TOWARD A *NATIONAL* CINEMA IN SOUTH AFRICA: LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES

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Signed

…….. **DATE: 24 January 2026**

Abulele Zimkhitha Njisane

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Abstract

This study investigated whether a truly *national* cinema exists in contemporary South Africa. In the process, the study theorised and provided a working definition of "national cinema" and sought to determine the limits to and possibilities of the emergence of such a phenomenon. The backdrop to the investigation is the fact that the corpus of apartheid cinema was too racially divided and unjust to constitute a national cinema. Thus, in the context of this study, a genuinely national cinema must be for the *whole* people, not just for *some* people. This implies that the putative search for a national cinema in South Africa only begins after 1994 when the new democratic constitution held out citizenship to all the people. The new constitution states unequivocally that "there is a common South African citizenship", thus ending the racial division of South Africa on the basis of the Population Registration Act of 1950 which sorted South Africans into White, Black, and Coloured, with an Asian addendum. The original racial division of the Population Registration Act set the stage for the further subdivision of Africans into nine ethnic boxes that fitted the National Party government's design and invention of the Bantustans. Given the divisions and injustices of the past, a discussion of what a national cinema should look like in South Africa merits sustained and systematic attention. Using the notion of *film services* as a theoretical framework, the qualitative study closely examined the film production value chain of four purposively selected South African feature films. A critical observation is that the post-1994 film production context has been a *messy affair*, characterised by a distribution duopoly (Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro), virtual subsidy dependence (National Film and Video Foundation handouts), division in terms of budget, and the persistence of racial division. The study found that ownership and access are still far from diverse, and that the film production value chain as a whole is characterised by complexity, tension and contradiction. Given this complexity, tension and contradiction, can we speak of a national cinema? The working definition adopted in the study regards a truly national cinema as being at the heart of an emergent "national culture", one that is intended by design to be inclusive and to transform and redress the injustices and "imbalances" of the past. The study found that South African film is in the process of becoming, characterised by broadened participation, meaningful exposure for some, and potential for growth. Nevertheless, these positive developments continue to be constrained and limited by remanent systemic problems. Past hierarchies and power relations remain, fuelling transformation-resistant patterns of infrastructure-resource ownership, industry networks, film financing, and limited industry access. Film production for those normatively described as "previously marginalised" remains a precarious affair, with financing largely dependent on limited government subsidy and uneven industry access and networks. Meanwhile, the cinematic experience for the majority of South African audiences continues to happen at the periphery. Film distribution and exhibition remain the core challenges for a transformed and sustainable national cinema in South Africa. Digital distribution and streaming hold some promise, although their overall effect on film services and ingrained practices and structures remain to be seen.

Contents

Plagiarism Declaration i
Acknowledgements ii
Abstract iv
Acronyms and Abbreviations vii
List of Tables x
List of Figures xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 11
1.1 SETTING THE SCENE 11
1.2 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY 14
1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT 17
Objectives 19
Research Questions 19
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY 9
1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY 20
1.6 STRUCTURE OF THESIS 21
1.7 CONCLUSION 21
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 23
2.1 INTRODUCTION 23
2.2 SA FILM HISTORY: A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE CONTEXT 25
2.3 THE CURRENT SA FILM PRODUCTION CONTEXT AND VALUE CHAIN: AN OUTLINE 32
2.4 DEFINING AND INTERROGATING NATIONAL CINEMA 58
2.5 CONCLUSION 94
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 97
3.1 INTRODUCTION 97
3.2 THE FILM SERVICES APPROACH 114
3.3 CONCLUSION 107
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 116
4.1 INTRODUCTION 116
4.2 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS: A GAZE FROM THE MARGINS 116
4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN 114
4.4 STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLING 123
4.5 DATA ANALYSIS 130
4.6 ETHICS 131
4.6 CONCLUSION 132
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND INTERPRETATION 134
5.1 INTRODUCTION 134
5.2 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND EMERGING THEMES 134
Theme 1: SA National Cinema and Identity: Culture, Audience, Place, Context and Complexity 156
Theme 2: Questioning and Defining South Africanness and Transformation in Film Production 191
Theme 3: Positionality, Directorial Reflexivity and Representation 229
Synthesis & Conclusion 243
CHAPTER 6 248
6.1 BY WAY OF CONCLUSION 245
BIBLIOGRAPHY 263
APPENDIX A: Ethical Clearance Approval 296
APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form 297

Acronyms and abbreviations

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AFRIFF	Africa International Film Festival
AMB	American Mission Board
AMPAS	Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
ANC	African National Congress
AOL	America Online
ATM	Artistes Personal Management
AWS	Amazon Web Services
BAFTA LA	British Academy of Film and Television Arts, Los Angeles
BFF	Bantu Film Festival
BFI	Black Filmmakers Incentive
BFI	British Film Institute
CCI	Cultural and Creative Industry (South Africa)
CDN	content delivery networks
CNC	French National Centre of Cinema (Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée)
Covid-19	Coronovirus disease 2019
DACT	Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology
DEDTEA	KwaZulu-Natal Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs
DFO	Durban Film Office
DIFF	Durban International Film Festival
DTIC	Department of Trade, Industry and Competition
DFM	Durban FilmMart Institute
DVD	Digital Video Disc
ECDC	Eastern Cape Development Corporation
ECPACC	Eastern Cape Provincial Arts & Culture Council
EPK	electronic press kit
ERSA	Economic Research Southern Africa
EU	European Union
FESPACO	Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou
FPB	Film and Publications Board
GDP	gross domestic product
GEAR	Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (policy)

GLT	globalisation/internationalisation, localisation, and translation
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HSSREC	Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (UKZN)
ICT	information and communication technology
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
IFFR	International Film Festival Rotterdam
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IP	intellectual property
ISP	internet service provider
JFF	Joburg Film Festival
JSE	Johannesburg Stock Exchange
KZNTAFA	KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority
LEAF	Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (Canada)
MICTSETA	Media, Information and Communication Technologies Sector Education and Training Authority
MLA	Moonyeen Lee Casting
M-NET	MultiChoice Network
MPPC	Motion Picture Patents Company
NDP	National Development Plan
NFVF	National Film and Video Foundation
NYFA	New York Firm Academy
OCRS	Online Content Regulation System
OTT	over the top (streaming platforms)
PAFF	Pan African Film & Arts Festival
PESP	Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme
PR	public relations
QSAPE	Qualifying South African Production Expenditure
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
ROI	return on investment
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACO	South African Cultural Observatory
SAFTAS	South African Film and Television Awards
SAHO	South African History Online
SAMAs	South African Music Awards
SARB	South African Reserve Bank

SVOD	subscription-based video on demand
TIFF	Toronto International Film Festival
TMDB	The Movie Data Base
TV	television
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
UIP	United International Pictures
UK	United Kingdom
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
VOD	video on demand
WB	World Bank

List of Tables

Table 1: Stephen Crofts' national cinema taxonomy 65
Table 2: Susan Hayward's national cinema typologies 67
Table 3: Film industries with a "-wood" suffix 69
Table 4: Film budget categories, with examples 86
Table 5: The budget categories of selected film productions 128
Table 6: Braun and Clarke's six-step method for the thematic analysis of interview data 130
Table 7: Themes emerging from the discussions 135
Table 8: List of participants and their roles in the film industry 136
Table 9: Local production output by language 204
Table 10: Distribution of selected film companies by province 242
Table 11: Distribution of selected film roles by province and film serviced 243

List of Figures

Figure 1: Five-part value chain structure of the film industry 13
Figure 2: Hollywood film titles released in 2024, with box office earnings 71
Figure 3: Organisational structure of the Walt Disney Media Group 73
Figure 4: Major African film-producing countries by volume 78
Figure 5: South African filmmakers from "previously disadvantaged" groups..... 88
Figure 6: An overview of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms 120
Figure 7: Qualitative inquiry and research design 121
Figure 8: An overview of primary and secondary data sources..... 117
Figure 9: Poster: *Inxeba: The Wound*..... 139
Figure 10: Poster: *Dear Future Wife*..... 145
Figure 11: Poster: *Knuckle City* 147
Figure 12: Poster: *Mandela*: *Long Walk to Freedom*..... 151
Figure 13: Overview of local content production on streamers..... 179
Figure 14: South African Coat of Arms 193
Figure 15: Elelwani 201

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 SETTING THE SCENE

This study grappled with the concept of a national cinema in South Africa. Considering the well-known racial divisions and injustices of the South African past, I examined whether a transformed post-apartheid national cinema has emerged or is emerging. The new democratic constitution of South Africa, adopted in 1996, holds out full citizenship to all South Africans, as opposed to citizenship merely being for those then officially described as "Europeans". Chapter 1 of the Constitution states that there is "a common South African citizenship" with all citizens "(a) equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship; and (b) equally subject to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship" (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Preamble to the Constitution also declares that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity". The provision of full democratic citizenship to all South Africans ends the racial divisions of the infamous Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950 which ingrained the classification of South Africans into White, Black, and Coloured (Burger, 2001; Guelke, 1992; South African History Online [SAHO], 2025). Thereafter, the racial violence of the racial classification of the South African population morphed into the subdivision of Africans into seven ethnic groups – Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Tswana, Venda, Sotho, and Swazi – which were restricted to 10 so-called ethnic Homelands and Bantustans, with Bophuthatswana for the Tswanas, KwaNdebele for Ndebeles, Lebowa for Northern Sothos or Pedis, Venda for Vendas, Gazankulu for those then described as Shangaan (Tsongas), KaNgwane for Swazis, KwaZulu for Zulus, QwaQwa for Southern Sothos, and Transkei and Ciskei for Xhosas (Burger, 2001; Guelke, 1992; SAHO, 2025). The pattern of racial classification adopted in the Population Registration Act was itself founded on an older, colonial pattern outlined in the Act of the Union of 1910 which made official the precept that only white people (British and Afrikaner) were citizens of the then newly founded nation, with Africans reduced to the category of mere "natives of the Union" (Burger, 2001; Golding, 2016). The study thus took the position that the pattern of holding out full citizenship to some South Africans while denying it to most South Africans is part of the foundational violence that any systematic attempt to "take stock" of where things stand today must grapple with.

Today, all South Africans are full citizens. This is officially acknowledged and taken for granted. Legally, the new democratic constitution did away with most of the vestiges of apartheid, laying the foundation for new institutions in a new society. For example, the

Bantustans have been abolished and there are no provisions for racial classification in the new constitutional order. However, what is not so clear is how this new society is constituted, how it lives, and *how* the official designation of full and "common" citizenship is "lived", operationalised, and socialised in real terms. Systematic studies are needed to take stock of how things are on the ground. Hence, this study sought to take stock of where things stand in the film industry, 30 years after the advent of a democratic dispensation in 1994 and the full citizenship that came with it. Mirroring the extension of full citizenship to every South African, this study applied this same test to the film industry, examining whether a "common" South African film industry, identifiable as *national*, exists. To do this, I followed the five-part film value chain (see Figure 1) to evaluate the film services used in the production of a selection of contemporary South African films. A film value chain refers to the ecosystem made up of a network of various businesses, experts and stakeholders with roles or inputs that contribute towards producing a film from development and production to distribution and exhibition – with this ecosystem playing a significant role in shaping the industry processes, culture and norms.

To examine the film services of the local film industry, I began by tracing the development of the South African film industry back to its colonial roots. In the process, I highlighted the significant moments and figures that shaped the industry (see Chapter 2). The easiest question to answer was this: Under the racially, politically and economically exclusive and prejudiced governance of the 20th century, did a truly national cinema exist? The answer is no. From the beginning, the very the idea of South Africa was based on racial partition. To mention South Africa was to invoke racial partitioning. Such partition explains why, for most of the 20th century, black people were considered mere *temporary migrants* within South Africa (Burger, 2001; Republic of South Africa, 2017). As already noted, only whites could be full citizens. The South African nation established in 1910 with the Act of Union, and in 1950 with the Population Registration Act, exclusive to white citizens (referred to as Europeans for the most part), with "Coloureds" and "Asians" added as an afterthought, was racially divided and exclusive. This exclusive nation invented a ladder-like hierarchy, with whites at the top, Coloureds and Asians in the middle, and Africans at the bottom (Burger, 2001; Republic of South Africa, 2017). As such, the culture operating in this pre-1994 nation was not a national culture. A truly national culture cannot be based on racial hierarchy, division, or exclusion. A nation cannot be just for some *within* that nation. The absence of Africans, Coloureds, and Asians from the designation of full citizenship before 1994, and the institutionalisation of a ladder-like racial hierarchy, means that we cannot speak of a national culture before the

democratic constitution made a full and common citizenship possible. To the extent that the national culture under the racist National Party was exclusively *white*, guaranteed in the Act of the Union and the Population Registration Act, it was *not* a national culture. Rather, it was only a *white nationalist culture*. Africans were invisible, except as cheap labour, and Coloureds and Asians were addendums, useful for divide and rule as buffers between Black and White. In fact, national culture began to emerge in the struggle against apartheid. That is, national culture started to emerge in the attempts by the oppressed in South Africa to do away with white nationalist culture. The Freedom Charter, for example, could be seen as a foundational document *against* white nationalist culture and in favour of a truly national culture. Thus, a truly national culture in South Africa replaces white nationalist culture. In essence, it replaces apartheid. To be truly national, a national culture must not replace white nationalist culture (that is, culture as designed by the National Party) with "black nationalist culture" (whatever this is) or with new hierarchies. Neither must it continue old hierarchies and cultures. Rather, it must be emancipatory, inclusive, and transformed. The official contemporary indicator is whether there has been a so-called transformation.

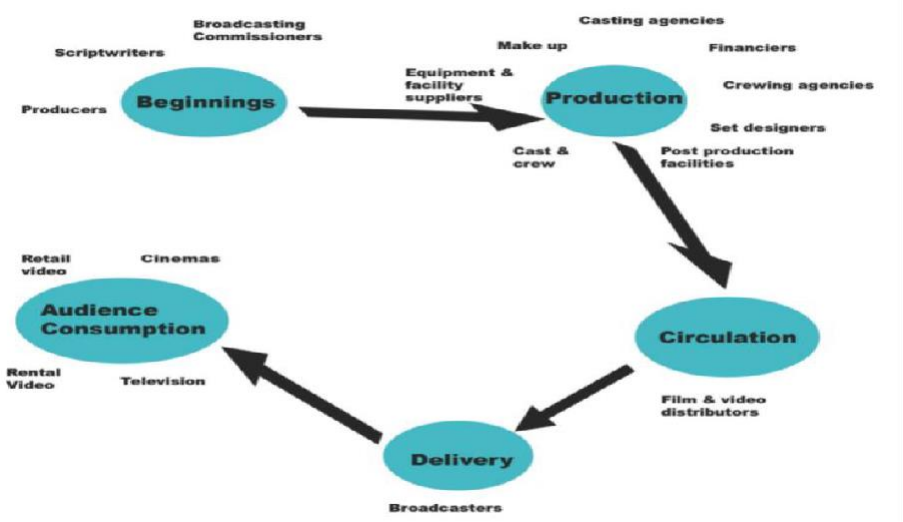


Figure 1: Five-part value chain structure of the film industry (Source: Adapted from the *South Africa Film and Television Industry Report*, 1998, p. 48)

I intended for this backdrop and subtext to mirror my investigation of whether a national cinema exists in South Africa. I proposed to use the material and empirical realities of cinema production in South Africa today – a film services "approach" – to study and test the question of *transformation*. Some 30 years after the dawn of democracy, it is opportune to take stock and map possibilities and limits for the future. How far has South Africa transcended the logics of a dehumanising apartheid "national" culture? Can this racially fraught state of affairs, built

on contradiction-filled histories and a messy present, resolve into a genuinely national cinema? If the national culture of the colonial and apartheid past was nothing more than an accumulation of white nationalist cultures, then the cinema of colonialism and apartheid in fact constitutes *a white nationalist cinematic culture*. For a long time, the white nationalist cinematic culture was an organising paradigm for the local film industry. Hence, I was interested in assessing, three decades later, whether this is still the case.

In this study, I adopted a working definition of national cinema drawn from two sources. I started by adopting Frantz Fanon's definition (1963) of a "national culture" in *The wretched of the earth*, where national culture is defined as "the crystallisation of the innermost hopes of the whole people". Next, I grafted Fanon's notion of a national culture to Yingjin Zhang's formulation (2004) of a national cinema as "a cinema of, by or for" a nation's people. I thus proposed to define national cinema simply as *transformed cinema*, in the broadest sense of transformation. Therefore, a transformed cinema is one that is at the heart of an emergent national culture (Fanon, 1963) and that crystallises the aspirations and the innermost hopes of the *whole South African people, not just some South African people*. It is the assertion of the nation-as-a-whole – rather than the nation-as-a-partition – that constitutes an *emancipatory*, *inclusive* and *transformed* national culture. The study examined how a selection of contemporary films has been made (and not made) and the contexts of production from cradle to distribution. In this way, I sought to establish how far the South African film industry has come and whether it passes the test of an emancipatory, inclusive and transformed national cinema, with the assumption being that South African cinema before 1994 was not and could never have been *truly national*.

1.2 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Film is an important subject of study generally because as a mass media story-telling medium and industry, it reflects and influences culture and social norms (Sharma & Biloria, 2025). Films also act as catalysts for discourse on issues relegated to the margins by mainstream media and institutions (Azzaro, 2018; Tombu, 2024). Significantly, the ideological work of film intertwines with the technical, narrative and artistic processes, thus bringing together filmmakers, policymakers, and investors (Azouz, 2008; Baudry & Williams, 1974). Furthermore, film industries are significant economic contributors to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the countries and cities in which they are physically situated. Networks of businesses and individuals directly and indirectly service the film industry at different points of the value chain. The American film and television industry, for example, contributed

"approximately $177 billion to the nation's economy in 2019, supporting 2.5 million jobs directly and indirectly" (Lakhal, 2025:11). Nigeria's Nollywood contributed approximately $104 million to Nigeria's GDP (Okafor, 2025). For its part, the South African film industry contributed R7.18 billion to the South African economy including direct, indirect and induced impact, including over 31 thousand jobs sustained (NFVF, 2021b). Finally, film research remains relevant as it generates contextually applicable insights into the evolving nature of these industries in terms of technological, economic, cultural and regulatory reform perspectives (Chapain & Stachowiak, 2017).

Since the introduction of film in South Africa in 1895, the cultural practice of producing, exhibiting and consuming films has been inextricably linked to social, cultural, economic, and political forces and their underlying ideologies. For one, the historical implicatedness and complicity of South African film in colonialism and apartheid informs the historical conditions that shaped the context of the ideation, production, exhibition and experience of local films. In the period between the late 1890s and 1940s, for example, filmic activity in general played a surrogate role in sustaining the ideological status quo (Botha 2012). Films justified capitalism, portrayed the black population as backward and in need of Western modernisation, and whites as civilisers. Film mirrored and documented the colonial and apartheid "transformation" of the country. Prior to the outbreak of the Second Boer War (1896-1899), foreign media enterprises such as the London-based Warwick Trading Company used cameramen from Europe, particularly London, to capture scenes in South Africa, including of the war, that were distributed globally (Gutsche, 1946). Thus, the industry from the beginning already had an international dimension. Due to the war, film activity ceased for a few years, with the exception of the filming of Cecil John Rhodes' funeral in 1902 (Gutsche, 1946). From the 1920s to the 1950s, religious institutions through missionaries used films to "educate" blacks in mining compounds with aims to "moralise" their leisure time (Peterson, 2003). In addition, black intellectuals of the New African Movement used film with the ideological motivation of promoting and catalysing African-led modernity (Masilela, 2013).

From the beginning, South African film was always already political. In *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa* (2003), Masilela and Balseiro note how cultural historian Thelma Gutsche refused to "treat films made in South Africa as autonomous aesthetic objects concerning itself instead with the introduction of European modernity into the country through film culture" (Masilela and Balseiro 2003: 3). The first South African film, *The Great Kimberley Diamond Robbery* (1910), directed by Rufe Naylor, also the first full-length

narrative feature film produced in the country, was an adventure film about the theft of a diamond found on the banks of the Vaal River that mirrored the colonial contest of the ownership of the mineral wealth of the country (cf. Botha, 2025). The plot of *The Great Kimberley Diamond Robbery* included "a large diamond, renegade whites, blacks in a form of insurrection, and a heroine who is critical to the action. Another element that would become familiar is the obtaining of the diamond from an African for a very low price – the African typically 'does not know its value'" (Botha, 2025: 5). The racism and paternalism of this early film was already a precursor of what was to come. More silent films followed, with diamonds as prominent iconographic features, in titles like *The African Diamond Conspiracy* (Baldassarre Negroni, 1914), *A Story of the Rand* (Lorimer Johnston, 1916), *Gloria* (Lorimer Johnston, 1916), and *Prester John* (Dick Cruikshanks, 1919) (Botha, 2025: 5). These films tended to construct stories and social relations mirroring the dark side of modernity which perceived Africans as lacking intellect and skill and being unruly, therefore "justifying" the actions undertaken by the white characters.

By 1956, when the national cinema subsidy scheme was established, film had become a full-blown tool that mirrored apartheid in cinematic form (Tomaselli 1989; Maingard, 2007). The subsidy scheme divided and segregated the film industry along racial, ethnic and language markers, with films targeting whites and blacks separately. The subsidy increases for Afrikaans-only films from 44% to 55% of gross box office earnings from 1969 till 1977 indicated the government's intention to exclusively promote Afrikaans-language films (Maingard, 2007). The introduction of the B-Scheme subsidy in the 1970s saw white filmmakers getting paid to make films exclusively targeting blacks in the 1970s. Maingard (2007) argues that the primary motivation for the B-Scheme approach was to "moralise" the leisure time of Africans, a formula already introduced by Reverend Phillip in mining compounds in the 1920s and eventually institutionalised by the Chamber of Mines.

Film genres that emerged during apartheid include the "back-to-homelands" category (Tomaselli 1989). Hence, films such as *Cry the Beloved Country* (1951), adapted from Alan Paton's novel (1948), and *Song of Africa* (1951), promoted themes that mirrored the state policy of dividing black people ethnically and linking each ethnic group to a designated location or homeland (Maingard, 2007; Tomaselli, 1989). In the back-to-homeland genre films "the city is a space of temporary sojourn from which the black heroes retreat 'back to the homelands' discarding his western attire and readopting tribal tradition" (Maingard, 2007). Other genres included action dramas described as "mercenary films" which showed white characters as

"saviours" in rescue operations carried out in Africa. The famed Simon Sabela starred in some of these pulp films, including in *Scavengers* (1988). Interestingly, films about diamonds continued to be produced, including *Diamonds are Dangerous* (1961) (Maingard, 2007). At the same time, film was also used as a tool of resistance, shaping culture and identities outside the dominant white nationalist culture. Thus, filmmakers used documentary films "to capture both the atrocities of apartheid and resistance to it" (Moyer-Duncan, 2012:105). Today, some of these films are studied under the conceptual umbrella of exile films, including anti-apartheid fictional films such as *Mapantsula* (1988). *Mapantsula* was shot clandestinely in South Africa by the German exiled Oliver Schmitz (Dovey, 2005).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The post-1994, post-apartheid social compact sought to transform the social, political, and economic order in South Africa, facilitating the emergence of a non-racial, inclusive national identity which Archbishop Desmond Tutu called the "rainbow nation". However, more than three decades later, severe inequality still persists in the country (Makgetla, 2020; Mtapuri & Tinarwo, 2021; Valodia, 2023). Power imbalances along gender, sexist, race, and class lines remain (Makgetla, 2020; Mtapuri & Tinarwo, 2021; Valodia, 2023). These remanent problems mirror the state of affairs in the South African film industry (Moodley, 2022). To the extent that the cinematic regimes under colonialism and apartheid constituted a white nationalist cinematic culture and paradigm, this study sought to evaluate if and how far matters have changed in the contemporary South African film industry, with a focus on the film services used in the five-part film value chain. Whereas the white nationalist cinematic paradigm entrenched whiteness, particularly Afrikaner and British whiteness, the official end of apartheid in South Africa contradicted and challenged this paradigm. What follows is an attempt to take stock of how far things have changed, if they have changed. To do this, the following were assessed: i) the presence, access, and participation of the "formerly oppressed", including African women, in key creative and decision-making roles and ownership, and ii) the persistence of inequalities, colonial binaries, and power relations in the film services utilised in the film value chain. Key areas such as film financing, access to industry opportunities, networks, infrastructure, and route to audiences were examined. The study utilised the concepts of national cinema and film services as a framework through which to investigate and address nationally specific film industry processes, thus evaluating, weighing, appreciating, critiquing, questioning and challenging normative assumptions about contemporary South African cinematic identity. Essentially, national cinemas are made up of film services and infrastructure that underpin the film industry's capacity to carve out its distinct offerings in local, regional,

and global markets. The concept of national cinema focuses on the existence of a shared, hybrid, diverse, and polysemic national identity that gives voice to unique cultural constructs and "miscegenations" that advance social cohesion and national development. Film services, on the other hand, make up a national cinema's value chain and ultimately its capacity to construct, challenge or shape notions of nationhood in a globalised world.

The South African film industry itself has gone through shifting epochs, from monopoly by Isadore Schlesinger in its early stages and the entrance of Hollywood studios, to division on racial grounds during apartheid characterised by the establishment of an exclusively white film industry, the B-Scheme films and exiled anti-apartheid films, and, currently, the emerging post-apartheid dispensation characterised by a distribution duopoly, state subsidy, and inadequate industry transformation. Systemic problems include the contemporary distribution duopoly by Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro; virtual subsidy dependence on the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) and provincial film commission handouts; division in terms of budget (low budget, medium budget, and high budget); a chronically underserved black audience (for instance, most cinemas are still located in well-to-do and formerly white-only areas which are out of reach of the majority of black South Africans); and division in terms of race (Afrikaans film, black film). These are some of the challenges still plaguing the country's cinema. In this context, there is little agreement, even, on what constitutes South African film. Thus, the study employed a film services framework as a lens to explore the contemporary film production context. Such a framework focuses on the present rather than the past, and on the context of film production rather than the textual analysis or close reading of film texts. The film services approach is concerned with unpacking the role of and relationship between various interconnected film services whose inputs shape the end-product – that is, the film – and contribute towards capacitating a film industry operating within national boundaries. I focused on how inputs from various film services – whether artistic, creative, economic or technical – ascribe a distinct marker and value to the filmmaking process and shape the film in ways that determine where and how it is distributed or exhibited and to whom.

In fact, this background foregrounds one of the key findings of this study, that South African film policy and industry practices are shaped by the coexistence of two, structurally contradictory, industry development aims. The first prioritises international competitiveness, economic growth and foreign investment, and is aligned to the notion of film friendliness. This developmental approach prioritises positioning the South African film industry as a service sector for foreign film projects. I have referred to this aim as Strategy 1. Secondly, is the aim

to transform the film industry and adopt strategies that facilitate redress, inclusivity, and equality as part of the nation-building project. This aim promotes a national film culture that reflects the aspirations of a diverse and unified South Africa. I refer to this as Strategy 2. Seen from above, the strategies appear to complement each other. In practice, they tend to pull industry development in different directions, *creating tension*. This tension pervades this study, the lenses it deploys, and the questions it asks about contemporary South African film policy, services and practices.

Objectives

The study has three key objectives, namely to:

1. Determine, through a film services analysis, if and how a truly national cinema exists in South Africa today.
2. Establish the limits to the emergence of a national cinema in South Africa.
3. Establish the possibilities for the emergence of a national cinema in South Africa.

Research Questions

The study sought to address three main research questions, namely:

1. To what extent can a truly national cinema be said to exist in South Africa today?
2. What are the limits to the existing national cinema in South Africa?
3. What are the possibilities for the emergence of a national cinema in South Africa?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Research on the development of a transformed national cinema in South Africa tends to emphasise textual analysis and on-screen representations of national life. Furthermore, normative studies that problematise inequalities within the film industry typically advance Western-centric political economy and film services critiques. These are neither adequate nor completely well suited to the South African context. Coloniality and the persistence of colonial-like situations, reproduced through patterns of power relations and hierarchies at macro, meso and micro levels of the film industry, mean that other approaches that are friendlier to the African context were sought. Thus, this study critiqued the state of the South African cinema, assessing its transformation (or lack thereof) and linking it to broader calls for decolonisation. As Rodny-Gumede et al. (2023) argued, "a new articulation of national culture is required that rearticulates the past and the present in ways that rehumanise and modernise Africans and 'reject the attempts by the powers that be to project an arrested image of [African] culture'" (Rodny-Gumede et al., 2023: 2). Ultimately, the domains of culture (the intellect, language, aesthetics, religion of indigenous people) remain colonised (Seroto, 2018: 3). Re-reading the

South African colonial and apartheid past through a decolonised lens enriches the exercise of epistemic disobedience. Rodny-Gumede et al. (2023:2) cautioned against South African exceptionalism, which runs the risk of treating apartheid as distinct from wider colonial experiences:

> the renewed focus on decolonisation finds its grounding in reading apartheid as an extension, and expression of colonialism, a colonialism at once both refined and denied by the South African Nationalist Party. Thus, the call for decolonisation is not one of breaking down the legacy of apartheid, but of ending colonialism and its legacies.

The development of an authentic, emancipatory, transformed, democratised, people-friendly, decentralised, and nationally accessible film industry requires plural and far-reaching interventions that affirm the legitimacy of the heterogeneity of experiences, realities, histories, and aspirations of "the whole people". Such a class of being is far more humanised and is more acknowledging of human capabilities than the normative, watered-down category of so-called "previously marginalised".

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study situates and is situated in the South African film production context, seeking to understand *how* each input in the filmmaking process results in an output of films that become part of the national canon of "cultural artifacts which have the ability both to shape and reflect our perceptions, to visualise identities, which is crucial for our citizenship and nationhood" (Maingard, 2007:3). Hence, this study examined four purposively sampled South African feature films which, compared to short film or documentaries, allow for a fuller and more comprehensive study of the film production value chain. The focus was on a spectrum of film services ranging from services rendered by individuals and freelancers to those rendered by small and medium enterprises, and organisations. Secondary data was drawn from government and independent reports, electronic press kits (EPK), online production notes, and information on websites by film servicing companies and individuals. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with personnel from each of the four film productions as well as other personnel who work in the film industry, based in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg. The participants were chosen because of their ability to provide real-time, unique insights into their experiences and areas of expertise within the film production value chain. The selected film services included scriptwriting, producing, directing, film marketing, distributing, exhibiting, and film funding.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1 provides a historical context of film production and the development of film services in South Africa under three political epochs marked by various government systems, agendas, and film policies. The chapter endeavours to build a case by unpacking why inequality persists in the South African film industry and its links to coloniality. There is a discussion about the rationale and significance of the study based on the research objectives and questions. The chapter provides an overview of the film productions and film services used as case studies and provides some justification for selecting them. Chapter 2 reviews literature on various national cinemas and discusses ways in which the concept of a national cinema in South Africa has been used and critiqued by scholars in their investigation of nationally specific film industries and texts. The chapter makes a case for the relevance of a study of the South African film industry through the conceptual lens of national cinema post-apartheid and provides a working definition for a post-apartheid national cinema. The chapter explores developments during the 30 years of democratic governance towards constructing an inclusive and economically sustainable film industry and the impact of these developments on policies, funding schemes, skills development initiatives, infrastructure and film distribution/exhibition in order to challenge long-standing ownership and power patterns in the industry. Furthermore, the chapter provides a review of current conditions under which films are developed, financed, produced, distributed/exhibited and consumed. Chapter 3 explains the theoretical framework underpinning the study, made up of the coloniality of power, a film services approach, and intersectionality. Chapter 4 provides the methodology approach which informs how data was collected and analysed. Chapter 5 provides the findings based on the interviews and secondary data collected from documents and websites on the selected film services. The findings are presented based on the themes extracted from the thematic analysis of the primary and secondary data. The interpretation of the findings through the application of theory and the relevant literature is presented and the original contribution of this study is demonstrated. The final chapter concludes the study, providing a summary of what the thesis set out to achieve based on the objectives and the extent to which the research process provides relevant insights into the topic.

1.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter introduced the study, outlining the research problem, objectives and motivation for the study. I described the background and context of the study, setting the scene for the discussion of how a national cinema might develop and emerge in a country inhabited by a majority population whose being was constrained by colonialism and apartheid logic and de-

constituted as a series of 'lacks' and a catalogue of 'deficits' (Escobar, 2012:viii). In this case, it was important to set the scene for how this situation is experienced by local filmmakers, service providers, and film professionals, crew, and workers. Examining power relations among film services within the film production process helped provide detailed and non-generalised insights into methods through which the South African cinema culture is shaped to determine the possibilities of or limits to the emergence of a truly national cinema. The normative American film production model does not work in South Africa due to differences in contextually specific factors such as history and historical factors, local market size, the quantity of highly skilled local and globally recognised above-the-line personnel, differing national socio-economic realities and histories, preparedness in infrastructure, level of investment, bank policies, and government policies. As such, this research needed to apply a framework that best situated the study in a specific context. Film production in developing nations is implicated in a persistent colonialism and constrained by the push and pull of globalised systems and norms that sustain unequal industry relations. Participation in globally visible cinematic forms and industries has become an exclusive privilege of a few, where long-standing internal inequalities are still rife. Arenas (2011) noted that the "unequal geography of globalisation and its historical links with European colonialism" remains a subject of contestation and confrontation in the process of developing African nations. Considering that the majority of South Africa's population still lacks basic amenities and rights "such as sanitation, education, adequate food, or decent housing" (Arenas, 2011: xviii), one cannot take for granted the constitutional provisions and guarantees about "rights". Going into the field allowed for the collection of rich data and insights about these contexts. Ultimately, the findings of the study can be read as encouraging dialogic engagement about what to do in terms of the current state of affairs of the uneven development of the film industry, the tension between Strategy 1 and Strategy 2, the uneasy co-existence of the two strategies, and the fundamental schizophrenia at the heart of the South African nation-building project and national development discourse that has morphed through RDP, NDP, GEAR, BEE, and so on.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Films are made and set everywhere, telling complex stories about people, individuals, communities, places and artefacts from all over the world. Such ubiquity points to an institution that historically sought local relevance and global competitiveness (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005). In South Africa, the film industry has been part of the local landscape for over a century, since 1895-1896, beginning with the colonial introduction of so-called European "modernity" in the country (Maingard, 2007). This chapter reviews literature on the interlinked themes that constitute the topic of study, namely South African film and film production and their relationship to the film industry, including the international context. The first part of the discussion underscores how film played a pivotal role in the colonial communication strategy of South Africa that sought to introduce ideas, ideals and ideologies valued in the imperial mission to "civilise" and "modernise" so-called "dark Africa" (Masilela, 2000; Paleker, 2014; Peterson, 2003). Film screenings functioned to re-structure how Africans experienced leisure, effectively by denying that Africans could enjoy films aesthetically, as perceptive and consenting humans with full subjectivity. Rather, colonial film was didactic and moralising, seeking to teach Africans the moral of "imperial culture", including the "virtues" of law and order and providing cheap labour (Diawara, 1992; Peterson, 2003; Tomaselli, 1989). This was, already, part of the process of denying the African full citizenship in South Africa, which functioned by way of an antecedent denial that the African was a full human being. This set the stage for the medium later becoming a full-on propaganda tool in the construction of a racially divided South African national identity through the support of the National Party government (Maingard, 2007:125). The chapter sets out this history in the context of a broader discussion on the nature of the film services that emerged, which is essential for an understanding of the theoretical framework selected as well as the justification of the study. Essentially, the core of film services in South Africa are colonial in nature – a fact that led me to ask: Have things changed in the 30 years since the official end of apartheid and, if so, to what extent?

This chapter therefore evaluates literature about the South African film industry under a democratic dispensation that now normatively considers colonialism and apartheid to be things of the past. Yet patterns of that past continue to be present. So, how present is the past? The ideology of the "rainbow nation" props the fact that a new national constitution now guarantees full citizenship to all South Africans, thus officially abolishing the Population Registration Act

and the Bantustans. However, abolishing racism is easier said than done. As such, the chapter pivots to a review of literature on the subject of national cinema, with a focus on the state of the nuts and bolts of the South African film industry as it appears to us today. A review of literature on the approaches used by various film scholars in perceiving, defining and framing the concept of national cinema, illustrated through various case studies, follows, providing further and deeper insight to the complexity and relevance of the concept. This selection of literature functions to justify my decision to focus on the *contexts of film production* rather than *the content of film texts*. Film scholars like Botha, (2012), Maingard, (2007), Golding (2016), and Dovey (2010) typically looked at film texts when examining the relationship between nationally specific film industries and a nation's people and culture. However, I pivoted exclusively to an examination of the factors and realities unfolding behind the camera. In the normative film literature, the aim seems to be an understanding of the significance of narrative themes, genre specific codes and conventions, aesthetic choices, and filmmakers' artistic visions and identity in the construction of what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls "imagined communities". My study stepped back from the narrative within the film text to the narrative of the film services utilised to make that very film. This meant examining the role of local and global dynamics, ownership, funding, local and global audiences, national government interventions, subsidies, censorship and the politics of infrastructure – all of which help to frame the notion of national cinema and gain an understanding of how truly "national" such national cinema is in contemporary South Africa.

In this study, the "national cinema" concept is used as a barometer to measure how and if the South African film industry has been transformed. The discussion sought to determine how and if redress of historical inequalities in the industry has happened or is happening. The passing of 30 years since the advent of democracy in 1994 warrants such stock taking. In a word, this is a study of change and if change has happened. A film services framework approach was adopted to place the focus of the study on "the importance of various film services providers" (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005) in this process of evaluative stock taking. Specifically, the film services framework is concerned with "the capabilities, skills, infrastructures and networks that underwrite the capacity of a film industry in a region or locality to create and innovate" (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005:55). In my study, I surmised that capabilities, skills, infrastructures and networks *also ought to underwrite* transformation, change, and redress. Ultimately, I linked transformation, change, and redress to national cinema, effectively arguing that the more transformed the South African film industry is, the more *national* it becomes.

It must be noted that other scholars have argued for the abandonment of national cinema, perceiving it as limiting and instead proposing replacing it with the notion of *transnational cinema* (De La Garza et al., 2019; Flanery, 2009). They saw this change as being more relevant in the study of film industries situated in various international geographical divides that are experiencing flux. However, I am not overly convinced about this alternative. For me, the conceptual lens for a transnational cinema study prioritises a film industry's transnational characteristics with emphasis on themes of globalisation, serving to overemphasise global trends at the expense of a nuanced examination of nationally specific industry practices and realities. In this study, I preferred to do "rich introspection" on the state of the local industry via an inward-looking approach that was still fully cognisant of global cinematic trends. That is, I considered transnational cinema to be inadequate as a concept for research prioritising the in-depth examination of local value chains and nationally and contextually specific film services. In essence, my study's interest is in the ongoing negotiation of power relations and dynamics pertaining to access, ownership, and control of infrastructure and industry resources and networks in search of a post-apartheid cinematic idiom.

2.2 SOUTH AFRICAN FILM HISTORY: A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE CONTEXT

Tracing the development of the film industry in South Africa shows how inextricably linked this development is to colonial and apartheid institutionalisation of racism and intersecting forms of marginalisation and the dehumanisation of Africans. Without providing such a background, the present-day form of the industry will not make much sense. Furthermore, such a background sets the scene for the discussion of the quest for a "truly" national cinema. Essentially, the development of the South African film industry was part of the project to subjugate Africans by any means necessary. Film was one of the means that was used. The imperialist project of colonisation sought a world divided in two: a centre and a periphery. The centre is occupied by Europeans who proclaim their superiority and regard themselves as (full human) Beings (Bertolt, 2018; Lephakga, 2015:146). The periphery, on the other hand, is reserved for non-Europeans who "service" the centre as cheap labour and are relegated and subjugated as non-Beings. This conception of conquering "formed an integral part of the socialisation process of the Europeans" (Lephakga, 2015:146) and presents us with, as Mamdani (1996) would say, citizens and subjects. The European is the citizen and the African the subject. In South Africa, Africans were denied full citizenship, initially given the status of mere "natives of the Union" in the 1910 Act of the Union and then embedded at the bottom of the ladder in the post-1948 dispensation that was built on a hierarchy with whites at the top,

and “Coloureds” and Asians in the middle (Burger, 2001; Republic of South Africa, 2017). I observed that this organising hierarchy reflected itself in the film industry. The real question was this: Does this hierarchy *still* reflect in the industry today?

During the colonial period, the dehumanisation of Africans was central in serving European interests in the “geopolitics of space” (cf. Dussel, 1985) which started with, or led to, the so-called “scramble for Africa” and which justified the invention of Africa as a “Dark Continent” where Africans were located as non-Beings in need of civilisation, modernisation and development. In essence, the colonial assumption was that Africans were incapable of “being modern” without the intervention of the coloniser. In an illogical reversal, the colonised are framed as needing, and dependent on, the coloniser. To invent Africa as a “Dark Continent”, the concept of race emerged to do the “ideological and political work” of *othering* identities “which is used to justify subordinate status, unequal treatment, to structure oppression and exploitation in numerous ways” (Omi & Winant, 2014:12). If the colonial conquest in Africa was, at least in part, ideologically informed by an always-already racist Eurocentric construct of a “duty” to “civilize Africans” (Diawara, 1992:1; Gugler et al., 2003:17), then race had real-life consequences. As Lephakga (2015:147) argued, the colonial project of invading and conquering the “periphery” was a violent process that entailed “1) the domination of the physical space, 2) the reformation of natives’ minds, and 3) the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective”. I will demonstrate, in the sections that follow, that the colonial structure of centre and periphery reproduced itself in the film industry. My aim was to set the scene for assessing whether this colonial structure is still reproducing itself in the contemporary context of local film production.

The early film industry in South Africa was a mirror of the mining industry and the “mineral revolution”. The discovery of diamonds and gold by the Europeans in South Africa “led to a dramatic increase in economic activity and to renewed imperial intervention in its affairs. For the first time, the region received large flows of immigrants and capital investment from abroad” (Marks, 2011:102). In this new relation, the majority of black people were intended only to provide “cheap” labour (Magubane, 1979; Masilela, 1991). Africans who were systematically dispossessed of land were relegated to labourers for white farmers and mine owners (Van Staden, 2024) in a transnational project that locked in local dynamics with the flow of international capital. Masilela (1991) opined that “the evolution, structure and ideological complications of South African cinema begins in the context of the history and

social contradictions that developed as a result of the mining revolution". [1] In a sense, just as the mining industry in South Africa was always already international due to the role of international capital, so the local film industry always already had a global and transnational aspect from the beginning. After all, cinema was an import that came with and alongside colonialism. The rapid industrialisation of South Africa due to mining resulted in significant economic and demographic shifts, with new land, labour, and capital relations and people moving into cities from rural areas. These shifts inevitably influenced and altered existing socio-cultural dynamics, including the infamous "poor white" problem, *swart gevaar*, and the calls for job reservations and segregation. Other changes were more mundane, such as music halls being transformed into film exhibition spaces within mining labourer compounds (Masilela, 1991). During this era, film production emerged in the context of imperial propaganda to "educate" and "modernise" the African peasant (Peterson, 2003) into a perpetual labourer servicing the needs of white settlers and international capital. Masilela rightly argued that it was the mining industry that "gave impetus to the development of a film culture in South Africa" (Masilela, 1991:2). A film culture was therefore born in which a Eurocentric ideological locus already shaped the development of South African cinema and the epistemic lens through which cinema was to be perceived and experienced.

The colonial paradigm in South Africa also influenced the restructuring of gendered identities and their designated socio-economic roles, an organising process that shaped the structure of the film industry. Therefore, delays in the participation of women in the film value chain were by design, with the first short fiction film created by a woman in South Africa only produced in 1959 by Anna Neethling-Pohl (Bisschoff, 2009). It took "two decades for three more white female directors to make feature films: Elaine Proctor, the Mozambican-born Helena Noguiera and Afrikaans director Katinka Heyns" (Bisschoff, 2009:66). Boris Bertolt (2018) stated that "in the colonial enterprise, the bodies of men and women are racialized and sexualized for the purpose of consolidating domination, but also for the distribution of social roles. In many non-European societies, colonization has had the effect of structuring the difference between men and women and establishing male hegemony and the subordination of women in all aspects of life" (Bertolt, 2018:9). Colonial gendered oppression of South African women was experienced in multiple ways due to the "intersecting nature of race, gender, sexuality and class" (Mshweshwe, 2020). Thus, there were multilayered oppressions *within* even the hierarchised

[1] Masilela, N., 1991, "Come back Africa and South African film history", *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 36:61-65, https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC36folder/ComeBackAfrica.html [Accessed: 4 Oct. 2025].

racial binary oppositions of black and white. Notably, the oppression of black women differed from that of white women along racial, class and cultural lines (Holland-Mutter, 1995; Ramohai, 2018). Although both experienced gendered oppression, black women were relegated to the bottom of the gender, race, and class hierarchy in private or public spaces (Nqadala, 2024). This meant that African women endured multiple oppressions in various relationships, "from the white man, the white woman, and the black man" (Bertolt, 2018:9).

I concur with Bertolt's assertion (2018) that the new social hierarchies introduced by colonisation destroyed the systems of solidarity and complementarity that existed in so-called "primitive" societies before the European conquest. In their place, rigid patriarchy was instituted. Adrienne Rich (1977:57) defined patriarchy as "a family-social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male". As Amadiume (1997) showed, patriarchy was not the main political and social organisation in Africa before colonisation. Instead, there had been many examples of strongly matriarchal social relations where women held important roles and "constituted the balance of society" (Bertolt, 2018:10). Decolonial feminists, in particular, argue that "in pre-colonial societies, gender differences were more complex and not simply based on biology" (Bertolt, 2018:12-13). For example, Oyewumi (1977), highlighted the fact that "gender" did not exist in some traditional African societies, such as among the Yoruba, before colonisation. The binary opposition "of gender identities was introduced by the European settler" (Oyewumi, 1977, cited in Bertolt, 2018:12). That is, the colonial paradigm is the one that normalised heteronormative sexual identities and patriarchal relations, introduced unequal gendered relations, and oppressed those whose sexual orientation did not align with prescribed gender norms. The point is that these oppositional binaries continue to influence, prescribe, and hierarchise identity, relations, rights and opportunities both in the film industry and in the macro, meso and micro levels of national life. In effect, any conception of a truly national culture and national cinema in South Africa must consider the gender dynamic.

The earliest significant South African-based film services emerged in the context of American born entrepreneur Isadore W. Schlesinger's vertically integrated film company, Killarney Film Studios, founded in 1915 (Gutsche, 1946). Schlesinger, the putative pioneer of the South African entertainment industry, monopolised the fledgeling film industry, building extensive production facilities, distribution companies and the country's first cinema theatre (Coetzee,

2019). Not surprisingly, most of the films produced in South Africa in these early experimental years were adventures related to gold and diamond mining, projecting images of "white heroes and heroines, with African actors in subservient roles" (Republic of South Africa, 1996:3). Schlesinger's film production company produced epics such as *Die Voortrekkers* (1916) (Maingard, 2007). *Die Voortrekkers* was a large-scale production based on the narrative of the migration of Dutch-speaking colonists from the Cape Colony towards the northern interior of South Africa, sparking Xhosa-Boer, Sotho-Boer, and Zulu-Boer clashes. The film reproduced the tropes of the racist American epic by D.W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation*, framing the Boer trek as the birth of the South African nation. *Die Voortrekkers* is the first important example of white nationalist culture, both in ideology and in the scope of its film services whereby the film's primary audience was London, the directorial expertise was from America, and the scriptwriter a Dutch-speaking historian. The inspiration, as noted, was the American story, *The Birth of a Nation*, which played on the stereotype of black people as savages and rapists who could be contained through the agency of lynching by the Klu Klux Klan. The trope of the black body as dangerous to whites in *The Birth of a Nation* syncs with the Boer notion of *swart gevaar*.

Ideologically, *Die Voortrekkers* invents a fake birth of a nation. In the film, Boers give birth to the nation of South Africa by embarking on the "Great Trek". This event is celebrated as the formative event of the South African nation. In reality, the so-called Great Trek was only great for some Boers. It had no such significance for Africans, for example. Indeed, the Great Trek is mourned – rather than celebrated – by Africans whose land dispossession it initiated. As such, the national culture of *Die Voortrekkers* is not a truly national culture but, rather, an example of the operation of white nationalist culture. The Great Trek shows the birth of what eventually becomes apartheid. Due to its sectarian nature and the racist mythology it invents, *Die Voortrekkers* cannot be the basis of the ideation of a national cinema, just as the Great Trek cannot be the basis of a national culture in South Africa. The birth of a nation in *Die Voortrekkers* is, in fact, the fragmentation of a nation, culminating in the Act of the Union in 1910 that reduced Africans to non-citizen "natives" and the Natives Land Act of 1912 that restricted Africans to only 13% of their own land. In *Die Voortrekkers*, Africans are invisible, as props and extras in subservient roles. The treatment of Africans as props and extras on the film set exemplifies the colonial paradigm of filmmaking that predominated prior to the democratic dispensation, mirroring the dehumanisation and denial of full citizenship to Africans.

The model of *Die Voortrekkers* and Killarney Film Studios inaugurated an elitist, racially segregated film production paradigm in the South African film industry, funded by mining capital and valorising settler colonialism (Sandon, 2024). This paradigm persisted throughout the 20th century and has proven difficult to resolve. It meant that those on the middle and bottom rungs of the Population Registration Act ladder could not make films as they lacked the social, racial, and financial capital needed to produce films. Instead of a truly national cinema, the *Die Voortrekkers* model, while keeping out *swart gevaar*, tended to integrate with the international entertainment complex. Thus, segregated local independent kinemas operated side-by-side with major American film companies such as 20th Century Fox which entered the local market, disrupting Schlesinger's monopoly (Maingard, 2007; National Film and Video Foundation [NFVF], 2000). This elitist paradigm of filmmaking was resisted by the likes of Solomon T. Plaatje, one of the founders of the African National Congress (ANC) and, in the nomenclature of Masilela (2013), a "new African" (Balseiro & Masilela, 2003; Masilela, 2013). Plaatje was quick to recognise "the power of film to enlighten and inform" and so travelled across South Africa setting up free "bioscope" viewings for underserved black audiences (Balseiro & Masilela, 2003). Plaatje aimed to inspire Africans to actively participate in forging an indigenous "modernity" in South Africa (Balseiro & Masilela, 2003; Masilela, 2013). Notably, the theme of chronically underserved black audiences has persisted since Plaatje's time. Most cinemas today are still located in well-to-do and formerly white-only areas which are out of reach of the majority of black South Africans. Interestingly, the Plaatje-pioneered practice of mobile bioscopes travelling for screenings in African areas was a major lynchpin of the B-Scheme film project of apartheid.

The National Party government, which came to power in 1948, not only propagated a racist ideology in which the only citizens of the country were the white population (defined as "Europeans" for most of the 20th century) but supercharged the *Die Voortrekkers* idiom. Once again, Africans, in the role of mere temporary migrants and cheap labour in South Africa, were rendered invisible. A "national" film industry controlled via a subsidy system was established in 1956 (Tomaselli, 1989). The state excluded Africans while generously subsidising white-owned film production companies to produce film output targeted exclusively at whites (A-Scheme) or, from 1972, exclusively at the "Bantu" (B-Scheme) (Botha, 2012; Paleker 2010). Local white film production companies were positioned to participate fully in the industrialised economy and so shape the cultural consciousness of post-1948 South Africa in the image of apartheid and the National Party. Essentially, the national culture of the National Party was an

apartheid national culture – which in any case already invalidates itself as truly national. That is, apartheid is the opposite of cohesion. A national culture cannot be formed on the basis of apartheid. By propagating cinema in the framework of A-Scheme (for whites) and B-Scheme (for Africans), "apartheid sets up segregation and 'separate development' as *the ideal"* (Mlambo & Mkhwanazi, 2021; Sithenkosi & Nzewi, 2024). The world is seen as either A-Scheme or B-Scheme, a binarity that remakes the film industry as a binarity. Interestingly, even though the B-Scheme films were intended for Africans, the film value chain and film services were completely dominated by whites. B-Scheme directors such as Simon Sabela were exceptions.

The result of the A-Scheme and B-Scheme model was a mass production of English- and Afrikaans-language films which guaranteed that mainstream South African cinema was for *white audiences only* (Tomaselli, 1989). Such an outcome is an expression of the white nationalist culture complex rather than a truly inclusive non-racial national culture that promotes cohesion. Instead of cohesion, the white nationalist culture complex promotes – and thrives on – division. The influx of American and European films meant that mainstream cinema was a collaboration of foreign films and South African English and Afrikaans films that still upheld the white nationalist culture complex while the majority of the black population were excluded and virtually invisible. Thus, in 1972, following in the footsteps of the A-Scheme subsidy scheme for whites, the government introduced a new and different subsidy scheme known as the B-Scheme. This new scheme fitted the propaganda aims of the government and was instituted, following the success of the blaxploitation genre in America, at the request of white entrepreneurs who saw an opportunity to make money by producing films for the natives (Paleker, 2010). White-owned production companies hired Africans as cast members, and sometimes as crew members, and had to use a recognisable "Bantu language" in order to qualify for subsidy (Maingard, 2007). In this way, the Bantustan model was integrated into the local film production value chain, cementing the role of the African film producer as a temporary sojourner in the film industry. Most of the B-Scheme films were cheaply and shoddily made, with poor technical and artistic quality, and were exhibited in churches, schools, community centres, and mobile cinemas also known as "bioscopes" (NFVF, 2000; Paleker, 2010). The sloppiness and shoddiness were by design, as the perception was that African audiences lacked sophistication anyway. Furthermore, the "filmmakers" who made B-Scheme films were not professional filmmakers but, rather, tinkerers and experimenters who saw an opportunity to make money from the windfall government subsidy. Ironically, some of the white film companies who benefitted from the B-Scheme deemed themselves "forerunners of

black empowerment" (Paleker, 2010). This was despite the fact that B-Scheme films were government-funded, state-sanctioned apartheid propaganda. Independent black South African films such as Nana Mahomo's *Last Grave at Dimbaza* (1974) and Gibson Kente's *How Long?* (1976) were banned. These non-B-Scheme films were produced on the sly under difficult and oppressive conditions. Miriam Makeba, for example, was permanently exiled from South Africa for taking part in such film productions that exposed apartheid. For exposing apartheid, such films were deemed illegal. They could neither be subsidised nor exhibited as part of mainstream cinema. In other words, the only film production allowed for black people was in the context of B-Scheme films – which themselves were made by whites for black audiences. As such, there was no scope for the existence of independent black filmmaking under apartheid nor for the mainstreaming of a black film idiom. This is the sense in which I argued that a truly national cinema was not possible under colonialism or apartheid. Only with the end of apartheid, or the beginning of the end of apartheid in the late 1980s and early 1990s, could the mainstream film production landscape break out of the A-Scheme and B-Scheme mould with films like *Mapantsula* (Schmitz, 1988) which "examined the socio-political realities of South Africa under apartheid critically" (Botha, 2012). An open question is whether the South African film industry has now fully broken out of and resolved the A-Scheme and B-Scheme mould of old or whether it persists in other, new ways. This question will be examined by considering the emerging dynamics of the contemporary South African film production context and value chain.

THE CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN FILM PRODUCTION CONTEXT AND VALUE CHAIN: AN OUTLINE

The vision of the democratic dispensation of 1994 meant building "one South Africa" (Musitha & Mafukatha, 2020). But what does this mean? In official terms, one South Africa meant a united, non-racial, non-sexist country with a broad-based and inclusive national identity and culture based on firm constitutional guarantees of "common citizenship" (Botha, 2009). This ideal, broadly, constitutes the beginning of the transformation agenda. It is an ideal because, though "common citizenship" is enshrined in Chapter 1 of the Constitution, it would take time to instil in practice. In the same sense, an inclusive national cinema is an ideal that would take time to achieve. Post-1994, the formation of an *inclusive* national culture in South Africa was seen as a national imperative. Realistically, such an agenda could not be achieved in a day, weeks, or months or even a few years in a country where identity had been based solely on separating people on the basis of race for centuries. This would, at least, constitute the work of

decades. This explains why I located this study as a form of stock taking, some 30 years after the inauguration of the democratic dispensation. Enough time has elapsed to question if change has taken place.

The construct of *post-apartheid South Africa* entails the creation of "new institutions, defining new culture, forging new citizenship, formulating new policies, putting in place new political and economic programs aimed at addressing people's demands, and institutionalizing the idea of the sovereignty of the state", which are aspects of "the national project for state building" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:12). Thus, the new multiracial democratic government of South Africa, in an effort to promote a unified, cohesive national identity and culture, codified common citizenship in a new rainbow nation. Coloniser and colonised, and oppressor and oppressed, are bound in this common citizenship as the new citizens of a new nation in which citizen rights and privileges are secured through the constitution and new, supposedly inclusive development policies. Thus, the national culture is an aspect of an expansive nation-building project that promotes "equality" and "unity" as the dominant shared experience for all. This is a form of "construction and structuring of national identity by the state" (Deutsch & Foltz, 2010). While the goal of nation-building is always laudable, such construction and structuring of national identity by the state is top-down, with negotiations for the new South Africa taking place in boardrooms and conference plenaries. Not surprisingly, the construction and structuring of national cinema in South Africa by the state, through the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), is as top-down as the crunch negotiations that resulted in the democratic dispensation.

In 1997, following the recommendations of the 1996 White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996), the state intervened in the construction and structuring of the film industry by establishing the NFVF. The NFVF is "a statutory body mandated by Parliament to spearhead the development of the South African film and video industry. The NFVF was created by an act of Parliament, Act 73 of 1997" (Botha, 2003:152). The Act was gazetted in 1999. On its website, the NFVF describes its role and function in the following terms:

> An agency mandated by the Department of Sport, Arts, and Culture, the National Film and Video Foundation provides funding for the development, production, marketing, and distribution of films – including helping filmmakers represent and market their work internationally. In addition, the NFVF commissions research and produces industry statistics that provide both the public and stakeholders with valuable insights into the South African film industry. It also promotes the development of South African film and television audiences, develops talent and skills in the country – with a special emphasis on

previously disadvantaged groups.[2]

Of interest here is how the NFVF describes its own mandate in terms of *film services*. Specifically, its film service is to fund film services in South Africa. The NFVF's formation was justified as part of the project of broad-based industry transformation that, along with other nation-building projects, aimed to redefine South African national cinema culture through realising the ideals and aspirations of a united, inclusive and cohesive nation made up of diverse ethnic, racial, gender, and class identities. This is the vision, as noted, of "one South Africa". The question is if the South African film industry could also mirror the "one South Africa" mantra and be "united in diversity". The transformation agenda following on the 1996 White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage aimed to address the current inequalities in the film value chain, from film sets and financing to distribution, exhibition networks, and film training. This entailed a new manifesto for the film industry that engages in a rigorous critique of the very foundational consciousness that informed the division of the South African film industry since the days of *Die Voortrekkers*. A genuinely *national* cinema in South Africa must reckon at the macro, meso and micro levels with, on the one hand, the Eurocentrism, patriarchy, capitalism and racial othering in which the film industry has been rooted and, on the other hand, the existing infrastructure, and the institutional and policy gaps.

2.2.1 The macro level of the film industry

At the macro level, a critical concern is what Goldsmith and O'Regan (2003) called "film-friendliness" and the demand that the South African government and its statutes, or a city like Durban, Johannesburg or Cape Town, be "film-friendly". To be film-friendly means that a city has the "ability to service filmmakers' needs through the provision of the relevant film services that enable the production of film content" (Tomaselli & Ngcobo, 2018: 34). Policies that have been instituted to capacitate the film industry include statutory legislation such as the National Film and Video Foundation Act 73 of 1997, which established the NFVF, and the Films and Publications Act 65 of 1996, amended in 2022, which established the Film and Publications Board (FPB) and the film and publication review process. Important policies include the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition's South African Film and Television Production Incentive (the Film Incentive) and the NFVF's National Film Strategy (2014). The DTIC's Film Incentive seeks to "support the local film and television industry to contribute towards employment creation, local procurement and enhance the international profile of the South African film and television industry while increasing the country's creative and technical

[2] National Film and Video Foundation, 2025, "What does the NFVF do?", https://www.nfvf.co.za/ [Accessed: 16 Oct. 2025].

skills base".[3] The DTIC incentive is designed specifically to "*address the historical imbalances in the sector and ensure diversity and inclusion at all levels of production including ownership and control* [and] To support the local film industry and to contribute towards employment opportunities in South Africa".[4] The National Film Strategy, on the other hand, "recognises the value that the film industry contributes to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), therefore all the plans outlined are geared towards ensuring that the film industry continues to grow and becomes a sustainable source of economic development and *transformation* for the country". The DTIC's Film Incentive and the NFVF's National Film Strategy are pitched at the national level as national imperatives. These policies repeatedly mention the need for transformation or addressing historical imbalances, as well as diversity, social cohesion, and inclusivity. As such, the policies are not just film-friendly in the sense identified by Goldsmith and O'Regan (2003) but are, also, *national cinema friendly*. Interestingly, the National Film Strategy treats economic development and transformation as separate but equal themes.

The establishment of the NFVF and the DTIC's Film Incentive, and of provincial film offices like the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority in 2010, Gauteng Film Commission in 2013, and Film Cape Town[5] (a partnership between the Cape Town film industry and the City of Cape Town) in 2018, indicate a readiness at state and provincial level that equates to film-friendliness. Essentially, these institutions have been mandated with accelerating transformational, inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the film industry. Part of mandate is to ensure that South African film servicing cities are "film-friendly" (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2003). To ensure meaningful access to skills training, infrastructure, resources, and government subsidies is, theoretically, available for all South Africans who apply for them, even if the reality is far more uneven. To attain international standards of film-friendliness requires that government oversees and capacitates the development of film production, distribution and exhibition infrastructure, services, skills, and film locations in ways that make them attractive to filmmakers, both local and international, and to foreign investors. Ultimately, the government is attempting to successfully balance two competing aims: growing a transformed, equitable film industry, and attracting and prioritising servicing foreign film production by developing world-class film services. Whether it is succeeding at this tricky

[3] DTIC, 2019, "South African Film and Television Production Incentive", https://www.thedtic.gov.za/financial-and-non-financial-support/incentives/film-incentive/south-african-film-and-television-production-incentive-3/ [Accessed: 16 Oct. 2025].

[4] DTIC, "South African Film and Television Production Incentive".

[5] Film Cape Town, 2018, "City launches one-stop portal for film industry", https://filmcapetown.com/city-launches-one-stop-portal-for-film-industry/ [Accessed: 16 Oct. 2025].

balance is an open question altogether.

Modelling the South African film industry's aspirations at the policy level shows an attempt to balance the seemingly competing goals of meeting "international standards" while addressing historical imbalances, attaining equity, and transforming the nation. The adoption of foreign film industry development models results in production processes that seek to balance these dual aspirations. Again, success is uneven. On the one hand, priority is placed on promoting South Africa as a film-servicing sector to the international market and financing big-budget local (co-)productions aimed at international and local markets (Collins et al., 2019; NFVF, 2022d). We can call this Strategy 1. Local filmmakers supported by the government produce high-quality film and television productions, which align with expectations of a "South African film trade with close connections with multinational distributors" (O'Regan, 2018: 9). Furthermore, these relationships create a baseline of capabilities and resources including "screening venues, film-related events such as DIFF, official content markets, a functioning advertiser-supported public broadcaster and pay-TV services" which enable "participation in global production, distribution and exhibition" (O'Regan, 2018:9). Participation by the South African film and television sector in the global film markets is largely through "formal markets, through ticket sales in shopping mall cinemas; through subscription television; through the SABC; and through subscription video on demand services" (O'Regan, 2018: 9). It is through the coordination and function of a national film and television market as well as its international integration that the South African film context positions itself as normatively film-friendly.

On the other hand, the government's focus is on a national cinema development strategy that includes local film production by South African filmmakers, making films for South Africans as the primary and at times only target market. We can call this Strategy 2. This inward focus places priority on culturally specific film content, and budgets are generally medium to low (micro) in scale. Medium-budget film production, through its eligibility and successful access to higher funding tiers in government incentives, subsidies and foreign finances, becomes better (yet inadequately) resourced than micro-budget films. Film productions such as *Inxeba: The Wound*, with an estimated budget of R6.5 million, or *Five Fingers for Marseilles*, with an estimated budget of R18 million to R20 million,[6] are some of the examples. South African micro-budget productions typically have budgets that range between R250,000 and R4 million. Since South African feature films are independently made, there is no studio financing for film

[6] Stage Five Films, 2016, "Five Fingers for Marseilles", https://stage5films.com/work/five-fingers-for-marseilles/ [Accessed: 10 Nov. 2025].

projects. Rather, producers raise funding from various government film funding organisations, which contribute varying amounts for different aspects of the film process, from development and distribution to marketing fees (DEDTEA, 2017; NFVF, 2024; Durban Film Office, 2025a). These budget levels fluctuate and increase over time as the industry evolves and adjusts in response to prevailing national economic and political circumstances. Feature films also vary in length, a characteristic partly influenced by the nature or flexibility of the funding call, such as the made-for-TV features. Running time for a feature is at least 40 minutes, as stated by the South African Film and Television Awards (DEDTEA, 2017). Funding levels and availability of funds, therefore, primarily account for the *structural unevenness* in the industry. O'Regan (2018: 9) stated that "South Africa's irregular film markets persist alongside its conventional markets and are based on a different logic with different market participants". The irregular film market, consisting of film distributors and consumers, exists because access to formal markets is "out of reach" (Primo & Lloyd, 2011). This inaccessibility has resulted in a South African national cinema marked by *uneven development and gaps* in levels of participation between those in formal and irregular markets within cultural production "as in many other cities and regions in Africa, Latin America and Asia" (O'Regan, 2018: 9). The theme of *uneven development* is critical to understand how Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 unfold in real terms. The binarity between economic development and transformation, and between centre and periphery, and between "temporary sojourner" status and "common citizenship", also spell out a form of Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. How we understand the side-by-sidedness of these two strategies in the context of uneven development will inform the answer about whether a truly national cinema exists in South Africa. Concern about this dichotomy is identified as contributing to the minority status of local film productions in the South African market (Collins, Ishizaka & Snowball, 2019). Therefore, indicating the potential risk of Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 morphing into another form of A-Scheme and B-Scheme, and centre versus periphery.

The South African government's film funding policies, overseen by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC), are divided into four primary categories, namely the Foreign Film and TV Production and Post-Production incentives, the SA Film & TV Co-production incentives, the SA Film and TV production incentives, and SA Black Film. Interestingly, these four categories still reflect the metamorphosis of Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. The various methods for managing the DTIC film fund are informed by each government agency's mandate and objectives. Strategy 2 is seen in the overall national agenda to develop and address historical imbalances by transforming the industry into an inclusive, diverse, accessible and

sustainable industry with meaningful cultural and economic benefits through employment creation, local procurement, the enhancement of the international profile of the South African film and television industry, and growth of the country's creative and technical skills base. However, funding from organisations such as the NFVF, KwaZulu-Natal Film and Tourism, Gauteng Film Commission, Durban Film Office, and Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development is not structured through the incentive model. These funding options therefore have less stringent eligibility and fund allocation criteria compared to the DTIC and Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). Nevertheless, even such funding seeks to balance Strategy 1 and Strategy 2.

The tier system is used to divide and determine the eligibility of applicants, which means funding amounts is a phenomenon used in the disbursement of services to the public – such as health care and education (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; McIntyre & Ataguba, 2012; Rotarou & Sakellariou, 2017; Shokr, Rishworth & Wilson, 2023). This shows how widespread the issue of uneven development is and how it shapes and is shaped by national imperatives, some of which compete against each other. In South Africa, the tiered nature of these imperatives reflects the persistent legacy of apartheid, again echoing the division between A-Scheme and B-Scheme. The tier system draws on socio-economic demographic data to determine the level and quality of services, facilities, resources, and financing better suited for various population groups belonging to lower, medium or high-income categories in a given nation. This tier system's redistributive modes follow current global economic policies which are neoliberal in nature promoting "'free-market" or "laissez-faire" economics. As a political ideology, it emphasises that the role of national governments, local authorities, and institutions is to provide "regulatory frameworks that enable global markets to function successfully" (Rotarou & Sakellariou, 2017:496). Yet, neoliberalisation is a form of capitalism on steroids that seeks to privatise public goods and attach a price to most things. In essence, the programmes for addressing historical imbalances, marginalisation and inequalities in access, ownership and power have become structured as commercial and marketable, open only to those who qualify. The redistributive tier system is problematic in the South African context where the national imperative is to move away from the model of *Die Voortrekkers*. The sense is that following these tiers to their logical conclusion will result in the return of A-Scheme and B-Scheme in new forms.

Part of the liberalisation, privatisation and commercialisation of the developing South African national cinema is made possible through a global cities framework where South African cities

and provinces are in a race to attain international global city status through a so-called world-class public infrastructure, an advanced ICT sector, high levels of safety and security, and a thriving local economy among other things (Booyens, 2012; Lemanski, 2007; Ngema, 2025). Each city aims to increase its competitive advantage in the globalisation of cities through a concentration of financial and business services to promote the city as a knowledge-intensive and service-based economy (Booyens, 2012). Durban, Cape-Town and Johannesburg thus remain leading film and creative economy hubs in South Africa (Visser, 2014) under a form of Strategy 1. This has meant that film industry development is also provincialised in ways that place responsibility on local government through local tourism and economic development departments whose expertise is not in film industry development. This is an important factor behind and a reflection of uneven development. Gradually, as Strategy 1 predominates over Strategy 2, the local film industry becomes inextricably intertwined with the local government's agenda to position a province as an ideal tourism destination through film commissions and offices.[7]

Notably, province-based film funding offices require a percentage of the budget to be spent within the province and encourage utilisation of locations in the province to boost provincial film servicing businesses, talent and infrastructure. Yet, provinces and cities exhibit internal economic, ethnic, and racial fragmentation and inequalities, with separate development for urban spaces (Booyens, 2012) through gentrification processes and the peripheralisation of small towns in efforts to reproduce global film cities or *local Hollywoods*. This phenomenon illustrates the uneven development that occurs when Strategy 1 remains unchecked and unregulated. Its unintended consequence is that it leads to a return of A-Scheme and B-Scheme type divisions and tiers. That is, it results in the "return" of apartheid or, at least, the apartheid paradigm. This is a serious concern. It is tempting to argue in favour of these creative businesses when they "cluster in a small number of unique city areas", seeing this as a high level of international film-friendliness. However, I have argued that high levels of film activity and film products emerging in a particular city do not speak on behalf of the whole country. Instead, it articulates the ideas, imaginations, and aspirations of the few who possess the necessary high-level skills and knowledge, and who "share resources and collaborate on a project basis" (Booyens, 2012; Scott, 2002). In other words, we have come full circle and are once again dealing with the apartheid paradigm in a new form. Film-friendliness, on its own, is not a panacea. In fact, in the South African context, it can exacerbate the situation and hinder the

[7] KZNTAFA, 2025c, "Tell your story", https://visitkzn-sa.com/film/ [Accessed: 17 Oct. 2025].

emergence of a truly national cinema. As such, Strategy 1 must be in constant dialogue with Strategy 2. Strategy 1 must be taught to understand the meaning, significance, and imperative of a viable Fanonian "national culture".

Government policy has yet to provide a clear plan for how the relationship between pursuing an economically viable, globally competitive industry and the vision to build a "new" transformed post-apartheid film industry will resolve the presently fragmented industry, built on messy histories. The international neoliberal approach, characterised by free-market principles promoted in the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) economic policy of 1996, and the development of a "new", diverse, and transformed film industry are clearly incompatible and in conflict (Mathe, 2002; Sebake, 2017). There is currently no room for meaningful inclusion of "previously marginalised"[8] population groups. Instead, they are in a perpetual catch-up cycle. The majority of film infrastructure providers, services providers and highly skilled individuals economically positioned in this high-risk, competitive free-market industry do not come from the indigenous South African population (NFVF, 2017b). McCluskey (2010: 10) asserted that, "blacks are less than 0,1 percent of all managers, technical crews and service providers in an industry that employs over 20,000 people and generates over 1.5 billion rand per annum". The participation of the previously marginalised population has reportedly increased by 300% since 2004, with some gaining access to decision-making powers in their creative roles even though "this does not apply in the case of business and economic decision making such as crewing and finance" (NFVF, 2022d: 3). Therefore, independent producers remain chronically dependent on public funding from the government through the NFVF, IDC and DTIC. In this way, the government has disproportionate power to shape the industry landscape, providing or denying certain projects funding opportunities. According to the NFVF report titled *Economic impact of the South African film industry* (NFVF, 2017b), the types of funding currently in place consist of gap funding, which is unpopular due to the risky nature of the film business, commissioning, pre-sales and, lastly, equity financing, which is the most used. Some of the emerging "previously disadvantaged" filmmakers have found the bureaucratic funding process onerous, "forcing many filmmakers to resort to working on independently funded projects, with different degrees of success" (Golding, 2016).

The project-based subsidy system does not provide sufficient funds to equip and support the emergence of South African black-owned film service companies. Therefore, the majority of

[8] The phrase "previously marginalised" is in inverted commas and is intended to capture the fact that those previously marginalised are, in fact, still marginalised today. As such, the phrase is inaccurate and ironic.

the previously disadvantaged population remain closed off from lucrative industry networks compared to the already well-established private sector creative industry (Collins & Snowball, 2014) largely owned by whites (NFVF, 2017b). While NFVF reports identify a lack in transformation regarding ownership of means of production and related services, no clear strategy has been developed in response to this barrier (NFVF, 2014b). The Cape Town and Western Cape film and media sector's South African Emerging Black Filmmakers Incentive is one of the few programmes aimed at financially supporting qualifying black-owned production companies. Its mission is to capacitate previously disadvantaged South African black filmmakers to take up big-budget productions by providing a rebate of up to 50% for the first R6 million of Qualifying South African Production Expenditure (QSAPE) and 25% thereafter (Grant Thornton South Africa, 2017). Qualifying production companies for big-budget films consist of those able to raise 10% of the total budget prior to application (Grant Thornton South Africa, 2017).

In the knowledge and service-based economy and film cities project of Strategy 1, South African marginalised townships and rural areas are only used as filming locations where necessary and for the duration of a film project. That is, they are a throwback of the A-Scheme and B-Scheme paradigm. Actual film consumption and creative and economic power remain centralised in big cities or the suburban areas of big cities. We are, once again, dealing not just with uneven development but also with the centre-periphery problem discussed earlier and in Chapter 1. That is, Strategy 1 starts to undermine the imperative of a *common citizenship* within the local film industry. This is perhaps the biggest danger. Local towns remain isolated in the development of a national film industry and therefore do not qualify as film-friendly based on the film services determining criteria. Those who end up operating within the informal markets of the South African creative and cultural industries are systematically positioned there as "a consequence of a history of social and economic exclusion under apartheid and consequent under-investment in basic service-provision to the black majority, leaving them with almost no access to legal cultural markets" (O'Regan, 2018; Primo & Lloyd, 2011).

The key takeaway so far in this discussion is that Strategy 1, pursued by the government, seriously undermines the goal of a national cinema in South Africa. This is because the neoliberal policies informing current development strategies in the country operate within the colonial and apartheid separate development framework. A separate development implicitly sustains the epistemic silencing of black South African creators, writers, set designers, makeup specialists, editors, film marketers, critics, programmers, and distributors, perpetuating

narratives about South African life in the global market from predominantly those once codified as superior. A development framework that assigns to the select few within these creative clusters the right to select those who qualify to participate in the core-periphery of the value chain on a tier system basis is nothing less than the metamorphosis of apartheid. The funding agencies and the policy frameworks have struggled to balance Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. When that happens, Strategy 2 is ignored or neglected in favour of Strategy 1 – the tendency in nearly every case. This is an existential risk to the development of national culture in general and to the national cinema project specifically.

Film production incentives under the apartheid government were given to white filmmakers only to create films for white audiences, and through the B-Scheme, white filmmakers were funded to produce films for the majority black population. This should be a clear red line in terms of how film strategy is thought of post-1994. The years of excluding black people from the film value chain and the operation of the apartheid paradigm meant that, post-1994, a white (Afrikaner, British and Western corporations) owned, controlled or regulated film value chain or ecosystem from development to exhibition, aligned with particular kinds of films, business relationships, and business methods was cultivated and retained.[9] However, this process is no longer visible as apartheid. Rather, it is regarded as a mere attempt to be "film-friendly" and to attain world-class standards. This is a major systemic gap and disadvantage for most previously marginalised filmmakers, film professionals, servicing companies, and their projects today. The democratic government initiatives for industry development and redress have now made funding "accessible" to all by "removing" racial, ethnic, gender, and sexuality prejudices among other things. Yet, even though the policies include all the right-sounding cliches about redress, transformation, and inclusion, the reality is that even deeper – but silent – systems of marginalisation are at work in film development programmes. When B-Scheme and A-Scheme return in the guise of film-friendliness, there is a need for vigilance. This is the sense in which this study argued for a national culture and national cinema as an antidote to Strategy 1 on steroids.

Fundamentally, present-day filmmaking conditions merge legacies of colonial-apartheid practices and democratic government aspirations, constructing conditions of participation riddled with contradicting industry priorities. The *new* aims to disarm the inequalities of the

[9] Bizcommunity (2022/9/14). "Black women, young people still excluded from meaningful ownership in film and TV", https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/97/231498.html [Accessed: 17 Oct. 2025].

old while old systems are concealed in new programmes. The NFVF concedes this by euphemistically stating that the current industry is a "complex, interdependent value chain filled with dozens of hidden barriers and other pain points reinforcing the racial status quo in the industry" (NFVF, 2022d:51). However, what is happening is more than just that. What is happening is a return of the apartheid paradigm dressed as film-friendliness. Therefore, South African films and the conditions under which they are made and consumed are a site marked with these contradictions of dominant national myths of equality, rainbow nation, and belonging amid *colonial situations* reproduced through inherited industry systems and culture (Baur, 2022; Moodley, 2022; NFVF, 2022d). A national cinema cannot emerge under such conditions.

Yet, filmmakers such as Zola Maseko, Ntshavheni Wa Luruli, Akin Omotoso, Teboho Mahlatsi, Dumisani Phakathi and Norman Maake contribute to the multiplicity of voices in cinema, garnering local and international acclaim for their features, documentaries and short films (Botha, 2012). The long-standing modes of production, distribution and exhibition driven by the excessive commercialisation of cinema and culture increase uneven patterns of advantage between previously marginalised emerging film services and already existing white-owned (local and international) companies. This sort of fragmentation, converging on race, capital and infrastructure, is a strong feature of the local mainstream industry's Strategy 1-based value chain. While such fragmentation can arguably be the breeding ground for true and innovative cinematic production, as with Nollywood and Zimbabwe, a production space unrepresentative of the extent of South Africa's multicultural population is deceptive and unsustainable.

The existential threat of the apartheid paradigm, dressed as Strategy 1, becomes clear when one considers the devastating effects of the Covid-19 global pandemic, particularly its economic impact. It is true that Covid-19 affected many people in a general sense. However, the people occupying lower levels in the socio-economic hierarchy experienced *disproportionately* intense, dehumanising levels of devastation, made worse by job losses and lack of economic opportunities (De Man, 2023; Litshani, 2022). Although the South African government made efforts to alleviate these peculiar conditions by funding special film industry programmes prioritising the previously disadvantaged through the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP) (among other initiatives in different sectors), it was clear that majority of the "previously disadvantaged"[10] continued to live, work and build businesses in increasingly

[10] Lindiwe Kunene., n.d., "The dimensions of the impact of COVID-19 on small and micro businesses in South Africa",

precarious conditions (Khambule & Mdlalose, 2022; Mokofe & Van Eck, 2022).

Thus, to rigorously examine the meanings connected to South African national cinema 30 years since the dawn of democracy requires unmasking modes of coloniality that find articulation through systems of governance and policies that sustain inequalities.

Covid-19's devastating and disproportionate economic impacts on the poor call for a closer look at how inequality is structured to affect different South Africans unevenly along the interlocking lines of race, gender, ethnic, and class (Brahic et al., 2025; Seekings, 2011). Mboti (2023, 2024) referred to this as the Rate of Oppression, which is an indication of the persistence of harm and injustice. The expectation that transformation should be an "organic" process resulting from high levels of international filming activity where local film businesses, crew, talent and locations service international production needs is a recycling of the B-Scheme and A-Scheme apartheid paradigm in another form. Tying up the "development and transformation of the national cinema to the expectation that the local servicing sector succeeds in attracting foreign industry business and investment" is a serious form of neglect of the national cinema imperative (Collins & Snowball, 2014). In essence, the provisions of the South African film strategy at the whole macro level need to be fundamentally revisited and rethought. Furthermore, it suggests that the film services framework on its own is seriously inadequate.

2.2.2 The meso- level of the film industry

An important question is how the binarity of Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 operates at the meso level where film servicing businesses and entrepreneurial actors within the industry, similar to other enterprises, have particular organisational structures, work processes, and norms aligned with the type of services provided. Each of these businesses has an identity and culture of its own rooted in the purpose, ideologies, beliefs and/or values of the owners, founders, or investors (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). These ideologies and values are arguably formed, partly influenced by the positionality of the business owner or key stakeholder, and political beliefs, also understood as "social identity" (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011:935). Therefore, businesses and entrepreneurial actors to an extent focus on opportunities that prioritise the interests of the business owner and key stakeholders (Maldonado-Bautista et al., 2021). These business interests influence strategies for stakeholder management, policies and processes that affect employment criteria, work relationship dynamics, hierarchies (formal or informal), and

https://ww1.clms.ukzn.ac.za/the-dimensions-of-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-small-and-micro-businesses-in-south-africa/ [Accessed: 17 Oct. 2025].

business networks (Hennekam & Syed, 2018).

Film industries have a long history of operating through networks formed along class, race, gender, and ethnic lines. The history of how South African cinema developed in the 20th century is one example. The embeddedness of history in daily practice means that "network-based recruitment practices are commonplace within the film industry and are central to initiating, developing and maintaining work as they provide exposure to people in positional power, increase market visibility and enable workers to leverage a place within the network of decision makers" (Hennekam & Syed, 2018; Lee, 2018). Juhasz and his fellow researchers (2020:1) succinctly detailed how positioning within networks carries potential to positively or negatively shape career experiences:

> A highly reflected concept to explain success in cultural fields and creative industries is the core/periphery structure of social relationships. A core/periphery network is characterized by a densely connected, highly central, cohesive subgroup of core actors and a set of peripheral actors that are only loosely connected to each other and to the core. It is often argued that individuals located in the selective core enjoy the social capital concentrating on a relatively small number of established players with the necessary material resources, political influence and social connections to enforce their central role in the creation of cultural and creative products. Core network position correlates with a prestige that signals legitimacy, experience and credibility and can influence how artistic or creative work is received by the audience.

Networks can also become a method through which marginalisation persists along race, class, gender and sexuality lines, facilitated by those within these networks and "old boys clubs". Nepotistic networks can create an exclusionary work culture that polices levels of diversity in the hierarchies of the network masked through criteria. A clear example in South Africa is how the government in the 1930s tackled the poor white problem by entrenching poverty among Africans to subsidise the elimination of poverty among whites. The ending of the poor white problem by making blacks poor was a form of "affirmative action" that was destructive for one side while it benefitted the other side. The rationale for the diversity in businesses or entrepreneurial actors in the core of the network can be articulated formally (official business policies and processes) and informally (e.g., BEEE compliance through fronting) for economic opportunities. Research indicates that those workers in the film industry who are socio-economically disadvantaged with limited access to networks and lack in terms of social capital, struggle to obtain work and advance their careers (Antcliff , Saundry & Stuart, 2007; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Hennekam & Syed, 2018; NFVF, 2022d).

The uneven development of the South African film industry suggests, in the final analysis, the hybrid convergence and re-convergence of apartheid and capitalism while also showing that apartheid did not end substantively in 1994. Rather, it got reconstituted and recommissioned (Mboti, 2023). The challenge becomes one of exposing apartheid in a post-apartheid dispensation when the official view is that apartheid ended. The steep inequality in South Africa, the poverty, precarity, exploitation and violence point to continuities between the past and the present, rather than a radical break (Govender, 2016). If this is the case, then understanding contemporary film production in terms of old norms such as Bantustan, the Population Registration Act, Group Areas, and B-Scheme and A-Scheme might be more useful than a strict and insular application of the film services framework. Resorting to a mix of theories is useful in adding another layer of rigour to the analysis. Hence, it helps, for example, to bring in decoloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) and even underdevelopment and dependence theory (Mkandawire, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) to buttress normative film theory. Usefully, in film production and elsewhere, "the periphery consists of a wider variety of actors who are less constrained by social relations and thus are more likely to develop alternative views or non-canonical concepts" (Juhasz et al., 2020:1). This coheres with the idea that apartheid might be revamped and remanent, but harder to detect and more pervasive.

In the absence of a national culture or a truly national cinema, narratives and film projects emanating from those within the core of the network move through distribution channels and theatre chains (Juhasz et al., 2020:1) with national and international reach, spreading faster and having higher chances to recoup financially. These projects appear to be outcomes of film-friendliness on the surface. In reality, they are severe forms of underdevelopment of local film industries. These core/periphery positions and relations are shaped by various historical and socio-economic factors, from structural issues to the seemingly personal choices that inform career background and experiences, including the type of education that affects levels of industry readiness, growth, and corresponding tier levels during opportunity pursuits (NFVF, 2022d). In the end, those who were already poor, exploited and subjugated under apartheid are today even poorer, more exploited, and more vulnerable. The violence and exploitation are cyclical. A case in point is the Marikana Massacre of 2012 where mine workers were massacred for demanding a wage increase of R12,500 (Marikana Commission of Inquiry, 2015). In essence, the sustainability of existing local film businesses remains difficult and even

unattainable because core/periphery relations remain. In other words, the more things change the more they remain the same.

Today, black filmmakers are even more dependent on subsidies than ever before (NFVF, 2022d; South African Cultural Observatory [SACO], 2017). Meanwhile, Afrikaans film thrives and remains sustainable (Jansen van Vuuren & Velthuysen, 2024). Distribution, in particular, is a critical challenge. Barriers to entry in distribution and exhibition remain for the majority of non-white aspirants, whether filmmakers, distributors or exhibitors (Brown, 2023). Currently, distribution and exhibition in South Africa exist under a Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro duopoly that favours international films, with theatres showing more Hollywood films for longer (Golding, 2016; NFVF, 2014b). Indeed, the distribution sector is critical to the value chain as it determines the degree to which films receive access to audiences (Tomaselli, 2013). It is fair to argue that without solving distribution, the quest for a national cinema in South Africa and Africa broadly is effectively stillborn. Local film productions still find it hard to access large markets through mainstream distribution models. Essentially, distribution under current models is "not profitable for the vast majority of South African films due to high exhibition costs; short exhibition windows; and low cinema attendance" (NFVF, 2014b:14).

The National Film and Video Foundation's Box Office Reports provide insight into challenges faced by the post-apartheid industry. For example, in 2017, out of 23 South African films, 13 were Afrikaans-language films "capturing 45% of the gross box office (excluding international films) while English only films took 48% of the revenues" (NFVF, 2017a:18). The other 7% of the market was captured by English/Afrikaans films (NFVF, 2017a:18). In 2018, South African film theatres exhibited 213 films in total with only 22 of those being South African (NFVF, 2018a). Furthermore, only five were black South African indigenous language films. Ten were Afrikaans-language films, while seven were English-language films (NFVF, 2018a). Black South African productions have better distribution opportunities and access to audiences through television including subscription channels (Golding, 2016). Meanwhile, foreign film productions continued dominating the "750 screens that are spread in the major metropolitan areas and cities in the nine provinces of South Africa" (NFVF, 2016a:5). However, change is also possible. Ernest Nkosi's independently funded *Thina Sobabili* (*The Two of Us*) (2014) is a recent example of the potential of black local film productions that received good international and local reception in cinemas and at film festivals. *Thina Sobabili* broke even at the box office (Golding, 2016) and was South Africa's official Oscar Award entry in the best

foreign language category. Zola Maseko's adaptation of South African writer Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* novel (2005) also debuted in mainstream cinemas (2017),[11] as did Akin Omotoso's *Tell Me Sweet Something* (2015) and *Vaya* (2016).[12] Importantly, Nollywood pioneered a unique straight-to-DVD model that successfully bypassed mainstream distribution channels (Odion, 2018).

Barriers to the development of local cinema audiences include socio-economic factors such as high rates of poverty (21.6%), unemployment (32.9%) and inequality with a Gini coefficient of around 0.67 among the majority of the black population (Stats SA, 2017; Twalo, 2024; Valodia, 2023). Since the majority of cinemas are in cities, suburbs, and affluent areas, the cost of attending film screenings in a cinema, which typically includes transportation and refreshments, is out of reach for most South Africans (NFVF, 2014b). Thus, in an example of the dominance of Hollywoodisation, South African cinemas have historically relied more on foreign feature films, with Hollywood blockbusters dominating and serving as an audience drawcard (NFVF, 2024a; SACO, 2017). A recent report on South African audiences showed that for most people there is "no access to cinemas at all while 28% said a cinema was within a radius of 10km-30km" (NFVF, 2022a:34). Furthermore, the spike in movie ticket prices because of inflation in South Africa "may have an impact on access to local content" (NFVF, 2022a: 34). The report's limited emphasis on industry structural barriers in South African mainstream film distribution and exhibition points to an underlying paradox whereby structural barriers are acknowledged as problematic, permanent, and historical yet also as *solvable* through the miraculous filmic undertaking by unique, creative and "world-class" local talent and individuals (Martinez Dy, 2020:690). This "miracle" perception of how challenges in film distribution will be solved sugarcoats and downplays the real challenges, in effect maintaining colonial legacies. Indeed, government policy on film and the national film strategy demonstrate a limited capacity, and a lack of political will, to address the monopoly in cinema distribution and exhibition (Treffry-Goatley, 2010).

The Ster-Kinekor-Nu Metro distribution duopoly is aided by the television business where broadcasters such as M-Net commission projects cheaply[13], buying low and selling dearly

[11] South Africa The Good News, 2017, "Another whale of a movie out of SA.", https://www.sagoodnews.co.za/another-whale-movie-sa/ [Accessed: 19 Oct. 2025].

[12] IMDb., 2016, "Vaya Release Info", https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4996954/ [Accessed: 19 Oct. 2025].

[13] Gavaza, M., 2023, "Unpacking MultiChoice's bet on local film and television", BusinessDay, 22 Aug. https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/companies/telecoms-and-technology/2023-08-22-unpacking-multichoices-bet-

(Teer-Tomaselli, 2005, 2007). This is almost like going back to the stage of the primitive accumulation of capital or, at least, to the thesis of Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (2018). Hence, "the dominance of the US majors means that independent film struggles for market share, is highly risky and delivers relatively low rewards. Access to production finance is difficult for independents" (Olsberg SPI, 2012: 9). Film producers in South Africa still require high-level training and experience in negotiating agreement terms favourable to them for the long term as they move beyond subsidy dependence. These relationships and the nature of agreements affect the potential of creating sustainable film production businesses since investors can leave producers "with little if any access to revenues generated from the distribution of the film and prevent them from building on prior success since they are left with no equity to invest in future projects" (Olsberg SPI, 2012: 9). This affects the potential for sustainability because it weakens the producer's position in future negotiations since a key factor to offset sustainability is the producer's ability to retain a meaningful share of the profits from the successful distribution of a film. However, even this does not resolve the macro challenges hampering the growth of locally produced films. Challenges in this context include a lack of access to economically viable distribution and exhibition infrastructure, which can lead to a more long-term sustainable path.

When analysing what is happening in the local film industry, it is crucial to understand that inequality and other marginalising factors may not be explicit within film businesses. An understanding of how coloniality operates through neoliberal policies and concepts such as globalisation and internationalisation helps us to unmask these hierarchies of power that were established during colonialism but continue to be operative today (Khoo, 2022). This, in effect, is what coloniality means. The coloniality of power operates even within recruitment criteria, the underlying logic of tier systems, industry culture, and norms, as well as their outcomes. In terms of outcomes, industry research states that "white owned film servicing businesses are more resilient and successful. Black-owned film businesses are the majority in terms of employing previously disadvantaged individuals or procuring services from other black-owned businesses. The majority of black-owned film businesses cannot provide employment on a permanent basis and depend on annual government subsidy, and there is no clear and agreed-upon understanding or definition of transformation within the film industry" (NFVF, 2022d: 68).

on-local-film-and-television/

2.2.3 The micro level of the film industry

The micro-level industry experiences also require attention to link them to how Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 operate in the meso and macro spheres. The micro level encompasses individualised strategies, efforts, and outcomes aimed at overcoming existing structural barriers (Hennekam & Syed, 2018). These acts of self-agency, when successful, are promoted at a macro level as the pathway to transformation that can be replicated, as described in Albert Bandura's concept of learning through modelling (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Hennekam & Syed, 2018; Tshetu, 2014). The "expression of agency can be related to the notion of self-efficacy, which concerns the belief in one's ability to complete a specific task or reach a goal successfully" (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Hennekam & Syed, 2018:553). There are various examples of South African film directors, producers, writers and other key players raising their profiles in the industry (for example, by getting nominated for an award or collaborating on an international level) because of the possibilities resulting from the so-called rainbow nation and the success of the transformation agenda. These individual accolades are held up as signs of success despite most film practitioners struggling to make ends meet and despite evidence on the inadequacies or limitations of the policies and initiatives aimed at facilitating high-level, transformative results. It is as if success is due to a magical process. Yet the fact of the matter is that the South African film industry and film sets are made up of socio-economically hierarchised networks:

- *Top tier*: On the top tiers of the network are a minority of individuals who are the industry captains, owners of capital, and holders of executive positions in key industry businesses, mostly vertically integrated (Basson et al., 2013; NFVF Transformation Report, 2022; O'Regan, 2018; Tuomi, 2007). These first-tier businesses are typically white-owned, with a few from the previously disadvantaged groups.
- *Second tier*: On the second tier are small business owners, entrepreneurs and managers, who consist of blacks, whites, and a few females. They are significant service providers at the core of the industry value chain and work in close proximity to those at the top of the network, providing jobs to individuals at the bottom and periphery of the industry (NFVF, 2022d; Tuomi, 2007).
- *Third tier*: The third tier is made up of a precarity-bound majority of individuals who work as freelancers with limited and inconsistent access points of participation in the value chain, except as short-term labourers occupying lower-level positions in the periphery of the industry network (Basson et al., 2013; Mathurine, 2021; NFVF, 2022d). This group generally works various jobs simultaneously to support their livelihood, afford transportation, access internet services, and purchase information and

> communication technology devices, even if it means outside of their desired area of specialisation (Mathurine, 2021).

These tiers somewhat (and uncannily) resemble the ladder of the Population Registration Act, which places whites at the top, Coloureds and Asians in the middle, and Africans at the bottom.

The film industry is not immune to the power of money. Indeed, it is at the mercy of finances, budgets, and spreadsheets. Money talks. The tiers of film industry practitioners discussed above themselves reflect and reproduce the film production budget templates. Although film budgets do not entirely define the worth of a film production, as artistic and socially impactful films have been made on low budgets, such budgets have a significant impact on what is possible in a film project (Kanecki, 2024; Simonton, 2005). The greater the financial investment, the more aggressive production, distribution, and marketing strategies are employed through the allocation of funds to relevant services (Chen, 2023). The services may include set construction, costume design, director services, post-production, casting agents, and acting talent. In other words, to make a film, money talks. Even zero-budget films have a financial cost. Crane (2013: 367-368) noted the differences in production budgets of the few top film-producing nations:

> The average cost of films produced by major studios in USA is close to $100 million while the average cost of independent films is less than $40 million. By comparison, the average cost of a British film is $13.3 million, of a French film, $5.1 million, and of an Egyptian film, $1.3–$5.5 million.

Principally, budget allocations are easily the most direct constraint on the quality and quantity of films that reach audiences. If there is no money, there is no film or film industry. This explains the pressure on the NFVF and the DTIC, as well as their subsidy-based system. If these agencies want a national cinema, and if the government wants to see the National Film and Video Foundation Act of 1997 operationalised, then they must put their money where their mouth is, as it were. Indeed, any South African "national film policy" is predicated in the first instance on the availability of *funding*. On page 4 of the National Film Strategy, the NFVF clearly concludes that "the results of the study validated the need for *increased investment into the film industry* by both public and private entities" (emphasis added)".[14] Again, money talks.

The very mandate of the NFVF – "an agency of the Department of Arts and Culture that was

[14] NFVF, 2014b, *National Film Strategy*, https://www.nfvf.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/National-Film-Strategy.pdf [Accessed: 16 Oct. 2025].

created to ensure the equitable growth of South Africa's film and video industry"[15] – is dependent on budgets and how much money it receives. The equitable growth of South Africa's film and video industry (that is, Strategy 1) is completely dependent on increased investment into the NFVF. That is, the funder itself must be adequately funded. The NFVF "provides funding for the development, production, marketing and distribution of films and also the training and development of filmmakers".[16] Money and funding have therefore become the magic words in the South African film industry and, indeed, in any film industry. This, then, explains the predominance of Strategy 1 in the South African film industry. Strategy 1 speaks the language of money and funding, whereas Strategy 2 is about intangibles. If, as we will see, Hollywood has reduced the film industry to a spreadsheet, there is little chance that Strategy 2 will predominate.

Strategy 2 is about the need for a film industry and film strategy – a national cinema – in South Africa that addresses and redresses the colonial and apartheid past. However, it seems that Strategy 2 can only follow behind Strategy 1 and can only be operationalised if Strategy 1 has been initiated first, tested and deemed successful. Strategy 1 has first dibs, as it were. It comes first. Strategy 2 is valuable, but fails to garner visibility, salience, and prominence because it does not primarily speak the language of money, budgets, and spreadsheets. This means that the film industry is caught in a catch-22 situation. It wants to do Strategy 2 but can only do so if there is a Strategy 1. Addressing the legacies of colonialism, racism and apartheid are now bound up with capitalist and neoliberal imperatives. How did we get here? Essentially, the message (and the lesson) is that there is no film or film industry without capitalism. Transformation becomes locked in with commodification. This is a big contradiction. How it will be resolved is key to the question of how and if a truly national cinema can exist in South Africa.

Anyhow, Strategy 1 is often manifest in the economically driven approach to the development of local film industries adopted from Western nations, notably America's Hollywood. It manifests in various national film industries seeking to reproduce so-called "local Hollywoods" (as described by Goldsmith and O'Regan, 2005). Elsaesser described the relation thus: "Hollywood has successfully exported and naturalized its construction of the cinema as

[15] NFVF, 2025a, "FAQs about the NFVF", https://www.nfvf.co.za/faqs-about-the-nfvf/ [Accessed: 16 Oct. 2025].

[16] NFVF, 2025b, "What does the NFVF do?", https://www.nfvf.co.za/faqs-about-the-nfvf/ [Accessed 16 October 2025].

fictional entertainment requiring narrative closure" (Elsaesser, 1989, cited in Crofts, 2009: 50). This naturalised construction of cinema is dominating the world's media and entertainment complex. Elsaesser even posited that "so much of any nation's film culture is implicitly Hollywood" (Elsaesser, 1989, cited in Crofts, 2009: 50).

Local Hollywoods and Contextual Discontents

This localisation of Hollywood can be identified through homogeneous modes of production, distribution and exhibition, dominant conventional narrative structures, and the employment of genre as a strategy to maximise profits. Therefore, films become mere spectacle and entertainment products for passive audience consumption. A 2002 *Newsweek International* article noted that, "Hollywood is no longer a place, it's a state of mind" (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005). Could the same thing be said of apartheid, the B-Scheme and A-Scheme, and Bantustans? It appears that, more than a state of mind, Hollywood has also become a set of practices, conduct, and tendencies that can be operative anywhere in the world, not just in America. Hollywood is also a genre and form of being. Whereas Hollywood is a form of national cinema that reflects the "American ideal," it has, in fact, become – just like capital – a viral (and virulent) form of border-crossing international cinema.

Hollywood's practices are thus the practices of footloose international capital. Its use of genre as an economic strategy and "insurance policy" (Watson, 2007), for example, is characterised by repeatedly using familiar narrative codes to predict target markets in an attempt to contain financial risks (Nelmes, 2012). These narrative codes and conventions have become the dominant film language familiar to audiences and a framework in which even local filmmakers place the content of their work (Diawara, 1988). In fact, various South African film industry stakeholders in pre-production, production and post-production prefer film training institutions to utilise "overseas" curricula when teaching and training potential industry employees (NFVF, 2016b). Furthermore, the naturalised Western film aesthetic becomes the prism through which to critique films, skills and industry capacity (Goldsmith, 2012; Hildenbrand & Farias, 2019). In this context, film studios become job creators or employers of local talent servicing local and largely international film productions. In the end, the possibility of a truly transformed national cinema in South Africa emerging within the Hollywoodisation of the "local" industry through a Western film services approach, powered by neoliberal economic policies where governments partly function as conduits for maintaining colonial relations, seems remote.

Studios and mega production companies remain central in the national and international film

production ecology of the Western media-industrial complex. Ster-Kinekor, Nu Metro, Filmfinity, Empire Entertainment, United International Pictures, and Indigenous Film Distribution, identified as some of the highest-earning companies in the South African box office environment (NFVF, 2018a), are plugged into international networks through which they distribute and exhibit films for longer periods. Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro theatres continue to dominate exhibition and distribution across the country on behalf of the Hollywood genre. So, if film studios are significant and strategic infrastructure in the development of globally competitive film industries (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005:52), situated in national territories to serve international production levels and demands, what happens to national cinema? The idea of transforming the industry to become "representative of the nation, commercially viable, encouraging development" (Botha, 2003) contradicts the idea of mimicking Hollywood through creating "local Hollywoods". For example, industry transformation in this context calls for a deeper philosophical engagement with modernity, as the intellectuals of the New African Movement did. With their diverse ethnic backgrounds and complex political, cultural and intellectual praxis, they exemplified endeavours by native South Africans engaged in a struggle to actively participate in constructing an African-led modernity (Masilela, 2009, 2013) in South Africa. These intellectuals engaged in critical discourse about African identity, tradition, language and modernity, thus setting the stage for the liberation movement. Their forte was asking the most important and urgent questions of the day regarding culture, identity, belonging, colonialism, power, empire, progress, race, knowledge, education, and development. This level of question-posing is necessary in the quest for a truly national cinema.

Question-posing must be accompanied by a strong focus on skills, learning, and public education. Indeed, the search for the emergence of a truly *national* cinema requires that film practice and scholarship confront what Dereck Attridge & Rosemary Jolly (1998) described in literature as 'the embarrassment, reminder of historical neglect and the impoverishment of black writing coexisting with the cultural privilege and opportunity in the case of white writing'. The South African government's transformation initiatives through the NFVF promote the development of the film industry through educational and training programmes approved by the Media, Information and Communication Technologies Sector Education and Training Authority (MICTSETA) (NFVF, 2016b). Learnership opportunities are granted to "previously disadvantaged" groups to provide them with practical work experience as part of on-the-job learning, while internship opportunities are granted to a number of graduates to fast-track their skills development and prepare them for potential employment (NFVF, 2016b). The development of skills focuses on employability, and while it provides the necessary preparation

for potential employment, it is not designed to disrupt hegemonic cultural matrices, ideologies, and uneven patterns of film service ownership that are part of the structural legacies of apartheid. Instead, it is designed to feed the industry's economically and racially fragmented value-chain structures. Furthermore, the disparities in industry experience, skills levels, ownership and control of key film services, and limited knowledge of industry business networks developed during colonialism times remain a burden on the current industry. According to an NFVF skills report, the majority of industry practitioners were identified as semi-skilled, with little room for upskilling (NFVF, 2016b; KZNTAFA, 2025a). This was due to the limited opportunities for sustainable careers in the industry, which is comprised of previously disadvantaged population groups (NFVF, 2016b).

Underlying micro-inequities and negative perceptions, such as the stereotyping of those previously marginalised, can influence the work environment or opportunities and experiences of those individuals within workspaces (Birkelund et al., 2020; Ndobo et al., 2017). The film production context is no exception. Although the increasing diversity of the film industry is being celebrated internationally as more films starring black women rise, global film services and experts such as writers, directors, producers, marketers, distributors, theatre owners, and streamers remain predominantly white (UCLA, 2024). In Hollywood, black directors are "disproportionately located on the margins, underrepresented in lucrative positions at core institutions – major studios – and on core cultural products – big budget movies" (Erigha, 2017: 1217). Furthermore, films in which black or "previously marginalised" people play a pivotal role in production and as cast have been marginalised by Hollywood marketing, failing to promote black films "based on the assumption that they cannot appeal to international audiences" (Kim & Brunn-Bevel, 2019:37). In Hollywood, this act of undervaluing black-led film projects has significant consequences leading to the industry losing $10 billion annually.[17] Alongside race, sexism remains at the core of industry despite seemingly increasingly progressive perceptions of gender equity internationally (Jones & Pringle, 2015). In the South African film industry, race and gender marginalisation remain a persistent organising characteristic. Although there are high participation numbers of "previously disadvantaged" people in the South African film production space, "the levels, employment terms and power of black individuals are not equitable to their sizeable participation, particularly when measured against white participation in the industry" (NFVF, 2022d: 32).

[17] Ramos, D.-R., 2021, "New study finds undervaluing of black-led projects costs Hollywood $10 billion annually", *Deadline*, https://deadline.com/2021/03/mckinsey-and-company-study-black-led-projects-hollywood-diversity-inclusion-representation-1234711705/

The same challenges persist along gender and sexuality lines (NFVF, 2022d: 32). Magubane (2019: 8) stated that "race as an established societal classification reassures historically informed insights, outlooks and actions towards individual group members. Thus, categorical blackness in the workplace initiates problematic suppositions around aptitude, lassitude and meritocracy". The persistence of perceptions rooted in colonialism and apartheid, even in the absence of their physical administration, reproducing inequalities, core-periphery, superior-inferior participation in opportunities and work environments, indicates how remanent the "old" problems are. Reuben and Bobat (2014: 8) explained that "these racist ways of constructing black South Africans are still embodied in everyday practices. It is argued that through everyday talk, people, whether voluntarily or not, discursively draw on resources that function in sustaining historical privilege and ideas about inferiority and superiority." This takes place in subtle, covert, naturalised or taken-for-granted ways which indicates the risk that the historically oppressed might internalise stereotypes and other identity markers of inferiority (Reuben & Bobat, 2014).

Persistent and invisibly entangled markers of colonial hierarchy in South African social life can affect perceptions and reinforce negative stereotyping in employability and work environments. These markers include:

- One's position in society: poor socio-economic status, a poor education system, curriculum issues, the choice of higher education institution, and the social connections to which the student belongs (Harry et al., 2018)
- A racial hierarchy of skills: stereotypes of black incompetence (Reuben & Bobat, 2014; Myeza & April, 2021)
- Power structures: allowing few individuals, mainly white men, to hold much of the decision-making power (Wolgast, 2025).

These persistent and systemic oppressive relationships are structured through social institutions such as schools, businesses, hospitals, and the workplace. Government agencies themselves can be viewed as representing the institutional dimension of oppression (Collins, 1989).

The dominance of Strategy 1 in South African film policy and funding infrastructure can be seen in made-for-TV films commissioned and produced for and with the "previously marginalised". In essence, the positioning of low-budget films in public and private South African television broadcasting is celebrated for helping to increase the number of productions

by “previously marginalised” industry professionals and businesses (Slade, 2015). A perception has thus been built that these increased volumes are contributing to the transformation agenda in the industry. However, positioning black-owned film services to exercise creative control over these stories does not fully capture the dynamics of this process. Instead, it calls for a closer look at the conditions under which the films were made. The films can be described as “made-for-television films since they are not intended for the cinema circuit but are commissioned by television networks to be exhibited exclusively on their channels” (Selekane, 2019:2). The shift to commissioned projects stems largely from the fact that the film distribution landscape in South Africa is limited and remains closed off to the majority of previously marginalised filmmakers. Entry to cinemas remains for foreign films and South African white-owned productions, particularly Afrikaans film. Hence, the commissioning model appears to be an alternative to the distribution duopoly enjoyed by Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro. The risk of such shifts is that the medicine can incapacitate or even kill the patient.

Shifting to the Commissioned Model: Novice Filmmaker and the Marginalised Audiences

The shift to the commissioning model has seen made-for-TV projects such as *Ekasi: Our Stories*, *Lokshin Bioskop,* and *Mzansi Movies* which typically utilise a feature film narrative structure to present local stories. An existing corpus of made-for-TV low-budget films can be traced back to ETV, DStv’s introduction of Mzansi Bioskop and Mzansi Magic, and SABC (Ebrahim, 2018; Selekane, 2019). These initiatives emerged after Nollywood films’ success in attracting large audiences (Ebrahim, 2018; Selekane, 2019). ETV has three distinct types of commissioned content which play a significant role in shaping the outcome of the content: i) content developed in alignment with the issuing of a brief by ETV; ii) the unsolicited submission of proposals by producers; and iii) the production of advertiser-funded content within ETV’s Advertiser Funded Programme (ETV, 2010). Inspired by the “success of Nollywood films, and its Africa Magic channel dedicated to broadcasting Nollywood films, DStv, in 2012, embarked on the formation of a South African black township film channel, namely Mzansi Bioskop” (Selekane, 2019:3). The narratives of these films focused on the South African township, following the Nollywood formula which prioritised novice filmmakers to direct the commissioned films about the stories, lives, and worlds of ordinary people (Selekane, 2019). Ernest-Samuel (2017) noted that MultiChoice’s African Magic channel provided direct and indirect benefits to the Nigerian film industry including improved-quality film productions and online access to films. Nollywood, in a sense, is deemed to be a type of popular film genre and industry due to its mass audiences and the discussions people

have about its films in public spaces (Haynes, 2000; Selekane, 2019).

The increased popularity of *Ekasi: Our Stories* and *Lokshin Bioskop* in South Africa led to an increase in commissioned films by local television networks (Selekane, 2019). However, the films lack an ideological centre: there is no sense that they are driven by a social or cultural imperative. Rather, they are forms of spectacle, made for money. MultiChoice wants content, and the filmmakers oblige. Such *transactional* films evidently depart from representing the township space in a deliberately thoughtful and socially conscious way, showing all its complexities, aspirations and struggles. Since the interest is commercial and transactional, and the focus is on spectacle, there is a watering down of socio-economic issues. Thus, commissioned film projects, as made-for-money-only artefacts, not only risk eroding the artistic autonomy of novice filmmakers, particularly those dependent on these growth opportunities, but foster dependence, short-lived gratification, and neglect of storylines that contribute to a meaningful national cinema. Making films only for money is one of the risks of an overdependence on Strategy 1. When TV networks reap economically from their entrenched position among South African audiences, wealth stays where it has always been. Once more, uneven development and underdevelopment persist. *Transactional filmmaking* is the wrong pathway to arrive at a truly national cinema.

2.3 DEFINING AND INTERROGATING NATIONAL CINEMA

The concept of a national cinema is the subject of a large amount of critical scholarship (Botha, 2012; Crofts, 1993; Flanery, 2009; Hayward, 2005; Higgins, 2000; Maingard, 2007; Masilela & Balseiro, 2003; O'Regan, 1996; Street, 2009; Zhang, 2004). It can be understood in terms of two approaches that examine the origin or rise of a nation and the role of nationalism in that rise. The first approach is an essentialist or classical analysis of national cinema. In terms of this framework, one looks "to the cinema, its narratives, iconography or recurring motifs" and attempts to "show the uniqueness of a nation's beliefs and values", highlighting their relation to the nation's identity (Elsaessar, 2013:6). The focus is not to problematise the 'national' in cinema but to reveal through signs and artefacts characteristics of a nation's identity (Elsaessar, 2013). In other words, this is a textual approach. Such an approach to the study of national cinema simply provides insight limited to the examination of film texts, their themes, narratives, characters, storylines, and textual meanings (Higson, 1990). Another limitation of the classical analysis approach to national cinema lies in its essentialism, in the sense of cultivating pre-conceived notions of national identity (Crofts, 2000; Elsaessar, 2013).

The second approach to the study of national cinema is connected to a modernist or constructivist school of thought that perceives nations as *constructs* and media constructs. In essence, cinema is seen as playing a crucial role in constructing what Anderson (1983) calls "imagined communities", with film texts, narratives and recurring motifs actively "constructing" "imagined" national identities and contributing to the formation of a cohesive national idea and ideal. This approach argues that "imagined communities" tend to be represented as unified, characterised by shared values and a common vision for the nation (Anderson, 1983; Higson, 2000). In this context, national cinema must in its "imaginative process be able to resolve the 'actual' history of conflict and negotiation in the experience of community. It must be able to hold in place – or specifically to exclude – any number of other experiences of belonging" (Street, 1997:6). This perspective provides a significant point of departure in that it leaves room for reflecting on and questioning the *national* in any cinematic form today if we agree that cinema not only constructs the "imagined" but somehow *imagines the nation*. If the nation and the national are constructed, the representation and construction of identities become a subjective exercise which can produce heterogeneous or homogeneous visions of the "imagined community".

It seemed that the second approach – that of looking at the contexts of production – would be more fitting to this study. Thinking about a national cinema requires that one look at cinema as a corpus. The theory and method for doing so can be, as in the present case, the film services framework. Such a methodology allowed me to track inputs in the different stages of the film value chain (see Chapter 1). It is fitting, in the examination of the inputs of the film value chain, to unpack the context from which cinematic narratives are birthed in order to understand the key voices shaping film practice in an imagined community or nation. Hill (1992:17) made the following observation in this regard:

> It is quite possible to conceive of a national cinema, in the sense of one which works with or addresses nationally specific materials, which is none the less critical of inherited notions of national identity, which does not assume the existence of a unique or unchanging 'national culture', and which is quite capable of dealing with social divisions and differences.

Here, Hill (1992) linked nation, national culture, national identity, and national cinema. This combo was critical to the thesis that I advanced in this study. Hill (1992) posited that national cinema is conceivable as a framework through which to investigate and address nationally specific industry processes, something of a conceptual lens through which to critique, question and challenge existing notions about the "national". Thus, in our examination, it is imperative

to explore how national cinema is shaped by the very society it shapes.

The practice in other countries is to define their own cinematic forms as "national" as a way of distinguishing and promoting it. In part, this is a "reaction to international pressures, political and economic" (Hayward, 2004:8). Hence, for example, the British government's initial introduction of film quotas in 1927 was motivated by economic and cultural fears (Street, 2001). It seems that the British government did so in recognition of the cultural significance of its film industry and because of fears that American films would dominate the British markets, thereby capturing the "British imagination" and shaping the desires and aspirations of British citizens in favour of American culture and goods (Napper, 2012). The result was that government regulations pertaining to film exhibition favoured local film production. The quotas were part of the first British legislation, the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927, in support of the development of a British cinema, requiring every film exhibitor to show a certain percentage of locally produced films (Napper, 2012; Street, 2001). The percentage would rise each year. This meant more screen space for British films alongside American films (Napper, 2012).

National cinema, if we take the British example as a case in point, therefore implies a level of cultural mercantilism and cultural nationalism. In this sense, it contains elements of a necessary essentialism, perhaps even strategic essentialism. Street (2009) described the current British national cinema as "inflected with a multitude of different connotations, often implying a jingoistic, nationalist imperative, while at other times challenging that view by giving a voice to those who have had very different experiences of living in Britain" (Street, 2009:2). In other words, focus is placed on promoting constructions of patriotic national identity while giving vent to ideas of "shared" "imagined" identity and giving voice to diverse and hybrid cultural miscegenation unique to that territory. In the same way, one can think of the film services that make up a film industry value chain as determining the industry's capacity to construct, challenge or shape national culture. If Street (2009) is correct and national cinema is jingoistic, then the concept cannot be adopted wholesale. Rather, it must be vetted and re-adapted for the South African context and history. After all, I have already rejected the sort of national culture that is represented, for example, by *Die Voortrekkers*.

Higson (1989:6) disputed the existence of "a single universally accepted discourse of national cinema". Rather, the concept is appropriated for different reasons in different ways. Hayward (2005:6) even asserted that, "the concept of a nation's cinema will change according to the

nation's ideology". As such, one cannot see the same national cinema every time. Rather, it is shapeshifting and chameleon-like. An underlying assumption in Hayward's assertion is that there is or must be a shared, unifying national ideology that shapes a nation's cinema as "national". For example, in capitalist countries, capital culture shapes or ascribes a cinema as "national" in economic terms as seen through America's Hollywood (Hayward, 2005). Hollywood, of course, is hardly "national" because of its pervasive global presence. It carries the idea not just of the American "nation" but also the desires and aspirations of the American "empire".

Higson's argument (1989) that there can be no single, universal definition of national cinema means that one can construct a working definition that fits a given aim. One of the aims of my study, in fact, was to construct a working definition of national cinema that fits the South African film production context. Whatever definition will be arrived at will be in concord with Hill's linkage of nation, national culture, national identity, and national cinema (1992). Furthermore, if Hayward (2005) is correct about the shapeshifting nature of national cinema, it allows us to see the antecedents and beginnings of national cinema in South Africa even before 1994, particularly in African storytelling, in the early work of Sol Plaatje and the New African Movement, and in the independent, banned filmmaking of the apartheid era such as that of Nana Mahomo. Indeed, Masilela (2009:2) argued that "simultaneous with the necessary breakage of white supremacy in film production, the native South Africans need to re-acquire the consciousness of the precedent of the intellectual and cultural heritage of the New African Movement". Hence, the development of black South African literature and poetry by the likes of Benedict Wallet Vilakazi and John Dube and the development of black audiences and film culture with intellectual discourse on the state of the African by the likes of Solomon T. Plaatje (Maingard, 2007; Masilela, 2009) are all antecedents of national culture, even if they begin before 1994.

Crofts' argument (2009:385) that "national cinema has long informed the promotion of non-Hollywood cinemas" allows us, effectively, to exclude Hollywood as national cinema. The point, rather, is that national cinemas are specific formations *against* Hollywood. Their effect, in the end, is to conscientise national and global audiences about the diversity of cinema, stories, storylines, narratives, worldviews, and film industries. So, in Crofts' view (2009), to posit national cinema is to resist and challenge Hollywood. If this assertion is correct, it becomes a radical critique of Strategy 1 which forms part of the normative policy infrastructure of the contemporary South African film industry. As I noted, Strategy 1 is preoccupied with

film-friendliness and creating "local Hollywoods". National policies are torn about which strategy to adopt, or how best to adopt a strategy, choosing between Strategy 1 and Strategy 2, in order to maximise the economic potential of creative industries, and, in this case, cinema. In a sense, all cinemas, if they seek to be competitive, and to circumvent Hollywood by being competitive, are national cinemas. The economic approach to national cinema concerns itself with understanding the dynamics of a local film industry's "economy, asking questions such as who funded the film? How many citizens were employed and in key roles such as directors scriptwriters or producers?" (Higson, 2000:36). The aim is to achieve commercial viability, sustainability and competitive advantage locally and globally – a strategy of "taking our place in the sun", informed by a need for film industries to carve out economic power among other cinemas including Hollywood. That challenge to Hollywood somehow always begins by cultivating local audiences and solving the puzzle of distribution (and exhibition). Films must reach the audiences for which they are intended. South African films must *also* be seen in South Africa by South Africans. South Africans must see South African films in South Africa. It is with this sort of reasoning that we can craft a national cinema.

There are many examples of national projects that seek to carve out a place in the sun for specific national cinemas. For instance, film festivals, art galleries and other non-conventional exhibition spaces are utilised in this regard. They help to mobilise and promote various film industry offerings through multiple screenings of a diverse body of film, thus branding a country as culturally distinct and internationally relevant. Some of these films exhibited at film festivals normally have little to no access to mainstream cinemas in their nation of production. The Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) is currently the longest running festival in South Africa, attracting film industry stakeholders including government, distributors, exhibitors, funders, producers, academics, and the public from across South Africa, Africa and internationally.[18] African film festivals such as the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), the Zimbabwe International Film Festival, and the Zanzibar International Film Festival prioritise screening and celebrating films produced by African filmmakers based on the continent, while also celebrating the usage of diverse African languages in film practice (Dovey, 2020; Ultian-Preston, 2022; Ureke, 2020). There is evidence that these African film festivals value the presence of local audiences, with screening sites in the city, townships and rural areas during the DIFF (for example), as well as the presence of filmmakers and curators to help make films and industry more accessible. In my experience,

[18] Durban FilmMart Institute, n.d., "About the Durban FilmMart", https://durbanfilmmart.co.za/faqs/ [Accessed: 22 Oct. 2025].

local audiences attend film festivals beyond mere spectatorship. There is scope for the cultivation of culturally nuanced reception, the enjoyment of films with loved ones, networking with industry, and discussions and dialogue on context-specific social, political and economic issues, as well as appreciation of alternative films outside the popular and commercial films (Dovey, 2020).

During apartheid, film festivals, along with churches and community halls, were film exhibition sites that were rigidly controlled, regulated and censored by the government (Botha, 2012). That said, film festivals, if imagined and reimagined *generatively*, could still form part of the film marketing, distribution and exhibition strategies for national cinema under a revamped idiom of Strategy 2. This helped film producers widen the audience reach for their films nationally and internationally. When all is said and done, distribution remains the key challenge in the viability of the national cinema project. Festivals have become a site for film exhibitions where audiences, film and filmmakers share an opportunity to interact with each other (Grunwell & Ha, 2008). They also serve film business agendas where film producers engage with sales agents from distribution companies and potential film financing platforms, a type of film festival approach that is predominant in festival circuits of the Global North such as the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), Cannes, Berlinale, Venice, and International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR). Disappointingly, major film festivals in South Africa have not radically re-imagined this idiom from the Global North film festival circuit. Local film festivals tend to be city-centric with the majority of film screenings taking place in the city, away from most of the local population that is already marginalised through inaccessible cinemas in terms of distance and costs (Ultian-Preston, 2022). However, the Durban International Film Festival hosts a few screenings in townships as part of its outreach programme. Furthermore, the major South African film festivals, borrowing from Euro-Western festivals, open and close with gala premieres that can only be accessed by those in the industry's "inner circle" through invitation (Dovey, 2020). Although the agency to create films, curate film programmes and set the agenda is in the hands of the previously marginalised, certain Eurocentric film festival practices carry pervasive influence (Dovey, 2020; Ultian-Preston, 2022). Furthermore, the financing of film festivals in Africa and their sustainability during and after festival screening periods remains contentious and dependent on each festival's funding strategy and access to relevant networks including film exhibition venue owners, screening technology, private and foreign investors, and government film offices (national, provincial, regional) (Ultian-Preston, 2022).

The concept national cinema, clearly, is not innocent or value-free. Rather, it is complex and

contentious partly due to the "politics of production, distribution, reception and their textuality" (Crofts, 2009). To talk of national cinema is to wade into the debate about what constitutes a nation and national culture. It is thus a big topic that must be narrowed down. In this study, the approach was to narrow it down by, first, avoiding the textual analysis of films and, second, focusing on film services and the value chain. This allowed me to critique national culture by critiquing aspects of the value chain. For example, I could focus on the funding structure in the local film industry. The funding structure of film productions, especially those that receive funding from outside the nation for production, draws criticism in terms of how "national" the film is, despite the presence of local actors, crew and setting.

Crofts (2009: 50) expanded on the definition of national cinemas as phenomena that are *distinct* from Hollywood. To do so, he provided seven taxonomic categories of existing national cinemas that offer a generalised description of the *elements* of national cinemas:

> 1) Cinemas which differ from Hollywood, but do not compete directly, by targeting a distinct, specialist market sector; 2) those which differ, do not compete directly but do directly critique Hollywood; 3) European and Third World entertainment cinemas which struggle against Hollywood with limited or no success; 4) cinemas which ignore Hollywood, an accomplishment managed by few; 5) anglophone cinemas which try to beat Hollywood at its own game; 6) cinemas which work within a wholly state-controlled and often substantially state-subsidized industry; and, 7) regional or national cinemas whose culture and/or language take their distance from the nation-states which enclose them.

Crofts' taxonomy (2009) is relational and comparative (see Table 1), defining national cinemas in relation to and in comparison with each other or Hollywood cinema, although he categorised Third World national cinemas without dealing with the nuances that inform various African countries' distinctive approach to cinema.

National Cinema Production	Key Descriptor	National Cinema
A. European-model art cinemas	• The best-known form of national cinema • Aims to differentiate itself textually from Hollywood • Asserts explicitly or implicitly an indigenous product • Specialist distribution channels and exhibition venues are usually called "arthouses"	France, post-1945 era West Germany Britain Australia

B. Third World cinemas	• 1960s-1970s – opposed the USA and Europe in its anti-imperialist insistence on national liberation • Distinguishes itself politically and largely aesthetically from Hollywood and European art cinema models • Funding for such cinema is highly unreliable	Latin American, African and Asian nations Chile 1980s in ex-Portuguese colonies in Africa Fifth-generation Chinese filmmakers Filmmakers: Solanas, Mrinal Sen, Kidlat Tahimik, Sembene and Cisse
C. Third World and European	• Competes, with varying degrees of success, with Hollywood products in domestic markets	Holland, Ireland (small language communities) France
commercial cinemas	• Less well-known because they are seldom exported to the European and anglophone film cultures • Targets a market sector distinct from European-model art cinema and thus vies more directly with Hollywood for box office success	Uruguay Tunisia Japan South Korea
D. Ignoring Hollywood	• Nation states with large domestic markets and/or effective trade barriers • Culturally specific cinemas can arise and flourish	India Hong Kong
E. Imitating Hollywood	• Sought to beat Hollywood at its own game, and overwhelmingly failed • State investment in the countries' film industries has secured relatively stable production levels but has not guaranteed a culturally nationalist product	Predominantly anglophone countries: Britain, Canada, Australia
F. Totalitarian cinemas	• Predominant mode of the communist brand: socialist realism, seeking to convince viewers of the virtues of the existing political order • Peripheral to this, core production has been the often political art cinema of Tarkovsky, Jancsó, Makaveyev, and Wajda	Fascist Germany and Italy Chinese cinema: 1949-mid-1980s and fifth-generation cinema Stalinist regimes of the Soviet bloc Various proponents of the Cuban and Czech New Waves
G. Regional/ethnic cinemas	• Ethnic and linguistic minorities • Generally lacked the funds and infrastructure to support regional cinemas or national cinemas distinct from the nation states that enclose them	Quebecois Welsh Aboriginal, Māori or Native American cinemas Chicano cinema Afro-American cinema

Table 1: Stephen Crofts' national cinema taxonomy

Croft (1993: 57) rightly highlighted the lack of continuous "infrastructural support which nurtures indigenous cinemas" even if, it must be said, such observations, although factual, are hardly new or uncommon. Interestingly, the lack of institutional infrastructural support identifiable in Zimbabwe's post-independence cinema, though still highly problematic, is seen as also birthing new contextually specific film genres through truly indigenous and artistic

endeavours (Kohlmann, 2018; Mboti, 2014; Mboti, 2015; Ureke, 2017). Crofts (1993) pointed to consistent political unrest and economic uncertainties as barriers to the emergence of indigenous cinemas, highlighting the economic dependency of African nations on European private investors. He regarded this as weakening indigenous film production. However, again, Crofts (1993, 2009) did not delve into the impact of colonialism on the post-independence industry's (lack of) production, distribution and exhibition structures. In the end, Crofts' generalising description of Third World national cinemas is inadequate for navigating through the complexities of post-colonial African cinemas within varying socio-economic and political contexts.

Zhang (2004: 3) in his book *Chinese national cinema* acknowledged how "Chinese cinema like Australian cinema is a *messy* affair". Here, "messy" was borrowed from O'Regan's conceptualisation of Australian national cinema (O'Regan, 1996: 2). Zhang (2004: 3) borrowed the term to describe the complexities of the national cinema paradigm in the case of China and its territorial divisions of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Zhang (2004) is hesitant to examine Chinese national cinema in terms of Crofts' delineation of seven distinctive national cinemas. According to Zhang (2004, quoting O'Regan, 1996: 2), Chinese cinema is "fundamentally dispersed historically, politically, territorially, culturally, ethnically and linguistically" to be understood through Crofts' taxonomic approach. Zhang (2004) therefore resolves to use the term "Chinese national cinema" to "cover all films produced in mainland China (including those prior to 1949), Hong Kong and Taiwan, and instruct the reader to keep in mind all problematics or messiness".

Susan Hayward's approach to the discourse on national cinema (2005) is not so much about messiness as it is about how national cinema mirrors the emergence of nations and nationalism. Specifically, she considers how French "national cinema" establishes a metaphorical relationship between the birth of cinema in 1895 and the rise of nations and their nationalism in the 19th century (Hayward, 2005). This definition aligns with the Andersonian view of how nations emerge. In its crudest iteration, the Haywardian view would seem to lend credence to the "white nationalist culture" framing of *Die Voortrekkers* as national cinema. In Hayward's view, cinema became a tool in the construction of national identities in Europe, used to resist American hegemony (Hayward, 2005). Thus, Hayward (2005) focused on the contribution of cinema in the construction and naturalisation of the concept of nation. Critically, she delineates seven typologies: narratives, genres, codes and conventions, gesturality and morphology, the star as sign, the cinema of the centre and the cinema of the periphery, and finally, cinema as

the mobiliser of the nation's myths and the myth of the nation (see Table 2). Hayward deployed these typologies to enunciate the "national" in French national cinema.

National Cinema Typologies	Examples
Narratives	*In Secret* (2013), a screen adaptation of French novel *Therese Raquin* (1967)
Genres	Comedy, melodrama, psychological drama of the 1930s, and psychological or intimist genre
Codes and conventions	Labour and production practices: artisanal films, small- and medium-budget films Iconography: 1930s' representation of French middle-class through locations (music hall, café concert, guinguette)
Gesturality and morphology	Gestures, words, intonations, attitudes, postures
The star as a sign	Jean Gabin, John Wayne, Simone Signoret, Brigitte Bardot, etc.
Cinema of the centre and cinema of the periphery	• Hollywood/United States and the indigenous cinema in the periphery • Homogeneity of equipment and conversely heterodoxy of the production, gestural and narrational specificities • Central indigenous cinema and the artisanal cinema, amateur cinema periphery
Cinema as the mobiliser of the nation's myths and the myth of the nation	Cinema during the Vichy Period (1940-1944)

Table 2: Susan Hayward's national cinema typologies

The examination of narratives, genre, codes and conventions and their relation to national cinema is evident from a spectrum of studies on South African national fiction dating back to colonialism (Botha, 1995; Botha, 2012; Ellapen, 2007; Gutsche, 1946; Maingard, 2007; Modisane, 2013; Selekane, 2019). These studies explored how films reflect the nation to itself and at times project an image of the nation with distinct aesthetic choices. For example, Ellapen (2007) observed how post-apartheid cinematic representations of South African townships tend to subscribe to "place myths" that were constructed and popularised under apartheid. It was a process for othering the space and the people who live there in ways aligned with the apartheid racist ideology. Ellapen (2007: 113) also notes that "the 'cinematic township' has become 'fixed' in its visual aesthetics and fetishised in the memory and representations of South African filmmakers". In colonial South Africa, adventure, exploration, and travel films became one of the lenses through which identities along racial lines and spaces were cinematically constructed, influenced by the colonial ideology of "discovery" and projected for international audiences (Van Eeden, 2004). Therefore, even though South Africa's cinema history spans over a century, visions of "nation", aesthetic choices, and film language used in constructing these "imagined" identities and spaces emerged not from native South Africans, but rather from Euro-Western

explorers (Van Eeden, 2004).

South African cinema has also partly relied on the construction of a star system to create identifiable national symbols on screen. This is evident in the pool of prominent South African actors and filmmakers who have worked on multiple local and foreign film and television productions, including Leleti Khumalo in *Sarafina* (1992), Leon Schuster in *Mr Bones* (2001), Thuso Mbedu in *The Underground Railroad* (2021) and *Woman King* (2022), and Charlize Theron in *Italian Job* (2003). They also include Presley Chweneagae and Terry Pheto who starred in the Oscar-winning South African film *Tsotsi* (2005), Fana Mokoena who starred in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), Connie Chiume and Dr John Kani in *Black Panther* (2018), Arnold Vosloo in *Hard Target* (1993), Sharlto Copley in *District 9* (2009) and Atandwa Kani in *Black Panther* (2018). There are also star directors such as Gavin Hood, Jamie Uys, Neil Blomkamp and Gray Hofmeyr. In television, Mfundi Vundla is a star director who directed renowned actresses such as Connie Ferguson.

Although South African film production in the early 1900s centralised white actors and nationalism, particularly Afrikaner identity as seen in *Die Voortrekkers* (1916), this practice was later formalised under apartheid and supported by the state film subsidy in 1956 (Paleker, 2010; Verkerk, 2023). Actors such as Al Debbo and Frederik Burgers, who starred in *Kom Saam Vanaand* (1949), gained fame in the 1940s (Botha, 2006). More importantly, this era ushered in the emergence of star South African producers and directors such as Pierre de Wet producing *Altyd in my Drome* (1952), Jamie Uys with his first film *Daar Doer in die Bosveld* (1951), *Voor Sononder* (1962), and the SABC production of *Gideon Scheepers* (1982) directed by Henk Hugo (Botha, 2006; Verkerk, 2023). Botha (2006) and Verkerk (2023) noted that many of the early Afrikaans-language films were covertly nationalist, enhancing the culture of an increasingly dominant Afrikaans influence in film. It was during the 1920s to 1950s that various projects were established to address black audiences cinematically, including Reverend Ray Phillips' screenings of foreign films to black labourers in mining compounds (Maingard, 2007). Solomon T. Plaatje's mobile cinema travelled and screened films with black Americans in the marginalised black South African communities. Between 1949 and 1959, for the first time, a select number of South African feature-length films focused on centralising black identities and experiences (Maingard, 2007). Here, Dolly Rathebe was cast in *Jim Comes to Joburg* (1949) and Miriam Makeba in *Come Back Africa* (1959). From 1972 to 1990, under the B-Scheme films, several black screen actors emerged, working for white filmmakers, creating films for the black market. Here, Ken Gampu and Abigail Khubeka starred in *Joe Bullet* (1973).

In television, Henry Cele played Shaka in the original *Shaka Zulu* series (1985). Indeed, South African cinema has a long history of utilising cinema as one of the platforms to grapple with identity politics in representations of the *national* (Maingard, 2006).

Film industries	**Nickname with a "-wood" suffix**
Nigerian film industry	Nollywood
Bombay (Mumbai) film industry	Bollywood
Wellington in New Zealand	Wellywood
South Africa	Sollywood
Germany	Goerliwood
Ghana	Ghallywood
Pakistan	Kariwood
Bangladesh	Dhallywood
South Korea	Hallyuwood
Kenya	Riverwood
Uganda	Ugawood
Peru	Chollywood
Mexican	Mexiwood
Australia	Ausiewood
France	Gaulywood
Zimbabwe	Zollywood

Table 3: Some of the global film industries nicknamed with a "-wood" suffix

Crofts' placement of Hollywood at the centre of world cinema (2003) is borne out empirically, even just by considering how many national film industries refer to themselves with a "-wood" to resemble Hollywood. Examples include Bollywood, Nollywood and Sollywood (see Table 3). A century has passed since the Hollywood studios – Warner Brothers, Loew-MGM, Fox, Paramount and Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) – established global dominance (Hadida, 2021; Kochberg, 2012). In terms of market size, Hollywood is currently worth US$23.44 billion.[19] Its overall contribution to American GDP in 2024 was US$49 billion.[20] It employs 441.7 thousand Americans.[21] Blockbuster projects such as *The Little Mermaid* (2023) cost US$300 million.[22] These amounts of money are more than the GDP of many small countries.

[19] Research & Markets, 2025, "United States Movie Market Size and Share Analysis – Growth Trends and Forecast Report 2025-2033", https://www.researchandmarkets.com/report/united-states-film-motion-picture-market [Accessed: 30 Oct 2025].

[20] PZAZ, 2024, "Movie Production Market USA 2024", https://pzaz.io/producer-blog/movie-production-market-usa-2024/ [Accessed: 30 Oct. 2025].

[21] Statista, 2025, 18 Jun, "Employment in the motion picture & sound recording industries in the U.S. 2001-2024", https://www.statista.com/statistics/184412/employment-in-us-motion-picture-and-recording-industries-since-2001/#statisticContainer [Accessed: 30 Oct. 2025].

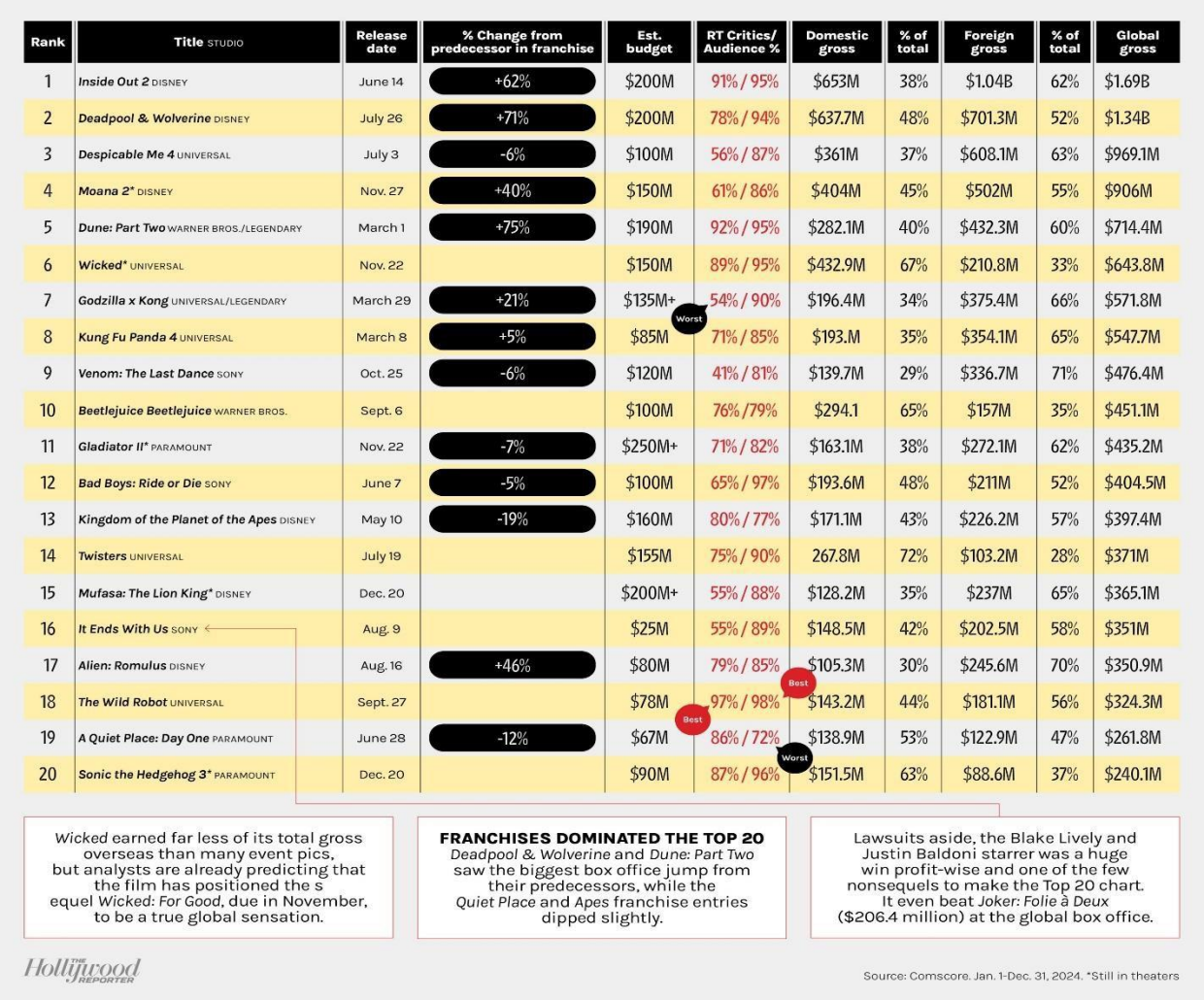
[22] NYFA, 2023, 20 Dec., "Analysing the production budget of box office blockbusters", https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/projects-that-made-the-most-of-their-monstrous-production-budget/ [Accessed: 30 Oct. 2025].

America has remained the most influential and powerful player, dominating the world's cultural industries (Crane, 2013; Hadida, 2021). Three factors have been identified through which Hollywood maintains its dominance and hegemony over global cultural production and consumption – and all three speak to the film services framework (Crane, 2013):

i) Resources, referring to the "enormous concentration of talent and economic resources dedicated to the production of film in the Los Angeles region" (Crane, 2013:366)
ii) Cost-effectiveness, referring to the "comparative advantage of the huge American market that offers economies of scale, ensuring that cultural exports can be sold at rates well below the cost of production for smaller nations" (Crane, 2013:366)
iii) Distribution system, referring to a "widespread and effective distribution system for American films in the USA and in many other countries that effectively excludes foreign films from the US market and ensures the success of American films abroad" (Crane, 2013: 366).

The first and second factors turn Hollywood into the gold standard for what constitutes a film-friendly nation, region or city. It is patently clear where the idea of film services, as currently understood, originates from. These three factors – all of which are critical in the film services framework – constitute Hollywood's competitive advantage (Crane, 2013; Scott, 2002). In a sense, Hollywood represents the mature and extreme version of Strategy 1 in the South African film policy and production context where the concentration of economic resources, talent, infrastructure in three cities and the presence of nationally dominant distribution companies in the three cities indicate the existence of a capacitated – even if unevenly – film industry. The two factors inform part of each city's competitive advantage. While South Africa has a smaller market compared to the American market, film services located in the three cities are positioned at an advantage, through close proximity to "high performing film industries" whose film projects frequently circulate the South African market (O'Regan, 2018). However, these factors also highlight a "gap in the limited structural industry resources of other provinces" when considered in terms of the film services framework (Visser, 2013).

The graphic below lists some of the salient Hollywood film titles released in 2024, along with their domestic and global box office earnings (see Figure 2).



Rank	Title STUDIO	Release date	% Change from predecessor in franchise	Est. budget	RT Critics/ Audience %	Domestic gross	% of total	Foreign gross	% of total	Global gross
1	*Inside Out 2* DISNEY	June 14	+62%	$200M	91% / 95%	$653M	38%	$1.04B	62%	$1.69B
2	*Deadpool & Wolverine* DISNEY	July 26	+71%	$200M	78% / 94%	$637.7M	48%	$701.3M	52%	$1.34B
3	*Despicable Me 4* UNIVERSAL	July 3	-6%	$100M	56% / 87%	$361M	37%	$608.1M	63%	$969.1M
4	*Moana 2** DISNEY	Nov. 27	+40%	$150M	61% / 86%	$404M	45%	$502M	55%	$906M
5	*Dune: Part Two* WARNER BROS./LEGENDARY	March 1	+75%	$190M	92% / 95%	$282.1M	40%	$432.3M	60%	$714.4M
6	*Wicked** UNIVERSAL	Nov. 22		$150M	89% / 95%	$432.9M	67%	$210.8M	33%	$643.8M
7	*Godzilla x Kong* UNIVERSAL/LEGENDARY	March 29	+21%	$135M+	54% / 90%	$196.4M	34%	$375.4M	66%	$571.8M
8	*Kung Fu Panda 4* UNIVERSAL	March 8	+5%	$85M	71% / 85%	$193.M	35%	$354.1M	65%	$547.7M
9	*Venom: The Last Dance* SONY	Oct. 25	-6%	$120M	41% / 81%	$139.7M	29%	$336.7M	71%	$476.4M
10	*Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* WARNER BROS.	Sept. 6		$100M	76% /79%	$294.1	65%	$157M	35%	$451.1M
11	*Gladiator II** PARAMOUNT	Nov. 22	-7%	$250M+	71% / 82%	$163.1M	38%	$272.1M	62%	$435.2M
12	*Bad Boys: Ride or Die* SONY	June 7	-5%	$100M	65% / 97%	$193.6M	48%	$211M	52%	$404.5M
13	*Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* DISNEY	May 10	-19%	$160M	80% / 77%	$171.1M	43%	$226.2M	57%	$397.4M
14	*Twisters* UNIVERSAL	July 19		$155M	75% / 90%	267.8M	72%	$103.2M	28%	$371M
15	*Mufasa: The Lion King** DISNEY	Dec. 20		$200M+	55% / 88%	$128.2M	35%	$237M	65%	$365.1M
16	*It Ends With Us* SONY	Aug. 9		$25M	55% / 89%	$148.5M	42%	$202.5M	58%	$351M
17	*Alien: Romulus* DISNEY	Aug. 16	+46%	$80M	79% / 85%	$105.3M	30%	$245.6M	70%	$350.9M
18	*The Wild Robot* UNIVERSAL	Sept. 27		$78M	97% / 98%	$143.2M	44%	$181.1M	56%	$324.3M
19	*A Quiet Place: Day One* PARAMOUNT	June 28	-12%	$67M	86% / 72%	$138.9M	53%	$122.9M	47%	$261.8M
20	*Sonic the Hedgehog 3** PARAMOUNT	Dec. 20		$90M	87% / 96%	$151.5M	63%	$88.6M	37%	$240.1M

Figure 2: Hollywood film titles released in 2024, with box office earnings (Source: The Hollywood Reporter)[23]

Critically, while Hollywood is dominated by the majors – currently Walt Disney, Paramount, Sony, Universal, and Warner Bros (Do et al., 2024) – the American film industry as a whole is not nearly as homogeneous. Rather, it is many-layered. On the one hand are the so-called majors or mega studios such as Paramount, Twentieth Century Fox and Disney which are horizontally and vertically integrated (Stöhr et al., 2019). On the other hand, there is the multiplicity of medium to small-scale independent industry players and small-budget productions with no global distribution endeavours but rather aimed solely for specific American niche audiences (Crane, 2013). Vertical integration simply means that a company is organised such that it can oversee a product from the "planning / development stage, through production, through market distribution, through to the end-user – the retail consumer" (Kochberg, 2012:5). For example, Walt Disney owns the companies that create and produce

[23] The Hollywood Reporter, 2025, 4 Jan, "How F-Bombs and Family fare saved the 2024 box office", https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/boxoffice-studio-marketshare-revenue-global-2024-1236098759/ [Accessed: 30 Oct. 2025].

their own films and television series which are marketed and distributed globally by them and broadcast on affiliated television networks including ABC.[24] When Walt Disney completed the acquisition of Pixar which is an industry-leader in animation production technology in 2006 it resulted in an accelerated rate of animation film development while Disney provided marketing and distribution (Li, 2023). Prior to the acquisition's completion, in 1991 already, Pixar and Disney collaborated on the production and distribution of three animated feature films (Li, 2023). The agreement stipulated that Disney was responsible for distribution, including sequels, while Pixar was responsible for production, story, and rights to sequels (Gasparini et al., 2025). Furthermore, "the two companies divide production costs and box office proceeds. Clearly, the teamwork was exceptional, as the first animated feature film 'Toy Story' grossed $362 million worldwide in 1995" (Li, 2023: 40). See Figure 3 for the organisational structure of the Walt Disney Media Group. The distribution window strategy for blockbuster films by majors generally includes a theatrical release window, which includes a phased approach to the cinematic release of films starting in the Global North (Kochberg, 2012). Thereafter, films are made available on other exhibition platforms, including online subscription-based video on demand (SVOD) or pay-per-view, followed by a movie channel window and then a free-to-air television window (Kochberg, 2012).

Horizontal integration, on the other hand, refers to "a merger or acquisition that occurs between two or more rival companies that produce and sell similar products in the same industry… firms can acquire advantage resources, lower costs, and expand market share through mergers, which greatly increases production and revenues" (Jiang et al., 2022: 1285). Disney, for example, finalised its acquisition of Fox in 2019, creating a horizontal merger and enabling Disney "to produce movies or TV series efficiently. This is because, as Fox and Disney are in the same industry, they are able to share each other's resources in movie production. Such as animators, art designers, and other parts of movie production will allow Disney to produce at both higher quality and quantity" (Deng et al., 2022:1286). At the time of writing, the media world was abuzz with the proposed merger of Netflix and Warner Bros.[25] The synergies resulting from horizontal mergers ensure, among others, optimal use of marketing tools for a film across the entire corporation, which includes print media, music, the online selling of merchandise,

[24] GHJ, 2017, "Vertical integration in the entertainment industry and its impact on profit participations", https://www.ghjadvisors.com/ghj-insights/vertical-integration-in-the-entertainment-industry-and-its-impact-on-profit-participations [Accessed: 30 Oct. 2025].

[25] Netflix ,20 January 2026, "Netflix and Warner Bros. Discovery Amend Agreement to All-Cash Transaction", https://about.netflix.com/en/news/netflix-and-warner-bros-discovery-amend-agreement-to-all-cash-transaction [Accessed: 1 February 2026].

ticket promotions and giveaways as demonstrated in the promotion of the *Harry Potter* films through the Time Warner and America Online (AOL) horizontal merger (Kochberg, 2012).

The division of film budgets into large, medium, and small categories is standard in Hollywood. The same budget-based division is replicated (and taken for granted) across the world. The different production and distribution priorities are facilitated by a network of local film services with the capacity to adequately supply independent and well-established filmmakers (Crane, 2013). Like all other film industries, the American film industry is not exempt from its own internal politics, contradictions, and tensions regarding the dominance of hegemonic systems of production and distribution predicated on differences in race, ethnicity, and culture (Dunn et al., 2021; Sperling, 2022; University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA], 2025). In other words, Hollywood is not as monolithic as it seems from the outside or from just using the catch-all label "Hollywood". Rather, it has a complex history, a contemporary reality and set of practices that are constantly in flux.

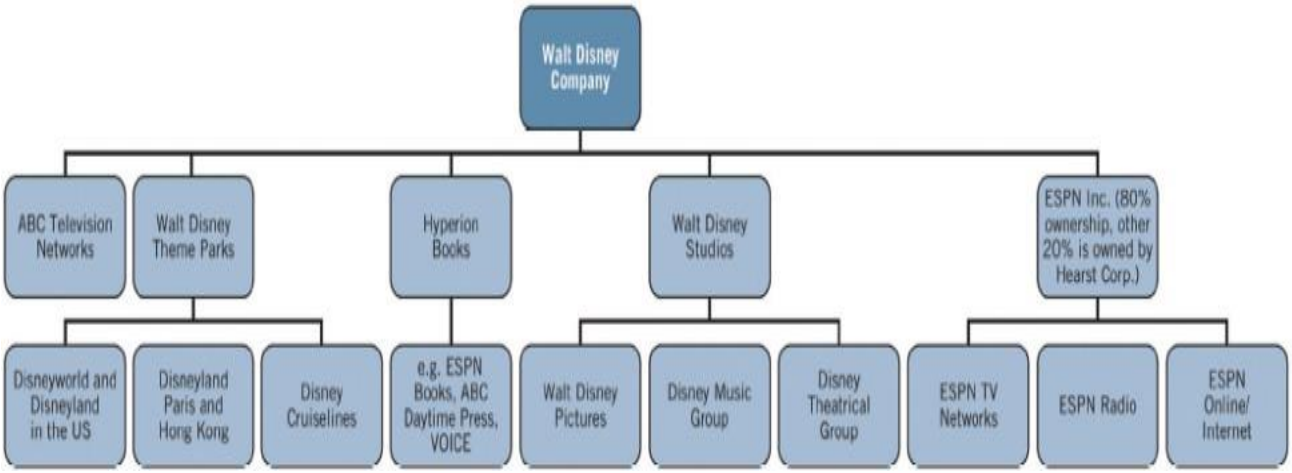


Figure 3: Organisational structure of the Walt Disney Media Group

The central role that private capital and rich white men play in Hollywood implies that the industry is correctly seen as being predicated on long-standing racially and culturally exclusionary production models that favour whiteness and patriarchy (Kim & Brunn-Bevel, 2019; Sperling, 2022). Its film value chain, spanning pre-production, production, distribution, and exhibition sectors, is run and dominated by white male elites (UCLA, 2025). This means that mainstream Hollywood film production sets are dominated by white-owned studios, casting agencies, filmmaking equipment and technology companies, directors, producers, and scriptwriters (Dunn et al., 2021). Recently, the #OscarsSoWhite social media hashtag spurred debate about one racialised aspect of the Hollywood value chain. This social media campaign

shone a spotlight on the long-standing lack of diversity in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) Awards, commonly known as the Oscars, as the 2016 nominations in 20 acting categories included only white performers (James, 2020). Since the #OscarsSoWhite hashtag, multiple film industry practitioners and the general public have expressed outrage and disquiet. The white and male-dominated academy's membership subsequently announced its aim to double the representation of women and ethnically underrepresented people as members.[26] There has been a gradual increase in the inclusion of racially and ethnically underrepresented people in top-grossing films, particularly in 2019.[27] However, the long-standing inequalities persist.

Ownership of means of production, distribution and exhibition, and key roles off-screen such as creator, director, producer or writer remain central to understanding how power and disparities along race, gender and class in cultural producing industries such as film are maintained. Capital itself, then, is fundamentally racialised. In Hollywood, the power shown by white males, extending into gender and sexual abuse, is exemplified by the Harvey Weinstein saga. The Hollywood executive producer and co-founder of Miramax Films was accused of and charged with sexual misconduct and certain instances of rape by "over eighty women" who worked with him (Cobb & Horeck, 2018; Khorasani, 2019:104). This case has highlighted the underlying racialised, class-based and gendered power imbalances in a white male-dominated industry, which enabled these violations to continue hidden for decades (Khorasani, 2019). The institutionalisation of white patriarchy in the film business created the conditions that produced, sustained and protected the predatory, abusive behaviour of powerful white men (Fisher, 2017). The film industry, and specifically Hollywood, is a intensely competitive, hierarchised gig industry that sexualises women and where livelihoods depend on securing jobs in multiple film projects. In this setup, males typically dominate on-screen and behind-the-scenes roles, in industry conditions that play a significant role in silencing victims who fear losing their income or being excluded and blackballed from future employment opportunities (Heldman & Haggard, 2017). The social stigma, fear of retribution, and secret settlement agreements have been contributing factors to a culture that accommodates gendered power-abusive behaviours (Khorasani, 2019). Furthermore, when organisations whose

[26] The New York Times, 2020, 6 Feb., "The hashtag that changed the Oscars: An oral history", https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/06/movies/oscarssowhite-history.html [Accessed: 1 Nov. 2025].

[27] USC Annenberg, 2020, 10 Sep., "Report finds popular film shows paltry progress towards inclusion", https://annenberg.usc.edu/news/research-and-impact/report-finds-popular-films-show-paltry-progress-toward-inclusion

ownership and executive positions are in the hands of a few white males fail to hold powerful executives accountable for sexual misconduct, it sends a message that priority is placed on protecting financial interests, male power and privilege (Fisher, 2017). Khorasani (2019: 105) has noted that, although there are government laws to protect against sexual assault, "Hollywood has somehow managed to evade these protections, as there has historically been a lack of federal oversight into the entertainment industry".

Hollywood's history of dividing filmmaking into three stages – production, distribution and exhibition – not only became a gold standard for film industries everywhere but demonstrated a turn from the initial novelty of motion picture as art into clearly defined areas for capitalist investment (Kochberg, 2012). Film is now normatively regarded as a business everywhere. Every aspect of the value chain is commodified and done for profit. Indeed, the most salient thing about Hollywood is the rabid commodification of every aspect of the film value chain. Film content and actors and actresses are proprietary brands that are marketed, sold, bought, exchanged, and contracted. Industry majors such as Paramount, William Fox, and Warner Brothers secured early financial backing, mobilising the finance sector to support their film projects and directing that capital to where their business interests lay in the value chain, whether in production, distribution, or exhibition theatres (McMahon, 2023; Morawetz, 2008). Due to the competitive, even cut-throat, nature of the industry, part of the success of production companies lies in their employment of highly skilled and capable professionals in specific roles, including directors, producers, scriptwriters, and cinematographers. Certain directors become internationally recognised for their distinctive directing style. For example, Steven Spielberg is known for a directing style that is "emotional and spectacle-driven … using special effects, creative camera angles and music to amplify wonder and surprise" in films such as *Jaws* (1975) (Khattri, 2024:2-3). Alfred Hitchcock, also known as the master of suspense and director of the iconic film *Psycho* (1960), is known for directing films, especially "psychological thrillers where editing, camera angles and music are manipulated to build tension, influence audience's perceptions and emotions" (Khattri, 2024:2-3). Certain actors become household names, known and remembered for prominent roles played in certain films. For example, Denzel Washington is known globally for his role as Malcom X in Spike Lee's film *Malcom X* (1992) and Meryl Streep is known for her role in Sydney Pollack's *Out of Africa* (1985). Other Hollywood scriptwriters such as Mario Puzo, Orson Welles, Herman Mankiewics, Robert Towne, Francis Ford Copolla, Woody Allen, Marshall Brickman even have prominence for their storytelling expertise.

Wayne (2020: 80) described Hollywood film production, stating that, "task fragmentation and hierarchical structuring of power relations within the production team are inextricably connected to the capitalist mode of production". The Hollywood workforce is typically hierarchical (Mayer et al., 2009). Workers are categorised and function as above-the-line professionals, which include film directors and producers who have creative and financial power, and below-the-line roles, which include set designers, camera operators, and various technical departments. These individuals function in specific roles with varying levels of remuneration, and creative and technical influence over the filmmaking processes, with their talent agents acting as dealmakers on their behalf (Roussel, 2017). McMahon (2023) stated that, ultimately, Hollywood's capitalist power lies in its ability to control how films are produced and consumed. The *capitalist power*, denoting "the ability to control, modify, and, sometimes, limit social creation through the rights of ownership – is the foundation of capital accumulation. For the Hollywood film business, capitalist power is about the ability of business concerns to set the terms that will shape the future of cinema" (McMahon, 2023). Business concerns influence why certain films are made and others are not made, and whose services and expertise to employ as part of risk mitigation because these considerations carry budget implications (McMahon, 2023; Watson, 2012). When filmmakers and TV networks involved in *Ekasi: Our Stories*, *Lokshin Bioskop* and *Mzansi Movies* show a preoccupation with film as a commercial transaction and as a commodity, this is a mutation of a practice that is second nature in Hollywood.

Navigating the Hollywood Effect: Nigeria, Korea and France

Hollywood, as the gold standard of Strategy 1, refracts to other film industries across the world, from France and Korea to Nigeria and beyond. Strategy 1 (that is, the capitalist imperative manifesting in the drive towards "local Hollywoods") is seen in the government interventions of the film-producing industries of France and Korea through import and screen quotas (Messerlin & Parc, 2017; Walkley, 2016). In Nigeria, the government also provides subsidies from time to time (Okoeguale, 2022). In terms of population, box office market size, and admissions per person, France is "around 66 million, USD 1.4 billion, and 3.1 admissions per

person" while Korea is "around 50 million, USD 1.5 billion, and 4.2 admissions per person for Korea, as of 2015" (Messerlin & Parc, 2017:52). A deeper analysis shows significant trends. For example, in 2024, foreign films lost dominance in Korean cinemas as the number of Korean films increased.[28] This suggests a shift towards a more *national* cinema. In Nigeria, similar dynamics seem to be at play. The Nigerian population is 239 million, as of the last census,[29] [29] and there are currently 81 cinemas, most of which are based in Lagos. This suggests a lessening of Hollywoodisation. In the heuristic that I propose in Chapter 5, a decline in local Hollywoods implies a strengthening of national cinema.

In 2024, Nigerian film productions were reported to have outsold Hollywood productions (Onyekwelu, 2025). The stranglehold on the local theatre seems to be loosening, Nollywood captured 50.05% in box office receipts in the first semester.[30] The very idea of Nollywood itself, as the world's second-largest film industry by volume (Amokeoja, 2024), represents a shift towards national cinema rather than a Strategy 1-style Hollywoodisation. The fact that national film industries refer to themselves with a "-wood" to resemble Hollywood seems only a marketing gimmick. In reality, Nollywood's strategy is *nothing* like Hollywood's. Recent reports by France's National Cinema Centre indicate that in 2024, French cinema admissions reached 181 million, with an overall gross of USD $ 1.41 billion, representing a positive increase following the Covid-19 pandemic (Keslassy, 2024). French-produced films had a box office market share of 44% which was higher than the market share of United States films at 36% (Goodfellow, 2024). As such, there seems to be a constant push in many countries against *Hollywoodisation*. This push, however, operates against the very real pull of Hollywood. This means that, at any given time, in any country, there is a push against Hollywood and a pull towards it. This implies that the concept of national cinema is inherently *schizophrenic*. The push for national cinema (Strategy 2) is contradicted by Hollywoodisation (Strategy 1). The tension between them is constant. Interestingly, although governments of film-producing nations have established interventions to protect and promote national cinemas and their cultural and economic value in a highly competitive capitalist industry, dependence on subsidies may also have negative effects by reinforcing the private sector's reluctance to invest

[28] The Korea Times, 2025, 3 Jan., "Korean films surpass foreign films in box office share for 2024", https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2025/01/398_389605.html [Accessed: 4 Oct. 2025].

[29] Worldometer, n.d., "Nigerian population", https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/nigeria-population/ [Accessed: 4 Oct. 2025].

[30] In On Africa, 2024, 3 Dec., "Nigeria creates Africa's first international and profitable film industry", https://www.inonafrica.com/2024/12/03/nigeria-creates-africas-first-international-and-profitable-film-industry/ [Accessed: 4 Oct. 2025].

(Messerlin & Parc, 2014). Hence, protectionist regulations that were implemented by the French government, such as the 1928 import quota, required that for every seven foreign films imported into the French cinema market, one French film must be produced (Messerlin & Parc, 2014). The intention was to 'support national film production and create an appetite for French films'; however, the quota was not effective due to the limited number of French productions. The introduction of screen quotas in the 1930s required US films to dub French language into a percentage of US films distributed in the French market' (Messerlin & Parc, 2014).

The Gradual Rise of Film Production in African Countries

The graph below illustrates the number of African film-producing countries with a high volume of annual productions, with Nigeria leading the way with a substantial number. Film production is on a gradual rise in African countries, even under difficult and precarious socio-economic and political conditions (see Figure 4).

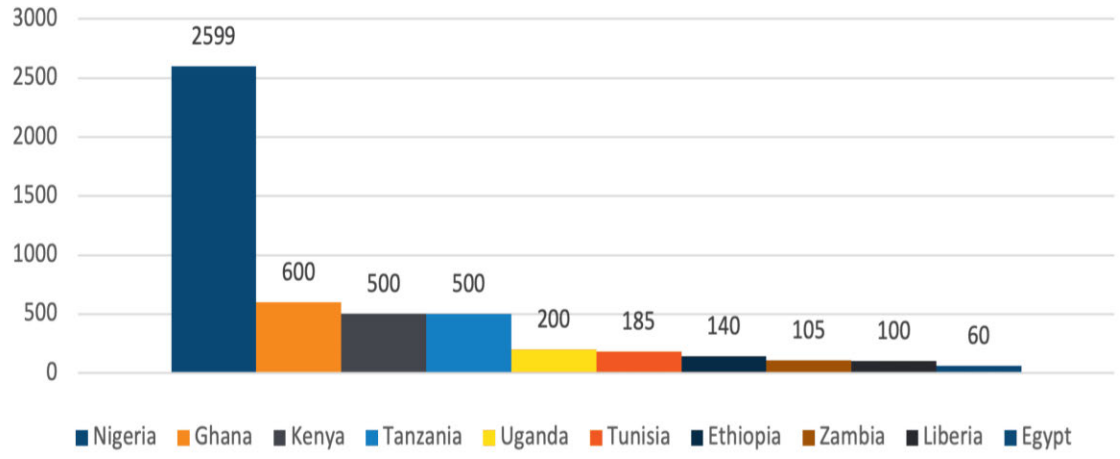


Figure 4: Major African film-producing countries by volume

The push of Strategy 2 and the pull of Strategy 1 complicate the quest for a truly national cinema in Africa. Considering that the introduction of cinema in Africa is closely linked to the arrival of European modernity, it is fitting to examine, first, what the emergence of African cinemas signifies as a cultural and ideological shift in history and, second, how this history can inform lessons in the quest for a truly national cinema. Cinematic production in various African nations during the colonial era was a practice by European explorers whose agenda included creating visual narratives about Africa for international audiences. In other words, cinema was introduced as an instrument of imperialism. There was no Strategy 2. There was only an early form of Strategy 1, but in the hands of the coloniser. Souleymane Cisse, a Malian film director, stated the following in this regard (in Blum-Reid, 2003:130):

> Those who came to film us never showed the people here as human beings. They came to show us to their audiences as though we were animals. They saw us with their eyes. They filmed us any old how. We know the camera can give a positive image of human beings. This White cinema shows Africans as not belonging to the human community. They filmed wild animals with more respect!

Other European films about Africans tended to romanticise life on the African continent, portraying Africans as either children or "noble savages" (Ukadike, 2013). The exhibitionist treatment of Africa in colonial cinema was made possible in part through the exclusion of Africans and African narratives in the production process. When featured as cast members, it was extras and props in a Dark Continent, portrayed through ideological frames based on "othering". An example is Josephine Baker's *La Sirene des Tropiques* (1927) which shows Africans as being the kin of the ape (Barlet, 2000).

The colonisation, exploitation and domination of Africa was not only in the physical and geographical domain where the continent's natural resources were pillaged, as happened in the case of South Africa with the discovery of diamonds and gold, reducing the majority of Africans to working as labourers (Magubane, 1979). Rather, the *other project* was to colonise and infect the minds, consciousness, cosmologies and worldviews of Africans (Fanon, 1963). The conqueror's quest to penetrate the Dark Continent left him with a so-called burden to civilise (Barlet, 2000), which included attempts to justify and legitimise the racist and cultural domination over Africans. Thus, colonialism was not just enforced through the gun. Rather, the coloniser also acted through Christianity, theatre performance, literature and media, including cinema (Masilela & Balseiro, 2003:3). The coloniser was already inventing and constructing the African. Notably, the African of the coloniser's imagination bore no resemblance to reality. Rather, he or she was a projection, made in the image of the white man. If the white man imagined that the black man was a rapist, it was because the white man was already raping Africa and African women. Thus, the "colonial image of the black man continues to characterize white mental projections, revealing a profoundly racist unconscious" (Barlet, 2000:5). Tomaselli's examination of the B-Scheme films (1989) noted how, for example, Heyns, a white production company, produced films for blacks which carried an essential disconnection between the actual lived experiences of black people and white cinematic representations of these lived experiences (Tomaselli, 1989). There is little doubt that colonial and apartheid film industries began with this elaborate *invention* of Africa and Africans. It is such inventions, for example, that national cinemas should seek to undo.

Power connected to ownership and control of means of film production enabled the dissemination of ideologically demeaning images of Africans as a people with "no history and

no culture" (Murphy, 2000:239). Neither A-Scheme nor B-Scheme films were designed to contest that false ideology. This pattern persisted through independence, meaning that film industries and cultural struggles in African nations are deeply marked by the territorial dispossession, violence, and exploitation of colonialism. The film industry of South Africa, for example, is ineluctably marked with pieces of legislation such as the Natives Land Act of 1913, the Act of the Union of 1910, the Population Registration Act of 1950, and the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970. It is these divisions and distinct, context-specific socio-economic realities and political histories that a national cinema, should it exist, must seek to undo. A nuanced reading of these histories should be the starting point, providing insight into the necessary and ideal character of national cinemas today. In other words, African film industries and the services underpinning their capacity to exist as distinct cinemas are shaped by the status of a nation's socio-economic, political, and cultural life histories, which come with a distinct colonial heritage.

The state of the Zimbabwean film industry, for example, mirrors the economic state of the country itself, helping to shape how the government perceives the industry's potential to contribute culturally and economically to national life (Kohlmann, 2018). Zimbabwe's under-resourced film industry, limited access to the latest and specialised equipment, informal training, and lack of distribution channels have even forced filmmakers to explore Nollywood's production and distribution strategy, which prioritises quantity over quality. Having said this, high-quality productions such as the psychological thriller *Mind Games* (2017) have been produced in Zimbabwe despite dire economic circumstances (Kohlmann, 2018). Indeed, in 1992, the popular Zimbabwean film *Neria* beat *The Terminator* at the box office (Mboti, 2014). However, such examples, which suggest how local film industries can divest from Hollywood, are few and far between.

Fanon's view of national culture (1963) is a lens through which this study makes sense of national cinema because the definition of national culture as "the crystallisation of the innermost hopes of the whole people" (Fanon, 1963) speaks to the importance of Strategy 2 as a thought process, meaning-making process, and a radical practice. Fanon (1963) described how, during and through colonialism, the crystallisation of national consciousness has been disrupted, distorted, and delayed by the coloniser. However, sooner or later, it becomes clear to colonialism that "a project of economic and social reforms which will satisfy the aspirations of the colonized people" is not for the colonizer (Fanon, 1963:208). In other words, finding value and dignity in the culture and identity of the colonised people is as imperative as fighting

for liberation. This is a task that can only be achieved by the colonised themselves, implying that both Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 are problematic because they are top-down, government-funded initiatives. To be complete, Strategy 2 must belong with the people – or else people must find *another strategy* of their own. Fundamentally, the emergence of the *national* in national cinema requires that the people (the nation within the nation, the oppressed) take part in the project or process of crystallising the innermost hopes *of the whole people*. The act of self-actualisation and determination by the oppressed will be evident in the exploration of the possibilities for a national cinema that regards film as emancipatory and as an instrument and function of liberation that addresses the deeply intertwined heritages of oppression, injustice, poverty, and entrenched systemic inequality in South Africa. Film as emancipatory praxis will involve a call for industry stakeholders and service providers to engage meaningfully in discourse about Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 for outcomes and industry practices that will mirror *the innermost hopes of the whole people*. Film historian Thelma Gutsche opined that the cultural practice of making films should be at the service of democratic traditions (Masilela, 2009). I will aver, simply, that the cultural practice of building a national cinema in South Africa is in the service of the innermost hopes of the whole people.

African nations have an ongoing task of reimagining their national identity and culture. The process began with the emergence of various African native filmmakers in different African nations around the 1960s, when a large body of film texts was produced in African nations by African filmmakers such as Senegalese Ousman Sembene, Malian Souleymane Cisse, and Nigerian Ola Balogun. Since those early founding days, each film production has cast a uniquely different image and vision of continental Africa, informed by nationally specific issues. Diawara (1989) has provided a rich account of the heterogeneous nature of African cinemas, suggesting that national cinemas in Africa will look different, because they will crystallise the innermost hopes of the whole African people. Each country is a living acknowledgement of the distinct contexts and modes of production that must be understood and navigated (Diawara, 1989). National cinema must resonate with audiences. Diawara's textual analysis of films screened at the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO) between 1987 and 1989 distinguished between three film genres – i) socio-realist narratives, ii) colonial confrontation narratives, and iii) return-to-source narratives – and provided insight into how and why these African stories found resonance with audiences.

Essentially, films that crystallise the innermost hopes of the whole people become catalysts for

meaning-making, engagement, discourse and praxis on African identities and realities, as well as reflections and explorations of contradictions, poverty, inequality, injustice, oppression, history, society, love, conflict, and the co-existence of African traditions and modernity. This necessitates the search for new idioms and a new film language through which to frame the *national cinematic gaze* of Africa, about Africa, by Africans, with Africans. Even the return to source genre (and its limitations) demonstrates a commitment by selected African filmmakers to challenge standardised Western film styles and aesthetics in attempts to re-imagine and introduce audiences to a different film language. Even when camera angles or movement techniques are recognisable, the meaning behind their use is redefined. This kind of creative freedom is already being experienced by some African filmmakers producing films on shoestring budgets with no obligation to represent a funder's ideological values. That is, it is through a *truly* national cinema that authentic, humanising, and diverse national frameworks can be tested and explored – and not under the masquerade of fake unity that promotes cultural assimilation. Such authentic national discourse makes room for a "hybrid of cultures" or "cultural miscegenation" (see Hayward, 2000: 101) and so manifests the innermost hopes of the whole people – and not just some people. The discourse on national cinema in post-colonial African nations, even where it is contested, articulates and speaks to ongoing aspirations by Africans to decolonise the cinematic gaze, however abstract, diverse and different this may be.

Development Institutions, Old Patterns

Indeed, as Saks (2010:21) stated, "each time the nation of South Africa reforms itself, a profound break with the past occurs, requiring that new structures be created, new modes of imagination be cultivated". The process of forging new ways of imagination was through the development of "new" policies aimed to transition and transform the country from racially, economically and politically oppressive past government policies and institutional practices. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), introduced by the late former President Nelson Mandela in 1994, aimed to "direct the progress of the transformation strategy", ensuring the "redistribution of resources to address inherited inequalities and promote representative ownership of the economy" (*Government Gazette*, 1994). Thus, a film industry restructure was imminent, and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) was tasked by the new democratic government to conduct research that would lead to a new way of organising and developing the industry. A report recommended the formation of a statutory body, now known as the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), to support, subsidise, transform, and diversify the South African film industry (Botha, 2012), in line with the RDP goals (Saks, 2010). Clearly, this is Strategy 2, but with the contradiction that to achieve it, the

NFVF might need to use Strategy 1. The same contradiction afflicts the RDP which seeks to reconstruct and transform South Africa (Strategy 2) by means of neoliberal capitalist economic policies (Strategy 1). How can capitalism, which causes inequality, end inequality?

That the NFVF is a subset of the RDP speaks volumes about its significance in the set of post-1994 strategies that the government deployed in an effort to rebuild and re-imagine a "new" South Africa. That is, the NFVF was the government's statement of commitment through the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, formerly the Department of Arts and Culture, Science and Technology (DACT), to the mandate of reconstructing, redistributing and redressing inequalities in this sector.[31] The problem came with the implementation of redress. Hence, in 1996, at around the same time policymakers were drafting the NFVF Act, the administration of former President Thabo Mbeki introduced and promoted the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) economic strategy. The policy retained the RDP objectives but placed emphasis on growing the economy, increasing employment and ultimately redistributing resources as far as a growing economy allowed (SA Government, 1996). In other words, redress was tied to economic growth. If government indicators showed that the economy had stopped growing or slowed down, then redress would also stop or slow down. The RDP's radical stance in matters of infrastructural redistribution and redressing of economic disparities between white and black South Africans was to be in effect when efforts to grow the economy bear fruit. The vision to grow the South African economy entailed opening it to international competition, thereby adopting an outward-oriented, neoliberal approach to economic growth (SA Government, 1996). In the nomenclature that I have developed in this thesis, economic growth is Strategy 1. Redress is Strategy 2. Strategy 2 is dependent on the viability of Strategy 1. This is the conundrum that the nation-building project in South Africa has been facing since the end of apartheid. Strategy 1 has no (or very little) understanding of what Strategy 2 is about. Strategy 1 is about money, finance, and economic growth. Strategy 2 is about humans, humanisation, re-humanisation and decolonisation. The two seem inherently incompatible. Indeed, Strategy 1 seems to undermine Strategy 2. This is largely because Strategy 1 is about the bottom line, profit, and financial spreadsheets.

The current National Development Plan (NDP) still draws on the RDP and GEAR, with addressing poverty and unemployment as top priorities in a quest to develop the South African economy. Additionally, growing the South African economy is a high priority in addressing

[31] Department of Sport, Arts & Culture, n.d., "Inspiring a nation of winners", https://www.dsac.gov.za/node/79# [Accessed: 4 Oct. 2025].

poverty and unemployment. Harnessing RDP together with GEAR, or the NDP with GEAR, appears to be a major and irresolvable contradiction. Yet, the harnessing together of the two contradictory elements defines government policy post-1994, including its strategies for national re-building. In other words, a *fundamental schizophrenia* sits at the heart of the South African national rebuilding project. The government wants redress (Strategy 2). However, it wants redress that is *dictated by* economic growth. Economic growth (Strategy 1) is the international gold standard and holy grail prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), their economists, economic theories, and economic indicators, as well as global lending agencies. This explains, for example, how the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) regards its mandate as dealing with inflation rather than, say, inequality (Vermeulen, 2020). The entire policy space thus becomes poisoned and contradictory. This *fundamental schizophrenia* has percolated down even to the cultural industries, including cinema, which are identified as significant contributors to the nation's economic growth (Phiri, 2021; Treffry-Goatley, 2010). Essentially, the film industry's strategists expect it to grow through Hollywoodisation (Strategy 1). Can a national cinema emerge from neoliberalism? This is the big question. Three decades into democracy, the South African film industry has encountered this big question, even when the question is not stated in exactly the terms I have put it here, showing a level of contradiction and stasis that now calls for the revision of the 1996 White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage. This revision is motivated by the need to "assess the achievements and advances, as well as address the shortcomings, omissions and challenges in both policy and practice since the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994" (Republic of South Africa, 2017:4). To my mind, the core issue is the fundamental schizophrenia that governs the post-1994 nation-building project. The schizophrenia is itself inherited from apartheid and colonialism. This is a form of path dependency (Felix-Faure & Klapper, 2025; Friedman, 2021).

Path dependency is a concept used to describe the powerful influence of the past on the present through institutions, which are "humanly devised constraints" for structuring social, political and economic interactions, in ways consistent with the values of society' (Friedman, 2021: 26). Value is placed in historical events and developments in ways that reproduce similar patterns of attitudes or beliefs about what is considered valuable, as well as relationships and habits that normalise amid transitions or changes. In South Africa, path dependency may be seen to operate through the colonial and apartheid "legacies" of division along racial, gender, and class lines, embedded in essential institutions. These social, economic, cultural and political institutions have remained firmly in place post-1994. Their persistence, therefore, reinforces their validity

in the democratic dispensation (Fadiran & Sarr, 2016). Institutions facilitate change while sustaining old patterns through "informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct) and formal constraints (constitutions, laws, property rights)" (Friedman, 2021: 25). More importantly, the issue regarding path dependency pertains to its rationale, the assumption that historical paths and their modes of persistence do not need to be removed but modified enough to absorb and accommodate the previously marginalised. Put another way, path-dependent development in South Africa requires the majority of the "previously marginalised" to acquaint themselves with existing knowledge, skills, economic structures, infrastructure, and networks for a successful experience of the "new" and "inclusive" South Africa. It assumes that historical institutions and privileges once enjoyed only by the minority population are the blueprint to be maintained and made accessible to all and determines the modes through which change is facilitated, as well as the rate and extent of change. Thus, at the core of path dependency lies a power struggle and attempts to transform and emancipate outside of historically established pathways which are often delegitimised and considered a threat to society. The pre- and post-1994 economic structure remains similar in that it is highly concentrated and exclusionary along race, gender and class lines; barriers to entry and meaningful economic participation remain high. The institutionally entrenched patterns, including "behaviours, social relations which serve to keep the past alive", shape the varying and contradictory experiences of inclusion, equality, redress, and transformation among South African citizens (Friedman, 2015: 32).

To show how deep the path dependency is, one only needs to survey the organisation of the local film industry in terms of the hierarchy of budgets. This *budgetisation* of the film industry, as I argued, is mimicked from the structure of Hollywood. Not only does money talk, but relations and relationships are best understood as and on a spreadsheet. Thus, Strategy 1 dominates. Currently, the South African film industry is loosely composed of low-budget, medium-budget (or standard) and large-scale budget film productions (Ebrahim, 2020; Retief & Pillay, 2024; Tomaselli & Mboti, 2018; Wilkinson, 2013). Interestingly, there is no formal or official definition of South African low-, medium-, or large-budget productions. That is, we do not know how much rand value distinguishes a local low-budget and medium-budget movie, or if there are even high-budget productions in South Africa. After all, what might seem to be a lot of money in South African rand might not be that much in US dollar, Hollywood-budget terms. However, a useful heuristic might be that low-budget productions are those by filmmakers who "rely on personal finance and private investment to support their productions"

(Treffry-Goatley, 2010:42). Examples of South African low-budget films would be Kagiso Lediga's *Matwetwe* (2017) produced with a budget of less than R2 million and Ernest Nkosi's *Thina Sobabili* (2014) on "a US$ 3000 budget" (approximately R35 000 in 2014) (Gardiner, 2015; NFVF, 2023). Medium or *standard* budget films, on the other hand, refer to productions that receive significant state grant assistance with the filmmakers also sourcing funding through "unofficial co-production finance agreements" (NFVF, 2023; Treffry-Goatley, 2010:42). Examples of South African medium-budget films include Daryne Joshua's *Noem My Skollie* (2016) with an estimated budget of US$700,000[32] (R10 million to R11 million in 2016). Lastly, large-scale budgets would refer to film producers "who want to make internationally competitive, large-budget films and have found it necessary to partner with foreign producers in financing their productions, gaining access to wider markets" (Treffry-Goatley, 2010:42). These large-scale productions are often made "through the official treaties that South Africa has entered into with other states, including Canada (1997), Germany (2004), Italy (2003) and the United Kingdom (2007) (NFVF, 2022d:23). Examples of South African high-budget films would be Neil Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009) with a budget estimate of US$30 million (approximately R254 million in 2009) and Justin Chadwick's *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013), with a budget estimate of US$35 million (approximately R296 million in 2013) (Zabezolo, 2014). The DTIC's incentive disbursement strategy provides a useful categorisation of film production budgets, which divides production budgets into three categories and caps the incentive at R50 million:

- Production budgets between R1.5 million and R6 million
- Production budgets between R6 million and R10 million
- Production budgets over R10 million.

Table 4 below categorises films based on budget estimates from sources such as news and magazine articles, government bulletins, and film industry websites.

Low Budget	**Medium (Average) Budget**	**High Budget**
Fanie Fourie's Lobola (2013)	*Crazy Monkey Presents Straight Outta Benoni* (2005)	*Sarafina!* (1992)
Thina Sobabili: The Two of Us (2014), *Faan se Trein* (2014)	*Pad na Jou Hart* (2014)	*Mr Bones* (2001)
Matwetwe (2017)	*Semi-Soet* (2012)	*Yesterday* (2004)
High Fantasy (2017)	*Inxeba: The Wound* (2017)	*District 9* (2009)
The Tokoloshe (2018)	*Ellen: The Ellen Pakkies Story (2018)*	*Spud* (2010)
Flatland (2019)	*Knuckle City* (2019)	*Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013)

[32] IMDb, 2016, "Noem My Skollie: Call Me Thief", https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4567500/ [Accessed: 13 Nov. 2025].

Runs in the family (2022)		*Kalushi* (2016)*Tsotsi* (2005)
Inkabi (2024)		*Happiness is a four-letter word* (2016)
Dear Future Wife (2024)		*Five Fingers for Marseille* (2017)
Real Estate Sisters (2024)		*Keeping Up with the Kandasamys (2017)*
The Heart Is a Muscle (2025)		*Sew the Winter to my Skin* (2018)

Table 4: Film budget categories in South Africa, with selected examples

Research shows that the South African film industry is made up of two parts, a "service sector" that "provides creative and technical support" and a production sector that "[produces] local content for television and cinema" (Tomaselli & Mboti, 2013:5). Tomaselli and Mboti (2013:5) observed that "the success of the national industry is based largely on its capacity as a service industry". Cape Town, in particular, is a popular location for international filmmakers who are attracted by "the weak currency, diverse locations, good services infrastructure including well-trained crews, top hotels (demanded by crews and actors) and the long sunny days of the summer months" (Tomaselli & Mboti, 2013:5). The articulation of a service sector and a production sector, once again, reprises Hollywoodisation. The South African film industry boasts of its success in Strategy 1, namely attracting and servicing film productions, the majority of them foreign, due to film-friendliness. The problem is that the long history of a white-owned, economically and racially exclusive film industry means that Strategy 1 is inherently distorted. Patterns of ownership in the service and production sector, resources, skill levels, work experience, industry knowledge and access to audiences are already organised as core and periphery. For example, cinemas exist in well-to-do and suburban areas and are rarely located in townships. Furthermore, the distortion is clear in the structure, with film and production services remaining centralised in the three cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban. The concentration of the industry in only three of the nine provinces – Gauteng, Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal – is itself a devastating example of uneven development, which, of course, militates against the emergence of a diverse, distinct, inclusive, and truly *national* cinema.

Masilela (2009) rightfully argued that film practice and film scholarship are confronted by the necessity to establish a "national" cinema in a post-modern context. What this means in the context of the fundamental schizophrenia noted above is another matter. In other words, establishing a national cinema in the current conditions is easier said than done. The push of Strategy 2 and the pull of Strategy 1 seem generally incompatible, leading to uneven development in the local film industry. The South African film industry seeks, rightly, to promote diversity through the representation of previously marginalised South African citizens

(Botha, 2012). However, the strategy employed is inherently contradictory. For example, the quest for "diversity" is cultivated through film service and production factors similar to those in Australian cinema. The assumption is that film industries have generic needs. Yet, Australian cinema and Australian society bear little resemblance to that of South Africa.

Diversity, Language and Culture in South African Cinema

The film service and production needs in Australia include "the nature of state support offered, the policy framework for delivering it, the concentration of film workers in selected areas and international co-productions in feature films" (O'Regan, 1996:157). In South Africa, however, where the oppressed are in the majority, a different dynamic is evident, with redress a common factor. In Australia, the indigenous oppressed are in a minority, and are largely excluded from the film industry. In South Africa there is evidence that A-Scheme and B-Scheme structures have been outdated as far as the diversity of demographic representation is concerned. In the past, there were literally no Africans directing films under the A-Scheme, and only one or two directing B-Scheme films (for example, Simon Sabela). However, the picture today is very different (see Figure 5 below). There are now many native South Africans in key roles, including script writers, directors and producers.

Producers	Script writers	Directors
Nosipho Dumisa	Nosipho Dumisa	Nosipho Dumisa
Odirile Mekwa	Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese	Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese
Travis Taute	Charlie Vundla	Charlie Vundla
Kagiso Lediga	Kagiso Lediga	Kagiso Lediga
Adze Ugah	Adze Ugah	Adze Ugah
Daryne Joshua	Daryne Joshua	Daryne Joshua
Lebohang Netshiozwi	Sibs Shongwe-La Mer	Sibs Shongwe-La Mer
Katleho Ramaphakela	Bhekizizwe Peterson	Katleho Ramaphakela
Rethabile Ramaphakela	Daryne Joshua	Rethabile Ramaphakela
Mandla Dube	Zee Ntuli	Jahmil X.T. Qubeka
Junaid Ahmed	Travis Taute	Junaid Ahmed
Thabang Moleya	Nozizwe Cynthia Jele	Thabang Moleya
Busisiwe Ntintili	Busisiwe Ntintili	Busisiwe Ntintili
Lwazi Mvusi	Lwazi Mvusi	Lwazi Mvusi
Anant Singh	Ricardo Arendse	Mandla Dube
Akin Omotoso	Akin Omotoso	Akin Omotoso
Sanjeev Singh	Ramadan Suleman	Ramadan Suleman
Sheena-Lee Hendriks	Sara Bletcher	Sara Bletcher
Salamina Mosese	Jerome Pikwane	Tebogo Malebogo
Elelwani Netshifhire	Elelwani Netshifhire	Elelwani Netshifhire
Tracey-Lee Dearham-Rainers	Tracey-Lee Dearham-Rainers	Mandilakhe Yengo
Dumi Gumbi	Stephina Zwane	Stephina Zwane

Figure 5: A selection of South African filmmakers from "previously disadvantaged" groups

Ntshavheni Wa Luruli's *Chikin Bizniz: The Whole Story*, Akin Omotoso's *God is African* and Zola Maseko's *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* were significant markers of the political and ideological shift taking place in South Africa after 1994 (Botha, 2012). Narratives on screen now reflect the demographic make-up of the country, including language, culture, and ethnicity. In a culturally diverse nation, "language is a carrier of culture and a form of communication" significant for post-apartheid film practice and the emergence of a national cinema (Shakib, 2011). Language carries cultural "values by which individuals or communities perceive themselves and their place in the world" (Shakib, 2011: 117), a vital identity marker in the cinema (Napper, 2012). Notably, the hegemony of the language of the coloniser among their former colonies remains a legacy of colonialism to this day (Ncube, 2019). South Africa is no exception. While 12 South African official languages are recognised constitutionally, "English remains a dominant official language used in higher education institutions, highway signposts, boardrooms and stock exchange".[33] Therefore, an examination of the relationship between language and national culture in film services, for example, is significant considering Western modernity's linguistically and culturally homogenising influence. This could be expressed through policy reports, funding applications and skills training pedagogy being available in Nguni languages.

Language forms a vital part of communicating culture, identity, worldviews, and belonging (Shakib, 2011). In language debates, a key issue is the perception that indigenous South African languages are backward and inferior to the language of the coloniser. The late Simon Sabela, a major B-Scheme pioneer director and actor, recognised the significance of language in filmmaking, stated:

> I want to make films in the vernacular, so the grannies can understand and learn from them. If we portray actual life, if we bring reality before people, they recognise what must be preserved – the traditions that are beautiful – and what has to be changed (in Deane, 1978, as cited in Paleker, 2010: 97).

Sabela recognised the significance of language in film to serve first and foremost a "cultural, intellectual and social purpose rather than a commercial purpose" (Ngulube, 2012:12). As such, any conception of national cinema must include a strategy for making many, if not most, films in the vernacular. In this sense, the relatively small number of films in indigenous languages in

[33] *Mail & Guardian*, 2019, 23 Aug., "On the power of language", https://mg.co.za/article/2019-08-23-00-on-the-power-of-language/ [Accessed: 5 Oct. 2025].

South African mainstream cinemas is a concern. The NFVF Box Office Report for 2019, which provides details indicating the performance of locally produced films by language, shows that there were "twenty-two (22) locally produced titles, nine (9) of these were English-language films which earned a total of R36,8 million. Eight (8) of the films were in Afrikaans, earning R10.6 million in revenue" (NFVF, 2019: 9). Notably, "Other indigenous languages did not perform well in cinemas" (NFVF, 2019: 9).

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963: 210) emphasised that "the claim to a national culture in the past rehabilitates that nation and serves as a justification for the hope of the future national culture". Fanon thus established a viable dialectical connection between the past and the present. What connects Africans and binds them together is far more than what divides them. Hence, the term *nation*, loosely translated *isizwe* (in IsiXhosa), also means a nation's people. It is also used as a geopolitical term to distinguish the nations of the world from each other. In South Africa, *isizwe* refers to shared national identity(-ies) based on unique ethnic lineages, traditions, value systems, language, linguistic nuances and markers, culture, and geography. It is these differences that the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959, the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970, and the Bantu Homelands Constitution Act of 1971 tried to exploit to divide Africans along so-called ethnic lines. The entire concept of the Bantustan was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the notion of "nation" among Africans. Thus, the Zulu-speaking people are a distinct nation *within themselves*, with traditional leaders and a king representing an aspect of South African identity and national culture. Yet, the Zulus have nuanced differences within themselves, while still being part of a larger Nguni grouping. These differences are sources of pride rather than division and should be facets of a national culture. Yet, for apartheid, differences between Zulu and Xhosa, and even between Xhosa and Xhosa (see the division between Ciskei and Transkei) were regarded as immutable and as the basis for geographical division and boundaries.[34] In reality, Xhosa, Ndebele, Venda, Tsonga, Zulu, Tswana, and Sotho are bound together as one diverse family of nations within a nation. The complex cultural nuances and differences between them do not mean that a national culture or national cinema is impossible. Rather, the differences enrich national culture and national cinema. Thus, complex and varied identity markers are vital points for consideration in the enunciation of the "national" in development strategies for a South African film service framework. The development of a national cinema requires that a post-apartheid "imagination" challenge any hegemonic system of thought and

[34] South African History Archive, n.d.," Transkei and Ciskei", https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/originals/finalreport/volume2/split/BMvolume2_s1ch5_pg23.pdf [Accessed: 5 Oct. 2025].

cultural production that seeks to divide and that "blocks any capacity to see, imagine, describe and re-invent black identity and culture in ways that are liberatory' (Hooks, 1992:2).

If national cinema, as posited by O'Regan (1996:176), is "obliged to enact, express and represent the national lifeways and aspirations of people", then decentralising filmmaking is necessary not only in the sense of shifting film production from its concentration in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, but also in a rethinking and reimagination of the ethics of representation. Hence, the recent public controversy caused by John Trengrove's *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), a film that explored sexuality and the experience of secretly gay Xhosa boys at a traditional initiation camp, is a cause for concern only if one imagines that Trengrove is a voice for the Xhosa or that his fictional gaze is somehow essential to how one must see the Xhosa or how the Xhosa must see themselves. That is, how the diverse multiplicity of "African nations" within the South African nation see themselves today is still overdetermined in rigid colonial compartments, such that Trengrove's gaze is seen as a direct and frontal attack on Xhosa culture. But what is Xhosa culture? In the 30 years since 1994, we have not yet had this discussion among ourselves. The space for such dialogic exchange among the people has not opened. *Inxeba: The Wound* received positive attention from some for seemingly recognising "realities" unflinchingly but was also accused of distorting and disrespecting a sacred tradition of the amaXhosa. Trengrove's depiction is neither truth nor reality, but a representation. His invention of homosexuality in Xhosa initiation schools is as much an invention of Africa as the invention of the Bushman in the Gods *Must be Crazy* (Uys, 1982), for example. A new, re-imagined ethics in representation would not be culturally threatened or bothered by such inventions. The reason they excite so much controversy today is partly because we still lack a corpus of representations that look and feel like national cinema.

Digital Platformisation of Film Distribution in South Africa

Interestingly, even online streaming models appear to strengthen and optimise Strategy 1 and Hollywoodisation, rather than undermine it. This is because such platforms are seen as contributing to change in the film industry through economic growth (Strategy 1) – rather than redress (Strategy 2). A case in point is Netflix. Netflix entered the South African film distribution market in 2016 as a film-distributing and exhibiting online platform (Mfolo & Jansen van Vuuren, 2022). Netflix is the leading streamer globally, but it ranks in fourth place in terms of market penetration in South Africa (Labuschagne, 2025). However, Netflix remains a major investor in local productions, having spent R4 billion between 2021 and 2024 (Gavaza, 2024). The global streaming giant first invested US$175 million between 2016 and 2022 in the

South African, Nigerian and Kenyan film market through commissioned original film and series (episodic) projects with local film production companies. The streamer also acquired license rights to put on the platform catalogues of existing film and episodic content produced in the selected countries (Netflix, 2023). In 2020, Netflix launched the "Made in Africa" collection, a curated inventory of African films, drawing from both recent and older, more well-known material, which was made globally available. This included Netflix original series such as Queen Sono (Kagiso Lediga, 2020) (Fisher, 2022). Furthermore, Netflix began promoting their films "Made by Africans, Watched by the World", signalling their ambition to produce film and episodic content with Africans. Netflix now operates as a producer and distributor of original film content, "acquiring its first narrative Oscar hopeful, *Beasts of No Nation*, and presaging its eventual Oscar campaigns for original narratives *Mudbound* (2017), *Roma* (2018), *Marriage Story* (2019) and *The Irishman* (2019), for which film festivals would serve as a crucial marketing platform" (Walters, 2020:5).

Through advancements in digitisation, online video-streaming platforms have shifted traditional ways of film exhibition and consumption (Mbombo, 2024; Song, 2024). The digital platformisation of film distribution through Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+ and Showmax has made film consumption accessible and individualised (Song, 2024). As a global platform, however, Netflix is a subset of Hollywoodisation. That is, it is a form of digital Hollywoodisation or Hollywoodisation by digital means. This is because the model and platform are top-down, originating from the USA and parachuting into local contexts – much like Uber, for example – in an intensely totalising, universalising mode. It is the local contexts that must adapt to (and join) Netflix, rather than the other way around. It is false, for example, to view Netflix as challenging Hollywood dominance in Africa. Instead, it further entrenches the dominance of global capitalism and systems from the Global North. That is, Netflix and Hollywood belong within the same spectrum that entrenches neoliberal capitalism. Netflix coopts, is coopted by, and is an extension of, Strategy 1.

One of the strategies used by Netflix in its internationalisation is the strengthening of its technological infrastructure for its global platform, which is then used as leverage with local players (Cui, 2024). Back in the 2000s, when Netflix began its international expansion, the streaming service relied on:

> … local ISPs and soon faced the problem of overloaded data traffic to the point of system crash in 2008. Thereafter, Netflix discontinued the use of physical data centers and ISPs. Instead, Netflix shifted to Amazon cloud computing services or AWS (Amazon Web Services 5). On top of AWS, Netflix established a new fast lane by setting up its own

> content delivery networks (CDNs). Through AWS and CDNs, Netflix has managed to secure its own internal infrastructure but on a global scale. This infrastructure consists of two levels through which the content flows (Ramasoota & Kitikamdhorn, 2021:3).

In terms of marketing and content strategies in foreign countries, Netflix has tried to appeal to local audiences with its GLT (globalisation/internationalisation, localisation, and translation) approach (Lobato, 2019). It does so on its own terms and conditions. Either one beats them or joins them.

The globalising element is clearly reflected in the platform's key resources, such as the content library. Netflix heavily relies on the use of its metadata to select content for streaming catalogues or production teams to work with in developing Netflix's original movies (Lobato, 2018). An analysis of Netflix Thailand's content library from 10 August to 8 October 2020, using country of origin as the criterion, found a global mix of 5 800 titles with Netflix's metadata covering the following:

> …synopses, story concepts, loglines, eleven names of accredited production houses, as well as names of accredited directors, and actors from countries around the world. These data are regularly retrieved to analyze and help process decision-making on the selection of content for the catalogues (Ramasoota & Kitikamdhorn, 2021:7).

The strategy includes local teams that help to develop Netflix originals. This is done, apparently, to ensure that the harnessing and design of content will better cater to the taste of platform users in different regions of the world. The bottom line for Netflix, however, is the bottom line. It is in the business of making money from film, video, and television content – nothing more, nothing less. The strategy of redress is tangential to what Netflix really wants.

Despite its embeddedness in Hollywoodisation, Netflix says all the "right things" about "localisation". For example, as far as localisation and local alliance are concerned, Netflix says that it has "invested significantly in the customization and localization of content, subtitle, translation, interfaces and artworks" (Ramasoota & Kitikamdhorn, 2021:7). Netflix's entry in the African market as a financier and distributor of local films seems, on the surface, a viable localisation strategy that provides a solution to perennial distribution challenges. However, after a decade of Netflix in South Africa, the distribution problem remains. Thus Bakari & Cham's (1996) concern remains relevant:

> … (the) development of vibrant Indigenous film industries in Africa is retarded, because when African films are not widely distributed and shown on their own turf not only are the prospects of recouping their production costs bleak, but also their effectiveness in combating the negative film image of Africa and Africans inscribed in the foreign film and their aim to be an integral part of the development process in Africa become severely

compromised (Bakari & Cham 1996: 3, cited in Falola & Ngom, 2010: 240).

It is not clear how Netflix resolves these structural and systemic issues, and whether it understands the imperatives of historical redress. Previous studies suggested that Netflix's global expansion has caused "tremendous changes and profound transformative impacts or 'the Netflix Effect' on worldwide media industry, technological infrastructure, policy agendas, and users' mode of consumption" (McDonald & Smith-Rowsey, 2016). At the macro level, "economic impacts have been most noted. This must be understood within the overall context of OTTs' penetration of which Netflix is a part" (Ramasoota & Kitikamdhorn, 2021:8). However, the jury is still out.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has critically reviewed literature on South African film and film production, situating the discussion within both national and international contexts. The analysis underscores how cinema in South Africa has long been entangled with questions of power, identity, and ideology, from its colonial origins to its contemporary democratic dispensation. What emerges is a cinema characterised by continuity and change, in that, while the industry has undergone significant transformation since 1994, the legacies of colonialism and apartheid remain embedded in its structures, practices, and imaginaries. The chapter examined the role and significance of film in South Africa upon its introduction, highlighting its deployment as a colonial communication strategy designed to inculcate imperial values and deny Africans full subjectivity. Film screenings for the urban black population in mine compounds through the American Mission Board (AMB) and by Reverend Ray Phillips were not intended to foster aesthetic appreciation but to discipline audiences into accepting the moral codes of imperial culture (Peterson, 2003). This indicated an inherent disposition that profiled "lack" in African human nature, a belief that laid the groundwork for cinema's later role as a propaganda tool under the National Party government and also reinforced racial hierarchies and exclusionary notions of citizenship to justify the development of a racially exclusionary film industry ecosystem through subsidy and censorship. The colonial origins of film services, from exhibition practices to production infrastructures, thus continue to cast a long shadow over the industry. The persistence of these legacies raises the central question animating this study: To what extent have things changed in the 30 years since the end of apartheid? While the democratic constitution guarantees full citizenship and the ideology of the "rainbow nation" proclaims inclusivity, film industry practices and lived experiences reveal that legally abolishing racism does not automatically dismantle entrenched structural inequalities.

The literature on national cinema highlights the contested nature of the concept itself. Essentialist approaches locate national identity in recurring motifs and narratives, while constructivist perspectives view cinema as a medium for producing "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983). Scholars such as Botha, Maingard, Golding, and Dovey have examined film texts to explore how narratives and aesthetics contribute to the construction of national identity. Yet, these analyses often privilege the representational aspects of South African cinema. My study took a different approach by examining the context of film services ownership, funding, infrastructure, and policy, privileging the institutional and structural dimensions of cinema and situating it within the broader conditions of its production. This shift is crucial because the concept of "national cinema" cannot be fully understood without examining the inner workings of the industry. The rainbow nation ideology may be symbolically powerful, but its material realisation depends on who controls resources, who gains access to opportunities, and whose labour sustains the industry. The literature indicates that while new voices in local film production have emerged and there is a significant increase in the number of black-owned film businesses in the production part of the value chain, structural inequities, particularly in distribution and exhibition, persist, raising doubts about how "national" South African cinema truly is.

The review of film services revealed uneven progress in democratising the industry. Institutions such as the National Film and Video Foundation, the DTIC, the IDC, and provincial film offices have expanded opportunities. Digital technologies have created alternative routes to audiences, as OTT businesses (over-the-top streaming platforms) invest in the production of local feature films each year. Yet disparities in access to larger funding categories through the tier system, distribution networks and ownership of viable, sustainable businesses with a large market share in the South African film industry endure. The global competitiveness of cinema, noted by Goldsmith and O'Regan, further complicates transformation, as international co-productions often prioritise global recognition over local specificity. Therefore, a push towards the concept of "film-friendliness" emerged as pivotal in the strategy employed by government film development institutions, with incentive schemes striving to strike a balance between international competitiveness and equity. Two divergent film industry development strategies dominate the South African industry: Strategy 1 positions South Africa as a film-servicing hub, privileging multinational productions; Strategy 2 emphasises the development of a national cinema, privileging culturally specific films for domestic audiences. Fanon's conception of national culture (1963) highlights the radical potential of Strategy 2. However, the *Hollywoodisation* of the South African film industry maintains long-standing dominance in

local distribution and exhibition, with cinemas relying more on foreign feature films, with Hollywood blockbusters dominating and serving as an audience drawcard (NFVF, 2024; SACO, 2017). The coexistence of these strategies reflects uneven development and risks reproducing apartheid-era divides. Globalisation exacerbates this duality, privileging elite film production and distribution clusters in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg while marginalising smaller towns and indigenous voices. Despite policy rhetoric, black professionals remain severely underrepresented in positions of industry economic influence, and the growing number of black-owned production businesses and independent producers remain predominantly dependent on the limited, project-based public funding (NFVF, 2022d). The tiered funding system further reflects uneven development, echoing apartheid-era divisions and aligning with neoliberal economic reforms. Programmes intended to address historical imbalances have become structured as commercial and marketable, accessible only to those who qualify or can afford, thereby reproducing inequalities in ownership and power. The colonial core of film services has not been fully dismantled, and the democratic dispensation has yet to achieve the inclusivity it promises.

This chapter thus advanced conceptual understanding in two ways. First, it reframed national cinema as a dynamic process shaped by both symbolic representation and material infrastructures. Second, it highlighted the importance of methodological pluralism. While textual analysis remains valuable, the study of film services and investigation into the *behind-the-scenes* realities of film offer critical insights into how cinema functions as both cultural text and industrial practice. This chapter established the terrain for my dissertation's intervention. By focusing on film services rather than film texts, my study interrogates the extent of transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, exposing how colonial and apartheid legacies persist beneath democratic rhetoric. It challenges the adequacy of rainbow nation ideology, critiques the uneven implementation of transformation policies, and foregrounds the structural inequities that continue to shape the industry. In doing so, the dissertation contributes both theoretically, reframing national cinema through production contexts, and practically, by identifying pathways for more inclusive and sustainable development in South African film services

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the conceptual framework informing this study. Specifically, I will discuss the *film services framework* proposed by Australian film theorists Ben Goldsmith and Tom O'Regan (2005). This framework is particularly useful for understanding contemporary film production contexts rather than film *diegesis*. It is also helpful in understanding the challenges, contradictions, and complexities plaguing the post-1994 film industry as it navigates the imperatives of the nation-building project, which centres, on the one hand, on transformation and redress, and on the other, on economic growth. The discussion in Chapter 2, the Literature Review, suggested that these twin imperatives – which I referred to as Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 – in fact contradict. The quest for a national cinema encounters these same contradictions. A context of conflict, complexity and ambiguities requires far more than textual analysis. If he who pays the piper calls the tune, the theoretical framework focuses on the process of paying the piper rather than the notes of the tune. In essence, this study explored the conditions that enable the persistence of film industry inequalities in post-1994 South Africa through a "film services" approach, whereby the film industry is viewed as comprising networks and inputs from services across the value chain, from development to exhibition.

Film-friendliness and film services are "Northern" theoretical conceptions of how a film industry is constituted and should work, the end goal, among other things, being profit-making. Hence, the theoretical discussion in the chapter augments the discussion by drawing on decoloniality. Tom O'Regan (1956-2020), for example, was a film scholar and historian of Australian film who authored the ground-breaking 1995 book, *Australian National Cinema* – making it quite clear where he drew his themes, lessons, and findings from. Thus, although there are general affinities, since film industries everywhere share certain generic similarities, the film "complex" in Australia is very different from that in South Africa. Essentially, the film services approach, developed with the privileged Western and European film production contexts in mind, is inadequate for a South African context which is located in the Global South and where the realities and histories of severe racial, gendered, economic, political and cultural oppression, including poverty and inequality, call for the centrality of redress and transformation in film policy and film development strategies.

The emphasis on economic growth, and so-called "growth" generally, in South African film

policy (cf. Botha, 2003; NFVF, 2022c) reflects how such film policy is an extension of the post-1994 nation-building project. In fact, South African film policy and the national film strategy (NFVF, 2014b) are extensions of the RDP and NDP. The core contradiction is that while RDP and NDP are putatively about historical redress (Strategy 2), they are fully under the spell of GEAR (Strategy 1). The "growth" of the film industry is a neoliberal capitalist requirement. In other words, the lofty goal and vision of historical redress – which is necessary to South African national culture – is now inevitably tied to such things as inflation reduction, macroeconomic policy, "growing the economic cake", and national credit ratings. The fixation on Strategy 1 as the holy grail in the RDP and NDP suggests that South African development discourse remains part of the technologies of the colonial matrix of power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Not only has such development discourse not been divested of a "racially hierarchized, Euro-America-centric, capitalist modern global power structure" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:4), but it is implicated with the coloniality of power and the illogics of the assumed superiority of Western developmental norms. In all of this, the most understated indicator of the pervasive influence of Strategy 1 is the forced reference to the poor and oppressed in contemporary South Africa as "previously disadvantaged". In reality, we are still disadvantaged today. There is nothing *previous* about it.

Indeed, the "previousification" of issues that are experienced daily today is an aspect of the fundamental schizophrenia of the nation-building project in South Africa. To raise issues of redress and transformation is treated as important *only* because it is a statutory requirement written into the laws and policies of the country, not an existential issue. The effect of *previousification* is that those who argue for redress as the definitive requirement of the nation-building project are seen as activists living in the past, as people who do not want to move on and have a chip on their shoulder, and as uneducated on economics. If disadvantages today are merely *previous* issues, and the poor were only disadvantaged previously, then this sounds like a definitive *call to move on* from the redress topic. As such, one senses a growing impatience and irritation with the "redress crowd" in South Africa. Such impatience is an inevitable outcome of the rigid "economisation" and neoliberalisation of critical national cultural issues. So, while I argued, broadly, in favour of a strategic essentialism that sees national culture in South Africa as primarily contingent on redress, the hard reality is that local film policy is preoccupied and obsessed with "growth". "Growth" itself is a euphemism for capitalist investment, including private sector sponsorship. This larger goal betrays a preoccupation with the bottom line (profits) which is a brainchild of Hollywood.

Notably, the obsession in local film policy is not just with funding but, also, sources of funding. Inevitably, he who pays the piper calls the tune. Since film industries are obviously *industries* to begin with, they cannot escape the factors of production: land, labour, and capital. However, the "film" in "film industry" means that film industries are not just a factor of economic growth. Rather, film has a strongly cultural, social and ethical dimension that puts it in the same category as language, identity, culture, and belonging. It must never be forgotten that film is about people. Without people, there is no film or film industry. If, in South Africa, we *centre people* – as we should – we are obliged to see national culture as far more than a spreadsheet. As such, one cannot be sucked in entirely into the economic debate. Film is not just in the service of business. It is also in the service of culture and a people's being. These concerns show the limitations of the film services framework's genealogy in the West and how, arguably, it may not entirely fit adequately in an examination of a South African film industry whose systems, experiences, practices, and policies are interlinked and interlocked with invisible matrices of power bequeathed by colonialism, and formalised and institutionalised under apartheid, "one of colonialism's legacies" (Rodny-Gumede et al., 2023:2). Hence, the film services framework's emphasis on inputs and outputs is inadequate. This is where the discussion of the coloniality of power and matrix of power form a significant part of the theoretical framework to unmask the intersectional and systemic nature of current problems in the film industry. The discussion of the coloniality of power enables the study to investigate how current global power designs and structures linked to colonialism and apartheid implicitly influence the development of a post-apartheid South African national cinema, thus facilitating a deeper understanding of "the entanglement of old forms of domination and social hierarchies with contemporary forms of oppression, exclusion and marginalization" (Bertolt, 2018:5). In other words, problems are not merely *previous*. Rather, they are part of an ongoing national (and international) crisis.

By framing problems in the film industry in terms of an ongoing crisis, the theoretical framing in this chapter raises the level, significance and urgency of the topic. Thirty years later, the situation cannot continue as usual or be treated as a prosaic aspect of reports, workshops, and talks. Rather, it must be treated with the urgency it deserves. Furthermore, the fundamental schizophrenia of treating people who are disadvantaged and suffering now, today, as only disadvantaged and suffering *previously*, is a part of this national crisis. The systemic issues in the industry are not just in the past and are not mere legacies of the past (cf. Mboti, 2024). The *previousification* of a persistent crisis is itself an indicator of how serious this issue is. Therefore, to explore the questions critical to the emergence of a national cinema in South

Africa, this chapter examines the themes of power, power relations, power structures, history, and (uneven) development as aspects of an ongoing crisis in the film industry. These themes are explored through a decolonial epistemic lens that aims "to destruct the coloniality of world power through liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation and domination" (Quijano, 2007:177). The combination of a film services framework and a decolonial lens helps to once again *centre the people* in film policy and the national film strategy.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012: 1) described decolonisation as "a political, epistemological and economic liberatory project that has remained an unfinished business, giving way to coloniality". Thus, in this study, the national cinema project is seen as a project of liberation. In South Africa, it is more a case of how to finish the unfinished business of liberation. The tendency in current film policy is to see Strategy 1 as the best instrument for finishing the unfinished business of liberation. Decoloniality is sceptical of such prescriptions. Coloniality is defined as an invisible power structure that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of direct colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 240-270). Coloniality, notably, differs from colonialism. Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power established through colonialism which:

> define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243).

Coloniality, in the words of Mignolo (2007), "relies on racial discrimination (the hierarchy of human beings, since the sixteenth century, that justified economic and political subordination of people of color and women) and of course also on class exploitation; in the sense that 'class' acquired in Europe after the Industrial Revolution" (Mignolo 2007:164). Colonialism, on the other hand, refers to a system or "form of domination – the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behavior of other individuals or groups" (Horvath, 1972: 47). A process of "European self-aggrandizement" followed, using invasion, occupation and exploitation for the economic, political, cultural and psychological domination of its colonised (Bulhan, 2015; Butt, 2013). The major difference between coloniality and colonialism, therefore, is that colonialism is physically constructed and administered through notions of exploration and discovery, violence and war by the military army of the coloniser on its colonised; extractions of wealth, taxes and various goods from the conquered regions,

exploitative policies and restructuring of economies of the colonised (Butt, 2013; Jules et al., 2021; Renzo, 2019). Coloniality, on the other hand, is the "residual form of any given form of colonial relations", including social behaviours, norms or patterns with underlying features of colonial power relations, culture and knowledge production, self-image and aspirations in the absence of the physical administration of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:243). Therefore, coloniality is a lingering effect of colonialism interlinked within and shaping everyday experiences of the formerly colonised. It persists through, and is remanent in, colonial matrices of power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). These are a set of technologies of subjectivation of four types, namely the control of the *economy* (land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of natural resources), control of *authority* (institutions, army), control of *sexuality/gender* (family, education) and control of *subjectivity* and *knowledge* (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity) (Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012).

In South Africa, an example of the control of the *economy* would be the fact that the black population was dispossessed of their land through the 1913 Native Land Act, forced to become cheap mine labourers in a capitalist economy and eventually relegated to economically unviable areas in 1948 (Van Staden, 2024). An example of the control of *authority* is the invasion and, ultimately, governance of South Africa as a European colony by the British and the Dutch through the violent, military subjugation of the black indigenous population and racist laws (Maistry, 2023). An example of the control of *sexuality/gender* is through the colonial imposition of heteronormative Christian beliefs on gender identities, perpetuated by various European missionary preachings and the entrenchment of homosexuality as a criminal offence under apartheid (Westman, 2023). Finally, the control of *subjectivity* and *knowledge* in South Africa is achieved through the institutionalisation of knowledge and knowledge production rooted in Eurocentric epistemic foundations, which negate other knowledges and ways of knowing – a "struggle for power and meaning-making" facilitated by, among other things, the construction of universities in South Africa during colonialism (Hoppers, 2001; John, 1989; Luckett, 2016). All these subjectivations are structurally interlinked in the service of global power, exemplified by the convergence of colonial race-making and Eurocentric capitalism's labour, resource and product control processes.

The film industry is not "untouched and unshaped by broader questions of power, epistemology, representation and identity construction" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:3). Race and gender, for example, are modern subjectivities which construct and inform the classification and hierarchization of people, within coloniality and colonial matrices of power. This not only

positions women as inferior to men but also causes black women to experience double (woman, black) and even triple (woman, black, poor) oppression. That is, black women's presence in colonial and apartheid economic relations functioned as a severe form of domestication routinely split between their own families and community, on the one hand, and white families, on the other (Zeleza, 1992). The domestication of women, as black men worked long hours in mines and factories, permanently restructured the black family. Through this form of labour and control, women were placed in subordinated socio-economic roles, creating unequal economic participation between men and women, with black women at the bottom of the hierarchy. The intention of advancing this mode of critique is to understand how intersecting social identities, relations of domination, and systems of power interlock to establish, sustain and intensify relations of inequality (cf. Collins, 2000). This is more so when faced with the normative assumption that apartheid and colonialism ended, that it is time to move on, and that disadvantage and marginalisation are only *previous*. The theoretical discussion in the chapter not only questions how the colonial "codification" of people within oppressive hierarchies and categorisations shapes present socio-economic production relations but also how coloniality determines policy paradigms such as Strategy 1 which subordinates redress to capitalism and economic growth. The film industry's reliance on Hollywood ("Hollywoodisation") to develop and transform itself is part of the conundrum of national cinema.

3.2 THE FILM SERVICES APPROACH

The film services approach, including the notions of film-friendliness, local Hollywoods, and Hollywoodisation, is captured in the seminal texts, six years apart, by Australian film scholars Goldsmith and O'Regan, namely *The Film Studio: Film Production in the Global Economy* (2005) and *Local Hollywood: Global Film Production and the Gold Coast* (2011). *The Film Studio*, which started as a report for the Australian Film Commission, titled *Cinema Cities, Media Cities: The Contemporary International Studio Complex* (2003), argues that the film production interests of Hollywood producers seeking to take advantage of the "enhanced mobility and flexibility of audiovisual production" are facilitated by the "location interests" of local actors in their localities aiming to attract international productions and ultimately contribute to the local economy by developing large-scale, technologically advanced film studios and capacitating their film industries with internationally relevant skills. Key themes include the role of the film studio complex in the internationalisation, globalisation, and decentralisation of film production, as well as the competitive advantage of places based on their ability to provide a range of skills, expertise, and services. The study found that the block-buster project-based production system is one of the contributing factors in the dispersal of film production or contemporary location production systems. An analysis of place-specific production characteristics generated insights about the "quality and depth of local and international

networks" (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005:39). It also highlighted the varying levels of risk, vulnerabilities and benefits experienced by film cities, regions and nations participating in the contemporary globally dispersed production system.

The main argument of *Local Hollywood*, which was authored with Susan Ward, is that global Hollywood has been made possible by a gradual increase in local Hollywoods. Therefore, the decentralisation, internationalisation and globalisation of film production infrastructure serve to expand and localise the economic, technological, skills, and expertise footprint of Hollywood globally. Local Hollywoods are made possible when the political will, regulations, and tax incentives of cities, regions, or countries are structured in ways more aligned with the imperative to host Hollywood or become a local Hollywood, as demonstrated in Australia's Gold Coast. Key themes include the Australian film production and consumption context of the 1980s, marked by the rise of independent production companies, international productions and an increase in multiplexes, which led to a significant surge in cinema attendance. The study found that a blend of unique local factors, including government support, innovation, entrepreneurship, resources, labour, and natural settings, made the Gold Coast a production destination of choice for hosting high-budget Hollywood productions, therefore concluding that there are valuable lessons from the Gold Coast as a pioneering story and case study of local Hollywoodisation.

The strength of *The Film Studio* and *Local Hollywood* lies in their high-quality, rigorous, empirical, and original analysis of the film case study. Indeed, this corpus recommends itself to any student and researcher of film industries, showing how film industry research should be carried out. My choice in this study to focus on the film industry and the film production context, rather than the film text, makes the work of Goldsmith and O'Regan (and Ward) (2005, 2012) central. That is, in film services approaches, the emphasis is not on the film product per se but, rather, towards "the variety of *intermediate inputs, organizational arrangements, and expertise* associated with the *processes* involved *in developing film projects*" (emphasis added) (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005:55). That is, in the film services framework:

> the target of intervention is not the film product but the variety of intermediate inputs, organizational arrangements, and expertise associated with the processes involved in developing film projects. In this sense, film services approaches are fundamentally concerned with the capabilities – skills, infrastructures, and networks – that underwrite the capacity of a film industry in a region or locality to create and innovate (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005: 55).

In essence, it is what goes into *making the film*, its journey from script to exhibition, that is the

focus. Movies are made by people, in a step-by-step fashion. There is no magic. So, film services approaches, in the main, are "concerned with the capacity of film industries, their technological competitiveness, and their robustness" (Mboti, 2014:147), with a deliberate emphasis on the sets or collection of *intermediate inputs*.

The film services approach foregrounds a given film industry's capacities and capabilities, referring to the skills, infrastructure, and networks that ensure a film industry in a region or locality can deliver, create, and innovate. The emphasis is on the importance of distinct film service providers across the value chain to provide what is needed for the film industry to sustain itself and grow. If we agree that the purpose of a film industry is to produce films for audiences, film services are the engine of that film production. Also, surveying the film industry value chain and assessing the viability and strength of the links in the chain are critical. Local and global trends in film production thus demonstrate an increased shift toward what Goldsmith and O'Regan (2005) defined as the film services approach, characterised by the efforts of various "film cities" and nations to establish themselves as dynamic sites of film production and film services provision. The notion of a "film city" or "cinema city" is of course drawn from the Australian Film Commission Report, *Cinema Cities, Media Cities: The Contemporary International Studio Complex* (2003), authored by Goldsmith and O'Regan. *Cinema Cities, Media Cities* observes a paradox: that "elements of film and television production" are becoming "widely dispersed" across the world while, "at the same time … there is a movement towards concentration of production and post-production in a number of particular locations" (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2003:7). It is these sites of particular concentrations of production and post-production film services that Goldsmith and O'Regan (2003, 2005) referred to as *film cities*. The nature and flow of filmmaking activities – intermediate inputs – in a given film city is the concern of the film service approach.

Goldsmith and O'Regan (2003, 2005) and Goldsmith, Ward, and O'Regan (2012) argued that film "serving" and film "servicing" cities and nations are recognised based on their capacity and capabilities to service the needs of both the local and international film industries, with the film services framework recognising "the presence of the studio complexes[35] as part of a filmmaking ecology to enable convergent, productive relations between the international and domestic industries" (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2003:84). In this approach, film value chain relationships are critical. The film city, already, is subservient to the transplantation of Global

[35] In the *Film Studio*, the term studio or film studio is used to denote "the physical infrastructure used for the production of feature films and television programs" (Goldsmith & O'Regan 2005: xi)

North modes of film production, with the concentration of film services facilitating the sort of film production dispersal that Elmer and Gasher, in *Contracting Out Hollywood: Runaway Productions and Foreign Location Shooting* (2005), call "contracting out" Hollywood. The contracting out that Hollywood does is not only in search of savings, profits, economies of scale, and cheap, distinctive, and "authentic" locations, but also a function of the fact that capitalism is open to learning new tricks to survive and perpetuate itself. These shifts that take place in Hollywood trickle and filter down to "local Hollywoods" such as Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban, affecting the shape and direction of national cinemas. In contemporary South African film discourse, "Johannesburg is considered a TV city, Cape Town is a bona fide film city, while Durban, still a video city, offers an anomalous niche as it hosts key national and international producers despite being without a studio and lacking feature film production or post-production facilities" (O'Regan 2018: 20). While the capacity of Cape Town as a film city is demonstrated through its "world class studio facilities, excellent film service infrastructure, diverse locations' (Tomaselli, 2013), government film commissions such as the KwaZulu Natal Tourism and Film Authority, Gauteng Film Commission and Eastern Cape Film Office fall neatly within the film services framework in their role to develop capacity through upskilling, attracting film productions and promoting these provinces as film friendly locations (O'Regan, 2018). In these circumstances, navigating *Hollywoodisation* as best as possible thus becomes a necessity for the survival of local film industries. However, the flow of film industry modes, systems, norms and practices is mostly one-way and unidirectional: from Hollywood to the rest of the world. That is, while Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban are inevitably shaped by shifts in Hollywood, and even mimic what Hollywood does, Hollywood itself is less bothered by what goes on in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban except where such sites offer cheap distinct locations, cheap labour, and profits. It takes radical paradigm shifts, as happened with Bollywood and Nollywood, to go in a completely different direction. National cinemas happen only if a local film industry chooses its own path and strikes out in a different direction.

The fact that Hollywood is the reference point for the global film industry opens the way for a decolonial critique of film service approaches that see local service providers as responding mainly to Hollywood-driven shifts. That is, Hollywood as a reference point simply entrenches, and points to the entrenchment, of core-periphery relations, the development of underdevelopment, and uneven development. Core versus periphery relations are reproduced and reproducible in local film industry, meaning that in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban,

there is a core and a periphery as well. This explains the hierarchy and division of the local film industry on the basis of budget (micro-budget, medium budget, and big budget) and race (Afrikaans film versus black film, for example) which can be traced to the A-Scheme and B-Scheme hierarchy and division. Essentially, the location of Hollywood as a reference point in the film services framework is an *indicator of local and global inequality*. The film services approach, useful in objectively surveying the intermediate inputs that go into filmmaking, misses the larger "political" and historical picture of how things got to be the way they are today. In other words, the structure and state of film services in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban is not accident. Rather, it is historically determined and overdetermined. Hence, whereas the film services approach simply looks at how film industries can grow on the basis of direct and indirect employment and multiplier effects, it fails to account for how, in the case of South Africa, a painful colonial and apartheid history literally rigged the "markets", the state, and the private sector in favour of elites and the white minority.

Whereas the film services approach moves linearly and directly to recommending Strategy 1 ("growth"), local realities and patterns are much more complex. In South Africa, for example, the starting point is redress (Strategy 2), thus altering Strategy 1 to suit the outcomes of historical redress. There is no scope in a routine survey of film services to critique how apartheid ensured that key film services would be majority owned and controlled by whites, with black people socially codified and constituted as a series of "lacks" and a catalogue of "deficits". Racist discourse presented Africans as "people whose being was constituted by negations and lacks: lacking writing, lacking history, lacking civilisation, lacking development, lacking democracy, to lacking human rights" (Grosfoguel, 2007:213; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:5). These "lacks" and "deficits" did not happen by accident but by design. Not only were the inequalities, hierarchies, and divisions in the local film industry designed to be that way, but they were set up to be perpetuated. To participate in constructing a truly national cinema for the whole people, by a nation's people, an account is needed that reconciles Strategy 1 to Strategy 2. While the focus is on the networks of various inputs from services rendered across the value chain, the ones that shape the character, nature and significance of the final film product, it is important to note that the end result from the network of inputs is more than the film. The result, rather, is a film culture. Distinct film cultures shape audiences, production methods, and relations. The nature and shape of local film cultures is not just a function of film services but, also, of the arc of history and a people's collective aspirations. Meaningful participation in a given film industry is not only based on one's capacity to create or innovate or one's resourcefulness in isolation. Rather, we must also consider issues of *equity* and *access*,

as well as the nuances of how open or closed an industry is, including the ability to enter and be recognised in both the network of relations and industry networks themselves.

The capacities of service providers to create and innovate, measured through the nature and level of skills, infrastructure and networks, can be used as indicators of the quality and value to expect from the input of each service in predominantly commercially driven film production contexts. Path dependency and reliance on using and reusing normative and already successful strategies are part of the business logic that is taken for granted in the industry. It is rarely questioned, even in policy pronouncements that champion redress, whether the matter-of-course pursuit of economic growth is compatible with the primary aims of national cinema. Instead, threats and risks to the film industry are calculated in terms of their impact on economic growth and vice versa. Economic measures are used to calculate the "growth" of the film industry, such that economic growth is taken to imply the growth of the film industry. Yet, we have seen inequality worsen even in years of economic growth, such as during the Mbeki years (Seekings, 2007). There is no guarantee that economic growth and reducing inflation will automatically translate into less inequality. If anything, it means more profits for those who already own the means of production, have access, and are historically positioned to benefit directly from the economy. Indeed, cinema emerged during the late 19th century at "a time when capitalism was increasingly associated with wealth inequality" (Waltons, 2018:1), and it quickly espoused this logic. The relationship between inequality and capitalism is not accidental. It is a feature rather than a glitch or a bug. Thus, the expectation that the film industry automatically grows as the economic cake grows is a version of "trickle-down economics" that has rarely worked as intended in the developing world, or even in the Global North where they were championed by the likes of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher (Seip & Harper, 2016).

The uneven development and inefficacious "trickle-down" economics that come packaged with Strategy 1 have not deterred South African film practitioners and policy makers from drawing from and adopting Global North film production models and adjusting them for the unique local socio-economic context. For example, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition's foreign film and television production and post-production incentive provides 25% tax incentives to international production companies that film in South Africa and for co-productions, 35% of the qualifying South African production expenditure (QSAPE). This strategy aims to attract direct investment into the local industry, particularly those that meet the criteria within the high-level tier categories. Successful applicants, in return, are to provide job opportunities to *previously* disadvantaged professionals in the film project, thereby facilitating

a type of trickle-down economic effect through job creation and skills development. However, films such as *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013), with arguably the highest production budget of a local production in South Africa since 1994, together with government bodies, incorrectly claimed that the film project sustained 12,000 jobs over a two-year period (Wilkinson, 2013). This raises questions about the realities and effectiveness of the trickle-down effect, generally explained as a "multiplier effect" in facilitating meaningful industry transformation and inclusive growth.

The effect of such adjustments, including attempts to integrate those on the margins, is the retention of existing power relations that privilege Western cinematic language, expertise, or experience, as well as criteria for access to foreign capital. That South African filmmaking conditions remain peculiar for the majority of the black population, whose daily living conditions are marked by a lack of basic human needs such as sanitation, education, adequate food, or decent housing, is typically treated as a footnote (Arenas, 2011). Globally prescribed criteria determining a nation or city's film-friendliness are problematic for this reason. National cinema cannot emerge in the context of such distorting universals. There is thus scope for redefining the nature and criteria of national cinema in the developing world in ways that address modes of coloniality. The corporate and financial sector, including banks, credit providers and lenders, and government as guarantor affect the form and existence of small and medium enterprises on the margins when they calculate and label risk in ways that disproportionately marginalise the "previously disadvantaged", a situation made worse by the fact that film is, in any case, an economically risky business. Film service businesses owned by the black demographic, especially women, are regarded as high risk (Mkosi, 2016; NFVF, 2018b). The majority start off with limited and basic experience, lack specialised education, and are economically disadvantaged, factors that compound and persist when the same normative "measures" and calculations are used to decide how and if to support such small and medium film enterprises. Thus, in South African cinema, the film service paradigm that incorporates Strategy 1 is interlocked with international film distribution and exhibition conglomerates that, alongside local privately owned distribution and exhibition companies, monopolise economic and cultural power and influence to dominate South African film markets. These institutions, including foreign conglomerates, are gatekeepers of the type of films that reach film screens in the country and partly determine the development trajectory and the type of national cinema emerging from consumption and production patterns. Again, there is scope for rethinking the manner, nature, and mode of support for these small businesses beyond the current narrow project-based approach.

The assumption, in *Film Studio*, that film industries already operate in a "global economy", betrays a belief that film industries are extensions of capitalist logic. Indeed, Chapter 1 in the book is titled "International production and globalisation", providing a perspective that regards globalisation and capitalist modernity as given. The chapter assumes that taking "advantage of the enhanced mobility and flexibility of audiovisual production enabled by technological developments and globalization" is the minimum requirement for those in the film industry, wherever they might be (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005:xii). That film production is a mass culture industry organised for capitalist exploitation and growth, with clear economic targets, technological investment and organisation of labour as forces of production, is taken for granted. Indeed, the division of the fledgling industry in the early 1900s into distinct areas of specialisation, namely production, distribution and exhibition, signalled a response to, and a need to organise the industry to meet the demands of the so-called "market". Characteristic of this economic system, already, was the promotion of free market competition, propagating the idea that *all* can participate freely in economic competition without limits in *laissez faire* fashion, eliminating or limiting government regulation of the market, and assuming that ultimately the market will self-regulate. The view, traced to Adam Smith, is that an "invisible hand" controls and regulates "the market" (George, 2010; O'Donnell, 2023). The early development of the film industry in America saw a capitalist "Wild West" fostering monopolistic practices such as those of the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), with various other monopolies emerging after the termination of the MPPC for unfair film industry practices (Kochberg, 2012). At any rate, capitalism has always been inherently entangled with colonial forms of social and labour organisation in ways that produce a state of perpetually uneven development and economic dependency whereby "direct producers have been separated from the means of production (and where these) now exist as the private property of a class of non-producers (owners)" (Alavi et al., 2023:6).

The assumptions about the inevitability of capitalist modernity and globalisation, including the operation of the so-called "invisible hand", are countered by decolonial epistemic perspectives that centre on the critique of power, knowledge, and being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 4). The decolonial epistemic perspective is productive because it "does not attempt to claim universality, neutrality, and singular truthfulness. It is decidedly and deliberately situated in those epistemic sites such as Latin America, Asia, Caribbean and Africa that experienced the negative consequences of modernity and that are facing development challenges" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 5). Furthermore, in locating the context of the convergence of colonialism and

capitalism, Maldonado-Torres (2007: 243) has usefully proposed that "capitalism, an already existing form of economic relation, became tied with forms of domination and subordination that were central to maintaining colonial control first in the Americas, and then elsewhere". A distinct socio-historical context of control of distinct forms of labour and production, revolving "around the capital-salary relation and the world market" (Quijano, 2000: 535), emerged as a "new, original, and singular structure of relations of production in the historical experience of the world: world capitalism" (Quijano, 2000: 536). Having control over specific forms of labour meant having control over a specific group of dominated people aligned with those labour forms, a structure of power that signified the introduction and entrenchment of new technologies of exploitation that made race and labour appear as a natural order (Quijano, 2000: 537).

Global capitalism itself emerged as form of labour control of particular races, with colonial capital implementing racially motivated forms of "extraction and commodification of labor power targeting Global South populations for the benefit of developing markets in the Global North" (Ashiagbor, 2021:506, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). Global capitalism also systematically organised human groups through land dispossession, spatial segregation, and forcing non-white populations into "groups areas" (for example, the apartheid Group Areas Act of 1950) that geographically distanced them from sites of desired economic activity (Van Staden, 2024). Deliberate legal and administrative restrictions were applied and enforced against black people, black businesses, and indigenous capital, including restrictions against attaining licenses and credit, producing cash-crops, and recruiting hired labour, and the application of discriminatory taxation policies and support for European settlers and Asian and Levantine traders (Zeleza, 1992). The institution of the dompas (the Pass Book), the Separate Amenities Act of 1953, and the Population Registration Act of 1950 meant that the apartheid government controlled the classification of the population and determined where one could live, where one could go, what level and quality of education one were to have, and the kind of work one could do (Bell et al., 2022). The form and nature of cultural and creative industries were inherently shaped by these restrictions. Nothing in that structure of relations, economic benefits, laws, and access to infrastructure was accidental. It was all by design. By implication, redress cannot also be accidental. It must be by design. That is, it cannot just be left to the "market".

Thus, questions about the existence, form, and viability of a national cinema in South Africa make it necessary to probe into the embeddedness of coloniality in normative industry practices and to identify how long-standing patterns of power influence and even distort film production.

There is no invisible hand in apartheid. Indeed, apartheid and colonialism were fully *visible hands* that regulated and controlled black life in the reserves, Bantustans, townships, factories, mines and farms in concretely empirical, consequential, and material ways. Whites, on the other hand, benefitted from the constant allocation, distribution, and re-distribution of resources, funding and power of this *visible hand*. The decolonial perspective suggests that the invisibility of the hands of capitalism is a relation that can be seen in the present-day workings of the film industry, where the hands of apartheid and colonialism have seemingly become invisible since South Africa is now a "rainbow nation" and the previously disadvantaged are no longer so disadvantaged. Here, at work, is the coloniality of power. In short, without combining it with decolonial perspectives, the film service framework runs the risk of fetishising what Goldsmith and O'Regan characterised as the "promise of international production" (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005: xii). What the decolonial perspective argues is that international production is not automatically promising. It can only be truly promising if put in constant dialogue with the imperatives of historical redress, access, inclusion, and transformation.

The notion of the coloniality of power refers to a global model of power founded on two converging axes (Quijano, 2000, 2024). The first axis codifies differences between the conqueror and conquered in the idea of "race", positioning some as naturally inferior to others (Quijano, 2000). The second axis is "the constitution of a new structure of control of labour and its resources and products around and upon the basis of capital and the world market" (Quijano, 2000: 533). On the one hand, the coloniality of power has positioned Africa at the interface between different value systems and different forms of logic: Western and African; urban and rural; patriarchal and matriarchal; modern and traditional; progressive and conservative; cultural and technical (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 14). On the other hand, the coloniality of power introduces the basic and universal social classification of the population of the planet in terms of the idea of "race" (Lugones, 2008: 1). The "new historical identities produced around the foundation of a new global structure of the control of labour were associated with social roles and geohistorical places" (Quijano, 2000). Non-European people were targeted to serve specific subordinated roles in the global economy and its racialised structure and hierarchy. "European", "Indian", and "African" are among the new "racial" identities, a classification and codification that is "the deepest and most enduring expression of colonial domination" (Quijano, 2001: 1). Race-making, in this case, is "a fundamental organizing principle of social stratification. It has influenced the definition of rights and privileges, the distribution of resources, and the ideologies and practices of subordination and oppression" (Omi & Winant, 2014:107). This principle features prominently as a category of

othering alongside patriarchal gender constructs and class in colonial projects of domination and subordination. Racial stratification, as Du Bois ([1935] 1998) famously suggested, stabilises capitalism by dividing the working class and allowing non-elite white workers to perceive their interests as aligned with those of white owners of capital. Both "race and the division of labor remained structurally linked and mutually reinforcing, in spite of the fact that neither of them were necessarily dependent on the other in order to exist or change" (Quijano, 2000: 536).

Fanon (1963) argued that the colonial system is incapable of reforming or transforming itself into an unselfish programme. Instead, its pattern is to fall back on its old reflexes of domination. Furthermore, "while the coloniality of power underpins the continuity of colonial situations in postcolonial Africa, (neo)liberal thinking attempts to dismiss its place in Africa's contemporary challenges, blaming instead anti-colonial struggles and the quest for complete decolonization as the cause of these challenges" (Fasakin, 2021:902). Perhaps not surprisingly, social codification happens to be the basis of the construction of modern subjectivities and the persistence of intersecting oppressions, with the codification process gradually evolving with the ideals and clichés of the socio-economic and political systems of the time which can include neoliberal "colorblind ideology" and "rainbowism" (Omi & Winant, 2014: 149; Palmer, 2016:1). Globalisation, the global politics of colour-blindness and human rights "for all", require racial codification to adjust and accommodate current political views. We thus see how colour-blind politics seemingly promote the elimination of prejudice predicated on racial lines, yet racism persists in deep, structural forms. Thus, racial axes have "proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established" (Quijano, 2000: 533). Now the once non-being, low-ranking race, barbaric and disposable, is reimagined as fully human and deserving of human rights and privileges, alongside projects to "develop their abilities" and "integrate" them into the long-established global model of power as symbols of a transformed society and more than just a labour force. The perniciousness of the label of "previously disadvantaged" becomes patently clear.

In any case, colonialism is seen, in the decolonial perspective, as constituting "the dark hidden face of the modernity project" (Mignolo, 2007) which operates through establishing new social relations on the basis of race and which constructed new social identities classified as the conquered and the conqueror. The geographical expansion and implantation of this system of power beyond Europe and America "permeated every area of social existence and it constitutes the most effective form of material and inter-subjective social domination. Thus, coloniality

does not just refer to racial classification" (Lugones, 2008: 3). Rather, it permeates all "control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/inter-subjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these inter-subjective relations" (Lugones, 2008: 3). Furthermore, colonialism is globalised. It naturalises human relations along hierarchical lines that enforce the superiority of "Eurocentrism". Quijano defined Eurocentrism as "the cognitive perspective not of Europeans only, but of the Eurocentered world, of those educated under the hegemony of world capitalism" (Lugones, 2008: 3). Eurocentrism divided the world's population in two groups: superior, rational, civilised and modern (European bourgeoisie colonisers), or inferior, irrational, primitive and traditional (non-European colonised). Fanon's description of the existential realities of the colonised as a constant struggle against the omnipresent death, with their constant nearness to death "experienced as endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 251), expresses, graphically, coloniality of being (the state of the wretched of the earth). It is a peculiar existential condition within the global power matrices characterised by invisibility, lesser-being, and dehumanisation, alongside the codification of non-white bodies as primitive, irrational, non-desirable, and *dispensable*. European modernity, racism, gender oppression and colonialism legitimise and naturalise the non-ethics of war and violence, with black bodies (those who exist below Being) marked as "dispensable as well as a target of rape and murder" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 254). Death and "daily forms of death are fundamental attributes of the reality of black bodies" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 251).

The social categorisations instituted by colonialism and imposed on the world as part of the modern/colonial global model of power include the codification of gender (Lugones, 2016; Quijano, 2000; Westman, 2023). Gender plays an important role in colonial socio-economic organisation, as outlined in Quijano's coloniality of power framework, even where the emphasis is on race. A particular gender system created different arrangements for colonised males and females distinct from that of white bourgeoisie colonisers (Lugones, 2007: 186). This introduced many-layered genders, treating gender itself as a colonial concept and mode of organisation within modes of production, property relations, cosmologies and ways of knowing (Lugones, 2007:186). The fact that Quijano's articulation of the role of gender has not sufficiently been explored (cf. Lugones, 2007) means that there is scope in this thesis to highlight how race and gender are interlocked categories of identification through which structural oppression and domination are wielded and experienced. Dominant conceptions of discrimination condition people to think about subordination as a disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis. However, this is not the case. An intersectional analysis of race and

gender reveals the often-hidden multidimensionality of oppression unique to black women's experiences (Clergé, 2023). Liberatory struggles and projects that rely on single categorical axes often lead to interventions that address the needs of the dominant group within a category, such as black men (racial struggle) or white women (gender struggle) (Ajele & McGill, 2020). In contrast, one can only fully see and understand liberatory struggles when black women's oppression is understood as *intersectional*. Modernity, capitalism and coloniality are all aspects of the same package of control of the economy, authority, law, gender, sexuality, knowledge, and subjectivity (Mignolo, 2007: 162).

3.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the theoretical framework guiding the study, combining the film services approach with a decolonial lens to interrogate the contradictions and complexities of South Africa's post-1994 film industry. The film services framework, developed by Goldsmith and O'Regan (2005) in the context of Australian cinema, provides valuable insights into the networks, infrastructures, and inputs that capacitate a film industry and measure its film-friendliness. Its emphasis on capabilities, skills, and service provision across the value chain helps to shed light on how films are made and how industries position themselves globally. However, as argued in the chapter, the framework's genealogy in Western contexts renders it insufficient when applied uncritically to South Africa, where colonial and apartheid legacies continue to shape relations of ownership, access, and participation. The chapter demonstrates that South African film policy is in a predicament between two contradictory imperatives: Strategy 1, which prioritises economic growth and global competitiveness, and Strategy 2, which prioritises redress and transformation. While policy rhetoric often claims to balance these imperatives, the dominance of neoliberal growth discourses inherited from GEAR (1996) and tied to global capitalist norms undermines the urgency of redress. Furthermore, this contradiction manifests in the "previousification" of disadvantage, where ongoing inequalities are treated as past issues, thereby delegitimising calls for transformation. Such framing enables the persistence of coloniality to remain hidden as the invisible power structure that sustains racial, gendered, and class hierarchies long after the end of formal colonialism and apartheid (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012).

By integrating decolonial theory, the chapter reframes the film services approach to account for the colonial matrix of power. This perspective highlights how economic, political, cultural, and epistemic controls continue to shape the film industry, from funding structures to labour hierarchies. It underscores that film in the South African context cannot be merely an economic

commodity. Instead, it should be a cultural and social practice tied to identity, belonging, and emancipatory projects. The unfinished business of decolonisation requires that South African national cinema be understood as a project of liberation, not simply a path-dependent economic growth project whose colonial-set norms, beliefs, and preferences are rebranded as part of "film-friendliness". The chapter also emphasised the risks of Hollywoodisation, where South African film services are subordinated to global core-periphery relations. While cities like Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban aspire to become "local Hollywoods", this often reproduces inequalities, privileging elite clusters. The film services framework, when combined with a decolonial critique, reveals that these patterns are historically determined rather than accidental, rooted in apartheid-era divisions such as the A-Scheme and B-Scheme films. The theoretical framework adopted here advances understanding in two ways. First, it situates film services within the broader historical and political context of coloniality, exposing how inequalities are reproduced through policy and practice. Second, it insists on centring people, their identities, cultures, and aspirations. By combining the analytical strengths of the film services approach with the critical insights of decoloniality, the study is positioned to interrogate the extent of transformation in South African film services, challenge the dominance of growth-centric discourses, and propose pathways toward a more inclusive, equitable, and culturally grounded national cinema.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the methodology utilised in the study, specifying how data was collected and analysed. The focus was to determine, through a film services framework, if and how a truly national and genuinely transformed cinema could exist in South Africa, as well as to establish the limits and possibilities associated with the emergence of such an inclusive, transformed national cinema, the study employed a qualitative methodology and research design. Since film is a medium and form of human communication and culture, a qualitative method of investigation was used to elicit rich data and insights from film practitioners. The study evaluated how far the South African film production context has come since the dark days of colonialism and apartheid, and the possibilities for redress of what the South African Constitution describes as the "injustices and the imbalances of the past" (1996: 17). This qualitative study employed a case study design that catered to the real-world context of filmmaking, allowing me to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex issue of national cinema.

4.2 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS: A GAZE FROM THE MARGINS

I am a young black South African female film lecturer and PhD student brought up in rural South Africa in a closely-knit low-income working-class family and community. My family, particularly my mother and father, lived through the oppression of apartheid. The older generation never saw themselves represented on screen except through distortion and caricature. As their child, I was implicated in the hardship they lived through and their desire for a new and transformed South Africa. Whereas they had limited agency to change the structural factors of oppression that shaped their life, I grew up in a "free" South Africa that putatively empowered the "formerly" oppressed and disadvantaged to rethink and reimagine representation. As such, my epistemological and ontological positioning was always already political. The framing of political change and transformation was a shared goal. The same goal is now shared with my students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. When my students debate the transformation of the film industry, I see myself in their concerns. I also see my parents and siblings. None of these concerns are necessarily new. Rather, they suture one in history and help link the past to the present.

In my role as a media and cultural studies lecturer and practitioner in the School of Arts, I have

interacted with South African film industry practitioners on various platforms, including the annual Durban International film festival (DIFF) where I had the opportunity to review film projects and to represent the DIFF manager in an international film market and festival programme in Cape Town. I have also been to Cape Town, selected as a participant in an industry development program aimed at young film professionals working in sales, traditional and online distribution, theatrical exhibition and programming for festivals, film clubs and archives. These experiences gave me a window into the business of film through private workshops, networking sessions, festival curatorial experience, and panel sessions with established film professionals from Africa, Europe and the United States of America, tailor made for the selected participants. Furthermore, through these engagements, I realised a need to grapple with the tension arising from the dual insider-outsider role as an academic-industry participant, as well as the intersection of my race, gender and socio-economic background within a historically and culturally white dominated industry required. In my role as a lecturer, I teach the courses Cinema Studies (MECS 302) and Screen Studies (MECS 201). In the Cinema Studies course, one of the subjects that regularly stir heated debates among the students in my class is the presumed out-sized role of the cinematic industry in overtly shaping knowledge, symbols, conversations and ideas about life (and the perception of life) in South Africa. This was a question of power, hegemony, and influence. Many of my students perceived an untransformed past as having a disproportionately dominant influence on the present, a fact that made them uneasy. Without intending to, they see issues through predominantly racialised lenses. For them, the past remains present. Critically, solutions tend to be political, politicised, and implicated with power. The shape of the future remains uncertain. Being in class most weeks and being part of these debates partly shaped how I approached my subject matter. Typically, debates in class resolve into stark questions about who gets to shape national film culture in South Africa and how they do so; audience and consumption trends and the power to distribute films; who gets to make which kinds of films, how, where, when, and why; and the role of government. These four broad categories represent my students' framing of the potential and future of a post-1994 South African film industry. As I led, moderated, and facilitated the discussions in class, I was also inevitably inserted, epistemologically and ontologically, into the debates and questions.

The deep debates with my students, and the occasional access I have in South African film industry programmes whose focus is business oriented, prompted me to clarify my own position and inscribe myself in the narrative of where South Africa is going as a society and what the endgame is. My choice to explore the notion of a national cinema and the methods I employed

in developing this position were thus as deeply personal as they are political. It was impossible for me to separate myself from history, gender, class, race, or social justice. Of equal importance is recognising that the researcher's experiences influence the sample criteria and data regarded useful for analysis, thus linking researcher positionality to interpretivist processes of research. Pickering (2008: 19) has observed that such experiences involve "interpretation of what happens in real life, what makes our perceptions, feelings and actions meaningful". Asking, 25 years into democracy, what access, inclusivity, and equality meant within filmmaking is a political act. It means that one is questioning the transformation project at its core. The layered views of my students and my own experiences intersected and reformulated as a larger research question about the shape of a South African national cinema, triggering and triggered by a need to make sense of national transformation through the gaze from the margins: black, female and working class. I also occupy a duality of outsider-insider position professionally, an experience which accorded me proximity to industry professionals, potential access and rapport with film professionals, while also enabling fluency in industry specific language advantageous for interviews, and an awareness of systemic industry shifts as they happen or are forecasted by key institutions. This positionality required that I design research that captures all these questions and starting points. Ultimately, the motives and underlying assumptions for my choice to conduct a qualitative study were important not only because they reflect different worldviews but also because they captured the issues that I constantly grappled with in my everyday life and work as a film lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. A worldview, specifically, establishes the unique position, or epistemological location (Grbich, 2007), for conducting qualitative research. The beliefs that one holds and one's ways of knowing ultimately influence how such research arrives at its findings and conclusions. The *ontological* and *epistemological* thus concern a person's worldview and its significant influence, and perceived relative importance, on reality and the interpretation of that reality.[36]

Qualitative research approaches broadly focus on studying phenomena in their natural settings (Lim, 2025). The reason for this is to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the *meanings* that people ascribe to them (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This method addresses questions that pertain to "why" and "how" (Marshall, 1996: 522). These types of questions are important because they lead to deeper insights into *why* and *how* people perceive or think of a phenomenon in a certain way. They also help explain states of affairs and how the world is the

[36] Adam, K. (2009), "Chapter 4: Research Methodology & Design", https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/4245/05Chap%204_Research%20methodology%20and%20design.pdf [Accessed: 22 Nov. 2024].

way it is. In other words, qualitative approaches are vital for understanding the reality of societal issues in their fullness. The research can uncover how people make meaning and sense of, and how they cope within, certain social, political, cultural and economic conditions and circumstances. Hence, qualitative research enables an exploration of the "understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, relationships work, and the significance of the meanings that they generate" (Mason, 2002:1). In this study, these understandings and experiences were explored through interviews with selected South African film industry stakeholders from Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg. These three sites are the most important nodes in the South African filmmaking landscape, showing both the persistent influence of the past and the flow of contemporary trends. Qualitative research using interviews as data-gathering strategy thus enabled me to "attend to the contextual richness of these settings, focusing on the everyday lives of many kinds of people and what they think about, under many different circumstances" (Yin, 2016:3). I was able, through the qualitative research, to link the varied cultural, racial, political and social experiences of film practitioners to how institutions treat and address Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. These layers could then be unpacked in ways that contribute to understanding the nature of contemporary social power relations, the state of social change, and even the reasons for the persistent inequalities and remanence of injustices that, constitutionally, were supposed to be a thing of the past.

An overview of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms

Orientation	**Quantitative approach**	**Qualitative approach**
Paradigm / Worldview (assumption about the world)	Positivism / Realism	Interpretivism / Idealism
Research purpose (rationale)	Numerical description Causal explanation Prediction	Subjective description Empathetic understanding Exploration
Ontology (nature of reality)		
Epistemology (theory of knowledge)	Dualist / Objectivist	Subjectivist
Methodology (aims of scientific investigation)	Experimental / Manipulative	Hermeneutical / Dialectical
Research methods (techniques and tools)	Empirical examination Measurement Hypothesis testing Randomisation Blinding Structured protocols Questionnaires	Ethnographies Case studies Narrative research Interviews Focus group discussions Observations Field notes Recordings and filmings
Scientific method (role of theory)	Deductive approach, testing of theory	Inductive approach, generation of theory

Nature of data instruments	Variables Structured and validated-data collection instruments	Worlds, images, categories In-depth interviews, participant observation, field notes and open-ended questions
Data analysis	Identify statistical relationships among variables	Use descriptive data, search for patterns, themes and holistic features, and appreciate variations
Results	Generalisable findings	Paticularistic findings; provision of insider viewpoint
Final report	Formal statistical report with: correlations, comparison of means, and reporting of statistical significance of findings	Informal narrative report

Figure 6: An overview of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms (Source: Qualitative and Quantitative Research Paradigms in Business, by Antwi & Hamza, 2015)

Qualitative research (see Figure 6) turned out to be the most relevant approach for my study for the five-fold reasons that Yin (2016) has succinctly outlined. First, this mode of investigation appealed to me because it is an approach committed to understanding the meaning of people's everyday lives. It does not rely on placing people in laboratory settings or representing them statistically. Instead, it focuses on lived experiences. Second, this approach prioritised the representation of the views and perspectives of the generality of my study's participants. This meant that the participants were able to share the meanings they give to real-world events *because they are the people who live them*. Third, qualitative research explicitly embraces contextual conditions – that is, the social, institutional, cultural, and environmental conditions within which people's lives unfold. In many ways, these contextual conditions interconnect with and may strongly influence all human affairs. Fourth, to the extent that qualitative research is driven by a desire to explain social behaviour and thinking, through existing or emerging concepts, my study did not simply record these everyday events rigidly or without nuance. Rather, concepts can be put in the service of attempts to explain nuanced social processes at individual or collective levels. Fifth, my study found qualitative research ideal for acknowledging the value of collecting, integrating, and presenting data from a variety of sources of evidence as part of any given study. The complexity of the setting and the diversity of the participants warranted the use of interviews and direct field observations as well as the review and close reading of documents and selected artefacts. I was also able to triangulate among the different sources and create converging lines of inquiry.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

My study into the existence, limits and possibilities for the emergence of a truly national cinema in contemporary South Africa deliberately employed an interpretivist approach. Here, the research and the researcher are "guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:22). In the

interpretive paradigm, "knowledge is relative to particular circumstances – historical, temporal, cultural, subjective – and exists in multiple forms as representations of reality (interpretations by individuals)" (Benoliel, 1996:407). Interpretivists accept multiple meanings and ways of knowing and acknowledge "objective reality can never be captured. The interpretive paradigm focuses primarily on recognising and narrating the meaning of human experiences and actions (Fossey et al., 2002; Levers, 2013). In turn, the positioning or location can influence one's choice of study design and selection of research procedures. Specifically, this study took the form of a case study, defined as a research method which allows for an in-depth examination of events, phenomena, or other observations within a real-life context for purposes of investigation (Yin, 2009).

Qualitative inquiry & research design					
Characteristics	**Narrative research**	**Phenomenology**	**Grounded theory**	**Ethnography**	**Case study**
Data collection Forms	Using Primarily Interviews And documents	Using primarily interviews with individuals, although documents, observations and art may also be considered	Using primarily interviews with 20-60 individuals	Using primarily observations and interviews, but perhaps collecting other sources during extended time in field	Using Multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, Artefacts
Data analysis strategies	Analysing data for stories, "restorying" stories, developing themes, often using a chronology	Analysing data for significant statements, meaning units, textural and structural description, description of the "essence"	Analysing data through open coding, axial coding, selective coding	Analysing data through description of the culture-sharing group; themes about the group	Analysing data through description of the case and themes of the case, as well as cross-case themes
Written report	Developing a narrative about the stories of an individual's Life	Describing the "essence" of the experience	Generating a theory illustrated in a figure	Describing how a culture-sharing group works	Developing a details analysis of one or more cases

Figure 7: Qualitative inquiry & research design (Source: *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, Creswell, 2007)

The case study research design is useful for studies such as this one which seeks answers that could only come after in-depth exploration. In particular, the question about how a *truly* national cinema can be said to exist in South Africa today required that I link, effectively, cases,

phenomena, and philosophical enquiry. Hollweck (2016:3) highlighted the importance of high-quality case study research that "brings into focus rigour, validity, and reliability... and urges the researcher to carefully consider whether a case study is the most appropriate method for their inquiry project". To the extent that my study investigated, questioned and critiqued the limits and possibilities of the emergence of a national cinema in South Africa, I found the case study design relevant. The study sought to generate themes that shed light on the experiences, practices, and norms of film services, including in key roles (above-the-line services) within the production value chain. Since many of the experiences, practices, and norms were already entrenched and taken for granted, the question and variable of *transformation* was applied inductively to the nuanced investigation of each of the links in the value chain. This nuance was necessary because the process of filmmaking is collaborative and depends on the *relationships* between interconnected pieces and services, whose inputs shape both the process and the product. Important nodes for investigation included creative, directorial and production leadership, and the relationships that play a role in establishing or maintaining a system of production-labour relations interlinked with specific, nuanced, complex and implicit values and cultural, social, economic, and political norms and ideologies. In terms of shaping the product, this relates to the nature of skills, expertise and level of capacity involved in production. Both the process and the product have links to historic, socio-economic, political and cultural conditions. A case study investigation is conducted especially when "the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Ridder, 2012:93). Specifically, case study research "constitutes an all-encompassing method that covers the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis" (Hollweck, 2016:3). In my choice to design the case study, the aim was to record and capture the thoughts and experiences that will inform the interpretive evaluation of the ongoing development of a transforming industry, if it is transforming at all.

Primary and Secondary Sources

To gather data, I engaged with each participant in ways that appreciated their conditions of work, augmented by the use of secondary sources such as written documents, blogs and YouTube videos (see Figure 6). In total, seven semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted, allowing me to extrapolate why things are the way they are in the film industry, where the limits and possibilities lie, and what their causes, properties, and effects are. The primary data (interviews) and secondary data (documents, blogs and YouTube videos) helped me to obtain a comprehensive, rich description of the phenomenon in question and provided

additional context. This corresponded with the definition of case studies as often employing "documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations during the course of research" (Yin, 2009:54).

Film Service and Industry Role	Data Source
Producer *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017)	Primary (interviews) Secondary (company website)
Producer & Director *Dear Future Wife* (2024)	Primary (interviews) Secondary (company website)
Producer & Distributor *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* **(2013)**	Primary (interviews) Secondary (company website)
Producer & Director *Knuckle City* **(2019)**	Secondary (company website)
Film Marketing Agency	Primary (interviews)
Film Festival Exhibition (Director)	Primary (interviews) Secondary (company website)
Film Festival Exhibition (Project Manager)	Primary (interviews)
Film Festival Exhibition (Marketer)	Primary (interviews) Secondary (company website)
Government Funding Agency	Primary (interviews) Secondary (company website; reports)
Government Agency	Secondary (company website; reports)
Government Funding Agency	Secondary (company website; reports)
Director	Secondary (company website; production notes)
Director and Writer	Secondary (company website; production notes)
Producer and Editor	Secondary (company website; production notes); Fame Week Industry Panel

Overview of primary and secondary data sources

4.4 : STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Since a population or universe consists of all items or individuals that are under consideration in a field of inquiry, and these individuals or objects in a certain population usually have similar characteristics (Casteel & Bridier, 2021), the population under study in my research were film industry service providers who operate in one or more of the four stages of the industry value chain: pre-production, production, distribution and exhibition in South Africa. Choosing a study sample is an "important step in any research project because it is rarely practical, efficient or ethical to study whole populations" (Marshall, 1996:522). Practical reasons for using

sampling include limited time, people's availability and the fact that a section of the population might not be of great significance in informing the study. Therefore, "research methods should be determined by the research question, not by the preference of the researcher" (Marshall, 1996: 522). The aim of sampling is to "draw a representative sample from the population, so that the results of studying the sample can then be generalized back to the population" (Marshall, 1996:522). In essence, sampling helps to focus the study on specific characteristics and is efficient in the sense that samples can be studied more quickly than larger population groups (Fink, 2003: 3).

To examine the characteristics of film services on offer in South Africa and how these could inform the interpretation of national film culture, I utilised a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique defined as the selection of "participants, settings or other sampling units that is criterion based or purposive" (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003: 78). Its advantages are that the "sample units are selected because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study" (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003:78). When a smaller sample size will suffice, the purposive sampling technique is "cost efficient and flexible by allowing researchers to adjust their sampling strategy as they gain more understanding of the research context, while targeting information-rich cases" (Tajik et al., 2024). Its disadvantage, of course, is its limited generalisability due to a smaller sample size and susceptibility to researcher bias (Tajik et al., 2024). Although the sample size does not permit statistical representativeness, it offers 'empirical insights' that illuminate broader industry dynamics and supports analytical generalisation on the question of a national cinema in contemporary South Africa (Yin, 2018). My use of the purposive sampling technique facilitated the selection of the sample population for the study on the basis that the participants had to be "active" industry practitioners who have participated in and experienced the production of a feature film. By "active," I meant those individuals or film services that participated in film projects in their various roles from 2013 to the present.

Convenience sampling, on the other hand, consisting of "a group of individuals that are ready and available" (Fink, 2003:18), provided the study with practitioners who were not only interested in discussions on the state of filmmaking and transformation in South Africa but were positioned to enrich the data-collection process due to their multifaceted and complex experiences in the industry. Inevitably, the busy timetables of filmmakers and the demanding

nature of film production schedules hampered the availability of participants for interviews. In addition, some turned down interview requests or did not confirm their availability for interviews. This meant greater reliance on convenience sampling. In 2018, I participated in the Cape Town Market & International Film Festival's Works in Progress workshop as a representative of the Durban International Film Festival. As a group of film industry members, we were granted access to an exclusive screening of films from South Africa and other African countries that were in the final stages of post-production. During this time, we had the opportunity to interact with the producers, directors, or editors of various films, including Jahmil Qubeka of *Knuckle City*, which premiered at the Durban International Film Festival the following year. In 2023, I had the privilege of attending and moderating a discussion with filmmakers at the Fame Shorts Film Festival, which forms part of the annual Fame Week Africa film market in Cape Town, providing additional contacts and interviewees. The session, titled *Transforming Screens: Navigating Trends in Today's Film and TV Landscape*, hosted film industry executives, producers and broadcasters and focused on themes that coincided with my own study's themes. Furthermore, some interviews had to be shifted from face-to-face meetings to virtual platforms (such as Zoom) due to scheduling clashes, short notice cancellations, and planning difficulties. My research design, and the qualitative research process in general, allowed for such flexibility and reflexiveness in the data collection. Indeed, being in the field teaches one to accommodate delays and frustrations and be prepared to pivot and change. Nothing is guaranteed in the data-collection process. Rather, everything tends to be fluid, thus necessitating a need for maximum flexibility to gather the required data in the time available. Ultimately, research studies often face multiple unforeseen challenges, and in my case, this frequently required additional time to complete my research. For example, in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a nationwide lockdown in South Africa, which affected my work and the research process. I attended numerous online staff training workshops at the university, which formed part of preparing staff and students for a shift to online lectures. Resources were redirected to helping students navigate the uncertainties associated with the sudden transition from the normal contact lectures and meetings to providing remote teaching and support. During this period, the research participants became less responsive to emails or phone calls regarding next steps for the research interviews. This was a period of uncertainty and transition in teaching, student support, and research. The South African film industry also grappled with the lockdown, including delays and limitations placed on film projects; it was no longer business as usual. Therefore, delays in my PhD work became inevitable, and they affected and prolonged the study.

The requirement that study participants must have participated in the production of a feature film was important because feature films, compared to short films or documentaries, allow for a 360° view of the value chain with all its critical workstreams. Furthermore, the feature film is the normative film form, according to so-called Hollywood standards. Four contemporary South African feature films were purposively selected for the study, and the participants must have been involved in the preproduction, production, distribution and/or exhibition of these or similar South African productions. The films selected were *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (Justin Chadwick, 2013), *Inxeba: The Wound* (John Trengove, 2017), *Dear Future Wife* (Obett Motaung, 2024), and *Knuckle City* (Jahmil X.T. Qubeka, 2019), reflecting preproduction, production, distribution and exhibition film services spread across the three main filmmaking centres of Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban. These films were also made during the decade in which I began my study (2013-2023), which gives a sense of how contemporary they are. It was also during this decade that a South African film with the highest budget to date, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (Chadwick, 2013) was produced. Most importantly, the research focused on this decade precisely to track contemporary industry practices resulting partly from the revision of foundational legislative and policy interventions introduced in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the introduction of new policies such as the NFVF funding policy in 2009, NFVF Language Policy in 2015, and the DTIC introducing a new dual audience funding programme targeting local film production, co-production and foreign production incentive in 2009.

The following roles were taken into account for the interviews: scriptwriter, director, producer, distributor, film festival organiser, and those involved in government film industry development and funding agencies, and provincial film offices. More importantly, certain participants had multiple roles or services. The final breakdown consisted of two scriptwriters who were also directors in the films, three producers, one of whom was a scriptwriter and director of the film, one distributor-producer, three representatives from a film festival organisation, and one representative from a government film industry development and funding agency. This resulted in a total sample of seven participants for interviews. Before each interview, I conducted a thorough review of publicly available printed, online, and video materials about each individual to ensure that the interviews were as informed as possible. When one of the four film producers and directors could not be reached for an interview, rich production information was obtained from the production's electronic press kit and production website, including relevant video interviews. Furthermore, the notes I captured regarding the

production during the 2018 Works in Progress industry session mentioned earlier proved to be relevant resources. The research prioritised film production processes and key areas of specialisation, such as story development, financing, production, distribution, and exhibition.

I deliberately selected the films and study participants to represent the various film budget categories (and budget constraints) used in South Africa, from zero and low to medium and big budget productions (see Table 5 for examples). Low-budget films refer to film productions that "rely on personal finance and private investment to support their productions" (Treffry-Goatley, 2010:42) due to significantly limited government subsidy and lack of access to private funding. Often, filmmakers fail to secure or access state funds due to various reasons, including "high competition from numerous filmmakers, lack of eligibility, (and) politics of funding selection processes" (SACO, 2024). However, in recent years, government efforts to financially support more filmmakers have resulted in the terms "low-budget" and "micro-budget" being used interchangeably in South Africa.[37] These are outlined below:

- *Low-budget productions*: The lowest subsidy allocation is R250,000 from the Eastern Cape Provincial Arts & Culture Film Fund, although amounts vary depending on provincial and national subsidy standards, as well as their tier systems (Eastern Cape Provincial Arts & Culture, 2022). The National Film and Video Foundation's partnership with Netflix allocated R4 million per feature production and R6 million per fictional feature production. The KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority provides R1.2 million for micro-budget features while the Durban Film Office allocates R350,000 to the same production category (DFO, 2025b; KZNTAFA, 2025a; NFVF, 2021a). The films in this budget range, with government support, tend to be made for TV or streamers as the primary intended platform.

- *Medium-budget fiction feature productions*: This refers to film productions that are eligible for the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition's South African Film & Television Production Incentive. These productions tend to source more financing through "unofficial co-production finance agreements" and target the South African market while aiming to access foreign markets (Treffry-Goatley, 2010:42).

- *Large-scale budget features*: These large-budget films are typically internationally

[37] The Conversation, 2020, "Enter the micro-budget film: Lockdown amplifies South African cinema trends", https://theconversation.com/enter-the-micro-budget-film-lockdown-amplifies-south-african-cinema-trends-143377 [Accessed: 3 Nov. 2025].

competitive. Practitioners "have found it necessary to partner with foreign producers to finance their productions and access wider markets" (Treffry-Goatley, 2010:42). These large-scale productions are often made "through the official treaties that South Africa has entered into with other states, including Canada (1997), Germany (2004), Italy (2003) and the United Kingdom (2007) (NFVF, 2022d:23). The recent highest film production budget in South Africa is approximately over R597 million.[38]

Film production budgets are generally confidential and typically contain sensitive information; therefore, differences in budget categories were considered based on official documents from funding sources and their budget categories, as well as media interviews with producers. Budgets were important to stratify the sample because through them I could explore the multiplicity, variations, layers and tensions of the production process and the existing dynamics. In the film production sample, one of the study participants worked in the low-budget range category, two in the medium-budget category, and one in the high-budget category.

Production	**Budget category**
Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom	High budget
Inxeba: The Wound	Medium budget
Dear Future Wife	Low budget
Knuckle City	Medium budget

Table 5: The budget categories of selected film productions

The study sample was gender and racially inclusive by design, not only to reflect the country's demographics but also its transformative imperatives. Thus, four of the participants were male, and three were female. The racial composition was five Africans, one white, and one Indian. The participants were based in the three key filmmaking cities, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. Three of the films were released in South Africa through the cinema circuit, travelled to national and international film festivals. One film has been screened on television and at film festivals. The production and post-production of *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* was done in Cape Town. *Inxeba: The Wound* was shot and produced in Gauteng. The production of Obett Motaung's *Dear Future Wife* was in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, while *Knuckle City* was mainly filmed on location in the township of Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape. The distribution of the

[38] The Hollywood Reporter, 2013, "South African filmmaking: A diverse country finds its own voice", https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/mandela-zulu-south-africa-filmmaking-451951/ [Accessed: 3 Nov. 2025].

sample films shows that three of the four films were filmed in the Western Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. This distribution also reflects recent efforts by the Eastern Cape to promote the province as a film production location through the establishment of the Eastern Cape Development Corporation in 2019. In terms of business operations, of the seven interviewed participants, six operated their film services in KwaZulu-Natal, two in Gauteng and one in Cape Town. The three main filming locations are representative of South Africa's film industry services, and the three cities are economic contributors, with dedicated government film offices facilitating the development of film in each province.

All seven interviews that I conducted were predicated on interaction between interviewer and participant. I therefore followed a flexible qualitative interview process that combined an implicit research agenda and structured research protocol, allowing for the fact that "questions as actually posed to any given participant will differ according to the context and setting of each interview" (Yin, 2016:142). The questions for each participant were purposely designed to elicit context-specific views and experiences about film services in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, aimed at shedding light on the state of transformation in South African cinema. In the questions, I placed deliberate emphasis on exploring the notion of the "nation" and "national" and their composite meanings, probing the work and contributions of each film service provider and industry participant. Furthermore, questions varied depending on the role that each participant played in the provision of film services. For example, the questions that I prepared for a producer were inflected differently to those meant for a director or distributor. At the same time, all interview questions stayed within the film services framing, thus providing a unifying thread. Where participants had dual or multiple functions (for example, writer-director), the interview questions were revised and adjusted to account for both roles. In keeping with the dictates of semi-structured interviews, the pre-determined questions merely guided the interviews and did not overdetermine the interview process – an approach that removed the researcher from the expert position and gave participants an opportunity to articulate their own stories (Chilisa, 2019). In some cases, instead of a single participant, I ended up interviewing two to three people at different times. This was because some participants would invite other colleagues and collaborators to accompany them to the interview to contribute to certain other areas of the discussion that they were deemed to be more familiar with. In the end, a single interview would actually turn into three interviews taking place across several days due to the intermittent availability of participants. This flexible and repurposed interview process demonstrated what Chilisa observed of post-colonial

interview methods "which privilege relational ways of knowing that valorize respect for relations people have with one another and with the environment" (Chilisa, 2019:176). Some participants also provided additional documentation (such as reports) that shed more light on their work.

DATA ANALYSIS

The study was based on primary interview data collected from filmmaking practitioners, complemented by secondary documentary sources. To analyse this composite data, I used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, defined as a qualitative method, "minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail … and interprets various aspects of the research topic" Braun and Clarke's six-step method was useful for "identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (2006:6). The steps of the process require the researcher to sufficiently familiarise themselves with the data during and after transcription and, thereafter, to generate initial codes, search for themes, review the themes, define and name themes, and then produce a report of the analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006:6) (see Table xx). The transcription itself involved reading and re-reading the data from the interviews, noting down initial ideas and nascent codes and reading actively for meanings and patterns.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarise yourself with the data	Transcribe the data (if necessary), read and re-read the transcription, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generate initial codes	Code interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Search for themes	Collate codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Review the themes	Check in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2) and generate a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Define and name the themes	Do ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells. Generate clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Produce the report	This is the final opportunity for analysis. Select extract examples that are vivid and compelling, do a final analysis of the selected extracts, relate the analysis back to the research question and literature, and produce a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 6: Braun and Clarke's six-step method for the thematic analysis of interview data (Source: Using thematic analysis in psychology, Braun & Clarke, 2006)

In the second phase, I generated initial codes from the entire data set, selecting, collating and pairing data relevant to each code. This phase was vital in the organisation of data into categories of meanings where interesting aspects were identified, providing a basis for the ongoing development of potential themes. In the third phase I actively searched for themes in

the data, thus beginning, already, the initial interpretation and analysis of the data. I categorised various codes together to form broader themes using different colours to differentiate between themes. In phase four, I focused on reviewing and re-evaluating the themes, checking if and how they worked in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2).

The result was to generate an initial thematic 'map' of the analysis. In phase five, I then set about defining and naming the themes. From here, ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme was imperative, including generating clear definitions and naming each theme. Finally, I produced the written report on the analysis. This process led back, inevitably, to the research questions and literature. The result is Chapter 5 of this study. Ultimately, the process meant analysing the primary data first and intensively, with secondary data playing a complementary role of filling in gaps in the multifaceted nature of the issues raised during the seven interviews.

4.5 ETHICS

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I followed strict ethical protocols to safeguard the wellbeing of the participants and to protect them from harm. Research ethics are defined as "moral principles undergirding the design and execution of research projects that involve observing and recording other people's lives" (Zhang, 2020: 299). Several steps determined and validated the ethical process that I followed. First, I refrained from collecting data before receiving ethics clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Data collection commenced in 2022 only after written approval of the study and its research methods by the university's ethics committee (see Appendix 2). After a thorough review of the research proposal, ethics clearance was received, under ethics number HSSREC/00000699/2019. Before each interview, I provided the participants with consent forms and gatekeeper letters as part of requesting permission. The interviews only took place after the participants had responded with signed consent forms and gatekeeper's letters, providing written permission and evidence of *informed* consent. Informed consent is critical to all scientific research with human subjects. Manti and Licari (2018) define informed consent as:

> … the voluntary expression of the consent by a competent subject and the adequate information disclosure about the research (which) are critical and essential elements of the informed consent process. Competent subjects able to comprehend the research-related information should personally decide and provide the consent on research participation (Manti and Licari 2018:145).

Consent forms in user-friendly English were provided to all the participants prior to the interviews to familiarise themselves with the context of the interviews and to ask any questions

where needed. This process was crucial to ensure that the participants understood the reason for the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. I assured them in the process that their identities and views would be anonymised, that their responses would only be used for this study, and that they would not suffer any ill effects due to their participation in the study. Consent was not viewed as a one-time decision but as an ongoing process whereby participants may decide to withdraw from the research at any time (Manti & Licari, 2018). I requested and received verbal and written permission to use all the recordings. The YouTube videos and website articles are in the public domain and are cited in the study. All collected data was retained on my password-protected computer to which only I have access. The data will be destroyed after five years, in line with the University of KwaZulu-Natal's data storage, retrieval, and handling protocols.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined and provided justification for the methodological choices underpinning the study. It demonstrated how a qualitative, interpretivist case study design is best suited to interrogate the limits and possibilities of a truly transformed national cinema in South Africa. The study privileged lived experiences, contextual richness, and multiple meanings. The qualitative inquiry enabled the study to move beyond abstract policy rhetoric and capture the realities of film practitioners embedded in the production value chain. The chapter also discussed my positionality as a black South African woman, lecturer, and PhD candidate, which shaped both the epistemological and ontological foundations of the study. In "gazing from the margins", I foregrounded the persistence of colonial and apartheid legacies in the film industry and underscored the urgency of transformation. Positionality was not treated as bias but as a critical lens through which questions of access, inclusivity, and equity could be asked. The case study design allowed for in-depth exploration of film services across pre-production, production, distribution, and exhibition, focusing on four contemporary feature films and their associated practitioners. Semi-structured interviews, triangulated with secondary sources, provided rich data on the collaborative processes, entrenched practices, and systemic challenges shaping the industry. Sampling combined purposive and convenience techniques, ensuring that the participants were active practitioners with hands-on experience of feature film production. While challenges such as scheduling conflicts, Covid-19 disruptions, and reliance on convenience sampling were acknowledged, the flexibility of qualitative research enabled adaptation and resilience in the data-collection process. The budget categories of South African feature films, encompassing low-, medium-, and high-budget productions, added further nuance, revealing how financing structures, eligibility criteria, and co-production agreements

create opportunities for industry growth and participation while reproducing inequalities, thereby limiting long-term, sustainable opportunities for transformation. The methodology positioned the study to critically evaluate how film services both enable and constrain the emergence of a national cinema. From the interviews it became clear that some service providers, freelancers and stakeholders aligned more closely with the growth side (and the aspirational "film-friendliness" and Hollywoodisation part) of the duality (i.e., Strategy 1) than with the redress side (i.e., Strategy 2).

In conclusion, the methodological framework combined interpretivist inquiry, case study design, and reflexive positionality to generate a comprehensive understanding of South African film services. It ensured that the study could interrogate not only the technical and economic dimensions of filmmaking but also the cultural, political, and ethical stakes of transformation. This methodological approach thus provided the foundation for analysing whether a truly inclusive national cinema can emerge, and how persistent inequalities continue to shape the industry's trajectory.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter forms the heart of the study. It combines the findings from the participant interviews and desktop study with a discussion, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. The chapter allows for an evaluation of whether the study's research problems, aims, and objectives have been addressed. Broadly, the analysis is framed by the study's research questions, theoretical framework, and literature review. Together, they produce the study's original contribution to knowledge. The central question that the chapter addresses is whether a truly national cinema exists in contemporary South Africa, and the possibilities and limitations of such. The interviews provided rich descriptions of current industry trends, experiences, and contributions, and specific visions for the work of each film service. The interviews revealed the participants' role in the South African film industry, their contribution, their production ethos and politics, the ways in which they negotiated their entry into the industry, and how they survive, thrive, or fail.

The interviews also provided valuable insights into state of the South African national cinema, film production contexts, and government intervention through policies and programmes. In essence, the chapter provides an interpretive lens and snapshot of film services and the state of the film production value chain as seen by filmmakers and practitioners. The film projects selected for closer study were *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (Chadwick, 2013), *Inxeba: The Wound* (Trengove, 2016), *Dear Future Wife* (Motaung, 2024), and *Knuckle City* (Qubeka, 2019), with the focus on film context rather than film text. The film context refers to what happens from concept to production, distribution and exhibition. The project span of roughly 15 years (2010-2025) allowed for a "long view" into the state of affairs in the film industry. All the film service providers and individuals were actively involved in the film industry, with the most experienced having been in the industry for 30 years while others only joined after 2010. This mix provided a range of views that captured long-standing issues as well as emerging ones.

5.2 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND EMERGING THEMES

The initial coding and thematic analysis generated key themes, making a connection between a viable national cinema project in South Africa and how "transformed" the industry was or seemed to be across the value chain, from development until distribution and exhibition. The

discussion coalesced loosely around four topics, as represented in Table 7 below. The issues overlap and are salient because they kept coming up in the discussions. Critically, the nature of the discussion moves beyond a mere preoccupation with quantitative checklists and putative *inclusion* and *empowerment* of so-called previously disadvantaged. That is, transformation cannot happen only on the surface. Rather, it must be seen, felt, acknowledged, and experienced by the generality of the people. Hence, the interviews explored industry practices through the filter of the experiences of those working within a fledgling *national* cinema every day. What did they see, experience, and feel? Is this sustainable? Is the film industry inclusive, accessible and equitable? Where, and what, are the opportunities? Who owns what and does what, to what end? Who is benefitting? What must be done and what is being done? Whose film industry is it?

Emerging Theme	**Description**
Inclusivity and equality	Is the South African film industry inclusive and equal? This theme touched on the participants' experiences of how "inclusive" and "equal" the film industry is, including in production processes and the existence of meaningful opportunities. On the one hand, an inclusive industry is one that recognises complex, intersecting identities and ensures broad and meaningful participation. On the other hand, equality refers to equal rights, opportunities and decision-making powers.
Sustainability	How sustainable is the local film industry? The participants discussed what they considered "sustainable" film services. Sustainability refers to the ability to maintain longevity and core purpose and respond to socio-economic and political change. That is, a sustainable film industry is one that has an ecosystem that enables film businesses and individuals to provide services efficiently, maintain their core purpose, and have staying power in an evolving industry.
Access	How accessible is the local film industry? To whom is it accessible? The participants discussed issues of "access" and levels of access, including networks, funding, and audiences. In this case, access refers to gaining entry into the industry and obtaining meaningful opportunities in terms of the experiences, identities, and aspirations of the "previously marginalised".
Ownership	Who owns what? This was a reference to who owned what in the industry, including major industry infrastructure and the means of production. Ownership is important because it demonstrates capacity and enables meaningful participation in the film industry's economic and cultural exchanges. This is an important indicator in the film services approach that measures film-friendliness in terms of ownership of relevant resources, infrastructure, and expertise, among other factors.

Table 7: Themes emerging from the discussions

The emerging themes developed into 10 cross-cutting themes, presented and discussed below. The views of most, and in some cases, all the participants, are represented under each of the themes.

To organise the data systematically and clearly, and to allow for careful analysis, I identified the participants in terms of their roles in the film industry. This is indicated in Table 8 below. As I noted in Chapter 4, I conducted seven interviews with selected filmmakers, practitioners, professionals, and industry representatives whose voices I deemed critical to the evaluation of the question of the emergence of a national cinema in contemporary South Africa.

Labelling used in the chapter to identify each participant	Role in the film industry
Elias Ribeiro	Film producer
Onke Dumeko	Film funder (government) based in Gauteng
Obett Motaung	Film director and producer
Sanjeev Singh	Producer and distributor, based in KwaZulu-Natal, works for a production and distribution company
Khanyi Zondi	Film marketing agency representative based in KwaZulu-Natal
Dr Ismail Moodley	Director of the centre managing a film festival, based in KwaZulu-Natal
Sakhile Gumede	Film festival manager, based in KwaZulu-Natal

Table 8: List of participants and their roles in the film industry

The distribution of the normative roles in Table 8 above indicates the purposive selection I made in deciding who to interview. A film director has "an obligation to tell a story and do so with the skill of a master storyteller" in collaboration with a team, including cinematography … and shares in "the creative vision of the work simpatico with the producer" (Shreibman, 2010:2-6). Film directors play an important role during preproduction, including the casting process, where they subjectively deliberate on which actors to use in which roles (Schell, 2016). Due to production logistics, scenes are shot out of sequence. As a result, the director and his understanding of each character arc serves as a "barometer to keep actors on track in terms of their emotional peaks and valleys, their inner struggles, their momentary values and principles, and clarity towards their relationships throughout the story" (Shreibman, 2010:19). A producer, on the other hand, is responsible for getting the entire production done. Film producers put together film finances, employ the relevant expertise including the crew, director, and heads of departments, negotiate with talent agents, distributors and the director, deal with tax-related matters and financiers, and ensure there is a budget for marketing. The role of the lead producer is often impacted by external factors such as budgets, which influence dealings with multiple

people and resources (Kachka, 2021). The role of a film distributor, for its part, is one that "binds the entire entertainment industry together – and provides project funding and release strategies" (Kirkpatrick, 2019:1). It is the actual process of "how a film, TV series or new media property gets distributed – and generates a profit" (Kirkpatrick, 2019:1). The function of a film festival manager is to find innovative solutions to challenges that may affect festival planning processes which include "programming, financial planning, marketing and service provision if they are to remain viable" (Carlsen et al., 2010:120). Film festival marketers are responsible for "developing marketing strategies based on a festival's mission statement, curation, content, and programming" in order to promote the unique position the festival holds within the industry to the targeted audiences.[39] Film marketing agencies play the role of constructing and managing "any activity that assists a film in reaching its target audience at any time throughout its life" from the development stage to beyond the film consumption stage (Kerrigan, 2017:8). Film funders invest in film projects that demonstrate strong commercial viability (Johnsen, 2023). Government film funds provide financial support to multiple local film projects while also being tasked with "a plethora of economic concerns related to securing inward investment, developing sectoral infrastructure and building labour capacity" (Noonan, 2020:12).

The profiles of the film directors of the four selected films function to highlight the "diversity" and richness of the South African production context. John Trengove is a South African film director and writer born in Johannesburg in 1978. He completed a master's degree in filmmaking at New York University. His professional experiences span television, theatre, commercials and experimental films. He is a director of Emmy-nominated mini-series *Hopeville* (2010) and short film *The Goat* (2014) that premiered at the Berlinale film festival and other festivals around the world. *Inxeba: The Wound* (2016) was his directorial debut of a feature film, and it premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. Other feature films include a drama he produced titled *Necktie Youth*, released in 2015, and the recent star-studded drama thriller, which he wrote and directed, titled *Manodrome* (2023), which was released in the United States of America and is available on Apple TV and other pay-per-view platforms. Justin Chadwick is a British actor and filmmaker born in Manchester, Lancashire, England in 1968. He studied drama at the University of Leicester and is an Emmy-nominated director for his directorial work and a British Academy Television Awards recipient for best direction for *Bleak House*. Chadwick's directorial work includes a number of episodes on "*EastEnders*, *Byker Grove*, *The Bill*, *Spooks*, *Red Cap* and nine of the 15 episodes of *Bleak House*, which

[39] Shift72, n.d., "How to market a film festival: From A to VOD", https://insights.shift72.com/hubfs/How_To_Market_A_Film_Festival.pdf [Accessed: 13 Dec. 2025].

was broadcast by the BBC in the UK and by PBS in the United States as part of its Masterpiece Theatre series.[40] His first feature titled *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2008) featured stars such as American actress Scarlett Johansson and American-Jewish actress Natalie Portman. In 2010, his directorial work included another feature titled *The First Grader*, which was distributed through Videovision in the South African market. This was followed by a South African feature titled *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* in 2013, produced and distributed by a South African-based distribution and production company, Videovision, Chadwick's recent directorial work includes features titled *Tulip Fever* in 2017, and his upcoming action thriller, *Sierra Madre* in 2025. Obett Motaung is a filmmaker and academic who holds a Master's degree in Film and Television from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University). In 2022, at the age of 29, Motaung was recognised as one of *Mail & Guardian*'s 200 Young South Africans. He has participated in prestigious African film festivals and highly competitive arts residencies. His films have screened on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and at the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO). He directed a short drama film titled *Oath* in 2017, a documentary titled *On the Hill* in 2019, and a made-for-TV romantic comedy titled *Dear Future Wife* in 2024, which screened at the Pan African Film & Arts Festival (PAFF) in 2025. Finally, Jahmil X.T. Qubeka, born in the Eastern Cape in 1979, is a South African film director best known for the films *Of Good Report* (2013) and *Sew the Winter to My Skin* (2019). Qubeka studied fine art and photography in the Eastern Cape. He has won multiple awards for his excellence in storytelling that reflects social issues, including a Peabody, British Academy of Film and Television Arts, Los Angeles (BAFTA LA), and South African Film and Television Awards (SAFTAS). Two of the feature films he directed, *Sew the Winter to My Skin* (2013) and *Knuckle City* (2019), were selected as South Africa's Oscar contenders in the best international feature category. His films have also competed at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), Cannes, Busan, the British Film Institute (BFI) in London, FESPACO, DIFF, Palm Springs, and the Pan African Film & Arts Festival (PAFF).[41] Qubeka has also written and directed other features, including *You're My Favourite Place* (2022), *Where has Time Gone?* (2017), *A Small Town Called Descent* (2019), a short titled *Still Born* (2017), and a series titled *Blood Psalms* (2023).

Broadly, the four profiles here indicate that the South African film industry is a diverse sector

[40] The Movie Data Base, n.d., "Justin Chadwick", https://www.themoviedb.org/person/71570-justin-chadwick [Accessed: 14 Dec. 2025].

[41] 15th Durban FilmMart, 2024, "Jahmil X.T Qubeka: Panellist Bio", https://durbanfilmmart.co.za/jahmil-xt-qubeka/ [Accessed: 18 Dec. 2025].

comprising individuals of various ages (including Gen X and millennials), races, ethnicities, classes, and, at times, foreign and international upbringing and identities. These identity markers also indicate the various sides of South African history that shaped their upbringing, whether it was during the height of resistance against apartheid in the 1970s or during the transition from apartheid to a democratic dispensation. The socio-economic and racial positionalities of the filmmakers, as well as the nature of industry opportunities and unique career trajectories, indicate the intersectional dimensions of their individual identities, which shape their lived experiences, worldviews and approach to storytelling. More importantly, these South African filmmakers demonstrate the existence of diverse talent in various parts of the country (rural, township, and urban) and increasing opportunities for professional growth available in the post-apartheid dispensation, indicating that filmmaking in South Africa is a sustainable career path for some.

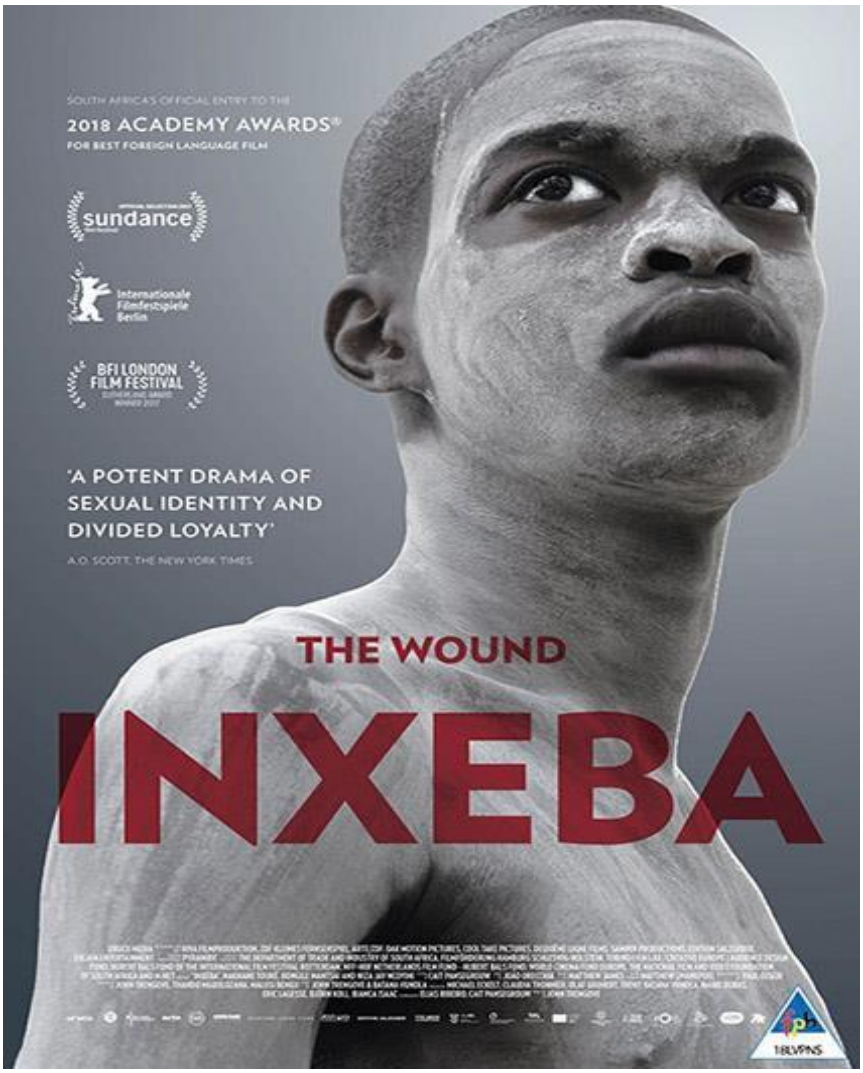


Figure 9: Poster: *Inxeba: The Wound*

Inxeba: The Wound

Inxeba: The Wound is an 88-minute South African feature film directed by Trengove and released in theatres in 2016. The film presents the story of Xolani, a lonely factory worker, who joins the men of his community in the mountains of the Eastern Cape to initiate a group of teenage boys into manhood. When an initiate from the city discovers Xolani's "best-kept secret", Xolani's entire existence begins to unravel (Indigenous Film Distribution, 2018). Nakhane Toure, who plays Xolani's character, was born in Alice, a small town in the Eastern Cape. Toure is a published author, a South African Music Award (SAMA) winning musician and an actor. Bongile Mantsai plays the character of Vija. He is an award-winning actor, dancer and musical director with an extensive theatre background. Niza Jay Ncoyini, who plays the character of Kwanda, actually made his acting debut in *Inxeba*. He is the co-founder of a series of panel discussions hosted in Joburg called *The Big Gay Debate*, and is also a writer. Thobani Mseleni played the character of Babalo, his first breakout role in a feature. Mseleni is a musician, and was formerly an actor in the SABC drama series, *Intersexions*, in 2013. According to *Inxeba*'s film's production notes, the idea for the film came from the director's interest to explore "what happens when groups of men come together and organise themselves outside of society and the codes of their everyday lives" (Indigenous Film Distribution, 2017:8). Trengove collaborated with novelist Thando Mgqolozana to do a screenplay adaptation of Mgolozana's novel about the *Ulwaluko* initiation tradition and masculinity in Xhosa culture. The editing of *Inxeba* was done at Priest Post Production, a Cape Town-based post-production company. The box office gross revenue generated by the film was R1, 950, 353 during the 10 weeks on South African cinema screens (NFVF, 2018a). The film also generated US$30,678 in the United States of America and Canada, and US$213,043 globally. Despite the film initially getting banned and classified as pornographic, as well as the negative reviews it received for its exploration and critique of a tradition considered sacred in Xhosa culture and manhood, *Inxeba: The Wound* won numerous awards in South Africa for acting, directing, editing and best feature at the 2018 Golden Horn Awards, and South African Film and Television Awards (SAFTAS).

Inxeba: The Wound had multiple local and international funders. In South Africa, it was funded by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition and the National Film and Video Foundation, and licensing rights were acquired by MultiChoice, showcasing the value of public-private collaborative partnerships in funding local films. Internationally, funding came from France, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany. Key financiers included the Hubert Bals

Fund, ARTE International Prize, and World Cinema Fund, and the film was pre-sold to broadcasters ARTE France and ZDF in Germany (Indigenous Film Distribution, 2017:4). At the level of local funding, MultiChoice is an interesting case study for two reasons. First, it has its origins in the old order of filmmaking under apartheid, having been a part of Naspers, founded in 1915 as a newspaper and magazine publishing house named *Nasionale Pers Beperk* (National Press Ltd.) Through strategic acquisitions and ventures, Naspers expanded over decades. It was responsible for the launch of M-Net in the 1980s while also pioneering pay-TV across the African continent (JSE, 2025:1). Notably, none of the colonial and apartheid media businesses such as Naspers, which benefitted from apartheid and supported the apartheid state, have accounted for their role in the racial division and classification of the local film industry and audiences. Instead, such a role has been glossed over, and the companies have been repackaged without blemish in the new South Africa. The reinvention of apartheid businesses as *post-apartheid businesses* is one of the complicated and uncomfortable aspects of "unity in diversity". It also complicates national healing because there has been no accountability. In a sense, MultiChoice's involvement in supporting local film production, as seen in films like *Inxeba: The Wound*, could be viewed as a form of atonement for the past and thus a contribution to collective redress (Strategy 2). However, MultiChoice is first and foremost a business, which is in film production for profit and *not* necessarily the redress imperatives of Strategy 2. The second interesting thing about MultiChoice is that it has just been acquired (in 2025) by Canal+, which means that it is now suddenly an international company with a dominant South African footprint.[42] The morphing of Naspers MultiChoice into Canal+ not only introduces an interesting feature of mergers and acquisitions whereby capitalism and international capital impose themselves and flatten local distinctions but also turns MultiChoice's involvement in local film production into a quintessentially Strategy 1 kind of approach.

The involvement of multiple funders meant that each funder involved with *Inxeba: The Wound* placed nationally specific conditions in the financing agreements. This included ensuring that parts of the budget were utilised *within* the financing mother country. Certain film services, such as creative producers, line producers, assistant producers, post-production supervisors, and aspects of marketing, were outsourced in France and Germany, making *Inxeba: The Wound*

[42] Canal +, 2025, *Canal+ announces the effective control of MultiChoice*, https://www.canalplusgroup.com/en/mandatoryoffermultichoice/multichoice-post-72 [Accessed: 27 Dec. 2025]. Canal+ is a French media giant which was founded as a French subscription-TV channel in the 1980s with 26.9 million subscribers worldwide, and it operates across the entire audio-visual value chain, including production, broadcasting, distribution and aggregation. CANAL+ also had significant equity stakes across Africa, Europe and Asia, namely in MultiChoice, and is now in effective control of the MultiChoice Group. Canal+, which now owns 94.39% of all MultiChoice Group shares, will start the integration process.

an international co-production. As Ribeiro pointed out, "So, we co-finance and we co-produce, meaning teams are deployed from all the nations that co-finance the films because a lot of the money that you raise in each country has a tax origin – which means the money becomes very nationalistic, which means you need to spend the money in the country that you raised it". In essence, the story is South African, as is the filmmaker and most of the crew. However, the co-production aspect means that *Inxeba: The Wound* is an international film. O'Regan (2005) emphasised the role of local services and locations in attracting international productions, from location services and below-the-line film workers to equipment suppliers and facilities providers, required by international production. In the case of *Inxeba: The Wound*, location services became relevant when local producers pitched for foreign investment. The gap that opens for foreign investment not only indicates the primacy of Strategy 1 but also shows that the DTIC and the NFVF, on their own, are *unable* to fund the local film industry. Rather, they only provide a portion of the funding needs of the local film industry.

Since South African films often struggle to raise sufficient funds at home, the local producer must then "sell" the story and other competitive cinematic attributes that the country has to offer to film investors seeking to assess the viability of the production and looking for a business case to fund a local film. In the case of *Inxeba: The Wound*, most of the film services were South African. These, for the most part, are white-owned, highlighting the skewed ownership patterns that continue to shape the structure and composition of the local film industry. However, since the DTIC and NFVF can only provide part of the funding, the key determining factor for whether the film could get made was foreign finance and distribution. The NFVF's National Film Strategy (2014b:5) speaks of "the need for increased investment into the film industry by both public and private entities", thus seemingly conceding to this inherent deficit and shortfall in public funding of South African film. When South African film policy refers to "inclusiveness", it is also a plea to the private sector, and in some cases, international funding, to become an integral part of the normative South African film funding model. Indeed, *Inxeba: The Wound* faced a funding crunch during production, risking the project's continuity and viability. For example, 80% of its budget was "raised before principal photography, some members of the crew worked for free, while cast members were paid a pittance due to budget restrictions. Furthermore, the producers were in debt due to the film's marketing and PR costs as they took the film and some cast members to Oscar pre-screenings in Los Angeles."[43] These issues are instructive because they serve as indicators of deep-seated

[43] TshisaLive, 2018, "We basically need a miracle' - The Wound producers' on the film's financial challenges",https://www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2018-02-01-we-basically-need-a-miracle-the-wound-producers-on-the-

viability issues throughout the industry's value chain. In essence, a key weakness of South African film development and transformation is the failure to independently and adequately support, fund and protect the local industry. In the blunt words of Diawara (1992: viii), "the film industry in Africa has no government protection". Walsh (1996) explained that "a national industry's specificity is established and held in place in both policy and critical practice". If this is correct, then film production policy and critical practice in South Africa is held in place by an opaque and composite mix of Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. This mix means that the approach to film policy and practice in South Africa is always in tension, even schizophrenic. The discourse of "inclusiveness" exacerbates rather than resolves the schizophrenia.

The film services utilised in the production department, camera department, catering, security services, and cast from lead to extras in *Inxeba: The Wound* were South African apart from the director of photography (DOP). Most were sourced and located in Cape Town and Johannesburg. The producer noted how they could not find a Xhosa art director who would be head of the art department, resulting in them using a Mozambican service provider. This sharing of film production services between South Africa and Mozambique indicates the possibilities of not just South-South collaboration but also African to African and Southern African to Southern African practice. At the same time, failing to get a Xhosa art director is an indictment, hinting at the continuing skills gaps in the local film industry, especially for the "formerly" marginalised. Such persistent skills gaps diminish the potential and attributes of a national cinema. Postproduction on *Inxeba: The Wound* was done locally. Ribeiro, a film producer, described the production process thus:

> All the gear came from South Africa, the catering, production department, the camera department apart from the DOP – the DOP was Turkish. The sound department, from post-production to the director, was also South African. Then we worked with, on set, we had of course a guardian of the culture, somebody that the director could consult with about playing with culture practices, because the writers that worked on the script with John, Thando and Melusi were not on set for production. So, he needed a similar level of understanding of the sensibilities of the culture and also there was a lot of dialogue that was improvised on set that he needed guidance on to be able to make right decisions. So, there was a master of all things that accompanied him throughout production and then I tried so hard to hire a Xhosa art director. I turned this country upside down to have a head of department, could not put my hand on one. He ended up working with Bobby Kaduzo who is actually Mozambican. Design, I always do all the design work in South Africa because it's way cheaper than paying a designer in Paris and I feel like they will also understand our narratives better and that shows in the design work.

films-financial-challenges/ [Accessed: 27 Dec. 2025].

It is a significant confirmation of the standard of the local film services sector that "all the gear came from South Africa". Furthermore, production design on the project was "way cheaper" in South Africa than in Europe. Affordability is one of the competitive advantages that attract film projects to specific locales. Not so positive was the fact that the director of photography had to be "imported" from Turkey, although it does point to the *international* aspect of co-production and filmmaking practice in general. In many respects the *Inxeba: The Wound* project remained predominantly national, which is an encouraging indicator for my evaluationof the ingredients of a national cinema. The diversity of film services relied on to make the film also indicate the general state of film-friendliness of Johannesburg and Cape Town. Although the story is set in the scenic mountains of the Eastern Cape on the lower eastern coast of South Africa, the filming itself was on location in Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and the North West. This *location interest*, in the film services approach, foregrounds the existence and extent of facilities in a location, the capacity of its film milieu, its technological competitiveness, and its robustness (O'Regan, 2005). Gauteng dominates this location interest, to the detriment of the Eastern Cape. The reliance on Gauteng as a location for a story set in the Eastern Cape shows the latter region's deficit in terms of infrastructure, skills, technology and film services. In other words, the Eastern Cape remains underdeveloped in terms of film services compared to Gauteng. This unevenness in film-friendliness is broadly characteristic of the South African film industry, a legacy of the historical structural apartheid that the industry has inherited.

Dear Future Wife

Dear Future Wife is a 2024 40-minute short film by Obett Motaung about Mam' Mkhize, a witty 55-year-old who devises an unconventional plan to enter a surfing competition to win R300,000 to fund her daughter Thuli's culinary school dreams. It stars Leleti Khumalo as Mam' Mkhize, and Masoja Msiza as Bab' Khumalo. The film budget was R2 million, sourced from the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority (KZNTAFA) and the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) Made-for-TV productions. The film was shot and edited in KwaZulu-Natal. The equipment used in making the film included the RED KOMODO camera, Sony FS7 underwater casing, drones that shoot at 4k, and Adobe Premier Pro for editing. In terms of distribution and exhibition, the film travelled to festivals such as the Pan African Film & Arts Festival (PAFF) in California, the Bantu Film Festival (BFF) in Botswana, and the Joburg Film Festival (JFF). The producer is also finalising a deal with the SABC regarding airing rights which can generate revenue for the producer. The captivating camera movements and immersive sound design and lighting of *Dear Future Wife* are key elements of its strong appeal

and demonstrate the ever-increasing standards of quality filmmaking in South Africa. Interestingly, the day before filming started, Motaung was busy with lecturing, as he is a full time academic in KwaZulu-Natal. During filming in 2023 the lead actress, Khumalo, had to leave the country to attend the re-release of *Sarafina*.



Figure 10. Poster: *Dear Future Wife*

Motaung's experience in making a made-for-TV film differs in many ways from the process that Ribeiro detailed for *Inxeba: The Wound*. The concept of *Dear Future Wife* was developed during Isiphethu, a Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) industry training and development programme. Programmes like these illustrate the systematic efforts currently under way to capacitate the local industry with skills. Capacity development is an important function of state agencies such as the NFVF under their national mandate. Such skills development builds national cinema from the ground up. Under Isiphethu, Motaung received financial and mentorship support, enabling him to build his production team and crew, and to focus solely on directing the film. The *Dear Future Wife* project was financed by a partnership between the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority (KZNTAFA) and the NFVF, thus showcasing viable collaboration between state and provincial film agencies. In the film services

approach, such collaboration shows concern with "the optimal functioning and development of facilities, capacities, and technological infrastructure" (O'Regan, 2005).

The concept of *Dear Future Wife* was selected for development and production directly from Isiphethu by the two agencies (KZNTAFA and NFVF). The financial support afforded Motaung the autonomy and space to make important financial and creative decisions for his project. The young director found the funding model largely empowering and enabling, though it required him to produce a short film rather than a feature. Motaung used South African film services exclusively, including casting internationally acclaimed screen talent such as Leleti Khumalo. Most of the services were contracted from KwaZulu-Natal, a regulatory requirement of the KZNTAFA. The creative process for the film showcased what is possible when a young filmmaking prodigy is allowed to experiment and draw on what the production context offers. Motaung described the process to me thus:

> In *Dear Future Wife* I got Masoja, who is on *Uzalo*, which is actually the biggest, most watched show in the country. So, already, you have an audience on that space. You make a cast decision to say, let's have Lettie Khumalo, like, she is a legend, on it, and then you have a supporting cast, Angel who is on *Mkhokha*, which is one of the biggest shows on Mzansi Magic. So already on your casting decision you have made a decision about distribution choices, that this story has an audience, even if it (turns out to be) a bad film, like there are people who would want it because of those people … So, it helps to make those sort of decisions. Okay, let's get Bongani Magatyana to make a song on the film because he has his own audiences. So, it is those (creative) decisions that help. I got producers on board, and went through a phase of shooting it, a very intense process but I collaborated with producers to handle all the nightmares and all those things. I went from just marking exams into just going to shoot the next day … I was just taking creative decisions, because it was important to have other people collaborating and running around while you can just focus on the creative decision and my job was to shoot and finish within time. In the middle of the shoot, one of the actors needed to go so we had to change the schedule. So it was just problems, but we managed to resolve them, then shot the film. Then the post-production, I was not happy with the editor that we got. I was not really feeling it. We were not telling the story creatively (so) then had to let them go to get someone else on board.

The approach that Motaung took was to *already* think of distribution and audience while casting. He pitched the film for local audiences, with the casting reflecting an attempt to draw on local acting stars and household names. Such a cast raised the profile of the film, giving it visibility and marketing it widely, as well as heightening its production values. Importantly, the casting mixed household names with upcoming talent, thus helping to build the CVs of the emerging actors. The production process was highly organised and synchronised, allowing the young director to focus on the creative direction of the film. The mishap with the editor in

postproduction indicates the up-and-down and stop-and-start process of filmmaking, further testing the competency and organisational acumen of the filmmaker. It also points to the uneven quality that exists in the industry and the difficulties encountered on projects even with experienced personnel. The filmmaker's enthusiasm and positive outlook on the project also helped to drive the quality and outcomes of the process.



Figure 11: Poster: *Knuckle City* (Source: Indigenous Film Distribution)

Knuckle City

Knuckle City is a 2019 crime sports feature film by Jahmil X.T. Qubeka which tells the story of Dudu Nyakama, a womanising, down and out ageing boxer struggling to attain the one fight that he believes will uplift his fractured family. The story is set in South Africa's Mdantsane township, known as the boxing mecca of South Africa, and explore's Dudu's intersecting worlds of boxing, rife with criminality and his broken family (Indigenous Film Distribution *Knuckle City* Production Notes, 2019). The film combines the sport and crime genres, a rare combination in South African fiction films, layering key elements expected from the distinct genres, such as gun violence, dominant masculinity, brutality, and corruption, which form part of the dark underworld of the boxing business. The cinematography and musical score have been described as captivating, enhancing the film's dramatic narrative and demonstrating the exceptional technical skills and high-level equipment accessible in South Africa (*Knuckle City* Production Notes, 2019). The film falls in the same genre as the popular Ryan Coogler film *Creed* (2019), starring Michael B. Jordan (as Adonis Johnson) where Johnson is a boxer with a challenging boxing and family life. *Knuckle City* had a total production budget of R10.6

million and was financially supported by multiple South African industry stakeholders, including the Eastern Cape Development Corporation, MultiChoice Network (MNET), the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC), the film producers and the National Empowerment Fund which contributed R2.9 million (National Empowerment Fund, 2020). The story was inspired by the director's upbringing in Mdantsane. In the film's Production Notes, he notes that the "energy of the landscape, and the visceral fight for survival that is palpable on the streets, has inspired in me a deep yearning to chronicle the lives of its inhabitants through cinema" (Indigenous Film Distribution *Knuckle City* Production Notes, 2019:9). In an interview with former Mnet and Amazon Studio executive producer, Qubeka stated how Mdantsane was characterised by grit, crime, gangsters and boxing, which were particular tropes and archetypes that he wanted to explore about the township at some point in his career but avoided making the film in the early years of his career when it seemed that everyone aspired to be like Quentin Tarantino.

During a meeting with Mzansi Magic executives, the Yellowbone Entertainment executive producers pitched ideas for films with the intention of understanding what stories the channel was looking for that aligned with its audiences. *Knuckle City* became the story that best aligned with the channel's mission to tell authentically South African stories that would resonate with local audiences (South African Film Festival, 2020, 1:29-2:50). Filming took place in and around East London and Mdantsane. Layla Swart, who is the co-founder of Yellowbone Entertainment, producer and senior editor of the film, stated that locals received the production team positively and worked collaboratively with the production, including a local boxer training the lead character and homes opening up for filming in the midst of limited production resources in the filming locations. Overall, the film did not perform successfully in cinemas, grossing R558 936 in box office revenue (NFVF, 2020). However, Swart highlighted that the successful collaboration with locals in the filming location resulted in *Knuckle City*'s successful box office performance in Eastern Cape cinemas, with every screening sold out, beating *Bad Boys for Life* – until COVID-19 disrupted the momentum (South African Film Festival, 2020, 7:19-8:55). The film won awards at multiple festivals including the South African Film and Television Awards (SAFTAs), Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) and Africa International Film Festival (AFRIFF). The film had mixed reviews as some critics highlighted the film as "toxic masculinity unchecked … a mess of conflicting styles, all jumbled into one" while other reviews stated how the film was "raw, unfiltered, thrilling and hilariously

unconventional".[44] Notably, *Knuckle City* was the first film that the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) endorsed and financed, pointing to the strategic shifts that are possible at provincial level in terms of boosting "film-friendliness". That is, the fact that the production of *Knuckle City* (2017) received financial support from the NFVF, the ECDC and the DTIC is notable for the participation of the ECDC whose stated aim to develop the film industry in the Eastern Cape. Thus, *Knuckle City* was "the first film that the Eastern Cape Development Corporation has endorsed and financed in their attempt to also grow the film industry here" (Swart, *Knuckle City* production notes).

There is a default appreciation of the uneven development of film production contexts in the different provinces of South Africa, thus the need for interventions such as those by the ECDC. As Swart noted, shooting in East London "had its difficulties because there was no culture of filmmaking in the area" (Swart, *Knuckle City* production notes). Supporting productions such as *Knuckle City* is how film-peripheral regions such as the Eastern Cape show intent to "catch up" with established filmmaking centres and hubs such as Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Western Cape. There is an inherent acceptance that boosting the nature, quality, and content of film services in the Eastern Cape is one way to "catch up". Only when film services in the Eastern Cape become competitive and uniquely leveraged can they attract increasing and sustained attention from film projects. The ECDC's strategy to support *Knuckle City* and Qubeka and Layla Swart's founding in 2017 of their own production company, Yellowbone Entertainment, determined "to transform the South African film and television landscape", illustrates the *strategic convergence* of individual and state efforts to build a national film industry from the ground up. Speaking of the Eastern Cape, Swart stated that "We are passionate about developing the industry here" (Swart, *Knuckle City* Production Notes).

Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom

Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom is a biopic about the life of Nelson Mandela. It is directed by Justin Chadwick and stars Idris Elba as Nelson Mandela and Naomi Harris as his wife, Winnie. The film was released in theatres in 2013. The screenplay was written by William Nicholson and the editing done by Andrew Cassels and Rick Russell. The *Long Walk to Freedom* project

[44] CityPress, 2019, 21 Jul., "Diff reviews: Our critics take on *Knuckle City*", https://www.news24.com/citypress/trending/diff-reviews-our-critics-take-on-knuckle-city-20190721 [Accessed: 27 Dec. 2025].

had a "budget of $35 million",[45] which was approximately R314 million in 2012, with world rights sold at international film festivals using a short reel of the film. The film is based on the autobiography of the first president of a democratic South Africa, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. The idea of adapting Nelson Mandela's story into a film was motivated by South African film producer Anant Singh's own history in the liberation struggle during apartheid. As a person of Indian descent, he was classified as non-white, along with black people. Anant Singh stated that "Madiba was that icon for everyone in that struggle, and when I started making movies, I believed that the story of this liberation was so profound, it had to be told."[46] It was through Singh's close relationship with Fatima Meer, anti-apartheid activist and author of Mandela's biography *Higher than Hope: The Authorized Biography of Nelson Mandela* that he was introduced to Mandela six weeks after Mandela's release from prison. Anant Singh stated that he was also given the opportunity to read *Long Walk to Freedom* by Mandela before the autobiography was released in 1995, and upon completing the read, Singh instantly told Mandela that there was a movie here and that he must tell it. Furthermore, upon the book hitting international agencies, "two months later, the offers came in from Hollywood and a bidding contest began. Singh recollects that Madiba said '*This is a South African story*, and I want you to tell it'" (Emphasis added).[47] The film was financed locally by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, which "invested R60 million (approx. $6.5 million)", the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa, the National Empowerment Fund and producer Anant Singh's Distant Horizon shingle". Internationally, production company Pathé co-financed the film and was responsible for worldwide sales to distributors, including those in the UK and French markets. The Weinstein Company held the US rights.[48] The principal photography took place in KwaZulu-Natal, the Drakensberg and Cape Town, including the film studios, and in Soweto in Johannesburg. Filming gear included Arricam LT and Arriflex 235 cameras, and Cooke S4 and Angenieux Optimo lenses.

[45] Mail & Guardian, 2013, 19 Dec., "Did the Mandela movie really sustain 12000 jobs?", https://mg.co.za/article/2013-12-19-mandela-movies-sustained-12-000-jobs-lasted-just-two-days/ [Accessed: 29 Dec. 2025].

[46] Mandela Movie, n.d., "Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom: Production Notes" https://www.mandelamovie.co.za/production-notes [Accessed: 29 Dec. 2025].

[47] Mandela Movie, n.d., "Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom: Production Notes" https://www.mandelamovie.co.za/production-notes [Accessed: 29 Dec. 2025].

[48] Bomb Report, n.d., "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom", https://bombreport.com/yearly-breakdowns/2013-2/mandela-long-walk-to-freedom/ [Accessed: 29 Dec. 2025].

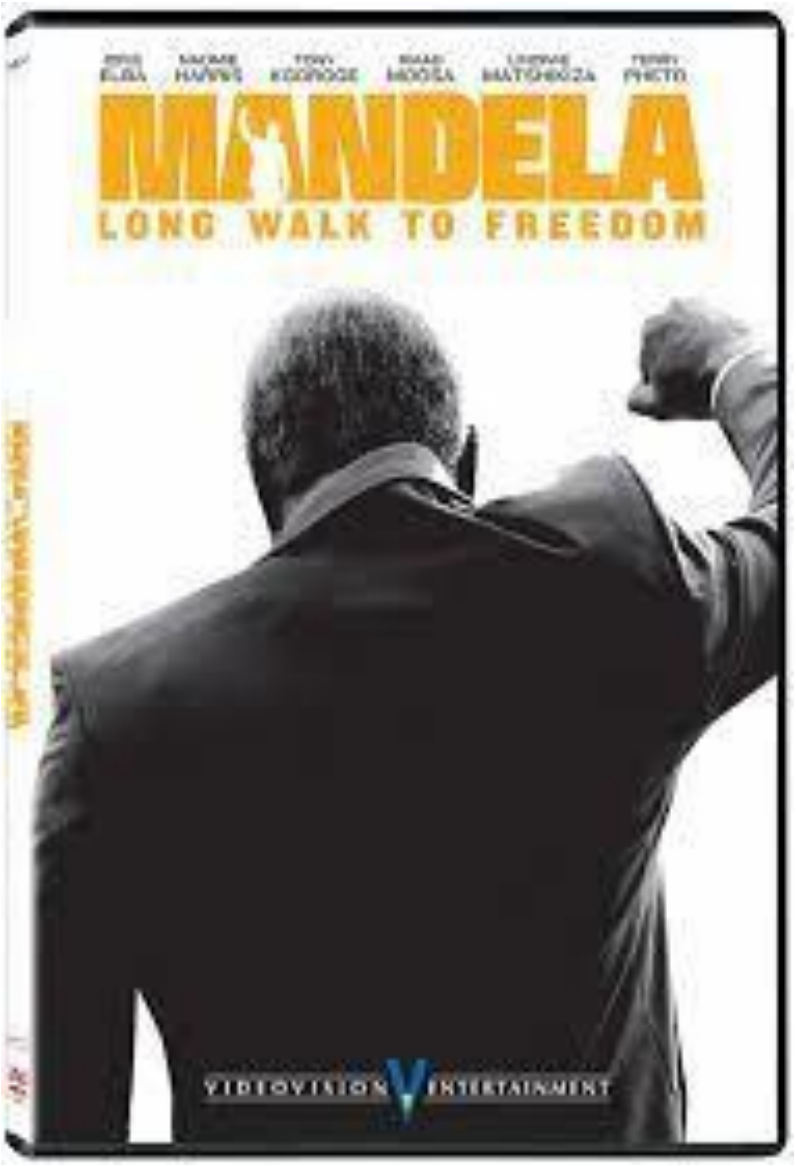


Figure 12: Poster: *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (Source: Videovision)

The principal cast included English actor Idris Elba as Nelson Mandela, British actress Naomi Harris as Winnie Madikizela Mandela, and South African stars Terry Phetho as Evelyn Mase, Tony Kgoroge as Walter Sisulu, Riaad Moosa as Ahmed Kathrada, Fana Mokoena as Govan Mbeki, the late Jamie Bartlett as James Gregory, and Deon Lotz as Kobie Coetzee. The film was released in theatres worldwide, including target markets such as South Africa, the United States of America, France, and the United Kingdom. It grossed $8,323,085 (approximately R87,665,948) in the United States of America and Canada, $27,985,788 worldwide (approximately R294,629,000), and R23.0 million in South Africa (NFVF, 2016a). The film can be considered a commercial success at the South African box office considering that the majority of local films struggle to gross above R10 million (NFVF, 2016a). However, worldwide, the film struggled to perform financially, particularly in the United States of

America,[49] where it made significantly less than the production budget, with no return on investment. The film received notable nominations at the Golden Globe Awards in the categories for best performance, best original score and best original song and won best original song, which was written by Irish super band, U2. The film also won a Golden Horn Award for best production set design in South Africa. The film was praised by various critics, with some highlighting Idris Elba's remarkable performance, particularly Xan Brooks in *The Guardian* stating that "Elba's central performance is the movie's trump card, and one it employs with abandon, shuffling the other players far down in the deck" (Brooks, 2014). Other critics highlighted that the film was unbalanced, with an inconsistent pacing. Joseph Walsh in CineVue (2014) stated that, "Chadwick's awards-hungry drama plods through the key moments of Mandela's life and political career in a reductive, box-ticking style". South African reviews praised the film. *YOU* magazine in particular stated that, "This is one movie all South Africans should see". SABC Radio called the film "South Africa's Gandhi … a gem with powerful performances" (Videovision, 2013). The *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* project showcases the best of Strategy 1 as well as "Hollywoodisation". On the one hand, the presence of globally renowned lead actors and key creatives ensured that the film sold internationally before filming was completed. On the other hand, aside from the positive PR and the sprinkling of international "star dust" that were present on a South African shoot, the project was reported to have brought immense economic benefits and multiplier effects. Hence, it created:

> 11,721 jobs for South Africans, 668 crew members were employed for an average period of 30 weeks at a gross cost of R50 586 051. Then 131 cast members who were employed for an average of 18 weeks at a cost of R5 371 226 and 10,922 extras employed for a 2-day period.[50]

The emphasis on job creation and economic growth in Strategy 1 pertains to both the NFVF Act and the NFVF's national film strategy and funding policy. The logic is that film is not just a product but a *profitable* product with commercial value and a contributor to a country's gross domestic product (GDP). Film is an element of commerce and economic strategy. Thus, films such as *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* have the greatest promise not as cultural artefacts but, rather, as commodities and economic drivers. Nation-building (i.e., Strategy 2) thus happens *indirectly* through jobs and GDP.

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[49] *The Guardian*, 2014, 3 Jun., "Mandela film failed because 12 Years A Slave sucked up all the guilt about black people", https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jun/03/mandela-12-years-a-slave-guilt-black-people [Accessed: 29 Dec. 2025].

[50] *Mail & Guardian*, 2013, 19 Dec., "Did the Mandela movie really sustain 12000 jobs?", https://mg.co.za/article/2013-12-19-mandela-movies-sustained-12-000-jobs-lasted-just-two-days/ [Accessed: 29 Dec. 2025].

Due to it being a biopic, believability and verisimilitude partly influenced casting decisions on the Mandela project. Sanjeev Singh noted that the process of casting a lead actor and actress was informed by key criteria-based concerns that included ensuring that Mandela's character was played by an actor whose physical appearance in terms of height was "right":

> We interviewed many actors to play Nelson Mandela locally and internationally and we did screen cast with a few of them. And because Nelson Mandela was so tall, there are only a handful of actors that are that tall that can play the role and incredible actors. If you go with somebody shorter, then you got to shoot, you got to count everybody else shorter than the actual person was so that you have that height difference. So, Idris Elba was the right look, the right built and if you look the pictures behind me here, the bottom right picture, when Madiba looked at that photograph, he said, 'Is that me?' And we said, no, that actor with makeup, we made him out to look like you.

It is not clear how or why the local actors who auditioned for the role of Mandela were deemed not good enough. In *Invictus* (2009), Mandela was played by Morgan Freeman, rather than a local actor. The director was Clint Eastwood, who had never been associated with the South African film scene. Thus, the decision to employ an English actor and Hollywood star to play Madiba, despite the pool of South African film and television talent who also fit the bill (for example, there are many South African actors just as tall as Mandela or Elba), indicated that other external criteria were in play. Specifically, the casting for lead roles was purposely designed to be "international", in keeping with the grandness of the project and Mandela's global stature. South Africans formed the supporting cast and extras. The late South African casting director Moonyeenn Lee (1944-2020) was instrumental in the casting process. However, most of the cast were South African actors. Still, the choice to go with Elba, Harris and Chadwick might be viewed as entrenching the perception that local talent is incapable of playing leading roles successfully, thus reinforcing marginalisation (Motsaathebe, 2015:448). Bringing in Hollywood stars for *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* also meant importing "world-class" film services and roles – from costume and make-up to director, writer and post-production. Sanjeev Singh stated:

> They (make-up artists) were international. They were Academy Award winning make-up artists. So, it is makeup and prosthetics that you put in, like a neck brace and then you cover the skin and you puff up the face and you make him look like Mandela. So, we hired the best expertise that we could get, whether there was director, the director was Justin Chadwick. He had done two bio gigs prior to this. He did the *First Grader* for us, which was a story of a 94-year-old warrior that wanted to learn to read and write at the age of six years old and enter the first grade as a 94-year-old to start first grade. And he had also done a previous bio gig that he was also acclaimed for. So, we decided to go with somebody who had done bio gigs. We had worked with Justin prior to the *First Grader* and we felt that he would be able and his passion for the story would be best for the film. And then the writer was Bill

> Nicholson, we worked with him on *Sarafina* previously. And he understood the nuances and the accents and the history of South Africa … And he was also an Academy Award nominated scriptwriter. And then for Winnie Mandela we had Naomi Harris who worked with us on *First Grader* and she was very good at the role … and we also had Terry Pheto play Evelyn. So, apart from the two actors, everybody else was South African.

Postproduction was done in the UK, just as the director and lead actor where from the UK. The project thus had a British core, even if local film services still featured prominently on the project. For example, the location and principal photography was South African as was most of the production crew. Local film services were largely bypassed where they were not deemed to be "world-class" enough but depended on when the tasks were standard and routine. Without necessarily being dismissed as inferior, local services were still not "trusted" for the big roles.

Videovision employed a "star finance" model to build up the Mandela film as "world-class" and appeal to international distribution and audiences. As Motsaathebe (2015:450) noted, "films survive on branding and, as such, major film industries invest a great deal in established film stars". The Hollywood studio system, which has dominated the film industry for over a century, has hegemonised this practice as the standard economic strategy for successful filmmaking. The practice has evolved to include attaching prominent producers or directors to "big" film projects. The many local actors who could play Winnie and Nelson Mandela were bypassed in favour of Jennifer Hudson, Morgan Freeman, Naomi Harris and Idris Elba. Since the film industry is a "show business", producers "will cast a star who is internationally acclaimed because s/he is likely to attract more moviegoers than someone who is less known internationally" (Motsaathebe, 2015:448). This avoidable practice persists due to the aspirational stance economically successful South African filmmakers and the government have towards the Hollywoodisation of South African films and stories. A high-budget production such as *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* thus satisfies the IDC's stringent investment criteria by simply reserving a large number of jobs for black professionals in low-paid menial roles and as extras. Black South African talent and film services are afforded space on the big screen as an aspect of transformation (Strategy 2), as long as the projects and budgets are small or moderate. Once the budget size increases, as it did with the Mandela biopic, the dominant logic becomes "markets", "jobs", "multiplier effects" and "international standards" (Strategy 1), and Africans revert to second-rate status. The choice of external film services resulted in the employment of "award-winning" and international talent with track records, internationally acclaimed work, and award nominations or wins. Thus, local film services, like the actors, played a supporting role even though the story was supposed to be a South African one. In essence, when such blockbuster projects "come" to South Africa, they disrupt and re-

shape the local film production ecosystem both positively and negatively. The positive is measured in the job creation. The negative is seen in the reproduction of a three-tier industry. The Mandela project demonstrates that decisions in a production context are complex, just as the decision to work with locals or expatriate talent. Unlike the choice of Clint Eastwood as the director of *Invictus* in 2009, the international core on the *Long Walk to Freedom* project were not strangers to South Africa. Instead, they had previously worked with the South African producers of the film on various other film projects. For example, William Nicholson had been part of *Sarafina!* and thus "understood the nuances and the accents and the history of South Africa", while Chadwick's involvement in the *First Grader*, winner of the Audience Award of DIFF 2011, showed his pedigree on African projects. Thus, the collaboration was based on respect that had been rightly earned, trust and strong relationships built over many years. In fact, the production notes referred to a "reunion":

> The film marks a reunion of sorts for Singh, screenwriter William Nicholson, Justin Chadwick, and producer David Thompson – with whom Singh produced *Sarafina!*, *Red Dust*, and *Bravo Two Zero*. William Nicholson penned the *Sarafina!* screenplay, and both Thompson and Singh were producers of Chadwick's multiple award-winning *The First Grader*, shot in Kenya (Singh, Production Notes).

These invaluable and long-term networks are crucial to the success of film projects. However, where such networks become an "old boys club", they risk perpetuating exclusion and entrenching hierarchy. At any rate, the Hollywoodisation characteristic of *Long Walk to Freedom* effaces otherwise complex film production choices. While Western business models and logic typically hold sway, they are not the only criteria and, in any case, operate in a productive tension with contextual factors. At the same time, it is critical to question how the creative decisions and production choices on *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* reveal the complicity of film services approaches to the coloniality of power that pervades film business activity. That putatively South African projects like the story of Nelson Mandela end up reproducing coloniality by positioning African talent and black-owned film services at the periphery is an important contradiction that is worthy of serious evaluation. If South African productions reproduce coloniality, unwittingly or not, how different are they from *Die Voortrekkers* or, at least, from B-Scheme films? Should films that reproduce coloniality and contribute to the persistence of the harmful apartheid paradigm be part of national cinema?

Ultimately, how films are developed, written, pitched to financiers, produced and ultimately distributed, exhibited, and screened is implicated with power, power relations and power dynamics. Applying Nimfuhr and Meloni's definition of decoloniality (2021:8) to filmmaking

contexts provides for a decolonial filmmaking critique, approach and praxis. To them, therefore, filmmaking in a decolonial frame is:

> … a complex and multifaceted process that is best conceived as a journey rather than a destination. By associating decoloniality as a journey in the context of film production, the individual and collective (learning) process is considered, which can be subject to constant change and is always in the process of becoming, and so needs to be constantly reflected upon.

What is apparent in "reflecting upon" the production context of *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* is that hierarchies and hierarchisation continue in film productions, on film sets and creative decisions, criteria and the networks that are tapped. Where Strategy 1 is dominant, Strategy 2 is relegated to a tick-box exercise of compliance, non-compliance, and metrics related to employment, casual gigs, and the number of jobs created. Meanwhile, fundamental transformation and change are not taking place. In fact, patterns of the past persist. In the final analysis, the contradictions exposed by the production context of *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* cannot be the basis for a truly national cinema.

Theme 1: South African National Cinema and Identity: Culture, Audience, Place, Context and Complexity

The first theme that emerged from the analysis concerned the complex relationship between South African national identity and culture, as well as their intricate connection to cinema, place, and audience. In essence, this theme captures the complexities of making and showing films in South Africa and how such complexities influence the fundamental question of whether there is a truly national cinema in the country. Predictably, variations of questions about the types of films made, who funds them, and who gets to watch them, including the traditional problem of *distribution*, abound. The golden thread is about the type of film culture that exists in South Africa and, ultimately, a national cinema culture and its antecedents, characteristics, and attributes. Hence, for example, Dumeko asserted that a national culture, and by extension national cinema, cannot be an "NFVF mandate". Rather, to him, it is "a country mandate". By "country mandate", Dumeko meant that defining South African identity is a task for the whole nation rather than just a single organisation. He asked, "Have we defined what the South African identity is? I don't know." Interestingly, Dumeko mentioned Nigeria and India, even saying that "(t)he same can be said for Hollywood", as examples of "national cinemas" where a national identity is demonstrated. Hence, in his view, "when you see a Nollywood film, you see a Bollywood film, there is a certain cultural nuance that you can expect. You know what you are buying into. There is a cultural identity for the country that the film represents." Furthermore, Dumeko suggested that film as an economic driver and commercial entity arises

from it being an exemplar of culture, stating, "That's why Nollywood or not completely why but it contributes towards Nollywood and Bollywood becoming the billion-dollar industries that they are". What is notable in Dumeko's answer is the assertion that, in fact, film policy must start with Strategy 2 and that Strategy 1 is – or should be – an outcome of Strategy 2. The focus on culture comes first, before economic growth. Also, he was doubtful that the post-1994 compact is adequate as a national culture, asking,

> So, have we defined that as South Africa? I don't know. Yes, we have unity and diversity, we have our wildlife, lovely people, great weather. South Africans are friendly. There are all of these things that we can associate ourselves with, right? But we are yet to get to a stage where we crystallise it into a South African identity. That is, neither the "new South Africa" nor the "rainbow nation" count – at least not yet – as sources of a national culture. Ribeiro, a producer, felt the same about this inadequacy, stating, "When you say, it is a French Film, you have quite a clear expectation of what that film might be. And I don't think we can say that yet it is a South African film and people immediately connect that statement with meaning." The repeated use of the phrase "not yet" by the participants suggests that 30 years has not been enough to crystallise either a national culture or a national cinema in South Africa. It could be that the process will take longer (hence just a matter of time) or the very post-1994 compact itself is not ideal as a source of national culture. The latter aligns with Grosfoguel's identification (2009) of the problem of the existence of an invisible coloniality and influence of current global colonial-racial hierarchies in the current strategies aimed at developing the South African film industry as *national* in terms of identity, accessibility and scope. That is, a resilient coloniality could be the reason a national cinema does not yet exist and may not exist.

For example, the issue of funding is not only crucial across the value chain but highlights issues of power and how film distribution is ultimately implicated with power and a resilient coloniality. In the case of *Inxeba: The Wound*, funding at the concept and development stages of the film was already a determinant of the distribution path of the film, thus eventually affecting the audience and reception factor of the film. Hence, Ribeiro said:

> So, the first time I took *Inxeba: The Wound* post cards to DFM was in 2013 ... there was always intrigue and there was always a lot of warning messages that did I know was playing with fire? Did I know this other production got shut down? And I always thought it was a bit of a novel reaction and people being overcautious. I never thought in a million years I was actually going to experience countless death threats. But there was also an equal amount of appetite for what we are doing. But the funders didn't really get it. They rejected the project for the development of production and then we received post-production support from the National Film and Video Foundation. The broadcaster really wanted the film but they weren't sure we were going to get it approved by the FPB, so they couldn't pre-buy it. But then when Netflix made an offer for the global rights on the Sundance screening then M-Net made a move and bought Africa. On *The Wound* we had Pyramedia France, they paid fifty thousand euros for the world rights as a minimum guarantee for distribution. They give you that money before the film is made. You use that money for production but you have licensed the rights of distribution to them and they pay thirty thousand for the world rights and twenty thousand for France as a distributor in France because they also distribute in the local market. That's how we get to the fifty. Now we also

> had a German distributor in my financing structure. So, the German theatrical rights were also pre-sold to a German distributor. So, when you do the deal with the sales agent you just exclude the territories that you already sold it or financed it for. I had an American distributor for *The Wound* (with whom the movie) had a terrible test, and they created a marketing complaint that we were really like literally embarrassed about. And we had to fight and then the film got on the Oscar shortlist and then it became a problem because in the US the film had been marketed with that horrible stuff that we didn't feel represented by. So, we had to spend a lot of money to undo the terrible marketing campaign that they did.

In the case of *Inxeba: The Wound*, securing international distribution rights were key to unlocking local and continental distribution pathways for the film, which highlights the unequal power and hierarchies of the global distribution context. Only when Netflix came through with the offer for global rights did M-Net make a move to secure the rights for distribution in Africa. Though African audiences should have primacy for African films, the power and influence of international distributors means that the sequence is reversed. The needs of African audiences are serviced later or, even, last. The fears and concerns of censorship around *Inxeba: The Wound*, which limits what kinds of films can be shown to African audiences, impacted decisions around its local distribution. Only the securing of global rights to distribution had the power to undo or bypass such concerns. Thus, funding is implicated in what kinds of films get made and shown, a fact which introduces ideology and power, even censorship, into the production context. Fundamentally, funding impacts creative decisions and is thus a critical factor in creative choices in films. Ultimately, funding also impacts how we define national cinema.

The views expressed by the participants regarding the process of financing the films provided significant insights that highlighted strategies, levels of access to networks, resources as well as the impact of experience in the film industry. Participant OB's response indicated difficulty in securing development funding. More importantly, it highlighted the significance of funding as a stamp of approval on the potential of a project – which can, in turn, make it easy for funders to get involved in financing the production, post-production or marketing and distribution of a film. Motaung's assertion that "story is king" with reference to *Dear Future Wife* highlighted the significance and value of a "strong story" to "excite" potential funders, suggesting that funders are attracted to stories that demonstrate "strength" in terms of the funding criteria used in the development finance stage:

> For me personally, in terms of this film, honestly, it wasn't that hard. It wasn't that hard because I think the key thing is development. The hardest part for me personally is to get the development funding. So, I had to get the story, then I apply for development funding. Then once someone picks it up for development it means that this story has potential. Story

> is king. Once you have something that is actually strong, (it) is easier to attract the funding because people want to be on board on something that excites them.

In essence, if the story is "strong", funding is unlocked. Indeed, the perception that "story is king" partly explains why Nelson Mandela's life as a revolutionary leader during apartheid made for a "great story" that made the rights to produce a screen adaptation of his biography to be highly coveted.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the story and the funders of the film is not innocent or value-free, as Ribeiro's response to *Inxeba: The Wound* showed. In fact, the relationship is intensely complex. Problems in securing development finance for the project due to the mixed reactions to the story – with some treating the subject of the story "as taboo" and leading funders rejecting the project as they did not "get it" – confirm this complex relationship. The NFVF rejected the producers' application for funding four times, until after the film received positive international recognition (Zeeman, 2018). The story did not resonate with funders during the early stages as they did not understand the heart of the story and the motivations behind its conception. Only the securing of international distribution rights seemed to convince the local funders that the story was worthwhile. In the final analysis, "story is king" can attract or repel potential funding based on what the funder is looking for. Funders like the NFVF or the national broadcaster can withhold funding, basing their decision on the apparent need to be cautious of the Film and Publications Board potentially red-flagging the project on censorship grounds. Thus, government "regulation" plays a role in what films are made and shown (and when and where films are made and shown) even by merely influencing financing and licensing rights decisions by the public broadcaster for particular films. As Ribeiro's response about the role of film festivals, particularly internationally renowned festivals, shows, the problem of how and where films are shown is as critical in framing the issue of national cinema as is the question of which films are shown and when they are shown.

Ultimately, distribution is fundamental in deciding which films are made. Film festivals, particularly international festivals, are critical not only for screening the films but also as a platform to position films for private foreign financing and to broaden a film's audiences. Indeed, successful entry into an international film festival's programme helps to build exposure, visibility and networks and contributes to a project's potential to attract expanded financial and distribution support. Typically, international film festivals like Rotterdam, Berlin, Cannes, DIFF, Sundance and FESPACO have value beyond their role as film exhibitors. Rather, they now facilitate financing links, thus taking on a producer role (Odabasi, 2021).

They function as "screening venues, markets, educational seminars, funding platforms and a potential place to broker distribution deals for independent filmmakers, especially from small countries with small or practically non-existent film industries" (Falicov, 2010:3). Film festivals such as DIFF provide targeted distribution, marketing, training, networking and financial support and interventions cutting across development, production and post-production. Such an international festival strategy adds significant value to the lifecycle of independent filmmaking projects, especially in countries that lack major film financing institutions. The beneficiaries are often those films that "would not otherwise get made" (Falicov, 2010:3). Where such platforms are not sufficiently decolonised, however, they may make things worse by reproducing colonial matrices of power. They can become "potentially neo-colonialist in their impact" (Odabasi, 2021). At any rate, Ribeiro's assertions highlighted the different strategies informing how different filmmakers approach and understand the acquisition and financing (or lack) of particular projects. Ribeiro's assertions about the potential drawbacks of a project financed by multiple international funders, particularly where the vision of the producer about aspects of the film such as marketing can clash with foreign-based companies' execution of that aspect for the international market, is a cautionary tale about how he who pays the piper calls the tune. Of *Inxeba: The Wound*'s R14 500 000 production budget, 31% came from Germany and 10% from the Netherlands, with South African funding making up the rest of the 59% balance (Ntsanwisi, 2022).

Each film project has unique origins and challenges, and each value chain leverages value differently. How each production deals with the question of funding is critical to answering the question about building a national cinema. Some productions leverage very different funding models and strategies. For example, Singh noted the following:

> So, we did *Stick*, which was an anti-war film. We did *Cry the Beloved Country*, a remake of the 1950 film. We did *Sarafina*, (and) *Yesterday*, the isiZulu film on Aids, which was nominated for an Academy Award and an Emmy award, and we did *Red Dust* on the TRC hearings. And then also we did commercial films like *Mr Bones*, *Mr Bones 2*, *Mamma Jack* – those commercial pictures fund all that niche-market, powerful stories that you want to tell. Because the niche-market story will not necessarily be the box office broadcast, but you need the commercial pictures to fund all the other passion projects.

Singh's articulation of how their company's long history of filmmaking and distribution has enabled them to use part of the profits made through its commercially successful films to fund niche films or passion projects suggests one way in which South African films can leverage unique funding models to create new spaces for different kinds of storytelling. The assertions

undercut conventional perceptions that discourage niche films from generally not performing well in local theatres compared to commercial blockbusters. Instead, the company's long and successful history of production and distribution in South Africa and internationally creates new and empowering spaces with more space for creative freedom and creative decision-making. The more such spaces there are the more the company can determine the types of films to make (described as "passion projects"), the budget, and the necessary resources and networks available or accessible for the projects. In other words, there is scope to think of funding that empowers local voices and disrupts colonial and Hollywood-friendly models of funding film.

Between 2017 and 2022, the NFVF funded 418 film projects in development (86 of them being feature length), 204 film projects in production and 21 film projects in post-production (six being feature length) to the tune of R178,453,349 (NFVF, 2022c). Most of the R178,453,349 funding was for production, with R60,235,360 allocated to development and R4,990,000 allocated to post-production. Ultimately, what makes the financing of films challenging and complex in South Africa are the limited funds from government institutions such as the NFVF and the DTIC. There is just not enough money to go around. The pattern that has developed shows the inherent contradictions of supporting a national film industry in a country still marked by deep inequality, resilient coloniality and the unfinished business of liberation. A-Scheme and B-Scheme subsidies were "viable" because the industry catered to a minority racial (white) interest. Where government funding must cater to the majority, persistent and debilitating funding issues arise. The high percentage of NFVF funding allocated to films in development and production contrasts with the extremely low percentage of funding allocated to post-production, indicating persistent funding gaps and structural unevenness in the value chain. The funding crunch is a permanent feature of the national film industry in the "new" South Africa. It remains unaddressed and unsolved. As long as it remains unsolved and unaddressed, the question of a national cinema also remains open.

The annual local box office numbers show that there were 24 locally produced films in 2013, dropping to eight films in 2023, with only six films in 2020, and 14 in 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions and the resulting reduced disposable incomes (NFVF, 2023; NFVF, 2022c). With the launch and increasing popularity of streaming services like Netflix, many local films have been made available on these platforms. Still, other feature films join the film festival circuit, while the rest are broadcast on television. The uneven releases and up-and-down numbers mirror the uneven funding landscape. Filmmakers dependent on subsidies struggle to sustain their livelihoods and productions, as high volumes of funding applications compete for scarce

funds. For most filmmakers, therefore, filmmaking is characterised by precarity. Many projects are delayed and remain at different stages of completion. When filmmakers rely exclusively on government funding, limited budgets for marketing and limited opportunities to access film festival circuits and distribution networks translate into difficulty in reaching audiences. Without ready access to audiences, the national cinema project remains non-viable.

Limited finance from government still plays a significant and indispensable role in film development, production and post-production of many South African film projects, as shown in the case of *Inxeba: The Wound*, *Dear Future Wife*, and *Knuckle City*. That is, three of the four projects discussed in this study were dependent on some form of government funding, even where foreign and private sources of funding were also tapped. Even big-budget and internationally co-produced projects such as Videovision's *Nelson Mandela* biopic still utilised government financing mechanisms and rebates availed through the IDC and DTIC, though operating differently from typical subsidies. For example, through the IDC, South Africa's largest development finance state-owned institution,[51] local and international productions and co-productions receive access to repayable loans. Incidentally, Videovision's track record and long-standing partnership with the IDC positions them for financially favourable conditions and perks in the film industry that other "small fish" do not enjoy, re-enacting some of the hierarchies of the past. The subsidy from the government through agencies such as the NFVF, KZN Film Commission, Gauteng Film Commission and ECDC, though insufficient to cover all the expenses of a film project, assists filmmakers in bridging critical resource gaps at the different stages of the filmmaking process. Thus, filmmakers require significant resilience and resourcefulness to take their projects from concept to exhibition. In some cases, filmmakers have used their own initiative to raise funds to develop and produce proofs of concept which are then used to pitch and attract finance from various distributors whose funds can cover the production or marketing of the project. Such filmmakers do not wait for government funding before initiating projects. Generally, however, existing funding models in the local film industry reproduce hierarchies of power that point to an undying colonialism and coloniality of power.

The government's development financing mechanisms, programmes and processes through agencies such as the IDC are structured and geared to seek a return on investment (ROI) and come with rigorous and stringent qualifying criteria. For example, they require that film

[51] One of the IDC's main objectives is the promotion of entrepreneurial development and growth for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

producers raise at least 51% of the total production budget, with the IDC covering up to 49% of the budget. The 51% does not include subsidy funds from the NFVF or any of the other government film funds (Industrial Development Corporation [IDC], 2026). Furthermore, to receive funding from the IDC, an applicant's project needs to demonstrate economic merit, measured in terms of its profitability and sustainability. They must also have a sales agent and "terms and conditions of distribution and marketing strategy for the film, track record of the sales agent, a list of films that were distributed and the success/performance of these films" (IDC, 2026). These stringent requirements indicate government's emphasis on Strategy 1, with film seen narrowly as a business, asource of profitability, an investment, and a driver of economic growth and GDP. In an environment where only a select few individuals and production companies can raise their own film funds or meet the stringent requirements, only the likes of Videovision qualify for big-budget projects. The stringent criteria are designed to be exclusive rather than inclusive. It ignores the hostile, unequal and alienated conditions under which the majority of black and female-owned production companies and industry workers work. Ultimately, many "previously" marginalised filmmakers do not meet the IDC's criteria. Instead, they are relegated to the lower-tier and second-tier subsidies of the NFVF. Wittingly or not, these barriers to entry reproduce the division of A-Scheme and B-Scheme films. Most filmmakers are shut out and condemned to barely surviving, even if they feel that their stories are worth telling and that South African audiences *need* to see these stories on screen.

The production funding criteria of the DTIC, one of the funders of *Inxeba: The Wound*, stipulate that 20% of the budget be spent on South African film services. Such services must be provided by companies that are at least 51% black-owned, have heads of departments in core production functions who are black South Africans, and have core teams, such as producers, head writers, and directors, that are comprised of South African citizens.[52] On the surface, these requirements are crucial to protect the local film industry and support black film enterprises. As Yellowbone Entertainment's film director, Qubeka, has asserted, the DTIC "rebate scheme is everything; you can't do business without it. If you are building a business case for funding and can demonstrate that you have a rebate that will cover 35% to 50% of your costs, it becomes significantly easier to secure the remaining funds. It's everything. We depend on it".[53]

[52] DTIC, n.d., "South African Film and Television Production Incentive", https://www.thedtic.gov.za/financial-and-non-financial-support/incentives/film-incentive/south-african-film-and-television-production-incentive-3/ [Accessed: 9 Jan. 2026].

[53] *Daily Maverick*, 2021, "DTIC blamed as rocky times hit South African film industry", https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-11-21-rocky-times-hit-south-african-film-industry-where-it-hurts/ [Accessed: 9 Jan. 2026].

However, these funding instruments are often accessible only to a local filmmaking elite – to those lucky few who have "made it". Furthermore, the regulations are, in any case, regularly flouted through BEEE "fronting" and tokenism. Ultimately, IDC funding DTIC rebates provide significant gap financing for qualifying tier-one production companies. In this way, government funding unwittingly maintains a structure and organisation that directly opposes the key priority of redress of marginalisation. Certainly, such a pyramid, with a few at the top, does little to promote a broad-based national film industry. Instead, it reinforces hierarchies, inequality, and divisions.

Indeed, the report on the impact of South African government's tax rebate film finance structure, by Collins and Snowball (2019: 214), noted an emerging tension between total employment and black employment on the one hand, and skilled black employment on the other:

> … although projects were meeting black economic empowerment quotas in order to qualify for the subsidy, there were still only a few projects where black people were employed in positions other than as extras. What the results showed was that the current incentive scheme is much more successful in achieving some of the stated objectives than others.

The government's Strategy 1-bias seems to be undermining the attempt to construct a viable and truly national cinema. Collins, Ishizaka and Snowball (2019) observed that the concerns that I have identified in this study as falling under Strategy 2 are not a key concern for the IDC or the DTIC. Rather, these agencies' exclusive criteria and emphasis on rigid and quantitative metrics of "value" have bypassed a large section of the "previously" marginalised and reproduced new hierarchies. Subsidised films are the new second-tier film industry. Those funded by the IDC and the DTIC tend to be the "high-quality" productions – often few in number. Collins, Ishizaka and Snowball (2019:215) made the following comment in this regard:

> The sample of subsidised films performed much less well. The percentage of black people employed in "skilled" categories was generally low for all production types. South African productions fared best in terms of overall black employment, but this was skewed towards lower-level employment categories, such as extras and cast.

In fact, film productions that "scored best on spending criteria tend not to create many jobs for South Africans, especially black South Africans, and especially skilled jobs" (Collins et al., 2019:215). It seems fair to criticise the current three-tier funding system as reproducing the practices of apartheid. A-Scheme and B-Scheme subsidies seem to persist, where "the differential amounts paid out to 'white' and 'black' films were in keeping with the political and concomitant economic ideology of 'separate development', and the apartheid government saw

no need to expend vast resources on Africans who were not South African 'citizens'" (Paleker, 2010: 93).

The notion that a resilient coloniality is a significant hindrance to the emergence of a national culture was repeated by several participants, including Motaung, a film director, and Zondi, from the film marketing agency based in Durban. Motaung stated bluntly that "we are fragmented due to issues of apartheid". Furthermore, to him, "being South African is not clearly defined. What does it mean to be South African?" The issue of *meaning*, and *what it means to be South African* came up repeatedly in the interviews, suggesting that the notion of national cinema is at heart about meaning or at least starts by sorting out questions of meaning and meanings. For Motaung, the question of what it means to be American is found in Hollywood films, such that "We are the biggest and the best in the world and our films capture that". The reference to Hollywood is an interesting one because it sets up the American film as a reference point. From a decolonial perspective, setting up the coordinates of a local film industry in Hollywood is a sign of a pervasive coloniality. Furthermore, it was notable how the participants did not question if Hollywood was ideal as a template of what a national cinema should be. Finally, it is notable that Motaung identified apartheid as the problem behind the lack of a national cinema in South Africa. Despite it being 30 years after the official end of apartheid, the feeling is that apartheid is still a manifest problem. Hence, in his view, "I don't think we have a national industry because also the issue of, the idea of national, is highly contested. The idea of the nation state of South Africa is highly contested, because you would understand that as a society we are fragmented." The suggestion is not only that a national cinema is the opposite of fragmentation but also that South Africa's national identity is identified negatively through a persistent and prevalent apartheid paradigm (cf. Mboti, 2023, 2024a, 2024b). Zondi repeated the assertion that a national cinema has not *yet* emerged in South Africa, suggesting that this is a temporal phenomenon that may or may not happen. Thus, "No, we are not as yet national … it is quite divided in that spectrum". Zondi even identified the "province-to-province" distribution of film services as a sign of fragmentation, stating that:

> I think it differs from province to province. So, from an industry point of view, you would find in Joburg is more of the local (television) industry, and then in Cape Town is more like your cinema goers, but it is an industry that serves as both film and advertising. And then Durban becomes TV but also commercials and also a shooting location. And in other provinces it is very limited.

This answer associates the exclusive allocation and dispersal of film services in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town, with other provinces lagging behind, with residual and resilient

coloniality and the persistence of apartheid. In Goldsmith, Ward and O'Regan (2011), "local Hollywoods" are framed as a good thing. However, for the likes of Zondi this is not necessarily so due to how such filmmaking centres reflect and entrench exclusivity and apartheid hierarchies. Singh, a producer and distributor, stated that he thought that the notion of a national cinema, broadly, is in any case "a relative concept – it may mean different things to different people" suggesting that it is more of an ideal rather than a concrete manifestation.

The participants generally argued that the notion of a South African national cinema in the post-apartheid period remains *elusive*. This argument was similarly assessed by South African film scholars (Botha, 2012; Flanery, 2009; Maingard, 2013; Masilela, 2000; Treffry-Goatley, 2010; Mboti & Tomaselli, 2015). This is, of course, due to a complex mesh of historical, socio-economic, political and cultural factors that I have identified in Chapter 2 (cf. Botha, 2012; Flanery, 2009; Maingard, 2013; Masilela, 2000; Treffry-Goatley, 2010). Ultimately, the reason a South African national cinema has not emerged is because of the unfinished business of apartheid and colonialism. This theme emerged strongly in the data, linking to concerns that, broadly, South African cinema does not have a distinct or meaningful identity. The more optimistic response is that South Africa does not *yet* have cinematic identity, leaving open the possibility that this will come with time. The pessimistic response doubts that a national identity will ever be possible due to the unresolved problem of resilient coloniality. Nevertheless, whether one is optimistic or pessimistic, *transformation* is identified as imperative if a national cinema is to emerge in South Africa. The feeling that transformation is critical is predominantly expressed despite little agreement about what transformation itself entails. The differences in the participants' responses stem from their varying perceptions, experiences, and exposure to the South African film industry over the years. Their views also express their uncertainty and doubts about films identified as normatively *South African* and how these contribute to constructing, sustaining, questioning or ignoring South African national identity and culture. The participants' answers also reflected what they think about the ways in which the film industry value chain has been or is being *re-structured* to support the development and sustainability of a post-apartheid national film production context based on the imperative of transformation (i.e., Strategy 2). Most of the participants expressed the idea that the search for a South African national cinema is an ongoing and messy process shaped by the dominant and hegemonic ideas and policies of a rainbow nation which, ironically, are disconnected from the nationwide realities of socio-economically unequal and divided communities. The analysis therefore suggests that it is useful to understand where and how post-apartheid national identity and culture are being forged. National policy, as Strategy 1, is top-down and hegemonic. The

realities of inequality, unfinished business, and a still-untransformed nation inform Strategy 2. These strategies, however, are disconnected from each other. There is, as such, an *inherent schizophrenia* at the heart of the search for a national cinema in South Africa. Understanding the forces shaping the country's national cinema in the present requires probing the schizophrenic environment in which a post-apartheid national culture is being constructed and maintained. For Masilela (2000), those who own virtually all the means of cultural production in South Africa still prescribe whose film industry it is and what it does. The very recent selling of MultiChoice to Canal+ shows how such ownership of the means of cultural production is already embedded in the movements of international capital. Ultimately, the construction of a national culture is a site for contestation around ideas, identity, and social norms linked to an economic and political system that influences what kind of national cinema emerges or if it emerges at all. The foundations of the South African national cinema and its attendant film services remain entangled with hegemonic and anti-pluriversal global designs and economic power structures. The quest for an international and universal standard for those who remain on the margins exposes an even deeper schizophrenia and disconnect. The need to grapple with, search for, question and define what it means to be South African in a post-apartheid dispensation remains and continues. Such a quest is meaningful, yet always complex.

The participants were critical of the broad lack of a coherent or clearly defined South African national identity and culture. Worse, the government policy operates by means of prescriptive, generic, and top-down definitions of South African national identity and culture typical of such organisations as Brand South Africa and the NFVF. The problem is that a prescribed *national character* is untenable and contradicts the bottom-up democratisation imperative – what Maingard (2007:3) called the state of "occupying plural subjective positionings in multilayered spaces of in-between-ness"– that the struggle against apartheid was built and predicated on. These prescriptions overlook the entrenched divisions of South African society that continue to organise society in terms of binary and Manichean opposites. Broadly, the participant responses emphasised films as cultural texts that are direct products of the interconnected relationship between a national culture (or lack thereof) and film industry practices. This relationship, interestingly, is viewed by the participants as one shaped by nationally specific policies and politics that are inevitably linked to the state of the economy, the activities within that economy, and who owns the means of cultural production. Films thus have a utilitarian and didactic function. In the words of Motaung:

> And now money is pumped into telling stories about social cohesion, nation building. So, there is a particular narrative that these funders are pushing towards … Also, like if you

> are getting funding from KZN Film, the essence, from KZN films, because it is money from economic development and tourism … their main purpose is … to drive tourism within the province and use the films to do that.

In essence, the primacy of funding to determine what, why, how, when, and where films are made and shown turns films into commodities. The clash between Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 results in a mainstream cinema that masquerades as national. In this masquerade, isolated *pockets of inclusivity* in leadership positions and commercially or internationally successful flagship projects are touted as *evidence* of transformation. However, for the participants, this masquerade has resulted in a South African film industry whose film texts lack identity and coherent meanings. The masquerade has even been noted in industry reports. For example, one reports noted that "historical patterns of ownership and employment are still replicated in the cultural and creative Industries in South Africa with the visual arts and crafts as well as performance and celebration sector showing improvement in transformation although still significantly low" (SACO, 2017:14). The participants questioned the role of the democratic government in aiding and abetting the persistence of patterns of the past, noting that the apartheid government's involvement in the local film industry's development through the use of subsidy and censorship, for purposes of propagating a race-based creative culture, skills and infrastructure, has often been carried over in new, problematic and prescriptive forms. Ultimately, what Fanon called a national culture exists in South Africa ironically via the trope of fragmentation. The picture is one of a nation in a constant state of brokenness. Furthermore, notwithstanding the new constitutional order and the Bill of Rights aside, whether South Africans can now get to fully exercise agency and the *privilege* of "locating for themselves where and how they want to be identified" (Maingard, 2007:4) remains an open question. Attempts to solve fragmentation through prescription seem to have made the situation worse. After all, the Eurocentric and apartheid "national" culture of the past was not only inherently exclusive and divisive but was prescribed and codified by the law.

The apartheid state, through the prescriptions of racist laws, played a significant role in allocating and codifying racially exclusive rights and defining socio-political, economic, and "ethnic" positionalities (Mamdani, 2001; Marutlulle, 2022; Mhlauli et al., 2015). This process inevitably shaped experiences and social and economic relations at all levels of South African society. Indeed, it is through law that colonialism and apartheid politicised identities by differentiating "natives" and further dividing them into even smaller, incoherent ethnic groups while whites – as Europeans and nonnatives – were "unified" as a race and as citizens (Mamdani, 2001; Mhlauli et al., 2015). Motaung's words thus bear repeating:

> We are fragmented due to issues of apartheid. Because of the South African nation state, being South African is not clearly defined. What does it mean to be South African? If anyone has to go out in the world and say, okay, I am South African, what does it mean? The idea of the nation state of South Africa is highly contested, because you would understand that as a society we are fragmented.

Fragmentation and prescription were apartheid imperatives. Through the A-Scheme and B-Scheme model, the state promoted, institutionalised, and essentialised them. Further, within the fragmented and politicised ethnic and racial identities were sexism and class divides, forms of social categorisations and hierarchical, dichotomous ways of defining things, people and ideas in terms of their opposites that functioned to entrench and legitimise dominance and oppression (Collins, 1989). The hierarchical order is fragmentary and prescriptive, categorising individuals and communities in economic, cultural, and political life as *superior* or *inferior*, less human or more human, citizen or subject, rich and poor, men and women, and white and black. If, under apartheid, fragmented identities were prescribed, under democracy the same fragmented experiences are *blended* to form one shared culture and identity where the promise of full citizenship is held out as delivering a brand new transformed and inclusive national culture. None of the patterns of the past have been *dismantled*. Rather, the democratic project is inherently *assimilationist*. We all become citizens under a democratic government that abets and reinforces the contradictions of the past. The majority of those codified as black, native and inferior are not only characterised by, in Mignolo's words (2000), an *inherent series of lacks* but must now exist in a state of perpetual "aspiration" and expectation of the promise of economic liberation, self-determination and full citizenship. The fact of living in *a state of perpetual aspiration* is what frustrates most of the filmmakers that I have interviewed.

Life in a state of perpetual aspiration is frustrating for filmmakers because it is seldom, if ever, fulfilled. Rather, it is like a constant Sisyphean task. In the myth of Sisyphus, the gods punish Sisyphus for his offences and cunning ways, including cheating death. Sisyphus is condemned to eternal punishment in the lowest parts of the underworld, where he is tasked to endlessly push a rock up a mountain and watch it roll back to the valley below.[54] While the filmmakers grapple with the stark realities of inequality, marginality and inferiorisation, life goes on under a new normal of endless dependence on NFVF subsidies. The government has sought to address social fragmentation through codifying and prescribing "unity in diversity" but without dismantling the economic hierarchies and patterns of the old order. Rather, everything is

[54] Greek Myths & Greek Mythology, 2025, "The Myth of Sisyphus", https://www.greekmyths-greekmythology.com/the-myth-of-sisyphus/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

subsumed under a new assimilationist paradigm. From the DTIC and NFVF the dominant message is that infrastructure, resources, and financing opportunities are now open "for all". One needs only to download forms and apply, requiring a modicum of self-agency. Even indigenous languages are recognised as official and *national* languages under a new idiom of nation building. The problem is that, in practice, the film industry is broadly fragmented and untransformed. The new idiom of unity in diversity, which is also the motto prescribed in the South African national coat of arms, does not do enough to reckon with the full extent of the damage caused by colonial oppression. As Fanon (1963) showed, colonialism goes beyond the imposition of oppressive rule. Rather, it also devalues and distorts the history of the colonised in ways that create cultural *estrangement* (see also, Chawla, 2017; Udah & Singh, 2019; Olsson & Peschel, 2024; Zewolde, 2021). It is this cultural estrangement that survives even in the democratic project. In the democratic dispensation in South Africa, there are more than subtle, entrenched hints that African-centric ways of being and living are not only inadequate as the basis for a national film industry but cannot thrive or grow in the absence of Eurocentric modernising culture. The inherent series of lacks remains. Indeed, for most of the participants, it is the dominant logic underpinning the present-day persistence of coloniality in various government film industry initiatives, policies and reports. The importance of *the local* and of meaningful transformation are acknowledged only superficially. In practice, the local film industry is unquestioningly subordinated to and within the present-day global power structures under Strategy 1 that worships he who pays the piper, leading to a state of perpetual unfulfilled aspiration.

Ultimately, it is impossible to understand the processes and problems of South Africa's democratic dispensation without considering "the wider socio-historical context of Western European expansion (industrial and mercantile capitalism) and the colonisation of Africa by the Western economies" (Matunhu, 2011:68). The present is a mirror image of the past. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012) argued that one way in which the coloniality of power operates is by positioning African countries at the interface between different, schismatic and contradicting value systems and forms of logic: Western and African; urban and rural; patriarchal and matriarchal; modern and traditional; progressive and conservative; cultural and technical. The participants' expression of doubt and uncertainty about the meaning, or meanings, of South Africa are connected not only to shared national culture that individuals can identify with but also the sense that South Africa is still shaped in the image of apartheid and colonialism, particularly their extractive and exploitative forms. Mboti (2023) has provided insight into how an "apartheid paradigm" is sustained and smuggled undetectably into the present daily life

through practices that we take for granted. Under the apartheid paradigm a white man calling a black man "boy" meant that although the white man and black man understand that the black man is not biologically a boy, declaring him a "boy" was an act, a lie to transform the man into a "boy". Thus, "apartheid transforms things into what they are not, so that it can appropriate the difference" (Mboti, 2023:250). The theft of this difference was not resolved by the democratic dispensation. Rather, it was codified as just how things are. Life must just go on as best as it can. Uncannily, the structure of life characterised by "Boer government, English capital and black labour under the management of Americans" (Mboti, 2023:250) remains today, with the addition of a black elite under the ANC governing for now. For the most part, Africans continue as cheap labour. Moreover, it is the basis of the state of cultural estrangement and perpetual aspiration. This can be observed the repetition of the adverbial phrase "not yet" when I asked participants about if a South African national cinema exists. "Not yet" perpetually defers the desired outcome into an indefinable future which can be 50 years, 100 years, or 150 years from now. Thus, until *fragmentation* and *prescription* are resolved and addressed, a national cinema remains a pipe dream. In post-apartheid South Africa, the black experience is marked as an inherent series of lacks. In addition, it is drawn into a negative relation with whiteness, normatively associated with superiority, economic contribution, competence, competitiveness, success, ownership and completeness remain. Predictions about the viability of creative industries thus depend on the participation and continued presence of whites in South Africa. To be is to be white. Under the pursuit of the assimilationist paradigm, the marginalisation of Africans is re-written into "criteria", "funding instruments", "international standards", and "prerequisites". The participants suggested that what the democratic project has achieved, whether unwittingly or not, is to *assimilate into* the apartheid paradigm rather than dismantle the hierarchical order. Thus, Strategy 2, which champions redress, is subordinated to Strategy 1, which is predicated on *not* rocking the boat, but rather on commercial imperatives, job creation, economic growth, and GDP. A study of filming as an economic catalyst at municipal level in KwaZulu-Natal from 2010 till 2020 (KZNTAFA, 2020:6) noted the following:

> Since 2010, a total of R20,4 million was generated from local film productions, while international productions for which information was provided amounted to R61 million. Given that the film industry in SA has a multiplier of 2.81, it can be estimated that at the very least, an additional R147 million is generated in the economy due to the direct R81 million that was spent by producers of filmed content in the Ugu District.

A South African national culture predicated on not rocking the boat is problematic because the apartheid paradigm can only be properly addressed by being dismantled rather than by

assimilation. A *truly national* cinema in South Africa is African led and reflects the demographics of the country, while ending the exploitative cheap labour paradigm. Anti-assimilationist logic is grounded, among other things, in the need for epistemic *delinking* from Euro-Western thinking. The messiness of national identity means that such delinking is, of course, easier said than done. The assimilationist impulse, meanwhile, aspires to and reproduces a type of Hollywood cinema. Inevitably, it misses opportunities to look within. The result is even more cultural estrangement, fragmentation, and prescription.

For South African films to have a truly national footprint, they must resonate with audiences, even where it is accepted that the success of movies is determined "by many variables, such as consumers' income, admission price, and subject matter (taste), etc" (Jung & Kim, 2010:1037). The matter of audience is fundamental in the whole value chain and, indeed, determines the shape and content of the value chain, factoring in distribution, market, and marketability. This was clear in how Ribeiro outlined their processes when selling their movies:

> We usually sell the film before the film is made nowadays. It is called a minimum guarantee for distribution. So, you receive that money in the financing stage from your international sales company and that helps finance production of film … My experience here, especially making films like *Inxeba: The Wound*, is the power of cinema, to touch people, to move people, to have people have an opinion about certain things and to polarise and to build nation … our audiences is definitely politically aware. They are also well travelled. They keep an open mind … They are well-educated. But when I say that I think about an experience, it is like the screening we did in Khayelitsha with *the Wound* and that throws all of that out the window because it would be a sacrilege to say that the film wasn't made for the audience because they engage with the film in such a visceral level.

In one sense, if South African films are to be about stories worth watching, they must be stories worth telling. Every producer and filmmaker must know their audience. In another sense, the stories must be *marketable*.

Indeed, the responses from the participants suggested that marketability is a minimum requirement in solving the distribution conundrum, with discussions delving into the kinds of films aligned with various distribution and exhibition platforms, factors determining the types of films currently being financed, and the strategies used to package them and make them marketable for successful distribution. Here, Zondi opined the following:

> Most South African films are very forgettable. I don't know how much stuff has come out this year, and I have already forgotten. I can't even name two myself. They are quite forgettable. So, what I have realised is that a lot of filmmakers, they consider marketing as an afterthought where now I need to do this, and it is such a longer journey … A lot of filmmakers don't understand the concept of marketing, because everyone uses social media

> and they think that it is easier, right? We always use the four Ps of marketing. The actual product itself, the pricing, the place and the people. And don't forget the people that actually you make films for. You would go to cinemas like the DIFF for instance, and other film festivals, and the people that you only find there is filmmakers. It is not an audience. Basically, we're solving that problem in terms of making South Africa films more accessible and memorable.

Making films memorable and accessible thus requires not forgetting "that, actually, you make films for your people", implying that the most memorable and marketable films are those that resonate with audiences. Marketability itself refers to a film's ability to draw viewers into theatres and denotes "how attractive a film is to its prospective target audience" (O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2013:770). Attributes contributing to a film's marketability include genre, celebrities, release date, familiarity as an adaptation or sequel, use of computer-generated imagery, and volume and cleverness of promotional hype (Davis et al., 2016). These aspects are packaged and marketed in the media, in press kits, at film festivals, and even by word of mouth.

The participants concurred that African film festivals play a significant role in connecting films and filmmakers with audiences, providing exposure, positive press, and meaningful engagement. Ismail Moodley highlighted how, because of methods used by the DIFF to profile local films, there has been an interest from international film festivals in some of the films that win in the categories for best South African documentary or best African film at the DIFF:

> So, I think, we definitely have a good number of films that we could project into the international spaces. But I do think, at the same time, I know as the Centre for Creative Arts and with DIFF, we are getting an increasing number of calls from film festivals abroad that want to screen the winning titles of each year's DIFF. Now, that is really good. It simply means we are making a significant impact in terms of the way we are profiling those particular films that are winning the best South African documentary, or the best African film as well.

How films are marketed and profiled to audiences is crucial for their success, generating positive buzz and branding, as well as positioning them in the public consciousness. Film festivals like DIFF connect filmmakers with audiences, both locally and globally, in personal and visceral ways. Press releases are disseminated that highlight key films and filmmakers (including emerging filmmakers) for audiences to look out for as part of festival brand positioning (cf. Kottary, 2018). Interpersonal relationships with local journalists, national television and radio broadcasters, and also social media platforms and opening nights, are leveraged to generate buzz and amplify the messaging around the film (Pulido & González, 2019). Taking films *to the people*, a practice that Masilela (2003) traced to Sol Plaatje's New African Movement inspired mobile screenings as part of a broader negotiation of Africans'

"entrance" into modernity, is as critical a pillar of this stage of the value chain as getting people to want to watch the films.

For Sakhile Gumede, platforms such as the DIFF have the unique and *generative* function of showcasing films, celebrating artists, and networking. That is, DIFF can be seen as "a celebration of films, but also … serves many purposes in the sense that it's not just a celebration of artists that have made films but…creates also a platform for networking for people to showcase their work" (Gumede, 2022). The film festival adds generative value to African productions. As the DIFF festival website states:

> Founded in 1979, it is the oldest and largest film festival in Southern Africa, presenting over 100 screenings, all of which are premieres in this region. The festival also offers screenings in township areas where cinemas do not exist. DIFF offers an opportunity for filmmakers to expand their networks, by attracting local and international stakeholders and is a gateway to global cinematic gems that enrich South African audiences.[55]

The festival was thus founded on the basis of an emancipatory praxis that resisted apartheid racial divisions while seeking to create a space for African cinema broadly through the independent Avalon cinema. In this way, it transgressed both the boundaries of apartheid and of the Ster-Kinekor monopoly. Giving a distribution and exhibition space to all races at a time when Africans were excluded from filmmaking except through B-Scheme films, DIFF was doubly transgressive. As an Oscar-qualifying festival renowned for premiering international and African-produced films and programming, DIFF now holds a significant place in the national and KwaZulu-Natal provincial calendar for the film and television sector. Thus, national and regional film festivals in Africa such as DIFF and FESPACO have a seminal role in linking audiences and films and advancing the conception of national cinema. The festivals, for example, have value as spaces where marginalised filmmakers and emerging voices are exposed to new and international networks, genres, marketing, discussion and debate, while helping to promote their films to national and international markets and audiences.

By connecting filmmakers and audiences, the likes of DIFF, Encounters, Jozi Film Festival and Silwerskerm Film Festival challenge colonialist frameworks of film exhibition. Across most of Africa, colonial film exhibition and distribution were established primarily to control and "educate" subject populations. Dovey (2015:88), for example, has noted the historical legacy of missionaries and colonial film units that "constructed" African audiences as "a homogenous and non-individuated mass to be feared and policed". Colonial mobile screenings typically

[55] Durban International Film Festival, 2024, "45th Durban International Film Festival", https://ccadiff.ukzn.ac.za/diff2024-home/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

showed films that were "instructional and valorised 'Western' technology. Africans were shown films about why they should cultivate and drink tea and coffee and save their money in banks" (Dovey, 2015:88). That is, film screenings in the colonial era were acts of cultural and political subjugation. Just as there was no concept of national cinema, there was indeed "no concept of nation for African territories run by foreign powers" (Utian-Preston, 2021:39). Contemporary African film festivals seek to reconstitute the space of film exhibition into a more meaningful experience. Where such platforms succeed, they enrich cinematic cultures and contribute new ways and possibilities for imagining national cinema.

National cinemas, in essence, centre *their own* audiences. In effect, the conception of local cinematic cultures begins when African films connect unapologetically with their target audiences. The example cited by Ribeiro, of the screening of *Inxeba: The Wound* in Khayelitsha, is in keeping with the attempt to build national cinema by addressing the modality of how films connect with "previously" marginalised audiences. The South African government's intervention through the NFVF's funding of film screenings is part of a broader paradigm shift towards developing and including local audiences in marginalised areas such as townships and villages. The shift is intended to reconnect with Sol Plaatje's nascent attempts to disrupt colonial constructions of African audiences in the New African Movement by taking film screenings to the people. Connecting with audiences as part of a decolonial reimagining of film spaces is a "cultural moment" that contrasts with B-Scheme mobile screenings that sought to force-feed cinematic content made by whites for Africans. Whether the NFVF's approach will work will depend on how deeply the films resonate with audiences and the scale, frequency, and accessibility of the screenings. Again, the limited funding of the NFVF constraints scale, frequency, and accessibility (Haikali, 2016). The frequency in the accessibility of the screenings currently depends on the success of annually submitted funding applications per NFVF call cycle (NFVF, 2022c). These latest audience development strategies are critical in shaping a sense of a national cinema that centres local audiences. However, they remain characterised by undertones of the "un-deservingness", with local audiences framed as being marked by a series of lacks. In the absence of a fundamental rethinking of what "audience" means in the context of a truly national cinema, the current efforts reproduce separatist developments of film culture for townships, rural areas, and other low-income settings. Under the surface, the film culture of mobile screenings is steeped in the coloniality of power. It is still part of the masquerade, even where it deploys the convenient slogans of access and equality. Indeed, to explore the nature of South African national cinema from a film consumption standpoint requires an understanding of the legacies of colonial-apartheid film

culture and the coloniality of power currently shaping industry trends in ways that reproduce marginalisation and inequality. As Mboti and Tomaselli (2015) opined, the notion of "cinema-going" needs to be problematised and deconstructed. Thus "cinema going" "is both a structured symbolic performance and an economic ritual that expresses privilege within a for-profit, earnings-based capitalist political economy. The notion of 'going' distances product and consumer and separates those who can 'go' from those who cannot" (Mboti & Tomaselli, 2018:6). To the extent that the NFVF's audience development "initiatives" are parachuted into communities, they are top-down approaches that "hypodermically inject townships with a miraculous drug called cinema-going culture" (Mboti & Tomaselli, 2018:7).

The need to imagine national cinema anew, particularly by addressing the questions of distribution and exhibition, came to the fore in a stark way with, as noted by Singh, the impact of Covid-19 on film exhibition. For example, Ster-Kinekor, which has 65% market share of the exhibition industry, had to go into business rescue as cinema attendance dropped. The monopolies of the past are still present. Hence, "film exhibition in South Africa primarily occurs in shopping mall complexes located in rich (mostly white) suburban areas" (NFVF, 2022a) while the "majority of black South African population resides in townships" (Mfolo & Janse Van Vuuren, 2022; Saks, 2010). This distance means transport and cinema ticket costs including snacks which are an expensive luxury reserved for those who can afford it. Therefore, it is more cost-effective for the average South African to watch television" (Mfolo & Janse Van Vuuren, 2022:62; Saks 2010). The ownership of South African cinema multiplexes is monopolised, with 99% of such structures in the hands of just two companies (Ster-Kinekor, which is part of the Primedia Group, and Nu Metro, a part of One-Fifty Capital) (Angelopulo & Potgieter, 2016; Mcleod, 2014). In addition, the distribution of films is controlled by these same two companies together with a third player, United International Pictures (UIP)" (Treffry-Goatley, 2010:48).

The breakdown of the distribution of money between producer and distributor/exhibitor for films that screen in theatres indicates that only films created for mass appeal such as Hollywood big-budget blockbusters reach the South African market and remain in that position due to often long and generous screening windows. Not only do local films compete poorly against international films but film productions with lower budgets remain on the margins of theatrical exhibition. For example, in 2015, Ster-Kinekor pulled the South African romantic comedy *Tell Me Sweet Something* (Omotoso, 2015) from their theatres three weeks after its initial release, resulting in an uproar in the local film fraternity. It was noted that Hollywood blockbusters

continue to receive preference because exhibitors generate more profit from these films (Sowetan, 2015). The move to limit *Tell Me Sweet Something*'s screening window came despite the historical plea from South African filmmakers that "a nation's cinema needs experimentation and funds to stimulate creative energy" (Mfolo & Jansen van Vuuren, 2022:62). Worse, the South African government has not bothered to intervene in this sector except by regulating the classification of films through the Film and Publication Board.

The continued dominance of Hollywood films in local cinema theatres reflects South Africa's lopsided participation, as a developing nation, in the global economy where the US maintains global hegemony and where the reach of its exports (including motion pictures) is boosted "through World Trade Organization and multilateral trade agreements'" (Treffry-Goatley, 2010:48). As Mboti and Tomaselli (2018:1) put it, control of film distribution routes translates into ultimate power "over what, how, where and why films are made". Ultimately, the control of film "routes" is lucrative business, as illustrated by the power and wealth of the Hollywood majors and conglomerates. Hence, of the 104 films released in South Africa between January and September 2021, "generating total gross box office earnings of R126.6 million" only nine South African films had gross box office revenues reaching R1.4 million. Of these, "four were independently released while three were State Theatre productions" (NFVF, 2022a:31). Thus, not only does South Africa produce significantly fewer films annually compared to Hollywood, but very few of those films make it to theatres. South African films only had 3% market share at the box office in 2023 (NFVF, 2022a:10). Furthermore, budgets for distribution costs are the lowest in the film subsidy scheme in South Africa. Currently, "most marketing allocations by exhibitors and distributors go to international marketing and promotion, and only very limited amounts go to local films. Improved financial incentives that relate to marketing costs could also encourage producers to focus on local audiences" (NFVF, 2014b:15). It is evident that national government has missed opportunities to address the hostile film distribution business and neglected to establish regulation that will stimulate audience film consumption. Box office ticket taxing of international films and imposing a requirement on exhibitors and distributors to carry an annual percentage of local films in their catalogue which can increase annually, could, for example, show how serious the state is about protecting the local industry. The South African government has yet to demonstrate the kind of clear-eyed support aimed at radically shifting industry systems and norms in favour of the "previously" marginalised, whether in production, exhibition or ownership of intellectual property. If the small market share of local film productions in cinemas is a result of the persistence of long-standing structured marginalisation of a specific demographic of South African filmmakers and businesses rather

than an indication of the failure of local, indigenous language films and their creators, it is – fundamentally – a sign of the absence of national cinema.

Solving the conundrum of distribution might require new ways of interacting and connecting with audiences. One of these avenues is tapping into the new opportunities offered by streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon, Disney, and Showmax. All the participants acknowledged that streamers and video-on-demand are significant growth areas that come with significant possibilities as well as limits. One result is that more films are being made. As Singh stated:

> The industry has grown tremendously with more films being made. Netflix … may be laying off staff but they had it very good for a long time. But Netflix is not the only streaming service out there. So, because you have got Amazon, you have got Disney, you got all these other streaming platforms. And they also sit on one content. So, although Netflix might end up commissioning less projects, you can also make your content available for all these other platforms that are now coming up.

The fast-changing exhibition landscape comes with its own variables. On the one hand, streaming on its own does not change much if filmmakers are not making stories that resonate with audiences. Mfolo and Jansen van Vuuren (2022:66) have noted that "if South African producers want to distribute more feature films through online distribution, they would have to make films that are contemporary and depict South Africans' daily lives as opposed to feature films that are most often set against the turbulent times of apartheid". On the other hand, there are significant regulatory issues that plague the streaming domain. The South African government is still grappling with how to regulate international streaming services such as Netflix. Erik Gruenwedel in *Media Play News* stated that, for example, the European Union "mandated foreign streaming services — starting in 2021 — carry at least 30% localized content, or risk undisclosed penalties. The new rules stipulated that if SVOD giants Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, HBO Max, Peacock and Paramount+ wanted to expand into Europe, they had to up their local content spending" (2022). A regulatory position that forces SVOD companies to adopt local languages and cultures while expanding their footprint in European markets. In South Africa, an online content regulation system (OCRS) is put in place for online film classification and regulation (FPB, 2025). Focus is placed on monitoring online platforms that disseminate FPB-prohibited content and enforcing tariffs on online content distribution platforms (FPB, 2025). Initially, Netflix, which has 1.8 million subscribers,[56] resisted the FPB's classification regulation rules, arguing that they wanted the "freedom to regulate content for

[56] MyBroadband, 2024, 15 Nov., "Surprise in Showmax and Netflix subscriber battle", https://mybroadband.co.za/news/broadcasting/570118-surprise-in-showmax-and-netflix-subscriber-battle.html [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

themselves and be free from government censorship. Furthermore, taxation of Netflix by the South African government is still unresolved" (Mfolo & Jansen Van Vuuren, 2022).



Figure 13: Overview of local content production on streamers

The entry of streaming platforms into the South African market enabled them to position their brands as distinct in terms of offering film content differently and shaping a taste for a particular type of film. (See Figure 13 for an overview of local content production.) The participants noted that streaming platforms boosted the production sector and the positioning of existing South African films by providing a platform for further and increased exposure to both South African and international audiences after the initial distribution cycle. Thus, Dumeko stated that:

> There is just a much more appealing convenient offering now with streamers. And the integration is a lot more. It is there a lot more, if you look at a lot of the channels that exist, a lot of the films that are produced, that find distribution on those local channels. If you look at what the SABC has done, for a lot of your low-budget films, we have a deal with SABC and SABC slate, where a lot of the local films are fine distribution there. It is a lot more integrated than it was before.

In 2020, Netflix launched its "Made in Africa" collection, a curated inventory of African films drawing from both recent and older, more well-known material (Fisher, 2022). The inventory included Netflix originals such as *Queen Sono* (Lediga 2020), which was made available globally, providing potentially greater access to the content for audiences while putting it behind a paywall (Fisher, 2022). Netflix later launched another collection, "Made by Africans,

Watched by the World", ostensibly aiming to promote stories about and by Africans (Fisher, 2022). This slogan implies that Netflix has moved locally made films by Africans from the shadows and periphery into a formal online distribution mode where they become more visible, accessible, and desirable.

To draw audiences by localising the film catalogue offering in a country, Netflix purchased the rights to traditional television content while developing a strategy to distinguish its content from competitors in the video-on-demand (VOD) sector. So-called "Netflix Originals" were part of this strategy, including films and series for which Netflix has bought the exclusive global distribution rights. Netflix also co-produces films in partnership with one or more producers in a specific territory, an arrangement that leads to the distribution rights for the country of production being retained by the producer(s) while Netflix retains exclusive rights for the rest of the world. Lastly, it streams content directly or indirectly produced by Netflix, for which they benefit from worldwide exclusivity (Taillibert & Cailler, 2020). The entry of Netflix in South Africa provides local filmmakers with opportunities and local audiences with alternative content and modes of consumption. At the same time, its business strategy contributes to a distribution culture that alienates many filmmakers while promoting and celebrating the select few as positive examples of what is possible when one "makes the cut" or lands a deal with them. Notably, many such deals "contain copyright clauses which does not allow the producer to sell their film to more than one streamer at the same time. This means that producers will only get a once-off fee from a streaming service (like Netflix) for their feature film (depending on the contract); they will not be able to exploit the film in other territories or platforms" (Mfolo & Jansen Van Vuuren, 2022:64). Netflix has aggressively positioned itself to "replace the interest of local television with its claim of 'a global TV network' with cultural diversity in its content" (Salsabila, 2021:15). It has also muscled its way into the traditionally exclusive distribution market in South Africa and has quickly been positioned to construct, influence and shape local audience preferences, expectations, and desires via a "Netflix narrative aesthetic" in features and serialised, episodic content. Findings showed that "some consumer habits had definitely changed over time as a large number (80%) of the respondents indicated that they preferred to watch films in the comfort of their home rather than to just go out. This can be attributed to the impacts of Covid-19 which have greatly affected consumer behaviours in relation to consumption of film" (NFVF, 2022a). However, the Netflix "revolution" is not just due to Covid-19. Rather, its approach to movie streaming has introduced a unique paradigm of content distribution that seems far more resilient. Netflix has increased its share of the South African market, investing capital into the local production of movies and

series franchises of American shows as well as streaming several old locally produced content made for television. An article in *BusinessTech* (2022:para 4-5) mentioned the following:

> Netflix said it has invested over R2 billion in South African productions over the last five years, resulting in 1,900 jobs being created in the process. In December 2020, more than 80 South African films and television series were available on Netflix. The company aims to create productions alongside local South African production studios such as Film Afrika, Gambit Film, Quizzical Pictures and Burnt Onion in an attempt to boost the South African film and TV industry.

On the surface, more content is being produced, and more filmmakers and producers have more work to do. However, comprehensive evaluation on the specific and definitive impacts of Netflix on the film culture of South Africa will take some time. How have individual filmmakers and service providers benefitted? What value is Netflix bringing? How much value is it taking away? Ultimately, Netflix benefits its shareholders and, particularly, the US economy. The net benefit for South Africa is still to be quantified. Furthermore, poverty and the digital divide mean that Netflix subscriptions are only accessible to a small fraction of South Africans. In the end, "access to films and film theatres is just as limited as access to data and technology, due to very similar constraints: the expense of theatre tickets, inaccessibility of cinema theatres, and lack of resources" (Karam, 2019: 155). The challenges with electricity mean that streaming is not always assured in marginalised areas with significant service problems. One also needs a compatible smartphone. Ultimately, the question may be posed, in the larger context of national priorities, about the importance of maintaining streaming subscriptions in a country with major problems such as poverty, crime, and inequality. One study found that Netflix programming "is of particular interest and appeal among the upper middle class and elite, who have the cultural capital to enjoy and appreciate" (Straubhaar et al., 2019:233). In places like Nigeria, Netflix's production and distribution strategy apparently "leaves many Nollywood content creators begging for acceptance when their content is adjudged inconsequential" (Omoera & Ojieson, 2022:128).

Ultimately, new and better ways of understanding and connecting with audiences might be crucial to unlocking the route to the market. Whereas a story like that of Nelson Mandela resonates – and sells – because he is a global icon, other stories resonate with audiences because they are inspired by ordinary people, situations or events – and thus their marketability is defined differently. Motaung drew attention to how *Dear Future Wife* resonated with audiences due to its story about ordinary people's lives and dreams. To draw audiences to this story, Motaung paid specific attention to casting, using it to play a significant role in shaping the target audience for the film while also influencing the distribution strategy. This turned out to

be a unique approach. In the case of Singh on the Mandela project, casting processes factored in the large scope of the film project, budget, global release and a biography about a real-life world-renowned former struggle hero. Thus:

> It is the Nelson Mandela biography, and he is one of the most revered people around the world and everybody wanted a bio gig on him. Authenticity and historical accuracy were key factors to which we paid close attention in order to ensure that the facts were not compromised. Also, you need to look at marketability and to sell the film. Like I mentioned, we started shooting it in May of 2012, and we went to the Toronto Film Festival with a promo reel and gave the bios a script. They read the script, they can read what's on the paper, they can look at the promo reel to see what the performances were like. And we sold most of the world (rights) based on that eight-minute promo reel. *Long Walk to Freedom* was a 35-million-dollar budget. And we got to be able to sell it for more than what you produce. So, generally, you sell it for less than what you actually spend on it. But what happens is, when you do sell a film, a revenue stream comes back. So, like I was saying for every ticket sold the producer gets some money back. For every DVD sold, the producer gets some money back. And it is sold to television or it is sold as a stream, the producer gets the money back. So, although you may not get your money up-front when you sell it initially, over time you will get your money back and hopefully more.

The Mandela film drew its success and marketability from "selling" the Mandela image at premier international film festivals, leveraging its big budget and scale to market widely and intensively to global audiences. *Dear Future Wife*, however, did not enjoy the same advantages and so targeted local television audiences by casting local stars such as Leleti Khumalo. Where *Long Walk to Freedom* utilised the tried-and-tested Hollywood star power strategy, *Dear Future Wife* used local stars.[57] In either case, stardom and star power are integral to the distribution strategy, with actors and actresses at the centre of film marketing and distribution strategies, creating buzz, fostering familiarity, and raising expectations. These stars pull in the crowds and are veritable marketing tools while adding "value to their brand" (Motsaathebe, 2015:455). As is the case in Korean cinema, "when consumers evaluate a film before they see it, they judge the film on the basis of the previous films in which the stars and directors have appeared" (Jung & Kim, 2010: 1037). Furthermore, local stars become the symbols and quintessential representatives of South Africanness and South African talent. Leleti Khumalo is a national asset compared to Naomi Harris, for example. In the Korean case, star power – specifically domestic star power – is considered very important in their film and entertainment industries, and has become increasingly salient since mid-1980s, with studies suggesting that the appearance of a star actor increases the probability of a hit or success by 15% to 19% (Jean, 2015; Jung & Kim, 2010). Indeed, "star power" is rated higher than, say, "director power". The

[57] IMDb (n.d.), "Dear Future Wife", https://www.imdb.com/title/tt34954685/ [Accessed: 11 Oct. 2025]

same tilt towards domestic star power is evident in *Dear Future Wife*. This contrasts with *Long Walk to Freedom*'s tilt to Hollywood star power.

The decision to opt for domestic or international stars is influenced by the producers' calculations about a film's potential marketability and translates into a distribution model. At the same time, it indicates divergent aesthetic and cultural visions about the direction in which a national cinema must develop. The South African film product context and market must grapple with this binary. Often, films utilise domestic stars. However, due to the dominance of Strategy 1, such stars are typically downgraded and bypassed for lead roles in high-budget local films, which prefer foreign stars in leading roles. Thus, "local stars argue that the trend of casting foreign stars defeats the purpose of investment, because the marginalisation or exclusion of local actors means they will not be able to fully compete in the international arena. This only leads to foreign stars further monopolising roles" (Motsaathebe, 2015: 446). Films with lower budgets such as *Dear Future Wife*, *Knuckle City*, and *Inxeba: The Wound* tend to use local actors and actresses. These generate strong local audience "network effects" and promote the viability of local talent. The KZN Film Commission's attempts to formalise a version of the star system in South Africa include proposals for the introduction of "favourable regulatory environment which allows actors to benefit from their work in the long run, thus enabling them to become more financially sustainable over time" (KZN Film Commission, 2020). Until regulations work in favour of local talent, and until the volumes of annual feature films increase, local actors and actresses remain economically marginalised "starving artists" with unsustainable careers. As Gumede said:

> I mean, for me it is always money. There is always money involved and artists are hungry. Money is shrinking, funding gets smaller and then obviously there is less for people to eat. So that's a challenge for artists. But also, I think film industry is not an easy industry to navigate because it is not a one-man show. So, what I am trying to say, there are so many people who have dreams, who have potential but might not be able to put things together.

Shifts in film consumption models occur, such as streaming and made-for-TV films which are fortunately providing more opportunities for the visibility of local talent. Yet, the elephant in the room remains the role of government financing in building and sustaining a national cinema. This cannot be done by Netflix. This is because it is not an issue of how many billions of cash can be thrown at the problem. Rather, it is part of the historical and political imperative of nation-building encoded in the South African coat of arms.

The binary about whether to go with local or global film talent extends into how government agencies market the local film industry as film-friendly. On the one hand, government film

financing and prefinancing include conditions that require filmmakers to help promote social cohesion and nation building, local heritage, as well as locations in the provinces where filmmakers received funding, indicating a focus on Strategy 2. However, in as far as the promotion of specific locations forms part of governments' strategy to boost tourism in various provinces, framed as contributing to the growth of the local economies, Strategy 1 dominates. Thus, KZN Film's mission is "To promote and market the province as a global destination for film production; to develop, promote and market, locally and internationally, the film industry in the province; and to facilitate investment in the film industry in the province".[58] The emphasis on international industry attraction is best captured in the message from the Mayor of Cape Town to film industry professionals from around the world in a government publication, stating (Creative Locations Cape Town & the Western Cape, 2019):

> (W)e have been mandated to deliver on the promise of building the opportunity city of the future; and the film, TV, commercial and stills sector are exactly the kind of business we want to continue to attract to this one-of-a-kind city. The magnificence of Cape Town has long attracted the creative industries, lured by our sunny climes, breath-taking architecture and diverse talent base, and we urge you to use this unique locations register to ease the process of location scouting. We have created this for you. A living, evolving asset directory that provides you with the essential information you need to make your shoot a success.

Thus, the promotion of film locations and world-class infrastructure and services forms part of the normative development of film-friendliness for the international film community and fraternity. Local filmmakers and film services are often omitted from these strategies, left to make do with crumbs and relegated to the margins. While the glossy marketing of these initiatives positions local film locations as internationally attractive with world-class services, most local film services by the "previously" marginalised are still marginalised. They are pre-disqualified by default unless employed through DTIC rebate requirements.

The tension between local and international, and between Strategy 1 and Strategy 2, extends to how locations are positioned, leveraged, and promoted in given films. Films take place in narrative worlds that are often located in real geographic spaces, with story worlds drawing their symbolic characteristics or features from real-life places. Landscapes become a character. Cinema depicts places and utilises artefacts that are symbolic, meaningful, and rooted in specific cultures and contexts. The use of buildings, architecture, heritage monuments, law-enforcement institutions and so on sets up story worlds laden with meanings and symbolism

[58] KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority, n.d., "Tell Your Story", https://visitkzn-sa.com/film/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

that do not only resonate with the audience but enforce beliefs, myths, values, ideas, ideals and worldviews. Through the depiction of space, notions of citizenship, belonging and identity – and also the national – are invoked, claimed, affirmed, contested or challenged. Furthermore, the construction of these narrative worlds provides particular views and stereotypes about spaces and their racialised, gendered and class-coded inhabitants (Ellapen, 2007). On the other hand, studies indicate that films positioning local spaces on local or global screens can have a positive and negative influence on perceptions of a place or people (Hoffmann, 2015). The media, including films, are "influential at promoting, confirming and reinforcing images, opinions and the destination identity, and play an important role in the image construction of tourist destinations" (Campo et al., 2011:137). The way "in which the destination is represented in films and television series can have an enormous influence worldwide in perpetuating a particular image and vision of the country" (Campo et al., 2011:137). The image formed by the movie industry "often represents an added value for certain destinations because it works as a real tool for promotion at an international level and as a factor that induces travel. The representations and images of tourist destinations developed through the mass media, such as cinema, television and literature play a truly significant role which influences in the process of vacation spot decision" (Campo et al., 2011:137).

Through film, audience perceptions of local spaces and landscapes are shaped or challenged through the creative choices made by writers and directors to serve particular narratives and, even, ideologies and ways of seeing the world. Through the eyes of film directors, spaces and the relationship that fictional characters have with them provide insight into the different ways spaces are constructed, the realities and politics of space, and the themes of belonging, marginalisation, negotiated belonging, and transactional belonging. *Inxeba: The Wound*, for example, while challenging the perception of the cultural practice of *ibhoma,* also proposed "other" ways of seeing the spaces and landscapes in which the relationships of black young men develop and how communities relate with such relationships and places. *Dear Future Wife* used locations that promoted Durban as a vibrant coastal city, inspiring "hope" and "dreams", and the township as home where characters are confronted by seemingly insurmountable financial struggles. How "black spaces" are represented is an important marker of how the building blocks of national cinema are being negotiated. Black spaces are typically denoted as "geographical areas, historically designated as spaces that are exclusively living spaces for the poor or the underclass in most societies around the world" (Selekane, 2019:36). The anti-racist philosopher Bell Hooks (1992) argued that, in the United States, contemporary popular culture often portrays the poor and their living spaces through negative tropes, stereotypes and

representations. South African films fare no better. For example, the cinematic representation of the South African township in *Tsotsi* (2005) and *Wooden Camera* (2003) relied on mostly negative tropes and representation of the space, showing frames that were stuck in the past (Ellapen, 2007). In a truly *national* cinema, the representation of place and space in films forms part of how national identities are constructed, framed, and located, including whether "our people" and their experiences and realities are represented with integrity, complexity and nuance.

The film services framework, as noted, is "concerned with coordinating, integrating, and facilitating connections among the different parts of the film industry and other arts-related industries" (Tomaselli & Mboti, 2013:14). In emphasising inputs and interrelatedness, it permits the boundaries between industries to be crossed, allowing film and television production to be placed alongside related cultural product and entertainment industries such as music, games, and multimedia on the one hand and information and communication technology on the other. The film industry is thus positioned as a "provider of valued inputs into other creative industries, the service sector, and ICT industries – variously urban entertainment businesses such as theme parks, digital content and applications industries, games industry, tourism, and even real estate and place marketing" (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005:56). A national cinema depends on this interrelatedness. However, there is a fundamental problem in the South African case: the South African film industry is structurally and heavily *centralised*. As Ribeiro noted, "I think I would say we definitely don't have a representative film industry. I think it is very centralised, especially around Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town. It is the only three spaces that you actually see production happening." The top three South African provinces with a significant economic contribution to the national GDP remain Gauteng (33,1%), KwaZulu-Natal (15,9%), and Western Cape (13,9%) (Economic Statistics South Africa, 2023). These are also the biggest contributors to the South African national film industry's GDP. Coincidentally, these three areas were also the centres of the colonial and apartheid economy, with the rest of South Africa providing a supporting economic role. The best cities and better infrastructure were developed exclusively for a minority. Today, the rest of the six provinces of South Africa occupy lower rankings in economic activity and contribution to the national GDP and significantly lack economically robust film, communication technology and multimedia services. These deficiencies force individuals and film enterprises to migrate to provinces with better business activity, further exacerbating the "film backwardness" of the other six provinces. Thus, in the words of Dumeko:

> If you look at South Africa and the problems it has had particularly in the last 30 years of democracy, had films been a proper area of focus, this country right now would be far

> ahead than what it is now. Because at the basis, your fundamental issues would have been solved, such as employment. You wouldn't have a situation where people are leaving other provinces in the country to come and work in Gauteng and Durban and Cape Town and because there is no work there, you would have established film studios in places like the North West, in places like the Northern Cape, for example. There is a huge international market for Westerns. You can shoot a Western easily in the North West, you can shoot a Western easily in the Northern Cape. You drive the economy of those provinces. Highlighted is the continuing failure to deliver or develop internationally attractive film services in other provinces. The post-apartheid inclusion of the black majority in formerly "white-only" areas, infrastructure and social services compel the democratic government to fix a "congested transport system, overburdened infrastructure, housing shortages, residential segregation and environmental degradation" (Ahmed, 2024). The result is an unequal and unevenly developed national economy.

Cities generally "lead in innovation, productivity and job creation, but the economic benefits from urbanisation are not automatic". This is because there are significant costs to agglomeration which demand investment in the built environment for cities to be prosperous and liveable (UNDESA, 2018). Also, as Lemanski (2007:458) noted, "cities can also be problematic: they have the capacity to exclude, to marginalise, to reinforce patterns of inequality, and to create insiders and outsiders". The problem in South Africa is that the normative film services framework is more suited to "developed" cities and nations that are *already* better equipped to promote their film industry on the basis of the services they provide through existing production and infrastructure to other industries and sectors of society. As Moodley opined:

> In any of the other provinces, new filmmakers – there is little opportunity. They just don't know when to start … The other provinces are fairly lagging behind. The Eastern Cape is in the early stages of development of their film commission. The Gauteng Film Commission had been around, but it has sometimes been riddled in controversy and issues. So, I think what is also problematic is that although these film commissions exist, it seems to be that they operate in isolation from each other rather than collaboratively and collectively towards a common purpose which doesn't then develop a national film industry footprint.

Gauteng, KZN, and the Western Cape, for example, already enjoy a stronger presence and activity of other creative and ICT businesses, while finance, real estate, commerce and personal services industries are leading provincial GDP contributors.[59] On the other hand, provinces such as Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Northern Cape, Free State, North West and Eastern Cape lack the same level of economic activity. Notably Durban, although part of the top three South African film industry economies, has "limited participation in national production and more

[59] StatSA,. 2023, Provincial gross domestic product: experimental estimates 2022, https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=D0441.1&SCH=73625 [Accessed: 30 Dec 2025].

weakly developed advertising, corporate video, and digital media activity, (and thus) is going to be similarly vulnerable to national and international market fluctuations" (O'Regan, 2018:21). Furthermore, Durban will continue to compete against South Africa's two "global cities" to "attract peripatetic film and television production and creative workers; just as the Gold Coast and Brisbane compete unequally with Sydney and Melbourne in attracting and maintaining a creative workforce" (O'Regan, 2018:21).

The film cities and film services logic would require that the *other* peripheral cities and provinces of South Africa be capacitated with necessary skills, technology, infrastructure, and financial institutions to form part of the international film cities of the world such as Cape Town, and Johannesburg. As Moodley stated, "I think what is also emerging is just the newer narratives that are being uncovered. Even in provinces where cinema is emerging there are new stories being told and I think that is fascinating. *Cinema doesn't always have to be located in Johannesburg or Cape Town to find its story angle*" (emphasis added). The disproportionate focus on Gauteng and the Western Cape, and to some extent KZN, in the film services sector reference what Dlamini et al. (2023:5) have called a surprising "neglect of geography". Thus:

> The neglect of geography and the influence of the dysfunctional urban form on the economy is surprising considering the centrality of *space* to apartheid, and its concerted efforts developing structural hardships for non-white population by separating them from economic opportunities in the cities. In other words, there is a risk that the country's challenges and possibilities are misdiagnosed without a spatial lens.

The "neglect of geography" speaks to the continuation of "separatist" development where provincial governments selectively determine areas for strategic economic investment with targeted returns and benefits while other areas are seemingly perceived as less worthy of this kind of investment (Westaway, 2012). The colonial and apartheid legacies of South African cities continue to influence the determination of priority economic growth industries versus so-called non-priority industries such as arts, culture and sports. An example of the "neglect of geography" is the Eastern Cape. As Westaway (2012:116) has noted, "the Eastern Cape was demarcated in 1994, as a separate part of the former, much larger, Cape Province. The eastern half contains two former Bantustans, the Transkei and Ciskei, while the western half falls within former white South Africa, the former Cape Provincial Administration areas." Today, the Eastern Cape remains virtually segregated with its vast rural areas experiencing the continuation of extreme poverty, inequality and unemployment compared to the Western Cape.[60] Large numbers of people relegated to rural and township life in these provinces

[60] South Africa Gateway, n.d., "Mapping Poverty in South Africa", https://southafrica-

(including Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal) have poor access to quality education, health services, economic opportunities and decent living conditions. This type of "discriminatory spatial perspective" reflects contemporary capitalism, which "thrives on uneven development and social marginalisation" (Westaway, 2008:80). Unfortunately, "all spheres of government" in the Eastern Cape have been caught up in this distorted thinking "in their respective programmes and interventions" (Westaway, 2012:121). Until such distorted thinking and the paradigm of uneven development have been fixed, the shift towards a national cinema will remain fragmented and schizophrenic. The problem is not just neglected geography but a *geography of neglect*.

The shift towards developing film services and film cities, which falls neatly within discourse on "global cities", is a puzzle that must be resolved in the context of the geography of neglect. Where do the priorities lie? For example, as part of the film services strategy to promote South Africa as a film production destination, a team of South African film and media organisation representatives as well as creatives, including Brand South Africa (through its Global South Africans Programme), the NFVF, IDC, Wesgro, the Durban FilmMart (DFM), KZN Film Commission and selected local filmmakers attend the annual European Film Market in Berlin. The intention, ostensibly, is to establish international relations that result in collaboration, co-production and exploration of untapped areas and "shape the sector and position South Africa as a film destination of choice by having a presence in, platforms such as the Berlinale."[61] It is one thing to facilitate the inclusion of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban on the roster of "global cities" that must attract, get and retain their fair share of global film productions and the attendant economic benefits. It is another thing to solve the unfinished business of colonialism and apartheid which entrenches inequality and poverty. Global cities, for example, operate through "increased social and spatial polarisation" and "aspirations for global competitiveness are problematic for cities in the developing world where poverty is widespread and resources are limited" (Lemanski, 2007:448). This is particularly the case in South Africa, where the legacy of apartheid informs the strong present-day infrastructural divides and inequality. It is inconceivable how aspirations for global competitiveness or excellence at the Berlinale can be achieved without these persistent divides being addressed. Continuing these trips to Berlin in the context of current structural deficiencies and divides constitutes a

info.com/people/mapping-poverty-in-south-africa/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

[61] Brand South Africa, 2024, "The Future of African filmmaking takes centre stage at the 74TH Berlinale: European Film Market", https://brandsouthafrica.com/161964/news-facts/the-future-of-african-filmmaking-takes-centre-stage-at-the-74th-berlinale-european-film-market/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

geography of neglect. Lemanski (2007) even wondered whether cities in South Africa (and more broadly, cities of the Global South) "should perhaps be avoiding the drive for globalised status is considered. But if so, what other choice exists in the global milieu?" (Lemanski, 2007:448). The larger question, in the context of this study, is whether the local film industry can afford to live without Hollywoodisation and what that would imply at the level of film strategy.

The geography of neglect is fed and sustained by shallow and insincere attempts at transformation. How is it that, three decades later, the patterns of the past still dominate? Cultural and economic life in South Africa is still marred by the echoes of *Die Voortrekkers*. For Masilela (2009:2), one of the foundational challenges that plagues the South African cinema and thus gets in the way of the creation of a genuinely national cinema is "unrepresentativeness", pointing his finger squarely at "the unrepresentativeness of the cultural domination of white South Africans in film culture". In Masilela's view, what sustains and reproduces colonial and apartheid like conditions in South African cultural life is the unbroken dominance "not only of diehard upholders of the apartheid system but also of white liberals and progressives as well, in their roles as academics, as critics, as anthologists, as impresarios, as gallery owners and publishers and as consultants of those who own virtually all the means of cultural production" (Masilela 2009:2). Masilela's critique is targeted at interventions that preserve rather than disrupt structural inequalities. In the production, distribution, and exhibition of films, interventions either mirror the past closely or display characteristic distortion and schizophrenia that sustain uneven development. Ultimately, the South African government's adoption of "neo-liberalism has gradually managed to naturalise a notion of politics that is dismissive of any radical thinking questioning the current status quo privileging the West" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:16). Mboti and Tomaselli (2015:627) have questioned the wisdom of the NFVF's strategy of attempting to "unclog" distribution bottlenecks by "taking a select number of local films to Cannes to promote their films at the NFVF booth, handing out booklets to delegates and screening short trailers" when the market at home remains fragmented, closed off to many local filmmakers, while many films gather dust, never having been seen by South Africans. Thus, the vision to create a truly transformed distribution sector can only emerge under a "revolutionary call for us all to 'turn over a new leaf' … abandoning the 'European game' on the grounds that it is dehumanising and dismembering other human beings" (Dovey & Sendra, 2023:278).

Theme 2: Questioning and Defining South Africanness and Transformation in Film Production

The second theme that emerged is built on the first, and expands the questioning and defining of South Africanness itself while assessing the criterion for transformation towards a national cinema in a South Africa context. As Singh asked, "Is a film considered to be national film if it tells an indigenous story or is it deemed to be a national film if it has a cast and crew that are all citizens of the same country?" The question suggests that we can begin to think about what constitutes a South African film production (or what does not) in two ways: First, through the nature, form and content of the narrative and, second, through the production process. This second dimension, notably, refers directly to a film services approach. Both dimensions are interconnected, although such interconnection must be teased out. The first dimension, about narrative, touches on the "South Africanness" of stories and whether there is or could be such a thing as *a South African story*. One approach that emerged from the data is that "South Africanness" is an identity expressed in the narrative of the political struggles that gave birth to the "new" South Africa, as noted in Anant Singh's production notes. Hence:

> Before *Long Walk to Freedom* was published in 1995, Mandela invited Singh to look at the manuscript. "It took me the weekend to read and I immediately said to him: 'There is a significant movie here, I have to make it!' When the book hit international agencies two months later, the offers came in from Hollywood and a bidding contest began. Singh recollects that Madiba said: '*This is a South African story*, and I want you to tell it" (emphasis added).

Thus, an important dimension of "South Africanness" is the adoption of the *mythos* of Nelson Mandela and the "long walk to freedom" of South Africa. After all, Nelson Mandela is the founding father of the new multiracial democratic South Africa. So, South African stories have Nelson Mandela – not so much the person as the myth and idea – in the background and foreground as an animating force. That is, Mandela embodies the *values* of the new South Africa, what has come to be known as "rainbowism" (Tavernaro-Haidarian 2019). At his inauguration on 10 May 1994, Mandela restated that "We understand it still that there is no easy road to freedom", while announcing the key punchline on which such a nation was to be built: "a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist" South Africa. The key words were unity, freedom, democracy, non-racialism, and non-sexism. "We must therefore", Mandela said, "act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation building, for the birth of a new world." This mythos is captured in the new South African coat of arms adopted on 27 April 2000, to symbolise the post-1994 nation's "values" of democracy and diversity (see Figure 14). The motto is *! ke e: /xarra //ke*, which translates to "diverse people unite". Fundamentally, *unity in diversity* is a constitutional provision. It is then up to t inequality in

cities he filmmakers of the new South Africa – such as Chadwick, Qubeka, Trengove and Motaung – to define and enunciate these "rainbowist" values. Whether they do so, how they do so, and how successfully they do so in their films, lies outside the scope of this study. What seems fairly straightforward, so far, is how rainbowism appears to mirror the assertion that "in essence, national cinema is a medium for showcasing a people's identity, history, and culture" (Ezepue, 2021:22).



Figure 14: South Africa's Coat of Arms (Source: The Presidency, National Symbols)

The rainbow nation is a concept that defines South Africa *after* apartheid, nominally referred to as *post-apartheid*. Both the concepts of rainbow nation and post-apartheid seek to signify that apartheid has ended and a new South Africa is at hand. As Mandela said, "for the birth of a new world". Thus, the founding template of a Mandelaist South African nation – a South Africa in the image of Mandela – is that of the so-called "rainbow nation" as first enunciated by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Buqa, 2015: 1). Indeed, one of the first, evocative and memorable attempts to define the South African nation after 1994 came from Tutu. The prevailing idea and belief were that, "through a commitment to the ideals of national reconciliation and the Rainbow Nation, all of society's historical problems would be overcome. National reconciliation and the idea of the Rainbow Nation were generally regarded as the main pillars of social cohesion and integration" (Mathebe, 2002:139, in Buqa, 2015:1). This meant that the black population with all the ethnic divisions, Indians, Coloureds and European colonial settlers, had to *reconcile* and see themselves as a *new* people of a new nation, united

in diversity, national identity, aspirations, multicultural, accepting and with equal rights (Mokoena, 2019; Yende & Yende, 2021). However, the assumption of a harmonious coming together of races into one new diverse nation should, as argued by Habib (1996), be seen as misleading because it focuses on race while omitting dividing lines such as class and other socio-economic variables that require concerted government attention to build a truly democratic society that works for all. Habib (1996) argues that there would be a need for "a holistic analysis on the prospects for consolidating democracy" which would include all the relevant variables. Ultimately, rainbowism as the underlying ideology of the rainbow nation metaphor becomes meaningful when accompanied by tangible results of transformation; otherwise, it remains a meaningless, utopian ideal. Tavernaro-Haidarian (2019: 2) argues that "realising the concept of the rainbow nation in its full legal and intended sense requires cultivating a related common identity from which, then, the necessary coordination of political will can take shape". Without a cultivated common identity, the kind that influences the coordination of political will to create change that results in equality and shared lived experiences, the intended purpose of the rainbow nation is not realised. Habib (1996) warned that if rainbowism is a myth and electioneering tool instrumentalised by politicians, then "the racial character of the ownership structure of the South African economy has and will continue to be a stark reminder of apartheid and its inequities" (Habib, 1996: 19).

Over 30 years into democracy, the rainbow nation remains a question mark largely because unity and equality, as envisioned by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former president Nelson Mandela, are a pipe dream. The structure of the economy remains racially divided, with poverty and unemployment getting worse (Crouthamel, 2021). The reminders of apartheid Habib (1996) warned of largely remain. Indeed, the rainbow nation discourse was surreptitiously modified in the early 2000s, with a gradual move away from unity and a new emphasis on diversity in ways that "acknowledged the persistent inequalities and yielded to critics of Rainbowism, while still adhering to the Rainbowist ideology" (Crouthamel, 2021: 39; Slade, 2015). The rainbow nation is now perceived as a dominant "myth and counter myth" in the construction of a new post-apartheid identity (Slade, 2015, "Abstract" para. 2). On a cultural level, to counter the dominant apartheid ideology of racial division, mass media is used as a tool to propagate messages aligned with the rainbowist ideology and discourse where new meanings and signs are constructed to denaturalise those constructed under apartheid, a "resemiotisation of the South African cultural landscape" (Slade, 2015: 10). The South African film industry is also experiencing the long-run influence of the myth-making process. Slade

(2015) highlighted the effect on funding processes as film projects and narratives aligned with the dominant myth receive financial support, a process detrimental to those filmmakers and film projects that do not fall neatly within the rainbowist construct. Slade (015) argues that this myth-making process can be seen in "cinematic representation and reification predominantly in comedy films such as *White Wedding* (2009), *Jozi* (2010) and *Fanie Fourie's Lobola* (2013) as well as the very popular work of comedian Leon Schuster" (Slade, 2015: 20). These films utilised humour in dealing with cultural and racial clashes between South African citizens in ways that trivialised the actual realities of the divisions and their underlying meanings of superiority and inferiority.

Thus, the values and characteristics that make South Africa a rainbow nation, "unity in diversity", are not only aspirational; they form part of democratic South Africa's "cultural priority" (Slade, 2015:20). On the surface, this is the *long walk to a common citizenship*, away from the entrenched systemic divisions of colonialism and apartheid. The essence of the NFVF Act of 1997 is about using film for nation-building and redress, as the NFVF's Funding Policy states clearly (NFVF, 2022c:15):

> The NFVF is mandated to create, develop, and promote the film and video industry in South Africa. The NFVF does so largely by empowering, nurturing, and creating opportunities for South Africans in the audio-visual ecosystem through our funding policy, which supports emerging, developing, and established members of the film industry. It primarily addresses and encourages the provision of opportunities for disadvantaged persons to redress historical imbalances in enabling infrastructure and the distribution of skills and resources. Grants are available both to commercially viable content as well as *content that is dedicated primarily to nation-building and social cohesion* (emphasis added).

On the surface, *rainbowism* in film production is the domain of Strategy 2. If this criterion is adopted, then Chadwick's *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* is a quintessential South African story since it captures the founding myths and ideals of the new South Africa, showing how hard-won its freedoms and democracy are and extolling its multiracial, united, diverse, and non-sexist ideals. At the same time, it is also the least South African story because it was produced and directed by a white British filmmaker. Finally, as with all ideals and myths, the problem comes with interpretation – in this case, with interpreting what a "rainbow nation" is in practice. Complicating the "rainbow nation" mythos, for example, is the fact that the last three decades since 1994 have shown that the new South Africa has significant unfinished business. As argued in Chapter 2 and 3, the concept of "previously marginalised" is a contradiction since the previously marginalised are still marginalised today. By and large, colonialism and apartheid are still with us. As such, the mythos itself is not even complete and

is still in the process of becoming. Thus, *Inxeba: The Wound*, *Dear Future Wife*, and *Knuckle City*, in their own way, capture not just the mythos of a "rainbow nation" but its complexity and contradiction. The complexity in Singh's question about cast and crew is in reconciling the reality of filmmaking and the "unity in diversity" ideal. Unity in diversity, just like unity, reconciliation, and multiracialism, is complicated by history, social hierarchy, capitalism, funding, and even global politics. Locally, most black filmmakers must compete for limited NFVF subsidies while Afrikaans films thrive via commercial, private, and corporate synergies and sponsorship. Regionally, there are tensions in processes that should be collaborative, especially in the use of foreign film services, locations, and cast (Ibbi, 2013; Ureke & Tomaselli, 2017). Singh's question hints at an underlying discomfort in the delineation invoked by *national* in an industry that thrives on unequal collaborative local and global networks, hierarchies, and workflows. Nations in the Global North, the "core zones of the capitalist world economy", continue to enjoy unequal relations with those in the Global South (Grosfoguel, 2002:206). These core and periphery relations also emerge in filmmaking and the distribution, quality, and quantity of film services.

Practically, the question by Singh echoes existing contradictions in film policies that loosely define or qualify a film production as South African while leaving significant gaps for foreign Global North film productions and their distribution networks that influence and dominate South African cinema. Just as the rainbow nation ideal is burdened with contradictions, so is South African film policy which says all the right things on paper but continues to alienate local filmmakers and film services in practice. The distribution duopoly neglects audiences for local film and instead strengthens appetite for international box office fare, deeming it commercially viable and more beneficial to the South African economy (Mboti & Tomaselli, 2018). Tuomi's study of the South African film industry (2007) concluded that "part of the industry's failure to produce a thriving national cinema could be attributed to a misalignment of policy emphasis. With production being favoured with few to no existent policies on distribution and exhibition, the author questions the prejudice of emphasizing production as a vital component of film success." Thus, most South African filmmakers already operate from a position of weakness and even the commercially viable routes to audiences are already ring-fenced for Hollywood first. Ezepue (2021:21) opined, "rather than improve on their national film policies, national film industries are emulating the US style of filmmaking, producing less culturally specific films that will appeal to a wider and global audience base". Again, the tension between using film for economic growth and commercial imperatives, on the one hand, and using film for fostering a common citizenship, on the other hand, re-emerges. Where does value lie?

The complexity of defining a South African film in practice is encapsulated in the comment by Motaung regarding what is authentically South African. What counts as authentically South African? Motaung provided the example of a South African who grows up in exile and returns to democratic South Africa post-1994. This person then makes a film about their experience. Motaung asked, "What is authentic? If someone grew up their whole life in London in exile and then they come to South Africa and then make a film, is that story *not* a South African story of their experience?" Is a quintessentially South African "story" only that "told by people that are within the country"? These are questions about identity and belonging, going to the heart of the question: Who is South African? What makes a South African? Further complicating the matter of South Africanness is the constitutional preamble which, in search of a ground for common citizenship after the divisions of apartheid, stated that *South Africa belongs to all who live in it*. In what way exactly does South Africa belong to all who live in it? Is the film by the ex-exile from London a South African film if the experiences it captures are those of a person who did not live in South Africa? The solution seems to be to make South African identity as open and diverse as possible – the direct opposite of apartheid hierarchies and denial of citizenship. Motaung suggested that even the narratives under the democratic dispensation should still speak to the complexities of colonial and apartheid identities and identity formations. The South Africa that is united in diversity cannot escape its history. Instead, it must come to terms with it. Thus, a truly South African film project enables the exploration and articulation of complex identities and experiences, tying and linking them to the *national*. The development of such a cinematic and artistic aesthetic and signature necessarily remains a work in progress and in a state of becoming. This is not only because what constitutes South Africanness has always been contested and has remained contested but also because such bold explorations go beyond what is merely economically viable. Rather, they should exemplify how the notion of authenticity is simultaneously subjective and critical in shaping national discourse on identity and cultural representation. At the same time, dominant ideas, societal values and norms reinforce or challenge what counts as normatively and authentically South African. The diverse nature of South Africanness means that the project to define what is authentically South African can be useful or a slippery slope. Rainbowism, for example, can easily – and indeed has – become a slogan. As far as diversity is concerned, the film industry can utilise the concept of authenticity to promote the development of stories rooted in valuing the distinct cultures, languages, people and places that filmmakers speak about or seek to represent on screen, with a nod to "accuracy, fidelity, and verisimilitude" (Sexton & Lees, 2021:200). That is, the concept can be coded afresh to capture the zeitgeist. Storytelling, through

careful construction and codification of narrative worlds, language, characters and other creative devices such as costume and accents, can spawn new cinematic worlds, styles, and conventions. Furthermore, these devices can be useful tools in the hands of the marginalised to resist assumed and constructed socio-cultural invisibility, voicelessness, and powerlessness (Hua, 2013). It therefore matters who is behind the camera, who crafts film policy, and who funds the films. The most authentic South African stories are those that enunciate a specific idiom about history, politics, society, culture, and the economy. Rainbowism is one such vague attempt to name and articulate this idiom. Central to the idiom is that films and film policy capture those experiences of South Africa that recognise where the country has been, where it is now, and what possibilities there are for its future.

Authentic South African stories, it seems, include those that capture the real-life experiences of the so-called "previously marginalised". Such narratives are more than just creative works. Rather, even in the way the films are made, they are artistic acts of epistemic disobedience or, at least, epistemic disruption of the current limiting and imposed production standards. The narratives also grapple with the nuances of living with intersecting post-apartheid identities and their multiple contradictions. Not only is black life heterogeneous, complex, and completely unlike dominant stereotypes, but it disrupts the glib expectations of rainbowism. It is important that South African identity go beyond slogans of "unity in diversity" towards a richer, fuller, and more humanising transformation. That is, it must move towards crystallising into a national culture. Thus, narratives will show "previously marginalised" women and men (and the non-binary) to "become their own image-makers as writers, artists, activists, creating more complex positive self-representations of their own subjectivities and communities as counter-stories and counter-memories to the various stereotypical images of the previously oppressed as produced by the mass media and mainstream society" (Hua, 2013: 31).

Authenticity, being complex and multifaceted, can then be traced in a variety of social, cultural, political and economic contexts. It can be seen, for instance, in the daily, mundane experiences and memories that inform childhood and adulthood growing up *in* South Africa, growing up South African, coming of age in South Africa, and *being* South African. It can be seen in aspects such as the types of music that one listened to growing up, where or with whom they listened to the music, neighbourly relations, beauty, fashion, hair care and the politics of hair, diet, family relationships and dynamics, religion and religious activities, and so on. All of these coalesce to make plural South African identities. Such identities, including the "genres", content, and forms of black life evolve, rather than being static and formulaic. *Mandela: Long*

Walk to Freedom, *Inxeba: The Wound*, *Dear Future Wife*, and *Knuckle City* therefore try, in their different and multifarious ways, to exemplify this evolution and dynamism of *being South African*, including its nuances, contradictions, richness, limits and possibilities.

What counts as authentically South African, thus, is always in a state of becoming and is always being negotiated and renegotiated. It changes and looks different from one film production to the other. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has recalled that she was once told by a Johns Hopkins Professor that her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, was not *authentically* African (2008). This was because the "characters were educated and middle class. They drove cars, they were not starving" (Adichie, 2008:48). The assumption that Africans look, act and speak like this, or do not look, act or speak like this, reflects decades, centuries even, of an *image of Africa* (Achebe, 2023). Such an image feeds, and is fed by, racist stereotypes. That such preconceived, lazy, and uneducated Western perceptions of Africa and its people exist and persist at all shows the importance of widening the pool of African stories and African filmmakers whose diverse experiences, visions and aspirations make up the corpus of "Africa" and its multiplicities. Authentic storytelling for and by Africans in a global context is necessarily a negotiation and a contestation of being, identity, aspirations, and belonging. Filmmakers, like writers and other artists, thus find themselves at the frontline of a battle to create "authentic" narratives that either raise or diminish Africa. It is not a coincidence that many of the stories that travel and find positive reception with Western funders and audiences reproduce and regurgitate stereotypes about Africa and Africans. Truly national cinemas truthfully capturing the richness of African life and the issues that Africans grapple with are yet to find an international niche and thus are often crowded out by stereotypical fare. This reality must be seen as a question of power (or lack of it), beginning with the roles that Africans play as writers, set designers, music composers, directors and producers. Such a reality can and must change. Moodley's assessment of the film about the assassination of Dulcie September is an attempt to make a case for such rich and nuanced South African narratives that also travel well and make an impression on international audiences:

> (C)inematically it was just a profound piece of work, a really incredibly well-researched work, incredibly well presented as piece of cinema as well artistically. And it's played to a wide of range of audiences both in South Africa and abroad, and it has also had an impact in the sense it has reopened a discussion around the assassination, around Dulce September. And I think when any kind of work that stems out of our national histories and deals with those kind of issues can have that kind of impact, then it is a really worthwhile investment. But on a fiction level I think, the work of Jamil Qubeka is incredible.

Thus, joy, hope, healing, love, displacement, yearning, belonging and memories are all themes

in the African stories of self-fashioning, being, belonging, and identity. African films must not be strait-jacketed about what constitutes "African" subject matter.

Not surprisingly, a critical tool for constructing national cinema is *language*. Gumede described it as an important thematic area that a film festival programme can celebrating. However, Ribeiro highlighted the importance of a unified market, but said that "*the different languages … further segregate the market"*. In South Africa, language has historically been a flashpoint. As noted in Chapter 1 and 2, only English and Dutch were designated official languages at the founding of the South African nation in 1910. African languages were ignored, sidelined, and marginalised (Cakata, 2015). Filmmakers are quite aware of this language debate and deficit. In the new South Africa, the pool of national languages has been significantly broadened – from two to eleven (see Section 6 of the Constitution). This enlarging of the pool of official languages is a pillar of the nation-building and transformation project. However, does the reality indicate whether all these languages are now visible and treated equally? The facts suggest otherwise. For example, the first Venda-language film in South Africa was *Elelwani* (Wa Luruli, 2012) (see Figure 15). The progress has been slow, sparse, and uneven. Of the five objectives of the NFVF, as set out in Section 3 of the NFVF Act of 1997, none refer to language. This is a fundamental omission.

Yet, interestingly, five of the six listed purposes of the NFVF internal *Language Policy* (2016) speak to the importance of language in filmmaking, namely:

- Promote and support the development and frequency of use of indigenous languages as a means of communication in the audio-visual industry and content development
- Contribute to creating a culture of language and cultural tolerance
- Maintain and stimulate filmmaking in all South African languages in our country
- Promote the usage of all South African languages (including sign language) in television programmes and on the screens; and
- Promote and develop the quality of multilingual films, among others, by means of developing scriptwriting, directing and developing written and spoken communication in films in all official languages, as well as in other media .

In South Africa, unity in diversity is broadly reflected in the constitutional requirement for multilingualism. Thus, to repair the damage of apartheid, films must be made in all 11 official languages. Yet this aspect is not leveraged in policy and practice. It is instructive that the NFVF does not yet have a language policy that drives the promotion of indigenous languages in South African film and, specifically, in the films that the organisation funds. None of the purposes listed in the internal language policy have been expanded into a cohesive film language policy

in South Africa. This neglect is problematic.



Figure 15: Poster: *Elelwani*

If Hollywood, British, Canadian and Australian films are in English, French films in French, German films in German, Spanish films in Spanish, Portuguese films in Portuguese, Chinese films in Mandarin, and Japanese films in Japanese, what about South African films? Afrikaans films are all in Afrikaans, obviously. *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* is in English. *Inxeba: The Wound,* is in isiXhosa. *Dear Future Wife* is in Zulu, and *Knuckle City* in isiXhosa. Indeed, *Inxeba: The Wound* and *Knuckle City* bucked the trend of prevailing industry wisdom that suggests that South African indigenous language films do not perform well. Still, there is no corpus of Zulu, Xhosa, Venda, or Tswana cinema in South Africa. Thus, intentionally or not, South African film still privileges the two colonial languages, English and Afrikaans. The language deficit alone indicates that a truly national cinema does not yet exist in South Africa. If language is a marker of identity, then the languages of South African film bespeak a contradictory identity. Certainly, the languages reflect entrenched coloniality. As Masilela (2009:5) argued, "there is no such thing as a 'raceless cinema', as some liberal ideologues are deluding themselves". Rather, cinema, particularly in South Africa, is always already "raced". The language of such raced cinema is always already racial and ideological. Hence, when local

cinema is predominantly in English or Afrikaans, this indicates a deficit of transformation in the local film industry. It is not an accident that English and Afrikaans-language films are the most circulated in South Africa. The dominant aesthetic and cinematic norms are shaped by white *national* culture and its imperatives. Each country even specifies how and where the money it allocates to international co-productions or internationally co-financed productions must be spent, thus elevating its own priorities, imperatives, and languages. Thus, Ribeiro stated that:

> My area of expertise is international co-productions. So, we co-finance and we co-produce, meaning teams are deployed from all the nations that co-finance the films because a lot of the money that you raise in each country has a tax origin. Which means *the money becomes very nationalistic*, which means you need to *spend the money in the country that you raised it* (emphasis added).

National cinema in South Africa must also deliberately *centre* marginalised indigenous languages and capture their cultural nuances. The idea is not to impose African languages or essentialise them as fixed or God-given. Rather, it is simply to recognise and acknowledge their worth, value, and existence after decades of systematic erasure. Films must be made in a language that forms part of the filmmakers' daily, common, and shared cultural, social, and lived experience. The choice and use of language by artists also connect "people and those who share histories of resistance to physical, emotional, psychic, and linguistic conquest" (Hua, 2013:36). African languages provide the tools to develop cinematic aesthetics linked to indigenous languages. Broodryk (2023) observed that the "new Afrikaans cinema" is in fact plural Afrikaans *cinemas* that address socio-political issues specific to the Afrikaner community, with a distinct aesthetic and artistic ethos and style, and rooted in cultural specificity. Such cinema has successfully re-invented itself in post-1994 South Africa. The neglected state of local film in indigenous languages indicates the persistence of the *linguistic underdevelopment* fostered by A-Scheme and B-Scheme hierarchies (see Table 9).

The table below arranged the number of annual local feature films by language from 2010 to 2024. The information is gathered and triangulated from sources such as government film reports, news and magazine articles, government bulletins, and film industry websites.

Est. No. of annual local feature films.	**Indigenous language**	**English**	**Afrikaans**

2010: (theatrical)	1 indigenous language film and 2 featuring an indigenous language.	+-13 English language films and 3 featuring English.	8-10 Afrikaans language films and 4 featuring Afrikaans.
2011: (theatrical)	3 indigenous language films and 4 featuring indigenous languages.	9 English language films and 5 featuring English.	9 Afrikaans language films and 1 featuring Afrikaans.
2012: (theatrical)	3 indigenous language films.	10 English language films.	6 Afrikaans language films.
2013: (theatrical)	1 indigenous language film and 4 featuring indigenous languages.	11 English language films and 2 featuring English.	14 Afrikaans language films and 3 featuring Afrikaans.
2014:(theatrical)	3-4 indigenous language films.	8-9 English language films.	10-12 Afrikaans-language films.
2015: (theatrical)	1 indigenous language film and 1 featuring an indigenous language.	8-10 English-language films and 2 featuring English.	10-11 Afrikaans-language films and 3 featuring Afrikaans.
2016: (theatrical)	1 film featuring an indigenous language.	9 English-language films and 2 featuring English.	15 Afrikaans-language films and 2 featuring Afrikaans.
2017: (theatrical, streamer)	4 Indigenous language films	8 English-language films and 2 featuring English. 5 films- streamer (original release in 2016 & 2017)	8 Afrikaans-language films and 1 featuring Afrikaans. 2 films-streamer (original release in 2016 & 2017)
2018: (theatrical, streamer)	2 indigenous language films and 1 featured an indigenous language. 3 indigenous language films and 1 featuring indigenous languages-streamer (original release in 2017)	7-8 English-language films. 2 films-streamer (original release in 2017)	10 Afrikaans-language films. 2 films-streamer (original release in 2017 & 2018)
2019: (theatrical, streamer)	3 indigenous language films. 2 indigenous language films-streamer (original release in 2019 & 2018)	9 English-language films. 3 English films, & 2 were mixed languages- streamer (original release in 2019)	8 Afrikaans-language films. 5 films-streamer (original release in 2019 & 2018)
2020: (theatrical, streamer)	1 indigenous language film. 2 films-streamer (original release in 2019)	1 English-language film and 3 English/Afrikaans films. 7 films-streamer (2019 & 2020 releases)	1 Afrikaans-language film and 3 English/Afrikaans films. 1 film-streamer (2020 release)

2021: (theatrical, streamer)	2 films featuring indigenous languages. 5 indigenous languages films-streamer (original release in 2021)	6 English-language films and 2 films featuring English 9 films streamed, 3 were mixed languages- streamer (original release in 2019, 2020, & 2021)	3 Afrikaans-language films. 6 films-streamer (original release in 2019, 2020, & 2021)
2022: (theatrical, streaming)	1 film featuring indigenous languages. 5 films featuring indigenous languages-streamer (original release in 2022)	4 English-language films and 4 featuring English. 5 English films and 5 films featuring English-streamer (original release in 2021 & 2022)	3 Afrikaans/English-language films. 3 Afrikaans films and 3 films featuring Afrikaans - streamer (original release day 2021 & 2022)
2023: (theatrical, streaming)	1 film featuring an indigenous language 4 indigenous language films streamed and 2 featuring indigenous languages-streamer (original release in 2023)	2-4 English-language films. 6 films and 3 featuring English-streamer (original release in 2023)	2-3 Afrikaans-language film & 1 featuring Afrikaans 1 film-streamer (original release in 2023)
2024: (theatrical) (streaming)	2 films featuring indigenous languages. 2 indigenous language film and 4 films featuring indigenous languages-streamer (original release in 2024).	4 English-language films and 1 featuring English 2 English-language films, and 4 predominantly feature English-streamer (original release in 2024)	4 Afrikaans-language films.

Table 9: Local production output by language

In whose image is South African cinema? Who is shown on South African screens, doing what? Again, the reference point is "diversity" or "unity in diversity". How unity in diversity creates conditions for the emergence of a specific type of South African film production that can come close to being called *national cinema* is a yet unexplored question. Diversity, while an often-used and even popular term in production notes and film policy handouts, has also become a weasel word for maintaining the status quo, power relations, and business as usual. For example, most non-white film industry professionals that I have spoken to still reported experiencing significant barriers to entry. There was no meaningful participation in the value chain. This anecdotal evidence is borne out by industry reports (cf. NFVF, 2022d). As in the B-Scheme eras, white scriptwriters, directors and producers can make still films about or targeting non-white audiences. However, there is still much "surrogacy" (Paleker, 2010). The conundrum is highlighted in this explanation by Dumeko:

> It is something that reflects South Africa's cultural identity. So now, in terms of funding, what we focus on is the fact that it is shot in South Africa, that there is a South African cast. There will always be value in diversity. There are not enough HoDs in production sets that are black and female, that are black in general. If your captive audience is predominantly of a certain demographic, you look at South Africa, you look at the population, 61 million, the majority of it is black, between the ages of 35 and whatever … So, you need to understand what those people want to watch, what those people want to see. One of the best places to understand that is to be that person. So, you need to have in your teams people that you are trying to target because they can help guide, conceptually, in terms of narrative, in terms of character development. They can help you guide exactly what you need to see on screen, exactly what they know people are going to watch. It is a win-win. You need to have in your team the people you want to see reflecting on screen.

In essence, there is much significance in film services and production sets whose service providers mirror the demographic make-up of South Africa's population. For Dumeko, it is not that black filmmakers can and should only write, direct, produce, capture stories about black people and for black people. Rather, his statement emphasises the need to undo the *unequal representation* of creatives, professionals and film services providers on production sets.

This argument is particularly important when reflecting on what constitutes a South African production, as films are, in any case, a significant part of mass culture. Mass culture serves as a powerful means of distributing information, ideas, worldviews, and lifestyles (Zheltukhina et al., 2017). Films are also a platform for constructing the imagined, foregrounding and normalising social values. Those privileged to practice screenwriting, directing, set construction and design, costumes, locations, and casting have agency to make choices shaping not only the visible images and auditory aspects of film texts but also the underlying messaging. Furthermore, storytelling is neither innocent nor value-free but is mediated through the concerns and interests of the filmmakers and those who provide resources and finances. If national cinema has come to mean films produced by a given country and the industry itself and "how they relate to the social, political, and cultural contexts of the country" (O'Regan, 1996:1), then questioning and problematising the conditions of production is important, including the forces that resist change, reproduce distortion, and sustain coloniality. Zondi's assertions about race, South African stories, and accessibility for audiences touched on this:

> So, we do have stories that conceptualise what South Africa is and South African production. My main problem with the examples that I am about to make, are mostly white productions or a concept that has come up with a white person, which for me is quite problematic. But also, I think the other projects that are truly South African are also very inaccessible to South Africans.

Thus, films everywhere *do* promote a particular worldview. Thus, it matters who is making the films, where they are made, how they are made, what the films are about, and who gets to watch them. As Higson (2002) maintained, *production context* is critical in defining the "national" in national cinema. Again, in South Africa, despite rainbowism, film is still not a "raceless" endeavour. It is important that the marginalised come out from the shadows, take up space and shape narratives, even commercial ones, and change perceptions about what sort of films are viable, entertaining, meaningful, and worth making. The negotiation of what value is (beyond money) and where value lies must necessarily be ongoing.

It is therefore no surprise that in defining a South African film production, some responses go beyond the production process to include reflections on real events associated with the consumption or reception of particular South African films and the way the films invoked a sense of nationhood through well-researched and artistically presented local stories.

The participants' definition of what constitutes South African cinema were coloured by perceptions of other national cinemas from across the world. Hence, there was tendency to attach distinct cultural identity and meaning to French, American (mostly Hollywood), and British cinema, as well as to Nollywood, and Bollywood, among others, and to extrapolate these to South African cinema. The participants saw in the films from these nations as already having something "national" about them and as conveying particular, over-arching coherent ideologies, cultural references, iconographies and values. For example, at the core of the French films is the continuing focus on the idea of the filmmaker as *auteur* (author), even if the practice today is radically different and plural. The auterist view places emphasis on film as an art and the filmmaker as the "author" using films to "write" and articulate ideas and vision, often philosophical, and typically rooted in French intellectual heritage. Thus, the auteur has a personal aesthetic, vision, style and signature that distinguishes him as a "genius" (Morari, 2017). Compared to Hollywood's commercial fare and films for mass consumption, auteur films are deliberately aimed at selected elite audiences. This "French-ness" is also seen in the lesser emphasis on big budgets and glossy production values, with films distributed through unconventional and alternative networks and spaces such as art galleries, film clubs, and high-end cafes. The distinct "frenchness" then informs approaches to filmmaking, financing, distribution and consumption. For example, the French government provides guarantees and "protection" to French cinema through policies that require that, for every ticket sold in cinema, 10.72% goes to the French national centre of cinema (CNC) to support the making of more French films, TV programmes, and video games or to build film infrastructure. Of that tax

percentage, if it is a local film, 20% goes to the CNC. If it is a foreign film, then the whole tax percentage goes to the CNC. In essence, although the French film industry has evolved and now draws from conventional genres as well as other national cinemas, perception about what is termed the "French Touch" is resilient (Michael, 2005:55). It seems that the designation of "national" in the case of the French is not necessarily an empirical measure. Rather, it is more of an "image" and stock idea that observers have, drawing from enduring perception.

The Nigerian case is more interesting not only because it is an African example but also because it is a recent phenomenon and, more importantly, it emerged after four decades. If the Nigerian example is anything to go by, then South Africa's three decades are still on course for a national cinema to emerge. Nollywood only arose at the turn of the century, and so it is even younger than post-apartheid South African cinema. Owing to this recency, the "image" of what constitutes Nollywood has become normative far more quickly than other conventional national cinemas. In Nigeria, like in the rest of Africa, colonialism and slavery enforced a cinematic and cultural experience that alienated indigenous people from the development of the local industry in affirmative, emancipatory and liberatory ways. Interestingly, for about 40 years since independence in 1960, Nigeria struggled to have a normative national cinema. State attempts to promote a viable local film industry floundered and failed (Adeyemi, 2010). This was in keeping with the persistent challenge of lack of protection and adequate support for the film industries by the various national governments (Ezepue, 2021). Furthermore, distribution was monopolised by foreign networks, ensuring that local audiences did not watch Nigerian films, even if the volume of Nigerian film was still very low (Adeyemi, 2010). In the succinct and still true words of Diawara (1992:viii):

> Not only film production but also distribution in Africa has faced a ruthless and monopolistic exploitation by American, European, and Indian distribution companies. The film industry in Africa has no government protection – neither import quotas nor the freezing of box office receipts. Because of import quotas, France and West Germany, Europe's two most important film producers, have survived the bombardment of their film market by the U.S. Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA). At the same time that African countries could not control foreign domination of distribution and exhibition, they also have not raised, as have France and Germany, subsidies for national African film production. Furthermore, foreign distributors use block-booking and other monopolistic practices so that African films are often not even seen in their country of origin.

Regarding the Nigerian government, Adeyemi stated that "it looked as if a conspiracy existed between foreigner film distributors and Nigeria's government, which always treated every indigenous filmmaker as an adventurer who had to be kept at arm's length" (Adeyemi,

2010:60). It was a testament to Nigerian ingenuity, and a mix of opportunity and timing aligning, that Nollywood arose without direct government intervention and assistance. Indeed, Nollywood arose *despite* the Nigerian government (Oguamanam, 2020). This is a critical point because it is not at all obvious that South African national cinema can arise without the direct involvement of the South African government. Already, the NFVF is the critical nerve centre of the South African film industry that must emerge from the margins. Afrikaans film, on the other hand, thrives without significant NFVF assistance. The idea of a Nigerian cinema constructed and pioneered by Nigerians in a potent entrepreneurial and artistic environment led to the emergence of various innovative film financing models, and distribution, and exhibition pathways that have made Nigeria one of the highest film-producing nations with a culturally distinct identity and wide audience reach today (Adeyemi, 2010; Akudinobi, 2015; Mboti, 2014). It is this entrepreneurial innovation, particularly on financing and distribution, that identify Nollywood as a national cinema for Nigeria.

The success and global visibility of Nollywood within two decades have challenged existing standards and normative notions of how industry development in Africa should look like. Nollywood also challenges the normative film services approach and what it takes for African cities to be deemed *film-friendly*. It is not that Lagos or Abuja is *not* normatively film-friendly. Rather, it is that the disposition of these industries demonstrates that significant value is placed on developing local services, networks, infrastructure, and expertise for the benefit, first, of locals, by locals. Instead of pursuing affirmation and acceptance by Western and European conglomerates, *local initiative* was the primary driver of value and competitiveness. Locals looked *within* and innovatively worked within existing socio-economic and politically challenging conditions to find ways of making Nigerian films produced in high volumes and accessible to all for consumption (cf. Mauyakufa & Pradhan, 2018). In fact, the government in Nigeria was visibly film-unfriendly. It was the film-unfriendly disposition of the state infrastructure that partly spurred innovation. Furthermore, the social and economic context of Nigeria, which may have seemed film-unfriendly to outsiders, was in fact the stimulant to what is today the second largest film industry globally. Nollywood has thus redefined the notion of *film-friendliness* for an African context and for Nigeria by demonstrating that local industry players *can challenge and pioneer industry norms*. A national cinema, therefore, must be *successful*. It must also challenge and pioneer industry norms. This sets the bar quite high for South African film.

The success of the Nigerian film industry is more remarkable when one considers the country's

cultural, social, and linguistic diversity. The same diversity is present in South Africa, with the difference being that South Africa's diversity is *racial* at its base, while that of Nigeria is *ethnic*. Nigeria's film "industry is broadly divided into Northern and Southern industries based on religious and sociocultural differences" (Ezepue, 2021:19). Furthermore, "Nigerian society differs remarkably from that of Western nations, because rather than create such a nation where religious, cultural, traditional values are repressed, they are upheld to be passed down to posterity" (Ezepue, 2021:19). Ezepue noted that various smaller societal formations uphold and define their identities based on the values passed on to them and that it is these identity formations in small groups marked by shared values, culture, religion, language, ethnicity, and ancestry that contribute to the construction of national identity – and therefore national cinema – in Nigeria. Soyinka (1979:103) cited in (Adeyemi, 2010: 66) has stated that:

> (I)t is our duty... to find relevant images from the society. Bergeman has found this, the kind of psycho-serial images which really suit the European personality. I have already seen one or two films by Africans who produced clichés of Bergema's images, which seem to me a very absurd approach. This society, its culture, is in fact one of the most cinematic films that I know of …

Thus, differences and cultural nuances alike, including diverse social, psychological and physical landscapes, contribute to the formation of distinct national identities and registers. It is from these that Nollywood emerges. Critically, Nollywood emerges by bypassing and upending the norms of the film services approach. Could a national cinema emerge in South Africa by doing the same? This is partly what this study investigated.

The key question that the participants grappled with is whether, in their view, there is development, integration and transformation in the South African film industry. These elements were seen to be crucial to South African cinema and film culture, which is national. The participants considered the signifiers of a "transforming" industry the working environment, funding, national identity, and their daily experiences of operating in the local film industry. Zondi was cynical about the state of transformation in the industry, noting bluntly that there was *nothing to transform* in the absence of radical and fundamental shifts:

> There is nothing to transform. I think we just need to fix systems; if you can fix it then it is fine. It can't be that filmmakers don't make a living from this. For instance, one needs to battle to find another project. One needs to battle to get into another production out of the productions that they have … I think we just need to re-strategise the entire industry. There have been talks of transformation, but there is nothing to transform if you can't fix systems.

The claim that there is nothing to transform is based on a sense that the problems in the local film industry are *structural* and *systemic*. In other words, not only do patterns of the past persist,

but current interventions and strategies are dismissed as cosmetic. The three-tier funding structure utilised by the South African government's film funding agencies, though similar to what is used in other national cinemas such as New Zealand and the United Kingdom (cf. Ferrer-Roca, 2017; Presence, 2017), takes on perverse connotations in South Africa due to the country's history of apartheid and the A-Scheme and B-Scheme hierarchies, as well as the dominance of the Gauteng-Western Cape-KZN axis. That is, the tier system used to distinguish and hierarchise film services based on specific criteria such as business annual turnover, is contaminated by already existing divisions in South Africa such that it is no longer innocent or value free. This context underscores the importance implementing radical transformation to address the injustices of the past instead of cosmetic changes. Without such fundamental redress, the conventional three tier-system remains a systemic risk and a built-in hindrance to the establishment of a national cinema.

The NFVF has unquestioningly adopted the three-tier system to categorise applicants based on industry experience, the assumption being that tiers guarantee that funds will be used accordingly, leading to the successful completion of projects and the stimulation of growth in the number of annual jobs and skills development opportunities. Tier 1 applicants have more than 10 years of experience and have successfully produced and distributed three or more feature films. Tier 2 practitioners have over five years of industry experience with at least two or more feature film productions, including shorts. Tier 2 practitioners have less than five years of industry experience with at least one feature or short film successfully produced and distributed (NFVF, 2022, 2023). This ladder-like system has created first-class, second-class, and third-class filmmakers, all of them drawing on state funding at different levels. The closer one is to the top, the more accessible and the better the funding is. Most of the funded productions between 2017 and 2022 sit on Tier 2 and Tier 3, but they received a smaller portion of the film fund budget. The larger portion of the film fund budget was allocated to production companies for feature films in the Tier 1 category, which are led by the most experienced filmmakers (NFVF, 2022e). This preferential status is ostensibly due to their level of experience. The disadvantage of this structure is that Tier 2 and Tier 3 filmmakers remain in this status indefinitely because limited funds. In other words, it is a trap. Worse, it fosters dependency. Lower-tier film projects generally depend on the limited subsidy funds, resulting in the predominant production of low-budget features or short films. As such, the production of low-budget features and short films is not always by choice. Rather, it is a constraint placed on the filmmakers by the three-tiered funding model. Notably, most of the NFVF-funded film production projects between 2017 and 2022 were based in Gauteng, Cape Town, and KwaZulu-

Natal (NFVF, 2022e:23). However, the introduction of NFVF roadshows in 2021 meant that marginalised provinces with less developed film services and production activity now receive detailed information on available funding opportunities in person from NFVF management (Eastern Cape Development Corporation, 2022).

The introduction of the Black Filmmakers Incentive (BFI) by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition in 2009, as well as NFVF funding for feature slate projects (typically funding for a package of three or more films), have provided additional layers of funding that supplement the scale of the funding landscape for filmmakers from the lower tiers. This incentive is significant because it is aimed at nurturing and capacitating qualifying emerging black filmmakers to take up big productions and contribute towards employment opportunities. Funding for feature slate projects is aimed at addressing the sustainability challenges of black-owned film production companies by providing funding for multiple projects over a longer period (NFVF, 2023). This funding model ensures that film services can provide ongoing employment opportunities while they develop their own production portfolio (Moyer-Duncan, 2021). Nevertheless, the number of filmmakers who receive slate funding annually is significantly small, which is partly due to limited film funds at the NFVF (*Mail & Guardian*, 2025). Opportunities for high volumes of funding for black filmmakers are administered through special callouts such as the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP) which, although less strict in terms of requirements, nevertheless remain subject to the tier system. In fact, all funding in South Africa follows the three-tier "caste" system, with all the implications for hierarchisation. There are also callouts for heritage projects (Film Cape Town, 2024), focusing on stories that align with themes such as the celebration of historical events and figures, social cohesion, and nation building. Inevitably, the current hierarchisation of funding continues to marginalise "previously" marginalised filmmakers, keeping them at, or near, the bottom of the industry structure. As Dumeko said, "I think there is an industry but whether it is developed to optimum, I don't agree. I think there is (sic) pockets of excellence in particular provinces. Audience development in South Africa is complex. It is impacted by our histories; it is also impacted by our *levels of access that we continue to have almost thirty years into our new democracy*" (emphasis added). Levels of access also refer to the function of the three-tier system. Without perhaps meaning to, the government is enabling a type of industry development conducive to maintaining and protecting forms of coloniality to the benefit of a few industry players at the expense of the many. Government funding agencies are complicit in the systemic relationships of domination and subordination structured through social institutions whereby the institutional dimension of oppression is wielded (Collins, 1989).

Some participants were more optimistic that things are changing, and that transformation is taking place, albeit slowly. Singh, Motaung, and Dumeko regarded funding as a method of giving filmmakers a launch pad. They saw the funding process as a marathon rather than a sprint. To them, state funding on its own will never be adequate. Rather, it is facilitative and a shot in the arm. This is how Singh articulated this:

> We have integrated and the government has got incentives for the rebates on film productions. And if you are an emerging market producer, there is a big percentage you have from government. So, they are trying to level the playing field. If they are non-white, they get the bigger advantage in funding. (But) subsidies and film incentives do not lead to transformation immediately. It (sic) provides financial resources to produce films which in turn provides opportunities for previously disadvantaged individuals to harness opportunities and develop and enhance their skills. This upskilling opportunity will result in people who develop capacity and competencies to take elevated positions in the industry which would then lead to transformation.

In other words, the funding from agencies such as the NFVF, DTIC and KZN Film Commission is only a means to an end. More importantly, the funding is itself not an indicator of transformation but, rather, an enabler of transformation. In the words of Singh, it "would then lead to transformation". One can call this a discourse of *gradualism*. It also places the burden of responsibility on the filmmaker. Motaung measured success in terms of the number of funding agencies that have emerged to support filmmaking in South Africa:

> I think there has been a significant leap towards transformation in terms of institutions developed in the late nineties – your NFVF and then going on to institutions like your film commissions, KZN, like in and around 2013. So, institutions that prioritise the development and access of particularly black filmmakers, even the BFI, the Black Filmmakers' Incentive, I think somewhere in 2009 …

The responses by Singh and Motaung shine a light on how different filmmakers interpret the role of government funding in constructing a framework for an emerging national cinema. Their glass-is-half-full perspectives see progress where the general tendency is to see distortion, stagnation, and even retreat from the project of using film for nation-building and redress. Dumeko is broadly encouraged by the NFVF focus on "Driving industry growth by providing funding solutions, policy interventions, industry research, and skills development initiatives. Serving as a gateway for collaborations amongst South Africans and the rest of the world", even if this is not happening at the rate or level that it should. Indeed, Dumeko even suggested that the system is meritocratic, inclusive, and universally accessible, stating that "we provide funding to anyone who is producing films with a South African link. So, producing films domestically, you can also be producing films internationally if they are in a coproduction. So,

we have coproduction treaties." The suggestion is that one simply needs to apply and, if their project is "South African" and "good enough", they get funding. The reality, however, is that funding is determined by the three tier-system. The three-tier system itself *reproduces* hierarchy, elitism, coloniality, and marginality.

The existence of the three-tier system does not mean that filmmakers are passive victims. Rather, they continue to work within and outside that system to produce generative work in front of the camera and behind it. All the participants indicated that they ventured into the "film "business" to fill a gap. Film for them is both a vocation and a calling. Ribeiro, for example, started initiatives such as Urucu Media and the Realness Institute "to create a safe space for authorship, for brave stories, for … narratives that questioned the ways we view the world" and with "intention of starting a movement" of making more than just brave little films once every few years. Thus:

> It was always part of our vision to create a safe space for authorship, for brave stories, for both narratives that questioned the ways we view the world. And the way Africa was portrayed, which really bothered me when I moved here, when I experienced a very different life from the ground. So, there was a commitment through Urucu to change that narrative, to contribute to that change of that narrative and to do it by the narrative in control of the African storyteller. And then we created Realness Institute with this intention of starting a movement because us making this brave little film every two, three years is not enough to lead us to potentially be able to say few years from now, oh my gosh, this is an African film and we know exactly what we are talking about.

This vision is not a narrative of dependency, a tier-system, or waiting for government to do something for filmmakers. Rather, the filmmakers take the initiative because they have a story to tell and will tell it *somehow*, with or without government funding. The two film businesses – Urucu Media and the Realness Institute – have been established in response to a felt need and to fill an important gap. African storytellers are thus not beggars or basket cases but griots, storytellers, and entrepreneurs with agency, driven to disrupt and undo dominant images and stereotypes about Africa, Africans and their realities and experiences. The "vision" of Cape Town-based Urucu Media is that "we're an independent production company working with a new wave of African filmmakers. We fight for fresh ideas and believe that films can change the world. This is why we're dedicated to telling brave stories."[62] Africans are now providing development support to *other* African filmmakers and professionals.[63] At least, this is what it

[62] Realness Institute, n.d., "We back independent Pan-African storytellers in cinema and television", https://www.realness.institute/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

[63] Established in 2011, Urucu Media produces films by South African and African filmmakers in the diaspora who

says on the surface.

A deeper reading suggests that the apparent success of Urucu Media and the Realness Institute is not all it seems. Rather, there is *deep paradox* at work. The paradox takes a very specific form. In short, *Ribeiro draws all this agency and independence precisely from the fact that he is white*. When scratching under the surface of his success, it becomes clear how whiteness is re-encoded and diffused as power in the new South Africa. This analysis becomes clearer below when I adopt a decolonial reading of the film services framework in light of Olsberg SPI's notions of maintained sustainability and investment readiness. It is notable that Ribeiro, the founder of Urucu Media, is an experienced producer who has undergone training in various European film industry incubator programmes, including Berlinale Talent and La Fabrique des Cinema du Monde. He is also a member of European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs and raises finances for projects using his business networks locally and internationally. Ribeiro even ensures the sustainability of his film projects by, for instance, prioritising *upfront payment* of *all* relevant film services from production to distribution, including for production company employees whose inputs are involved in the production of the film. Thereafter, he reaps the residual financial benefits that accrue should the film project perform well on the various exhibition platforms based on agreements with distributors about the profit split. Ribeiro does this to ensure that film services and all employees receive wages for their work irrespective of how a film performs upon its release. *So how does he ensure that he always gets paid upfront?* Typically, navigating these highly complex multi-party funding structures is tricky business and has sometimes led to producers being "forced to surrender most or all of their intellectual property rights to investors and trade partners in order to get a film made" (Olsberg SPI, 2012:9). So, how does he get paid upfront and still get to keep his IP? The answer, as I will show below, is the same in every case: *whiteness*.

Different film services use different methods to sustain themselves. For example, some film businesses diversify horizontally by engaging in other business activities such as television commercials and corporate video production. Others pursue a vertical approach by engaging in other stages of the film value chain such as distribution or exhibition theatre business. Singh's

desire to tell "authentic" and "bold" stories – stories that would otherwise experience difficulty breaking through "the hostility of mainstream film financing and local cinemas". Equipped with information and social capital that enables him to facilitate and become an expert in international co-productions between South Africa and Global North film businesses, he assists local filmmakers negotiate fair agreements with relevant investors since "private investors most often will dictate not just what the topic should be, but how the narrative should unfold" (Golding, 2016:232).

business demonstrates this through its involvement in production and distribution while Ribeiro engages in film development business through its many incubator programmes. Motaung engages in film lecturing work among other projects, while Zondi engages in skills training amongst other things. None of these horizontal and vertical diversifications of film services, however, are guaranteed to be sustainable. To understand why one South African film service maintains its sustainability while another fails one needs to understood how coloniality works to sustain patterns of the past. Typically, coloniality works hand in hand with whiteness, as the example of investment-ready paid-upfront white film services illustrate.

That is, Ribeiro's professional biography and payment plans are useful in my analysis not only in inscribing him as a *white beneficiary* of the NFVF's three-tier system but also to show how and where he attained his – and his film service business's – *maintained sustainability* and *investment readiness*. It was not so much in the European film industry's incubator programmes that Ribeiro's film services business attained these two attributes; it is in something far more historical. In essence, Ribeiro status and biography are neither a coincidence nor an accident. I will endeavour to show why. That is, Urucu Media's success, capacity and independence are not innocent. Rather, they draw their "social capital" on the fraught history and foundation of *Die Voortrekkers*. Such foundations are conveniently occluded by the discourse of "unity in diversity" in the "new" South Africa. This analysis will become clearer when I read Ribeiro's "success" against that of Motaung, and that of *Inxeba: The Wound* versus that of *Dear Future Wife*. Both filmmakers are South Africans and both films are South African films. Yet, they draw their maintained sustainability and investment readiness from *very different* sources, roots, and routes. Indeed, the two "sides" are diametrically opposed even where they work on the same film set of the same film shoot, "united in diversity". The proof lies in a decolonial understanding of the concept of *maintained sustainability*.

How exactly can a decolonial reading show the link between whiteness, power and the absence of a national cinema in South Africa? What "social capital" does Ribeiro have that other South African filmmakers do not have? How does one *maintain* such *exclusive social capital* in a democratic country and "open" society like South Africa where there is a constitutionally enshrined common citizenship and unity in diversity? To understand this paradox, I draw on examples of how some of the participants experience the South African film production context. Motaung and Zondi also ventured into filmmaking because they responded to a felt need and a gap that existed in the distribution and storytelling space. Their continued presence in the film industry is an indication of how they exercise their agency, initiative, and

independence. For Zondi, their experience in the industry opened their eyes to opportunities for branding film and television:

> I think the agency was based on my experience of becoming a filmmaker. I think it is a chance that I saw a need for myself. Actually, there is no agency that I have come across that especially covers this, and in the country there is still none that at this stage, but there are other agencies that are more consumer brands and they focus on other brands as well, but not specially film and TV.

Zondi is a doer and bold risk taker who sees and assesses opportunities. Their assertion that "I saw a need for myself" expresses business acumen and an instinct for problem solving. The result is a fairly successful film services business. Importantly, they have agency: They do not feel pity for themselves. In the words of Martinez Dy (2020:688), "social and financial disadvantage can be overcome through a combination of innovative opportunity and hard work". For Dumeko, the driving force was an entrepreneurial spirit that sees the economic opportunity in the local film industry:

> I think the vision is being realised just for me personally. It has not been realised at the rate of which it should have been now. So, in terms of industry development or audience development, I just think that South Africa has been sleeping on the potential of this industry. This industry is valued at 7.1 billion rand and that's excluding commercials. I am talking about pure film. 7.1 billion …

This vision suggests that Strategy 1 can be realised *through* Strategy 2, rather than the typical approach taken by government agencies that subordinates redress to money-making. For Dumeko, by transforming our storytelling, we can make billions. That is, there is money in our communities and stories. Filmmakers need not be starving artists. However, this requires that normative frameworks be disrupted. Motaung appears to agree: they see money in the film industry. In their case, the money is in independence and owning one's IP:

> I own the IP, right, so I am not restricted … The importance of it, it is like your creative content, right? And your creative content, your IP, your hard work. So, you don't want to be in a situation where you are exploited. So, you want to engage with the distributor who has your interests at heart. Because a lot of people will always try to take. People will just try to take advantage because you are creative on one side but, at the end of the day, it is a business, it is a product … In the long run, money is made through ownership in the creative industry. That's actually where the money is, where your grandkids can be, like, my grandmother or grandfather made this product, I can resell it. That's where the real thing is.

Motaung is touching on a critical nerve of the problem. In his view, "where the real thing is" is in *ownership*. It is not an accident or a coincidence that *ownership* also happens to be the very thing that whites denied Africans during apartheid and colonialism. It is possible to decode this

problem through a decolonial reading of Olsberg's (2012) two-level definition of the sustainability of film businesses. This kind of reading allows us to drill down to the real reason why South Africa has no truly national cinema yet. At the same time, there is a thriving Afrikaans film industry next door.

Olsberg's two-level definition of sustainability for film business (2012), using the example of independent Swedish film businesses, refers to sustainability as the *investment readiness* of a film business. First, the company must demonstrate a robust financial track record and growth potential that is enough to attract private investment. Second, the company must demonstrate *maintained sustainability*, a reference to the fact that, although the company may not attain investment readiness status, it is able to still produce high-quality films regularly even if this is through reliance on some level of consistent government subsidy (Olsberg SPI, 2012:9). For Motaung, his ownership of IP rights to his films are fundamental to the sustainability of his work. Owning the rights of the film enable him to leverage distribution opportunities for financial gain for years to come after the initial distribution window closes when opportunities come. Investment readiness is a dimension that most black film projects is denied under the three-tier paradigm. The same projects are assured of maintained sustainability from the NFVF but at the cost of being hierarchised as second class and third class. In other words, the greatest risk for black film projects is the form of maintained sustainability that they fall under when they depend on NFVF subsidies. This is readily demonstrated by the fact that Afrikaans film products typically do not draw any maintained sustainability from the NFVF. Rather, they draw their maintained sustainability from the long tradition of *Die Voortrekkers*. That is, colonialism and apartheid mean that Afrikaners already have ownership (of the means of production and factors of production). The basis of the Afrikaans film industry is the maintained sustainability and investment readiness drawn from a history of dispossession of Africans.

Motaung's ability to own his own IP and therefore assert his independence allows him to, for once, leverage ownership. He has access to *maintained sustainability* that not only allows him to insist on redress (Strategy 2) as a starting point but also to assert that money can be made from films. That is, film can be commercialised without one losing their value if one can leverage ownership as an element of *maintained sustainability*. Unfortunately, this is precisely what history denies most "previously" disadvantaged. It is also the reason the "previously" disadvantaged are still disadvantaged today. That is, ownership, in the deepest sense of the matrix of *maintained sustainability* and *investment readiness*, is the reason that South Africa does not yet have a national cinema. The *lack of ownership* forces black filmmakers to choose

between redress versus profit, nation-building versus commercialisation, localisation versus Hollywoodisation, Leleti Khumalo versus Naomi Harris, and so on. They are forced to choose either Strategy 1 or Strategy 2. If a filmmaker or producer wins with Strategy 1, he or she eats well but risks being seen as a traitor or askari to their own people. If he or she opts for Strategy 2, they seem like heroes to their own people but also risk ridicule as starving artists. As Zondi recounted:

> Guys, people need to eat. So, this guy on Twitter, he does community-based screenings for kids, and then he was talking about his business being liquidated and going to debt because the business is not being supported. And he is an NPO. I just wish that most producers that work in the industry and have businesses in the industry, they are incubated, they are going to be taught how to run business and just claim all their ideas into a business model. And when you go into the market, at least it is like a commercially viable product or business. So, you don't find the likes of production companies being liquidated, running through debt, where we can't see project, we can't make a living of our ideas or projects that we have.

A Manichean dualism is posited between "Guys, people need to eat" and "film as a nation-builder". The two strategies are constantly at war with each other. This is the source of the schizophrenia at the heart of local film policy. The current *film production context* is thus a trap. Hiding behind constitutionally enshrined common citizenship and the slogan of "unity in diversity", it consistently denies African filmmakers the agency to choose both Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 on their own terms. Instead, the production context is always presented as either/or, in a sequence of choices and creative decisions. If one is for Strategy 1, then they are against Strategy 2, and vice versa, or at least one must always start with one and not the other. One cannot tackle both and succeed. This is why the three-tier strategy is such an epitome and exemplar of the *reproduction of a resilient coloniality*: it keeps African filmmakers from *reimagining* maintained sustainability and investment readiness on their own terms. Resilient coloniality, hiding behind the three-tier system, explains why the NFVF never has enough money for the many black projects – despite the acknowledged *national* importance of such projects and despite the NFVF being empowered by the NFVF Act of 1997 to find and provide such resources. It also explains the persistence of distribution monopolies by Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro and, even, how Netflix rides rough-shod over local television. These are systems of re-inscribed whiteness that no longer answer to their old names such as colonialism, slavery, or apartheid. Instead, they masquerade as business logic, demand and supply, markets, investments, capital, shareholding, the invisible hand, credit ratings, and economic logic.

Specifically, Motaung's *ownership* of his own IP has fundamentally radical and epistemically disruptive content. It proves, for example, that there is no conflict between making films for

redress and nation building, on the one hand, and making films to make money, on the other hand. Why must only African filmmakers be the starving artists? The distinction and difference between making films for redress and making films for commercial ends is *how one goes about it*. If one starts with independence and love for their community as the basis, they will end up making billions without compromising their values. However, if one starts with an obsession with the bottom line, they end up prostituting themselves and, worse, harming their own best interests and communities. Hence, the key is to invert the normative three-tier process that subordinates creativity and redress to the imperatives of quantitative measures and bottom lines. This is how Motaung commented:

> MultiChoice is not doing enough in terms of transformation and playing their part. They could be doing much bigger and they have a bigger capacity. They are like a billion-dollar company. In terms of distribution outlets, there is no government or private sector distribution platform that actually cares about black audiences and going to those spaces. Because if you look at Ster-Kinekor in its fundamental essence, Ster-Kinekor is an Afrikaans company and it was built on the pretext of creating cinemas for Afrikaans audiences at particular places. So, if that transformation on that level does not work, there needs to be a person. Imagine if a black person were to own a distribution outlet. What would you do? We have seen it with spaza shops – there is billions in spaza shops and we have seen in situations where foreign nationals own spaza shops and in township communities what it does – actually, there is money, there is an industry here … Sometimes when they build malls, they build it on particular agendas. It is not built on the ethos of we are trying to bring nice things into this or access. So, on that level there needs to be more players in the game who own, there needs to be more different minds and different people in certain positions of power to always bring those progressive thoughts and say, "Hang on, no, why are we doing this?" Doesn't make sense, in a country particularly like South Africa, there is certain strategic intervention that needs to be made. That's why it is not by mistake that Leon Schuster is the biggest selling person … yes talent and all of that but it was strategic intervention that enabled him to that level. So, if that does not happen with our own people we won't go to the right direction.

The critical message here is that the filmmaker needs to care – and care about more than just the bottom line. Rather, there needs to be an ethos. Unfortunately, most of those who are successful from following normative models do not care *enough* about transformation. Studies have shown that key limitations for black-owned small businesses include lack of relevant resources such as "finance, human resources and knowledge" (Sixaba & Rogerson, 2023:83). If this is the case, why is nothing being done about this? The answer is that these are, as I noted above, components of the *geographies of neglect*. The radical line in Motaung's argument is that "there needs to be more players in the game who own, there needs to be more different minds and different people in certain positions of power to always bring those progressive thoughts and say, "Hang on, no, why are we doing this?" In just one line, Motaung appears to have solved the puzzle of how we can get to national cinema: more players in the game, more

players who own, different minds, more different minds, different people in certain positions of power who constantly bring progressive thoughts, and a framework for saying, "Hang on, no, why are we doing this?" These six dimensions can be the basis for a generative framework and manifesto against which a truly national cinema in South Africa can be imagined and re-imagined. Whether the business is small or big, from a spaza shop to DIFF, Urucu, or Videovision, there ought to be enough generative room for all these players in a *truly* national cinema.

Motaung's radically unapologetic framework and manifesto echo Masilela's postulation (2005:5) that "a South African national cinema can come into being in the context in which the cultural means of production revert back to or are expropriated by the majority of the African people". This radical and decolonial positionality echoes Martinez Dy's definition of entrepreneurship (2020:688) as:

> … a social process by which opportunities for profitable exchange are pursued. This sociologically informed processual definition attends not only to entrepreneurial actor(s), opportunities, and modes of organising, but also to the social, economic, political and technological contexts often outside the frame shaping how entrepreneurship is enacted in everyday practices.

Martinez Dy's definition recognises the relationship between entrepreneurial activity and contextual conditions that shape the socio-economic background and status of the entrepreneurial individuals as well as the environment in which they work.[64] It is neither an accident nor a coincidence that the majority of black people are always playing catch-up through training and job or business opportunities while simultaneously navigating ways to sustain themselves, create livelihoods, raise families, preserve incomes, and grow their businesses. Rather, it is because of history: colonialism and apartheid. It is also hardly an accident or a coincidence that "black owned companies are more likely to hire larger numbers of black practitioners and, additionally, are more likely to hire women and youth" (NFVF, 2022d: 4). Rather, this is an imperative of redress. It is not an accident that "non-black companies appear to have far greater resilience than black owned companies" (NFVF, 2022d:68). Neither is it an accident that most black-owned companies that service the film industry cite "access to finances and funding as an issue, followed by cashflow challenges and

[64] Martinez Dy elaborated that entrepreneurship is characterised by "informal to formalised exchange activities which include ad-hoc trading, freelance work, self-employment/lifestyle businesses, corporate intrapreneurship, part-time, nascent. In this view, opportunities are no longer primarily understood as the products of economic relations between atomistic individuals and a potential market. Instead, they are nested within entrepreneurs' lives and experiences are therefore subject to social conditions and conditioning, and the advantages or disadvantages that ensue" (Martinez Dy, 2020: 688).

constrained access to the market" (NFVF, 2022d: 67) as critical and existential pain-points. Vision, mission, and foundational business philosophies, practices, activities and outcomes are embedded within social worlds. Filmmaking is not innocent or passive. Instead, it is inherently political and agential. Its goal is not paralysis. Rather, its goal is to change the world.

Businesses – and visions and missions – fixated on Strategy 1 merely consider how they operate in a fast-changing environment characterised by politics, economy, social conditions and technological developments at provincial, national and international level which affect competitive advantages of various companies, costs and internationalisation (Pearce & Robinson, 2000:3). As such, businesses adjust their strategic direction continuously based on opportunities and threats (Van der Walt & Fourie, 2004:206). As Sandada et al. (2014:59) put it, "businesses must scan the environment to make informed decisions. They also advise SMEs to have a mission and vision statement because it gives direction to the business and to have a formal strategic plan as it guides the business in strategy implementation". This means the growth trajectory of the business and the strategies employed are guided by their foundational philosophy. But what is this foundational philosophy? For Motaung, the way we ought to do business as filmmakers who are building a national cinema is to embrace a foundational philosophy whereby "there needs to be more players in the game who own, there needs to be more different minds and different people in certain positions of power to always bring those progressive thoughts". More importantly, that foundational philosophy needs to be built on the radical assertion of: "Hang on, no, why are we doing this?"

The story of Videovision Entertainment is instructive in the discourse of transformation-as-Hollywoodisation and what happens when important players do not constantly ask, "Hang on, no, why are we doing this?" Just as the DIFF and the Avalon cinema partnership continues to generatively drive the work of attracting audiences and the film community from all parts of South Africa, the African continent, Europe and the United States of America, from the base of a transgressive vision, so Videovision Entertainment was formed in response to the need for entertainment in a context where the apartheid government suppressed and racially divided access to film content. In the words of Singh:

> So, because South Africa was segregated and we didn't have television until 1975, home movies (had) a big audience. People rented movies to watch at home, and there was no entertainment on Sundays. So, you had this big entertainment that you could go to or you could go to the cinema to watch a movie. You had no home entertainment, no television, no DVD, no video or any of those home entertainment. So, renting out 16mm and 8mm was the bigger tranche and (we) then started buying movies to release in South Africa,

> going to the film markets to buy movies for release cinemas. (We) then decided we are going to produce movies.

Videovision entered the film distribution space and later expanded by adding the production of local and internationally co-produced films to disrupt and oppose a film production landscape monopolised by white capital. As a *"diversified company with operations that range from its core business of film and television production and distribution to media, live entertainment, film studio and real estate development*",[65] Videovision has broken into the formerly exclusive spaces that were once white-dominated and white-only. It now effortlessly produces multi-million-rand big-budget studio blockbusters such as *Long Walk to Freedom*, attracting international Hollywood stars. Its Cape Town Film Studios is "the first custom-built high-tech film studio complex of its kind in Africa"[66] which seeks not only to bring Hollywood to Africa but even to rival it.[67] The studios have been involved in such big ticket films as *Dredd* (2012), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), *Maze Runner: The Death Cure* (2018) and *Tomb Raider* (2018). There are also plans, as intimated by Singh, to build new film studios in Durban:

> I don't know if you are aware that we have been awarded the license to build studios near the Suncoast casino and we currently doing costings for that. And we hope to start film production, start building the studios next year … Well, it will become a tourist attraction as well and also people coming in to shoot films here. And our winters are very mild compared to the rest of the country. So, we can do shoots throughout the year. Compared to Cape Town who has rain in winter, and freezing cold temperatures in Johannesburg.

Thus, the company's footprint, influence, infrastructure and asset base are growing ever larger. From a humble base, Videovision now plays with the "big boys", as it were. It is thus a source of national pride for South Africa as well as a significant generator and driver of economic growth, GDP, and jobs. In essence, Videovision has arrived: It now possesses the type of success that enables them to meaningfully diversify their film services into other industries such as tourism and hospitality. It is almost too big to fail.

Ironically, Videovision's story of transformation is also a cautionary tale because the company represents the logical conclusion of the hierarchisation of three-tier system. As one of the few tier-one companies that enjoy state largesse, it is an "untouchable" that drives Strategy 1 and

[65] Videovision Entertainment, n.d., "Film production, film distribution", https://www.videovision.co.za/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

[66] Cape Town Film Studios, n.d., "About us", https://capetownfilmstudios.co.za/about-us/

[67] York, G., 2016. "Cape Town film studio brings in booming blockbuster business", *Globe & Mail*, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/cape-town-studio-brings-in-blockbuster-business/article30817610/

Hollywoodisation to the detriment of second-class and third-class filmmakers. This is not necessarily by design but an outcome of uneven and distorted "transformation" that benefits only the few at the expense of the many. More importantly, under the three-tier system, Videovision enjoys the sort of maintained sustainability and investment readiness that, formerly, only white companies would enjoy. Only a select few black companies can enjoy this status. That is, companies like Videovision enjoy an honorary whiteness. Without asking, as Motaung does, "Hang on, no, why are we doing this?", the superlative success of Videovision has often been interpreted to mean that entrepreneurship and SME growth (or failure) is an individualised experience, where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed or fail and a lack of growth is assumed to reflect a lack of ambition or entrepreneurial agency. Such individualised agency is an oxymoron. In reality, and in history, black people are subjugated as a people and as a collective. This is why Fanonian national culture refers to the aspirations of the whole people rather than those of isolated individuals. Entrepreneurship does not exist in a void. Rather, it is "shaped by the influence of specific social structures such as race, class and gender upon reflexive decision-making, actions and practices, as well as on external perceptions of legitimacy, both of diverse entrepreneurial actors themselves and the niche markets in which many engage" (Martinez Dy, 2020:688). Decent family economic status and support and access to networks located on the right side of colonial difference can work advantageously to start a business (Edelman et al., 2016). These can never be downplayed.

Old boys' clubs, fraternities, talks at golf games, mutually beneficial business relationships and networks built on patterns of privilege and historical dispossession drive contemporary business dynamics in ways that are far more significant than what it written down in company annual reports and visions and missions on websites and catalogues. Today, many apartheid businesses, including Naspers and Ster-Kinekor, have been laundered and legitimised as if they did not subsidise apartheid and were not subsidised by apartheid. Instead, today, they are part of the nation-building dispensation that is normatively building the new South Africa under the guise of so-called public-private partnerships. After all, as Martinez Dy (2020:690) correctly pointed out, "it is this nuanced interaction of social structures that underpins the inequality in which the structural aspects of entrepreneurial disadvantage are grounded. The social arrangements emerging from intersectionality give rise to particular forms of positionality, defined as the juncture between structure (social position/social effects) and agency (social positioning/meaning and practice)".

The decolonial reading that I have done of Olsberg's maintained sustainability and investment readiness provides a lucid framework to understand how the current "disadvantaged space that most African nations and cities still occupy within a global context is directly linked to the history of colonisation and the economic and cultural exclusion of Africa from the global world of material and cultural exchange" (Utian-Preston, 2021:39). It also explains the failure of the South African National Development Plan to cater for the arts, as posed by Dumeko:

> In South Africa we have the National Development Plan – the national development plan of 2030 was great. The problem with the NDP is that it apportioned pretty much the same attention and investment to every sector – which doesn't work. What are the things that are going to get you farther aggressively? It is like an 80:20 rule, you hold on with the 20, you focus on the 80, you make sure that you invest in the 80 aggressively over time. You don't say you are going to give the same to arts and culture, and everything is in the same pot and you underestimate arts and culture, because in arts and culture are sitting industries where you can kill it.

The NDP, like other South African developmental policies, fails because it is caught in the trap of the historical schizophrenia inherited by the 1994 settlement. Such policies are caught between Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 and end up doing neither very well. The decolonial reading of Olsberg's maintained sustainability even explains why festivals such as the DIFF are seemingly always out of money, despite support from the UKZN and the government, and despite the *national* importance of its work. As Moodley stated:

> DIFF doesn't just exist for the industry. It does also exist essentially in terms of how we archive cinema and how DIFF can – the content and stuff developed at DIFF could become accessible for future studies in the university environment. So, that is crucially vital (sic). I think the fact that we have got three-year funding for the very first time from both the NFVF and the KZN Film Commission is that for a moment we can take the focus off the big worries that you have about whether we will have money for the next year's film festival to actually talk about how do we build the stakeholder relationships, how do begin to map out new ways of access, how to begin to do new levels of engagement with the industry. Which means that we can actually now put our energy into the real growth and development areas that previously have been neglected because it was constantly thinking about where do we get our money to run a programme and the big focus was around the ten-day existence of DIFF rather than the ten-day existence of DIFF as a catalyst for what happens throughout the year in terms of films that have been showcased and how they get additional markets, additional footprint, more traction where the people come to DIFF and have been able to establish networks or be able to attract potential distributors for the filmmakers and that's the conversation where we can begin to support and encourage now that we most so much focused around do we have money to present a ten day program. I do think there is a need for maybe new kinds of regulatory frameworks that need to be considered. I think maybe there needs to be some kind of legislative intervention as well that supports the industry in some way. But I am not the best person to speak on that. I think that would probably be a response that you would get from people such as Anant Singh, people that work in the distribution sector.

The answers that Moodley seeks about the nature of *persistent scarcity* are located in a decolonial analysis of the three-tier system behind which hides the corrupting patterns of the past that manifest as the binary split between Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. Film festivals such as the DIFF, which operate "within a globalised and hierarchical network with geographically uneven development that characterizes the world of international film culture" (Utian-Preston, 2021:45), are at the mercy of the persistence of coloniality. Film festivals in Africa not only have to "compete for extremely limited local and regional resources, they have to work within an inherently disadvantaged global system, in which they are linked to host cities, and even host nations, whose lack of power and resources place them at the bottom of the global network" (Stringer, 2001:138). Put plainly, African film festivals and their host cities "rank low in the hierarchy of global festivals, because they are in Africa and operate in African cities" (Utian-Preston, 2021:51).

Obviously, as part of survival strategies, African film festivals develop ways to identify closely with the core audiences who are mostly residents in and around the festival host city. This strategy is supported by various government initiatives due to the festival's culturally engaging programme enjoyed by visiting tourists and citizens. The role of the festival audiences is vital in that the programme is designed to attract local and international "imagined" audiences. Therefore, the festival's relationship with the local film community becomes vital in the sustainability of a film festival's relevance to the nation's people and film industry as well as the international community who seek to understand the types of films and emerging filmmakers in this part of the world. However, despite such survival strategies, and despite constant grant funding (such as the DIFF gets), such festivals are still not able to maintain their sustainability. This is because the issue is not about asking for or getting more funding. Rather, the issue is about finishing the unfinished business of liberation. If the previously marginalised are still marginalised, it means "Freedom Day" is illusory and democracy is masking the persistence of apartheid.

The participants in the study grappled with the search for answers regarding the maintenance of sustainability. Where one participant called for more funding and legislative interventions to sustain the DIFF, Dumeko suggested an aggressive and cohesive cultural sector development strategy that would require the government to allocate meaningful resources to the Arts and Culture sector over time. Dumeko believed that the government needs to treat Arts and Culture as a top economic investment priority and that the budget allocation must be in line with international standards and benchmarks. This would also mean making the arts as

important as minerals and energy in the economic growth debate. This appears a pipe dream due to how the commodities markets work and the high levels of profitability associated with energy and minerals. The clue about what the issue is can be sought in understanding how African countries and other developing nations of the Third World can be rich in natural resources (such as mineral wealth) while their citizens are insanely poor. Africa is the world's richest continent and yet also the poorest. This paradox goes to the heart of the questions that this study asks. Meanwhile, the illusion and slogans of development and progress persist. Poverty and inequality also persist – in some cases getting seemingly worse. How are people poor in one of the richest countries in the world? How are people poor in the richest continent on earth? The framework developed in this thesis has sought to provide some answers about the nature of the *geography of neglect* and the *persistence of scarcity* and their link to the unfinished business of liberation. How the unfinished business of liberation can be finished falls outside the scope of this study, although the analysis and discussion provide critical hints.

The study of the geographies of neglect and the persistence of scarcity that prevent the emergence of a national cinema in South Africa has provided an explanatory framework in terms of which to understand the central problem of the NFVF and its national film strategy. Just because an issue – such as a national cinema – is important does not mean that it will succeed or even that the best analyses will be available to best understand what is going. In South Africa, critical issues still suffer policy, economic, social and legislative neglect. This is what I have described as the geography of neglect. Furthermore, the proposals for building a national cinema have so far been woefully inadequate. They have mostly failed to put their finger on what the central problem has been. This study has attempted to help fill this gap by providing a tightly argued conceptual and analytical framework by which to understand what is going on in the local film industry. The approach combines a decolonial lens, the film services framework, and decolonial reading of Olsberg's analysis of the itinerary of independent cinema. The study assessed what filmmakers and film services providers had to say about the film production context in South Africa, including a consideration of the inputs of the full film value chain from conception to exhibition. I also examined the processes that went into the making of four selected films, *Dear Future Wife*, *Knuckle City*, *Long Walk to Freedom*, and *Inxeba: The Wound*.

The participants suggested many interventions to solve the problem I posed about the lack of a national cinema and how to get there. Interventions that were proposed include the youth-led development of film exhibition entrepreneurship, solving long-standing racial and class-based

marginalisation of audiences, the further involvement of government in infrastructural investment, appeals for more government funding and more subsidies, proposals for public-private partnerships, appeals for more private sector involvement, reviving Sol Plaatje-type bioscopes, various business support strategies to equip entrepreneurs with the necessary business skills, innovations such as those of Sunshine Cinema ("a non-profit solar-powered media network working through Southern Africa to address youth unemployment" by equipping "young entrepreneurs with a Sunbox (mobile solar cinema kit) and the skills necessary to become media facilitators, earn an income and spark social change"),[68] the commission of studies to better understand local audiences, their needs, culture, preferences, the involvement of local traditional leaders, building more and new film studios, community "crusades", industry-led audience development strategies, South-South partnerships, innovative film festival ideas, film clubs, education, deeper Hollywoodisation, film scholarships, understanding film through Ubuntu, film schools, international collaboration, quota systems, more and different regulations, skills workshops, skills exchanges, guerilla filmmaking, mentoring, regulating Netflix, the provision of community cinemas, deeper research, streaming, and the mirroring of the Chinese example – of investing extensively in cinema infrastructure – or the Nigerian example of Nollywood. These are all important interventions. However, none of them go to the heart of the matter, unfortunately. Dumeko suggested that the solution is "time and money". Thus:

> I think the industry has an opportunity to thrive. But I think that is all dependent on our ability as a country to see this industry as one of economic value that it is. That's what it is dependent on. It is not dependent on how efficient the NFVF, the NFVF is run efficiently, you can have as many NFVFs as you want, at the end of the day NFVFs annual budget is about 150 million rand. This is public knowledge. In my opinion as a creative, as a person who knows it from this side as well, I know this industry from both ends. In my opinion, as someone who also knows the numbers, who knows the data back to front, who knows that an American feature film on average costs about 980 million rand – talking about an average block buster. That's a billion rand. We should be giving one grant for a feature, the maximum you should be giving is a 150 million, in other words, the maximum you should be giving is our entire budget. If you want to say South Africa is taking this industry seriously then you find organisations accordingly, like the NFVF. In other words, the NFVF should be in a position to say, through your funding policy, if you are applying for a feature film, feature production whatever, fiction, even non-fiction, even a doccie, your cap is not what the cap currently is. Which is even less than five million rand. Your cap is a hundred and fifty million rand, which means, because that's an informed amount. That's looking at it in terms of international levels, what the level is. Because then what that means is, if you cap for one is a hundred and fifty million, your budget as the NFVF is at least 10 billion of not 30, at least. It is not money that is flowing around, people are getting rich, people are

[68] Sunshine Cinema, n.d., "Reach audiences where it matters", https://sunshinecinema.org/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

> buying houses, no. You are building an industry. Because if you are going to build something, if you are going to put in an investment in something, you need two things, you need time and you need money. You put the money in, over time you see the investment grow, you see the investment grow, you see the investment grow and develop its own interest. Over time. the focus is not necessarily on marginalised individual per se. And there is a very good reason for that, if you are previously marginalised and you are tier one film maker, then it works in your favour right. But with co-production the focus tends to be on tier one and two because really need a level of experience of film makers that actually can get a project over the line.

This detailed answer is still an iteration of Strategy 1. It still sees the industry in terms of the three tiers. The answer also still suffers from schizophrenia. The development of the R7.5 billion film studio in Durban is envisaged as a significant move towards strengthening Durban's position as a film city in South African, continentally and internationally. This world-class studio will provide a one-stop shop for film productions while the weather conditions also boost the attractiveness of Durban as a film location. The studio construction process is envisaged to create an estimated 50 000 construction jobs and 4 300 operational jobs.[69] However, it is not yet clear how the development of the Durban studio will contribute towards shifting the long-standing problems of distribution, lack of funding, and pattens of inequality – or the main problem of the maintenance of sustainability. It is also not clear how a "world-class" studio will address the problem of the three tiers. Motaung's argument that "ideally for me, in the future, would be to really work on developing an industry in KZN, where people can be based and access job opportunities there. So, for me, it is really important, an ideological decision that money must be spent within the province" is a sound one. However, it is not new and still does not address the elephant in the room.

None of all the interventions listed in the previous paragraph and suggested by the participants address the question of how to finish the unfinished business of liberation. Such a question is not necessarily a film studies problem. Rather, it is a social and political problem. The real issue is one of coloniality. Once the issue is properly understood, a decolonial lens can be applied to its solution. Even the promising idea of ReaGilè (meaning "we have built" in Southern Sotho) community cinemas – "pre-fabricated, self-contained, education and entertainment complexes situated on a 400m² site at local schools or public open spaces consisting of a 60 seat cinema theatre, 30 seat computer and internet centre, community care aid centre and community policing centre" (Mboti, 2012:1)[70] – does not address the question of a resilient coloniality.

[69] Global Africa Network, 2024, 16 Oct., "Huge potential in Durban Film City development" https://www.globalafricanetwork.com/government/durban-film-city/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

[70] ReaGilè cinemas were conceived to be "owned and run by 27 local community members, provide a basic salary, medical-

Such community cinemas can be derailed and disrupted easily by corruption, community instability, or the deaths or resignation of the project leaders. Yhingin Zhang's concept of a national cinema (2004) as being *by*, *for* the nation's people points to the need to ascertain what it is that the people aspire for. This takes us back to Fanon's conception of national culture.

Theme 3: Positionality, directorial reflexivity and representation

This theme developed out of an examination of the ways in which representation, positionality and directorial reflexivity operated and were constructed in *Inxeba: The Wound* (2017), *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013), *Knuckle City* (2019), and *Dear Future Wife* (2024). I investigated how the four selected South African films and the filmmakers' positionality interface with and test the film services approach. From that interface I sought to evaluate whether a national cinema is in the process of emergence in South Africa. Positionality is important because, as Stuart Hall (2019: 304) puts it:

> all thought is shaped by where it comes from, that knowledge is always to some degree "positional". One can never escape the way in which one's formation lays a kind of imprint on or template over what one is interested in, what kind of take one would have on any topic, what linkages one wants to make, and so on.

In other words, clear links can be mapped between *identity* and the *politics* of film production. Understanding this association is critical in relating filmmaker voices and perceptions to the make-up of the industry value chain and production context, including relations (including power relations), relationships and networks. These together contribute to the perception of film-friendliness and, ultimately, to the development of so-called film-friendly cities, nodes, regions, and nations. It is also critical to see how the filmmakers translate "unity in diversity" or depart from it, and whether they see their work as part of the development of a *national* filmic idiom. How contemporary filmmakers use film to imagine South Africa is critical in defining a national cinema. Whereas colonial and apartheid film constructed South Africa as a white nation with Africans on the margins, post-apartheid film constantly grapples with the structures of filmmaking and meaning that colonialism and apartheid left behind. The fundamental objective of the NFVF itself is to undo these legacies. How the filmmakers do so is instructive in whether a national cinema is emerging. The second and fifth points of Section 3 of the NFVF Act (1997) state clearly that the objective is to provide and encourage "the provision of opportunities for persons, especially from disadvantaged communities, to get

aid and an equitable share of all distributable profits to each member/employee, give preference to women, youth and the disabled, structure prices affordable to each community, offer free sport, edutainment, community news and adverts on 5 outdoor screens and be financed through government, other grants and/or term loans" (Mboti, 2012: 1).

involved in the film and video industry" and "to address historical imbalances in the infrastructure and distribution of skills and resources." The intention, therefore, is to deliberately and consciously use film to undo the past and thus, to construct the "new" nation in the image of those from the margins. This is Strategy 2. The third theme – positionality, representation, and directorial reflexivity – is thus about how filmmakers interpret Strategy 2.

In *Inxeba: The Wound*, the narrative approaches South African identity from a contemporary rendering of sexual taboo, sexuality and sexual politics – thus not just providing an interpretation of "unity in diversity" but unsettling and turning it upside down. More importantly, it takes the position of countering what the director perceives as stereotypical perceptions of black masculinity in Africa. Hence, Trengove stated that, in writing *The Wound*, "inspiration came, unexpectedly, from President Robert Mugabe. Statements that he and other African leaders have made since the early 1990s imply that homosexuality is a symptom of Western decadence that threatens 'traditional' culture". Here, the film clearly plays an ideological and counter-ideological role, contesting what it means to be an African man. Trengove intended his film to problematise and question dominant narratives about African masculinity, specifically the Xhosa cultural practice of *Ulwaluko*. In choosing *Ulwaluko*, a coming-of-age rite of passage that facilitates boys' transition into manhood, as a theme, the director is inserting himself in debates not only about contemporary South African identity but also about the role of film and filmmaking in nation-building and (de-)constructing the nation: *The Wound* was born out of a desire to push back against clichéd stereotypes of black masculinity perpetuated inside and outside of African cinema. As a white man, representing marginalized black realities that are not my own is, of course, complicated. Even highly problematic.… It was important to me that the story mirrors this problem. The character of Kwanda is an outsider to the traditional world who expresses more or less my own ideas about human rights and individual freedom. He's also the problem. His preconceptions create jeopardy for others who have much more to lose than him. [Trengove, *Production Notes*].

Remarkably, Trengove is conscious of his identity as a white man telling a black story. In his words, he is "a white man, representing marginalized black realities that are not my own". He concedes that this is "complicated". As Chapter 2 showed, what complicates this is, in part, the history of B-Scheme films where entitled whites claimed for themselves the right to tell African stories on behalf of Africans, succeeding in producing caricatures rather than authentic stories. This was part of a general tradition within Eurocentric modernity which saw itself as bringing light to unenlightened, uncivilised and backward non-white cultures (Eizerik, 2015). This

framework also constructed whites as adults and Africans as perpetual children.

Ribeiro cited the difficulties and precarity of making *Inxeba: The Wound* as critical challenges to filmmaking in the South African context. His account is worth recounting in detail because of what it illuminates about the tensions in the "unity in diversity" discourse on South African film sets. Thus:

> The obvious top of mind challenge is the lack of resources when you make such a brave films. So, it took a real commitment to a certain lifestyle to be able to making this kind of work. So, I knew for a very long time that I wasn't going to make bank and make the next *Transformers* and be able to put my kids through private school through my work … Here is incredible stories that haven't been told before. We don't have a robust distribution system. We don't have multiple funding buddies that create an environment of abundance. We operate a lot of out of scarcity but we do have an abundance of stories, and that is the power that we need to harness and to use in our favour… So, the first time I took *Inxeba: The Wound* postcards to DFM was in 2013. And we hadn't even made *iBhokhwe*, which is the short film which is the predecessor to *the Wound* that released in 2014. There was always intrigue and there was always a lot of warning messages that did I know I was playing with fire. Did I know this other production got shut down? Did I know this or that or the other? And I always thought it was a bit of a nova reaction and people being over cautious. I never thought in a million years I was actually going to experience countless death threats. But there was also an equal amount of appetite for what we are doing. But the funders didn't really get it. They rejected the project for the development of production and then we received the post-production support from the National Film and Video Foundation. The broadcaster really wanted the film, but they weren't sure we were going to get it approved by the FPB, so they couldn't pre-buy it.

That the founder of Urucu Media and Realness Institute put the livelihood of his family and children at risk as part of committing to *Inxeba: The Wound* and the conditions in the South African industry, compared to conditions in other nations' industries, are constituted as a series of severe lacks. These lacks are even more severe for the "previously" marginalised who are still marginalised. For the latter, consistent film production is rendered financially unsustainable. Ribeiro has a safety net of social capital and white networks in South Africa and Europe that came through for him to save his projects. Moreover, however severe the lacks he faces, he is insulated by his positionality as a tier-one producer. Indeed, it is his tier-oneness that enables him to tell black stories even if he is white and gets away with controversy. As noted, it is not an accident that "non-black companies appear to have far greater resilience than black owned companies" (NFVF, 2022d:68). It is also not an accident that most black-owned companies that service the film industry cite "access to finances and funding as an issue, followed by cashflow challenges and constrained access to the market" (NFVF, 2022d:67) as existential. Securing basic services such as transport and food on set are constant worries for

second-class and third-class filmmakers. Indeed, film sets are comprised of a "unity in diversity of "industry professionals from the affluent suburbs of Johannesburg and lower-paid support workers – service workers, security personnel, labourers – and drivers" (O'Regan, 2018:23). Starving artists and well-to-do professionals are all part of the new South Africa. This paradox is clarified by a decolonial reading of Olsberg's study of the question of sustainability of independent film business in Sweden.

I showed, in my decolonial reading of Olsberg's two-level definition of sustainability for film business (2012), specifically the notions of *investment readiness* and *maintained sustainability*, that whites in the "new" South Africa are able to benefit from the new South Africa without needing to answer, account, atone or stand trial for the past. Instead, the new South Africa wipes the slate clean *such that* when the NFVF draws on a three-tier system for allocating funding, white producers such as Ribeiro benefit from historical *investment readiness* and historical *maintained sustainability*. *Investment readiness* means that a company like Urucu Media must demonstrate a robust financial track record and growth potential that is enough to attract private investment. If it cannot, it just needs to demonstrate *maintained sustainability*, a reference to the fact that, although the company may not attain investment readiness status, it is able to still produce high-quality films regularly even if this is through reliance on some level of consistent government subsidy (Olsberg SPI, 2012:9). In this case, Ribeiro depends on the consistency of the government's three-tier system. More fundamentally, Ribeiro, like most affluent white artists and practitioners in South Africa, depends on *the consistency of the subsidy of whiteness*. This subsidy goes all the way back to *Die Voortrekkers* and *The Birth of a Nation.* In other words, colonialism and apartheid are fundamental sources, roots, routes, and paths to the sustainability of white film productions. Today, this is coded simply as whiteness or, less accurately, as white privilege. In reality, it is a form of pervasive coloniality, coded in the three-tier system of the NFVF. It is whiteness that explains why Ribeiro is not a starving artist even if other black film producers are.

Whiteness – that is *the maintained sustainability and investment readiness of whiteness* – explains why the severe lacks that affect the whole South African film industry are slightly less severe for white filmmakers and disproportionately more severe for black filmmakers, even if they work on the same set or are citizens of the same country united in "diversity". The *maintained sustainability and investment readiness of whiteness* is the reason Ribeiro can produce a film about black life in *Inxeba: The Wound* and not be scarred by the experience. He can afford to show disdain for Xhosa culture and call it "critique" of masculinity. Also, *the*

maintained sustainability and investment readiness of whiteness is what re-encodes the B-Scheme of the 1970s as a three-tier system in 2025 without anyone complaining about it. The *maintained sustainability and investment readiness of whiteness* is the reason Afrikaans film is thriving while black film struggles with dependency. Finally, the *maintained sustainability and investment readiness of whiteness* is the reason South Africa has no national cinema today. Investment readiness and maintained sustainability are dimensions that most black film projects are denied under the three tier paradigm. Ribeiro, on the other hand, has ready access to these devices.

As a white and male South African director, Trengove is engaging in the representation of identities and oppressions – and racial, cultural and class experiences – that he is removed from is a show of power and an exercise of power. He seems fully aware of how problematic this is. A white man representing black realities that are not his own is not just complicated. It is controversial. For one, it evokes questions of cultural appropriation and misappropriation and cultural colonisation. It also continues racist or at least paternalistic traditions of whites telling African stories. Thus, it is important to evaluate how Trengove sees his own role and how reflexive he is in that role, including the accumulated racial privilege and networks that afford him status as a bona fide "author" of films. The director is constructing a story as an "outsider within" (Nadarajah, 2007) about a people, place and realities positioned in the margins of society and dominant national culture – an "outsider" who can speak on behalf of what the NFVF calls the "previously marginalised". When a non-marginalised filmmaker engages – and feels entitled to engage – in representation of marginalised, being critical of their own standpoints is a minimum requirement (Nimfuhr & Meloni, 2021). A film such as *Inxeba: The Wound* is thus an exercise in racial audacity which may further open or close spaces in how local film production contexts articulate "South Africanness". These kinds of films are works in progress that contribute to the discourse of national cinema in South Africa.

Qubeka, the writer and director for *Knuckle City*, offered a distinct interpretation of the diversity of South African stories and their "authentic" core. He stated, for example, that he draws story ideas from his upbringing and writes about places and people and conditions of life that he is familiar with:

> Growing up in Mdantsane in the 80s and 90s was an experience that has shaped the entirety of my life. The energy of the landscape, and the visceral fight for survival that is palpable on the streets, has inspired in me a deep yearning to chronicle the lives of its inhabitants through cinema. It is my intention to capture the essence of life in Mdantsane, and the restless pursuit of being a champion within a society that often dictates, you are a failure.

> I am determined with this film to give audiences a glimpse into a world rarely seen, and a deeper understanding of the multi-faceted individuals inhabiting our land (Qubeka, Production Notes).

Qubeka grew up in the very apartheid environment that the symbolism of "rainbowism" seeks to transcend. His positionality, however, is that as a filmmaker he has not transcended the past. Rather, the past "was an experience that has shaped the entirety of my life". As such, the past is always present. However, *Knuckle City* is not a re-interpretation of apartheid or of the past. It is not even a political or historical film but, rather, a crime sports film about boxing, relationships, and crime. Thus, "Our aim was to bring more awareness to boxing, so we partnered with world boxing champion Zolani Tete to bring authenticity to the movie (Layla Swart, Production Notes)." As Qubeka said, he was determined "with this film to give audiences a glimpse into a world rarely seen, and a deeper understanding of the multi-faceted individuals inhabiting our land". The film thus casts light into how some South African film directors from the margins are imagining "diversity" – the diversity of story and cast in communities that before 1994 were not part of the South African nation. Qubeka's film also shows bold experimentation with genre, thus drawing attention to the place and role of innovation and *innovative practice* in defining the emerging national cinema.

How much does Qubeka's innovative experimentation with genre and "out of Mdantsane" point of view challenge or stereotypes and dominant ideas about black townships? Does he make compelling stories or he commodifies them? After all, the tension between Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 is whether to turn film into viable profitable commodity or a national cultural heritage. If our analysis is nuanced, it means that a filmmaker is not "authentic" simply and merely because he is black. Neither is a filmmaker inauthentic simply because he is a white person telling "black stories". Indeed, what are black stories anyway? Rather, one must, in the words of Grosfoguel (2009) "distinguish the *epistemic* location from the *social* location. Just because one is socially located on the oppressed side of power relations, does not automatically mean that he/she is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location" (Grosfoguel 2009:1). The male African filmmaker of *Knuckle City*, just like his white counterpart in *Inxeba: The Wound*, also enters the story-making process desiring to "chronicle" and contest dominant beliefs. The tool for doing so is to take the lived and living experiences of community of Mdantsane and use them to overturn to age-old perceptions of township "failure" as inevitable. Unlike Trengove, Qubeka does not speak as an outsider. Yet, a commonality between the two directors is the desire to use film to *cinematically* contest, resist, and disrupt dominant ideas while creating space for the re-emergence of marginalised and erased characters, stories, and

storytelling. Qubeka's storytelling is *rooted* – rooted specifically in Mdantsane:

> When I looked at boxers, doing a lot of research about the fighters, it always seemed like the fight at home was always bigger than the actual real fight – the opponent that they were fighting. The day to day seems to always defeat these guys. Obviously, it was taking a very entertaining perspective on the situation… Mdantsane post-1994 has produced about 17 world champions in one division or another. Which is insane. Absolutely insane. And it's literally this reality of going broke – literally giving your all to try and get out of the streets. But a lot of these guys don't have the skills to deal with life (Qubeka, Production Notes).

In this way, Qubeka brings the periphery back to the centre. Trengove's filmmaking is loosened and dis-anchored, taking the former centre to the peripheries. Qubeka is *authorised* by his positionality and experience and by his intimate knowledge and personal connection to the place and the people of Mdantsane. This same "authority" and "inherent advantage" to represent the township and the particular landscape and flavour of that part of the Eastern Cape recurs in films like *The Queenstown Kings* (Qubeka, 2024), showing that *Knuckle City* is not just an isolated experiment. Rather, it is part of Qubeka's filmic *oeuvre* and corpus. That is, places like Mdantsane *are* a film service. Furthermore, experiences in places like Mdantsane are also a film service. The memory and social and cultural experience that goes into making films like *Knuckle City* must be added to the normative film services framework, changing how we perceive film-friendliness. In other words, what is elicited from Qubeka in relation to his filmmaking suggests that we must expand and broaden how we think of film service and what counts as *a film service*. For those who grew up as non-citizens under apartheid, this experience *is a critical film service* that must be studied and drawn on in defining national cinema in South Africa.

In a deeper sense, thus, the director's relationship with his film project (and his other films) indicates not only how "the cultural communities in which individuals are socialized are also epistemological communities that have shared beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge" (Banks, 1989:5) but, rather, are also constitutive of film services. The commonalities shared between the director and the community being represented can "create a sense of community which can enhance trust and openness" (Merriam et al., 2010:407) *but is also important as film-friendliness*. Hence, Qubeka keeps going back to the Eastern Cape for inspiration and for locations. Furthermore, he continues to draw repetitively on his memories and experiences of, and in, this universe. His filmmaking is thus quintessentially grounded and rooted, such that the filmmaking value chain itself begins with these memories and experiences. Earlier, I asked: Where is the value? Where does the value lie? In Qubeka's case, *filmmaking value* is rooted in the "cosmology" of the Eastern Cape. The director's individual interpretation of his

socialisation experiences within the community is influenced by his own subjective "positions he occupies in terms of race, gender, culture, class and this personal interpretation shapes his viewpoint of the subject and people" (Merriam et al., 2010). We must thus conceive of a national cinema in terms of the *former* margins as the *new* centre of filmmaking. The experiences that were ignored and neglected under the A-Scheme and B-Scheme formats are now *centred*. This would be what Ngugi waThiong'o calls *moving the centre*. That is, moving the centre is itself a film service in which certain forms of filmmaking and film content are rooted. Rootedness in Mdantsane in *Knuckle City* means that the director does not romanticise socio-economic struggles and the psychosocial effects of the township space. Rather, he moves away from the "narratives of neoliberalism and nation-building" which tend to lean towards happy endings and social order restoration in efforts to "conceal the true state of black lives, the township and rural spaces" (Selekane, 2019:1). We can thus think of epistemologies as film services and film services as epistemologies.

Whereas *Inxeba: The Wound* and *Knuckle City* are medium-budget and low-budget productions, Chadwick's *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* is by design South Africa's attempt at a mega, big-budget "world-class" production, with implications for how we evaluate the basic framework for a national cinema in South Africa. The producer and director of *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* sought to make an international blockbuster out of the *mythos* and iconicity of Nelson Mandela, bringing international stars and "Hollywood" production values to the set of the film. More importantly, the film was framed as a production-as-mythology and myth-making based on the well-known story of a national and international icon. That is, much hinged on the cinematic take of Nelson Mandela because the production would take on the same "epicness" and *national significance* as *Die Voortrekkers* and *Birth of a Nation*, just without the racism and white supremacy. Chadwick endeavoured to humanise the former president of South Africa as more than just a freedom fighter, hero and world icon. Thus:

> When Anant first talked to me about the project, he stressed that the centre of the story was the human narrative; the cost to the man, the cost to the family, and to his relationship with Winnie. As a filmmaker that seemed to be a way to focus the lens of the camera. Yes, we could remember those television images and the iconic moments when he was released from prison, but I wanted to take the camera behind the closed doors right before that moment, and his personal interaction with his daughters, and our screenwriter, William Nicholson, embraced that (Chadwick, Production Notes).

Chadwick further stated that, "My instincts told me that I should concentrate the story on him as a man. When I met his daughters and other people who were close to him and I discussed

my approach to the film, all of them stressed: "Yes, treat him like a man. Tell the story of him as a man" (Chadwick, Production Notes). This hints at a tension between Mandela the saintly international icon and the ordinary human being, and, specifically, to whom such a Mandela belongs. Does he belong, first of all, to the Mandela family or to the nation of South Africa? Who must tell his story? How must his story be told? In this case, the artistic vision was left to Chadwick.

Thus, in the Chadwick film, there was an intentional focus and gaze on Mandela's humanity and persona as "a man", father, friend, husband, and human being, one who was relatable and preoccupied with the same ordinary concerns as any family man. That is, the South African epic was to be Mandela as an "ordinary man" and an ordinary South African. In this sense, the film seeks to construct and *sell* a South African archetype out of the Mandela myth. Interestingly, the Mandela epic still projects a normative image of a black male protagonist and his place in the world. That is, this representation mimics patriarchal conceptions of a heteronormative world typical of Hollywood[71] "epics" and from various other national cinemas in Europe (Jansson & Wallenberg, 2020). Furthermore, the epic, iconic, and international Mandela results in a much more *international* rather than national production. In the words of Singh:

> It is Nelson Mandela's biography, and he is one of the most revered people around the world and everybody wanted a bio gig on him. Authenticity and historical accuracy were key factors to which we paid close attention in order to ensure that the facts were not compromised. Also, you need to look at marketability and to sell the film. Like I mentioned, we started shooting it in May of 2012, and we went to the Toronto Film Festival with a promo reel and gave the bios a script. They read the script, they can read what's on the paper. They can look at the promo reel to see what the performances were like. And we sold most of the world (rights) based on that eight-minute promo reel. *Long Walk to Freedom* was a US$35 million budget. And we got to be able to sell it for more than what you produce. So, generally, you sell it for less than what you actually spend on it. But what happens is, is that when you do sell a film a revenue stream comes back. So, like I was saying, for every ticket sold the producer gets some money back. For every DVD sold, the producer gets some money back. And it is sold to television or it is sold as a stream. The producer gets the money back. So, although you may not get your money up-front when you sell it initially, over time you will get your money back and hopefully more.

The image of Mandela was, in the end, a commercially successful commodity. The production context itself, from the international stars to the budget and way it was marketed and distributed, is such a "once-off" that it is more of the exception than the rule to how films are

[71] AP, 2024, 5 Aug., "One thing that hasn't changed in Hollywood: Male characters still more than double female ones", https://apnews.com/article/gender-gap-hollywood-2024-ebdc7eed509f3ca12d4e1713722b6ea0 [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2025].

made in South Africa.

Just as Mandela is arguably South Africa's most recognised import and icon, so the producer and director was imported. Chadwick is the white male UK citizen who earned the "right" to direct the film based on his long-standing work relationship with certain South African productions. His status and standing as an established European director positioned and legitimised him as a "natural" candidate to direct a once-off African film on a world-renowned African icon. His male white and elite Britishness and "culturedness", as well as his status as "already international", recommended him for the directorial role and artistic power to tell Mandela's story over South African "others" who could not quite be trusted to pull off the "mega" project. Chadwick stated the following in the Production Notes:

> Although I knew the film I wanted to make, I was very conscious – as a native of Manchester – of coming from 'the outside' and I listened to Madiba's comrades and those close to him and that helped me find my way into the film. So, it was really through those personal conversations that I was able to get the emotion into the story.

The outcome is that the Mandela film is perhaps the most archetypal South African story. Yet, it is perhaps the least South African in terms of its "production values" and in terms of who made the film and *directorial sensibility*. Chadwick also decided that the Mandela film would not be a period film, since he is not a fan of period movies. "Who wants to watch a historical drama?" he asked. "I wanted our crew to experience the energy and excitement seen in many South American movies," he said, answering his own question. This British director decided that no one wants to watch a period movie about Mandela without ever asking South Africans what they wanted to watch. In terms of its production formula, *Long Walk to Freedom* is clearly a Strategy 1 kind of film that showcases "Hollywood" production values, commercial pitch, and international co-financing. As a narrative and a South African struggle "epic", it draws on Strategy 2 which seeks to bring South African stories to the screen as part of nation-building and addressing the structural oppressions of the past. If Motaung is correct that the objective of a national cinema is "to tell very interesting and engaging stories that are authentically South African but also can resonate and reach global audiences", then *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* is still an important template in the search for a national cinema in South Africa. However, compared to the other three films, it seems the least relatable in terms of how and by whom it was made.

Motaung, the director of *Dear Future Wife,* approaches filmmaking with a sense of curiosity and creative freedom to make the stories he desires to tell and see how audiences respond to

them. Priority is placed on creative freedom and expression, with the understanding that policymakers shape the filmmaking industry in ways that can provide a conducive environment for creative freedom. *Dear Future Wife* is an idea, a story realised partly due to various government-funded industry initiatives that provide a platform for developing ideas, networking, and financial support to emerging and established filmmakers. Enabling local filmmakers to afford the services required to start or complete a film project. Motaung said the following in this regard:

> Sometimes you just create and you see how it resonates to people. I think for me it is about giving myself that freedom to create what I really think I like, and it works. And I think as a creative, I am not on a global mission. I am here to tell the stories that need to be made. It is the policymaker's job to worry about, to create the policies and create a conducive environment, for people to just tell whatever they want to tell.

Motaung's emphasis on creative freedom in his filmmaking highlights the role of government funding initiatives in providing younger and newer filmmakers with opportunities to produce films while maintaining creative control and IP retention, without incurring the associated economic risk and pressure to achieve commercial success as seen in mainstream and its "capitalist imperative to prioritise profit over artistic merit" (Ingersoll et al., 2025:413). His interest lies in discovering the stories he enjoys telling and exploring ways to establish connections with his intended audience. This aligns with the NFVF's agenda under Strategy 2, which aims to transform industry ownership by supporting black-owned film servicing companies and promoting retention of intellectual property. Under Strategy 2, government film subsidy is used to help ensure that local filmmakers retain the intellectual property of their films, positioning them to "benefit from the wealth their material creates" (NFVF, 2014b:8). Motaung's prioritisation of creative freedom and exploration is echoed in Ribeiro's explanation of the necessary process and experience that the majority of South African filmmakers should be afforded for a distinct, inclusive national cinematic identity to emerge: "Before one develops an aesthetic, I think it comes with a lot of trial and error, with a lot of doing and getting the opportunity to fail, to push boundaries, to try different things."

Still, Motaung's experience of making *Dear Future Wife* is not untouched by Strategy 1's commercial imperatives. Although the development, production, and post-production stages of the project are financially supported by government subsidy interventions, for the film to stand a chance of reaching audiences, it had to adhere to Strategy 1 industry norms. Motaung explained:

> This is a possibility of, for example the Isiphethu programme, for the film concept started there and ended up somewhere in a bigger platform. So, a shout-out to you guys first. So, it started there, then this idea got developed in a workshop, and then I worked on it a bit more. Then ended up going to apply at KZN film. And then *Made for TV* got more development over the years, and then after that I applied for production funding. Masoja, then also took it to film markets while it was still in development. Went to Rwanda, went to Cape Town MIP Africa [FameWeek Africa], and I started to get more ideas around how I want to package it. Who do I want to attach on it, then got producers on board, Caroline. Went through a phase of shooting it, very intense process but I had my, I collaborated with procedures to handle all the nightmares and all those things.

The South African film distribution network is a part of the film value chain inaccessible to the majority of filmmakers, particularly those categorised as previously disadvantaged and their film projects. Most films whose primary dialogue language is indigenous rarely make it to cinemas, as the majority of local film distributors prioritise English-language and Afrikaans-language local productions for theatrical releases, as demonstrated in the NFVF Box Office reports from 2010 to 2024, the most recent box office reports available. This is the part of the project Motaung knew he would eventually need to confront and navigate. Part of his strategy was to utilise the Hollywood star system by collaborating with a prominent black South African actor, who is part of a Durban-based South African television soap opera with the highest viewership, and an internationally renowned South African actress as lead characters.

In Motaung's producing role, he recognised the importance of collaborating with an experienced producer, allowing him to focus on executing his directorial work within the limited time allocated for filming. He identified having the right personnel as a key contributing factor to a successful filmmaking process, from development to the completion of the film, considering he had lecturing responsibilities until the day before filming took place. This is an experience that many filmmakers, freelancers, and previously disadvantaged film business owners are familiar with when endeavouring to sustain their livelihoods between film projects. Motaung said the following in this regard:

> When it comes to distributing there are various markets. So, if you are able, it is about not thinking about South Africa as an entity. It is about thinking that when I was going to other film markets, I found out that there is another streaming service that just deals with black content in the diaspora. So, you can have your content there. There is a distribution company that deals with content in Kenya. So it is about trying to get into those various distributors in an international platform, because some places have stronger currencies than the rand. So, it is about striking those deals, time and time again.

Identifying and accessing distribution platforms and markets outside of South Africa that focus on black stories and filmmakers formed part of Motaung's strategy for positioning his films in places aligned with his film projects. He was intentional in highlighting racial alignment as one

of the key factors in his distribution endeavour. *Dear Future Wife* deals with a socio-economic issue prevalent in black South African families, where parents struggle to afford tuition fees. The issue of tuition fees in higher education and training institutions is a significant part of the discourse on decolonising higher education and was an important message in the #FeesMustFall student protests in South Africa, in 2015 and beyond. Although the film is a romantic comedy, it grapples with ills such as single-parent households, particularly focusing on a black mother's determination to raise money to support her child's dream of attending culinary school. Mamkhize, the 55-year-old mother, enters a surfing competition where she stands to win R300,000.

The NFVF Box Office Reports have consistently shown the limited success and infrequent success of films by black-owned production companies, producers, and indigenous language stories. To date, when dealing with black and independent filmmakers, Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro have a long-standing trend whereby "little is invested in publicity, accessing black audiences, or preparing audiences to engage themes and forms that differ from the standard fare" (Moyer-Duncan, 2011:69). A distribution trend that entrenches a national cinematic identity which filmmaker Akin Omotoso stated as, "what passes for South African cinema is not representative of the population" (Omotoso, 2016: paragraph 1). The intertwining of race with the economics of film production, distribution and exhibition in South Africa, justified through box-office statistics among other things, negatively influence perceptions about film projects with majority black people in "above-the-line" key creative roles (producers, directors, writers, cinematographers, and editors), and cast. This phenomenon is global, with Monica White Ndounou stating that "distribution is the greatest obstacle to broad-based success for African American feature filmmakers" (Ndounou, 2014:5).

The current race-based economics of film production and distribution mean that filmmakers such as Motaung must find strategies to survive the unwritten rules of the industry, rules hidden within criteria linking individuals and film services to particular industry opportunities in funding, networks, marketing and distribution, justified through Hollywoodisation strategies and box office statistics, a priority of Strategy 1. The hidden rules of the industry are designed and linked to colonial and apartheid legacies to keep the broad-based agenda of transformation in the South African film industry sluggish. Meanwhile, the previously disadvantaged film services, including those in above-the-line and below-the-line roles, remain stunted in their growth and are operating from a state of perpetual catch-up even when located in Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. The outcome is state in which the rewards are as limited

and infrequent as the meaningful opportunities they pursue.

Province	Company	Films Serviced
Western Cape	• Pansegrouw Urucu Media • Film Afrika Worldwide • Priest Post Production • Media Film Services	• *Inxeba: The Wound* • *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* • *Inxeba: The Wound*
	• Beautifully Crafted Cuts • ATM (Artistes Personal Management) • ERM Actors Agency • Indigenous Film Distributors • Shesha Film & TV Catering • *Ithuba Security*	• *Inxeba: The Wound & Knuckle City* • *Inxeba: The Wound* • *Knuckle City* • *Knuckle City* • *Inxeba: The Wound* • *Inxeba: The Wound* • *Knuckle City*
Gauteng	• Yellowbone Entertainment • Film and Vinyl Club • Moonyeen Lee Casting (MLA) • Thespians • Bladeworks Post Production • Precision Stunt & SFX • AAA Entertainment • Chilling Affairs • Mzantsi Magic • NFVF • DTIC • Quizzical Pictures • Game Set Match Catering	• *Knuckle City* • *Inxeba: The Wound* • *Knuckle City* • *Knuckle City* • *Knuckle City* • *Knuckle City* • *Knuckle City* • *Inxeba: The Wound* • *Knuckle City* • *Knuckle City & Dear Future Wife* • *Knuckle City* • *Inxeba: The Wound* • *Knuckle City*
KwaZulu-Natal	• Videovision • Distant Horizon • Emela Films • Four Mountains Production • Insight Creatives • Daniel Bate-Red Carpet Media • Deaf Dog Production. • Reeltime Film & TV Production. • KwaZulu-Natal Tourism & Film Authority • Mustard Seed • Grafton Street Security	• *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* • *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* • *Dear Future Wife* • *Dear Future Wife* • *Dear Future Wife* • *Dear Future Wife* • *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* • *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* • *Dear Future Wife* • *Dear Future Wife* • *Dear Future Wife*

Other Provinces	• Next Media (Eastern Cape). • Ronnies Motors Mercedes-Benz (Eastern Cape) • Eastern Cape Economic Development Corporation (Eastern Cape)	• *Knuckle City* • *Knuckle City* • *Knuckle City*
International	• Oak Motion Pictures (Netherlands) • The Weinstein Company (United States)	• *Inxeba: The Wound* • *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*

Table 10: Distribution of selected film companies by province

Province	**Film practitioner, Role and Film**
Western Cape	John Trengove: scriptwriter, Director, *Inxeba: The Wound* Thando Mgqolozana: Screenwriter, *Inxeba: The Wound* Bongile Mantsai: Key cast, *Inxeba: The Wound*; *Knuckle City* Thembekile Komani: Key cast, *Knuckle City* Siv Ngesi: Key cast, *Knuckle City* Matthew Swanepoel: Editor, *Inxeba: The Wound* Matthew James: Sound Designer, *Inxeba: The Wound* Claudine Jurd: makeup, Knuckle City Zayaan Damon: makeup, Knuckle City Nomthandazo Zwane: makeup, Knuckle City
Gauteng	Layla Swart: Producer, Editor, *Knuckle City* Malusi Bengu: Screenwriter, *Inxeba: The Wound* Jahmil X.T Qubeka: Producer, Screenwriter, Director, Knuckle City Malusi Bengu: Screenwriter, *Inxeba: The Wound* Gerald Thabo: Special Effects, *Inxeba: The Wound* Tertius de Lange: Special Effects, *Knuckle City* Niza Jay Ncoyini: Key cast, *Inxeba: The Wound* Thobani Mseleni: Key cast, *Inxeba: The Wound* Terry Phetho: Key cast, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* Masoja Msizi: Key cast, *Dear Future Wife* Sipho Zele: Key cast, *Dear Future Wife* Patrick Ndlovu: Key cast, Knuckle City Faniswa Yisa: Key cast, Knuckle City Bobby Cardoso: Production designer, *Inxeba: The Wound* Thanduxolo "Thando" Magwaza: Sound Designer, *Dear Future Wife* Guy Steer: Sound Designer Willie Nel: cinematographer, *Knuckle City* Alec Ngwenya: catering, *Knuckle City*
KwaZulu-Natal	Anant Singh: Producer, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* Benjamin Maier: Producer, *Dear Future Wife* Obett Motaung: Scriptwriter, Director, *Dear Future Wife* Caroline Doherty: scriptwriter, producer, *Dear Future Wife* Ashlynne Jones: production manager, *Dear Future Wife* Leleti Khumalo: Lead, *Dear Future Wife* Angel Zuma: Key cast, *Dear Future Wife* Jimmy Reynolds: cinematographer, *Dear Future Wife* Nondumiso Makhanya: makeup, *Dear Future Wife* Nanazy Mthethwa: makeup, *Dear Future Wife*
Other provinces	Deon Carelese: security, *Knuckle City*

International	Justin Chadwick: Director, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* Idriss Elba: Lead actor, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* Naomie Harris: Lead actor, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* William Nicholson: Screenplay, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* Nakhane Touré: Key cast, *Inxeba: The Wound* Paul Özgur: cinematographer, *Inxeba: The Wound* Johnny Breedt: Production Designer, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* Rick Russell: Editor, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* Lol Crawley: cinematographer, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*

Table 11: Distribution of selected film roles by province and film serviced

5.2 SYNTHESIS & CONCLUSION

This chapter presented and discussed the themes extracted from the data, providing an in-depth synthesis and interpretation of the findings and situating them within the broader question of whether a truly national cinema exists in contemporary South Africa. Drawing on interviews with film directors, producers, distributors, film festival managers, funders, and marketers, as well as close contextual analysis of *Knuckle City, Inxeba, Dear Future Wife* and *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom,* the study ended with four main themes that highlighted both the possibilities and limitations of national cinema in a post-apartheid context. The central thread running through the findings is the issue of transformation which participants consistently linked to the viability of a national cinema and the film value chain, from development and production to distribution and exhibition. Yet, transformation is not reducible to surface-level inclusion or token empowerment. Rather, it must be experienced as broad-based, meaningful participatory and equitable. It must be inclusive and sustainable and be about ownership and opportunity. Essentially, the nature of the discussion quickly moved beyond a mere preoccupation with quantitative checklists to the insistence that transformation cannot happen only on the surface: transformation must be seen, felt, acknowledged, and experienced by the generality of practitioners in the industry.

The three overarching themes that emerged underscored the complexity, even contradictions, of building a national cinema. Inclusivity requires recognition of intersecting identities and equitable participation. An inclusive, accessible and sustainable film industry is not only one that has an ecosystem that enables film businesses and individuals to provide services efficiently, maintain their core purpose and longevity in an evolving industry but also grapples with Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 and, even more importantly, maintained sustainability and investment readiness. Access involves not only entry into the industry but *radically meaningful* opportunities that include marginalised voices. This space must be radically meaningful because these voices are not merely “previously” marginalised. Rather, they are marginalised

in the present. Ownership, in the final analysis, is a critical indicator of change and whether things have changed. The study, in this regard, suggested that neither the "new South Africa" nor the "rainbow nation" count – at least not yet – as sources of a national culture.

The first theme that emerged from the analysis touched on South African national identity and culture and their complex relationship to cinema, place, and audience, seeking to capture the complexities of making and showing films in South Africa and how such complexity influences the fundamental matter of whether there is a truly national cinema in South Africa. Predictably, variations of questions about what kinds of films are made, who funds the films, and who gets to watch the films, including the traditional problem of *distribution*, abounded in the data. The golden thread was about the sort of film culture that exists in South Africa and, ultimately, a national cinema culture and its antecedents, characteristics, and attributes. The second theme that emerged enlarged on the questioning and defining of South Africanness itself as well as assessing the criterion for transformation towards a national cinema in a South Africa context. The theme suggested that we can begin to think about what constitutes a South African film production (or what does not) in two ways: firstly, through the nature, form and content of the narrative and, secondly, through the production process. The second dimension, notably, referred directly to a film services approach. In the data, both dimensions were interconnected, although such interconnection needed to be teased out.

The third theme developed out of an examination of the ways in which representation, positionality and directorial reflexivity operated and were constructed by respective film practitioners and film services providers, including how the filmmakers' positionality interfaced with and tested the film services approach *in practice*. From that interface I sought to evaluate if a national cinema is in the process of emergence in South Africa. Positionality is important because, as Stuart Hall, puts it, "all thought is shaped by where it comes from, that knowledge is always to some degree 'positional'. One can never escape the way in which one's formation lays a kind of imprint on or template over what one is interested in, what kind of take one would have on any topic, what linkages one wants to make, and so on". There were clear links that I could map between *identity* and the *politics* of film production. Understanding this association was critical in relating filmmaker voices and perceptions to the make-up of the industry value chain and production context, comprising relations (including power relations), relationships and networks. These together contribute to the perception of film friendliness and, ultimately, to the development of so-called film-friendly cities, nodes, regions, and nations. It is also critical to see how the filmmakers translated "unity in diversity" or departed from it, and

whether they saw their work as part of the development of a *national* filmic idiom. How contemporary filmmakers use film to imagine South Africa was critical in defining a national cinema.

The case studies of *Inxeba: The Wound*, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, *Dear Future Wife*, and *Knuckle City* exposed succinctly the contradictions at the heart of South African cinema. Far from a coherent national project, the industry is marked by dependency, uneven development, and unresolved struggles over ownership and identity. *Inxeba: The Wound*, for example, exemplifies this paradox: celebrated as a local story, yet structurally reliant on international co-production and foreign capital, with a conflicting and conflicted plotline. Such unevenness is not incidental but symptomatic of both chronic ideological and funding deficits. State institutions like the NFVF and DTIC continue to provide only partial support without ever resolving the contradiction of Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. The result is a cinema that is simultaneously national and pseudo-national, unevenly transnational, and with an autonomy compromised by a mish-mash of imperatives. Regional disparities reinforce these structural weaknesses. Gauteng and Cape Town monopolise infrastructure and services while provinces such as the Eastern Cape remain peripheral. This *unevenness* is not simply economic but historical, reproducing apartheid-era geographies of privilege and exclusion as well as, importantly, spawning geographies of neglect. Ownership patterns further entrench inequality: white dominance in key film services and distribution routes undermines policy rhetoric of inclusivity. Transformation, despite being a central discourse, remains partial and contradictory. Thus, a key finding is that industry practice oscillates between two strategies – one privileging international investment and market logics, the other advocating redress and inclusivity. In reality, the coexistence of these strategies produces a schizophrenic policy environment, where inclusiveness is invoked while dependence on foreign capital persists.

Defining "South Africanness" in film production reveals further contradictions. Firstly, language underscores the limits of transformation. The dominance of English and Afrikaans reflects entrenched coloniality and the ideological weight of "raced" cinema. Indigenous language films remain marginal, despite the success of *Inxeba: The Wound* and *Knuckle City* challenging the industry's orthodoxy. The persistence of linguistic inequality signals that a truly national cinema has yet to materialise. Secondly, narratives often reproduce the founding myths of rainbowism, epitomised by Mandela. Yet, films such as *Inxeba: The Wound* and *Knuckle City* complicate this myth by foregrounding marginal voices and incessant contradictions about what is South African and the meaning of being South African. Production processes, however,

remain shaped by demographic imbalances and entrenched privilege. Directors' positionalities highlight the politics of representation: Qubeka's intimate knowledge of Mdantsane authorises his storytelling, while Trengove's reflexivity underscores the privileges that enable him to speak as an "outsider within". Chadwick's authorship of Mandela's story illustrates how international standing and whiteness continue to legitimise authority over iconic South African narratives. These examples reveal that who gets to tell South African stories is still mediated by race, class, and global hierarchies.

Opportunities *do* exist, but are unevenly distributed and constrained by intense path dependencies. While South Africa's affordability and skilled services attract international productions, and diverse local talent enriches storytelling, these strengths are undermined by persistent skills gaps, funding deficits, and skewed ownership. International co-production is necessary but dilutes national specificity, while the absence of accountability for apartheid-era media corporations obstructs collective redress. The industry's sustainability is fragile, dependent on external capital and vulnerable to structural inequalities. The evidence suggests that South African national cinema exists only in fragments through local stories, diverse talent, and service infrastructures but remains compromised by dependency and inequality. National cinema cannot be understood as a settled entity; it is an unfinished project, continually reshaped by competing imperatives of transformation, sustainability, access, and ownership.

Crucially, the lived experiences of practitioners reveal that transformation must move beyond rhetoric and tokenism. Unless felt in the material conditions of filmmaking funding, ownership, language, and representation, policy discourse will remain empty and meaningless, even self-undermining. South African cinema, therefore, is *not quite national yet*. Three decades have not been enough to crystallise either a national culture or a national cinema in South Africa. It could be that the process will take longer, hence just a matter of time before a truly national cinema emerges. However, a more substantive reason seems to be that the very post-1994 compact itself is not ideal as a source of national culture, a contention that aligns with Grosfoguel's (2009) identification of the problem of the existence of an invisible coloniality and influence of current global colonial-racial hierarchies in the current strategies aimed toward developing the South African film industry as *national* in terms of identity, accessibility and scope. Hence, a resilient coloniality is identifiable as one of the reasons a national cinema does not yet exist and may not exist. The "nationalness" and "nationness" have neither emerged nor settled in any substantive sense. Instead, it remains a contested terrain where the struggle

continues. National cinema in South Africa is not only unfinished business. It is an ongoing project.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

This study investigated the notion of a national cinema in South Africa, seeking to determine the *extent* to which a truly national cinema can be said to exist in South Africa today, to establish the *limits* and *possibilities* to the emergence of a national cinema. The unit of analysis in the study was the film context rather than the film text, with film context referring to what happens from idea and concept to production, distribution and exhibition. The interviews explored industry practices through the filter of the experiences of those working day-to-day within this fledgling *national* cinema. What did they see, experience, and feel? Was this viable, inclusive, and sustainable? Was the film industry transformed and equitable? Where, and what, are the opportunities? Who owns what and does what, to what end? Who is benefitting? What must be done and what is being done? Whose film industry is it? A core assumption underpinning this study, of course, was that South African cinema before 1994 was not, and could never be, *truly national*. However, since the official end of apartheid, South African society has been constitutionally challenged to transform itself by urgently doing away with racist systems of "national" culture and systems of cultural production rooted in colonialism, whiteness, and apartheid. Thus, the objective of the study was to determine the extent to which the film production value chain has transcended the logic of coloniality, apartheid, inequality, fragmentation and inaccessibility for the so-called previously marginalised.

Ultimately, the study concluded that the notion of a South African national cinema in the current post-apartheid period remains *elusive*. An attempt was made to lay out the factors behind this persistent elusiveness. The findings, for example, assert that there is nothing *previous* about the conditions reproducing fragmentation, marginalisation and inaccessibility in the industry. Rather, these conditions are at work *now*. Patterns of privilege remain. The study's exploration of the putative emergence of a transformed South African national cinema through a thematic analysis of interviews with selected filmmakers and film-services providers, businesses and entities, while also digging into secondary sources to augment the insights from the interviews, utilised the film services approach in combination with a decolonial lens to interrogate patterns and trends in the industry. The concepts of coloniality of power and matrices of power were employed to assess the ways in which invisible forms of power are reproduced in specific practices, ultimately showing that the concept of "previously marginalised" is a contradiction.

This is because, as noted, those who were previously marginalised are still marginalised today. In fact, the *previousification* of an ongoing persistent crisis is itself an indicator of how serious this issue is.

Has the historically checkered and messy filmmaking landscape and environment, built on messy histories and a messy present, resolved into a national cinema? The answer is *no*. Broadly, South African cinema still lacks a distinct or meaningful *national* identity. Responses to this tended to be divided into optimistic and pessimistic. The more optimistic response is that South Africa does not *yet* have cinematic identity, leaving open the possibility that this will come with time. Such things take time. The recent success and global visibility of Nollywood within two decades has already challenged existing standard and normative notions of how industry development in Africa should look like, or how long it must take for national cinemas to emerge. South Africa could still have its own Nollywood moment. The success of the Nigerian film industry is all the more remarkable when one considers the cultural, social, and linguistic diversity of the country. The same diversity is present in South Africa, with the difference that South Africa's diversity is *racial* at base while that of Nigeria is *ethnic*. Critically, Nollywood emerges by bypassing and upending the norms of the film services approach. Could a national cinema emerge in South Africa by doing the same? On the other hand, the more pessimistic response doubts that a coherent and unified national identity will ever be possible in South Africa due to the unresolved problem resilient coloniality.

Yet, whether one is optimistic or pessimistic, *transformation* is identified as imperative if a national cinema is to emerge in South Africa. The feeling that transformation is critical is predominantly expressed despite the fact there is little agreement about what transformation itself entails. The search for a South African national cinema is an ongoing and messy process. The study suggested that this process is shaped by the dominant and hegemonic ideas and policies of a rainbow nation which, ironically, are disconnected from the nationwide realities of socio-economically unequal and divided communities. Ultimately, the notion of a national cinema in South Africa is complex and contentious, even considering the lack of a clearly defined understanding of it. That is, the need to grapple with, search for, question and define what it means to be South African in a post-apartheid dispensation remains and continues. Such a quest is meaningful, yet always complex and contested. A significant point of contention, of course, is linked to the convergence of history, its legacies on national identity and cultural production as well as the post-1994 nation-building "agenda". Fundamentally, *unity in*

diversity is a constitutional provision. It is then up to the filmmakers of the new South Africa such as Chadwick, Qubeka, Trengove and Motaung to define and enunciate these "rainbowist" values. Complicating the "rainbow nation" mythos is the fact that the last three decades since 1994 have shown that the new South Africa has significant unfinished business. While neoliberal economic policies and the aspirational "rainbow nation" mythos seek to present a picture of a reconciled, harmonious, equitable, and homogeneous national identity and lived experience, matters in practice are not so simple. The three major themes that emerged in the study indicate this clearly, particularly through a stark split between Strategy 1 and Strategy, with the findings revealing a tension between two broad strategies in South African film policy. Strategy 1 emphasises international co-production, foreign investment, and market-driven imperatives. In essence, Strategy 1 is the aspirational stance for an economically successful South African film industry which, intentionally or not, leads to the Hollywoodisation of South African film services. Strategy 2, on the other hand, stresses redress, inclusivity, and collective healing. In practice, the industry operates through a composite and often contradictory mix of both strategies. That is, national policy, as Strategy 1, is top-down and hegemonic, while the realities of inequality, unfinished business, and a still-untransformed nation inform Strategy 2. These two strategies are disconnected from each other, thus pointing to the *inherent schizophrenia* at the heart of the search for a national cinema in South Africa. Indeed, the clash between Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 results in a mainstream cinema that masquerades as *national*. The *inherent schizophrenia* is evident, for example, in the discourse of inclusiveness, which simultaneously seeks private and international investment while claiming to advance national redress and transformation and, under post-apartheid conditions, leaving filmmakers to operate in a "Hollywoodised" *free market* within which many local productions are locked in a dependency framework that indefinitely positions them as "emerging".

The emphasis on job creation and economic growth in Strategy 1, which pervade both the NFVF Act and the NFVF's national film strategy and funding policy, is born of the logic is that film is not just a product but a *profitable* product with commercial value and a contributor to a country's GDP and that film is an element of commerce and economic strategy. Even government development financing mechanisms, programmes and processes through agencies such as the IDC are structured and geared to seek a return on investment and come with rigorous and stringent qualifying criteria. Films such as *Nelson Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* have the greatest promise not as cultural artefacts but, rather, as commodities and economic drivers. Nation-building (i.e., Strategy 2) is thus framed as happening *indirectly* – or

even directly – through jobs and GDP. At the same time, the appeal to foreign investment underscores the primacy of Strategy 1 while simultaneously revealing the limitations of the DTIC and the NFVF. How can Strategy 2 be met if these state agencies cannot sustain the local film industry *independently*? Confusingly, under Strategy 1, the film business interests of the elite, international production and narrative norms, and local regulations aimed at industry development are implemented to promote South Africa as "film-friendly" in order, oddly, to achieve the imperatives of Strategy 2. Thus, when the NFVF's 2014 *National Film Strategy* speaks of the need for increased investment into the film industry by both public and private entities, it is admission about the inherent deficit and shortfall in public funding of South African film. When South African film policy speaks of "inclusiveness", hence, it is also a plea to the private sector and, in some cases, international funding, to become an integral part of the normative South African film funding model. These issues are instructive because they are indicators of deep-seated viability issues in the industry across the value chain. In essence, a key weakness of South African film development and transformation is the failure to independently and adequately support, fund and protect the local industry. In the blunt words of Diawara (1992: viii), "The film industry in Africa has no government protection".

A high-budget production such as *Nelson Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* satisfied the IDC's stringent investment criteria by simply reserving a large number of jobs for black professionals in low-paid menial roles and as extras. Black South African talent and film services are afforded space on the big screen as an aspect of transformation (Strategy 2) as long as the projects and budgets are small or moderate. Once the budget size increases, as it did with the Mandela biopic, the dominant logic becomes "markets", "jobs", 'multiplier effects" and "international standards" (Strategy 1), and Africans revert to a second-rate status. When such blockbuster projects "come" to South Africa, they disrupt and re-shape the local film production ecosystem both positively and negatively. The positive is measured in the job creation. The negative is seen in the reproduction of a three-tier industry. Creative decisions and production choices on film projects reveal the complicity of film services provision to the coloniality of power that pervades film business activity. Putatively South African projects end up reproducing coloniality by positioning African talent and black owned film services at the periphery. These are important contradiction that are worthy of careful evaluation. If South African productions reproduce coloniality, unwittingly or not, how different are they from *Die Voortrekkers* or, at least, from B-Scheme films? Should films that reproduce coloniality and contribute to the persistence of the harmful apartheid paradigm be part of national cinema? The study showed

that how films are developed, written, pitched to financiers, produced and ultimately distributed, exhibited, and screened is implicated with power, power relations, power dynamics and the exercise of power. Applying Nimfuhr and Meloni's (2021) definition of decoloniality in filmmaking contexts provided for a decolonial filmmaking critique, approach and praxis. What was apparent in "reflecting upon" the production contexts is that hierarchies and hierarchisation continue in South African film productions, on film sets and creative decisions, criteria and the networks that are tapped.

As suggested, what makes the financing of films challenging and complex in South Africa is fairly simple to diagnose: limited funds from government institutions such as the NFVF and the DTI. There is just not enough money to go around. The stringent criteria are in fact designed to be exclusive rather than inclusive, ignoring the hostile, unequal and alienated conditions under which the majority of black and female-owned production companies and industry workers work. Simply, the majority of "previously" marginalised filmmakers do not meet the criteria. Instead, they are relegated to the lower-tier and second-tier subsidies. Wittingly or not, these barriers to entry reproduce the divisions of A-Scheme and B-Scheme, with most filmmakers are shut out and condemned to barely surviving, even if they feel that their stories are worth telling and that South African audiences *need* to see these stories on screen. The A-Scheme and B-Scheme subsidy systems of the past were "viable" because the industry catered to a minority racial (white) interest. Where government funding must cater to the majority, persistent and debilitating funding issues arise. Participants thus repeatedly highlighted persistent funding gaps and structural unevenness in the value chain.

The funding crunch is a permanent feature of the national film industry in the "new" South Africa. It remains unaddressed and unsolved. As long as it remains unsolved and unaddressed, the question of a national cinema also remains open. The uneven releases and up and down box office numbers of South African films mirror the uneven funding landscape. Filmmakers dependent on the subsidy struggle for a livelihood and to sustain their productions and production companies as high volumes of funding applications meet scarce funds. For most filmmakers, therefore, filmmaking is characterised by precarity. As films scrap through the different stages of production, the toll of scarce funding tells and many projects are delayed and remain at different stages of completion. The limited budgets for marketing, and limited opportunities to access film festival circuits and relevant distribution networks for filmmakers who rely exclusively on the government translate into difficulty in reaching audiences. Without ready access to audiences, the national cinema project remains non-viable. The pattern that

has developed shows the inherent contradictions of supporting a national film industry in a country still marked by deep inequality, resilient coloniality and the unfinished business of liberation.

The ladder-like three tier system that categorises applicants based on industry experience, the assumption being that tiers guarantee that funds will be used accordingly leading to the successful completion of projects, and the aim being ostensibly to stimulate growth in the number of annual jobs and skills development opportunities, has created first class, second class, and third-class filmmakers, all of them drawing on state funding at different levels. The closer one is to the top, the more accessible and the better the funding is. In theory, all one needs to do is apply and, if their project is "South African" and "good enough", they get the funding. The reality, however, is that funding is determined by the three tier-system. Thus, the three-tier system itself *reproduces* hierarchy, elitism, coloniality, and marginality. Indeed, the tension between total employment and black employment on the one hand, and skilled black employment on the other is partly explained by the situation where government funding and rebates provide significant gap financing for qualifying tier-one production companies, creating a pyramid, with a few at the top, they unwittingly maintain a structure and organisation that directly opposes the key priority of redress of marginalisation. Such pyramids do little to promote a broad-based national film industry. Instead, they reinforce inequality and divisions.

Indeed, the government's Strategy 1-bias undermines the attempt to construct a viable and truly national cinema. Strategy 2, which champions redress, is subordinated to Strategy 1, which is predicated on *not* rocking the boat but, rather, on commercial imperatives, job creation, economic growth and GDP. Subsidised films are the new second-tier film industry. That is, the current two-tier funding system reproduces the practices of apartheid. On the surface, the existence of the three-tier system does not mean that filmmakers are passive victims. Rather, they continue to work within and outside that system to produce generative work in front of the camera and behind it. Filmmakers take the initiative because they have a story to tell and will tell it *somehow*, with or without government funding. African storytellers are not beggars or basket cases but, rather, griots, storytellers, and entrepreneurs with agency, driven to disrupt and undo dominant images and stereotypes about Africa, Africans and their realities and experiences. A deeper reading suggests that there is *deep paradox* at work where agency and independence are still tied to privilege and whiteness, an analysis that becomes clearer when I deployed a decolonial reading of the film services framework in light of Olsberg's notions of maintained sustainability and investment readiness.

A decolonial understanding and reading of the concept of *maintained sustainability* showed the link between whiteness, power, the three-tier system, and the sustained absence of a national cinema in South Africa, as well as the probing of a different vision and proposition through which Strategy 1 can be realised *through* Strategy 2 rather than the typical approach taken by government agencies that subordinates redress to money-making. However, this new vision requires that normative frameworks be radically re-thought and disrupted. The critical nerve of the problem was "where the real thing is": *ownership*. It is not an accident or a coincidence that *ownership* also happens to be the very thing that whites denied Africans during apartheid and colonialism. It was possible in the study to decode this problem through a decolonial reading of Olsberg's (2012) two-level definition of the sustainability of film businesses. This kind of reading allowed me to drill down to the real reason why South African has no truly national cinema yet, for example, there is a thriving Afrikaans film industry next door.

Olsberg's (2012) two-level definition of sustainability for film business, using the example of independent Swedish film businesses, refers to sustainability as the *investment readiness* of a film business – meaning that a company must demonstrate a robust financial track record and growth potential that is enough to attract private investment – and, secondly, to *maintained sustainability*, a reference to the fact that, although a company may not attain investment readiness status, it is able to still produce high quality films regularly even if this is through reliance on some level of consistent government subsidy. Investment readiness is a dimension that most black film projects are denied under the Three Tier paradigm. The same projects are assured of maintained sustainability from the NFVF but at the cost of being hierarchised as second class and third class. In other words, the greatest risk for black film projects is the form of maintained sustainability that they fall under when they depend on NFVF subsidies. This is readily demonstrated by the fact that Afrikaans film products do not draw any maintained sustainability from the NFVF. Rather, they draw their maintained sustainability from the long tradition of *Die Voortrekkers*. That is, colonialism and apartheid mean that Afrikaners already have ownership (of the means of production and factors of production). The basis of the Afrikaans film industry is the maintained sustainability and investment readiness drawn from a history of dispossession of Africans.

Film can be commercialised without one losing their value if one can leverage ownership as an element of *maintained sustainability*. Unfortunately, this is precisely what history denies most "previously" disadvantaged. It is also the reason the "previously" disadvantaged are still disadvantaged today. That is, ownership, in the deepest sense of the matrix of *maintained*

sustainability and *investment readiness*, is the reason that South Africa does not yet have a national cinema. The *lack of ownership* forces black filmmakers to choose between redress versus profit, nation-building versus commercialisation, localisation versus Hollywoodisation, Leleti Khumalo versus Naomi Harris, and so on. They are forced to choose either Strategy 1 or Strategy 2. If a filmmaker or producer wins with Strategy 1, he or she eats well but risks being seen as a traitor or askari to their own people. If he or she opts for Strategy 2, they seem like heroes to their own people but also risk ridicule as starving artists. A Manichean dualism is posited between "Guys, people need to eat" and "film as a nation-builder". The two strategies are constantly at war with each other. This is the source of the schizophrenia at the heart of local film policy. The current *film production context* is thus a trap. Hiding behind constitutionally enshrined common citizenship and the slogan of "unity in diversity", it consistently denies African filmmakers the agency to choose both Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 on their own terms. Instead, the production context is always presented as either/or, in a sequence of choices and creative decisions.

If one is for Strategy 1, then they are against Strategy 2, and vice versa, or, at least one must always start with one and not the other. One cannot tackle both and succeed. This is why the Three-Tier strategy is such an epitome and exemplar of the *reproduction of a resilient coloniality*: because it keeps African filmmakers from *reimagining* maintained sustainability and investment readiness on their own terms. Resilient coloniality, hiding behind the Three-Tier system, explains why the NFVF never has enough money for the many black projects – despite the acknowledged *national* importance of such projects and despite the NFVF's being empowered by the NFVF Act of 1997 to find and provide such resources. It also explains the persistence of distribution monopolies by Ster Kinekor and Nu-Metro and, even, how Netflix rides rough-shod over local television. These are systems of re-inscribed whiteness that no longer answer to their old names such as colonialism, slavery, or apartheid. Instead, they masquerade as business logic, demand and supply, markets, investments, capital, shareholding, the invisible hand, credit ratings, and economic logic, among other new names for old phenomena.

Most white film services benefit from and depend on *the consistency of the subsidy of whiteness* – a subsidy that goes all the way back to *Die Voortrekkers* and *Birth of a Nation.* In other words, colonialism and apartheid are fundamental sources, roots, routes, and paths to the sustainability of white film productions, coded today in scholarship as whiteness or, less accurately, as white privilege. In reality, maintained sustainability is a form of pervasive coloniality, coded in the

Three-Tier system of the NFVF. Whiteness – that is *the maintained sustainability and investment readiness of whiteness* – explains why the geographies of neglect and the severe lacks that affect the whole South African film industry are slightly less severe for white filmmakers and disproportionately more severe for black filmmakers, even if they work on the same set or are citizens of the same country united in "diversity". The *maintained sustainability and investment readiness of whiteness* is what re-encodes the B-Scheme of the 1970s as a Three-Tier system in 2025 without anyone complaining about it. The *maintained sustainability and investment readiness of whiteness* is also the reason Afrikaans film is thriving while black film struggles with dependency. Finally, the *maintained sustainability and investment readiness of whiteness* is the reason South Africa has no national cinema today. Investment readiness and maintained sustainability are dimensions that most black film projects are denied under the Three Tier paradigm.

The example of Motaung's *ownership* of his own IP suggested that there is no conflict between making films for redress and nation building, on the one hand, and making films to make money, on the other hand. The key is to invert the normative three-tier process that subordinates creativity and redress to the imperatives of quantitative measures and bottom-lines. The critical message here is that the filmmaker needs to care – and care about more than just the bottom-line – and have an *ethos*. Unfortunately, most of those who are successful from following normative models do not care *enough* about transformation. These are components of the *geographies of neglect*. The radical line was delivered by Motaung's argument is that "there needs to be more players in the game who own, there needs to be more different minds and different people in certain positions of power to always bring those progressive thoughts and say "Hang on, no, why are we doing this?" In just this one line, Motaung appears to have solved the puzzle of how we can get to *national cinema*: more players in the game, more players who own, different minds, more different minds, different people in certain positions of power who constantly bring progressive thoughts, and a framework for saying "Hang on, no, why are we doing this?" These six dimensions can be the basis for a generative framework and manifesto against which a truly national cinema in South Africa can be imagined and re-imagined. Whether the business is small or big, from a spaza shop to DIFF, Urucu, or Videovision, there ought to be enough generative room for all these players in a *truly* national cinema.

Motaung's radically unapologetic framework and manifesto echo Masilela's (2005) postulation that "a South African national cinema can come into being in the context in which the cultural means of production revert back to or are expropriated by the majority of the African people".

It is neither an accident nor a coincidence that the majority of black people are always playing catch-up through training, job or business opportunities while simultaneously navigating ways to sustain themselves, create livelihoods, raise families, preserve incomes, and grow their businesses. Rather, it is because of history: colonialism and apartheid. Redress is imperative. Businesses – and visions and missions – fixated on Strategy 1 merely consider how they operate in a fast-changing environment characterised by politics, economy, social conditions and technological developments at provincial, national and international level which affect competitive advantages of various companies, costs and internationalization. Again, the way we ought to do business as filmmakers who are building a national cinema is to embrace a foundational philosophy whereby "there needs to be more players in the game who own, there needs to be more different minds and different people in certain positions of power to always bring those progressive thoughts".

More importantly, that foundational philosophy needs to be built on the radical assertion of: "Hang on, no, why are we doing this?" The status quo in South Africa is an outcome of uneven and distorted "transformation" that benefits only the few at the expense of the many. More importantly, under the Three-Tier system, a privileged few enjoy the sort of maintained sustainability and investment readiness that, whites would enjoy under the old order. In reality, and in history, black people are subjugated as a people and as a collective. This why Fanonian national culture refers to the aspirations of *the whole people* rather those of isolated individuals. Entrepreneurship does not exist in a void. The decolonial reading that I have done of Olsberg's maintained sustainability and investment readiness provides a lucid framework by which to understand the current lack of a national cinema in South Africa.

Fundamentally, film production policy and critical practice in South Africa is held in place by an opaque and composite mix of Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. This mix means that the approach to film policy and practice in South Africa is always in tension, even schizophrenic. The discourse of "inclusiveness" exacerbates rather than resolves the schizophrenia. The issues of funding and distribution are not only crucial across the value chain but highlights issues of power and how film financing and distribution are ultimately implicated with power and a resilient coloniality. In theory, African audiences should have primacy for African films. In practice, the power and influence of international distributors reverses the sequence. The needs of African audiences are serviced *later* or, even, last, as an afterthought. Funding and distribution are implicated in the geographies of neglect, influencing what kinds of films get made and shown, a fact which introduces ideology and power, even censorship, into the

production context. While each film project has unique origins and challenges, and thus each value chain leverages value differently, is differently nuanced, and has unique emphases, how each production deals with the question of funding and distribution are critical to answering the question about building a national cinema. Fundamentally, funding and distribution impact creative decisions and are thus a critical factor in creative choices in films and the question of *how* and *where* films are shown, as is the question of *which* films are shown and *when* they are shown. In the final analysis, funding also impacts how we define national cinema. Where Strategy 1 is dominant, Strategy 2 is relegated to a tick box exercise of compliance, non-compliance, and metrics about employment, casual gigs, and the number of jobs created. Meanwhile, fundamental transformation and change are not taking place. In fact, patterns of the past persist.

The film services framework, theoretically concerned with coordinating, integrating, and facilitating connections among the different parts of the film industry and other arts-related industries, and emphasising inputs and interrelatedness, shows that national cinema depends on the quality of this very interrelatedness. However, there is a fundamental problem in the South African case: the South African film industry is structurally and heavily *centralised* in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, the biggest contributors to the South African national film industry's GDP. Coincidentally, these three areas were also the centres of the colonial and apartheid economy, with the rest of South Africa providing a supporting economic role. These deficiencies force individuals and film enterprises to migrate to provinces with better business activity, further exacerbating the "film backwardness" of the other six provinces. That is, the normative film services framework is more suited to "developed" cities and nations that are *already* better equipped to promote their film industry on the basis of the services they provide through existing production and infrastructure to other industries and sectors of society. The film cities and film services logic would require that the *other* peripheral cities and provinces of South Africa be capacitated with necessary skillset, technology, infrastructure, and financial institutions. As the study showed, the problem is not just neglected geography but a *geography of neglect*. The exclusive allocation and dispersal of film services in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town, with other provinces lagging behind, is consistent with a residual and resilient coloniality and the persistence of apartheid. Whereas in Goldsmith, Ward and O'Regan (2011) "local Hollywoods" are framed as a good thing, the South African film landscape suggests that they are not necessarily so due to how such filmmaking centres reflect and entrench exclusivity and apartheid hierarchies. The geography of neglect itself is fed and sustained by shallow, fragmented and insincere attempts at transformation.

In whose image is South African cinema? Who is shown on South African screens, doing what? How unity in diversity creates conditions for the emergence of a specific type of South African film production that can come close to being called *national cinema* is a yet unexplored question. Diversity, while an often-used, even popular, term in production notes and film policy handouts, has also become a weasel word for maintaining the status quo, power relations, and business as usual. Films everywhere *do* in fact promote a particular worldview. Thus it matters who is making the films, where they are made, how they are made, what the films are about, and who gets to watch them. As Higson (2002) maintains, *production context* is critical in defining the "national" in national cinema. Again, in South Africa, despite rainbowism, film is still not a "raceless" endeavour. It is important that the marginalised come out from the shadows, take up space and shape narratives, even commercial ones, and change perceptions about what sort of films are viable, entertaining, meaningful, and worth making. The negotiation of what value is (beyond money) and where value lies must necessarily be ongoing. What counts as authentically South African is, necessarily, always in a state of becoming and is always being negotiated and renegotiated. It changes and looks different from one film production to the other. Authentic storytelling for and by Africans on a global context is necessarily a negotiation and a contestation of being, identity, aspirations, and belonging. Joy, hope, healing, love, displacement, yearning, belonging and memories are all themes in the African stories of self-fashioning, being, belonging, and identity, in a context where African films are not strait-jacketed about what constitutes "African" subject matter. Yet, truly national cinemas truthfully capturing the richness of African life and the issues that Africans grapple with are yet to find an international niche and thus are often crowded out by such stereotypical fare, a reality that must be seen as a question of power (or lack of it).. Such a reality can and must change.

A critical tool for constructing national cinema is *language*. Notably, in South Africa, language has historically been a flashpoint since 1910 when only English and Dutch were designated official languages at the founding of the South African "nation" and African languages were systematically ignored, sidelined, and marginalised. In the new South Africa, the pool of national languages has been significantly broadened – from two to eleven – under the constitutional requirement for multilingualism. Thus, the enlarging of the pool of official languages is a default pillar of the nation building and transformation project. To repair the damage of apartheid, films must be made in all eleven official languages. Unfortunately, this

aspect is yet to be effectively leveraged in policy and practice. If Hollywood, British, Canadian and Australian films are in English, French films in French, German films in German, Spanish films in Spanish, Portuguese films in Portuguese, Chinese films in Mandarin, and Japanese films in Japanese, what of South African films? After all, Afrikaans films are all in Afrikaans. obviously. The prevailing industry wisdom is that South African indigenous language films do not perform well and, still, there is no corpus of Zulu, Xhosa, Venda, or Tswana cinema in South Africa. Intentionally or not, South African film still privileges the two colonial languages, English and Afrikaans. The language deficit alone indicates that a truly national cinema does not yet exist in South Africa. If language is a marker of identity, then the languages of South African film bespeak a contradictory identity. Certainly, the languages situation reflects entrenched coloniality. It is not an accident that English and Afrikaans-language films are the most circulated in South Africa. The dominant aesthetic and cinematic norms are still shaped by white *nationalist* culture and its imperatives. National cinema in South Africa must grapple with this and deliberately *centre* marginalised indigenous languages and capture their cultural nuances. The idea is not to impose African languages or essentialise them as fixed or God given but, rather, to recognise and acknowledge their worth, value, and existence after decades of systematic erasure. Films must be made in a language that forms part of the filmmakers' daily, common, and shared cultural, social, and lived experience. The neglected state of local film in indigenous languages indicates the persistence of *underdevelopment* fostered by A-Scheme and B-Scheme hierarchies.

In a decolonial analysis, *persistent scarcity* in the South African film industry is an aspect of the Three-Tier system behind which hides the corrupting patterns of the past that manifest as the binary split between Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. How are people poor in one of the richest countries in the world? How are people poor in the richest continent on earth? The framework developed in this thesis has sought to provide some answers about the nature of the *geography of neglect* and the *persistence of scarcity* and their link to the unfinished business of liberation. How the unfinished business of liberation can be finished falls outside the scope of this study, although the analysis and discussion provides some critical hints. The study of the geographies of neglect and the persistence of scarcity that prevent the emergence of a national cinema in South Africa has provided an explanatory framework by which to understand the central problem of the NFVF and its national film strategy. Just because an issue – such as a national cinema – is important does not mean that it will succeed or even that the best analyses will be available to best understand what is going. In South Africa, critical issues still suffer policy,

economic, social and legislative neglect. This is what the study has described as the geography of neglect. Furthermore, the proposals for building a national cinema have so far been woefully inadequate, having mostly failed to put their finger on what the central problem has been. This study has attempted to fill this gap by providing a tightly argued conceptual and analytical framework by which to understand what is going on in the local film industry. The approach combines a decolonial lens, the film services framework, and decolonial reading of Olsberg's analyses of the itinerary of independent cinema. The study assessed what filmmakers and film services providers had to say about the film production context in South Africa, including a consideration of the inputs of the full film value chain from conception to exhibition.

None of the interventions suggested by the study's participants address the question of how to finish the unfinished business of liberation. Such a question is not necessarily a film studies problem. Rather, it is a social and political problem. The real issue is one of coloniality. Once the issue is properly understood, a decolonial lens can be applied to its solution. The concept of a national cinema *by* and *for* the nation's people points to the need to ascertain what it is that the people aspire for. This takes us back to Fanon's conception of national culture. What Fanon called a national culture exists in South Africa, ironically, via the trope of fragmentation. Attempts to solve fragmentation through prescription only make the situation worse because government has sought to address social fragmentation through codifying and prescribing "unity in diversity" without effectively dismantling the economic hierarchies and patterns of the old order. In this masquerade, isolated *pockets of inclusivity* and tokenistic projects are touted as *evidence* of transformation. Life in a state of perpetual aspiration is frustrating for filmmakers because it is seldom, if ever, fulfilled. Rather, it is like a constant Sisyphean task under a new normal of endless dependence on NFVF subsidies largely subsumed under a new assimilationist paradigm. That is, participants suggested that what the democratic project has achieved, unwittingly or not, is to *assimilate into* the apartheid paradigm rather than the dismantling of the hierarchical order. The dominant message from government is that infrastructure, resources, and financing opportunities are now open "for all", and one needs only to download forms and apply. The problem, however, is that, in practice, the film industry operates under extreme opacity. Under the assimilationist paradigm, the marginalisation of Africans is re-written into "criteria", "funding instruments", "international standards", and "pre-requisites". The new idiom of unity in diversity, which is also the motto prescribed in the South African national coat of arms, does not do enough to reckon with the full extent of the damage caused by colonial oppression and cultural estrangement that survives even in the democratic

project. The importance of *the local* and of meaningful transformation are acknowledged only superficially. In practice, the local film industry is unquestioningly subordinated to and within the present-day global power structures under Strategy 1 that worships he who pays the piper and leads to a state of perpetual unfulfilled aspiration. The assimilationist impulse, meanwhile, aspires for and reproduces sub-Hollywood cinema in South Africa. Inevitably, it misses opportunities to look within. The result is even more cultural estrangement, fragmentation, and prescription. National cinemas, in essence, *should* centre *their own* audiences, such that the conception of local cinematic cultures begins when African films connect *unapologetically* with their target audiences. Needless to say, a South African national culture predicated on not rocking the boat is problematic because the apartheid paradigm can only be properly addressed by being dismantled rather than by assimilation. Until *fragmentation* and *prescription* are resolved and addressed, a *truly* national cinema remains a fleeting ideal, even a pipe dream.

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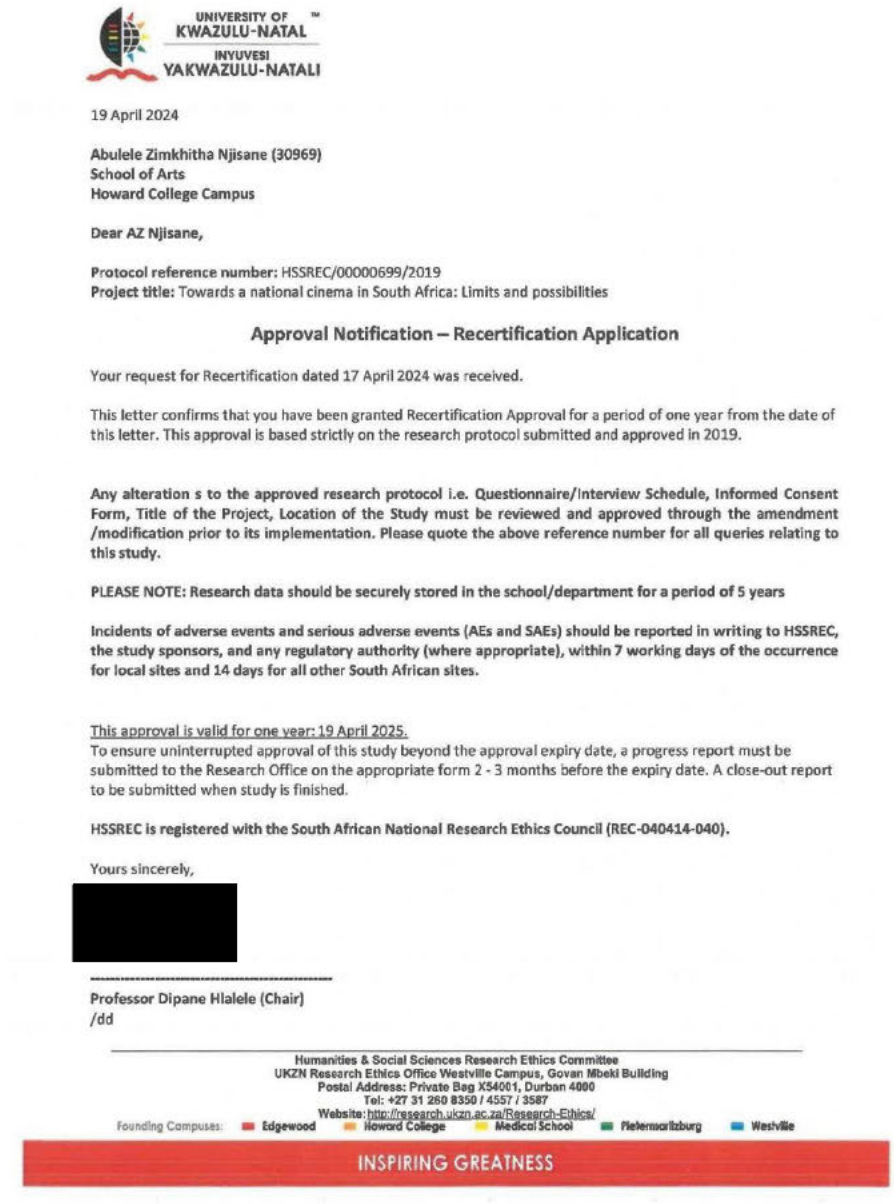
APPENDIX:

ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

19 April 2024

Abulele Zimkhitha Njisane (30969)
School of Arts
Howard College Campus

Dear AZ Njisane,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00000699/2019
Project title: Towards a national cinema in South Africa: Limits and possibilities

Approval Notification – Recertification Application

Your request for Recertification dated 17 April 2024 was received.

This letter confirms that you have been granted Recertification Approval for a period of one year from the date of this letter. This approval is based strictly on the research protocol submitted and approved in 2019.

Any alteration s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid for one year: 19 April 2025.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)
/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/
Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(To be read out by researcher before the beginning of the interview/Focus Group Discussion. One copy of the form to be left with the respondent; one copy to be signed by the respondent and kept by the researcher.)

I am doing research on a project Titled: ***Towards a "National Cinema" in South Africa: Limits and Possibilities***

The study aims to determine, through a *film services framework*, the extent to which a *truly* national cinema exists in South Africa today, as well as establish the limits and possibilities to the emergence of an inclusive, transformed *national* cinema in South Africa. The study explores the value chain of five purposively selected South African feature film productions including *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2014) .This research is conducted by Abulele Njisane (Student No: 208522308) towards my Doctoral degree in the department of Media and Cultural Studies at University of KwaZulu-Natal. This project is supervised by University of Johannesburg Professor Nyasha Mboti. Should you have any questions our contact details are:

Media and Cultural Studies,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Howard College Campus
Durban,
4041.
Tel: 031 260 2965
Cell: [redacted]
Email: [redacted].

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. Before I start I would like to emphasize that:
-your participation is entirely voluntary;
-you are free to refuse to answer any question;
-you are free to withdraw at any time.
The information you provide in the Interview (researcher to tick where necessary) will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher. Excerpts from the Interview discussions may be made part of the final research report but your identity will not be reflected in the report.

If you give consent to participate in the study, please sign this form to show that you have read the contents.

I……..(Full names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should I so desire.
Signature of the Participant…….Date……..