TRANSITIONAL NARRATIVES:

YOUTH AND SCREEN MEDIA IN CONTEMPORARY

SOUTH AFRICA (1994-2014)

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Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis

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Abstract

South Africa is a "young" nation in a dual sense. It is not only a democracy in its twenty-second year, but also a country with a large youthful population under 35 years of age. South African youth are often referred to as "Born Frees", being the first generation to grow up without the discriminatory policies of apartheid. However, ongoing disparities in relation to class, gender, and race in South African society reveal stark differences within this generation. These complexities are illuminated in numerous post-apartheid South African films and television drama series that place young people at the centre.

This thesis explores the production, representation, and exhibition of a selection of youth-focused South African films and television programmes: *Otelo Burning* (2011), *Rough Aunties* (2008), *Intersexions* (2009-2010), the *Steps for the Future Youth Films* (2009), and *The African Cypher* (2012). Using qualitative, interdisciplinary research methods, the study explores the discourses on the "Born Frees" in these film and television texts; the power relations and ethics informing the production of these works; and the works' role in creating "publics", that is, the discussions and actions they provoked among audiences in South Africa, and further afield.

The thesis' major findings suggest that the films and television dramas under analysis evoke "transitional narratives" in multiple ways. These works evoke the idea that just as youth is a period of transition, so too is South Africa in a transitional stage, where apartheid has not yet entirely ended. The analysis thus renders more complex European and North American definitions of "youth" that often fail to

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consider the myriad meanings of this concept. Moreover, these media productions expose persisting inequalities of gender, "race", and class that exist in South African society today, and the initiatives some people have taken to address them.

In the final analysis, the thesis reveals that different screen media platforms, and the publics they create, are increasingly "converging" in contemporary South Africa. The television medium (more than cinemas) had a vital role in exhibiting the films studied here, and social media sites were important spaces where young audiences discussed the films and television programmes. However, the study also suggests that it was particularly community film screenings that played a vital role in creating publics which brought audiences from different social backgrounds together in intimate and socially generative ways.

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Illustrative Material: DVD with Film Clips

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Abbreviations

AFDA	Academy for Film and Dramatic Arts
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AMVCA	Africa Magic Viewer's Choice awards
AMAA	African Movie Academy Awards
ANC	African National Congress
AMPS	All Media and Products Survey
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
ARV	Antiretrovirals
BBFF	Byron Bay Film Festival
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
BFI	British Film Institute
CADRE	Centre for AIDS Research, Development and Evaluation
CASE	Community Agency for Social Enquiry
COLTS	Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service
CSO	Child Safety Officer
CWFF	Cape Winelands Film Festival
DET	Department of Education and Training
DIFF	Durban International Film Festival
DOP	Director of Production
DStv	Digital Satellite Television
FESPACO	Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou
FPB	Film and Publications Board

HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HOA	House of Assembly
HOR	House of Representatives
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IDFA	International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam
IFP	Independent Filmmaker Project
IM	Instant Messenging
JHHESA	Johns Hopkins Health and Education in South Africa
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MNC	Multinational Corporation
M-Net	Electronic Media Network
NFVF	National Film and Video Foundation
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
NP	National Party
PAC	Pan-African Congress
PEPFAR	United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Response
POC	Prophets of da City
PSA	Public Service Announcement
Q&A	Question and Answer Session
SAARF	South African Advertising Research Foundation
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
SANNC	South African Native National Congress
SDU	Self-Defence Unit

SIFF	Seattle International Film Festival
SMS	Short Message Service
STEPS	Social Transformation and Empowerment Projects
SRC	Student Representative Council
TAMS	Television Audience Measurement Survey
TED	Technology, Entertainment and Design
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TV	Television
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UWC	University of the Western Cape
VHS	Video Home System
VOD	View on Demand

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Chapter 1   Introduction:

Youth and Screen Media in Past and Present South Africa

1.1   A "Born Free" Generation?

South Africa is a "young" nation in a dual sense. It is not only a democracy in its twenty-second year, but also a country with a large youthful population under 35 years of age, estimated to make up 76.6 per cent of the total populace (United Nations Population Fund, 2014). Out of a population of approximately 54 million South Africans, 18.5 per cent are aged between 10 to 19, and 24 per cent are between the ages of 15 and 24 (United Nations Population Fund, 2014). These young people, having spent most or all their lives in a democratic South Africa, have grown up in a society very different to the one their parents experienced. In 1994, racial segregation established under apartheid[1] was formally abolished, replaced by a liberal democracy and a constitution that emphasises diversity within unity. The laws that, during apartheid, systematically excluded non-White[2] people from the right to vote, to an education, to own property, and to engage in skilled labour were abolished. The

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[1] Apartheid was a system of racial segregation imposed by the National Party (NP) government of South Africa between 1948 and 1994. It curtailed the rights of the majority non-White population to establish, and maintain, White minority rule.

[2] Although the racial classifications constructed under apartheid have changed since 1994, I align myself with scholars who argue that questions of race continue to matter in the democratic South Africa (Nuttall & Michael, 2000a; Gqola, 2010). The capitalised "Black" is used in this thesis to refer to those people who would have been classified as "black", "Indian", and "coloured" (mixed-race) under apartheid. The lowercase "black" is used to identify people sometimes referred to as "African", in racial terms (Gqola, 2010: 16). The capitalised "White" refers to the apartheid nomenclature for South Africans of British and other ancestry, whose main language is English, and to those known as Afrikaners, who are primarily of Dutch and other European descent (Krabill, 2010: 167). By using uppercase first letters of terms connoting ethnic groups, I seek to avoid the naturalisation of racial categories that are socially and politically constructed.

newly elected African National Congress (ANC) government has focused on enhancing the lives of young people who were marginalised during apartheid, indicative in its ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)[3] in 1995, and Section 28 of South Africa's Bill of Rights,[4] which guarantees children's right to basic services, education, and protection within the legal system (Bonthuys, 2006; United Nations Children Fund, 2009: 14). For these reasons, people born in the mid and late 1990s in South Africa are often called the "Born Frees", a term bestowed on them for being the first generation of South Africans to grow up free of the legally entrenched racism of the past (Masland, 2004; Mattes, 2012).

The ideas for this thesis emerged from grappling with the complexities of the term "Born Free" generation. The continuing disparities in wealth, income, healthcare, and education among different racial and socioeconomic groups in South Africa call into question the idea that the country's new generation is truly "Born Free". The legacy of apartheid and the neoliberal principles guiding South Africa's economy today continue to constrain the wellbeing of the majority of young people, as revealed in the high rates of youth unemployment,[5] the many youths who have not completed their education, and their low life expectancy, mainly attributable to violent crime (Wood, Lambert & Jewkes, 2007; Kamper & Badenhorst, 2010), poverty (Swartz, 2009), and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Mitchell et al., 2005; Pettifor et al., 2005; Bray & Brandt, 2006). Almost 60 per cent of young people aged 15 to

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[3] The UNCRC is an international treaty established in 1989 that grants children and youth a particular set of rights. Since then, it has been ratified by all United Nations member states, except the United States (US) and Somalia.

[4] The Bill of Rights is a human rights charter of the new Constitution of South Africa, which enshrines all people's civil, political, and economic rights.

[5] In 2014, youth unemployment in South Africa was estimated at 70 per cent (National Youth Development Agency, 2014: 15).

24 years in South Africa (regardless of racial background) live in low-income households with a monthly income of less than R555 (£30) per person. For Black youth in this category, this figure lies above 60 per cent, whereas the same applies to only eight per cent of White youth (Statistics South Africa, 2010: 38). Black youth also constitute the majority of those who are neither in employment nor in an educational institution (Statistics South Africa, 2014: 8), and who experience racial discrimination within educational institutions (Dolby, 2001; McKinney, 2007).

However, focusing only on these problems would lead one to overlook the many positive and inspirational ways that youth themselves engage with the issues they confront in their lives. Youth from diverse backgrounds are those who drive the most vibrant cultural expressions in South Africa today, including films, videos, music, street dance, and fashion styles (Bogatsu, 2002; Haupt, 2003; Watkins & Charry, 2012). And although many young South Africans occupy a marginal position in society, they display agency in day-to-day life and often voice their concerns publicly, for example, through demonstrations (Moses, 2008; Bray et al., 2010). In their ethnography of youths in the rural Eastern Cape, Rachel Bray and others argue that "the stories of most South African children and adolescents are not stories of 'failure' or of a 'descent' into marginality. They are the opposite: stories of creativity and at least partial success in tackling old and new challenges alike" (2010: 10). Hence, although many youths face challenges in life, they deal with them in ways that do not necessarily conform to dystopian narratives constructed around socioeconomic statistics.

Certainly, however, the values of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in South Africa's new Constitution are, in practice, often constrained by material inequality,

racial discrimination, and violent crime. Thus, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have argued, the formal institutions of democracy – such as elections, parliaments, and the rule of law – do not guarantee social equality and people's participation in political decision-making; instead, these principles ought to infiltrate the processes of everyday life (1985: xv). In turn, drawing from Mouffe's book *On the Political* (2005), Gholam Khiabany and Annabelle Sreberny propose that the realm of what is often termed "the political" is not a set of practices separated from "the social" (2007). Rather, the boundaries between "social" and "political" practices are porous, and what is "political" is thus always an expression of "social" power relations. A "political space", therefore, is where "agonistic debate about social practices takes place" (Khiabany & Sreberny, 2007: 363), and this definition of "the political" allows for a more substantive understanding of what "democracy" is or should be (Willems, 2012).

In South Africa's media and cultural industries, however, an "agonistic debate" about the state of South Africa (and the new generation) has become increasingly restricted over the past few years. The country has witnessed the emergence of an institutionalised "official culture" established by the ruling ANC, which puts restrictions on the circulation of information and freedom of speech in film, photography, and the arts in the name of "nation building" (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b: 307). For example, the controversial Protection of State Information Bill of 2012, often termed the "Secrecy Bill", allows government officials to classify certain information as secret, and threatens journalists with imprisonment upon disclosure of classified information. Moreover, the Amended Broadcasting Act of 2007 imposed censorship on media representations of violence and sexuality (Duncan, 2007),

implicitly silencing issues that affect many youths in the country. And in 2013, the Film and Publications Board (FPB) – the national institution responsible for classifying films and publications – briefly banned the fiction film *Of Good Report* (Qubeka, 2013a) from screening at the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF), on the grounds that it contained "child pornography" (Dovey, 2015: 159–167). Set in the Eastern Cape, the film centres on an affair between a 16-year-old schoolgirl and her teacher.[6] The ban was lifted following an appeal by the filmmakers, but some observers expressed concern over the increasing emergence of state control limiting freedom of expression, reminiscent of apartheid censorship laws (Tomaselli, 2014).

Kerry Bystrom and Sarah Nuttall have argued that the "official culture" of nation building promoted by the ANC has been accompanied by an increasing "re-racialisation" and fragmentation of South African society (2013b). They note that in 1998, former President Thabo Mbeki enforced Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programmes, informed by the idea that social equality is impossible without integrating Black South Africans into the national economy. In turn, the current President Jacob Zuma and the previous controversial leader of the ANC Youth League, Julius Malema, have expanded this discourse into new directions, promoting politics based on racial identities (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b: 323). For example, in response to people's growing frustration about income inequality, Zuma has turned to a "compensatory cultural nationalism" based on Zulu identity and masculinity, which starkly contradicts the non-racial, gender-neutral values embraced by the ANC's stated principles and South Africa's Constitution (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b:

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[6] I do not discuss *Of Good Report* in detail in this thesis, for the film is, in the first instance, a thriller focused on paying *stylistic* homage to the films and aesthetics of classic Hollywood cinema, rather than exploring the *social* predicament of youth in South Africa (Qubeka, 2013b). It was also not a collaborative film production (which, as discussed below, is one important focus of this thesis) involving youth and adults, and/or Black and White South Africans.

323). However, this concept of "re-racialisation" is also problematic, as it fails to acknowledge the fact that the ANC was the only major political party that has promoted non-racism for most of its history and that has opposed White racism in South Africa for centuries. Moreover, racial divisions in contemporary South Africa are not simply determined by political programmes, but particularly by persisting inequalities in the distribution of economic resources, and with it, the continuation of White privilege (Seekings & Nattrass, 2008).

Within this environment, it interesting that a wide array of contemporary South African fiction films, documentary films, and television dramas explore the "private lives"[7] of young South Africans, and their positioning in the new democracy. These media productions centre on aspects of coming of age from the personal perspectives of young people, exposing moments of pain and failure, as well as situations of success and joy. Chief among them are *Tsotsi* (Hood, 2005), *Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema* (Ziman, 2008), *Rough Aunties* (Longinotto, 2008), the *Steps for the Future Youth Films* (2009), *Otelo Burning* (Blecher, 2011), *The African Cypher* (Little, 2012), *Four Corners* (Gabriel, 2013), *Future Sound of Mzansi* (Rasetuba & Mathambo, 2014), and *Hear Me Move* (Smith, 2014). Many South African television drama series, too, focus on the personal stories of young people, such as *Intersexions* (Nikiwe, 2010-2011), *Yizo Yizo* (Mahlatsi et al., 1999, 2001, 2003), and *Tsha Tsha* (Greene, Moropane & Semenya, 2003-2006).

It is the aim of this thesis to explore the production, representation, and reception of a selection of these youth-focused films and television dramas made after 1994. At a time of increasing state secrecy, it is particularly vital to interrogate the ways in

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[7] I unpack the term "private lives" later in this Introduction.

which these media productions engage with the personal stories of youth (which are often not addressed by politicians), and to explore the reactions and discussions they have provoked among audiences, and particularly young audiences.

This research concentrates on films and television dramas made between 1994, when apartheid formally ended, and 2014, when many people born after apartheid voted for the first time in South Africa's general elections, and when political leaders celebrated the 20th anniversary of South Africa's democracy. This period offers an opportunity for looking back at the democratic transition and disentangling the relationships among youth, audiovisual media, politics, and society in South Africa.

1.2   Research Focus

1.2.1   Narrative Screen Media

The object of study in this thesis is "narrative screen media", which I define as fiction films and television programmes that tell a story, or set of stories, as well as documentary films that emphasise subjective experiences. I have chosen to focus on narratives, for stories have often been ascribed an important role in the construction of sociocultural discourse, due to their reliance on imagination and fantasy. As scholars of film, television, and video in Africa, such as Lindiwe Dovey (2009), Leila Abu-Lughod (2005), and Brian Larkin (2002, 2008) have argued, fantasy, desire, and subjectivity play a central role in the creation of, and in response to, ideas about identities, communities, and nations. [8] For example, Abu-Lughod's

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[8] See *Storytelling in World Cinemas* (Khatib, 2012) for a range of essays exploring how films in contexts across the world tell stories.

ethnographic study of television audiences in Egypt proposes that the narratives of soap operas have played a crucial role in the construction of nationhood in the country, with viewers engaging imaginatively with the plots and characters in them (2005: 20). Thus, the supposed boundaries between objects and concepts, and body and mind are in fact, fluid and constantly evolving (Dovey, 2009: 5). I, too, seek to explore these interplays between imagination and reality in this thesis, by approaching narrative screen media as texts with which audiences engage in creative and imaginative ways, and which can inspire fantasy and imagination, as well as reflection on sociocultural and political realities.

1.2.2 Youth

This thesis explores narrative films and television dramas focused on the subject of youth in post-apartheid South Africa. "Youth" commonly designates the "in-between" or "liminal" period from childhood to adulthood, and yet, there is no universal definition of the term. Historically, European and North American psychological and sociological theories have conceptualised youth as a period defined by biological age, characterised by rebellion, immaturity, and dependence on adults (Piaget, 1967; Amit-Talai, 1995; Ansell, 2005b). This view, which stems from bourgeois European ideas at the turn of the nineteenth century (James & Prout, 1990), has also been institutionalised within international law over the past few decades. For example, the UNCRC defines youth according to age, as everyone between 15 and 24 years (Ansell, 2005b: 1).

However, age-based definitions of youth do not necessarily correspond to the various meanings of adolescence in societies across the world. Within many African communities socio-cultural norms of gender, ethnicity, and economic status

determine understandings of who "youth" are (Durham, 2000; De Boeck & Honwana, 2005; Aguilar, 2007). Initiation rites, marriage, and the completion of education also represent common markers of the end of youth and the beginning of adulthood in many African societies (Zegeye, 2008: 25). The UNCRC's definition of youth thus excludes the manifold, complex ways in which the transition from childhood to adulthood is understood within African contexts.

While acknowledging certain biological dimensions of youth, I align myself with scholars who define youth as a sociocultural discourse and who see the concept as contingent on different political, legal, social, and economic factors (James & Prout, 1990; Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou, 2003; Durham, 2004; MacNaughton, 2005). As Deborah Durham suggests, discourses on youth represent an outcome of sociocultural practices and intergenerational relationships of a given place in time (2000, 2004). The boundaries between childhood, youth, and adulthood are, therefore, porous and constantly negotiated in relation to social patterns, customs, and ethical norms.

In contemporary South Africa, it is particularly difficult to determine who "youth" are. The periods of social unrest that ravaged the country from the 1970s onwards, as well as the increasing levels of poverty and unemployment, have made it difficult for many young people to become financially independent, get married, or establish their own households; hence, the transition from youth to adulthood has been "postponed" (Slabbert et al., 1994; Strelitz, 2005: 53). As stated in the National Youth Policy of 1997:

> The National Youth Policy recognises the context in which young women and men live is changing rapidly. The challenge is to provide an

environment and means whereby the concept of "youth" is re-defined. Young women and men need to find a new place in society; one which enables them to develop fully as individuals and as citizens, where their personal and collective efforts contribute to society and the reconstruction and development of their communities and the country as a whole. (National Youth Commission, 1997: 2.3)

This "delay" in adulthood has been acknowledged by the post-apartheid government in the National Youth Commission Act (No. 19 of 1996), which defines youth as people between 14 and 35 years, thus, from a very broad age group (Strelitz, 2005: 54). These changing social and legal understandings of youth during South Africa's history suggest that concepts of youth and adulthood have become increasingly blurred.

In South Africa, the term "youth" also has a historical connotation, having often been used to refer to those young people who actively fought in the anti-apartheid struggle (Seekings, 1993). Young men and women played a significant role in this struggle, for example, in the "Soweto uprising" of 1976[9] and the subsequent mobilisation of young men and women against apartheid's segregationist policies (National Youth Commission, 1997: 2.3). The term "youth" in South Africa has thus historically had conflicting meanings, referring to both the "heroes" of the anti-apartheid struggle and a rebellious, violent, and unruly part of the population (Seekings, 1993).

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[9] The Soweto Uprisings began on 16 June 1976, when thousands of students from Soweto township demonstrated against the introduction of Afrikaans as the major language of education in schools. The uprisings soon spread beyond Soweto, however, after police opened fire on the unarmed children and youth (Krabill, 2010: 20).

1.2.3 Gender

The complexities and contradictions of the "Born Frees" are articulated particularly by the gendered nature of coming of age in South Africa. The country's Constitution of 1996 is one of the most progressive legal documents in the world concerning gender equality, enshrining the rights to non-discrimination, for women and girls of all ages, irrespective of their racial and social background. Moreover, Women's Day is a public holiday in South Africa, celebrated annually on 9 August since 1994, to commemorate the march of 20,000 South African women against apartheid's pass laws in 1956.

This emphasis on gender equality in formal legislation is, however, related to the fact that young women and girls are particularly affected by the damaging developments in the new South Africa, such as poverty, violent crime, murder, and sexual abuse (Richter & Higson-Smith, 2004; Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). For example, it is estimated that a woman is raped every 17 seconds in South Africa (Strudwick, 2014), and that girls under the age of 18 constitute 40 per cent of all reported and attempted rape cases each year (Petersen, Bhana & McKay, 2005: 1234). Adolescent girls are also particularly vulnerable to contracting HIV/AIDS and to living in poverty (Pettifor et al., 2005; Bray & Brandt, 2006; Mpumalanga, 2013). Therefore, this thesis focuses, particularly on the gendered politics informing the production, representation, and reception of the film and television texts studied here, and how gender and age intersect.

1.2.4   Collaborative Screen Media

Films made in Africa by Africans have historically been theorised via the concept of "African Cinema", with early scholars of the topic arguing that African films share distinct features, such as a political agenda, non-commercial structures, and a focus on class, gender, and issues of neo- and post-colonialism (Diawara, 1992; Bakari & Cham, 1996; Ukadike, 1994). They drew heavily from theories of Third Cinema, a Latin American film movement of the 1960s and 1970s that rejects the aesthetics and ideology of Hollywood films, which were perceived as promoting and fostering capitalism, structural inequality, and neo-colonialism (Gabriel, 1982).

However, these early theories of African Cinema have been subjected to critique over time (Murphy, 2000; Dovey, 2009, 2010; Cieplak, 2010a; Tcheuyap, 2011; Harrow, 2013). Firstly, these concepts can no longer account for the complex, international dimensions of contemporary film and television industries on the continent, since many contemporary African film and television makers receive international funding, are trained abroad, and collaborate with producers and distributors across the world (Cieplak, 2010a). Films from Africa are also frequently exhibited elsewhere. As Litheko Modisane highlights, some South African films made during apartheid generated discussions and even political activism in other parts of the world (2013). The production and reception of media evolving from what is often termed the "global South" are thus informed by complex, transnational, processes, making it impossible to draw a demarcated boundary between "Western" and "non-Western" media and societies (Shohat & Stam, 1996; Khiabany & Sreberny, 2014).

Therefore, this thesis is not restricted to the works of South African filmmakers only,

but includes films made in collaboration between South Africans and non-South Africans. In this way, I seek to explore how contemporary South African film and television production in South Africa are embedded within regional, national, and transnational circuits. For reasons of scope, I am mainly concerned here with the reception of these screen media productions within South Africa; however – as I will explain later in this Introduction – I have also paid attention to some of the discussions these media garnered in other geographical locations, so as to highlight the divergent ways they have been interpreted in different national contexts.

What characterises film and television as mediums is that they are intrinsically collaborative, involving – among other stakeholder groups – funding bodies, producers, directors, and distributors; and these collaborations often reach beyond national and continental borders. Therefore, as film scholar Piotr Cieplak argues, films made in Africa be explored through the framework of collaboration, rather than national or continental parameters (2010a); thus, researchers ought to focus on the encounters and interactions between different actors involved in the making and exhibition of screen media. Such a focus on collaboration allows for exploring the power relations and ethics at play in filmmaking practices involving "African" and "non-African" participants (Cieplak, 2010a).

The South African films and television dramas studied in this thesis offer an opportunity to explore these aspects of collaboration in films and television programmes involving "Africans" and "non-Africans", as well as Black and White people, for the case studies all involve filmmakers, film subjects, and producers from diverse racial, social, gender, and generational backgrounds. Focusing on the relationships among these actors allows for exploring relations of "race" and class in

South Africa's film and television industries and society more general. As Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael argue, although the racial configurations established by apartheid have begun to change, divisions along racial lines continue to matter in the new South Africa (2000a). For example, Black South Africans, as explained later in this Introduction, are still marginalised in the country's film industry, while White people continue to take on primary roles as film directors and producers.

Consequently, questions about the power dynamics informing film and television productions that involve collaborations among Whites and Blacks are key to this research. I investigate who decides on the narratives of the films, whose "voice" is projected on the screen, and the impacts of collaborative films and television programmes on filmmakers and film subjects.

1.2.5 Significance of the Research

Studies on childhood, youth and media in Europe and North America have proliferated in recent years (Buckingham, 2000; Pomerance & Gateward, 2005; Shary & Seibel, 2007; Livingstone & Haddon, 2009); however, the body of research on youth and media in South Africa (and Africa) remains remarkably small (Pecora, Osei-Hwere & Carlsson, 2008; Bradbury, 2010; Carklin, 2010; Yenika-Agbaw & Mhando, 2014). Most studies on South African media do not dedicate explicit attention to youth as producers, subjects, and consumers of media (Zegeye & Harris, 2003; Hadland et al., 2008; Wasserman, 2011). However, some scholars have, more recently, begun to investigate the consumption and appropriation of international media, music, and fashion styles by South African youth (Bogatsu, 2002; Haupt, 2004; Strelitz, 2005).

Studies of South African cinema have also not devoted significant attention to the subject of youth (Tomaselli, 2006; Botha, 2007; Maingard, 2007; Dovey, 2009; Saks, 2010). Film scholar Michael Carklin has explored, in an article (2010), the narratives of childhood constructed within the South African fiction films *Yesterday* (Roodt, 2004), *The Wooden Camera* (Luruli, 2003), and *Malunde* (Sycholt, 2001), while Glen Thompson has explored the representations of young people's surf culture in the fiction film *Otelo Burning* (2014). However, these articles are focused mainly on these films' diegetic worlds and do not take into account their production and reception. To date, no book-length study has investigated the many youth-centred films and television series that have proliferated in post-apartheid South Africa in relation to the social contexts within which they have been made and screened.

This thesis builds upon those studies on South African film and television which have focused as much on exploring the social contexts of screen media as on their form and aesthetics (Maingard, 2007; Dovey, 2009; Krabill, 2010; Modisane, 2013). It also contributes to the fields of history, sociology, and social anthropology in Africa, which have recently devoted increasing attention to film and television (Davis & Burns, 2002; Larkin, 2002; Meyer & Moors, 2005; Tsika, 2015). For example, the *Journal of Southern African Studies* recently devoted a special issue to South African films before and during apartheid ("Special Issue: South Africa on Film", 2013). Carli Coetzee's article in this issue, "All Tickets Please" (2013), highlights the value of exploring not only the narratives and aesthetics of South African films, but also the specific contexts of their exhibition, and the role of film audiences in the creation of normative and alternative social discourses and practices.

Interdisciplinary in nature, this thesis works across the fields of Film Studies, Media Studies, Childhood and Youth studies, and (South) African Studies. Embracing the approach of contemporary scholars of media and literature (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin, 2002; Quayson, 2003; Abu-Lughod, 2005), this research explores how the film and television texts analysed here articulate with what may be referred to as their social contexts; this relationship I want to describe as one of "inter-animating" each other (Arvind Rajagopal 2001:28, qtd in Abu-Lughod, 2005: 21). I thus approach media as what Georgina Born calls a "constellation of mediations" (1993: 233), indicating that the production, distribution, and reception of film and television intersect with a variety of sociocultural, political, and economic factors.

Historically, South African film and television have mostly been studied separately and rarely in relation to each other (Maingard, 2007; Krabill, 2010; Saks, 2010).

Studies of South African cinema have also focused primarily on celluloid films, and have rarely devoted attention to the similarities and differences between the production and exhibition of film and other audiovisual media (see, however, Modisane, 2013). For example, many contemporary African directors call themselves "filmmakers" although they work in television and video (Dovey, 2010: 2). Moreover, the increasing spread of digital media in (South) Africa has opened up new avenues of film production, distribution, and consumption not accounted for by the term "cinema" (Dovey, 2010; Saul & Austen, 2010). The South African film *SMS Sugarman* (Kaganof, 2006), for example, was the first film worldwide to be shot entirely on mobile phones (Modisane, 2010a: 52; Goggin, 2011: 96).

Therefore, I embrace the term "screen media" (Dovey, 2009) to describe the various forms of audiovisual media, and their confluences, including film, television, and new media, such as mobile phones. These overlaps of different media technologies and exhibition platforms are what Henry Jenkins has described as "convergence culture" (2006: 8), a key concept in this thesis discussed below. Focused on both film and television, this thesis thus takes part in an emerging strand of scholarship which interrogates the relations and overlaps between different kinds of narrative screen media productions in African contexts (Dovey, 2010; Saul & Austen, 2010; Grätz, 2011). This angle makes a contribution to studies on the reception of films in African contexts (Barlet, 2000; Larkin, 2002; Bouchard, 2010; Kerr, 2011; Azeez, 2013), as well as to those on the reception of television programmes (Smith, 2000; Andersson, 2010; Strelitz, 2005; Ndlovu, 2014; Ponono, 2014). In particular, my focus on the online reception of my selected screen media productions offers vital, new contributions to these fields of research.

This thesis also contributes to the works of media scholars who have grappled with the idea that a "convergence culture" is emerging in contemporary societies (Jenkins, 2006; Castells, 2009; Shirky, 2011; Willems, 2011). Jenkins, who has pioneered this concept, defines "convergence culture" as the "flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences" (2006: 2). Media convergence, according to Jenkins, is driven by the increasing availability of different media technologies, which allows people to source information from different media platforms, including online and offline media (2006: 2–8). Audiences are seen to use "new" media technologies (such as the Internet) more actively, whereby they simultaneously become the producers of media content (Jenkins, 2006: 231).[10] The notion of "convergence culture", then, denotes an emergence of participatory media practices and the intersections of "top-down", corporate media and "bottom up", community media practices (Carpentier, 2011: 526).

However, concepts of "convergence culture" have also been subjected to criticism. Notably, in a special edition of *Cultural Studies* ("Rethinking Convergence/Culture", 2011), Nico Carpentier suggests that Jenkins glosses over structural and historical power dynamics that exist within communities, thereby eclipsing a discussion of the factors that influence audiences' access to, and use of, media technologies (2011). Other contributors to the issue critique Jenkins' neglect of the gendered dimensions of media convergence. Laurie Ouellette and Julie Wilson, for example, reveal that media access is fundamentally rooted within (unequal) gender relations pronounced in domestic spheres and the work place (2011). Taking these critiques into account, I

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[10] The argument that audiences are transforming into producers is also articulated by Axel Brun's concept of the "produser" (2008), and Alvin Toffler's term "prosumer" (1981).

have sought to pay particular attention, in this thesis, to dimensions of gender and class when exploring screen media audiences, and their engagement with film and television.

Another vital contribution this study makes to scholarship is its focus the reception of film and television among audiences, and particularly young audiences, in South Africa. In the fields of screen media studies in South Africa, qualitative research on the reception of film and television among youth audiences (and audiences in general) is scant (Smith, 2000; Strelitz, 2005; Andersson, 2010; Ponono, 2014). And while many scholars of South African cinema have explored films' engagement with their social contexts, the films' reception is not their major concern (Balseiro & Masilela, 2003; Tomaselli, 2006; Maingard, 2007; Dovey, 2009; Saks, 2010). This research aims to fill this gap in scholarship by exploring youth-focused screen media with a focus on what Modisane has called their "public lives" (2013) – that is, their contexts of exhibition and the discussions they have generated among audiences. The thesis adopts a multidimensional approach to exploring reception – via written texts (such as newspapers), oral discussions, and social media – thereby making important inroads into audience research in South Africa, which has tended to focus primarily on oral responses and written texts (Barnes, 2003; Modisane, 2013; Ndlovu, 2014; Ponono, 2014). Yet, it is not my intention to dismiss the important work that has already been conducted in the field of South African screen media; I embrace this scholarship so as to explore, more fully, the relations among media production, representational politics, and reception.

1.3   Screen Media, Publics, and Intimacy

1.3.1   Media and the Public Sphere

An important question in this thesis concerns the theoretical conceptualisation of the discussions and actions evoked by films and television programmes. Media scholars have intensely debated the concept of the "public sphere", initially developed by Jürgen Habermas (1989), when discussing the relationship between media and democratic processes (Fraser, 1990; Calhoun, 1992; Livingstone & Lunt, 2013; Shami, 2009). Being of European origin, this concept may not seem immediately relevant to South Africa. However, a "nativist" approach (Mbembe, 2001), which establishes a clear-cut divide between scholarship that is "African" and scholarship that is "Western" – or "non-African" – is problematic, for it neglects the ways in which academic ideas circulate across the world, with international scholars often informing one another. Such a theoretical stance would also sustain the historical dichotomies between "Africa" and "the West" criticised earlier in this Introduction. What is more, there have been many recent debates about the "public sphere" in African contexts, such as Modisane's book *South Africa's Renegade Reels* (2013), a special issue of the journal *Africa Development* (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa [CODESRIA], 2012) and Abebe Zegeye and Richard Harris' collection *Media, Identity, and the Public Sphere in Africa* (2003). Exploring theories of the public sphere in the South African context in this thesis, then, allows for an engagement with these current debates, as well as with the relevance and limits of the concept.

The term "public sphere" was first developed by the German political theorist Jürgen Habermas, who argued that in feudalist Europe at the end of the 17th century, the rise

of capitalism resulted in the creation of a new space for the exchange of ideas (1989). In the feudal era, he suggested, public communication had been constrained by the power of the state and the church. The expansion of capitalist markets, according to Habermas, enabled the creation of a space which opposed absolutist, monarchical regimes. Habermas saw the public sphere as constituted of individuals who congregated in coffee houses and debating societies in order to engage in "rational-critical debate", and identify societal problems. In Habermas' framework, these individuals put aside their own interests to discuss the collective good and reach a consensus on political affairs (Willems, 2012: 17). The public sphere, according to Habermas, represents a space where communal opinion is shaped in an inclusive way, and has the ability to influence politicians' decisions (Edgar, 2006: 124).

Habermas argued that the rise of "modern" media, such as radio, film, and television from the end of the 19th century onwards, were responsible for the decline of the public sphere. He argued that media organisations had been transformed into advertising companies and commercial outfits motivated only by profit. He thus believed that the media had degenerated into a reproduction of existing power relationships, replacing rational-critical modes of debate with consumerism (Habermas, 1989: 170).[11]

Habermas' conception of the public sphere has been criticised on various grounds, particularly since it defines a particular type of public sphere, constituted by debates carried out in bourgeois spaces of 17th century Europe. Some scholars have argued that Habermas ignores aspects of gender, class, and age that may restrict people's

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[11] Habermas recently revised this view (2006), suggesting that film represents an adjunct to "critical public engagements" (Modisane, 2013: 9).

access to the debates occurring in the public sphere (Fraser, 1990; Benhabib, 1992; Hansen, Negt & Kluge, 1993; Willems, 2012). For example, Oskar Kluge and Alexander Negt propose that it is vital to distinguish between an elite and a proletarian public sphere, with these spheres creating parallel, competing narratives (1993). In turn, Nancy Fraser suggests that Habermas ignores those spheres where socially disadvantaged people create what she calls "subaltern publics" to voice their concerns (1990). Focused on the issue of class, these critiques are pertinent if the concept of the public sphere is to be explored in the context of South Africa, where material equality and access to media is far from fully realised (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b).

1.3.2   Publics

Habermas' idea of one singular public sphere has increasingly given way to the idea of a fragmented public sphere composed of myriad "publics" (Gitlin, 1988; Cunningham, 2001; Warner, 2002). Todd Gitlin argues that complex, multinational, and communications-saturated societies have developed around the world over the past few decades. In these contexts, numerous public "sphericules" have emerged, characterised by overlapping cultures, identities, and social and political agendas and commitments (1988: 173).

Michael Warner's article "Publics and Counterpublics" (2002) is useful for conceptualising the role of film and television in the creation of publics. He defines a "public" as a space brought into being through people's (oral and written) engagements with texts that circulate; hence, a public emerges through the accumulation of discussions and texts over time, and the discourse emerging from such engagements (Warner, 2002: 62). Warner introduces the term "counterpublic" to describe a public that challenges dominant publics, and is aware of its subordinate status. A counterpublic thus challenges both a normative discourse and the social norms that constitute it (2002: 80). In this way, Warner emphasises the competing narratives that form around media texts through audiences' engagements with them.

Modisane's research explores Warner's concept of publics in relation to South African films engaging with black identities during and after apartheid (2010b,c, 2013). Modisane proposes that film and television programmes can also be considered within Warner's framework, for they, too, bring debates and secondary texts into being over the course of their circulation (2013: 16). Hence, narrative screen media derive meaning not only from intra-textual elements, but also from

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contexts of exhibition and spectatorship. For example, some films made within the restrictive climate of apartheid, such as *Come Back, Africa* (Rogosin, 1959) and *Mapantsula* (Schmitz, 1987), have stimulated what Modisane calls "public critical engagements on blackness" in South Africa, as well as in other geographical contexts (2013: 2). My interest, in this thesis, lies primarily in the reception of the selected screen media within South Africa, and particularly among young South African audiences. However (as discussed in the methodology section of this Introduction), inspired by Modisane's approach, I have also attempted to trace certain publics created by these media beyond South Africa's national borders.

Warner's concept does not devote significant attention to the possibility of conflict within the space of a public, however. His distinction between "publics" and "counterpublics" implicitly suggests that the counterpublic opposes a certain hegemonic, normative discourse. However, just as Habermas perceives the public sphere as a space of consensus, this "compartmental" idea of publics neglects the actual workings of power in society. Wendy Willems (2012) introduces Michel Foucault's theory of power (1980, 1981) into her discussion of the public sphere in African contexts. Foucault, Willems notes, suggests that power is not concentrated in the realm of the state; instead, it is dispersed across social networks and relationships. Foucault posits that rationality and power are not oppositional concepts, which contrasts with Habermas' separation of "rational" debate in the public sphere from the power of the state. Since Foucault would reject the possibility of a power-free zone of communication within the space of a public, publics can thus be described as spaces of struggle and conflict, not necessarily of consensus (Willems, 2012: 18–19). In line with Willems, I prefer to see publics as moments and

discursive spaces where both conflict and consensus are possible.[12]

1.3.3   Publics, Audiences, and Authorship

The impact of the mass media on audiences has been discussed within the fields of Communication Studies and Cultural Studies from the 1930s onwards (Baron & Davis, 1981; Adorno & Horkheimer, 1986). Of particular importance for this thesis are the works of scholars of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, who began to argue from the 1980s onwards that the "decodings" of films and television programmes are contingent on the positioning of viewers regarding their class, race, and gender (Hall, 1973; Morley, 1980). This understanding is linked to the work of post-structural theorists, such as Roland Barthes (1973, 2001), who have asserted that literary texts have infinite meanings created in the process of reading. If this understanding is applied to film and television, audiences can be described as the "the skin of the film" (Marks, 2000: 19), for they too negotiate screen media in multiple ways, establishing their manifold, if not infinite, meanings.

Researchers thus need to explore the contexts in which films and television programmes are interpreted, and study audiences in relation to the specific "cultural and historic" sites in which they are situated (Fiske, 1987; Morley, 1992). In my analysis of the films and television programmes studied here, I have, therefore, attempted to be guided by points of interest raised by audience discussions around the selected primary texts, rather than my own interpretation alone.

This thesis emphasises not only the significance of audiences, however, but also of

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[12] See also Dovey's exploration of film festival audiences in Africa via the concept of "(dis)sensus communis", adapted from Kant (2015).

authorship. Most of the film and television makers I spoke to during my research shared a desire to articulate social and political critique through their work. Similarly, Dovey, in her study of African film adaptations, challenges poststructuralist theorists' rejection of authorship, arguing that filmmakers and audiences are "two sides of the same coin" (2009: 15). This description can also be applied to theatre performances and oral storytelling in African contexts, which have historically required the participation of spectators (Barber, 1997; Kruger, 1999). In a similar way, narrative screen media producers in Africa often encourage their audiences to engage with film and television as though they would respond to oral tales – as active and critical participants, rather than passive observers (Dovey, 2009: 12–14).[13]

Acknowledging the importance of authorship in film and television production, I have conducted interviews with directors, producers, writers, and film subjects during my research, so as to explore their authorial roles in the screen media texts analysed here. This approach has also allowed for investigating the differences and similarities between the intentions of producers and the responses from audiences respectively.

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[13] This "active" reception of films African context is also discussed, for example, by John McCall (2002), Vincent Bouchard (2010), and Birgit Engler and Nginjai Paul Moreto (2010).

1.3.4   The "Public" and the "Private"

One important question that follows from debates on publics is what is, in fact, meant by the terms "public" and "private". Historically – and along with the rise of the concept of "private property" emanating from Europe and the United States (US) – public and private spheres have been conceptualised spatially, with the walls of buildings separating what is deemed public from what is seen as private (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b: 309). In Habermas' thinking, too, issues such as childcare, domestic work, and parenting are located in the "private sphere" and outside of the "public sphere". However, this concept dismisses social interactions that take place in domestic spheres, especially as they involve women (Fraser, 1990; Benhabib, 1992), as well as children and youth. Habermas' public sphere is, therefore, not only conceptualised as an elite space, but also as a masculine arena (Willems, 2012). Moreover, as discussed later in this Introduction, the recent rise of digital media has complicated historical distinctions between the "public" and "private", allowing people to use these media from the space of their homes.

Given this thesis' focus on youth and gender, it is necessary that an alternative, more dynamic understanding of the "public" and the "private" is reached. Kerry Bystrom and Sarah Nuttall introduce a valuable concept of the private/public that is grounded within South African politics and society (2013b). The "private", they argue, connotes experiences related to the self, such as inwardness, intimacy, and subjective experiences. What is private, then, can also refer to bodily experiences and aspects of sexuality, gender, race, and violence. Bystrom and Nuttall identify an emerging cultural trend in contemporary South Africa, arguing that filmmakers and artists focus on what they call "intimate exposure" – on using their works to *make public*

their feelings, emotions, desires and internal dialogues (2013b).

In contrast, Habermas did not ascribe significance to "private" and emotional experiences. For Habermas, *public* "rational" debate was essential for reaching a consensus about political issues, with emotionality, feelings, and expressions of subjectivity perceived as a threat to critical consciousness (Lunt & Stenner, 2005: 64). Warner and Fraser, too, stress that "counterpublics" and "subaltern publics", respectively, address issues of social injustice, the state, and political institutions, rather than intimacy, pleasure, and emotions (Berlant, 2008: 8).

However, political and social discussions, in fact, often involve emotions and subjectivity, while "private" experiences are not necessarily "irrational". Peter Lunt and Paul Stenner point out that even debates among politicians sometimes evoke personal testimonies, self-reflection, and emotionality (2005: 68). As Lauren Berlant cogently asks: "can absorption in affective and emotional transactions that take place at home, on the street, between intimates and strangers be deemed irrelevant to civil society unless they are somehow addressed to institutions?" (2008: 8). Referring back to Mouffe's understanding of "the political" as an unstable category (2005), it is thus vital to explore people's expressions of emotions and imagination created in contexts of "pleasure", such as their engagement with narrative screen media.

This thesis, therefore, explores the contexts where people express "private" sensations "in public" when negotiating films and television dramas. For example, watching a film in the dark room of a cinema takes place among an audience, but the thoughts and emotions triggered by that film are occurring "privately", in viewers' minds. In turn, as some scholars of African film have pointed out, spectators

sometimes voice these thoughts and emotions aloud, thereby making their experiences of films "public" (McCall, 2002; Bouchard, 2010). Moreover, some scholars have suggested that screen media can even encourage viewers to sense, on the skin, the cinematic texture, angle, lighting, saturation, sound, and vibrations. In some cases, they argue that audiovisual media can manipulate the senses and trigger an embodied reaction to characters or actions seen on screen (Marks, 2000; Davies, 2011; Mroz, 2012).

The films and television programmes studied in this thesis share a focus on young people's feelings, desires, memories, and emotions; the productions' collective on "intimate exposure" (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b: 309) thus poses an array of questions about what happens when "the private" is made "public", and vice versa. In this thesis, particular attention is devoted to the ethical issues and questions arising from such intimate exposure. Who uses the medium of film and television to engage with personal emotions and experiences, and why? What drives people to disclose personal feelings on film and television (Ndlovu, 2013b: 380)? Who benefits from this kind of exposure? And how do audiences respond? These are some of the issues explored in this thesis, which attempts to further investigate the relationship between the "public" and the "private".

1.3.5 Publics and Intimacy

Despite the problems with Habermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere, one aspect that remains useful is his focus on the spaces where interpersonal discussions occur and social networks are formed. Habermas was concerned with the emergence of interactions among strangers (Malila, 2013); and interrogating the creation of such relationships is particularly interesting in the context of South African society, which is still divided along the lines of class, race, and gender. The contributors to a special issue of *Cultural Studies* (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013a) probe how, in contemporary South Africa, cultural texts create situations that bring people together by establishing feelings of belonging and solidarity. The articles in this issue suggest that certain literary works, photographs, and the arts have the potential to "knit together" people from historically segregated contexts (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b: 323). This thesis, too, interrogates the kinds of publics created around the films and television programmes studied here, focusing on the extent to which these media have evoked feeling of belonging among young South Africans.

How, then, can an exploration of publics created by film and television be united with an investigation of "the private"? Berlant's concept of the "intimate public sphere" (1997, 2008, 2009) offers useful perspectives for thinking about the imbrications of the personal and the collective in contemporary screen media and societies. Berlant probes that an "intimate public" is a space constituted of personal revelations, expressions of intimacy, and emotional contact. In *The Female Complaint* (2008), she argues that certain books, films, and television programmes made by and for women in 20th century US (such as "chick lits" and cinematic melodramas) have cultivated the fantasy that women have certain historical and

emotional experiences in common, and are seeking an intimate dialogue with one another. In this way, these texts evoke the idea that a woman's experiences are not only her own, but are shared with other women. These feelings of belonging are at the heart of what Berlant calls an "intimate public", which she defines as a space that

> foregrounds affective and emotional attachments located in fantasies of the common, the everyday, and a sense of ordinariness […] and where challenging and banal conditions of life take place in proximity to the attentions of power but also squarely in the radar of a recognition that can be provided by other humans. (2008: 10)

Hence, an intimate public is constituted by subjectivity, fantasies, and aspirations; it is grounded in what Bystrom and Nuttall call "the private" (2013b) – rather than the "rational" discussions Habermas describes in his concept of the public sphere. Berlant notes that intimate publics are "juxtapolitical" (2008: 10), however, for although they operate outside of political institutions, they are constantly shaped and permeated by them (Fuller & Sedo, 2013: 213).

Berlant goes on to argue that intimate publics cultivate commonality and emotional contact, "of a sort" (2008: viii). Accordingly, an intimate public promises the "porous, affective sense of identification" (2008: viii) to its members by enabling them to identify – in the process of reading or viewing – with others. This emotional contact evoked among strangers stimulates reflection on what it means to be part of a certain social group (such as women), and ascribes value to the lives of the participants of that group (Berlant, 2008: viii). As Berlant notes, "the concept of the 'intimate public' thus carries with it the fortitude of common sense or a vernacular sense of belonging to a community, with all the undefinedness [sic] that implies" (2008: 10). Intimate publics are thus constituted by people's articulations of shared

emotional knowledge and aspirations, thereby constructing the fantasy of emotional connections (Fuller & Sedo, 2013: 212).

Berlant probes that intimate publics are "*textually* mediated" (2008: 10, my emphasis), however, and does not further explore how this "emotional contact" takes place among *viewers and readers*. Through literary criticism and historical analysis, she interrogates the stylistic devices and modes of narration that evoke intimacy in literary texts, and their cinematic adaptations, over time. Berlant thus explores the ways in which audiences are "interpellated" (Althusser, 1971) by writers and filmmakers, not how ordinary readers and/or viewers have received these texts. Moreover, as Bystrom and Nuttall point out, Berlant elides questions of whether personal and social transformation might be possible in an oppressive or unequal social and political system, such as that of apartheid had been (2013b). They ask, instead, how intimate publics create "structures of feeling"[14] that bind *different* people in contemporary South Africa's divided society together (2013b).

Building on the works of Willems, Bystrom and Nuttall, and Berlant, this thesis is concerned with the ways in which certain youth-focused films and television programmes create publics and, in certain contexts, intimacy. Do film and television facilitate human connectivity and if so, how? How do publics manifest themselves as sites of intimacy and emotional contact? What binds filmmakers, subjects, and audiences together? What does "intimacy" mean in South Africa's increasingly digitalising media landscape? And how, if at all, can film and television texts evoke

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[14] Bystrom and Nuttall borrow the term "structures of feeling" from Raymond Williams, who uses the concept to describe people's lived experiences, such as social values and morale, of a particular moment in history (Williams & Orrom, 1954; Williams, 1977: 132).

publics that are socially and individually transformative?

1.4 South Africa's Media Context

1.4.1 Film, Youth, and Publics During Apartheid

South Africa's past and present film and television landscape represents the background to this thesis. I will not engage in a comprehensive history of cinema and television in South Africa here, as various scholars have already provided one.[15] Instead, I concentrate on particular moments in this history that pertain to my discussion of screen media, youth, and publics, as well as to the subject of gender.

The first films that were made in South Africa in the late 19th century were produced, owned, and exhibited almost exclusively by and to White people. As with other colonised African countries, film represented an instrument of power and propaganda, allowing the colonisers to establish and maintain racial hierarchies (Maingard, n.d.; Davis & Burns, 2002; Ukadike, 2002). This is exemplified by one of South Africa's early silent films, *De Voortrekkers* (Shaw, 1916) – among other films[16] – made in 1916 by the American producer Harold Shaw and Afrikaner screenwriter Gustav Preller. Based on the historical epic of the "Great Trek", the central myth of Afrikaner nationalism, *De Voortrekkers* dramatises the migration of the so-called "Voortrekkers" (Dutch farmers called "Boers") away from the Cape Colony in the 1830s. The film's climax is a reconstruction of the Battle of Blood

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[15] See, for example, Thelma Gutsche (1972), Keyan Tomaselli (1988), Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela (2003), and Jaqueline Maingard (2007).

[16] See, for example, *The Symbol of Sacrifice* (Cruikshanks, 1918), *The Rose of Rhodesia* (Shaw, 1918), and *The Zulu's Heart* (Griffith, 1908).

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River of 1838, in which the Zulu people were brutally defeated by the Boers (Hees, 2003: 49; Dovey, 2009: 34).

Children play a crucial symbolic role in *De Voortrekkers*' construction of racism. The film's representations of the Zulu as cruel relies primarily on the portrayal of their king, Dingaan, in a scene in which he orders the killing of an infant (Tomaselli, 2006: 132). Child characters are also central to the film's characterisation of the Black warrior Sobuza. In a scene in which Sobuza arrives at the settler camp, he observes two Voortrekker boys who smoke a stolen pipe. They cough, run away, and an extreme close up of Sobuza's face reveals his enjoyment of the situation (Hees, 2003: 61), thereby creating an analogy between the boys and Sobuza which suggests that he is childlike. Sobuza subsequently covers the boys with a blanket, signifying that he has been emasculated and has become their "nanny" (Tomaselli, 2006: 133). Hence, *De Voortrekkers* depicts Black South Africans as "eternal children" who – as the film suggests – require the paternalistic control and guidance of White colonisers.

The publics *De Voortrekkers* created in South Africa played a crucial part in the propaganda and nationalist discourse of Afrikaners, after their defeat by the English during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).[17] The film was exhibited widely across South Africa in 1916, exciting a large Afrikaner audience. Until the end of apartheid, the film was screened at Afrikaner revivalist celebrations every year on the anniversary of the Battle of Blood River (Maingard, 2007: 25; Parsons, 2013). This enforced exhibition of *De Voortrekkers* thus created publics that propagated notions of White superiority, the use of violence against Black people, and Black people's

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[17] The Anglo-Boer war was fought between the British Empire and Boer settlers, who inhabited the two former republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The war ended with the defeat of the Boers and the annexation of both territories by the British.

exclusion from social, economic, and political participation.

Until the 1940s, film screenings in South African cinemas were reserved for White, male civil servants, with the exception of a few cinemas established for Black people in the urban areas (Dovey, 2009: 39–47). Many of these cinemas were run by White missionaries who regarded films as a tool for educating and "moralising" Black audiences, who they perceived as gullible and easy to influence (Peterson, 2003). However, Black South Africans' low wages and apartheid's draconian policies severely restricted access to cinemas for the majority of the Black population (Gutsche 1972: 379, in Modisane, 2013: 7). Nevertheless, in the 1920s, Solomon T. Plaatje, founding member of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC),[18] began to screen films about the successes of African Americans in the US to Black audiences in South Africa via a portable bioscope (McCluskey, 2009: 3–4). The exhibition of these films challenged the racism propagated by most films shown in South Africa at that time, and the exclusion of Black people from the national cinema landscape (Modisane, 2013: 6).

When apartheid was formally established in 1948, the National Party (NP) brought film production and distribution in South Africa under its control (Dovey, 2009: 45). By means of a subsidy system in 1956, the state controlled domestic filmmaking with the aim of building a nationalist cinema and disseminating racist propaganda. The government also drastically censored the content of films made within South Africa and monitored their distribution (Tomaselli, 1988). Within this environment, Black filmmakers had very little funding and training opportunities to make films, meaning that Black audiences accessed cinema largely at the mercy of White

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[18] The SANNC was the forerunner of the ANC.

filmmakers (McCluskey, 2009: 5). The first films made particularly for Black South African audiences – such as *Jim Comes to Jo'burg/African Jim* (Swanson, 1949) and *Zonk!* (Hyman, 1950) – were produced by Europeans and White South Africans, and fashion racist stereotypes of Black people as naive and childlike (Dovey, 2009: 46; Paleker, 2009, 2010). In 1972-1973, the apartheid government introduced a differential subsidy scheme – known as the "B-Scheme subsidy" – that financed films directed at Black audiences (Paleker, 2010). [19] However, this supposedly "black" film industry created by the subsidy mostly benefited White filmmakers, while Black South Africans had only minor roles as actors, directors, and producers (Paleker, 2010).

During apartheid, only two feature films were made by Black South African filmmakers, namely, *U-Deliwe* (Sabela, 1975), and *How Long?* (Kente, 1976).[20] *U-Deliwe* is of interest for this thesis, for it narrates the story of a young, rural Zulu girl called Deliwe, who moves to Johannesburg to try to become a model. The plot culminates in a meeting between Deliwe and her uncle, Mabaso, who condemns his niece's career. Mabaso loses his temper and drives his car recklessly, resulting in an accident that kills him and injures Deliwe. In the film's closing scenes, Deliwe gets married and remains in Johannesburg. The release of *U-Deliwe* caused controversies among Black audiences after it was revealed that the film had received funding from the apartheid government, and since it suggests that Black youth ought to be excluded from urban areas (Dovey, 2009: 47). Equally problematic is the film's encouragement of young Black women's domestication and patriarchal hierarchies.

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[19] The subsidy was known as the "B-Scheme" to differentiate it from the general "A-Scheme subsidy", introduced in 1956, which sponsored Afrikaans-language films (Paleker, 2010: 91).

[20] *How Long?* was confiscated and never released.

In the 1950s, at a time when governmental oppression mounted in South Africa, cinema theatres in the country became legally segregated according to the racial categories established by the state (Tomaselli, 1988). However, cinema-going represented a popular leisure activity for both Black and White youth in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Sophiatown (Dovey & Impey, 2010). Young Black people often gathered at the cinemas before and after film screenings to discuss, or even re-enact, films they had seen (Dovey & Impey, 2010). Hence, for many Black South Africans, these film screenings provided opportunities for socialisation, while offering momentary escapes from the oppression that characterised their everyday lives.

One film made during apartheid, which features young Black actors, created publics through the "hidden" critique of apartheid it contains – namely, *Jim Comes to Jo'burg/African Jim*. The first South African fiction film to star an all Black cast (including the young Dolly Rathebe[21]), *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* attracted thousands of Black viewers to the cinemas, for it challenged the dominance of White actors in the majority of films shown in South African cinemas at that time (Maingard, 2007: 78–79). However, as Lindiwe Dovey and Angela Impey reveal, *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* also contains concealed criticism of apartheid, in a short scene in which a group of Black extras sing a song in Zulu that is not subtitled in the film; this critique was thus accessible only to Zulu-speaking South Africans (2010). Dovey and Impey expose the importance of exploring contexts of spectatorship, rather than taking films at face value, demonstrating that publics which engage with the state and its policies can, indeed, emerge in seemingly "apolitical" spaces of leisure.

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[21] Rathebe was a South African musician and actress. During apartheid, she was also a model for the politically critical magazine *Drum*.

A rare, outspoken critique of apartheid is offered through American filmmaker Lionel Rogosin's *Come Back, Africa* (1959), which centres on young, urban, Black South Africans in 1950s' Sophiatown. Rogosin collaborated with young, Black intellectuals – including the *Drum* writers Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi and Can Themba – in the conceptualisation of the script (Balseiro, 2003). Due to its explicit critique of apartheid, *Come Back, Africa* could not be not shown in South Africa; however, its international exhibition initiated discussions about the oppression of Black South Africans in Europe and the US (Modisane, 2013: 25–70). Rogosin clandestinely smuggled the film out of South Africa, and screened it in New York two weeks after the Sharpeville Massacre[22] – a coincidence that favoured his aim to draw international attention to the apartheid regime (Modisane, 2013: 43). Indeed, some US newspapers and magazines wrote about the film's critique of apartheid and the South African state's attempt to suppress its publicity (Modisane, 2013: 47). Thus, Rogosin's dedication to exhibit *Come Back, Africa* in the US created transnational publics that generated international awareness about the anti-apartheid cause.

A young man is also the protagonist of *Mapantsula* (Schmitz, 1987), the second anti-apartheid film, which was made in collaboration between White South African director Oliver Schmitz and Black South African director and lead actor Thomas Mogotlane. *Mapantsula* is a politically motivated film that narrates the story of Panic, a young gangster who turns from crime towards political activism and who, at the end of the film, decides not to collaborate with the apartheid regime. Like *Come Back, Africa*, *Mapantsula*'s ability to create publics in South Africa was hindered by

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[22] On 21 March 1960, 69 black people in Sharpeville Township were killed by apartheid police during protests against the "pass system". Until the mid-1980s, Black South Africans were obliged to carry a pass that restricted their movements in urban areas.

the problem of censorship; and yet, the film was watched supported and watched secretly by student organisations, cultural organisations, and exiled members of the ANC, making it a part of the anti-apartheid movement (Modisane, 2010b, 2013: 112–113).

South Africa not only looks back upon a film history where Black people were represented as child-like; this history has also been dominated by men – male characters as well as male filmmakers. Male dominance in the film industry is not unique to South Africa, however, but is prevalent across post-colonial Africa (Dovey, 2012: 21). During apartheid, only three White women (Katinka Heyns, Elaine Proctor, and Helena Noguiera) directed feature films, and it was not until the 1990s that Black female filmmakers gradually entered the industry (Blignaut & Botha, 1992: 233–254). Filmmaking and film narratives in south Africa have remained dominated by men until the present day; however, increasingly women are involved in the making of – and as protagonists in – films and television programmes, including those explored in this thesis.

1.4.2   Film, Youth, and Publics After Apartheid

Many filmmakers in the post-apartheid period – both Black and White – share a desire for critiquing historical social problems and aspects of gender and race in South Africa (Dovey, 2009; McCluskey, 2009; Saks, 2010). Interestingly, a number of filmmakers establish this critique by focusing on the subject of youth. Of note is the fiction film *Fools* (1997),[23] directed by Ramadan Suleman and written by

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[23] *Fools* is not discussed in detail in this thesis, as it has already been analysed widely (Dovey, 2009; Graham, 2012; Modisane, 2013).

Bhekizizwe Peterson, the first post-apartheid film made by Black filmmakers. Released in 1997, *Fools* is based on Njabulo Ndebele's 1983 novella of the same name. Set in Charterston township in 1989, the film centres on the relationship between Duma Zamani (Patrick Shai), a respected teacher, fatigued and paralysed by fears and insecurities, and Zani Vuthela, an activist youth whose sister, Mimi, Zamani has raped. *Fools* was exhibited during the formative years of black majority rule in South Africa, with the newly elected ANC government focused on promoting reconciliation, racial inclusiveness, and multicultural diversity. *Fools*, however, does not focus on the liberation struggle or on the people who fought in it (Dovey, 2009: 63–64). In his brave choice to foreground a rape in a Black township and its aftermath, Suleman thus sought to draw attention to gender inequality and violence in the Black communities of the "new" South Africa (Graham, 2012: 212).

Fools was shown in cinemas in South African city centres in 1998, where it had only 20,000 admittances (Dovey, 2009: 66). However, *Fools* aired several times on the South African television channels SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) and M-Net (a private television station), and was distributed on VHS by the former South African distributor Film Resource Unit (Modisane, 2013: 145); the film thus reached a larger audience than box office figures alone suggest. However, Modisane reveals that the film's screenings on television did not stimulate significant discussions about gender inequality and masculine dominance among ordinary people, politicians, and in the national media (2013). The critiques of the film's subject matter (sexual violence) were confined to academic circles – hence, to a small elite – which indicates that socially critical films can also be restricted in their potential to create publics, particularly if they address delicate social issues, such as

rape and violent masculinities (Modisane, 2013: 155).

Since *Fools* was made, Black South Africans' presence in filmmaking has increased slowly, although White people still form the majority (59 per cent) of people employed in the national film industry (Joffe & Newton, 2008: 24). Black South African filmmakers continue to lack financial and institutional resources and support, and, as a result, many struggle to produce non-commissioned films independently ("Black Filmmakers Get Boost", n.d.). It is, perhaps, for these reasons that the racial hierarchies are less pronounced in the television industry, where Black people frequently occupy the roles of writers and directors. The films and television programmes studied in this thesis exemplify these racial disparities in South Africa's screen media landscape. They were made through collaborative processes involving people from various social backgrounds, "races", and, for some, from different nationalities; yet, most of the film directors are White, while the subjects and other people involved in the productions are Black.

The National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), a statutory body mandated by the South African Department of Arts and Culture, has aimed to rectify the historical inequalities in South Africa's film industry, but progress has been slow (Saul & Austen, 2010: 151). Nevertheless, some initiatives have successfully enhanced Black people's presence in South Africa's film and television landscape. Film schools such as at the Newtown Film and Television School in Johannesburg and the Academy of Film and Dramatic Art (AFDA) in Johannesburg and Cape Town offer training opportunities in filmmaking for youth from diverse backgrounds. Moreover, the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and the NFVF launched the Emerging Black Filmmakers Fund in July 2014, a new incentive to support Black South

African filmmakers. The fund allocates R4.5 million (£226,987) for development and production, and R500 000 (£25,220) for marketing to selected feature films; however the funding is limited to six qualifying films per year over three years ("NFVF IDC Fund", 2014).

Disparities in gender also continue to exist in the post-apartheid film industry, with filmmaking by young Black women, in particular, having remained intermittent. For example, Palesa Letlaka Nkosi, the first Black South African woman to make a short fiction film – *Mamlambo* (1997)[24] – has only made one film. Maganthrie Pillay's film *34 South* (2005),[25] released in 2005, was the first feature-length fiction film directed by a Black South African woman; however, Pillay has only made one subsequent fiction film, *Dream Time* (2014). Another female voice in South African cinema is filmmaker and playwright Zulfah Otto-Sallies, whose short film *Raya* (2001) places youth in contemporary South Africa at the centre (Holden, 2002), and whose documentary *Through the Eyes of My Daughter* (2004) centres on the filmmaker's relationship with her fifteen-year-old daughter.[26]

I would have liked to include these films in my thesis; however, they offer very limited material for analysis, since most of them have not been screened widely in South Africa. They were exhibited at a small number of film festivals and were not widely released. Some films are also not easily accessible, and do not exist in contemporary digital formats. *Mamlambo*, for example, is held as a VHS copy in only two libraries worldwide, at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and at Nanyang

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[24] *Mamlambo* is a love story between a Black boy and a Chinese prostitute (Fourie, 2001: 84–85).

[25] *34 South* deals with issues related to racial identity in the new South Africa (McCluskey, 2009: 192).

[26] The films *A Country for My Daughter* (Blankenberg, 2010) and *Waited For* (Penzhorn, 2011) also explore mother-daughter relationships.

Technological University in Singapore. It was necessary for me to focus on screen media productions that were exhibited relatively widely in South Africa and, sometimes, abroad, and which generated a range of oral and written secondary texts over the course of their circulation.

1.4.3 Television and Publics During Apartheid

Television was introduced into South Africa much later than film, and later than in other countries of Africa. While West African countries established television services from the 1950s onwards (Umeh, 1989),[27] the NP banned television in South Africa until 1976, fearing its potential ideological power. When television was finally introduced in South Africa, the government held exclusive control over the medium. The major television channel, SABC, was a state-controlled broadcaster serving as a mouthpiece of propaganda (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 63). At this stage, television programming was addressed mainly at the White population, and channels for Black audiences were only slowly introduced (Teer-Tomaselli, 2006: 207). However, Ron Krabill argues that the advent of television also opened South African audiences to information and entertainment from other parts of the world (2010). He suggests that the broadcasting of international events, such as the World Cup and the Olympics, increased White South Africans' awareness of their isolated position in the world (2010: 27). Furthermore, at a time when images of resistance leaders were banned in South Africa, the US television programme *The Cosby Show* (Sandrich et al., 1988) reintroduced Black people's visibility in the country's television landscape (Krabill, 2010: 27–28). Hence, although television was firmly controlled by the state, this television programme opened viewers' eyes to the situation in the US at that time, where Black and White people had been granted equal rights. Krabill reveals the importance of investigating television programmes that are watched on a regular basis in people's homes and the recurring publics they constitute – something that is further discussed later in this Introduction.

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[27] Nigeria was the first African country to establish television in 1953.

1.4.4 Television, Youth, and Publics After Apartheid

South Africa's democratic transition in 1994 was accompanied by an economic course of liberalisation and privatisation, including deregulation of the media. Broadcasting reforms and media liberalisation resulted in a diversification of television stations in the country, creating a favourable environment for various production companies to make television content (Ponono, 2014). Moreover, in 1993, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) was established and charged with transforming the SABC from a mouthpiece of state propaganda into a public broadcaster, and separating it from governmental institutions. The SABC was subsequently split into three free-to-air channels (SABC 1, 2, and 3) and one pay-tv channel (SABC Africa), and today broadcasts in South Africa's 11 official languages (Teer-Tomaselli, 2006: 220). The IBA was also responsible for the design and implementation of broadcasting policies, broadcasting licenses, and the regulation of broadcasters' activities. However, it was often criticised for the slow implementation of policies and lack of credibility (Fourie, 2001: 16–18). For example, in 1995, the IBA set the target that the SABC would have at least 50 per cent of local programming content by 2000, but this objective was never realised, and has been subject to discussion since then (Fourie, 2001: 17).

As part of its new responsibilities as a public broadcaster, the SABC has produced a range of educational programmes for children and youth (Barnett, 2002). In the 1990s, for example, the SABC began to commission educational programmes about HIV/AIDS for youth aged 13 to 16, with the aim of raising awareness about the disease (Owen, 2008). Today, a wide range of television dramas for children and youth air regularly on SABC, including *Soul Buddyz* (Matsunyane, Omotoso &

Kabinga, 2000), *Tsha Tsha*, and *Takalani Sesame* (Cooney & Henson, 2000), South Africa's version of the US children's show *Sesame Street* (1969-present). The SABC's television drama *Yizo Yizo* (discussed in chapter 3), was unique in its representations of youth violence and sexuality, and resulted in fierce controversies among South African audiences (Smith, 2003; Andersson, 2004; Modisane, 2010c).

This diversification of television programming after apartheid has brought with it a proliferation of "private" narratives on national television. As Thabisani Ndlovu argues, the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the late 1990s, which were broadcast on television, transported people's individual memories and emotions via the public sphere of the TRC into people's homes (2013b: 379). Yet, ordinary interpersonal relationships often took a backseat during these hearings, which were geared towards large-scale national catharsis. Recently, talk shows[28] that focus on Black families, people's feelings, and relationships have proliferated, and viewers frequently discuss these shows at work, in families, and taxis (Ndlovu, 2013b). These shows can thus be described as "intimate publics" (Berlant, 2008) created around televised testimonies of emotions and intimacy.

Yet, the publics that form around television programmes are not entirely inclusive because of the structures governing television in South Africa (Ponono, 2014). Television in the country has increasingly become privatised, leading to a battle over ownership and control. A few commercial media organisations dominate television programming in the country, such as M-Net, a pay-tv channel owned mainly by Afrikaners until 1997 (Tomaselli, 2000: 283). Moreover, as a result of the

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[28] Ndlovu discusses the talk show *Relate* (2009, 2011)*,* which is broadcast on SABC1 and centres on people's problems and relationships.

Broadcasting Act of 1999, the SABC was restructured as a company, thereby becoming heavily dependent on advertising revenue, a source of funding biased towards economically privileged audiences (Berger, 2011: 340). Today, the SABC is highly commercialised, and its market-driven activities have been opposed by civil society groups protesting against the corporation's focus on addressing middle class, English-speaking audiences (Berger, 2011: 340–342). The SABC's financial constraints have also resultd in limited investment in the production of domestic television programmes (Tomaselli, 2006: 220–222). And although the SABC has officially transformed into a public broadcaster, the ANC has maintained an influential role in it through its presence in the broadcaster's executive board. This has called into question SABC's ability to report critically and independently on political issues, including those affecting youth (Hadland et al., 2008).

1.4.5   Exhibition Platforms and Viewing Contexts

To an extent, the geography of (young) cinema audiences in contemporary South Africa reflects the legacy of apartheid, during which Black people's access to cinemas was restricted. South Africa currently has the largest annual output of films in Africa (not including videos), but South Africans are often unable to see these films (Saks, 2010: 60). In poor communities and the rural areas, there are only few opportunities to go to the cinema. For example, in Soweto, which has a population of two million people, only two cinemas exist (Dovey, 2009: 58). Filmmaker Ramadan Suleman, however, has expressed doubts over arguments that building cinemas in townships would attract young audiences, suggesting that youths want to go to the cities to watch films (Dovey, 2009: 66). Many South African filmmakers, including those studied in this thesis, have therefore taken the distribution of their films into their own hands, showing their films in poor and remote communities and organising screenings in schools, youth centres, and village halls.

There are also limited opportunities to see South African films in the cinemas, since the majority of cinemas in the country are owned by two conglomerates, Ster-Kinekor and Nu-Metro, which show mainly Hollywood films (McCluskey, 2009: 11). These exhibition structures seem to have influenced the preferences of young cinemagoers. The filmmaker Sara Blecher told me: "When [young people] go to the cinema, they go and see American films. They do not see local films" (2013). Except for slapstick comedies – for example, *Mama Jack* (Hofmeyr, 2005) and *Mr. Bones* (Hofmeyr, 2001) – and the feature film *Tsotsi*, South African films do not perform very well in the cinemas (Saks, 2010: 61). In 2014, local films secured a market share of only 11 per cent at box offices in South Africa (National Film and Video

Foundation, n.d.), and South African films are exhibited mainly at film festivals in South Africa, Europe and the US.

Television is the most accessible audiovisual medium in South Africa, with 69 per cent of people watching it regularly (Malila, 2013: 30). Television viewership has grown constantly since 1994, due to improvements in electrification and falling prices for television set (Ndlovu, 2013b: 382). In 2012, of the 14.5 million homes in the country, almost 10.7 million had a television (SAPA, 2012). To an extent, television access has remained uneven, concentrated mainly in urban areas. However, 48 per cent of households in South Africa have one or more television sets, and television reaches 80 to 90 per cent of the population in a given week (Saks, 2010: 59).

Young people aged 25 to 34 represent the majority of television viewers in South Africa, followed by those in the 16-24 age group. Television is accessible to 86.6 per cent of 16 to 24 year-olds (Official GCSI Marketing and Advertising Newsletter, 2009), and more than 82 per cent of youth use television, more than any other medium, to access information (Malila, 2013). This wide availability of television content demonstrates the importance of studying television programmes aimed at youth, and young audiences' engagements with them.

When South African films are shown on television, they often have a much larger audience than when shown in cinemas, as the case of *Otelo Burning* (see chapter 2 in this thesis) demonstrates; this wide accessibility of television even to poor people suggests that the study of film should not be separated from that of television. As Moradewun Adejunmobi argues, the historical division between cinema and

television in scholarship should, in fact, be corrected (2015). She suggests studying these media in relation to the publics they create, and exploring their potential for "televisual recurrence" – that is, the "ability to attract similarly constituted publics to the same or similarly themed and styled audio-visual texts on a fairly regular and recurrent basis" (2015: 121). Adejunmobi argues that weekly television dramas create publics in different African contexts on a regular basis in the space of people's homes. She notes that these publics can be episodic, for viewers often interrupt watching television to do something else, or change channels during advertising breaks. The idea that the mere act of watching television as part of a group constitutes a "public" bears certain problems, however, since – as chapter 4 in this thesis highlights – it does not guarantee that viewers also discuss these programmes with one another.

Studies by Teresa Barnes (2003) and Mvuzu Ponono (2014) reveal the kind of publics created by the "televisual recurrence" of soap operas in South Africa, which constitute the television genre with the highest audience ratings in the country (Ponono, 2014: 3). The watching of soap operas often creates publics within the spaces of people's homes, for families and friends frequently gathered around the television screen, discussing the plots and characters (Barnes, 2003). In some contexts, soaps are also consumed and discussed in "public" spaces. For example, students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) regularly watch US series on campus (Barnes, 2003). Barnes, Ponono, and Adejunmobi pose certain questions discussed throughout this thesis, concerning the kind of publics conjured by television dramas, how these publics emerge, and how they differ from publics constituted by film screenings in cinemas and communities.

1.4.6 Digital Media and Publics

The recent rise of digital media in South Africa has opened up alternative paths for the exhibition of films. For example, the television channel M-Net broadcasts via satellite and the Internet, streaming a diversity of channels across Africa, including M-Net West Africa, M-Net East Africa, Channel 0 Africa – which addresses particularly young audiences – and Africa Magic, which screens Nigerian video dramas on a daily basis (Dovey, 2009: 61; Saul & Austen, 2010: 150).[29] South African films and television programmes are also increasingly released on online view-on-demand (VOD) platforms, such as iTunes and Netflix. The South African government has sought to promote these developments in digital media in the country, but has also caused delays in their nation-wide roll-out (Berger & Masala, 2012: 6).

While South Africa has the highest rate of Internet penetration in sub-Saharan Africa (Bosch, 2011: 83), Internet access in the country remains relatively small, at around 20 per cent of the population – although some sources estimate it to be as high as one in three people (Malila, 2013: 30). Most people are also unable to afford the bandwidth required to download or stream film and television online (Gumede, 2014). Nevertheless, South Africa's recent surge in mobile phone ownership has enabled more and more people from all social classes to use the Internet, with 84 per cent of South African Internet users accessing the medium via their mobile phones (Malila, 2013: 30). Cellphone use in South Africa increased from 17 per cent in 2000 to 76 per cent in 2010 (Hutton, 2011), mainly a result of cheaper handsets and pay-as-you-go systems enabling users to purchase airtime on an ad-hoc basis; and has

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[29] See, for example, Mahir Saul and Ralph Austen (2010) and Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (2013) for a discussion of Nigeria's "booming" film and video industry.

made mobile phones an increasingly central part of adolescent fashion (Bosch, 2011: 75).

With cellphone penetration rising in South Africa, social media and online social networking applications have emerged as important platforms for exchange and communication among South African youth across the social spectrum (Bosch, 2008, 2011). In 2014, Facebook, the most widely used social networking site in South Africa (Bosch, 2011: 77), had 9.4 million active users in the country, compared to 6.8 million users in 2013 (World Wide Worx, 2014). People aged 13 to 18 constitute the largest group of Facebook users in the country, accounting for 2.5 million (World Wide Worx, 2014). In turn, Twitter saw an increase from 2.4 million South African users in 2013 to 5.5 million in 2014 (World Wide Worx, 2014). Notably, 87 per cent of Facebook users and 85 per cent of Twitter users in South Africa access these platforms via their cellphones (World Wide Worx, 2014) which enable people to instantly share brief bursts of information, photos, and videos from cell phones and computers (Hermida, 2010).

Publics and notions of intimacy have taken on new, complex dimensions in this context of digital media. Mobile phones and social media enable instant flows of communication, speeding up time and compressing the geographical distance of interpersonal exchange. Moreover, Facebook and Twitter, more than any other digital forum, make "private" dialogues and photographs accessible to other Internet users (Hjorth, King & Kataoka, 2014). How, then, do the developments in digital media in South Africa change the practices through which film and television programmes are made, exhibited, and received? What kinds of publics do social

media create? And what questions do digital media pose for conceptualising "public" and "private" spheres?

In order to attempt to answer these kinds of questions, I have analysed the exhibition and reception of the selected screen media productions via digital media, exploring audience discussions through Facebook, Twitter, online magazines and blogs. Exploring the "digital publics" created by the films and television texts on social media sites allowed for discovering immediate responses from viewers as they occurred during or shortly after screenings and broadcasts, and for gaining valuable insights into naturally occurring, instant flows of communication about the screen media under analysis.

1.5   Methods and Methodology of the Research

1.5.1   Methodological Approach

This thesis embraces a qualitative research approach, combining a variety of interdisciplinary research methods. A triangulated approach to the research objects was used, with different methods complementing and reinforcing one another. This has allowed for approaching the selected screen media productions from various angles, exploring textual representation, production, distribution, and reception.

The primary field research was undertaken in South Africa and the UK between 2012 and 2013. I spent two months conducting research in Durban and Amanzimtoti, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), in 2012; three weeks in Cape Town in 2013; and two weeks in Durban in 2013; as well as meeting with filmmakers and attended film screenings and film festivals the UK.

This thesis' main focus rests on the reception of the selected films and television programmes in South Africa. However, inspired by Modisane's research (2013) discussed above, I have also sought to trace the publics the selected films and television programmes have created in other geographical contexts. I initially intended to compare the discussions surrounding the selected screen media productions in South Africa to their reception in the United Kingdom (UK); however, the interviews I conducted and the social media platforms I analysed during the research process revealed that some of the screen media studied in this thesis created crucial publics in other contexts of the world, such as the US and Europe. I have, therefore, widened my research to trace these diverse "transnational publics" by focusing on those discussions and texts that presented interesting insights

for this thesis' focus on South African youth, intimacy, and publics.

1.5.2 Methods

1.5.2.1 Interviews

I have conducted semi-structured interviews with the producers, distributors, directors and subjects of the selected screen media, carrying out face-to-face interviews whenever possible, but also interviews over the telephone and Skype. These interviews enabled me to target key players in the production and distribution of the films and television programmes. Moreover, the interviews provided insights into the political and social intentions of producers and directors, the contexts of production and exhibition, and the reception of the selected texts. The personal contact I had with the interviewees also meant that data was checked for accuracy and relevance as it was collected. I carried out 37 interviews in total, of which four were repeat interviews with the same person, and two were interviews conducted via email.[30]

The interview method has been criticised, since the information gained is based on what people say, rather than what they do. Interviewees can also be intimidated or distracted by the researcher or the recording equipment, and interview statements may not always reflect the true opinion of the interviewee (Masolo, 1994: 234). I attempted to mitigate these problems through using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, which allowed for flexibility regarding the order in which questions were considered, while encouraging interviewees to speak in their own terms and express their own ideas.

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[30] A list of all interviews is included after the bibliography.

1.5.2.2 *Analysis of Documentary Sources*[31]

Modisane suggests that "reading" publics around screen media emerge through secondary documents, such as reviews and newspaper commentary, as well as texts directly attached to films, such as film posters, DVD jackets, and publicity (2013). The latter are defined by literary scholar Gérard Genette as "paratexts", which he divides into two categories, the "peritext" and the "epitext". The peritext includes a book's title, its cover, and all that is inherent to the text itself. The epitext contains secondary texts that are created in conjunction with the text's circulation in public (Genette, 1997: 10, 12). Epitexts include posters, publicity, and advertisements not materially attached to the text. In both cases, paratexts provide what Genette calls "thresholds" that frame readers' experience of the text.

The paratexts analysed in this thesis include film posters, websites of the films and television programmes, and publicity circulated by the distributors. In addition to paratexts, I explored secondary texts, such as film reviews, interviews, and "letters to the editor" published in South African newspapers and magazines, both print and online. Due to the scope of the material, I focused on articles published up to six months after the films and television programmes were released. I accessed these documentary sources through conducting research at the archives of UCT in Cape Town, the online archive HighBeam, and websites of the selected newspapers.

I researched newspapers with a large South African readership, namely, *The Sowetan*, a politically critical newspaper aimed at an English-literate black readership, which has 1.5 million readers ("South Africa's newspapers", 2013); the *City Press*, targeting a black readership, with 1.7 million readers ("South Africa's

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[31] A list of all documentary sources is included after the bibliography.

newspapers", 2013); *The Saturday Star*, South Africa's biggest selling Saturday newspaper which caters for the middle classes (The Inc, 2010: 7); and *The Times*, a popular newspaper in a tabloid format, as well as its Sunday edition, *Sunday Times*, which is South Africa's biggest Sunday newspaper ("South Africa's newspapers", 2013).

I also considered newspapers focused on investigative journalism and cultural content, including the *Mail and Guardian*, which publishes investigative reporting, film and literature reviews, and opinion pieces ("South Africa's newspapers", 2013); *The Sunday Independent*, which concentrates on political journalism, news, opinion, and reviews (The Inc, 2010: 12); and *Drum*, a magazine containing news, entertainment, and reports, which was one of the most widely read magazines by Black South Africans during apartheid (Chapman, 1989).[32]

Moreover, I included smaller, regional newspapers published in the areas where the films under analysis are set. Since *Otelo Burning* and *Rough Aunties* are set in Durban, I researched *The Mercury*, Durban's morning newspaper for an educated readership; the *Daily News*, *The Independent on Saturday*, *Sunday Tribune*, and *The Witness*, which all cater for readers in KZN. I also considered *The Cape Times*, which is consumed mainly by a middle class readership in Cape Town; the *Cape Argus* (including its Saturday edition, the *Saturday Argus*) a tabloid paper published in Cape Town; and *The Citizen*, a newspaper distributed mainly in Gauteng ("South Africa's newspapers", 2013).

Since these newspapers are published in English, I also included *Isoleszwe*, South

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[32] *Drum* was an important publication for both Black lifestyle and resistance against apartheid in the 1950s and 1960s. Zola Maseko worked the history of the magazine into the fiction film *Drum* (2004).

Africa's biggest Zulu language daily newspaper, and the Afrikaans newspapers *Beeld* and *Burger*.

I complemented these sources with major newspapers from the UK such as *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, *Mail and Guardian*, *Independent on Sunday*, *Daily Mail*, and *Mail on Sunday*, so as to investigate the transnational "reading publics" constituted around the primary texts.

1.5.2.3 Social Media

Another source of secondary texts consisted of online commentary and videos posted to Facebook and Twitter, as well as newspaper websites, blogs, and YouTube. I decided to explore tweets and Facebook posts that occurred during and shortly after television broadcasts and film screenings. In order to do so, I set up queries for particular keywords and hashtags via Twitter's Advanced Search function. This method posed certain challenges, since the tweets collected in this way had to be counted and coded manually. However, Twitter's Advanced Search allowed for identifying tweets that were several years old. In contrast, if specific computer software had been used to mine the tweets, Twitter would not have returned tweets older than one week via its Search Application Program Interface (API) ("The Search API", 2015).[33] Nevertheless, some tweets might have been missed by my method, with archived tweets often being sold by Twitter to commercial vendor-researchers, and since Twitter allows accessing only the last 3,200 tweets of user timelines (Lancet, 2012).

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[33] API is a set of routines, protocols, and tools for building software applications. Twitter has two APIs, namely, The REST (Representational State Transfer) API, which allows developers to access Twitter data, and the Search API, which provides methods for developers to interact with Twitter search and data (Beal, n.d.).

While Facebook and Twitter are both designed to share information, connect people with one another, and foster communication, some important differences between the two social media platforms are to be considered. Facebook has a variety of functions that enable users to publish text alongside photographs and videos, and to embed text and images from other websites (Kwon, Park & Kim, 2014). In turn, Twitter is a micro-blogging service with a relatively simple interface that restricts tweets to 140 characters and that only allows for publishing links to multimedia materials and other Internet sources (Kwon, Park & Kim, 2014). Arguably, then, tweets ought to be treated as fragments of information and limited exchanges, rather than genuine "conversations" among users. Nevertheless, as I will show here, tweets can give rise to the circulation of certain discourses, which, in turn, can call to life "digital" publics of engagement.

Another important difference between Facebook and Twitter is the fact that the latter is centred primarily on real-time conversations, while the lifespan of posts made to the former is generally longer. Studies have shown that approximately 92 per cent of engagements with a particular tweet occur within an hour of that tweet being made, while Facebook posts and status updates are often responded to for several hours or days (Widrich, 2011). Hence, the exploration of tweets surrounding films and television programmes in this thesis can present insights into the immediate, spontaneous responses from viewers. I have complimented my analysis of these primarily real-time exchanges on Twitter with a discussion of Facebook posts that deal with the selected screen media texts. This methodological approach allowed for exploring both instant and "delayed" responses to the selected screen media texts on digital media platforms.

1.5.2.4 Observation

An investigation of written and digital texts only would have posed certain problems, since books, newspapers, and journals indicate generic continuity, but they do not reflect perspectives outside of "formal" institutions. Analysing written texts alone would confine the findings of this thesis to literate people, but an estimated nine million South Africans cannot read or write ("Effective Literacy Programmes", 2009). Moreover, while statistics on Information and Computer Technology (ICT) literacy in South Africa are dismal, it is estimated that many South Africans have never used a computer (Gush, Cambridge & Ronel, 2004). Many children and youth are growing up without adequate training in how to use computers (Hogson, 2012), and only 20 to 23 per cent of schools in the country have more than one computer (Gush, Cambridge & Ronel, 2004).

Consequently, focusing on written documents and social media only would overlook the fact that one of the most powerful aspects of film and television is their accessibility to non-literate audiences. I therefore complemented my research on written secondary texts with oral responses and commentary that occurred during "live" screenings. This allowed for exploring people's immediate engagements with the selected screen media, and for comparing responses during screening contexts with those of written commentary.

Through the method of non-participant observation, I documented audience responses in cinemas, film festivals, schools, and community screenings, using a voice recorder and making notes. I, as a researcher, remained detached from the discussions, since audiences might have altered their behaviour as a consequence of my involvement. Non-participant observation provided insights into natural audience

responses, allowing for obtaining a greater depth of reactions compared to participant observation. The range of information collected in this way was wider than that provided through interviews and secondary texts, capturing different people's responses at the same time. However, the disadvantage of non-participatory observation is that the research participants are often not identified (Drew, Hardman & Hosp, 2007: 67–69). What is more, it poses ethical questions about deception, for some people – for example, audiences of film festival screenings – were not informed about the intentions of the study. As opposed to the interviews I conducted, these audiences were not always asked for informed consent to participate in the research. I sought to mitigate this problem by seeking consent from the organisers of screenings I attended at schools, and from individual participants whose responses are quoted in this thesis.

1.5.2.5   Data Analysis

The interviews and recordings from observations were transcribed by the transcription service Flatworld Solutions and myself. The translation service Tomedes translated one newspaper article from Zulu and three articles from Afrikaans into English, and I translated tweets and Facebook posts from Zulu to English wherever possible. I organised, catalogued, and coded the transcripts from interviews and observations, secondary texts and paratexts using the computer software HyperResearch, which is used for qualitative data analysis.

Qualitative discourse analysis was the major method used to explore the themes that emerged from both the primary and secondary texts. I investigated whether particular themes could be abstracted from the different sources, thereby identifying the discourses that emerged from the body of data.

1.5.3 Ethical Considerations

When conducting research with children and youth, the ethical principles to be considered are similar to those that apply to research with adults (Noret, n.d.). The researcher is obliged to protect children from physical and emotional harm, and to ensure that the research is beneficial for the research participants and for wider society (Furey et al., 2010: 121).

There are, however, some particularities to be considered when conducting research with young people. Obtaining informed consent from children and youth is one of the most complex issues researchers confront (NSPCC, 2013). I have argued earlier for the need to view youth as a social discourse rather than an age-based category; in practice, however, this understanding is often constrained by legislations stating that people aged below 18 are not legally allowed to consent to research (Noret, n.d.). For under-18-year-olds, parent or guardian consent is required, and if a child is in care of the state, additional requirements are necessary (Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2012: 2). During this research, informed consent has been difficult to achieve in some contexts, where the parents or carers of young people I sought to interview did not consent, or were not in immediate reach.

In particular, my research on *Rough Aunties*, a documentary film about the organisation Bobbi Bear, which cares for sexually abused children, posed ethical challenges. I spent six weeks at the organisation in Amanzimtoti to conduct research about the film. However, I was not able to interview the children that participated in the film, for, I was told, they were emotionally and socially vulnerable. Interviewing these children could thus have had re-traumatising effects and unpredictable emotional consequences for their lives. I have attempted to mitigate these problems

by interviewing the adult women at Bobbi Bear that took part in film. To an extent, these interviews also touched upon sensitive issues and personal stories, but I left the decision to participate in the research to the women, and respected those women who did not want to be interviewed.

1.6   Structure of the Thesis

The first chapter of the thesis investigates the production process, textual politics, and exhibition of the fiction film *Otelo Burning* by Sara Blecher. Set in the late 1980s, *Otelo Burning* centres on a group of Black teenage boys from Lamontville township, who discover surfing as a way of escaping the political violence that unfolded during this time. *Otelo Burning* was screened widely in South Africa and internationally, thereby creating a multitude of commentaries at screenings, in newspapers, magazines, and on social media. *Otelo Burning*'s representations open up a discussion about young masculinities in South Africa; however, the film's making and exhibition raise other, vital questions about the issue of authorship in collaborative filmmaking processes. The chapter reveals how the film's exhibition extended its diegetic meanings into entirely new directions and stimulated publics that were socially transformative. The publics *Otelo Burning* created on social media also illustrate certain dimensions and contradictions of feminist/feminine filmmaking and spectatorship.

Chapter 2 delves further into the questions the first chapter raises about young masculine and feminine identities, collaborative filmmaking efforts, and intimate publics. The chapter engages with one of the most disturbing expressions of

masculinity in South Africa, namely, child sexual abuse, and how this topic has been mediated by film and television. The discussion focuses on *Rough Aunties*,[34] an observational documentary about the women and children of Bobbi Bear, a child-welfare initiative near Durban. Produced by the UK-based company RISE Films and directed by the renowned British filmmaker Kim Longinotto, the documentary follows the women who work for Bobbi Bear as they try to bring child abusers to justice and to care for the young victims. Unlike *Otelo Burning*'s wide circulation, *Rough Aunties'* exhibition in South Africa was restricted; it was exhibited mainly at film festivals and on television in Europe and the US. The film allows for exploring both the ethics of documentary films about young people who have experienced sexual violence, and the ways in which audiences respond to these representations. *Rough Aunties'* textual politics, and the publics that came to exist around the film, are compared to those of the controversial television drama *Yizo Yizo*, which was commissioned by the South African government with the aim of addressing problems in township schools. The comparative analysis of *Rough Aunties* and *Yizo Yizo* highlights the ways in which different exhibition contexts of film and television can create very different publics around a similar issue, while providing nuance to the concept of *intimate* publics.

The medium specificities of film and television are explored further in chapter 3, which analyses the similarities and differences between the publics created by two media projects dealing with South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis, namely, *Intersexions*

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[34] Many films have been made between 1994 and 2014 that focus on youth and gender-based violence in South Africa, including the documentaries *The Lost Girls of South Africa* (Shipley, 2010), *No Past to Speak Of* (Gans, 2006), and *Rape for who I Am* (Kavuma, 2005); the fiction film *Uhlanga: The Mark* (Ndaba ka Ngwane, 2012)*,* and the animated short film *And there in the Dust* (Foot Newton & Marx, 2004). *Rough Aunties* was chosen for this thesis because it generated a significant amount of commentary in South Africa and abroad.

and the *Steps for the Future Youth Films*. *Intersexions* is a television drama exploring

the spread of HIV/AIDS among a group of people, who are unknowingly connected

through the sexual partners they have shared. *Intersexions* had the second-highest

audience ratings in South Africa when it was broadcast on SABC1 between 2010 and

2011, and nearly half of all South African television viewers aged between 16 and 35

has seen it (Collinge et al., n.d.: 32). *Intersexions* became the subject of extensive

discussions on Twitter and Facebook – something no other educational programme

about HIV/AIDS had achieved previously. *Intersexions*' publics are compared to

those conjured by the *Steps for the Future Youth Films*, a documentary film series

commissioned by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) STEPS (Social

Transformation and Empowerment Projects). STEPS made four video films in

collaboration with young South Africans from disadvantaged backgrounds; thus,

their analysis allows for deepening the discussion of the previous chapters about the

ethics arising from films made by adults in cooperation with young people.

Moreover, in contrast to *Intersexions*' nationwide broadcast, STEPS has exhibited

their films via community screenings, with facilitators leading post-screening

discussions with young audiences. The chapter compares *Intersexions*' "online" and

STEPS' "live" publics with the aim of deepening the conceptualisation of publics,

intimacy, and digital media platforms.

Chapter 5 continues to grapple with the aspects raised by the previous chapters,

discussing a film that has also created both "live" and "online" publics: *The African

Cypher*, a documentary that engages with street dances practised in townships and

inner-city areas of South Africa. The young, White filmmaker Bryan Little directed

the film, together with his young, White producer Filipa Domingues, and in

collaboration with young, Black dancers from disadvantaged backgrounds. The chapter explores whether this collaborative filmmaking effort, in fact, represents a form of appropriation, and the implications the collaborative processes had for the filmmakers, film subjects, and audiences. The analysis of the film's production and its textual politics highlights another form of appropriation, namely, how "youth subcultures" (Hebdige, 1979) can be co-opted by international corporations. People's "live" and "online" engagements with the film also demonstrate that intimate publics created around films can, in some contexts, have transformative effects on filmmakers, viewers, and film subjects.

The concluding chapter synthesises the thesis' findings, its limits, and presents ideas for further research in the fields of film, television, and youth in South Africa, and further afield.

1.7   Major Research Findings

The selected films and television programmes, in their diegeses, evoke the idea of "transitional narratives", suggesting that just as youth is a period of change, the "new" South Africa is a transitional country, where the legacies of apartheid have continued in many aspects of life. This critique of South African society in these screen media productions is established not through a critique of the state or political institutions, but through a focus on intimacy. Invested in young people's desires, emotions, sexualities and relationships, the screen media under analysis evoke Mouffe's idea of "the political" (2005) as being firmly entwined with "the social", pronounced in the power relations of everyday life.

The films' and television programmes' textual politics reveal both the agency and creativity of youths and what Alcinda Honwana has called the "quiet daily struggles" of youth (2013). She borrows the term from Asef Bayat (2010: 5) to describe young people's actions that take place outside of formal institutional channels, and moments in which their everyday lives blend with social and political activism. Honwana proposes that

> if we pay careful attention to the lyrics of [young people's] songs, the
> verses of their poems, the scripts of their plays, and the discourses
> propagating in their Facebook pages, blogs, tweets, and SMSs we
> uncover a strong critique of the status quo. (2013: 6)

Similarly, popular culture scholars in Africa (Barber, 1987; Newell & Okome, 2014) have revealed that political critique is pronounced in the "everyday", in media, music, and the arts, rather than via "official" institutions.

The gendered aspects of the screen media under analysis reveal the particular "politics" at work in families, leisure activities, relationships, and schools in the current South Africa. They suggest that in these areas, boys are often socialised according to a discourse of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1987, 2005; Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012), which defines manhood via expressions of violence, toughness, hypersexuality, and disrespect for women. Hence, the films and television dramas studied here reveal the complex gendered aspects of coming of age in the new South Africa, which are largely absent from the discourses upon which the ANC's "official culture" of gender equality and non-violence is built (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b). Importantly, however, the actions that some of the young, male participants in the films have taken *outside* of their films suggests that some young South African men are breaking with normative ideas of hegemonic masculinity; instead, they act as role models for the younger generation.

The collaborative screen media productions under analysis point to another transitional aspect of contemporary South Africa, namely, the continuing inequalities of race and gender in the country's film and television industry. While people of all races, classes, and genders participated in the production and distribution of the films and television programmes discussed here, the majority of the directors are White and/or male [35] and the majority of the film subjects were Black people from marginalised social backgrounds. The power relations resulting from this imbalance were not always equal, for it was predominantly the White filmmakers who benefited economically and symbolically from the exhibition of their films, rather than the people on whose life experiences the films are based. This raises a variety of ethical

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[35] This was one reason why two films by female directors were chosen for analysis.

questions about the benefits and dangers of collaborative filmmaking efforts, particularly if young people are involved.

However, in some contexts, the collaborative filmmaking productions also initiated a more positive, personal transformation for the young people who took part in them. Seeing their own lives projected onto the screen, and audiences' emotional reactions to them, made some film subjects recognise their own capacities, strengths, and ability to inspire others. The examples presented in this thesis also show that collaborative filmmaking processes can, in some contexts, create a mutual relationship of "interdependence" between most filmmakers and film subjects, from which both sides benefit long after a film is completed. These processes that emerged from the production of screen media also suggests that a "public" does not start with the exhibition or reception of a films or television programmes, but with their very making.

My analysis of the exhibition platforms of the selected screen media reveals the transitions and transformations taking place in the economic, technological, and institutional arrangements of South Africa's current media landscape. They support Jenkins' idea that a "convergence culture" is taking place in the contemporary media age, which describes the increasing distribution of media texts across different media platforms. The films studied here were all exhibited on a variety of platforms, ranging from screenings in cinemas and communities to television and iTunes. Yet, the thesis' findings also suggest that disparities of class and gender in South African society require a nuancing of the concept of convergence culture, for social media sites, film festivals, and cinemas are not accessible to many South African youths from marginalised backgrounds. Moreover, in some contexts, it was particularly

young women and girls who were excluded from the production and exhibition of films, which reveals the continuing gender inequalities in the country.

Audiences responded to the films and television dramas studied here through face-to-face discussions and on a variety of media platforms, including newspapers, online blogs, and social media; this multifaceted negotiation of screen media is what I would like to describe as a "convergence of publics", to refer to those publics that are created at the intersections of different media platforms, of the "public" and the "private", as well as "online" and "offline" spaces. It is not my aim to suggest that the particular spaces where publics are formed no longer matter; these contexts provide important insights into the people who constitute publics and patterns of access to different media. Nevertheless, the term is useful for highlighting the fact that publics are often situated at the junctures of different media platforms and viewing contexts.

Although television reaches a wider audience than cinemas in South Africa, it was particularly the "live" screenings of the films in cinemas and communities that created publics – and particularly intimate publics that fostered feelings of intimacy and emotional connections among audiences and film subjects. In some situations, these intimate publics exerted a transformative effect on young audiences, especially when the people who participated in the films were present at screenings. Of course, just as audience responses are infinite and complex, the screen media studied here did not unequivocally create the same kinds of publics, or always have a socially generative impact. Nonetheless, the thesis' findings imply that intimate publics created by community screenings, with the presence of the film subjects, hold potential to generate situations of solidarity and intimacy among South Africa's

"Born Free" generation.

The idea that "live" screenings foster the creation of publics is complicated by audiences' discussions about the films and television programmes on social media. The thesis' findings suggest that social media have emerged as an important platform where young people in South Africa expressed and exchanged their opinions about the selected film and television programmes, often at the same time as they watched them. These "digital publics" which young audiences created on Facebook and Twitter support the idea that the public and the private are not binary, spatial categories; instead, they overlap in complex, manifold ways. These digital publics could allow different people who are geographically dispersed to participate in a virtual, shared and, sometimes, intimate, viewing experience without having to reveal their identity, which – as I will show – has both benefits and disadvantages.

Moreover, this thesis' findings suggest that in some contexts, digital publics that formed on social media created intimate publics, allowing for greater intimacy of discussion on private or taboo topics. As Larissa Hjort, Natalie King, and Mami Kataoka argue, digital media's ability to transgress physical space by enabling instant communication renders "the intimate public and the public intimate" (2014: 2), thereby creating an emerging "mobile intimacy" (2014: 7). However, the anonymity granted by social media that gave rise to intimate publics also enabled some viewers to articulate and disseminate normative, discriminatory discourses on gender.

This thesis aims to fill a crucial gap in the existing theoretical literature, in which the relationships between youth and screen media in South Africa have remained

remarkably unexplored. It analyses these relationships from multiple angles, with the aim of attaining a holistic picture of the production, representations, and exhibition of selected youth-focused screen media in South Africa. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the thesis makes important contributions to the fields of Media and Film Studies, Cultural Studies, Childhood and Youth Studies, and (South) African Studies. Most importantly, perhaps, this thesis puts the spotlight not simply on contexts and situations of adversity, but also on the agency, creativity and initiative of South Africa's "Born Free" generation.

Chapter 2   Transitional Narratives, Young Masculinities, and

Questions of Authorship: The Publics of *Otelo Burning*

A film is a paradox; it needs many people to make it, but it has to have a single voice

–Ken Loach[36]

2.1   Introduction

It is 5 a.m. in the UK, a sunny morning in June, when I call Sihle Xaba, who lives

near Durban, on his mobile phone. Xaba is a famous body boarder, surfer, and one of

the lead actors in the film *Otelo Burning*, directed by Sara Blecher. I start our

interview by asking the 37-year-old about his childhood and how he became a surfer.

He replies:

> I grew up in a township, Lamontville. The township has the only
> swimming pool that has survived all the service delivery protests, the
> political violence, [and] gangsterism [during apartheid] […]. That's when
> I gained the love of swimming and I joined the swimming club and, from
> there, I was coached by this guy [Thembiso Madiya]. (2014)

Xaba reveals a very different side of South African surfing than that represented by

surf magazines, international surfing competitions, and tourist advertisements.

During apartheid, the sport was reserved for young White men, while Black South

Africans were consigned to inadequate swimming pools and unsafe beaches remote

from those reserved for Whites (Thompson, 2008, 2011a). Hence, surfing in South

Africa has historically represented a leisure activity entwined with problematic

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[36] See *Ken Loach In Conversation with Cilian Murphy* (n.d.).

discourses on race and gender, which highlights the fact that – as noted in the Introduction to this thesis – youth leisure is often "political", laden with social and cultural meanings (Zeleza & Veney, 2003).

After South Africa's formal transition to democracy, the racial configurations of surfing have begun to change; and yet, it has remained an activity carried out mainly by young, White, affluent men (Thompson, 2011b; Conibear, 2014). The gendered nature of the sport has been explained via socially entrenched norms of femininity and masculinity,[37] which prescribe that women and girls are sexualised objects who should tan themselves on the beach – rather than surfing – while men ought to demonstrate athleticism and strength on the surfboard (Waitt & Clifton, 2013: 489). This gendered politics of surfing poses the question of how notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed and maintained among South Africa's young generation.

The fiction film *Otelo Burning*, released in 2011, engages with this continuum between the "old" and the "new" South Africa, as well as expressions of young masculinity. *Otelo Burning* is set during the transition years, between 1988 and 1994, in the township of Lamontville, near Durban. The film centres on three Black teenage boys as they discover surfing – during apartheid the privilege of Whites – as a way to escape the unfolding political violence. With *Otelo Burning*, director Sara Blecher sought to address a young South African audience, "as a way of talking about freedom" (2012a). She says: "when I look at freedom here [in South Africa], it […] has become about greed and betrayal […] in many ways" (2013). The

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[37] "Masculinity" and "femininity" are defined in this thesis as socially and culturally constructed concepts, rather than fixed, biological categories; therefore, they are not tied to biological sexuality alone (Moolman, 2013: 95).

filmmaker's aim of provoking discussions about contemporary South Africa with a film about a *historical* story makes *Otelo Burning* stand out within the canon of post-apartheid South African cinema. Of the films on the subject of (male) adolescence that have been made over the past 20 years – such as *Tsotsi, Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema*, and *Hijack Stories* (Schmitz, 2000) – the majority are set instead in *present-day* South Africa. The apartheid past is thus relatively silenced in contemporary South African films; yet, as this chapter demonstrates, this history is important for understanding normative discourses on gender and "race" in the post-apartheid era.

Since its release in 2011, *Otelo Burning* has been exhibited both in South Africa and internationally, screening in diverse contexts and on different media platforms, including cinemas, television, the Internet, community screenings, and film festivals. Over the course of this wide circulation, the film created a variety of oral and written discussions and commentary in newspapers, magazines, on websites, and on social media sites. Recently, *Otelo Burning* also received academic attention in a range of articles (Modisane, 2014; Peterson, 2014; Samuelson, 2014a; Thompson, 2014) published in a special section of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* ("Contemporary Conversations: Otelo Burning", 2014). This chapter contributes to these discussions surrounding the film by examining, more holistically, its production, textual politics, and reception.

What the existing studies of *Otelo Burning* do not address in detail is the fact that the film is inspired by the life of the young man mentioned earlier, Xaba, who grew up in Lamontville during the 1980s and 1990s, and who plays the antagonist Mandla in the film. *Otelo Burning*'s script is based on the memories of Xaba's youth, as well as

on workshops Blecher ran with people from Lamontville who had experienced the transition years in South Africa. The filmmaker stresses that *Otelo Burning* is a "real story", "told by the people of Lamontville" (qtd in "More Awards for SA Film Otelo Burning", 2013), which indicates her attempt to "co-author" the film and to "authentically" represent the lives of Black youths at the end of apartheid. Aspects of collaboration and representation in *Otelo Burning* are thus intriguing areas to explore. Whose stories are being told in the film? How has the collaborative filmmaking process translated into diegetic representations of youth and masculinity? In particular, how is Xaba's key role in the film's inspiration reflected in its internal textual politics, as well as in its external publicity and exhibition? Close attention also needs to be paid to how this collaborative filmmaking process was understood and received by spectators, particularly those young South Africans who were Blecher's major target audience.

My analysis of *Otelo Burning*'s publics focuses on the period between 2011, when the film premiered in Durban, and 2014, when it was released via digital media platforms. These publics were formed by audiences' discussions during and after screenings; their comments on Facebook and Twitter; and journalists who published reviews in newspapers, magazines, and on websites. My research identified 39 articles about *Otelo Burning* from South Africa, of which 14 were published in print newspapers. These articles were written in English, except for one article in Zulu published in the newspaper *Isolezwe*; two articles in Afrikaans published by *Die Beeld*; and one article in Afrikaans in *Die Burger*. I accessed these articles via the newspaper archives of UCT and the online archive HighBeam Research. My analysis of these documentary sources was complemented by interviews I conducted with

Blecher, Xaba, lead actor Thomas Gumede, Tim Conibear, the founder of the NGO Waves for Change, [38] and Tricia Sibbons, the Board Secretary of the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Trust.[39] I also observed Q&As after screenings of the film at the Film Africa film festival 2012 in London.

This chapter proposes that Blecher's critique of young masculinities in *Otelo Burning* suggests that present-day South Africa is a "transitional", rather than a "post-apartheid", society. Yet, the film's production process and reception extended these diegetic meanings in a range of different directions. *Otelo Burning* is an example of participatory filmmaking practices and, in part, a biographical film based on the young man Xaba's life. Xaba not only inspired the film, but his facilitation of screenings also enabled it to have a transformative effect on young audiences in South Africa and beyond. However, Blecher was the ultimate "author" of the film, for she had the agency over its production and completed form. Xaba's key role in the film's story is also relatively absent from its diegetic worlds and paratexts, suggesting that his life story has, to an extent, been "appropriated" by the filmmaker. Importantly, however, the making and exhibition of *Otelo Burning* also helped Xaba to come to terms with the painful memories of his childhood and youth.

Otelo Burning was screened via a range of different media platforms, including cinemas, television, and the Internet, which evokes Jenkins' idea that a "convergence" of media production and consumption is emerging in the contemporary media age (2006). In turn, the film created "converging publics",

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[38] Waves for Change runs surf therapy projects for youths growing up in violent communities in Cape Town. It hosted various screenings of *Otelo Burning*, which Xaba attended.

[39] The Trust provides young people from Soweto with educational support and training opportunities. The organisation ran various screenings of *Otelo Burning* and Blecher's previous documentary film, *Surfing Soweto* (2010).

which spanned a variety of exhibition contexts and media platforms, from written reviews and oral conversations to online discussions on social media sites. Television, however, was the major distribution platform through which *Otelo Burning* reached a nationwide, young audience in South Africa, and it was mainly television viewers who created digital publics around the film by commenting on it on Facebook and Twitter. Despite television's wide reach, however, it was primarily the community screenings with young audiences facilitated by Xaba that enabled *Otelo Burning* to carve out opportunities for intimacy and even for transformation.

The digital publics that formed around Otelo Burning offer vital insights into the complexities of feminist/feminine filmmaking and spectatorship. Blecher's focalisation of the film through the perspective of young, male characters, and her work with the conventions of Hollywood cinema, complicates any attempt to classify the film according to the genre of "feminist film". In turn, it was predominantly female viewers who commented on the film, and particularly on the good-looking male protagonists, on social media. These responses resonate with the arguments of film theorists who have proposed that it is not only male viewers who "gaze" upon female characters on the screen, but that female viewers, too, can perceive male characters as objects of sexual pleasure (Koch, 1980; Studlar, 1984; Hansen, 1986).

2.2 Locating *Otelo Burning* in Sara Blecher's Filmography

Blecher is a White South African-born filmmaker who had been a frontline journalist in her own youth, covering the anti-apartheid struggle in KZN between 1990 and 1994, and often personally endangering herself (The Forward, 2014). Hence, she has had personal experiences of the historical events documented in *Otelo Burning*.

Throughout her career, Blecher has directed and produced numerous films and television programmes about youth, such as *Bay of Plenty* (2007), *Surfing Soweto* (2010), and *Ayanda* (2015). Blecher says she has focused on youth, in these works, since "coming of age fascinates me, because it's what forms people, and in a funny way it's what forms society" (2013). In an interview, she explained to me:

> To me, the biggest problem in South Africa is a lack of nuclear family units. I think the statistics that we're seeing is that more than 70 per cent of people are raised by a single parent, and very often a mother. So especially with young boys…you're raised by a single working mother and when you come of age – at that moment when you become a man – that parent figure has lost control and power. So you go to the streets to learn to be a man. (2012)

Blecher could, therefore, be described as a filmmaker with an anthropological and journalistic approach. Feminist intentions, too, are a central theme of her films, which explore male (and, more recently, female)[40] coming of age in the social and economic context of South Africa.

Blecher has said that she seeks to inspire young audiences with her films and point out new perspectives on life to them. Her own daughter played an important part in this directorial vision:

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[40] Blecher's most recent fiction film, *Ayanda* (2015), centres on a young woman from Johannesburg who works as a mechanic.

> We went to see *Juno*[41] and when my daughter came out of the cinema,
> she came out as a different person than the person that went in […]. She
> got to see a young girl being something that she hadn't thought was
> possible in her life […], who really engages in life and makes mistakes,
> moves, corrects, sees and actually lives. […] I want to do a similar thing.
> I think film is such a powerful medium to present options. (Blecher,
> 2013)

As discussed later in this chapter, resisting expected life choices and obtaining personal "freedom" through unconventional avenues are key themes in Otelo Burning's narrative themes, as well as in the publics it created.

A concern with collaborative filmmaking is another theme that connects Blecher's films. Prior to *Otelo Burning*, she was executive director on *Bay of Plenty*, a 36-part television drama series, which centres on lifeguards at the Durban beachfront. The ideas for *Bay of Plenty* were developed, in part, from the same workshops from which the script of *Otelo Burning* emerged. Blecher also directed and produced the documentary film *Surfing Soweto*, for which she followed a group of teenage boys from Soweto over a period of several years. In this film, Blecher explores why these boys practise "train surfing", a dangerous leisure activity that involves standing on the top of moving trains. During the production of this documentary, Blecher gave the boys video cameras to document their lives; this attempt to present *Surfing Soweto* from the perspective of young men indicates her aspiration towards an inclusive and authentic filmmaking practice.

Surfing Soweto would offer interesting possibilities for exploring the ethics of participatory documentary filmmaking; however, it was never released in South Africa. It was shown at community screenings and film festivals, but it did not create

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[41] *Juno* (Reitman, 2007) is a US fiction film that centres on a teenage girl who accidentally falls pregnant, and who decides to keep her baby.

a significant amount of commentary. *Bay of Plenty*, in turn, went out of commission when the SABC reached the brink of financial collapse in 2009 (Blignaut, 2012, "Walking on Water"),[42] and very few records of discussions about the series exist. *Otelo Burning*, however, was shown on a wide range of media platforms in South Africa and internationally, and diverse oral and written material was available for analysis.

2.3 *Otelo Burning*: A Collaborative Production

2.3.1 Participatory Cinema

Otelo Burning's script was developed through workshops Blecher conducted with people from Lamontville. These workshops, held in 2006, were funded by the Ford Foundation and organised in conjunction with the Market Theatre Laboratory, a drama school in Johannesburg committed to providing opportunities for marginalised youth. In light of this collaboration, *Otelo Burning* can be described as "participatory cinema", a term often used to explain practices that actively involve the film subjects in the production and the scripting of films (MacDougall & Taylor, 1999; Singhal & Devi, 2003; Pink, 2007). Participatory filmmaking – sometimes called "indigenous media" (Ginsburg, 1999) or "intertextual cinema" (MacDougall & Taylor, 1999) – has been perceived as an important alternative to observational filmmaking,[43] for it requires the active contribution of individuals and communities, rather than subjecting them to the perspective of the filmmaker; participatory cinema has,

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[42] In 2009, the SABC's financial crisis was exacerbated by increasing concerns over its bias towards the ANC, and the fact that the government did not provide any funding for its coverage of the national elections (Southall & Daniel, 2009: 226). The broadcaster required a government bailout of more than R 1 billion (£51 million) ("Govt gives go-ahead for SABC bailout", 2009).

[43] See chapter 3 in this thesis for a discussion of observational documentary filmmaking.

therefore, been described as a "collaboration and joint authorship between film-makers and their subjects" (MacDougall & Taylor, 1999: 136). Researchers and filmmakers alike have hailed participatory film and video practices for making the stories of ordinary people more accessible to audiences (Singhal & Devi, 2003; Pink, 2007).

However, participatory cinema practices are complex and not necessarily representative of a "joint authorship" between filmmaker(s) and film subject(s). Filmmaking involves many stages of scriptwriting, shooting, and postproduction, and it is thus more "active" and "intrusive" than simply observing or reflecting reality (Singhal & Devi, 2003: 13). Power relationships between the filmmaker and the participants often determine who, in fact, has the ultimate agency over the creation of cinematic representations emerging from participatory filmmaking.

The moral and ethical dimensions of participatory filmmaking are particularly pertinent when film directors collaborate with groups or individuals from cultures other than their own (Huijser & Collins-Gearing, 2007).[44] For example, filmmakers who involve and represent, in their works, people from different backgrounds have been accused of "appropriating" and publicising the stories of others as their own (Young, 2008: 7). Mary West (1999) has discussed these claims in relation to the South African play *My Life* (1996) by Athol Fugard, which the playwright developed through workshops with adolescent girls from diverse demographic backgrounds. Fugard asked the young participants to write down memories of their childhoods, and he therefore claimed he had not "authored" the play himself, but that it was

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[44] See Henk Huijser and Brooke Collins-Gearing (2007) for a discussion of white Australian filmmakers representing Aborigines through participatory cinema.

entirely based on the young girls' stories. However, West reveals that *My Life* is, ultimately, a representation of Fugard's own vision of South Africa's new generation, for he had the authority to select, summarise, and modify the girls' biographical accounts (1999). Therefore, questions of whose stories are being told in *Otelo Burning* – which emerged through similar workshops – how they impacted upon the filmmaker and the film subjects, and who benefited financially and symbolically from these artistic representations are vital.

2.3.2   Whose Stories Are Being Told?

Otelo Burning, set in Lamontville between 1988 and 1994, centres on the 16-year-old protagonist Otelo, his best friend New Year, and Otelo's 11-year-old brother Ntwe. They dream of a better life outside of the township where they grow up amidst dysfunctional families, poverty, and political violence fought between two anti-apartheid movements, the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Inkatha Freedom Party. The plot reaches a turning point when Otelo and New Year take up swimming lessons at the Lamontville pool, where they make the acquaintance of a young man, Mandla, who begins to give them lessons in surfing – which, during apartheid, was reserved for White people. One day, a White man, Kurt, observes the boys as they surf and encourages them to enter surfing competitions. But as Otelo and his friends begin to win surfing contests, the friendship between Otelo and Mandla begins to deteriorate. Rivalry develops between the two, enforced by Mandla's jealousy of Otelo's love affair with New Year's younger sister, Dezi. The film's narrative peaks when Ntwe is murdered by the UDF, who mistake him for an informer for the apartheid police. Otelo's life begins to disintegrate after his brother's death; he is chased out of the house by his father, starts to drink, and flees into self-imposed exile

to a beach. The film draws to a close when Otelo discovers that it was Mandla who sold Ntwe to the UDF, and that he has also raped Dezi. As he seeks vengeance, he fatally shoots Mandla on the same day Nelson Mandela is released from prison. Following the shooting, Otelo runs with his surfboard into the sea and frantically surfs the waves of the Indian Ocean. His fate is not revealed, but the film's ending indicates that he has died in some way. In the closing scene, set several years later, New Year has taken over the role of the swimming coach at the Lamontville pool and teaches a new generation of youth to swim.

As mentioned above, *Otelo Burning*'s script emerged through a workshop process involving people who themselves experienced the transition years in Lamontville, and it is partly based on the childhood and adolescence of Sihle Xaba. Born in 1978, Xaba learned to swim in the Lamontville Municipal pool, which eventually led to him joining a life saving and surfing club, until he obtained a job as a life guard at the Durban beachfront in 1996. As Xaba told me: "My parents did not like the idea of me going to swim and I had to go secretly into the pool" (2014). He explained that Lamontville's swimming pool was the only pool that was kept open to black youths during the political violence in the late 1980s, saying:

> In Durban, a lot of other townships had swimming pools, but they were just vandalised […]. The gangsters would use the swimming pools for their meetings […]. So that swimming pool […] was the only one that has survived all of that. It was looked after by a guy by the name of Thembiso Madiya. (2014)

Xaba subsequently became one of the first Black surfers in Durban in the transition period; he is one of the first Black South African body boarders to win a national title, and in 1998, he travelled to Hawaii to represent South Africa in international competitions (Thompson, 2014).

Blecher was inspired with the idea for *Otelo Burning* in 2004, when she made the acquaintance of Xaba during a visit to the Durban beachfront:

> I was astounded how quickly Durban had changed. When I'd been there [during apartheid], the beaches on the beachfront were white and the lifeguards were white. And very quickly, beaches became black. The lifeguards were exactly the same: good-looking, tattooed, but they were all black and speaking Zulu. I was chatting to one of the lifeguards, Sihle, who plays Mandla, and he started telling me that all the lifeguards come from [Lamontville], because it is the only township on that whole coastline that has a swimming pool. ("Q&A at Film Africa", 2012)

Xaba, in turn, remembers:

> I told her [Blecher] about the swimming pool in Lamontville, how I started body boarding, how I started swimming, how I got into life saving as well. I think what really struck her was when I told her that 90 per cent of the lifeguards [at the Durban beachfront] come from Lamontville. (2014).

Blecher saw a film in Xaba's adolescent experiences, saying: "when I heard [that] story for the first time, I was like 'this is the film!'" (2013). She subsequently visited Lamontville, where Xaba showed her the pool, and introduced her to the community.

With the aim of gathering ideas for *Otelo Burning*'s script, Blecher and Colin Oliphant,[45] one of the scriptwriters, ran workshops with members of the Lamontville community. Blecher explains: "The first draft of the script came out of the workshop

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[45] Oliphant is a South African television writer, who has worked, for example, on the television drama series *Isidingo* (Sargeant et al., 1998) and *The Lab* (Berk et al., 2006).

[…]. People would tell stories and then the group would develop them into scenes. We'd then write up these scenes and over time structure them into the story until finally we had a script" (qtd in "FDL Movie Night", 2014). She stresses that Black people's experiences of the transition had been largely absent from the news media during apartheid, and that "[t]he police never investigated, which is kind of what caused the problem, because if the community felt there was no justice for crimes, then justice is something the community feels they have to do themselves" ("Q&A at Film Africa", 2012).

Blecher's workshops attracted many people who lived in Lamontville, including former gangsters, lifeguards, and swimmers, who had witnessed or even participated in the political violence that unfolded in the late 1980s. Xaba recalls:

> They [Blecher and Oliphant] went around the township putting up
> pamphlets that if anybody wants to learn how to act, if you want to be on
> TV [sic], they must come to the Lamontville hall. So everybody just
> came in numbers […]. I was very surprised that everybody was there to
> actually tell their experience about their lives. (2014)

This suggests that people from Lamontville were eager to share their memories with Blecher, but it is also possible that people came to the workshops mainly because Blecher provided free lunch (Blecher, 2013). Poverty could have been an equally motivating factor for people to tell their stories to the filmmakers.

The discussion so far illustrates that the question of authorship in *Otelo Burning* is complex. Blecher wanted to "co-author" *Otelo Burning* with people from Lamontville, rather than projecting her own interpretation of the township's history onto the screen. Yet, she also had her own vision for the film – to make a drama about young men growing up during the transition years. The question "whose

stories are represented" is complicated further by the fact that *Otelo Burning*'s script is based not only on the general memories of people from Lamontville, but very specifically on Xaba's youth.

West's conceptualisation of "authorship", in her discussion of Fugard's participatory theatre described earlier, is useful in this respect (1999: 5). She argues that it is not constructive trying to disentangle whose ideas or stories are represented in a play or literary text; instead, one needs to ask who has the power over the final composition of these ideas – hence, who "'authored' it [a play] and what constitutes authorship" (West, 1999: 5). The process of "authoring", West proposes, does not simply involve the act of writing, but concerns someone's agency in the different stages of composing a play, such as production, direction, and selection of actors (1999: 5). In the process of filmmaking, which involves many stages of (pre- and post-) production, authorial agency also concerns control over the script writing, shooting, editing, cinematography, sound, as well as publicity and distribution.

South African and international film critics have emphasised the fact that Blecher was not the sole author of *Otelo Burning*. For example, the South African journalist Tymon Smith writes this in an article published in *The Times*: "Blecher doesn't feel that she's an outsider telling other people's stories but that '*we*'ve told it […]. [W]e ran acting workshops in the township and it was out of those that the film came" (2011, my emphasis). The website "South Africa" quotes Blecher as saying: "it's not just a story that someone sat in a room and made up. It's a Lamontville story, told by the people of Lamontville" ("More Awards for SA Film Otelo Burning", 2013). Moreover, *Otelo Burning* won awards at international film festivals because it was perceived as a film made collectively and based on "real events". In March 2012,

Otelo Burning was awarded Best Cinematography and Best Child Actor at the prestigious African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) in Lagos, Nigeria. One of the awards' criteria was to honour films that "tell real stories: inspired by, reflective of and crafted by the people, by whom and for whom they were made" (Africultures, n.d.). *Otelo Burning* also won an award for Best International Film at the Bronze Lens Film Festival 2012 in Atlanta, where it was praised for being "based on true events" ("Six of the Nations Most Provocative Filmmakers", 2012).

However, the collaborative production process of *Otelo Burning* suggests that the film's authorship is difficult to decipher. It was Blecher and Oliphant who organised the workshops, encouraged people to share their stories, and judged these stories by either including or excluding them from the final script. The "memory work" people engaged in during the workshops thus did not emerge spontaneously, but in response to the filmmaker's initiative. Moreover, people's stories were modified over time, since Blecher recruited additional scriptwriters towards the end of the process, which is a mode of film development typical of Hollywood filmmaking. According to Blecher:

> The problem with this script was that it was really all over the place. So after quite a bit of time we brought a writer – James Whyle[46] – on board and working together with Clarence [Hamilton],[47] he took all the material we had gathered in the workshop and structured it into a new script. (qtd in "FDL Movie Night", 2014)

Moreover, the stories that emerged from the workshops were constantly refined, because *Otelo Burning* took seven years to make. This long development was not a

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[46] Whyle is a South African screenwriter and actor, who features in the films *Sarafina!* (Roodt, 1992), *A Place for Weeping* (Roodt, 1986), and *Steel Dawn* (Hool, 1987).
[47] Clarence Hamilton was the controversial head of the NFVF at the time.

deliberate choice, but emerged from difficulties Blecher faced in obtaining the necessary funding. She ultimately succeeded in securing money from private South African investors and the NFVF, and from the No Borders Independent Filmmaker Project (IFP), the major co-production market for independent films in the US.[48]

Otelo Burning's scriptwriters wove the personal accounts that emerged from the workshops into an adaptation of Shakespeare's play *Othello*. Blecher explains: "when we were looking at the material, I realised this is really the story of *Othello*. It is a story about betrayal and greed and jealousy" (2013). *Othello*, notably, centres on a Black general of the Venetian army, whose life and marriage are ruined by an envious White soldier, Iago. Since the play focuses on a Black man who marries and then murders a White woman, it has been accused of depicting Black men in racist terms. For example, when the play was performed in the Eastern Cape of South Africa in the 19th century, it was criticised for its racist representations by the "father of Black South African cinema", Solomon T. Plaatje (Orkin, 1987). It thus remains open to question whether people from Lamontville would also have chosen *Othello* as the overarching narrative framework for their memories.

Nevertheless, when shooting *Otelo Burning*, Blecher handed over part of her authorial agency to the young, Black actors. The film features young South African actors, including Thomas Gumede, Jafta Mamabolo and Nolwazi Shange, who are themselves "Born Frees", for they were very young when South Africa became a politically democratic country. Some actors, such as Xaba (see figure 2.1), emerged from the acting workshops the filmmakers held in Lamontville. Furthermore, Blecher

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[48] Blecher partly grew up and studied in New York, which probably helped to secure funding from IFP.

decided to shoot *Otelo Burning* entirely in Zulu, the language that is spoken in Lamontville, rather than in her own mother tongue, English. Blecher understands Zulu but does not speak it fluently, which meant that the actors had a certain linguistic freedom in interpreting the script ("Q&A at Film Africa", 2012). Some actors also modified the film's narrative. Mamabolo, who plays Otelo, says: "certain scenes and some of the chemistry couldn't really be written into the script and had to be developed as the relationships with the other actors developed" (qtd in "FDL Movie Night", 2014). It was Gumede who wrote the scene in which New Year and Blade talk about the meanings of "freedom", since he felt the relationship between the brothers was not adequately developed in the existing script.

Figure 2.1 Indigenous Film (2011). *Xaba and Blecher on the set of* **Otelo Burning** *in Durban* **[Digital image]. Available from Indigenous Film. Image courtesy of Sara Blecher and Indigenous Film.**

2.3.3 Enacting the Past

Interestingly, the making and exhibition of *Otelo Burning* had a transformative effect on Xaba's life. He says that taking part in shooting the film was initially unsettling, since:

> It brought back a lot of memories. I realised that a lot of the things that had happened were very traumatising. Seeing people being killed and people being burned, and my mum […] nearly losing her life. It was traumatising […]. When they started filming, the whole thing […] came back again. (2014)

However, Xaba asserts that the making of the film also helped him, and people from the Lamontville community, to come to terms with the painful memories of the transition years. He explained to me:

> Now […] I look at the film from a different perspective […]. I'm also talking for the community of Lamontville. It actually brought a lot of closure on what had happened, because as much as it was a long time ago, there were times when I would […] walk past or drive past or whatever – there's been a lot of killing [sic] […]. But when we filmed the whole thing, it just brought a lot of closure. (2014)

He adds that many people from Lamontville felt proud that a film was made about the history of their home and lives:

> A lot of people have seen the film and they absolutely loved it. Some of them still talk about it. On Facebook, there is a site called "Lamontville" […] and everybody was talking about the film and about how they loved the film and how they felt really proud to be from the Lamontville community […]. It was the first time in KwaZulu-Natal that a film has been shown in the cinema and internationally that comes from a township [sic]. (2014)

These transformative effects which the making of *Otelo Burning* exerted on some of the film's participants reiterate the ideas put forward in the collection *Art and*

Trauma in Africa (Bisschoff & van de Peer, 2013a), proposing that representations of trauma in film and the arts can enable people to take agency over their painful past, thereby coming to terms with difficult memories. In the introduction, Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie van de Peer suggest that artistic representations of trauma can connect individual memories with the wider community (2013b), thereby challenging the common idea that it is unethical to represent the painful memories of other people in audiovisual media (Sontag, 2003), such as those committed during apartheid.

However, the fact that Xaba was allocated the role of the antagonist, Mandla, in *Otelo Burning* complicated the process of "working through trauma" for him. Xaba explains the challenges of playing Mandla as follows:

> [Mandla] is ruthless and in my heart I'm a lifeguard […]. I'm a very, very gentle person and it was […] really difficult for me to jump from being Sihle to being Mandla […]. There were times when I would read the script and then I would go up to Sara and I'd be like: "Sara, but then why does Mandla have to do this? This is so bad!" And she was like […]: "Don't worry sweety, it's only a character, it's not you". It was nothing about how people are going to look at me afterwards. It was just something personal that was too heavy for me, doing something like that. (2014)

Mandla is also not an entirely fictional character, but embodies a diversity of people and situations Xaba experienced during his childhood. Xaba explained to me: "When Mandla had to […] give out information to the police and somebody else dies, these are things that did happen […]. Mandla helped to tell the story of what […] some of the individuals in the township did" (2014). He stresses that it was particularly challenging for him to play the rape scene, saying, "every time I look at it, I'm like 'eurgh that is not me!' I have to cover my eyes" (2014). Enacting violence and

hegemonic masculinity thus contradicted Xaba's own morals as a husband and father. *Otelo Burning*, then, is comparable to the memory theatres Michaela Grobbel has described in her book *Enacting the Past*, which simultaneously "enact" and remember the past and the present, making the past appear as present in the process of performance (2004). In *Otelo Burning*, too, subjects and actors, as well as the past and present merged during the production process.

2.3.4   Xaba's Biography in *Otelo Burning*

That some of Xaba's own childhood and youth is "enacted" in *Otelo Burning* demands exploring the treatment of his biographical information in the film. Xaba – like the lead characters Otelo, New Year, and Mandla – grew up without a father. In an interview with *City Press*, he explained:

> It's a whole complicated story – the usual one. You get someone
> pregnant and you say it's not my child. He came to his senses when I was
> six and came to visit. My mum explained, "That's [sic] your father" […].
> A few months later he was killed. All I know is he was murdered in
> Matatiele. (qtd in Blignaut, 2012)

Xaba says his swimming coach, Madiya, was like a surrogate parent for him, since "it wasn't only just coaching; he was like a parent, because he would teach us about discipline and also he would engage a lot with parents as well" (Xaba, 2014). This biographical information is "enacted" in a scene nine minutes into *Otelo Burning*, in which New Year's voice-over states: "Skhumbuzu [the swimming coach in the film] was like a father for all of us in Lamontville. That's why everyone could swim".

For Xaba, swimming and surfing represent not only sports and leisure, but are also a means of psychological liberation and inspiration. He told me:

> When I [first] came to the beach, I was in a different world, because it was just so peaceful and quiet. I was in my own frame of mind where nothing else mattered. And when I paddle out there, as much as on my way to the beach I'd be thinking of what I saw in the township, all traumatised, as soon as I jump on a surfboard or go on a body board and get out there, and catch my first two waves, it will just be erased what I've experienced or what I've been through.(2014)

Correspondingly, in the *Otelo Burning*: *Behind the Scenes* video (Erasmus, 2012), Blecher states: "Sihle […] brought a knowledge of the surfing and a knowledge of the sea that he just has within himself".

Since *Otelo Burning* draws strongly from Xaba's life, the film could be placed as much in the genre of biography as in drama. As West argues, if someone's biography is authored by someone else, it is necessary to distinguish between the role of the "writer" and that of the "model" (1999).[49] She notes that the function of the model is to tell the writer about his/her life, while the writer is tasked with the responsibility of structuring, summarising, and condensing that information. Within this process, the author takes on the role of a "mediator" of biographical information (West, 1999: 6–7). Correspondingly, Blecher, Oliphant, Whyle, and Hamilton all were "mediators" of Xaba's story, for they structured and modified Xaba's biographical account when adapting it to the conventions of fiction film. As the film's director, Blecher inevitably adapted and selected the material from Xaba's life according to her interest in critiquing the formation of young, hegemonic masculinity and the complex nature of political "freedom" in South Africa. However, the ethical risk involved in this process is that the model can be reduced to the function of a *source*, with the author's own vision taking over the model's story, as well as potentially reaping the symbolical and economic benefits from it (West, 1999: 6–7).

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[49] West builds on Philip Lejeune's discussion of autobiography (1989).

Indeed, it could be argued that Xaba's biography has, to an extent, been transformed into a source for *Otelo Burning*. When writing the script, Blecher and Oliphant merged Xaba's memories with other people's stories (Blecher, 2014). When I asked her why she decided to develop *Otelo Burning* as a fiction film, Blecher said that she does not see fiction and documentary as demarcated genres:

> I think very often making a documentary or doing the research for a documentary allows you to make a [fiction] feature. It allows the feature to be very rich and I think making features allows you to think of storytelling in different ways [than] when you make documentaries […]. But actually I think the line is kind of blurred. (2013)

Blecher, then, was aware of the fact that there is no absolute subjectivity in filmmaking, both documentary and fiction filmmaking not being "neutral" representations of reality. And yet, fiction inevitably carves out more room for a filmmaker to "stage" reality than documentary, since the filmmaker can entirely invent storylines and characters.

Xaba was not aware when he first met Blecher that she intended to make a fiction film about his life, saying: "I thought she was just being curious. Later on she said, 'it's a really good story to be told'. I thought: 'Well, maybe she wants to make a documentary about this'" (2014). Blecher did, of course, reveal to Xaba eventually that she aimed to make a feature film, and she can hardly be criticised for not explaining her identity upfront, for she met Xaba during an informal conversation. One thing that will remain open to question, however, is whether Xaba would have told Blecher his life story so openly had he known that it would translate into the story for a fiction film.

Xaba has also been relatively in the background of the film's publicity materials. The film's official website ("Otelo Burning", n.d.) makes little mention of the fact that the film is partly based on Xaba's life. The main page lists the film's awards and places a reviewer's quote on the top, which states "a beautifully authentic film, based on a rather unconventional movie theme". The first page of the website directs to a further page, which mentions Xaba briefly: "Sihle (who plays Mandla) actually grew up in Lamontville, learned to swim in the pool shown in the film, and is now a lifeguard, champion surfer (and a film star)" ("Otelo Burning", n.d.). Yet, the promotional poster (see figure 2.2) that accompanied *Otelo Burning's* release in South African cinemas states that the film is "written by James Whyle, Sara Blecher and 'The Cast'". The poster places Gumede in the foreground, with Xaba and Mamabolo appearing behind him – probably since New Year is the film's narrator and since Gumede has a large (female) fan base in South Africa.
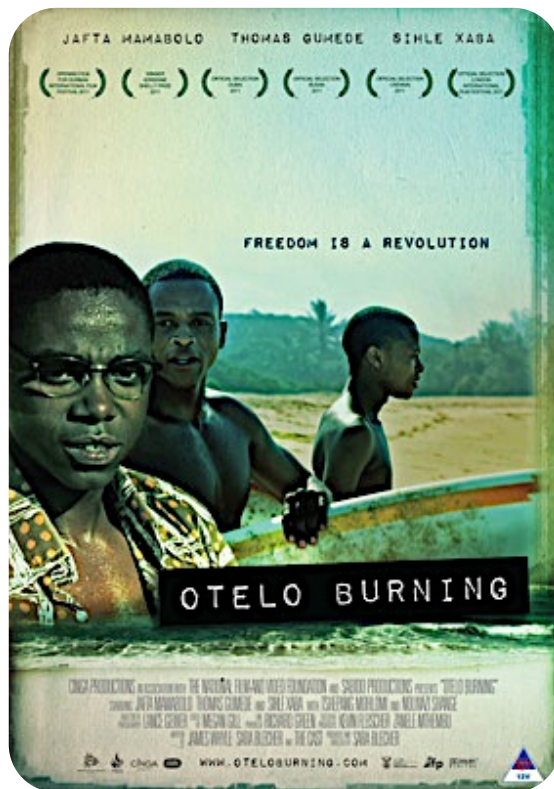
Figure 2.2 Indigenous Film (2011). Otelo Burning *film poster*. [Digital image] Available at: http://bit.ly/1bwEQeR. [Accessed 2015, August 08].

The majority of South African reviewers and film critics discussing *Otelo Burning* also eclipse Xaba's central role in the film's script or only mention it in passing. For example, the catalogue of DIFF 2011, where the film premiered, states: "Developed from a workshop process in Lamontville, the film is based on the true story of a swimming pool in the area that survived the ravages of apartheid […]" (Centre of Creative Arts, 2011). What the catalogue does stress is that one of South Africa's few female filmmakers made the film. Over the course of *Otelo Burning*'s circulation, some journalists also tweaked the background to its story. For example, one journalist writing for the *City Press* on 11 May 2013 states:

> Speaking about the inspiration for the story, Blecher relays a story.
> "When I was working as a journalist, covering the violence in KwaZulu,
> after a particularly brutal attack in Umgababa I saw a dog running
> through the township carrying a human bone in its jaw. What I have
> come to realise is that I spent eight years making the film as a way of
> exorcising that image from my mind. And now it is gone, and I, too, am
> free to move on". ("An eight-year Burning Passion", 2013)

Xaba, nevertheless, speaks highly of *Otelo Burning*, saying: "it tells the story of how
the youngsters lived and how we overcame the apartheid, and how we survived
through the political violence […]. Just to get out there and surf is a story that has
never been told before" (2014). That he embraces *Otelo Burning* seems to legitimise
Blecher's role as the mediator of his biography. But despite the film's critical
acclaim and wide exhibition, Xaba did not act in another film until 2015. In the
interview I did with him in 2014, he said that he was content with his job as a
lifeguard, but he added: "hopefully, somebody sees my performance and says: 'I'd
like to take you on one of my films'" (2014). Blecher, in turn, has travelled the world
with the film and has won critical acclaim as a filmmaker, which poses the question
of who the ultimate beneficiary of *Otelo Burning* was.[50] However, Blecher hired
Xaba again as an actor for her latest film, *Ayanda*, which premiered in South Africa
at DIFF 2015 (Mngoma, 2015);[51] and this suggests that Blecher sought to maintain a
professional relationship with Xaba long after *Otelo Burning* was completed.

Blecher's role as a mediator of Xaba's life story in *Otelo Burning* cannot be judged
by the film's production and reviews alone. It is equally important to consider how
the participatory filmmaking process translated into on-screen representations of
youth, and what kinds of publics it has created.

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[50] Xaba did, however, travel to a film festival in Los Angeles together with Blecher. Gumede, too,
traveled with the film to a short series of screenings in the UK.
[51] Xaba once again plays the role of a villain, the policeman Sifiso. The film also features Thomas
Gumede and Jafta Mamabolo.

2.4   Transitional Narratives in *Otelo Burning*

2.4.1   A Youth Perspective

Blecher developed *Otelo Burning* as a coming of age story presented from the perspectives of Black, male youth from Lamontville. The film centres on what Bystrom and Nuttall would call the "private lives" (in this case, of teenage boys), that is, emotions, subjective experiences, and the self (2013b). This focus is evoked in the film's establishing sequence, which puts the spotlight on the three young, major characters – Otelo, New Year, and Ntwe – as they walk leisurely beside one another in the glowing sunlight, wearing school uniforms (see figure 2.3). Otelo's tie is loose, New Year has tied his around his head, and the boys laugh and joke, evocative of the director's attempt to create sympathetic characters to which young audiences can relate. In the subsequent scene, New Year's voice-over states: "It was 1988. Me and Otelo still thought freedom meant getting out of Lamontville. We were 16 and we thought we knew absolutely everything", thereby informing the spectator that the narrative is told from the perspective of a teenage boy. New Year knows the final story, and by allowing the audience to access that special knowledge, the filmmaker establishes points of identification with the young characters for spectators.

Figure 2.3 *Ntwe, New Year, and Otelo (left to right) walk alongside the river* (2011). From: *Otelo Burning*. Dir. Sara Blecher. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Sara Blecher.

As New Year and Otelo walk away from the river, the camera rests on Ntwe as he approaches the riverside, then cuts back to Otelo who, a few moments later, realises that Ntwe is no longer with them. The sound of screams breaks the silence and the camera frames Ntwe, who is being dragged along with the river stream and struggles to keep above water, as he does not know how to swim. Otelo and New Year race to the river and finally succeed in pulling Ntwe out of the river. It takes some moments until Ntwe regains his consciousness, thereby creating dramatic tension that encourages audiences to sympathise with the lead characters. This focalisation of *Otelo Burning*'s opening sequence through teenage boys indicates Blecher's attempt to present the film in a realist style that remains truthful to Xaba's life and the stories collected during the workshops.

Otelo Burning's youth perspective is emphasised by Blecher's decision to make the Lamontville pool a key setting and symbol in the film.[52] This pool is the space where Otelo and New Year go to parties (see figure 2.4), have fun, and flirt with girls; but it is also the place that encapsulates the possibility for individual and social transformation. At the pool, the young protagonists are introduced to surfing, a sport through which they find liberation from poverty and political violence. Blecher uses parallel editing techniques to depict the pool as a space of temporary escape from daily life. For example, in the sequence in which violent clashes break out on the streets of Lamontville, the camera frames New Year as he dives under water and holds his breath, then cuts to the invasion of the township streets by Inkatha, then cuts back to Otelo as he calls on New Year to come out of the water (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 2.1). In this scene, the pool thus emerges as the only space in the township that allows the youths to "dive" into a different world. This symbolism is embellished by the film's colour grading and lighting. Eight minutes into the film, the pool is introduced with a birds-eye-view shot, its light blue colour forming a stark contrast to the brown matchbox houses of the township, thereby setting the pool apart from the surrounding area (see figure 2.5).

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[52] See Cieplak (2014) for a discussion of the motif of pools in South African films.

Figure 2.4 *Mandla, New Year, Ntwe, Otelo and Dezi (left to right) at a party at the Lamontville pool (2011). From: Otelo Burning*. **Dir. Sara Blecher. [Film still] Available from Indigenous Film. Image courtesy of Sara Blecher and Indigenous Film.**

Figure 2.5 *The Lamontville pool* **(2011). From:** *Otelo Burning*. **Dir. Sara Blecher. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Sara Blecher.**

When *Otelo Burning* was released in South Africa, Blecher's focus on young people's private, intimate experiences of the transition years captured the attention of various film critics. One reviewer of the magazine *Drum* praises *Otelo Burning*'s focus on personal stories, writing: "what makes *Otelo Burning* different from most South African films set in the apartheid days is its strong focus on many subjects other than racism – an exhausted theme typical of films portraying pre-1994 South Africa" ("Otelo Burning Rev.", n.d.). A journalist writing for the *Sunday Times*, too, emphasises the film's potential for creating points of identification for young audiences, stating that "as someone who is part of the generation that did not fight for political freedom but inherited it, the film left me pondering about freedom, and what it means to me" (Boikanyo, 2012). Hence, Blecher's focalisation of *Otelo Burning* through the eyes of teenage boys created "reading publics" that welcomed the film's emotional depiction of the transition years, thereby contributing to its critical acclaim.

2.4.2 Personal and National Transitions

Otelo Burning is a transitional narrative not only on an individual level. Blecher's focalisation of the narrative through the young male characters also allows viewers to experience South Africa's transition years from the perspective of three young men, indicative of the filmmaker's attempt to address young audiences. The film is played out at the moment in time when South Africa was itself "coming of age", and when it was on the verge of both political liberation and a civil war. Blecher remarks that in *Otelo Burning*, "[South Africa] is on the cusp of freedom and these boys are on the cusp of freedom. And it is how those two stories intersect" (2013). In *Otelo Burning*, these two stories are bound by the film's overarching theme of "transitions", both on the personal and at the national level. For example, at the same time that Otelo and his friends begin to discover the world of surfing, the violence between UDF and Inkatha begins to escalate in Lamontville. Yet, these political clashes only provide the background to the film's story, its focus resting on the intimate experiences of teenagers. Information about South Africa's political history, such as Nelson Mandela's release from prison, is given only through the film's soundscape, through the voice-over of a radio reporter; instead, the personal goals, conflicts and obstacles of Otelo and his friends drive *Otelo Burning*'s plot.

Blecher, once again, uses the technique of parallel editing to emphasise the simultaneity of Otelo's coming of age and South Africa's political transition. One example is the sequence that cuts between Ntwe's killing and Otelo's victory at his first surfing competition (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 2.2). The director

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splices together the scenes in which Ntwe is "necklaced"[53] by the Lamontville community – which are based on real incidents in Lamontville in the 1980s ("Q&A at Film Africa", 2012) – with scenes showing Otelo performing vibrant moves on his surfboard. Hence, the "transitions" evoked in *Otelo Burning* encompass both personal coming of age and that of society as a whole, illustrating the changes and continuities between the "old" and the "new" South Africa.

Anecdotal responses to *Otelo Burning* from young viewers suggest that the film enabled some viewers to establish a personal connection with the historical events it portrays. Blecher screened *Otelo Burning* at schools in Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town and accompanied some of the screenings. She describes a discussion she had with some students after one screening at Greenside High School, Johannesburg[54] as follows:

> Many kids don't really know about apartheid other than what their parents have told them or what they learn at school. When they learn apartheid at school, they learn about Mandela or Steve Biko, extraordinary people. The thing that was so moving to me about the response from these kids to the film was that they said it was the first time they understood what apartheid was like – this is black kids – for ordinary people. They had learned what ordinary people's lives were like, not the extraordinary people. ("Q&A at Film Africa", 2012)

These responses from young audiences suggests that *Otelo Burning*, in mediating particular moments of history, encouraged reflection about people's lived experiences of a particular time and place. They are reminiscent of the arguments put forward by Robert Rosenstone in his influential book *Visions of the Past* (1995), who

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[53] "Necklacing" is a torture practice that was frequently used during apartheid. It involves forcing a rubber tire covered in petrol over the victim's neck and setting it on fire.
[54] Greenside High is a government school located in Greenside, an affluent suburb of Johannesburg. Two thirds of the student population are black (Wines, 2007).

suggest that the medium of film is able to record those experiences of a particular historical period, which are often absent from "official" accounts of history.

Some responses to *Otelo Burning* from young spectators reiterate the film's theme that post-apartheid South Africa is a transitional country. Film scholar Meg Samuelson has documented audience responses to *Otelo Burning* at the Waves for Change project in Khayelitsha, a developmental surfing programme for youth. The post-screening discussion (conducted in Xhosa) revealed the following:

> A surfer from the Khayelitsha Waves for change programme thanks Sihle Xaba for his encouragement. Yet without acknowledging the more than two decades between the setting of the film and the present this young surfer sees a correspondence between the life of struggle depicted in Otelo Burning and his own everyday experiences of risk and danger in the township. (Samuelson, 2014b)

This comment supports one of the major ideas of this thesis, namely, that contemporary South Africa has not yet entirely transformed into a "post-apartheid" society. *Otelo Burning*'s diegetic meanings, and this comment from a young viewer, evoke the idea that the country is, in fact, *continuing* to experience a "transitional" period, where young people from disenfranchised backgrounds are still constrained by the economic and structural legacies of apartheid.

2.4.3   Hegemonic Masculinities

Otelo Burning's narrative reveals the systematic destruction of Black families during the apartheid years. The scene in which Otelo and Ntwe return home after the incident at the river, introduces their father, Osar Buthelezi, a truck driver in Lamontville. Osar shouts at Otelo to find out where the boys had been, and hits Otelo in the face when he learns that his sons had spent time by the river against his command. This scene paints a well-known image of Black men in contemporary South African fiction films, such as *Tsotsi* and *Yesterday* (Roodt, 2004) – namely, that of violent fathers who have been "emasculated" by the structural oppression they experienced during apartheid. In the development of *Otelo Burning*'s narrative, Osar is shown not to be involved in the lives of Otelo and Ntwe, who are, for the most part, unsupervised. Not only fathers are portrayed as violent, however. Dezi and New Year have an abusive mother, who owns a local shebeen and is known for sleeping with her clients.[55] This representation of motherhood differs from those South African films that tend to idealise mother figures, for example, *Tsotsi* and *Mapantsula*. Thus, what binds *Otelo Burning*'s protagonists is the absence of loving mothers and fathers, suggesting that apartheid has alienated and brutalised young, Black men in particular.

In *Otelo Burning*, Blecher also critiques the *consequences* of violence and lack of care within the young protagonists' families, exposing how the teenagers themselves become the perpetrators of multiple kinds of violence. In one scene in the film, Mandla rapes Dezi, since he is jealous of Otelo's love affair with her, whereby

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[55] No information is given about Mandla's parents in *Otelo Burning*, but it is indicated that he lives alone with his mother, who works for a White family in the beach house where Mandla, Otelo and New Year spend their leisure time.

Blecher addresses the delicate subject of sexual violence against girls in past and present South Africa (a topic that is discussed in depth in the next chapter). Furthermore, in the film's closing sequence, Otelo walks to the beach in order to take revenge on Mandla, while a voice on the radio reports on Nelson Mandela's release from prison (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 2.3). This statement is followed by the film's tragic resolution, in which Otelo shoots Mandla on the very same day that the democratic South Africa is "born". These parallel narratives evoke the idea that violent masculinities have taken on a central position in past and present South African society. As Blecher says, "I don't think you tell a story about a historical period only because of its relevance for [the past]. It's all about its relevance for now" (2013).

The kind of masculinity critiqued in *Otelo Burning* can be conceputalised via the North American sociologist R.W. Connell's theory of "hegemonic masculinity" – a key concept in this thesis – which describes discursive ideas that embrace patriarchy and men's domination over women (1987: 67, 2005). Within a patriarchal social order, hegemonic masculinity represents the social standards into which boys are socialised when they grow up, and to which they are expected to conform in order to be seen as "real men" (Lindegger & Maxwell, 2007: 96).

The entrenching of a form of hegemonic masculinity in South Africa has been interpreted as part of the legacies left by colonialism and apartheid. Forty-six years of apartheid rule resulted in the brutalisation of Back men through economic and political oppression, the institutionalisation of violence, and the destruction of Black families noted above. Apartheid's policies "emasculated" Black men, for example, by forcing them into exploitative migrant labour, subjecting them to a violent police

system, and refusing them the right to political participation (Posel, 2005a). In turn, the state ensured that White South African men were recruited into the military and that they were heavily armed – although many White men refused to enter the military forces (Gqola, 2007: 13,14). Hence, South African men from all racial backgrounds were indoctrinated into a violent system (which they may have individually rejected), and boys were socialised into a society that had gender inequality, violence, and gun culture at its core (Gqola, 2007: 14).

Otelo Burning, however, gives little background information to the reasons for the institutionalisation of hegemonic masculinity in South Africa, which opens the film up to the critique that it depicts Black parents as not caring for their children out of disinterest or negligence. Moreover, the film's narrative does not provide an explanation of Mandla's motivations for betraying Ntwe and raping Dezi, other than pure jealousy. In the closing sequence set on the beach, Otelo confronts Mandla and threatens him with a gun (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 2.3). He screams: "For money? Did you do it for money? Or because I'm a better surfer than you?", but Mandla refuses to answer his questions. As a South African reviewer, writing for *The Sunday Independent*, points out, the fact that Mandla seemingly commits these acts of rape and murder without any political or social motivation could erroneously suggest that violence and brutality among young Black men is endemic and does not require any motivation ("African films take Centre Stage", 2012). On the other hand, however, Blecher's imagined spectators were South Africans, who are familiar with the country's history (Blecher, 2012); thus, her film encourages one to draw the "hidden" connections between apartheid's legacies and the disintegration of families in the past and the present.

2.4.4 Surfing to Redemption

Surfing is *Otelo Burning*'s main subject and leitmotif, which acts as a metaphor for the protagonists' coming of age. When Otelo is introduced to the sport by Mandla, the narrative reaches a turning point as he begins to change in other areas of his life. He overcomes his fear of water, wins money at surfing contests, and woos Dezi. Otelo's improvements in surfing thus emerge as a symbol for a change in identity and his pathway of becoming a man. This change is visualised, for example, by Otelo's change of clothing. He wears his school uniform in the establishing sequence, but he wears beach shorts and surf t-shirts in the second half of the film, suggesting that he has transformed from a schoolboy into a member of the surfing community.

Otelo Burning is both an affirmative and pessimistic representation of South Africa's new generation. On the one hand, surfing in *Otelo Burning* is presented as having redemptive potential for the young protagonists, evoked by the contrasts Blecher establishes between the film's different settings. The scenes in which Mandla, Otelo and New Year surf are filmed in a bright light, which brings the vivid yellows and blues of the beach, the ocean and the sky to the forefront (see figure 2.6). In contrast, the streets and houses of Lamontville are set in a low light that underlines the grey and brown colour of the township space (see figure 2.7). These techniques construct the township as a dystopic place, while the beach emerges as a place where liberation and joy become possible.

Figure 2.6 *Otelo surfs* **(2011). From:** *Otelo Burning*. **Dir. Sara Blecher. [Film still] Available from Indigenous Film. Image courtesy of Sara Blecher and Indigenous Film.**

Figure 2.7 *New Year and Otelo walk through the violence-ridden streets of Lamontville* **(2011). From:** *Otelo Burning*. **Dir. Sara Blecher. [Film still] Available from Indigenous Film. Image courtesy of Sara Blecher and Indigenous Film.**

Through the practice of surfing, *Otelo Burning*'s male lead characters are able to transgress social rules and norms. Otelo and New Year do not take part in the military anti-apartheid struggle as does New Year's brother Blade, who embodies a form of "struggle masculinity" (Thompson, 2014). Otelo and his friends also transgress apartheid rules that permit them to surf on "White-only" beaches, and Zulu myths about the dangers of water, epitomised in Otelo's statement: "Fuck tradition. Let's go surfing!" before he enters a surfing contest. Surfing, then, epitomises a new identity for the main characters, which is different to what is expected from them by their families and society. *Otelo Burning* thus depicts surfing as a "redemptive and transformative activity" (Thompson, 2014) that asserts the possibility of transformation for young, Black men – and, implicitly, the "new" South Africa.

However, Blecher's engagement with coming of age and South Africa's transition to democracy in *Otelo Burning* is also pessimistic. Otelo wins the surfing competition, but this is followed by a succession of personal tragedies, such as the death of his brother, being chased out of his home by his father, and Dezi's rape by Mandla (Thompson, 2014). As I have emphasised above, the film's narrative culminates in a tragedy when Otelo fatally shoots Mandla to take vengeance for Dezi's rape and Ntwe's death. In the closing sequence – the only scene in the film that is entirely fictional and not based on the workshop process ("Q&A at Film Africa", 2012) – *Otelo Burning* thus presents a pessimistic vision of the future for Black, male South African youths. It remains unknown whether Otelo drowned in the sea or whether he was imprisoned, but the fact that he is not present in the closing scenes of the film indicates that New Year is the only one of the group who survived. Yet, this tragic

ending of *Otelo Burning* could once again be interpreted as Blecher's critique of simplistic ideas that apartheid simply "ended" after 1994.

In the film's closing sequence, nevertheless, the pool emerges as a symbol of hope. This sequence is set several years after Otelo shoots Mandla, in which New Year has taken on the role of Skhumbuzo as coach at the local swimming pool (see figure 2.8). New Year's voice-over states: "I always thought freedom meant getting out of Lamontville. Now I know that this is not true". He stands beside the pool, smiling at a group of youths who are about to jump into the water for the first time, and says: "This pool here can give you a future. Are you sure you want to go in?" The youths jump in as a response, followed by a shot of the very same bird's eye view perspective that introduces the Lamontville pool in the film's establishing sequence, with its bright blue colour creating a striking contrast to the brown houses of the township. The repetition of this shot at the film's ending has been critiqued for framing the township as a "static" space that has not changed at all since the end of apartheid (Peterson, 2014). However, New Year's character in this closing shot also challenges this interpretation, for he *has* changed from a teenage boy to a teacher and a leader, and through him, Skhumbuzo's belief in a prosperous future generation of Lamontville lives on.

Figure 2.8 *New Year, the new swimming coach of the Lamontville pool* **(2011). From:** *Otelo Burning*. **Dir. Sara Blecher. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Sara Blecher.**

Otelo Burning's cinematic treatment of surfing resonates strongly with global cinematic representations of youth culture involving, for example, sport and music. That *Otelo Burning* puts the spotlight on surfing establishes the film as a sports "action" story in the vein of Hollywood films such as *Cool Runnings* (Turteltaub, 1993), *Coach Carter* (Carter, 2005), and *Invictus* (Eastwood, 2009). International influences are also indicative in the film's aesthetics, which are reminiscent of US surf films such as *Blue Crush* (Stockwell, 2002), *Surfer, Dude* (Bindler, 2008) and *Lords of Dogtown* (Hardwicke, 2005).

Correspondingly, *Otelo Burning*'s South African distributor, Indigenous Film,[56] has used marketing strategies typical of the commercial sports and entertainment

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[56] Indigenous Film is a distribution company owned by Helen Kuun, who formerly worked as a marketing and acquisitions manager for Ster-Kinekor, one of South Africa's largest cinema exhibition corporations. Indigenous Film focuses on distributing films by South African filmmakers in South Africa on a variety of platforms, including cinemas, DVD and television (Indigenous Film, n.d.).

industries, indicative of their attempt to market the film to a young audience. For example, the film's soundtrack features songs by well-known South African musicians, such as Tumi and Zaki Ibrahim. Moreover, Indigenous Film's website promotes the film as a fusion between a coming of age story about social "underdogs" and a surf film, stating: "Somewhere between *City of God* [Meirelles & Lund, 2002] and *Blue Crush*, *Otelo Burning* is a coming of age story set against the backdrop of Nelson Mandela's release from prison" (Indigenous Film, n.d.). Hence, the distributors present *Otelo Burning* as a "new" genre that cuts across two "old" genres, which is a strategy typical for Hollywood films. These paratexts situate the film, and Blecher's aims for it, as much within commercial cinema as within the realms of "independent" filmmaking.

These publicity strategies and Blecher's focus on surfing were, perhaps, the major reasons why *Otelo Burning* gained international exposure and critical acclaim. The film was shown at international surf film festivals, which have seen an increasing demand for "indigenous" surf films in recent years (Samuelson & Thompson, 2014). At the Byron Bay Film Festival (BBFF) in Australia, for example, *Otelo Burning* won three awards for Best Film, Best Dramatic Feature, and Best Surf Film. BBFF's director, J'aimee Skippon-Volke, says *Otelo Burning* won these accolades because "apart from being an exceptional film, *Otelo Burning* is a perfect reflection of BBFF's diversity because it's politically educational, has a lot of heart and in a way it's a surf film" (qtd in "Another award for Otelo Burning", 2012). *Otelo Burning* was also well received by African-American audiences in the US, [57] and at prestigious film festivals such as the Panafrican Film and Television Festival of

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[57] See GWETV Network (2012) for a post-screening Q&A with Xaba in Harlem.

Ouagadougou (FESPACO), the London Film Festival, the Pusan Film Festival in South Korea, and the Dubai International Film Festival.

In South Africa, *Otelo Burning* received attention from film critics mainly because of its focus on Black surfers. Many reviewers writing for newspapers, magazines, and blogs perceived the film as an important cinematic correction to ideas that surfing is an exclusively "White" sport. For example, one journalist writing for the *Saturday Argus* highlights the fact that "the film's strength lies in its authenticity and presenting the novel but honest idea of black surfers" (Martin, 2012). Another film critic states in an article in *The Times* that "the still rare image of black guys intrinsically gliding across Durban's scenic beaches [in] *Otelo Burning* is refreshing" (Boikanyo, 2012). However, some reviewers also criticise *Otelo Burning*'s narrative. Mary Corrigall, writing for the *Sunday Independent*, states: "*Otelo Burning* might have political resonance but there is no subtlety in the storytelling. The sea and surfing as a metaphor for freedom, which is drilled home with a hammer and nail, is too obvious" (2012).

The discussion up to this point indicates that Blecher's adaptation of Xaba's passion for surfing to screen was one of the major reasons why *Otelo Burning* won international acclaim. Yet, *Otelo Burning*'s public life cannot be grasped through the responses of journalists alone. The next section takes a more systematic look at the spaces in which young audiences watched *Otelo Burning* in South Africa and where it created publics.

2.5 *Otelo Burning*'s Exhibition

2.5.1 "Converging Publics"

Otelo Burning's distribution in South Africa spanned a wide range of media platforms, from film festivals and cinemas to television and a digital release. The film's manifold circulation can be described via Jenkins' idea that a "convergence culture" is emerging in the twenty-first century (discussed in the Introduction to this thesis), with audiences consuming information via diverse media technologies. *Otelo Burning* was not only exhibited through a variety of media, however; it also created publics on different media platforms and in diverse viewing contexts. Audiences' discussions of the film ranged from articles in print newspapers and online magazines, to blogs and social media commentary, as well as oral discussions after "live screenings". The spaces where these manifold negotiations of *Otelo Burning* took place are what I would like to describe as a "convergence of publics", to emphasise that the engagements with the film took place across a variety of media sites, as well as through face-to-face conversations.

Film festivals were *Otelo Burning*'s first exhibition platform in South Africa. The film premiered at DIFF on 21 July 2011, and it was screened at the Cape Winelands Film Festival (CWFF) 2012, where it won an award for Best South African Feature Film, decided by the festival audience. Yet, the four screenings during DIFF took place at the casino multiplex Suncoast-Supernova and the Musgrave shopping mall (Centre of Creative Arts, 2011). There was no screening in KwaMashu township, where the festival shows films free of charge in the community centre "Ekhaya". The film's screenings at DIFF were thus frequented by people from the upper and middle classes, hence, by only a small fragment of potential South African audiences.

Otelo Burning gained critical acclaim in the South African press following its exhibition at film festivals. This praise had, however, minimal effects on its distribution in South African cinemas. *Otelo Burning* was released in 29 nationwide cinemas on 11 May 2012, but on its opening weekend it earned only R83,336 (£4,595) in ticket sales. In contrast, the US science fiction film *The Avengers* (Whedon, 2012) made R3.3 million (£181,936) at South African box offices the same weekend (Ndlovu, 2012). Gumede suggests that *Otelo Burning* did not gain a cinema audience because South African youths prefer to watch US action films in the cinema. He says: "[Action films] is what we love, that's why we going to the cinema. We go to watch *Transformers* [Bay, 2007] more than we go watch a heavy, politically [sic] […]. I mean, I loved [*Otelo Burning*] but 100,000 people went to see it" (2014).

However, *Otelo Burning* had very high audience numbers when it was shown on television. Data from the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) shows that more than 700,000 viewers watched *Otelo Burning* when it aired repeatedly on the pay-DStv channel Mzansi Magic between January 2013 and March 2014. *Otelo Burning* was shown nine times in total during this period on Mzanzi Magic's different channels, Mzansi Magic, Mzansi Wethu, Mzansi Bioskop and Africa Magic. The film's premiere on Sunday, 27 January 2013, at a prime-time evening hour of 20.30 p.m., attracted 138,000 viewers, and of these, more than

96,000 were younger than 15 years (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2014).[58]

Therefore, *Otelo Burning*'s small cinema audience cannot fully be explained via young South African audiences' supposed preference for Hollywood films over South African films, especially since *Otelo Burning*'s cinematography borrows heavily from these films. The high audience numbers the film achieved on television suggest that it did resonate with a young local audience, even with its social and political critique. *Otelo Burning*'s significant television audience is also indicative of ways in which young people consume films in South Africa. Although access to television in the country is still uneven, the medium is much more accessible to South Africa's population than cinema is. As noted in the thesis' Introduction, television reaches 80 to 90 per cent of the population in a given week (Saks, 2010: 59), with young people aged 16 to 34 years representing the major consumers of the medium (Official GCSI Marketing and Advertising Newsletter, 2009). *Otelo Burning*'s large television audience thus exemplifies Jenkins's argument that audiences display "migratory" behaviour, as they source media content from different platforms according to the media technologies available to them (2006: 2).

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[58] SAARF uses two major research methods to determine the numbers and demographics of television audiences. One is the All Media and Products Study (AMPS), which collects information on media use, consumption patterns, and demographics in South Africa. The study is conducted via questionnaires and personal interviews carried out at the homes of respondents by means of laptop computers provided by fieldworkers (Bornmann, 2009: 38). SAARF's second method is the Television Audience Measurement Survey (TAMPS), which provides information on television viewing minute by minute, using so-called "peoplemeters". Peoplemeters are semi-automatic electronic meters that are connected to television sets and that allows for recording activities on television units, such as satellite decoders, M-Net decoders, and DVD. Remote control units allow for registering the viewing of household members and visitors in the measured household ("FAQ's", n.d.). However, the data provided by TAMS is based on estimates derived from a small sample of viewers; its accuracy is, therefore, questionable. In 2009, for example, peoplemeters were installed in a representative panel of about 1,600 households across South Africa, measuring the television use of around 5000 people. This sample is modeled according to the population of all people watching television in South Africa as indicated by the AMPS (Bornmann, 2009: 40).

It is possible that *Otelo Burning*'s television audience ratings were influenced by the publicity the film gained through the awards it won at the Africa Magic Viewer's Choice awards (AMVCA) 2013 in Lagos, Nigeria. *Otelo Burning* had its highest audience numbers (208,840 viewers) in South Africa on 17 March 2013 (South African Advertising Research Foundation [SAARF], 2014), which was shortly after the award ceremony was held on 9 March 2013. The award nominations were broadcast in 47 African countries, and *Otelo Burning* won the awards for Best overall film, Best art direction, Best lighting, and Best makeup, which were decided by an industry jury panel ("More Awards for SA Film Otelo Burning", 2013).

Otelo Burning is one of few South African films to have received a digital release on iTunes and Netflix. That Blecher had received funding for the film in 2009 from the IFP's Narrative Independent Filmmaker Labs played an important role in this distribution, since *Otelo Burning* was released through IFP's partnership with the Sundance Institute's Artist Services Initiative, an initiative that provides filmmakers with opportunities for self-distribution. *Otelo Burning*'s digital release enables South Africans to buy and watch the film more cheaply and easily than by going to the cinema. However, as noted earlier, only few people in South Africa are currently able to afford the broadband speed necessary to download or stream films, which means that *Otelo Burning* can only be purchased for digital download by an elite minority.

Audience figures alone do not provide sufficient information about whether or not *Otelo Burning* has created opportunities for discussion, however. Despite the wide reach of television in South Africa, exhibiting films in communities and via "live screenings" presents the most vital opportunities for creating "intimate" encounters

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around a film. Tricia Sibbons, the Board Secretary of the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Trust (a centre for disenfranchised youth in Soweto), regards the public screening of films such as *Otelo Burning* and *Surfing Soweto* – more than their programming on television – as opportunities for creating communal events that draw people from different backgrounds together. She said in a personal interview:

> A lot of people [in South Africa] watch television as background noise, it's not an event, whereas going to the cinema is a social event, an opportunity to connect with people in a different way and to see things that perhaps you wouldn't actually see on the TV […]. The cinema has a huge potential for bringing different audiences together from different racial, cultural, economic backgrounds.(2014)

However, it would be too simplistic to assume that youth only watch television as background noise. As shown later in this chapter, a large number of television viewers commented on *Otelo Burning* on Twitter, which suggests that they were watching the film attentively and actively.

2.5.2   Community Screenings and Intimate Publics

Blecher screened *Otelo Burning* in various youth projects, such as Umthombo in Durban, a surf centre for young men from the street community, and the organisation Waves for Change in Khayelitsha, near Cape Town. Waves for Change teaches disadvantaged youth from the community to surf, with the aim of addressing youth unemployment, gang crime, and gender-based violence. Xaba accompanied various instances of these screenings, for example, at the Waves for Change centre and at Esangweni High School in Khayelitsha, where he spoke to the young audiences after the screening (Conibear, 2014).

Although *Otelo Burning*'s internal textual politics do not provide an entirely optimistic picture of young masculinities, the film's exhibition through these community screenings created publics that were of a socially transformative nature. Interestingly, it was especially Xaba's role as a facilitator in community screenings that allowed the film to gain this transformative potential by extending its diegetic meanings in entirely new directions. Xaba recalls that young viewers felt inspired when he spoke to them about becoming a professional body boarder, lifeguard, and surfer, despite having grown up in a township:

> I had a long chat to them about the film, and about how I grew up, and about how to handle peer pressure. So it was more talking about the film and at the same time I was a motivational speaker too […]. It's one of the things I really enjoy doing: To motivate the youth to overcome challenges in life, and how to get out of bad situations, and how to get yourself into positive mind-sets […]. They look at what I've been through and they really feel proud. They ask me did I really go through all of that? And some of them they actually don't believe that I existed when all of that happened. (Xaba, 2014)

Tim Conibear, the manager of Waves for Change, similarly, said in a personal interview:

> A lot of [the discussion] was less about [Xaba's] role in the movie, just more about his background and how he became a surfer […]. That celebrity walking in created interest in him and he tried to tie that into where he came from and how he made it […]. His background is fairly similar to some of the kids we work with. (2014)

He adds:

> [In the] UK, you have your parents and your grandparents, they have a pathway, they have gone to school, university, they got a job […], and that pathway in the townships doesn't really exist […]. So for Sihle to come and just say "well this is where I have got to" emphasises the idea that surfing is cool and […] if you work hard, if you make good choices if you hang out with the right crowd. I think that was probably the most important thing that he said.(2014)

These debates surrounding *Otelo Burning* can be conceptualised via Berlant's notion of "intimate publics" (2008, 2009) – discussed in the Introduction to this thesis – which describes publics that articulate intimacy, shared personal knowledge, and a subjective sense of belonging among its members. *Otelo Burning*'s "intimate publics" were created by Xaba and young viewers who engaged in empathetic discussions about intimate, personal experiences, relating them to Xaba's own story. Young spectators seem to have felt a sense of emotional connection with Xaba, for they recognised their own lives in his adolescent experiences, and felt inspired by the example he provided. These moments of emotional contact indicate the transformative potential offered by screenings of *Otelo Burning* in marginalised communities and with the presence of the film's major subject, Xaba.

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The intimate publics that formed around community screenings of *Otelo Burning* also suggest that notions of hegemonic masculinity in South Africa – evoked by the film's narrative – needs to be nuanced. The initiative Xaba has taken as part of the film's exhibition demonstrates that there are young men who are breaking destructive patterns of masculinities by providing younger boys with a positive, male role model. Xaba himself aims to have a transformative effect on the future lives of young people. He states in an interview published in the *Sunday Tribune*:

> I would say I'm successful. I'm a successful, professional lifeguard. I'm an actor. I'm a spear fisherman. I'm a surfer, a body-boarder. I've travelled. And when I look at it all - from the life that I lived in Lamontville – I […] survived all of that. I should have been involved in crime, and now I'm living a straight life. I've got two kids, it's all wow! So hopefully the film will be educational to a lot of the youth who watch it. "Listen, you live in a township. You live in crime-surrounded areas. But crime is not the only way. You can improve, and be a better person". (qtd in "Burning Issues", 2012)

Furthermore, Xaba's discussions with young viewers highlight the different facets of South Africa's "Born Free" generation. He remembers:

> I would get a question like "how old am I". And I tell them that I'm 36 [Xaba is now 37], and they'll be like "no way, you look 24!", which gives me an advantage to tell them that if you really, really look after yourself, you could be forever young. So, it gives them that hope that they could make it in life. (2014)

Xaba, who was born in 1978, does not officially fall into the category of the "Born Frees", which is used to refer to people born after 1994. Yet, the fact the he has transformed his life, perhaps, makes him as much part of the "Born Free" generation, as those young people who have no personal recollection of apartheid.

The screenings of *Otelo Burning* to Black youths from marginalised backgrounds pose certain challenges, however. Conibear emphasises that he has been careful not to "over-screen" the film at Waves for Change, as he fears it could exoticise Black surfers (2014). He explains that there is an emerging interest in Black surfing in South Africa from the mass media and corporate businesses, which runs the risk of "putting a huge amount of value into [young people's] race as opposed to the actual work they do" (2014). He adds: "we don't want the guys to consider themselves as other, we want them to see themselves as surfers or a bigger movement" (2014). This exemplifies the importance of screening *Otelo Burning* in disenfranchised communities with the presence of Xaba, for he inspired young audiences by sharing the achievements of his life with them.

Viewers' responses described by Xaba were not specific to the screenings in South African townships alone. He experienced similar reactions from youths during screenings he attended in Harlem, New York:

> I just talked them [the youth] through how to deal with a lot of issues that they are currently dealing with. Not only in Khayelitsha, I went to New York as well. I went to a school with Dolly Turner and talked to the youth that are exposed to a lot of gang violence. They want to make a bigger life but they find it a huge challenge, because of the drug abuse in the communities, and the violence and all of that. (Xaba, 2014)

Blecher's focus on creating points of identification for young people, and Xaba's facilitation of screenings, thus created "transnational" publics constituted by young audiences in other parts of the world.

Otelo Burning also became part of educational resources for students in the UK. The film's UK distributor, Aya Distribution,[59] incorporated the film into an educational resource pack for schools, which links the film in with themes of the country's National Curriculum, including Human Rights and democracy, equality and social justice, as well as moral, cultural, and spiritual development. Gumede, who went along to a trial of the resource pack at Haverstock High School in Camden, London, says: "going to the schools and hearing the […] inner city kids of a completely different country talk about the film…I never thought the film would be a literacy material for kids in another country" (2014). However, Gumede also laments the fact the film has not yet become part of educational resources in South African schools (2014).

2.5.3   Digital Publics

Otelo Burning did not only create "oral" publics during screenings and "reading publics" in newspapers, but also brought digital publics into being. My research identified a large number of tweets containing the words "Otelo Burning" when the film was broadcast on South African television. For example, on the day of the film's premiere on Mzansi Magic, on 27 January 2013, there were almost 800 tweets mentioning the film; and on 23 February 2013, when the film was broadcast for the second time, Twitter recorded more than 1,300 comments. Some viewers also posted to the *Otelo Burning* Facebook page, albeit to a smaller extent. Between July 2012 and March 2014, around 20 Facebook users wrote on *Otelo Burning*'s page, which suggests that Twitter represented the major social media platform where television viewers exchanged their views on the film.

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[59] Aya Distribution focuses on distributing African films in Europe.

Due to the large volume of commentary about *Otelo Burning* on Twitter, my analysis of tweets focused on the period between May and June 2012, when the film premiered in South African cinemas; and on the dates of the first three television broadcasts, 27 January 2013, 23 February 2013, and 17 March 2013. Focusing on tweets made *during* the broadcasts, as opposed to afterwards, allowed for exploring the immediacy of the reactions spectators expressed on Twitter.

My analysis of the commentary on Twitter reveals the "liveness" of digital publics created on social media sites. Viewers commented on the film on Twitter, with some of them indicating that they were tweeting at the same time as they were watching. Tweets such as "[g]onna watch Otelo Burning now" (brooklyn, 2013); "[t]he acting is ok good so far #OteloBurning" (Ndlovu, 2013a); and "[t]ime to watch Otelo Burning! *big smile!*" (Professional Stalker, 2013) suggest that television viewing does not constitute an entirely "private" activity, for Twitter made people's "private" comments about the film "public". Hence, the public and the private cannot be conceptualised as dichotomous, spatial categories; instead, they overlap and intersect in complex ways. Due to limits of scope, chapter 4 in this thesis will further unpack the theoretical implications posed by social media commentary for theorising audiences, viewing practices, and publics; this chapter focuses particularly on the themes emerging from, and the gendered nature of, Twitter and Facebook comments on *Otelo Burning*.

While many people expressed their opinion about *Otelo Burning* on Twitter, their tweets did not create an extensive "debate" about the film. The majority of tweets were isolated viewer comments, rather than extended conversations between different Twitter users; and this calls into question the potential of social media

networks to create opportunities for relationships of closeness. As the previous section has revealed, it was particularly the community screenings that created debates around *Otelo Burning* with the potential to have a transformative effect on young viewers, particularly from marginalised backgrounds.

2.6   Gender and Spectatorship

2.6.1   *Otelo Burning*: A "Feminist Film"?

Otelo Burning could be described as a film that was made with feminist intentions. Via the film's representational strategies, Blecher sought to problematise the ways in which the apartheid period has alienated and brutalised a new generation of young men. As feminist film theorists writing in the 1970s and 1980s have argued, feminist films frequently expose the patriarchal undercurrents of classic Hollywood films and present a narrative from a feminine point of view (Mulvey, 1975; Doane, 1982; Kuhn, 1985). This critique of genre films is particularly pronounced in Laura Mulvey's influential 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in which she argues that the cinematic techniques of Hollywood fiction films frame women as sexual objects, creating sexual viewing pleasure ("scopophilia") for male spectators. Because of this male domination on and off screen, according to Mulvey, male audiences identify with the male characters in films; women are thus excluded from this process of identification occurring between spectator and protagonist (Erens, 1990: xx).

As female filmmakers began to develop a "women's cinema" in the 1970s and 1980s, many experimented with style and technique, seeking to expose the

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naturalisation of sexism in Hollywood films and to challenge the stereotypical representations of women (Erens, 1990: xix–xvii; Kuhn, 1994; Rich, 1998). For example, Silvia Bovenschen and Beth Weckmeuller propose that the content and style of women's artworks is different from those made by men, because women's experiences had historically been different from those of men (1977).

However, placing *Otelo Burning* into this category of "feminist film" poses certain problems. *Otelo Burning*'s aesthetics and publicity blur the boundaries of Hollywood films and "alternative" films. More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the film's narrative is not presented from a female perspective, but that it is entirely focalised through young men. From this point of view, the young, female character, Dezi, is sometimes represented through the "male gaze" established by Hollywood films that feminist film scholars have critiqued (Mulvey, 1975; Kaplan, 1988). For example, Dezi is not given a lot of screen time compared to the male protagonists, and her character functions primarily to provoke the actions of Mandla and Otelo. Moreover, in the sequence depicting a pool party, Blecher frames Dezi from the perspectives of Otelo, with the camera framing Dezi's cleavage, and a seductive expression on her face as she dances with Mandla (see figure 2.9).

Figure 2.9 *Dezi dances with Mandla at a pool party* (2011). From: *Otelo Burning*. **Dir. Sara Blecher. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Sara Blecher.**

There is thus a seeming ambivalence between Blecher's aim to critique dysfunctional masculinities and *Otelo Burning*'s framing of the female characters through a male gaze. On the level of the narrative, however, the film does not leave the violent actions of the male characters unproblematised. Its focalisation through the young men allows Blecher to expose a male perspective, which she uses to critique, rather than naturalise, sexism, hegemonic masculinity, and gender inequality. For example, the scene in which Mandla rapes Dezi is set in a dark light, giving emphasis to this violent act. Blecher also focuses on the emotional consequences the rape has on Dezi, who has to cope with depression and apathy afterwards. Through these techniques and narrative strategies, Blecher critiques patriarchal structures and hints at the high rates of sexual violence against women and girls in contemporary South Africa.

There are moments, however, when Blecher's focalisation of the narrative from the perspectives of the male characters is interrupted through a "female" point of view. Focused on surfing, many scenes in *Otelo Burning* frame the male surfers' undressed upper bodies and invite a heterosexual female "gaze". For example, in the scene that introduces Mandla for the first time, a medium shot slowly pans across him sitting leisurely beside the pool between two girls, wearing swimming trunks (see figure 2.10). Accompanied by an upbeat soundtrack, the camera frames his athletic body, then cuts to Dezi's face in a close up as she remarks "Muhle" ("he's sweet"), thereby making her perspective the "eye" of the camera's gaze.

Figure 2.10 *Mandla flirts with girls at the Lamontville pool* **(2011). From:** *Otelo Burning*. **Dir. Sara Blecher. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Sara Blecher.**

To an extent, *Otelo Burning*'s aesthetics thus maintain patriarchal ideas of "manliness" as manifested in muscularity and physical strength. Yet, this idealisation

of male bodies could also be interpreted as the filmmaker's attempt to address a female South African audience, and this idea is supported by the film's publicity material. The foreground of the South African film poster is filled with a medium shot of Gumede, and behind him Xaba and Mamabolo with bare upper bodies exposed. Blecher's oscillation between a male and female perspective, then, highlights the complexities and different layers of "feminist" filmmaking.

2.6.2   Digital Publics and Female Spectatorship

Feminist film theories have modified, over time, Mulvey's argument that female spectators are passive and unable to identify with male characters on screen (Erens 1990b). The African American film critic bell hooks, for example, laments the fact that Western feminist film scholars do not acknowledge the particularities of Black female spectatorship (1992). According to hooks, Black women can have an "oppositional gaze", due to their awareness of race relations depicted on screen. Janet Bergstrom's work (1979), in turn, challenges Mulvey's arguments in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), which suggest that female audiences are inevitably excluded from the identification process between male spectators and male on-screen characters (1979). [60] Building upon Sigmund Freud's theory of bisexuality (1976), Bergstrom proposes that women can, in fact, identify with male characters on-screen, while men can identify with female characters (1979).[61]

The digital publics *Otelo Burning*'s audiences created on social media platforms confirm Bergstrom's arguments about male and female spectatorship. *Otelo Burning*

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[60] Mulvey herself revised these arguments in her later 1981 article "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'", proposing that female viewers might oscillate between a male and a female viewing position (1993).

[61] See also Gaylyn Studlar's article "Visual Pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetics" (1985).

is presented from a male perspective, but people who discussed the film on Twitter and Facebook were overwhelmingly young women.[62] As Tanja Bosch suggests (2008, 2011), many South African women today access social media relatively easily via their mobile phones, although inequalities in Internet access remain among different social classes. Hence, women from disenfranchised backgrounds were probably unable to participate in the publics that formed around *Otelo Burning* on social media platforms.

One thread that runs through women's tweets is that their expression of emotions about how *Otelo Burning* made them feel. These opinions were split into those who enjoyed the film and those who expressed shock or sadness about the events it portrays. One female Facebook user wrote: "Tjo[63] gr8 [great] movie so touching *teary*" (Mhlanga, 2013), and another one stated: "was just watchng [sic] Otelo Burning for the umpteeenth tym I jus cnt help myself bt cry whn Ntwe is burn eish [sic] #apartheid hey" (Sitiya, 2013). Inga ka Majola wrote on Twitter that "[t]his movie is painful #OteloBurning" (2013), while Fatimah MohamedLuke tweeted: "LOVED !! Great movie...funny, gut-wrenching, insightful and captivating!! So Proud!! #SupportLocal" (2012). These Facebook and Twitter comments can be described as what Berlant has called an "intimate public" (2008), constituted by female spectators who felt a sense of belonging with *Otelo Burning*'s male lead characters, and who voiced their personal experiences and emotions of watching the film via social media sites.

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[62] This observation relies on tweets and Facebook posts that indicated the gender and age of their authors via profile pictures and/or usernames. However, the gendered identity of Twitter and Facebook users is not always clear and can be concealed by abstract usernames and profile pictures that do not provide information about someone's age or gender.

[63] "Tjo" is a South African slang word for "wow".

Within these "intimate digital publics", the female Facebook and Twitter users also expressed the pleasure they felt when "gazing" at the male lead actors. One user tweeted: "Mandla's tats [tattoos]!!! ....and bod [body]!!! Aaii ke! #OteloBurning!" (Belle ♥†, 2013), while other women wrote: "@ThomasGumede am watching Otelo Burning and u supper sexy yoh I love ur acting it so real 9t *wink* [sic]" (VartyPee, 2013); and "[…] I'll share my body crush. Sihle Xaba from Otelo Burning. That man's body is a gift from above" (Third Force, 2012). Women's responses to *Otelo Burning* on the film's Facebook account were similar. In March 2014, the filmmakers posted a question on their Facebook page asking fans who their favourite actor was. It was only women who responded, writing, for example, "[t]hey're all absolutely amazing actors! But Mandla and his hotness man!!!!!" (Mbangula, 2014), and "il go wit newyear.......mandla, wow m fallin inlov wt hm everyday [sic]" (Fufu, 2014). Both Xaba and Gumede were the subject of discussion on social media. For example, one woman wrote on *Otelo Burning*'s Facebook page: "[…] Thomas Gumede mhhh…I'd lyk [sic] to meet you one day, just to see that awesome smile of yours!!" (Nxumalo, 2013). These responses run in line with Miriam Hansen's arguments in the article "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship", suggesting that women equally "gaze" upon male characters in film, and that women – and not only men – can also see male characters as objects of sexual pleasure and erotic desire (1986).[64]

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[64] See also my discussion of tweets about *Intersexions* in chapter 3.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter's discussion has attempted to reach beyond the textual politics of *Otelo Burning*, illustrating the vital role Sihle Xaba has played in the film's "public life", both in inspiring it, and providing a role model *outside* of the film, rather than through the character he plays *in* it. Xaba's significance as a role model for young men in the film's distribution illustrates one of the key arguments made in this thesis, namely, that the public life of a film extends far beyond what its diegetic interpretations can suggest.

The chapter has shown that although television has the potential to reach a wide audience in South Africa, community screenings have a vital role to play in creating intimacy around films, for they enable a film to become part of interpersonal encounters and a shared, communal event. The face-to-face discussions between Xaba and young audiences were at the heart of the *Otelo Burning*'s ability to conjure intimate publics with an individually and socially transformative effect on the lives of historically disadvantaged youth. Until the present day, Xaba has continued the work he began as a motivational speaker for *Otelo Burning*. He has begun to work with the Umthombo project in Durban, which teaches former street children to surf and to become professional surfing instructors.

The digital publics that formed around *Otelo Burning* on Twitter and Facebook open up interesting perspectives on male and female spectatorship, which challenge historical conceptions of women and girls as passive consumers of media content. Women's commentary on *Otelo Burning* via social media platforms created *digital* intimate publics around the film, where female audiences communicated freely about their emotions and the pleasures of "gazing" at male bodies. Furthermore, the Twitter

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and Facebook comments about *Otelo Burning* indicate an increasing overlap of people's consumption of films on television and their responses via digital media technologies. These ideas are pursued and theorised further in chapter 4 of the thesis, which explores tweets about the South African television drama *Intersexions*.

Despite Xaba's key role in *Otelo Burning*'s exhibition in communities, his biography is relatively absent from both the film's paratexts and the "reading publics" it created. However, it was the film's focus on surfing – which is derived from Xaba's life – that has enabled it to gain international exposure and acclaim. This paradox poses questions about the ethical and moral dimensions of the film's collaborative production and exhibition, and about the extent to which Blecher has "appropriated" Xaba's life story for her own success. In contrast, what could be said to "recuperate" Blecher's ethical relationship with the film's script, and the people upon whose lives it is based, is that *Otelo Burning* enabled Xaba's story to become part of wider public discourse in South Africa and in places across the world. It is possible that the stories of Xaba and the people from Lamontville would have never (re-)entered public spheres had Blecher not adapted them to a fiction film. More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the making of the film helped Xaba to overcome the painful experiences of his own youth. These ethical dimensions of collaborative filmmaking are explored further in the next chapter, which puts the spotlight on a *documentary* film made with the participation of children and youth.

This chapter's discussion of *Otelo Burning*'s production process, diegetic worlds, and publics invites further reflection on notions of masculinity and femininity pertaining to South Africa's new generation, and how these ideas are constructed on the screen. Therefore, the next chapter delves deeper into the gendered aspects of

growing up in the new South Africa. It explores one of the saddest expressions of hegemonic masculinity, namely, the pervasive sexual abuse of children, examining whether, and how, this delicate issue can and should be represented in fictional and documentary screen media.

Chapter 3   Sexual Violence Against Children, Intimate Publics, and Adult

Panics: *Yizo Yizo* and *Rough Aunties*

3.1   Introduction

The fiction film *Fools*, written by Bhekizizwe Peterson and directed by Ramadan Suleman, was the first film made by Black South Africans after the end of apartheid. Set in 1989 in Charterston township, *Fools* centres on the rape of an adolescent girl, Mimi, by her much older teacher, Zamani, and on the aftermath of this violent act. As scholars of South African cinema and literature (Dovey, 2009; Graham, 2012; Modisane, 2013) have pointed out, it is remarkable that the first film made by Black filmmakers after apartheid critiques the issue of sexual violence against young girls, rather than celebrating the achievements of the anti-apartheid struggle.

Less known about *Fools* is that in 2010, Patrick Shai, the actor who plays Zamani, featured in a public service announcement (PSA) on South African television, commissioned by Brothers for Life, an organisation that encourages men to reject violence, alcohol abuse, and crime (Johns Hopkins CCP, 2011; see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 3.1). In this 59-second-video, Shai confesses, with a trembling voice, that he used to beat his wife over many years, and that he managed to change his destructive behaviour. The reasons behind Shai's personal transformation are striking. Shai grew up surrounded by men who exerted violence against women, making him believe he was not doing anything wrong when abusing his wife. However, in 1995 – two years before *Fools* was released – he had to play a violent husband in a scene for *Soul City* (1994-2011), an educational television drama series

on SABC. When shooting this scene, Shai was instructed to beat his acting partner, which made him realise his own wrongdoing. In an interview with *Drum*, he recalled:

> The house we were filming in suddenly became mine, my co-star became my real wife, the kids were mine – it was as if I was beating my wife as usual […]. Something switched. God used the talent he'd given me to open my eyes and show me the pain I was causing my family. (qtd in "Patrick Shai", 2010)

Shai subsequently undertook counselling and reconciled with his wife and children. His experiences illustrate once again that not only the textual politics of screen media matter, but also the social contexts of their production processes.

It is certainly possible, that Shai's affirmation to have turned his life around represents a performance, rather a genuine transformation of his behaviour. Yet, his public admission points to a hidden tragedy in South Africa that unfolds in the spaces of many people's homes. The country currently has one of the highest rates of sexual violence and domestic violence against women and children worldwide (Moffett, 2006).[65] Forty per cent of the victims of sexual violence are children and youth under 18 years of age, and sexual abuse is particularly common in impoverished households and communities (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana & Rose-Junius, 2005: 1815). However, while the post-apartheid ANC government has emphasised its support of gender equality, the issue of sexual violence has often taken a "backseat" in national politics. The ANC has been preoccupied instead with tackling the significant disparities of race and class inherited from apartheid. Moreover, constructive debates

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[65] The exact figures of sexual violence against young people in South Africa are unknown, since only one in ten child rape cases is reported to the police. Yet, it is estimated that half a million people under 18 years are sexually abused each year ("Half a Million of SA's Children Are Abused Each Year", 2012).

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regarding gender inequality among South African politicians have often been constrained by anxieties about addressing issues of Black masculinity in public (Modisane, 2013: 131).[66]

A rare, feature-length documentary film to give intimate insights into the subject of sexual violence against children and youth in South Africa is *Rough Aunties*, directed by the British filmmaker Kim Longinotto. Released in 2008, this film centres on the organisation Bobbi Bear in Amanzimtoti, KZN, which rescues, counsels, and assists young people who are victims of sexual crimes. *Rough Aunties* follows the lives of five women – both Black and White – who work at Bobbi Bear, thereby tracing several child rape cases through South Africa's criminal justice system. As explained later in this chapter, *Rough Aunties* was not distributed widely in South Africa, but it was shown at film festivals in the country and abroad, creating a variety of oral and written commentary and discussions over the course of its exhibition.

The television drama series *Yizo Yizo*[67] is another important screen media production on the subject of youth and gender-based violence, given that it stirred fierce controversies in South Africa at the time of its initial broadcast in 1999. *Yizo Yizo* was commissioned by South Africa's Education Department and SABC Education, with the aim of creating a debate about the gravity of violence in township schools. Set in a fictional township high school, *Yizo Yizo* follows a group of students and their experiences of violence, relationships, gang culture, and family problems. Due to its gritty, uncompromising depictions of violence, the drama series stirred a wave

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[66] See Deborah Posel (2005a) and Lucy Graham (2012) for explorations of debates about masculinity and gender-based violence in South African politics, literature, and the media. See Peter Gill (2006) for a critique of Thabo Mkeki's stance on rape and Black masculinity.

[67] Due to limitations of space, this discussion focuses only on the 11 episodes of *Yizo Yizo I*, which were first broadcast on SABC in 1999.

of controversies in the South African media, the press, and even in political circles. That both *Rough Aunties* and *Yizo Yizo* created such vibrant discussions invites a comparative analysis of the representations of sexual violence in these media productions, the publics created by these works, and of film and television spectatorship.

My exploration of *Rough Aunties* and *Yizo Yizo* ought to be located within the historical debates in feminism and media studies about how sexual violence has been, and should be, represented on screen. Second-wave feminists have critiqued narratives of sexual violence in Hollywood fiction films, arguing that they tend to aestheticise violence and disavow the painful experiences of the victims (MacKinnon, 1989; Horeck, 2004: 10). Documentary films dealing with sensitive issues such as rape, too, have been criticised by film scholars debating the impacts such films might have on the lives of the people they represent (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009; Nash, 2011; Thomas, 2012). Questions of ethics are particularly pertinent for documentary filmmakers, since – in contrast to actors who perform in fiction films – people who participate in documentary films are "social actors" who ought to continue living their lives once a film is completed (Nichols, 2001: 5). However, the majority of studies on documentary films discuss the role of the filmmaker, while relatively little is known about the participants' experiences (Nash, 2012). Therefore, this chapter pays specific attention to the impacts *Rough Aunties'* production and exhibition has had on the women and children at Bobbi Bear.[68]

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[68] My primary research focused on *Rough Aunties*, for *Yizo Yizo* has already been discussed widely by South African media scholars (Smith, 2003; Barnett, 2004; Andersson, 2010; Ndlovu & Smith, 2011; Modisane, 2013).

The delicate subject matter of *Rough Aunties* and *Yizo Yizo* poses a number of questions regarding the consequences of making "private" suffering "public" via screen media. How are films and television programmes watched in South Africa? What kind of publics did *Yizo Yizo* and *Rough Aunties* create? And what impact did their exhibition have on the film subjects? Aiming to explore these questions in relation to *Rough Aunties*, I conducted six weeks of research at Bobbi Bear. I was, however, unable to interview the children who feature in the film, for this could have had adverse, unpredictable emotional and social effects on their lives. I thus conducted the interviews with adults at the organisation instead.

Since a British filmmaker made *Rough Aunties* in collaboration with South African women, it is also important to explore the ways in which she represents women from a different culture and society. Cinematic depictions of "insiders" by "outsiders" in African contexts have been widely criticised (Cieplak, 2010b; Diawara, 2010; Higgins 2012). As Cieplak notes, many Hollywood films about violence in African contexts continue to adhere to stereotypical representations of "otherness without understanding" (2010b: 62), erasing African people's experiences, histories, and individual identities.

This chapter's findings reveal, however, that while Longinotto was supposedly an "outsider" to the Bobbi Bear women, *Rough Aunties* is an intimate, personal, and sensitive portrait of their lives. The director's "outsider perspective" and her observational mode of documentary filmmaking allowed her to capture the "quiet daily struggles" (Honwana, 2013) of the women at Bobbi Bear, thereby critiquing the issue of child rape and related social problems. In this way, the film evokes the idea – like *Otelo Burning* in the previous chapter – that South Africa is a "transitional

country", where some of apartheid's legacies continue to impact on the lives of young people. However, *Rough Aunties* does not focus on suffering alone; the film depicts women and girls who have been raped as "survivors", not as victims, suggesting that some of the transitions taking place in the new South Africa are socially transformative.

Rough Aunties' exhibition created "intimate publics" constituted mainly by women. As discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis, Berlant defines intimate publics as spaces where people share a sense of belonging, intimacy, and the desire for personal conversations (2008, 2009). Correspondingly, *Rough Aunties'* reception suggests that female spectators from South Africa and across the world responded emotionally to, and identified with, the women portrayed in the film. Some post-screening discussions facilitated by the Bobbi Bear women even encouraged female audiences who had been raped to confront the suffering they had experienced in their own lives. These intimate publics highlight – as the previous chapter did – the important role of communal film viewings in establishing spaces for intimacy among people from different demographic backgrounds.

However, much is at stake when intimate spaces are exposed in documentary films. In some situations, Longinotto took on the role of a "witness" who encouraged young rape survivors to share their experiences with the Bobbi Bear counsellors. However, the shooting process also resulted in tensions between the Bobbi Bear women's expectations of the impacts the film might have on their work and Longinotto's aim to maintain independence, as a filmmaker, in this situation.

While *Rough Aunties* is presented from the perspectives of adult women, *Yizo Yizo* exposes the perspectives of youths – both male and female. Focused on a group of high school students, *Yizo Yizo* grapples with issues pertaining to hegemonic masculinities, sexual violence, and sexual harassment. Like *Rough Aunties*, *Yizo Yizo* suggests that South Africa is a transitional country, where the violent legacy of apartheid remains. However, *Yizo Yizo*'s narrative focus and aesthetics differ significantly from those of *Rough Aunties*. The television drama exposes sexual violence in a realistic, gritty way, thereby drawing attention to the brutality of rape and the suffering experienced by the victims.

Yizo Yizo had a large youth audience in South Africa, being broadcast on the country's most-watched television station, SABC1 (Modisane, 2013: 162). It was particularly the series' gritty representation of violence that created a large volume of oral and written discussions in newspapers, radio talk shows, and even in the South African Parliament. Importantly, however, these controversies did not spark a wider discussion about sexual violence against children in South Africa (Modisane, 2010c, 2013). Television programmes, despite being consumed widely in South Africa, can thus not automatically be ascribed the potential to create publics that are socially transformative.

The publics created by *Rough Aunties* and *Yizo Yizo* reveal adults' anxieties about the potential effects media representations of sexual violence against children might have on young audiences. *Yizo Yizo* triggered moral panics among some adults who feared its graphic representation of violence could corrupt and mislead young viewers. *Rough Aunties*, in turn, had no wider circulation in South Africa due to national media legislation prohibiting its exhibition; however, the film's screenings

at film festivals, and its informal distribution on DVD, generated publics that were of socially generative nature.

3.2   *Yizo Yizo*: Youth Perspectives and Adult Panics

3.2.1   Background

Set in the fictional high school Supatsela High, *Yizo Yizo* deals with a variety of issues affecting youths in township schools, such as violence, drug abuse, lack of educational resources, and family conflicts. Expressions of gender-based violence against girls (such as rape, sexual harassment, and patriarchal attitudes) form a recurring theme throughout the television drama. *Yizo Yizo I* follows a group of students as they confront an outbreak of violence at their school, initiated by Chester (an out-of-school youth), Papa Action (his friend who attends the school), and Bra Gibb (their patron). In the development of the first series, the school descends into a place of chaos, drug dealing, and vandalism. Subsequently, a new, young female principal tries to restore order and discipline by working with teachers, parents and the Student Representative Council (SRC). In turn, *Yizo Yizo II* revolves around the young characters' struggles to learn, change, and find their place in life, while the third series follows the main characters as they leave school and face new challenges as they move to the city and enter adult life.

The initiative for *Yizo Yizo* came from SABC Education and the South African Department of Education. It was part of the Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service (COLTS) campaign, which sought to raise awareness about the deteriorating conditions in township schools, including violence, lack of discipline among teachers

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and students, and insufficient educational resources (Modisane, 2013: 161). The series' major target audiences were high school and out-of-school youths, their teachers and parents (Modisane, 2013: 161). *Yizo Yizo I* was produced by Laduma (formerly The Bomb) Film Factory and directed by a team of Black and White directors and producers from different social backgrounds, including the producer Desiree Markgraaff, film director Angus Gibson,[69] and the young filmmaker Teboho Mahlatsi.[70]

An extensive discussion of the power relations informing *Yizo Yizo*'s production falls beyond the scope of this chapter. Yet, it must be noted that the script of the first series was based on research the producers and directors carried out in township schools around Johannesburg over a period of three months (Modisane, 2013: 161). Mahlatsi, in a TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design)[71] talk he gave in Soweto, explained that he conducted extensive research at township schools across Soweto, talking to students and staff (TED x Talks, 2010). He states that *Yizo Yizo*'s storylines are derived from situations and people he had encountered during that time. For example, one of the gangsters that terrorised a school he conducted research at was called "Papa Action", which translated into the name of one of the fictional gangsters in the television series (TED x Talks, 2010). However, the young people (and adults) upon whose lives *Yizo Yizo*'s stories are based did not participate in the writing and conceptualisation of the drama series. To an extent, then, the

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[69] During apartheid, Gibson was a member of Free Filmmakers, an anti-apartheid filmmaking collective. His films *7 Up South Africa* (1992) and *21 Up South Africa: Mandela's Children* (2006) expose young people's experiences of the transition years (Modisane, 2013: 161–162).

[70] Mahlatsi directed *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning* (1999), a gritty representation of a young serial killer in a township, and *Ghetto Diaries* (1996), a television series of four documentaries made with and about people living in South African townships.

[71] TED is an internationally operating NGO that aims to spread new ideas via conferences and short talks (TED, n.d.).

makers of *Yizo Yizo* could be considered to have "appropriated" the stories and experiences of marginalised youth, rather than having actively involved them in the drama's production.

3.2.2 *Yizo Yizo*'s Publics and Viewing Contexts

Yizo Yizo was very popular among South African audiences, with approximately two million viewers watching per episode (Smith, 2003: 250). Youth made up the majority of these viewers, and especially Nguni and Sotho speakers between 13 and 25 years (Smith, 2003: 250). In 1999, *Yizo Yizo* became the highest-rated television programme in South Africa, and after only three episodes, 14 million people in the country had seen it (Andersson, 2004: 293).

These high audience numbers pose the question of how *Yizo Yizo*'s popularity can be explained. Firstly, the drama series was distributed via the medium of television, which (as noted earlier in this thesis) reaches 80 to 90 per cent of South Africa's population each week (Saks, 2010: 59), and is easily accessible to youths across different classes. *Yizo Yizo* was broadcast each week on the youth-focused television channel SABC1, at the prime time hour of 19:00 p.m. (Modisane, 2013: 162). The television series was thus consumed regularly in the "private" spaces of people's homes; it had what Adejunmobi would call a "televisual recurrence", referring to the ability of certain screen media productions to conjure similarly constituted publics on a regular basis (2015).

However, *Yizo Yizo*'s paratexts transgressed the familial space of the home (Modisane, 2010c). In addition to the weekly television broadcasts, *Yizo Yizo*'s creators distributed a variety of supplementary material which posed questions about

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the series to young viewers. These paratexts included talk shows on the radio (such as Metro Fm, Take 5, and Rea Bua), a weekly youth magazine in newspapers, articles in a daily tabloid, and a printed viewing guide for educators (Modisane, 2010c; Ndlovu & Smith, 2011). In this way, *Yizo Yizo*'s producers aimed to stimulate a discussion about the series outside of immediate, "private" viewing contexts (Modisane, 2013: 164).

However, it is uncertain whether *Yizo Yizo* has, in fact, created debates about the issues it addresses – such as sexual violence against youth – within families. Research conducted by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) and South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) reveals that 90 per cent of young participants in the study had discussed *Yizo Yizo* with their friends, but the majority had not spoken to their parents and teachers about it (Gultig, 2002: 261, qtd in Modisane, 2013: 170). This relative lack of intergenerational debate can be explained by the fact that in Black South African communities, young people and their parents tend to not talk about issues of sexuality and intimacy (Mudhovozi, Ramarumo & Sodi, 2012).

Yizo Yizo did, however, create fierce debates across a range of nationwide media platforms, especially in newspapers and on radio talk shows (Modisane, 2013: 172), and it is the only screen media production discussed in this thesis that instigated a debate in South Africa's Parliament. When *Yizo Yizo* first aired, it hardly created any commentaries on social media sites, compared to the large volume of social media debates about *Intersexions* (see chapter 4). Social media networks were virtually inaccessible in South Africa in 1999, and Facebook and Twitter did not yet exist at

that time; this exemplifies the rapid progress with which digital media have expanded in the country, and in the world at large.

It is thus vital to explore questions of why *Yizo Yizo* created publics on such a large scale, and the nature of the discussions surrounding it. In this chapter, of particular interest are the ways in which these debates engaged with the subject of sexual violence against children and youth. As the following sections reveal, *Yizo Yizo*'s "televisual recurrence" alone does not offer sufficient information about the series' popularity and the debates it created; rather, it was primarily its realistic representation of violence that triggered an outcry among adults. And yet, these publics remained relatively silent on the issues of child rape and hegemonic masculinity.

3.2.3   Representations of Sexual Violence against Children in *Yizo Yizo*

3.2.3.1   Personal Perspectives

Yizo Yizo's directors imagined their audiences as youths who are able to understand the series' open-ended critique of violence. They sought to create a drama that would not patronise young viewers or instruct them what to do, but that would instead allow them to identify with the main characters (Andersson, 2004: 48). *Yizo Yizo*'s makers thus broke with the conventions of the existing educational programmes of SABC Education – such as *Soul Buddyz* or *Takalani Sesame* – many of which do not leave young audiences with much room for their own interpretations of educational messages (Effendi, 2013).

Yizo Yizo's storylines unfold from the perspectives of the young lead characters, indicative of the producers' aim to establish points of identification for young viewers. The drama stresses what Bystrom and Nuttall describe as "the private" (2013b), that is, emotions, feelings, and matters related to the self and to sexuality; this focus is established in episode 1 of *Yizo Yizo I*. In the exposition, the camera pans across empty beer bottles to a number of teenage boys asleep next to one another in someone's home. One boy wakes up and hastily wakes his friend, Javas. A shot through a window, mimicking Java's point of view, reveals that his father is waiting outside. Two other boys wake up and one talks about "having been busy with the 'Boom Shaka' girl"[72] in his dreams. This scene is intercut with a sequence in the house of Thiza, an adolescent boy who gets ready for school. He asks his grandmother for money to buy books, but she refuses and sends him to his brother. In the subsequent scene, Thiza is shown to interrupt his brother in bed with his

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[72] Boom Shaka was a popular South African kwaito band.

girlfriend, a frontal shot framing the couple from Thiza's point of view. The camera then cuts to a mise-en-scene in the house of the Shai family, where a young girl, Nomsa, gets ready for school, complaining that her skirt is too short for her full figure. In this way, the establishing sequence introduces the young lead characters with a focus on questions of intimacy, sexuality, and family constellations (Andersson, 2004).

Yizo Yizo embraces a realist form that underscores its narrative focus on the personal perspectives of youth; and it is indicative of the directors' and producers' aim to make a drama that remains truthful to the lives of youths from South African townships. For example, the programme's soundtrack is rich in kwaito music, which – as I will discuss more in chapter 5 – is a genre of music that is very popular among Black youths in townships and urban areas (Smith, 2000: 250; Ndlovu & Smith, 2011).[73] The series' realist style is also evoked through its use of different South African languages and vernaculars (especially isiZulu and "tsotsitaal")[74] (Ndlovu & Smith, 2011). These stylistic devices establish *Yizo Yizo*'s focus on the "quiet daily struggles" (Honwana, 2013) of youth in post-apartheid South Africa, as well as their leisure and pleasures.

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[73] References to youth media are interspersed throughout *Yizo Yizo I*. For example, in episode 1, Nomsa, Hazel, and Mantwa excitedly discuss the film *Men in Black* (Sonnenfeld, 1997) and the CD *Rapture* by Anita Baker.
[74] Tsotsitaal is a dialect spoken in South African townships.

3.2.3.2 Hegemonic Masculinities

Yizo Yizo engages in a critique of sexual violence against teenage girls, and of hegemonic masculinity in the post-apartheid context. The television drama periodically inserts scenes in which adolescent boys at Supatsela verbally harass fellow female students. For example, in episode 1, in a scene set in the school corridor, a group of boys stare at Nomsa's exposed legs, with one of them making the suggestive comment: "If I had those thighs, I'd put pepper on it [sic]". In the second episode, Nomsa is again hassled because of her bodily features, this time by a male teacher who remarks that "sexy legs like this can cause men a heart attack". And at the end of episode 3, Chester first threatens to beat a girl, and then demands she kisses him. These create the idea that sexual harassment forms an integral part of daily life at Supatsela High, and that both adolescent men and adult teachers are responsible for it.

Yizo Yizo's narratives evoke the idea that the young, male characters have been, and are being, socialised into a society that holds up ideas of hegemonic masculinity. As explained in the previous chapter, Connell's term "hegemonic masculinity" (1987, 2005) refers to social patterns that embrace patriarchy and male domination over women. *Yizo Yizo*, too, implies that boys and men regard girls as inferior, sex objects, or personal possessions. The series also shows how young men who do not behave in a tough, hypersexual way are sometimes coerced into hypermasculine behaviour by their peers; this is exemplified by the storyline in which the gang around Chester forces Thiza, a hardworking student, to drink alcohol and assist them in hijacking cars.

Yizo Yizo further suggests that, in some situations, girls are complicit in upholding social patterns of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Thiza develops feelings for Hazel and treats her with respect and love. However, he is initially unsuccessful in dating her, for she chooses an older, chauvinistic taxi driver, Sunnyboy, as her boyfriend. Moreover, in episode 2, Hazel's friend Mantwa asks her: "Why are you so slow [in having sex with him]? […] You know, taxi drivers have money", suggesting that money and social status are seen as important features of manhood, and that transactional sex of various kinds is commonplace in South Africa.

However, the drama's narratives provide an explanation for socially entrenched discourses on hegemonic masculinity. Like *Otelo Burning*, the drama series' focus rests on young people's personal transitions from childhood to adulthood, but intersperses references to South Africa's own transition too. One aspect that the majority of the young characters share is that they grow up without either a mother or father. Hazel lives without her father and her mother is an alcoholic; Thiza lives with his grandmother and brother; and Javas does not have a mother, illustrating the devastating consequences apartheid has left on families in Black communities. Moreover, the teachers Ken Mokwena and Elliot Khubeka are portrayed as weak men who have been "emasculated" through apartheid, for they sleep with female students accept the patronage of the violent Bra Gibb (Andersson, 2004: 203).

3.2.3.3 Narratives of Rape

Yizo Yizo depicts sexual violence as a consequence of hegemonic masculinity and in a realistic, discomforting way, illustrated particularly by the rapes of Hazel and Dudu. In episode 6, Hazel and her boyfriend, Sunnyboy, attend the end-of-year party at school (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 3.2). After a while, Sunnyboy suggest the two retire to his taxi. As he tries to open Hazel's blouse, she rejects his sexual advances, saying she does not have condoms on her and does not want to fall pregnant. Sunnyboy, however, talking with a heavy voice indicating he is drunk, responds, "it's not raining. Why must I wear a raincoat?", and forces himself on top of her. A high angle shot frames Hazel's screams and the frightened expression on her face, while Sunnyboy's voice exclaims: "I'm you're boyfriend […] Why do you treat me like a stranger? I love you". The rape scene is shot in a grainy, dark light, and is repeatedly intercut with illuminated scenes showing students at the party vandalising the school and dancing ferociously around a fire. These visual contrasts give dramatic emphasis to the viciousness of Hazel's abuse (Smith, 2000: 48). This storyline also stays true to the facts of rape in South Africa, where the majority of women and girls are raped by someone they know, such as boyfriends, husbands, fathers, or uncles ("Myths & Truths about Rape", 2015).

Episode 9 of *Yizo Yizo* engages with the subject of gang rape in an equally graphic, discomforting fashion. In this episode, Dudu is kidnapped by Chester and his gang, and is taken by them to a chicken factory (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 3.3). While Dudu's ear-piercing screams are heard in the background, the camera pans

across chickens in cages[75] to Chester as he exclaims: "Let her die for her sins!" A subsequent, medium frontal shot exposes Dudu surrounded by two men – suggesting that she is being gang-raped – confronting the viewer with her painful facial expression, screams, and tears. René Smith (2000, 2003) has criticised this scene for presenting the perspective of the perpetrators of rape, not that of the victim, thereby eschewing a critique of the sexual violence it depicts. However, this scene could also be interpreted as what Ruby Rich has called "conversion cinema" (1983), whereby she describes films that attempt to make spectators feel as though they participate in the violence depicted on screen, and so stimulate an ethical reflection about this violence (Rich 1983, qtd in Horeck, 2004: 96). Interpreted in this way, *Yizo Yizo*'s depictions of rape epitomise not merely an intention to shock viewers, but the producers' intention of stimulating reflection about hegemonic masculinities and sexual violence against girls.

Yizo Yizo places emphasis on the suffering of the victims of sexual crimes. In episode 7, for example, Hazel is depressed and apathetic in the aftermath of the rape, refusing to get out of bed in the morning. In later episodes, she struggles to engage in physical contact with her new boyfriend, Thiza, as a direct result of her memories of the violation (Smith, 2000: 117). At the beginning of *Yizo Yizo II*, Hazel tries to commit suicide, and tells Dudu afterwards that she "didn't have enough strength" to live on (Andersson, 2010: 117). Similarly, Dudu is depicted as distraught after the rape, and refuses to report Papa Action to the police, fearing the revenge of his gang. *Yizo Yizo* thus paints a realist yet dystopic picture of rape, suggesting that little can be done to address the problem; and this idea is very different from the representations of sexual

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[75] This can be read as an intertextual reference to the rape scene in *Fools*, which also features a squeaking chicken (Andersson, 2004: 32).

violence against children in *Rough Aunties*, discussed later in this chapter. Yet, this narrative choice indicates the *Yizo Yizo* directors' commitment to cinematic realism, for, in South Africa, the majority of sexual crimes are not reported to the police, with many women and girls being too scared to report it (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). It must also be noted that in the development of *Yizo Yizo*'s second series, Dudu takes Papa Action and Chester to court, and they are convicted as a result (Smith, 2000: 117). Yet, it is possible that some television viewers only watched *Yizo Yizo I*, or the first episode of *Yizo Yizo II*; and these viewers could thus get the impression that rape victims have little power to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice.

3.2.4 Publics and Moral Panics

Yizo Yizo's treatment of sexual violence against schoolgirls challenges the idea that South Africa's new generation is, in fact, "Born Free". When the series first aired, in 1999, it marked a break with the celebratory discourse of South Africa's "rainbow nation", which, at that time, was strongly pronounced within political and religious circles and the media. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that *Yizo Yizo* generated a variety of publics constituted of discussions in radio talk shows, letters to the editor and reviews in newspapers, as well as debates in Parliament.

These discussions around *Yizo Yizo* centred mainly on its *representation* of violence, and on the question of what television should and should not show; however, viewers devoted relatively little attention to the underlying problems of violence (including sexual violence against children and youth) (Modisane, 2013: 160).[76] The opinions of reviewers and commentators can be roughly split into those who were concerned

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[76] It must be noted, however, that the genre of newspaper reporting tends to be sensational and to deflect from the issues at stake (Modisane, 2013: 161).

about the impacts the drama's gritty representation of violence might have on viewers, and those who welcomed its realist depiction of the problems youths are facing in townships. The first kind of response was pronounced particularly in newspaper commentary by journalists, as well as in letters from parents and community leaders published in newspapers; these viewers blamed *Yizo Yizo* for setting anti-social trends, glorifying violence, and promoting sexual violence in township schools (Smith, 2000: 15).

These anxieties over *Yizo Yizo* even extended to discussions in Parliament. For example, the ANC Member of Parliament Lulu Xingwana, a former Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, called for banning the series during a parliamentary session, arguing it glorified crime. She also made this call on the *Tim Modise* show, aired on the SABC's radio news and current affairs channel (Modisane, 2013: 166). Moreover, the FPB, in a presentation to the Parliamentary Committee of Home Affairs, accused *Yizo Yizo* of containing "child pornography", due to its representation of children in school uniforms having sex (Modisane, 2013: 166).[77] However, the FPB's legislative power is restricted to films and it cannot censor television shows (Andersson, 2004: 313).

Some spectators challenged these concerns about *Yizo Yizo*, however, praising the television series' realist approach to depictions of violence and township life. For example, some people who called in on the *Tim Modise* show argued that calls for banning it were reminiscent of the censorship of apartheid (Modisane, 2013: 167). Moreover, the then National Media Secretary of the ANC Youth League, Blessing

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[77] As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, the FPB also accused the film *Of Good Report* of containing "child pornography", and briefly banned it in South Africa in 2013.

Manale, wrote an opinion piece published in the *Sowetan Sunday*, in which she hailed *Yizo Yizo* for representing the problems faced by students in township schools (Andersson, 2004: 313).

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of these controversies is that they occurred predominantly among *adult viewers*, some of whom felt the need to protect youths from explicit media representations of sexuality and violence. However, these assumptions were, for the most part, based on the ways in which adults imagined young viewers would react to such representations. This logic reveals an understanding of children and youth as gullible viewers who are easily corrupted by television content, and this runs contrary to the media-literate ways in which *Yizo Yizo*'s producers imagined young spectators. At the same time, many adult viewers distanced themselves from *Yizo Yizo*, perceiving the drama as addressed to youths only (Andersson, 2004: 313). For example, some teachers in South Africa felt the programme did not contain any messages addressed to them (Andersson, 2004: 313). While this perception runs in line with the series' target audience, its narratives also critique the behaviour of adult characters, such as male teachers who harass girls, an autocratic principal, and a negligent female teacher. Hence, many adult viewers did not interpret *Yizo Yizo* according to the producers' intentions, which was to critique the ways in which both youth and adults are responsible for gender-based violence and hegemonic masculinities.

Interestingly, however, young audiences were far less shocked by *Yizo Yizo*'s representations than parents and teachers were. As evaluation reports of the series show, many young viewers (and particularly Black viewers) identified with the situations depicted in *Yizo Yizo* (Andersson, 2004: 309), and welcomed the fact that

someone had finally understood and engaged with the problems they faced (Smith, 2000: 15). In Smith's evaluation of *Yizo Yizo*, the majority (55 per cent) of young respondents said they did not perceive *Yizo Yizo* as a "violent" programme, but as a realistic, informative drama that represented situations with which they were familiar (2000: 45). Thus, in contrast to some adult viewers, these young viewers interpreted the series in line with the producers' intentions to draw attention to the brutality of violence in township schools. These interpretations also highlight intergenerational discrepancies in spectatorship, and the need for studying actual youth audiences, rather than making assumptions about them.

However, adults' concerns about *Yizo Yizo*'s potential impact on young audiences were not entirely unfounded, since some school children *did* imitate violent scenes depicted by the television drama (Pitout & Ndlovu, 2001). In April 1999, *The Sowetan* published an article about the gang rape of an 18-year-old girl in a school toilet, which described the perpetrators as a "copycat gang", for the young men had named themselves "Yizo Yizo" (Kotlole, 1999). Earlier that year, the *Sunday Times* had reported an incident at a high school in Vosloorus township, where a 20-year-old student had flushed another student's head in a toilet, just as Papa Action does in episode 1 – and the student admitted he had copied the scene from *Yizo Yizo* (Andersson, 2004: 292). These incidents run contrary to the producers' assumption that young television audiences are able to read the drama series for its intended critique of (sexual) violence.

On the other hand, the drama series elicited empathy for the victims of violence from some young viewers. Smith and Ndlovu note that some young, female audiences identified with Dudu and Hazel (the rape survivors), since *Yizo Yizo II* reveals the

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development of Hazel's character after the rape (2011). However, focus groups research has also shown that some young viewers, and especially boys, were impatient with *Yizo Yizo*'s emphasis on the problems rape victims are facing (Andersson, 2004). These viewers did not welcome the representations of Hazel's anguish and her rejection of Thiza – suggesting she should "get over it" (Andersson, 2004: 294) – thereby eschewing an engagement with *Yizo Yizo*'s critique of gender inequality.

Notably, the scenes of two girls being raped in episode 6 and 9 of *Yizo Yizo I* generated relatively little debate in national newspapers and political circles (Graham, 2012: 178). The absence of publics that formed around these scenes contrasts starkly with the controversies sparked by a homosexual rape scene in episode 4 of *Yizo Yizo II*, in which Chester is raped by another male prisoner; only then did outraged viewers (including teachers, members of the ANC Women's League, and parents) dismiss *Yizo Yizo* for glorifying *sexual* violence. Newspapers were inundated with letters and columns denouncing *Yizo Yizo*'s graphic representation of the rape, calling for the series to be banned (Graham, 2012: 178). But *Yizo Yizo* co-director Mahlatsi argues that the public outcry over this scene was indicative of homophobic attitudes in South Africa, saying: "We didn't show actual nudity. Everything was shielded. The heated response to it comes out of homophobia. We have had rape scenes but they were of girls. There was no criticism" (qtd in Graham, 2012: 178). Indeed, it is telling that politicians, including female politicians, only expressed outrage after a homosexual rape scene in *Yizo Yizo*, whereas representations of sexual violence against girls did not spark a significant debate.

Yizo Yizo's audiences thus created publics that were characterised mainly by adults' anxieties over the series' potentially negative impact on young television audiences, rather than engagement with the roots of sexual violence against children. Similar concerns among adults were provoked by *Rough Aunties*, a *documentary film* on the subject of child rape in South Africa. However, *Rough Aunties*' content differs significantly from that of *Yizo Yizo*, and it was exhibited not on television but primarily during "live screenings" at film festivals; these aspects were among the major reasons why the film created intimate publics in South Africa and beyond.

3.3   *Rough Aunties*: "We are not victims, we are survivors"

3.3.1   Background

Rough Aunties revolves around the work of Operation Bobbi Bear, an NGO in Amanzimtoti, in KZN, that rescues, assists, and counsels children and youth who have been sexually abused. The film's eponymous "aunties" are five women who work at Bobbi Bear: Jackie Downs-Branfield (the founder and chief executive), Sdudla Maphumolo, Mildred Ngcobo, Eureka Olivier, and Thuli Sibiya (see figure 3.1). *Rough Aunties* follows these women in their daily work and private lives, revealing how they provide children and youth affected by sexual abuse with medical care, counselling, and legal support. The film also shows how Bobbi Bear focuses on breaking the silence of rape in their community by educating women and girls about speaking out, and seeking help, in case they, a friend, or a relative become a victim of sexual violence.

Figure 3.1 Women Make Movies (2008). *The "Rough Aunties" of Bobbi Bear: Thuli Sibiya, Eureka Olivier, Sdudla Maphumolo, Jackie Downs-Branfield and Mildred Ngcobo (left to right).* **[Digital image] Available at: http://bit.ly/1OFCsYB [Accessed 2015, July 08].**

The idea for *Rough Aunties* came from Paul Taylor, a British filmmaker, producer, and the co-founder of the production company RISE Films, who had longstanding experience of working with, and filming, children in South Africa. Taylor's reasons for making *Rough Aunties* were relatively pragmatic. During the shooting of his previous documentary film *Thina Simunye* (*We Are Together*, 2008) in KZN,[78] he learned of the work of Bobbi Bear and he "was struck by the work they do and how it would be an interesting situation to film for a documentary" (Taylor, 2012). Taylor subsequently discussed his ideas with Downs-Branfield, Bobbi Bear's founder and chief executive. Downs-Branfield was attracted by the suggestion, for she saw the making of a film as an opportunity for raising awareness about the work of the

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[78] *Thina Simunye* tells the stories of children at the Agape orphanage and the impacts of HIV/AIDS on their lives.

women at her organisation. She said in a personal interview: "[Paul] said: 'I'm not making any promises, but would you like a film done?' And I said: 'If it'll show my CSOs [child safety officers] as heroes - absolutely!'" (2012) Hence, although the impetus for *Rough Aunties* came from a British filmmaker, the founder of Bobbi Bear – an expert in working with abused children – was integrated in the decision-making processes about the documentary from the very start.

Aware of the delicate nature of Bobbi Bear's work, Taylor and his co-producer, Teddy Leifer, thought carefully about a director who would be capable of filming this work in a sensitive way (Taylor, 2012). The producers approached Kim Longinotto, an acclaimed British filmmaker, known for films that focus on oppressed and strong women across the world.[79] According to Taylor:

> Kim was a natural choice. She's one of the most sensitive and respectful people and with the subject matter, dealing with child abuse, a film would require a person who is extremely sensitive and a non-threatening presence. Kim was the perfect person. (2012)

Longinotto, however, had initial doubts about directing the film. She told me:

> It is really unusual to be asked by someone to make a film [about] them. You think "is this going to work? Are they going to be difficult about the film when it's finished? Are they going to want a different film than I want?" Normally I wouldn't do that. But I thought, because [Jackie] had come to see me, I would go to Durban to meet them and just have a look. (2012)

Longinotto's intention was thus not necessarily to create a film focused on activist publicity for Bobbi Bear, contrary to some of the Bobbi Bear women's expectations. As discussed later in the chapter, Longinotto was aware of the potential tensions that

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[79] Longinotto's films include *Divorce Iranian Style* (1998), *The Day I Will Never Forget* (2002), *Sisters in Law* (2005), *Pink Saris* (2010), *Salma* (2013), and *Dreamcatcher* (2015).

could arise between the anticipations of the Bobbi Bear organisation, and her desire to maintain independence, as a director, during the film's making.

RISE Films set up an introductory meeting between Downs-Branfield and Longinotto in London. Longinotto and Taylor subsequently visited the staff of Bobbi Bear in Amanzimtoti, to see whether the director could make a film within this environment. Longinotto recalls, "only after about an hour I thought: 'I love these women'" (2012). The staff of Bobbi Bear, too, felt sympathy towards the director. Downs-Branfield remembers:

> The whole team fell in love with her straight away. She spoke to all of us about making the film. The CSOs were spoken to as well before she even agreed to do the film. We didn't quite know what she was going to do or what she was going to film, but her personality and the way she spoke about people attracted us to her. We knew she wouldn't harm anybody. We trusted her. (2012)

This establishment of trust between Longinotto and the women of Bobbi Bear was thus an important reason why the making of *Rough Aunties* was agreed upon.

Rough Aunties was made with the aim of being distributed in South Africa and overseas, and the prospect of gaining international exposure motivated some of the Bobbi Bear staff to agree to the film. The women anticipated that the film would depict their work in a positive light to international audiences, and would raise support and funds for the organisation. Sibiya explained to me in an interview:

> We wanted [people] to know that this is what is happening in South Africa with the rape victims. We wanted people in other countries to see that there is rape, and rape isn't going down but it is escalating […]. Not only females are being raped, males are being raped, mentally retarded kids are being raped. The justice system, how the police officers are conducting the investigations, and how social workers are working together with us was something that we wanted to expose. (2012)

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She adds: "It was introduced to us in the way that after the filming, we were going to be known and it was going to bring money for Bobbi Bear". The NGO has limited funds, and many staff struggle in making a living for themselves, especially those from the Zulu communities. Some CSOs also mentioned that the filmmaker and the producers made a verbal promise that all staff would have an opportunity to travel abroad to film festivals. However, as discussed later in the chapter, the producers and director were not entirely able to keep these promises.

3.3.2 Mediations of Intimacy in *Rough Aunties*

Longinotto does not speak Zulu and had never been to South Africa before the making of *Rough Aunties* began. Hence, one can assume that she was more "visible" and "audible" among Bobbi Bear's team than a South African filmmaker would have been. However, during the ten weeks of shooting *Rough Aunties*, Longinotto gradually became a part of daily life at Bobbi Bear. Downs-Branfield told me: "I actually forgot she [Longinotto] was there, because she literally became part of the team" (2012). Longinotto and her sound recordist, Mary Milton, were the only crewmembers, making the filmmaking process an intimate experience. Moreover, Longinotto did not write a script for *Rough Aunties*,[80] saying: "it's all live action, and we are watching these things as they are happening […]. There is no script, no writing, no commentary. It is just things happening in front of your eyes" (2010). To an extent, then, Longinotto – without being entirely invisible – became a "fly on the wall" in her documentation of everyday life at Bobbi Bear.

Longinotto's "fly-on-the-wall" perspective is reflected in *Rough Aunties'* narrative and form. Like most of Longinotto's films, *Rough Aunties* follows the tradition of

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[80] Many documentary filmmakers have a script in place before shooting their films.

observational documentary film and "cinema verité". The film resembles those of Frederick Wiseman, Richard Leacock and Don Pennebaker, which refrain from advanced planning, scripting, staging, narration, and re-enactment (Nichols, 1991: 33). In *Rough Aunties*, the Bobbi Bear women organically dictate the narrative, with situations unfolding in front of the camera without the director's intervention. Even in scenes showing interviews, Longinotto's voice is not heard; these personal confessions are reserved for the women and children of Bobbi Bear. The film subjects never look directly at the camera, creating the impression that the filmmaker is taking part in intimate moments of their lives. Like *Yizo Yizo*, *Rough Aunties* allows the audience to see what the film's main subjects see, thereby encouraging viewers to identify with them.

Consequently, Longinotto can be described as a mediator of the "private lives" (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b) of the Bobbi Bear women. She reveals, in the film, how these women care for each other, not only at work, but also during tragedies that took place in their families at the time of filming, such as the death of Maphumolo's six-year-old son, Shubaba, and the murder of a member of Eureka's extended family. Longinotto places particular emphasis on the personal story of Ngcobo, showing how she counsels children who have been raped, and reveals, through interviews, that she had been abused herself in the past; for this reason, she is now dedicated to helping others who have had similar experiences.

Rough Aunties' focus on "the private" could also be critiqued for removing Longinotto's authorial presence in the film, and concealing her directorial influence over the on-screen representations. Moreover, as the UK film critic Peter Bradshaw argues in a review for *The Guardian*, *Rough Aunties* does not provide much

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background information about the context of child rape in South Africa or even about Bobbi Bear (2010). Some storylines and events remain unexplained and unresolved, such as the fate of an elderly woman who looks after her grandchildren, or a deadly robbery in a White middle-class home. Audiences unfamiliar with the South African context might, therefore, struggle to understand the film's narratives and its critique of sexual violence.

However, this argument would not do justice to the nuanced ways in which *Rough Aunties* engages the subject of sexual violence. Focused on the "quiet daily struggles" (Honwana, 2013) of women and youths, *Rough Aunties* sheds light upon the imbrications of gender inequality, hegemonic masculinity, and sexual violence in South Africa. *Rough Aunties*, like *Yizo Yizo*, remains true to the demographics of rape in the country, showing that the majority of rape survivors/victims are young women and girls from historically marginalised communities. What unites the stories of the different children and youth portrayed in the film is that they have been abused by men they knew, such as fathers, uncles, grandfathers or neighbours. In this way, the film reveals the dysfunctional expressions of masculinity in the "new" South Africa, particularly in *intimate* spheres. Men do not only appear as perpetrators in *Rough Aunties*, however, with some – both Black and White – being shown to help the Bobbi Bear women, such as the police officer Martin; Downs-Branfield's husband Allan; and Ngcobo's new boyfriend. Moreover, in an early scene, Ngcobo and Olivier discuss a case where a *woman* had abused a girl, revealing that females can also be the perpetrators of rape. The film also shows that in some circumstances, boys are victims of rape, encapsulated in the story of "Boytjie", a toddler who was sodomised by his own father.

Rough Aunties also exposes the "transitional" state of South Africa's post-apartheid criminal justice system, and how rape cases are often being dealt with inadequately. In an early sequence in the film, for example, Ngcobo is close to tears when Eureka discovers that the police lost the file of a rape case that has been postponed for nearly two years. Subsequent scenes show Ngcobo and Downs-Branfield rescuing Nonhlanhla, a girl who social workers had placed back into the care of her abusive uncle, and working on the case of a raped baby boy whom police had handed back to his brutal father. *Rough Aunties* thus exposes the deficiencies of different legal and social institutions in the post-apartheid context, and the difficulties of bringing the perpetrators of rape to justice.

Rough Aunties' focus on women's personal lives reveals that sexual violence against young people is entwined with socio-cultural understandings of childhood and intergenerational relationships. In the film's establishing sequence, Ngcobo counsels Pinkie, a little girl who was raped by her next-door neighbour. The girl is embarrassed to name her private parts, and Ngcobo asks her to explain her experience of sexual abuse by drawing on a stuffed teddy bear with a marker pen (see figure 3.2. and *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 3.4). This sequence illustrates that the Bobbi Bear counsellors use teddy bears as a way of communicating with young rape survivors in sensitive, non-verbal ways.

Figure 3.2 *Ngcobo counsels Pinkie* **(2008). From:** *Rough Aunties*. **Dir. Kim Longinotto. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Women Make Movies.**

Pinkie's struggle to verbalise her ordeal is explained by Sibiya in a later scene, when she states:

> A little child in our Zulu nation cannot say the private parts openly if ever there is an adult present. The child has got to go around it and give you an outline of what she wants to say. The elderly people always say: "You brought this onto yourself. You wanted to be raped". Then others say: "I've been raped – so what? Let me live with it". But it's not a matter of living with it. You need some help.

Sibiya indicates here that the norms of respecting adults within Zulu culture dictate children's behaviour, and intergenerational relationships in Southern African communities have historically been informed by notions of respect for adults and the elders (Moses, 2008). Girls, in particular, are expected to demonstrate respect for adults through obedience, listening when adults talk, and not talking back (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana & Rose-Junius, 2005: 1813). These relationships between children and

adults are crucial for understanding girls' limited ability to reject sexual advances from adult men, and especially from a father or an older relative (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana & Rose-Junius, 2005: 1814).

It seems, therefore, that Longinotto's "outsider" perspective was vital for her to be able to represent specific aspects of child abuse in South Africa, and the peculiarities of the Bobbi Bear organisation. Eureka Olivier, the Operations Manager of Bobbi Bear, said in an personal interview: "She [Longinotto] was very clever in her way to make that movie, to bring in the crying bit and then a bit of laughter, a bit of humour, even a swearword here and there" (2012). She is referring here to an early scene in the film, during which some of the Bobbi Bear staff discuss their use of Zulu swearwords, and the fact that their work against the perpetrators of rape has caused them to become "rough" (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 3.5). The women burst into laughter and discuss how they have learned to break the Zulu custom of not talking about one's problems, and the Afrikaner culture of ladylike behaviour.

Rough Aunties thus encourages rethinking common understandings of "otherness" in collaborative filmmaking processes. As Cieplak suggests, with reference to collaborative filmmaking projects in Rwanda, "being 'other' does, inevitably, entail a lack of knowledge, but […] it can also lend itself more positively to an increase in objectivity and therefore the ability to *mediate*" (2010b: 81, my emphasis). As noted earlier, Longinotto can be described as a mediator of the "private lives" of the Bobbi Bear women and children, her "otherness" creating a dynamic that allowed her to represent the intimate lives and particularities of specific women at the organisation. *Rough Aunties* thus evokes the idea that "otherness" is an unstable, multi-axial, and shifting category, rather than one based on nationality or racial identity.

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3.3.3   Testimonies of Sexual Violence Against Children

In contrast to *Yizo Yizo*, *Rough Aunties* is devoid of gritty depictions of violence; instead, Longinotto's slow-paced cinematography invokes drama from the personal confessions and emotions of women and children. Downs-Branfield says:

> She [Longinotto] filmed so many things that would have made headlines. But I could see by watching the film that she wanted to show the dedication of the staff and their stories. And for that reason, I love it. She wasn't sensationalist. When I think of the raids and the stuff she actually filmed, if Kim had been a different person, it could have been quite tragic and a very different film. (2012)

The filmmaker also individualises women and children via the frequent use of close-ups of their faces, thereby emphasising emotions of both sadness and joy and drawing attention to the women's and children's personalities, feelings, and uniqueness (see figure 3.3 and figure 3.4). This process of individualisation in the film's diegesis is crucial, for it encourages audiences to establish an emotional connection with the film's major subjects.

Figure 3.3 *Ngcobo talks about her own abusive childhood* (2008). From: *Rough Aunties*. Dir. Kim Longinotto. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Women Make Movies.

Figure 3.4 *Sibiya counsels Nami* (2008). From: *Rough Aunties*. Dir. Kim Longinotto. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Women Make Movies.

Therefore, Longinotto's role in *Rough Aunties* can be described not only as that of a "mediator", but also as a "witness" of private testimonies. As Leshu Torchin points out, documentary films can produce eyewitness testimonies that conjure politically and morally engaged communities (2012: 3). Similarly, Cieplak argues that representations of violence and suffering in film can be a means of bearing "witness" to violent crimes (2010b). He points out that, in legal terms, a "witness" is defined as "an individual able and obliged to testify" (2010b: 55), with the process of witnessing involving commitment and obligation. When this idea is extended to films, witnessing thus means "not merely to narrate but […] to commit the narrative, to others: to take responsibility […] for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which […] goes beyond the personal" (Felman, 1992: 204, qtd in Cieplak, 2010b: 55). It is, however, difficult to determine what exactly the process of "witnessing" implies if people's testimonies are recorded on film, for film production inevitably requires the interventions of the filmmaker; it is not an entirely unmediated experience of events (Cieplak, 2010b).

Witnessing via documentary filmmaking also poses the ethical question of when it is appropriate to film someone's suffering and testimony. During the *Rough Aunties'* production process, occasional tensions cropped up between Longinotto and the sound recordist, Milton. In some situations, they had different opinions about whether their presence with the camera was an act of witnessing or an intrusion in people's privacy. For instance, Longinotto and Milton were present when Maphumolo's son, Shubaba, drowned in a local river (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 3.6). Milton saw it as inappropriate to document the intense pain of the mother and the people from the community, but Longinotto kept filming. Longinotto

described this situation to me as follows:

> It is difficult, because Sdudla [Maphumolo] was a lovely, close friend by
> then and if something bad happens to you the last thing I'd think of is
> filming you. But we were to make a film; we were not there to be friends.
> Actually, when you're making a film you have to be very rigorous. You
> have to say: "Is this important for the film to be shown?" And if not, of
> course you don't film it. But it seemed really important. It seemed to be
> part of what their lives were. (2012)

Here, Longinotto indicates that her intention of documenting the "everyday" at
Bobbi Bear required her, as the filmmaker, to keep a certain emotional distance from
the film's participants. However, despite keeping this distance, Longinotto
approaches her subjects closely and empathetically.

3.3.4 Survivors, not Victims

In *Rough Aunties*, it is not only Longinotto who takes on the role of a mediator, but
also the Bobbi Bear women. While *Rough Aunties'* main subject is sexual violence
against children, it is, in the first instance, a documentary about five charismatic,
energetic women at Bobbi Bear. The film represents a multifaceted picture of sexual
violence against young people in South Africa, which – unlike *Yizo Yizo* – is focused
on women who have take the initiative to address this problem. As Downs-Branfield
says, "I believe the characters of our women were portrayed wonderfully […]. I
wanted these women to be known as the heroes they are. I feel the film did portray
that" (2012). The focus on activist women thus enabled Longinotto to capture not
only the children's suffering but also to provide glimpses of hope in these situations.

Rough Aunties shows that the entire team at Bobbi Bear – both Black and White
women – are working against sexual violence. This aspect is noteworthy when
compared to Lara Foot-Newton's animated short film *And There in the Dust* (2004),

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which is based on the events of "Baby Tshepang". [81] In this film, the Black community of the infant is never shown, and instead, a voice-over opens the film with the words "Nothing ever happens here. Nothing. – The Big Boss" (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 3.7). A White man subsequently steps out from an ambulance, saves the baby, and he is the only one who cries. As Lucy Graham notes, the film's representation of sexual violence against children is problematic, for it casts Black township communities as indifferent to this violence, denying them the ability to take the initiative on this problem (2012: 185).

Rough Aunties' narrative, in contrast, traces the transformation of women who have been raped from being victims to survivors. The film reveals that many women at Bobbi Bear have experienced some kind of abuse in their own lives and shows how they have overcome these experiences. In one scene, for example, Ngcobo speaks about her abusive childhood and contemplating taking her own life after her husband betrayed her (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 3.8). She stresses that with the support of Downs-Branfield, she was able to overcome feelings of shame and pain. Longinotto explains:

> With rape it's very much the feeling that it's a shameful thing […] [suggesting that] the person who has been raped should be ashamed and shouldn't want their face shown, and should be anonymous and guilty […]. What [Bobbi Bear] are fighting brilliantly is this cultural silence. They are saying: "Look, we are all talking about it and we're proud". (2010)

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[81] "Baby Tshepang" is the name given to a baby girl from Upington, who was raped by her mother's ex-partner and his friends in October 2001. It was one of the first baby rape cases to receive extensive publicity in the South African press (Bird & Spurr, 2004; Posel, 2005b). The men were eventually acquitted of the rape charges.

Focused on personal testimonies, then, *Rough Aunties* puts the spotlight on women who challenge the social acceptance of child rape and the frequent silencing of sexual violence in their community.

In this way, Rough Aunties draws attention to the transformative nature of Bobbi Bear's work. Longinotto said that she intentionally did not want to make a film about victims, but about survivors:

> That's why I did [the film] through Bobbi Bear, because they are strong and wonderful women – black and white women – working together against rape. It wasn't just filming raped children, which I think would be just ghastly. It was somebody doing something about it and filming their work, so it had a positive side to it. Films about victims, I think, just make you feel weak and depressed, whereas films about survivors and about activists make you think "wow". (2012)

Rough Aunties' emphasis on people's transformations from being victims to survivors is encapsulated in the story of Ngcobo, who, towards the end of the film, decides to leave her abusive husband and start a new life. Moreover, the documentary ends on a note of optimism, the last scene showing Sindi and Nonhlanhla hugging each other joyfully (see figure 3.5), after they have received the news that Nonhlanhla can stay at the Branfields as a foster child. Hence, *Rough Aunties* signals that Bobbi Bear's work has a transformative impact on the lives of women and children, providing inspiration to address the suffering caused by sexual violence.

Figure 3.5 *Sindi and Noni in* **Rough Aunties** *' closing scene* **(2008). From:** *Rough Aunties***. Dir. Kim Longinotto. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Women Make Movies.**

3.3.5   Ethical Aspects of *Rough Aunties*' Collaborative Production

Longinotto's focus on intimacy and private testimonies in *Rough Aunties* poses questions of how the filming was conducted, and how it has impacted on the lives of the participants. The film's making required a great deal of sensitivity, and Longinotto was careful not to harm the children through their involvement in it. Prior to shooting, Longinotto and Milton were briefed by CSOs about their work (Olivier, 2012), and Longinotto formed an agreement with the Bobbi Bear staff that she would film a child only in the presence of a member of the organisation (Longinotto, 2012). Longinotto says she was careful not to intrude on Bobbi Bear's interactions with the children, and refrained from interviewing them or asking personal questions. The director told the women: "if there's any point where you think we're being a problem, just tell us to stop filming. Or if you want to go in a room without us, it's absolutely fine" (2012). In turn, the staff at Bobbi Bear who I interviewed perceived

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Longinotto to be non-intrusive and respectful. Olivier remarks:

> To be honest, three quarters of the time we didn't even realise she was filming. That's how good she was. There were times I would look up and see the grey speaker and I knew she was filming, but her approach to the work and her sensitivity made it a pleasure to work with her because we didn't know she was there. (2012)

It seems, then, that Longinotto's directorial skills, and her choice to have only a small crew, made the shooting a nonintrusive process based on mutual respect. However, Longinotto's presence also proved to be challenging for some Bobbi Bear counsellors. Sibiya told me: "it was sometimes difficult when [the filmmakers] were around, as you feel there is this...then you say to yourself: 'Ok let me forget about the film crew, I am now doing the case, and this case should be successful'" (2012).

Longinotto also does not speak the local languages (isiZulu, predominantly), and Bobbi Bear staff had to translate the children's stories and conversations with them for her (Sibiya, 2012). The director thus might not have been able to entirely judge the children's opinions about her presence as a filmmaker in all situations, the sensitivity of their stories, and whether the information they disclosed publicly in front of the camera could have put them at any risk in their communities. However, Longinotto's linguistic distance from the Bobbi Bear women also prevented her from intruding on the organisation's work. Longinotto says: "the kids have enough to put up with and that is what they said was so painful when local crews came to film. They would start asking children: 'How do feel about being raped?' You can't do that. It's not my place to do" (2012). Despite her linguistic "otherness", then, Longinotto was, perhaps, more aware of the delicate nature of the situations she filmed than "local" filmmakers had been; and this suggests, once again, that

"otherness" cannot simply be defined by someone's nationality alone.

Furthermore, Longinotto felt that her presence with the camera encouraged some children to share the experiences of their abuse with the Bobbi Bear counsellors. According to the director, Pinkie, the girl shown in *Rough Aunties'* opening sequence, "was really encouraged when we were filming her, because it almost felt like a safety thing" (Longinotto, 2010). Longinotto describes another situation as follows:

> When we very first started filming [sic], there was this wonderful kid who wouldn't talk. And Thuli said: "Kim you should go out of the room, she is not talking". So we went out and then we went back in after she had gone. Thuli said it was exactly the same. Whether I was there or not, she just didn't want to talk. I think we then realised that if somebody wanted to talk, and was ready, they were actually glad to have a witness there […]. I have witnesses and everyone is going to see that I want to talk about it. (2010)

In this situation, then, the filmmaker seemed to have reassured a young girl of the significance of her testimonies and encouraged her to speak about the painful experience of sexual abuse.

The potential risk of *Rough Aunties'* concentration on intimate moments is that the children who participated in the film might feel embarrassed about these representations when they grow up, and that they might be stigmatised at school (Downs-Branfield, 2012). However, Bobbi Bear did seek informed consent from the children to participate in the film, and from parents for children under 18 years old. They also explained the purpose of the filming to the children and their parents or caregivers (Downs-Branfield, 2012). Erika Clifton-Park, a police officer and counsellor at Bobbi Bear, says this about the shooting process:

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> Before [the children] went on camera, we first asked for the parents'
> consent and we spoke to them and explained to them what the purpose of
> the camera would be. So they were aware of it before. Some of the kids
> didn't want to go on camera and that was fine. (2012)

Similarly, Olivier emphasises: "Kim showed sensitivity towards the children. I wasn't concerned at all" (2012). It seems, then, that children's own decisions to participate in the film were respected during the shooting process.

After *Rough Aunties* was completed, Bobbi Bear has kept track of the children who took part in the film (as with all the children they look after) until the present day (Olivier, 2012). Nonhlanhla still lives with the Branfields and today is a lively, healthy teenage girl. "Boytjie" is now in the care of his grandparents and court orders are in place to prevent further abuse by his father (Downs-Branfield, 2012). However, some children and youths have struggled to recover from the painful experiences depicted in *Rough Aunties*. The girl whose father was shot in the burglary suffered from the emotional consequences of the incident for several years. The disabled girl, Nami, was raped again repeatedly after *Rough Aunties* was completed. She was first placed back with her abusive family by social workers, and was subsequently removed again from that family by Bobbi Bear (Sibiya, 2012). Unfortunately, then, Bobbi Bear has not been able to make a long-term improvement to the lives of all the youths portrayed in *Rough Aunties*, even though – as discussed later – the film stirred empathy and compassion among audiences.

3.3.6 Limited Exhibition in South Africa

Rough Aunties premiered at the Amsterdam International Documentary Festival (IDFA) in November 2008, signalling the importance of international capital and skills in its production. It is likely that Longinotto's international reputation, as well as the film's own merit, helped to enable the film to enter many renowned film festivals in the UK (Sheffield DocFest), Australia (Sydney Film Festival), US (Sundance), Canada (Hot Docs), Brazil (Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine), Germany (Frauenrechte Film Festival), Russia (Moscow International Film Festival), Korea (DMZ Korean International Film Festival), and Bahrain (Bahrain Human Rights International Film Festival).

At these festivals, *Rough Aunties* was met with critical acclaim, attracting the interest of film critics and broadcasters across the world. RISE Films sold *Rough Aunties* to the television channels VPRO in Holland, Yes/DBS in Israel, Australia's SBS, Canada's ETV, Folkets Bio in Sweden, VRT in Belgium, EZY in Germany, and HBO in the US. In the US, *Rough Aunties* is also distributed on DVD by the women-focused film distributor Women Make Movies.

In South Africa, however, *Rough Aunties* was screened publicly only at the Encounters Film Festival 2009 in Cape Town, and at DIFF 2009. A wider distribution of the film in South African cinemas or on television was hindered by national media law. The fact that the children's faces and identities are revealed in the film undermined its possibility for distribution, as Article 8.3 of the South African Press Code states that "the press shall not identify children who have been victims of abuse, exploitation, or who have been charged with or convicted of a crime, unless a public interest is evident and it is in the best interests of the child"

(qtd in Banjac, 2012). Naming and identifying a child who is the victim of abuse is also illegal according to Section 154 (3) of the South African Criminal Procedures Act, which stipulates:

> No person shall publish in any manner any information which reveals or may reveal the identity of an accused under the age of 18 years or of a witness at criminal proceedings who is under the age of 18 years: Provided that the presiding judge or judicial officer may authorise the publication of so much of such information as he may deem fit if the publication thereof would in his opinion be just and equitable and in the interest of any particular person (qtd in Bird & Spurr, 2004: 40–41)

While this act refers to the distribution of media texts, it is also flawed, since – as the discussion of *Otelo Burning*'s production process in chapter 2 has shown – a "publication" can also be interpreted as the very making and existence of a film. More importantly, these legalities, by prohibiting the publication of the identities of children who have experienced sexual abuse, also protect the *perpetrators* of such crimes from being exposed and shamed in public.

Ironically, Bobbi Bear themselves had campaigned in the past for putting the laws in place prescribing that the faces of abused children have to be concealed in the national media (Downs-Branfield, 2012). *Rough Aunties*' screenings at South African film festivals were possible only because Bobbi Bear had obtained the necessary permission from authorities and the film festivals. Downs-Branfield explaied in a personal interview: "The film festivals had a certain amnesty […]. It presented a terrible dilemma for me. When I knew it was shown in Durban, I had to phone the courts and explain my dilemma" (2012).

In turn, staff of Bobbi Bear I spoke to during my research stressed that they do not aim to distribute *Rough Aunties* in South Africa, stating that a wider distribution of

the film would have adverse implications for the children who participated in it. One counsellor argues:

> If we show [the film] and that individual is in the community, they will become a celebrity for bad reasons. They're teenagers at school. If you think children are going to ask them: "Weren't you the one in the DVD that got abused?" We can't do that, we can't re-traumatise an individual. It's already been through something so traumatic. (Jedhi, 2012)

Moreover, Bobbi Bear received a request from RISE Films to bring the children to the screenings at DIFF, but the organisation did not comply with it, because it would have required extensive therapy with the children and their parents/guardians (Downs-Branfield, 2012). Downs-Branfield remarks: "being Noni's [Nonhlanhla's] foster mother, I would never have allowed it. Seeing her on film is one thing, but having her standing there is another thing" (2012). Bobbi Bear, of course, sought to protect the children from emotional and social consequences incurred by their participation in screenings of *Rough Aunties*. Comparable to the anxieties about *Yizo Yizo*'s exhibition, it was thus predominantly adults who were concerned about the consequences *Rough Aunties'* exhibition could have on the young film subjects. However, these concerns diverge from the film's actual reception, since – as demonstrated below – the majority of audiences responded to the film with empathy and sympathy.

These assumptions about audience reactions – similar to the legislations described above – also elide the crucial question of what would happen to the *perpetrators* of sexual crimes if *Rough Aunties* was widely shown in South Africa. Longinotto says this about filming the girl Pinkie: "The rapist kept getting released and he was next door. She [Pinkie] was really frightened and I think she thought 'they're filming me,

something will happen'" (2012). She adds:

> That does go against everything Jackie [Downs-Branfield] said to me. Pinkie was really clear that she was pleased to be in the film, she was proud to be in the film. Surely it must be up to *the kids* themselves […]. I'm quite sad about that [Rough Aunties not being shown in South Africa]. They [Bobbi Bear] could blur the faces, it wouldn't cost much […]. But then, it would be horrible actually, because it goes against what the whole film is saying, which is that we shouldn't be ashamed. (2012, my emphasis)

That Longinotto's and Bobbi Bear's views on *Rough Aunties'* exhibition diverged significantly reveals clashes in their interpretations of "childhood" and of what children and youth are (and are not) capable of. Longinotto proposed that the young film subjects understood what the consequences of the choices they made at the time of filming could be. This idea runs in line with the arguments by scholars of the so-called "New Sociology of Childhood" (James & Prout, 1997; Lee, 2001; MacNaughton, 2005), arguing that children should be treated as agents in their own rights, rather than passive individuals who are dependent on adults. Bobbi Bear, in turn, believed that children ought to be protected from the implications of their actions by adults; this understanding of childhood is, perhaps, grounded in the experiences they have made during their work with vulnerable children in the past.[82]

With a wider release of *Rough Aunties* not possible in South Africa, Bobbi Bear has produced their own copies of the DVDs to personally hand the film to sponsors, prospective donors, churches, and families in their community. The staff stressed that they wanted the film to be shown in "private" spaces, such as the boardrooms of companies or family homes. However, it is questionable whether these supposedly "private" screenings are truly "safer" for the children shown in the film than

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[82] This understanding is also common in Europe and the US (Corsaro, 2014.; Ansell, 2005b).

screenings open to the public – especially since they do not provide opportunities for discussion with the filmmaker and film subjects. As my analysis of *Otelo Burning*'s publics in chapter 2 has revealed, the presence of the main actor Xaba at screenings in township communities allowed young audiences to talk to him about his life and role in the film; and this personal interaction with Xaba provided young viewers with an inspiring role model.

The Bobbi Bear staff's fear of exhibiting *Rough Aunties* in "public" is understandable, however, since they work in a social context where people often make children (as well as adults) feel as though it is shameful to have been raped. As Longinotto puts it, "it just seems so awful, that's why rape just goes on and on and on. We're all just so frightened about talking about it or showing what it means, or standing up against it" (2012). This dilemma points to the continuing importance of Bobbi Bear's work, which focuses on raising awareness about sexual violence, and encouraging women and children to talk about having been raped without feeling ashamed. Part of this work, perhaps, could include screening *Rough Aunties* in a public context with the presence of the film subjects, since, as the next section demonstrates, these screenings created intimate publics that, in some situations, were socially transformative.

3.3.7 Intimate Publics

Rough Aunties' exhibition at screenings which the Bobbi Bear women attended created "intimate publics" as described by Berlant (1997, 2008, 2009). Co-producer Taylor told me: "It's a difficult film to watch in terms of its subject matter, which can be quite shocking or disturbing, but at every screening I went to audiences responded very well – especially when the 'Rough Aunties' themselves were present" (2012). Longinotto, in turn, remembers that during one Q&A in South Africa:

> [T]wo men in the audience said it was shameful to show the girls' and the children's faces. And three women stood up in the audience and said: "I've been raped and I've never said anything before" […] [and] "I've been raped too. I want to speak out", and "how dare you say we should be hidden? It's the rapist that should be". (2012)

Moreover, a young counsellor at Bobbi Bear whom I interviewed said:

> The way [Bobbi Bear is] taking a stance against it [rape] is something so good. It's the only way to tackle this in the communities in the rural areas, because of the way people react to it. If they didn't take a stance, justice wouldn't be served. I think the film is excellent because it shows that we're going to deal with this. (Gordon, 2012)

Interestingly, *Rough Aunties* provoked similar responses when it was shown in the US. Longinotto says this about a screening at the Sundance Film Festival, to which her, Ngcobo, and Sibiya attended (see figure 3.6):

> This young woman ran up to Mildred [Ngcobo] and said: "I'm so proud of you. I'm going to tell my parents now that I've been raped". Her dad was looking shell-shocked. She said: "I now realise it's not a shameful thing. I'm a survivor like you". It was so moving. Then Mildred started counselling her outside the cinema. It was amazing. (2012)

These responses from viewers can be described as constituting "intimate publics"

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created around emotional contacts, feelings of empathy, and intimate conversations (Berlant, 2008: viii). The intimate publics that formed around *Rough Aunties* were composed mostly of female viewers who were moved emotionally by the film's stories and characters, and the "Rough Aunties" themselves, who talked to these women after screenings and who, in some cases, counselled them. Moreover, the situation at Sundance described above suggests that, in some contexts, *Rough Aunties* demonstrated to women who had themselves experienced sexual abuse that it is not shameful to have been raped, and that it is crucial to seek help. For some female viewers, these intimate publics thus affirmed their identity as "rape survivors", not victims – and this is precisely what Bobbi Bear seeks to achieve with its work.

Figure 3.6 Women Make Movies (n.d.). *Ngcobo, Sibiya, and Longinotto at the Sundance Film Festival 2009.* **[Digital image] Available at: http://www.wmm.com/longinotto/about.htm [Accessed 2015, August 08].**

Intimate publics emerged not only through conversations after screenings of *Rough*

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Aunties, but also through letters that women from across the world, and especially from Black communities in South Africa, wrote to the Bobbi Bear organisation. Downs-Branfield told me:

> In South Africa, among the Zulu people, it [the response to the film] was the most positive, because any black person who has seen the film was amazed at the strength of the CSOs because of the patriarchal society […]. We got floods of letters from black men and women saying they couldn't believe the strength of these women and the fact that they face their own demons and they were out there, not crying, not scared. To me that was incredible. It's what I've worked for all my life […]. Even from Bahrain, where Thuli [Sibiya] went [to a film festival] I got a letter. Black women who saw the film actually believed that they could break out and protect their own children. (2012)

These responses evoke the idea that Black, female viewers, in particular, felt a sense of connection with other women in situations similar to them. These spectators were bound together by expressing, in writing, their emotional reactions to *Rough Aunties* and their ability to identify with the Bobbi Bear women; therefore, they constituted what Berlant has described as "intimate publics" (2008). Within these intimate publics, female spectators, in particular, glimpsed alternative ways of being, while feeling part of a community of women who are able to address gender inequality and sexual violence.

The fact that some South African men also wrote to Bobbi Bear to express their admiration for the organisation suggests that, although *Rough Aunties* is focalised through the perspectives of women, certain male viewers also connected emotionally with the female characters. The discussion of *Otelo Burning* in the previous chapter has already indicated that male/female spectatorship is unpredictable and complex, and that it is not impossible for men to identify with female characters depicted on screen, and vice versa; this research on the reception of *Rough Aunties* further

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confirms this point.

Like *Yizo Yizo*, *Rough Aunties* also created "reading publics" in South Africa constituted by journalists and film critics writing for newspapers and magazines. This research identified 12 articles about *Rough Aunties* in total, published in print and online newspapers and magazines shortly before and after the film's South African premier at DIFF in July 2009: one article published in the *Cape Times*, one article in *Daily News*, three in *The Mercury*, one in the *Sunday Tribune*, and one in the *Mail and Guardian*. Further reviews were published in online magazines, including one article published via the news website *Durban Live*, one via the online magazine *The Good News*, one via the website *Media Club South Africa*, and two reviews via the magazine *The South African*.[83]

The South African reviewers – like the intimate publics constituted of oral and written audience responses – emphasise empathy and admiration for the Bobbi Bear women. A reviewer writing for *The Mercury* states: "whilst some scenes featuring children are particularly disturbing, one has to admire the Bobbi Bear counsellors who have devoted their lives to fighting the good fight" (Compton, 2009). Moreover, Deborah Myburgh of the online magazine *The South African* writes: "you can see the difference that even grassroots activism is making to change and progress communities in SA [South Africa]" (2010). Implicitly, these reviewers ascribe to *Rough Aunties* the potential to create transformative, intimate publics, in which people (and women in particular) feel a sense of identification with, and admiration

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[83] I sourced these articles through conducting research at the archives of UCT, the online archive HighBeam, and independent Internet research. I organised and coded these articles using HyperResearch, and the coding process revealed the discourses that emerge from the material.

for, the Bobbi Bear organisation. These narratives emerging from the "reading publics" that formed around *Rough Aunties* will be further unpacked in the following section.

3.3.8 Empathy in Transnational Publics

In South Africa, *Rough Aunties* stirred reactions of empathy and admiration for Bobbi Bear, even among viewers who were not directly affected by sexual violence. As one Bobbi Bear member of staff said in an interview:

> The reactions you get when people see the movie is: "Oh my word, I didn't know things like this actually happen in and around us on a daily basis!" […] People come back saying: "We cried our hearts out last night watching this film and seeing what actually takes place". (Jacobs, 2012)

In turn, a male Bobbi Bear counsellor states:

> The first thing [people] say is: "I can't believe it's happening in my community" […]. And the first thing I say is: "Where do you expect it to happen?" I think they understand then that it could happen anywhere and it is not restricted to socio-economic standard at all. (Jedhi, 2012)

Therefore, as Olivier puts it, "[people] heard of Bobbi Bear or read about it, but to actually see it live in a movie brings the whole thing a lot closer, and closer [sic] to home" (2012). These responses illustrate the value of showing *Rough Aunties* in South Africa, for it opened some people's eyes to the (often hidden) reality of sexual violence against children and youth. Some people in Amanzimtoti who saw the film have also taken action themselves and started supporting Bobbi Bear by donating clothes, shoes, or organising fundraising events (Olivier, 2012). These findings confirm once again the arguments made by Bischoff and van de Peer, who suggest that representations of trauma in film and literary works can open spaces for

empathetic identification by allowing "the spectator to enter into the victim's experience through a work's narration" (2013b: 5).

Correspondingly, South African journalists emphasise that *Rough Aunties* is a film that would stir empathy among audiences. Niren Tolsi, a film critic for the *Mail and Guardian*, states that "Longinotto's camera is never intrusive" (2009); and Deborah Myburgh, writing for *The South African*, argues that *Rough Aunties* is "a film that is immensely honest as a witness to these controversial topics and she [Longinotto] tackles these with extreme care and sensitivity" (2010). One reviewer of *The Sunday Tribune* relates *Rough Aunties* to wider social problems in South Africa, stating, "while anyone who watches *Rough Aunties* will no doubt find the commitment, bravery and compassion of these women completely inspiring, they will also be disturbed by the violent and uncaring society the film depicts" ("Pain and Courage", 2009). In contrast to the controversies stirred by *Yizo Yizo*, then, *Rough Aunties'* publics were constituted not only by moral panics, but primarily by empathy for young rape survivors and admiration for the transformative actions of Bobbi Bear.

In the UK, Longinotto's native country, audiences of *Rough Aunties* also formed publics by expressing empathy and admiration for the Bobbi Bear women. The film was shown at film festivals and broadcast on the television channel Channel 4 (More4) on 3 August 2010 at 22:00 p.m., attracting a significant number of 100,000 viewers (Gray, 2013). Around that time, some reviews and articles about *Rough*

Aunties were published in newspapers and magazines in the UK. [84] I have therefore,

devoted particular attention to these "reading" publics that formed around the film in

the UK, comparing them to the film's publics in South Africa.

Interestingly, the UK reviewers equally stress the strength and inspirational work of

the Bobbi Bear team, but they show much more concern about the ethics informing

the film's production and representation than the South African film critics did.

Some journalists from the UK also call into question the appropriateness of the

film's overt depictions of women's and children's suffering. Bradshaw of *The*

Guardian writes about the scene in which Maphumolo grieves her son's death – the

same scene that led to tensions between Longinotto and Milton – as follows:

> There are moments of raw, almost unbearably painful emotion and
> distress in Kim Longinotto's documentary […]. Longinotto films the
> mother's agony, and for the first time, I wondered if her camera really
> needed to record her pain quite so intimately. In fact, the movie could
> perhaps have given more factual information about the group and in
> particular its relationship with the police, who are by implication
> criticised for dragging their feet. (2010)

Furthermore, a journalist writing for *The Independent on Sunday* describes *Rough*

Aunties as a "voyeuristic documentary", stating that "the casework is horrendous and

there are some troubling insights into the South African mindsets, but the ethics of

the film itself are open to question […]. Could these people really have consented to

this sort of exposure?" (Barber, 2010). Hence, these film critics question whether

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[84] This research identified six reviews and commentaries in total published in UK newspapers between July and August 2010, when the film was shown at festivals and on television in the country. One article was published in the *Daily Mail*, two were published in *The Guardian*, one in *The Independent on Sunday*, one in *The Mail on Sunday*, and one in *The Telegraph*. Three additional reviews of the film appeared in the British Film Institute's (BFI) journal *Sight & Sound*, and the film and television-focused websites *Bristol Indymedia* and *Cinésthesiac*.

Rough Aunties' representation of deeply intimate situations is ethically sound, with some accusing the film of sensationalism.

These assumptions about *Rough Aunties* made by film "experts", however, diverge from Bobbi Bear's embracing of the film and the responses of many "ordinary" viewers, who were moved by *Rough Aunties'* depictions of intimacy and inspired by the Bobbi Bear women. Discussions of the ethics of documentary filmmaking thus should not consider "expert commentary" alone, but also ought to take into account "ordinary" spectators' negotiations of films, as well as the perspectives of film subjects.

3.3.9 Bobbi Bear after *Rough Aunties*

Rough Aunties met with critical acclaim at film festivals in South Africa and abroad, and won numerous awards around the world. For example, it was awarded the prestigious Grand Jury Prize at the 2009 Sundance Film festival, and the Amnesty International Human Rights Award at DIFF. DIFF's jury statement explains:

> This affecting documentary is about an Amanzimtoti-based NGO,
> Operation Bobbi Bear and its small group of remarkable workers, mostly
> women, who battle to rescue and rehabilitate young victims of abuse and
> courageously pursue the perpetrators to bring them to justice. This film is
> expertly constructed from intimate footage of the different environments
> people live in, and the things that they say or struggle to say, resulting in
> a movie that is both authentic and compelling. ("SA Film Directors",
> n.d.)

Furthermore, the Krakow Film Festival in Poland granted *Rough Aunties* a Special Mention, for

> a rare ability to raise the most difficult subjects in documentary cinema,
> for a touching picture of women who, despite all the cultural stereotypes,

> fight with rapes and sexual abuse of children as well as for the most
> surprising and shocking scene among all the films in the competition.
> ("Winners of the 49th Krakow Film Festival", 2009)

These comments suggest that it was both the film's focus on the remarkable strength of the Bobbi Bear women, and Longinotto's expertise and skills that won it critical acclaim worldwide.

However, Bobbi Bear stresses that it has not made significant gains from the film's international screenings and acclaim. The NGO receives no royalties from *Rough Aunties*, although Longinotto says that its screenings in the UK and US raised "loads of funds […], which is why they were so smart to have the film made" (2010). She mentions that the film raised £56,000 (R1,051,181) in donations for Bobbi Bear following a screening at the Brancharge Jersey International Film Festival (2010). Nevertheless, staff of Bobbi Bear I interviewed stressed that *Rough Aunties'* international exhibition had only limited financial benefits for them. Allan Branfield, Downs-Branfield's husband, explains that one of the reasons for this was that "a lot of people that have wanted to fund Bobbi Bear because of the film haven't been able to, because of legislation, and there has always been a problem with the Exchange Control" (Branfield, 2012).[85] He indicates that South African businesses need to seek approval from the Reserve Bank when trading in a foreign currency ("South Africa Exchange Control Regulations", n.d.), and that they are limited in their ability to receive monetary transfers via PayPal, an online payment system commonly used by NGOs.[86] Ironically, *Rough Aunties'* international publicity also had adverse effects on the financial situation of Bobbi Bear. Branfield says: "[the film] did have a

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[85] South Africa's Exchange Control Regulations are a set of legal provisions made by the Reserve Bank, which controls every monetary transaction into and out of the country.
[86] The Rand is a currency that is not supported by PayPal, and South African Banks charge high withdrawal fees for foreign donations received via this website ("PayPal in South Africa", n.d.).

negative impact at one stage, because people were saying, 'well, there's even been a film made of Bobbi Bear; because of that they really don't need funding any more'" (2012).

Sibiya has expressed her disappointment about the lack of financial rewards from *Rough Aunties*, asking: "where is the money from the film? You promised that there would be money after this film. Where is the money, we really need it. We have gained exposure but we need money". She indicates that the making of *Rough Aunties* had raised hopes among the Bobbi Bear staff, which, partly due to legal restrictions imposed on foreign monetary transactions, have not been entirely fulfilled.

Some of the Bobbi Bear women travelled with the film to international film festivals, which had varied effects on the team's dynamics. On the one hand, the visits to other countries were a positive experience for those members of the team who travelled abroad. Downs-Branfield tells me that attending the film's premiere in Amsterdam

> changed Sdudla [Maphumolo] and Thuli [Sibiya] forever. I had always spoken about Anne Frank, because black women think that they're the only ones that have ever been marginalised […]. The visit to the Anne Frank Museum was phenomenal […]. As you come into the Anne Frank house, there is a picture of her at the entrance. As we were leaving, Thuli just went up and laid her cheek against the cheek of Anne Frank. It was one of those moments that not everybody gets, that you treasure […] When they got back, they explained to the rest of the team that women are oppressed all over the world, it's not just Africa. This grew the team. (2012)

For Maphumolo, in turn, attending IDFA was a painful experience, for some people in the audience asked her about her son during a Q&A (Downs-Branfield, 2012). Maphumolo's confrontation with these sensitive questions, however, brought the

Bobbi Bear women closer together. Downs-Branfield explains: "In the Amsterdam film festival […] they asked Sdudla [Maphumolo] about her son on stage. There were reactions from the audience saying, 'don't answer! Don't answer!' And then Mildred stepped in quickly […]. So these film festivals were a lovely platform for them to grow" (2012).

However, the international screenings of *Rough Aunties* also caused a rift in the Bobbi Bear team, since only the five main subjects of the film were able to travel to its premier in Amsterdam, and other international festivals invited only one or two members of Bobbi Bear. The staff of the organisation who are only shown in the background of the film were not invited to any film festivals (Olivier, 2012). That only some women were able to travel abroad resulted in jealousy and divisions within the team, which Downs-Branfield described to me as follows:

> As a team, we grew apart a bit. But Kim warned us. She said there is always a certain amount of jealousy if you make somebody a principal. We thought we could handle it as a team and we spoke about it. But we didn't because, rightfully, we would have wanted each team member to [go] overseas. (2012)

Some Bobbi Bear members even stated they would never agree to a film about Bobbi Bear again. However, others expressed that they would like to see a second part to *Rough Aunties*, which would follow up on the work of Bobbi Bear and the cases and children depicted in the film.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that *Rough Aunties* and *Yizo Yizo* share a focus on the private lives of their central subjects, whereby they exert a poignant critique of sexual violence against children and youth in post-apartheid South Africa. While these screen media productions differ significantly in their content and form, they both suggest that many South African children grow up in a society that holds up notions of hegemonic masculinity and violence – which are, to a significant extent, one of apartheid's legacies.

Rough Aunties' narrative and form suggest that it is possible for documentary films to depict sexual violence against children in sensitive, respectful ways. Despite its limited exhibition in South Africa, the film created intimate publics in the country, constituted of (predominantly female) audiences expressing their empathy for rape survivors and their admiration for Bobbi Bear. The discussions occurring within these intimate publics generated the idea that women and girls have the agency to overcome the painful memories of sexual violence, and that they are not victims, but survivors. One could argue that, to an extent, *Rough Aunties* was "preaching to the converted", for it was mostly female audiences who constituted these intimate publics; and the question remains how more boys and men could be involved in the debates about the issues addressed by the film.

Longinotto's skilful approach to documentary filmmaking has translated into nuanced representations of the Bobbi Bear women's "private" lives. Yet, as the discussion of Xaba's role in the making of *Otelo Burning* (see chapter 2) has also shown, the people whose stories are represented in the film were not necessarily those who benefited from its international exhibition, both financially and personally.

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Rough Aunties illustrates that the exposure of private experiences via documentary film can have unpredictable, complex effects on the film subjects. Since some of the Bobbi Bear women voiced their frustrations about the lack of financial rewards from the film, it would, perhaps, have been important for the director and producers to stay in closer contact with the Bobbi Bear team after the production was completed.

The publics that formed around *Rough Aunties* and *Yizo Yizo* illustrate adult anxieties about the effects media representations of sexual violence against children might have on young audiences and young film subjects. However, this chapter has revealed that in a social context where sexual violence is pervasive, narrative films and television programmes have an important role to play in creating a debate about such violence, which often remains hidden in people's homes (as Shai's PSA discussed in this chapter's Introduction reveals). Therefore, more scholarly attention needs to be paid to young spectators' interpretations of films and television programmes, as well as to intergenerational differences in audience reception.

The chapter's comparative discussion of *Rough Aunties* and *Yizo Yizo* has demonstrated – like the previous chapter's analysis of *Otelo Burning* – that "live screenings" of films have the potential to create a kind of intimacy among audiences in a way that television cannot do. The personal conversations among the Bobbi Bear women and *Rough Aunties*' audiences at film festivals brought people from different social backgrounds together in socially transformative ways; these intimate publics thus highlight the value of screening the film in South Africa, where this was legally possible. In turn, *Yizo Yizo*'s exhibition on television reached a vast nation-wide audience, but the publics the series created eschewed a discussion of the problems

underlying sexual violence against children and youth. The differences and similarities in the publics created by community film screenings and television programmes are explored further in the next chapter, which engages in a comparative discussion of a film project and a television drama series focused on youth and HIV/AIDS.

Chapter 4   Negotiating HIV/AIDS in "Online" and "Live" Publics:

A Comparative Discussion of *Intersexions* and *Steps for the*

Future Youth Films

4.1   Introduction

On a sunny afternoon in July 2013, during my research at the Durban International Film Festival, I made the acquaintance of the South African filmmaker Rolie Nikiwe. Nikiwe has worked on numerous South African television dramas, including *A Place Called Home* (Smith et al., 2006)*, Tsha Tsha,* and *Hard Copy* (Greene et al., 2005-2006), and he directed *Inside Story* (2011), a fiction film about a Kenyan soccer player's infection with HIV. Over a cup of coffee, Nikiwe, a young man with an infectious laugh, told me: "I've done a lot of HIV/AIDS programming in my life. I've got a drama series on TV now […]. It's a sensational success. It's probably the single most successful thing on South African television in the last ten years" (2013). To my intrigued question "What is it?" he replied: "It's called *Intersexions*" (2013).

Intersexions (Nikiwe, 2010-2011) is a television drama series consisting of 26 episodes that centre on human sexual networks and the spread of HIV within them. *Intersexions* gained the second-highest audience numbers on South African television when it first aired on SABC1 between October 2010 and April 2011, attracting six million viewers on average per broadcast (Collinge et al., n.d.: 7). It is estimated that nearly half of all South African television viewers aged between 16 and 35 has watched *Intersexions* regularly (Collinge et al., n.d.: 32). The series was

broadcast again a few months after the first broadcast, and a second series followed in 2013.[87] *Intersexions* soon became the subject of discussions among friends at school, colleagues at work, strangers on the streets, but also on social media platforms, especially on Twitter and Facebook (Hajiyiannis et al., 2011). No previous educational television programme in South Africa had been discussed so extensively on Twitter and Facebook, illustrative of the recent rise of social media use in the country. As noted in the Introduction to the thesis, Twitter currently has 5.5 million users in South Africa, while Facebook has 9.4 million users, with young people between the ages of 13 and 18 constituting the largest group of Facebook users (2.5 million) in the country (World Wide Worx, 2014).

Intersexions was not the only media project about HIV/AIDS to create a debate, however. The film collection *Steps for the Future Youth Films: By Youth for Youth*,[88] by the NGO STEPS (Social Transformation and Empowerment Projects), has been enjoyed by youths (as well as adults) across South Africa. These films consist of nine short documentary films STEPS made in collaboration with youths from disadvantaged social backgrounds. The organisation has screened these films exclusively in South African communities, such as schools, youth centres, and rural areas, with the screenings being followed by a facilitated discussion with audiences. In some contexts, the facilitators who moderate these discussions are the very same young people who feature in the *Steps Youth Films*.

That both *Intersexions* and *Steps Youth Films* attracted the attention of many young people in South Africa is intriguing. Since 1994, the SABC has commissioned a

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[87] Due to limits in scope, this chapter focuses on the first *Intersexions* series.
[88] The film collection will henceforth be referred to as *Steps Youth Films*.

range of educational dramas on the subject of HIV/AIDS, as part of its aspiration to transform into a public broadcaster (Barnett, 2002). Chief among these are *Tsha Tsha*, a drama series about a youth group who confront HIV/AIDS, crime, and violence; the educational drama series *Soul Buddyz*; and *Takalani Sesami*, South Africa's version of *Sesame Street* (Hodes, 2014: 46–47). However, these television programmes have not always attracted the attention of youth audiences. On the contrary, research suggests that HIV/AIDS media campaigns in South Africa have created an "AIDS fatigue" among young people, who are tired of hearing worrying messages about HIV/AIDS, AIDS-related illnesses and death (Mitchell & Smith, 2003; Shefer, Strebel & Jacobs, 2012).

What was it, then, that so attracted South African youths to *Intersexions* and *Steps Youth Films* despite their "educational" objectives? What was the nature of the debates around them? What can be said about the discussions on social media sites and during "live screenings" in communities? In other words, how did the different publics around *Intersexions* and *Steps Youth Films* emerge, what was the nature of these publics, and what are the implications for screen media seeking to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS? These are the main questions explored in this chapter.

This chapter's discussion is grounded in the context of contemporary South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis. It is estimated that 17.9 per cent of South Africans aged 25-49 are infected with HIV (UNAIDS, 2013), resulting from young people's physiological vulnerability, endemic sexual violence, and the difficulties many people face in accessing necessary health care (Harrison, Xaba & Kunene, 2001). Young women and girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection (Harrison, Xaba & Kunene, 2001); while prevalence rates for 15-19-year-old males in South Africa are estimated

at four to five per cent, they are as high as 15 to 17 per cent for females in the same age group (UNAIDS, 2013). This chapter, therefore, pays particular attention to the gendered dimensions of the production, representational politics, and reception of *Intersexions* and *Steps Youth Films.*

The chapter's findings suggest that the makers of *Intersexions* and *Steps Youth Films* shared a non-didactic approach to HIV/AIDS education, focused on creating open-ended, "entertaining" narratives with which young audiences can engage – rather than overtly instructing them. The provocative and realistic narratives shared by these screen media projects were one important reason why they generated discussions among audiences, and particularly young audiences.

However, *Intersexions* and *Steps Youth Films* took on very different approaches in the way they chose to address audiences and, therefore, in the publics they created. *Intersexions* offers a punitive narrative that depicts HIV infection as a consequence of individual behaviour. As a result, the series instilled fear in many young television viewers, and this prompted some of them to take an HIV-test. However, *Intersexions* also created digital publics that disseminated discriminatory narratives that placed the blame for South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis on young women.

STEPS, in turn, focused on addressing fear and stigma attached to HIV/AIDS by treating it as a collective and social – rather than individual – problem. The organisation has specifically attempted to tackle gender stereotypes through engaging with young viewers in post-screening discussions. STEPS has also embraced a collaborative approach to filmmaking, integrating young women and girls into the making and exhibition of their films. This participatory filmmaking

practice holds the potential to address the marginalised social position of the girls who participated in the films, but it also presents a variety of ethical challenges.

Intersexions and *Steps Youth Film*s formed "online" and "live" publics respectively, which invites a discussion and comparison of the different contexts of spectatorship within which these publics were formed. *Intersexions* was exhibited to a nationwide audience via the medium of television, and many young viewers discussed the drama series on social media. The digital publics that formed around *Intersexions* on Twitter can be described as "unofficial cultures" (Barber, 1987), where ordinary people negotiated and appropriated the television drama. In some contexts, these unofficial cultures also resulted in the creation of digital intimate publics on Facebook, constituted by young viewers who formed virtual support networks around their experiences of sexual abuse. However, the discourse that emerged from the tweets about *Intersexions* also reiterated, rather than questioned, normative ideas of gender hegemonic masculinity.

In turn, *Steps Youth Films* were distributed via community screenings and facilitated post-screening discussions, thereby creating publics through face-to-face conversations with young audiences. However, young viewers did not always engage with *Steps Youth Films* in the ways in which the filmmakers intended, with some post-screening debates highlighting the ongoing racial divisions in contemporary South Africa. Nevertheless, in some situations, the interpersonal conversations among audiences and young STEPS facilitators created intimate "live" publics that had an individually and socially transformative effect.

4.2   *Intersexions*: "Do you know your lovers' lovers?"

4.2.1   Background

Intersexions was a collaborative production between SABC1, SABC Education, Quizzical Pictures (formerly Curious Pictures),[89] AntS Multimedia,[90] and Johns Hopkins Health and Education in South Africa (JHHESA).[91] The drama series was initiated in 2009, when SABC Education put out a call for pitches for an "edutainment"[92] television drama that would address the risks of having multiple sexual partners and unprotected sex (Hajiyiannis et al., 2011: 13). This focus emerged from research suggesting that having several concurrent sexual partners was a major reason for HIV-transmission in South Africa (Uzanenkosi, 2013). *Intersexions* received its major funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Response (PEPFAR).

A discussion of *Intersexions*' production process falls beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind the critiques of media productions in Africa funded by donors from Europe and the US. These media texts have often constructed narratives suggesting that people in Africa have to be educated by the global North (Higgins, 2012). However, the multiple "local" *and* "international" actors involved in making *Intersexions* indicate that it is difficult to determine whose interests are ultimately represented on screen. As Karin Barber

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[89] Quizzical Pictures has produced a range of South African films and television series, such as *Tsha Tsha* and *Soul City*.

[90] AntS Multimedia is run by Uzanenkosi Mahlangu, a filmmaker and writer who has worked on South African television drama series such as *A Place Called Home* and *Soul Buddyz*.

[91] JHHESA is an NGO that runs health education programmes in South Africa using the mass media.

[92] "Edutainment" describes a mode of television production aimed to both entertain and educate viewers about certain social issues (Singhal, 2006).

(2014) emphasises, the flow of donor funding to support cultural production in contemporary Africa has destabilised the distinct historical categories of "local" and "global" media.

4.2.2   Representations of HIV/AIDS in *Intersexions*

4.2.2.1   *Audience Address*

Intersexions was designed to address young South Africans from various demographic backgrounds, and particularly the "Now Generation", who are SABC1's primary target audience (Hajiyiannis et al., 2011: 14). SABC defines the Now Generation as black youths aged 15 to 35 years, who are "highly materialistic and full of aspiration. Fashion and entertainment are high on their priority list" (SABC, 2013). Hence, in contrast to STEPS (discussed later), *Intersexions*' major target audiences were those youths who are, indeed, "Born Free" from the economic disadvantages of the past.

Similarly to the makers of *Yizo Yizo*, *Intersexions*' producers imagined their audiences as youths who would desire an unconventional television programme that differed from the existing, didactic television dramas about HIV/AIDS. Harriet Gavshon, the owner and managing director of Quizzical Pictures (the producers), said in a personal interview:

> [Intersexions] did not patronise the audience and it certainly tried never to preach to the audience […]. All we were trying to communicate is that one message: "At the moment you sleep with someone you are entering into a sexual network that's out of your control. Be careful" […]. We were certainly not trying to be moralistic in any way. (2013)

Intersexions' producers thus embraced a non-didactic approach to HIV/AIDS

education, assuming that young audiences would be able to "work out" the messages of open-ended television programmes for themselves. This approach differs from many South African edutainment television programmes, which are often designed according to the rationale of the "hypodermic needle model", suggesting that media messages translate into desired behavioural changes in audiences (Baron & Davis, 1981). However, as discussed in the following section, *Intersexions'* producers adopted a strategy of fear in their aim to educate television viewers, which contradicts their assertion that the drama series was not moralistic at all.

4.2.2.2 Fear and the Sexual Network

Intersexions' producers designed the programme according to psychological fear appeals theory, which proposes that if people perceive a certain threat in their environment, they will embrace protective behaviour (Clarfelt, Hajiyiannis & Myers, 2011). Exposing both the "threats" posed by HIV/AIDS, and ways to prevent infection with it, *Intersexions'* narratives aim to motivate young audiences to use condoms and reduce their number of sexual partners (Myers, Clarfelt & Hajiyiannis, 2012). *Intersexions'* approach was unconventional, since health professionals do not usually support fear appeals theory, with scare tactics being perceived as risking a "boomerang" effect, especially if audiences feel they are unable to protect themselves from a perceived threat (Clarfelt, Hajiyiannis & Myers, 2011).

The sexual network acts as the major narrative device of *Intersexions'* dramatisation of HIV/AIDS. The series' first episode opens with a sequence in which Mandisa, a young, Black woman, gets ready for her wedding day in her apartment with her friend Cherise (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 4.1). Mandisa's delight over a necklace from her future husband, the lawyer Kabelo (see figure 4.1), is interrupted

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by a radio report about the famous "DJ Mo" who is dying from AIDS. Mandisa's face freezes – this DJ was her boyfriend five years ago. This sequencing of events creates the impression that Mandisa is infected with HIV, and that she has unknowingly infected Kabelo. The episode closes with a sequence in which Mandisa receives the result of her HIV-test, but its outcome is only revealed in episode 24. *Intersexions'* writer Uzanenkosi Mahlangu said in an interview I conducted with him: "The story […] had a direct implication on whether Mandisa was going to be HIV-positive or not […]. It was like really a dice being thrown up with every episode" (2013). The unknown outcome of Mandisa's HIV test thus acts as a "cliff hanger" in *Intersexions* ("cliff hangers" being typical of the soap opera genre), creating suspense and mystery at the end of the first episode.

Figure 4.1 *Mandisa (left) gets ready for her wedding day* **(2010-2011). From:** *Intersexions* **episode 1. Dir. Rolie Nikiwe. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Quizzical Pictures.**

Intersexions' subsequent episodes collectively construct a network of characters from various social backgrounds and geographical contexts of South Africa. These people have never met each other, but they are connected through the sexual partners they have unknowingly shared. The series' second episode takes viewers back five years in time to Mandisa's relationship with DJ Mo (Sdumo Mtshali), revealing that he cheated on Mandisa with the dancer Boitumelo (see figure 4.2) and Kabelo's assistant, Lindi. Episode 3, in turn, centres on Boitumelo's affair with the actor Thami, who has a wealthy, White "sugar mama", Ruth. Each following episode unpacks a new sexual relationship until the narrative reaches a full circle at Mo's funeral in episode 23. Producer Karima Effendi explained to me that *Intersexions*' narrative structure represents an allegory for "the interconnectedness [of people], that if you sleep with one person you've slept with a whole lot of others" (2013).

Figure 4.2 *DJ Mo and Boitumelo shoot a music video* (2010-2011). From: *Intersexions* episode 2. Dir. Rolie Nikiwe. [Film still] Available from Quizzical Pictures. Image courtesy of Quizzical Pictures.

Intersexions' dramatisation of HIV/AIDS is "wrapped" in a high-end television form. It was shot in high definition, to create glossy visual effects akin to US films and television series, which are enjoyed by vast numbers of youths in South Africa (Barnes, 2003), and it is accompanied by a soundtrack of contemporary hip-hop and electronic music, creating the effect that it is entertainment television, not merely an educational programme. These stylistic devices indicate the producers' attempt to "entertain" their audiences, rather than preaching to them. As explained later in the chapter, this strategy was an important reason why *Intersexions* created publics in South Africa.

The majority of South African soap operas centre on romances among young, slim, wealthy people living in urban areas (Barnes, 2003). *Intersexions*, however, centres on South African characters from all walks of life, including rich, poor, rural, urban,

homosexual and heterosexual people. As with many South African "soapies", *Intersexions*' characters switch between multiple languages, including Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Afrikaans, with subtitles in English. When I interviewed Nikiwe, he said that he sought to create a programme that "people can actually relate to […]. When they say: 'Ah ja, that's me!'" (2013). *Intersexions*' narratives thus differ from those of *Yizo Yizo*, discussed in chapter 3, in that the characters are not only Black youths from socially disenfranchised backgrounds. The series' idea that HIV/AIDS can affect anyone is key, since, during apartheid, the NP government wrongly constructed the disease as affecting only black and homosexual people (Hodes, 2007: 156).

Intersexions invites audiences to explore its narratives in relation to their own lives. In the first episode's closing scene, the doctor asks Mandisa: "Do you know with whom your previous lovers have slept?" (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 4.2), and this scene is repeated at the beginning of each of the following episodes. The title sequence emphasises the idea of sexual connectivity, a deep, male voice-over stating, "our lives intersect in a vast network that affects us all. In sex, there are no strangers". These narrative devices "interpellate" (Althusser, 1971) audiences to reflect on their own sexual history and vulnerability to HIV infection.

Intersexions embeds a "warning" about HIV/AIDS in its narrative structure. The series centres on people who fall in love, have one-night stands, cheat on their partners, get drunk, or sell their bodies for sex. Some episodes also present scenarios where characters find out that they are infected with HIV, such as DJ Mo, Ruth, and Ntombi. Implicitly, then, the series suggests that unprotected sex, and infection with HIV, can lead to suffering and death, culminating in DJ Mo's funeral in episode 24.

The theme emerging from *Intersexions'* narrative thus resonates with many media HIV/AIDS media campaigns in African contexts, which have historically linked sex and sexuality to notions of violence, suffering, and danger (Reuster-Jahn, 2014). Hence, sex has become "de-eroticised" by media narratives that silence feelings of sexual intimacy, enjoyment, and desires – and particularly female desires (Reuster-Jahn, 2014). To a certain extent, these perceptions are reminiscent of racist myths prevalent during colonialism and apartheid, proposing that the "hypersexuality" of Black men posed a threat to White people (Graham, 2012).

4.2.2.3 "HIV": The Invisible Protagonist

> The characters you have met are all my friends. Did you recognise yourself in them? Let me tell you why I love them all so much. I love how they follow their hearts' desire, always searching for that perfect partner […], having sex along the way. I love sex. Sex is the power. Sex is the mystery. Without sex we would never meet.

These words open the final episode of *Intersexions* (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 4.3). They belong to a sinister, male voice with a devilish chuckle, which claims to be HIV itself. "HIV", as he introduces himself, explains the series' sexual network, revealing which characters he infected and which he did not, but he does not disclose which character started the infection chain in the first place (Clarfelt, Hajiyiannis & Myers, 2011). "The virus" states that he "likes" characters with certain qualities and lifestyles, involving drinking, not using condoms, and having low self-esteem, for they make it easy for him to infect them. In turn, he expresses his hatred for characters that use condoms, take Antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) or abstain from sex. Implicitly, then, HIV infection is presented in this episode as a punishment for sexual behaviour, with the blame for infection put squarely at the feet of individuals.

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However, this punitive representation of HIV/AIDS glosses over the myriad social aspects that render certain young people more vulnerable to HIV infection than others, notably through gender-based violence. The socially entrenched sexual violence against young women and girls in South Africa is one of the major causes for the high infection rates among female youth (Wood, Lambert & Jewkes, 2007). *Intersexions'* fourth episode addresses the subject of rape, but it centres on male rape in prison, not on the sexual violence many girls face in daily life. The exception to this relative silence on sexual violence is in episode 6, in which a young, rural girl, Tsholofelo, sleeps with her much older teacher in return for groceries. Tsholofelo makes this decision out of poverty, but she also agrees to have sex with the teacher, which poses the question of whether this sexual relationship is, in fact, "non-consensual".

Intersexions' satanic personification of HIV/AIDS could also be interpreted as removing the responsibility for HIV infection from individuals. "HIV" repeatedly stresses his power to infect people, evident in comments such as "I will give you AIDS" and "I will kill you". His narration evokes the idea that no one but "HIV" – depicted as an invisible, evil force – is to blame for South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis. Interpreted in this way, *Intersexions* would challenge the discrimination and stigma frequently attached to HIV; however, taking accountability for HIV infection away from people also evokes the fatalistic idea that nothing can be done to address the epidemic. The political dimensions of HIV/AIDS at that time are also silenced within this narrative, especially former President Thabo Mbeki's "denialist" stance (Gill,

2006; Waal, 2006), [93] and the current President Jacob Zuma's controversial comments about HIV. However, the political responses to HIV/AIDS in the 1990s and 2000s have been an important contributing factor for the lack of treatment and education about the disease in South Africa.

Furthermore, "HIV" makes sarcastic comments – such as "it's like sex. I don't score all the time" and "I'm just dying to meet you" – and this poses the question of how HIV-positive people felt when watching that episode. That HIV is embodied by a Black, male voice could also evoke the very problematic idea that HIV/AIDS is an exclusively "Black" South African disease, thus reconstructing historical perceptions which perceived Black people as the "source" of HIV/AIDS (Hodes, "HIV/AIDS in South African Documentary Film").

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[93] Over the course of his presidency, Mbeki publicly denied that HIV causes AIDS and delayed rolling out a programme to provide Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) in public hospitals (Gill, 2006; Waal, 2006).

4.2.3   *Intersexions***' Audiences and Publics**

4.2.3.1   *Family Viewing Contexts*

Intersexions had a mass audience in South Africa, with an average of six million viewers watching the programme every week (Collinge et al., n.d.: 7). The series' television broadcast on SABC, South Africa's most popular television channel, was accompanied by a weekly radio talk show, which aired on ten of the SABC's local language stations. JHHESA prepared the radio scripts on topics introduced by *Intersexions'* episodes, and selected experts who participated in the shows (Collinge et al., n.d.). However, the producers' main strategy to create a discussion around the series was through their extensive use of social media. *Intersexions* had a Facebook page and a Twitter account, whereby the producers regularly posed thought-provoking questions regarding specific episodes to audiences (Govender et al., 2013: 68).[94] JHHESA also appointed a professional sexologist who responded to viewers' questions and comments on social media, and who managed *Intersexions'* Facebook page (Govender et al., 2013: 72). Therefore – as I will unpack throughout this chapter – Facebook and Twitter expanded audiences' discussions about *Intersexions* beyond immediate viewing contexts of their homes, while simultaneously creating opportunities for the producers to communicate with audiences.

Since *Intersexions* was exhibited on television, many youths watched the series at home with their families (Ponono, 2014); their experiences of the programme were thus embedded in what David Morley has called the "politics of the living room" (1992). Morley suggests that children and youth are not always able to select the

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[94] For reasons of scope, this chapter primarily explores audiences' commentaries on social media, and does not discuss the radio talk shows in further detail. This focus on social media allows for engaging more deeply with the relationships among digital media, audiences, and publics.

television programmes they want to watch, since decisions about what is being watched are often made through negotiations with parents, grandparents, and siblings, and tend to be determined by older family members.

Mvuzo Ponono has conducted a study on the reception of *Intersexions* among Xhosa-speaking youth in Ginsberg township, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa (2014). He demonstrates that the "politics of the living room" were crucial to these young viewers' negotiations of *Intersexions*, since, in most families, there was very little discussion about the issues raised by the series. Parents and children generally avoided talking about *Intersexions*' themes of sex and sexuality, due to cultural and intergenerational codes of respect (Ponono, 2014). Across South Africa's diverse communities, parents often fear that talking about sex with their children will encourage sexual activity at an early age (Mudhovozi, Ramarumo & Sodi, 2012). In countries across the world, adults often have difficulties acknowledging adolescents as sexually active beings, teenage sexuality being perceived as something that needs to be restricted (Mudhovozi, Ramarumo & Sodi, 2012).

On Twitter, too, some people stated they did not want to watch the drama with their parents. One girl tweeted: "1st time watching *Intersexions*…n moma [mum] next to me. Hope there's no uncomfy [uncomfortable] moment" (Kari S., 2010). Another female replied: "Oh, der [there] will be gal [girl]" (Penelope.†, 2012). A study by the National HIV Communication Survey[95] suggests that only one per cent of adults who watched *Intersexions* regularly discussed the drama with their sons, and two per cent discussed it with their daughters (Collinge et al., n.d.: 37). This study thus points to

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[95] The survey sampled 10,034 male and females viewers of *Intersexions* aged 16-55 from all South African provinces (Collinge et al., n.d.: 32).

the gendered dimension of intergenerational conversations about sexuality, suggesting that young girls are more educated about sex than boys, who might be left to behave as they wish.

However, most parents allowed their children to watch *Intersexions*, since it was publicised as an "educational" drama by SABC. Parents felt the programme would teach their children important issues about HIV/AIDS, which they felt uncomfortable talking about (Ponono, 2014). In some families, then, *Intersexions* emerged as a substitute for conversations about sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Yet, there were also exceptions. In a study conducted by Helen Hajiyiannis and others, one young woman reported discussing *Intersexions'* episodes with her younger siblings (2011: 34–35), suggesting that social and cultural taboos about sexuality vary among families.

Interestingly, viewers' reactions to *Intersexions* suggest that "publics" are not necessarily characterised by verbal discussions, or their lack thereof; they can also represent actions people take as a result of their engagement with media texts. Steven Collinge and others reveal that some parents used *Intersexions* as a tool for warning their children about HIV/AIDS, although they refer to parents with adult children (n.d.). For example, a 69-year-old woman from Mpumalanga persuaded her 40-year-old daughter to watch *Intersexions*, since she was convinced her daughter was HIV-positive. The daughter had previously refused to take an HIV-test and had consulted traditional healers instead. The mother and her daughter watched an *Intersexions* episode in which an HIV-positive, female character decides to embark on Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) instead of using traditional medicine, and feels better thereafter. Subsequently, the woman who watched the episode with her mother

decided to take an HIV-test herself, and – after testing positive – was immediately enrolled for treatment via ART (Collinge et al., n.d.: 27).

4.2.3.2 Responses on Social Media

Intersexions (like *Otelo Burning* discussed in chapter 2) created "converging publics", for it was negotiated both in "online" and "offline" spaces, via social media and through face-to-face discussions. The discussions around *Intersexions* became a subject of discussion in people's everyday lives shortly after the first episode aired. As previously mentioned, viewers discussed the stories and characters with whomever they watched the television show, on social media sites, with friends at school, sexual partners, colleagues at work, neighbours and even with strangers on the street (Hajiyiannis et al., 2011: 33). These discussions about the series frequently revolved around recommending it to others to watch, explaining the stories to people who had missed an episode, and discussing the characters and plots (Hajiyiannis et al., 2011: 33). *Intersexions*' publics, then, extended beyond immediate viewing contexts of people's homes to encompass "everyday" life, thereby challenging the idea that watching television is an entirely "private" activity.

The publics *Intersexions*' audiences created were not only constituted of face-to-face conversations, however, with thousands of viewers also commenting on Twitter and Facebook. These exchanges on social media platforms cannot be ignored in a discussion of *Intersexions*' publics, particularly since they have a predominantly young user base. More than 60 per cent of all social media users in South Africa are aged 18-34 years (World Wide Worx, 2014). Attempting to explore these digital

publics further, I have, therefore, analysed a selection of tweets containing the subject and/or hash tag "Intersexions".[96]

The number of tweets which referenced the word "Intersexions" was extraordinary, amounting to an average of 2,000 tweets per episode, and over 15,000 tweets when the final episode aired (Marivate, 2012). Vukosi Marivate (2012) recorded 30,000 tweets about the television series from February until April 2011 alone. Due to the limited scope of this chapter, my analysis focused on tweets occurring during and shortly after the first broadcast of episodes addressing subjects that are crucial to this thesis' discussion of youth and gender. These were episodes 1 and 2, which engage with subjects of femininity and masculinity; episode 6, which revolves around the sexual abuse of a schoolgirl by her teacher; and the final episode, 26, about which viewers tweeted intensely. My Twitter search identified approximately 1,800 tweets for each of the episodes 1, 2, and 6, which I evaluated using qualitative discourse analysis. Due to limits in scope, I focused on the first 2,000 tweets during the last episode, which my research identified.

Investigating tweets which occurred during and shortly after the broadcast of *Intersexions* made it possible to explore audiences' immediate responses to the programme, for – as noted in the introduction to this thesis – Twitter is centred primarily on real-time conversations. The instantaneous comments about *Intersexions* on Twitter suggest that digital media have changed the spatial and temporal nature of contemporary television audiences. As Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst have suggested (1998), mass media audiences are increasingly

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[96] Viewer comments on *Intersexions'* Facebook page were no longer available online at the time of research.

"diffused", for digital technologies, such as smartphones and computers, enable people to be constantly connected to film, television and radio. Ien Ang even argues that is no longer useful to ask whether or when people are part of "an audience", since satellite television, DVD players, and watch-on-demand channels (and, more recently, mobile phones) have created multiple experiences of watching television (1991, 1996). Television's "stubborn alwaysthereness" (Ang, 1996: 67), she argues, has complicated the concept of "the television audience" as a concrete object of study with demarcated boundaries.

By exchanging comments about *Intersexions* on Twitter, *Intersexions'* "diffused" audiences created a "second screen", that is, the idea that at the same time as people watch television, they access and create additional information and texts on mobile phones or computers (Warren, 2013). Many viewers tweeted as an *Intersexions* episode progressed, commenting on storylines, characters, and details. For example, one Twitter user wrote: "finally watching #Intersexions. Awesome job guys! Shot awesomely!" (27 October 2010), while another one tweeted: "RT @TsholofeloYende: @Kari_baby wats this u watching lol ?>Intersexions!" (26 October 2010). Moreover, viewers who missed an episode were able to find out what happened through engaging with social media commentary after an episode's broadcast (Hajiyiannis et al., 2011: 33). However, given the poor Internet penetration in South Africa (around 20 per cent only) (Malila, 2013: 30), it is likely that people who are unable to afford mobile phones and computers were excluded from *Intersexions'* digital publics.

Intersexions' "second screen" brought the television drama's "diffused" audiences together into a shared experience of watching television. Even before an *Intersexions*

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episode started, people tweeted in anticipation, for example, "Charging now...can't wait, woo hoo! RT @Intersexions: Dear BlackBerry users, please make sure your phones are charged for 20:30 tonight […]" (Tina, 2010), and debated with their friends on Twitter whether they planned to watch the show. Around 63 per cent of tweets during each *Intersexions* episode were replies to other tweets (Marivate, 2012), which suggests that audiences negotiated both their own and other people's experiences of the series on Twitter. Examples of re-tweets involving multiple Twitter users include: "NO!! RT @MaddGOAT: Answer???RT @Sbusile: Good q! RT @Nonku101: *dead RT: Is intersexions [sic] about how we shouldn't trust Xhosa chicks or am I missing the point?" (Snapchat maddgoat, 2012); [97] and: "RT @CCRavele: Too true! RT @mafundes: CCRavele a true eye-opener!!! #Intersexions" (Mlimi, 2010). Therefore, although tweets are isolated, atomic comments, they can be loosely joined through people's use of hashtags and keywords, thereby forming short conversations (Hermida, 2010). Twitter thus created a "mental network" among *Intersexions*' audiences, providing a structure for geographically dispersed viewers to instantly communicate with one another about the television series.

The exchanges surrounding *Intersexions* on Twitter were not only constituted of "ordinary" viewers, but also of celebrities and prominent figures in South Africa. For example, Bonang Matheba, a famous South African radio and television personality, replied to a tweet by the former head of SABC Leo Manne as followed: "So far, so good!! Loving it...RT @LeoManneZA: Intersexions on now" (2010). While Matheba could have genuinely enjoyed *Intersexions*, one must also question the vested

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[97] The "@" sign signifies a reply to another Twitter user.

interests she might have had in promoting the programme, given that she worked for SABC at the time of the series' broadcast. Moreover, since these "online celebrities" have thousands of followers on Twitter, it is possible that their comments about *Intersexions* were designed to market the programme to a large audience. Therefore, it ought to be questioned whether viewers' significant engagements with *Intersexions* on Twitter evolved organically or whether they were in fact orchestrated by individuals motivated by advertising and selling the programme.

The publics *Intersexions'* audiences created on Twitter challenge historical divisions between the public and the private, with some Twitter users publishing their thoughts and feelings about the programme via the highly "public" realms of digital media. Consequently, "online publics" cannot be regarded as clearly demarcated from "offline" publics; instead, these publics "converge" and intersect in manifold ways. This convergence of online and offline publics is further exemplified by the fact that some conversations about *Intersexions* on Facebook lasted long after an episode had aired. One young man explained: "The people that I'm friends with on Facebook, we'd actually have discussions for long, from 8 o'clock until 12 o'clock […]" (qtd in Clarfelt, Hajiyiannis & Myers, 2011: 25). In some contexts, then, watching *Intersexions* instigated a discussion among Facebook users that lasted long after the show aired.

4.2.4 Audience Responses on Twitter

Viewers' engagements with *Intersexions* on Twitter evoke Willems' theorisation of publics (2012), discussed earlier in this thesis, which proposes that a public represents a site of struggle, rather than consensus. Such moments of consent and dissent are highlighted by Twitter users who subverted *Intersexions*' educational messages, as well as those who reiterated the programme's fear strategies. For example, some people joked about the series' attempts to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS transmission, tweeting, for example, "my question is during this whole Intersexions series not one of the people thinks of using a condom…" (Richard, 2011), and "[i]s it me or is #Intersexions boring now???" (Zawke, 2010). Audiences also joked about the characters and particular details, stating "DJ Mo's friend is like 5 years old" (Nxasana, 2010), and "LMAO! This DJ Mo is a joke I tell ya [sic]" (SAMiR, 2010). Moreover, some Twitter users questioned the extent to which *Intersexions*' narratives are realistic depictions of life in South Africa. For example, in response to episode 6, one man tweeted: "in real life, the teacher gets away with the crime" (Sweet Jones, 2010); and during episode 2, one Twitter user wrote: "The scene is 5 years ago but we see a modern phone […]" (DOHA Employee, 2010). These responses illuminate that viewers' reception of television texts does not always correspond to the intentions of the producers, with some Twitter users subverting and rejecting the producers' fear strategy through ironic, humorous comments.

On the other hand, some of the tweets analysed here suggest that some viewers interpreted the drama series as a realistic representation of sexuality and coming of age in South Africa. Some Twitter users stated that episode 6 depicted the reality of

the sexual abuse of girls in South African schools. "The reality of today's storyline. Things that happen in school, even primary school nowadays", wrote one woman (Ngcobo, 2010); while others tweeted: "…and this really happens #intersexions [sic]" (Nkosi, 2010), and "[…] worst thing about this shit is you can see it happening in real life" (Mutata, 2010). Moreover, Hajiyiannis and others argue that many audiences interpreted *Intersexions* as a realistic depiction of the ways in which young people in South Africa deliberately ignore the risks of HIV infection (2011: 29). These responses run in line with director Nikiwe's attempt to capture audiences' attention by creating points of identification for them. These different engagements with *Intersexions* via Twitter illustrate Willems' argument that a public can be described as a site of struggle where multiple, conflicting engagements are possible.

Twitter was also a media platform where *Intersexions*' producers interacted with audiences. The series' producers posed questions to viewers via their Twitter account, thereby directing some of the conversations and comments. In response to viewers' tweets, the production team even decided to re-shoot the final episodes of the first series, which was initially scheduled to end with reconciliation between Mandisa and Kabelo. However, after some Twitter users condemned female characters in the series who easily forgave partners who cheated, the producers decided to change the ending to Mandisa leaving Kabelo, telling him that "she deserves better" (Collinge et al., n.d.: 19). Hence, some of *Intersexions*' audiences became "prosumers" (Toffler, 1981) of television content, while the series' producers became listeners. This evokes once again Jenkins' argument that media companies enforce the diffusion of media content across various platforms (often with the aim of broadening their market), while consumers also exert increasing

control over the production of media content through their use of different media technologies (Jenkins, 2006: 18).

Some of the tweets analysed here allude to the political responses to HIV/AIDS in South Africa. For example, during the final episode, some Twitter users joked about President Zuma, writing: "LOL! They should have asked Pres Zuma to do the laughing […]" (#IAmChizama, 2011); "I guess hiv [sic] didn't score with zuma [sic] #intersexions" (Thomas, 2011); and "1 man, 1 Lethal Virus. From the producers of @intersexions. Comes.. Jacob Zuma: HIV Whisperer. 'Where's my shower cap?'" (Wasanga, 2011). These comments subverted Zuma's controversial statements about HIV/AIDS during his rape trial in 2006, when he said that he had "taken a shower" to prevent infection from the supposed victim, who was HIV-positive. In turn, the jokes about Zuma that circulated via Twitter were exploited by his longstanding opponent Julius Malema, the former controversial president of the ANC Youth League. Malema, who has 1.5 million followers on Twitter, tweeted: "[s]trangely, nobody took a shower after having sex #intersexions" (2011), and this was re-tweeted by many of his Twitter followers. Hence, some publics that formed around *Intersexions* on Twitter were not constituted by "ordinary" viewers' comments, but were orchestrated by political elites.

4.2.5 Fear in Digital Publics

There were also situations where viewers' negotiations of *Intersexions* on Twitter reiterated rather than challenged the programme's narratives of fear. *Intersexions'* final episode provoked a storm of discussion on Twitter, constituted of 15,000 tweets at the time of its broadcast (Marivate, 2012). The main theme that emerged from the segment of these tweets analysed in this chapter was that the last episode shocked

and scared viewers. Words such as "scary and "freaked out" were used frequently, with people tweeting, for example, "V's voice scares the ish [sic] out of me #intersexions" (MangalisoSeanMbusi[TM], 2011), and "[t]odays episode of #intersexions was enough to have us freaked out for decades!" (Sechaba_G, 2011). Some Twitter users even seemed to internalise "HIV"'s narration, writing, for example, "[n]ow I'm going to bed with the voice of HIV in my head #intersexions" (Cherry, 2011), and "Thanks #intersexions I now keep hearing the voice of HIV narrating my life […]" (Carelse, 2011). These responses could be described via Hall's concept of "preferred readings" (1973), with viewers reacting to *Intersexions'* fear tactics according to the ways in which the producers intended them to.

As a consequence of fear, some viewers decided to take an HIV-test themselves after watching the series. For example, one school girl and four of her friends decided to test together the day after the final episode's broadcast, although they had ignored previous invitations to test during their peer education classes (Myers, Clarfelt & Hajiyiannis, 2012: 13). Furthermore, Eliza Govender and others conducted a study of *Intersexions'* Facebook page, which suggests that after episode 8, which centres on a drunk one-night stand, 18 per cent of the Facebook participants reported taking an HIV-test as a result of watching *Intersexions* (2013: 76). Moreover, some participants in Hajiyiannis and others' evaluation of the programme reported that after having watched *Intersexions*, they made sure to always carry condoms with them; however these respondents were exclusively young women, while no males reported using condoms as a result of viewing *Intersexions* (2011: 55).

However, not all audiences took an HIV-test, because of the stigma and shame attached to being HIV-positive (Govender et al., 2013: 79). Knowing one's status is

often associated with fear of being stigmatised and discriminated against, and this presents a major obstacle for many South Africans to test for HIV and seek treatment (Peltzer et al., 2012). As Hajiyiannis and others note, many people who had watched *Intersexions* were too afraid to take an HIV-test, although the final episode had scared them. One participant said that watching *Intersexions* in fact perpetuated his friend's anxiety about testing (2011: 43). Therefore, while *Intersexions* made some young people aware of their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, it might have left many with little personal assistance in coping with their fears. However, as noted above, a professional sexologist responded to people's questions on Facebook, and the producers also set up a telephone helpline, which viewers were able to call if they had any concerns about the television series.

4.2.6   Gender and the Sexual Network

Intersexions' storylines emphasise the entrenchment of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) in South Africa – that is, the social and political practices that define manhood via toughness, hypersexuality, and violence. The majority of the series' male characters cheat on partners, lie to them, or abuse them verbally and physically. DJ Mo sleeps with other girls when away from Mandisa; Kabelo has another girlfriend when proposing to Mandisa; and the truck driver Duma cheats on his wife when he travels and beats her at home. *Intersexions* thus evokes the idea that having many sexual partners, and exerting physical and emotional power over women, are defining features of manhood. However, *Intersexions* also reveals other sides of masculinity, since some male characters are faithful and respect women, such as Muzi, who loves his girlfriend, and Charlie, who respects women's feelings.

*Intersexion*s also suggests that women's acquiescence is necessary in the construction of social practices that uphold hegemonic masculinity – particularly consensual, transactional sex. One aspect that links most of the female characters is that they sleep with men either for money, to enhance their social status, or improve their careers. Boitumelo sleeps with DJ Mo and Thami, hoping to launch her career as a dancer; Sarah sleeps with Shaan to enhance her position in her company; and Tsholofelo sleeps with her much older teacher in exchange for groceries. The exception is Ruth, who uses her own wealth to engage in sexual pleasure with younger men. Hence, *Intersexions* implicates women in its critique of hegemonic masculinities, showing that women who *tolerate* such behaviour are part of the problem.[98] At the same time, these narratives critique poverty and social inequality in post-apartheid South Africa by exposing the ways in which materialism and consumerism have led to a rise in exploitative relationships.

Intersexions reveals the complexity of socially constructed ideas of hegemonic masculinity. Episodes 1, 23 and 24 revolve around Mo's death from an AIDS-related illness, suggesting that he contracted HIV through having unprotected sex. This sequencing of events critiques his unfaithfulness, suggesting that it may result in death. However, DJ Mo is also a funny and charming character. Episode 2 places emphasis on Mo's physicality, numerous scenes framing his bare upper body as he dances with beautiful young women in a club (see figure 4.3, figure 4.4, and *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 4.4). The episode depicts Mo's rise to fame as he gets drunk and has sex with many women, but his unfaithfulness to Mandisa does not

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[98] As Jacques Lacan has pointed out in his book *Feminine Sexuality*, masculinity and femininity are relational, with male authority often dependent on female acquiescence.

have an immediate impact on his career. The question, then, is how viewers

responded to these multidimensional representations of hegemonic masculinity.

Figure 4.3 *DJ Mo on stage in a nightclub* **(2010-2011). From:** *Intersexions* **episode 2. Dir. Rolie Nikiwe. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Quizzical Pictures.**

Figure 4.4 *DJ Mo in a nightclub* (2010-2011). From: *Intersexions* episode 2. Dir. Rolie Nikiwe. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Quizzical Pictures.

Viewers' comments on Twitter offer interesting insights into the gendered nature of the publics that were created around *Intersexions*. Some female Twitter users[99] perceived DJ Mo as funny and attractive, indicative in tweets such as: "kahle [beautiful] dj [sic] Mo wit da deepness. Bekumnandi ngenkathi ubizi slipin […] ['delicious like sipping milk']" (Mashiy'amahle, 2010); "DJ Mo's Zulu is so sexy" (Umi Says, 2010); and "[i]t worries me how i'm [sic] attracted to bad boys like DJ Mo!" (Masondo, 2010). Hence, these female spectators seem to have engaged with *Intersexions* for the pleasure of "gazing" at the good-looking, male actors, rather than for the series' critique of hegemonic masculinity. These comments are reminiscent of female viewers' responses to *Otelo Burning* (see chapter 2), who expressed, on Facebook and Twitter, the pleasure they derived from watching the male surfers on

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[99] I identified female Twitter users via their username and/or profile picture. However, Twitter users often use nicknames and profile pictures, which conceal their gender. Some Tweets by female spectators might thus have been missed in this analysis.

the screen. This aspect challenges once again the historical arguments of feminist film scholars, such as Mulvey (1975), who have proposed that it is primarily male viewers who derive sexual pleasure from representations of female characters in fiction films.

However, another discourse unfolded on Twitter, which *confirms* Mulvey's argument that fiction films can manipulate viewers into uncritically accepting the patriarchal value systems that inform their production. One theme that emerged from the tweets was that viewers "blamed" the female characters for the male characters' unfaithfulness and for infecting men with HIV. For example, episode 1 creates the impression that both Mandisa and DJ Mo are infected with HIV/AIDS, but there is no indication that Mandisa has slept with many men in the past. However, Mandisa was labelled a "jezebel"[100] on Twitter, by both male and female users.[101] Tweets on 12 October 2010, during the first *Intersexions* episode, included: "Mandisa was a Jezebel...[…]" (Thato, 2010); "wooo Mandisi [sic], ayi lies so early in marriage! See the consequences of being a Jezebel…suka [get out]!" (Jack, 2010); and "[h]uh see what bein [sic] a jezabel [sic] leads to?? #intersexions" (Tembe, 2010). It was thus primarily Mandisa, not DJ Mo, who was blamed for spreading HIV, although, as the following episodes reveal, Mandisa had been faithful to Mo while Mo cheated on her.

Similarly, during episode 2, it was particularly Boitumelo's behaviour that was scrutinised by Twitter users, although both Mo and Boitumelo sleep with many

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[100] The term "jezebel" is used in South Africa for a loose woman who goes out with certain men, especially DJs, and who frequently cheats on her partner.
[101] The word "jezebel" was used 84 times in the tweets analysed here to describe either Mandisa or Boitumelo.

different people. She, too, was described as a "jezebel", with one man tweeting: "Hahahaha! Now That's a jezabel [sic] Parting Shot [sic]! #InterSEXions [sic]" (Kenhuk, 2010), to which a woman replied: "Jaw dropping! Tjo! RT @XtraLargePtyLTD: Hahahaha! Now That's a jezabel Parting Shot! #InterSEXions" (Ndlovu, 2010). These comments created a narrative that places the blame for the spread of HIV in South Africa squarely at the feet of young women. Hence, while *Intersexions*' diegesis critiques in particular *male* sexual behaviour, the "unofficial cultures" on Twitter echoed social perceptions that women are to blame for South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis (Petros et al., 2006). Moreover, the stand-up comedian and actor Trevor Gumbi[102] tweeted: "Moral of the story: don't date girls who've slept with DJ's! #intersextions [sic]", thereby constructing female temptation and sexuality as the source of male unfaithfulness. These responses to *Intersexions* are indicative of cultural norms prescribing that women should play a passive role in sexual relationships (Shefer, Strebel & Jacobs, 2012). However, some female viewers criticised these narratives, tweeting "Haai suka!! ['get out'] Girls aren't the only to blame!!" (Aus'Tsholi, 2010) and "wait wait wait? So the HIV blame is all on the woman? In this country? In this day when our men are killing us!" (Ndungane, 2010). Consequently, Twitter emerged both as a site for the creation of publics that discriminate against women, and for publics which openly critiqued such narratives.

Intersexions also provoked debates on social media that can be described via Berlant's concept of the intimate public sphere, described earlier in this thesis. Facebook, in particular, was a platform where some female viewers engaged with

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[102] Gumbi acts, for example, in Mzansi Magic's drama series *Rockville* (Barbuzano, 2013, 2014, 2015) and SABC 1's comedy show *Ses'top la* (Black Brain Pictures, 2012).

women who have had similar experiences to them (Govender et al., 2013). In response to *Intersexions*, some women who had been sexually abused discussed these issues with other women. One Facebook user wrote: "I've also been a victim of rape (on more than one occasion) […]. I just keep living my life and I don't care about telling anyone coz that might cause family disruptions or worse, they could decide to ignore it and call me a liar […]" (qtd in Govender et al., 2013: 80). One female Facebook user who disclosed having been raped was particularly admired by other women who found her to be encouraging, demonstrated in statements such as: "you are such a remarkable woman, I truly admire you" (qtd in Govender et al., 2013: 80). These comments reveal that while some women felt unable to discuss their experiences of rape with their own family members, they felt safe to share them with other women on Facebook. Hence, some young women used social media to talk openly about taboo topics and establish a virtual support network. Thus, the debates surrounding *Intersexions* on social media created a "mobile intimacy", making people's feelings and experiences "public" while rendering publics intimate and personal (Hjorth, King & Kataoka, 2014: 2).

This chapter probes the discussion of intimate publics, screen media, and HIV/AIDS further by turning to a film collection called *Steps Youth Films*, which, just like *Intersexions*, was made with the aim of creating a debate about HIV/AIDS among young audiences. However, the films' content, exhibition platforms and the publics they brought into being diverged considerably from those of *Intersexions*.

4.3 *Steps for the Future Youth Films*

4.3.1 STEPS' Audience

The film collection *Steps for the Future Youth Films: By Youth For Youth* comprises of four short films about youths from South Africa – namely, *Girlhood* (Ndandani et al., 2009), *Khoko's Story* (Mangwane, Nxadi & Xhaka, 2009), *Kwerekwere* (Limenyarde et al., 2009), and *MXiT* [sic] (Dehahn et al., 2009) – and five short films from Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.[103] The films were all made in 2009 by the NGO STEPS, which was founded in 2001, and which has since then made a variety of documentary and fiction films aiming to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. Headed by the South African film producers Don Edkins and Laurence Dworkin and based in Cape Town, STEPS is constituted of people of diverse ages, gender, and demographic backgrounds.

Contrary to *Intersexions*, STEPS has pursued a community-oriented film distribution strategy, which was in place before the youth films were made. Since 2001, STEPS has exhibited their first film collection, *Steps for the Future*, across southern African communities. *Steps for the Future* is constituted of 21 fiction and documentary films about people from southern Africa who cope successfully with HIV/AIDS. Through running screenings of these films in schools, hospitals, and the rural areas, STEPS had become aware that children and youth constituted their major audience. STEPS' programme coordinator Marianne Gysae said in a personal interview:

> We didn't say: "Look we target youths specifically", but youth were always in the audiences […]. Young people were always a part, because film is a very attractive tool […]. They would send a lot of kiddies:

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[103] These films are *Keitumetse's House* (Laba, 2009), *Marafiki* (Ahmed et al., 2009), *Never too Late* (Lenabe et al., 2009), *Tariro* (Tambandini et al., 2009) and *Thinking about It* (Kaluba et al., 2009). This chapter focuses primarily on the South African films for reasons of scope.

"There's a film, let's go!" It was easier to attract young people to come to screenings than working mothers or working fathers. (2013)

STEPS was thus aware of the demographics and viewing patterns of their audiences. However, as Gysae indicates, it is also possible that youth attended STEPS' screenings primarily to socialise with their peers, not to see a particular STEPS film in the first instance. As Larkin (2002) has demonstrated, in urban Nigeria, going to the cinema is a popular leisure activity because it creates a social event regardless of the film that people watch. As discussed later, STEPS has, however, sought to draw young viewers' attention to its films through facilitated post-screening discussions.

Like *Intersexions'* producers, STEPS was aware of the "AIDS fatigue" among youths in South Africa. Gysae told me: "Many young people said: 'we're actually tired of HIV. We want to talk about relationships, love, SMS-ing or MXit, xenophobia' […]. We also learned there, because if you want to approach HIV, don't just talk about HIV" (2013). Hence, in a similar way to *Intersexions'* producers, STEPS' filmmakers perceived of young audiences as media literate, "active" consumers of screen media narratives. The *Steps Youth Films* were – according to the producers – designed to "entertain" young audiences, rather than overtly instructing or preaching to them. However, a closer look at the narratives of the films reveals certain elements that contradict these claims. In the short film *Khoko's Story*, for example, the main subject, Khoko, recalls being ostracised in her community following her mother's public disclosure of her HIV-status. *Girlhood*, in turn, follows a teenage girl from Khayelitsha township who faces discrimination by her neighbours because she falls pregnant. Hence, in suggesting that infection with HIV/AIDS and pregnancy can lead to social isolation, the *Steps Youth Films* could

also be interpreted as an attempt by the adult filmmakers to warn young viewers of the potential dangers of sexual activity.

While *Intersexions* was produced with the aim of engaging audiences across South Africa, *Steps Youth Films* were made particularly for disenfranchised youths, including migrants, people struggling with addictions, the poor and unemployed. STEPS sought to engage these people, because they "have been quite left out of the mainstream HIV/AIDS campaigns" (Gysae, 2013). "[Migrants] are vulnerable, because they are often illegal and they can't report sexual violence and don't know where to go for help", explains Gysae (2013). Hence, STEPS focused on reaching those young people who are the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, but whose particular situation is often not considered in existing health communication programmes.

STEPS thus rightly perceives HIV/AIDS as a complex, social problem, rather than an individual problem linked to sexual behaviour alone. STEPS' outreach coordinator Elaine Maane[104] said in a personal interview:

> HIV […] has to be addressed in a holistic way […]. It's not about telling people how to put on a condom. What we have found is people know about HIV, people do know. It's something you know, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you personalise it. (2013)

Corresponding to this strategy, *Steps Youth Films* engage with a variety of issues that render youths vulnerable to contracting HIV, including stigma, discrimination, sexual violence and xenophobia.

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[104] Maane is an HIV/AIDS community activist and founding trustee of the Openly Positive Trust. Her book *Umzala* (2008) deals with disclosure, relationships and single motherhood from a personal perspective. "Umzala" means "cousin" in isiZulu, whereby Maane alludes to HIV/AIDS in a familiar, "intimate" way.

STEPS' awareness of the complex, social dimensions of HIV/AIDS resulted in the *Steps Youth Films*' focus on girls and young women, who are the most vulnerable group to contracting HIV. STEPS' director Dworkin explained to me: "it was obvious that you had to target youth in a strong way if you look at all the statistics of infection rates and who was becoming infected. There were young, pregnant, unmarried women becoming infected" (2013a). As a consequence, STEPS made the *Steps Youth Films* with the involvement of young girls themselves, and this approach to filmmaking – as discussed later in the chapter – presents a variety of possibilities, but also certain ethical challenges.

4.3.2   Community Screenings

Steps Youth Films were never shown on television; they have been screened instead in schools, community centres, hospitals and HIV-support groups via mobile cinemas (Dworkin, 2013a). In this way, STEPS avoided having to comply with the standards of broadcasters, which usually require films to have a particular length (subject to programming schedule and advertisement breaks), appeal to a certain target audience, and run in line with a channel's ideological and commercial values.[105] The organisation was also able to monitor, through personal contact, whether viewers enjoyed and engaged with their films. Dworkin explains STEPS's distribution strategy as follows:

> We don't have a very aggressive distribution approach and try and get it
> to all the schools or anything. We prefer to just let it filter into our
> networks, because they get used over time […]. We work with the same
> groups and the same organisations […]. If you can […] affect the lives of

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[105] STEPS' film collection *Steps for the Future* was produced with broadcasters from southern Africa and across the world. During the production of these films, the broadcasters and commissioning editors significantly influenced the selection and shortlisting of treatments for films, and they were also strongly involved in pitching sessions (Dworkin, 2013a).

50 kids, then that's good, rather than 5000 kids but they're all not paying attention and walk out. (2013b)

Some *Steps Youth Films* have even become a part of the national curriculum in South African schools. For example, Scalabrini, an organisation working with refugees in Cape Town, uses the film *Kwerekwere* in life orientation classes for Grade 10 students (Carciotto, 2013). In this way, STEPS' films are shown repeatedly and to different youth, thereby expanding the films' publics over time and across different geographical locations.

Compared to *Intersexions'* vast audience numbers, STEPS's audience has been composed of small groups of young people. After a typical STEPS screening, facilitators, who have been trained by the organisation, moderate a discussion about the film with audiences, encouraging people to share their opinions on it with one another. The facilitators are either members of the STEPS organisation, or the young people who themselves feature in the *Steps Youth Films*. STEPS have, therefore, focused on creating opportunities for young audiences to debate their films face to face, thereby establishing *physical* communities around their films.

However, STEPS has also made the *Steps Youth Films*, as well as most films of the *Steps for the Future* collection, available for online streaming via their website and YouTube.[106] To an extent, then, the films' audiences were just as "diffused" as those of *Intersexions* were, for it is possible that some people watched the films online on their own, rather than as part of a facilitated screening. However, the small number of views that the *Steps Youth Films* have had on YouTube to date suggests that these

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[106] STEPS' YouTube channel is available via: http://bit.ly/1OZ4nTH [Accessed 2015, August 09].

films have not been widely viewed online. [107] Moreover, youth from poor backgrounds are usually not able to afford the smartphones and computers necessary for streaming videos online (Gumede, 2014). STEPS's community screenings, therefore, continue to play an important role in making their films accessible to young audiences from socially disenfranchised backgrounds.

4.3.3 "Private Lives", Gendered Perspectives

The majority of the *Steps Youth Films* centre on young women and girls, as well as issues of gender. In the short film *Girlhood*, the audience meets five teenagers from Khayelitsha township; *Khoko's Story* focuses on the young girl Akhona whose mother is HIV-positive; *Kwerekwere* reveals a young Angolan girl's experiences of xenophobia at her school in Cape Town; and the Zimbabwean film *Tariro* introduces a young woman who was raped as a young girl and who is HIV-positive as a result. Together and individually, these films evoke the idea that patriarchal structures, broken families, and poverty place adolescent girls in a marginalised social position and, sometimes, at risk of HIV infection.

Like *Intersexions*, *Steps Youth Films* are not overtly didactic, and reveal instead young women's intimate experiences and feelings; thus, what Bystrom and Nuttall would call "private lives" (2013b). *Steps Youth Films* mediate girls' everyday lives by combining the realism typical of documentary films with the focalisation of fiction films. In *Khoko's Story*, for example, Akhona guides the audience through her village, Hamburg, and proudly introduces details of her house, her mother, her dog, and even her fridge (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 4.5). As noted earlier, she

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[107] On 9 August 2015, *Kwerekwere* recorded only 6 views on YouTube, *Khoko's Story* recorded 9 views, *Girlhood* had 15 views, and *MXiT* [sic] had 5 views. There were also no comments from viewers about the films on YouTube.

reveals, in interviews, how she feels about her mother's infection with HIV. Focused on a young girl's life, *Khoko's Story* thus paints a personal picture of South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis.

Girlhood, in turn, introduces a group of girls who live in townships and poor areas near Cape Town (see figure 4.5). Through an audiovisual "bricolage" of the girls' own narrations and poems, the film reveals that these young women have collectively experienced the loss of a father, poverty, and stigmatisation by their communities because of pregnancy (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 4.6). Like *Khoko's Story*, *Girlhood* thus exposes intimate experiences of adolescent girls in South Africa who face a variety of challenges, and how they have addressed their problems.

Figure 4.5 *Four girls chat in a cafe in Cape Town* **(2009). From:** *Girlhood*. **Dir. Tembekani Ndandani et al. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of STEPS Southern Africa.**

Kwerekwere, too, gives a glimpse of the personal experience of Vanessa, an Angolan girl who lives in Cape Town. The film opens with Vanessa's voice-over informing the viewer that she feels like "an outsider without a home" in South Africa, and subsequently follows her as she interviews her fellow students about their attitudes towards foreigners. These interviews and conversations expose the stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes students have about people from other African countries who live in South Africa (see figure 4.6 and *Supplementary DVD* clip 4.7).

Figure 4.6 *Vanessa (left) interviews students at her school* **(2009). From:** *Kwerekwere.* **Dir. Liliane Limenyarde et al. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of STEPS Southern Africa.**

The narratives and form of these *Steps Youth Films* mediate the spontaneous, complex nature of young people's daily lives, rather than establishing a moralising narrative about the issues they raise. The films can be described as creative, observational documentary films that lack narrative closure and are shot with hand-held cameras; however, they also use abstracting techniques typical of fiction

filmmaking, such as jump cuts and rapid editing. [108] As with *Intersexions*, the characters speak in various South African languages and dialects, such as Zulu, Xhosa, Hlubi, and Afrikaans. The aesthetics of *Steps Youth Films* thus represent the private lives of young women and girls in a realistic way, thereby encouraging young South African audiences to identify with the films' main characters and narratives.

Steps Youth Films' narratives highlight not only the problems of adolescent girls, but also how these girls are coping successfully with them. *Khoko's Story* emphasises Akhona's strategies to confront feelings of sadness and loneliness (as a result of her mother's HIV infection) by actively seeking the support of her friends. *Girlhood* and *Kwerekwere*, in turn, focus on girls who voice their opinions about social prejudices related to sexuality, teenage pregnancy, and xenophobia. *Steps Youth Films* thus frame the girls not as victims of their social situation, but as articulate "survivors", thereby evoking the major theme of *Rough Aunties*, discussed in chapter 3.

4.3.4   Ethics of Collaborative Filmmaking

STEPS asked young people to participate in the making of the *Steps Youth Films* so as to make their filmmaking practices more inclusive. Gysae says:

> With the youth programme, I think we just said, "let's try what we didn't do before". [In our earlier films], we didn't really make the films together with the characters. It was more films about the characters. With the youth films, we decided, let's make films with youth for youth. (2013)

Dworkin, similarly, explained to me that he attempted to project a "youth perspective" onto the screen: "We as older people […] didn't want to come in and

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[108] These visual effects were also a result of the small budget STEPS had for the *Steps Youth Films*. To reduce production costs, the organisation used cost-effective cameras, and had a short shooting schedule and a quick turnaround on the editing (Dworkin, 2013b).

say, 'we are doing films about the youth'. We wanted to say: 'Let's do films with the youth'" (2013a). STEPS thus attempted to make its existing filmmaking practices more inclusive, and to avoid speaking on behalf of young people. The motivation to make *Steps Youth Films* did not emerge from young people themselves, however, but from adult filmmakers.

STEPS' concern with young people's participation reflects an emerging trend in the practices of humanitarian organisations, such as the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children, which have increasingly advocated children's participation in their projects. Over the past few decades, it has become increasingly "fashionable" to integrate children and youth into so-called "media for development" projects. For example, the South African NGO Molo Songololo has involved children in the making of a newspaper and a children's television show (Moses, 2008: 7), and the organisation Photo Voice has assisted children in Orange Farm affected by HIV/AIDS in documenting their own lives via photographs (Mitchell et al., 2005).

There is a common assumption within the international development community that enhancing the "visibility" of marginalised children and youth through audiovisual media will automatically enhance their social power and status. However, the ways in which marginalised children and youth take part in the making of film, television, and video warrant very careful consideration. As my discussion of *Otelo Burning* and *Rough Aunties* has demonstrated in the previous chapters, the production of collaborative films (and even so-called "observational" documentaries) involves not only observation; such filmmaking is both "active" and "intrusive" (Singhal & Devi, 2003: 13), and it creates publics that may shape and change those who are

represented on the screen. It is, therefore, important to pay attention to the way in which young people participated in the *Steps Youth Films*, who authored these films, and what consequences they have had on the lives of the young participants.

In order to find participants for the *Steps Youth Films*, STEPS approached youth organisations that work with young people with disabilities, as well as prisoners and migrants. The NGO then ran workshops in order to identify young people who would be committed to the film project,[109] and asked the youth groups to come up with an idea or subject they wanted to make a film about (Wege, 2013). Dworkin explains:

> Although we were going to be using the films in the broader context of HIV/AIDS awareness, we didn't want it to be about HIV and AIDS. We took the approach of asking them what they felt were the most pressing issues confronting them in their lives right now. Things like teenage pregnancies […] [were derived from] groups of kids saying "this is the thing that's affecting us the most right now". (2013a)

STEPS' approach thus differed from that of *Intersexions'* producers, who tested the television programme's story lines with focus groups only after initial scripts were written.[110]

STEPS made the films in collaboration with youths, but they did not entirely hand the production process over to them. Dworkin says: "We were very mindful of the fact that to just give a group of youth a camera and say 'go out and make a film' doesn't always work. They can have a lot of fun but the film will come back very bad" (2013a). For this reason, STEPS assigned the youth groups in South Africa two experienced adult filmmakers, Tim Wege and Miki Redelinghuys, a couple that has

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[109] The group sizes varied from six to 12 people and the participants were aged between 14 and 17 years (Wege, 2013).
[110] In most educational television programmes, audience participation takes place only during the stage of message design (Storey & Sood, 2013).

made various documentary films with and about children and youth.[111] Wege and Redelinghuys assisted STEPS' young participants during the scripting and shooting stage. For example, they helped the youths in narrowing down initial ideas to one single issue that formed the theme of the film, and in finding a suitable format for the limited time and small budget they had (Wege, 2013). Supervised by adult filmmakers, the youths worked in teams, with one person on camera, one doing sound, and one directing the film (Wege, 2013). Wege describes his role in the STEPS films as follows:

> I'd come and just talked to them [the youths] and we'd have two meetings to figure out what we were doing and how we were going to do it […]. They [had] to come up with that, but obviously under our guidance of what can actually work and can create a product out of this […]. It needs to be something that's achievable in half a day at a school. (2013)

The making of the *Steps Youth Films*, then, can be described as a process of mentorship in which adult filmmakers guided young people. This kind of training is crucial if localised filmmaking is to develop in South Africa (and across Africa) in the future, for training opportunities for Black filmmakers, in particular, are rare and expensive.

The relationship between STEPS' mentoring directors and the young participants was crucial to the development of *Steps Youth Films*. Wege and Redelinghuys focused on getting to know the young people, and to establish a personal relationship with them. Redelinghuys explains in a personal interview: "With young people, it's often very helpful to really work on a relationship before you even start getting into

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[111] Redelinghuys produced the documentaries *Brass Boys* (O'Donoghue, 2007) and *Krisimesi: Video Diaries by Cape Town Children* (Jegger, 2003). Wege directed the documentary *How Funky is Your Chicken?* (2007).

the story" (2013). She and Wege had known Akhona – the main character of *Khoko's Story* – and her family for years, and had previously directed a documentary, *Keiskamma* (2007), about them. According to the Redelinghuys, "That's really why the film [*Khoko's Story*] worked so well, because we had such a long, sustained relationship with the family. We still know them" (2013). With other youth groups, however, Redelinghuys experienced difficulties establishing a close relationship, for she got to know them in the short time period of two or three workshops. She says this about the production of *Girlhood*:

> The girls […] [from *Girlhood*] had started the process, done the research, found the group, and then they had to lead the project. […] Then I came into it half way into a certain foundation, and I didn't know the girls so well and they were already half way down the process. (2013)

These limited interactions affected the relations between Redelinghuys and the girls. The mentoring director recalls that she "was teaching [the *Girlhood* group] how to shoot and how to use the camera, but in the end, because the film had to look a certain way, I actually had to shoot it myself" (2013). In the case of *Khoko's Story*, however, the filmmaker felt that it was a more collaborative effort, because she knew the participating girls well, saying: "We gave them a little camera to film their stuff themselves [see figure 4.7]. It was a longer process, more of a fun process" (2013).
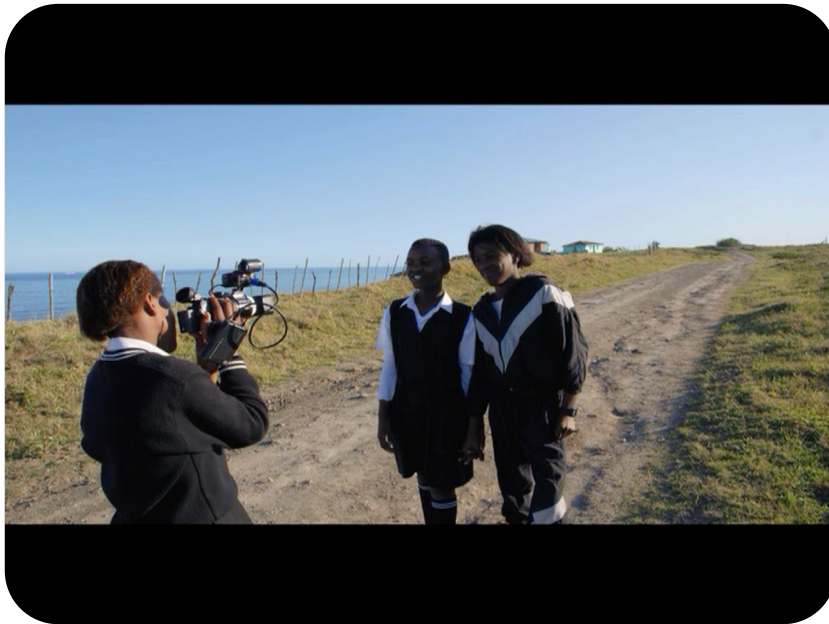
Figure 4.7 *Akhona (middle) and her friends film one another* **(2009). From:** *Khoko's Story***. Dir. Akhona Mangwane, Sibabalwe Nxadi and Khutala Xhaka. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of STEPS Southern Africa.**

STEPS' mentoring directors edited the films themselves, but they also sought to give the young people an opportunity to have a say in this process. Wege and Redelinghuys invited the girls from *Girlhood* to their home, showed them editing techniques, and asked for their editorial input (Wege, 2013). Wege says: "in all the films actually, we tried to bring people into […] the process […], to at least have a sense of this is how the film is going to flow and how they think about that" (2013). However, the girls were not very interested in the tedious editing process. Wege explains:

> The younger people were really interested in the filming process, because that's really fun […], but editing is hard work. It's a slog […]. They quite often lost a bit of momentum. All the girls weren't really interested; they just wanted to see the DVD at the end […]. And did they look fabulous or not? [laughs] You know, it is fair enough. It's fine; it's not their job to make films. (2013)

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Redelinghuys emphasises: "What's the key is that they really need to buy into the process. It needs to be for them and about them. They must want it" (2013). The adult filmmakers thus respected young people's decisions not to participate in the editing, but it also meant that they retained control, to an extent, over the films' authorship.

The making of *Steps Youth Films* had a transformative effect on some of the young people who participated in them – just as *Otelo Burning* initiated a personal transformation for the young man Xaba, who was able to come to terms with the painful memories of his childhood by participating in the film. In some situations, STEPS' young filmmakers interviewed their teachers and students who were older than them in front of the rolling camera, and in this way, directed conversations with people older than themselves. Wege states:

> Because there's a camera […] and you're holding it and pointing it at this person on the school ground a year or two older than you, the tables completely turned. And [the youths] loved that! It was a huge thing. For a 15-year-old to be able to point a camera at a 17-year-old at school and say: "ok, how are you going to answer that question?" And they had to, because the camera was rolling. (2013)

Hence, in some moments, the shooting process changed intergenerational relationships and interactions. According to Wege and Redelinghuys, the production process of *Khoko's Story* changed the dynamics of Akhona's community, since using a camera to interview people in their village gave Akhona and her friends the courage to speak to people who were older than themselves, and who they would not normally dare to approach. As Wege says: "Because the girls had a camera, people much older than them had to talk to them. It was amazing how they sort of stepped up to the challenge of behaving older than they normally would, because they had

this power of suddenly being journalists" (2013). Redelinghuys adds that "[the filming] also gave [the girls] a new status in the community" (2013), suggesting that the public created through the making of *Khoko's Story* momentarily changed the social status of the participating girls. These situations also suggest that "youth" is not only a fluid, transitional period, but is also defined through the relationships between different generations.

The filmmakers' observations reflect arguments within the scholarship on participatory cinema, proposing that providing marginalised people with the ability to document their lives through film and photography enhances self-confidence and social status (Mitchell et al., 2005). However, young people do not necessarily participate in filmmaking with the objective of advancing skills or participating in social activism. Some youths enjoyed the making of the *Steps Youth Films* primarily because it was a "fun" experience that allowed them to socialise with their peers. Dudu Khumalo, one of the girls who features in *Girlhood*, told me that what she enjoyed most about the making of the STEPS films was to be able to make a "[film] with my friends and to learn about others' lives, and knowing what happened from each other and in each others' lives, and to put it into a story" (2013). For Khumalo, the making of the films was thus both a validation of her own experiences and an opportunity to share that experience with other youths.

However, the production of a film about personal experiences does not necessarily establish a solution to one's problems. One of the girls who participated in the film *Kwerekwere*, has recently encountered psychological problems, and Maane has encouraged her to seek professional counselling (Maane, 2013). Moreover, although

STEPS obtained consent from parents and guardians, young people do not always feel comfortable being exposed to the public through being in a film. Wege explains:

> Sometimes you still have issues of responsibility around, even if the child's parent signs the release form and they say they're happy. Then you're making the film, editing it, and you realise that despite all those things, is it still ok for this film to say what it does? You still have the responsibility to that and it goes beyond what is just responsible filmmaking […]. Maybe the parent isn't as educated as they might be and they don't realise what they think they signed […]. I think there is a much stronger sense of responsibility with kids and it's a much finer line to tread. (2013)

Redelinghuys and Wege had encountered such situations in their previous documentary *Keiskamma*. The main character, Khuleleko, was 14 years old when the film was made. While Khuleleko's aunt had signed release forms, Khuleleko did not want to the film to be screened in his community, because he did not want his friends to see him on screen, crying (Redelinghyus, 2013). Redelinghuys says:

> That child is not going to be 14 years forever and the question I keep wondering is when this person is 20 or 21, how will they feel about this film? And would I still be comfortable with filming this person? I do think the film is easier for Khuleleko now, but I don't think he likes to watch it. It's a very painful time of his life. (2013)

Hence, just as youth is a transitional period, young people may change the way they feel about being in a documentary film when they are adults. As the discussions of *Rough Aunties* and *Otelo Burning* have also shown, the making of a film can assist young people in "working through" traumatic experiences, but it can also have painful emotional consequences.

STEPS involved youths not only in the making of their films, but also in their exhibition. The organisation trained some youths as facilitators to guide post-

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screening discussions of their own films. For example, the girls from *Girlhood* started to work as facilitators and have taken the film to their own schools and the townships they grew up in (Gysae, 2013). Akhona and her family, too, came to Cape Town to run workshops with the film. The youths who worked as facilitators made certain financial gains from this work, for they received a small stipend from STEPS for their facilitation (Dworkin, 2013a).

Some youths said their work as facilitators had changed their ability to communicate with other people, for it gave them the confidence and courage to talk to others about issues and problems they confront in their lives (Gysae, 2013). As Khumalo says: "I also facilitate [the film] and take it to other people, which is nice […]. It really opened up discussions and I like talking to them" (2013). Gysae explains: "for most of these kids, they could never go to school and stand there and say: 'I want to tell you a story'. But they have a film about that and they can take that and start engaging" (2013). Redelinghuys, in turn, describes her experience of a screening of *Girlhood* as follows:

> The girls came back after the session and they were all very excited, it had gone really well. I think for them […] making the film, and then seeing the film in action and being part of that process was great. I remember, the people from Khoko's film all came down and were part of that […]. They see how their stories can touch other people's lives. (2013)

The facilitated screenings thus enabled young people to experience the responses from audiences, thus creating physical communities around their films.

However, young people's roles as facilitators had complex effects. For some youths, moderating the post-screening discussions was, as Gysae puts it, "scary at first […].

We also needed to workshop them a lot preparing them, because I don't think you realise necessarily what it means when you're suddenly out there on a screen. Everybody looks at you and you talk about really personal issues" (2013). STEPS attempted to mitigate these problems, however, through running workshops with the youth to prepare them for difficult situations that may arise in the screenings. The facilitators also did not moderate the discussions by themselves but worked in pairs and received support from professional trainers (Maane, 2013).

Importantly, STEPS have kept in touch with the youth who participated in their films wherever possible. Maane, in particular, communicates with the girls who took part in the films on a regular basis and through social media (such as Facebook, Blackberry Messenger and Whatsapp), saying: "I engage with them and we don't want people to think 'now my story is told and I'm just left hanging there'. So we're still there, we're in touch […]. I think it's really about people, feelings. It's not just a conduct" (2013). For example, some girls from the film *Girlhood* came to a staff party at the STEPS office, which I attended during my research in Cape Town. Moreover, as noted above, Maane has continued to monitor the wellbeing of the youths until the present day, and seeks to support those who confront personal problems. She states:

> One of the girls [from *Kwerekwere*] […] is not feeling well and I've said
> she must go and see someone, a specialist. I think she's got issues and
> needs somebody to counsel. It's just varying stuff going on [sic], but I
> think she's taking it very hard (2013).

This focus on keeping in close touch with the participants of the films is important, given that some of *Rough Aunties'* film subjects felt they were "left behind" once the film was completed. The making of *Steps Youth Films* thus created a relationship

between adult producers and young participants that could be described as one of "interdependency", and from which both sides benefited from the films long after their completion.

4.3.5   The Reception of *Steps Youth Films*

4.3.5.1   *Intimate Publics*

In some contexts, *Steps Youth Films* created "intimate publics" (Berlant, 2008) comprised of young viewers who were moved emotionally by the films, and who established a sense of personal connection with the narratives, characters, and the facilitators. According to Dworkin, the films have often been interpreted by youths as a reflection of their own lives, and the films that audiences enjoy the most are those that are perceived as "closest to home" (2013b). For example, *Kwerekwere* and *Girlhood*, which are set in Cape Town, are particularly popular with young audiences in South Africa (Gysae, 2013; Maane, 2013). Dworkin explains the popularity of these films as related to the fact that they allow young audiences to identify and empathise with the young characters they portray (2009). As Maane says, *Girlhood* has been enjoyed by youths, because:

> it addresses different issues. You know, growing up without both parents, losing the mother at tender age, being raised by a single parent, having an abusive dad, teenage pregnancy. It pulls out a whole lot of different issues that young people nowadays face. Quite a bit of them [sic] can relate to that. (2013)

The personal viewpoints and private perspectives expressed in *Steps Youth Films* thus allowed young viewers to "read" their own lives through the films' narratives,

thereby creating publics characterised by empathy and emotional connections among young people from different backgrounds.

STEPS' facilitators played an essential part in the creation of the intimate publics that formed around *Steps Youth Films*. In some communities, the girls who participated in the making of the films moderated the post-screening discussions, thereby providing opportunities for youth audiences to talk about personal, sensitive issues to the people portrayed in the films. As Gysae explains:

> [The facilitated screenings are] about young people who are open and brave enough to share their stories about crime and their own risk behaviour. It's a completely different story than somebody stands and tells you what you should be doing and what you shouldn't. (2013)

Thus, as Lucinda Englehart notes, the presence of the STEPS film characters in the screening room can transfer social issues, such as HIV/AIDS, from a perceived distant issue to a disease by which people in the audience feel directly affected (2003: 74, 83).

However, since *Steps Youth Films* were made with adolescent participants, it has become difficult for some of them to facilitate screenings of their own films over time. Some young facilitators have been increasingly busy at school, while others have started working or have become parents themselves; thus, they are no longer able to take part in the exhibition of their films (Khumalo, 2013; Maane, 2013).[112] Moreover, in some situations, the presence of facilitators who were part of STEPS' films undermined a constructive discussion with viewers, triggering suspicion among spectators about the reality of HIV/AIDS. The documentary *Ask Me I'm Positive*

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[112] This also posed problems interviewing the girls who feature in the *Steps Youth Films*. I was only able to interview one of the girls who took part in the making of the *Girlhood* film.

(Edkins, 2004) – a film *about* the exhibition of an earlier STEPS film, *Ho Ea Rona* (*We Are Going Forward*) (Phakati, 2001), in rural Lesotho – shows a man in the audience accusing the facilitator: "You have been hired to pretend you have the disease!", thereby exposing the necessity of STEPS' work to raise awareness about the reality of HIV/AIDS in rural and disenfranchised communities.

The ability to identify with *Steps Youth Films* has was sometimes upsetting for youth who had themselves experienced the situations depicted in the films. Maane describes one screening of *Kwerekwere* as follows:

> In one of the screenings, one of the girls was crying. They [the facilitators] actually didn't know why she was crying but it came out in the discussion. She was able to open up: "watching that film is just like watching what I go through at school. The girls mock me", and that kind of thing. (2013)

Moreover, Maane recalls that during one post-screening discussion of *Koko's Story*, a few girls were upset, since the film reminded them of their own experiences of losing their mother to HIV/AIDS (2013). The films' focus on young people's "private lives" thus had painful effects on those young viewers who fully identified with the characters and situations they depict. However, STEPS provided personal support in these situations, since a counsellor was present to speak to the girls in the audience (Maane, 2013) – whereas for the viewers of *Intersexions*, no such direct, personal care was available.

My research at some screenings of *Steps Youth Films* revealed this complex, changing nature of the publics the films have brought into being. I attended several screenings of *Kwerekwere*, which STEPS held in collaboration with Scalabrini at a high school in the Bo-Kaap area of Cape Town. Racial discrimination among

students is rife at the school, which is primarily attended by primarily "black",

Xhosa-speaking students and "Coloured", Afrikaans-speaking students; for this

reason, Scalabrini has shown *Kwerekwere* at the school on a regular basis. The

STEPS facilitators, Sergio Carciotto and Khadija Heeger (see figure 4.8), screened

Kwerekwere at the beginning of the class, and as soon as the film finished, they

opened up a discussion about it that encouraged the students to engage with the

major themes raised by the film (see figure 4.8). For example, Heeger asked the

class: "How did the film make you feel?" and "Have you experienced something like

this in your life?", thereby encouraging the students to connect the film's major

themes to their own experiences and emotions.

Figure 4.8 *The STEPS facilitators Heeger and Carciotto before a screening of* **Kwerekwere** *at Vista High* **(2013). Cape Town. [Photograph] Personal photograph by author.**

During one post-screening discussion (see figure 4.9), a girl responded to the facilitator's questions as follows:

> I felt bad […] and sad […], because the guy that was from another country said that the immigrants take over the jobs, that we don't have jobs any more. It was so sad in a way, 'cuz if it happened to you as an individual, it wouldn't be, you know, so nice. ("Facilitated Screening", 2013)

In turn, one boy said: "It [the film] made me feel bad. I feel bad about our future here. It's almost like we're bringing them down. The Coloureds are bringing them [black people] down" ("Facilitated Screening", 2013). Heeger responded to these comments by trying to further unpack, with the youths, the social norms and prejudices that are responsible for the attitudes exposed in *Kwerekwere*. She asked the students: "What is another word for 'bringing them down?'" and one boy exclaimed: "Discrimination!" This discussion was constantly interrupted, however, by students who did not pay attention or who simply made fun of the questions. The debate also ended abruptly with the end of the school lesson, and without further exploring avenues to address discriminatory attitudes at the school. In this situation, then, the screening of *Kwerekwere* created intimate publics, where young viewers engaged emotionally with the film, but these publics did not result in a constructive discussion about racial discrimination – which was, in part, due to the limited time the facilitators had at their disposition.

Figure 4.9 *Facilitated discussion of* Kwerekwere *at Vista High* **(2013). Cape Town. [Photograph] Personal photograph by author.**

4.3.5.2 Negotiating Fear

STEPS' facilitators usually do not address the topic of HIV/AIDS directly in the post-screening discussions; instead, the films often act as an instigator for broader discussions. Carciotto from the Scalabrini centre explains to me in an interview:

> You need to engage them [students] and the film is a perfect tool, because all the kids enjoy films […]. It helped us to unpack issues and to discuss topics with the learners in a very interactive way, rather than, you know, traditional ways of listening to the teacher. (2013)

However, according to Gysae, the post-screening debates "often [come] back to HIV anyway" (2013). Hence, STEPS' focus on discussing the wider issues related to HIV/AIDS has provided a starting point for approaching subjects related to

HIV/AIDS and sexuality, which are issues that many people feel uncomfortable talking about.

The open-ended films of *Steps for the Future* could create confusion about HIV/AIDS infection and transmission (Stadler, 2003), just as some young viewers might have had questions about HIV/AIDS after having watched *Intersexions*. However, key to STEPS' screenings is that people can voice these questions and concerns in the facilitated post-screening discussions. Maane says: "After the screening, people would come saying 'is there anywhere I can contact you for questions I didn't want to ask in the group?'" (2013). STEPS' facilitated discussions thus provide opportunities for audiences to address their fears and confusion about HIV/AIDS through intimate, confidential discussions.

STEPS' screenings also assisted some young women from disenfranchised backgrounds to overcome their fears of HIV-testing and treatment. Lucinda Englehart (2003) has explored the responses to an earlier *Steps for the Future* film, *Mother-to-Child* (Lipman, 2001), in an antenatal clinic in Alexandra township, where many young women are HIV-positive, but many of them are too scared to know their HIV-status. *Mother-to-Child* follows two young women, Pinkie and Patience, who discover they are HIV-positive when pregnant. Pinkie and Patience have regularly facilitated screenings of the film at Alexandra clinic's maternity wing. According to Englehart (2003), the main question women voiced during the post-screening discussions was how being HIV-positive would affect their lives and those of their unborn babies. In the post-screening discussions, the facilitators talked to the women about HIV-treatment and giving birth when being HIV-positive, insisting that women have an obligation to confront HIV/AIDS to protect their babies. Young

women were given advice on how to cope with their worries, and many women decided to be tested after the screenings. It seems, then, that these publics created by STEPS' screenings – unlike audiences' responses to *Intersexions* – helped young women to devise strategies for confronting fears and coping with being HIV-positive.

While STEPS has stimulated debates about HIV/AIDS in some situations, moral judgments and stigma attached to HIV/AIDS are still very present in southern African communities, however. Gysae recalls:

> Recently […], the film production in Lesotho found a young woman nearly dying in her village […]. Her boyfriend knew it probably was HIV and the girlfriend knew also, but still did not take that step to go to the village clinic to do something about it. (2013)

Maane, too, stresses that "people won't easily walk into health centres, because they're like looking 'ok, who do I know here? They're just going to say they saw me'" (2013). These examples highlight the importance of STEPS' focus on addressing, rather than fostering, fears and anxieties about HIV/AIDS.

4.3.5.3   Intimacy

STEPS' focus on engaging in a conversation with young audiences during post-screening discussions is crucial in light of the cultural taboos of talking about sexuality that exist in many families, discussed earlier in this chapter, and in the previous chapter. Audience feedback demonstrated that some young people spoke more openly to their partners and parents about sensitive issues, including HIV/AIDS and sexuality, after having attended the STEPS screenings (Gysae 2013). Maane says: "people later do share, like 'after that screening, I was able to go and talk to my

partner about this and that. I probably would not have if I hadn't gotten what I got from the screening'" (2013). Gysae, in turn, explains that the films often serve as an instigator of discussion even after the screenings:

> One of the things that youth mentioned was to talk more open to their parents. Wow! This is a big thing, because parents and children don't talk about sex. And these kids felt empowered enough to talk to their parents or the parents ask: "So what are you doing? What is this film about?" (2013)

In some instances, the publics created at the STEPS screenings thus expanded into domestic, "private" spheres, encouraging young people to talk to their parents about the issues raised by the films. This suggests that, in some contexts, *Steps Youth Films* have taken on a "mediating" role between children and parents by fostering intergenerational dialogues.

However, not every STEPS screening has been successful in opening up a constructive debate about the issues the films address. After the screening of *Kwerekwere* in the Bo Kaap school which I attended (discussed above), the facilitated discussion sparked an argument between "Coloured", Afrikaans-speaking students and "black", Xhosa-speaking students. One black girl said: "We're all Africans as one. We were talking about black and Coloureds and Whites. I say that we're all blacks. But they [pointing to a group of Afrikaans-speaking boys] say they are not black" ("Facilitated Screening", 2013). Some Coloured boys shouted back: "Don't lie!", "but we're not black!", and "you don't like us, we don't like you!" ("Facilitated Screening", 2013). This heated discussion almost resulted in a fight between a group of Xhosa-speaking boys and Afrikaans-speaking boys, and the facilitator expelled them from the class as a result. This conflict took over the

discussion about how to address racial discrimination at the school, and the screening ended without conclusive points to probe the debates further. This situation illustrated that South Africa's new generation is still deeply divided along racial lines; on the positive side, however, the film screening allowed these issues to surface and be spoken about rather than remain hidden by prejudices and fear.

In some situations, STEPS' community screenings also had a transformative effect on the lives of disenfranchised young people. For example, STEPS' partner organisation Sesotho Media and Development ran a cinema programme in Lesotho with young prisoners who are HIV-positive, who took the initiative to organise their own screenings in the prisons and were trained by STEPS as facilitators. As Maane says:

> They took the initiative completely […]. [O]ur partner organisation
> Sesotho Media and Development are now negotiating with Correction
> Services to see if this can be part of their rehabilitation programme,
> because some of the released prisoners who were trained as facilitators
> are now […] going out to the communities, they go back to the prisons
> and work as facilitators. (2013)

Moreover, Sergio Carciotto and Mulugeta Dibabo (2013) suggest that STEPS' community screenings and trainings helped these young men to form communities in the prisons and enhanced their confidence. The conversations with audiences after screenings enabled them to identify social problems and organise appropriate collective action; and this made them realise their ability to change their own and other people's lives (Carciotto & Dinbabo, 2013).

4.4 Conclusion

Both *Steps Youth Films* and *Intersexions* were made with the aim of addressing South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis, and creating discussions about this problem, particularly among young people. One essential aspect these media projects share is that they were able to create publics mainly because of the different producers' focus on non-didactic, realist narratives that refrain from "preaching" to audiences. However, the discussions and commentary that constituted the publics of thes screen media productions diverged significantly due to the different contexts – television and community screenings – within which they were exhibited.

In contrast to *Steps Youth Films*, *Intersexions* was debated extensively via social media, and especially via Twitter and Facebook. Viewers used these social media platforms to instantly share their viewing experiences of *Intersexions* with one another, thereby creating "virtual viewing communities", or "digital publics", around the television series. These digital publics suggest that different media platforms are converging in South Africa, with people's "offline" consumption of television content overlapping with their use of online media. Yet, it is important to bear in mind that *Intersexions*' digital publics were created only by those people who are able to afford Internet access, and thus were likely to exclude people from disenfranchised backgrounds.

The discussions surrounding *Intersexions* on Twitter reveal the complexities of film and television spectatorship, since viewers' interpretations of the drama series did not always correspond with the producers' intentions to educate about HIV transmission. Some viewers mocked and critiqued the series' educational attempts, while others engaged with politicians' controversial responses to HIV/AIDS.

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Moreover, some young, female viewers of *Intersexions* formed digital, intimate publics on Facebook by sharing their personal experiences of sexual violence with one another, thereby initiating a virtual support network. However, social media, perhaps because of the anonymity they provide, can also allow for circulating discriminatory discourses that dominate in "offline" spaces. On Twitter, some spectators of *Intersexions* disseminated problematic narratives about female sexuality that placed the "blame" for HIV/AIDS squarely at the feet of young women. It thus remains open to question whether the digital publics that formed around *Intersexions* will have long-standing, positive impacts on South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis and on gender inequality. Moreover, it remains to be seen whether *Intersexions'* fear tactics have provoked not only reactions of shock, fear, and, sometimes, hilarity, but have furthered the social integration of people affected by HIV/AIDS – and, crucially, whether they have contributed to lower infection rates.

In turn, the publics conjured at the community screenings of *Steps Youth Films* fostered a kind of intimacy based on sharing fear and prejudices about HIV/AIDS, and this has encouraged some people to take the initiative to address the disease and related social problems. In some situations, STEPS' post-screening debates created "intimate publics", comprised of young audiences who were moved emotionally by the films and shared private matters with the STEPS facilitators. These moments of intimacy emerged especially during discussions facilitated by the young film subjects themselves. In contrast to the *digital* intimate publics viewers formed around *Intersexions* on Facebook, *Steps Youth Films'* intimate publics were thus based on *physical*, face-to-face discussions. Focused on direct, personal contact with audiences, STEPS was able to identify and support those youths who voiced their

problems and concerns after film screenings. In contrast, it is unknown how many of *Intersexions'* spectators took the initiative to seek answers to their questions via the online and telephone services provided by the producers.

STEPS has continued its community approach to making and exhibiting films addressing HIV/AIDS, with their most recent documentary films exploring the relationships of HIV/AIDS to tuberculosis, discordancy, and substance abuse. These themes, once again, emerged from people's responses during facilitated discussions, illustrating the close contact the organisation maintains with their audiences (Maane, 2013).

This chapter's discussion of adolescent girls' participation in the making of STEPS' films has highlighted the positive impacts collaborative filmmaking efforts can have on the lives of young film subjects. However, my analysis of young people's participation in *Steps Youth Films* has also revealed the variety of ethical issues that are at stake when intimate experiences are exposed publicly via documentary film, particularly since children and youth may no longer feel comfortable with this exposure when they are older. My discussion of *Rough Aunties* in the previous chapter has also shown that children's participation in documentary filmmaking can both act as a way of "working through trauma", and have unpredictable, and potentially adverse, emotional and social consequences for them. These multiple possible effects of collaborative filmmaking are probed further in the next chapter, which explores a documentary film about young, Black dancers from Soweto made by young, White South African filmmakers. In this chapter, the discussion around "online" and "live" screenings, publics, and digital media is also continued through a

focus on the "converging publics" the film has created through "live" screenings and through exchanges on social media.

Chapter 5　　**"I dance as if I have a gun against my head": Subcultures and**

Redemptive Narratives in *The African Cypher*

The thing that changed my life? There is definitely one answer: Dance, man!

–Mada[113]

5.1　Introduction

It is a hot, overcast afternoon in Cape Town when I meet Bryan Little, a young, South African filmmaker who directed the documentary films *The African Cypher* and *Fokofpolisiekar: Forgive Them for They Know not what They Do* (2009), and his young, lively producer, Filipa Domingues. I jump into their car and we make our way through the afternoon traffic, out of the city center. We are on our way to a dance workshop for children and youth in Westlake, a community near Cape Town, where alcohol, crime, and gangsterism are rife. As we arrive at Westlake's community hall, I can already hear the heavy beats of rap and hip-hop music. Inside, a breakdance[114] class with a group of 30 to 40 children and teenagers – mostly boys – is underway. The children are jumping, wheeling, and turning, instructed by two young men dressed in hip-hop clothes (see figure 5.1 and *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.1).[115] These two men are Duane and Jed Lawrence of Ubuntu, a b-boy dance

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[113]　See Mada (2014).

[114]　Breakdancing, or "b-boying", originated among Black youths in New York's Bronx neighbourhood in the 1970s. It has been practised in South African townships since the mid-1980s, especially in "Coloured" communities. It is performed to hip-hop, rap and funk music (Watkins, 2012: 57).

[115]　Typical hip-hop clothes are baggy trousers, loose t-shirts, and caps.

group famous in South Africa (see figure 5.2). The brothers grew up in Mitchell's Plain, a township outside of Cape Town, and became professional dancers,[116] travelled to international competitions, and performed with famous hip-hop artists across the world (Lawrence, 2013).

Figure 5.1 *Breakdance workshop at Westlake community hall* **(2013). Westlake, Cape Town. [Photograph] Personal photograph by author.**

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[116] Duane Lawrence started breakdancing early in his life. His rise to fame started when, near the end of his matric year, he received an invitation to participate in the Battle Of The Year in Germany (Red Bull, 2012a).

Figure 5.2 *Duane Lawrence (right) and Jed Lawrence (middle) run a dance workshop for youth in Westlake* (2013). **Westlake, Cape Town. [Photograph] Personal photograph by author.**

During a break, I spoke to Duane Lawrence who said this about the workshop:

> My mission is […] to teach others and spread the positivity [….] that is
> not being spread in the world right now. You know, there is so much crap
> on TV, so much crap on the radio. Unfortunately, the little kids are
> forced to listen to all of that. Everything that's on TV, all these naked
> women, gangsters, bands…whereas they could dance […]. That's how
> they grow up, by those negative images. So I feel that […] because
> people have blessed us, we have to bless others and give back to others,
> otherwise what are we living for? (2013)

Hence, for Lawrence, breakdancing has a deeper meaning than bodily performance

alone, offering alternatives to street violence, drugs, and alcohol.

Little's documentary film *The African Cypher* is one of few feature-length films to engage with the diverse street dances of South Africa.[117] The film centres on two young Pantsula dancers from Soweto, Prince "Pringle" Mofokeng and Sthembiso "Mada" Moloi, revealing how Prince has transformed from a criminal into a dancer who makes an earnest living. While Prince's personal transformation guides *The African Cypher*'s narrative, the film introduces a variety of youth dances practised in South African townships, including breakdance, Krump, and Sbhujwa, as well as their histories and meanings. Pantsula, which is performed with long, loose, fast steps, is popular with Black urban youths (Gunner, 2006: 96). It originated in South Africa during the apartheid era as a response from young black people to the forced removals of the 1950s and 1960s (Myburgh, 1993). Pantsula simultaneously developed a fashion style known as "tsotsi",[118] characterised by loose trousers, Converse trainers and hats. Moreover, Krump, which originated in the early 2000s among African-American youths in the US, involves frenetic dance moves, face painting, and "battles" between dance groups; and it often represents a non-violent release for youth who face violence in everyday life.[119] Sbhujwa, in turn, combines moves from Pantsula, breakdance, contemporary dance, and freestyle. Its origins are relatively unclear; what is known is that it was developed in the 1990s by young dancers from Soweto (Red Bull, 2012b).

The African Cypher exemplifies an emerging trend in post-apartheid South African filmmaking, where White filmmakers have increasingly chosen the path of collaboration when it comes to depicting marginalised youths. *Gangster Project*

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[117] *Hear me Move* is a fictional story about street dancers in South Africa.
[118] The word "tsotsi" refers to a street thug or petty criminal.
[119] The documentary film *Rize* (LaChapelle, 2005) explores Krump practices in Los Angeles.

(Edkins, 2011), *Four Corners*, and *Otelo Burning* are all examples of films that emerged through collaborations between White directors and Black film subjects. oral – although many Black youths of this generation did experience the political violence first-hand – yet neither are they young enough to have been "Born Free" from apartheid. This chapter explores how this "in-between" position of Little and Domingues has translated into collaborative filmmaking, and the implications *The African Cypher*'s making and exhibition has had on the filmmakers, subjects, and audiences. Since a young, male filmmaker made the film together with a young, female producer and young, male dancers, particular attention is paid to the gendered dimensions of the film's production, content, and reception.

The *African Cypher* is interesting for this thesis not only because of its production and diegetic worlds, but also because it has created both "live" and "online" publics, just as *Otelo Burning* (discussed in chapter 2) has done. In South Africa, the filmmakers exhibited *The African Cypher* at film festivals and community screenings, which created opportunities for face-to-face discussions; however, the film also created digital publics on social media, after the filmmakers initiated an online media campaign for Prince, who was diagnosed with cancer in March 2014. Questions of how and why these publics came into being, and the nature of the discussions that constitute them, are explored in this chapter.

The chapter's findings suggest that *The African Cypher*'s collaborative production and exhibition resulted in a relationship of interdependency between the filmmakers and the film subjects, based on respect and mutual support. In turn, the collaborative filmmaking effort enabled Little to project the personal, intimate perspectives of the young Black dancers onto the screen, suggesting, once again, that South Africa's

new generation is not entirely Born Free, and that for some young people, economic freedom is still to be attained. Yet, it was ultimately Little and Domingues who were – as with Blecher in *Otelo Burning* – the "authors" of the film and who were also the major beneficiaries of its exhibition.

In many "White-authored" post-apartheid films, "redemptive narratives" are common (Dovey, 2007; Rijsdijk & Haupt, 2008). *Hijack Stories*, *Gangster's Paradise*, and *Tsotsi* all evoke narratives of individual and communal redemption embodied by a Black, male anti-hero (Duck, 2014). *Tsotsi*'s plot, for example, is driven by "redeeming features", depicting the path of a young gangster, Tsotsi, who steals a car from a wealthy Black couple and afterwards finds himself in possession of their baby (Dovey, 2007). However, Tsotsi soon becomes attached to the infant, which reminds him of his own troubled childhood. At the end of the film, he is "redeemed" through the affection he has developed for the baby, and through his attempts to make amends with his delinquent past (Dovey, 2007).

This chapter suggests that *The African Cypher*, too, is a "redemptive narrative" with multiple layers. The film's plot emphasises individual redemption and collective liberation through dance, projecting an optimistic vision of South Africa's new generation onto the screen. The dances exposed in *The African Cypher* can be described through Dick Hebdige's concept of "subcultures" (1979), which describes cultural expressions and styles developed by young people from marginalised backgrounds as an expression of resistance to the ruling social classes and normative discourses (1979: 84, 132). Hebdige probes that subcultures are an expression of marginalised young people's liberation from societal norms, with resistance

expressed through a "map of meaning" (1979: 15, 18)[120] – what James Scott would call "hidden transcripts" (1990) – inscribed in style and music. Hebdige notes that subcultures tend to disappear over time, as they are often appropriated by the agendas of corporate businesses and the "mainstream" media. To an extent, the role of *The African Cypher*'s co-producer, Red Bull, illustrates that youth subcultures can, indeed, be co-opted by large corporations. However, audiences of *The African Cypher* from across the world created intimate digital publics on Facebook and Twitter, which challenged the consumerist, individualist lifestyle advertised by Red Bull. The actions Mada has taken outside the film's exhibition, too, require a nuancing of Hebdige's argument that the members of subcultures become inevitably co-opted by commercialism and consumerism.

The African Cypher's production process also delineates the young, White filmmakers' own redemption, for they were able to establish personal relationships with youths from different cultures and "races". In turn, the film's exhibition had a "redeeming" effect on one of its main subjects, Mada, as I will show. At the same time, *The African Cypher* comprises some tensions concerning its position in the contemporary social and political landscape in South Africa. Focused on individual redemption, the film ultimately eclipses a discussion of the wider socio-economic structures of the post-apartheid period. And the film's redemptive narratives are almost entirely masculine, focused on young men, while women are remarkably absent.

The film created "converging publics" constituted of digital publics on social media platforms, "reading publics", and "oral" publics during live screenings at film

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[120] I will unpack this term later in the chapter.

festivals. However, it was the presence of Prince and Mada at screenings that created "intimate publics" (Berlant, 2008, 2009) around the film, which had "redeeming" impacts on the lives of some viewers, and particularly young men. This illustrates, once again, the important role of community screenings, in the presence of the film subjects, to create publics around screen media that are individually and socially transformative.

5.2 Whiteness and the Politics of Belonging

Little and Domingues developed the idea to make *The African Cypher* in 2011, when Red Bull South Africa approached the filmmaking collective Fly on the Wall, to which Little and Domingues belong. Red Bull commissioned Fly on the Wall to make two-minute-long teaser films for the inaugural Red Bull Beat Battle 2011 in Johannesburg, a competition for the best street dance crew in South Africa.[121] These films introduce the dance crews that took part in the contest, such as Prince's and Mada's Pantsula crew, Shakers and Movers; the freestyle dancers Afro-Tribal; Duane Lawrence's Ubuntu B-Boys; and Tom London's Sbhujwa dance crew Soweto Finest. The making of these short films inspired Little and Domingues to produce their own feature-length documentary about street dance in South African communities. *The African Cypher* was co-produced by Fly on the Wall and Red Bull, and it was completed within one year.

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[121] These films are available on YouTube: http://bit.ly/1IJY1Ge (accessed 13 August 2015).

Little states that *The African Cypher* is both a film about street dance and an exploration of a particular Black subculture in South Africa. He said in an interview I did with him and Domingues:

> There's two reasons why I wanted to make the film […]. It's just such a cinematic thing, dancing. It's emotional, it's physical, it translates so well onto film. I've always been fascinated with Pantsula dancing […] and I just really love the […] energy of it. For me, it's an iconic South African dance […]. That's one reason. The other is, as a white South African from Cape Town, the more I can learn about my country and the various subcultures, the better. I just wanted to immerse myself in that subculture, for purely selfish reasons, I guess. Just to explore it. (2012)

Little's producer, Domingues, had similar motivations for making the film, saying:

> People think now that apartheid is over we should all be friends and holding hands and skipping down the road. It's not like that; it's a culture difference, not a colour difference, [and] […] an economic difference […]. We can all relate on a very surface level, but I never thought that we ever go deeper. (Little & Domingues, 2012)

Hence, with *The African Cypher*, Domingues and Little did not only seek to explore the subcultures of Black youths, but also their own identity and positioning as young, White South Africans within post-apartheid society. Domingues' words suggest that although apartheid formally ended in 1994, she still feels disconnected with people of other "races" and cultures. These social divisions evoke once again the idea that contemporary South Africa is still a "transitional" country, with the historical discourse on race and class continuing to dominate the ways in which identities are being constructed.

In the post-apartheid period, the divisions along racial lines established by the apartheid state ("black", "white", "Afrikaner", "Indian" and "Coloured") have certainly begun to shift towards divisions along the lines of class (Mbembe, 2007).

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Partly as a result of the former President Mbeki's enforcement of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programmes, more Black people have entered the middle classes and have taken on leadership positions.[122] However, Black South Africans still command less than five per cent of the economy, while many Whites continue to enjoy economic privilege (Mbembe, 2007). Of course, some White people are committed to achieving racial equality, while others are part of the poor, working classes. Yet, ongoing White privilege, in conjunction with rising Black nationalism, have fostered a culture of mutual resentment, which has made it difficult to overcome the historical divisions between White and Black people (McKaiser, 2011). Racial prejudices discriminating against Blacks have also re-emerged in debates about social problems, such as HIV/AIDS, rape, and crime (Nuttall & Michael, 2000a: 11–12). In turn, discourses of "victimhood" by historically disadvantaged people have also emerged, obscuring cases of personal enrichment and corruption in the Black upper classes, and stirring anger across different demographic groups.[123]

In light of this background, Little's and Domingues' intentions for making *The African Cypher* illustrate the complexities of the "politics of belonging" in the post-apartheid period from the perspectives of White South Africans. As Sarah Nuttall points out, Whiteness in postcolonial Africa has historically been linked to a "settler" identity, which evokes the idea of someone appropriating land from its original

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[122] BEE is a programme initiated by the South African government in 1994 aiming to address the historical economic inequalities established during apartheid. The initiative seeks to decrease historical disparities in income, while increasing the numbers of Black people who manage, own, and control the country's economy ("History of Black Economic Empowerment", 2007). However, BEE has been criticised for enriching only a small, Black elite – thereby exacerbating economic inequality – and for neglecting investment in Black education and entrepreneurship (Harrison, 2009).

[123] For a critique of corruption in the Black upper class, see the documentary films *Dear Mandela* (Kell & Nizza, 2012) and *A Place in the City* (Morgan, 2008), which focus on Abahlali baseMjondo, a social movement that originated among shack-dwellers in Durban in 2005 (Jacobs, 2011).

owners through violent means, and of someone who benefits from exploiting other people's labour (2001: 117–118). The term "settler" also has the connotation of "coming from elsewhere", "not being from" a particular place, and this meaning has become particularly relevant in the post-apartheid context (Nuttall, 2001: 118). After the end of apartheid, South Africa's TRC confronted White people with the fact that "belonging" to the country could no longer be assumed in the new political dispensation, but that it required establishing a new, White identity that breaks with the burden of the past (Nuttall, 2001: 118).

An exploration of White South African identity informs the film Little and Domingues made prior to *The African Cypher*, with the provocative title *Fokofpolisiekar: Forgive Them for They Know not what They Do*. The film centres on the controversial punk band Fokofpolisiekar, founded in 2003 by five young Afrikaner men from a conservative Cape Town suburb. Little's documentary reveals that many of Fokofpolisiekar's songs express a rejection of the band members' upbringing, reflect on Afrikaans life style, Christian conservatism, and White guilt during apartheid (Haupt, 2012: 95). At the same time, however, Fokofpolisiekar has re-affirmed an identity that is often dismissed in the new South Africa. As Little says, the band "made Afrikaners feel […] like they had an identity and place to be and that they could express themselves in their own language and then in culture without the [burden] of the past" (Little & Kholer, 2013).[124]

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[124] There has been a recent "renaissance" of critical Afrikaner culture in South Africa, through bands such as Fokofpolisiekar and the controversial rock band Die Antwoord. See, for example, Adam Haupt (2012).

That Little and Domingues wanted to explore Black youth culture in *The African Cypher* partly derived from audience responses to *Fokofpolisiekar*. Domingues explains:

> Some people were angry that there were no black people in the documentary […]. We didn't know how to answer that, because the film is not about black people, it's about white Afrikaans people […]. It always got me thinking: "Are we ever going to connect with black people?" […] We did on this documentary [*The African Cypher*] and it changed a lot of things for me. (Little & Domingues, 2012)

Little, in turn, says:

> Generally people ask me: "What do you hope that people take away from the film [*The African Cypher*]?" […] My response has always been that I hope that just for one moment, whether you are a black guy or a white guy – and the person on the screen is a black guy – or whether you're a Pantsula and they're Krump, or whether you're foreign or South African, I just hope for one point in the film that you can find a real connection. (Little & Domingues, 2012)

Through collaborating with young Black men during the production of *The African Cypher*, Little and Domingues thus sought to establish personal relationships with youth from other racial backgrounds, and to come to terms with questions of belonging to the "new" South Africa as Whites. *The African Cypher* is not a film about young, White South Africans, however, but about Black youths from disenfranchised backgrounds; the filmmakers' negotiation of their identity thus took place in relation to others. It is, therefore, vital to explore the ways in which the filmmakers have grappled with questions of their own belonging in *The African Cypher*'s making, textual politics, and exhibition, as well as the impacts the film's production and circulation have had on the lives of the young participants.

5.3   *The African Cypher*'s Collaborative Production Process

Collaborative documentary filmmaking practices involving people from different social and "racial" backgrounds have been debated by numerous scholars (Gross, Katz & Ruby, 1988; Downing & Saxton, 2010; Nash, 2011). Discussing Australian cinema, Catronia Elder points out that White filmmakers' collaboration with aboriginal people has become popular "because of the legitimacy [Aborigines] can bring to non-Indigenous peoples' occupancy of this land" (2007: 147). Elder argues that participatory filmmaking practices often serve White Australians to help carve out a feeling of belonging for themselves (2007: 148). Refuting such arguments, Henk Huijser and Brooke Collins-Gearing (2007) suggest that participatory cinema projects can benefit both filmmaker(s) and film subject(s), provided the collaborative production process is based on mutual respect and a relationship of trust. However, the ethics of documentary filmmaking do not only concern relationships *during* the production, but also *afterwards*. As my analysis of *Otelo Burning* (chapter 2) and *Rough Aunties* (chapter 3) has revealed, the filmmakers, and not the film subjects, often benefit from collaborative filmmaking efforts, both financially and by furthering their own careers. For this reason, the making of documentary films (as well as fiction films based on people's lives) is more ethically charged than that of films based on entirely fictional stories.

According to Little, the initiative to make *The African Cypher* came not only from himself, but also from Prince and Mada, while shooting the promotional short film for Red Bull. He says: "I met these guys and it evolved from there. But it was a mutual desire to try and tell their story. Initially it wasn't necessarily my idea. The

people in it inspired me to make the film" ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012). Mada, in turn, described the initiative behind the film in an interview with me as follows:

> There was a day when Bryan and […] Filipa were doing the coverage for the Red Bull Beat Battle […]. After that, I think they came up with the thought that they want to do a documentary. But me, I didn't know why. So I think they were just embraced in our story [sic], the way we live, the things that we did in our lives. (2014)

It seems, then, that while *The African Cypher* was a collaborative undertaking, it was Little and Domingues who instigated the making of the film. Moreover, although Little insists that *The African Cypher* was "co-authored" with Mada and Prince, he called himself sole director of the film – as with Blecher in *Otelo Burning* and Longinotto in *Rough Aunties*.

During the making of *The African Cypher*, Little and Domingues established close, personal relationships with Mada and Prince and familiarised themselves with their lives. Little stresses he "had a strict policy of not just diving in with the camera, because the camera is quite powerful. We met them [Prince and Mada] and talked to them first and really got to know these guys" ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012). Comparable to Longinotto's small production team in the making of *Rough Aunties*, Little shot the film with a team of five people, which allowed him to be flexible and to film in intimate situations. According to him, "it makes a difference. Imagine having 20 people, it would just dilute the whole thing. It's nice to have a small, mobile crew" (2012).

Little's and Domingues' close relationships with Mada and Prince made the shooting a spontaneous, organic process. Little remained in the background, rather than intervening in events that unfolded in front of the camera, which translates into *The*

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African Cypher's observational style, comparable to that of *Rough Aunties*. Little

says this about the shooting:

> I never really directed or interviewed anyone in the film […]. Prince
> would talk about his prison experience and all that. I [thought] about a
> way of how to get that across and stay true with these characters. So
> we'd do a little scene like by the shack with the wire and stuff […]. At
> other times, I let them interview each other. Before we'd start I'd say, the
> last week we've been dealing with this issue, this theme, I like you guys
> to talk about it. In a sense, they took ownership of the film. I believe that
> I directed this film, but also it was a collaborative effort between myself
> and the dancers. We had long discussions about themes. I think that's
> what helped to make it feel more authentic, rather than me just imposing
> my vision on it. I mould and sculpt the process along the line. ("Q&A at
> DIFF", 2012)

By involving the young men in the film's narrative, then, Little sought to extend the

film's "authorship" to them. However, as the previous chapters in this thesis have

shown, the making of documentary films involving people from different

demographic backgrounds is complex, and not always based on mutual agency. It

was ultimately Little, not Mada and Prince, who "authored" (West, 1999) *The*

African Cypher, for he chose the situations that were filmed (or staged), and he was

in charge of the editing process and the distribution. And while the observational

mode of documentary enabled him to capture the everyday life of the film subjects,

"this fly-on-the-wall" perspective also risks eliding questions of ownership and

whose perspective the film really shows.

Little was not the sole author of the film, however; this authorship was shared with

his producer and girlfriend, Domingues. Her role in the making of *The African*

Cypher surpassed that of an ordinary film (or television) producer, which usually

encompasses organisational tasks, such as managing a film's production schedule

and budget, the smooth operation of the shooting, and the post-production.

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Domingues, however, was as much a "director" of *The African Cypher* as Little was, for she, too, was actively involved in the shooting process and followed the film's participants in their daily lives ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012).[125] During an interview, she said: "Every day was different, it was very much on the go. Whatever we picked up, whatever we found interesting, we just made sure we filmed it" (Little & Domingues, 2012). As with Little, Domingues established personal friendships with Prince and Mada during the film's production, stating: "we met them before, we met all their families, elders, cousins, sisters. We went into the shebeens and shisa nyamas[126] with them" ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012). Not only Little, but also Domingues thus became a "fly-on-the-wall" in the lives of the young Black dancers; she was also an "author" of *The African Cypher*, which suggests that the film's authorship is informed by both a male and a female perspective. And yet, as discussed later in the chapter, the film's narrative unfolds from a distinctively masculine point of view.

The African Cypher's soundtrack represents another dimension of the collaborations that informed the film's production. Simon Kohler, the composer, was part of the film crew that followed the young dancers in day-to-day life. He says:

> Luckily I was involved right from the beginning and so I got to go along and meet […] all the guys. I would just try and figure out what it is that they use with music, how they use it […]. All I tried to do really was to zone in to what the feeling was and what I felt then, what I could gather from them, and use that as the base for creating stuff […]. I think that a lot of the meaning came from rhythm […]. There's maybe one or two […] tracks with singing on it, but most of them are rhythmic tracks. (Little & Kholer, 2013)

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[125] It was unfortunately not possible for me to interview Domingues individually about her experiences of being part of the almost entirely male film crew.

[126] Shisa nyama is an informal barbeque or grill.

It was thus a White composer who authored the film's soundtrack by adapting original genres of "Black" music into new songs; and this poses further questions about who, in fact, "owns" the film, and whose subculture has been represented in and adapted – or even appropriated – through it.

Beyond questions of authorship in collaborative documentary filmmaking, it is also important to explore the impact such films might have on the lives of the film subjects – especially when filmmakers and participants develop close relationships during the shooting (Nash, 2011).[127] My discussion of *Rough Aunties* in chapter 2 of this thesis has revealed that the outcomes of collaborative documentary films are not always positive for the participants, particularly if filmmakers do not keep in touch with them once the film is completed. These ethical aspects are also relevant for *The African Cypher,* since Prince and Mada came from very poor backgrounds. As Domingues says:

> When we first met [Prince], was at Pick and Pay, which is one of our major supermarkets. He'd pack the shelves from 11 at night until six in the morning and was getting paid […] 30 Rand [£1.50] a night. Absolutely nothing. Hopefully they'll get some opportunities out of this [film]. (Little & Domingues, 2012)

Little was wary of the fact that *The African Cypher*'s distribution could have consequences for Prince and Mada, saying "in the film I was so worried about […] what that exposure would do to them" (Little & Kholer, 2013). He explains: "Prince and Mada […] don't really know anything outside of Soweto, even just to go and perform in Johannesburg will be a big deal there" (Little & Kholer, 2013).

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[127] See Kate Nash's work (2011, 2012) for a comprehensive discussion of documentary film ethics.

The exhibition of *The African Cypher* did indeed have some effects on Prince and Mada's lives. They travelled abroad for the first time in their lives to perform at a screening of the film at IDFA in Amsterdam, one of the largest film festivals in the world (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.2), and at Étonnants Voyageurs, a small film festival in Brazzaville, Congo. These experiences, in turn, opened up some economic opportunities for the young dancers. Mada says: "most of the jobs that we did get, it's because of [sic] *The African Cypher*" (2014), although he is still struggling financially. Prince and Mada were also not able to attend all the film festivals where the film was screened, such as DIFF, Étonnants Voyageurs in France, and the Seattle International Film Festival (SIFF), since most film festivals pay for only one representative of a film to attend – and Little and/or Domingues travelled to represent *The African Cypher* (Little & Kholer, 2013). It was also Little who received awards at film festivals, such as Best South African documentary at DIFF, and the Audience Award at the Cape Town Encounters International Documentary Film Festival.

However, Domingues and Little sought to support Prince and Mada once *The African Cypher* was completed. For example, Domingues taught Prince and Mada, as well as the Ubuntu B-Boys, basic skills in social media, and how to use Facebook to promote their work (Little & Domingues, 2012). Moreover, Fly on the Wall paid for Prince and Mada to fly to, and stay in, Cape Town to attend a party for the completion of *The African Cypher* (Little & Kholer, 2013). It seems, then, that the filmmakers did not simply forget Prince and Mada upon completion of their film; this continuation of a relationship is similar to that fostered by the STEPS organisation, who have kept in close contact with their young film subjects once the

Steps Youth Films were made (see chapter 4). This reciprocal relationship among Little, Domingues, Mada, and Prince following the making and exhibition of *The African Cypher*, can, once again, be described as one of "interdependency", from which both filmmakers and film subjects benefited.

5.4   Private Perspectives

While both a male and a female filmmaker authored *The African Cypher,* the film unfolds entirely from the perspectives of young men, providing intimate, private insights into their lives. Little remains hidden behind the camera, seemingly ignored by the subjects, and allows for situations to develop without intervening. Most of the time, the young men do not look directly at the camera, whereby the film reveals moments of intimacy. Only the sometimes shaky movement of his handheld camera, and people's occasional references to the film crew, indicate the filmmaker's presence, creating the impression that the film unfolds from the point of view of the young, Black dancers.

However, Little periodically inserts himself into the intimate moments he captures, through voice-overs characteristic of expository documentaries. The film's establishing sequence follows Prince as he wakes up, gets dressed, and makes his bed in a tiny shed (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.3). Little's voice-over states:

> This is Pringle. His real name is Prince. But that is a whole different
> story. He lives in Mapetla, in Soweto, in a shack with his elderly mum.
> Prince tells me, in Mapetla, if you steal phones and handbags, you will
> not live long. The community will kill you. But if you do a heist, they
> will tell the police you are not there.

Little's narration explains in the subsequent scene: "I don't know him yet, but I have a strange feeling that at some point he is going to tell us something absolutely true and beautiful". Introduced in this way, Prince's personality is subtly defined by Little, not himself, with the filmmaker's own perspective layered over the young dancer's identity. One could even go as far as to interpret the director's voice-over as a well meaning, but almost reversed racist assumption that a Black person has an "extraordinary story" to tell.

The private perspectives exposed in *The African Cypher* evoke the idea that contemporary South Africa is still a "transitional" country. One aspect that unites the dancers portrayed in the film is that they grew up in economically deprived areas, such as Mitchell's Plain, the Cape Flats, Orange Farm, and Soweto. Little takes the viewer deep into these neighbourhoods by introducing the young dancers' struggles with crime, poverty, and unemployment. For example, the scenes with the Real Action Pantsula crew in Orange Farm, a township outside of Johannesburg, reveal how basic resources, such as electricity, are lacking in their community. The camera frames the dancers as they gather in the shack of one member's grandfather, Stefaans, who struggles to connect electricity cables hanging down from the wall (see figure 5.3). When asked how he feels about his grandson dancing Pantsula, Stefaans replies: "I'm satisfied because I know you are dancing and not stealing", suggesting that crime and poverty are a daily reality in Orange Farm.

Figure 5.3 Domingues, F. (2012). *Stefaans and the Real Action Pantsula crew.* **From:** *The African Cypher.* **Dir. Bryan Little. [Film still] Available at: http://on.fb.me/1MvLlGH [Accessed 2015, July 08].**

However, *The African Cypher* does not focus predominantly on young men's social and economic problems. The plot centres instead on the energy and agency of young dancers, highlighting the fact that they seek to define themselves through the physicality of dance, rather than their social situations. Like *Rough Aunties*, the film thus evokes the idea that historically disadvantaged youths are survivors, not victims. In one scene, Mbuso Kgarebe of the Afro-Tribal crew states: "if I come from a shack, it doesn't mean that my mind or my brain is a shack". In turn, one member of the Ubuntu crew says: "b-boying can do a lot for you, my bru [brother]. B-boying is fun and it keeps you off the street". These statements in the film illustrate that dancing represents a pathway for these young men to transform adversity into creativity and self-affirmation. This suggests that they do not embrace the behaviour patterns of

hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 2005), discussed earlier in this thesis, which prescribe that manhood is defined by such things as violence, hypersexuality, and alcohol abuse.

The African Cypher's soundtrack creates an important subtext in the film that affirms the agency of the young men. As in *Yizo Yizo*, kwaito – a music style developed in the 1990s by youths living in deprived urban areas and townships – recurs throughout.[128] For many adults, however, kwaito has been an unwelcome expression of South African youth culture, due to its lyrics that are often hedonistic, rebellious and sexually charged (Peterson, 2003). Kwaito is, nevertheless, popular particularly among young, Black urban South Africans, and its lyrics typically speak to harsh urban conditions, with musicians often adopting an anti-establishment stance in their expression of "street-credibility" (Impey, 2001; Peterson, 2003; Haupt, 2012). Correspondingly, Kholer explains that the kwaito songs in *The African Cypher* deal with "busting through the grime and trying to get to the good life" (Little & Kholer, 2013); and Little adds: "there's a lot of affirmation [in the songs] […], like, 'we are onto something and we can do it, we can reach higher, or we can elevate ourselves'" (Little & Kholer, 2013). Hence, *The African Cypher*'s soundtrack emphasises Black youths' agency in creating their own cultural expressions within, and despite situations of adversity.

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[128] Infusing American rap and hip-hop with reggae, soul, and traditional South African music, kwaito has been described as the "first genuine wave of post-apartheid expression in music" (Magubane, 2006: 213).

5.5   Redemptive Narratives in *The African Cypher*

5.5.1   Street dance, Subcultures, and "Moments of Freedom"

The African Cypher depicts street dances as a leisure form that offers pathways for redemption from economic and social oppression for young Black men. The film's content resonates with the arguments of Hebdige, who has proposed that any subculture is constituted by a group of young people seeking to differentiate themselves from the normative ideas of the society to which they belong (1979: 84–85). Discussing Reggae and Punk culture in 1970s Britain, Hebdige argues that the younger generation of a subordinate class expresses rebellion against their marginalised position by developing new styles and cultural practices, rather than through overt political and social critique (1979: 75). He notes:

> Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance. Its transformations go against nature, interrupting the process of "normalization". As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the "silent majority", which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus. (1979: 18)

Hebdige goes on to argue that subcultures inevitably become subjected to a process of commodification by the mass media and corporate business. For him, the incorporation of subcultures into the "mainstream" represents a consequence of the transformation of subcultural signs (such as dress and music) into mass-produced commodities, and of the "'labelling' and re-definition of deviant behaviour by dominant groups" (Hebdige, 1979: 94), which include the police, the media, and the judiciary.

Hebdige's theory has some conceptual shortcomings, however. For example, he tends to construct subcultures as static, bound entities defined by members' belonging to a subordinate class. However, this idea does not take into account the constantly evolving nature of cultural and social practices, and the fact that youth culture is not only defined by class status alone. Hebdige's suggestion that all subcultures are inevitably assimilated into the "mainstream" also denies young people's agency to resist practices of commodification and commercial advertising (Bennett, 2011; Griffin, 2011). Despite these weaknesses, Hebdige's concept offers a useful theoretical grid for exploring the street dances depicted in *The African Cypher*, since it calls for exploring subcultures' "maps of meaning" (Hebdige, 1979: 18) – that is, signs, symbols and histories inscribed into young people's performances and styles, which may not be immediately apparent (Cobb, 2008: 59).

The street dances portrayed in *The African Cypher* can be described as part of subcultures, for they are widely known in townships and suburban areas of South Africa, but they are relatively absent from the news media, academic research, and formal dance schools. Breakdance is an exception, having recently received exposure from the music industry, as well as attention from researchers (Haupt, 2008; Watkins, 2012). Yet, there are not many platforms for Pantsula, Krump, and Sbhujwa to be seen by the wider population in South Africa (Pantsi, 2014). As Domingues says:

> When we were researching [the dances], there was hardly anything […]. From my experience, in the townships they all know about it, but there's nothing online about it […]. The more I speak to people, they're all saying "Yah, Pantsula!" It's a word that they know. (Little & Domingues, 2012)

Pantsula has not remained entirely absent from the mass media, however. For example, in 2011, Pantsula dancers performed in the US artist Beyoncé's music video *Run the World* ("Pantsula dancers hit the big time", 2011). Therefore, as Jesse Weaver Shipley argues in relation to the recent Ghanaian dance craze Azonto, subcultures can become transnational in nature, and "African" styles and symbols can sometimes being appropriated by international commercial artists (2013).

The street dances depicted in *The African Cypher* evoke certain "maps of meaning" (Hebdige, 1979) that reveal the social and historical significance of these subcultures. For instance, Pantsula dancers have historically been perceived as "tsotsis" (or thugs), and were regarded as an apolitical, deviant expression of township youth culture by their communities (Peterson, 2003). However, as Lewis Nkosi has said, "it would be a great mistake to treat the tsotsi simply as lumpen proletariat without any political acumen or desire to wage the real struggle" (1971: 33, qtd in Rijsdijk & Haupt, 2008: 29). *The African Cypher* brings these "maps of meanings" of Pantsula to the forefront. For example, in one sequence, Sicelo, a Pantsula dancer, describes how the dance was developed in the townships around Johannesburg in the 1950s and 1960s, by black working-class youths wearing a specific dress and practising certain dance moves.[129] He explains how, by the 1980s, when the townships were ravaged by violent clashes with the apartheid police, Pantsula dancing embodied an expression of rebellion, resistance, and social commentary for Black, urban youths. Hence, *The African Cypher* reveals that Pantsula is not simply an "apolitical" dance practised by rebellious youths, but one that has specific social and political significance.

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[129] See Gwen Ansell (2005: 137–128) for a history of Pantsula dance.

The African Cypher's depictions of Pantsula are reminiscent of those in Oliver Schmitz' fiction film *Mapantsula*, one of the few films made during apartheid to overtly critique the state's draconian policies.[130] Set at the height of apartheid, in the 1980s, *Mapantsula* is a *fictional* treatment of Pantsula subculture, centred on the life of Panic, a young, Black petty gangster from Soweto. Panic is set apart from the anti-apartheid activists in the township, who are protesting against Black poverty and unemployment; his rebellion finds a different expression through embracing Pantsula lifestyle, such as expensive clothing, pickpocketing, and a seeming disinterest in national politics. In a key scene set in a nightclub, Panic refuses to take off his hat when asked by the owner, thereby contesting the environment around him (Magogodi, 2002: 249). He then enters the dance floor with his friend, Dingaan, and playfully drops his trousers to reveal his underpants while dancing Pantsula (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.4). This scene reveals both the provocative, extravagant manner of Pantsula dancers and the hyper-masculine behaviour they display. *Mapantsula*, like *The African Cypher*, thus represents Pantsula as a self-affirmative expression of subculture providing young men with liberation from structural oppression (Magogodi, 2002: 249).

While *The African Cypher* focuses primarily on Pantsula dance and culture, it also introduces other subcultures. Through interviews with hip-hop artists,[131] including Ramone and DJ Ready D of Prophets of da City (POC),[132] as well as Isaac Mutant,[133]

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[130] See Modisane (2010c, 2013) for a discussion of *Mapantsula*'s exhibition and the publics it created.

[131] Weaam Williams' documentary film *Hip Hop Revolution* (2007) explores the development of hip-hop in South Africa.

[132] POC is one of South Africa's first hip-hop bands. In the 1980s and 1990s, POC's songs were abundant with social and political messages. Their 1993 album *Age of Truth* was banned for critiquing the NP's credibility in South Africa's reconciliation processes (Haupt, 2012: 32–33).

the film explains how b-boying emerged as a form of youth rebellion to poverty and racial oppression in the Cape Flats during the early 1980s.[134] In one scene, DJ Ready D states:

> The b-boying was there to counter everything that said "you cannot".
> That was our way of saying: "We'll smash you out of the way and this is the way we will. You suppress us, oppress us, come with your guns, come with your gas, but the pen and the mike is a very, very powerful tool".

DJ Ready D's words here evoke Hebdige's argument that subcultures challenge what he calls the "process of normalization" [sic] (1979: 18) of oppressive practices that are widely tolerated in society.

The African Cypher's representations of dance as a means of liberation can also be described through Johannes Fabian's arguments in his book *Moments of Freedom* (1998). Fabian proposes that popular culture can enable people who are excluded from power to momentarily free themselves from social constraints. Pantsula, b-boying, krumping and Sbhujwa all embody such "moments of freedom", representing a means of psychological and spiritual liberation. In the same way that Blecher treats surfing in *Otelo Burning*, *The African Cypher* evokes the idea that street dances offer redemption from social and economic disadvantages. For example, in one scene in the film, a Krump dancer states: "[Krump] was […] a way to channel all the negativity that we are going through, instead of being part of a community where gangsterism is rife and drug abuse is everything". Kgarebe of the Afro Tribal crew, in another scene, says dancing is "where we let go […] and rise

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[133] Mutant is a "gangster rapper" from the Cape Flats, known for songs that centre on drugs, addiction, displacement and redemption.

[134] B-boying and hip-hop originated in the U.S. in the 1970s, and were gradually appropriated by Black youths in South African townships in the 1980s (Haupt, 2012). Some hip-hop crews danced at high schools and protest rallies, especially in the Cape Town area (Watkins, 2012).

above". Little's cinematography captures this "rising above" over and over again, devoting numerous scenes to the physicality of dancing bodies. Dance choreographies are emphasised through slow motion sequences shot from various angles, illuminating the spinning, flipping and wheeling movements (see figure 5.4 and *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.5). Yet, as I will unpack later in the chapter, the film's depiction of street dance as redemptive could also be critiqued for representing a romanticised vision of young Black men's struggle with poverty and crime.

Figure 5.4 Domingues, F. (2012). *The Ubuntu B-Boy crew*. **From:** *The African Cypher*. **Dir. Bryan Little. [Film still] Available at: http://on.fb.me/1fzcivc [accessed 2015, July 206].**

What *The African Cypher* does not explicitly show is that young street dancers are often frowned upon in their communities. Little explains:

> It's like a double-edged thing, because […] everyone has appreciation for dance and they enjoy it. Say for instance if Mada and Prince dance in Soweto, people stop and watch and enjoy it. But then the moment that those dancers say that's going to be their career […] and they are not really making any money from it, then […] it becomes really difficult for them in their families and their communities. People just think they are […] not really doing anything serious. (Little & Kholer, 2013)

Street dance, then, embodies a form of leisure that challenges normative ideas of how youths should behave. As Little says:

> If you are a young guy in Soweto and you are 18 years old […], you are kind of expected to contribute to the family. It's not like in white culture, where the kids get everything to […] get their career going […]. It's like now that they are men, they must now contribute back and look after their elders. (Little & Kholer, 2013)

These social expectations placed on young men are made explicit in one sequence in the film, in which Mada drives through Soweto with a car, explaining how he set up a small chicken business. He says: "That money is very helpful […]. I can also help out at home when they need food. […] There's five of us at home and all of us are unemployed". Mada told me in an interview that when he started Pantsula dancing at the age of 13, he was attracted to the dance because of "the attention of people while they were watching the guy [Pantsula dancer], the respect that they had for the guy. That thing [sic] made me want to dance at that moment" (2014). This highlights that while young Pantsula dancers might not be highly regarded within their communities, they also momentarily obtain social status when performing in public.

The production of *The African Cypher* can be described as a "redeeming narrative" in itself, for it enhanced Prince's and Mada's belief in their career as dancers. A sequence 60 minutes into the film shows how Prince and Mada watch the short film Little made about them for the Red Bull Beat Battle (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.6). In this "film in the film", Mada states: "when I dance, I dance as if someone is holding a gun to my head. I dance as if someone had said to me: 'This is your last day, you are going to die tomorrow'"; in this way, *The African Cypher* suggests once again that dancing is an avenue towards individual redemption. The film cuts back to Prince and Mada as they are watching the film, mesmerised, laughing, and clapping. When asked in the subsequent scene what his favourite part of the film is, Mada replies: "When you say something, and then you see it, you start to feel it and it becomes more real […]. I'm excited because I can see where my life is going with dance". Hence, watching the short film initiated a personal transformation for Mada and Prince, which "validated" their identity as Pantsula dancers. As Little said during a Q&A in 2012:

> Prince now talks about [dancing] as something that could feed him and he talks about living off this. It's the first time he's really starting to believe it, and that's just because someone listened to him […]. Before we rocked up and met Prince and started meeting his grandmother and his mother, they were grieving for wanting to be a dancer. Suddenly, within a few weeks of us having the camera there, it validates what he'd been doing for a lot of his life. This community and his family were looking at him differently, now he was all of a sudden a star. ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012).

As explored later in the chapter, the exhibition of *The African Cypher*'s also inspired Mada to become a role model for other youth.

5.5.2 Personal Redemptions

Not only the dances portrayed in *The African Cypher* have a "redemptive" function; the film's narrative also provides the framework for Prince's personal transformation from a thug into a self-confident dancer. A scene 20 minutes into the film shows Prince standing in front of a fence outside of a shack, explaining how he used to conduct robberies, hijackings, and burglaries before he went to prison (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.7). In this scene, he recalls how, during the time in prison, he changed his life and became a dance choreographer, stating:

> If I hadn't gone to jail and continued doing crime the way I was before, I probably would have been dead by now. Jail can punish you, discipline you, but it can also ruin you if you don't watch out. So it's up to a person to decide. Your decisions will determine your future […]. I want to show the world that Pantsula is talent. Pantsula could be someone's daily bread or someone's success story. […] Pantsula saved my life.

Hence, the film suggests that Prince is "redeemed" because he has seen the errors of his past, accepted the punishment by the state, and made a fresh start in his life.

The African Cypher's engagement with Prince's life story can be compared to the rite of passage depicted in the fiction film *Tsotsi*. In this film's narrative, the protagonist Tsotsi – similarly to Prince – is redeemed because he realises the flaws in his criminal past; however, the film does not engage further with the political and economic reasons underlying Tsotsi's marginalised social position in the post-apartheid context (Rijsdijk & Haupt, 2008). *Tsotsi* thus refrains from a critique of the crucial class divisions in the country, thereby establishing a liberal solution to socio-economic problems, where individual property and rights are respected (Dovey, 2007).

The African Cypher equally places emphasis on the personal growth of young Black men. It could therefore be argued that the film presents a romanticised, liberal vision of social change, which removes the need for confrontation with the present and future economic and social conditions in South Africa. Of course, it was not Little's primary aim to make a film about structural inequality in South Africa, but one about street dance and Black youth subculture. And yet, the film's emphasis on Prince's and Mada's struggle with poverty and crime places the major characters in a context of pervasive structural inequality, which is not explicitly problematised by the film's narrative. In this way, however (as discussed later in the chapter), the film also critiques an important moment in South African politics that is characterised by uncertainty about how to address the socio-economic legacies of apartheid.

The African Cypher became a redeeming narrative for the filmmakers too, since, the production process, Little and Domingues established close friendships with Prince and Mada. Domingues says:

> We chat regularly [with Prince and Mada] on the phone, we BBM [Blackberry Messenger] and Whats App each other. They're constantly sending love and we're constantly sending love [laughs]. It's been great and we really connected with them on a real level where we can actually be friends for a very, very long time. For me personally, that was the most amazing thing I took away from this. I didn't know it can ever even happen. But it can actually. Before, I didn't think it could because of the cultural difference, but it proved me wrong. ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012).

With regards to Little's and Domingues' relative youth, then, the story behind *The African Cypher* can be interpreted as an active attempt by young people of different racial and social backgrounds to establish personal relationships and to form common cultures.

One screening of *The African Cypher* provoked a discussion precisely about the

White filmmakers' positioning vis-a-vis the film. During a Q&A with Domingues

and Little at DIFF 2012, at the Blue Waters Hotel, one woman in the audience said:

> Thank you Bryan and Filipa, it was such a wonderful film. I'm black and
> I was so surprised that actually white filmmakers created that. It just
> makes it so much more interesting. I just wanted to find out how do you
> relate to the story that you were telling, how does it make you feel as
> South Africans? ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012).

Little responded as follows:

> That's a very good question, something that I've spent a lot of time
> thinking about. I am who I am, I'm a white, English guy from Cape
> Town. Mainly the reason why I wanted to make this film is I wanted to
> learn more about other cultures and subcultures […]. But as I was going
> along, I realised there's so many things that I can connect with all of
> these characters. Basic human things, having a sense of purpose, having a
> sense of identity, having the courage and conviction to carry on with
> your art form, whether it's filmmaking, dancing, or whatever it is. I've
> had a lot of a similar sort of struggles that they have had in their
> communities […]. I engaged with and understood a lot of the difficulties
> that they had from just wanting that sense of identity and that sense of
> purpose. Probably the most powerful thing I believe any human can have
> is a real sense of purpose and that's what Prince brought so beautifully to
> me. I guess on those levels I can totally engage. ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012).

Little's honest remarks shed light on another way of thinking about what "youth" and

the transition from youth to adulthood signifies, namely, searching for, and finding, a

sense of identity and purpose in one's life; and that this search for identity can

transgress social, divisions along the lines of class and race.

5.6   Questions of Appropriation

What distinguishes *The African Cypher* from the other films discussed in this thesis is that it was co-produced by a multinational corporation, Red Bull, which sells energy drinks. Founded in the mid-1980s, Red Bull currently operates in 166 countries worldwide, with its headquarters in Austria (Brenneis, Rhemouga & Wallner, 2014). Red Bull has gained an increasing presence in the South African mass media and youth leisure market through its own TV channel, a mobile phone brand, and sponsorship of surf contests, motorsports, and dance events.

Red Bull contributed financially to the colour grading of *The African Cypher*, but was not actively involved in the film's production and post-production, which were conducted by the small crew of the Fly on the Wall collective. Little remembers: "a lot of time, the whole crew worked for free. Everyone gave their time. They were having faith in us" (Little & Kholer, 2013). *The African Cypher*'s oscillation between commercial and non-commercial (or "independent") modes of filmmaking is reflected in its cinematography; the film is "patchworked" from the commercial footage of the Red Bull teasers and Little's own footage, with glossy, high-lit scenes oscillating with raw, grainy sequences shot with handheld cameras.

While Red Bull was ostensibly not actively involved in "authoring" *The African Cypher*, the corporation is ubiquitous in the film. From the Red Bull logo in the opening credits and the film's climax in the Red Bull Beat Battle, to the dancers' Red Bull T-shirts, the film creates "advertorial" (advertising and editorial content) for Red Bull. *The African Cypher*'s focus on young, male dancers runs in line with Red Bull's marketing strategy. The company targets, in particular, active, urban men aged 16 to 24 who engage in sporting activities (Dudovskiy, 2012). It is perhaps not

surprising, then, that Red Bull decided to sponsor a film about young, male dancers who are living life to the full.

The African Cypher's narrative structure evokes Hebdige's argument that youth subcultures can become co-opted by commercialisation and corporate businesses (1979: 95). Towards the end of the film, the narrative peaks in the Red Bull Beat Battle, and the environment in which this contest takes place is far removed from Prince's and Mada's life in Soweto. The scenes at the Protea Hotel, in which the dance crews stay, unravel the luxury that is unaffordable for many young people of South Africa's new generation (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.8). These scenes show how Prince and Mada are fascinated as they enter the large hotel rooms, the fitness centre, and the rooftop swimming pool. The dancers' performance on the illuminated Red Bull dance stage in subsequent scenes (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.9) forms another striking contrast to the dusty, unpaved streets in which they dance at the beginning of the film. Composed in this way, the film suggests that personal redemption is made possible through incorporation into the lifestyle promised by Red Bull; the film thus suggests that it is Prince – and not Red Bull – who is to seek redemption. Prince has to answer for the crimes he committed during his time in prison, while corporate businesses are not encouraged to change their exploitative business strategies. Red Bull, instead, takes on a catalysing role in the film, providing young dancers with an opportunity to "make it" in life – although the majority of them still live in poverty.

In line with the major arguments of this thesis, *The African Cypher* could thus be interpreted via the post-Marxist argument that economic freedom has not yet been achieved in South Africa. The film's emphasis on individual redemption mirrors the

current political and economic context of South Africa, which is dominated by commercialisation, privatisation, and the financial dominance of foreign corporations. During the first democratic elections in 1994, the ANC made concessions to large corporations from Europe and the US, which did not have to answer for their complicity in crimes committed during apartheid; neither did they assist the state in the redistribution of wealth. Consequently, the stakeholders of multinational corporations (MNCs) currently have power over the actions of large businesses operating in the country (Haupt, 2012: 180–181). However, MNCs make very few contributions towards the redistribution of wealth in South Africa; instead, their practices are often exacerbate structural inequality (Seekings & Nattrass, 2008).

Red Bull played an important role in the production of *The African Cypher*'s soundtrack, which further illuminates how corporate businesses can appropriate youth subcultures for advertising purposes. The film features music tracks by emerging South African artists, such as Ruffest, a kwaito group; Richard the Third, a kwaito and electronic music DJ; and Tumi and the Volume, a Black hip-hop ensemble. Many of these tracks were recorded in the Red Bull Studios in Cape Town, which provide a free music recording service to emerging artists, but, in exchange, demand rights to use the music for their own purposes (Little & Kholer, 2013). Kholer says:

> [Red Bull] got a studio here in town that artists are allowed to use […].
> You don't pay anything and there's a producer there that will help you
> make a track […]. But the deal is that Red Bull then can use that track for
> phones or whatever […], so its kind of a trade between their studio and
> the artist, so you get a lot of emerging artists that can't afford to go to a
> paying studio. (Little & Kholer, 2013)

Kholer here indicates that kwaito and rap music, being youth-dominated genres, have become very attractive to advertising companies targeting South African youth. The consumption patterns of urban and suburban youth in the country are strongly oriented towards American products (such as Coca Cola and Pepsi), and advertisements of these products that feature rap music and dance are particularly popular among them (Magubane, 2006: 221).

However, South African youths do not unequivocally embrace the commercial values of corporations like Red Bull. *The African Cypher* reveals that some of the young dancers it portrays embody role models for younger boys. Through interviews with Duane and Jed Lawrence, the film highlights the fact that they seek to pass on the purpose they gain from dancing to disenfranchised youth through training and mentorship. Some scenes also show the brothers holding the dance workshops in Westlake mentioned in the chapter's Introduction. Duane Lawrence told me in an interview:

> This [dance workshop] is what gets me through the week […]. I just see these kids and I give them prizes, they appreciate the smallest things. They will dance in a battle to get the smallest thing ever, that's what makes my week you know. It's just for these kids, because they don't have role models, they don't have people to look up to. (2013)

Similarly, Mada states: "It's not for us to be the best dancers, but it's to be the best guys who can share their joy when they're on the stage. Just to share that with other people who are sitting there watching us. That's bouncing back to us" (2014). These examples suggest that many young men "give back" to their communities by acting as role models for younger children, rather than simply being co-opted by the commercial incentives of businesses.

Consequently, expressions of masculinities in South Africa are not unequivocally violent, hypersexual, and deviant; instead, some young men who have grown up amidst hegemonic masculinities are breaking the mould. The initiatives Lawrence and Mada's have taken for young people from marginalised backgrounds are comparable to those of Xaba (discussed in chapter 2), who is committed to inspiring disenfranchised youth through his participation in screenings of *Otelo Burning*. Perhaps this is what makes these young men more "grown up" than people who are (in biological terms) adults, for they are providing South Africa's youngest generation with inspirational male role models.

5.7   Gendered Narratives

Little's exploration of the redeeming features of street dance in *The African Cypher* won the film critical acclaim in South Africa and internationally. At DIFF 2012, he won the Award for Best South African Documentary "for conveying the energy and creativity of young people across South Africa today" (Centre for Creative Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2012). The website of SIFF, where the film screened in May 2013, states that "[d]irector Bryan Little harnesses the energy of the unique and diverse performance styles of isiPantsula and sBhujwa [sic] to Krump and B-boy" (Seattle International Film Festival, n.d.). Furthermore, a reviewer writing for the South African newspaper *City Press* described the film as "an electrifying documentary that maps township street culture, dance and display" ("Fresh African Film Perspectives", 2012), and a journalist for the blog Indiewire hailed it for revealing how "urban youth locked up in the country's ghettos are able to transcend the harshness of their circumstances through dance" (Obenson, 2012). The publics

formed by these film critics, therefore, re-emphasised *The African Cypher*'s idea that dance represents a pathway to individual and collective transformation.

One theme that is remarkably absent from these "reading publics", however, is the gendered nature of *The African Cypher*. The overwhelming majority of the dancers in the film are young men, and only one young female Krump dancer called "Snow" is introduced in a short sequence, who tells the camera: "When I dance, it's like there's nobody there […]. There's relief like no-one else matters". Whether or not her experience dancing differs from that of the boys is not explored further in the film, however. Female characters in the documentary are shown predominantly as background figures, such as bystanders of dance performances. *The African Cypher* focuses on young *men*'s personal redemption through street dance, creating the idea that these dances are predominantly male-dominated movements.

The kwaito soundtrack frames the masculine context within which the film is set. As Adam Haupt and Ian Rijsdijk argue (2008), the style of a soundtrack can be described as a leitmotif in film, for the individual songs often conjure a collective meaning. In *The African Cypher*'s opening sequence, a non-diegetic, kwaito song with an upbeat feel – *Boss* by Richard the Third – is heard, while the camera follows Prince into a night club in downtown Soweto. This track both authenticates the film's narrative context in time and place, and frames Prince in a masculine way. As Bhekizizwe Peterson suggests:

> Kwaito is generally under the sway of an urbanite, male point of view,
> and one that is often accused of objectifying and demeaning women in its
> explicit lyrical content and in the scantly dressed female dance troupes
> performing raunchy routines that seem to be pre-requisite for many
> groups and shows. (2003: 199)

Peterson thus critiques kwaito for its expressions of sexism and sexual violence against women. Angela Impey (2001), in turn, argues that kwaito music also provides a platform for female agency in post-apartheid South Africa. For example, the lyrics of the kwaito band Boom Shaka at first glance enforce stereotypes of Black women, but they also contain critiques of gender inequality (Impey, 2001). Despite these variations in kwaito songs, the historical gender politics of the genre potentially allows young South African viewers familiar with kwaito's themes to engage with the film in ways that stress violence and sexism; this aspect is explored further in my discussion of *The African Cypher*'s reception below.

The African Cypher also places emphasis on the masculinity of young b-boys and hip-hop artists. In one scene, Mutant presents a short rap to the camera which consists of an accumulation of Afrikaans swearwords – but these are not subtitled in English (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.10). This scene frames the young men in a typically "masculine" way that contradicts their representation as non-violent musicians and dancers. While it would be naive to conflate the various types of hip-hop that exist in South Africa, the lyrics of this genre often give expression to sexism, materialism, and the objectification of women (Hunter 2011). As Haupt points out, POC's lyrics are heavily gendered, and that the songs of their 1993 album *Age of Truth* discriminate against women (2003).

The narrative of *The African Cypher* indicate that girls are relatively excluded from the communalism and the support network created among male dancers. In one scene, for example, Duane Lawrence states that b-boying is "about unity, *brotherhood*. We stand together and nothing can bring us down" (my emphasis). The interconnectedness among the male dancers is emphasised in scenes devoted to

dance choreographies. Little frames the simultaneity and coordination of the dancers' movements, which is given emphasis by their similarity in dress. For example, the dancers of Soweto Finest wear exactly the same outfits while they perform their synchronised choreography (see figure 5.5). The film's emphasis on the young men's concordance thus suggests that youth in the new South Africa are able to find liberation through "unity in diversity"; however, this unity is created by young men, not women. Consequently, the kind of "nation" that is being imagined in *The African Cypher* is ultimately defined by the perspectives and bodies of men.[135]

Figure 5.5: *The Soweto Finest Sbhujwa dance crew* **(2012). From:** *The African Cypher*. **Dir. Bryan Little. [Film still] Author's screenshot. Image courtesy of Bryan Little.**

While film critics did not pay particular attention to the gender relations in *The African Cypher*, South African audiences during screenings at film festivals I

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[135] This motif can be found in other post-apartheid films that depict Black masculinity as symbol of the new South Africa, for example, in *Tsotsi* (Dovey, 2007) .

attended did. During DIFF 2012, one question that spectators asked at different screenings was whether girls danced or not. This question emerged during a Q&A at the Ekhaya multi-arts centre in KwaMashu township, which was attended by people from disenfranchised backgrounds, and especially boys and men;[136] and during a Q&A at the Blue Waters Hotel, which was attended by people from middle class backgrounds. When asked why *The African Cypher* features predominantly young men, Domingues explained to the audience:

> There are not really any girl-only crews. What we discovered is that there's such a stigma attached to wanting to be a dancer, whether you're a girl or a boy […]. People say: "What are you doing? You're a thug, you just want to be violent". If the guys are experiencing that kind of stigma, the girls are experiencing it even more. There are girls out there, not too many, unfortunately. There were only two in the documentary. But it's getting there. […] The Real Actions […] had about eight girls. They were in the crowd in the Beat Battle where you saw all the dancing. It's getting there slowly but surely. ("Q&A, DIFF", 2012)

However, the filmmakers did not devote further attention to the background of these girls of the Real Action crew in *The African Cypher*. During the Q&A at the Blue Waters Hotel, one woman stood up and said:

> I'm a dancer myself. The thing is with girls and Pantsula […] and krumping, at home our mother would like to say: "You know what, that's something that won't get you anywhere". It's a lack of support […]. It's just that our parents kind of hold us back through that. But there are a lot of girls who dance Pantsula – I can dance Pantsula like those guys! ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012)

The question thus remains why the filmmakers did not focus at all on the few girls that do dance, since they are, therefore, participating in a masculine narrative that

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[136] It emerged from my conversations with staff at Ekhaya that girls tend to stay at home in the evenings to help with cooking and household chores.

denies women the ability to also achieve individual "redemption" through the practice of dancing.

5.8   *The African Cypher*'s Publics

5.8.1   Exhibition Platforms

Little was adamant about screening *The African Cypher* in the communities in which it was shot, saying he had "made a promise to all the dancers that we will have a screening in all the communities" (Little & Kholer, 2013). In May 2013, for example, the filmmakers organised free screenings in poor communities in Ocean View, Bay Harbour and Westlake, near Cape Town, as well as in Soweto and Orange Farm, near Johannesburg (see figure 5.6). Another screening was held in Hout Bay in November 2013. This suggests that Little did indeed attempt to actively involve his film subjects, as well as their communities, in the film's exhibition.

Figure 5.6 Little, B. (2013). *Community screening of* **The African Cypher** *in Orange Farm.* **[Photograph] Available from Bryan Little. Image courtesy of Bryan Little.**

The African Cypher was also screened at film festivals in South Africa and abroad. Little states that the small film festivals, in particular, provided an important platform for him to engage with audiences, saying that "everyone wants to get into the big festivals, but for me the smaller ones are the coolest ones, because you actually get engaged with people" (Little & Kholer, 2013). However, Little and Domingues also showed the film at large, international film festivals in Canada and Europe, such as SIFF and IDFA, and the premier policies of these film festivals sometimes impeded Little's ability to show his film widely in South African communities. He says: "You have to get a huge permission to […] screen it [the film] in the Congo because of Toronto […]. I can't even screen it here in the townships and it doesn't seem right" (Little & Kholer, 2013). However, it was the filmmakers themselves who chose to enter these prestigious film festivals, and this runs against their "activist" aims of holding screenings in townships. The film has also not yet been made available on

DVD or via digital media platforms, which has prevented many people from seeing it. At the time of this chapter's writing, however, the filmmakers were negotiating with the South African television channel E-TV to screen the film (Mada, 2014). This attempt to broadcast the film on television would present an important opportunity for making the film accessible to a broader (youth) audience in South Africa.

5.8.2 Audiences, Performance, and Intimacy

The African Cypher's textual politics reveal that street dance often creates opportunities for intimate encounters, with various scenes in the film revealing how people gather to watch and cheer as Prince and Mada dance in bars and on street corners. Moreover, Little's camera shows how Mada and Prince seek to educate people about crime and violence through their choreographies. In one sequence, the duo dances amidst a group of school children, their performance mimicking a fight (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.11). The camera cuts to Mada who explains:

> There is a story line behind all our pieces. We don't just choreograph a piece just for the sake of choreographing it. We look at the story and then build from that, so that it can teach people right from wrong […] The first story […] [is] about these two Tsotsis, these two guys fighting for no apparent reason […]. It was influenced by Pringle's story. The way he used to live his life and the things he used to do before he went to prison.

This "map of meaning" (in Hebdige's terms), inscribed in Pantsula dance can be described through Kelly Askew's argument that performance is positioned in a dialogical relationship with social life (2002). In her discussion of Swahili music in Tanzania, Askew uses Victor Turner's concept of the "social drama" (1974), which proposes that performance and role play embody important sites of reflection on society, and on actions that are damaging to the social fabric (Askew, 2002: 19–20).

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It is thus important to consider street dance as part of a broader, constantly evolving, social environment where young people negotiate both their own identities and their perceptions of the social context they grow up in (Shipley, 2013).

This social relevance of street dance was, perhaps, one of the reasons why *The African Cypher* created publics constituted mainly of young South African audiences, and particularly of historically disadvantaged youths. When the film premiered at the 2012 Encounters Festival in Cape Town and Johannesburg, its screenings were attended predominantly by young people (Encounters South African International Documentary Festival, 2012). The film sold out all five screenings at the festival, and a sixth was added to meet the demand (Encounters South African International Documentary Festival, 2012: 6). A screening I attended during DIFF 2012 at the Ekhaya multi-arts centre in KwaMashu township was similarly attended predominantly by young people, and mostly boys and young men. The organisation Constitutional Hill Education project also organised a screening of *The African Cypher* in Hillbrow[137] in December 2013 for high school students, which brought together a group of 220 young people from different socio-economic backgrounds.[138] And in June 2014, the film was screened as part of a youth workshop organised by Inkasi Youth, a youth-focused organisation working with the community of Imizamo Yethu township in Hout Bay, near Cape Town. The workshop was organised for students from Silikamva High school,[139] with the aim of addressing issues related to gangs and gender-based violence, drugs, and teenage pregnancy (The African Cypher, 2014) .

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[137] Hillbrow is a deprived, inner-city area of Johannesburg.

[138] One group was composed of 60 teenagers and young adults from Hillbrow and the Inner City of Johannesburg, and another group came from the South African National Schools Debating Competition (The African Cypher, 2013).

[139] The school is located next to Imizamo Yethu.

As indicated above, feedback from these screenings suggests that young audiences engaged with *The African Cypher* primarily through its representations of dance and the soundtrack. At the screening I attended in KwaMashu, young boys danced in their seats, and some even started to dance on the cinema's stage. As Little describes it: "I never forget that one [screening] in the township in Durban. By the end of the screening, all the kids were […] doing head spins in the seats!" (Little & Kholer, 2013). Young people responded similarly at a screening at Durban's Luthuli museum during DIFF 2012, to which a group of school children attended. Domingues says:

> There were some little ones in the front […] from about eight until 18 [years]. They went crazy. This time we had our iPod. So I put the iPod on and it took a while, but eventually one came up and did his dancing and then they all came and they danced. It was really cool; it was amazing. (Little & Domingues, 2012)

In turn, Paula Rahina, an employee of the Constitutional Hill Education project describes the screenings she organised in Hillbrow as follows:

> The screenings went really well, we had two very different audiences but everyone LOVED the film. The kids laughed, they repeated the lines, they screamed, they clapped, tapped their feet, danced in their seats, sang along and were even silent and listening when it was time to do so. The second group was so inspired that they launched an impromptu dance party […] after the film. At some point we had nearly 200 kids dancing away to the beat of their cellphones […]. (The African Cypher, 2013)

At the Étonnants Voyageurs festival in Brazzaville, young audiences also started dancing after the screening of *The African Cypher* (see figure 5.7). As Little recalls: "in the Congo, a whole stage got flooded by kids from the audience filled just after the movie […]. The whole crowd went on the stage as well and they were all dancing, it was […] chaos, it was good" (Little & Kholer, 2013).

Figure 5.7 *Young audiences dance on stage after a screening of* **The African Cypher** *at Étonnants Voyageurs Brazzaville* **(2013). [Digital Image] Available at: http://on.fb.me/1HUQy6O [accessed 27 July 2015].**

The screenings of *The African Cypher* in communities and at film festivals thus created a kind of interaction that blurred the lines between the dance performances represented on-screen and dance performances in "real life". This close relationship between film and its audience evokes Barber's influential argument that audiences in African contexts respond to theatre performances in active, participatory ways, thereby forming an integral part of performance arts (1997). However, since young audiences engaged with *The African Cypher* particularly through its music and dance, it is possible that some youths accessed the film primarily via the kwaito and hip-hop soundtrack – and thus via the hegemonic masculinity and sexism associated with these musical styles. Therefore, for some young audiences, the film's central

message of redemption was, perhaps, subsumed within its celebration of Black youth subcultures.

5.8.3   Community Screenings and Intimate Publics

It was primarily Mada's and Prince's presence at screenings of *The African Cypher* (see figure 5.8) that extended the film's themes of individual redemption and transformation into the publics it created. Their presence at film festivals and community screenings formed "intimate publics" (Berlant, 2008) constituted of viewers' expressions of emotions, moments of empathy, and compassion among the film subjects and young audiences. It was particularly youths from disenfranchised backgrounds who were able to identify with Prince's and Mada's lives since, according to Little: "their [Prince's and Mada's] stories are pretty universal, unfortunately. These guys are struggling" (Little & Kholer, 2013). Domingues, correspondingly states in an interview: "they [young audiences] can connect to them [Prince and Mada] personally" (Little & Domingues, 2012).

Figure 5.8 Little, B. (2013). *Mada and Prince talk to audiences after a screening of* **The African Cypher** *in Kliptown, Soweto.* **[Photograph] Available from Bryan Little. Image Courtesy of Bryan Little.**

Some people in the audience openly expressed this personal connection they felt with Prince and Mada. Mada has said that, after the screenings, people wanted to know more about his life, saying: "The people were looking at it [the film] and […] [i]t was nice, man. They wanted to know what's happening in our lives, what we achieved in our lives" (2014). Little, in turn, describes an experience at Étonnants Voyageurs Brazzaville as follows:

> There was this one guy in the Congo, Carlos, a volunteer at the festival […]. He went to prison in Paris for a couple of years and then…very gentle guy, but just got into the wrong thing, and he came up to Prince as soon as Prince arrived […]. He was like "thank you so much for that one scene about your prison thing". The whole thing just changed something inside him and […] you could just tell the way the two of them were talking to each other. It was […] a really important thing for both of them in many ways, so that was really cool. It sounds cheesy, but […] if I can see one thing like that, the film was almost worth making. (Little & Kholer, 2013)

Some screenings which Prince and Mada attended thus created intimate publics based on private, moving conversations between *The African Cypher*'s spectators and the film's participants. These moments of intimacy extended the films redemptive narratives beyond diegetic meanings, exerting a "redeeming" effect on some young viewers. This reveals, once again, the potential "live" film screenings hold for creating opportunities for personal conversations.

The intimate publics that formed around *The African Cypher* not only transformed, or "redeemed" some of the film's audiences, but also its participants, Prince and Mada. Mada said this about attending screenings of the film: "I was overwhelmed to feel the importance of the story to some other people […]. It's very inspiring, I know. We did the screening in the Congo. It was awesome, actually. […]. I nearly cried […] seeing some other people" (2014). And although Mada and Prince lost the Red Bull Beat Battle, Mada feels the exhibition of the film affirmed his capacity as a dancer, saying, "we didn't win the Red Bull Beat Battle, but in the eyes of other people, we are the winners. It was kind of nice that people were talking to us like that" (2014).

In some contexts, the redeeming effects *The African Cypher* had on some audiences extended beyond immediate screening contexts. Mada recalls that after some screenings of the film in Soweto and the Congo, other young people began to take up Pantsula dancing, saying: "It [the film] is changing some other people's lives. So many crews started being active after seeing the movie […]. We did teach some other people, most people that are dancing today in Soweto" (2014). Moreover, experiencing audiences' empathetic responses to *The African Cypher* made Mada realise that he has the potential to inspire others. He says:

> The story [of the film], it is powerful. It's helping most of the people, the other dancers, just to have that spirit. I did know me and Prince have the spirit of dance, but I didn't know it was that big, actually. But sitting and watching *The African Cypher*… it was nice, man, seeing me and Prince talking that way. […] Even now, my wish is that most of the dancers can see it all over the world. (2014)

With Shakers and Movers, Mada has recently begun to teach Pantsula dancing to disenfranchised youths from Soweto. He is currently planning other activities, such as arts and computer literacy training, saying:

> I want to show it [the film] in the townships. Just for the kids to see it, because I know the power of that film. […] We want to do some activities just for the younger guys, just to keep them off the streets, because some of them don't like dancing, some of them like other stuff. We just want to try to help them. (2014).

Like Xaba, whose work as a motivational speaker for *Otelo Burning* is discussed in chapter 2, Mada has himself transformed into a role model for boys and younger men over the course of *The African Cypher*'s exhibition.

As noted earlier, *The African Cypher* has also opened up some economic opportunities for Mada, who has received dancing jobs as a result of the film's exhibition. However, he still lives in Soweto and struggles financially. The tensions between the need to make money and the desire to be a role model for other youths became apparent when I asked Mada about his plans for the future, to which he replied:

> I'm a business-minded guy, too. I've just got the license of liquor, so I'm selling liquor at my house now […] to the older people. But the thing that I want to achieve actually is I want to see myself helping some other kids, because I've been in their shoes before, so I know the pain. […] I want the power just to do something, I want to change most of the kids. Most of them are in the struggle I was in […]. I don't know how, but I want to help them. That's what I want to achieve, actually. To help them,

I have to get money. Money has to come out of that […]. The thing
which I can help them with now is going to school each and every day.
They come to class, then we teach them dancing and everything we know
and share with them. (2014)

Mada's statement is an affirmation of a young man believing that the meaning of life

is to help others, rather than becoming rich; and this subverts the life style of

consumerism and materialism promoted by corporations such as Red Bull.

5.8.4   Digital, Intimate Publics: "Dancing for Prince"

In one scene of *The African Cypher*, Mada states: "We are not acting. We are

living"; this bears a sad irony, for Prince was diagnosed with leukaemia in March

2014, and had to undergo chemotherapy and radiation treatment. Still living in

Soweto, he lost out on money he had previously earned from his dance performances

(Kumona, 2014: 106). Consequently, Little and Domingues initiated a campaign

called Dancing for Prince, which aimed to raise money for Prince's medical

treatment and to support him psychologically. The campaign was launched via a

Facebook page (called Dancing for Prince) that Domingues created, and via a Twitter

account of the same name. On these social media platforms, the filmmakers

publicised fundraising events, and encouraged people to post videos of themselves

dancing onto Facebook to show their support for Prince.

Little and Domingues' appeal set in motion a process that created transnational,

digital publics around *The African Cypher*. Between February and May 2014, people

from across the world and across the social spectrum posted videos of themselves

dancing onto Facebook and YouTube, accompanied by messages of empathy and

encouragement for Prince. These videos range from Little and Domingues dancing in

their homes (Domingues, 2014a,b; see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.12 and 5.13)

to the Quirk marketing agency dancing in their Cape Town office (Domingues, 2014c; see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.14), and from people dancing in the snow in Norway (Domingues, 2014d; see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.15) to a group of school children from Nyaka Combined Primary School in KwaDukuza in South Africa performing a dance to a Beyoncé song (Domingues, 2014e; see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.16).

However, as the discussion of *Intersexions'* digital publics in the previous chapter has shown, social media can also offer opportunities for circulating normative, discriminatory discourses. Moreover, in the context of South Africa, digital publics are relatively exclusive spaces, for up to 80 per cent of its population is unable to afford Internet access (Malila, 2013: 30). Online campaigns have also been accused of being self-congratulatory and focused on "being fun", rather than raising awareness about a social problem. Some scholars have described campaigns organised via social media as "slacktivism" or "clicktivism" – that is, as actions in support of a cause that takes little effort on the part of the individual (Karpf, 2010). The question that emerges, then, is whether the Dancing for Prince campaign has, in fact, produced a form of "clicktivism" that eschewed meaningful action upon Prince's illness.

While the Dancing for Prince videos emphasise people's enjoyment of dancing, the publics that formed around them reached beyond hedonistic pleasure; they instead mobilised processes of reflection and a sense of personal connections, creating what Berlant would describe as "intimate publics" (2008, 2009). One theme that emerges from the posts on the Dancing for Prince Facebook page and the dance videos is that people were inspired and touched by Prince's personality, and sought to support him

in his struggle with cancer. For example, in Quirk agency's video, one member of the team states:

> Hello Prince, this is Conn from Cape Town. You inspired us through your dance. And I know you're going through a heavy time. And I'm going to send you a video about dancing through cancer, which is your passion and your skill and your talent. If anyone can do it, you can. (see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.14)

Moreover, one young man from Soweto posted the following to the Dancing for Prince Facebook page:

> Prince what an inspiring being you are over coming obsticles [sic] of life and hardship with dance i [sic] feel honoured and blessed to know you in person you have touched me and my crew so much we so inspired by your work with your partner sthembiso mada [sic] […] you are Sowetos hero Sowetos legend Sowetos story [sic] of success like you said "a Prince is someone waiting to be a King" and thats [sic] what you are #SowetoIsProudOfYou (Mpho Freshboii, 2014)

Another narrative running through people's posts on the Dancing for Prince Facebook page is that they felt empathy with Prince. One South African woman wrote: "Have faith, will pray for your full recovery. I can't imagine what you must be going through, but know that you have touched the hearts and brought together people from around the world. Hope to see you back on stage soon!" (Rambhuron, 2014). Another woman posted: "We love you Prince, God is with you through it all, we are praying for you and we know that your heart is strong and you will make it through" (Moyo, 2014). Prince, in turn, stated in an interview with *Drum*: "To know there are people who are rooting for me in places I have never even visited warms my heart. It makes me realise my life matters and I was here for a purpose" (qtd in Kumona, 2014). The intimate publics created by the Dancing for Prince campaign thus seemed to have provided Prince with glimpses of hope and momentary strength.

Interestingly, *Drum*'s article gives more background on Prince's past than *The African Cypher* does, with the journalist stating that Prince grew up with his father's sister and never had a relationship with his own father. Prince is quoted describing how this experience made him feel:

> Having cancer showed me the importance of forgiveness. In the initial stages of the disease my heart was contaminated with negative feelings about my father who never took care of me while growing up and how I only met my mother when I was older. When I forgave him the pain eased. I literally now preach forgiveness to everyone I come across, that is the purpose of my cancer. (qtd in Kumona, 2014: 106)

The author of *Drum*'s article thus addressed the issue of "missing fathers" in South Africa, which – as my analysis of *Otelo Burning* in chapter 2 has revealed – continues to be one of the major problems young people are confronting in post-apartheid South Africa.

In response to the publicity created by the Dancing for Prince campaign, people across the world donated money towards Prince's cancer fund and organised fundraising events. For example, the Fist Up Film Festival in California initiated fundraising screenings, while one of the film's translators arranged screenings in Bern and Zurich. Little and Domingues themselves conducted an online auction via Facebook, as well as holding fundraising screenings in Cape Town. According to an update the filmmakers posted on the Dancing for Prince Facebook page on 31 March 2014, the money raised by the Dancing for Prince campaign paid for Prince's transport to and from the hospitals, nutritional supplements, warm clothing and for someone to cook for him (Dancing for Prince, 2014). Hence, while Red Bull's product placement in *The African Cypher* advertises values of individualism and materialism, the responses and actions of viewers challenged and subverted these

principles; and this reveals that social media sites can, indeed, act as a platform for "unofficial cultures" that contest normative discourses and practices.

5.8.5　A Convergence of Publics

The Dancing for Prince campaign did not only create digital publics, however; it also created what I have called "converging publics" in this thesis, to describe publics that span a variety of media and social contexts, including social media platforms, television, newspapers, and face-to-face conversations. Correspondingly, the Dancing for Prince campaign received coverage in South African television, with the programme Carte Blanche[140] broadcasting a report about Prince's illness and the online videos on 11 May 2014 ("Pantsula Prince", 2014). This programme, in turn, led to an increase in people's posts addressing Prince's illness on Facebook and Twitter. Moreover, the South African newspaper *Mail and Guardian* published an article about the fundraising events ("Don't Miss this", 2014), and (as noted above) *Drum* published an article about Prince's battle with cancer (Kumona, 2014).

Although Facebook and Twitter were important avenues in generating publics around Prince's illness, these publics were not created through people's use of social media alone. As Saskia Sassen (2011) argues, face-to-face communication and collective organisation in urban spaces continue to represent important means for social and political action. This argument is exemplified by a video Mada and a group of dancers in Soweto made for Prince, which they posted on Facebook and YouTube (Domingues, 2014f; see *Supplementary DVD*, 2015 clip 5.17). Mada says this about the making of the video:

> It was a friend of mine that helped me to get some other people. On Facebook, the people know Shakers and Movers and they know me and Prince individually. So we just sent them a message on Facebook, and we did some other flyers and emails. (2014)

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[140] Carte Blanche is an investigative journalism series that is broadcast on M-Net.

The video that was made as a result shows a group of young dancers taking over the streets of Soweto holding a "Dance for Prince" banner. They dance Pantsula on the streets, on crossroads and rooftops, causing traffic to come to a standstill. Other people from Soweto, including one elderly woman, join in the dance. Hence, although social media were important platforms for creating publics around Prince's illness, (re-)claiming urban spaces continues to represent a central means for people to assert agency and power (Sassen, 2011). As my discussion of *Intersexions*' digital publics (see chapter 4) has also shown, "online" publics can intersect with "offline" publics in myriad ways and are not entirely separated from each other; and the publics created by the Dancing for Prince campaign support this argument.

Sadly, however, the Dancing for Prince campaign was unable to save Prince's life. He passed away at the end of May 2015, as this thesis was nearing completion. Prince's death conjured, once again, a multitude of converging publics. An article about his death was published in *Drum* (Kumona, 2015), and Carte Blanche broadcasted a short report on his passing ("Update: Pantsula Prince", 2015). That Prince did not survive his illness is a tragic ending to this final chapter of the thesis, and it demonstrates the limits of young people's freedom in post-apartheid South Africa, where a lack of healthcare continues to impact negatively on the wellbeing of many youths. And yet, Prince's funeral illuminated, once again, young South Africans' agency in turning situations of adversity into self-expression, artistic creativity, and a particular subculture. Mada, Little, and Domingues went to Prince's funeral in Soweto, which many Pantsula dancers attended who danced from morning until evening – even on Prince's coffin – giving expression to their grief while celebrating Prince's life (see figure 5.9. and figure 5.10).

Figure 5.9 *Mada (middle) and members of the Afro Tribal dance crew (right) at Prince's funeral (2015)* [Digital Image]. Available at: http://on.fb.me/1MsgXvK [accessed 2015, July 27].

Figure 5.10: *A young dancer performs Pantsula on Prince's coffin* (2015) [Digital image] Available at: http://on.fb.me/1VIzGqW [accessed 2015, July 27].

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that *The African Cypher*'s redemptive narratives encompass its making, diegetic worlds, and even the lives of the people who participated in it. Little and Domingues attempted to collaborate with youths from other social and racial backgrounds, thereby forging close relationships and a common culture, if not subculture. At the same time, the filmmakers used the stories of marginalised, Black youths to help them come to terms with questions of their own, White identity in the post-apartheid context. What "redeems" the filmmakers' position, however, is that the collaborative filmmaking process resulted in a relationship of interdependency among Little, Domingues, and Prince and Mada, which extended far beyond the film's production. It must be noted, however, that despite *The African Cypher*'s international acclaim, Mada continues to live in poor conditions, suggesting that he did not benefit significantly, in economic terms, from the film's exhibition.

It is possible that the stories of Prince, Mada, and other dancers would have only been made "public" through the gateway of Red Bull's commercial short films, had Little not worked them into a feature-length documentary film. However, *The African Cypher* also poses ethical questions around the issue of product placement, with the film framing the young dancers' redemption as being catalysed by the Red Bull corporation. Nevertheless, the actions that some young men, such as Mada and Duane Lawrence, have taken *outside* of the film challenge the values of individuality and consumerism promoted by Red Bull, for they aspire to act as role models for younger boys. The Dancing for Prince campaign, too, challenged Red Bull's

promotion of materialism in *The African Cypher*, creating digital, intimate publics based on empathy and support for Prince.

Audiences' engagements with *The African Cypher* created converging publics on a variety of different media platforms, including community film screenings, social media, television, newspaper, and social media; these publics are thus comparable to the converging publics *Otelo Burning* bought into being over the course of its exhibition (see chapter 2). However, *The African Cypher* highlights, once again, the potential of "live" film screenings, in particular, to create opportunities for intimacy. The chapter has demonstrated – as with the reception of *Otelo Burning* and *Steps Youth Films* – the significance of those screenings of *The African Cypher* that were accompanied by Prince and Mada, the people whose personal lives are exposed in the film; these screenings created intimate publics that brought young audiences together in socially generative ways. At the same time, the glaring absence of women and girls from the film's content, as well as from some of its viewing publics, evokes yet another "transitional narrative", suggesting that apartheid's legacy of patriarchy is continuing in the new South Africa.

At the end of our interview, Mada stated: "The thing that I would like to say to Pantsula dancers and other crews is: 'don't be the trouble, just be the solution. In order to deal with this life, you have to come up with solutions'" (2014). It is this hope in the possibility of positive transitions and transformations that lies at the heart of *The African Cypher* – and of all the film and television series that have been discussed in this thesis.

Chapter 6   Conclusion

6.1   Introduction

This thesis set out to explore a selection of post-apartheid South African narrative films and television programmes that focus on the subject of youth from three major angles; first, it has explored the processes and ethics informing the production processes of these screen media; second, it has analysed their representational politics; and third, it has paid attention to the discussions and actions they provoked among audiences, and particularly young audiences. It has also focused on the gendered dimensions of these films and television programmes, as well as on the "racial" relationships informing their production and exhibition. My study of the publics garnered by these screen media productions has concentrated primarily on audiences in South Africa; however, I have also traced discussions of interest they created in certain contexts in other parts of the world.

The social context and media landscape of South Africa reveal that a study of this kind is necessary. Contemporary South Africa is a "young" nation in a dual sense, being both a democracy just past its twenty-first year, and a country with a substantial youthful population aged under 35 years. People born after the formal end of apartheid in 1994 are widely known as the "Born Frees", for they are the first generation to grow up without the institutionalised racism and the segregationist policies of the past. This generation drives and creates a variety of dynamic, evolving forms of media and cultural expressions in South Africa today, from films and television programmes to street dance and music, and the recent rise of digital media in the country. However, the striking discrepancies in class, gender, and race that have continued to exist in South Africa also suggest that the term "Born Frees" is

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someway problematic; and it is precisely these contradictions and complexities that are illuminated by specific narrative films and television drama series, which put the spotlight on the personal, intimate, and, sometimes, painful experiences of young South Africans.

The existing literature on youth and screen media in South Africa (as well as Africa), is limited, most of this research being focused on Europe and the US. Those studies that do exist on the South African context are often inconclusive on various crucial questions, particularly those concerning the production and reception of film and television programmes. Moreover, sociological research as well as international legislation established in Europe and North America have tended to define "youth" in terms of biological age and as a period characterised by rebellion, confusion, and immaturity. However, as this thesis has shown, this concept of youth offers only restricted insights into who or what "youth" in South Africa really are.

My thesis has, therefore, sought to explore the following questions:

- What ideas of "youth" are constructed within selected narrative films and television dramas that focus on experiences of being young in post-apartheid South Africa? What ideas about the country's wider social, economic, and political contexts are created through their form and content?

- What can be said about the processes and ethics informing the making of these same films and television programmes? How and why are young people's intimate and sensitive experiences exposed via the mediums of film

and television? And what are the consequences of such exposure for filmmakers, film subjects, and audiences?

- What were the relationships that characterised the making of the screen media productions, which involved the collaboration of Black and White South Africans? What do these processes tell us about aspects of "race" and class in the "new" South Africa?

- What kinds of ideas about gender are evoked by the making, diegesis, and reception of the selected films and television programmes? In other words, how do aspects of gender and age intersect?

- How and where did the screen media productions analysed here create "publics", that is, discussions, secondary texts, and actions among audiences, and particularly youth audiences? Who constituted these publics? What kinds of discourses emerged from them? And what are the wider theoretical implications of theorising "the public" and "the private"?

- Did the selected films and television programmes generate opportunities for human connectivity and intimacy in the still relatively divided society of contemporary South Africa (and if so, how)? And how, if at all, did these screen media stimulate publics of a socially and individually transformative nature?

Seeking to find answers to these questions, I have conducted an interdisciplinary study of the selected screen media productions and their publics. I have used a variety of qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, documentary research, and social media analysis. Qualitative discourse analysis was the major method to subsequently identify and abstract themes and narratives from the body of data.

The remaining sections of this concluding chapter synthesise the findings of the thesis, how I arrived at them, as well as the questions that remain. I also locate these findings within the relevant theoretical literature, considering the implications of the knowledge gained and suggesting possible pathways for further research that might be done as a result of this study. Finally, I engage in a reflection on the limits of the thesis, and its implications for my own research practice.

6.2   Findings of the Thesis

One major finding of this thesis is that the selected screen media productions all suggest that "youth" is a phase of transition, often characterised by one's search for identity, meaning, and belonging, and that this period is characterised both by experiences of anxiety, alienation, and uncertainty, and by determination, enthusiasm, and creativity. The thesis' individual chapters have suggested that contemporary South Africa, too, is situated in a "transitional" stage, where the painful legacy of apartheid is still present in many young people's lives, often constraining individual "freedom". For instance, *Otelo Burning*'s narrative problematises the imbrications of hegemonic masculinity, violence, and broken families, suggesting that these social problems are a direct result of apartheid's policies. In turn, *Rough Aunties'* and *Yizo Yizo*'s narratives reveal that hegemonic masculinities have led to pervasive sexual violence against children and youth in the post-apartheid context. Moreover, *Intersexions* and *Steps Youth Films* both engage (albeit very differently) with aspects of HIV/AIDS and interrelated issues from young people's perspectives; and *The African Cypher* exposes the effects that ongoing structural inequality and poverty have on young Black men. Thus, one central aspect these screen media case studies share is that they all evoke "transitional narratives" that span the personal, community, and the national level.

Importantly, however, these films and television programmes do not present us with an entirely dystopian picture of South Africa's new generation. *Otelo Burning*'s narrative suggests that Black teenagers from marginalised backgrounds can achieve personal liberation and redemption, while *Rough Aunties'* major theme is that children who have experienced rape are *survivors* rather than victims. The *Steps*

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Youth Films, too, emphasise the agency and creativity of adolescent girls who are confronting difficult situations in their lives, such as HIV/AIDS, racial discrimination, and teenage pregnancy. In turn, *The African Cypher* evokes the energy, creativity, and resilience of young street dancers from different South African townships. Together and individually, these screen media productions thus construct a complex, multidimensional picture of the "Born Frees" that is neither overtly celebratory nor explicitly pessimistic – just as the period of youth itself is a multifaceted, often contradictory stage of life.

Together and individually, the chapters of this thesis have suggested that the "publics" of films and television programmes do not start at the moment of their exhibition or reception, but with their very making. In some situations, the collaborative filmmaking processes have initiated personal transformations for the participants, and especially those films that are based on people's real-life experiences, such as the documentary films *Rough Aunties*, *The African Cypher*, and *Steps Youth Films*, and the fiction film *Otelo Burning*. For example, the making of *Otelo Burning* has enabled Xaba (on whose childhood and youth the film is based) to come to terms with the painful memories of his youth; the girls who participated in *Steps Youth Films* have become more confident sharing their experiences with other people; and Mada, one of the main subjects of *The African Cypher*, has recognised his ability to inspire others during the film's production and exhibition. Despite these positive outcomes, the collaborative filmmaking processes have also presented the filmmakers with various ethical challenges, particularly when the filmmaking process involved the participation of younger children, who might not have been

entirely aware of the consequences such intimate exposures could have on their future lives.

My discussion of screen media productions involving White and Black people has pointed to another "transitional" aspect of the current South Africa, namely, the continuing inequalities of race and class that exist in the country's film industry and in wider society. It was predominantly the (White) filmmakers who "authored" the films, and who benefited economically and symbolically from their exhibition, rather than the (Black) people upon whose personal experiences the films are mostly based. However, some of the filmmakers have kept in close contact with their participants, and have supported them after the film was completed and screened. In particular, the collaborative making of *Steps Youth Films* and *The African Cypher* has led to a reciprocal relationship between filmmakers and film subjects, from which both sides have benefited long after the films' production and exhibition; this relationship can be described as one of "interdependency". The television drama series *Intersexions* and *Yizo Yizo*, in turn, were written and directed by multi-racial teams, suggesting that there is greater scope for Black filmmakers to take on positions as directors and scriptwriters within South Africa's television industry. However, the creative freedom granted to directors working in television is often restricted by the specific standards and requirements of broadcasters.

The diegetic worlds of the screen media productions discussed here establish a particular narrative of youth and gender, which suggests that boys and girls in South Africa are being socialised into entrenched ideas of hegemonic masculinity and acquiescent femininity. For example, *Otelo Burning* suggests that Black teenagers grow up amidst practices constituting hegemonic masculinity, such as machoism,

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violence, and absent fathers; however, the film uses the metaphor of surfing to suggest that young Black men can transform their lives and obtain individual "freedom" through various avenues. *The African Cypher*, similarly, reveals that many Black youth grow up on the margins of society, but it employs street dance as a symbol for personal "redemption" within and despite situations of poverty and violence. Both of these films suggest, however, that individual and collective redemption is reserved for young *men*, thereby defining South Africa's new generation in masculine terms. And yet, these films' main subjects, Xaba and Mada, started initiatives working with marginalised youths through surfing and dance, respectively; their activities *outside* of the films thus require a nuancing of the idea of hegemonic masculinity in South Africa, revealing that some young men break with destructive social patterns and, instead, act as role models for the younger generation. The makers of *Steps Youth Films* and *Rough Aunties*, too, have sought to challenge the roots of gender inequality by putting the spotlight on the inspirational actions of *female* youth, and integrating women and girls into the production and exhibition of these films. The thesis has thus uncovered not only the patriarchal currents that inform South Africa's film and television industry and wider society, but also the initiatives both men and women have taken to address them.

My analysis of the exhibition and circulation of the screen media case studies has exposed the important role the television medium plays in making films widely available to (young) audiences in South Africa, while cinema theatres remain relatively inaccessible for the majority of the population. *Yizo Yizo*, for example, had a much larger audience than *Rough Aunties*, which (due to legislative restrictions) was publicly shown only at film festivals in South Africa and abroad. *Otelo Burning*,

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too, attracted only a small audience when it was shown in South African cinemas, but its broadcast on national television attracted a significant number of viewers. *Otelo Burning* was also one of only a few South African films to have had a digital release, which points to the increasing importance of online platforms in making the works of South African filmmakers available to audiences in the country. At present, however, digital media still offer limited opportunities for distributing films widely in South Africa, with many people being unable to afford access to online media platforms. And yet, the number of South Africans who are using the Internet regularly (mainly through their cellphones) is constantly increasing, which indicates that digital media could offer important opportunities for film distribution and consumption in South Africa in the future.

The research findings suggest that social media sites (in particular Twitter and Facebook) have emerged as important spaces where young South African viewers – provided they are able to afford access to the Internet – share their opinions about films and television programmes. The digital publics created by audiences of *Intersexions* and *The African Cypher* via Facebook and Twitter were constituted of both consensus and dissent, with some viewers subverting normative discourses while others supported them. These responses illuminate Willems' argument that publics can represent sites of complex power struggles, rather than consensual engagements only. Moreover, in some contexts, these exchanges on social media platforms generated "intimate publics", defined by Berlant as a space that "foregrounds affective and emotional attachments located in fantasies of the common, the everyday, and a sense of ordinariness" (2008: 10). However, as my discussion of *Intersexions* has shown, the anonymity granted by social media

networks also enabled users to articulate and disseminate normative, and sometimes sexist, narratives of women and gender.

The digital publics that formed around *Otelo Burning*, *The African Cypher*, *Rough Aunties*, and *Intersexions* have also posed thought-provoking questions about the gendered aspects of spectatorship. *Otelo Burning* is focalised through the perspectives of young teenage boys; however, viewers' comments on the film via Facebook and Twitter revealed that female audiences identified with, and derived pleasure from "gazing at", the male actors. In turn, *Rough Aunties* is focalised from a female point of view, but some male spectators expressed, through letters, their feelings of empathy and admiration for the female film subjects. And while *Intersexions*' narratives exert a critique of hegemonic masculinity, some female viewers expressed their attraction to the good-looking male actors on Twitter, even if the characters these actors played conformed to hegemonic masculine behaviour. Spectators' discussions on social media platforms have thus revealed the complexities and contradictions of male and female spectatorship, highlighting that viewers' identification with male/female characters on the screen is not dependent on biological sex alone.

Given the limited opportunities currently provided by cinema theatres, community screenings and (to a smaller extent) film festivals have represented important avenues for the South African filmmakers studied here to make their films available to South African audiences. My discussion of *Otelo Burning*, *Rough Aunties*, *Steps Youth Films*, and *The African Cypher* has shown that the exhibition of these films through communal screenings has, in some contexts, created "intimate publics", particularly when the films' participants were present. For instance, *Otelo Burning*

has created intimate publics in marginalised communities via post-screening discussions facilitated by Xaba. These intimate publics were formed by Xaba himself and young, male spectators who were able to establish a personal connection with him, and who felt inspired to live up to the example he provided. In a similar vein, Mada's and Prince's presence at screenings of *The African Cypher* created intimate publics constituted of empathy and emotional interactions, which, in some contexts, provided role models for younger boys in the audience. The young facilitators of the *Steps Youth Films*, too, engaged in intimate discussions with spectators about intimate experiences of HIV/AIDS, discrimination, and xenophobia; and the Bobbi Bear women spoke to, and sometimes even counselled, female audiences who had themselves experienced sexual violence after screenings. It was thus the presence of the films' participants at screenings of their own films that created spaces for personal discussion and reflection, thereby carving out moments of intimacy and a sense of belonging among film subjects and audiences. Consequently, despite television having an important role to play in making films widely available in South Africa, "live screenings" are crucial for creating publics that have the potential to be individually and socially transformative.

6.3   Theoretical Implications

Interdisciplinary in nature, this thesis offers vital contributions to the fields of Media and Film Studies, Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, Childhood and Youth Studies, and (South) African Studies. The research findings run in line with sociological and anthropological studies proposing that the concept of "youth" is not simply determined by biological age alone, but that it is determined by the different social, economic, and historical contexts in which young people are situated (Amit-Talai, 1995; Durham, 2000; Bucholtz, 2002; Dolby & Rizvi, 2008). It has become apparent from this study that notions of "youth" in contemporary South Africa are dependent upon young people's social, economic, and historical positioning. For example, my analysis of *The African Cypher* has shown that for some young men, the transition from youth to adulthood is marked by gaining financial independence. In turn, the discussion of *Rough Aunties* has exposed the different and sometimes conflicting ideas of "childhood" and of young audiences that exist in contemporary societies. Taken together, the individual chapters of the thesis have also illuminated that South African youths – both male and female – often take on agency and exert creativity in their daily lives; this finding runs in line with the arguments of scholars who have suggested that despite situations of adversity, young people in (South) Africa are not a "lost generation" (Barbarin & Richter, 2001; Moses, 2008; Honwana, 2012, 2013). What these studies do not explicitly stress, however, and what this research has revealed, is that youth is also a period of searching for identity, belonging, and one's purpose in life; and this makes the period of youth both a "private", subjective, and personal experience and one that is shared by young people from different social backgrounds.

In line with contemporary scholarship on youth and gender in South Africa (Campbell, 1992; Gqola, 2007; Bhana & Nkani, 2014), this thesis has suggested that socially entrenched ideas of hegemonic masculinity – such as hypersexuality, violence, and exerting control over women – are central to experiences of coming of age in South Africa. Moreover, the individual chapters have revealed some of the roots of hegemonic masculinities, such as absent fathers and broken families; and these have also been documented within a recently emerging field of research on fatherhood in South Africa (Richter & Morrell, 2005; Swartz & Bhana, 2010). Importantly, however, this thesis has also shown that important nuances ought to be brought to ideas about hegemonic masculinity in South Africa, for some young men are breaking normative patterns of violence and machoist behaviour.

This study contributes to research on the ethics of documentary films (Gross, Katz & Ruby, 1988; Downing & Saxton, 2010; Nash, 2011; Thomas, 2012), where very little research is devoted to films made with the involvement of children and youth (Saxton, 2010; Riele & Brooks, 2013). Moreover, the studies that exist on documentary filmmaking are often focused on the role of the filmmaker(s), rather than the film subject(s) (see, however, Huijser & Collins-Gearing, 2007; Cieplak 2010a; Nash, 2011, 2012). This research has, therefore, investigated the relationships among filmmakers and film subjects of screen media productions involving Black and White South Africans, as well as children, youth, and adults. It has demonstrated the complexities and challenges of collaborative filmmaking practices, revealing that in some contexts, the film subjects did not benefit financially or personally from the making of a film, particularly if the filmmakers did not keep in touch once a film was completed. However, some filmmakers and participants have benefited mutually

from the making and exhibition of their film, and have maintained the relationship of "interdependency" they developed during the shooting process. Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that some of the collaborative filmmaking efforts have had a transformative impact on the films' participants, particularly if they actively took part in the exhibition of their own films.

This research has suggested that the participation of children and youth in documentary films adds a further dimension to questions of the ethics of documentary filmmaking practices. It has revealed that young people's decision to participate in the production and exhibition of films should be respected, but doing so is often not legally possible. As the chapter on *Rough Aunties* has highlighted, it is often only adults who are able to make decisions on behalf of young people until they reach the age of 18. There is thus a clash between legal definitions of "childhood" and "youth" and academic research arguing for an understanding of young people as agents and individuals in their own right.

My analysis of the publics created by the selected screen media makes an important contribution to contemporary scholarship on screen media in (South) Africa (Maingard, 2007; Dovey, 2009; Saks, 2010), and particularly to an emerging field of research on the reception of film and television programmes (Kerr, 2011; Modisane, 2013; Ponono, 2014). Unlike the majority of studies in this field, I have used a multi-dimensional methodology to explore the discussions generated by particular films and television programmes from a holistic perspective, drawing together written texts, "oral" debates, and social media commentary. Integrating social media platforms into my analysis has allowed for exploring those audience responses that took place outside of the "formal" contexts of film festival screenings, newsletter

articles, and magazines. The digital publics have thus exposed those discussions that emerged in contexts of "the everyday", in the "private" spaces of people's homes and families. These insights highlight the value of a methodology that takes into account a variety of secondary texts, media platforms, and screening contexts in the study of media reception.

The thesis' findings support the idea of media scholars, notably Jenkins, who have suggested that contemporary societies are witnessing a "convergence culture", characterised by the increasing distribution of media content across different, overlapping media platforms (Jenkins, 2006; Fagerjord, 2009; Willems, 2011). I, in turn, have suggested in this thesis that the reception of the selected films and television programmes also reveals a "convergence of publics", with South African audiences negotiating these screen media texts on various media platforms and through face-to-face discussions. These converging publics were constituted, for example, through written reviews in newspapers, social media commentary, and oral conversations during "live screenings" and at home; these publics were thus created at the intersections between "public" and "private" spaces, as well as "online" and "offline" media.

However, the thesis has also highlighted the fact that access to "converging" media platforms, and the publics they create, is not necessarily equal in South Africa. Marginalised people were largely excluded from publics at film festivals, and from the "unofficial cultures" generated by social media users. Furthermore, in some contexts, women and girls were remarkably absent from the "live publics" conjured at community screenings, as the exhibition of *The African Cypher* has shown. These findings support the arguments of media scholars who have suggested that the

concept of "convergence culture" needs to take into account the social and economic inequalities that continue to restrict certain people's access to different media platforms and technologies (Carpentier, 2011; Hay & Couldry, 2011; Ouellette & Wilson, 2011).

The thesis' analysis of the digital publics some viewers created on social media platforms offers vital insights for the existing research on gender and spectatorship. Historically, feminist film scholars have argued that (Hollywood) fiction films tend to objectify women for the pleasure of male spectators (Mulvey, 1975; Doane, 1982). Indeed, the findings of this thesis suggest that normative discourses often prevail through social media networks, rather than being critiqued or corrected within them. Many tweets addressing *Intersexions*, for instance, supported rather than challenged sexist discourses on women and HIV/AIDS. However, my analysis of social media commentary has also revealed the contingency and changing nature of film and television spectatorship, suggesting that identification with on-screen characters is not necessarily dependent upon one's biological sex; this aspect supports the claims of feminist scholars who have emphasised the contingency and unpredictability of spectatorship, arguing that women can equally "gaze" at male characters when watching film and television (Bergstrom, 1979; Koch, 1980; Studlar, 1984).

The intimate publics young audiences created via exchanges on Facebook and Twitter support the ideas of scholars who have suggested that "the public" and "the private" are not binary categories, but that they overlap in complex ways (Bystrom & Nuttall, 2013b; Hjorth, King & Kataoka, 2014; Gikandi, 2013). Young viewers often commented on the films and television programmes on Facebook and Twitter while watching them from the domestic space of their homes; thus, these digital publics

complicate the historical divisions of "public" and "private" spheres. As Hjorth, King, and Kataoka argue, digital media's ability to transgress physical space and to allow instant communication renders "the intimate public and the public intimate" (2014: 2), resulting in an emerging "mobile intimacy" (2014: 7) in the contemporary media age. This blurred boundary between "public" and "private" space reveals once again the value of a definition of "the private" (as established by Bystrom and Nuttall [2013]) that refers to emotions, the self, and bodily experiences, rather than spatial categories.

6.4   Limitations of the Thesis

This study has explored the relationships between youth and narrative screen media in South Africa using qualitative methods and by sampling oral discussions, documents, and social media comments in contexts within South Africa and beyond. As a consequence of this methodology, the study confronted a number of limitations, which require consideration.

Being a White, German, female scholar studying at SOAS, University of London, in the UK, I have brought my own personal, academic, and historical "baggage" to this research. The question might be posed as to how far I, as a foreign researcher, was able to gain insights into the mediated discourses within communities other than my own and to mediate them – through interpretation – to others. In turn, an "indigenous" researcher might benefit from being able to access these "insider" point of views; and yet, s/he may also struggle to critically interrogate his/her own culture (Rettová, 2007: 43). Moreover, my use of qualitative research methods poses

questions of reliability and of whether other researchers would interpret the data discussed here in different ways. There is no guarantee that such reliability is possible, however, given that researchers are likely to differ in their motivation and background.

In turn, as argued earlier via Barthes (1973, 2001) and others, spectators' interpretations of film and television are infinite, and it would have been impossible to collect every single engagement with the screen media texts studied here. Consequently, my research ought to be treated as presenting one segment from a myriad of possible audience interpretations, and the publics they created, at a particular place and time.

Another limitation of this research derives from my analysis of predominantly English secondary texts. With only basic knowledge of isiZulu, my access to commentary on social media and oral discussions in South Africa's various languages and dialects was restricted. It was also not possible for me to interview people in Zulu, which means that important linguistic nuances might have been lost. I have, however, considered at least some newspaper articles and some social media commentary in Zulu and (to a smaller extent) Afrikaans, which were translated by the translation service Tomedes and myself. Language is, however, not the only factor that determines one's access to research subjects; so are class, race, and gender. For example, during my research at DIFF's screenings in kwaMashu, a township near Durban, I made the acquaintance of a young, Black, female researcher from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, who was conducting research on the festival audiences in the township. She was fluent in Zulu; however, she told me that she

found it difficult to interview people in kwaMashu, because she, too, felt like an "outsider" to the township community because of her class status.

This research has provided insights into the discourses emerging from young people's engagements with screen media on social media sites; however, what this research has not been able to explore, due to its limited scope, was the question of *who* the users of social media are. Hence, to an extent, my research on digitall media challenges the very same position on audiences I have attempted to establish – namely, that audiences ought to be studied in relation to their social, political, and historical surroundings. However, sourcing this information is, methodologically, a different task, for the anonymity offered by social media means that users cannot always be identified, particularly if they use nicknames or do not have a profile picture that reveals their age and gender. The digital publics discussed in this thesis are thus to be valued less for the information they provide on the identities of spectators than for the themes and ideas that have emerged from them.

In retrospect, it has proven to be challenging to conduct research involving children and youth. As discussed in the Introduction to the thesis, conducting interviews with people aged under 18 years is ethically charged and requires the consent of parents or people in charge of their care. I have, therefore, not been able to speak to some children, because adults advised me not to do so. Moreover, some young people who took part in the films studied here had grown up at the time of research, were busy working, parenting their own children, or had moved away. This highlights how the precarious nature of youth can extend into the research processes itself, and this needs to be taken into consideration by scholars setting out to do a study of this kind.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This research has proposed some answers to the research questions; however, it has also identified a variety of new questions on youth, screen media, digital cultures, and publics. First, the chapters exploring *Otelo Burning* and *The African Cypher* have highlighted the ways in which leisure has emerged as a theme in contemporary South African screen media productions. Exploring further the contexts and significance of these youth cultures, such as sport, dance, music, or simply "hanging out" in South Africa would make for fascinating areas for future research; and would speak to the emerging field of leisure studies in African contexts (Tiyambe Zeleza & Cassandra Rachel Veney, 2003; Thompson, 2008; Palen et al., 2010)

The diverse contexts and practices of watching television in South Africa have remained relatively unexplored, and only a few studies exist on how and where young audiences consume and engage with television programmes (Barnes, 2003; Krabill, 2010; Ponono, 2014). As Abu-Lughod's ethnographic study of audiences watching television dramas in Egypt has shown (2005), exploring these contexts can present vital insights into the publics created by television programmes in the familial space of the home; and studies could shed further light on the relationships between "public" and "private" spaces in South Africa.

This research poses new questions concerning the relationships among youth, media, and digital culture in South Africa, and in African contexts. Some scholars, such as Tanja Bosch (2008, 2011), have already initiated research on how young people in South Africa use digital media technologies, the relationships between social media use and young people's identities, and the dialectics between online and offline interactions. Pursuing this kind of research in the future will be vital for exploring

who the users of social media platforms are, the motivations that drive young people to engage with them, as well as the potential dangers and possibilities these digital networks pose for young people. The future study of social media use also promises to offer vital insights into people's "everyday" conversations, the use of various languages in digital spaces, and normative discourses on gender.

The various ways in which film and television are being consumed and received in South Africa invite further studies on the making and exhibition of video films distributed only on DVD. Some young South African filmmakers and film students who I met during my research are already imitating the cost-effective, straight-to-DVD production mode that led to the recent emergence of Nigeria's video industry, known as "Nollywood". Taking these novel, "informal" ways of filmmaking and distribution into account would make a vital contribution to the field of (screen) media studies in South Africa in the future.

6.6   Concluding Remarks

In spite of how South Africa's "Born Free" generation has often been represented in the media and theoretical debates – either being hailed as "free" from apartheid history, or condemned as a "lost generation" – this research has shown the various sides of coming of age in the country, suggesting that it is a multi-faceted, sometimes contradictory, and complex process. Not all the "freedoms" promised by the political dispensation of the democratic South Africa have been achieved yet; however, the films and television programmes studied in this thesis, and the publics they created, underscore the agency and creativity of the "Born Frees". And just as youth is a transitional period, characterised by a search for identity, contemporary South Africa itself is engaged in a continuous, multi-layered, creative process of transition and transformation.

Chapter 7   Addendum

7.1   Reflections on Positionality

This addendum presents an attempt to critically reflect on the methodological and theoretical frameworks of my thesis, which explored the subject of youth, screen media, and what I will theorise, via others, as "the intimate public sphere" in contemporary South Africa. I – the author – am not South African and I have only resided in South Africa for a maximum of two months at a time. I am 32-year-old White, German, female scholar educated in the UK, where I have lived for the past eleven years. Hence, I need to position myself within a context (Europe) in which much of the academic knowledge generated about Africa has been historically entwined with colonial agendas and Eurocentrism (Krenceyová, 2014). In the following sections, I will, therefore, explore the ways in which my own motivations, background and positionality have influenced the research process itself, as well as the interpretation of my findings.

The topic of this thesis developed from my longstanding academic engagement with representations of African children and youth in film and television, as well as the wider social contexts in which such texts are produced and circulated. This interest was sparked during an internship I carried out with UNICEF UK in 2009, during which I was responsible for selecting, editing, and publishing photos and videos of children in "developing" countries – and African countries in particular – affected by poverty, conflict and disease, to promote the organisation's work and raise funds. This work gave me a first-hand insight into the production of media narratives that construct children and youth in contemporary Africa as a "lost generation". Through my academic work, however, I have sought to challenge such problematic

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perceptions. In previous research, I have explored, for example, unconventional representations of HIV/AIDS in South African films (Singer, 2013), and African films that transcend dystopic "western" narratives of African children living in contexts of war (Singer and Dovey, 2012). For this thesis, therefore, I specifically selected films that emphasise the agency of South African youths (as well as adults) in addressing social problems, rather than simply representing these young people as a powerless and "lost" generation.

I chose South Africa as the geographical context of my thesis due to a longstanding fascination with filmmaking practices in the country, as well as with its wider history, culture and society. This interest first emerged when in 2007, aged 22, I spent two months in KwaZulu-Natal to volunteer at an orphanage called Agape. This kind of work ought to be critiqued, for I carried out what has been dubbed "voluntourism" in African contexts. European voluntary work projects operating in Africa often evoke an archetypal "adventure narrative" which constructs Africa as a place to be explored and conquered or "saved" by White people. However, it was during this time that my initial critical interest in the subject of this thesis was sparked. At Agape, I made the acquaintance of Paul Taylor, the co-producer of *Rough Aunties* and the director of *Thina Simunye* (2006), a documentary film about the children who live at Agape. Taylor had spent a long time with these children to make this film, which depicts intensely personal moments, such as three siblings attending the funeral of their father. This encounter triggered my interest in the impact the production and exhibition of a film may (or may not) have on its participants, the ethics of making films about young people (particularly within a

culture *not* one's own), and the pattern of dynamics between White adult filmmakers and young Black film subjects that I discuss in this thesis.

I collected the primary data for the thesis between 2012 and 2014 through three research trips to South Africa which respectively lasted two months, three weeks, and two weeks. While in the UK, I conducted Skype and telephone interviews with South African interviewees, researched social media sites and online articles, and worked for the children's programme of the Film Africa film festival in London. Despite these efforts, I ought to acknowledge that my position as a non-South African researcher inevitably entailed a certain lack of knowledge. For example, I have only basic knowledge of one indigenous South African language (isiZulu), which rendered me a linguistic "other" to many South Africans who speak languages other than English. Therefore, my access to dialogues in South Africa's various languages during screenings, interviews and everyday conversations was restricted. I have sought to mitigate this problem through considering at least some newspaper articles and some social media commentary in isiZulu and Afrikaans, which were translated by professional translators and myself. However, it was not possible for me to interview, for example, isiZulu-speaking South Africans in their mother tongue, which means that linguistic nuances might have been lost during the research process. My lack of language skills thus made me an outsider on the level of language, and this may have resulted in some blind spots in the research findings.

My national and linguistic distance from the object of research poses the question of whether the findings of the thesis have any validity. Such an argument has been put forward by media scholars and social activists who have called for the "de-Westernising" of scholarship on the global South (Park & Curran, 2010). For

example, the Rhodes Must Fall[141] student movement in South Africa – which emerged as this thesis was nearing completion – campaigned for addressing White supremacy in educational institutions in the country and beyond. These campaigns confront White European academics with the limits of their ability to access and understand African contexts. However, calls for "de-Westernising" scholarship also sustain a dichotomy between "African" and "Western" societies (Murphy, 2000). As Khiabany and Sreberny argue, media landscapes in contexts across the world have been historically informed by transnational movements and international exchanges (2014). Thus, it is difficult to distil "Western" scholarship and societies from those that are "African", and the relationship between researchers and research participants is more complex than such definitive "outsider/insider" terminology suggests.

While conducting research in South Africa, I encountered some situations that demonstrated to me that being "insider" and "outsider", "same" and "other", can be experienced at the same time. For example, for a period of two months, I conducted research at Bobbi Bear, an organisation in KwaZulu-Natal which cares for victims of sexual violence. On some days, I was asked by the Black South African staff whether I would be willing to attend court hearings with them in Umlazi township to support rape victims and their families during trials. The women explained to me that my presence – as a White European – could exert pressure on the judge (a Black South African) to reach a verdict in favour of the victim, as he might fear that I would publicise the cases internationally. I was clearly positioned as an "outsider" in the

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[141] In late 2015, student protests erupted at the University of Cape Town, directed against a commemorative statue of the British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes. The movement sparked allied student protest at different universities in South Africa and across the world.

courtroom, being a White European, while the other court attendants were Black South Africans. However, was I not then being treated also as an insider of Bobbi Bear, putting my otherness to a strategic use for their own goals? It seems to me that, in this situation, I was both an "insider" (to Bobbi Bear) and an "outsider" (in the courtroom) at the same time, highlighting the precarious nature of the two modes.

What is more, a scholar can potentially benefit from conducting research on a culture that is not his or her own. During my research, in some contexts, being White European (rather than White South African) might have brought with it certain benefits, since I am not directly implicated in the history of apartheid. For example, I made the acquaintance of a Black isiZulu-speaking South African student at the Durban International Film Festival 2013 who, like myself, was carrying out research at film screenings in KwaMashu township. We discussed our experiences of the research process, and I explained to her that I felt like an outsider to this township community. To my surprise, she told me that it was equally, if not more, difficult for her, because she was from an affluent family and did not speak the dialect spoken in KwaMashu. She said that because I was "very obviously a foreigner", it might in fact be easier for me to interview people than it was for her. While I was thus inevitably more "visible" than a Black South African researcher, I was not directly positioned within home-grown tensions and relationships of difference. Writing about documentary filmmaking practices in Rwanda, Cieplak has argued that a foreign filmmaker inevitably lacks certain kinds of knowledge about his or her film subjects, but s/he may not be as entangled in "local" relationships as an "insider" might be (2010a). Thus, there are both advantages and disadvantages to being a national and linguistic "outsider", particularly in societies that have histories of trauma.

The heart of the problem, then, is not only the question of whether or when one is an "insider" or "outsider" to one's object of research, as every researcher will be an insider or outsider to a different extent. What is more important is that there are crucial imbalances in the research that has been carried out on Africa and Europe. Many White Europeans have conducted research on Africa, but not a great deal of research on Europe has been carried out by Black African scholars. What is needed, perhaps, is a greater exchange in research on Media and Cultural Studies, which could widen scholarly perspectives on Africa and Europe, while deconstructing the historical European bias in scholarship on Africa, itself a result of imperialism and colonialism. Such a widening of perspectives would benefit from critically evaluating rather than disguising one's own positionality and historical embeddedness, recognising the challenges and benefits posed by being in the position of the "other" in the research process, and acknowledging that one's own background and motivation inevitably shape the findings and arguments of one's research.

7.2   Film and the "Intimate Public Sphere"

My major interests, in this thesis, lied primarily in the reception of certain films and television programmes in South Africa and beyond. The concept of the "public sphere", as first developed by Habermas (1989), seemed to present an apt framework for theorising audience responses to these screen media texts in my doctoral thesis. This theoretical choice was inspired particularly by the work of the South African film scholar Litheko Modisane, who has explored notions of the public sphere, and of "publics", through a discussion of the production, representational politics, and circulation of South African films and television programmes during and after apartheid (2013). Modisane shows that although films such as *Come Back, Africa* and *Mapantsula* were made within the oppressive political climate of apartheid, they stimulated what he calls "public critical engagements" (2013: 2) on Black South African identities in South Africa and in contexts across the world. His work demonstrates – as I have attempted here – the value of an analytical approach that considers responses to films in different geographical contexts and at different moments in time to illuminate a wide range of narratives they may have called to life.

Habermas' concept of the "public sphere" has also been subjected to criticism in a variety of disciplines, from politics and sociology to media studies and gender theory (Fraser, 1990; Downey and Fenton, 2003; Zegeye and Harris, 2003; Berlant, 1998, 2008; Mudhai et al., 2009; Modisane, 2013). In particular, his emphasis on discussions dependent on "rationality" has been critiqued by scholars who have drawn attention to those publics created by what are often referred to as "intimate" revelations (Berlant, 2008; Bystrom, 2010; Bystrom and Nuttall, 2013). Notably,

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Berlant's well-known concept of the "intimate public sphere" (2008, 2009) describes a discursive space in the United States (US) formed by literary texts produced for and by women. This public sphere, she argues, generates the fantasy of emotional connections and a sense of belonging among those who participate in it (2008: viii). Berlant's emphasis on women and emotions offers an important expansion of Habermas' focus on "rational-critical" discussions among bourgeois men. However, Berlant's concept of the intimate public sphere also poses certain problems, as I will show here.

My discussion of the "intimate public sphere", in this addendum, is guided by an exploration of three films centred on youth. As noted in the introduction of the thesis, South Africa has recently witnessed a proliferation of films revolving around the young generation, such as *Malunde* (2001), *Tsotsi* (2005), *Jerusalema* (2008), *Rough Aunties*, the *Steps for the Future Youth* Films (2009), *Life, Above All* (2010), *Otelo Burning* (2011), *The African Cypher* (2012), *Four Corners* (2013), *Of Good Report* (2013), *Hear Me Move* (2014), and *Necktie Youth* (2015). Interestingly, many of these films centre on the lives of Black South African youth while the directors are White adults. These dynamics call for an exploration of the intergenerational and interracial relationships informing these films' making, textual politics, and circulation. Scholars have yet to pay significant attention to the many youth-centred films that have been made recently in South Africa, creating a blind spot around the politics of race, age, and class in contemporary South African filmmaking (see, however Carklin, 2010; Haupt, 2012). However, these films offer important insights for theorising the relationship between film and the "intimate public sphere".

Some scholars have argued that experiences of "intimacy" tend to involve the revelation of one's inner self, the expression of emotions, and embodied or imagined contact with others (Berlant, 2008; Weems, 2016). In turn, these largely positive understandings of "the intimate" have been nuanced by some South African scholars who argue that relationships of closeness can be the result of, and/or generate, undesired interpersonal encounters, oppression and violence, including sexual violence (Bystrom and Nuttall, 2013; Ndebele, 2013; Dlamini, 2014; Gqola, 2016). The films discussed here foreground these positive and negative forms of what is often called "the intimate", such as people's personal lives, memories and experiences. The first case study is the documentary film *The African Cypher* (2012), directed by the young White South African filmmaker Bryan Little. Focused on street dances practised by Black South African youths, the film provides insights into the subjects' personal lives, homes, and families. In turn, the documentary film *Rough Aunties* (2008) focuses specifically on sexual violence against women and children –arguably one of the most violent forms of "intimate" encounters (Weems, 2016) – in KwaZulu-Natal. Directed by the White British filmmaker Kim Longinotto, the film follows the lives of staff at the child-welfare organisation Bobbi Bear which rescues and cares for young rape survivors. The third example explored here is *Otelo Burning* (2011), a fiction film directed by the White South African filmmaker Sara Blecher. Set during South Africa's transition years (roughly 1990-1994), its narrative centres on a group of Black teenage boys who discover surfing, while exploring the subjects of friendship, love, jealousy, and sexual violence.

These films seem to support Bystrom and Nuttall's argument that cultural production in contemporary South Africa is witnessing an increased articulation of people's personal lives and spaces, affect and emotions, as well as embodied experiences (2013). The authors suggest that many Black South African artists and photographers produce through their work "intimate exposures", a term they use to describe these artists' displays of their inner lives, their bodies and/or homes (2013: 309-310). However, what distinguishes the films discussed here from the works described by Bystrom and Nuttall is the fact that they do not expose the directors' *own* lives, feelings, and bodies, but those of *others*. This calls for an exploration of the relationships that developed between the White filmmakers and the mainly Black film subjects, of the directors' justifications for documenting the personal lives of others, and the differences and similarities between representing the intimacy of others through fiction films and documentary films.

Most importantly to this addendum's theorising is that a discourse of intimacy is evoked not only through the films' representational politics, but particularly through the filmmakers' ways of describing their filmmaking practices. They have stressed, in interviews and post-screening discussions, that they established close friendships with their film subjects during their films' production processes (Longinotto 2010, 2012; Blecher, 2012; Little and Domingues, 2012). Hence, the filmmakers' revelations of people's personal and, often, painful experiences seem to be justified by claims to what might be called "intimacy" with the subjects. However, it is important to question how "close" these relationships were, who seemingly benefited from these supposed friendships, and what constitutes "intimacy" in the first place.

This final chapter proposes that the filmmakers' claims to "intimate" relationships with their film subjects are enmeshed with a discourse that can be described as a "White paternalism" or "White maternalism". The Oxford English Dictionary states that the word "paternal" (derived from Latin paternus) means "of relating to a father […], bearing towards, or authority over offspring", while "maternal" describes the qualities of a mother (2016). The term "White maternalism/paternalism" also appears briefly in Berlant's discussion of the "intimate public sphere" (2008: 6) to describe the works of certain female writers in the early 20th century US, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Edna Ferber's *Show Boat* (1926), and Margaret Landon's *Anna and the King of Siam* (1944). Berlant notes that these mostly White bourgeois writers often use in their novels narratives of Black suffering to grapple with their own, more privileged concerns (2008: 6). For example, she argues that Show Boat and its adaptations to plays and films twist the history of slavery to such an extent that they construct the idea of a racially inclusive US society that does not need to confront a legacy of racism. Readers, Berlant claims, often fail to notice this discourse of White maternalism due to this novel's preoccupation with romance, pleasures, and emotions (2008: 6-7). However, the focus of Berlant's analysis rests on a close textual analysis of these works, rather than on responses by readers and viewers. My analysis, in turn, explores not only my chosen films' textual politics, but also contexts of production and reception. The notion of "White maternalism/paternalism" is, nevertheless, useful for describing the films discussed here, which are equally embedded in a discourse of White superiority. I will argue that some of the White filmmakers used the experiences of Black youths to grapple with their own identities and concerns, while their claims to "intimacy" with the film subjects gloss over the power struggles that informed their

films' productions. For example, the White maternalist/paternalist perspective of these films was challenged by some of their participants, actors, and viewers in subversive ways.

Some South African film scholars have observed a similar subversion of White paternalism in state-sponsored films made for Black audiences during apartheid. While these films were mainly tools of state propaganda, some of them transgressed apartheid's ideology through their representational politics and their reception (Dovey and Impey, 2010; Modisane, 2013). For example, Jim Comes to *Jo'burg/African Jim* (1949) is a fiction film that features overtly racist stereotypes, but it also contains a hidden critique of apartheid in isiZulu (Dovey and Impey, 2010). Moreover, the subsidy film *uDeliwe* (1975) orchestrated critical engagements with Black identity despite being made in the context of state propaganda (Modisane, 2013). The film was embraced by Black South African intellectuals, including the politically critical magazine *Drum* and the Black Consciousness Movement,[142] mainly due to its dialogues in isiZulu and its realistic depictions of Black urban modernity (Modisane, 2013). These films reveal an interplay between White maternalism/paternalism and processes of resistance that resembles what has happened with the films discussed in this article to a certain extent.

This imbrication of domination and resistance suggests that a "public" called to life by film be conceptualised as a site of struggle, a concept I adapt from Willems (2012), as I will explain in more depth in the next section. This understanding of a public draws attention to the complex operations of power that inform a film's

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[142] The Black Consciousness movement was an anti-apartheid movement that emerged in the 1960s in South Africa.

production and exhibition. This kind of public disrupts Berlant's concept of the "intimate public sphere", which is constituted by (largely positive) emotions and a sense of identification with others, making it difficult to determine what "intimacy" precisely is. Hence, researchers can at best analyse people's discursive claims to intimacy, the agendas possibly entwined with such claims, and the power struggles enmeshed with discourses on intimacy.

I also propose to connect here research that draws on textual responses to films with research that draws on in-situ audiences in a study of the relationship between film and publics. Studies on media and the public sphere have focused mainly on written responses from audiences, such as books, newspapers, and textual digital media (Berlant, 2008; Modisane, 2013; Fuchs, 2014). These scholars focus primarily on texts composed by journalists, academics, and film experts, rather than on spontaneous responses and face-to-face discussions among "ordinary" viewers. Access to film screenings is not necessarily inclusive in South Africa, with cinemas frequented mainly by people from the upper and middle classes. However, some South African film festivals, such as DIFF, organise screenings in townships and poor communities. Moreover, films are increasingly shown on television in South Africa, which is widely accessible in the country. Out of the 14.5 million homes in the country, almost 10.7 million have a television set (Independent Online, 2012). Uniting immediate, oral responses from in-situ audiences – from such contexts as live screenings and post-screening discussions – with "delayed", written responses can thus uncover a wider variety of viewer responses than a focus solely on written documents allows. One ought to keep in mind, however, that people's responses in both live and textual contexts are always affected by what people are willing to share

in such "public" domains; and these responses can never be taken entirely at face value.

7.3 Theorising Publics and Intimacy

Warner offers an important starting point for conceptualising the relationship between film and publics (2002). He defines a "public" as a space brought into being through people's engagements with texts – both oral and written – that circulate over time (2002: 62). The term "counterpublic" describes a public that challenges dominant discourses and that is aware of its subordinate status (2002: 80). Warner's emphasis on the different narratives that may form around media texts is useful for theorising the debates called to life by people's engagements with films, as well as for acknowledging the agency of socially marginalised individuals. However, his idea that a public is formed by a consensus and (in the case of a counterpublic) by consensual resistance to a dominant discourse ignores the fact that some people might be complicit in authoritative structures and resist them at the very same time (Dlamini, 2014; Wedeen, 1999). Hence, Warner puts forward a somewhat limited understanding of the operation of power in society.

Willems (2012) tackles this conceptual problem by introducing Michel Foucault's theory of power (1980, 1981) into her theorisation of the public sphere. Foucault, Willems notes, suggests that power is not concentrated in the realm of the state, as suggested by Habermas, but that it is pronounced through a myriad of dynamic social networks. Foucault would reject the possibility of a power-free zone of communication put forward by Habermas' and Warner's theorisations. Willems

suggests that a public can at best be described as a site of struggle where both consensus and dissent may occur (2012: 18–19). I embrace this definition of publics, as it highlights the complexity of engagements and the competing discourses that may arise from people's engagements with films.

Berlant's claim that "publics presume intimacy" (2008: vii) offers an important modification of Warner's and Willems' theorisations. Her concept of the "intimate public sphere" describes a public generated by a collective of texts both produced and consumed by women, evoking the idea that all women have similar histories and emotional desires. The participants of this intimate public, for Berlant, share a mutual sense of belonging, emanating from a fantasy of shared emotions, histories, and pleasures (2008: 8). She thus suggests that the exposition of feelings, affect, and desires – aspects often designated as "private" (Fraser, 1990; Benhabib, 1992) – through literature and film can call to life the publics of engagements described by Warner. In pointing to the overlaps of "private" experiences and "public" domains, Berlant challenges historical theorisations of the public and the private as strictly separated spheres.[143] This point echoes Chantal Mouffe's important argument that what is "political" is articulated not only through governmental debates and state institutions, but also through social relationships and the familial sphere of the home (2005). Berlant thus reminds us that "the public" and "the private" are slippery modes that transgress strictly binary definitions.

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[143] The separation of the public sphere from "private" spheres has been articulated by Habermas, as well as by his critics. For example, some feminist scholars have argued that Habermas neglects the "private" activities of women, which they define as domestic labour and child rearing (Fraser, 1990; Benhabib, 1992).

As noted earlier, Berlant also draws attention to the ways in which intimate publics can be enmeshed with the maternalistic attitudes of White privileged writers who appropriate, in their novels, the lives of Black working class men and women. However, this critique of White liberalism is not followed by a discussion of the implications it poses for defining "intimacy". Berlant acknowledges that it is difficult to define what a "sense of belonging" is (2008: 10), yet she uses this idea throughout her analysis. However, her "intimate public sphere" is extremely difficult to locate in practice, for emotions and identification are highly subjective experiences. "Intimacy", then, emerges as a slippery concept that is performed perhaps as much as it is taken for granted.

South African scholars have offered a useful expansion of Berlant's concept of the intimate public sphere in that they highlight the power struggles that may underline "intimate" experiences (Ndebele, 1996, 2013; Bystrom and Nuttall, 2013; Dlamini, 2014; Gqola, 2016).[144] In this scholarship, the term "intimacy" is often seen as related to experiences and memories not of positive occurrences, but of violence (including sexual violence), as well as Black people's loss of their homes and family members during apartheid. As discussed below, particularly the works of Njabulo Ndebele (2013) and Pumla Gqola (2016) provide vital insights into the power constellations and the positive as well as negative elements of "intimate" relationships.

Certain South African scholars' theorising of intimacy reveals certain problems, however. As mentioned earlier, Bystrom and Nuttall's concept of "intimate

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[144] See Carli Coetzee (2017, forthcoming) for an overview of notions of intimacy in contemporary South African scholarship.

exposure" (2013b) illuminates the display of Black South African artists' inner selves through cultural works with a focus on experiences of bodily and psychological violence. Like Berlant, these scholars draw attention to the slippery nature of common distinctions between "the public" and "the private", demonstrating that what is often called "private" can find visibility in spaces typically regarded as "public". However, they do not resolve the problem of determining what "the intimate" precisely is. Moreover, focusing on the *exposure* of other people's inner lives neglects the silences, secrets, and thoughts that people (even artists) do not make public; and these "hidden" intimacies are virtually impossible to identify for researchers. Bystrom and Nuttall's account is also problematic in that it represents a trend in South African scholarship that subjects the intimacy of Black South Africans to the perspectives of White scholars (Coetzee 2017, forthcoming). [145] These relationships between Black and White South Africans are addressed by Njabulo Ndebele's argument that a "fatal intimacy" has come to structure interpersonal encounters in contemporary South Africa (2013). This definition of intimacy is less related to the feelings of affect and identification described by Berlant, and instead refers to interpersonal encounters that are undesired, painful, and that one seeks to avoid. For Ndebele, since South Africa's democratic transition in 1994, people from different demographic backgrounds have engaged with one another in daily life, but these confrontations are often uncomfortable and informed by a suspicion of racial others. These undesirable elements of human relationships are illustrated later in my discussion of some of the Black film subjects' experiences of the White filmmakers' presence in my three case studies.

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[145] See, for example, Nuttall (2009) and Bystrom (2016).

Gqola's work (2016) presents vital insights for theorising the complexity of so-called "intimate" relationships. She usefully points out that relationships of closeness can act as a "double bind" (2016: 3), as friendships and sexual relationships can give rise to power hierarchies, oppression, and danger. This argument is based on a discussion of the xenophobic outbreaks in South Africa in 2008 and 2015. Gqola argues that the construction of poor Black African immigrants as "foreigners" by Black South Africans evolved not from situations where these people were strangers to each other, but from the personal spaces they shared, such as neighbourhoods and schools, and from relationships of friendship and romance. For example, some South African school children began to discriminate against fellow students who spoke Xitsonga, constructing their own peers as foreigners (2016: 8). In another situation, a Zimbabwean migrant woman was rejected by her own South African partner after being displaced during the attacks (2016: 5-6). Considering these oppressive dimensions of interpersonal relationships is vital in this article, which explores the power relationships between filmmakers and film subjects who worked together for an extended period and often shared familiar spaces.

Bystrom and Nuttall, Gqola, and Ndebele all offer important frameworks for analysing the three films that make up my case studies. These scholars remind us that what is often described as "private" can find revelation in "public" spaces, thereby challenging strict theoretical distinctions between the two modes. Most importantly, they demonstrate that relationships of closeness – which they relate to "intimacy" – can generate not only emotions and a sense of belonging, but also complicated power hierarchies and situations of oppression. However, as discussed in the next section, it is my contention here that it is difficult to define "intimacy" – and, consequently, the

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"intimate public sphere" – in absolute terms, for it is both a subjective experience and one that can be performed on multiple levels.

7.4 Film Production, Publics, and Performances of Intimacy

Scholars exploring the relationship between media and the public sphere have focused primarily on the exhibition of media texts (Lunt & Livingstone, 1994; Warner, 2002; Livingstone, 2005). Warner, for example, proposes that publics come into being through people's engagements with texts over the course of their circulation (2002). However, it is problematic to apply this concept to the medium of film, for it is difficult to determine the precise moment when a film's "public life" (Modisane, 2013) begins. Does a film's circulation start with its release in the cinemas? Does its public-ness begin with the circulation of trailers and posters? Does the screening of a first cut to the production team launch a film's circulation? If we think of the final cut of a film as just one version of that film, then we could even think of the film's production process in relation to public-ness, suggesting that a "public" can begin with a film's very making.

The production processes of the films discussed here have called to life publics that can be described, following Willems (2012), as sites of struggles. I will start with *The African Cypher*, a documentary made by two young White South African filmmakers (Little, the director, and Domingues, the producer) who have described the filmmaking process in ways that construct a discourse of intimacy. They have stressed the idea that the film evolved out of friendships they established with the film's main subjects, Prince and Mada. For example, Little said that "it was a mutual

desire to try and tell their [Prince's and Mada's] story. Initially it wasn't necessarily my idea" ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012, my emphasis). Domingues, in turn, stated: "we met them [Prince and Mada] before, we met all their families, elders, cousins, sisters. We went into the shebeens and shisa nyamas with them" ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012). These statements construct a narrative of "intimacy" between the filmmakers and the film subjects, which could be read as an attempt to legitimise the film's making. The producer's affirmation that she knew the young men and their families well suggests that the making of the film rendered her an "insider" rather than an "outsider" of Black township communities. However, Mada contradicted the filmmakers' claims, saying that: "Bryan and […] Filipa […] came up with the thought that they want to do a documentary. But me, I didn't know why. I think they were just embraced in our story [sic], the way we live, the things that we did in our lives" (2014). From Mada's perspective, it was the initiative of the filmmakers – not a "mutual desire" – to reveal his personal life through a documentary film. Hence, publics can form around a film even before its production begins, and these publics can be fraught and enforced rather than consensual.

Little's and Domingues' performance of intimacy with their film subjects is entwined with an attempt to come to terms with their identities as White South Africans. Domingues has said: "People think now that apartheid is over we should all be friends […]. It's not like that […]. We can all relate on a very surface level, but I never thought that we ever go deeper. We did in this documentary [sic] and it changed a lot for me" (Little & Domingues, 2012). Little's stated reasons for making the film were similar: "as a White South African from Cape Town, the more I can learn about my country and the various subcultures, the better. I just wanted to

immerse myself in that subculture, for purely selfish reasons" (Little & Domingues, 2012, my emphasis). The filmmakers' assertions evoke here the language of "the intimate", suggesting they established close personal relationships with Prince and Mada, and – furthermore – that this "intimacy" was therapeutic for them, bringing them "closer" to Black South African communities.

Little and Domingues' claims to "intimacy" with their film subjects are entangled in a discourse of White paternalism/maternalism. *The African Cypher* centres on Prince, a young Black man who – as the film suggests – has transformed his life, turning from being a "thug" to making an honest living as a Pantsula dancer. In a key sequence, Prince recalls his criminal past, explaining how he developed a love for dancing in prison and now seeks to inspire other disenfranchised youth to do the same. Yet, Prince's "redemption" is not his own version of his story; this exposure of his past is framed by a White perspective. For example, the film's establishing sequence shows Prince as he gets dressed in a shed while Little's voice-over states: "This is Pringle. His real name is Prince. […] I don't know him yet, but I have a strange feeling that at some point he is going to tell us something absolutely true and beautiful". This voice-over narration is a clear example of White paternalism, subjecting Prince to a racist perspective which perceives all Black people as extraordinary and, therefore, as different from Whites. As explained earlier, Berlant has described a similar operation of White paternalism in early 20th century US literature, arguing that White liberal writers were often motivated by racial solidarity and compassion for Black people, but a close analysis of their works reveals a discourse of White supremacy and a problematic racial stereotyping of African Americans (2008).

Little's redemptive framing of Prince is disrupted, however, by one of the film subjects, Mada. Mada makes statements that resist Little's suggestion that his life has been "redeemed" simply through dancing Pantsula by highlighting the poverty and lack of opportunities that many young Black men in South Africa experience. In one scene in the film, he is shown to drive a car while the camera pans across the shacks and dusty roads of a township. In isiXhosa, Mada talks about having set up a small chicken business, saying: "That money is very helpful because I can pay some of my bills and […] I can also help out at home when they need food. There are five of us and all of us are unemployed". The attentive film viewer realises, at this point, that Mada clearly does not earn enough through Pantsula dancing to sustain a living, and this subverts Little's paternalistic framing practice.

The documentary *Rough Aunties* further illustrates the ways in which a White filmmaker's claims to "intimacy" with her Black film subjects can be entangled with a maternalistic attitude. Made in an observational documentary style, the film centres around individual cases of rape survivors and the personal lives of five women at Bobbi Bear, a non-profit organisation based near Durban that cares for the victims of sexual abuse. The film's major subject matter thus evokes what one could call the "intimate exposure" (Bystrom and Nuttall, 2013) of others. Its depictions of personal tragedies and painful experiences calls for an exploration of the relationships between the White British filmmaker, Longinotto, and the South African film subjects.

Longinotto has emphasised repeatedly that she became "close friends" with the women who work at Bobbi Bear (2010, 2012). However, this assertion diverts attention away from Longinotto's primary objective, which was to direct a

documentary film for a British production company, and to capture on film moments of suffering that create dramatic tension. Moreover, the director does not speak the local languages of the film subjects (isiZulu and Afrikaans, predominantly) and was not familiar with the ways in which Zulu communities deal with the problem of child abuse (see Jewkes, Penn-Kekana & Rose-Junius, 2005; Petersen, Bhana & McKay, 2005; Moffett, 2006). She and her sound recordist spent only two months in South Africa to shoot *Rough Aunties* (Longinotto, 2012), to suggest that their access to the nuances of isiZulu language and customs was very limited, let alone the ability to form enduring friendships. Longinotto's claim to have become friends with her subjects could thus be interpreted as an attempt to compensate for her own linguistic and cultural otherness, as well as to enhance the film's marketing potential.

Some of the Black South African staff at Bobbi Bear resisted Longinotto's claims to "intimacy" with them. For example, the child safety officer Thuli Sibiya did not seem to perceive Longinotto as her "friend", saying: "the problem was we knew that [the filmmakers] didn't understand the language. After we talked [to the children] I had to give them a summary of the story" (2012). Sibiya's remark could be interpreted via Ndebele's idea of a "fatal intimacy" noted above, which suggests that encounters between Black and White people in South Africa are often experienced as uncomfortable and undesired (2013). However, it is not possible to know whether these relationships were always undesired, for Sibiya might have rejected Longinotto's presence in some moments but welcomed it in others – for example, when she gives an interview about her personal life in the film. Hence, it is important to remember that the power struggles and moments of dissent that constitute publics are volatile and subject to change over time.

Some publics that formed during *Rough Aunties'* production illuminate the performative nature of "the intimate". There were disagreements over documenting one of the most extreme forms of intimacy, namely, Sdudla Maphumolo's tragic loss of her child. Shortly after her son had drowned, the sound recordist Mary Milton (a White British woman like Longinotto) saw it as inappropriate to document the mother's pain, while Longinotto kept filming. Longinotto explained:

> It was very difficult, because Sdudla was a lovely close friend by then. But we were there to make a film; we were not there to be friends. When you're making a film, you have to be very rigorous. You have to say: "Is this important for the film to be shown?" And if not, of course you don't film it. But it seemed really important. (2012)

Longinotto's statement is contradictory, maintaining that she formed a friendship with Maphumolo but insisting that a "good" documentary film can only emerge when the filmmaker keeps a distance from her subjects. However, her presence might not have been welcomed by Maphumolo at this traumatic time, evoking once again Ndebele's idea of a "fatal" intimacy that undermines rather than fosters human relationships. To an extent, then, it is the filmmaker's performance of intimacy with the Bobbi Bear women in how she speaks about the film that seeks to justify the film's problematic representations of Black suffering. It is noteworthy that Maphumolo rejected my request for an interview about Rough Aunties. Her silence could be interpreted as an act of resistance to Longinotto's claim to be "friends" with her – or, indeed, an act of resistance to revealing her thoughts and feelings to me, a White European academic – and it illuminates the difficulty of defining "intimacy", for "the intimate" can encompass feelings and emotions that people deliberately choose not to reveal.

My third and final example of White maternalism and moments of resistance to it is to be found in the fiction film *Otelo Burning*. This film follows a group of Black teenage boys who take up surfing at the end of apartheid, and it focuses on the friendship and tensions among the boys, a romance between the protagonist Otelo and his girlfriend Dezi, and the rape of Dezi by the antagonist Mandla. Like *The African Cypher* and *Rough Aunties*, *Otelo Burning* thus centres on what some scholars have described as experiences of "intimacy" (Bystrom and Nuttall, 2013b; Gqola, 2016). However, while the former are documentary films, *Otelo Burning* is a fiction film. It could be assumed that the production of *Otelo Burning* was not as controversial as that of *Rough Aunties* and *The African Cypher*, for Blecher did not project "real" people's inner selves onto the screen. However, *Otelo Burning* is in part based on the memories and life stories of Black South Africans from Lamontville, a township near Durban. The film's script was developed through workshops Blecher conducted in this community over seven years. During this time, the workshop participants shared with Blecher their personal and, sometimes, painful memories of the political violence that unfolded in this township during the transition years (Blecher, 2013). Blecher thus orchestrated a process leading to the "intimate exposure" (Bystrom and Nuttall, 2013b) of other people's memories, suggesting that the lines between fiction and documentary are somewhat blurred in *Otelo Burning*.[146]

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[146] Throughout the history of South African cultural production, White authors and playwrights have repeatedly appropriated the personal lives and sometimes painful experiences of Black South Africans, from Athol Fugard's "workshop" plays (1993, 1996) to the recent literary works by Johnny Steinberg (2008, 2015). In turn, there is a longstanding critical discourse in South African scholarship that has critiqued these White appropriations of Black narratives (Coetzee, 1988; Dovey, 1988; Crow and Banfield, 1996; West, 1999; Dovey, 2007).

Blecher used the fact that *Otelo Burning* is based on people's memories to promote the film and justify its making. It was publicised as a film "based on true events" (Indigenous Film, 2011), with Blecher repeatedly emphasising the "democratic" nature of the workshops. For example, during a Q&A in London, she said: "we started the workshop process before we had the script […] People told their stories and acted out scenes and the film came out of that process […]" (2012). However, in the film's official credits, the screenplay is attributed to "James Whyle, Sara Blecher, and The Cast", erasing any references to the people upon whose memories and biographies it is based. Moreover, it was Blecher – not the Lamontville community – who was celebrated as *Otelo Burning*'s director at international film festivals and among film critics (Heath, 2012; Durnford-Slater, 2013; Diab, 2014). Moreover, the film's official *Behind the Scenes* video (2012) features a clip of the workshop process, showing Blecher telling the participants that: "We believe that some of you have got stories that should be told and stories that we are going to help tell". This statement is a vivid example of White maternalism, with Blecher proposing that her intervention – as a White South African – was necessary to authenticate the memories of the Lamontville community.

The White maternalism enmeshed with Otelo Burning's production is highlighted particularly by Blecher's relationship with the surfer and lifeguard Sihle Xaba, who plays the antagonist Mandla. The film is based very specifically on the biography of Xaba, who grew up in Lamontville and learned to swim in the township's pool when the political violence began to unfold in the late 1980s. Blecher recalled that making the acquaintance of Xaba on the Durban beachfront inspired her to make the film in the first place:

> Sihle started telling me that all the life guards come from this particular township, which is the only township on that coastline which has a swimming pool […] He took me to the pool and started introducing me to people and telling me the story of how he was growing up. And I was like: "This is the movie!" Then Sihle and I started working together and worked with the people in the community. (Q&A at Film Africa, 2012)

Xaba, in turn, emphasised that the film partly represents his own youth, saying "part of Mandla's journey is my journey; surfing, the area that I grew up in, and the swimming pool. Things like when Mandla had to go and give out information to the police and somebody else dies did happen" (2014). However, that Xaba inspired Blecher to make the film and essentially handed over his autobiography to her is virtually absent from the film's publicity materials. For example, the film's official credits, promotional posters, and the official Facebook page make no mention of the fact that it is derived from Xaba's childhood and youth, which suggest that his life story has been appropriated by a White filmmaker.

Nevertheless, Xaba has challenged Blecher's maternalistic attitude and her celebration of the workshops. He said in an interview that taking part in the film's shooting was a painful experience for him:

> A lot of the things that had happened were very traumatising. Seeing people being killed and people being burned, and my mum being involved…and also her nearly losing her life. It was traumatising. […] When they started filming the whole thing, it all came back again. (2014)

Xaba added that *Otelo Burning*'s production in the end brought "a lot of closure" (2014) and helped him to come to terms with the painful memories of his childhood. At the same time, he noted that he struggled with having been assigned the role of the antagonist Mandla: "[Mandla] is ruthless and […] I'm a very, very gentle person and it was […] really difficult for me to jump from being Sihle to being Mandla"

(2014). He stated that Blecher dismissed his apprehensions: "I'd be like: 'Sara, why does Mandla have to do this? This is so bad!' And she was like […]: 'Don't worry sweetie, it's only a character, it's not you'" (2014). In some situations, then, Blecher treated Xaba (who is now 38 years old) like a child who had to be instructed about the differences between acting and reality. This narrative of White maternalism and Xaba's resistance to it could be described via Gqola's idea of the "double bind of intimacy" (2016), illustrating the ways in which personal relationships cannot be read neutrally but need to be seen as potential sites of tensions, hierarchies and even exploitation.

Blecher's and Xaba's relationship illuminates the complex ways in which power operates in the publics that form through a film's production processes. It is possible that Xaba was not able to challenge Blecher's authority as much as he might have liked to, because – as one of the film's stars – he was dependent on her economically and professionally. Xaba's resistance to Blecher's maternalism can thus not be entirely separated from the practices that establish and maintain this discourse of White maternalism in the first instance. This dynamic evokes the arguments put forward in the edited volume *Entanglements of Power* (2000). In the introduction, the Editors adopt a Foucauldian perspective to argue (like Willems [2012]) that power is diffuse, rather than coupled to government institutions, and that it operates in complex, unpredictable ways. They note that even oppressive states can allow for resistance to unfold (such as oppositions under communism), while some resistance movements can reproduce the dominating power they claim to oppose (for example, right-wing movements in Europe). In some contexts, then, domination and resistance maintain a complicated, almost symbiotic relationship with each other.

The discussion so far has revealed the ways in which the White filmmakers'
performances of "intimacy" with their Black subjects could be interpreted as
disguising a White maternalistic or paternalistic approach. Berlant has noted a similar
operation of White maternalism/paternalism in US literature, arguing that certain
White liberal writers' appropriation of Black suffering often maintains a discourse of
White supremacy (2008). However, my examples show that this White
maternalism/paternalism is often resisted by certain film subjects and actors. This
interplay between, and entanglement of, domination and resistance highlights the
value of Willems' conceptualisation of a public as a site of struggle, where power
operates in complex and unpredictable directions. Furthermore, the deconstruction of
the filmmakers' claims to "intimacy" has shown that "the intimate" does not simply
designate the revelation of emotions and affect, as suggested by Berlant. Instead, the
film subjects clearly sometimes experienced the encounters with the filmmakers as
uncomfortable, which evokes Ndebele's idea that a "fatal intimacy" (2013) has come
to structure daily life in contemporary South Africa. Moreover, the films' production
processes sometimes gave rise to power hierarchies and exploitative relationships
between the White filmmakers and the Black film subjects, which can be
characterised via Gqola's notion of the "double bind of intimacy" (2016). However,
the examples above also suggest that it is not possible to define "intimacy" in
absolute terms, for it is a slippery, unstable, and subjective concept. The precarious
nature of "intimacy" is revealed not only by the films' production contexts, but also
by the publics called to life over the course of their circulation, to which I now turn.

7.5 Exhibition Contexts, Audiences, and Public Sphere Theory

Scholarship on media and the public sphere has focused primarily on textual discourses in books, newspaper articles, and social media (Berlant, 2008; Modisane, 2013; Fuchs, 2014). Audience studies, in turn, are concerned mostly with responses from spectators in immediate viewing contexts (Morley, 1980; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin, 2002; Bird, 2003; Ang, 2006). Hence, while public sphere theory usually focuses on viewers' responses via secondary texts, studies of in-situ audiences grapple with the contexts and situations in which films are exhibited. I suggest that a theorisation of the relationship of film, "intimacy", and publics can benefit from connecting the study of textual sources with that of in-situ audiences. This methodology can reveal a wider range of responses to films than written sources alone allow and allow for a generative comparative study of the two methods themselves.

First, the written responses to *Otelo Burning* evoke a specific discourse that reiterates the White paternalism/maternalism embedded within the film's making. In South Africa, the film was generally met with praise from film critics and journalists, some of whom saw it as an important correction to the idea that surfing is an exclusively White sport. For example, one journalist at South Africa's *Saturday Argus* wrote that "the film's strength lies in its authenticity and presenting the novel but honest idea of black surfers" (Martin, 2012), and a Black South African critic writing for the *The Times* stated that "the still rare image of black guys intrinsically gliding across Durban's scenic beaches [in] Otelo Burning is refreshing" (Boikanyo, 2012). These responses speak to a need for more racial inclusiveness in surfing communities in South Africa, which have historically been the privilege of Whites. However, these

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reviews also create a narrative that risks exoticising the Black surfers in the film, positioning them as "others" due to their racial identities. To an extent, then, the White maternalism permeating the film's production is reproduced in the "written publics" that emerged around the film, even in the review by a Black journalist.

However, some post-screening discussions of *Otelo Burning* transgressed the discourse of exoticism established by these reviews. Blecher organised a series of film screenings at youth centres in townships and poor communities across South Africa, which Xaba attended. He recalled that after these screenings, many young viewers were intrigued to learn about his childhood and how he became a professional body boarder and surfer despite having grown up in a township (2014). According to Xaba: "They [the youth] look at what I've been through and they really feel proud. They ask me did I really go through all of that? Some of them don't believe that I existed when all of that happened" (2014). Young viewers during screenings in Harlem, New York, are said to have reacted similarly. Xaba said: "I went to a school [in Harlem] and talked to the youth who are exposed to a lot of gang violence. They want to make a bigger life but they find it a huge challenge, because of drug abuse in the communities and violence" (2014). These screenings seem to have transgressed Blecher's authorship in *Otelo Burning*, highlighting instead the central role of Xaba's autobiography in the film's realisation. However, it is likely that these audience responses generated a feeling of worthiness for Blecher, just as she had seen herself as a "catalyst" in retelling the memories of the Lamontville community through the film. These screenings can thus not only be interpreted as a subversion of White maternalism, but also as a continuation of it, which highlights the multidirectional ways in which power operates in the spaces of publics.

A similar discourse of White maternalism also emerges from the publics that formed around the exhibition of *Rough Aunties*. The director, Longinotto, has emphasised repeatedly that after screenings of the film, women of different backgrounds engaged in conversations and revelations of having been raped themselves (2010, 2012). She said this about a screening at the Sundance Film Festival, which she attended with the Bobbi Bear women Ngcobo and Sibiya:

> This young woman ran up to Mildred [Ngcobo] and said: "I'm so proud of you. I'm going to tell my parents now that I've been raped". […] She said: "I now realise it's not a shameful thing. I'm a survivor like you". […] Then Mildred started counselling her outside the cinema, it was amazing. (2012)

A similarly "intimate" moment was said to have emerged during one Q&A in South Africa. According to Longinotto, "two men in the audience said it was shameful to show the children's faces. [Then] three women stood up and said: 'I've been raped and I've never said anything before' […] [and] 'how dare you say we should be hidden? It's the rapist that should be'" (2012). Longinotto's account would suggest that the publics constituted by these screenings were constituted of emotional encounters that helped women to speak up about their traumatic experiences of sexual violence. However, these accounts of "intimacy" that developed among audience members come from a White European filmmaker who, similarly to Blecher, saw herself as a feminist advocate for Black women who had experienced rape. Rather than representing an objective perspective, these stories of intimacy could be read as the filmmaker's attempt, once again, to justify the exposure of the personal and sometimes troubling experiences of Black women and children – this time from the perspective not of the making of the film, but its impact on spectators.

Some of the written publics called to life by *Rough Aunties*' critiqued the ethics

underlying Longinotto's filmmaking. Notably, some UK film critics raised questions about the film's representations of the suffering of Black South African women and children. For example, the film critic Peter Bradshaw of the UK newspaper The Guardian described the scene in which Maphumolo grieves her son's death – the same scene that led to tensions between Longinotto and Milton – as follows:

> Longinotto films the mother's agony, and for the first time, I wondered if her camera really needed to record her pain quite so intimately. In fact, the movie could perhaps have given more factual information about the group and in particular its relationship with the police, who are by implication criticised for dragging their feet. (Bradshaw, 2010)

Moreover, a journalist of the UK's *The Independent on Sunday* described *Rough Aunties* as a "voyeuristic documentary", stating: "the ethics of the film itself are open to question […]. Could these people really have consented to this sort of exposure?" (Barber, 2010). These reviewers call into question the ethical appropriateness of Longinotto's filmmaking, challenging her legitimisation of the film's making by simply claiming intimacy with the subjects.

The publics created around *The African Cypher*'s exhibition further illuminate the ways in which the White filmmakers' maternalism/paternalism was affirmed as well as subverted over the course of the film's exhibition. Little's accounts of screenings of *The African Cypher* are similar to those of Longinotto (described above) in that he sought to provide a justification for the film's redemptive narrative. For example, he described an encounter between Prince and a member of the audience at the Étonnants Voyageurs film festival in Brazzaville, Congo, as follows:

> Carlos, a volunteer at the festival […] went to prison in Paris for a couple of years and […] just got into the wrong thing, and he came up to Prince as soon as Prince arrived […]. He was like: "thank you so much for that

one scene about your prison thing". The whole thing just changed
something inside him […] you could just tell the way the two of them
were talking to each other. (Little & Kholer, 2013)

If Little's interpretation was to be taken at face value, this screening of *The African
Cypher* evoked an interpersonal encounter that "benefited" both a Black African
spectator and the film's participant. However, this narrative of "intimacy" cannot be
taken at face value, for it is the interpretation of the White filmmaker. Like
Longinotto, Little implicitly distances himself from the Black spectators, who he saw
as "empowered" by (as he claims) responding emotionally to his film. One could
even argue that these White perspectives resonate with colonial attitudes perceiving
Black African people as irrational and driven by bodily instincts, while reserving
rationality for White European colonisers.

To an extent, Little's paternalistic approach is reproduced by the written publics that
formed around *The African Cypher*. Film reviewers in South Africa and
internationally generally praised the film for representing a vibrant youth subculture
in South Africa ("Mahala", n.d.; Francis, 2012; Obenson, 2012). For example,
Brandon Edmonds wrote in the online magazine *Mahala*: "[Prince and Mada] dance
for free. Because they want to. It has nothing to do with consumption or exchange"
(2012). However, this statement is inaccurate, for some of the young men who
participated in the film occasionally do earn money by performing in commercials or
in films (Lawrence, 2013; Mada, 2014). This journalist also belittles the young Black
dancers by suggesting that they are driven simply by physical pleasures, once again
evoking White colonial perceptions of Black people as motivated by bodily instincts
only. Moreover, Tambay Obenson, writing for the website *Indiewire*, calls *The
African Cypher* "a redemptive story of how urban youth locked up in the country's

ghettos are able to transcend the harshness of their circumstances through dance" (2012, my emphasis). However, as noted earlier, this supposed "redemption" of Black working class youths is simply the perspective of White filmmakers who appropriated Black experiences to grapple with questions of their own identities.

In some screening contexts that I observed, viewers critiqued Little's and Domingues' positioning vis-à-vis their film subjects. For example, Q&As with the filmmakers at DIFF 2012 illuminated their motivations for making the film. After a screening at a hotel in Durban, one woman in the audience said: "I'm Black and I was so surprised that actually White filmmakers created that […]. I just wanted to find out how do you relate to the story that you were telling, how does it make you feel as South Africans?" ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012). Little responded:

> I'm a White, English guy from Cape Town. Mainly the reason why I wanted to make this film is I wanted to learn more about other cultures and subcultures [sic] […]. But as I was going along, I realised there's so many things [sic] that I can connect with all of these characters: basic human things, having a sense of purpose, having a sense of identity, having the courage and conviction to carry on with your art form, whether it's filmmaking, dancing, or whatever it is. ("Q&A at DIFF", 2012)

Little's assertion to be able to "connect" with Prince and Mada was not scrutinised during this discussion, but it brought to the surface the filmmaker's interests and positioning towards the subjects. This encounter also revealed the imbrication of Little's claims to "intimacy" with his film subjects and his own agenda, which was to explore his identity as a White South African.

These examples illuminate the gains to be made from exploring both written reviews and immediate spectator responses in attempts to gain a deeper insight into the nature of the publics that can form over the course of a film's exhibition. The narratives arising from these publics suggest that the White filmmakers' maternalism/paternalism and their claims to intimacy with the film subjects were resisted particularly by viewers in the context of live screenings. Yet, accounts of resistance ought to be considered critically, especially if they represent the perspectives of White filmmakers claiming that screenings of their films "benefited" Black audiences and film subjects.

7.6   Conclusion

This addendum has grappled with the relationships among film, publics and "intimacy" through a discussion of three South African films centred on youth. My discussion has critiqued the White filmmakers' claims to intimacy with the Black film subjects, and their claims to certain "intimate encounters" that occurred during the film's screenings, which would appear to divert attention away from these same filmmakers' participation in a form of "White maternalism/paternalism". It may seem that I have adopted an overly critical approach to the chosen filmmakers, but this focus arose from my intention to explore the power relationships that arose within the publics created through the films' production and exhibition.

I do not suggest that Berlant's concept of the intimate public sphere be dismissed entirely. Her theory devotes much-needed attention to those publics generated by the revelation of emotions, fantasies, and pleasures, thereby transgressing public sphere

theory's historical distinctions between supposedly "public" and "private" modes. Equally important is the fact that Berlant's term "White paternalism/maternalism" (2008: 6) – while only mentioned briefly in her work – draws attention to the problems and ethical questions arising from White writers' and filmmakers' appropriations of Black lives, and to the need for deconstructing and exposing such discourses. Her critique offered a vital starting point for my exploration of three South African films involving White filmmakers and Black film subjects in a holistic way, analysing their production processes, representational politics, and audience reception. As I have demonstrated here, it is crucial to reveal the motivations behind White filmmakers' claims to "intimacy" in the "public lives" (Modisane, 2013) of their films (from production through exhibition) and, most importantly, to the practices through which such paternalistic/maternalistic attitudes are resisted, subverted, but also potentially reproduced.

Berlant's concept of the intimate public sphere ought to be extended and nuanced, however. It has been my contention here that "intimate" publics do not simply involve the revelation of emotions, feelings of affect, and a sense of belonging. Instead, as Willems reminds us, power operates in complex and sometimes contradictory ways within the spaces of publics. South African scholars (Modisane, 2013; Ndebele, 2013; Gqola, 2016; Coetzee, 2017 forthcoming) have a vital role to play in the debates on films, publics and intimacy in the future. Their explorations of the multifaceted and potentially negative aspects of interpersonal encounters transgress Berlant's definition of "intimacy" as raising mostly positive emotions and identification. Gqola's notion of the "double bind" of intimacy (2016), Ndebele's idea of a "fatal" intimacy (2013), and Coetzee's critique of the White bias in

academic scholarship on intimacy (2017, forthcoming) all highlight the ongoing power struggles between people of different racial, national, class, and gender backgrounds in South Africa. In drawing attention to these undesired, violent, and sometimes dangerous experiences generated by relationships of closeness, these scholars encourage us to explore the ways in which intimate encounters can generate complex and difficult power constellations that may not always be desirable and that certainly cannot be predicted.

Finally, rather than seeking to establish an absolute classification of "intimacy" and the "intimate public sphere", one can at best interrogate how narratives and discourses of intimacy are constructed through language, and how performances of intimacy can be enacted across relationships influenced by race, age, gender, and class. Exploring the contexts and practices where intimacy is performed requires considering the production processes and exhibition contexts of films, and this methodological approach can benefit greatly from uniting the analysis of textual and oral responses. However, the ultimate "intimacies" are perhaps those thoughts and feelings that are unspoken and that remain hidden from the researcher. Scholars ought to devote more attention to, and attempt to theorise, these silences in the future to grapple with the unpredictable and multifaceted relationships between films, "intimacy", and publics.

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your work with your partner sthembiso mada i wish u a speedy recovery we busy making a video for u which by friday will post because we love and respect you am sadden with the current challange you facing but i have faith ul over come from me and Supreme I crew you are Sowetos hero Sowetos legend Sowetos story of success like you said "a Prince is someone waiting to be a King" and thats what you are #SowetoIsProudOfYou." *Facebook: Dancing for Prince* [Online Posting]. 26 February. Post no longer available online.

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Q&A with Bryan Little and Filipa Domingues after a Screening of *The African Cypher* at the Durban International Film Festival. 2012. Blue Waters Hotel, Durban. July 25.

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Chapter 5

Clip 5.1.	Breakdance workshop at Westlake (2013)
Clip 5.2.	Prince and Mada perform at the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) (2013)
Clip 5.3.	*The African Cypher* (2012): Prince's introduction
Clip 5.4.	Oliver Schmitz' *Mapantsula* (1987): Panic's Pantsula dance
Clip 5.5.	Dance scenes from *The African Cypher*
Clip 5.6.	*The African Cypher*: Prince and Mada watch their teaser film

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