ruled for a long time as a ‘man’ (in the way that she dressed and used the masquerade that made her look like one). Mkabayi, who features in Shaka Zulu, played a similar role in Zululand in the eighteenth century on behalf of her half-brother and Shaka’s father, Senzangakhona. In “Men Rule, but Blood Speaks: Gender, Identity, and Kinship at the Installation of a Female Chief in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe,” Björn Lindgren discusses a more recent case of the installation in December 1996 of “Sinqobile Mabhena as

Therefore, I use the term masculinities to point to the status which men *and* women occupy in given social contexts and on which their performances of gender subjectivities depend, but also to the power<sup>5</sup> that accrues to the masculine status. For instance, a man may perform a role traditionally associated with female gender and a woman with male gender, depending on their social status and material circumstances. They may also subscribe to a wide range of sexual subjectivities which complicate the very meanings of being a man and a woman. And, needless to say, these sexual subjectivities change in every generation, even within generations, as styles of gender identifications change, merge and mutate. In Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies (1994), Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne, for instance, propose that one must

try to dismantle the conventional categories which dominate thinking on a particular subject. Thus anthropologists may ask themselves what they mean by their use of the terms ‘man’ or ‘woman’ and to what extent their own notions of gender are likely to intrude in their attempts to understand gender relations among others. Or they may start with a notion such as ‘masculinity’ on which everyone seems to agree. By looking in detail at everyday usage and the contexts in which people talk of masculinity, its complexity soon becomes apparent. (2)

Such would be the meaning of femininity, so that Erik Erikson’s view that,

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the first female Ndebele chief . . . to rule over the Nswazi area” (Changing Men in Southern Africa 2001: 177).

<sup>5</sup> The issue of power is a complex one and requires careful analysis; in Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa (2003), for instance, Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher note that “[i]n the case of a female Igbo ‘king’ . . . her constituents seemingly accepted her authority up to a point. When she tried to usurp a masquerade explicitly associated with physical manhood, local men rebelled and worked to remove her political power, wives, and associated masculine status” (5 – 6). Thus, whereas masculinities and the power, prestige and privileges associated with them are not an exclusive male preserve in some African societies, to some degree biological manhood remains the last resort for heterosexual men to wrest authority from women.

[A] woman, whatever else she may also be, never is not-a-woman, and this creates unique relations between her individuality, her bodily intimacy, and her productive potentials, and demands that feminine ego-strength be studied and defined in its own right (601),

may be seen to assert a biological essentialism that has no grounding in the “detail of everyday usage and the contexts in which people talk of [femininity]” (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 2).

Against this backdrop, I speak of *shifting* conceptions of black African masculinities in two basic senses. Firstly, I refer to the consequences of transformations to the very understanding of masculinities in gender theory for the study of representations of men and women in film, rather than to linear changes in the behaviour of black African *men* and the representation or imaging thereof from negative to positive or vice versa. My view is that the value judgements such as ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ are subjective, constituted as they are by and in discourse which, as Cornwall and Lindisfarne warn above, may privilege one’s own notions of what is positive and/or negative at the expense of other considerations of value. While I am aware that shifts in the understanding of masculinities have also resulted in the emergence of other film genres such as queer cinema and theories that examine these, this study focuses on what David Bell and Gill Valentine, in Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities (1995), call the most neglected area in the study of sexuality, that is, heterosexuality. This, they argue, is a glaring irony in that the sexuality which happens to be one of the reasons that we have queer and feminist interventions has been left relatively intact. The danger, they further point out, is that locating shifts in genres such as queer film and interventions like queer theory, while

important, may very easily enforce “gay ghettos” when, in fact, what is called ‘mainstream’ or ‘straight’ sexuality is heterogeneous from within.

The second sense in which I use *shifting* is that I am of the view that a film such as Fools, whose stated project is to examine the politics of gender, intervenes very deliberately in its contemporary social and cultural space; however, Fools is also conscious of how the sexist past that it attempts to redress is still embedded in the present. The question then is: how does the film navigate the fine line between past and present apprehensions and practices of gender – of masculinities especially – given that its authors are male and that they may very well operate with concepts (of masculinity and femininity) that undermine the film’s intervention? Or, how does Shaka Zulu, whose declared intention is to redress historical (read colonial) distortions of the Zulu social and military past, avoid installing a regressive Zulu masculinist ethos at a time, in 1986, when to reconstruct an exclusive ethnic past involves distorting the (‘Zulu’) present?

Because of the approach that I adopt, it would not be necessary to trace representations of black African men over a long history of cinematic attempts at ‘changing perceptions’ about black African men. My approach means that there is no *necessary* correlation between *conceptions* of black African masculinities and *representations* of black African men. Another film, mini-series, drama series or documentary other than the ones that I have selected would not alter the fundamental argument that I explore in this thesis, namely, that the assumptions about gender – about the meanings of femininity and masculinity – depend in large measure on the paradigms that filmmakers operate with. These paradigms often shift based on the filmmakers’ perceptions of the changing expectations of the audiences that their films address at any given historical moment. A recent film such as Jerusalema (2008) still



operates with the same idea of the underworld as exclusively male that Mapantsula or crime films before Mapantsula operated with, even though in Jerusalema the political issues that Mapantsula inscribed are neither urgent nor deemed relevant.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, each of the four audio-visual texts that I study constructs conceptual frameworks or categories within which it portrays its male and female characters. Shaka Zulu virtually films out its female characters as active agents in the social and political milieu that it reconstructs. On the other hand, Mapantsula, a film made at about the same time as Shaka Zulu, shifts the gender paradigm somewhat and portrays its female characters as active agents. This is so even though its conceptual apparatus still retains a bifurcated spatial structure in which the presence of women in public spaces is limited. Yizo Yizo 1 is a critique of black African male youth sexual violence. In this sense, its focus shifts significantly from conceptualising men as a generalised black mass and instead foregrounds the issues that bear directly on the coming-into-being of male subjectivity. Lastly, Fools' primary project is to raise debate on the issue of gender and so provides grounds for the evaluation of its characters as gendered subjects. Thus I aim not for a broad or, for that matter, exhaustive analysis but, rather, for an in-depth one, whereby I consider the internal dynamics of each audio-visual text's gender aspect.

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<sup>6</sup> Lucky, the gangster-protagonist in Jerusalema, quotes Al Capone and Karl Marx, reads a book by Donald Trump while driving a taxi and appropriates the current political rhetoric of transformation and empowerment all in an effort to navigate a world that understands this language better than the moral-political one of earlier times and which earlier films adopted. However, the film makes no attempt to alter the established perception and gangster cinema trend that in the underworld men are gangsters and resourceful and women are prostitutes, usable and disposable. Earlier, mainly made-for-blacks, vernacular films such as U-Deliwe and Ikati Elimnyama differed mainly in the way in which they rehearsed the Jim-comes-to-Joburg formula but their worlds, like the worlds of Mapantsula, Tsotsi, Jerusalema and other recent crime features and dramas, were through and through governed by a masculinist ethos that portrayed female characters as naive, gullible and, generally, victims with no capacity for criminal and other action. Similarly, a film like Tsotsi does not shift the masculinist foundation but simply confirms that the underworld is not a space closed off from other social spaces: it says, in other words, at certain moments *tsotsis* function in social situations in which they are called upon to act humanely. What Tsotsi retains, however, is the edifice on which gangster films are founded, which is that men are dynamic and resourceful.

I approach all four audio-visual forms as textual records, rather than as strictly film and/or television. In this sense, I favour the approach that Robert Stam and Louise Spense adopt to the question of representation in film. In their introduction to the *Screen* issue on “Racism, Colonialism and the Cinema” they point out that,

Although we are quite aware of the crucial importance of the *contextual*, that is, of those questions bearing on the cinematic industry, its processes of production, distribution and exhibition, those social institutions and production practices which construct colonialism and racism in cinema, our emphasis [is] *textual* and *intertextual*. (1983: 3)

They further say that analysis of colonialism and racism – and, I would add, of representation broadly – “must make the same kind of methodological leap effected by feminist criticism” and must transcend “the usefully angry but methodologically flawed ‘image’ analyses . . . in order to pose questions concerning the apparatus, the position of the spectator, and the specifically cinematic codes” (3). Given this sense, then, I must reiterate the point that I make above that my thesis is not seeking to chronicle changes in the manner in which black African men and women, as generalised categories, have been represented in cinema. Rather, I look at the models of masculinity and femininity that each audio-visual text projects on the screen and how viewers are positioned in relation to the words and images.

To put the above another way, in this study I am concerned with why and to what effect each audio-visual text frames black African male and female genders and sexualities in the way that it does, against the backdrop of the strong interest in gender, mainly feminist, studies in South Africa from the nineteen eighties onwards. I track the issue of black African masculinities by considering the manner in which the identities black African and masculinity are internally riven by forms of

identification that include, among others, class, modes of embodiment, generation and place, all of which mark the continuum of black African masculinities with points of hierarchy, disequilibrium and diversity. Rather than treat black African men and women as generalised ‘black people’ and track the transformations in their representations in film as such, this study views them as constructs of various gazes, institutions and gender/sexual mythologies,<sup>7</sup> as all men and women across racial lines are wont to be.

## 1.2 Rationale for thesis

To reiterate the point that I make above for the purpose of drawing it closer to the rationale for this study, I share the view of Stam and Spence that, while studies that “focus on certain dimensions of film – social portrayal, plot, and character” (2)

have made an invaluable contribution by alerting us to the hostile distortion and affectionate condescension with which [black African subjects] have been treated in the cinema, they have been marred by a certain ideological naiveté. While posing legitimate questions concerning narrative plausibility and mimetic accuracy, negative stereotypes and positive images, the emphasis on realism has often betrayed an exaggerated faith in the possibilities of verisimilitude in art in general and the cinema in particular, avoiding the fact that films are inevitably constructs, fabrications, representations. . . . The insistence on ‘positive images’, finally, obscures the fact that ‘nice’ images

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<sup>7</sup> I use this term not to mean ‘falsehoods’ but to suggest that subjectivity is a construct of various imperatives of popular and mass media discourses. The male youth in *Yizo Yizo 1*, for instance, is as much a construct of generational imperatives (or youth rebellion) as it is of the imperatives of commodity fetishism. This, I argue, is neither good nor bad – neither positive nor negative – but, rather, reveals the variegated forms of masculine identification and performance in urban black male youth cultures, in the case of *Yizo Yizo 1*.

might at times be as pernicious as overtly degrading ones, providing a bourgeois façade for paternalism, a more pervasive racism. (3)

Against the background of Stam and Spence's contention, then, the rationale for this thesis is that while the study of positive and negative images of black African subjects is an important area for investigation, there is also a need to investigate black African subjectivities from the 'inside', rather than simply as a cipher for an ostensible racist or colonialist 'outside'. Discussions of black African subjects have generally (and understandably in historical terms) acquired a monolithic character, as though the composite designation 'black subjects' did not mask multiple subjectivities that relate hierarchically to one another. Whereas what can be called the 'inside' of black African subjectivities is multiple and varied, in this thesis it is the 'inside' of only one form of black African subjectivities that I consider, namely, black African masculinities, which I argue is also multiple and varied. I posit the view that the term masculinity as the name for a singular identity, namely, biological manhood, is misleading, in that it conceals a range of claims that men *and* women make on the term in their political, economic, social, and cultural lives.<sup>8</sup>

Let me probe the issue of race and colonialism further, for it is important to clarify my point about the need to investigate black African subjectivities from the inside. This does not mean that I separate the history of race representation in South African cinema from instances of conceptions of black African masculinities in the four audio-visual texts. A cursory glance at contemporary work on representations of black African masculinities in South African film and media will show that how we see and conceive of racial subjects has as much to do with racist mythologies and

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<sup>8</sup> Here I have in mind Stephen Miescher and Lisa Lindsay's idea, in Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa (2003), of masculinity as not meaning the same thing as "physical manhood" (5), that is, masculinity as a subjectivity that can be, and indeed is, performed by men and women.

ethnographies as with audio-visual representation. On this issue of the construction of spectatorship in film and media, Jane Stadler, for instance, argues in “Tsotsis, Coconuts and Wiggers: Black Masculinity and Contemporary South African Media” that the representation of “black-on-black violence in the South African media (and subsequently abroad) was used to shift responsibility for apartheid-era violence while justifying its own use of force” (345). She then concludes by asserting that, “[o]ne could say that the cinematic representation of violence among black gang members [in American cinema] fulfils a similar function, undermining the social criticism offered by rap music and deflecting attention from the social problems that give rise to gangs and drugs” (345).

Stadler’s point is significant for raising the issue of racial stereotyping in what came to be known as ‘blaxploitation’ films in America, where black characters functioned in ‘white films’ as scapegoats for larger socio-political problems. However, it is also important to recognise the internal dynamics of subcultures, in particular their articulation with prevailing assumptions about masculinity and femininity in the context of brutal patriarchal capitalism. Clive Glaser’s Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976 (2000) shows how gang subcultures develop from a variety of sources and that, while they (gang subcultures) speak of political and economic marginalisation they are almost always in collusion with the acquisitive brutal capitalist culture that creates them. He calls this the “contradictory attitude” (7) that gang subcultures have towards the *status quo* which creates them, at once holding “middle-class values in contempt and aspir[ing] to high levels of comfort and accumulation” (7). While this does not necessarily delegitimise Stadler’s reading, it nevertheless complicates the context in which certain expressions of black African masculinity can be read. In this sense, whereas, as Stadler points out, rap music – like

*Kwaito* music in South Africa – may function as social critique, it may – and indeed does – also function as the means for upward mobility.

Glaser also argues that the gender dimension of gang subcultures in black South African townships needs to be taken into account as “in some sense an extension of pre-urban sexual socialization,” whereby “girls were socialized into domesticity [and] boys were given the freedom to embark on an exploration of sexuality and identity” (4). This is what I mean by the need also to investigate black African masculinities from the inside, for at some point one must concede agency to the black African actors that is not simply the direct and inevitable consequence of racial typecasting. In this connection, one could also consider Lindsay and Miescher’s elaboration on their approach to the study of men and masculinities in modern Africa. They state that, “our inquiries are rooted in local dynamics; our primary interest is in *Africans*, generally in relation to each other” (Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa 3). It is not that they are blind to the impact of “political and coercive power” of colonialism; rather, they argue that “colonial states and their actors often had a limited reach within African societies” (3). I am also of the view that much could be lost if issues of black African masculinities are not addressed as also informed by the internal dynamics of black African lives.

Below, in the section entitled “Audio-visual culture in South Africa and the place of my research in it,” I provide a review of critical-theories of audio-visual culture in South Africa, including those, like Stadler’s, which examine constructions of black African masculinities.

### 1.3 Questions that the thesis asks and seeks to answer

The basic question that informs this thesis is: what conceptions of black African masculinities are promoted in the four audio-visual texts and why? Related to this question is: given the fact that in the four audio-visual texts masculinity is conceived narrowly as synonymous with heterosexual men, how can we then talk about representations of black African heterosexual men in them, more especially considering the major advances in theoretical investigations into the different ways in which men perform their subjectivities in South Africa, signposted by Robert Morrell's Changing Men in Southern Africa (2001)? In other words, have creative media, in particular the four audio-visual texts that I investigate in this thesis, perpetuated a narrow conception of *even* heterosexual men and thus missed the evidence of diverse profiles among them which inform their relation to conventional social expectations?

The significance of this study lies in the answers that I give to these questions. In general, I contend that where men are the focus of representation, mass media discourses are often notoriously vague on, or at the very least inconsistent about, the issue of the coming-into-being of male identity, preferring, instead, conventional oppositions between men and women as the precondition for, and more often, for not speaking about men's diverse performances of masculinity. In my discussion, I take into account the arguments of theorists such as Judith Butler, Terry Threadgold, Robert Connell, Robert Morrell, Antony Easthope, Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, Lisa Lindsay, Stephan Miescher, Signe Arnfred, Niara Sudarkasa, Andrea Cornwall, Nancy Lindisfarne and Rosi Braidotti, particularly insofar as their views on masculinities centre on the *problem* of constituting the masculine, rather than on masculinity as a social given and unitary subject position. In addition to the general

theories of masculinities, I also consider those studies that have examined specific cases of black African male representations and self-representations. These are, among other studies on which I also draw, Kopano Ratele's, Thembisa Waetjen's, Mxolisi Mchunu's, Thokozani Xaba's and Glen Elder's.

But why do I analyse black African masculinities, when most of these questions can be, and have been, asked of conceptions of masculinities generally? In this thesis I seek to interrogate the essentialisms often associated with black African male identification. I advance the view that, in varying degrees, this simplification implicitly informs the conceptions of black African men (and women) in the four audio-visual texts and that, for this reason, this study is crucial.

#### **1.4 Rationale for selecting the four audio-visual texts**

I have chosen the four audio-visual texts for two basic reasons: firstly, all four audio-visual texts came out at crucial moments in the social and political history of South Africa, but also in the history of filmmaking. Their creators all made claims regarding the uniqueness of their interventions and the paradigmatic shifts that their texts effected: in interviews, lectures, brochures, promotional literature and other media. Bill Faure, the creator of Shaka Zulu, touted the mini-series as revisionist, correcting distortions about Zulu social and political history. The creators of Mapantsula, Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane, argued that their film marked a departure from earlier films about black life and sought the endorsements of Mongane Serote and Achmat Dangor, who wrote the Preface and Foreword respectively for the published film script that included a long interview with Schmitz and Mogotlane by Jeremy Nathan. In his Preface, Serote claimed for the film the status of being the “first South African movie” (8), which was in line with what its creators claimed for it



in the interview. When Yizo Yizo 1 appeared, it immediately became the talking point among parents, politicians, members of the general public who had seen it and academics at some institutions where it became a set work, mainly because of its perceived relentless pursuit of realism and defiance of social and family drama taboos.<sup>9</sup> Ramadan Suleman, the director of Fools, proclaimed the film a forum for debating gender politics. This is a critical departure from the preoccupation of its founding text, Njabulo Ndebele's 1983 story of the same title, which is a sympathetic portrayal of a teacher who is disgraced after raping his pupil.

Secondly, the four audio-visual texts were selected because they appeal to and – most importantly for my concern in this study – wittingly and/or unwittingly engender *ways* of conceptualising black African masculinities that require close analysis. In this sense, my approach to their material is both historical and formal. I do not mean historical in the sense of tracing a linear cinema/film historical trajectory<sup>10</sup> but, rather, in the sense in which to their creators – and to some critics who wrote on them – the audio-visual texts mark a break of some sort with, and/or paradigm shift from, productions before it, however debatable such a claim may prove to be in the context of my thesis.<sup>11</sup>

I also conceive of the historical in this case in the sense that each text's conception of black African male and female subjectivities can be linked to an ideological

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<sup>9</sup> As a family drama, Yizo Yizo 1 nevertheless created consternation among some quarters of the black African community who felt that its dramatisation of explicit sex and violence among young people was gratuitous and went beyond the boundaries of the moral story which they expected it to be.

<sup>10</sup> There are aspects of cinema history that I bring to bear on my discussion, but only insofar as they help situate particular points in the present discussion. For instance, I look at the degree to which a film like Mapantsula, whose creators make direct references to earlier films in the interview with Jeremy Nathan in the published script, substitutes a political framework for the moral framework of these earlier films but retains what Jacqueline Maingard (in "New South African Cinema" 238) and Nokwenza Plaatjies (in "Ubuntu" 223) argue is a predominantly male world.

<sup>11</sup> In Images of South Africa: The Rise of the Alternative Film (1992), Martin Botha and Adri van Aswegen provide a theoretical context for some of the films that arose from the need to break with older traditions of filmmaking and raise crucial questions regarding representation of the new/alternative in these films which I introduce below. It is a study that is also important for my discussion of Mapantsula and Fools in particular.

current, both at the time of its production and, in the case of Shaka Zulu, at the time in which it is set, that is, nineteenth-century Zululand. For instance, Shaka Zulu can be read in the contexts of, among others, Gerhard Maré and Graham Dawson's discussions of Zulu and British martial masculinities in Brothers Born of Warrior Blood: Politics and Ethnicity in South Africa (1992) and Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities (1994) respectively. These studies, and others like them,<sup>12</sup> examine the continued fascination with martial masculinity in contemporary contexts, particularly when this fascination seems quite out of place. A discussion of the mini-series can also gain from studies of Shakan and Imperial historiographies, such as Carolyn Hamilton's Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention (1998), which make pointed remarks about the intersection of maleness, historicity and commerce in the contemporary moment.

The formats that the texts adopt – the episodic format adopted by Shaka Zulu and Yizo Yizo 1 and the feature film format adopted by Mapantsula and Fools – also influenced my choice. The mini- and drama-series formats generally target specific language groups in family settings during family viewing times by appealing to situations that are familiar to their target audiences. For this reason, they are formats that insinuate themselves fairly clandestinely into the daily routines of their audiences and raise far less suspicion and criticism among their audiences. Moreover, these formats work by creating suspense and anticipation in the viewers, further disarming them as historical addressees with the capacity for critical engagement. The huge popularity of Shaka Zulu and Yizo Yizo 1 was not only reinforced by the re-runs that

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<sup>12</sup> Gerhard Maré's Brothers Born of Warrior Blood: Politics and Ethnicity in South Africa (1992) and Thembisa Waetjen's Workers and Warriors: Masculinity and the Struggle for Nation in South Africa (2004), for instance.

they enjoyed on TV-1/TV-2 and SABC-1 respectively, but also by the industry that they generated in the form of soundtracks. Thus I am interested in how the formal aspects of the mini and the drama series engender certain kinds of audiences.

In the main, Shaka Zulu was targeted at conservative Zulu-speaking black African, particularly male, audiences and combined in its ten one-hour long episodes entertainment, education in Zulu history and pride in being a Zulu man for those Zulu – *and* black African – men who subscribed to the mini-series' ideology. Viewed in this light, it served as a tool for gender training, as it were, for reinforcing cultural views about being a Zulu man at a time (in 1986) when the political activism among black African youth threatened to upset the generational and gender hierarchy. Likewise, Yizo Yizo 1 was screened in 1999 on SABC-1, the national broadcaster's flagship, which is also its black audience-orientated channel, in thirteen one-hour long episodes. It served to moralise the lives of black African male youth and, alongside this moral stance, the drama series also unwittingly and paradoxically presented township heterosexual masculinity of the violent and cynical type as iconic. This contradictory character is at the root of Yizo Yizo 1's problematic agenda: on the one hand, the series appeals to a moral citizenship while on the other it revels in the popular images of black African heterosexual male youth subculture.

Feature films, on the other hand, present a complete world to a fee paying anonymous audience and thus place emphasis on the imagination and, depending on the world they present, on the hero and/or villain. Because of their self-enclosed worlds, feature films also tend to simplify the complexity of the real worlds of their audiences by superimposing on them set structures, even when, as in avant garde films, irony and parody are often foregrounded to undercut the idea of a self-enclosed world. As feature films, Mapantsula (1988) and Fools (1998) tapped into the tradition

of *cinema verité* and combined this with the critical idiom of Third Cinema, both of which provoke crucial questions about the relation of form to social and political phenomena.

## 1.5 Synopses of the four audio-visual texts

### 1.5.1 Shaka Zulu: a synopsis

Shaka Zulu<sup>13</sup> is a mini-series that comprises ten one-hour long episodes which dramatise the history of the encounter between Shaka, the early nineteenth-century king of the Zulus, and the Europeans who arrive at his kingdom, Kwa-Bulawayo (Place of Killing), as emissaries of Lord Charles Somerset, the Governor of the seat of the British colonial government at the Cape. First screened in South Africa in 1986 by the South African Broadcasting Corporation's TV1 and TV2 channels during family time and targeted at South Africans across the racial and age spectrums, the mini-series is presented as a retrospective narrative that assesses the value of Shaka's legacy after the collapse of the empire that he built. As the narrator informs viewers in the mini-series' Epilogue,<sup>14</sup> the fall of the Zulu empire occurred as the result of meddling in and mismanagement of Zulu affairs by British colonists. The action is guided by the narrative voice-over of Henry Francis Fynn, whose character is based on the historical Fynn.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I have transcribed all the speeches of the characters. To the best of my knowledge, there is no published script of the mini-series.

<sup>14</sup> Because the mini-series begins in 1882 after the defeat, in 1879, by the British of the Zulus led by Cetshwayo, and works its way back to the early nineteenth century during Shaka's time, the Epilogue functions as the mini-series' introduction.

<sup>15</sup> In Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention (1998), Hamilton points out that historical records show that the historical Fynn was among the earliest of the British subjects to set foot in Zululand, mainly as traders, during the reign of Shaka. She further points out that Fynn's diary, published as The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn in 1950 under the editorship of anthropologist James Stuart and Natal superintendent for native education, D.M. Malcolm, has become one of the key texts of Shakan historiography, even though its authority continues to be fiercely contested. In any event, in Shaka Zulu it is Fynn's narrative that positions the viewers *vis-à-vis* the mini-series' historical material and action. He is also the right hand man for Francis George Farewell,

Shaka Zulu opens with Fynn's Epilogue; the setting is the court of the British Crown in London in 1882. England is also the place where the Cape colonial government has exiled Shaka's grandnephew, Cetshwayo, after the defeat of his army by the English and Welsh armies in 1879 at the battle of Rorkesdrift and the subsequent systematic dismantling of Shaka's legacy. The narrator informs viewers that Cetshwayo has come to Queen Victoria's court to "demand his kingdom back." In the Epilogue is also a fictional character by the name of Bramston, a Professor who has been brought in to present to Queen Victoria and the courtiers a brief lecture on the context in which the British Crown must understand Cetshwayo's demand and, he advises, reject it. The following is the Professor's brief lecture, which links the present state of Empire to what might have been had the "war machine" created by Shaka not been stopped:

Shaka Zulu, Your Majesty, yes, the founder of the great Zulu nation and the Zulu Empire, reigned from 1816 to 1828. Most definitely one of the greatest military geniuses in history, certainly on the level of a Caesar or an Alexander the Great. Imagine, if you will, the prodigious feat accomplished by this nineteenth-century African Achilles, Shaka Zulu. In less than twelve years he transformed a handful of idyllic, relatively harmless, herdsmen who were by nature reluctant to engage in any form of warfare, into a Spartan army of over eighty thousand highly trained ruthless warriors, extending his influence over most of South East Africa, an empire comparable in extension and might to that of Napoleon and in treachery to that of Genghis Khan. Your Majesty, gentlemen, the war machine created by Shaka Zulu was so monolithic it has

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the leader of the delegation sent to liaise with Shaka, whom Hamilton identifies as having been, like Fynn, historically a "trader and adventurer" (37).

survived his death by almost half a century. Yes, yes, the Crown has defeated it, but that defeat is purely temporary; it will rise again and again if we don't stop it once and for all. And why? Because King Shaka was no ordinary mortal; he was a messiah, a God-figure. Like an African Mephistopheles he gave the Zulus glory in return for their souls, wielding the forces of life and death on an endless battlefield of blood and carnage.

To this, Cetshwayo responds with disdain at the lack of "human respect" shown by the Professor and the other courtiers for Shaka's legacy and for Shaka himself, whom he describes as having been "one of those rare men who had the courage to live his ideals and to instill his dreams into the hearts of his countrymen." For her part, Queen Victoria believes that it is

precisely why we cannot give you back your realm. Shaka Zulu is more alive today than ever. His military strength still prevails. You're the king, but it is his spirit which rules your people.

Concluding this brief episode, the narrator intones:

So it was that the empire created by Shaka Zulu some six decades earlier was disbanded, the king's territory subdivided and placed under British supervision. The resultant political mismanagement, continual white interference and ensuing strife would effectively destroy the house of Shaka. From this time on, the Zulu people would only be able to dream of the dignity and glory given to them by their legendary king.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> It is this historical framework that Shaka Zulu sustains throughout, with the message of Shaka's enduring legacy by implication carried over to the volatile South Africa of the nineteen eighties in which it was screened. When after the brief encounter between Cetshwayo and Queen Victoria the narrator turns not to the colonial future but, instead, to the pre-colonial, Shakan, times, to tell "his story," it becomes particularly significant to pose two basic questions, namely, why Shaka? Why in the nineteen eighties? It is these questions that will shape my critical intervention.

From the England of 1882, the mini-series goes back in time to the South East Africa of 1822. The narrator locates the “first time [that] Europeans felt the ripple effects of Shaka’s war machine” in 1823. At this time, viewers are told, the “Zulu king was at the height of his power” and that “like most military despots, Shaka became both master and victim of his regime. His empire, having been born out of aggression, now required continued war action to keep it alive.” For his part, Somerset, in his letter to the Crown, describes Shaka as

a mass murderer, a depraved ogre whose thirst for conquest knows no limits. He has deluged his country with innocent blood, disregarding the most sacred ties of affection, turning father against son, son against brother in a bloodbath that defies description.<sup>17</sup>

When the action moves back to England, this time to the court of King George IV, the camera sets up what becomes a sustained contrast between the British and the Zulus. Essentially, this is a contrast between the quiet, civil atmosphere of Cape colonial life and the noisy, frenzied spectacle of Zulu life. This contrast is illustrated in the quick camera interchanges between the scenes of the Cape colony’s ordered social and political life and the scenes of the south eastern region’s perilous military life. For instance, when Lord Bathurst meets up with political strategists Wilkins and Worthing at the Cape parliamentary house to discuss the best way to address the threat posed by Shaka’s advance westward, after King George has turned down Somerset’s request for military reinforcements, the language Barthurst uses is that of

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<sup>17</sup> The terms that suffuse Fynn’s narrative of Shaka’s life as king of the Zulus are, Shaka’s need “for more victims” and his “propensity for war,” which, even while ostensibly set against the terms of Somerset’s characterisation of Shaka, are ultimately of a piece with them. In short, while the narrator and Somerset may be said to differ on the nature of Shaka’s savagery, with the former clearly aligning his evaluation with a romantic idea (of Shaka’s noble savagery) and the latter with a cynical idea (of Shaka’s ignoble savagery), they arguably clearly agree on (what their terms portray as) Shaka’s self-evident savagery.

“soothing the savage beast with years of our tried and tested double-talk.” Set against this scenario is a scene showing Shaka’s army in battle, indiscriminately killing and burning the homesteads of the adversaries. But Farewell, whom Barthurst recommends for the role of liaising with Shaka on behalf of the British Empire, despite Somerset’s disapproval of dialogue with a “savage” king, points out that Europe has furnished her own cast of barbarian warriors like Attila and Charlemagne. Nevertheless, the three-week perilous journey that Farewell, Fynn and their recruits undertake to Shaka’s Kwa-Bulawayo domain is a venture into what Fynn describes as “forsaken regions.”

The story of Shaka’s birth and rise to power is couched in terms of a fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. Professor Bramston’s brief lecture about Shaka as “no ordinary mortal . . . a messiah [and] a God-figure . . . [who] gave the Zulus glory in return for their souls,” introduces this mythological/prophetic aspect of the mini-series’ story. The myth takes on various forms, all of which rest on the idea of Shaka’s predestination as the founding father of the Zulu nation. Viewers first encounter this idea during Shaka’s mother Nandi’s difficult pregnancy and the birth of Shaka. A fictional character named Sitayi, an ancient *isanusi* (diviner), appears on both occasions (during Nandi’s pregnancy and again during the birth of Shaka) as the medium for the prophecy. It is also Sitayi who intervenes when Shaka’s father Senzangakhona’s aide, Gubhela, who has been sent to kill Nandi before she gives birth to Shaka, ambushes her. After Sitayi unleashes her hyenas, which devour Gubhela, she (Sitayi) tells Nandi, in an ominous tone of voice, that, “from you shall come the first born of a king, giving birth to a mighty nation of bloodstained spears and thundering black shields.”



This captures the substance of the myth-historical form that frames the mini-series' portrayal of Shaka and Shakan times. This form is further reinforced by the narrator's statement that with Shaka's birth "history had cast its die" and by Senzangakhona's right-hand man, Mudli, who describes the signs of the child of the prophecy to Senzangakhona in the following terms:

As your father, the great Jama, suspected, he is the child of the prophecy.

Your father felt it the day of Shaka's birth. That's why he wanted the woman [Nandi] to die before childbirth. It was the last act of his reign, one which unfortunately was of no consequence.

And about Shaka's birth, Mudli points out to Senzangakhona that,

He [Shaka] was born in *Ntulikazi* [July], the month of the prophecy. He was illegitimate, the condition of the prophecy. And then, his moment of birth coincided with the death of your principal wife's son; that too is the curse of the prophecy.

Mudli's advice to Senzangakhona is that,

Shaka must be killed now, before he is allowed to start a new era in which the word AmaZulu will signify terror and death. If he remains in your house, your wives will be barren. Is that not the case *Baba* [father]? Since you met that woman [Nandi], you've had two children, both hers. We'll call Nondumo of the Nzuzo clan. His powers to these mysteries far exceed those of the *sangomas* [diviners]. He will read the secrets of the child and provide you with the secrets of your need. And then *Baba*, you shall make your own decision.

Nondumo, a dwarfish male figure, is promptly summoned to Senzangakhona's court where the young Shaka has also been summoned; Nondumo proceeds to 'smell evil' and cuts incisions in Shaka's legs so that the blood should tell if he is, indeed, the child of the prophecy. Nondumo 'reads' Shaka's blood, drinks it amidst thunder and a ghostly appearance of Sitayi and dies instantly from it, as Sitayi repeats his earlier prophecy to Nandi.<sup>18</sup>

Nondumo's death and the general consternation in the Zulu royal house about Shaka's 'mysterious and evil' powers lead to Shaka's exile, which begins his and his mother's long years of suffering and the hardening of his resolve to inflict vengeance on their foes. As a young man, Shaka returns to Zululand on his father's invitation and the attempt on the part of the latter to rein him in proves unsuccessful. Shaka leaves with the promise that he will return to take his rightful place on the Zulu throne "by force," which incurs the wrath of his father. His father promptly sends out a party of warriors to hunt him down and to bring him back alive, apparently to be executed. It is while these capturers pursue him that Godongwana's warriors rescue him. Godongwana, who has changed his name to Dingiswayo (wanderer), is a man whom Shaka saves from certain death in an earlier episode, not knowing that he (Godongwana) is heir to the throne of a neighbouring Mthethwa clan. Dingiswayo takes Shaka under his wing as a surrogate son and also provides refuge to Shaka's

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<sup>18</sup> In my view, all of the above serve two basic purposes for the mini-series. One is to legitimise a claim made by Faure in a companion brochure, of insider knowledge of Zulu myths. In this brochure, Faure decries the distortion of African "witchcraft and superstition" and claims that "always paramount was our intention to place in historic perspective seventeenth [sic] century Africa with its witchcraft and superstition and to correct the misconception of those who judged the beliefs and traditions of Africa – not in the context of Africa but in narrow Christian perspective" (15). The other, which I have already mentioned and which I shall examine in depth in my analysis, relates to the use-value of the mini-series in the nineteen-eighties as a general warning about the (prophesied) rise of Shaka's spirit. Indeed, *Shaka Zulu* makes a number of allusions to the inevitability of this rise. Among these allusions is Shaka's aunt Mkabayi's view that, "Shaka will bring a new world, a new order and a new society. What our father (Jama) and his generation called evil is the future and it is not evil. Of that I'm convinced."

mother and two siblings. It is while Shaka is a guest of Dingiswayo that his stature as a great warrior grows.

Shaka Zulu fleshes out the personal history of the rise of Shaka to unparalleled greatness and, in doing so, departs quite significantly from the socio-political and economic history of the south east African region that the narrator seems at times to promise. For instance, at the barracks of the Mthethwa regiments, Shaka, among other acts, defies the commander's methods of training the regiments and of throwing conventional long spears in battle. Shaka visits a blacksmith to forge a short stabbing spear that he has invented; he returns to the Mthethwas and argues successfully for his military ideas and strategies to be implemented and gets an opportunity to train fifty warriors and another to fight in a war that his father has declared against the Mthethwas for refusing to give his son up, in which he and the warriors he has trained distinguish themselves. To buttress the point of Shaka's singular transformation of the landscape of warfare during his exile at Dingiswayo's kingdom, the narrator informs viewers that,

With this one battle, Shaka had reshaped the form of African warfare. Never again would battles in this region of the continent be the same, for Shaka was to begin what was to become known as the *U-Mfecane*, a reign of terror that would be unparalleled in Africa's turbulent history.

This is followed by the depiction of Shaka's ferocious wars and the subjugation of weaker chiefs under Mthethwa authority. The brutality of his methods is spectacular and his concept of war is what he terms "total war." The mini-series shows his army attacking and burning down enemy homesteads.

Shaka's return to Zululand after the death of his father to take over as king coincides with the arrival of Europeans. At first circumspect about their host, the Europeans gradually warm to him. Among the many things that they do while in his kingdom, they attempt to convert him to Christianity; they nurse him back to life after an assassination attempt by his half-brothers; they fool him into believing that an application of macassar hair-dye has restored his youth. Furthermore, the British virtually annihilate Zwide's army with one cannon and a few rifles (much to their surprise, as one of them remarks how amazing it is what "a little gunpowder does to them") and make Shaka sign off a tract of land to them, which they proceed to establish as a British Colony of Port Natal.

In turn, Shaka becomes an obliging, albeit sceptical, host. By and by, he sends Farewell with his Prime Minister, Ngomane, and a small band of his warriors and Farewell's recruits to seal a peace treaty with Somerset's government. In their absence, Nandi dies and Shaka promptly institutes a year-long mourning period. He also sends his physically-exhausted armies on military campaigns, including one in the direction of the Cape. As the peace treaty falls under threat, Farewell and the Zulu warriors, who have been treated disdainfully by Somerset and the Colony's public, return to Zululand to find that Shaka's actions after the death of his mother have caused misery to his people. Farewell's attempts to reason with him fail. The story ends with Shaka's brutal life coming back to him in flashbacks as he walks to his death where his brothers await to kill him.<sup>19</sup> As he lies dying, Mkabayi orders everyone present to burn everything that will remind the Zulus of Shaka.

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<sup>19</sup>This episode summarises the ambiguous attitude that the mini-series exhibits towards its hero throughout, at once portraying Shaka as a great man of Zulu national legend and a usable liability in the contemporary moment. The final episode condenses, in Gary Mersham's words about the mini-series as a whole, the warning "against violence in the pursuit of power . . . the parable of a man

### 1.5.2 Mapantsula: a synopsis<sup>20</sup>

Set in Soweto, a black African township south of Johannesburg, South Africa, at the time of the State of Emergency of 1985, Mapantsula tracks the past and present of a small-time criminal and former bus driver, Johannes Themba Mzolo (alias Panic), in the context of the nineteen-eighties' popular politics of the United Democratic Front (UDF). The film uses the device of parallel stories and parallel 'worlds': the main stories are those of Panic and his underworld, on the one hand, and, on the other, the activists who are claiming the township streets from criminals and are agitating for political change against township Councillors whom they regard as instruments of the apartheid regime. These stories and the 'worlds' in which they are set meet on crucial occasions, such as when Panic is imprisoned with the political activists and has to share a prison cell with them or when the activists hold a meeting with the Councillors to discuss the rent hike. The idea behind the film, and what drives its action, is that these contrasting 'worlds' must come to some kind of encounter or collision.

Panic sometimes shares his single room with his girlfriend, Pat, who works as a live-in housekeeper for Mrs. Bentley. Mrs. Bentley makes brief appearances in the course of the film, all of which are within the environs of her suburban house, which she shares with her husband. At the time that viewers encounter Panic, he has stopped working and makes a living by doing petty crime: stealing from shops in the city, grabbing purses from unsuspecting shoppers and pickpocketing. In the course of the film, viewers also learn from police detective Stander that he sells dagga

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obsessed with violence, and [prophesy of] the 're-awakening' of a 'new' form of Zulu nationalism" (79).

<sup>20</sup> I shall draw on the published film script for quotations.

(marijuana), for which he has been arrested on a few occasions but released early as a reward for his co-operation with the police as an informer.

By means of flashbacks, the film spends a good deal of time following Panic's criminal life. His side of the story is well developed and provides an excellent opportunity for viewers to follow his criminal career which dates back to the nineteen seventies. However, the 'actual' story is of his arrest during the political riots in the township, which occurs at the beginning of the film, and his refusal to sign a confession implicating him and Duma in the riots at the film's conclusion. In the confession, Panic must admit to knowing that Duma has been bringing arms into the country. Nevertheless, the film does not allow the 'actual' story to overwhelm the details of Panic's criminal life, which is the key to understanding the film's broad message of the consequences of the political struggle of the nineteen eighties for criminals and for those who colluded with the apartheid regime.

The film opens with a succession of shots each of which gives viewers a glimpse of the context in which the events of the film take place and briefly introduces the main antagonists, namely, Panic and the UDF political activists. The opening shot is of children playing in the dusty street at dusk who are suddenly scattered by a speeding riot police van, indicating that the country is in a State of Emergency and that, as the result of this, the black African townships are under riot police surveillance. This shot is followed by a close-up one of the back of the same police van, where Panic and some political activists who have been arrested during the police raid sit *en route* to prison. Panic is asleep and "looks incongruous in his flashy evening suit" (53). Thereafter, the camera shows a crowd singing and dancing the *toyi-toyi* in the street; the *toyi-toyi* is a defiant political struggle dance accompanied by political songs and slogans. Both the shot of the back of the police van with Panic

inside and that of the *toyi-toying* crowd bring the two worlds of the criminal underworld and political activism together in two quick camera movements, for what follows is the prison scene where Panic and the comrades formally meet. The film announces its title only after these brief shots have played out, so that they could be said to be the film's prologue.

Viewers next encounter Panic in the city stalking an unsuspecting white businessman. An accomplice, Dingane, who serves as a decoy for Panic, distracts the businessman while Panic picks his pocket. When the businessman realises what has happened, Panic casually pulls out a knife and tells him to “Voetsek! (Fuck Off!)” (57). After this incident, Panic is seen approaching a group of gamblers playing dice on the pavement of a Johannesburg city street. He “steps on the dice and picks up the money. The gamblers complain and he kicks one away” (58). Later at an eating-house with Dingane, he boasts that, “Ek is ‘n tiger. (I’m a tiger)” (58).

When the camera cuts back to the prison to pick up from where its opening scene left off, viewers see Panic in a jail cell with UDF political activists. Here he tries unsuccessfully to impose himself as he does in the street in the two incidents above. The following exchange between Panic and a UDF activist called Mandla takes place:

PANIC: ‘Mabandiet! Wies Julle? (Bandits! Who are you?) Skyf!  
(Move!)

MANDLA: Usho Kanjani? (What do you mean?) Ungubani wena? (Who are you?)

PANIC: My bras call me Panic.

PANIC: Wena ungubani? (Who are you?) Is jy die boss in die sel (Are you the boss in this cell?)

MANDLA: Ulethwe yini la Panic? (Why are you here?)

PANIC: Yona lento ekulethe la nawe. (Same reason as you.)

TEACHER: Panic! Awuchaze ke mfowethu. (Please tell us brother.) Uze kanjani la? (How did you come here?)

PANIC: Ngilethwe amacomrades, uyangithola? (Because of the comrades, get me?)

MANDLA: Look my brother, ngibona sengathi awazi ukuthi kwenzakalani la. (I think you don't understand what is happening.)

PANIC: Hey! Ek is nie jou broer nie! (I'm not your brother!)

TEACHER: Panic, singabantu mfowethu kufanele sizwane. (Panic, as people we've got to understand one another.)

[. . .]

PANIC: Cut my uit! (Cut me out!) Jy ken my nie, ek ken jou nie! (You don't know me, I don't know you!) (62-63)

After this exchange, Panic “retreats to the far side [of the cell], wary, isolated” (63).

The action moves to Club Hi-Lite, a speakeasy where viewers encounter Panic at a table with Pat, Panic's girlfriend, and her friend Joyce. Dingane also joins them.

“There is a generous supply of liquor in front of them and Pat is surprised by Panic's display of prosperity” and remarks, “U rich nê Panic? (You're rich Panic?)” (64).

Here Panic dances the popular township version of the strip dance called *stshwetla*, which stands in sharp contrast to the *toyi-toyi* dance that the crowd of political activists perform earlier in the film.

The camera then captures him returning home with Pat; he is drunk, unsteady on his feet and, when they get to the door, struggles to find the keyhole. Having been too drunk that night, the next morning he pleads with Pat to make love to him, but Pat



turns him down as she has to leave for work. In-between these two scenes, that is, Panic and Pat returning home from the nightclub and the following morning, viewers observe Panic inside the police interrogation room being abused by Stander, who treats him like a boy. The following passes between them:

STANDER: Johannes Themba Mzolo . . . alias Panic. . . . Is that what they call you?

PANIC: Yes, Panic.

STANDER: Panic? Wat vir 'n naam is dit, jong? (What sort of a name is that, boy?)

[. . .]

STANDER: Verstaan jy Afrikaans? (Do you understand Afrikaans?) . . . Jy moet leer jong, jy moet leer. (You must learn, my boy, you must learn.) (68-69)

Other interrogations by Stander continue this pattern where Panic's manhood is put to the test. For instance, he asks Panic about the trade unionist, Duma, who runs a political office and organises rent boycotts; Stander threatens to expose Panic as an informant to his "prison mates" and to send him "back to the prison farms" (98) if he refuses to co-operate with the police authorities. At one stage, during one of the interrogations, Stander forces Panic to strip down to his underpants, exposing scars on his back that Stander has inflicted on him at previous interrogations and basically tells Panic that he can do as he pleases with him. Although Stander tells Panic that he is "not such a bad chap" (94), he cannot trust him because Panic has previously been arrested for the "assault of a white man" (79).

The camera then cuts to Panic visiting Pat at her workplace later in the day to demand money from her. Mrs. Bentley sets her dog on him and, despite his threat of violence toward Pat and Mrs. Bentley, he is forced to flee.

When the world around Panic begins to take a more overtly political intensity, he is found wanting: Pat loses her job because of his unannounced visits to her workplace and Panic cannot help her fight her case; only Duma can. Panic's landlady, Ma Modise, wants her rent money which Panic cannot afford because, as Pat tells him on the morning that he asks her for sex, he is a "loafer" (71). He does not understand the political issues around the rent boycott in the township and when Pat's aunt chases him away from her house, after Pat leaves him to live with her, he turns to an *isangoma* (healer/diviner) for help. He also retreats to the night club.

The turning point in Panic's life comes about after his landlady's son, Sam, is shot dead by the riot police, and it is a short route from this incident to his decision to say "No!" (139) to signing Stander's confession at the film's conclusion.

On the 'other side' of Panic's underworld is the 'world' of UDF politics. Even though this side of the film is not as developed as Panic's is, it nevertheless has bearing on how viewers read Panic's experiences. In any case, these two worlds meet on a few occasions, such as (i) when Panic is arrested and has a confrontation with Mandela and Teacher in a prison cell full of political activists; (ii) when he confronts trade unionist Duma, whom he suspects of "messing around with [his] woman," when in fact he, Duma, is handling the case of Pat's dismissal from her job; (iii) tangentially when Panic looks through the window of a community hall where the political activists hold a meeting with the township's Councillors in which they accuse them of being puppets of the apartheid regime and of enriching themselves through rent hikes;

and (iv) when there is a riot in the township which results in the death of the landlady's son, Sam.

Viewers first encounter the political activists at the beginning of the film *toyitoyi* and defying the riot police's order to disperse. After some protesters are arrested, the camera shows them being booked in as prisoners, but still defiant. In the prison cells, they mock the apartheid system's attempt to silence their protest by imprisoning them: Teacher, for instance, shouts to the other activists that the "whole township will be here soon" and Mandla adds that they "might as well send us back to our shacks" (78).

However, for the most part, viewers rarely see the political activists portrayed individually and in a sustained way as Panic is. The exception is Duma, who does feature individually, even if his role is still linked and limited to his political work. The film portrays political activists as a collective – they also refer to one another as "comrades" – and they act in unison either in chanting political slogans and dancing the *toyitoyi* or when one of them speaks on behalf of the others. There is not much variation to this portrayal so that one could say that Mapantsula is mainly about Panic's 'redemption' whereby politics and political activists serve mainly as the impetus for his decision to defy detective Stander at the film's conclusion.

### **1.5.3 Yizo Yizo 1: a synopsis**

Yizo Yizo 1<sup>21</sup> is a thirteen-episode drama series that came out in 1999 to wide critical acclaim for its so-called frank depiction of the problems of violence, drugs and cynicism among school-going black African youth in South Africa. It was screened on SABC 1 on Wednesday evenings between 20h00 and 21h00 from February to

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<sup>21</sup> All references to the words of the characters are my transcriptions. To my knowledge, there is no published script for the mini-series.

April. Yizo Yizo 1 is set in a fictitious township high school called Supatsela and its action is divided between the school and a few locations in the surrounding township. In addition to its depiction of the malaise at the root of youth disaffection and apathy, the mini-series tracks the coming of age of a few of Supatsela's male and female learners and dropouts, by showing how the meaning and category of youth in post-apartheid South Africa is tied to the legacy of apartheid neglect of black education and the entrenched masculine ethos in a society left for years to disintegrate.<sup>22</sup>

The youngsters on whom the mini-series focuses most consistently are Thabo Nonyane (or Thiza) and Jabulani Nyembe (or Javas) – the mini-series' exemplary male characters; Nomsa Shai, a bright and assertive female learner; Hazel Ratshithanga and Dudu (the female rape victims who are also the basis of the series' moral message and outrage); and Chesterfield Serote (or Chester) and Papa Action (the gangsters). On the side of the teachers, the drama series highlights the characters of the strict school principal, Mr. Mthembu, his corrupt deputy, Mr. Ken Mokoena, the dedicated science and English teachers, Mr. Edwin Thapelo and Miss Zoë Cele respectively, and the cynical ones, Miss Louisa Tlale and Zaza. There is also Grace Letsatsi, the female principal who takes over after Mr. Mthembu resigns and after Mr. Mokoena destroys the school's moral foundation.

Chester has already dropped out of school by the time that the drama series begins, even though he re-registers during Mr. Mokoena's tenure as acting principal, after the resignation of Mr. Mthembu, the school's first principal. Papa Action is a pupil only in name; to all practical purposes, he is a gangster who comes to school to harass his

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<sup>22</sup> What distinguishes Yizo Yizo 1 from Mapantsula is that the political dimension in Yizo Yizo 1 is only implied in the images of decay, poverty, inferior education resources and the apathy among most of the teaching personnel, whereas in Mapantsula the political dimension is constitutive of the film's depiction of its protagonist's criminal conduct.

‘schoolmates’ and to recruit drug runners who infiltrate the school and undermine its moral fibre.

Because the physical and symbolic boundaries between the school and the immediate environment of the township are tenuous, and can be crossed at will, the distinction between the township streets and the schoolyard cannot be guaranteed, neither by means of the fence around the school nor by means of the Principal’s words at morning assembly. Indeed, very early in the first episode, on the first day of the school year, Mr. Mthembu complains to the school’s security guard, Mr. Moloji, about graffiti on the school’s walls. As it turns out later in the first part of the series, it is not those who have dropped out of school that are responsible for the breach of the boundaries but rather those – Javas, Sticks and Bobo – who are not the violent type but at worst just boys trying to act masculine in a culture that extolls masculinity; this complicates the problem for the principal somewhat.

What worsens this already dire situation on the level of the school’s symbolic integrity as a place where teaching and learning should go some way towards undermining the conditions that have created the abject reality, is that even some of the teachers at the school traverse the very fine line between professional and criminal – or at least deviant – conduct. For instance, Mr. Mokoena has not only fathered a child with Snowy, the sister of Hazel and a former pupil, who has had to drop out of school in order to raise the child, but he also owes money to a drug lord, Bra Gibb, which he is struggling to pay back. And after the resignation of Mr. Mthembu,<sup>23</sup> Mr. Mokoena, as his deputy, takes over as acting principal, which further complicates the distinction between the school and the underworld. At one stage he promises Bra

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<sup>23</sup> Mr. Mthembu’s resignation occurs after he severely canes Nomsa for coming late to school. Her mother confronts him and, after he refuses to apologise, she demands redress from the Superintendent of the local schools, Mr. Mahlatsi. When Mr. Mahlatsi approaches him about the matter and asks him to apologise, he offers to resign, because, as he says, he has successfully run his school with a cane for thirty years.

Gibb that his promotion to acting Principal, which obviously puts him in charge of the school's chequebook, would see the end of his financial problems, including his indebtedness to Bra Gibb. However, because he seems to spend virtually all his free time in the bar which Bra Gibb also patronises, viewers are given a glimpse of what his tenure as Principal will entail, which is permanent indebtedness to Bra Gibb and the latter's equally permanent stranglehold on the school's finances. In fact, Chester's re-registration during Mr. Mokoena's tenure as acting Principal is on the strength of the agreement that, as Bra Gibb's drug runner, he will not be refused a place, even though he neither adheres to the school's rules nor attends classes.

Needless to say, as is seen in later episodes during Mr. Mokoena's tenure, the school's administration deteriorates into chaos until the thugs who had offered him their services to get rid of his detractors on the staff shoot a teacher, Mr. Thapelo. Mr. Mokoena is taken hostage by one of the pupils, Thulani (or Thulas), who demands that the District Education Coordinator, Mr. Mahlatsi, be summoned to intervene. This highlights one of the messages that the drama series conveys, which is that the problems in black African township schools are also complicated by delinquent teachers.

Other characters enter this basic structure, either on the side of Thiza, Javas, Nomsa, Hazel, Dudu and the conscientious teachers and pupils, or on the side of Chester, Papa Action, Bra Gibb and the corrupt teachers, until order at the school breaks down completely. Whereas in the process of constituting the drama series' moral-didactic structure its creators take certain artistic/creative liberties, this basic structure appeals to the terms of Yizo Yizo 1's intention to educate the youth about the dangers that are inherent in criminal or deviant behaviour. The drama series'

other intention is to help redirect the energies of those already led astray, or contemplating such a course, toward responsible adulthood.

#### **1.5.4 Fools: a synopsis<sup>24</sup>**

Written for the screen by Ramadan Suleman and Bhekizizwe Peterson as an adaptation of Njabulo Ndebele's 1983 long story/novella of the same title, Fools is a feature film which is set in the fictional Charterston Township in December 1989. It is mainly about a disgraced schoolteacher, Duma Zamani (in the film referred to as just Zamani), who gains some redemption in the end through a selfless act.

After raping his pupil, Mimi, which viewers only come to know about during the course of the film, Zamani is temporarily suspended from the school, Charterston High, where he teaches. Viewers encounter him for the first time as a drunk and sleeping in the waiting room of a Johannesburg train station where he has been waiting for a train to Charterston. Mimi's brother, Zani, who, with his girlfriend, Ntozakhe, is returning from school in Swaziland to Charterston for the December holidays, confronts Zamani in the waiting room. Zani and Ntozakhe attend school in neighbouring Swaziland. The confrontation carries on in the train to Charterston, where Zani accuses Zamani of being a "failure" and of turning on the weak around him to mask his and his generation's impotence against the apartheid "system."

The camera then shows Zamani at his house drinking and being visited by male elders of the community who have come to inform him about their intervention on his behalf to have his suspension set aside so that he can return to school to resume teaching. In both these early representations of Zamani, viewers see him as a corrupt but weak character who has traded responsibility to his community for the sexual

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<sup>24</sup> I have transcribed the speeches of the characters from the film. To the best of my knowledge, there is no published script for the film.

abuse of its young female members<sup>25</sup> (and the emotional abuse of his wife) and of himself through drunkenness and sexual debauchery.

However, viewers pick up on some of the events relating to the rape and his suspension during the course of the story and action. Aside from the ‘letter’ that the film replays in Zani’s head while on the train from Swaziland, which he was sent by Mimi after her rape by Zamani,<sup>26</sup> the rape itself is re-enacted in a flashback well into the film and is framed in Zamani’s memory of the event on one occasion when he approaches Mimi’s house to bring Zani home after Zani had been stabbed by a local thug, Mazambane, during a street brawl. Zamani’s suspension has already occurred by the time that the film opens and viewers see him at the train station. It is only after the elders have visited him and the school principal announces his return to school (to the schools’ inspector after the morning assembly the next day) that viewers learn that Zamani has been away.

The film has two related dimensions to it: one is marginal and features a township lunatic, Forgive Me, who, one of Zamani’s friends says, returned mad from the “German War.” Forgive Me’s role in the film is symbolic; he appears at strategic moments and reads verses from the New Testament Gospels and, in some sense, assumes the role of Christ as a misunderstood prophet in a corrupt world of sinners and earthly desires. The other dimension, which is the film’s main story, features Zamani and his wife, Nosipho; Zani and his girlfriend, Ntozakhe; Zani’s sisters, Mimi and Busi; and their mother, Ma Buthelezi. Other characters are Zamani’s drinking mates, who are unnamed except for one named Khehla. There are also the township thug, Mazambane; the school principal who is only referred to as Meneer (sir); the

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<sup>25</sup> At one point in the film Zamani and his drinking friends discuss their sexual involvement with schoolgirls, which suggests that his rape of Mimi constitutes a pattern of behaviour on his part that has a much longer history than the single incident for which he is suspended.

<sup>26</sup> In the part of letter that is replayed by means of Mimi’s voiceover, Mimi does not mention Zamani’s name but, rather, talks about how women in general are subjected to abuse by men.



male Afrikaner schools' inspector, Meneer Coetzee; the female prostitute with whom Zamani engages in sex; and an unnamed male Afrikaner motorist who features at the end of the film.

The main story opens on a train bound for Johannesburg from Swaziland, in which Zani and Ntozakhe make love in a private coach. Here Mimi's voice is heard reciting the letter that she had sent Zani about the rape in which she says,

I have survived two months of hell. I am now frightened of men. Whatever it is that men want, must it be built on our tattered souls? I cannot wait to see you. Expecting you soon. Your loving sister, Mimi.

This letter sets the tone for the film's theme of male sexual violence and its resistance by the female characters, which it develops through a dynamic cast of characters.

The camera then moves to Zani's home, where Busi's voice is heard in the background as the elders, who had visited her mother to intercede on Zamani's behalf, leave her home. She accuses them of "drag[ging] us through the mud like this," before she comes out to follow them out of the yard, daring them to come and molest her as they have her younger sister. As the elders leave for Zamani's house to report on the progress of their negotiations with Mimi's family, Mimi comes out to restrain Busi, while Ma Buthelezi stands on the doorway watching silently. At Zamani's house, before the elders go in, Zamani is berating his wife, telling her that he "can come home and go as I like." However, as soon as the elders walk in, he transforms into a decent and respectful man.

While the elders inform him of their decision to let him resume teaching, Nosipho appears from the bedroom, watches the proceedings with disdain and disappears into the bedroom only to reappear after the elders leave. What the elders say to Zamani and what Nosipho says to him after they leave is important to note at this stage. After

one of the elders informs Zamani of their decision to wash their hands of the matter, another, their spokesman, says to Zamani:

Teacher, when the great rains have passed, and the sun reappears, we see fallen trees, fences sagging, roofs blown away, crops choked by what should nourish them, we have to look around us, then to see what men are left. As you know, Teacher, we need teachers. We have to maintain good results.

And so we hope we will see you soon with a shovel in hand.

This figures in the film as outdated wisdom, a fact that is reinforced by Nosipho when she tells Zamani after the elders leave that, “You men have no dignity. You have no shame.” Whereas to the elders’ speech and threats Zamani reacts with relief and sheepish contrition, to Nosipho’s comment he reacts by attacking her in the following words:

ZANI: Are you starting again? You forget who is the man here? Just because you have got this cheap *tiki-line*<sup>27</sup> education, you think you can belch at me.

Remember who is wearing pants in this house. Don’t confuse me with those women of yours who wear pants at that *stokvel* [women’s saving group].

Bloody stupid Women’s League. Get out of my sight before I puke! [*pushing her out of the way*] Any problem Your Royal Highness? You better not, you bloody barren toad.

Zamani leaves the house and the next scene is of him engaging in stand-up sex with a prostitute against the wall outside a train station. The prostitute tells him to hurry up and proceeds to take money out of his wallet. There is a police raid and everyone runs, including Zamani, who calls out to an absent Nosipho as he does so. The

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<sup>27</sup> Pronounced with the explosive falling on the letters “t” and “k,” the word most likely comes from the word *tickey*, an old South African small denominator coin. *Tiki-line* is an old township term that men, in particular, use to refer to a ‘loose woman’ or a woman they consider to be without morals. Here Zamani uses the word both to trivialise Nosipho’s education as equivalent to a *tickey* or ‘small change’ and to insult her by implying that she is a ‘loose woman.’

camera follows him through the station's subway and out on the street looking respectable and innocent as he passes by the raiding policemen. There is a contrast here between his aggressive conduct at home and his servile fearfulness in the presence of the apartheid police.

The camera returns to Zani and Ntozakhe as they disembark from the train from Swaziland. Zani finds Zamani sleeping in the waiting room, recognises him as his sister's rapist and immediately becomes agitated. The conversation between them after Zamani wakes up is intense. Once on the train to Charterston, Zani confronts Zamani again, this time revealing that he knows who he is. During the confrontation, Zani says the following, which is another of the film's areas of emphases:

ZANI: [*in an arrogant tone*] Do you still like to peel the skins of kids?<sup>28</sup> My sister wrote a lot about you in her school letters. [...] I see nothing in front of me but failure. Why should I greet failure? I will not be distracted like you and your generation – the masters of avoidance. Instead of confronting the system, you smoke and drink and direct your anger at the weakest around you. Look at you, the township's shining prince. You know, I remember your wedding to reverend Shezi's daughter; the biggest white wedding the township had ever seen; a teacher and a priest's daughter – what a fine couple. And now the prince oozes spittle.

Arriving in Charterston, Zamani sees his wife on her way to work, tries to speak with her and she simply ignores him.

The camera moves to Charterston High during morning assembly where the principal leads the singing of "Die Stem," an apartheid national anthem, against the

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<sup>28</sup> Here Zani is referring to Zamani's reputation at his school as vicious with the cane.

backdrop of the National Party flag. The sound of army helicopters overhead frames the scene as politically charged. This is reinforced by the gift that the principal receives from the schools' inspector: a framed picture of the newly elected Afrikaner president, F.W. De Klerk.<sup>29</sup> He proceeds to hang it on his office wall, which is lined with past Afrikaner presidents, all of whom were male. When Zamani enters the principal's office, the principal gives him a batch of tickets to sell for the Dingaans' Day picnic to be held at the school.<sup>30</sup>

Another crucial scene in the film features Zamani and his friends at the house of one of his friends. They are discussing the schoolgirls that they are sleeping with. The host, Khehla, who is a teacher, takes out a picture of a schoolgirl who is his latest conquest, whom the other men proceed to describe in exaggerated terms as a "sugar baby," "die *ding* (this thing) is strictly fresh, no preservatives." They also talk about the upcoming Dingaans' Day as a celebration of "our defeat, our colonisation."

When, after the above scene, the camera moves to the township streets where a wedding is taking place, viewers are introduced to Mazambane. Mazambane is a local thug who recruits young boys into his gang and displays his macho style on one occasion by beating a young woman for not coming to him when he demands that she does.

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<sup>29</sup> F.W. De Klerk became the last president of the apartheid regime. In 1990 he released Nelson Mandela from political imprisonment and started negotiations with the then banned political organisations which culminated in the Government of National Unity and, in 1994, an ANC-led post-apartheid government elected through a general election.

<sup>30</sup> Until after the official end of apartheid, Dingaans' Day was the day on which Afrikaners held celebrations to commemorate their defeat, in 1838, of the Zulus under (King) Dingane. Again, through its reference to Dingaans' Day, the film highlights another aspect of male confrontations. Dingaans' Day is part of a longer history of the Afrikaners' migration from the Cape into the hinterland that became known as The Great Trek, after the Cape was conquered by the British in 1795 and colonised in the early eighteen hundreds. This migration became the rallying point for the Afrikaners and was re-enacted as emblematic pageant during Afrikaner rule and immortalised in a 1916 film called De Voortrekkers (The Pioneers), which casts The Great Trek and the defeat of Dingane's warriors as the God-ordained triumph of Afrikaner men over Zulu men, and Afrikaner women as the suffering but stoical *volksmoeders* (mothers of the nation), despite historical evidence of their participation on the frontline.

The last scene features a scuffle between “Meneer,” the principal of Charterston High, and Zani during the Dingaan’s Day picnic, which leads to the principal throwing a stone at him. The stone accidentally hits a passing car driven by an Afrikaner man. The Afrikaner chases all and sundry, but Zamani does not run, whereupon the Afrikaner whips him with a *sjambok* (rubber truncheon) while Zamani laughs. The film ends with the Afrikaner exhausted and ‘defeated,’ while Zamani climbs a rock face on his way back to the township. The film’s closing words of wisdom, which are drawn from Ndebele’s novella and chanted to the sound of music, are that, “The sound of victims laughing at victims. And when victims spit upon victims, should they not be called fools?” These closing words capture the spirit of the film’s story, which is that viewers must look upon both victims and perpetrators as products of established social ideologies and practices which must be subjected to critical, rather than moral, analysis.

### **1.6 Lenses through which I examine the four audio-visual texts and the critical-theoretical tools that I use**

I examine the four audio-visual texts using the lens of gender, drawing strategically on studies of masculinities in (South) African and global, particularly Euro-American, theories of space/place, corporeality and subjectivity. I also consider some case studies of masculinities in audio-visual discourses, insofar as these provide some context for my focus. The aim of this approach is to show that while audio-visual culture in South Africa is not always attentive to the fact, in their social and cultural lives black African men in South Africa have performed their masculinities differentially. They have done so in regard to, firstly, where they are physically and discursively located, secondly, to whether they subscribe to the dominant notion of

masculinity and, thirdly, in response to changing conditions of masculine subject formation in their lived experiences. In this sense, it is fair to probe the underlying assumptions that govern the representation of men and women in audio-visual discourses, the better to establish the nature and significance of these assumptions in the context of an unstable masculine framework and a range of masculine practices, including the conventionally ‘masculine’ roles that women have played in history as regent chiefs (as Mkabayi in Zulu history) and as breadwinners and heads of families (as Pat, Ma Modise and Pat’s aunt in Mapantsula, Thiza’s grandmother in Yizo Yizo 1, and Nosipho and Zani’s mother in Fools).

The lens of gender, then, informs my understanding of the shifts in gender representation from Shaka Zulu to Fools. As I point out in the opening section, the four audio-visual texts present different images of black African men and women, owing to the different contexts in which they map their particular themes.

### **1.7 Preliminary consideration of seminal positions in critical theories of and on masculinities**

Let me begin by stating the commonplace. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990) defines “masculine” as an adjective denoting that which is “of or characteristic of men . . . manly, vigorous . . . (of a woman) having qualities considered appropriate to a man” (728). Further, it defines a man in comparative, rather than essentialist, terms as “distinct from a woman or boy” or as “a person showing characteristics associated with males (*she’s more of a man than he is*)” (718). Similarly, it says that a woman is “an adult human female” or “the female sex” and defines womanly as “not masculine or girlish” (1409-1410). Female and male are defined in strictly sexually functional terms as “the sex that can beget offspring by fertilization or insemination” (717) and

“the sex that can bear offspring or produce eggs” (430), respectively. Needless to say, whereas these definitions privilege the active male over the passive female and thus reveal a gender bias, for theories of gender and sexuality they have always served to reveal the very imprecise nature of the identities that the words define.

Taking their cue from this imprecision in the grammar of gender and sexuality, theories of masculinities have sought answers in the ‘dictionary’ of actual gender and sexual performances, so to speak. Morrell argues in the introduction of Changing Men in Southern Africa that to represent heterosexual men as though they were exemplary of, and equivalent within, the category masculine is to miss the point of the unstable nature of the category.<sup>31</sup> Lindsay and Miescher also make a similar point in Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa (2003), by pointing out that “African gender identities have been particularly fluid and contentious, heavily articulated with wealth, age, seniority, and ritual authority” (4). They note that the term masculinity refers, among other things,

to a cluster of norms, values, and behavioral patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others. Ideologies of masculinity – like those of femininity – are culturally and historically constructed, their meanings continually contested and always in the process of being renegotiated in the context of existing power relations.

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<sup>31</sup> He says, for instance, that “[t]he unflattering view of South African men [that they are the same and ‘bad’] is a stereotype. Not only does it isolate specific aspects of masculinity and represent these as common and universal, but it fails to capture masculine diversity. What could be more different than the image of a grim-faced, rifle-toting soldier clad in camouflage gear, patrolling the streets of a township and a colourful cross-dresser, strutting his stuff in a gay pride march?” (3)

They further point out that “there is not always a connection between physical manhood and sociological masculinity,” which is not to say that “the relationship between sex and gender is . . . completely arbitrary” (5). This necessarily calls for a brief introduction to the seminal positions in the study of gender and sexuality that my discussion of the four audio-visual texts invokes. For whereas the essays in Changing Men in Southern Africa that deal with South African cases make it abundantly evident that men and ideas about men have been changing and continue to change in South Africa, it does not follow that South African creative media have been attentive to these changes. This is not to say that from Shaka Zulu to Fools the conception of men and masculinity remains unchanged; indeed, in Fools and, to a lesser degree, in Yizo Yizo 1, there are attempts to weaken certain aspects of masculinist ideology somewhat or, at the very least, to present it explicitly as an ideology founded on exclusion. It is, however, to say that in the selected audio-visual texts the representations of the shifts in the conception of gender remain quite limited and, at times, contradictory.

At any rate, the broad implication of Morrell’s view is that there is no set of unchanging traits common to all men. Rather, men inhabit multiple symbolic spaces/settings, bodies and subjectivities and mark these differently. As it were, a physical setting such as the street would host a range of meanings, depending on how it is inhabited. Given this fact, then, masculinity and, indeed, femininity, as Robert Connell asserts in Masculinities (1995), are “remarkably elusive and difficult to define” (3).

Connell’s work on masculinities provides a good starting point for a broad-based theoretical introduction to the field of male gender and sexuality studies. In Masculinities, for instance, he provides a wide range of theoretical frameworks that



intersect various approaches to the concept of maleness. These he calls “Rival Knowledges” (3): scientific, biological, sociological, populist, modernist, queer, historical, political and utopian. Moreover, his work has been, and continues to be, influential in the field.<sup>32</sup> The principle that guides Connell’s investigation into the nature and practices of masculinities and masculine identifications is that, while “[i]n many practical situations the language of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ raises few doubts,” for the simple reason that “[w]e base a great deal of talk and action on this contrast . . . the same terms, on logical examination, waver like the Danube mist” (3). The idea of an elusive or ‘mist-like’ definition of masculine and feminine categories, Connell points out, mirrors the elusive “character of gender itself, historically changing and politically fraught” (3).<sup>33</sup> Hence Connell’s assertion above that, “on logical examination,” the meanings of masculine and feminine “waver” (3) or Morrell’s argument that to “isolate specific aspects of masculinity [and, one could add, femininity] and represent these as common and universal” (3) leads to the fixing of otherwise fluid subject positions that men and women inhabit in their social, political and cultural lives. Indeed, as Cornwall and Lindisfarne point out, the idea “that ‘a man is a man’ and everywhere this means the same thing” (3) has no basis “in the contexts in which people talk of masculinity” (2).

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<sup>32</sup> His work is cited in major collections of research in African gender studies such as Robert Morrell’s Changing Men in Southern Africa (2001), Signe Arnfred’s Re-Thinking Sexualities in Africa (2004), Oyèrónké Oyewùmí’s African Gender Studies: A Reader (2005) and Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell’s African Masculinities: Men In Africa From The Late Nineteenth Century To The Present (2005), to name a few of the major voices in the field. However, what is important for my thesis is how these studies also infuse Connell’s broad theoretical models and histories with more specific inflections. These are the kinds of inflections that provide the dialectical energy between global theory and more focused interventions in South Africa. This dialogue also makes evident the urgent need for masculinity studies to forge an interdisciplinary complex. For, as Connell points out, masculinity studies are deeply organised in the history of knowledge that is both universal and specific.

<sup>33</sup> From this point of view, what may seem like a commonsensical view of the world, or, in Yizo Yizo 1’s parlance, what may appear to be what (and how) things are, may obscure complex changes beneath the veneer of the visible when seen through the lenses of gender and sexuality.

Closer examination of the social situation of men and women in this thesis involves examination of the nature of social space, that is to say the nature of the social settings in which men and women perform their roles as gendered and sexual subjects. It also involves examination of the influential but unstable biological grammars against which constructionist and sociological theories have staked their critical interventions. Lastly, it means that a term such as subjectivity, which derives from psychoanalysis and posits a non-essentialist idea of identity, is, if used with caution, indispensable in the study of masculinities and representations of men and women in the four audio-visual texts.<sup>34</sup>

In Masculinities, Connell provides a rich history of the term masculinity in theory. He proceeds from the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud and theories which contextualise psychoanalysis in the disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and history. He then considers biologically-orientated theories based on the idea that “there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life” (45). Lastly, he examines the theories which place emphasis on the socio-political and cultural organisation of masculinity, as it were, on the view that “[m]asculinity is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced” (67). The latter theories, Connell notes, are attentive to the history, politics and practices of masculinities that confound the biological presumptions about masculine gender and sexuality.

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<sup>34</sup> In discussions of gender and sexuality there is always a need for strategic essentialism, by which I mean that, simply to elide the body – bodies of women, gay men and women and/or men who do not subscribe to conventional masculinity – as the target of masculinist violence and sexist talk is to lose sight of the significance that heterosexual men place on their bodies as markers of power and those of others as sites of subordination and violence. Women, gay men and women and those men who refuse the aggressive heterosexual male ethos often have to wrestle control of their bodies from, and re-define them against, prevailing stereotypes.

What is significant about Freud's theory is that it provides a non-essentialist basis for an investigation into the coming-into-being of male sexuality, a feature that Connell argues later psychoanalytic theories tended to overlook. Freud's theory, Connell further asserts, establishes its non-essentialist argument by positing the view that "adult sexuality and gender were not fixed by nature but were constructed through a long and conflict-ridden process" (9). This process, which Freud termed the Oedipus complex, Connell says, involved "the hypothesis that humans were constitutionally bisexual, that masculine and feminine currents coexisted in everyone" (Masculinities 9). About "men's bodies and their relation to masculinity," he points out that, "[t]wo opposing conceptions of the body have dominated discussion" (45). They are "the language of biological science [in which] the body is a natural machine which produces gender difference" (45), and the alternative view "which has swept the humanities and social sciences," namely, the conception of the body as "a more or less neutral surface or landscape on which a social symbolism is imprinted" (45-46). About the former, Connell argues that theories of a biological orientation, such as those of

the mythopoetic men's movement, Jungian psychoanalysts, Christian fundamentalists, sociobiologists and the essentialist school of feminism, [presuppose that] [t]rue masculinity . . . almost always proceed[s] from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about the male body. Either the body drives and directs action . . . or the body sets limits to action . . . [for example] men are naturally more aggressive than women; rape results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence [or] men naturally do not take care of infants; homosexuality is unnatural and therefore confined to a perverse minority. (45)

Regarding the historical and political underpinnings of masculinity, he proffers the view that “[t]o understand the current pattern of masculinities we need to look back over the period in which it came into being” (186) and to remember that the “stake in masculinity politics is power . . . the capacity of *certain* men to control social resources through gender processes . . . and the kind of society being produced by that power” (205; my emphasis).<sup>35</sup>

The four audio-visual texts offer a range of perspectives that reflect the shift in the understandings of masculinity, from biological to social, political and cultural. Shaka Zulu locates the masculine in the biological idea of the physical (read muscular) and spatial mastery. Mapantsula understands the nineteen eighties’ struggle for a new nation to be coincidental with, and reflective of, the struggle for heterosexual black African male assertion within a nationalist framework.<sup>36</sup> In Yizo Yizo 1 agency, whether violent or benign, ultimately rests with heterosexual men. Women of different social affiliations and ‘effeminate’ men either endure heterosexual male violence and taunts, are grateful for the availability of a few good men, or, if given a chance, have the capacity to act fairly, non-violently and equitably. This, as I show in my discussion of the drama series, is a mixed blessing at best and, at worst, a somewhat convenient evacuation of the more complicated social site in which women and men act out their subjectivities in non-unilateral ways. Despite some telling contradictions, Fools problematises the idea of a biological masculinity by proffering

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<sup>35</sup> I must state here that, even though Connell is careful to discriminate between different types of men, Lindsay and Miescher have argued that “[s]tudying masculinity in African situations requires using Connell’s model with caution,” because his claim that “one form of masculinity . . . is culturally exalted” (Masculinities 77) “. . . was *not* always obvious” in “colonial Africa . . . since understandings of gender depend on the specific context and on different actors’ subject positions. The limited power of colonial ideologies, combined with the social flux created by new constraints and opportunities, meant that a multiplicity of competing masculine identities promoted sometimes divergent images of proper male behavior within certain contexts” (6; emphasis in original).

<sup>36</sup> This is evidenced by the political slogans that the male activists chant, in which they invoke an older generation of male political ‘fathers’ or patriarchs against historical evidence of the political activism of women.

the view that attributes which are traditionally associated with heterosexual men have no essential bearing on how men behave in social situations. The male antagonists in the film, Zamani and Zani, occupy two somewhat different positions along the heterosexual male continuum.

Against the background of the above examples, what Connell provides in his study, then, is an extended summary of key positions in the theoretical engagement with the question of gender. As I have shown, it is by no means exhaustive, but nevertheless presents an efficient outline of a complex field.<sup>37</sup> In the next few pages of this introduction I situate Connell's theoretical insights in African interventions in the study of (male) gender and sexuality. This is important given the complex and scandalous history of Africa's entry into the technologies of representation, such as film, that, for a long time, constructed Africa (*and* African men and women) in essentialist terms as the monolithic 'Other' of and in the Western pseudo-scientific imaginary. In African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Nineteenth Century to the Present (2005), for instance, Arthur F. Saint-Aubin notes that,

Eighteenth-century European science set out to codify common assumptions about dark male bodies; indeed, science began to recodify these assumptions since the efforts made during the 1700s were not new. Scientists undertook this recodification by providing a precise vocabulary to talk about racial difference and about the process of racial differentiation and by circumscribing black corporeality within a particular modality. . . .

Eighteenth-century science set out to illustrate natural law by establishing

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<sup>37</sup>Theorists of indigenous African societies, such as Niara Sudarkasa, have argued that in African societies gender roles are largely determined by status, rather than by preconceived and unchanging notions of masculinity and femininity. A female chief, for instance, presides over the affairs of the tribe or, as the Queen Modjadji of the Balobedu in the Northern Province in South Africa, takes 'wives' as the tribe's 'patriarch'. In this regard, the concepts of femininity and masculinity become particularly indistinct.

biological differences between different (i.e., black and white) bodies and by proving that these “natural” differences explain the differences between the races and between the civilized and the primitive. (23)

Alongside this have been efforts by Africans themselves to wrest agency – the means to self-representation – from the Eurocentric pseudo-scientific gaze. And, needless to say, these efforts have also incurred criticism that the second chapter of this thesis considers, particularly in, but not limited to, the areas of gender, class, generation and place. In “The ‘Status of Women’ in Indigenous African Societies,” for instance, Niara Sudarkasa contends that arguments about the “*status* of women” (2005: 25) in indigenous African societies need to be revisited for the distortions that they impose on the nature of “the relationships between females and males in most of the African societies [she] had studied” (25). Her view is that often in studies of gender in precolonial African societies the crucial distinction between *status*, “the collection of rights and duties that attach to, and define, particular positions” (25), and *role*, “which refers to the behavior appropriate to a given status” (25), is not drawn, which results in “the placement of females relative to males in a dual-level hierarchy” (25). It is this dual-level hierarchy that, Sudarkasa argues, fails to account for her “own readings on Africa,” where,

it appears that except in the highly Islamized areas, women in Sub-Saharan Africa, more than in any other part of the world, were conspicuous in high places in the precolonial era [as] queen-mothers, queen-sisters, princesses, female chiefs, and holders of other offices in most towns and villages. There were occasional female warriors; and in one well known case, that of the Lovedu, the supreme monarch was a woman. Almost invariably, African

women were also conspicuous in the economic life of their societies, being involved in farming, trade, or craft production. (25)

For my discussion, what is of particular significance about Sudarkasa's historicisation of gender in the precolonial context is that it provides a context for reading the socio-political economy of gender. This is an issue that becomes crucial in my discussion of Shaka Zulu, in which a similar scenario to that which Sudarkasa describes obtains but is nevertheless undermined by the mini-series' disproportionate attention to male agency in the social, political and economic affairs of nineteenth-century Zululand, despite the status that Zulu royal women held in these affairs.

Yet there is the reality of the modern or postcolonial social milieu that Mapantsula, Fools and Yizo Yizo 1 overtly project onto their scripts and screens – and which Shaka Zulu conceals by projecting onto the past – that requires different critical-theoretical tools and lenses to those that Sudarkasa calls for in her case of indigenous gender subjectivities. In relation to this modern or postcolonial scenario, I take my cue from Signe Arnfred's view that colonial and/or settler modernity in Africa ushered in a new era in the sphere of gender and sexual relations and the family (including the Family of Man). In South Africa, for instance, women's productive and reproductive labour became a private commodity: women reproduced and raised able-bodied young men for the migrant labour system but remained ostensibly excluded from it. Modernity also engendered new epistemologies which have had to be revised in line with the increasing sophistication of the forms of gender and sexual identifications. This is a point that leads Arnfred to assert the following in the introduction of Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa (2004):

The time has come for re-thinking sexualities in Africa: The [sic] thinking beyond the conceptual structure of colonial and even post-colonial European

imaginings, which have oscillated between notions of the exotic, the noble and the depraved savage, consistently however constructing Africans and African sexuality as something ‘other’. (7)

This re-thinking, Arnfred avers, “necessitates a double move of de-construction and re-construction, developing an analysis whereby, through critique of previous conceptualisations, attempts are made to approach materials in new ways, coming up with fresh or alternative lines of thinking” (7).

For my discussion of the four audio-visual texts, this double move involves an inquiry into current trends not only in the theories of black African masculinities but also in the constitution of the local in the four audio-visual texts. For a reconstructive move comes encumbered with new interests and agendas that are also vulnerable to the deconstructive impulse that Arnfred proposes in regard to the older colonial project of ‘othering’. A “Deconstructionist project” or “Deconstruction,” Christopher Norris says,

locates certain crucial oppositions or binary structures of meaning and value that constitute the discourse of ‘Western metaphysics’. These include (among many others) the distinctions between form and content, nature and culture, thought and perception, essence and accident, mind and body, theory and practice, male and female, concept and metaphor, speech and writing etc. A Deconstructive [sic] reading then goes on to show how these terms are inscribed within a systematic structure of hierarchical privilege, such that one of each pair will always appear to occupy the sovereign or governing position. The aim is then to demonstrate – by way of close reading – how this system is undone, so to speak, from within; how the second or subordinate term in each



pair has an equal (maybe a prior) claim to be treated as a *condition of possibility* for the entire system. (1989: 71)

I have quoted Norris at length for the simple reason that deconstruction is the main critical-theoretical tool that I adopt in my discussion of the four audio-visual texts.

What Norris describes as deconstruction's aim, namely, to demonstrate how the binary system is undone from within, animates some of the most complex investigations into the issues of gender and sexuality in recent years. Two examples should suffice at this stage: one is Lindsay and Miescher's contention that, "[i]f so much of African history has been written with men as an unmarked category, then destabilizing the male subject can yield insights into processes previously understood to be outside the realm of gender" (2). The other is Antony Easthope's similar observation in What A Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth In Popular Culture (1991) that, "[d]espite all that has been written over the past twenty years on femininity and feminism, masculinity has stayed pretty well concealed. This has always been its ruse in order to hold on to its power" (1).<sup>38</sup> Studies of cases of this phenomenon as it finds expression in various aspects of South African life<sup>39</sup> inform much of my discussion of the re-marking of masculinity as, to cite Easthope again, having "its own *particular* identity and structure," in which case "it can't any longer claim to be universal" (1).

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<sup>38</sup> In The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations (1993), Richard Dyer says the same about what he calls "whiteness," which "secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular" (140).

<sup>39</sup> There is a significant body of works in this regard. The works of Morrell, Kopano Ratele and Mxolisi Mchunu, to mention only a few, mark the field as thoroughly complex. If deconstructive theories provide the tools, these works provide the lenses through which my discussion of South African constructions of masculinity will be filtered. Whereas in this thesis I draw on as many as possible of these works, this thesis does not make any claim to exhaustiveness. Rather, I attempt to provide a dynamic appraisal of these works in the light of my own particular critical-analytical intervention.

What Norris describes as a deconstructive project informs a good number of studies of masculinities in (South) Africa. Many of the essays in Changing Men in Southern Africa, Men and Masculinity in Modern Africa, African Masculinities and Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa testify to the influence of this critical-theoretical project and trajectory. Moreover, in these studies, as in others that I consider in the second chapter on masculinities, the historical situation of masculine conduct becomes a crucial element in re-thinking the place of the male and female subjects in the present. In this regard, my discussion of the four audio-visual texts intersects the deconstructive-historical pattern that informs these studies. Aside from Derrida's groundbreaking analytical strategy, numerous theoretical approaches to the historical dimension of representing men and women have extended deconstruction to signal the breakdown of the old forms of conceptualising each of the two terms. These range from the historical materialist critiques to the case studies of (South) African historical and contemporary conceptions of gender and sexuality.

### **1.8 Brief review of critical-theoretical research in audio-visual culture in South Africa and the place of my thesis in it**

In this section I provide a brief review of some of the literature that gives theoretical context to the four audio-visual texts and against which one can assess the claims that their creators made about them when they appeared. I begin by considering some seminal works on the changing face of audio-visual culture in South Africa and conclude with a look at some of the more situated research into the relation of audio-visual culture to gendered subject formation.

Keyan Tomaselli's The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film (1989) ranks among the important studies of the political and economic history

of the film industry in South Africa and has serious consequences for the claims that the creators of the four audio-visual texts have made about their films and dramas. However, given the nature of my study, I focus on Tomaselli's discussion of two aspects of this history, namely, his assessment of the films made for blacks and independent cinema. Tomaselli's analysis bears directly on the pre-history of the four audio-visual texts selected for my study and also serves as the basis for evaluating the break that these texts may or may not have made with this past. In discussing the historical place and role of cinema in Africa in the Western colonial imaginary, Tomaselli notes:

For Africa as a whole, cinema has always been a powerful weapon deployed by the colonial nations to maintain their respective spheres of political and economic influence. History is distorted and a Western view of Africa continues to be transmitted back to the colonized. Apart from the obvious monetary returns for the production companies themselves, the values Western cinema imparts and the ideologies it legitimates are beneficial for Western cultural, financial, and political hegemony. (53)

He points out that “[f]ilmmakers to the north of South Africa have largely sought emancipation from Hollywood-derived cultural dependency” (53). With only a very few exceptions such as Lionel Rogosin's Come Back Africa (1959), Gibson Kente's How Long (1976) and David Bensusan's My Country My Hat (1983), early films made for black migrant labourers, Tomaselli argues, shared one thing in common, namely, the production of “docile” (54) black subjects for the key economic sectors. Those films which cast black African actors, such as David Swanson's African Jim or Jim Comes to Joburg (1949), “largely ignore[d] the gathering momentum of enforced segregation, which was to culminate in the brutal February 1955 removals of blacks

from Sophiatown” (57). The issue of structured evasions or absences in films made for blacks is an important aspect of Tomaselli’s critique of “pre-1982 films” (70). Aside from the absence of politics, these films also structured their cinematic milieus in such a way that different races did not appear to inhabit the same South African space: “[i]n this way, producers . . . omit points of conflict, over-emphasizing personal causation and individual solutions rather than collective action” (70).

Tomaselli’s Marxist/materialist analysis in The Cinema of Apartheid yields some valuable insights and while in his discussion of films made for blacks his use of the categories ‘blacks’, to refer to those who do not own the means of production, and ‘whites’, to refer to those who do, reflects “the dominant ideology of racial capitalism” (66), there is nevertheless sufficient evidence to suggest that he does not conceive of either of these categories as self-enclosed. For my study, which aims to investigate black African masculinities as internally multi-accentuated, this aspect of his conception of blackness as riven by class divisions is crucial, even though class divisions are also complicated by those of gender, sexuality, generation, place and others which render the category ‘blacks’ a site of interlocking ideological contests and meanings.

At the other end of the South African colonial and apartheid cultural-political spectrum, Tomaselli says, have been traditions of cinema whose impact only began to be felt by South African filmmakers “in the early 1980s” (196). “Tercine Cinema” (or Third Cinema), “independent film-making,” “oppositional film-making” and “radical film-making” (195-198) are designations that have been used to describe various but related features of the cinema that developed in opposition or as alternative to colonial, and in South Africa also apartheid, audio-visual culture.

Tomaselli defines Tercine Cinema in the following terms:

Tercine Cinema . . . is the cinema of the guerrilla by camera units: a helping hand in the rebuilding of an oppressed nation and a way of anticipating events in order to expedite them. Revolutionary in content, polemical in form, questioning bourgeois esthetic canons, it re-defines cinema's relationship with the audience. (196)

About independent film-making, Tomaselli notes that, "The concept of 'independent film-making' is . . . generally used to describe practitioners working outside a system or industry" (196). Practitioners of independent film use "alternative circuits" (196) to screen their films. Their films "may or may not have secured *copyright* clearance" or they "will have been passed against the expectations of the producer" (196). "[P]roduction is of a *low budget* nature and is financed either by the film/video makers themselves, or by organizations which have made known their opposition to the state or the existing order of things" (196-7). The "independent film is one that by virtue of its relative cheapness and financial autonomy is best able to exploit the *relationship between cost and content* . . . the bigger the budget, the less likely is the film to deal with social realism and contentious class conflicts from the point of view of the oppressed" (197). And, lastly, "[i]ndependent filmmakers try to work within-the-possible *to prepare the way for the not-yet-possible*. . . . [T]hese filmmakers deliberately exploit hegemonic fissures in the course of their filmmaking practice within the state" (197).

Oppositional film-making, Tomaselli says, "makes visible or draws attention to the structured absences of commercial cinema brought about by the prevailing productive forces and legitimized by bourgeois critical methods" (198). Lastly, radical films

are not only in opposition to the capitalist mode of production, but are aware of their own technique/style/technology/conventions and the way in which

these mold the view of the reality portrayed. . . . Radical cinema thus refers beyond the text and documents not only the what, but the how and the why. A radical film, furthermore, is one which devises directions for cultural resistance/action against an oppressive social order in cooperation with the subject community. (198)

What Tomaselli describes above could readily be applied to Shaka Zulu (a mini-series funded by big capital and made *for* blacks, rather than with the cooperation of its target audience) and Mapantsula (as an example of Third Cinema). Tomaselli's critique warns against the ideological underpinnings of any film's claim to authenticity, especially if a film receives the backing of big capital: as he says above, "the bigger the budget, the less likely is the film to deal with social realism and contentious class conflicts from the point of view of the oppressed" (197). Shaka Zulu was generously funded by local and foreign companies and so produced the myth of the Zulu nation rising again in the nineteen eighties, against the challenges of the broad democratic movement led by the African National Congress-aligned United Democratic Front. On the other hand, if one follows Tomaselli's proposition, Mapantsula offers an alternative view of the same context which Shaka Zulu maps, that is, the "contentious class conflicts from the point of view of the oppressed" (197).

However, while taking Tomaselli's point into account as the basis for accessing the material ideology of audio-visual culture, my thesis also examines the fissures within such radical interventions, mainly those fissures which render these texts culturally conservative. By this I have in mind the preeminence in films of the Third Cinema genre of broad anti-colonial politics, which are not tempered by the nuances of the politics of gender. Often in these films heterosexual masculinity drives the anti-colonial agenda, without heterosexual masculinity itself being subjected to critical

scrutiny. Indeed, more recent work such as Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs' Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity (2003), or Adrian Hadland *et al's* Power, Politics and Identity in South African Media (2008), show how "social and political changes . . . [are] mediated – by media in a broad sense [but also by] . . . new media . . . hip-hop, kwaito, television drama, or the claiming of the airwaves by refugees" (Wasserman and Jacobs 16). Needless to say, this brings to Tomaselli's argument new inflections: as the industry becomes less mediated by overt political imperatives, those of subcultural and autochthonic identification emerge as the new, covert, 'political' imperatives. *Kwaito* music features prominently in post-apartheid gangster films and television dramas and defines what Adam Haupt calls the increasing "commodifi[cation]" of black African and 'Coloured' male youth urban culture (378).

What I have highlighted in this section are the crosscurrents between the old and new directions in critique of audio-visual culture in South Africa. While a lot has been written on these issues, as I remark earlier on in this section, my thesis is not an extended review of cinema theory and critique. Rather, this section simply offers a glimpse of the theories' founding assumptions. There are studies such as Martin Botha and Adri Aswegen's Images of South Africa: The Rise of the Alternative Film (1992) which probe into the construction of a docile and uncritical spectatorship in South African cinema. Botha and Aswegen, for instance, point out that

Ideally, the viewer as a member of the community has the right to expect the film industry not to offer a false image of society in a film. Nonetheless local viewers have over the years been so conditioned by superficiality in the South African film that they scarcely expect more from the film makers. It is important that cinema-goers should gradually be exposed to more meaningful

films and that a critical awareness should be developed in them. The film should correctly serve as a progressive force in society and directors and their teams should bear this firmly in mind when planning the film's content. (2).

Let me conclude this section by briefly outlining a few insights from Tomaselli's *Encountering Modernity* (2006), insights which provide an important vantage point from which to assess South Africa's encounter with, and entry into, the modern. These insights also offer a viewpoint by means of which one can return to attempts by other critical theorists of film to theorise this encounter. Tomaselli's argument is organised into four 'encounters': "Encountering Africa" (2), "Encountering culture" (2), "Encountering modernity" (4) and "Encountering (inter-) national film theory" (8). About film theory in Africa, he asks, "who is an African?" and ponders "how international relationships impact on definitions of 'African cinema'" (2).

Concerning culture, he considers two versions, namely, Frantz Fanon's argument for "national cultures' rather than 'African cultures'" and Amilcar Cabral's "cultural conservat[ism] ... a return to pre-colonial social and cultural formations" (2-3).

Encounters with the modern in South Africa, Tomaselli notes, have varied from group to group, with each group responding to the unsettling experience of modernity in different ways.

What Tomaselli provides in his study is a cognitive map of the place of the racial, class and gender subject in popular film culture in South Africa today. Needless to say, it is a cognitive map which has come to form the broad basis for perspectives in film theory and criticism in South Africa in recent years. It also informs some of the controversies over the right to speak for racial subjects, or subjects of any category for that matter, within the broad frameworks such as the ones that he highlights, that is, African, Afrikaner and blacks. In this sense, much of the activity in contemporary



South African film theory has been to give Tomaselli's 'encounters' specific inflections. My thesis brings some of Tomaselli's insights to bear on the constructions of black African male and female subjects in the four audio-visual texts.

## **1.9 Organisation of thesis**

Aside from the introduction and conclusion, this thesis comprises five main chapters, which are further subdivided into subsections. These are Chapter Two, which provides a broad theoretical discussion of how masculinities intersect the key concepts that make up the main title of this thesis, namely, space, body and subjectivity. This chapter also situates the four audio-visual texts in this intersection by placing emphasis on the imbrication of masculine identities with ideas of space/place, corporeality and subjectivity in contemporary theory. Chapter Three analyses Shaka Zulu as a species of male biography in which history and phallogentric notions of ethnic identity and difference serve to reassert nineteenth-century Zulu and British martial masculinities in an uncertain contemporary context of the nineteen eighties. Chapter Four discusses Mapantsula's appraisal of the nineteen-eighties' black African youth's struggle for self-determination in the face of a corrosive urban masculine criminal subculture and apartheid political and economic repression. Chapter Five examines the value of the mimetic framework that Yizo Yizo 1 adopts to represent black African urban male youth subculture. And, lastly, Chapter Six discusses the nature and value of Fools' critique of male sexual violence and apathy.

While I endeavour to create and maintain a consistent pattern in the chapters in which I discuss the audio-visual texts, some of the subsections reflect the particular character of each of the four audio-visual texts that I analyse. For instance, whereas

in chapters three to six I provide (i) an introduction, which lays out the terms of my engagement with each audio-visual text and links the chapters to one another; (ii) the background of the audio-visual text's production and reception; (iii) an analysis of the implications of space, body and subjectivity for the discussion of each audio-visual text's conception of masculinity; and (iv) a conclusion, other subsections reflect the links that are specific to the individual audio-visual texts. Two examples illustrate this point: Suleman's Fools is an adaptation of Ndebele's novella of the same title and explicitly engages with the spirit and history of its founding text. As an adaptation, the film has incurred criticism for failing to replicate the irony of Ndebele's story and for presenting a weakened version of the protagonist, Zamani. In Chapter Six I consider these issues in detail, especially the implications of the film's choice to shift focus from Zamani as focaliser. Yizo Yizo 1 resulted from a commission spearheaded by the Department of Education and thus reflects – and, as I show in my discussion of the drama series, refracts – part of this mandate. For the most part, the drama series presents a world without much judgement – moral, political and/or social – as the world that *is*.<sup>40</sup> My discussion probes the assumptions about masculinity and femininity that are smuggled into this apparently plain style.

I have arranged the chapters on the audio-visual texts in the way that I have for one reason: they mark specific, if problematic, shifts in conceptions of black African men in South Africa. Shaka Zulu reconstructs old assumptions about Zulu and English masculinities within an ethnic framework. Mapantsula attempts to propose a shift from this framework but holds the masculine/feminine binary intact, thus asserting the masculine, in its narrow sense as maleness, as the privileged term throughout the film. Yizo Yizo 1 focuses more closely than Mapantsula on the coming-into-being of black

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<sup>40</sup> Yizo Yizo is slang for 'this is it'.

African male (and to a lesser extent, female) identities. Fools develops a fully-fledged gender discussion. In this sense, even though Fools came out before Yizo Yizo 1, in the context of my thesis it is a film that, more than the other three, directly addresses the issue of gender. It is thus examined last. Because, ultimately, the four audio-visual texts implicitly and explicitly mark certain historical moments in the representation of men and women in action, this thesis considers the nature and extent of the shifts that occur in their conceptions of masculinity as a term that is in practice unstable.

## Chapter Two

### **Masculinities Through the Prism of Space, Body and Subjectivity: Implications for the Four Audio-Visual Texts**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I situate my introductory discussion of some of the critical-theoretical literature that has examined masculinities in the three concepts that make up the main title of this thesis, namely, space, body and subjectivity. I do so via brief and strategic appraisals of the central features of the four audio-visual texts. My aim in this chapter is to drive critical theories through the four audio-visual texts in order to provide both anchors and contexts for the theories. Moreover, it is my view that theories of masculinities inevitably raise issues of setting and embodiment, together with the positioning of gendered and sexual subjects within and between these. The four audio-visual texts are also, in some respects, ‘critical-theoretical’ interventions: they posit certain ways of talking about men and women in various settings and in various ‘body-images’.

I contend that seen through the prisms of space, body and subjectivity, masculinities acquire greater complexity which further helps free discussion of men and women from the constrictions of biological and cultural essentialisms. I must reiterate the point that I made in the previous chapter, namely, that I use masculinities not to refer to male identities but, rather, to a set of assumptions about what constitutes masculine behaviour. And, because these assumptions are subject to change depending on the practices of masculinity by men and women (as gay,

straight, bisexual, transvestites, eunuchs, female chiefs, male queens and wives, female husbands, effeminate men, muscular women and other practices of masculinity that also stake their claims on and complicate what is masculine), the basic questions that I pose are: what assumptions govern these representations and, related to this question, what is concealed or downplayed in these representations which could broaden our understanding of what it means to be a gendered and sexual subject?<sup>41</sup> For instance, Shaka Zulu derives its idea of masculinity from its portrayal of Shaka as a one-man “war machine” and of his army as his creation,<sup>42</sup> an image that it generalises as the composite image of proper Zulu manliness to which, it seems, every legitimate claim to Zulu masculine conduct must subscribe,<sup>43</sup> while the other three audio-visual texts conceive of men and women variously as sites of political, social and cultural meanings. Thus, even when Mapantsula, Yizo Yizo 1 and Fools portray their characters as agents of heterosexual male gender violence, as repositories of such violence and/or as sites of resistance thereto, this aspect of the three audio-visual texts’ representations of characters as ‘meaning machines’, so to speak, takes priority over the biological imperative that animates Shaka Zulu’s portrayal of Shaka and his warriors.

The link between the muscular body and manliness acquires greater emphasis in Shaka Zulu than in the other three audio-visual texts which locate men’s and women’s

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<sup>41</sup> As Robert Morrell points out, it is in the ways in which men (and, by extension, women) inhabit spaces – the ways in which they claim them for diverse causes – that one can begin to understand the complexities of gender and sexual subjectivities and identifications. Again, as Robert Connell asserts, the view that the body is a machine that produces gender and sexual identities must confront the reality that, in their social, economic, political and cultural lives, men and women perform their subjectivities in ways that confound their sexual anatomies and the conventional roles that society assigns to them on the bases of these.

<sup>42</sup> Describing Shaka at the height of his career, the narrator in Shaka Zulu says Shaka had created a “war machine,” and throughout the mini-series Shaka is portrayed as all body and muscle without emotion unless it is related to physical exertion in preparation for war.

<sup>43</sup> Whatever claim that can be made about the mini-series being a moral parable of the dangers of unchecked power cannot resolve the fascination that Shaka Zulu holds for Zulu martial masculinity at a time, in 1986, when this model of aggressive Zulu masculinity had become diluted.

bodies in culture and/or ideology. Furthermore, in Shaka Zulu space is subjected entirely to the authority of men – of Shaka in particular – so that in the mini-series Zululand is referred to as “the house of Shaka,” whereas in the other three audio-visual texts different, if in some ways also problematic, ideas of space obtain which foreground space as a site of contest. In Mapantsula Panic, the gangster protagonist, is not only pitted against the male youth political activists in a contest over township and other spaces, but also against his landlady, Ma Modise, his live-in girlfriend, Pat, Pat’s and Pat’s employer, Mrs. Bentley. In Yizo Yizo 1 the mother of Nomsa, a learner at Supatsela High, which is the setting of the drama series, confronts the school principal, Mr. Mthembu, after he physically punishes her daughter, which leads to his resignation. In what is a direct consequence of this, a female principal, Grace Letsatsi, is hired to replace Mr. Mthembu and his successor, Mr Mokoena (the acting principal hired after Mr Mthembu’s resignation), which creates consternation among some male parents who object to a woman occupying what in their view is a male space. In Fools the home that the protagonist, Zamani, shares with his wife, Nosipho, becomes the site of a protracted battle of attrition, as both characters seek to assert themselves: Zamani tries to establish his male authority as husband “who wears pants in this house” while Nosipho insists on her independence. Lastly, whereas Shaka Zulu promotes a rigid, which is to say ethnic, notion of being a man and woman, in which ‘men are men’ and active and ‘women are women’ and largely passive (except for a few royal women), the other three audio-visual texts provide a more diverse cast of ordinary male and female subjects, thus to some degree rendering the concept of masculinity a site of crisis and multiple claims.

For a more systematic approach, I consider, firstly, the theories that examine the intersections of gender and sexuality with space; secondly, those that consider the

relation of corporeality/embodiment to masculinity; and, lastly, arguments within these theories that hold the view that masculinity is a position that subjects inhabit differentially in relation to the meanings that they confer on, or meanings that are conferred on them by, such a subject position, because neither space nor embodiment are fixed. To this end, I posit that notions of masculinities shift according to the changing social conceptions of time and culture; and, because spaces and bodies are worked on by such social conceptions of time, neither is timeless. In the course of my consideration of the theories, I provide strategic commentary on the audio-visual texts in order to give the theories substance by grounding them in the selected audio-visual texts themselves.

## **2.2 (En)gendering space: masculinities, spatiality and the visual as symbolic/cultural space**

As events, all four audio-visual texts can be said to *take place*, both literally and metaphorically. Literally, they usurp the place of the ‘real’ by creating new frames for ‘it’ and, metaphorically, they function as simulations or allegories under new regimes of representation. And because all four audio-visual texts function mainly as allegories based on either ethnicity (Shaka Zulu), race, generation and citizenship (Yizo Yizo 1) or nationality and/or community (Mapantsula and Fools),<sup>44</sup> they, like all allegorical forms, “allow the most random, minute, or isolated landscapes to function as figurative machinery” (Jameson, Geopolitical Aesthetic 5) in which broad questions are worked out.

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<sup>44</sup> Given its production in the nineteen eighties, a time of so-called black-on-black violence, Shaka Zulu also functions as a parable, that is, a story of a man obsessed with violence which must serve as a warning and object-lesson for those of the time in which it is screened. In this sense, its historical import is largely metaphorical, relying in large measure on the agenda that it served in the nineteen eighties.

Two ideas of space capture the sense in which I intend to deploy the term: one is Andre Lefebvre's, who argues in The Production of Space (1991) that space is socially produced, rather than "strictly geometrical" or "simply . . . an empty area" (12). To elaborate on this point, Lefebvre notes:

To speak of 'producing space' sounds bizarre, so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever else ends up filling it. . . . What is called for, therefore, is a thoroughgoing exposition of these concepts [i.e. '*production*' and '*act of producing*'], and of their relations, on the one hand with the extreme formal abstraction of logico-mathematical space, and on the other hand with the practico-sensory realm of social space. (115)

The thoroughgoing exposition, argues Lefebvre, must involve attempts to "ascertain, after mak[ing] an inventory of the terms of everyday discourse concerning space – a room in an apartment, the corner of the street, a marketplace, a shopping or cultural centre, a public place, and so on – what paradigm gives them their meaning, what syntax governs their organization" (16). In this sense, Lefebvre asserts, "the concept of production [of space] . . . does not become fully concrete or take on a true content until replies have been given to the questions that it makes possible: Who produces? What? How? Why and for whom?" (69). He concludes that, "Outside of the context of these questions and their answers, the concept of production remains purely abstract" (69).

The other conception of space that is crucial to my analysis is Doreen Massey's, who makes a similar point in Space, Place and Gender (1994) about the need to engage the "politics" (250) of space. She notes that,



among the many and conflicting definitions of space which are current in the literature [about space] there are some – and very powerful ones – which deprive it of politics and of the possibility of politics: they effectively depoliticize the realm of the spatial. By no means all authors relegate space in this way. Many, drawing on terms such as centre/periphery/margin, and so on, and examining the ‘politics of location’, for instance, think of spatiality in a highly active and politically enabling manner. But for others space is the sphere of the lack of politics. (250)

Let me point out at this stage that whereas in his study Lefebvre provides a wide-ranging philosophical history of the idea of space, by considering how in Western philosophy René Descartes’ *cogito* both freed discussion of space from the mathematical notion of area as empty space and obscured such discussion by rendering space as an issue of metaphysics or as an extreme formal abstraction, my project is quite specific. I argue that the deployment of setting in the four audio-visual texts to posit an idea of gender and sexual identity indicates that, by and large, South African audio-visual culture has been bedevilled by what I call a metaphysics of presence/the actual/correspondence – what Lefebvre above calls the practico-sensory realm of social space. Thus if South African audio-visual discourses generally map sexual identity onto a practico-sensory realm of social space, it would make sense to point out that insofar as it is also organised within culture, space is subjective, or, to borrow from Lefebvre, has a formal or abstract dimension.

The organisation of visual space also depends on the interplay between material and conceptual space. For instance, Massey relates a story of a visit with two young men to “an Art Gallery . . . [which] was full of paintings, a high proportion of which were of naked women . . . painted by men” (186). About this experience, she says:

This was a ‘space’ that clearly let me know something, and something ignominious, about what High Culture thought was my place in Society. The effect on me of being in that space/place was quite different from the effect it had on my male friends. (I remember that we went off to a café afterwards and had an argument about it. And I lost that argument, largely on the grounds that I was ‘being silly’). (186)

She draws another example from her childhood experience in Manchester, of “the wide shallow valley of the River Mersey . . . divided up into football pitches and rugby pitches [and how] all this huge stretch of the Mersey flood plain had been entirely given over to boys” (185). From these two examples it is evident that cultural constructions of space dovetail with gender assumptions about the places of women and men in society, society itself being an ideologically marked term. Massey feels that the Gallery space that she describes is not only marked in masculinist but also in bifurcated ways: heterosexual men are the privileged subjects who are imbued with the power to look and heterosexual women are the objects of the male gaze. This, she argues, belies the reality that spaces are “gendered in myriad different ways, which vary between [and, I would add, within] cultures and over time” (186). The convention of the female pin-up that governs the Gallery’s space-spectator relation and charges the images with a binary visual economy posits both (the Gallery) space and the images (of women) in it as stasis; indeed, as Massey points out, “space and the feminine are frequently defined in terms of dichotomies in which each of them is most commonly defined as not-A”<sup>45</sup> (257). This, she says, is because,

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<sup>45</sup> Here Massey assesses the idea of space as stasis that Ernesto Laclau posits against a dynamic idea of time in *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time* (1990), namely that because unlike time, which “Marches On,” “[t]he spatial lacks dislocation, [it] is devoid of the possibility of politics” (Massey 252).

There is a whole set of dualisms whose terms are commonly aligned with time and space. With time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason, portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space on the other hand are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, ('simple') reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body. (257)

In Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities (1995), Massey's point about the spatial and symbolic mapping of gender and sexualities acquires multiple implications for what David Bell and Gill Valentine call "the spaces of sex and the sexes of space" (1). Like Massey's idea of space, Mapping Desire speaks of space as a concept that is far from static. For Bell and Valentine space is subject to the shifts in time, sexual identifications and to transformations in human geography.

The essays in Mapping Desire challenge older ideas about habitat, habitation, family, gender, sex and the social, based on "the ways in which the spatial and the sexual constitute one another" (2). After going through the long and complex history of the intersection of human geography and sexuality, Bell and Valentine note that "the dominant sexuality within contemporary societies – heterosexuality" (12) has been significantly under-theorised in this history. And this, they say, has limited the examination of the limited purchase of heterosexual masculinity in the area of 'the everyday' – of the intimate spaces – in feminist geographical research. This ties in with Massey's view that, while thinking about space "in geographically more expansive terms" is important, if it is at the expense of local places, it has the effect of "rob[bing] places in a certain measure of their individual specificity" (117).

What, then, does this brief introduction to some of the positions in the conceptualisation of space mean for my discussion of the way in which politicising space could enable a deconstruction of prevailing assumptions concerning men and

women and their places in given social and cultural contexts? Put differently, how do changes in the understanding of space influence our apprehension of what a man and a woman is in everyday social and cultural life? Recall Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne's contention that the meanings that we give to these subjectivities may change, given "the various ways in which people understand masculinity in any particular setting" (3). There is one important point that Lefebvre, Massey and Bell and Valentine share in common which will inform my discussion of the four audio-visual texts. They all concur that an informed discussion of space must begin with localising spaces together with the terms of everyday discourse about space. It is on this basis that I identify the ideological grammars that govern the organisation of different social spaces in the four audio-visual texts.

The sites of play, work, family, community, nation, conflict, intimacy, and other related sites, all define the contours of the four audio-visual texts' projections of their respective themes and the characters that carry these themes forward. It is what holds these contours in place that concerns me here: the way in which Shaka Zulu reconstructs historical sites of ethnic conflict by inversely underplaying the complex domestic spaces of the nineteen eighties; Mapantsula's pursuit of the story of male auto-redemption, which is played out in public and private settings that nonetheless lack gender and sexual politics at the very moment that the masculinisation of space sustains the film's popular- nationalist framework and appeal; the way in which Yizo Yizo 1 weakens the potential of its critique of violent male dominance over township space by robbing its female characters and those male characters who resist violent and aggressive masculinity of any significant and active social and spatial presence; and, lastly, Fools' pursuit of male auto-redemption against the backdrop of what I

argue is its largely unvoiced and sometimes stereotyped domestic/intimate and public spaces.<sup>46</sup>

As the introduction of this thesis indicates, South African and African scholars – including scholars of Africa outside Africa – have made significant contributions to the study of various aspects of black African masculinities. More importantly, what they have brought to the field is much-needed specificity, without neglecting the place that Africa occupies in the global imaginary. Earlier, I introduced Niara Sudarkasa’s argument that, where indigenous African societies are concerned, studies of gender need to draw a distinction between the notions of “*status*” and “*role*” (25), the first, namely, status, defining “the collection of rights and duties that attach to, and define, particular positions” (25) and the second, that is, role, “the behavior appropriate to a given status” (25). I also proffered Signe Arnfred’s idea that in postcolonial (or contemporary) African societies a rethinking of gender must involve a double gesture, that is, a deconstruction of colonial stereotypes of Africa and Africans and, “through critique of previous conceptualizations,” a reconstruction that “attempts . . . to approach materials in new ways, coming up with fresh or alternative lines of thinking” (7). The gender rights and duties of which Sudarkasa writes overlap with the types of spaces that men and women inhabit in indigenous African societies, which she argues are not defined by a pre-ordained sex role but, rather, by acquired status. In this sense, as I have argued previously, a woman can occupy a ‘masculine’

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<sup>46</sup> For instance, the film spends a disproportionate amount of time and visual space on its male protagonists in contrast to the amount of time and visual space that it affords its female characters. While this may be considered part of the film’s critique of male preeminence in the township, its author Ramadan Suleman’s declared intention to deconstruct this state of affairs means that the film must also sustain an alternative voice to strengthen its critique. As Christopher Norris says of a deconstructive reading, by first showing how terms such as male and female “are inscribed within a systematic structure of hierarchical privilege, such that one of each pair [male] will always appear to occupy the sovereign or governing position,” it [a deconstructive reading] demonstrate[s] – by way of close reading – how this system is undone, so to speak, from within; how the second or subordinate term in each pair [female] has an equal (maybe a prior) claim to be treated as a *condition of possibility* for the entire system” (71).

position and a man a ‘feminine’ one, depending on their social, political, cultural and age ranks in a given setting. I showed how, using the case of the nineteen ninety-six installation of Sinqobile Mabhena as a female chief of the Nswazi area in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, Björn Lindgren tackles the tension and conflict between female masculinity and traditional notions of manhood. For Lindgren, the event

challenged the gender order in Matabeleland generally. More specifically, it challenged the gender regime within traditional leadership, in that power relations, ‘marriage’ customs, and the division of labour were reversed. As a result, the installation threatened a dominant form of male identity by questioning a hegemonic masculinity connected to the system of patrilineality, *patrilocality*, and *lobola* (bridewealth). (178; my emphasis on “patrilocality”)

The significance of Lindgren’s argument for my thesis about space lies in his view that space – in his case the “patrilocal” (178) – is unstable, subject to shifts in time and generation. In the case of Zimbabwe and southern Africa as a whole, the emergence of other spaces that contest the meanings of being a woman and a man – the city,<sup>47</sup> for instance – provides a point of reference for those who challenge conservative views of masculinity and femininity.<sup>48</sup> In terms of Lindgren’s argument, Shaka Zulu can be used as a test case in that one of its claims is that it reconstructs the authentic social and political history of Zululand and of the Zulus against the distortions of colonialism. Indeed, in Shaka Zulu there are women such as Mkabayi

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<sup>47</sup> The emergence of cities (and the resultant labour migrations) is a global phenomenon, even though very little of this aspect is theorised in mainstream Euro-American studies of heterosexual masculinities and spatiality, which, by and large, tend towards a homogeneous view of heterosexual masculinities and space. Lindgren, like Lindsay and Miescher above, for instance, is critical of Robert Connell’s opposition of “‘hegemonic masculinity’” (in Lindgren 184) to “‘emphasised femininity’” (ibid. 184), for the simple reason that, while these characterisations “make sense in relation to” some forms of some men’s resistance to change, they do not necessarily reflect the complexities and fluidity of lived masculinities and femininities.

<sup>48</sup> In the case of Sinqobile Mabhena’s installation, Lindgren points out that those who supported her chieftainship pointed out to her detractors, all male, that times had changed, and that “We have headmasters, MPs, and governors who are women” (Mrs. Hadebe, qtd. in Lindgren 186).

and Nandi who occupy a comparable position of tribal status and authority and whose portrayal requires the same level of analytical rigour with which Lindgren treats the case of Sinqobile. However, I also go further than Lindgren to examine the consequences of the power that such women as Mkabayi and Sinqobile wield beyond the obvious case that they challenge the gender order. Even though, as Lindsay and Miescher note, such powerful women often faced criticism and rebellion from men of tribal authority and influence, when these men felt that they (the female chiefs) “tried to usurp a masquerade explicitly associated with physical manhood” (5 – 6), female chiefs have nevertheless continued to occupy positions of immense masculine power and, more importantly, wielded their power, which makes this as much a gender question as it is one about ‘class’ or prestige.

After its filming, Shaka Zulu also engendered another cultural space, a theme resort for tourists called Shakaland that was opened by two businessmen, Barry Leitch and Kingsley Holgate, on one of the sites used for filming the mini-series. Not only did Shakaland establish a link between the mini-series and big business, it also re-marked contemporary space in the terms of the regressive rhetoric of the Zulus’ love for regimented patriarchal life. It did so through its reconstruction of ‘Zulu social and family life’, for tourists, via the agency of ‘Zulu cultural experts’, as tourist guides.<sup>49</sup> The myth of regimented Zulu social, cultural and political life is a durable one and resounds with the mini-series’ composite image of the Zulus and Zululand as a timeless tribe and timeless space (Shakaland) respectively. In her discussion of Shaka Zulu and Shakaland, Carolyn Hamilton quotes Leitch’s comment about the structure of authority in Shakaland:

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<sup>49</sup> Shakaland also included an elaborate tourist itinerary which, among other things, gave tourists ‘first-hand experience’ of what a Zulu household looks like and how it is governed by its patriarch.

The two patriarchs of Shakaland are myself and my partner, Kingsley Holgate. We are essentially White Zulus. We conduct ourselves very much in the Zulu fashion . . . and the whole way that we run Shakaland is exactly the same way as the head of a kraal or the head of a family in the rural areas. (201)

Shakaland, then, places Shaka Zulu firmly in the context of the nineteen-eighties' revival of Zulu martial masculinity and the militarisation of Zulu men (*amabutho* or regiments) living in male hostels bordering black African townships against the rising tide of black African township youth political activism. However, Shakaland also raises another aspect of this revival that became crucial for some of the critics of the mini-series, but which had been the subject of interest for social scientists for some time, that is, the intersection of Zulu ethnic nationalism with black and white male business interests in Zululand and Natal. The first Inkatha,<sup>50</sup> Gerhard Maré and Georgina Hamilton note in An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and the Politics of 'Loyal Resistance' (1987), "was the creation of the African petty bourgeoisie in Natal in the 1920s, which had seen the possibilities of using Zulu 'traditionalism' as a political tool and a means of economic advancement" (46). This fact could not be truer of Buthelezi's revival of the movement in 1975. In any event, the reincarnation of Inkatha in the nineteen seventies saw the values of this cultural movement being introduced in black African schools in KwaZulu and Natal under Social Studies as Good Citizenship or *Ubuntu Botho* which, as Timothy Parsons says,

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<sup>50</sup> This is the name of a cultural movement that was created in the nineteen twenties to serve as the guardian of Zulu culture, history and traditions. Over the years it changed its character and emphases as political conditions changed. In the nineteen seventies, with the creation of self-governing ethnic homelands, also known as Bantustans, by the apartheid regime, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who had been a member of the African National Congress (ANC), revived the movement in Zululand and Natal in what was seen as a clandestine revival of the then banned ANC. However, as his power grew, so did his political ambitions, which led to Inkatha participating in the apartheid ethnic homeland system and, in the nineteen eighties, taking a political stance that was increasingly at odds with that of the ANC. The violent conflicts between Inkatha *amabutho* and the youth political activists affiliated to the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front (UDF) in the nineteen eighties marked the period of Inkatha's complete transformation into an ethnic political movement with strong paramilitary foundations modelled on Zulu martial masculinity of the Shakan era.



“[Buthelezi] defined as the Zulu tradition ‘whereby we each are responsible for one another’” (341).<sup>51</sup> Aside from investing public spaces such as the male hostels, the townships and schools as Zulu territory with its ethnic structure and imagery, Inkatha also sought to annex private spaces such as homes and KwaZulu homeland government offices by mobilising visual imagery in the form of what became iconic photographs of Shaka holding a long spear and looking regal and another of past Zulu kings’ head shots encircling a Zulu traditional homestead (*umuzi*). The marking of private spaces with the visual imagery of Zulu royal patriarchs, visual imagery which functions to define symbolic/cultural space, effectively superimposes a narrow masculinist cultural model over spaces whose relation to the Zulu senior and aristocratic male line is tenuous at best, given the troubled state of gender and sexual subjectivities in the nineteen eighties.

At the centre of the idea of Zulu cultural cohesion was the view that to be Zulu meant the acceptance of a hierarchical social, cultural *and* political order in which one knew one’s place and how to conduct oneself as a proper Zulu boy, girl, man and woman. The political upheavals of the nineteen eighties brought older and younger men into a violent conflict mainly because youth politics began to upset an already precarious balance between Zulu culture and politics by aligning itself with non-ethnic causes associated with urban youths’ socio-political and cultural identifications. Older Zulu men saw male youth as having lost the core values such as respect for one’s seniors and, instead, having adopted urban values that conservative men saw as bound to cause younger men to go astray. I contend that seen in the

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<sup>51</sup> In his essay, Timothy Parsons looks at how, “in Buthelezi’s view, Scouting and Inkatha worked together during the apartheid era to teach discipline to young people who were in danger of being led astray by radicals who told them that education could wait for liberation. By teaching ‘education for liberation’ both Scouting and Inkatha dissuaded boys and young men from ‘blindly following the call to arms and violence’” (341-342). This is a discussion of one instance in the construction of Zulu boyhood and young manhood that I shall return to in due course.

context of the nineteen eighties, the mini-series can be regarded as an ideological attempt at reconstructing ‘authentic’ Zulu cultural *and* political, social and spatial order.

What is evident in the brief discussion of the intersection of space, gender and representation above is that cultural memory carries emotional currency in times of transition. It substitutes for lost (tribal) cultural spaces in times when these spaces become less distinct and when, as happened in the nineteen eighties, their older cultural associations are contested. Thus, the re-invention of (Zulu) traditions also provides anchorage and continuity. Jabulani Sithole talks about “*ubuZulu bethu*” (our Zuluness), that is, “perceptions of what made and continues to make Zuluness,” as “constructed, redistilled, and changed over time by various ideologues and activists competing in a political arena” (328). Benedict Carton argues that this “idiom” (*ubuZulu bethu*) “provides the spatial metaphor to situate studies of Zuluness in a research commons, an area of inquiry defined more by its intersecting paths than by high boundaries; some routes vary from worn to fresh; others vanish or rematerialise” (4).

Shaka Zulu is a species of cultural memory that, like the images I mention above (of a regal Shaka and Zulu kings encircling a Zulu homestead as icons of gravitas and continuity), not only usurps the places of contemporary reality but also takes over and remakes the private spaces of the homes on which it superimposes itself. About the rhetoric of the Shakaland tourist guides regarding the organisation of the model Zulu homestead or “Great Kraal” (*umuzi*), Hamilton says that, “with its emphasis on the division of the homestead into separate male and female domains, [the homestead] was readily transformed through gender-based banter between guides and audience into crude stereotyping of the role of women in Zulu society” (202). Offered the less

prestigious roles of mothers and homemakers, women were excluded from 'masculine' roles, which, as Sudarkasa argues, have, for some, been an important part of being a woman in indigenous African societies.

Arnfred's thesis that contemporary critique needs to rethink gender, the better to posit new agendas for talking about men and women in contemporary social settings, has direct consequences not just for Mapantsula, Yizo Yizo 1 and Fools, which are set in twentieth-century South Africa, but for Shaka Zulu as well which, as I show above, conceals the complexities of its contemporary setting beneath the veneer of a historical one. The battlefield, the township neighbourhood, the school, the bedroom, the street, the social club, the city, the suburb, the prison cell and other related spaces that raise significant questions about the spatial organisation of gender and the gendered organisation of space in the four audio-visual texts, are all packaged in forms that have histories and operate within regimes of representation. The parabolic epic (Shaka Zulu), the gangster film (Mapantsula), the situational drama about a drug and violence-infested school (Yizo Yizo 1) and the story of a disgraced community man who earns his dignity back through an atoning act (Fools) are forms that resonate with established popular cultural histories and traditions of audio-visual representation. In this sense, what requires careful consideration is how the settings that the four audio-visual texts create within these forms engender certain ways of conceptualising gender and how each audio-visual text's imaging of gendered subjectivities shapes its understanding of space. Recall in this instance the common point that Lefebvre, Massey, and also Bell and Valentine make above concerning the ideological *production* of space.

I have considered the intersection of space and aggressive masculinity in Shaka Zulu at some length and now I move to examine, also in broad theoretical terms, the

same in the other three audio-visual texts. Firstly, I consider the constitution of the (black South African) underworld and how, in Mapantsula, this space is framed. I also examine the conflict that the film sets up between the underworld and the emergent space of African popular nationalism. In the course of this examination, I discuss the largely privatised worlds of female characters and how this reflects the conceptions of criminality and politics in the masculinist social landscape of the nineteen eighties. Earlier I cited Lefebvre's view that concrete and abstract spaces inform and underpin each other and it is in this light that I test Mapantsula's realism as the film seeks to capture a crucial moment in the nineteen eighties in South Africa.

In Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976 (2000), Clive Glaser tracks myriad and contradictory forms of subcultural expression and identification, including territoriality, among young black African urban male gangs (known as *tsotsis* or petty crooks/thugs). The geography of criminality that Glaser theorises in his study is informed by his view that the ways in which gangs demarcate spaces share one thing in common, namely, a strong masculinist component. To this end, he notes with reference to *tsotsi* gangs of the 1940s and 1950s and the Soweto gangs of the 1960s and 1970s:

The *tsotsi* gangs of the 1940s and 1950s, as well as the Soweto gangs of the 1960s and 1970s, were expressions of young urban masculinity. Although women were sometimes drawn peripherally into gangs as girlfriends, decoys, and lookouts, the gang subculture was essentially male. The distinctive subcultural clothing style was for males only, and women were excluded from the prestige spheres of gang life such as fighting. The masculine identity of the gang hinged around fighting skill, independence, street wisdom, feats of daring, law-breaking, clothing style, proficiency in the *tsotsitaal* argot, and

success with women. Adeptness and success in these areas determined a *tsotsi*'s status and prestige as a "man." Young township women, as objects of subcultural prestige, as trophies of masculinity, were subjected to astonishing levels of sexual violence. Male power and control in the gang subculture were underpinned by rape and the threat of rape. (4)

Mapantsula offers viewers a glimpse of the scenario that Glaser describes above, but at its vanishing point. Panic, the film's gangster-protagonist, is caught between two worlds: one is the criminal underworld that he knows how to navigate and the other is the political one which, at first standing parallel to his own, poses little immediate threat. The film allows these two worlds to develop relatively separately until they come into an inevitable collision as the political tensions in the township escalate. It is the film's strategy to switch from one to the other that makes for an interesting examination of the structure and content of each world, particularly the underworld, in some depth. However, let me consider briefly and in general terms the historical background of the story that Mapantsula dramatises, keeping an eye on the spatial and gender patterns on which the film's story is grafted.

Mapantsula descends from a deeply complex history of urbanisation and the concomitant creation of the urban black African underclass in South Africa. The process of urbanisation also saw the rise of a black African middle class political vanguard, mainly of royal lineage and/or from Christian backgrounds, virtually all male, and educated in the British humanist tradition, whose political language increasingly became cumbersome in a brutal capitalist context.

I join this process from the late nineteen forties after the publication of Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country (1948), which coincided with the high point of Afrikaner nationalism and the beginning of Afrikaner rule that lasted over four

decades. In his novel Paton decries the destruction of the black African “tribe” and the tribal way of life, warns against the corrosive and corruptive influence of urban, mainly slum, life on black African men and women and calls for the return of black Africans to their tribal lands. However, the novel does so by means of an ostensible Christian code. Needless to say, at the time of its publication Cry, the Beloved Country was belated in at least three ways: firstly, the liberal solution it proposed, in which cooperation between those men educated in the British humanist tradition, black and white, would bring about an equitable society founded on English social values, had not only failed but had also been forced into political retreat by Afrikaner and black African nationalisms which balked at its paternalism; secondly, the novel had underestimated the depth of black African urban identification; and, thirdly, its language was, despite evidence of women having settled in the urban areas, sexist,<sup>52</sup> implying that the urban environment was not a place for women.

Paton’s novel marks the watershed moment in the representation of black African subjects in urban areas for the simple reason that its formula inaugurated a literary and film genre that came to be known as the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ genre, the name itself coming from a 1949 film of that title by Donald Swanson.<sup>53</sup> Cry, the Beloved Country is the story of Reverend Kumalo, a country naïf who travels to the big city of Johannesburg in search of his son, Absalom and his sister, Gertrude. He discovers that his son has got involved in violent crime and that his sister has a ‘sickness’. The ‘sickness’ to which the Sophiatown priest refers in his letter turns out to be of a spiritual/moral, rather than physical, nature: Gertrude has fallen in with the bad

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<sup>52</sup> Here I refer to the novel’s treatment of Reverend Khumalo’s sister, who has learnt the ways of survival in the slums but incurs the most gender biased treatment in the novel. However, this is not to imply that Afrikaner and African nationalisms did not mobilise similar images of fragile and demure womenfolk against images of rugged and resourceful men.

<sup>53</sup> This genre included plays, novels and films in African languages such as Sibusiso Nyembezi’s novel, Mntanami! Mntanami! (My Child! My Child!) (1969) and the film U-Deliwe, all of which spoke of the suffering of black African protagonists in the crime-ridden slums of Johannesburg.

company of women in the slums who brew beer for a living. Reverend Kumalo's journey to Johannesburg and back to his rural Ndotsheni is figured as a journey into the depths of moral and political depravity and then a return to hope. Moral depravity is figured as the burden of women and political depravity that of men such as Reverend Kumalo's brother John. Hope comes in the form of Reverend Kumalo's return to the tribal lands with his sister in an awkward ending that invents a romantic future for the rural land that the novel itself admits is barren.

The nineteen fifties saw a significant paradigm shift in the conceptualisation of black African urban space in black African writing, especially in the journalistic stories of Drum magazine writers such as Can Themba and Casey Motsisi. In these stories, black African male characters embrace the urban space of Sophiatown in ways not anticipated by Paton's novel which, to be sure, is also about the black African urban slums despite its sentimental withdrawal from its main context. These stories also captured the masculine energy that animated the times and environment of the nineteen fifties. The common feature of black African writing of this time is the ease with which in the stories about Sophiatown township space and aggressive – mainly criminal – masculinity are seen seamlessly to intersect. In a perfect illustration of Glaser's description of the territoriality of criminal gangs above, the stories of Themba and Motsisi not only portray Sophiatown streets as in the control of men but also portray women as male 'territory', so to speak. The strong sense of male sexual abandon and of women "as objects of subcultural prestige" (4), to use Glaser's formulation, saturates these texts. This, I argue, is Panic's underworld in Mapantsula where African nationalist politics is largely peripheral.

Black African urban spaces of the nineteen fifties to the early nineteen eighties were also overrun with images of popular, mainly American, film and visual culture.

The “Americans” and the “Apaches” (Glaser 55 & 56) were some of the names that the criminal gangs of the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties adopted, influenced mainly by depictions of the criminal gangs and action heroes of American cinema. Like in the cinema images of American criminal gangs and action heroes, preference for aliases and spectacular violence characterised gang subculture in township streets around the country. Mapantsula’s portrayal of Panic, whose real name is Johannes Themba Mzolo, is influenced by the images of gangsters of the nineteen fifties and resonates with many of the characteristic features of American gangster and action films which saturated the subcultures of Sophiatown in this period. For instance, at one time in the film, after robbing a white woman of her handbag, Panic escapes into a cinema where an action film is showing, thus reinforcing the film’s take on subculture.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the film Panic is the object of the film’s criticism for his affiliation with gang subculture at a time (the nineteen eighties) when it has become antithetical to the political aspirations of the township youth. For its part, Drum magazine reproduced the female pin-up of the American magazine culture as the object of male desire and, in the process, revealed the gender division of symbolic/cultural space in the popular cultural imaginary of the nineteen fifties. In Mapantsula, both the underworld and the political world are male domains and women feature either as sexual partners, homemakers or are effectively filmed out of the public spaces that men inhabit.

The situational drama about a troubled school has a long history in American film, with notable examples being The Substitute, Lean on Me and 187. The school in each of these films serves as a microcosm for, and the locus for comment on, the wider social landscape and situation. Yizo Yizo 1 adapts this concept and presents it in the

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<sup>54</sup> Again, on the dance floor of Club Hi-Lite the camera zooms to his two-tone Florsheim shoes, an accessory of American film gangsters.



form of a family drama series.<sup>55</sup> The realism that characterises the American example finds expression in the very title of Yizo Yizo 1 which, loosely translated, means ‘this is it’. Like its American counterparts, Yizo Yizo 1 portrays a school in a rough neighbourhood: violent male thugs have breached the school’s boundaries. Not only are these thugs learners at the school, they also run drugs on the school premises for drug lords outside the school, hijack cars for the black market and rape school girls to assert their street credibility. The school environment as a whole is a male domain, from the male school principal who runs the school with a cane and a stern demeanour, the all-male school’s governing body, a male teacher who sexually preys on his female learners, to the male learners for whom female learners are objects of sexual attention and violence. Aside from the images of male violence, the drama series’ visual space is also framed by popular township music known as *Kwaito*.<sup>56</sup> Taken together, these features illustrate the view that space, in its material and symbolic manifestations, is governed by a gender ideology. Indeed, to use the formulations of the three theorists that I cited above, each of the two types of space in Yizo Yizo 1, that is, material and symbolic spaces, “involves, underpins and presupposes the other” (Lefebvre 14), both spaces are “given over to boys” (Massey 185) and “the spaces of sex and the sexes of space” (Bell and Valentine 1) in the drama series are assigned according to the dominant conception of masculinity where girls and women play limited and often predictable ‘female’ roles.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> This is due largely to its mandate to act as an educational tool and to engender discussion on male youth apathy and violence in particular.

<sup>56</sup> Glaser speculates that the etymology of this word could be “two Afrikaans words: *kwaai*, meaning ‘angry’ or ‘fierce,’ and *ou*, meaning ‘guy.’ It may also conceivably have been derived from the 1957 war film, Bridge on the River Kwai” (115).

<sup>57</sup> For instance, even though Thiza’s grandmother plays the conventional masculine role as the breadwinner in the house and Nomsa’s mother is the one who takes up the issue of her daughter’s corporal punishment by the school principal, which leads to his inglorious resignation, there is no fundamental change in the understanding of the shifting conception of the masculine in the social environment of the drama series.

Strictly speaking, Yizo Yizo 1 is a critique of the scenarios that it portrays and it would be unfair to align the drama series with the masculinism that governs its various settings. However, having said this, I must add that Yizo Yizo 1's critics have argued that it takes its realism – as it were, the ‘this is it’ of its title – somewhat too far, which, as I argue in chapter five, does tend to create a sense of inevitability about its contents and structure of action. This is due largely to the limited spaces of its action, namely, Supatsela High, and the few locations which are in any case linked to the school. Whereas this affords the settings of the drama series, the primary one in particular (that is, Supatsela High), “a certain measure of . . . individual specificity” (117), as Massey argues thinking about space in concentrated ways does, there is nonetheless a lack of dynamism about Yizo Yizo 1's spaces, with the drama series at times seeming to overstate the masculinity and femininity of most of its public and domestic spaces respectively. To a significant degree, this robs the drama series' spaces of the politics of which Massey speaks, but more importantly of the different gender relations to space other than the conventional ones. Having said this, Yizo Yizo 1, unlike Shaka Zulu and, to a lesser degree Mapantsula, does introduce a radical paradigm shift, however contradictory, by positing masculinity as a performative subjectivity.

In my discussion of the drama series, I contend that township space is complex in a variety of ways and that women participate in public spaces as much as men do, despite the preeminence of the imagery of violent men and docile young women. Moreover, women inhabit public spaces not as the perpetual victims of male violence

that Yizo Yizo 1 makes most of the schoolgirls out to be. Likewise, men relate to township spaces in ways that are not uniformly masculinist.<sup>58</sup>

Domestic and intimate spaces in Fools offer a wealth of analytic possibilities mainly because in the film there is no clear line that separates them from public spaces. The point of the film is to bring these conventionally distinct and differently-valued spaces into a productive collision by using, firstly, the conflict between its protagonist, Zamani, and Nosipho, his wife, and, secondly, Zamani and the family of Mimi, the school girl that Zamani rapes in the home that he shares with Nosipho. Zamani is shown to assert in his own house the kind of traditional manhood that he has lost not only in this space, as Nosipho has taken over the masculine role of manning the house, but also in his social life. For instance, it is in his house that he rapes his pupil, an act which leads to his disgrace and suspension from his job as a school teacher, and it is also in his house that he becomes *persona non grata* to his wife. Having lost credibility at home, at work and in his community, he tries to assert his aggressive manhood in the streets by paying a prostitute for stand up sex; the prostitute is not only disdainful of his failing manhood but at one point during the sexual act takes money out of his wallet and leaves him to find his way out of a police raid. The streets, in other words, are as much a place where his failing manhood is reinforced as his house is.

The township of Charterston where most of the film is set presents its own set of contests over space. It is a time in the nineteen eighties when the apartheid regime has declared a State of Emergency against the backdrop of black African male and female youth political activism in the townships across the country. The streets of

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<sup>58</sup> To be fair to the creators of the drama series, they do make an effort to break away from this trend. Indeed, in subsequent series, Yizo Yizo 2 and Yizo Yizo 3, they do explore issues of male homosexuality and alternative forms of male and female identification. These issues are already implied in Yizo Yizo 1, but because of its focus are not quite developed.

Charterston are subject to regular police raids and older black African men spend their time drinking, discussing young girls and/or harassing them in what the film portrays as a misplaced and distorted show of bravado against a deep sense of political impotence. It is in this context that Zamani commits his act of rape. Yet the alternative to Zamani and his male friends is far from redeeming, at least insofar as this alternative never quite vacates the idea of maleness as the aggregate of what is masculine<sup>59</sup>; Zani, whom the film proposes as a compromise position,<sup>60</sup> is a sensitive but naïve young man and the ‘effeminate’ role that he is given in the film is undercut by his constant appeal to black African manhood.

What I have shown in the outline of the four audio-visual texts’ treatment of the gender/sexual-spatial relation above is a tendency either to impose frameworks for this relation in advance of the actual performance of gender subjectivities or, as in the case of Fools and, to some degree, Yizo Yizo 1, to limit and at times undercut the potential for re-conceptualising masculinities in new ways, especially when the audio-visual texts already point in this direction. I am of the view that the projects of reconstituting the ethnic model (in Shaka Zulu), of staging a conflict between the criminal underworld and the popular struggle within the framework of nationalism (in Mapantsula) or of rendering appearances as what things are (Yizo Yizo 1) run the risk of reinforcing conventional notions of gender – of masculinity in particular – that in the contexts of the audio-visual texts’ socio-historical moments of production no longer have resonance.

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<sup>59</sup> It is my view that even when Fools makes forays into the spaces where its male characters lose ground to its female characters, as when Zamani fails to assert his authority over Nosipho, or when the male elders of the community are chased out of Mimi’s house by her sister, Busi, when they try to intercede on Zamani’s behalf, the masculine is still very much synonymous with maleness.

<sup>60</sup> Here I refer specifically to the film’s portrayal of Zani as the opposite of the predatory men whose company Zamani keeps. Otherwise his political naivety is not lost to the film.

I now turn to the notions of the *embodiment* of gender identities that shape the four audio-visual texts' conceptions of masculinities, taking into account Connell's view that biologist or essentialist theories of gender embodiment have had to confront those that conceive of the body as a "writing surface on which messages [including gender ones] can be inscribed" (Grosz 62).

### **2.3 Embodying black African masculinities: from the "body proper"<sup>61</sup> to subjectivity**

In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1995), Michel Foucault argues that the body is *produced* in various forms of institutional surveillance and discipline. For Foucault, already in the "classical age," the body was "discovered . . . as object and target of power," a body that has come down to our times as "manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its force" (136). This view of the body as "pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit" (135) has been taken up by, among others, Elizabeth Grosz. She observes that,

the metaphysics of *body-writing* poses the body, its epidermic surface, muscular-skeletal frame, ligaments, joints, blood vessels and internal organs, as corporeal surfaces on which engraving, inscription or 'graffiti' are etched [and that] the metaphor of a textualised body affirms the body as a page or material surface on which messages may be inscribed (62).

These ideas are of particular significance for my discussion of the representation of the male and female bodies in Shaka Zulu, in particular, and, in varying degrees of emphases, in Mapantsula, Yizo Yizo 1 and Fools, as the sites for certain views on

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<sup>61</sup> This phrase is used by Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar in Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life (2007) to denote a tendency in biological sciences to treat physical bodies as determinants of identity. Against this tendency they posit a cultural anthropological alternative, whereby they conceive of bodies as cultural markers.

being a black African man and woman in South Africa. Furthermore, my discussion of the representation of the male body in the four audio-visual texts takes into account Grosz's view that "the analogy between bodies and texts is a close one," in that,

[T]ools of body-engraving – social, surgical, epistemic or disciplinary – mark bodies in culturally specific ways; writing instruments – the pen, stylus, or laser beam – inscribe the blank page of the body. The 'messages' or 'texts' produced by such procedures construct bodies as networks of social signification, meaningful and functional 'subjects' within assemblages composed with other subjects. Each gains a (provisional) identity from its constitutive relations with others. Inscriptions of the corporeal differences between bodies can be seen to produce body-subjects as living significations, social texts capable of being read or interpreted. (62-63)

However, as my discussion of the four audio-visual texts will attest, the body has been used variously to signify essence as opposed to construct, nature against culture, and sex as opposed to gender; in short, as a stable biological essence/given. It is the dialectical tension between the apprehension of the body proper and the body as produced in networks of signification that I theorise in this section. In other words, the body, like space, has circulated in visual discourse via a complex network of disciplinary practices with their own axioms and analytical procedures.

The concept of subjectivity, which I consider in the last section of this chapter, entered the theoretical vocabulary via Descartes' famous dictum, *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), and its legacy has remained one of the most contested, with various disciplines, ranging from biology to literary studies, questioning its usefulness. What is today called Cartesian dualism refers to the separation of the body and the mind in Descartes' philosophical proposition and the concomitant

metaphysical valorisation of the latter as the only aspect that makes humans human. This brings up the problem that Lefebvre identifies in Descartes, that is, his (Descartes') separation of space into "*re cogitans*" and "*re extensa*" (Production of Space 1) with the former signifying mental space and the latter physical space. Because Lefebvre conceives of material and conceptual spaces as underpinning each other, misconstruing the material as a mere receptacle for the soul/mind risks prioritising the mind over matter as the centre of meaning and being. In this sense, as in the sense in which Lefebvre conceives of the consubstantiality of the physical and mental dimensions of space, the binary logic of Descartes' proposition misses a crucial point, which is that the body matters as much as the mind does in the constitution of subjectivity. My discussion of Shaka Zulu, in particular, where the body of Shaka is posited as *the* marker of racial, sexual, gender and ethnic difference, and its training as the training of the body politic, illustrates this point.

Antony Easthope posits that, "the body always has to be installed in its social roles . . . by means of an internal, subjective process" (167). About the conception of masculinity in popular culture, Easthope notes that,

The masculine ego must master everything. If the physical world on the outside can be overcome as nature, on the inside it may be dominated as the body, and an idea of the body. . . . The physical differences between male and female bodies are relatively slight. Only one gene in eighteen is different, the rest are shared. From this welter of possibilities popular culture selects a certain stereotype to stand for the masculine body. . . .

For the masculine ego the body can be used to draw a defensive line between inside and outside. So long as there is very little fat, tensed muscle and tight

sinews can give a hard, clear outline to the body. Flesh and bone can pass itself off as a kind of armour. (51-52)

What Easthope above sees as a predilection in popular cultural representations of masculinity to select particular stereotypes and raise them to the status of essentialisms<sup>62</sup> that nevertheless have no essential basis even in the genomic presumptions that underpin such stereotypes, is posited as a biological given in Shaka Zulu. In effect, this means that, because in the mini-series gender identities are underwritten by a simple gender-body equation, the far more complex semiotic inventory that Easthope adumbrates is positively denied. Even at those moments in the mini-series when the representation of Shaka's body appears to hint at the tradition of the male pin-up, the mini-series endeavours to cultivate a masculine look by making Shaka's gaze originary and penetrating, without itself being the object of another's gaze. Nevertheless, something of a residual homosocial looking relation slips through the tightly structured camera angles to render Shaka as, at the very least, the object of the mini-series' male gaze, even though the camera goes to great lengths to force this gaze into a conventional masculine, rather than a homo-erotic, viewing framework. What I am suggesting here is that looking relations shape the subjectivities of the objects of the gaze, rather than the other way around. In this sense, what Shaka Zulu projects as the marker of Zulu masculinity, that is, Shaka's muscular body, no longer means the same thing in the contemporary moment in which the mini-series is set, where muscular bodies have become signifiers of androgynous subjectivities. Indeed, one could say that the gaze of the camera, which coincides with the male gaze, denies rather than erases the possibility of another, non-heterosexual, gaze. At those times when Shaka is presented in long shots and his gaze

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<sup>62</sup> This is the same point that Morrell makes in his argument that essentialist notions of masculinity elevate random traits traditionally associated with manliness to the status of a male phenotype.



is not seen to be looking back, or when his body is turned during the ritual of its oiling, it is a homo-erotic look as well that is invited, though for obvious reasons it is never quite meant.<sup>63</sup>

The issue of the male body as pre-social and pre-cultural, that is, as armour, is thus a complex one, and Easthope's view above testifies to this complexity by laying bare the interiority that it must keep at bay. In this relation, Easthope further notes that,

It [the male body] is not to be looked at with the eye of desire. This is precisely the look the masculine body positively denies as though it were saying, 'Whatever else, *not* that.' The hardness and tension of the body strives to present it as wholly masculine, to exclude all curves and hollows and be only straight lines and flat planes. It would really like to be a cubist painting. Or whatever. But above all not desirable to other men because it is so definitely not soft and feminine. . . . The masculine body seeks to be Rambo, not Rimbaud. (54)

To function as a male body, the body must undergo a process of ritualistic initiation. Because masculinity is an identity that is assigned in advance of its actual social meaning and practice, it has to be constantly monitored by means of the rituals of training and of cultivating a look that is 'properly' masculine over and against that which is construed as 'properly' feminine; otherwise, there is no essential core to underline the body as either masculine or feminine outside culture. The representation of the body as male by virtue of its outward frame increasingly takes centre stage in Shaka Zulu, as Shaka develops from boyhood to manhood along the

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<sup>63</sup> Having said this, there is no reason why it cannot be inferred that Shaka Zulu's inordinate attention to Shaka's naked body leans towards Donald Morris's view that Shaka "was probably a latent homosexual" (46) even if in the end it is to dismiss it, that is, to present him as a heterosexual male superman.

path of his physical strength. What Easthope implicitly proposes in the comments above is a reconsideration of Foucault's view of the body as an inert automatism of habit, a view which, despite its radical departure from the idea of a neutral body, nevertheless retains this view by conceiving of the body as a template.

Foucault's view, which essentially means that sex and gender exist in a binary, rather than in a mutually inclusive, relation, has been influentially challenged by Judith Butler. In Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990), Butler argues that:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (6)

For Butler, then, the body continues to be used to determine the social identities of men and women. In this sense, theory cannot afford to neglect the historical reasons for this apprehension of the body in phallogocentric societies. In regard to Foucault, for whom the body is neutral before it is inserted into social discourse, Butler's argument serves as a reminder that it is possible for a study such as Foucault's, which purports to trace the history of sexuality, to elide its object of investigation, namely, the body, by misconstruing it as an inert empirical object ready at all times to be manipulated. Of Foucault's view of the body as a pliable surface, Butler says in Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex' (1993) that,

Insofar as Foucault traces the process of materialization as an investiture of discourse and power, he focuses on the dimension of power that is productive and formative. But we need to ask what constrains the domain of what is materializable, and whether there are modalities of materialization. (35)

What this means for my discussion of the uses to which sexed, racialised and ethnicised bodies are put in Shaka Zulu, Mapantsula, Yizo Yizo 1 and Fools, is that it is precisely because these bodies are subjected to the devices of intelligibility, as it were, either explained within conventional discursive frameworks or taken for granted as already known to belong in these frameworks, that the possibility of a different looking relation is denied. Put differently, if one follows Foucault's view of discursively produced bodies, without also considering that bodies as they function in society are also male and female and within these homosexual, bisexual and more, one runs the risk of presuming a level playing field on which sexed bodies have equal status before discourse. In The Men and the Boys (2000), Robert Connell notes that "bodies are both agents and objects of practice [and] do not turn into symbols, signs, or positions in discourse. Their materiality . . . is not erased, it continues to matter" (26-27). In the same light, Butler argues in Bodies That Matter that bodies matter as much as discourse in that what passes as male and female sexualities is already invested with a certain binary significance that admits only two terms. To this end, Butler asks of Foucault's scrupulous collapsing of the material into the discursive:

To what extent is materialization governed by principles of intelligibility that require and institute a domain of radical unintelligibility that resists materialization altogether or that remains radically dematerialized? Does Foucault's effort to work notions of discourse and materiality through one another fail to account for not only what is excluded from the economies of

discursive intelligibility that he describes, but what has to be excluded for those economies to function as self-sustaining systems? (*Bodies* 35)

These questions place the integrity of Foucault's discursive approach to bodies in doubt.

Luce Irigaray is another theorist who has questioned the elision of female sex in male discourse about women. For instance, she argues in regard to Freud's essay "Femininity" that by speaking of "the riddle of the nature of femininity" (*Speculum* 13) it runs the risk of becoming "a case of . . . men speaking among themselves about woman, who cannot be involved in hearing or producing a discourse that concerns the *riddle*, the logogriph she represents for [men]" (*Speculum* 13). In this sense, Irigaray notes that the "enigma that is woman will therefore constitute the *target*, the *object*, the *stake*, of a masculine discourse, of a debate among men, which would not consult her, would not concern her. Which, ultimately, she is not supposed to know anything about" (*Speculum* 13). Irigaray's contention is that the dematerialisation of the body of woman in discourses generated by men is appropriative, rather than simply discursive; "discourse," Irigaray asserts, "has a sex" (*Ethics* 133).

The four audio-visual texts that I study in this thesis provide sufficient grounds for my analysis to take into account Butler and Irigaray's assertion that bodies function in hierarchical power relationships and continue to be informed by these relationships in their social situation. Even though in less sustained and spectacular ways than in *Shaka Zulu*, the other three audio-visual texts also tap into the idea of the male body variously as a marker of social cohesion, moral decline or redemption. By contrast, the bodies of women function in the conventional sense as, in Irigaray's words, "the *target[s]*, the *object[s]* [and] the *stake[s]* of a [traditional] masculine discourse" (*Speculum* 13).

Two examples from the closing scenes of Mapantsula and Fools illustrate the male body as both auto-destructive and auto-reconstructive. After Panic, the male protagonist in Mapantsula, has failed to assert his manhood against a new brand of male, the political activist, he is wrongfully arrested during riots, charged with a political crime and humiliated by a police detective. In the final scene, Special Branch detective Stander forces him to strip naked in what can be read as Panic's moment of truth. Brought out of the underworld of shebeens and street corners to the interrogation room of John Vorster Square police headquarters, severely battered and stripped of its *tsotsi* (criminal) paraphernalia, Panic's naked body stands on the literal and symbolic threshold between masculine selfhood and the apartheid system in what could be termed a masculine showdown. In Fools, Zamani, who has degenerated into debauchery and inaction against the background of the political inertia of his male generation, finds his way back to redemption in the final scene by placing his body on the line. During a school picnic to commemorate a day in 1838 on which Zulu and, by extension African, men suffered defeat at the hands of their Afrikaner rulers, the school principal accidentally hits a passing car with a stone, whereupon Zamani intercedes to take punishment from the Afrikaner motorist. Because his act wins him new sympathy in the eyes of those present (who had previously written him off), his body functions as the residual 'text' of male sexual assertion and redemption.

Based on the coming of age of a few central characters in a violent neighbourhood, virtually the whole of Yizo Yizo 1 is saturated with explicit and implicit references to the male body as a template on which male identity is negotiated via a cast of inert women. The drama series' fascination with male youth subculture becomes possible because of its construction of its female characters as hapless victims and of their bodies as available for possession by their male counterparts.

In my consideration of the representations of the male and female bodies in the four films, I shall keep in mind that, whereas Butler is critical of Foucault's elision of the unequal positions that male and female bodies are assigned in culture and society, she concurs with him on the point that, insofar as the body is deeply embedded in signification, "language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the processes by which it is signified" (Bodies 68). But bodies also operate in social situations, which, as Regenia Gagnier points out, mark people as "producers and consumers, workers and wanters, sociable and self-interested" (45). Moreover, bodies are racialised, fetishised and, generally, function in orders of discourse that are ostensibly polemical.

#### **2.4 Black African masculinities at the crossroads: debunking the myth of masculine essence and the value of the concept of subjectivity**

From Butler's critical reading of Foucault above, it is clear that what is called sex, while not a biological essence, nevertheless carries currency in phallogentric social and cultural formations, not simply as an "investiture of discourse and power . . . that is productive and formative" (Bodies 35) but more often as the target of discourse and power both of which are prohibitive and exclusionary. The concept of subjectivity, then, functions within material exigencies of discourse and power and informs the structure of this materiality as much as it is informed by it. This is what Butler means by her point that – and this warrants repeating here – "[w]hen the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Gender Trouble 6). Put differently, Butler's view echoes that of

Arthur Brittan's, namely, that power, which historically is exercised differentially according to sexual identity with men as its agents and women its objects, prevents the concept of gender from becoming absolutely relative. Thus says Brittan, "masculinity is [not] so variable that we cannot identify it as a topic" (1).

To speak of subjectivity in this way is to reinforce the theoretical position that I have taken in regard to both the space and body-gender relations, that is, that each of the terms in the relation must underpin and inform the other. This is because to think of gender as unmarked by the locations and the bodies onto which it is mapped, or, alternatively, to think of spaces and bodies as neutral is, to borrow Butler's formulation, to revert to the romantic idea of subjectivity as "a free-floating artifice" (Gender Trouble 6). Masculine essence, by which I mean the aggregation of masculinity to maleness, functions in this way to naturalise its claim to an otherwise unstable concept, but what is crucial is not to forget this essence when we speak of women as also capable of performing masculinities and men femininities. As Irigaray puts it above, it is often too easy to speak of the unstable nature of these subjectivities – to say discourse levels the fields of masculine and feminine – but in social practice discourse about gender is ideologically saturated; it "has a sex" (Ethics 133).

From the point of view of the above, studies of contemporary identities which carry titular phrases such as "being Zulu, past and present" (Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present) or "changing men" (Changing Men in Southern Africa) signal to the fact that identity – being – is as much a function of the past as it is of the present. If thus conceived, one would do well to consider not only the changes in the behavioural patterns of men and women but more importantly for my critical-analytical focus, the paradigms that govern such changes and patterns, the better to avoid confusing vogue with fundamental conceptual shifts. Earlier I proposed the

view that the concept of subjectivity enters the scene of discussions of identity when older notions of space and body can no longer account for change, that is, for new forms of identification. Yet change is not linear but is, rather, acted upon by the past and the present simultaneously or, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, the "centripetal" forces which aim at centralisation and unification and those, "decentralizing, centrifugal," forces that pull in the direction of dispersal (272 – 273). Gender identities and how they shift in time and place reflect this contradiction at the centre of change – of transition – so that Shaka Zulu and Fools, for instance, could be said to illustrate two sides of this contradiction, even if in general terms.<sup>64</sup>

What, then, have (South) African studies of gender identities in transition proposed in place of older notions of masculinity? There are at least two positions that contest the meaning of masculinity in (South) African studies. One uses the term as a reference to heterosexual men and conceives of the changes in the behaviour of men as the basis for broadening the scope of the term to include other expressions of maleness and/or manhood. The other position considers the extent to which "the familiar oppositions – male/female, man/woman and masculinity/femininity – are everywhere belied by a much more complex social reality" (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 2). Cornwall and Lindisfarne, for instance, say that "it is useful to think of those ideologies which privilege some men (and women) by associating them with particular forms of power as 'hegemonic masculinities'" (3). Morrell's introduction of Changing Men in Southern Africa can be said to articulate the first position and operates with the opposition between men and women as the precondition to talk about men. Given his theoretical orientation, women in Morrell's framework do not

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<sup>64</sup> I conceive of the contradictions of transition to be both between and within the audio-visual texts that I investigate and where gender is concerned this is inevitable, given the fact that the audio-visual texts that I investigate are male-authored.



occupy privileged ‘masculine’ subject positions in which they maintain a prevailing *status quo*, whatever their place on the hierarchy of ‘masculine’ privilege. I contend that these two positions, that is, Morrell’s and that of Cornwall and Lindisfarne, are not mutually exclusive but, rather, help highlight the complex nature of masculinities in the (South) African context where forms of gender identifications are so diverse and yet in many ways so interwoven as to require careful analysis.<sup>65</sup>

As it is the aim of this chapter to drive theory through the four audio-visual texts, I am going to limit my discussion of the general theories and case studies of the shifts and continuities in the understanding of masculinities in (South) Africa to those that relate to the themes and frameworks of the four audio-visual texts. However, having said this, I must add that the four audio-visual texts allow for a wide-ranging discussion of such shifts and continuities because of the extent of their historical and formal reach.

I begin by probing the issue of indigeneity which comes up quite frequently in those theoretical positions within African gender studies that are critical of the tendency in contemporary gender studies to place “females relative to males in a dual-level hierarchy” (Sudarkasa 25) as the precondition for talking about men and women. These theoretical positions, articulated by, among others, Lundgren, Lindsay, Meischer, Cornwall and Lindisfarne, share the view that the “portrait” of men occupying “a better situation” or having “a higher status” in contrast to women who are “saddled with home and domesticity” does “not ring true” of indigenous African gender relations (Sudarkasa 25). Furthermore, they view this portrait as a “distortion of the ethnographic reality – for, indeed, women were outside the home *as well as* in

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<sup>65</sup> Earlier I mentioned the proximity of the past to the present and, by implication, of past and present subjectivities in (South) Africa, so that contemporary and indigenous subjectivities among black Africans are often embedded in each other.

it” (ibid. 25). Lastly, these theories concur on the view that there is “something inappropriate about the notion that women and men were everywhere related to each other in a hierarchical fashion” (ibid. 25). However, these theories are not dismissive of the issue of hierarchy; rather, as Sudarkasa points out, “the problem of determining the conditions under which women’s relationship to men *does* take on the characteristics of a hierarchical relationship” is a “critical research problem that should be pursued” (26).

What Sudarkasa highlights above about her experience of conducting research on African indigenous gender systems raises an important issue whose consequences reach far beyond the indigenous context of her paper. Conducting an ethnography of gender expressions among different classes of black African men and women in contemporary South Africa yields the same kinds of concerns that she voices and the conclusions that she reaches about the distortion of ethnographic reality by some theories, mainly those which proceed by presuming that “female and male are *unitary* statuses that are measured, or ‘sized-up,’ one against the other” (26). I make this point against the backdrop of the dominant theoretical tendency in most South African research on gender, including ethnographic research, to deploy the label of hegemony and/or loss thereof as an exclusively male privilege and crisis state, respectively, without scrupulous analysis of how it may, in fact, mystify – and, indeed, simplify – the subjectivities of men and women on the ground. This tendency which, in fact, is a consequence of the narrow focus engendered by the binary system that operates in most South African studies of gender, often undermines the so-called ‘female, gay and/or effeminate male periphery’ of the so-called hegemonic masculine ‘centre’ by rendering both ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ as closed categories that relate to each other – and only to each other – as dominant and subordinate respectively. To

say this is not to imply that there is no place for hierarchy in the gender relationships among and between certain categories of black African men and women in contemporary and traditional settings; rather, it is to argue that the very understanding of hierarchy needs to be a critical research problem, lest one ends up trotting out the same moral framework that is the general foundation of Mapantsula, Yizo Yizo 1 and Fools, whereby the victims and the villains – the saints and the sinners – bear their pre-given gender roles without ambiguity.<sup>66</sup> In the introduction I argued that in the contemporary moment Sudarkasa and Arnfred's positions constitute an interface, whereby residual indigenous subjectivities (Sudarkasa) co-exist with postcolonial ones (Arnfred) in ways that require careful critical-theoretical attention.

Who, then, is to say who and/or what a black African man is, was and/or will be? Moreover, can there be a foundation on which a consistent case can be built for a typical 'black African man'? In broad political contexts, generalisations about black African maleness have been possible. Yet everyday modes of being a black African man and woman have not properly been theorised and the historical reason for this is that for a long time political narratives of blackness assumed priority over those about the everyday lives of the people thus categorised. Njabulo Ndebele wrote extensively on this issue in the nineteen eighties, but failed also to theorise these everyday modes.<sup>67</sup>

"Preparing Ourselves for Freedom," a 1989 position paper on culture by Albie Sachs which was meant for an in-house discussion within his political organisation, the African National Congress (ANC), appeared in Spring is Rebellious in 1990 as a

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<sup>66</sup> I say "general foundation" because in these audio-visual texts there are glimpses of other possibilities that could provide some insights into the complexity of the gender relations that obtain in the township contexts which they portray. However, I argue that the potentials for these possibilities are not explored in any sustained way by the audio-visual texts.

<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, his collection of essays entitled Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture (1991).

leading article accompanied by responses by writers, critics and ‘cultural activists’. Sachs’ paper questioned the wisdom of fostering an inevitable link between culture and politics, in the then popular slogan ‘Culture as a weapon of struggle’, and argued for writing that dealt with day-to-day themes and issues, including issues of love and intimacy. In both Ndebele and Sachs’ critiques the view that representations of black Africans in particular and South Africans in general had no bases in the daily experiences of its subjects raised crucial questions about blackness, African-ness, South African-ness and who defined these identities. For instance, in “Actors and Interpreters” Ndebele decried the tendency among black African writers to impose on their characters ready-made images such as those of a perpetually suffering black African underclass under the yoke of a generalised image of ‘white rule’. The imagery mobilised by black African writers, Ndebele argued, ignored the “resourcefulness” of ordinary black Africans who continued to live active social and cultural lives despite their political circumstances. Sachs’ paper took the argument further by specifying the areas that were absent in black African writing such as those that I have mentioned above.

Up to this point, my argument has been that whereas identity is conferred by means of a system of oppositions – man/woman, white/black and straight/gay – lived identities, or what I call subjectivities, are, however, split by class/status, generation, location, embodiment and other aspects of social and cultural practices. Yet the pull towards the idea that identities are fashioned through a process intrinsic to the words that designate people as man and woman, Zulu and non-Zulu, and similar categories of identification, remains influential. This tension between identity (as a more or less stable locus of being) and subjectivity (as the marker of that liminal space between being and nothingness) shapes the ways in which black African men and women in

South Africa have lived their experiences: as men and women, as young and old, as inhabiting various settings, as cultivating different attitudes towards their bodies, as belonging to different classes/statuses, as lovers, husbands, wives, gangsters, professionals and many other positions that they inhabit as subjects whose meanings and values shift with time. In my discussion of the four audio-visual texts, I explore this tension by examining the roles played by space/setting and embodiment in entrenching and/or dismantling the essentialist imperatives in the construction of black African masculinities.

## Chapter Three

### **Shaka Zulu and the Political Mobilisation of Zulu Martial Masculinities in the Nineteen Eighties**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I proffered the view that Shaka Zulu is parabolic in that, on a sub-textual level, it attempts illustratively to ‘explain’ the violent conflicts of the nineteen eighties in Zululand and Natal (and across South Africa where Zulu migrant workers lived) between members of the Zulu ethnic Inkatha and political activists aligned to the African National Congress. It does so by means of a narrative of the founding of the Zulu nation by Shaka in the early nineteenth century. The mini-series tells the story of Shaka, a man obsessed with war, who single-handedly builds a Zulu nation. One character in the mini-series, a British Professor Bramston, says in building the Zulu nation Shaka gave the Zulus “glory in return for their souls.” Professor Bramston also speaks of the enduring spirit of Zulu militarism that will “rise again and again” if not stopped, not by the Zulus themselves, who are already bound to its legacy of violence, but, rather, by the British. He speaks in the context of the aftermath of the defeat of the Zulus under Shaka’s grandnephew, Cetshwayo, by the English and Welsh forces in the late nineteenth century.

In this chapter I argue that Shaka Zulu is not simply an historical ‘text’ whose sole preoccupation is with the past but, rather, one that uses history as an alibi to frame the nineteen eighties in ideological terms as the fulfillment of a certain version of the past

without seeming to do so.<sup>68</sup> It is, as Carolyn Hamilton puts it in Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka and the Limits of Historical Invention (1998), a “positional gambit” (171). However, whereas most studies of, and/or commentary on, the mini-series have emphasised its historical distortions,<sup>69</sup> which is an important area for investigation that has yielded interesting insights for contemporary historiographical research, my focus is on Shaka Zulu as a work of contemporary political ethnography, as it were, one that claims to disclose the ‘character’ of the ‘Zulus’, specifically of Zulu men, to those who may have wondered about the causes of the civil strife in Zululand and Natal in the nineteen eighties. As it happens, Carolyn Hamilton points out that the mini-series’ director, Bill Faure, decided to make Shaka Zulu after he had completed a research degree, “in 1974,” on “the problem of the ubiquity of violence on screen” (176) at the London Film School and “conceived the idea of Shaka Zulu in the immediate aftermath of the 1976 Soweto uprising” (176). I focus mainly on the mini-series’ emphasis on the martial aspect of not only Zulu political life but also on the martial aspect of Zulu social and cultural life as timeless and transcendental, despite evidence to the contrary. This emphasis, I argue, is underpinned by gender assumptions about the ‘character’ of ‘the Zulus’ that this chapter aims to submit to systematic critical inquiry.

I also argue that Shaka Zulu’s use of myth to explain the military prowess of Shaka and of his army plays into the fear of the Zulus as a nation of powerful witchdoctors, a myth that has endured well into the present and served a significant purpose in the political violence of the nineteen eighties. For instance, those young men belonging

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<sup>68</sup> Earlier I spoke of the mini-series as usurping the context of the nineteen eighties, both physically by superimposing nineteenth-century space over nineteen-eighties space and metaphorically by reviving a static version of what Jabulani Sithole calls ‘our Zuluness’ or “*ubuZulu bethu*” (328) which Benedict Carton regards as a “spatial metaphor” (4).

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, Hamilton’s Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka and the Limits of Historical Invention (1998); Themba Msimang’s “Shaka Zulu: A Discussion of its Historical and Cultural Context”; Dan Wylie’s Myth of Iron (2005).

to the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front (UDF) who engaged in the violent clashes with Inkatha *izimpi* (armies) spoke of *ukugqirha*, which is an isi-Xhosa word for fortifying oneself with traditional war medicines. During the clashes there were claims that when the houses of Inkatha ‘warlords’ were attacked, they disappeared before the eyes of the attackers, or turned into dams, and of medicines that made one invulnerable to bullets. Myth also functions in the mini-series to mystify its political underpinnings, which in the nineteen eighties involved the militarisation of Inkatha men, young and old, into Zulu armies (*amabutho*) which carried ‘traditional weapons’ and terrorised black African youth and those deemed to be United Democratic Front (UDF) members and sympathisers.<sup>70</sup> By deflecting the issue of politics onto the idea of the innate inclination of the Zulus to fight for the preservation of their ‘Zuluness’, the meaning of which remains clouded in emotional rhetoric throughout Shaka Zulu, the narrator of the mini-series, Henry Francis Fynn, sidesteps the question of subjectivity, that is, of the fact that to be Zulu also involves being part of a wide spectrum of choices regarding being and becoming. In this sense, I use the term myth not to mean falsehood but, rather, to highlight a tendency in representations of Zulu people, of Zulu men in particular, to stereotype them as inclined towards violence and witchcraft, a tendency which governs the narrative of Shaka Zulu.

Also significant in my discussion of Shaka Zulu is the fact that the entire action is guided by the voice-over narrative of Henry Francis Fynn, an Irish ‘doctor’ who accompanies Lord Francis Farewell as part of the delegation that journeys to Shaka’s kingdom to liaise with the Zulu king on behalf of the British Crown and the Cape

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<sup>70</sup> Politically, Inkatha operated through its Zulu police (ZPs) who administered physical punishment on the spot; Self-Defence Units (SDUs) which were deployed in the black African townships to fight UDF activists; Inkatha Youth Brigade which recruited youth membership, mainly on university and college campuses; Boy Scouts which reinforced the military code of Zulu *amabutho*; and a highly trained modern military force armed with sophisticated weapons.



Colony which is governed by Lord Charles Somerset. Equally important is the fact that Shaka Zulu is a story told in flashback in 1882, long after the central events which make up its main plot had come to pass and about three years after the Zulu army under Shaka's grandnephew, Cetshwayo, had been defeated by the English and Welsh forces at the battle of Rorkesdrift. The first of the two facts means that Shaka Zulu is not a 'Zulu story' but, rather, a story by a non-Zulu about what he considers not only to be the Zulu past but also to be the value of this past for Zulu people in the nineteen eighties. The second fact means that the story is told from the perspective of the victors and that it is likely to present a romantic and/or condescending view of 'the Zulus' as a warrior nation that has endured well into the twentieth century.

However, the mini-series not only became hugely popular when it first appeared, it also earned the endorsement of the Inkatha political elite which was under pressure to justify its ethnic politics.<sup>71</sup> The story of two 'great nations', 'the Zulus' and 'the English', having engaged in two famous battles in which each tasted victory, had long captured the public's imagination and had also long been a perfect alibi for the legitimacy of Inkatha ethnic politics in Zululand and Natal. In a speech that Buthelezi gave in January 1992 at the opening of a tourist centre in Isandlwana, the site of the first battle in which the Zulu armies won against the British, he proudly and nostalgically eulogised:

We as Zulus come from a warrior nation who know what valour and bravery is all about. We recognize it wherever valour and bravery are found. We always have paid – and again here pay – tribute to the valour and bravery of the British forces which were defeated here at this battle site. In turn, the British army and the Welsh regiments which fought here, have always paid

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<sup>71</sup> Keyan Tomaselli informs us that "Inkatha politicians . . . lauded the series as faithful to their hero, King Shaka and saw it as a positive mobilising force for Zulu nationalism" (Shaka Zulu 1).

deep tribute to the valour of the Zulu warriors who fought and died here in defense of the king and their kingdom. In memory there is the over-riding awareness that valour and honour belong here to both the vanquished and the victor.

Needless to say, Shaka Zulu was also condemned by some who felt that it was ethnic and racist propaganda and by academic and cultural historians who argued that it distorted historical facts to attract funding and the support of the conservative Zulu and English-speaking male elite in Zululand and Natal.<sup>72</sup>

From the brief remarks above, it is clear that, despite criticism of its historical and political bad faith, there is some evidence that Shaka Zulu tapped into existing and compelling presuppositions about ‘the Zulus’ and ‘the English’ in Zululand and Natal at a time when its message was ideologically useful. For this reason, it is my view that an assessment of its conception of Zulu and English masculine identities in South Africa in the nineteen eighties is warranted. Shaka Zulu may not be as diplomatic as Buthelezi in seeking a balanced appraisal of the region’s military past; indeed, the narrative of Henry Fynn and the behaviour of his fellow emissaries project two ethnic masculinities as at once unequal<sup>73</sup> and complementary.<sup>74</sup> Yet this ambivalence in the text of Shaka Zulu might explain the role that ethnic politics played in the battle for the control of Zululand and Natal, not just the obvious party political battle between

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<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Kaiser Ngwenya’s review in the January 1987 Drum magazine; also see a review in the October 9-16 Weekly Mail under the title “Shaka Through White Victorian Eyes”; for a cultural and historical critique, see Themba Msimang’s “The Reception of Shaka Zulu: An Evaluation of Its Cultural and Historical Context,” in African Studies Forum, Vol. 1, 1991; and for an political-historical critique, see Hamilton’s “A Positional Gambit: Shaka Zulu and the Conflict in South Africa,” in Terrific Majesty (1998).

<sup>73</sup> The emissaries stand for reason and critique, patriotism, courage, common purpose and, above all, true manliness, and Shaka and Zulu men are portrayed as given to violence, at times dishonest, proud without being fair or reasonable and, generally, without common purpose other than a military one.

<sup>74</sup> At some point after spending a long time in Zululand, the emissaries begin to identify with the Zulus. Francis Farewell even declares to Lord Charles Somerset that “I am a Zulu now,” when Somerset orders him not to return to Zululand as Shaka’s messenger and representative, after he has switched sides.

Inkatha and the UDF but, more importantly, the rearguard one for the control of the region's economic resources by the male business élite, both Zulu and English. In this sense, the portrayal of Shaka as a warrior-philosopher and as a madman and genius requires careful consideration, for it may very well be that, at bottom, the mini-series is a critique of Buthelezi, who had become both an asset and liability for moderates and businessmen in the transitional politics of the nineteen eighties: “simultaneously needed and feared”<sup>75</sup> (Marks 123).

I draw on the growing body of scholarship on constructions of Zulu male and female identities, including the most recent Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present (2008). In this regard, I must reiterate my point above that my main concern is not so much the historiographical debates about the construction of the Zulu past, which require a specific focus and research premise, as the manner in which the production of the mini-series in the nineteen eighties resonated with certain prevailing assumptions about the meanings of Zuluness and, in particular, Zulu masculinity. For even though the main text of Shaka Zulu is historical, its subtext or, to use Fredric Jameson's formulation, its “political unconscious”<sup>76</sup> is the nineteen-eighties' contest over the meaning of Zululand and Natal, and of Zuluness, including the masculinist character that this contest took on.

What follows is a discussion of the context of the mini-series' production, in which I situate it in the debates about the meanings of Zulu ethnic politics, culture and identity in the nineteen eighties and beyond. I close with a discussion of the two ethnic masculinities, Zulu and British, that come together to confer on Shaka Zulu the status of a highly chauvinistic ‘text’ both in its historical presuppositions and in its

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<sup>75</sup> Shula Marks remarks that, even at the high point of apartheid rule, Buthelezi “constantly face[d] the state with his contradictory presence both as critic and as collaborator extraordinary” (123).

<sup>76</sup> In The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (1981), Jameson looks at how form is underpinned by ideology.

framing of the nineteen eighties, particularly in Zululand and Natal, as a time for a re-introduction to the ‘authentic’ Zulu ‘spirit’ which the mini-series warns will rise again. Woven into this discussion is an analysis of the interconnection of space and body in the production of conservative models of British and Zulu identities, both masculinities and femininities, at a time when these models had shifted on the ground. I conclude the chapter by assessing the mini-series’ status as an example of one type of cultural memory in which the present is given over entirely to the past, which in the Mapantsula chapter that follows comes under implicit critical pressure.

### **3.2 Situating Shaka Zulu in the nineteen eighties: a brief sketch of its context of production**

In this section, I assess the value of Shaka Zulu in the context of its production, focusing mainly on its metaphorical significance for the nineteen eighties. I also keep in focus the point that I made earlier, namely, that Shaka Zulu is essentially an epic piece in which history, ideology and show business intersect to produce a classic ‘text’ of male chauvinism. In this sense, the fact that the mini-series sets great store by its presentation of Shaka as custodian of Zulu history, however ambivalent its message, marks it out as a work of epic fiction that shares with other similar works the same assumptions about men, in the classical sense of the word, as mediators of great historical events.

Whereas, in the final analysis, Shaka Zulu is a work of imagination, despite its creator William Faure’s claim of its absolute historical correctness, there is no doubt that Professor Bramston’s warning of the rise of Zulu militarism is more than mere fiction, given the bloody ethnic violence that gripped Zululand and Natal in the nineteen eighties. Keyan Tomaselli, for instance, writes in “Shaka Zulu and Visual

Constructions of History” that Joshua Sinclair, who wrote the script for the mini-series, “severed his connection with the series on realising director Bill Faure’s connection with [the apartheid state’s] Military Intelligence” (“Shaka Zulu” 1). The Zulu ethnic movement, Inkatha, founded in 1928 by the Zulu male élite and revived as Inkatha YaKwaZulu (Inkatha of Zululand) in 1975 by Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi (and renamed Inkatha Freedom Party in 1990), found common cause with the mini-series’ message of the historical exclusivity of the Zulus and of their manifest destiny as the inheritors of KwaZulu. In many of his speeches as leader of Inkatha and traditional Chief, Buthelezi himself claimed Shaka’s mantle; he positioned himself as heir to Shaka’s legacy and the Zulus as exemplary of Shaka’s military prowess. Thus, Shaka Zulu served as an ideological tool at a time when its historical method was most useful.

It is fair to say that the civil war in Zululand and Natal in the nineteen eighties arose as the result of two conflicting versions of nation espoused by Buthelezi and his Inkatha on the one hand and the ANC-aligned UDF on the other.<sup>77</sup> In the nineteen eighties, faced with a defiant, mainly township, youth, Buthelezi defined nation in narrow ethnic terms as a reference to the ‘Zulu nation’. In earlier years of resistance to apartheid, when political movements such as the ANC and the Pan African Congress (PAC) were in exile, he had managed to oscillate between a broad definition to project himself as the custodian of anti-apartheid resistance and a narrow one to maintain sole control over Zululand regional politics and to reap the rewards of the apartheid Bantustan arrangement as Prime Minister of the KwaZulu homeland. In An

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<sup>77</sup> This does not mean that the apartheid regime did not have a significant role to play in propping up ethnic politics and leaders of ethnic movements such as Buthelezi for political ends. Rather, the point that I am making is that Buthelezi mobilised political support on an ethnic ticket for his *own* political ends and for the ends of those Zulu traditionalists who saw great benefits in ethnic politics. As such, it would be naïve simply to read Buthelezi’s objectives off those of apartheid, even though at some level they were mutually reinforcing.

Appetite for Power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and the Politics of 'Loyal Resistance' (1987)

Gerhard Maré and Georgina Hamilton write of this phenomenon thus:

Langner claims that by the time the first copies of the Inkatha constitution were published, 'Inkatha YaKwaZulu' had been altered to read 'Inkatha Yesizwe' ('Inkatha of the nation', rather than 'Inkatha of the Zulu people') (1983: 21). This ambiguity of being caught between the 'Zulu nation', on the one hand, and national aspirations on the other continues to haunt the movement. (45)

On the other hand, the UDF organised and campaigned on the ticket of an inclusive South African nation under the auspices of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) and in 1993 challenged Buthelezi's exclusive nationalism by organising a mass gathering in Natal which it called "*Sonke*" (all of us). Contests over Zululand and Natal territories in the nineteen eighties, whereby vast parts of the region where black Africans lived had been declared 'no-go areas' by Inkatha's *amabutho*, are obscured in the mini-series' designation of these otherwise socially, politically and culturally fragmented spaces as the "house of Shaka."<sup>78</sup>

The defence of 'our Zuluness', "*ubuZulu bethu*" (Sithole 328), functioned in the nineteen eighties to enforce a static ethnic-spatial metaphysic which in Shaka Zulu finds expression in repeated invocations of the sanctity of "Zulu!" by Shaka and Zulu warriors, despite Jabulani Sithole's assertion that what is called 'our Zuluness' is a shifting – vertical – subjectivity (328). Nevertheless, in her discussion of national space, in Workers and Warriors: Masculinity and the Struggle for Nation in South

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<sup>78</sup> The House of Shaka (1988) also happens to be the title of a book on Zulu history by Charles Ballard, an academic with Inkatha links.

Africa (2004), Thembisa Waetjen remarks that it is typical of nationalist movements to define space – both physical and communal – in “horizontal” terms, because,

National space, or territory, can be a powerful symbol of social cohesion.

Political meaning is attached to the physical spaces in which people carry out their ordinary lives. Their idea of a homeland is of a place embodying the social and historical essences that legitimate claims to natural sovereignty. A homeland is a landscape also of historical memory that offers tangible images of rootedness and grounded community. Within well-delineated borders the nation is considered a *horizontal* community, a family with a rightful home.

(51; my emphasis)

Despite Buthelezi’s furious denials that he had accepted the apartheid idea of a KwaZulu homeland after he revived the Inkatha in 1975, and his emphasis of links between his movement and the banned ANC of which he had been a member, he nevertheless began systematically to inculcate the notion of a ‘Zulu character’ in rural Zululand and in some of the townships of Natal that fell under his influence and authority.

Buthelezi shaped and promoted the idea of a ‘Zulu character’ in a variety of subtle ways, at least before the direct challenge to his version of nationhood that the UDF posed from the mid-nineteen eighties until the early nineteen nineties. One of these ways was to capture the imaginations of young school-going boys, from junior primary to senior secondary school levels, by instituting the Cubs and Boy Scouts systems for young and older boys respectively. Timothy Parsons looks at the Boy Scout Movement as one of the areas in which Buthelezi sought to sow his idea of loyalty to Inkatha which would germinate into loyalty to the Zulu nation as “a

horizontal community” (Waetjen 51) and KwaZulu as the “rightful home” (Waetjen 51) for Zulus (initially disguised as Africans). Parsons notes that,

Buthelezi claimed Scouting for Inkatha by linking Scout ideology with his party’s doctrine of *uBunto* [sic] *Botho*.<sup>79</sup> . . . In Buthelezi’s view, Scouting and Inkatha worked together during the apartheid era to teach discipline to young people who were in danger of being led astray by radicals who told them that education could wait for liberation.

[. . .]

Far from being an expression of African humanism, it [*uBuntu Botho*] became a rallying cry for aggressive Zulu cultural nationalism that Buthelezi and Inkatha used to mobilise an informal Zulu militia armed with ‘traditional’ Zulu weapons. (341 – 342)

At Boy Scout rallies, cultural events and competitions involving Zulu traditional dancing, military-style drills, physically-demanding sports extolling the virtues of traditional masculinity and the singing of traditional isi-Zulu songs (*amahubo eSizwe*) took place. Through these events and activities, Buthelezi also re-organised Zululand and Natal public spaces as places for men and boys who would be men.

The carefully gendered ‘Zulu character’ endorsed by Buthelezi was, of course, different for girls. Schoolgirls were organised into Brownies<sup>80</sup> and Girl Guides and met indoors or, when they went out to camp, learnt so-called girl’s skills and values such as sewing, housekeeping and chastity, all in preparation for domesticity and service in marriage. Waetjen remarks that,

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<sup>79</sup> This is an African humanist concept which means that each person is responsible for the well-being of others.

<sup>80</sup> So-called because of their brown uniforms.



Historically, apartheid constructed relations to home differently for men than women, and Buthelezi was able to draw upon and manipulate these differences to produce a powerfully felt response. For men, many of them migrant workers in South Africa's cities, the notion of home implied a return to patriarchal values and domestic control in a historically constituted homeland; for women, Buthelezi emphasized the new modern opportunities opened up by KwaZulu homeland and the importance of their God-given gifts of motherhood. (53)

And, in “‘So That I Will Be a Marriageable Girl’: *Umemulo* in Contemporary Zulu Society,” Thenjiwe Magwaza writes about how practices to do with girls, like

*umemulo*, the ‘coming-of-age’ ceremony held for a girl reaching marriageable age, eluded disruptive external shocks and manipulation [and that] [p]erhaps this is because a custom recognising the potential of adolescent girls was perceived as no threat to white minority power. (482)

What this gender-specific ‘Zulu character’ means for my point above is that the seamless commerce between contemporary and traditional modes of being a Zulu woman also aided Inkatha’s ideology in that its leaders could point to enduring examples of continuity within Zulu culture against the challenges of modern-orientated organisations such as the UDF, while legitimising the masculinism of its public character. More importantly, those aligned to tradition could argue that not only could the old and new co-exist, but they also reinforced each other.

It is in the light of the above that, in “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Women and Nationalism in South Africa,” Anne McClintock remarks that, “[a]ll nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous,” and warns that,

Nations are not the natural flowering into time of the organic essence of a people, borne unscathed through the ages. . . . Most modern nations, despite their appeal to an august and immemorial past, are for the most part very recent inventions. [They are] systems of representations whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community. (324)

While claiming historical connections between Inkatha and the heroic Zulu past, the gender component with which Buthelezi imbued his brand of Zulu nationalism was nevertheless antithetical to the practices of masculinities and femininities that flourished in Zululand in the nineteenth century. In “A Reassessment of Women’s Power in the Zulu Kingdom,” Sifiso Ndlovu uses the example of the status of Regent Queen Mnkabayi<sup>81</sup> [sic] kaJama [Mnkabayi of Jama] in Zulu history to make the point that powerful women “participated in traditional networks of authority” (111) and did so in “a form of gender co-operation, as opposed to gender contestation, which both Zulu men and women acknowledged as essential to maintaining a collective (hierarchical) society” (111). I raise this point here for three reasons. The first reason is that the relation of space to gender is not dichotomous. It is this point that Doreen Massey makes about spaces being “gendered in myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time” (Massey 186), which is echoed by Niara Sudarkasa and Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne’s assertions that, on the ground, women and men in Africa occupy both public and private spaces. The second reason is that Ndlovu shows that women in traditional African societies held and still hold positions of (masculine) authority and responsibility. And the third reason for my reference to Ndlovu’s argument is that, whereas Buthelezi honoured

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<sup>81</sup> This spelling appears in most historical documents, as opposed to the one used in the mini-series, that is, Mnkabayi.

senior royal Zulu women, particularly his mother Princess Magogo,<sup>82</sup> he did so by positioning them as ceremonial royals, rather than as figures of tribal authority (which historically they were).

Thus, with its portrayal of historically powerful Zulu women such as Mkabayi [sic] and Nandi, who nevertheless have limited power within its field of action in comparison to the time and space afforded men, Shaka Zulu departs from available historical evidence and, instead, appears to find resonance with the gender imagery of Inkatha with its iconic stock of men as mediators of history and women placed on a pedestal as mothers, Queen mothers and good sisters, but knowing that their place is not with public affairs or affairs of state. Again, rather than base its portrayal of Zulu men on historical evidence, the mini-series' overall portrayal of them as desensitised to violence and physical pain echoes the rhetoric of Inkatha leaders and hostel dweller members of Inkatha who warned that Zulus were "born out of Shaka's spear" and of warrior stock. Ndlovu argues that even in the most militarised of contexts, some Zulu men served in conventional 'feminine' roles, at least in the Western sense of the word, as carriers of food for warriors and as cleaners of barracks.

What I have provided above is a brief outline of the key features of Buthelezi's Zulu nationalism and some of the critical-theoretical literature that has sought to understand this phenomenon as it pertained to gender.

As I note in the introduction, woven into the narrative of the founding moment of the Zulu nation is the story of a handful of European male subjects who arrive at Shaka's kingdom as representatives of British colonial interests. Given my view that

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<sup>82</sup> A soccer stadium in Kwa-Mashu Township, north of Durban, is named after her. Buthelezi also found the name of Princess Magogo useful to him as it linked him to the Zulu royal family when his legitimacy as a Zulu Chief came into question. Moreover, he was also thought to have usurped the position that rightfully belonged to his older half-brother, Mceleli.

Shaka Zulu is a parable of the troubled time of its production, this aspect of the mini-series provokes an important question: what could the value of the reconstruction of British settler masculinity via the narrative of the first Zulu-English encounter be? In “Mass Media Discourse and the Semiotics of Zulu Nationalism,” Gary Mersham provides one clue to the status of the Europeans in the mini-series and, indeed, to the value of the mini-series itself as an important and, in some sense, timely ‘document’. He proposes that Shaka Zulu be read as

essentially a white South African rendition of a black myth – a political ‘mythomoteur’ – that attempts to efface fears about the future for white South Africans, to dispel class contradictions, and legitimate KwaZulu’s leaders [sic] rights to rule through the establishment of a political mythology of a founding community. (80)

He bases his view on the idea that when Shaka Zulu appeared it immediately became “a cultural forum” and its material mirrored “many of [the] concerns” of its time (78). He further notes that these concerns overlap with the very nature of transitions, which generate myths “narrated in anxious times to sometimes preserve, and sometimes recreate common identities – when societies move from one political level or style of organisation to another” (78). In Mersham’s terms, then, Shaka Zulu is a work of sublimation; it relates to nineteenth-century British settler masculinity only tangentially, that is, insofar as in the nineteen eighties this masculinity, in the shape of white English businessmen,<sup>83</sup> threw its lot behind Zulu nationalism of the reformed, middle class, type in order to preserve prevailing economic and, thus, class, relations

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<sup>83</sup> Businessmen such as Barry Leitch and Kingsley Holgate; they created Shakaland after the conclusion of the filming of Shaka Zulu as a business venture that, nevertheless, mobilised the imagery of nineteenth-century Englishmen such as Henry Fynn going native and usurping the prestige of aristocratic Zulu patriarchy.

in the region by appealing to a shared economic future with Inkatha.<sup>84</sup> In Shaka Zulu Shaka hints at this possibility in a conversation with Farewell:

Perhaps a nation could be built where the whites and the Zulus would live together in harmony. A council of elders would be formed with the wisest men of each kingdom. And these men must be given eternal youth [here pointing to his dyed hair] so that the heart of the nation would be immortal.

Do you think this could be possible?

To which Farewell replies: “Yes, nothing is impossible if two kingdoms truly wish to live in harmony.” Needless to say, Shaka has no intention of honouring his words but, rather, uses this occasion as a ruse to get Farewell and his men to fight in a war with the Ndwandwes, his strongest foe.<sup>85</sup>

There is abundant evidence for the argument that the mini-series is a case for the ‘re-colonisation’ of Natal by big capital and, by association, by big men, both black and white. For instance, in “Bulls in the Boardroom: The Zulu Warrior Ethic and the Spirit of South African Capitalism,” Benedict Carton and Malcolm Draper explore this nexus of capitalism and co-operative masculinities. They note, for instance, that, “the archetypal Zulu warrior was never monopolised by black business” (592). And, citing Mike Boon’s African Way: The Power of Interactive Leadership (1996), they point out that,

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<sup>84</sup> The first Inkatha, Maré and Hamilton note in An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi and the Politics of ‘Loyal Resistance’ (1987), was the creation of the African petty bourgeoisie and, in this regard, it made sense for the mini-series to appeal to reason and a future of co-operation with Shaka.

<sup>85</sup> Throughout the mini-series Shaka remains unreformed and increasingly beyond reform until his assassination: the more he loses his virility and grip on his personal affairs (the birth of his son and its concealment by his mother and his mother’s death) his genius deserts him and the madman persona comes to the fore. In this connection, it is not far-fetched to argue that the mini-series is a cloistered critique of Buthelezi’s hard line stance which the financial backers of the mini-series considered bad for business.

Shaka long served as an idol in a range of companies. . . . [B]efore the advent of democracy ‘white Africans’ . . . were turning to Zulu culture to navigate the ‘complex and challenging marketplace’ (Boon 11). An English- and isiZulu-speaking South African, Boon grew up in rural KwaZulu-Natal and developed close ties with prominent ‘white Zulus’ such as . . . Johnny Clegg, . . . as well as Barry Leitch and Kingsley Holgate, founders of Shakaland. . . . (592)

Lastly, they note that, “[a]lthough Boon disclaims sexism, his guide to ‘interactive leadership’ borrows the language of martial patriarchy” (592).

Yet the notion that Shaka Zulu is a work of sublimation notwithstanding, there is something in the mini-series – and in Leitch and Holgate’s extolling of Zulu patriarchal order and hierarchy – that makes the story of Francis Farewell, Henry Fynn and their entourage in Zululand more than just illustrative. Doubtless Shaka Zulu was massively supported by big capital – Harmony Gold in particular – and employed the services of accomplished local and foreign actors, which could reinforce the idea that the series was simply business conducted in a cultural-political arena, using a discursive tactic to influence its course. But business *was* always at the centre of colonialism and colonial settlement, and the narrative of British adventure *was* a narrative of economic adventure.

I propose that Graham Dawson’s Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities (1994) provides another clue as to the source of the fascination that the Zulu story has held for generations of British adventurers, writers and filmmakers over many years since the appearance of the first ethnographic literature on the Zulus. By tracking the past and present of British nationalism, Dawson’s study yields interesting insights into the psyche of nationalism that may

explain why “the idea of an integrated Zulu nation” (Waetjen 53) continues to appeal to Englishmen after over a century.

Dawson contextualises his study in his personal experiences as a boy growing up in Britain after wars, two of which, World War 1 and World War 2, were of such magnitude that they informed the direction of war culture and discourse generally.

He says about the aftermath of the Second World War:

Of particular interest to me was the intense fascination and excitement generated for men and boys by the military side of the war. This was evident across a wide range of cultural forms: from the massive popularity of war adventure stories as bestselling fiction, comics, films and television series, to the use of war themes by the tourism and leisure industries, and by the military themselves. . . . [I]t seemed feasible to speak of a popular masculine pleasure-culture of war. . . . To grow up in Britain seemed to have meant, for generations, an unavoidable encounter with the potency of national military manhood. (3 – 4)

He then poses the question: “Might there be a relation between the fantasies of boyhood, the reproduction of idealized forms of masculinity, and the purchase of nationalist politics?” (4). Shaka’s dream of an eternally young – *and* strong – nation of men answers part of Dawson’s question and resonates with many of the features of the mini-series and, I argue, Inkatha ideology. What Dawson highlights above regarding the central place of popular war/military culture in the formation of the British national psyche – in particular, British boyhood – echoes what I have argued became the standard that Shaka Zulu set as a reference point for Zulu martial masculinity and the ethnic culture industry. That is, Shaka Zulu dramatised the story of the founding of the Zulu nation at a time when Inkatha was mobilising for a

separate Zulu ethnic national space using the imagery of Zulu militarism as the aggregate of the Zulu past and, thus, Zulu future. With this point in mind, I move to consider the mini-series.

### **3.3 Dis-closing the Zulu nation: a discussion of Shaka Zulu as male biography**

In this section, I examine Shaka Zulu under the following themes: (i) the status and role of the narrative of the founding of the Zulu nation in the nineteen eighties and of Shaka as the founding ‘father’; (ii) the emphasis that the mini-series places on the military aspect of Zulu political, social and cultural life, and how it achieves this emphasis by constituting Shaka’s and the warriors’ bodies as “war machines” that produce the Zulu nation and national space (I also consider how this conceals the ideological mobilisation of Zuluness in the nineteen eighties); and (iii) the implications of Fynn’s narrative of Zulu-British co-operation and how this renders Shaka Zulu a highly chauvinistic ‘text’ both in its historical assumptions and in its portrayal of Zulu and British male and female characters. However, I begin by offering some general remarks regarding the heading for this section and the nature and function of the mini-series as a form.

I have chosen the above heading for this section for two reasons. Firstly, because I remarked in the introduction of this chapter that, at least on a pre-critical level, Shaka Zulu appears to be driven by the compulsion to re-introduce – or to disclose – Shaka and the warrior spirit of the Zulu nation that he built to the nineteen eighties where, it seemed, this spirit had risen again.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the mini-series warns that this spirit will

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<sup>86</sup> The speeches of Buthelezi at Inkatha rallies and during cultural occasions such as Shaka Day, especially at the height of the civil strife of the nineteen eighties, clearly pointed to this. Buthelezi framed the acts of violence conducted by Inkatha warriors in historical terms as a defence of the warrior legacy bequeathed on the Zulus by Shaka.



rise again and again and attempts to demonstrate why it considers it timeless. Secondly, because in the word disclose is also implied the possibility of closure, that is, of limiting the terrain of the meanings of Zuluness and nation at the very moment that in Shaka Zulu this terrain appears to be availed on a grand scale. Shaka Zulu is an ambitious project which purports to chart the social and political history of Zululand in the nineteenth century, but nonetheless remains through and through the story of one man and, moreover, of a time that, because it is already in the past, is amenable to appropriation to further the agendas of the nineteen eighties in which it is recalled. These two tendencies – the compulsion to tell all and the possibility of selective remembering and telling – co-exist in the mini-series and require careful discrimination, not least because the story of Shaka in the nineteen eighties provoked as much scholarly interest in the academic and popular historian as it did the polemical questions, why Shaka? Why now?

In the introductory chapter I described the mini-series as a form that works by seduction, very much like a soap opera, in that it tends to insinuate itself clandestinely into the day-to-day lives of its audience. However, I add that, because the mini-series is not exactly a soap opera, which runs over a longer time and often goes around in circles (which means that some of its episodes can be missed but its story picked up again, even after many episodes have passed), it could more appropriately be called a hybrid form that creates the suspense of a soap opera and offers up the complete world of a feature film simultaneously. Like a feature film, its story has a definite beginning and a definite ending, and so impresses its world – *and* its ideology – upon the minds of its audience long after it has ended. It is, as it were, a perfect form for propaganda purposes: rhetorically, it slowly draws the audience into the ambit of its world as it entertains. The principal rhetorical device in the mini-series is the

narrative voice-over which at once creates a sense of continuity between the past and the present and positions viewers in certain ways in relation to both.

I thus seek to assess exactly what is at stake in the reconstruction of the Zulu past in the nineteen eighties, well over a century after this past had run its course and become legend.

On a visual level, the first indication that Shaka Zulu aims at usurping the nineteen-eighties' space, as I put it in the previous chapter, literally by superimposing another space and thus creating new frames of reference, and metaphorically by making the nineteen eighties seem allegorical and the past real/transparent, can be found in its elaborate set, its actors' costumes and the mimicking of nineteenth-century speech and manners. And, on a conceptual level, the action is guided by a tightly-structured narrative that makes no reference to the nineteen eighties in which the mini-series was produced and screened. From this perspective, the unsuspecting viewer becomes enclosed in a world that is complete in and of itself.

### **3.3.1 Founding the nation: Shaka as metaphor, or, lessons for boys and men**

For all its emotional currency and grand scale, on a formal level the story that the mini-series tells of Shaka as the founding father of the Zulu nation is sufficiently simple and paradigmatic for a viewer familiar with the conventions of the epic form: it is a typical epic story of a boy born of an illicit union, who achieves greatness against all odds by sheer dint of personal courage, dogged determination and resourcefulness. In this sense, there is no reason to believe that the historical Shaka's life took the form and followed the course that the mini-series, as epic, constitutes and charts for it, except, of course, that he was born, lived, became king and died. Rather,

one would assume that, as an ordinary boy growing up in an ordinary environment with other illegitimate children, he would have had friends, got up to mischief, gone out to play, ate, drank, danced and, in short, lived a boy's life.

Yet through the devices of prophecy and predestination, the mini-series posits Shaka's boyhood as an elaborate metaphor in which the substance of his entire life can be distilled and as a durable template on which it implicitly grafts object lessons for boys and men, both within its framework and outside in the world in which it stakes its claim. In short, Shaka Zulu turns Shaka's life into a text not so much of his own time, where his life would have been there for everyone to see, as for the nineteen eighties in which investment in discipline, loyalty, courage and true manliness, especially as it related to Zuluness, was tied to Inkatha and apartheid politics and thus served political ends. It is in these fundamental but subtle ways that the mini-series, as a 'text' of propaganda that was funded by the then apartheid-run SABC and big capital, insinuates itself into the nineteen eighties.

One could say that Shaka Zulu is principally a story of male, mainly kinship, figures. This story involves weak and absent fathers (Shaka's father, Senzangakhona); kind and generous surrogate fathers (Dingiswayo, the chief of the Mthethwa tribe who takes Shaka under his wing after he is rejected by his own father, and "ubaba u-Joji," father King George to whom Shaka defers in his dealings with Europeans); surrogate sons (Shaka, who is determined to justify his worth as a surrogate son and to defend his family and clan honour); founding fathers (Dingiswayo and Shaka, who founded the Mthethwa and Zulu nations respectively); sibling rivalries (Shaka's half-brothers who plot his eventual demise); and solitary men in search of adventure, fortune and political fame (Francis Farewell and his entourage). The following discussion focuses on Shaka Zulu's construction of

Shaka's 'fatherhood' as a generic function, that is, of Shaka as the 'father' of the Zulu nation, and ponders its implications for both the context in which the mini-series is set and for the nineteen eighties onto which, supposedly, it (the mini-series) projects the meaning and value of this model of 'fatherhood'. Linked to this is the discussion of the construction of boyhood and male rivalry in the context of the mobilisation of aggressive Zulu youth masculinity in the political battles of the nineteen eighties.<sup>87</sup>

As the story of weak and absent fathers, Shaka Zulu tracks the difficult relationship between Shaka and his father, which culminates in his and his mother's expulsion from the Zulu kingdom. This develops into his pathological hatred of his father. His father is a serial suitor and polygamist who produces numerous children and thus creates tension in his household regarding favourite wives and sons, and of course, succession. Indeed, after his father dies, it turns out that before he died he had named Shaka's half brother from a junior household, Sigujana, as his successor. About this, Shaka remarks to Dingiswayo before he returns to Zululand to take over power by force, that, "even in death he has shown weakness." In turn, the legacy of his father's sexual abandon becomes literally the undoing of the empire that Shaka's vaunted self-sacrifice helps to build, as in the end Shaka is murdered by his half-brothers, the issue of his father's sexual recklessness. Essentially, this is the context in which Shaka grows up from boy to man. As a boy, his estrangement from his father nurtures in him a violent and obsessive drive to succeed that the mini-series uses to explain his rise to, and fall from, power.

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<sup>87</sup> In "Culture Change, Zulu Masculinity and Intergenerational Conflict in the Context of Civil War in Pietermaritzburg (1987-1991)," Mxolisi Mchunu discusses this phenomenon in the context of the Pietermaritzburg area of northern KwaZulu-Natal, where political affiliation was also tempered by generational conflicts in the form of older male affiliates of Inkatha, or "fathers," 'disciplining' younger men, or "sons" (226) who were seen to be 'delinquent' UDF affiliates.

It is also his hatred and anger towards his father's promiscuous life which, it seems, leads Shaka to a loveless adult life. Two incidents in the mini-series illustrate this. The first, which occurs when he is at the height of his power and illustrates his determination to succeed, involves his mistress, Pampata, who offers him love and companionship to relieve his loneliness, an offer that he rejects with the words, "a man who builds a road to heaven must travel alone," heaven being *izulu* in the isi-Zulu language. The second, which occurs when his power is about to take a sharp decline, is about his discovery of his son that Pampata has given birth to in secret, whom he orders killed because, as he tells his mother who pleads for love and for the child to be spared as the future of the Zulu kingdom, "We are incapable of [love], Mother. All we ever felt is vengeance and hate" and "Shaka is the future." The Shaka of the mini-series, then, places himself above the ordinary sexual labours which define biological fatherhood. By having his son killed and equivocally appropriating the future, he defines himself as not a father in any sexual sense of the word but, rather, in the symbolic sense as the father of the entire Zulu empire over which he presides with absolute martial masculine authority, a position made even more prestigious by the fact that it is the responsibility that his father trades for sexual abandon.

Yet the model of 'fatherhood' that Shaka embodies is of the stern type; punishment, even for minor transgressions, is severe. Disloyalty to the Zulu political (read military) unit is punishable by death. This means that even those men who are fearful (*amavaka* or cowards) are deemed to have committed a treasonous act punishable by death.

Now, given the shifting political meanings of parenthood in South Africa from the late nineteenth century onward, the question is, of what use is the model of fatherhood

with which the mini-series imbues Shaka? But more importantly, to what use does it put Shaka's overarching 'fatherhood' in the contemporary moment of the nineteen eighties? It is important to recall, as Mamphela Ramphele and Linda Richter note in "Migrancy, Family Dissolution and Fatherhood," that fatherhood had been a vexed issue among modern black Africans at least since the inception of the migrant labour system. They point out that,

Households and families were harassed and torn apart by restrictions on people's movements, by migrant labour, by forced resettlement, and by the resulting poverty and disarray, in the most painful ways. (78)

Among these causes, they also mention "[p]olitical conflict and street violence" (78) of the nineteen eighties which, as Mchunu notes, also pitted father against son and vice versa. At the height of political unrest in the townships of Natal and in the University of Zululand where he was Chancellor, Buthelezi was known to blame youth political activism on poor upbringing and particularly on mothers who neglected 'their duty' of raising disciplined children. Waetjen remarks that Buthelezi appealed to "parents to discipline their children and send them back to school" when they boycotted "the apartheid's program of 'Bantu education'" (18). She also notes in this context the death, in 1983, "of six students at the Ngoye University [University of Zululand] in a rampage by Inkatha's own youth organization, the Inkatha Youth Brigade [an incident which] drove a wedge between Inkatha and urban township youth that would become irreconcilable" (18 – 19).

In Shaka Zulu, discipline takes priority over politics in the narrator's rhetoric of Shaka's rise to power and his kingship, and the close correlation between the imagery of a tightly-run military polity where everyone knows their place and the decisive violence of Inkatha's foot-soldiers as described by Waetjen, means that the socio-

political explanation pointing to the failures in paternal care that Ramphele and Richter proffer in their analysis is positively denied. Indeed, gestures of loyal deference to Shaka – or *ukuhlonipha/ukukhonza* – and to other men of tribal authority abound in the mini-series and further establish its pedigree as a ‘text’ which attempts to resolve the political contradictions of the time and place of its production by proposing a single and nostalgic centre of patriarchal authority.

The notions of ‘the father of the nation’ and ‘mother of the nation’ hold a special, because emotional, appeal in all nationalist politics and culture, but more so within conservative nationalism. In the men of the nation is invested the masculine task of founding and defending the nation, while the women are assigned the feminine one of nurturing it. Both roles are tied to the idea of the essential natures of men and women, that is, their biological sexualities which equip them for different tasks. Related to these notions are those of ‘the son of the nation’ and ‘daughter of the nation’, also linked to the sexual roles deemed appropriate for boys and girls. In this connection, therefore, nationalism projects itself as the form that best adapts the logic of ‘natural’ relations between men and women and, by extension, boys and girls, as these relations find ‘natural’ expression on the ground. Deviation from their ‘nature’ – women and girls entering the public arena and, thus, behaving like men, or men and boys neglecting their public duties and doing women’s work – is seen within conservative nationalism as unnatural and a distortion of their pre-given places and roles.

It follows, then, that within conservative nationalism sexuality is assigned in advance of gender subjects choosing their sexual orientations. Again, age plays a significant role in conservative nationalist social formations, especially as it pertains to boys and girls: the young must show respect to their parents who, in turn, must

guide them towards ‘proper’ manhood and womanhood. Nationalism, then, presents itself as pre- and post political and pre- and post socio-cultural at the very moment that it is deeply organised within politics, society and culture.

In the light of the above, Shaka Zulu portrays Shaka as a hero-‘father’ with a tragic flaw: the enduring message of the mini-series is that, had it not been for his father’s neglect of his duty to raise him from a normal boy in a normal household with a mother to become a caring man and leader, his accomplishments as the ‘father’ of the Zulu nation would not have been blemished and his legacy ambiguous. However, as it turned out, he grew up harbouring intense hatred and disdain for the institutions of marriage and the family and, without the nurturing influence of mothers and the proper governance of fathers, his own kingship turned boys and men into loveless murderers of their own kind. This, I argue, is the stern warning which underscores the narrative of Shaka Zulu as a parable for the nineteen eighties: that violence begets violence and that it all starts with the way in which boys are raised into men. This warning not only serves as a simple lesson for boys and men but, in its simplicity it masks its ideological import by providing a context and an explanation for the so-called black-on-black-violence of the nineteen eighties which is nevertheless freed of the burden of the political realities of its context of production.<sup>88</sup>

The rhetoric of Buthelezi, especially as it pertained to Inkatha Youth and Women’s Brigades, evinced the characteristic features of the simplification of politics that subtends the narrative of Shaka Zulu. However, in his political speeches, Buthelezi

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<sup>88</sup> Hamilton argues that, William Faure, the mini-series’ director, “began his career at the London Film School where, in 1974, he presented a dissertation entitled “Images of Violence.” Faure’s study addressed the problem of the ubiquity of violence on screen. The solution posited in the dissertation was not the elimination of violence, but the provision of tools for viewers to deal with it” (176). It would seem that the tools that he provides for understanding the civil violence in the nineteen eighties are a combination of the idea of the essential Zulu inclination to violence in defence of Shaka’s legacy and the collapse of discipline among young males because of parental neglect. The mini-series does not trace political causes of violence and the changing meanings of fatherhood and boyhood in the political context in which Shaka Zulu functions as an object lesson.



cultivated a discourse that aimed at inculcating the values of ‘good citizenship’ and ‘responsible’ motherhood not so much by ignoring the political context which had engendered dissent among UDF township youth as by mobilising powerfully-felt imagery of home-grown politics. Thus, Waetjen notes,

“Home” figures importantly in Buthelezi’s efforts to undermine the legitimacy of the exiled and foreign-based ANC by presenting Inkatha as its *local* alternative – the liberation movement that stayed home and remained with the people. The utility of “home” in such a metaphor is derived from the emotional power it wields in the communities to whom the speeches are addressed. (54)

Home in Buthelezi’s politics, Waetjen further points out, momentarily resolves the contradictions of its political violation by substituting “Inkatha-as-home” (56) for the real one that stands broken or “undermined by demographic and social changes as well as economic uncertainties” (55). I also add that the idea of the generalised ‘father’ of the nation helps mask the reality of the absence or weakening of the role of fathers from the inception of the migrant labour system onward. By exaggerating an otherwise ordinary role, Shaka Zulu further raises Zulu masculinity to the status of an ultimate solution without due analysis of its conditions of possibility on the ground.

Thus notwithstanding the mixture of admiration and foreboding with which the apartheid regime regarded Buthelezi, he figured on its list of villains as a reasonable, if sometimes ‘delinquent’, leader-father of a mainly harmless Zulu cultural movement which helped sow the message of respect for social *and* political hierarchies.

As I point out above, linked to the story of weak and absent fathers is the story of boyhood and male rivalry. In fact, the mini-series derives much of what the narrator

passes off as Shaka's "story" from what it portrays as the effects of Shaka's difficult boyhood on his psyche. Though characterised as a special "child of the prophecy," viewers are given to understand that his boyhood is simply an extreme example of Zulu boyhood generally: tough, militarised at an early age and, to all accounts, fatherless and motherless. There are no family scenes in Shaka Zulu and, thus, no ultimate familial space; rather the narrator elaborates on the violent course of male youth development and succession by downplaying the socialisation of boys and young men. The ascendance of the men folk into positions of clan and military seniority occurs along an almost exclusively aggressive male trajectory which receives sanction from a rigid Zulu social and political superstructure. Conceived thus, Zulu masculinity takes on a monolithic character and becomes a stereotype. The Zulu boys and young men of the mini-series are, as Maré' puts it, "born of warrior blood," or in the words of Buthelezi at the height of Zulu ethnic mobilisation, "come from a warrior nation who know what valour and bravery are all about" (qtd. in Laband 51).<sup>89</sup> Yet the image of Zulu men that Shaka Zulu and Buthelezi deploy belies the reality of Zulu masculinities both in the past when Buthelezi claims this image consolidated itself and in the nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties when he invoked it.

Ndlovu writes of a more diffuse terrain of what it entailed to be a boy and girl, and a man and woman, in nineteenth-century Zulu social *and* military life. According to him, "everyday Zulu life" as it pertained to boys and girls was governed more by necessity than by set roles for the sexes, whereby "a range of cross-gender

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<sup>89</sup> Taken from Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi's speech at the commemoration of the Battle of Isandlwana, delivered on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1992 at the historical site of the Battle in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

obligations” fell on boys and girls alike depending on where they were asked to serve (112). In this regard, he points out, “during some important communal ceremonies Zulu girls – not their male counterparts – ‘alusa[ed]’, [that is], ‘look[ed] after cattle’. Many of the cooking duties in the royal house were not carried out by women but by male members of the *izincku* . . . or attendants” (112).

Except for Mkabayi, the ‘odd’ exception whose political role is nevertheless limited to advising Senzangakhona on how to deal with Shaka and, after Senzangakhona’s death, on how Shaka’s brothers should kill him, the status that female characters have in the mini-series has limited bearing on Zulu social and political life. Sitayi, who is afforded the most central place in the mini-series, is a figure of myth that presides over Shaka’s pre-destination and acquires her power by not being a human being in the strict sense. Girls have no place in what the mini-series constitutes as an exclusively male world, except as bare-breasted symbols of Zulu maidenhood. In other words, in the girls is invested the cultural function which is devoid of any material content and significance. Men, young and old, are themselves ranked according to their unquestioning loyalty to their military calling, which is their readiness to commit acts of violence on command.

Thus lacking any organic relationship with its social life, Zulu military life becomes merely the “content of the form,” to use Hayden White’s conception of the act of historicisation.<sup>90</sup> Given the absence of multifaceted social content in both the mini-series and Inkatha’s notions of Zuluness, of Zulu masculinity in particular, the far more porous and fluid boundaries that separated masculine and feminine domains

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<sup>90</sup> The phrase, which makes up the title of White’s The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (1987), a study of how historical content serves as a function of the forms that historians choose, is pertinent here, in that what Shaka Zulu does is reduce the content of the Zulu past to a single formalist item, namely, Shaka’s (military) biography which, however, in reality occurred within a broader context that provided a socio-political structure – and protocols – for his boyhood, rise to power, kingship and fall.

and subjectivities in early Zulu social and political life, and rendered Zuluness a non-horizontal (and in terms of gender, fluid) subject position, become conveniently solidified. In this respect, the whole of Zululand as the homeland for the Zulus acquires the collective reference as “the house of Shaka,” which conceals the contradictory claims made on it by different political interests, both in the nineteenth century and in the nineteen eighties. This, as I show later, is one side of the mini-series’ elaborate agenda.

The project of forging a Zulu nation as the ‘home’ for Zulus out of dissenting tribes and what the narrator calls harmless herdsmen, begins with Shaka’s loss of his paternal home through exile by his father, Senzangakhona. Mkabayi’s exhortation of Senzangakhona to bring him back home to prevent his mother, Nandi, from becoming a negative influence on him, and Senzangakhona’s failure to give Shaka any guarantee that Nandi would also have a place in the Zulu kingdom as first wife if he returned, inaugurate a tense moment which culminates in a civil war. Dingiswayo, king of the Mthethwa Paramountcy and Shaka’s host while in exile, provides Shaka with the base and small army to prepare for his type of war, a violent close combat that would henceforth transform the way in which wars would be fought in the region, as the narrator informs. Thus in a very direct way Shaka’s exile from Zululand becomes the impetus for his determination to prepare himself physically for the time when he returns to take what he considers his rightful place as heir to the Zulu throne. Militarism in this sense figures as the means either to take back lost territory or to defend it from other possible claimants. And, because militarism is tied to the idea of masculinity as physical manhood, the notion of Zulu space – of the Zulu nation’s home – which the mini-series promotes, is one that appeals to war-inclined and territorial Zulu men. It is this idea of the “‘home’ in the homeland” (51) as a place to

be invented and defended, because it has neither natural borders nor internal coherence, which Waetjen argues also

bring[s] into the political lexicon a vocabulary of deeply personal identity, one in which emotional qualities are heightened because they are related to intimate and ideologically mystified relations of gender, sexuality, and family. Home, and the social relations that are invoked through related narratives of kinship and domesticity, may assist in the project of unifying a disparate and diverse population across distance. (51)

Waetjen is writing in the context of the nineteen-eighties' invocation by Buthelezi of Zululand as the natural home of the Zulus, against the threat posed by city life and ANC politics to Zulu men working in the cities and returning to their rural homes once a year. She highlights the lexicon of Buthelezi's political speeches to these men at the height of his ethnic mobilisation, namely, his expression of sympathy with their plight in single-sex hostels far from their ancestral homes and his reminding them of the rewards of their labour that awaited them back home. These rewards, Waetjen notes, included acquiring wives for the unmarried men or re-claiming patriarchal positions for the married ones. Yet, as I have argued previously, Waetjen's point goes to the core of the subtext of Shaka Zulu: both Buthelezi and Shaka Zulu rationalise the experience of dislocation and exile by means of the story of heroic return and nation-building.<sup>91</sup>

However, close analysis of Shaka Zulu reveals that neither Shaka nor the Zulus reap the rewards of his homecoming in the same way that Farewell and his men do. The Zululand to which Shaka returns is marred by internal strife which results in such

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<sup>91</sup>The story of a boy exiled for long years from his rightful home and working hard to earn enough respect to enable him to reconstitute the fragments of his lost years with 'his people' is a seductive one indeed.

incidents as the attempt on his life by his half-brothers. Moreover, the mini-series draws a very fine line between Shaka the nation builder and Shaka the warmonger who sends his warriors to war just to satisfy his love of it. Shaka makes this clear at one point immediately after his murderous takeover of the Zulu throne: when Mgobhozi, the commander of *Ufasimba*, Shaka's trusted military force, asks him what he has in store for the Zulus, Shaka tells him that, "there'll be but one reality – war" and that "when there are no wars" to fight he will "create them." This could be read in two ways, both of which speak of the type of future for Zululand and Natal that Shaka Zulu projects. On the one hand, Shaka's inclination towards war reinforces the mini-series' message of a ferocious people who are always ready to go to war to defend the legacy left them by Shaka, that is, Zululand as their ethnic home and *ubuZulu bethu* (our Zuluness) as their timeless ethnic identity. On the other, it suggests that, without a moderating force such as the Europeans, Shaka's extreme military inclinations may turn out to be disastrous for the region. Needless to say, this explains the mini-series' introduction of the story of the arrival of Farewell and his men before viewers can assess the nature and value of Shaka's governance. The narrator introduces this story on the night of Shaka's ascendance to the Zulu throne, so that from this point of the mini-series onward Shaka's story becomes intertwined with the European men's. At any rate, the narrative that governs the entire historical project of Shaka Zulu is Fynn's. However, I must add that, even while it may be argued that in the end it is the European men who benefit from the narrative of Zulu nationhood,<sup>92</sup> the framework that governs the idea of nationhood (both Zulu and British) in both Buthelezi's and Shaka Zulu's conceptions is masculinist.

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<sup>92</sup> Shaka gains his power through a combination of witchcraft and physical discipline and the Europeans theirs through rationality.

### 3.3.2 ‘The war machine created by Shaka’: body politic(s) and the militarisation of Zuluness

In Shaka Zulu, it is not so much what Shaka does to forge a warrior nation as how his muscular body (and the bodies of the men that he trains) allows him to do it that requires close examination. As his *imbongi* (praise singer) declaims after he survives an assassination attempt which surprises all and sundry, not least the principal conspirator, Shaka’s brother Dingane, “*uShaka akashayeki*” (Shaka is invincible). The choice of Henry Cele<sup>93</sup> to play the part of Shaka could not be more revealing of the underlying ethnic stereotyping at work in the mini-series’ portrayal of Zulu men. In Shaka Zulu, there is a strong echo of A. T. Bryant’s description of Shaka in Olden Times in Zululand and Natal, who informs us that,

Physically, all accounts agree, he was of splendid build - tall of stature, though not so tall as his brother, Mhlangana, robust yet sleek in limb and torso, with buttocks full, yet not so massive as were those of his brother, Mpande, and clothed throughout in a glossy skin, as Isaacs says, decidedly black in colour. (121-122)

Yet the mini-series’ portrayal of Shaka differs in some respects from Bryant’s, who also tells us that,

Old Natives and European pioneers who saw Shaka in the flesh have delineated for us more than one picture of his person; but over his countenance, indiscreetly we opine, they have drawn a veil. None has portrayed for us the facial features of this most interesting personage. From

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<sup>93</sup> The late Cele played for African Wanderers, a Hammarsdale (KwaZulu-Natal) soccer team, as a goalkeeper and also trained the players of another KwaZulu-Natal soccer club called AmaZulu. An avid sportsman and fitness fanatic, he was probably by far fitter than the historical Shaka, if Bryant’s guarded guess about Shaka’s physical build above is anything to go by. At any rate, Cele was most certainly fitter than many Zulu men, then and now.

this we conclude he was neither remarkably attractive nor especially repulsive; just the normal mean of his race, with the Bantu characteristics of large, soft eyes, full lips and broadened nose, all moderately chiselled (121-122).

Shaka Zulu is decisive about what Shaka's body looks like from boyhood through to manhood: it is chiselled from head to foot, his eyes are stern and piercing and, as a young man played by Glen Gabela, he is the picture of a champion bodybuilder with tight, muscular buttocks.

Nevertheless, in Shaka Zulu Shaka's muscular body is both a centrepiece and an extended metaphor: it is the mini-series' enduring reference point for its idea of true Zulu manhood and the theme of spatial mastery and defence as the character of Zuluness. Shaka's body's taut, sinewy outer layer posits a boundary and a place: as boundary, it marks the distinction between true (read martial) masculinity as physical manhood, and its weak 'others', namely, the feminine and effeminate, femininity being the sole attribute of all but less than a handful of women who have 'masculine' status, and effeminacy the surrogate identity assigned to weaker men. As symbolic space/place, it is, to use Elizabeth Grosz's formulation, a "page or material surface on which [certain] messages [pertaining to Zulu identity are] inscribed" (62). Posed thus, that is, as a page or material surface on which Zulu manhood is inscribed, Shaka's body provides the mini-series' treatment of the concepts of the Zulu homeland and nation with both material and ideological cohesion.

Yet about Zulu military life, Ndlovu has the following to say:

[I]n military zones (*amakhanda* or barracks), females actively participated in the most masculine of male domains – warfare. . . . King Shaka launched campaigns with married women, *amakhosikazi*, as well as girls in his army. Girls were, like boys, ritually enlisted in single-sex regiments; female



conscripts cut their own shields . . . and hurled spears in skirmishes. They fought, for example, in the 1827 Zulu incursion into amaMpondo territory in what is today southern KwaZulu-Natal. . . . Finally, during times of peace, women with combat experience also wore their *iziqu*, a necklace of valour showing that they had killed enemy fighters in battle. (113)

In the rhetoric of Shaka Zulu, “*abafazi*” (women) is a derogatory term that Shaka uses to refer to those men whose bodies cannot withstand his rigorous training methods. However, given Ndlovu’s contention above, one would have expected the mini-series to provide a corresponding image of women whose bodies are trained for, and perform, military service. In this regard, the social and political domains of men and women would be far more complex than the simple picture that Shaka Zulu paints of the Shakan times. Needless to say, this goes to the heart of the issue of the Zulu body politic (the Zulu nation) and the gender assumptions – in this case the body politics – that govern the notion of the ‘founding *father*’ in Shaka Zulu.

Bodies abound in Shaka Zulu and define the parameters of gender performance in decisive ways; they are, to recall Robert Connell’s point, “natural machine[s] which produce gender difference” (45). To the men is given the task of dying in defence of Zulu honour and the rhetoric of bravery that it is grafted on. Thus death – the sacrificing of the male warrior’s body for the Zulu nation’s cause – plays a significant role in the mini-series’ imagery. The battle cries include “*uyadela wena osulapho*” (happy are you who is already in the midst of the battle).

By contrast to the hardened bodies of the Zulu warriors, the bodies of Zulu women feature as markers of Zulu maidenhood and serve an (erotic) cultural function. The motivation for this is unclear, given the active agency of Zulu women in the political and military history of the Shakan times. However, Hamilton provides a clue which

ties the production of the mini-series to the cultural-ideological predilections of Faure's artistic/cultural advisors, Leitch and Holgate. Hamilton quotes Leitch as having said about the Zulus in the context of Shakaland, that "[i]n Shakaland you are paying tribute to a culture that everything else Western has tended to negate and look down upon" (190). Thus Zulu 'difference' in the form of culture plays an important role in the mini-series' emphasis on the bare-breasted symbols of Zulu womanhood, a notable feature of tourist brochures. Indeed, the current Zulu king Goodwill Zwelithini has since revived the Zulu maidens' Reed Dance which attracts hordes of tourists, mainly male, and has also engendered internet sites which link Zulu maidenhood to male sexual fantasy on a world scale.

To return to the issue of the mini-series' consistent emphasis on Shaka's body as a machine that produces true Zulu manhood, viewers are treated to what to me is perhaps its (Shaka's body's) most contested aspect in ethnographic and scholarly literature. Earlier I alluded to Donald Morris's assertion that Shaka was "unquestionably a latent homosexual [and that] he always took great pride in bathing in full public view" (46). In the mini-series Shaka spends some time in his king's quarters naked and having his muscular body oiled by one of his trusted men in full view of Farewell and his men. The tension between the homoerotic viewing relation and one that re-affirms his manhood is palpable on these occasions and the mini-series tries to resolve this tension by making him the ultimate fighting machine. In this sense, the residual homoerotic 'text' is erased in the public appearances that Shaka makes where, still with very little to cover his body, he is the initiator and terminus of the gaze. Indeed, in public no one dares look him in the eye: his body retains the masculine profile that the mini-series asserts over the homoerotic one.

The representation of Shaka's and the Zulu warriors' bodies as hardened for war resonates with many of the rhetorical terms employed by Inkatha in the nineteen eighties. I have cited a number of examples to this effect: the refrain on Zulu men as born of warrior stock, for instance. The mobilisation of the Inkatha warriors' bodies as the nexus between the survival of the Zulu nation and its literal and symbolic death took centre stage in the violent skirmishes between Inkatha and the UDF. The rituals of fortification of the warriors' bodies with powerful traditional medicines was also part of the armour, rhetorical and substantive, in Inkatha's storehouse of stock images of Zulu military ingenuity. The oiling of Shaka's body thus resonates with these assumptions, rather than with Morris's claim that Shaka "was probably impotent" (46). What, then, constitutes the allure of Shaka's story for the Europeans, given that it is ultimately Fynn's story that the mini-series purports to tell? In the next section, I tackle this question by returning to the two positions that I outlined above, namely, Mersham's view that *Shaka Zulu* is a "white South African rendition of a black myth" whose role was to entrench the prevailing political and economic structure of the Zululand-Natal region and Dawson's argument that such mini-series fulfill a cultural-economic function by working ideological assumptions about gender into 'historical' material and form.

### **3.4 Admiring narrative? The contradictions of co-operative masculinities in the narrative of Zulu greatness**

As I note earlier, Mersham posits that when it appeared, *Shaka Zulu* served the interests of white (male) business in an uncertain period of political transition by legitimising Zululand and regressive Zulu ethnic politics as the inviolable home and narrative of the Zulu people respectively. To a significant degree, the narrative of Fynn exemplifies this aspect of the mini-series. While the mini-series is presented as

an anti-colonial reconstruction of nineteenth-century Zulu history – a narrative of admiration of Zulu bravery – the fact that the entire story is told from the perspective of one of a handful of European men who visit Zululand means that the text of the Zulu past serves as a forum for the concerns of the nineteen eighties. And, despite Faure's intention to demystify the issue of the link between Zulu masculinity and violence, by providing a historical context for this link, violence in the mini-series, in the form of Shaka's wars for supremacy in the Zululand region, serves to clear space for Anglo-Zulu male co-operation.

In the previous section I referred to the conversation that Shaka has with Farewell on the virtues of co-operation between his nation, the British, and the Zulu nation. This conversation sits oddly with the upheavals created by Shaka's military campaigns and in which Farewell and his men take part at one time. This is because the language given to Shaka by the mini-series to use against his neighbouring clans is not of co-operation and good neighbourliness but that of "total war." In the reality of the nineteen eighties, Inkatha men waged a bloody civil war against predominantly Zulu male youth. While in the media this civil war was represented as black-on-black violence, there was always recognition that a "third force (clandestine forces either armed and controlled by the state or operating with its tacit consent)" was involved (Xaba 109). Thus it seems to me a legitimate question to ask why it is that Shaka, who is presented as an intelligent man, reserves his savagery – his madman act – for those with whom he has shared regional space.

There is, as Mersham further argues, a parabolic dimension to the allegorical function of the mini-series' narrative. As I note earlier, the story of a 'genius' "obsessed with power" (Mersham 79) offers a perfect alibi for the mini-series simultaneously to extol and critique Buthelezi as the embodiment of such qualities in

the story's subtext, while situating its own 'emissaries' (in the historical and ideological senses) in a favourable position to influence the course of the Anglo-Zulu future. And it is a future that will see white and Zulu men shaping the social and economic future of post-apartheid KwaZulu-Natal. The admiring narrative of Zulu bravery and of the rise of Shaka's spirit thus turns out to be a ruse.

Yet, as Dawson argues, the culture industry plays a significant role in reproducing fixed gender assumptions through such grand narratives as Shaka Zulu, which work themselves clandestinely into the daily lives of their audiences. To recall his efficient formulation, the "the intense fascination and excitement generated for men and boys by the military side of the war" and the "unavoidable encounter with the potency of national military manhood" (3 – 4) has kept the war culture industry financially well primed. Moreover, this fascination dovetails with prevailing views of an international capitalist patriarchy. The story of Farewell's journey to Zululand illustrates the central point of Dawson's argument.

Farewell, leader of the Cape delegation to Shaka's kingdom and self-made man and adventurer is, as his wife says of him, "married to his dreams." Lord Henry Bathurst, Somerset's emissary to the British Crown, calls him a "solitary Caucasian and luminary." About himself he says to Somerset's strategists, Worthing and Wilkins, "the fact that no one has yet conquered that (south-east) coast does not mean that I won't" and "God knows I've been in some tight spots in my sailing days." The journey that he undertakes to Shaka's domain, he says, is a chance to serve "my king and to collect some ivory." In Zululand, he becomes increasingly drawn to, and admires, Zulu martial masculinity. In this sense, he serves as a metaphor for the culture industry's vested interest in "national military manhood" (Dawson 4). As a narrative that rehearses an established story of British male adventure, Shaka Zulu

joins Zulu (1964), Zulu Dawn (1979) and other earlier dramas of British male self-legitimation via the surrogate agency of a static Zulu ‘tribe’.

What I have mapped out above speaks in broad terms of the type of edifice on which Shaka Zulu is built, in terms of both its formal and ideological underpinnings.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Shaka Zulu is through and through a text of martial masculine preeminence in which Zulu and British women play their conventional roles as passive, ‘feminine’, subjects. To the men the mini-series awards the rigours of nation-building whereby physical strength and endurance defines the boundary between masculinity and femininity. Made in the nineteen eighties, a time when feminist interventions in the area of political critique made their presence felt, the mini-series is thoroughly anachronistic. Yet given its ideological provenance, its regressive take on gender becomes all the more clear.

What I have argued in this chapter is that the mini-series’ ideological force lies in its naturalisation of gender difference and that it is on the basis of this naturalisation that it pitches its narrative of male political and historical agency and mediation. The next chapter discusses Mapantsula, a film which appeared at about the same time as Shaka Zulu, but which shifts the field of vision on the issue of masculinity somewhat.

## Chapter Four

### Crime and Politics: Competing Masculinities in Mapantsula

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I propose an analysis of Mapantsula<sup>94</sup> which departs somewhat from discussions that focus on its status as a general political statement of its time. My point of departure is that a lot could also be gained from reading Mapantsula through the lens of gender and, in this light, posing specific questions about its constitution as a film of the political context and its actors. This is more so since the discourses of criminality and popular politics, like those of nation and nationalism, draw on gender imagery and symbolism, albeit not for the same reasons and/or for the same ends.<sup>95</sup>

In proposing a gender analysis for Mapantsula, I have in mind the tension that the film sets up between the black African male youth activists and Panic, the male protagonist, but also the other conflicts that take place in which Panic is challenged *as a man*. All these tensions and conflicts are underpinned by gender, but also importantly, by the intersection of gender, race, class and spatial contests as the characteristic feature of South African society and politics at the time.

I argue that, as a story of Panic's redemption from a common criminal to someone sympathetic to the political struggle, Mapantsula negotiates his subjectivity and its transformation through these tense and conflicted situations. As such, it makes sense

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<sup>94</sup> The word *mapantsula*, which is the plural form of *i-pantsula*, refers to members of a township male sub-culture, i.e. *isi-pantsula*, who are characterised by their Americanised dress style, street savvy and law-breaking.

<sup>95</sup> However, Thokozani Xaba notes that, "[s]ince 'struggle masculinity' existed side-by-side with *street masculinity*" – which he describes as "masculinity represented by the *tsotsis* or youth gangs" (120) – which was disparaging towards women, "'struggle masculinity' was tainted by some of the negative attitudes and behaviours towards women" (109).

to examine the terms whereby the film constitutes his subjectivity and those of his antagonists. And since his criminal subjectivity is shot through with the masculine aggression of the underworld, and the territorial character that this masculinity takes on, I am interested in how the film deconstructs both, firstly, by portraying him as not the tough man that he thinks he is and, secondly, by narrowing his sphere of influence and authority.

There is also a measure of attention that the film pays to Panic's body in its various poses and disguises. As a gangster, Panic adopts the carapace of a businessman to hide a body that is in a state of physical and symbolic disintegration: his stolen suits provide temporary cover for a body that has been scarred, most probably by the police and criminal adversaries, in conflicts that are fraught with aggressive masculine references and imagery; his aggressive *pantsula* style and showmanship prove to be without substance when put to the test by political activists and others with whom he comes into conflict; and, while he refers to himself variously as a "tiger" and "a travelling executive," the film nonetheless shows him up to be a drunkard with a false sense of his own power and subcultural prestige.

I also examine the extent to which Mapantsula eschews male aggression, whether of the criminal or political type, as evidenced in the film's portrayal of Panic and Stander, even though, on some level, the film does so by means of a male discourse and framework which present a lopsided picture of the nineteen eighties. For instance, Nancy Nokwenza Plaatjies points out that, "the development of Panic's character is constructed through a truncated political consciousness, which avoids engagement with the gendered dynamics of the discourse" (223). What follows is a brief appraisal of the context of the film's production.



## 4.2 The production of Mapantsula: a consideration of its context

In this section, I provide an outline of the context of the film's production. This is in part to highlight the nature and significance of the shift in focus and emphases that Mapantsula introduces to the same period and political climate that Shaka Zulu frames in Zulu ethnic nationalist terms. In other words, an account of the context of production of Mapantsula helps explain the differences in the two audio-visual texts' choices of themes and approach, on which depends my analysis of the shifts that occur in Mapantsula's representation of its black African male and female characters. I pay particular attention to (i) the geography of crime and politics in black African townships before and at the time that the film was made; (ii) the place of gender and sexuality in the making of criminal and political subjectivities; and (iii) the nature and significance of the nineteen-eighties' contest between the criminal underworld and the political struggle that Mapantsula enacts.

Except for its historical place as a film produced in the time of heightened political activity in South Africa, the issues that Mapantsula dramatises are not quite unique to the nineteen eighties. In Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976 (2000), Clive Glaser reminds us that the conflicts – *and* co-operation – between criminal gangs and political activists predate the nineteen eighties and were most visible in the nineteen seventies during the Soweto students' riots, but also earlier in “the political foment of 1959-1960” (159). These moments of high political drama, Glaser notes, have always produced complex spatial and gender alignments and misalignments. The nineteen eighties were no less marked by conflicts and co-operation between the territorial male criminal gangs (*tsotsis*) and the more socially-orientated school and university-going youth, predominantly male, who sought to redefine township space

in new and politically overt ways.<sup>96</sup> Added to this complex scenario was the co-operation between apartheid operatives, black and white, and the migrant workers, mainly Zulu men who lived in hostels in and around the cities of Durban and Johannesburg. However, Thokozani Xaba sounds a note of caution; he remarks that,

Little research has been conducted on violent femininities in South Africa, although Clive Glaser (1992) has revealed the existence of ruthless female gang leaders on the Witwatersrand in the 1950s. This case likewise alerts us to the error of assuming that femininity is synonymous with passivity and nurturing. Struggle masculinities will only be fully understood when we know more about struggle femininities. (119)

The impetus for the countrywide protests against the apartheid regime in the nineteen eighties, which led to the formation of the UDF in 1983, was the collapse in the delivery of services in the black African and so-called Coloured and Indian townships and the inverse hikes in service charges. In Natal townships, *Asinamali* (We have no money) became the rallying issue after a Lamontville, Durban, community leader, Msizi Dube, who had led protests against these hikes, was assassinated.<sup>97</sup> Hitherto the apartheid regime had enforced systematic segregation between Black Africans and ‘Coloureds’ and ‘Indians’, culminating in its establishment, in 1983, of a Tri-cameral parliamentary system in which a House of Representatives and House of Delegates were created for ‘Indians’ and ‘Coloureds’ respectively. No such provision had been made for black Africans who had for a long time been considered temporary

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<sup>96</sup> However, as in the periods before the nineteen eighties, the identities of participants in political conflicts, and their stakes in the skirmishes, could not easily be determined. In the nineteen eighties, for instance, the term ‘*com-tsotsi*’ referred to those youth activists who were deemed to be *tsotsis* disguising themselves as comrades (a word used to refer to political activists).

<sup>97</sup> The rallying issue also features prominently in the political activists’ street protests in Mapantsula.

sojourners in the urban areas,<sup>98</sup> despite many of them having settled lives and being largely cut off from any form of tribal links.<sup>99</sup>

Prior to the momentous political events of the early nineteen eighties, which led to the apartheid regime declaring a State of Emergency in 1985, male youth *tsotsi* gangs had dominated the black African townships, drawing sporadically from constituencies of female school dropouts who led criminal lives and aspired towards subcultural prestige. These female *pantsulas*, known in the townships as *mshozas* (*mshoza* for singular), accounted for some of the deaths of prominent violent male thugs whom they either lured into traps where they were killed or killed them themselves. In certain respects, then, the subjectivities of male gangs were mediated through those of their female cohorts and molls.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, male gangs largely ran black African townships – its streets, clubs and, at times, homes – with extreme violence, at once creating safe territories for those in their neighbourhoods and preying on their affluent financially and female members sexually. They also provided the only, or at the very least the most, viable models for success in an environment of few sustainable role models. As in the years prior, gangsters adopted the names of, or in, mainly American films for their gangs and the style of the criminals in these films.

As the material conditions in black African townships began to worsen and the resentment towards the apartheid regime's divisive tactics grew, the relative balance that the regime had created and maintained through the re-tribalisation of the

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<sup>98</sup> In "The Struggle for Natal and KwaZulu: Workers, Township Dwellers and Inkatha, 1972-1985," Debbie Bonnin, Georgina Hamilton, Robert Morrell and Ari Sitas point out that "all black labour [was deemed] as migrant labour and therefore, [black labourers] as a mass of temporary urban sojourners" (143).

<sup>99</sup> In fact, part of the violence in Natal was the result of the attempted incorporation of the townships of Lamontville, Chesterville and Hambanathi, which were under the Port Natal administration, into Buthelezi's KwaZulu tribal homeland.

<sup>100</sup> Even though Panic's girlfriend, Pat, shares with him his shack and table at Club Hi-Lite, the film does not develop her character in complex and nuanced ways. There are only a few hints that she is an assertive woman in her own right.

administration of some of the townships; the extension of the Bantu education system which produced a relatively satisfied semi-skilled labour force; and tight security measures which operated through informers within black African communities also began to crumble. Combined with the attempts by the regime to pass responsibility of governing all black African townships onto the Bantustan administrations, the failure of its power to deceive led to protests and open resistance. In the case of KwaZulu-Natal, for instance, Thembisa Waetjen recalls that,

[W]hen the KwaZulu government announced [in September 1983] that the Lamontville and Hambanathi townships, located on the outskirts of Durban, were to be incorporated into KwaZulu, [it] generated the immediate resistance of many township residents, and over the next year violence ensued between opposed township locals and Inkatha sympathizers. (57)

The pattern of the 1976 Soweto riots which Glaser traces, of criminal gangs joining political activists when the protests turned violent, repeated itself in the nineteen eighties, so that the criminal and ‘struggle’ masculinities became at once polarised and aligned. As in the Soweto riots, realising that their territories were threatened by the new political affiliations, the criminal gangs of the nineteen eighties could nonetheless carry out their criminal activities under the protection of “large, volatile crowds” (Glaser 172).

[I]n an atmosphere of racial polarization, robbery of white-owned or “collaborationist” property lost any criminal stigma . . . ; it was seen almost as a positive act of symbolic revenge. (Glaser 172)

Yet there were also violent clashes between gangs and political activists, most of which involved the systematic punishment of gang members accused of crimes that in

the preceding political vacuum would have attracted little, if any, widespread attention, much less sustained systematic confrontation. Trials at ‘people’s courts’, often followed by public floggings and other spectacular forms of ‘people’s justice’, became widespread phenomena in the townships and earned political activists guarded gratitude from their communities.<sup>101</sup> In many ways these clashes were between male youth and the administration of punishment was largely a male prerogative. The instruments of violence and the mythology associated with death and survival mobilised martial masculine imagery<sup>102</sup> and that of the purification of the body of the guilty through physical punishment and pain.

The displacement of the gangs in the violent political purges of the nineteen eighties across the country’s black African townships also resounded with gender and sexual metaphors: criminals and those suspected of being police informers were either stripped naked and paraded on the streets (called modelling), flogged with a *sjambok* (rubber truncheon) while embracing a tree trunk (called holding Brenda) or burned to death using a petrol-filled tyre placed around their necks (called necklacing). In the film, for instance, not only does Panic gradually lose his credibility as a man in a context in which the discourse has changed from lone criminal to collective (predominantly male) political heroism, his space also begins to narrow and the stories that he tells of his criminal exploits only serve to deepen the viewers’ sense of his isolation and irrelevance. The exchange that I quoted in the synopsis earlier between Panic and the UDF political activists sheds light on this point: it is a confrontation between two assertive masculinities, with one on the rise and the other

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<sup>101</sup> Communities were never quite comfortable with the methods employed by the male youth in particular, even though the results changed the face of township gang crime irrevocably. Again, in the practices of youth justice there were always fears that criminal elements used the ‘people’s courts’ to settle old scores that had nothing to do with the political issues of the day.

<sup>102</sup> In the previous chapter I mentioned the mythology associated with the invincibility of the men engaged in the violence; in particular, I wrote about the concept of *ukugqirha*, fortifying oneself with war medicines to deceive adversaries and to make oneself invulnerable to bullets.

on the wane. When Panic calls the activists “Bandits” (62), and they respond by enquiring after his political credentials, it is to this contextual and lexical shift that the film appeals.

Nevertheless, whereas in the nineteen seventies the protests were largely concentrated in Soweto schools, and the Black Consciousness movement played a supportive role, the nineteen eighties saw a broad-based mass movement with representation across all levels of society where there was cause for grievance. What this meant is that more and more female youth took up leadership roles in neighbourhood structures and on university campuses, a departure from the nineteen seventies where, as Glaser notes, “girls participated widely in student politics . . . even if only rarely in leadership positions” (72). Also, while the protests of the nineteen eighties, like those of the nineteen seventies, were driven by an intellectual agenda, in the nineteen eighties this agenda was far less exclusive and male-driven than it had been in the philosophy and practice of the Black Consciousness Movement.

Mapantsula presents a glimpse of these events and issues from the point of view of the vanishing allure and power of the *tsotsi* subculture, assailed at various points by a new crop of male activists and assertive women.

The creators of Mapantsula, Oliver Schmidt and Thomas Mogotlane, also provided some pointers in regard to the nature and significance of their project and it is worthwhile to highlight some of these pointers, especially those which frame the film as a notable departure from the grand narratives such as Shaka Zulu's.

When Mapantsula appeared, it captured an important moment in the history of the struggle for political and social change in South Africa and, to some extent, engendered a new audience. Its power lay in its doing so by means of a human, rather

than a documentary or ethnographic, narrative. In this sense, Mapantsula partly answered some of the urgent questions regarding the future of film in a society that was changing. In their interview with Jeremy Nathan, the creators of the film also make the point about the film's departure from earlier films about black Africans. In particular, they make the point about the film's care to develop the character of its protagonist, Panic, into a character that South African viewers familiar with the film's material context could recognise. Schmitz's view is that, "What we need are small films about ordinary people and ordinary situations. Not the grand canvasses" (31). What constitutes ordinariness, however, is the matter that this chapter, in part, considers against the background of the tendency in the nineteen eighties to employ the term ordinary as a critical manoeuvre without adequate engagement with those to whom, and the situations to which, it was applied.

Needless to say, the idea of representing ordinary people and ordinary situations did not begin with Mapantsula. It had been around for quite some time in the form of critiques of black South African writing by Ezekiel Mphahlele in the nineteen seventies, Lewis Nkosi in the early-nineteen eighties and Njabulo Ndebele in the early to late nineteen eighties. However, it was Ndebele, in his idea of the "rediscovery of the ordinary" (Rediscovery 37) as the kind of renewal which post-protest literature and culture needed, who gave the term the currency and visibility which Mapantsula appears to have adopted and gave content to in 1988. For his part, Ndebele published a collection of short stories, Fools and other Stories (1983), the title story of which was adapted for a feature film that I consider in the final chapter of this thesis, and a collection of essays, Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on Literature and Culture (1991), that he had delivered at different times in the nineteen eighties. Yet the idea of the ordinary – of ordinary people and ordinary situations – remains broad in

Ndebele's essays, and my examination of Mapantsula involves assessing the extent to which the film gives it content. I do this by focusing on the film's dramatisation of relations between men and men, women and women, and men and women within the frameworks of crime and political dramas.

Another issue that I highlight from the interview is Schmitz's reason for choosing the story's structure, what he calls its "two parallel threads" (26). He points out that the composition of the film and of the character of Panic proceeded from the sense that one cannot reduce

black experience in South Africa [to] frequent brushes with jail, being arrested for ridiculous things, being inside, then outside jail, [but that] a film that undertakes to represent someone like Panic [must] reflect his character. It [must] develop a strange dynamic not strictly as a flashback, but as two parallel threads in the same character. (27)

The two parallel threads are the personal and the socio-political, because, as Schmitz further observes,

If you look at a gangster in South Africa, somewhere along the line you have to ask why he is a gangster, what has the political situation got to do with that, and also how does he relate to things that are going on around him? It is a central conflict in the film from the very beginning. (28-29)

Mapantsula could be said to be an extended answer to the questions that Schmitz proposes above about the political situation of a gangster. In this sense, Mapantsula implicitly rejects the narrow moral and apolitical context of its predecessors by asking the questions that the earlier films about black township gangsters never got to ask.

Yet it is also important to consider the fact that by beginning his questions with



“why,” Schmitz also invokes viewer responsibility, and this involves the likelihood that the film’s viewers may not be bound by the same constraints within which Mapantsula provides answers to his questions. One of the issues that I consider in my discussion of Mapantsula is the view that the film takes its masculine framework almost entirely for granted, that is, that Mapantsula’s world is male first and foremost, even before one can begin to examine the film’s particular creative and political intervention.

Let me consider the contests that the film sets up between Panic and the political activists and the gender character that these conflicts assume.

### **4.3 (En)gendering conflict in Mapantsula**

In this section, which I have divided further into two sub-sections, namely, “staging the political contest” and “contesting the political stage,” I propose two related points. Firstly, I show that in adopting the framework of popular struggle rather than the narrow ethnic nationalistic one of Shaka Zulu, Mapantsula broadens its perspective on the conflicts of the nineteen eighties. Secondly, I argue that, on some level, such a broad framework tends to elide some of the social hierarchies that are discontinuous with the film’s ideal. Moreover, conceived within an overarching and often nebulous category such as populism, the concept of politics becomes somewhat exclusive, extolling the virtues of unity at the expense of other politics, such as those of gender and class.

Given my misgivings about the film’s choice of framework, I propose that there are two structured absences in the film’s story line that require analytical attention: the first occurs as the result of the film’s reluctance to address the class dimension of the contest that it sets up between the main antagonists, Panic and the political

activists, and the second is the lack of a viable and sustainable position other than the male-orientated from which the film frames its contest. Needless to say, addressing these absences would provide a clue as to why, as Xaba notes, after 1994, “[f]ormer ‘liberation soldiers’ sought but did not find confirmation of their masculinity from the new society where a new hegemonic form of masculinity had been installed” (112). For his part, Xaba avers that, “[t]he masculine characteristics they possessed were inappropriate for the new South Africa” (112); they had cultivated a masculinity which was “disproportionate to reality” (110). This is because,

During those days [the nineteen eighties], being a ‘comrade’ endowed a young man with social respect and status within his community. Being referred to as a ‘young lion’ and a ‘liberator’ was an intoxicating and psychologically satiating accolade. This was especially so to young men who were members of a group with low social status and who came from families where accolades of any kind were hard to come by. . . . Such accolades also came along with the kind of power and respect which attracted women to men. As such, ‘young lions’, especially those who were in leadership positions, were coveted by women. In fact, some tended to have access to more than one woman at a time, either as girlfriends or sleeping partners. Indeed, the more status a man had, the more women there were to whom he had access. (110)

Here Xaba sheds light on the meaning of the political struggle of the nineteen eighties to some of its class of agents and he does so with a sharper sense of ordinary detail than is found in general commentaries.

Let me summarise the four points that I posited in the introduction of this chapter as the main areas of my analysis of the constitution of gendered subjectivities in conflict in Mapantsula. The first point is that a gender analysis allows me to pose

specific and relevant questions regarding the film's constitution of its political context and the actors in it, since the discourses of criminality and popular politics are saturated with gender and sexual imagery and symbolism. The second point concerns the conflicts between Panic and the other, mainly male, characters, which bring to the fore issues of the masculinisation of political space and the spatialisation of struggle masculinities, to paraphrase David Bell and Gill Valentine's formulation.<sup>103</sup> In this connection, Panic's space narrows considerably with the gathering momentum of the popular struggle. The third point relates to the film's use of Panic's body as the site of its elaboration on his physical and symbolic disintegration, on the one hand, and redemption on the other. And the fourth is the film's critique of aggressive masculinity which, however, it achieves by means of a political discourse that remains uncritically, or at the very least unacknowledged as, male.

### **4.3.1 Staging the political contest**

The two parallel stories that Mapantsula dramatises must ultimately be seen as constituting a single political dynamic, with each serving to elaborate on the other and giving it context and motivation. Without the political story, Panic's story simply becomes a crime drama out of kilter with its time. By the same token, without the story of Panic, the political story runs the risk of turning into a high-minded tract. Yet a strategic separation of the two stories makes for interesting 'reading'/viewing, for the simple reason that the context of the first, that is, Panic's story, both predates and outlasts that of the second story of political struggle. In this strategic separation also lies the opportunity to situate the film in the broader context other than the one constituted by the stories themselves. This section is such an attempt to derive from

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<sup>103</sup> To say this does not mean that I exclude the confrontations that occur between Panic and the female characters; rather, it is to separate those which are decisive from those that are not quite in the context of the main theme of the film.

these stories certain clues pertaining to their broader contexts, the better to posit the paradigm shift that I believe the creators of Mapantsula introduce to a time fraught with regressive socio-political visions for South Africa post-apartheid.

The political drama is founded on the issues of the day and presents a relatively dynamic cast of characters, especially male characters, who project these issues onto the screen. These characters also infuse the issues with the realism that the film craves, in its pursuit of the intricacies of setting, voice and performance. Thus Stander and his black African right-hand man portray the tough and murderous Secret Service/Special Branch interrogators;<sup>104</sup> Mrs. Bentley plays her part as the ‘white madam’ without much political consciousness other than the half-finished liberal refrain she is allowed to utter before she is distracted by the sound of the kettle (after she tells Pat about a burglary at her friends’ house, she says: “I mean I don’t agree with everything the police do but sometimes . . .” (74)); Ma Modise, Panic’s landlady, is the suffering single mother who takes in washing from white households to augment the irregular income that she earns from renting back rooms in her yard; Panic is a *tsotsi* who is not only ignorant of politics but is also scornful of those involved in the political struggle (his dismissive reaction when he looks in on a meeting between members of his community and Councillors sums up his attitude towards the political issues of the day); Pat is a domestic worker and a gangster’s moll and her character evinces the contradictions of her position, simultaneously gainfully employed and weighed down by a boyfriend that she knows is, and indeed calls, a “loafer” (71).

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<sup>104</sup> Here it is impossible to miss the parallel which hindsight makes apparent between Stander and such apartheid regime’s enforcers as the jailed Vlakplaas head Eugene de Kock or between Stander’s right-hand man and de Kock’s operatives Joe Mamasela and Almond Nofomela.

The settings that the characters inhabit also mark their subjectivities in political ways. Thus viewers only see Stander in the interrogation room equipped with surveillance machinery and ‘backroom boys’ doing the regime’s dirty work; Mrs. Bentley is ensconced in her suburban house that radically contrasts the single room shack that her domestic worker sometimes shares with her boyfriend; and, even though viewers are not shown where the township Councillors live, they can nonetheless deduce from the way they are dressed, the cars they drive and Duma’s accusation of them as “comfortable” that they live in more affluent parts of the township. Panic’s spaces reflect his contradictory character, at once poor and politically marginalised and aspiring to a life of material wealth and personal comfort. For instance, his backyard shack stands in sharp contrast to the clothes that he wears and his conspicuous display of affluence, which at one stage at Club Hi-Lite leads Pat to comment that he is “rich” (64). In prison this contradiction persists, as Panic spends one part of the time in a jail cell eating prison food and another in Stander’s office eating hamburgers and drinking coffee in exchange for his services as a police informer. The political activists, who come from depressed households, want to claim the township space from the regime’s collaborators, the Councillors and the mayor, in order to halt the pattern of spatial exploitation. Needless to say, the larger struggle is for the radical overhaul of the political system that has engendered the vastly contrasting suburban space of Mrs. Bentley and the cramped spaces in which the political activists live.

The bodies of the male protagonists, then, acquire a broad political and conventional masculine significance and are situated on their respective sides of the political and physical male contest that the film sets up. For instance, the political activists place their bodies on the line for a political purpose, whereas Panic places his

on the line to acquire the accessories for his subcultural style, at least before his physical suffering at the hands of the police interrogators. The bodies of the female characters, on the other hand, function in the conventional modes as sexual and/or victimised bodies. Pat, for instance, is linked to the film's politics via the sexual thread that sees her being 'liberated' from the irresponsible sexual demands of a petty criminal to the 'normal' ones of a labour lawyer and unionist, Duma. Ma Modise's wounded body after she is shot in the melee by the riot police towards the end of the film functions as the site of male outrage and facilitates Panic's manly decision which ends the film. Even though they are present at the street protests and can thus be said to take the same risks as their male comrades, the female activists nevertheless lack the corporeal presence and narrative significance of their male comrades.

The ideological location of gendered bodies in space and their differential inscriptions *as* gendered spatial metaphors produce a text of political contest that is nevertheless deeply organised within the mores of conventional gender and sexual assumptions. The mobility of the male body, whether in the *toyi-toyi* performance in the streets or in the showy *pantsula* style on the dance floor at Club Hi-Lite, carries in its train the notion of mastery. This mastery is at once internal and external: the young male activists who lead the *toyi-toyi* dance routines not only exude the masculine power and confidence which Xaba says was "psychologically satiating" (110) and sexually attractive for the young activists of the nineteen eighties, they also take over the spaces in which they move.

For his part, Panic has developed the tactics of cutting through spaces, and his body is well adapted to his sleek and aggressive masculine *tsotsi* style: he can manoeuvre it through dense traffic as he runs from the scenes of his crimes and he can roll a suit around his legs in the cramped space of an outfitter's shop's fitting room and leave

without raising much suspicion about the theft. At Club Hi-Lite he performs exhibitionist dance moves to “show them” (66), as he says to Pat when he invites her to join him on the dance floor, an invitation that she refuses. At one stage when he meets another *pantsula*, Jabu, at Club Hi-Lite, who earlier on in the film beats him to a white woman’s handbag in the street of Johannesburg city, he prevails over him in a violent confrontation. It is Panic’s swiftness with a broken beer bottle against Jabu’s knife, which Jabu draws first, that reinforces his might as a *tsotsi*. In the setting of the township shebeen, Panic is physically adept and confident.

The prison setting, however, presents an entirely different set of challenges to Panic’s subcultural style. Here his body becomes the object of another man’s sadistic political power: he is stripped of all his *tsotsi* powers and paraphernalia, literally by Stander and symbolically by the political activists. Whereas on the dance floor of Club Hi-Lite he half-strips in a performance of the exhibitionist *stshwetla* dance, in Stander’s interrogation room he has two choices: he can either accept Stander’s offer of a “new identity” (129) in exchange for informing on the activists, or have Stander strip him naked, as he indeed does, to show his colleague, Visagie, “how a terrorist shits” (129). Whichever way he chooses, in prison Panic is sure to have his identity and his powers stripped from him. Symbolically, the political activists reduce him to a loner whose subcultural aggression has lost its physical support: there are no *tsotsis* in the prison cell with whom he can engage in a violent trial of male physical strength and daring. All these are examples of the space-body-gender links that shape the masculine power struggles in the film, and all of them mark male bodies in terms that, to recall Robert Connell’s formulation, reassert the idea of the body as “a natural machine which produces gender difference” (*Masculinities* 45).

The issues that I have raised above are not extraneous to the film's visual codification of the nineteen eighties but, rather, remain largely unvoiced aspects of its message which endorses the political struggle for freedom. In the next pages, I explore these areas in the light of, among others, Maingard, Plaatjies and Magogodi's critical interventions.

### 4.3.2 Contesting the political stage

The political activists' slogans foreground the struggles of men against men:

Nelson Mandela, ubaba wethu!

Oliver Tambo, ubaba wethu!

Steve Biko, ubaba wethu!

(Nelson Mandela is our father!

Oliver Tambo is our father!

Steve Biko is our father!) (135)

This, and other similar aspects of the film where male agency is invoked, leads Maingard to the conclusion that, "[w]hile the film's text is representing a black view, it is also a male view and the perspectives of black females are marginalized" ("New South African Cinema" 238). One of the moments in the film on which Maingard bases her critical comment is when Panic sits in the Bentleys' unlit servant's quarters waiting for Pat who later enters bearing a plate of food for him. As she collapses onto the bed exhausted, Panic remarks to her as he eats that, "[t]his place is killing you. There's no more life in you" (80), and then suggests that, "[w]e'll clean this place out, sharp!" (80). All the while as he speaks Panic is observing the Bentleys in their kitchen through the window and over Pat's shoulder while Pat's back is turned away from the window. For Maingard, this moment, together with the image that it



portrays, is paradigmatic of the general tendency of the film to filter the subjectivities of its female characters through those of its male ones. She says of this scene:

The shot makes manifest the alienation experienced by domestic workers, but although this is Pat's experience, textually, it is Panic's point of view that is confirmed. It is his anger that is expressed and furthermore his frustration that is vented at Pat abusively. ("New South African Cinema" 238)

In the last point Maingard is referring to Panic's retort when Pat is alarmed at his suggestion that they will clean the Bentleys' house out; Panic says to her, "Hayi fuck you, Pat! You must wake up, man!" (80).

There are other examples of the privileging of the masculine perspective and/or agency that Maingard highlights above, and all of them involve the male colonisation of women's spaces and women's concerns in these spaces. In another scene in which Panic barges into Pat's aunt's house looking for Pat, Pat's aunt defends her home space against his invasion of it by invoking an absent man: she tells Panic that he has "got no respect just because I have no husband!" (117). Yet she and Pat successfully expel him from the house, so that her invocation of an absent husband, whom viewers would not have known was ever there in the first place were it not for this invocation, seems quite odd in a film in which there are single *and* resourceful women. Indeed, before her invocation of an absent husband, her position is by all accounts strong enough, both in legal terms and the fact that it is her space that Panic invades.

A similar point can be made about the film's treatment of Ma Modise's character. She heads a household and runs a rental business, yet in the community meeting with the mayor and the Councillors on the issue of the rent hikes that she would be more qualified to speak on, the centre stage is given over to men. Her protestations about

rent hikes and poor municipal services are kept to her yard where she rails against Panic, a positively irrelevant audience for such issues. This approach to female characters, Magogodi remarks, echoes a strong tendency in African cinema. Reflecting on the uses of female sexuality in African film in the context of the depiction of Pat in Mapantsula, Magogodi notes that,

Mapantsula invites a comparison with depictions of women in Rue Princesse and Xala whose movements are within the biological realm as sexual partners, not partners in the shaping of the destiny of “the nation.” As such, it seems that women are credited with nothing beyond their sexual power(lessness) or partnership in an African nationalism that is defined in masculine terms. Essentially, these constructions and deconstructions of power, race, and nationalism, as brokered on the gendered body, inform and are informed by history. (“Sexuality” 190)

Indeed, in Sembene Ousmane’s film, Xala, which is a critique of the post-independence Senegalese nationalist élite, the men who take over from the French colonial regime not only consolidate their political power by acquiring material possessions, but also do so by acquiring more wives as a symbol of their affluence and sexual power. In the film, El Hadj Abdoukader Beye, a wealthy polygamous businessman and powerful political figure of the new nation, takes a young wife to show off his sexual (read political) power. On his first night with her, he is struck by a *xala*, which is a curse that renders him sexually impotent and prevents him from consummating his marriage. Here Ousmane establishes a direct link between male political power and its colonisation of the female body as one of the ‘items’ in its list of accessories. Moreover, Ousmane’s film illustrates a deeper and more general attitude within male discourse, of which nationalism is one example, to mediate

women's subjectivities through those of their male counterparts. In this sense, the example of the sexual utility of women in the discourse of male power is a symptom of a general condition. Hence the film's portrayal of Pat as an object of sexual interest and Ma Modise and Pat's aunt as at once resourceful and powerless. Needless to say, all the women who participate in the protests and get arrested for it ultimately have no place within the narrative of the nation that Mapantsula could be said to be.

Similarly, Plaatjies' comments on what she construes as the limitations of critiques of Mapantsula elaborate on my points above. She says that,

When Panic escapes criticism for his treatment of women in the movie, the female oppression of Pat and Mma Mobise [sic] is obfuscated by a decontextualized race and class analysis. This happens because the development of Panic's character is constructed through a truncated political consciousness, which avoids engagement with the gendered dynamics of the discourse. Hence little attempt is made within existing film criticism to examine the realistic portrayal of the character's cultural contexts. (223)

What Plaatjies calls "the realistic portrayal of the character's cultural contexts" (223) is what Piniel Viriri Shava, citing Frederick Engels, calls "a faithful portrayal of social reality through the 'reproduction' of 'typical characters within typical circumstances'" (Engels qtd. in Shava 1; Plaatjies 224). However, this "social realist emphasis" (224), Plaatjies points out,

[S]hould include weaving in an inter-textual reading that would allow a creative discourse with an unlimited number of texts outside the frame of the filmic text. It, therefore, expands the range of the "typical" social experience.

An inter-textual reading allows us to raise questions of race, class, ethnic, gender, sexual or age interaction in more depth in our interpretation of a text.

(224)

Plaatjies' main criticism of Mapantsula is that it lacks what I have previously called a platform – what she calls a cultural context – for its female characters which in their socio-political reality they have always had. This cultural context, she says, incorporates

various relatively developed female communicative networks, such as *stockfelles* [sic] popular among domestic workers [and a] support network of various forms of parent, teachers, youth and students setup [sic] to assist families in search of their children during the turbulent period of the uprisings.

(228)

Regarding the inter-textual range that Mapantsula fails to tap, Plaatjies points to “existing oral traditions embodied in the everyday life-worlds of their [the black African characters'] communities” (234).

I have argued in the previous chapters that, whereas a gender analysis must take cognisance of the historical bias towards heterosexual men that has shaped and characterises relations between men and women, the aim of my discussion of the four audio-visual texts is also to consider how the agency of women characters could be discerned. For Plaatjies, the existing oral traditions are one of the resources for this undertaking. To this I would add written sources, documentary, creative and critical, which have written women back into social, political and cultural life from which in male discourse they are either excluded or have had their perspectives appropriated for ends that are not their own. Another productive way of achieving this is by testing

the audio-visual texts' conceptions of masculinities and femininities against the unstable nature, on the ground, of the terms masculinity and femininity and, by association, masculine and feminine agency. For while a symptomatic analysis that seeks to unmask textual bias towards masculinism is significant, of more importance is an analysis that attempts to provide an alternative platform and voice for addressing the questions around gender. This is what Signe Arnfred means by the significance of the "double move of de-construction and re-construction" (7) in dealing with the texts of masculine preeminence and authority. This alternative platform and voice may in the end not prevent regressive conceptions of gender in the everyday lives of men and women but it would weaken their claims to absolutism.

I recall the above point here because, unlike Shaka Zulu, Mapantsula does not lack the context – the means even – for examining the performative nature of masculinity. In Mapantsula, Pat, her aunt, Ma Modise and an array of other women in the street protests and prison have the potential to undercut the binary notion of the docile woman and resourceful man. Rather, what the film lacks is a *form* and sustainable *platform* whereby women's agency can be processed. It is also the same lack that prevents the film from portraying the evidently diverse profiles of men beyond its broad struggle framework. In short, what Maingard critiques in the presentation of the scene in Pat's domestic quarters above is the *structure* of the film's vision – the missed opportunity for delineating the visual and ideological space in a different way – rather than the potential of Pat's vision as such. It is, after all, Pat who introduces to Panic the issue of her 'request' for a wage increase from the Bentleys; however, perhaps in an effort to show Panic's lack of facility for political analysis of the living wage issue, the film undercuts that of its own agent, Pat, by awarding to Panic its structure of, and platform for, vision and voice. And later, when the opportunity

presents itself for the film to restructure its angle, after Pat is dismissed from her job and leaves Panic, it is the male trade unionist Duma who takes charge of her issue with the Bentleys. Viewers see Duma leading Pat from across the street to the trade union offices, and again telling her to wait for her turn, or to join them, while they meet with the mayor and the Councillors. It is a meeting in which Duma holds the stage in a rousing critical speech to the mayor and the Councillors and in which Pat looks positively out of place.

The undercutting of feminine agency is evident also in the film's portrayal of Ma Modise, potentially one of the most complex of the film's secondary characters but in my view equally one of the most simplistically drawn. Like Pat's aunt, Ma Modise is the head of her household, but unlike Pat's aunt she also manages a rental business on her premises. Except for the problems that she has with Panic, whose rental payments are irregular at best, her other tenants pay their rent, at least if we consider that at no point in the film do viewers see her argue with them. Given her resourcefulness and the fact that she is not intimidated by Panic in the one scene that viewers see her demanding rent from him, her secondary place in the film is something of an anomaly. Moreover, the fact that her status in the community is downplayed means that she simply fits into the general stereotype of a 'female character' that the film constitutes in advance when, in fact, she has some financial power and, one would think, leverage. Viewers only ever see her exercising her authority within her domestic space. As a landlady who is also the head of her household, the question remains as to the nature of her position in a community in conflict with those of its own members who, like the mayor and the Councillors, are seen to be unaffected by rent hikes. Clearly, she does not command the same political power and financial resources that the mayor and the Councillors possess; hence her township house

which does not differ from the average house in her neighbourhood and her additional job of doing washing for an unnamed white employer. Yet she cannot exactly be part of the call of *Asinamali* (We have no money).

The last point above brings me to the second part of my discussion, namely, an inquiry into the sociality of the film's central and marginal characters, or the social realism that Plaatjies argues needs to inform and be informed by filmic language and the language of audio-visual critique. I must note though that Plaatjies' is an explicitly "black womanist analysis" (Plaatjies 227) and so leans toward a critique of the film that asserts the socio-political and cultural agency of women, and their solidarity, in their lived experiences as women. Like Maingard and Magogodi, she finds the film's 'black perspective',<sup>105</sup> while commendable, oddly silent on "female representation, difference and knowledge-power" (227), one result of which is that,

Panic's interaction with his female counterparts, Pat, his girlfriend, and Sam's mother, Mma Mobise [sic], has been given scant, if not a total lack of consideration in commentary by filmic critics. (227)

However, while I take this line of critique into consideration, my intervention also elaborates on "an inter-textual reading of [Mapantsula] that examines the intersection of race, class, . . . gender, sexuality and age" (Plaatjies 227). This means that I probe the interactions between Panic and the male activists as much as those between him and Dingane, the young men gambling on the pavement of Johannesburg, Pat, Pat's aunt, Ma Modise, Mrs. Bentley, Stander, Stander's right-hand man, Jabu, Duma and his brother, Lucky, however brief some of these interactions are. I also consider the interaction between the community protesters and the Councillors and their

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<sup>105</sup> Plaatjies is cautious about the so-called black perspective of the film, asserting that, "the assessment of MP [Mapantsula] on the basis of race or color is inadequate" (226).

encounters with the riot police. Indeed, these interactions broaden the camera's visual field/space and extend the range of its issues.

All the character projections and interactions in Mapantsula are in large measure determined by the film's construction of its visual space. In other words, it is where and how the characters are located that determines their worth in the contests and conflicts that unfold in the film's storyline. Again, the notion of gender that the film deploys rests on the express assumption that men, by virtue of their physical manhood and strength, are better equipped to take the lead. Thus, for instance, while the camera shows viewers the imprisonment of male and female protesters, the only jail cells that they see or know about are those in which men are incarcerated. In the female-headed homes, the camera negotiates the subjectivities of Ma Modise and Pat's aunt through the active agency of Panic. In the street protests, men take the lead and women make up the numbers. On the dance floor at Club Hi-Lite, Panic and Dingane dominate the floor space while Pat, who refuses to join Panic for the dance, looks on. In Stander's interrogation room, the only 'woman' present is a semi-nude pin-up pasted on the locker, most probably placed there to comment on the male view of women; however, given the film's own male-stream structure of vision, the pin-up simply becomes an ironic comment on the film's erasure of the women's historical presence in this space. Other spaces reinforce this pattern and give the film a distinctly masculinist character.

The projection of the characters' bodies also betrays a clear gender ideology. Whereas both sexes take part in the political protests, it is the men who place their bodies in the line of riot police fire. Ma Modise, who gets shot in the ensuing chaos, becomes an accidental victim who happens to be there while looking for her son. The link between her sex and nurturing is difficult to overlook in a film that, at least where



gender is concerned, misses numerous opportunities that it itself avails to plot a different trajectory for its female characters. Indeed, Margaret Daymond remarks in “Martha’s Quest: The Self and its Spatial Metaphors,” an analysis of Doris Lessing’s Martha Quest (1952), that, whereas “[n]o society has yet altered the fact that women bear its children, . . . what does vary enormously is the response to this fact” (166). In this essay, Daymond examines Lessing’s tracing of “Martha’s struggle to attain an adequate sense of self” (166), an aspect of Mapantsula’s portrayal of its female characters that remains elusive.<sup>106</sup> Pat, who has issues that require engagement of the type that the film affords Duma in the meeting with the Councillors, is nevertheless positioned principally as Panic’s bedfellow; and, after she leaves Panic, as Duma’s.<sup>107</sup> To borrow Magogodi’s formulation above, male power and female powerlessness in Mapantsula are “brokered on the gendered body” (“Sexuality” 190).

The gendered body also functions to mediate the film’s overall political message. Throughout the film Panic is portrayed as projecting a false sense of his true self, mainly through his *pantsula* style: his flashy stolen clothes, his aggression and *tsotsi* argot. His true self is brought starkly into view inside Stander’s interrogation room where he is stripped to his bare flesh, called a boy, beaten and threatened with death. However, linked to his suffering at the hands of Stander’s right-hand man, who beats him with his bare fists, is the idea of the body that goes through ritual initiation and purification for the political cause. In short, Panic is made a man by his physical suffering and the suffering of others – other young men in particular – at the hands of

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<sup>106</sup> Whereas before he disappears Ma Modise’s son, Sam, leaves her with the political message of the day, that is, “*Asinamali*” (We have no money), Ma Modise undergoes no transformation of the nature that Panic goes through. This is despite her personal losses in a struggle whose aim is to restore the dignity of even those who are alienated from the issues of the day.

<sup>107</sup> Even though the film does not actually show Duma and Pat as lovers, two incidents nonetheless suggest that Duma has more than just a client in Pat. The first occurs when Panic goes to Duma’s place after he hears that Sam was last seen in his company. Assuming that Panic is looking for Duma to question him about Pat, Duma’s brother, Lucky, tells him to “forget the girl” (128). The second incident happens when Panic confronts Duma about “playing with [his] girl” (131).

the police; hence his decision to refuse to sign the confession, which ends the film. There is no corresponding idea of the woman's body that goes through transformation or that inhabits *and* transforms, or is transformed/transfigured/disfigured by, diverse settings, other than Ma Modise's, which, needless to say, is not imbued with active (political) agency. In the prison cell, political activists show their strength by going on a hunger strike but still manage to dance to the rhythm of *toyi-toyi* songs. Even though viewers see women entering prison, the film is scrupulously silent on how they act – or how, like Panic, they are acted upon – while incarcerated.

It is now, as it was then, a matter of historical commonplace that the images of women that the film projects, and the manner in which it projects them, belie the social and political realities and experiences of women before, and in, the nineteen eighties. The same can be said of its elisions of some of the realities of male political activism in the nineteen eighties and earlier. However, let me begin by considering the former at some length and thereafter rejoin Xaba's appraisal of struggle masculinities of the nineteen eighties.

As I remark in the previous chapter, discourses of national struggle have always constructed a virtually unvarying place for women, anachronistic to the places inhabited by real women. In these discourses women have figured as icons – the 'mother/daughter/sister of the nation' – and rarely as subjects of various social and political orientations and constructions. Politically, however, black African women in South Africa have not always acceded to the potential of the pedestal of iconicity to obscure the fissures – economic, political, cultural, spatial, social and generational – that have flourished under it. Outside the political framework, in the depressed and affluent spaces where black Africans have lived and continue to live, the 'political' questions, in the broad sense of the word political, have also been those of survival,

death, aspiration (of the nature of commodity fetishism, personal wealth and comfort) and others that have marked both men and women as subjects and objects of various forms of agency and interpellation. The national narrative/allegory which Mapantsula employs, then, seeks – but consistently fails to find – adequation between image/icon and the ‘real’, at least outside in the spaces of critique. This, I argue in the next pages, is the film’s faultline. That seen against its contemporary in Shaka Zulu, Mapantsula is a different film, in that it does not foreclose on the possibility of a non-biological conception of masculinity and femininity, makes its capitulations to silences about, and outmoded conventions of, gender representation deeply ironic.

Speaking in the specific context of African nationalism, Anne McClintock informs in “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Women and Nationalism in South Africa” that, the spatial and agential relation of (black African) women to the African nationalism of the African National Congress (ANC) underwent changes. The first of these changes occurred in 1943 when “the ANC granted women full membership and voting rights” (115). The second came about in 1956 after women marched on the Union Buildings in Pretoria, the seat of the then apartheid regime’s power, in protest against “passes for women” (115). In the thirty-one years prior to 1943, women had been treated as “auxiliary” (115) members of the ANC dominated by men of royal lineage and power. Similarly, the corporeal relation – the meaning of women’s bodies in African nationalist politics and culture – expanded, albeit not in proportion to the still male-dominated discourse and imagery of nation. No longer tied to the singular role of childbearing and rearing, women took up active positions in politics, in the process contesting the foundational myths of African nationalism as a teleological narrative of male custodianship, struggle and triumph.

However, having made the point above, it would be naïve to declare the rituals of spatialisation and embodiment in African nationalist politics and poetics gender-neutral, especially as the issue of space and embodiment relates to subaltern women.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, in *Skin Tight: Apartheid Literary Culture and its Aftermath* (2006), Louise Bethlehem provides a finely-textured appraisal of the uses to which pre- post-apartheid gendered bodies and spaces of the subalterns have been put in the post-apartheid narratives of healing, reconciliation and nation-building. In assessing the use-value of the body and cultural space of Saartjie Baartman (a.k.a. the Hottentot Venus) in post-apartheid South Africa,<sup>109</sup> Bethlehem finds that,

Baartman's 'life and death' achieves meaning in the context of a linear historical narrative governed by the teleology of racism – but no less, by the teleology of its defeat. Her repatriation provides an occasion for the rewriting of the underlying script of racist appropriation and reification, but does so at the cost of literally transforming her into the property of the new South African state which now speaks through her of its triumphant accession to a non-racial democracy. (56)

Furthermore, the acts of reclaiming her body and its burial

near her place of birth along the Gamtoos River in the Cape, on 9 August 2002, the public holiday designated 'Women's Day' in post-apartheid South Africa in commemoration of the 'March of the Women' on the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956 in protest against the pass laws [insert

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<sup>108</sup> For, indeed, the category of women is not rendered homogenous by spatiality and embodiment but, rather, fragmented by them: where women are located, and their senses of selfhood, also inform their relation to the power that accrues to proximity to or distance from the national narrative.

<sup>109</sup> One of the texts that she considers is the speech of the first post-apartheid Minister of Art, Science, Culture and Technology, Dr Ben S. Ngubane, who declared on the occasion of Baartman's remains' return from the Musée de l'Homme in Paris where they had been displayed for scientific study of racial difference, that she had come back to where she belonged.

Saarjtjie Baartman] within a narrative that anachronistically frames her identity in accordance with the historiographic priorities of a post-apartheid nationalism. (56)

Nevertheless, Bethlehem argues throughout that delineating the voices of the “subaltern,” whereby subaltern also functions as a designation for those to whom speech is denied, or from whom it is appropriated, must be an ongoing, if inherently vexed, critical project and/or concern.<sup>110</sup>

If bodies of women in nationalism operate in the traffic between icon (the insertion of the violated body into a teleological national narrative) and abstraction (the ascription of the disarming designation of mother/daughter/sister of the nation), then, to generalise Bethlehem’s questions regarding Khoisan women’s agency, “where else might evidence of [women’s] agency lie? What forms, however contingent and momentary, might it be imagined to take?” (72). I argue that, whereas in the case of the Khoisan, as Bethlehem informs us, one only has the archive from which to track the clues to the questions of subaltern speech, the Khoisan having virtually disappeared as a people, the case of recent black African women’s (political) speech is somewhat different.

As I note above, in Mapantsula the sexualised body of Pat and the wounded body of Ma Modise function to heighten the stakes and political outrage in a text of male contests and thus fit the profile of the use-value of Baartman’s body in the discourse of national sacrifice. The confrontation between Duma and Panic over Pat not only serves to illustrate the sexual place that she is given in the conflict between the two

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<sup>110</sup> She cautions, for instance, that, “[i]n invoking the laughing Khoisan woman [that is, the Khoisan women who laugh at the travellers seeking to confirm sexual stereotypes about them], let me be clear about the price I do not wish to pay: the mystification of laughter, even if conducted [in] the name of a certain feminism” (73).

men but also how in Duma's eyes she enhances his public status as a labour lawyer and trade unionist. When Panic confronts Duma and accuses him of "playing with [his] girl" (131), Duma, who is running from the Special Branch police, is "furious" and his response to him is that he (Panic) has "just put the cops on [him] for [his] private shit!" (132). Thus Pat is wedged between the private lives of the two men. And, when it is politically expedient for Duma, Pat's character functions to enhance his public life as well. The case of Ma Modise speaks for itself: her shooting, which, to be sure, is posited as the shooting of an innocent mother whose young son has just died in the same way, is slotted into the political drama unfolding in the streets as a memento/testimonial to the costs of the struggle.

To return to the point of the challenges that women have mounted against their exclusion from and appropriation by male discourse, I contend that there is a living store of information, including that which McClintock adduces above, from which one can begin to plot a few trajectories pertaining to the places of women both inside<sup>111</sup> and, perhaps much less documented but nonetheless available in oral culture and personal letters, outside,<sup>112</sup> African nationalist politics and poetics.

The nineteen eighties in South Africa saw a significant shift in the priorities of theory, with feminism increasingly taking centre stage in the academy. The

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<sup>111</sup> As McClintock warns, nationalism is not necessarily a closed 'text' of pure male speech. One could extend this thought by saying that women's spatial claims *within* the nationalism of the ANC also involved contesting nationalism's construction of their place and role "as the 'bearers of the nation,' its boundary and symbolic limit, but lack[ing] a nationality of their own" (105).

<sup>112</sup> In Not Either an Experimental Doll (1987), Shula Marks contextualises the correspondence between three women – "Lily Moya", Mabel Palmer and Sibusisiwe Makhanya – in the constraints of colonial and African patriarchies. In a letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> January 1949, "Lily Moya", the pseudonym of a 15 year-old girl from the Eastern Cape, approaches Dr Mabel Palmer, the Organizer of Non-European Studies at Natal University College, to help her further her studies. It turns out that she is fleeing from an arranged marriage. After she gets a place at Adams College through Dr Palmer's efforts, she then flees to her relatives in Johannesburg because of sexual harassment by boys at the College. In Johannesburg, she is declared mentally unstable and spends 25 years in mental institutions, testimony of the struggles of one woman against institutions governed by male norms. Her letters remind us of the price to be paid by women for challenging male power and authority, but are also a testimonial to such a challenge.

publication of such studies of the lives and thoughts of women as Vukani Makhosikazi: South African Women Speak (1985), which documents the lives and struggles of mainly working-class women in South Africa in the periods of political and economic repression and resistance, Shula Marks' Not Either an Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women (1987), which traces an earlier context of colonial patronage, its investments and contradictions through the correspondence between three women, and Women and Writing in South Africa: A Critical Anthology (1989), which engages with writing by women, marked the nineteen eighties as a period of intensive feminist theoretical activity.

In various ways these texts responded to the need to render visible the subject positions that women occupy in and outside the collective image that has dominated their representation both in literature (creative and documentary) and visual culture. In this sense, these texts serve as cautionary tales, as it were, reminders that the images of women that Mapantsula projects do not exhaust the range of possibilities available to women at the time. Margaret Lenta, for instance, examines literary interpretations of the “housewife-employer and domestic servant . . . relationship” (238)<sup>113</sup> which has direct bearing on how one assesses the analytical value of Mapantsula's portrayal of the relationship between Pat and Mrs. Bentley as housewife-employer and domestic servant, but also as “the closest of strangers”.<sup>114</sup>

Let me begin by stating the main point of Lenta's evaluation of the housewife-employer and domestic servant relationship. Lenta notes that,

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<sup>113</sup> In “Intimate Knowledge and Wilful Ignorance: White Employers and Black Employees in South African Fiction” (Women and Writing in South Africa, 238-251).

<sup>114</sup> I am borrowing this phrase from Judith Lütge Coullie's The Closest of Strangers: South African Women's Writing (2004), a re-consideration of lines of convergence and divergence between different women in South Africa.

[T]he fact that the typical situation in domestic work is white ‘madam’ (rather than ‘master’) and black maid offers a clue as to why their relationship is frequently a guilty or painful one. South African white women are, in most cases, engaged in housework and child-care, tasks which they share with or delegate to black servants. These tasks, in the general view of society, are low in status and entitle any individual who performs them to very low wages. The reaction of the white woman in such a situation must frequently be to insist on her own innate superiority and the employee’s inferiority and dependence on her supervision. The possibility of the employee’s becoming a rival either in domestic skills or in a sexual sense is often present, though resisted; *but the very concept of rivalry depends on the existence of a power superior to that of white women or black, and this power belongs to white men.* (238; my emphasis)

Lenta’s point about the relationship between the “white ‘madam’ and . . . black maid” (238) is true of the relationship between Pat and Mrs. Bentley and between Ma Modise and the unnamed ‘madam’ for whom she does washing and about whom she says:

That woman actually told me my work was bad! What does she know about work? Especially her? Hugh! [sic] She wouldn’t even know how to use a broom if one put it in her hands and said ‘sweep’! Lazy bitch! Has the nerve to moan about me! I’ll show her a few tricks. (61)

However, unlike Lenta who contextualises the supervisory role of the ‘madam’ in the psychological make-up of the ‘madam’s’ domestic space, Mapantsula stops at Ma Modise and Pat’s indignation at their ‘madams’. In the process, the status of the invisible



‘masters’, who may have a lot to do with the behaviour of the ‘madams’, is filmed out. Indeed, Lenta further points out,

The white madam is merely the immediate and visible employer of her maid; she is usually economically dependent, as is the maid, on her husband, and in any case, the positions of both depend on their continuing to please the male head of the house. (238-239)

Thus when Mapantsula introduces the text of politics within a gangster film via the agency of the four women (Mrs. Bentley, Pat, Ma Modise and her unnamed employer), it neglects to examine the basis of its racial-economic politics in the subtle politics of gender. Whereas Mrs. Bentley appropriates the masculine authority of her husband in his absence, it is one that comes at a price: it is compensatory, rather than real, power. She sublimates her inferior gender position in her household by asserting the borrowed supervisory power in the few hours of borrowed space before her husband returns in the evenings.

Another issue on which Mapantsula remains silent is that of the women who viewers see entering prison as political prisoners, but never see the inside of their cells thereafter. Indeed, the editors of Vukani Makhosikazi, Jane Barrett, Aneene Dawber, Barbara Klugman, Ingrid Obery, Jennifer Shindler and Joanne Yawitch, note that their study of women’s lives and struggles seeks to address “women’s position” (v) in a changing society. In particular, their concern is with “the experience of the women most abused by the process of apartheid and capitalism” (v) on the one hand, and, on the other, by “male dominance in sexual relationships” (v). To this end, they explore different situations, public and domestic, and narratives in which women assert their presence and constitute alternative frameworks for the struggle. For instance, they use the cases of five women political prisoners to make the point that while “[l]ittle is

known about the conditions of women political prisoners” (259), a silence that Mapantsula reinforces, in reality they face challenges which often exceed those under which male prisoners are incarcerated. In this sense, their absence in the film is as anomalous as the absence of any viable platform from which women speak and act other than the one mediated by its male characters. Given the above, the creators of Mapantsula appear to have opted for the dramatic over the analytic, even though studies such as Vukani Makhosikazi had already revealed the multiple positions from which the struggle was waged.

Coming to the side of its conception of male subjectivity and agency, Mapantsula presents a relatively dynamic cast of men, owing largely to its founding script, namely, The Grabber, a crime-does-not-pay type of story which, in the interview with Jeremy Nathan, Mogotlane says they used “as a trailer to get funds” (20). Indeed, Mapantsula awards to its male characters a disproportionate amount of space – physical and symbolic – but also speech and subjectivity. They also embody many of the dynamic features of the time – Panic’s subcultural facility and the comrades’ political assertiveness – but within certain conceptual and historical limits. Thus, properly-speaking, Mapantsula is about manly pursuits negotiated via the suffering of women. It is not male discourse in the sense in which Shaka Zulu is, but, rather, a text that overlooks its female characters at crucial moments in its conception of historical time. For, strictly-speaking, Mapantsula is a critique of the violent masculinity of Panic who directs his aggression at both men and women on the basis of what he perceives to be their weakness.

In the second chapter I traced the history of Mapantsula to the urban and visual culture of the nineteen fifties. However, in delineating the historical context of Mapantsula, I added another aspect that characterises the film as the product of the

nineteen eighties, a time when criminality and politics contested for space and legitimacy. Whereas, as I note in the second chapter, in the nineteen fifties African nationalist politics were largely peripheral to the criminal gangs,<sup>115</sup> in the nineteen eighties criminals found themselves faced with a very stark choice: either to change their criminal ways or face severe physical sanctions by the UDF male activists or comrades. Needless to say, criminals did not disappear but a deadly, if complicated, contest was set up that would see the lines being drawn between those who were for and those who were against the struggle. Naturally, criminal gangs had much to gain by blending in as comrades (or, as they were called, *com-tstotsis*), which was not the case with those men, most of whom were members of Inkatha, who had vested political and economic interest in the *status quo*, mainly as township Councillors and businessmen (in most cases both). Thus, the story of the politicisation of a gangster resonates with the times in which Mapantsula is set, but, I argue, requires more than a mere gesture of recognition as such.

Earlier I remarked that owing to the time in which Mapantsula was made, the representation of Panic could not occur outside the context of the climactic political events in South Africa in the nineteen eighties and the concomitant displacement of the lone gangster. In this sense, Mapantsula could not but be a film of two worlds, that is, the criminal underworld and the political world (the brief intrusion of the mayor and the Councillors is also significant here). However, I also proposed the view that a strategic separation of the two worlds yields some interesting insights for my analysis of competing masculinities that the film stages but never sufficiently

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<sup>115</sup> In “The Bottom of the Bottle,” Can Themba recalls a visit to his room in Sophiatown by representatives of the ANC who accuse him of having “some young men about [him]” whom he “can make do things, do things that we don’t think are in the nahtional [sic] interest” (112). Earlier they tell him that they “want you all, nice-time boys . . . *Tstotsis*, teachers, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, all!” (112). After they leave, Themba, who is the only one still drinking, others having blacked out on the floor and couch, returns to his bottle and forgets about the politicians’ visit.

engages. In the next few pages, I attempt to unravel how these worlds come into collision. I focus mainly on the masculine terms in which their collision is couched.

At Club Hi-Lite, Panic and other figures of his underworld dance to the music of The Ouens.<sup>116</sup> “Ouens are coming, things must change. Ouens are coming, things must change” (64). And, in the prison cells the male activists *toyi-toyi* to: “Hold on men/ The guns of these boys/ remind me of Mozambique” (96). The ominous ‘threat’ posed by the refrain in “Ouens are coming” (64) refers not just to the band, The Ouens, but more to its implicit identification with the subcultural masculinity of its name and the nightclub space. Township nightclubs have always had the reputation of being places where criminal gangs take their molls to show off their ‘wealth’. The activists’ songs, on the other hand, pose a different kind of threat; their threat is directed at both the political establishment and its collaborators, including *tsotsis*.

Yet, in Mapantsula both sides, namely, The Ouens and the activists, extoll the virtues of aggressive masculinity, even if for different reasons and for different ends. For The Ouens, the song is a signature tune that announces them to their followers by saying that they are men and they are ‘with it’. For the activists, however, the freedom songs momentarily lift them out of their ordinary masculinities and imbue them with the ideal ones of the *Umkhonto weSizwe* (Spear of the Nation, the military wing of the ANC in exile) fighters and ANC leaders.

Another contest that requires attention occurs between the political activists and the instruments of government, namely, the police and the township officials. The stakes in this contest are higher, with each side capable of enlisting considerable political resources to mount its challenge. The political activists have numbers on their side while the police can summon the power of the regime’s ideological and coercive

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<sup>116</sup> Robert Morrell translates the word as “men, ‘lads’” (Changing Men 30).

apparatuses. The stakes are high for another reason as well: the marked difference between the activists, who have no money, and the township officials, who obviously have money to spend on expensive cars and suits, adds to the contest a class and generational component. Also, in hindsight, given Xaba's argument that this difference became decisive in the post-apartheid realignment of social classes and, with this, masculinities, the contest between the two sides of black African masculinity requires careful analysis. Let me begin this analysis by examining the manner in which the film stages the contest between the activists and the police.

The confrontations between the political activists occur both in the township street and in the prison. As I point out above, the male activists are not the only political protagonists in the street confrontation but in the visual structure of the film they occupy a prominent place compared to that of the female activists. In this sense, the film frames the contest as a heterosexual masculine showdown. Nevertheless, the activists and the police possess the language of aggression and instruments of violence (symbolic guns in the case of the male activists) which mark both the township street and the prison in aggressive masculine terms. In the street, the leader of the *toyitoyi* chanting calls upon his fellow comrades to "Pull up your guns, ready to shoot!" (53). Again, in the prison cell one of the songs, which I cited above, establishes the link between political violence and black African male youth political assertion. This link is sealed by the historical connection that the male activists make between their struggle and that of the patriarchs of the black African liberation movement in the slogan with which I opened this section. There is thus a clear masculinist agenda that is enforced by the film against its own evidence of women's participation in the protests.

The all-male white police, on the other hand, represent the militaristic masculinity of a highly regimented apartheid political superstructure. Typically, their fingers are on their triggers and ready to execute their commander's instruction. Thus in many ways the two sides – the activists and the police – reflect each other but, more importantly, they reflect the film's idea of the nineteen eighties' political contest as ostensibly a male affair. The detectives in the interrogation room, led by the white detective Stander, provide another dimension to this idea: men as also imbued with the ability to break each other down through the combination of violence and ideology/persuasion. The 'woman' (the white female magazine pin-up pasted on the locker in the interrogation room) is the symbolic 'reward' after the detectives have accomplished their task.

However, the two masculinities reflect each other insofar as they are also different in the context of the film's critique. White men are portrayed as cowardly, relying on guns and apartheid state machinery to wage an unfair offensive against defenseless youth and old women. The crowning moment of this portrayal is the random shooting which results in the wounding of Ma Modise. Figured in the conduct of its functionaries, especially in the female pin-up on the locker, apartheid is itself figured as a hetero-normative system in which white women function, in absentia, to enhance its masculine and sexist character. The corresponding scenario, in which Pat functions as the object of sexual interest for both Panic and Duma, is given a different gloss by the film. She provides the film with the grounds for its critique of Panic and Mrs. Bentley and its elevation of Duma's masculine profile. Indeed, after Duma advises Pat to return to the Bentleys to demand her outstanding wages, and Mrs. Bentley refuses to pay her, Duma does not share Pat's failure to get her money.

The aspects of the film's treatment of the masculinities of the activists and police that I adumbrate above reveal the strengths and limitations of the film's visual facility. Whereas understandably given its context and project Mapantsula identifies and critiques the aggressive masculinism of those who fall outside its political approval, it offers no such critique of the activists, even though the basis of such critique exists within the field of the film's reference. This brings me to the last part of my discussion of male contests in the film, that is, the brief but potentially rich confrontation between the community, led by Duma, and the mayor and his Councillors. Here Xaba's assessment of struggle and post-struggle masculinities becomes significant.

Duma's confident performance at the meeting contrasts sharply with the timid one of the mayor and the film makes the point of underlining the nature and significance of this contrast. Xaba contextualises the confidence that underscores Duma's performance in the politicisation of working class black African male youth and the psychological aspect that this politicisation took on. While strictly-speaking Duma is not exactly a working class character, he clearly identifies with a working class cause. His t-shirt identifies him with SADWA (the South African Domestic Workers' Association) and his fugitive status – he is sought by the Special Branch police – captures what Xaba describes as the “intoxicating and psychologically satiating” status of being a “liberator” (110). His speech to the mayor and the response that it elicits from the crowd illustrate Xaba's point:

DUMA: . . . many of us are out of work, there is shortage of jobs . . . [*turns*] . . .  
 . . . whereas you Mr Mayor, have a high paying job – have many businesses,  
 houses, cars . . . so maybe for you apartheid is comfortable [*laughter in the crowd*] . . . But it is at our expense and we are sick and tired of carrying you

on our backs. What we are saying is this, you must be accountable to the people or resign. (105)

The collective “we” and “our,” on the one hand, and “you” on the other, not only establish the credentials of what Xaba calls the male class and generational conflict – the comrades’ “impatien[ce] with the elders” (110) – but also enhance Duma’s status as a man in the eyes of his ‘protégé’, the new member of the audience, Pat.

By contrast, the mayor’s speech and obsequious demeanour are portrayed as unmanly or, more to the film’s point, belonging to the apartheid men who teach restraint, namely, that “the approach to the solution has got to be slow and careful . . .” (103).

Owing largely to the lack of nuance in the film’s representation of both the political activists and the township officials, there is no space opened up for the viewers to assess them as social subjects. While this is understandable given the focus of the film on Panic, there are nevertheless grounds to contest the staging of the political conflicts in Mapantsula from the point of view of gender politics. As I have tried to show, one can do this without denying the film’s “sociocritical” status as a “pioneering work [and] one of the first truly South African films made from a black point of view “ (Botha 94).

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

There is no doubt that Mapantsula is a notable departure from Shaka Zulu in its portrayal of masculine identities. Part of the film’s strength lies in its delineation of township space as complex and inhabited differentially by different classes and generations of men. As a critique of subcultural masculinity, the film also sets up an important contest that further renders masculinity multiple and contradictory.



Furthermore, as a political text it probes into the myriad political identifications that define black African masculinity as internally fragmented.

However, the film retains many of the stereotypes which pertain to the place of women in relation to men. Whereas the film provides sufficient grounds to enable it to deconstruct historical gender conventions, it neglects to take its images of women seriously enough to portray them as political agents. The link that it makes between women and sex, child-rearing and lack of political knowledge undermines its notable intervention somewhat. But Mapantsula is in this sense a film of its time and addresses the urgencies of its particular theme, which is male political consciousness against the backdrop of the shift from subcultural masculinity to struggle masculinity. Of course, in doing so it narrows its angle on women's political activism.

The next chapter takes up this discussion of the critique of male violence which Mapantsula presents in the form of contests between men. Yizo Yizo 1 vacates the overtly political setting that is so central in Mapantsula and, instead, situates its drama in the broader political, which is to say everyday, lives of its characters. In doing so, it allows viewers to observe its characters in social situations and thus opens itself up to critique of a different type.

## Chapter Five

### **‘Ghetto Fabulous’: Township Space and the Representation of Post-Apartheid Black African Male Youth in Yizo Yizo 1**

Thin’ e-kasie<sup>117</sup> si-ghetto fabulous. (We in the location are ghetto fabulous).

From the soundtrack of Yizo Yizo

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine Yizo Yizo 1’s depiction of post-apartheid black African township male youth violence and apathy, its portrayal of the adult male members of the black African community who make this violence seem acceptable and, at times, glamorous, and its representation of the female youth who are portrayed as the victims of sexual violence. I also examine the theoretical integrity of the drama series’ implicit proposition that perhaps it was time that middle class black African women take over the masculine roles that men consistently fail to play in the drama series’ social and school milieus. For, whereas Yizo Yizo 1, like Mapantsula, treats of black African male criminal violence, unlike the latter, it shifts the gender paradigm somewhat, at least insofar as it uncouples, on some level, physical manhood and masculine performance.

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<sup>117</sup> This is an abbreviation of the Afrikaans word for location (as the township is also called), that is, lokasie. The phrase, “ghetto fabulous,” comes from an American popular film, Money Talks, and is uttered in that film by the African-American actor, Chris Tucker, in a complaint to a white journalist who has embroiled him in a diamond smuggling investigation and, in the process, interfered with the life he had known until their meeting, where, as he says, he “was living ghetto fabulous.” In its conception and execution, Yizo Yizo 1 bears a strong resemblance to African-American popular films, particularly the hardcore violent but moralistic films about the “hood” (ghetto) that John Singleton popularised in Boys in the Hood.

Another aspect of the drama series that has been contested by its critics is its title's explicit claim to realism or "authenticity" (Haupt 378). Loosely translated, 'Yizo Yizo' is township slang for 'this is it' or this is 'the real thing', and some of its critics have argued that, on the contrary, Yizo Yizo 1 is a copy of an established Hollywood theme and form which it transposes, sometimes literally, onto the South African black African township milieu. Adam Haupt uses the term "commodified" (378) to describe the method of this transposition. Commenting on the "specific types of black masculinity" in Hollywood and post-apartheid crime dramas and films about blacks, he notes that,

The tendency to privilege specific types of black masculinity is not unique to South Africa and parallels Hollywood representations of African American men as well as the worldwide appeal of gangster rap, which has come to signify the pervasiveness of US cultural imperialism. (378)

However, I also argue that Yizo Yizo 1 points to the long history of this type of pervasiveness, which, with the rapid entry of post-apartheid South Africa into the world of global capitalist values, begins to take newer forms. In this sense, it may not entirely be the drama series' doing to codify black masculinity in the way that it does. To recall the back cover comment on Frank Mort's Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain (1996), the "world of goods becomes a critical factor in determining identity [and] consumption [begins] to occupy a privileged place in the fabric of . . . society" (n. pag.). Moreover, "popular and commercial culture [also dramatise] a series of pressing questions about sexual politics and the meaning of masculinity" (n. pag.). At any rate, a 'pure' local culture in a globalised capitalist world does not exist, but only degrees of 'locality'.

My sense is that, firstly, realism (on which questions of authenticity are staked) in representation is a form of intervention, a presentation that is, which is governed by the laws of equivalence rather than correspondence. Secondly, for this reason all acts of representation are, at some level, acts of ‘co(mmo)dification’, that is, of rendering the ‘real’ within the economy of forms. The drama series’ ‘this is it’ is not necessarily universal, neither is it without its disciples. In this sense, if Yizo Yizo 1 appears to co(mmo)dify black African masculinity by seeming to traffic in the violent type *tout court*, which I do not think is entirely the case, it is because the criminal characters that it portrays, who rape, harass and run drugs outside the school, *do* have equivalences in the world that it codifies. In any event, the drama series casts a diverse number of male and female characters so that its assessment requires careful discriminations.

But what of Yizo Yizo 1’s portrayal of its working class male and female characters, in particular the female learners from poor backgrounds? Does it simply *show* how the misfortunes of these characters, especially those who get sexually violated in the course of the drama, are bound up with their lot as poor and female in an aggressively masculinist environment, or does it *woo* viewers to buy into a masculinist ideology with which it is complicit? How is it possible to determine if it is complicit in the images that it presents of its characters, if its project is to show and what it shows has resonances in the ‘real’ situations of its characters? Is it, then, complicit or simply limited in its visual facility, choosing to view its world through the narrow lens of its violent male characters and of a few privileged female ones, in the process reproducing established stereotypes about all its characters? How does one determine the meaning of what is real anyway, even if one uses the word real under erasure? Are there not numerous examples of ideologies smuggled in under the

guise of realism – of the ‘plain style’? I contend that these questions, some of which the critics of the drama series have posed and addressed in various and illuminating ways, bear directly on how one assesses the value of Yizo Yizo 1’s ‘this is it’.

Lastly, if Yizo Yizo 1 is an educational drama, does it not invest a rather disproportionate amount of time pursuing ‘authenticity’ and not much time projecting its ‘lessons’? I argue that, while it may seem to eschew the classical features of an ‘educational drama’, seen in the context of Theodore Adorno’s and the Frankfurt School’s concept of “negative dialectics,”<sup>118</sup> the drama series’ ‘educational’ value lies precisely in its pursuit of the details of township life (whatever the limitations of its visual field)<sup>119</sup> rather than in a preeminent didacticism. The effectiveness of its approach depends in large measure on the critical sophistication of its audience, in that it uses prevailing stereotypes in order to show up a world that *is* predicated on such stereotypes.<sup>120</sup> Whereas its target audience was the black African township youth, most of whom in all likelihood focused on its entertainment value, I am quite reluctant to presume that the creators of the drama series meant it to be taken in that light. Rather, I would argue that they simply presumed too much on the part of their target audience. Yet the issue of its ideological partiality, especially where gender is concerned, cannot be resolved by an appeal to a reconsideration of its audience.

My discussion of the drama series, therefore, is not of the classical media or communication studies type that inquires into whether “the portrayal of media

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<sup>118</sup> Frankfurt School philosopher, Theodore Adorno, uses this term in his Negative Dialectics (1973) to denote a critical strategy that seeks to avoid co-option by the status quo that it is deployed to critique. Yizo Yizo 1 could be said to employ a simple version of this strategy in its resistance to convey a conventional didactic message.

<sup>119</sup> The criticism that the drama series tends to reify township life is relevant in this light. Even so, René Smith, for one, concedes its inventiveness as “a highly textured narrative that is open to multiple interpretations” (261), despite its gender “essentialism” (Yizo Yizo and Essentialism 249).

<sup>120</sup> J.M. Coetzee’s reading of Alex La Guma’s A Walk in the Night (1981) makes this point. Coetzee’s argument is that, while in the novella La Guma appears to portray a ‘Coloured’ world that seems insulated and (stereo)typical, the significance of his story lies outside its pages, that is, in the reader’s inquiry into the conditions that have made the novella’s world possible.

violence . . . may contribute to the culture of violence in South Africa” (Ndlovu and Pitout 9-10). Rather, I proceed from the view that such a culture of violence already exists and that its sources are material, that is, they are of the order of economic and social inequality. It is on these sources that the symbolic systems of representation draw. In this regard, the approaches that different media take, whether utopian or dystopian (or a combination of these), require textual interrogation, rather than moral or psychological analysis that is determined in advance.<sup>121</sup> This chapter, then, assesses the structure and ideology of the drama series’ construction of male and female agency, and the constraints that affect such agency in the making and unmaking of a violent culture.

Following is a consideration of the drama series’ context and strategy.

## **5.2 Situating Yizo Yizo 1: a consideration of its context and strategy**

On 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela came out of prison after twenty-seven years of political incarceration. In the short term, the day of his release was seen as the culmination of the final push that the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) had sustained since the founding of the UDF in 1983. However, looking back over the many years of struggle which led to his imprisonment, Mandela’s release was interpreted by his generation, both those imprisoned with him and prominent members of the ANC returning from political exile, somewhat differently. Outside of these two contexts, but nevertheless directly implicated in them, were those who were anxious about the future. Among them were some, black and white, who had been brought up to fear ‘communist (read

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<sup>121</sup> This must not be confused with the view that media do not shape opinion. Rather, what I am proposing is that media shape opinion about relations that already exist, be they violent, sexist, class prejudicial, racial or any of the attitudes that prevail in unequal social relations. Thus, my concern is not with whether the drama series promotes or discourages violent conduct, which belongs to a field with its own axioms and assumptions, but, rather, with how it explores *the conditions of possibility* of a violent culture.

ANC) rule'. The most vocal of these were leaders of ethnic organisations, such as the Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging (AWB), their sympathisers and most of the Bantustan leaders. Still others were anxious to see how a country so thoroughly divided and with such a violent past would lift itself out of the morass of apartheid and ethnic violence to achieve even a semblance of reconciliation and nationhood. Indeed, various claims to separate nationhood by groups such as the Zulu ethnic Inkatha and the white Afrikaner AWB had begun to circulate even before it was known who would govern, and how, after the official end of white rule.

I use this very brief sketch of the period before the beginning of democratic governance in South Africa as a preface in order to point to two issues that will, in part, preoccupy my discussion of Yizo Yizo 1: firstly, the release of Mandela signalled the beginning of the end of UDF and *Umkhonto weSizwe* militancy and, secondly, it meant the eventual return to civil society and order. Both of these, particularly the first, would prove difficult to achieve; indeed, to this day the notion of the so-called post-apartheid liberal democracy as the betrayal of the revolution remains strong among some former UDF and *Umkhonto weSizwe* militants. The second issue, the return to civil society and order, has been dogged by persistent socio-economic inequality and deep-seated resentment among some of the members of the UDF generation who have seen their erstwhile political foes rising to greater levels of economic comfort as part of the post-apartheid black African élite.

The political prognosis of the nineteen eighties – the heroic return of the ANC combatants, the redistribution of wealth and ANC government support of those who put it in power – proved elusive. After 1994, disillusionment and apathy began to set in, especially among the working class black African township male youth. And the disaffected and impoverished *Umkhonto weSizwe* militants, who could not be

absorbed into the new South African National Defence Force (SANDF), began to utilise their military skills in daring military-style robberies, risking limb, life and their freedom in the process. For the first five years after 1994, the priorities of the new Government of National Unity (GNU) were reconciliation and nation-building, ideals that the incompletely demobilised male youth found rather far-fetched. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), established to investigate and lay to rest gross abuses of human rights during apartheid, and Mandela's consistent choice of Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of Inkatha and UDF adversary, as stand-in President whenever he travelled outside the country, created further consternation in the ranks of the former militants. Post-apartheid, it seemed, had not delivered on the expectations of those who felt that they had put their lives on the line to bring about a new political dispensation.

By and large, the unfolding post-apartheid drama pitted different classes and generations of men against each other. With the shift of emphasis from “struggle masculinity” (105), which “considered women to be fair game” (116), to “post-struggle masculinity” (105), which extolled the values of “gender equality and women's rights” (Xaba 112), most male youth of the struggle period, now young men without viable future prospects, found that their masculinity had become a liability. Interestingly, this situation also produced an acquisitive materialistic culture among working class black African township male youth that blended the rhetoric – at times practices – of the underworld with the emerging culture of capitalist competitiveness. This subculture centred on a music genre known as *Kwaito*<sup>122</sup> and attracted a fairly good number of young streetwise women, initially as dancers and back-up singers and

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<sup>122</sup> The origins of the word remain unclear, but at some stage the term *ama-kwaitos* was used to refer to male gangsters, like the term *ama-pantsula* did at a later stage. As I note in chapter two, Glaser speculates that the etymology of this word could be “two Afrikaans words: *kwaai*, meaning ‘angry’ or ‘fierce,’ and *ou*, meaning ‘guy’ (115).



subsequently as leading *Kwaito* singers in their own right.<sup>123</sup> In the *Kwaito* scene, the values of a new ‘struggle’ to make money, all-night partying, drugs, violence, open display of youth sexuality and other ‘social vices’ glamorised a lifestyle of youth abandon that had become somewhat ‘invisible’ in the politically turbulent nineteen eighties.

Xaba examines another aspect of black African male youth disillusionment after 1990, to which I have alluded above, that is, criminal violence. He observes that,

As economic, political and social outsiders, former ‘comrades’ and ‘exiles’ did not have access to the trappings of general respect and honour. Respect and honour among them rested on their ability to dictate terms and procedures within the areas they considered to be their domains. Those who violated such terms and procedures were often violently reprimanded. The vigorous and virulent enforcement of the group’s codes contributed to the notoriety of some ‘comrades’ and ‘exiles’ for their hair-trigger irritability and the ‘unnecessary’ violence in their communities. (113)

It is in this broad context of post-apartheid (male) youth ‘trouble’ that the government sought to intervene, and Yizo Yizo 1 (1999) became one of its interventionist projects. An educational drama series commissioned by the Education division of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC Education) in collaboration with the national Department of Education’s Culture of Learning and Teaching Services (COLTS) to help inculcate in the black African youth the culture of learning, and in the black African teachers that of teaching, Yizo Yizo 1 became an instant hit among black African township youth. However, its appeal did not lie so much in its

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<sup>123</sup> However, as *Kwaito* grew in popularity and the opportunity to make money and achieve fame (or notoriety) became irresistible to black African young men and women, and some of the older generation of the ‘Bubblegum’ music era of the nineteen eighties, it also attracted some young men and women from relatively affluent backgrounds.

educational value as it did in its entertainment value and its perceived authentic depiction of black African township youth life and culture. As a result of its popularity among the black African youth and its controversial standing among the parent generation, it became one of the most watched television drama series of its time, and also one of the most talked about among members of its target audience.<sup>124</sup> Yizo Yizo 1 also attracted a fair amount of academic attention in the form of research projects and university courses.

However, as I note in chapter two, Yizo Yizo 1 was also typical of the American situational films about troubled inner city schools in rough neighbourhoods, films such as Lean On Me (1989) and The Substitute (1996). Thus in many respects Yizo Yizo 1's appeal also lay in the familiarity of its format. In another respect, its message of hard work and discipline echoed with that of its American counterparts. Both these American films feature what in America are called 'ethnic minorities' – African-Americans and Latinos – and both place considerable emphasis on the inclination of the male members of these groups towards violence (male-on-male and sexual violence towards women), drug abuse, antipathy towards schooling, love of easy money and flashy style. While these types of films attempt to situate the problems that their characters face in their depressed social environments and, by association, their dysfunctional families, they rarely touch on the political economics that govern minority education and life in general. Often they place responsibility on the individual learners to work hard or on their parents, the mothers in particular (for the troubled learners almost always seem to come from female-headed homes), to find jobs and get off welfare.

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<sup>124</sup> René Smith remarks that “[t]he series attracted 13-, 16- and 25-year olds, Nguni and Sotho language speakers primarily, with approximately two million people watching per episode . . .” (“Yizo Yizo: This is it?” 250).

Yizo Yizo 1 also marks another departure in the gangster film genre by projecting the African township as a complex setting of gender and sexual antitheses. Produced in 1999, five years after the official end of apartheid, Yizo Yizo 1 posits a certain conceptual distance from, and crisis in, the political material which animates Mapantsula and, to some degree, Fools and Shaka Zulu. Indeed, as I note above, the drama series owes its production to the anxious times when the political certainties which sustained male youth radicalism of the nineteen eighties had given way to what politicians and educationists considered a dangerous form of post-apartheid complacency among black African male youth in particular. Hence the investment by SABC Education and the national government's Department of Education in a drama series that would be screened during family time.

The tender to produce the drama series was won by Laduma Films, with Desireé Markgraaf as the producer, Teboho Mahlatsi and Angus Gibson as the directors and, with Peter Esterhuysen, Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Harriet Perlman as the creators and writers. After Yizo Yizo 2 and Yizo Yizo 3, both of which appeared after I had proposed this research project, the production company has since become known as The Bomb Shelter and has continued to produce local television drama series about everyday township life, with the most recent, shown in 2007/8, being Zone 14 on SABC 1.

The brief to the prospective winner of the tender had been to create a medium that would appeal to the youth while simultaneously educating them about the values of good (read educated) citizenship, a combination that required both creative licence and strategic didacticism.<sup>125</sup> Precisely because of this often-contradictory requirement, the drama series soon fell foul of what has generally been referred to as

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<sup>125</sup> Clive Barnett tackles this issue in "Yizo Yizo: Citizenship, Commodification and Popular Culture in South Africa," an article which appeared in Media, Culture & Society 26. 2 (2004): 251-271.

the parent section of black African society for its explicit portrayal of violence, sex and drug abuse among black African youth.<sup>126</sup>

To many ‘parents’, the drama series increasingly lost sight of its founding commission to educate and simply became a licentious gangster ‘movie’ disguised as an educational drama. However, to those who defended the drama series, it succeeded in raising important issues for discussion. As far as they were concerned, it did not have to settle these issues and risk losing the interest of its youth target audience who, if it pursued the didactic imperative, would regard it as just another conventional heavy-handed family drama. The summary and the minutes of the meeting of the Home Affairs Portfolio Committee of 28 March 2001, to which the Film and Publications Board (FPB) was invited to provide clarity “on how the law stands in respect to alleged overly-explicit scenes in the television series Yizo Yizo” (1), provide some insights into the extent to which, in South Africa anyway, creativity and creative licence are often bound up with issues of race, gender, sexuality, space, generation, social and political responsibility. The summary read:

The meeting was overshadowed by heckling and accusations that the DP’s (Democratic Party’s) comments were an attempt to gain political mileage. In particular, members felt that Yizo Yizo creates the impression that black people behave like animals. They also felt that the show is contradictory; although it carries a PG (parental guidance) classification its aim is to educate children. Some members said that the bad behaviour Yizo Yizo portrays may encourage mimicking from young people. (1)

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<sup>126</sup> René Smith makes this point in her MA dissertation entitled “This is it? Representations and Receptions of Violence and Gender Relations.” She further argues that in trying to achieve relevance – the ‘this is it’ of its title – Yizo Yizo 1 misses both the point of *what is* by Americanising the South African ghetto and *what ought to be* by alienating the expectations of its commission.

However, the actual discussion presented a wide range of opinions which provide a glimpse into the extent to which youth is a contested category and that it is often the basis on which notions of race, gender, class, community, nation and, more specifically, citizenship are staked. For instance, beyond the formalities of “whether the young people depicted engaging in sexual intercourse are under eighteen or are portrayed as being under eighteen” and that, “if so, it would be an offence under Schedule 6 to broadcast the show” (2), the discussion also raised issues of race portrayal. A member of the Democratic Party, Ms. Smuts, objected to the Film and Publications Board’s presence at the meeting, likening the occasion of its presence to “the old South Africa where politicians ‘called the shots’” (2). To this, a member of the African National Congress (ANC) is reported to have said that,

it was unfortunate that Ms Smuts called the issue irrelevant. She [the ANC member] said it is the right of the Committee to call on the Board. . . . She added that the members here are not only politicians, but also parents. She and her fellow members on ‘this side of the house’ had never had exposure in their communities to the things that Ms Smuts had. (2)

In addition to the above, another “ANC member suggested . . . that Ms Smuts should leave as the discussion centres on African people and African culture” (2). Yet, despite a suggestion that “the rights of a few people who favour the show should not override the majority of people who do not” and that “people [should not] be made to feel uncomfortable in their own homes” (3), the issue of the drama series’ artistic provenance, of its right to disengage from social responsibility or, at least, to rejoin the social discussion from another, aesthetic, path, was also reinforced, most notably by the then Education Minister, Professor Kader Asmal. Paradoxically, it is in having made the choice to underplay the conventional didactic imperative in favour of

realism – as it were, of letting the images speak for themselves – that Yizo Yizo 1 is an interesting medium, not only for the purposes for which it was commissioned but, also more importantly, for my present purpose, which is to examine its conception of male youth sexuality and gender ideology.

Yizo Yizo 1 also featured prominently at film festivals and in 1999 won five Avanti Awards for Best Director, Best Drama Series, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor and Best Supporting Actress; it was selected for INPUT in 1999, won the Japan Prize in 2000 and received coverage on CNN, BBC, CBC, SKY and ARTE, among other international media. And one of its directors, Teboho Mahlatsi, received the Tribute Entertainment Achiever of the Year Award from President Thabo Mbeki and was honoured by the ANC Youth League. The popularity of Yizo Yizo 1 also saw Mahlatsi giving talks at schools and being invited by some academic institutions to address undergraduate students whose course material included the drama series. In addition, Mahlatsi also appeared on current affairs television programmes and in newspapers to contextualise the ‘controversial’ drama series, as it had come to be referred to by the media.

Yizo Yizo 1 presents a thesis about the role of the social environment – the black African township/location – in the formation of black African male and female youth identities. In presenting this thesis, Yizo Yizo 1, like Mapantsula, although more overtly and persistently, also portrays the environment as itself the product of various forms of male and female gender and sexual identifications and performances.

If Yizo Yizo 1 is a notable departure from the central preoccupation of Mapantsula with the political basis of the gangster genre, it certainly shares strong affinities with the treatment of the ‘politics’ of survival by some of the black African writers of the

nineteen fifties. In the obituary of Can Themba, for instance, Lewis Nkosi observes that,

[F]or Can Themba, the African township represented the strength and the will to survive by ordinary masses of the African people. In its own quiet way the township represented a dogged defiance against official persecution, for in the township the moments of splendour were very splendid indeed. . . . It is true that Can Themba's romanticism drove him in the end to admire more and more the ingenious methods of that survival - the illicit traffic, the lawlessness, the everyday street drama in which violence was enacted as a supreme test that one was willing to gamble one's life for one moment of truth. . . . In this respect he echoed Ernest Hemingway's romanticism of violence. (viii)

It would seem that whereas Yizo Yizo 1 shifts the terms of its image repertoire from official institutionalised mistreatment (in Can Themba's works) to sexual violence, to some degree it replicates the splendid romanticism<sup>127</sup> that informed Themba's depiction of the African township of the 'fifties.

Could Yizo Yizo 1, then, be a nostalgic aesthetic reversion to the conceptual framework of the stories which Themba and the black African writers of the nineteen fifties wrote, in which the African township – in Themba's case, Sophiatown – was conceptualised in fabulous terms?<sup>128</sup> I think not entirely, for in Yizo Yizo 1 the primary preoccupation is not with mere documenting but with critique as well. Yizo Yizo 1 proceeds from the implicit premise that the criminal subculture of the nineteen

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<sup>127</sup> The drama series does this by giving a prominent place to *Kwaito* music which, like the song "Ghetto Fabulous," romanticises township life – both its colourful and violent aspects.

<sup>128</sup> It was Lewis Nkosi who coined the phrase "the fabulous decade" in reference to the 1950s in South Africa, in his autobiographical Home and Exile (1965).

fifties never really disappeared but, rather, went underground with the gathering momentum of mass/popularist political challenges from the nineteen sixties, through the nineteen seventies to the nineteen eighties.<sup>129</sup> From this premise, the drama series explores ways in which such an entrenched subculture, which has become increasingly sophisticated, may be contested. Here lies the drama series' apparent 'fascination' with its criminal characters, which, as I argue in the introduction above, is a critical strategy.

At least two aesthetic forces are in operation in Yizo Yizo 1. One is the obvious moral one of satisfying the SABC Education and Department of Education's brief to create an effective medium with which to re-orientate the African youth, the male youth in particular, away from social vice and in the direction of responsible adulthood. The other, it seems to me, is the implicit advantage that the creators of the series take of the unspoken disillusionment on the part of its sponsors with the efficacy, post apartheid, of the moral *aloofness* of the early films made for black Africans,<sup>130</sup> but not with their interests in mind, that is, the so-called *blaxploitation* films.

If one considers that the SABC was also involved in bringing Yizo Yizo 1 out, surely they could have pulled one or, as they have since done so, all of the South African moral classics out of the archives and re-circulated them for the purpose for which the tender was established. After all, one of these classics, U-Deliwe (1975), tells an explicitly moral story of an orphaned young girl, Deliwe, from KwaZulu, who

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<sup>129</sup> The chapter in Glaser's Bo-Tsotsi, entitled "June 16, 1976, spoiled our fun," in which he discusses the tenuous relation of criminality to politics, is important in this connection. I want to return to these questions and to Glaser's thesis, for they coincide with the ascendance of a certain gritty realism in recent films in South Africa which, as I intend to argue, appears to suffuse the terms of Yizo Yizo 1's staging of its particular intervention.

<sup>130</sup> See Keyan Tomaselli's The Cinema of Apartheid (1987) and Peter Davis's In Darkest Hollywood (1996).



is adopted by the family of a priest to whom she is related. In Johannesburg she is seduced by the immoral glamour of the big city, gets mixed up in the wrong company as a result and survives near death. In short, U-Deliwe is a tale of moral redress aimed at black youth.

Nevertheless, U-Deliwe does not address itself to the primary target of the tender, namely, the deteriorating culture of learning and teaching in black schools post-apartheid. As a moralising text it also lacks the relevance, as it were, the in-touch-ness with the aesthetic role that Yizo Yizo 1 appears to fulfill, that is, of proceeding from the ground up and/or of establishing the ground rules for moral intervention. Moreover, and in the final analysis, such non-recognition – call it incomprehension – of the underlying causes of male youth anti-social attitudes and conduct runs the risk of perpetuating the conventional aesthetic wisdom of the earlier films, that is, the aesthetics of critical avoidance well established by the inert films of which U-Deliwe is an example. After all, the films of which U-Deliwe was part addressed a conservative parent audience that bought into films that did not offer a social analysis of black African township youth subculture that Yizo Yizo 1 attempts to provide.

Yizo Yizo 1's grounding in the African township, and its implicit insistence that this space must be known with its idiosyncrasies and specific idioms, serves to underscore the point of the drama series' in-touch-ness. In Yizo Yizo 1, the camera never leaves the township. The title itself, that is, 'Yizo Yizo', is a double emphasis on the locative 'this is it'. Yizo Yizo 1 seems to say that because post-apartheid apathy has led to a situation of moral decay in the black South African townships, any attempt to interrupt and/or overthrow this state of affairs must proceed from an acute recognition of how it has become entrenched and naturalised. In other words, the drama series attempts to offer a glimpse of the development of moral decay in the

history of the criminalisation of black African youth and tries to show how this constitutes a deeper social substructure that a simple moral and/or didactic story cannot possibly unravel.

Yet, having said this, to some of its critics what Yizo Yizo 1 calls ‘it’ is a fabrication which obscures as much as it reveals. For instance, in “Yizo Yizo: This is it? Representations and Receptions of Violence and Gender Relations,” René Smith argues that Yizo Yizo 1 sidesteps not only the gender questions but also the political ones, preferring an explanation that, in spite of the drama series’ promise to show it like it is, ultimately locates the problems of male youth violence in the dark underworld. Put differently, in asking its viewers to climb the fabulous scaffold<sup>131</sup> of its ghetto realism, so to speak, by embedding its image repertoire in a form that is ultimately conservative, Yizo Yizo 1 simply substitutes one kind of conservatism (realism’s failure to go beyond what ‘is’) for another (the tyranny of moralist critique). Smith makes an important point here, which essentially is that the drama series elides the fact of its own constitutive role in the production of that which it claims to be the real thing. To this end, she contends, “the contradictions of representations of violence in the series lie at the precise moment of representation where violence is commodified in the process of representing the ‘real’” (“Yizo Yizo: This is it?” 38).

In the following section, I develop my view that, to a significant degree, Yizo Yizo 1 does carry out the promise of its title to hold a ‘mirror’ up to its chosen ‘reality’, however contestable the images in this mirror, and indeed the ‘mirror’ device, may be. However, I also argue that in venturing solutions to what it constitutes as the root

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<sup>131</sup> As in the celebratory “*Thin’ e-kasi si-ghetto fabulous*” (We, in the township, are ghetto fabulous) of its soundtrack.

causes of black African male violence, including sexual violence, within and outside the school context, the drama series makes ideological choices, rather than those that one would associate with the documentary style (which, needless to say, is fraught with ideological assumptions of its own).

### **5.3 Imaging the black African youth: spatiality, gender embodiment and male youth (sexual) violence in Yizo Yizo 1**

In Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things (1988) Dick Hebdige has the following to say about youth as a category:

More precisely, the category “youth” gets mobilised in official documentary discourse, in concerned or outraged editorials and features, or in the supposedly disinterested tracts emanating from the social sciences at those times when young people make their presence felt by going “out of bounds”, by resisting through rituals, dressing strangely, striking bizarre attitudes, breaking rules, breaking bottles, windows, heads, issuing rhetorical challenges to the law. (17-18)

About the position of female youth in the category, he notes in regard to Britain that,

Girls have . . . been relegated to a position of secondary interest, within both sociological accounts of subculture and photographic studies of urban youth. *The masculinist bias is still there in the subcultures themselves.* Subject to stricter parental controls than the boys, pinioned between the twin stigmas of being labeled “frigid” or a “slag”, girls in subculture, especially [British] working-class subculture, have traditionally been either silenced or made over in the image of the boys as replicas. . . . (27; my emphasis)

In Bo-Tsotsi, Clive Glaser argues similarly about the position of girls within black African subculture in regard to the South African context. And as I note in the previous chapter, Xaba also makes the point that women have been largely excluded in accounts of subculture. This exclusion, however, has no essential basis in the real lives of girls and/or women and my discussion of the drama series takes this into account. And, as Xaba further points out, the assigning of passive and active subjectivities to women and males respectively is an anomaly within sociological research and, I would add, most male-authored creative discourse.

There is no doubt that the vexed category of youth shaped many of the choices that the creators of Yizo Yizo 1 made in determining the areas of emphasis, both in terms of form and message. More than any other drama series ever shown on South African television, and despite the nature and sources of its criticism, Yizo Yizo 1 was to become arguably the most widely discussed tele-visual event dealing with the subject of youth and youth subculture in black African townships. At a time when mainly black African youth were assailed from different sides, both as rebels and commodities of various commercial interests – at best, the line was blurred – Yizo Yizo 1 keyed into a predominantly masculine black township youth subculture which already had its *Kwaito* music, dress codes and a youth station, Y-FM, with a curious pay-off line, *Yona-ke-Yona* (this is it/it's the real thing).<sup>132</sup>

Whereas the commercialisation of the rebellious youth subculture is constitutive of what may be called the character of youth across histories and places, in South Africa in 1999 when Yizo Yizo 1 appeared there was significant vested political interest in the kinds of social shifts that political transition would bring about. With emphasis on nation-building and little attention paid to the youth by translating the youth political

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<sup>132</sup> It is a pay-off line that curiously echoes a *Coca-Cola* tag line.

activism of the nineteen eighties into new forms of social activism, post-apartheid, it seemed, had not followed on from the expectations created by youth *political* leadership of the decades prior to 1994. There was, for instance, the ANC youth generation of 1949, the image of the young Philip Kgosana leading the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) anti-pass march on Sharpeville in 1960, the Soweto youth of 1976 and the United Democratic Front (UDF) youth of the nineteen eighties, all of whom represented the promise of a politically-engaged post-apartheid youth leadership.

Yet on this point of a seemingly intractable historical teleology, Yizo Yizo 1's most poignant intervention was its anachronistic historical imperative, that is, its implicit reminder that urban black African youth have always been constructs of multiple vested interests, such as the commodity market and its corollary, commodity fetishism, rather than of a single, political, one. In Yizo Yizo 1, the gangsters, Chester, Papa Action and, to a lesser degree, Zakes, represent the attitude among mostly working class young black African men after the end of apartheid: the clamour to be 'bad' and earn recognition/notoriety for it, which translated into 'bad' language (*Kwaito* lyrics), 'bad' dress codes (*pantsula* style), 'bad' attitude (anti-authority) and 'bad' behaviour (such as excessive drinking, drug use, hijacking, sexual harassment, abduction and gang rape – also called jackrolling – and street fighting). However, much of this was part of an older township youth male subculture some of which was now being re-enacted above ground, as it were, on television or in the media in general.<sup>133</sup> In fact, Bra Gibb, for whom Chester and Papa Action sell drugs to the learners at Supatsela, represents an important link between the new gangster trends and the old, established, forms on which the new ones draw.

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<sup>133</sup> For instance, in the early two thousands, the late Khabzela (Fana Khaba) of Y-FM ran a weekend phone-in programme in which prisoners called in and the station's music was predominantly *Kwaito*, with its strong anti-social lyrics (or lyrics that glamorised township street subculture and male youth sexuality).

The idea of male youth, in particular, as troublesome and the call by the Department of Education to create a medium for the youth that would accentuate the positive images with which young people would identify, is one that is founded on a particular idea of community and citizenship. If, as Hebdige points out above, youth is a category that is often invoked for the purposes of administration and control of the *polis*, especially when young people make their presence felt by going out of bounds, I argue that outside the context of administration the youth category has another presence and meaning. As I point out above, youth is also a construct of other, more insidious and ‘egalitarian,’ systems of interpellation: consumer capitalism and commodity fetishism. In the context of consumer capitalism and commodity fetishism, going out of bounds is a value that can be exploited through a dexterous combination of maleness and badness as prized commodities, often reproducing images of women as male accessories. There is a part in the drama series where, referring to schoolgirls standing in a queue, Papa Action tells Chester that, “It’s time to claim your crown.”

In “Yizo Yizo: Citizenship, Commodification and Popular Culture in South Africa,” Clive Barnett points out that,

Yizo Yizo’s success depends in no small part on its conscious use of aesthetic features of an increasingly internationalized and commercialized popular culture in South Africa. While the success of the series demonstrates that citizenship and consumerism are not necessarily diametrically opposed principles, Yizo Yizo also illustrates the uneven way in which institutional restructuring of post-apartheid mass media is contributing to the commodification of a ‘black-youth market’. (266)

Indeed, the drama series traces the contours of the emergent youth subculture – its music, different forms of violence, acquisitiveness and defiance of authority – by adapting its form, but not necessarily its message, to it. It is in the spaces within these contours that issues of masculinities and femininities can be engaged via the interactions between its characters that the camera avails.

For a systematic analysis, I begin by examining the drama series' understanding of black African township male youth identities in the post-apartheid moment and the meanings/weight that it attaches to black African township space and gender embodiment in registering its understanding. Thereafter, I look at how the images of black African male youth contrast with those of their black African female youth counterparts via the same consideration of the intersection of space, embodiment and feminine subjectivities. In the course of this discussion, I try to detect the shift in the drama series' gender paradigm, point out where it occurs and, on the basis of this, say how one can begin to engage with the directions that such interventionist texts as Yizo Yizo 1 chart for post-apartheid black African youth citizenship.

#### **5.4 Space and gender in Yizo Yizo 1**

The first indication of the way in which space is marked in the world of the drama series is in the construction of the opening camera sequence. It is the morning of the first day of the school term and within the opening frame viewers observe two male figures: the principal of the school and the school's security guard. On the two men the governance and security of the school depend: a second, close-up, shot of the principal's face reveals a stern demeanour and the guard carries a stick. When they begin to speak, the subject of their dialogue is the breach of the school's security; someone has entered the school unnoticed and painted graffiti on the school's walls.

The camera angle then changes to show them towering above another frame, this time provided by another piece of graffiti, which takes up the length of what appears to be two classrooms. It reads: “School is like serving a long term in prison,” thus curiously inscribing the school within the terms of a coercive institution.

It is as well that the principal and the guard are shown towering above the writing on the wall, for, as it turns out soon after the three quick camera movements, its authors, the pupils Javas, Bobo and Sticks, occupy a position further down the line of an ostensible masculine hierarchy that Yizo Yizo 1 inscribes. At any rate, all the while that viewers are invited to follow the two men, the abiding detective questions that seem to linger on the principal’s lips as he surveys his domain are, “When did this happen? How did they get in?” Needless to say, these questions once again link the figures of the principal and the guard, the second piece of graffiti and the school building’s high prison-like windows in one long chain of signification that is presided over by men. Thus, from the outset, to enter Yizo Yizo 1’s frame is to enter this masculine semiotic space simultaneously.

The second camera movement reveals, in slow motion, the sleeping bodies of three boys – Bobo, Javas and Sticks – on the same morning of the first school term. It is significant to note the camera’s slow tracking of the unbroken link that their sleeping bodies have formed and that they have spent the night sleeping in Javas’ outhouse that curiously looks like an open space/outside. Indeed, even the empty bottle of beer that is wedged between Bobo’s knees and Javas’ hip links them to the male camaraderie that underscores their sleeping together in a rugged-looking setting. I could stretch this point to suggest that the beer bottle also seems to stick out like an erect phallus, but suffice it to say that it enhances the spatial-sexual dyad of which, in my view, its position between the two boys is pressed into service. Nevertheless, the sexual link is



difficult to resist, especially when Sticks tries to wake Bobo up only to learn that he is in the middle of a wet dream, in which he “was busy with the Boom Shaka girl.”<sup>134</sup> Needless to say, this serves further to reinforce the masculine and phallic undertones that suffuse the camera’s masculine metaphors.

As I note above, there is an obvious sense of ruggedness about the boys sleeping in a room that looks like a campsite, which is reinforced, firstly, by Bobo’s shoe that has come off his one foot; secondly, by Javas’ shoe that rests on Bobo’s face; thirdly, by Sticks’ soiled face; and, lastly, by the worn-out sofa on which they sleep. All this transforms what is a domestic setting into a boy’s camp that echoes with other kinds of camps, the military camp for example.

The third camera movement shows Thiza at home in the kitchen preparing to go to school. What is interesting to note here is that he is having his breakfast while standing up; in fact, he only takes a few bites at a piece of bread and a few sips from the mug, picks up his schoolbag and asks for money for a school book from his grandmother, all in one take. This may not seem such an important observation; after all, he is rushing through his breakfast in order not to be late for school. However, if one considers the unhurried time that he spends in his brother Zakes’ room, after leaving his grandmother going through her handkerchief to gather the coins for the twenty rand that he has asked for, the rush seems to be about his haste to get out of the kitchen and into another, male, space. This simultaneously terminates the grandmother-grandson pairing that the kitchen setting avails, whereby Thiza’s identity may be read along the (grand)mother’s, rather than the older brother’s, trajectory.

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<sup>134</sup> Boom Shaka is a now defunct 1990s *Kwaito* group which was led by two scantily dressed young female vocalists whose stage performances were sexually suggestive. “Boom Shaka” eventually entered the township lexicon, basically to mean a female sex object.

There is no doubt that, on a simple level, Thiza's departure from the kitchen is linked to his concern about burdening his pensioner grandmother with his financial need. However, when his brother, who is unemployed and steals for a living, gives Thiza a few notes from a wad of notes, one gets the impression that it is men who are resourceful among the working class in this community. Indeed, the last image that viewers have of the grandmother before Thiza leaves the kitchen is of a powerless senile woman left complaining about having to give "Money! Money at all times."

The fourth camera movement takes viewers into the kitchen of the Shai household, Nomsa's home, where the family is having breakfast. The primary message here is that this is a classic middle-class nuclear family; so, typically, the gender roles are set. Nomsa's mother, a nurse, is busy nurturing and her husband, a police officer, is at the breakfast table eating and reading a book simultaneously. He is preparing to take an examination for a course that would see him ascend the career ladder. Thus, despite the fact that both parents work outside the home, their sexual inscription inside the home is nevertheless conventionally middle class: the caring (working) mother who has her feet firmly on the kitchen floor, and the go-getter husband, who, as viewers learn, would soon be away for a while on a work-related trip. Nomsa's father is also aloof from all the 'woman talk' and activity in the kitchen; rather, he is drawn toward the book that he is reading. In a sense, in the household he maintains the perfect balance of body and mind, eating and reading.

The camera then moves to the school and shows pupils standing in a single queue that leads to the registration desk manned by Mr. Maleka. At the head of the queue is Bobo, who has apparently lost a school book, loaned one from Sticks for ten rand and is trying to pass it off as the one originally given to him by the school so that he can be registered. Here again Bobo frames the scene as focaliser. Within this frame, a

new teacher, Zoë Cele, arrives, and the camera zooms in on her beaming face as she shakes hands with Edwin Thapelo. However, as she walks away, the camera assumes the viewing angle of Edwin Thapelo and very clearly imbues the frame with his desiring gaze.

All these camera movements, and the angles that they assume, establish the triadic structure of *Yizo Yizo 1*'s gender viewing relations; that is, the space-body-subject/object relations that subtend its angle on its world, as it were. The drama series takes this viewing structure to the schoolyard, into the classrooms, the boy's toilets where drug dealers establish a base, outside the school into the bar, the chicken run where one of the rapes takes place and into the taxi where, at the end-of-term school party after order at the school has completely broken down, Sonnyboy, a taxi driver and Hazel's boyfriend, rapes her.

The school and its vicinity make up most of the drama series' spatial grid, and most of the events unfold there. It is also within, or in relation to, these spaces that secondary ones emerge; thus outside the classrooms in the schoolyard the boys and girls have their own separate domains. Outside the school's perimeter fence Chester, Papa Action and their acolytes arrive in a red BMW almost daily, either to park there and play *Kwaito* music or to enter the school premises and disrupt the school's routine and order. Among their activities within the school premises are drug dealing and harassing schoolgirls.

The separate spaces are charged with gender and sexual discourses and practices that are typical of the subjectivities of those who inhabit them. The boys engage in bullying and talk about topics ranging from their material conditions to their aspirations. Viewers see Bobo being forced into a filthy toilet bowl by Papa Action, which, from his words when he rejoins his friends, Sticks and Javas, seems to be a

frequent occurrence. It also turns out that Sticks had pilfered from someone else the book Bobo borrows earlier to facilitate his registration. However, he calls his pilfering by the ‘political’ metaphor of “repossess[ing],” which became part of township lingo after the government announced its Growth and Redistribution Programme. To the poor, the government’s programme was for the élite and so engendered a ‘properly’ working class version. At any rate, the ‘boys’ talk’ also involves the future; Thiza, a bright learner, arrives with a bursary brochure and tells the three boys of his intention to further his studies after he finishes school. To this, Sticks counters with the words, “why must we beg to further our education? That’s why I’d rather steal [for a living].” This, needless to say, establishes one of the drama series’ terms of engagement with the discourse of working class black African township male youth disillusionment.

At the other end of the boys’ space, viewers see the girls cleaning their toilets and engaging in ‘girl talk’. However, like the boys, they are not altogether alike in their views about their future: Mantwa, who, like Sticks among the boys, is portrayed as a typical streetwise girl, jokingly remarks that cleaning the toilet could be “good practice for marriage,” much to the other girls’ disquiet. Nomsa, who is like Thiza on the side of the boys, has spent her school break helping at the hospital where her mother works because, as she says to the other girls, it is good “practice for her to become a doctor.”

Middle-class values and aspirations clash with and separate from working class ones in the micro-cosmos where, to use Tomaselli’s remark in “Popular Communication in South Africa: ‘Mapantsula’ and its Context of Struggle,”

[C]lass, social, and language differences do not easily find separate spaces where wealthy families are able to isolate themselves from the poor, the

criminals or the gangs . . . as occurs in normal free-market-driven economic spaces. (47)

The drama series pitches this scenario, where the ideals of Thiza's boyhood and Nomsa's girlhood confront the 'practical' ones of Sticks and Mantwa respectively. The ideal in Yizo Yizo 1, however, is not a simple choice between good and bad: Ken and Louisa, the teachers, are not exactly the examples that the aspirant learners can follow. Similarly, Thiza's brother, Zakes, is not the 'bad' thug of the type that Chester and Papa Action are. He steals to provide for himself and his family; he also supports Thiza's schooling and has promised to finance Thiza's Law studies after he finishes school. His advice to Thiza in the morning of the first term, after Thiza tells him that he no longer plans to study Law but to become "a writer," is that he "must think of the family and their grandmother" before making such a decision about his future.

What viewers have, then, are masculinities and femininities that are not altogether fixed or predetermined, owing largely to the non-homogenous space in which they are performed. Indeed, in the previous section I proffered the view that Yizo Yizo 1 presents a thesis about the role of the social environment – the black African township/location – in the formation of black African male and female youth identities, but that in presenting this thesis it also portrays the environment as itself the product of various forms of male and female gender and sexual identifications and performances. In the drama series the two gender forces exist side-by-side with the first, namely, the social environment, bearing quite heavily on the boys' development of their psychical and corporeal schemas. For instance, Thulas, a twenty-three year old boy too old for Standard Seven (Grade Nine), comes from a strife-torn area and the legacy and memory of the political violence of the nineteen eighties have

inscribed themselves quite deeply in his psyche. His family died in the violence and he carries a notebook in which he expresses his deep sadness and inner strife by drawing pictures depicting death and police harassment. Chester and Papa Action have devised their own means of making money by running drugs for a local dealer, Bra Gibb, and hijacking cars on the side, which they sell to local buyers like Zakes, who, in turn, turns them into cash with which he sustains himself and his family.

The girls, on the other side, have limited choices and space in which to make them, except for a few, like Nomsa, who come from relatively stable backgrounds. Their chance to form a healthy spatial and corporeal sense of themselves is largely curtailed by the constant presence of thugs and schoolboys whose masculinity reflects the prevailing attitudes towards women as objects of sexual banter and harassment. For instance, on the first day of school Javas, on seeing Nomsa in a short skirt, comments, “If I could have those thighs.” The interactions between the girls and the boys are either marked by the threat or reality of sexual violence and/or unwanted sexual attention. And, in what is supposed to be a ‘girls’ space’, the netball court where an inter-school game is underway, Chester invades the field in his BMW and proceeds to grab Hazel, instructing her to “[g]et into the car and come and serve [him].” Girls from poor backgrounds like Mantwa and Hazel depend on men for money: Hazel, who gets involved with Sonnyboy, says to Thiza, who has a love interest for her, “[h]e cares for me, he’s good-looking and he gives me money.” As it turns out at the netball game incident, he is also her knight in shining armour: it is Sonnyboy who “save[s]” her from Chester, as Mantwa informs Thiza when he arrives “too late” to save her. The female teachers are no less vulnerable to the link that the men around them make between femininity and sexual object status; when Louisa suggests to Ken, who arrives on the first day of term in a BMW, that he might give her a ride in

his new car, his response is, “only if you also give me a ride.” Papa Action sends her a paper kite in which he has written “I want to have you for breakfast, lunch and supper.”

The women like Zoë, Grace and Nomsa, who seek to inscribe their own selves – their bodies and subjectivities – by forming a different spatial relation to their immediate environment, have to contend with the overarching masculinist framework in which the entire township space exists. Zoë, for instance, who tries to introduce new methods of teaching literature to her learners, not only has to face questions about her sexual life from the boys in her class but also threats from the Principal, Mr. Mthembu, who insists that she remove her dreadlocks if she wants her temporary teaching position to be made permanent. The boys who, as Javas puts it during the nominations, think “Girls are not good for the SRC,” undermine Nomsa’s position in the Student Representative Council (SRC). Grace, who takes over as the third Principal, has her car mobbed by the thugs in an act of retaliation for the changes that she makes to the school’s codes of discipline, which include mobilising to get Chester and his entourage out of the school premises and the immediate space around it.

The rapes of Dudu and Hazel, then, occur in this context of male preeminence and Clive Glaser’s Bo-Tsotsi is a salutary text in this connection. Glaser’s point that in the spatial grid of subculture women figure as either trophies or objects of sexual attention and violence echoes many of the characteristic features of the drama series. In Yizo Yizo 1 there is very little space in which the schoolgirls and women can “make their presence felt” (Hebdige 18), as the boys and men do, without being slotted into a sexual category, either as victims of uninvited sexual attention and rape or as objects of a desiring male gaze.

### 5.5 Is this it? Evaluating the ‘real’ in ‘the real thing’

As I note earlier, Smith argues that the discrepancy between showing and challenging gender violence is what undermines the drama series’ educational value and, moreover, its value as a critical intervention. She points out that, even though “Yizo Yizo is indeed a text of immense dexterity” (“Yizo Yizo and Essentialism” 260),

[I]t falls short of its (potential) counterhegemonic [sic] narrative in so far as it refrains from exposing the myth of the “conditions” of township high schools. In so doing, the viewer is left with the dominant ideological positioning of the forces of evil as responsible for a state of disequilibrium. (ibid. 261)

She further notes that, while the directors of the drama series’ “attempts to address rape within the context of intimate relations (e.g. Hazel and her boyfriend) . . . must be commended” (ibid. 259), Yizo Yizo 1 nevertheless perpetuates “various myths and representations of women” (ibid. 255), in particular, of working class women. By placing undue emphasis on men and delinquent male youth as the place from which to begin a conversation about the state of teaching and learning in black African schools, Smith argues, the drama series simplifies its ‘real’. More insidiously, however, it smuggles a class and patriarchal ideology into the ‘real’ on the back of its depressed working class women.

Smith’s is a compelling, because nuanced, critique, which utilises the research developed by bell hooks, Wahneema Lubiano and Lucinda Peach, among others, on representations of blackness and maleness in America, and the essentialisms that inevitably creep into single-issue-based conceptions of identity. This research rightly eschews the “regressive and ultimately useless criticism from reactionary critics and commentators concerned with ‘negative images’” (Lubiano 174) and, instead, enters



the reified 'field' of 'blackness' from the perspective of its omissions. One of these omissions, Lubiano notes, relates to "the ways in which culture constitutes contested ground – contested by different groups even within racialized communities under different circumstances" (180). Here "[t]he complex problems of realism, representation, and essentialism" (180) become apparent. For Smith's point is not so much that Yizo Yizo 1 does not have a right to the claim of realism, which it executes dexterously, as her objection to the contentious nature of its realism's "legitimacy" ("Yizo Yizo and Essentialism" 261), given its realism's gender politics. I would add to Smith's view about the absence of a viable engagement with working class women what hooks calls the lack of "vision of how black males might create new and different self-concepts" (We Real Cool x).

Let me probe further the drama series' construction of black African masculinities and femininities, beginning with its images of working class male and female youth. Later I tackle its proposed solution to the problems that it portrays.

Writing of the representations of American-American men, hooks remarks that,

Read any article or book on black masculinity and it will convey the message that black men are violent. The authors may or may not agree that black male violence is justified, or a response to being victimized by racism but they do agree that black men as a group are out of control, wild, uncivilized, natural-born predators. (We Real Cool 47).

Needless to say, as Hebdige, Glaser and Xaba point out, not much has been written about women in subcultures or in cultures in which, as part of what is generally called the underclass, they stake their claim as active subjects. In the absence of a cohesive discourse about working class values, politics and self-concepts, owing largely to the

bias of scholarly and creative discourse toward middle class values, oftentimes both working class males and females feature in research either as agents of violence (male bodies) or objects thereof (female bodies). For a systematic discussion, I examine the portrayal of working class men, young and old, and then the representation of working class women, against the background of the drama series' structured evasions.

In the second section I contextualised what the drama series constitutes as post-apartheid black African township male youth delinquency in the shift from the pre-1994 youth political activism to the post-apartheid consumer culture and commodity fetishism among predominantly working class black African youth. I also remarked that for many of the young men and women from poor backgrounds the *Kwaito* scene provided both an alternative space to the obscurity of township existence and a promise of fame/notoriety and money. For young men forced into insignificance by the emergence of new male models and gender equality discourse, it also provided the opportunity to reclaim lost masculine ground. This, I argue, is the context that Yizo Yizo 1 does not narrate; neither does it examine it in its complexity. Rather, the drama series focuses on the spectacular appeal of the *Kwaito* subculture to the point of being fascinated by it.

Writing on *Kwaito*'s African-American counterpart, "gangsta rap" culture (116), hooks argues in Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations (1994) that such fascination or, alternatively, rigid feminist critique, risks naturalising or depoliticising its dominant "capitalist" (117) aspect by rendering it as "a black male thing" (116). She points out that,

To see gangsta rap as a reflection of dominant values in our culture rather than as an aberrant pathological standpoint does not mean that a rigorous feminist

critique and interrogation of the sexist and misogyny expressed in this music is not needed. . . . Yet this critique must always be contextualized or we risk making it appear that the problems of misogyny, sexism, and all the behaviors this thinking supports and condones, including rape, male violence against women, is a black male thing. (116)

In this regard, hooks proposes “taking a critical look at the politics of hedonistic consumerism [and] the values” of those who produce its cultural discourse (117).

In the absence of a critical apparatus with which to frame male violence in Yizo 1, the actions of Chester, Papa Action, Sonnyboy and other violent men quickly degenerate into the stereotype of working class black African male pathology. *Kwaito* lyrics may not actively promote misogyny – indeed, there are no parental advisory warnings on the covers of *Kwaito* albums as one would find on the covers of gangsta rap albums – yet the *Kwaito* music created by male artists extolls the virtues of materialism and the advantages that money and fame bring, including women. In this sense, *Kwaito* is not an aberration but, rather, is deeply organised in the established mainstream patriarchal capitalist culture which links the acquisition of wealth and status to the acquisition of women as “objects of subcultural prestige” (Glaser 4). As it were, in the *Kwaito* scene the men are ‘entitled’ to sex with the women that they have ‘paid for’. It is an idea of masculinity that is formed in the minds of young men daily by a combination of factors, but mainly by the ways in which youth sexuality is co(mmo)dified in popular (television) culture. Yet in Yizo 1’s critique, it is only the gangsters who “take the heat” for what is essentially “a central core of patriarchy” (hooks, Outlaw Culture 116).

What makes the images of the gangsters in the drama series simultaneously attractive and repulsive is the characteristic ease with which its story constructs

working class black African boyhood as both fascinating and dangerous. Removed from their social context, the working class black African male youth characters inhabit a world without restrictions, as it were, a glamorised world of irresponsible material and sexual excess which attracts even the most sober of its young men, such as Thiza. Chester and his entourage appear in his BMW from nowhere and disappear into a cloud of dust every time they arrive or leave the scenes in which they cause trouble. The drama series leaves unanswered the crucial question of the broader social space which they inhabit, which would explain the masculinity that they perform through their possession of guns and fast cars and their determination to possess the bodies of the young women that they rape.

The young working class women do not fare any better in the drama series' discourse of redress. Citing Peach in Women in Culture: A Woman's Study Anthology (1998), Smith argues that they are offered two problematic positions, the "Madonna . . . idealised and sentimentalised as pure, good, modest, at once virginal and maternal" (qtd. in Smith, "Yizo Yizo and Essentialism" 257) and "the whore . . . disdained and treated with contempt as sexually promiscuous and manipulated temptress" (ibid. 257). In the drama series the Madonna figures are Dudu and Hazel, whereas Mantwa and Snowy fit the profile of sexual "deviants" (Smith 257). Accosting Dudu, Chester says, "Who's this little beauty? I'm going to bring you up myself and keep the wolves and little boys away from you." Mantwa, on the other hand, tells Hazel on the day before the end-of-term party that she will be wearing "hipsters and smoking zol [marijuana]." Snowy, a drop-out who has an illegitimate child with her former teacher, Ken, has turned into an alcoholic and neglects her child. Hazel is raped because she is naïve but attracted to the lifestyle that Mantwa aspires to and at times claims to lead.

Thus it is on the back of the simple dichotomy between woman as Madonna or whore that Yizo Yizo 1 seeks to earn its value as an interventionist educational drama. The drama series portrays the status of being a poor female as lacking in complexity, either dependent on men or alcohol. Pitted against streetwise and resourceful gangsters, and in the case of Snowy a teacher who consorts with a gangster, the working class women and men play their conventional roles as nihilists (gangsters) and victims or bystanders (young women) in what is essentially a male-orientated script. This structure of gender relations produces an impossible impasse: there is hardly a position that both genders can occupy outside their predetermined identities. Thus having created the impasse, the drama series can propose a middle class alternative in the form of the third principal, Grace, without needing to engage with the complexities of working class life.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Yizo Yizo 1 is a complex drama, especially in its portrayal of black African male youth violence. Its power – even though its weakness too – lies in its chosen method to track the details of the lives of diverse characters as they act out their social and cultural lives in a realistic setting. Its mandate to create a forum for discussion of the failures in the education of black African youth does not prevent it from exploring the foundations of these failures in the fabric of the society where many of the school going youth come from. What results is a text of “immense dexterity” (Smith, Yizo Yizo and Essentialism 260) which tackles the issue of masculinism as one of the causes of black African male youth violence and apathy.

As I put it above, the drama series’ weaknesses also lie in its strengths: in an effort to tell it like it is, it reconstitutes and leaves unexamined discredited stereotypes of

both working class men and women. Its solution also fails to take into account the bias that inheres in its proposition of middle class values on the back of its roundly discredited working class ‘perpetrators’ and ‘victims’. Lastly, its rhetoric of female victimhood sits oddly alongside its assertion of male agency, whether violent or benign, particularly given the fact that the notion of a docile black African woman is, quite frankly, a fiction.

## Chapter Six

### Fools and the Politics of Gender

#### 6.1 Introduction

Like Shaka Zulu and Mapantsula, which share the period that came to be called the end-game of the apartheid regime, Fools shares with Yizo Yizo 1 another highly contested period in South African history, what I call the period of assessing the violent legacy of apartheid, its resistance and its ‘casualties’. When I speak of the casualties of the apartheid legacy in the context of this chapter, I refer primarily to the theoretical absences in the discourses of resistance. I have in mind the absence of any sustained and coherent critical-theoretical discourse on the violated bodies of black African men and women at the very moment that the iconography of resistance valorised the heterosexual black African male body as the site of emotional investment<sup>135</sup> and virtually obliterated the presence of the female body, or, alternatively, eroticised (sexualised) its suffering.<sup>136</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that Fools attempts to address this critical-theoretical absence, albeit with some contradictions, by working the formal issues of male and female gender and sexual embodiment, and subjectivities, into a densely-textured filmic code. In this sense, even though Fools appeared in 1998, a year before Yizo Yizo 1 did, it nevertheless provided a crucial perspective on some of the issues that were to become central to the latter, but which, as I argue in the previous chapter, in Yizo Yizo 1 remain somewhat obscured, or at best limited, by its largely documentary

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<sup>135</sup> Consider, for instance, Mtutuzeli Matshoba’s anthology of short stories, Call Me Not A Man (1979), in which black African male assertion gains heightened emotional currency by being filtered through the deeply felt bonds of apartheid’s racial-capitalism and emasculation.

<sup>136</sup> Siphso Sepamla’s representation of the police torture of Bongi in A Ride on the Whirlwind (1984) may be seen in this light.

style. By endeavouring to probe the politics of gender, Fools, unlike the other three audio-visual texts, actively provides grounds for its own evaluation. Nevertheless, my aim in this chapter is to assess the extent to which the film's treatment of gender and sexuality offers new insights into these concepts as they manifest themselves in relations between men and men, women and men and women and women.

## **6.2 Fools as an adaptation: old and new audiences**

In this section I discuss the aspect of the film as an adaptation of Njabulo Ndebele's long story, "Fools" (1983), as this aspect became the subject of interest for some of the film's critics. What is important about this discussion is that it reveals what in The Production of Space (1991) Andre Lefebvre conceives of as the ideological meaning of space: the film is not simply an adaptation of Ndebele's story, but an instance of a specific type of symbolic spatial and ideological translation. For instance, in "Translation, or, Regimes of Domestication in English" Lawrence Venuti tracks the complicated history of the practice of translation, of which adaptation is a species, as characterised by two tendencies. One tendency is to 'domesticate' the translated text, that is, to bring the author closer to the translator's new audience, and another is to send the author home, as it were, to 'foreignise' the text and, thus, to make it the responsibility of the author's new audience to decipher the meaning of the text as it was originally intended (209).

With his film, Suleman hoped to achieve the first, that is, to bring Ndebele's story closer to his new audience by introducing the issue of male gender violence as its focus, a notable departure from Ndebele's story's focus on Zamani's introspective narrative. As Suleman put it in a 1995 interview,



Fools will provoke a debate in the heart of the Black South African community on the state of consciousness, education, the brutal imposition of the Afrikaaner [sic] culture, sexual violence, and *the place of women in the everyday life of the townships*. These issues are particularly pertinent at this moment, as the country is undergoing profound democratic transformations. (1; my emphasis)

However, critics of the film have argued that as an adaptation of Ndebele's long story, which appeared in his collection Fools and Other Stories (1983) and was told through the interior monologue of its protagonist, Zamani, Fools presents some conceptual difficulties over and above its insights into post-apartheid social and political concerns. About the conceptual difficulties, Lindiwe Dovey and Luc Renders, for instance, argue a similar case about what they see as a weakness in the adaptation. Renders says that the film is a "failed adaptation" (248) because,

While in the novella the psychology of the characters is of paramount importance, in the movie the characters lack psychological depth and credibility. Zamani is portrayed as a pathetic, bumbling loser who is afraid of his own shadow. In contrast, Zani is an arrogant, young firebrand but without charisma. He also seems to be completely out of touch with the power relations in the township. And whereas in the novel [sic] the women are the pillars of strength in the black community, in Suleman's movie version they lose their dignity, resilience and earthly wisdom. (249)

For her part, Dovey feels that the film could have opted for a "voice-over narrative" (107) in order not to lose the psychological depth and irony that are the two important elements of Ndebele's presentation of Zamani in the story.

How much difference this criticism makes to my discussion of the film's gender politics is a matter that I consider in detail. My view is that what Dovey and Renders note about the film's lack of psychological depth in its structure of address is fundamental to some of its weaknesses in other respects, namely, its constitution of space, female bodies and subjectivities. But let me very briefly contextualise the film in the broad history of Ndebele's creative writing and criticism and then proceed to discuss what its theme of the "politics of gender" (Dovey 107) means both in terms of the film being an adaptation and a new object with new concerns and, one would assume, a new audience.

The conceptual history of Fools lies in the fictional and critical project of Ndebele in the nineteen seventies, through the nineteen eighties to the early nineteen nineties, which culminated in his 1983 collection of short stories and his collection of critical essays under the title Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture (1991). The essays themselves span some seven years prior to their collection in Rediscovery of the Ordinary and address the issue of the relation of art by black Africans in South Africa to politics or, more specifically, to the social and cultural lives of ordinary black Africans. Fools and Other Stories has been seen by critics as Ndebele's fictional version of his longstanding critical project or, more importantly, its impetus (Vaughan 186-204; Morphet 129-141). However, Ndebele's theme dates back to the nineteen seventies and could already be discerned in his poem, "The Revolution of the Aged," for instance, which poses questions similar to those that he poses in his later fiction about the cultural and intellectual inventiveness of the ordinary people, who are almost always forgotten in the literature by black South African writers, particularly that which is written in English and set in the cities. In "The Prophetess" (Fools and Other Stories), for instance, Ndebele writes

about the prophetess, a well-known figure in urban and rural black African communities, but whom black African writers often ignore in their literature or treat as part of the local background.

As an adaptation and revision of Ndebele's title story, then, Fools is implicated in this conceptual history and its reading framework. However, as a film it also invokes other viewing/'reading' positions besides those associated with Ndebele's story. On the point of the film's affinity with Ndebele's critical project, Suleman mentions in the interview that I have referred to above as his primary motivation for creating the film the intention

to say to the politicians, 'Let's not invent images or formulas for the people; let's not slip false words into the language; let's allow daily life to create its own vocabulary.' (3)

This echoes Ndebele's idea in Rediscovery of the Ordinary that literature by black South African writers must rediscover the ordinary as its first claim to relevance, a point that provoked the kind of debate which Suleman hoped the film would extend by translating it into a new and popular medium.

The questions that I pose and consider in this section are: how, then, does Fools address the place of women in the everyday life of the film's Charterston? Does the film provide women with a place that Suleman claims his project was aimed at? My critical inclination is that, whereas a few strong and resourceful women feature in the film, women such as Busi, Nosipho and the prostitute, they are given very limited roles, spaces and voice, which have little significance to the film's overall structure and message. This may very well be part of the film's aim to address the issue of

male sexual violence and the limited space that women have in the community of its story. Yet it is fair to expect that a film whose intention is to “provoke a debate in the heart of the Black South African community,” including debate on “the place of women in the everyday life of the townships” (1), will do more than merely reveal the existence of such violence and/or the limited spaces of women in the everyday life of the townships (which in the case of the latter is inaccurate). Nevertheless, Suleman’s point provides an important context for a consideration of the motivation behind the production of *Fools* and raises many of the issues that I examine in this section.

To return to the point of the status of the film as an adaptation and revision of the written, including the implications thereof for the new emphasis that it achieves on gender and sexuality, Dovey’s discussion, a part of which I quoted above, provides a useful point of departure. She writes in “African Film Adaptation of Literature: Mimesis and the Critique of Violence” that,

The film was inevitably to lose Zamani’s interior voice in the transformation . . . from book to film, and the filmmakers have not chosen to replicate Zamani’s consciousness by means of a voice-over narrative. Irony – which is vital to Ndebele’s critique of the violence made possible by certain modes of thinking or knowing – is also inevitably lost. In losing this critique, the filmmakers have, in some ways, depoliticized the discourse in the novella that relates to the epistemologies of white domination. On the other hand . . . they have introduced a new political discourse through their adaptation – the politics of gender. (107)

On this transformation, Dovey quotes Suleman as saying that while he “liked the

book, [he] tried to go a step further in the film to try to make South Africans reflect, especially at this democratic period, on the relationships with women” (107). The epistemologies of white domination to which Dovey refers are those that, if properly engaged, would explain why someone like Zamani, who suffers under the same regime as those whom he abuses, would nevertheless turn on the weak among those with whom he shares his political suffering. In short, Zamani’s actions mirror his own emasculation as a black man, which Dovey argues is not properly developed in the film as it is in the story.

Dovey’s view is significant, especially if read against Zani’s criticism of Zamani on the train and the sexist discussion that Zamani’s drinking friends have about young girls (against the background of their powerlessness to stop Dingaan’s Day celebrations). Yet in ways that are subtler than the broad political context in which Zamani and his friends act out their political impotence, the film also reveals the simple fact that gender and sexual violence, whether symbolic or enacted, also confounds political explication. This is so even if at times it appears to be produced by men’s racial emasculation in racist regimes. The power that these men possess and abuse is class-based. For instance, after raping Mimi, Zamani’s house is attacked; as stones rain in through the windows, he repeats the words, “I’m a respectable man!” The fact of his class power is not lost on him, even though his violent masculinity, which comes under violent attack at this point in the film, is no longer enhanced by it.

It is thus my view that the film’s achievement as an adaptation for a new post-apartheid audience lies in showing that racism simply throws otherwise deeper

historical problems of masculinism into sharp relief. In fact, what appears to be the main source of conflict between Zamani and Zani is as much Zani's anger at Zamani's rape of his sister as his view that Zamani and his generation have failed to assert their manhood against the apartheid regime's men. Whereas the idea of manhood and male assertion that Zani operates with is given some space in the film, Fools nevertheless does so in order to portray Zani as a misguided political rebel who takes his young and virile masculinity for granted. Even when Zani decides to address Zamani's pupils about the political significance of Dingaan's Day, the angle that the film takes is that he is motivated as much by the political energy among the black African male youth of the nineteen eighties and prior<sup>137</sup> as by the fact that this energy (which Zani's energetic idealism captures quite efficiently, even if sometimes comically) was about young black African men taking umbrage at older men for having accepted the status of lesser men within the country. Indeed, this is what Zani accuses Zamani of, among other things; he says:

I will not be distracted like you and your generation, the masters of avoidance. Instead of confronting the system, you smoke and drink and direct your anger at the weakest around you.

Furthermore, whereas in Ndebele's story the emphasis is on the political conformity of the older generation of black African men to the dictates of the apartheid system, which the film considers to some extent via the principal's conduct and speech, the

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<sup>137</sup> When Steve Biko says, in I Write What I Like (1987), that under apartheid the black man was "Reduced to an obliging shell" (28), it is this sentiment that he expresses. However, the priorities of Biko's time were different to those of Suleman's, and when he spoke of black men it was not in opposition to black women as such. Fools is a film of the nineteen nineties and is explicit about its politics as the politics of gender. In this sense, it invites a specifically gender-orientated reading.

emphasis in the film is placed on the masculine performances that produce the text of Zani's lesson to Zamani's pupils about the impending Dingaan's Day celebrations and its unspoken subtext, that is, De Voortrekkers (1916). Made by African Film Productions (AFB), whose films were "funded by the State Information Service" (Tomaselli, The Cinema of Apartheid 55), De Voortrekkers is a film which documents the historical migration of the Afrikaners from the Cape into the hinterland of the country where they met, fought and (in 1838) defeated Dingane, then Zulu king. In De Voortrekkers Afrikaner male narcissism is depicted with flourish and hyperbole. The performance that Zani gives in the few minutes that he has with Zamani's pupils before he is chased off the school premises by the principal is spirited and narcissistic. It obviously lacks the triumphal tone that marks De Voortrekkers as a highly seductive text of Afrikaner male endurance and triumph, in which women are offered conventional roles as mothers and stoical sufferers, but its tone and motivation are heraldic of the coming into their own of the new black African men.

If one considers that the film's project, as Suleman frames it above, is to displace male discourse, then the questions that it poses through Zani's performance are: what is at the centre of his performance? Who is he addressing, that is, who is his implied audience? I propose that, together with his accusation of Zamani and his male generation, Zani's implied audience is the black African nationalists whose language his lesson appropriates. The Dingaan (sic) episode simply becomes a metaphor in his elaborate ensemble of literal and figurative references to his ideal male leadership and historical subjectivity that must emerge from the morass of debauchery to reclaim its place in a present that does not seem to me to include women as historical actors.

Let me return to the issue of irony that Dovey argues was lost in translation from print to film. She posits that the irony attending Zamani's interior monologue in Ndebele's story leads to "the schoolteacher arriving at an understanding of the nature of the 'terrible crime' that he has committed three years previously, and what made it possible for him to commit the crime" (Dovey 104). Renders argues similarly that the "black individual who has faced the truth about himself and has realised the causes of his degeneration, namely the oppressive system of apartheid which is utterly dehumanising, can recover his dignity and self-respect" (251). The understanding here is that Ndebele's story's adoption of a stream-of-consciousness mode of narration allows it to locate in the character's consciousness the chain of causes and effects in which irony is the primary device in working out the motivation behind the "terrible crime" (Dovey 104).

My view is that it is part of the film's critical strategy *not* to replicate Zamani's self-irony but, instead, to relocate it to other places. In the film, the apparatus of irony resides in the camera and it is in the ways in which the camera deploys it that makes it most effective. The Zamani of the film is always too drunk to recognise (or, perhaps more to the point, acknowledge) the irony of his daily life in the public places where some of it is literally and symbolically on display. To cite a few instances, one would note the fact of Zamani's drunkenness against the backdrop of (i) the political climate of the country that is figured in the slogans on the walls of the waiting room in which he sleeps in a drunken stupor; (ii) his rape of Mimi when he knows only too well what it means in the context of the present political conditions (indeed, he is able to say to Nosipho that he "degenerated a long time ago"); and (iii) the irony of his



drunken charades at his house about “who is wearing pants in this house” which neither Nosipho nor the viewers take seriously. The question, then, is: are these instances to be understood in political terms as products of political irony? Surely it would be overstating the point of politics and the “epistemologies of white domination” when the case before the viewers of the film is older and more complex than what seems to me to be a narrow political explanation? Does the film not bring the politics of gender into prominence precisely by shifting to the background the general politics of ‘men’s issues with their apartheid adversaries’, so to speak?

I contend that Zamani’s self-irony in Ndebele’s story serves a different purpose, that is, it captures the contradictions that are inherent in the act of victims victimising other victims of which Dovey speaks. In the political context in which Ndebele wrote his story, this reality was patent but hardly ever portrayed in black African writing. Indeed, Fools acknowledges this but, as Suleman put it, as scriptwriters they

had a problem in adapting this part of the book [in which Zamani talks about his moral degeneration after the rape] because the issue of rape is very important and needed to be addressed fully. [...] And how can the rapist be the moralist? (qtd. in Dovey 104)

Thus in terms of what they construe as the best route to black people’s self-knowledge, Suleman’s and Ndebele’s approaches are different: in his story, Ndebele argues that black men must conduct self-introspection while Suleman posits that after apartheid this route can best be described in the ways in which black African men, as men, relate to black African women. And the facility for achieving this insight, the

film implicitly argues, is a visual platform on which the erstwhile ‘victims’ have a chance to fashion their own perspectives. Dovey acknowledges the film’s subtle critique of the story when she points out that,

Looking at different facets of the same thing in the film leads to a shift away from Zamani’s consciousness and to the development of an array of characters. If Ndebele provides a critique of the rape through a weighing of competing epistemologies, the film provides its critique by visualizing the gender politics operative in the township. The film thus simultaneously engages in a form of criticism of the novella. In bringing the action closer in time to South Africa’s political transition, the filmmakers shift more responsibility onto Zamani, whom the audience is less likely to see as a victim of structural violence that he cannot control. (110)

Thus in the film Zamani goes through a symbolic rite of passage over which he has no control: at one time he runs through symbolic fire flames after Busi expels him from her home. *Forgive Me*, who reads from his Bible passages that speak of things that will be revealed (“Verily, verily, I say unto you . . .”) while this happens, further places the instruments of redress out of Zamani’s reach. Furthermore, for most of the film Zamani is pitted against Zani, Mimi, Nosipho and a whole array of antagonists, among whom viewers are also positioned as antagonists. In this sense, the passage towards Zamani’s redemption is negotiated through a polyphonic visual device by means of which the authority of his interior monologue in Ndebele’s story is displaced. Within the film’s conceptual framework, Zamani is the instigator of the

conflicts but not the terminus thereof. The beating that he endures at the hands of the Afrikaner motorist towards the end of the film may seem to redeem him, but it is also enough to raise the viewers' suspicion that maybe even this may not be enough. This, to me, reinforces Suleman's point about the film's status as the instrument of provocation.

With the above in mind, I now turn to the strategy that the film employs to develop its array of characters and, with them, its multiple focal points. I have examined the extent to which Zani's challenge to the impotence of Zamani and his friends, while in general terms politically adventurous, simply shifts the grounds of contest within a masculinist groove. In this sense, I am reluctant to agree entirely with Dovey's argument that the film uses the relationship between Zamani, whose

sense of powerlessness under apartheid that has led him – a victim – to seek someone even more powerless than himself as a scapegoat for his anger and pain (106), [and Zani, whose] self-assuredness . . . [which] quickly fades after he arrives home and finds himself alienated in Charterston, where people do not embrace his budding political activism and arrogance (105), [to pit] *different ways of knowing against one another*. (105 -106; my emphasis)

Even though they lack the broad canvas on which the characters of Zamani and Zani are drawn, the much stronger, because less grand, challenges come from Nosipho, Busi, the prostitute and Mimi herself. As I point out earlier, it is, indeed, Mimi's letter to Zani that sets the tone for the film's theme of male gender violence.

Nevertheless, these characters posit an alternative to Zamani's point of view by

shifting the terms of engagement with the text of male preeminence. Whereas on the surface Nosipho appears to be the suffering but stoical wife of moral tracts, on a deeper, even at times unvoiced, level she simply has nothing to say to Zamani. Similarly, the prostitute cannot provide the sexual affirmation that Zamani seeks but fails to get at home. There is a poignant moment in Ndebele's story in which Zamani reflects on his failing manhood but which the film revises in such a way that the viewers' sympathy for him is shifted to Nosipho's agency instead. In Ndebele's story, Zamani says about himself:

I put out the paraffin lamp next to me, and rose to go and sleep. After undressing I sat naked at the edge of my bed and looked at Nosipho breathing regularly in her sleep. And I felt how worn my body was. So unfit. Too unfit for any hard tasks. The sagging breasts with wrinkles going across; useless strands of hair around the nipples; a navel closed shut by flabs of stomach; and from the depths of where a sagging stomach met with tired thighs, peeped the point of a circumcised penis, too tired now to be a release for passion. Had it been consumed by the fire of its own corruption? Perhaps that is why tears filled my eyes as I stared at Nosipho in her sleep: once more, another month would pass without my visiting her bed. ("Fools" 200-201)

In the film Nosipho quietly turns away from his sexual overtures and leaves him to retreat to his bed. There are other instances in which the camera undercuts Zamani's perspective or, if it allows it, does so in order for it to undercut itself. It is to these that I now turn.

### **6.3 Masculinities in retreat? Public and intimate spaces, docile/ violated and resistant bodies**

In many respects, Dovey says, *Fools* may be said to occupy “a unique place in history” (100). Its creators’ “decision to adapt a novella written in 1983 and set in 1966, about the rape of a schoolgirl by her teacher, seems remarkable” (100). About the film’s portrayal of its female characters, she contends that,

While Ndebele’s set of female characters could be said to be somewhat schematic – the innocent and childlike victim of rape (Mimi), her sister Busi who “exudes a whorish sensuousness” (Ndebele 187), the intellectual girl (Ntozakhe), the idealized wife (Nosipho), the traditional mother (Ma Buthelezi) – the film gives shape and voice to an array of strong women. (111)

In this section, which I further divide into another entitled “looking relations and the precession of the male gaze,” I argue that much of what constitutes the film’s uniqueness (and, in the second part of this section, its familiarity) are the places from which it is told. Whereas Ndebele locates his narrative in the single consciousness of its male protagonist, the film refuses the seductive facility of an overarching voice-over narrative. Instead, the camera enters spaces, public and intimate, where Zamani’s original monologic ‘text’ is put under various kinds of critical pressure. For instance, the child who results from the rape in the original text is in the film aborted together with the self-authorising ‘text’/act whereby Zamani inscribes (and describes) his masculine violence on Mimi’s body.

The action of the film takes place against the backdrop of the political tensions of the late nineteen eighties but is not altogether structured by these tensions in the same way that the main story's action in Mapantsula is. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that the organisation of the school and township spaces owes a lot to the legacy of apartheid's social engineering, that is, the creation of a docile and self-abusing black African body politic. The regimented school milieu; the principal who leads the singing of the apartheid regime's national anthem under the watchful eye of an Afrikaner schools' inspector; the deafening sound of army helicopters overhead; the row of framed photographs of past apartheid heads of state on the wall of the principal's office; the Dingaan's Day celebrations tickets that the teachers must sell; and the appearance of the Afrikaner motorist at the end of the film who scatters learners and staff at the Dingaan's Day picnic with a whip, all situate the school within the apartheid political framework.

Likewise, the broad township space evinces strong signs of a depressed community that has devised diverse methods of survival: there are those, like the male thugs (Mazambane and his gang of boys) and the male schoolteachers (Zamani and his teacher friends), who prey on the young female members of their community. Others, like the Apostolic Faith congregants who sing at the train station about following Jesus (during which a straggler joins in and sings about following Mandela), have turned to religion. Still others, like the *stokvel* women, have turned to each other for company and to counter the economic impact of a largely masculinist political economy.

There is no doubt that on a psychosocial level the political nature of the spatial organisation of the township has telling effects on the conduct of the film's characters. Yet, having said this, it is also doubtless that the film eschews political and psychological determinism and, instead, hones in on the issue of individual action and accountability. Thus Zamani and his friends' behaviour has its roots also in the unchecked class entitlements that the educated – and, in the case of Mazambane, moneyed – male members of the community feel they have. With the film's focus on individuals also comes its emphasis on intimate spaces as sites for its gender politics. In fact, even some of the public spaces assume a more intimate, if at least domestic, character as viewers follow Zamani from the railway station's waiting room where he sleeps, his home which he shares with his wife and where he rapes Mimi, the backstreet of a high-rise apartment building where he has sex with a prostitute to the living room of his teacher friend, Khehla, where he discusses young girls with his friends over beer.

The enduring message of the film is that the spaces of male aggression are also sites of the loss of male power so that male violence becomes literally and symbolically compensatory. As a husband, teacher and, as he says of himself, “respectable [community] man,” Zamani is a spent force, so to speak, and his once-virile body has been worn down by excessive drinking, reckless sexual conduct and inactivity. In short, he is a parody of the “respectable man” that he thinks he is: his formal appearance stands in comical contrast to his almost permanent state of drunkenness. To buttress this point, the film shows him on one occasion taking a swing at Zani whom he finds in his living room talking to Nosipho, missing his target and passing

out on the floor. It is also at this point that Nosipho, after stepping over his drunken body (still in a formal coat and tie), proceeds to pack her clothes in a suitcase in preparation to leave him.

Mazambane also functions as a cipher for the film's extended spatial and corporeal metaphors. In the street during a wedding he accosts a young woman in whom he has a sexual interest, but his attempt to reach out to her is brutal: when she walks away, he can only reach her with his blows, unprovoked, so that the act itself becomes an absurd inversion of courtship. However, Mazambane's violence, like that of Zamani, conceals a bitter sense of his masculine impotence. Besides his abuse of the young woman, later on the same day he stabs Zani because he has told him that he has "the mind of a chicken." And when the police arrive soon after the stabbing incident, he runs with the mob, limping as if comically but poignantly enough for the film to imbue its shot of him running (with such a limp) with multiple meanings. These meanings arise from similar circumstances as those that viewers come to associate with Zamani: male political and social withdrawal, for which Mazambane compensates by being spectacularly violent and self-possessed. Mazambane recruits his 'gang' from impressionable pre-pubescent schoolboys, as though, like a metaphorical prosthetic limb, they can carry for him the promise of youth, extension and sexual potency. However, his violent command of the township streets ends when the police arrive to reclaim it for the regime that has limited his action to the narrow township precinct.

The principal of Charterston High School is another male character who has been domesticated by the apartheid regime's hierarchy and whose threats of violence to those (learners) who disregard his authority hides masculinity that has been reduced



to mere form. At the morning assembly, where viewers first encounter him, he speaks under the supervision of Meneer Coetzee to whom he constantly defers thereafter. His frail body contrasts sharply with that of Coetzee which projects an authoritative and self-assured patriarchal demeanour. Added to this is the line of photographs of past apartheid heads of state on his wall, which bear down on him like a constant reminder of his borrowed and mediated space and authority. The Afrikaner motorist who whips him at the end of the film seals this chain of references to a space and body that are externally governed.

If for the black African male characters public spaces coincide with their political domestication, domestic spaces force them into retreat. There is a scene at the train station that is fairly unremarkable and which has gone unremarked in reviews of and critical essays on the film. It occurs within the scene where the Apostolic Faith congregants sing while waiting for the train and involves a woman chasing her husband with a stick. From what the husband says as he runs, that is, "*Ngek' ung'thole*" (you will never catch me), it is evident that the chase originates from their home and may be an instance of retributive justice. I argue that the scene itself serves as a stark metaphor for the reorganisation of the domestic space in the Charterston township environment. Contrary to the dominant but inaccurate image of the black African township as a place where men rule over docile and fearful women, this scene brings home what many in the townships already know, that is, that men do not have monopoly on violent domestic acts.

If, however, the example of masculinity in retreat above seems unremarkable – after all, it lacks a story that would explain it and its significance – it nevertheless forces the viewers' attention to those aspects of the film most remarked upon, which also involve the failure of the men to assert their patriarchal authority over women in

intimate relations. One of these aspects is Zamani's presumption about Nosipho's status in their house: he reminds her that he is the one "who wears pants in this house" and accuses her of being "barren." Leaving aside the fact that Zamani's assessment of his status has no bearing on the evidence of the viewers' eyes, let alone their sense of what constitutes masculinity in the performative sense, his presumption about Nosipho's barrenness is a red herring: it conceals his loss of possession of the female body that his power as the "township's shining prince"<sup>138</sup> once guaranteed.

When I speak of masculinity in retreat, then, it is also in the more subtle ways than the case of the man running along the platform of the railway station: it is in the way in which Zamani's friends retreat from the reality of their world into the fantastical one of American jazz and, by extension, of male sexual abandon where the female body is the 'edible' target – the stake – "fresh with no preservatives." But the question is: whose body is it that they discuss in such terms? For Rosi Braidotti it is not the body of a real-life woman; rather, the rhetoric of femininity – of "the feminine" (36) – in male discourse is, in fact, "nothing more than a very elaborate metaphor, or symptom, of the profound discontent that lies at the heart of phallogocentric culture" (36). Moreover,

It is a male disease, expressing the crisis of self-legitimation. . . . This 'feminine' bears no immediate or even direct relationship to real-life women . . . a rather ancient mental habit which consists in using the 'feminine' as the sign, the metaphor or the symptom. . . . It is a typically masculine attitude, which turns male disorders into feminine values. (36)

The male possession of the female body, whether symbolic or violently literal (as in the teacher's photograph of the schoolgirl and the rape of Mimi respectively), is thus

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<sup>138</sup> It is Zani who uses this phrase to remind Zamani of who he used to be when he confronts him on the train in the opening sequence of the film.

in reality a form of male self-possession, but also, as Braidotti puts it, an act of male “self-legitimation” (36).

What I have attempted to highlight in my discussion of *Fools* is its place in a community in transition from political imperatives to the new questions about gender, sexual violence and sexism. Both the political questions and those that the film addresses bear directly on the film’s visual world. But it is also clear that the film seeks to engender new viewsites without unduly forgetting the political past that looms large over the male characters’ conceptions of their diminished spatial and corporeal prevalence over the women who now emerge from the obscurity of the original story’s partial narrative space and, thus, angle. However, as is wont to happen in male discourse about such a highly contested field as gender, stereotypes slip through the net that is put out to catch them, so to speak. It is with this in mind that I move to consider some of the lapses in the film’s constitution of the identities of some of its female subjects.

#### **6.4 Looking relations and the precession of the male gaze: the female body-object**

The constitution of viewing/looking relations in film intersects with what Laura Mulvey calls “visual pleasure” (803), by which she means the constitution of spectatorship as the effect of the cinematic framework and experience. In this sense, the viewer can, in fact, be outside the film narrative frame insofar as s/he is inside the cinematic frame, which is “reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him” (803). Of course, as Mulvey intimates, this is not an inevitable position. Nevertheless, “film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially

established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle” (803).

I invoke Mulvey here in order to reflect on some of the scenes in which the body of woman is used in sexual scenes, consummated or interrupted, and so invites a certain structure of viewing relations. The first scene involves lovemaking between Zani and Ntozakhe on the train from Swaziland. Ntozakhe’s role in the film is limited so that this scene, in which her naked upper body is portrayed, is one of the rare ones in which she holds the viewers’ attention in a high stakes drama that threatens at once to be an occasion for voyeurism and for aesthetics. The other scene in which a similar case occurs is when Zamani has interrupted sex with a prostitute, even though the film appears to invite neither voyeurism nor aesthetics. Nevertheless, both scenes offer a rare instance in which a broad political reading is momentarily suspended and a sexual one is foregrounded, even though in the second case a politics of sexuality is embedded in the sexual act more overtly than in the first.

Yet what do these two instances signify and what assumptions about male and female sexualities do they represent? Whereas the scene on the train opens with both lovers’ bodies visible to the viewers, it closes with Zani’s mostly hidden from view, except for his head. For no reason that the film can explain, or makes the effort to explain, Ntozakhe has not covered her breasts when the camera again returns to them after a brief interruption. In this sense, she becomes both aestheticised and made the object of the scene’s voyeuristic residue. And, because Zani is not posed in this manner to be looked at, the film keeps the convention of the nude female pin-up and

its associations with the consuming and fetishising masculine gaze in place. Could it be that Easthope's view that the male body has conventionally featured in culture as a hard surface but unavailable for a gaze that might also install a homosexual looking relation informs the construction of this scene?

It seems plausible to me that in constructing the sex scene, the idea of the female body as the object of male desire played a significant part. Ntozakhe's naked torso certainly invites male spectatorship and it is not a coincidence that her breasts linger on within the framed visual space. By contrast, Zani rehearses an old convention of male sexual representation: he fixes Ntozakhe with his gaze and thereby directs the spectators to the object of desire already posed by the camera, which is not he. It is a process that Richard Dyer describes in the following terms: "the artist or photographer constructs the image to be looked at; and, on the other hand, the image that the viewer looks at is not summoned up by his or her act of looking but in collaboration with those who have put the image there" ("Don't Look Now" 269).

The prostitute engenders another conventional set of assumptions about looking at 'deviant female sexuality' that are nonetheless surreptitiously smuggled into a scene that at once reveals and conceals these assumptions. Because she is inserted into a charged but ultimately disarming gender political text whose objective is to portray Zamani's sexual-political sterility, she is made to play a conventional role as 'the prostitute'. She also becomes an instrument – a device – that guarantees the film and the viewers the gender political message that is made primary. In "Eighteenth-Century Prostitution: Feminist Debates and the Writing of Histories," Vivien Jones

writes that, “In the triad, virgin/mother/whore, which defines femininity within modernity, ‘whore’ is the category which, through difference, guarantees the respectability of the other two” (127). In some sense, the prostitute features in the film to guarantee Nosipho’s respectability and Zamani’s loss thereof. Indeed, it is Nosipho that Zamani calls out to when, after his interrupted sex with the prostitute, he escapes the police raid through the station’s subway.

The scenes of Zamani’s rape of Mimi and his inability to achieve intimacy with Nosipho are held in place by the presence of the prostitute as the causal link; it is immaterial that Mimi’s rape occurs prior to the scene of the prostitute, because the time-space relation is compressed in one fleeting flashback that plays out in Zamani’s head. Mimi functions in the film as the violated virgin and her role is framed in inverse terms as an innocent girl. There is an indication that she has an identity and agency outside this framework, but it remains merely an indication in a letter that she wrote to Zamani while he was in Swaziland, which is ‘re-read’ through her voice and ‘re-played’ in Zamani’s memory, and in the comment that she makes about being structured out of her own experience. So, not only do viewers ‘see’ her body in the possession of her rapist or hidden in a toilet where she aborts/miscarries, she is also symbolically erased from the very scenes at and in which she features.

These representations do not diminish the credibility of the film’s critique of male self-legitimation which is simultaneously ‘won’ and lost over the bodies of three women: Mimi, Nosipho and the prostitute.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In Fools there is a notable shift in the gender paradigm, owing largely to the film's project to focus on the politics of gender. Unlike in the three audio-visual texts that I have discussed, Fools utilises space in ways that force its viewers to observe its male subjects as male firstly and as black subjects secondly. As men, their fantasies of masculine self-possession and self-legitimation are rendered patent, so that whatever acts they commit to assert their authority over women fail largely because the women are not consenting or hapless victims.

What Fools brings to its text of politics is not the general 'black perspective' that one finds in Mapantsula but, rather, the recognition that the text of politics is gendered.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

I began this study of the four audio-visual texts by proposing an in-depth textual and intertextual analysis that situates them in the already established and still growing field of masculinity studies in (South) Africa and the west, particularly in Britain, Australia and America. This in-depth textual and intertextual analysis, I noted, is a relatively underdeveloped area in the critical-theoretical scholarship of transitional and post-transitional popular cultural expression in South Africa. Moreover, by using the prism of space and corporeality to extend the reach of gender analysis, this thesis taps into many of the central concerns of critical-theoretical studies of masculinities.

This thesis has developed along two related trajectories. In the first two chapters I provided both the rationale for the study and a review of general theoretical and situated research in the field of masculinities. In the second chapter I placed particular emphasis on the roles of spatiality and corporeality in the construction (*and* deconstruction) of conventional conceptions of male and female genders as diametric opposites. Here I argued that social, political and cultural spaces are inhabited by men and women in ways that confound the old gendered separation of domains into public (men's) and private (women's). In regard to the body (or corporeality), I posited that the body-identity matrix is a complex one, that is, that whereas the reproductive function remains biological and, thus, gender-specific, attitudes towards women and men are socio-cultural. And in the chapters in which I discussed the audio-visual texts



I demonstrated, through close textual analysis, how this research opens up avenues of critique often obscured by the texts' foregrounded themes and focus. In a study such as this, this intertextual emphasis is crucial as it reveals the collusions of representation with outmoded conceptions of male gender as primary and consistent with itself.

The basic argument that I have sustained throughout is that, in its singular form as the marker of biological manhood and of all that accrues to the conventional status of being a man, the concept of masculinity has limited purchase in the lived social, political and cultural identities of men. However, as a *performative* subjectivity, the concept of masculinity marks an area of crisis in biological assumptions about male gender. By performative I refer to what Robert Morrell conceives of as the disaggregation/de-totalisation of the multiple expressions of masculinity. I also refer to the very indecisiveness that one finds in the grammar of gender and sexuality which, as Niara Sudarkasa, Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne point out, means that masculinity and femininity are not oppositional biological essences but, rather, fluid subject positions that define status in given socio-cultural and political settings.<sup>139</sup> In this sense, masculine status accrues to men and women depending on their spatial proximity to power and socio-political prestige.

Yet having said the above about the fluidity of masculine subjectivities, I also cautioned against a hasty erasure of the body from the power-gender nexus. Sexual identity in the form of the body, Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray argue, remains a

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<sup>139</sup> See Sudarkasa's "The 'Status of Women' in Indigenous African Societies" (25-30) and Cornwall and Lindisfarne's "Introduction" in *Dislocating Masculinity* (1994).

powerful locus of the exercise of gender power and resistance thereof.<sup>140</sup> It is summoned in heterosexual male discourse for different agendas which nevertheless almost always converge on some or other form of male self-legitimation. The body of woman, as Irigaray puts it, tends to function in heterosexual male discourse as “the *target*, the *object*, the *stake*” (*Speculum* 13). Wedged between the discourses of sexual misogyny, as target and object, and morality, as the stake in male discourses of outrage and redress, the woman’s body’s anachronistic status is possessed, erased, moralised and/or allegorised but hardly ever humanised. In the course of my discussion of *Mapantsula*, for instance, I cited Louise Bethlehem’s critique of the allegorisation of the body of Saartjie Baartman, dismembered in pursuit of the cause of male ‘science’, and ‘re-membered’ for the cause of another grand narrative of male political triumph, that is, post-apartheid nation-building. I proposed that, while *Mapantsula* does not perform the racial – indeed racist – dismembering and re-membering of nineteenth-century Western science, it nevertheless performs the masculinist kind, whereby Pat and MaModise largely function as trophies in a male discourse of political outrage.

I have employed the concept of space primarily to point to the ideological ways in which spatiality – the being-ness of space – is remade in visual discourse. This means that the translation of ‘real’ into visual space occurs at the interface of plausibility and interpellation. To make this point, I adduced the work of, among others, Andre Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, David Bell and Gill Valentine all of whom conceive of space as material only insofar as it is shot through with the ideologies of habitation

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<sup>140</sup> See Butler’s *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (1993) and Irigaray’s *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985).

that govern its organisation. For Lefebvre, these ideologies *produce* space so that in speaking about space it makes sense to ask who produces it, for whom and for what ends. Working specifically with the gender/sex-space dyad, Massey, Bell and Valentine argue similarly about the gendering of spaces of play, intimacy, work and community. I have also used the concept of space metaphorically to refer to the conception of identity, particularly national identity, as linked to a place or a 'home'. For instance, in his discussion of Zulu identity – of being a Zulu – Benedict Carton describes the phrase 'our Zuluness' as a "spatial metaphor" in that it renders identity as spatially determined and therefore fixed.

It is against the background of the above conceptions of space, body and subjectivity that I approached the conceptions of black African masculinities in the four audio-visual texts, bearing in mind their historical and formal specificities. For instance, a text such as Shaka Zulu, which reaches back to the past as a way of framing the nineteen eighties in Zulu ethnic terms, does so by superimposing a cohesive spatial framework on a thoroughly fragmented political milieu. It achieves this in a number of ways that I considered at length in my discussion: its choice of northern Natal locations associated with the Shakan past; the elaborate costumes which imbue its narrative with the authenticity that it craves; the endless parades of bare-breasted Zulu maidens as markers of authentic Zulu femininity and cultural identity; and the muscular bodies of warriors which help define the mini-series' spatial boundaries (where the Zulu male warriors' bodies function as metaphors for nation).

The argument that I advanced in regard to the procession of these images of Zuluness, all grafted on space and bodies, is that in the nineteen eighties the investment in Zuluness served an ideological, rather than a cultural, purpose. Drawing on the work of Thembisa Waetjen, Benedict Carton, Carolyn Hamilton, Sifiso Ndlovu, Gerhard Maré and Georgina Hamilton, among others, I posited that the timing of the mini-series' production was far from accidental, given the political mobilisation of Zulu ethnicity by Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi under the banner of his ethnic cultural-political movement, Inkatha. The warning of the rise of Shaka's spirit by the fictional British Professor Bramston in the mini-series' epilogue, I argued, echoed similar invocations of the undying warrior spirit of the Zulu people, in particular Zulu men, by Buthelezi and the Zulu monarch, king Goodwill Zwelithini. These invocations served to obscure the fragmented nature of Zulu identities in the region by appealing to the emotional aspect of Zulu pride, notions of home or the familiar and what was foreign. Moreover, these invocations served to provide historical justification and gravitas for the bloody civil war that Inkatha was waging at the time against the African National Congress-aligned United Democratic Front.

Made at about the same time as Shaka Zulu, Mapantsula (1988) shifted the terms whereby the former inscribed Zululand and Natal political spaces as Zulu (or Shaka's) space. I argued that, in contrast to Shaka Zulu, in Mapantsula bodies and spaces are located in a broad understanding of culture and politics. Rather than define a black cultural and spatial essence, the locations in the film – the township street, the jail cell, the nightclub, the home and the city – map political and crime geographies. The bodies in them, in various types of adornment – T-shirts inscribed with political

messages worn by the political activists and flashy American clothing worn by the criminals – mark these spaces with black youth political militancy and the subcultural style of the criminal underworld. However, while the contest that the film sets up between men is primarily political, it brings to light the masculine character of political contests in South Africa in the nineteen eighties. I have argued that whereas in the political world of the film black African men and women bring the same commitment to the issue that it raises, the angle of the film's vision is primarily male. Citing Jacqueline Maingard and Nancy Plaatjies, I proposed the view that it is not so much that Mapantsula does not provide grounds for a different imaging of men and women, particularly women, as that it lacks a platform and a structure of vision whereby women can speak as agents, which in the film they are. Thus Maingard and Plaatjies argue that while the film presents a black perspective, it is also a male perspective.

The last two texts that I discussed, Yizo Yizo 1 and Fools, came out in the late nineteen nineties, after the official end of apartheid and the inception of a new government. As I observed in my discussion of them, the fact of their being post-apartheid texts played a significant part in their choices of subject matter: Yizo Yizo 1 tackled the issue of black male youth violence and apathy, while Fools sought to provoke debate on the issue of gender. Both the issues of post-apartheid youth apathy and gender became particularly urgent with the collapse of the general political apparatus and the rise of acquisitive urban youth cultures. The notions of gender and sexuality that find their way into Yizo Yizo 1 are embedded in the intersection between male youth rebellion and commodity fetishism whereby rebellion is largely a well rehearsed performance. Fools is a text which confronts male gender violence in

ways that reveal the link between political and sexual impotence in violent male culture.

What this thesis has contributed to the area of gender studies, in particular the study of black African masculinities, is an understanding of the intertextual ways in which audio-visual texts draw on prevailing assumptions about men *and* women either to reinforce these or to undercut them. However, more trenchantly, what I have attempted to show is that reinforcing or undercutting prevailing assumptions is not an easy opposition.

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**Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is the product of my own research and that it has not been submitted to any other university for the purposes of examination.

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