South African Cinema and Its Depiction of Race, Gender, and Class: Portrayals of Black Women in Post-Apartheid South African Films

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The history of film production in South Africa shows that films made during the periods of colonialism and apartheid generally served as tools to further the ideals and consolidate the hegemony of the colonial and apartheid governments of the time. These films were characterized by portrayals of Black people in general, and Black women in particular, in ways that can be considered problematic. Keyan Tomaselli notes that most films produced in South Africa during the apartheid era showed very little emphasis, if at all, on grass-roots problems experienced by South Africans. However, there was also a significant anti-apartheid film tradition that was suppressed inside South Africa. Any film that attempted to challenge the status quo or deal with "the lives and the struggle of the people" (Botha 185) was banned, and the producers were harassed or exiled. For instance, Gibsen Kente, a Black filmmaker who produced the film *How Long Must We Suffer* (1976), was arrested in the year of the film's production. Films produced by Blacks were generally banned, as was the case with Mapantsula (1988) which was "one of the first truly South African films made from a Black point of view" (Botha 94). The dissuasion of an active Black film industry in favour of films produced by Whites for Black audiences was, according to Botha, one of the significant devices used to restrict any form of content that challenged the hegemony of apartheid. It is therefore important to examine the new waves of post-apartheid films that appear progressive in terms of their portrayal of and reflections on South Africa, in order to determine whether these films challenge

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the stereotypical images of Black women that were promoted during the colonial and apartheid periods.

This article focuses on three of the most popular commercial films that seem to provide the lens from which to examine post-apartheid issues in South Africa: *Tsotsi, Yesterday,* and *Jerusalema*. These films were produced between 2004 and 2008, the five years following the first decade of democracy in South Africa. This interregnum period provides an indication of South Africa's success, or lack thereof, in tackling post-apartheid issues such as inequality and oppression, including gender, class, and race relations, and how these relations are envisioned on film within a framework of the country's violent past.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is useful in this discussion because of his argument that the dominant class gains limited consent, achieved via ideological manipulation, from the subordinate class, bearing in mind that ideological contest is always present. According to Leslie Baker-Kimmons, "[t]he use of Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony supports the argument that negative Black images, as the expression of ideological hegemony, aid in the justification and reinforcement of Blacks occupying the lowest strata of society, as well as impede the development of class consciousness" (4). Patriarchy is similarly an important part of hegemonic ideology, and in this sense, the media can easily be used as a hegemonic device to ensure that the marginalized are less likely to question the injustice of their position.

Examining Black women as represented in post-apartheid South African films inevitably involves the concept of representation, in which aspects of reality, such as gender, race, or class, serve writers, producers, and directors in constructing texts and creating meanings for the audience. In this sense, film becomes a site in which certain aspects of reality are featured and others are not. Stuart Hall sees representation as, essentially, the production of meaning through signifying systems such as language and images. For Hall, representation is a process that takes place at two levels; for instance, the images that we carry in mind (our own world) are referent points that give meaning to the texts we encounter. These referent points are the first level, and the interpretation we attach to the texts is the second level. Seen in this way, representation becomes a twofold process with the signifier imposing meaning on the receivers, who in turn rely on their referent points to derive meaning. Hence, Hall refers to the concepts of encoding and decoding, with the sender/filmmaker encoding the message that will be decoded by the receiver/audience.

Representation gives the media power to construct influential images of groups, situations, and ideas, and according to Dennis McQuail, also a kind of social

barometer of changing attitudes toward social groups and trends. For Nkosi Ndlela, stereotyping, a process of selection, magnification, and reduction, is one way of making representation meaningful. In this regard, Jacquelyn Kilpatrick's assertion that "[f]ilms have been around for only a century, but the stereotypes within them have their origins in over five centuries of perceptions—and misrepresentations" (1), is accurate. As Vambe, Chikonzo, and Khan have shown, stereotypes are particularly powerful in colonial films. Pumla Gqola highlights the dangers of their effect for postcolonial films when she notes in "Ufanele Uqavile" that "the task of representing Black women in postcolonial cinema is challenging since it demands from us that we create and refashion forms of representation which continue to break new grounds" (15).

The content of the films examined in this article was analyzed according to semiotics, the study of signs or signifying practices, perhaps best explained by Keir Elam:

> Semiotics can best be defined as a science dedicated to the study of production of meaning in society. As such, it is equally concerned with process of signification and with those of communication that this means whereby meanings are both generated and exchanged. (1)

Elam further points out that semiotics uses "sign-systems and codes at work in society and the cultural messages and texts produced" (1). The sign-systems produce messages that can have connotative meaning, a straightforward, overt/literal meaning; and/or denotative meaning, a deeper, covert meaning connected to the image/object of representation or the ideological implication. Features such as behaviour, gesture, images, and taste are known in semiotics as codes because they reveal more than is presented at face value. For instance, a person's behavioural patterns or taste in clothing and food can reveal much about his/her class (see Bourdieu). This means that the text creates a certain reality beyond what is immediately presented. The semiotic analysis used in this article, accordingly, makes it possible to unravel the ideological meaning behind the representations of Black women in post-apartheid South African films.

Selection of Films

The films selected for this article were ones whose premieres generated significant publicity. This was important, since most locally produced South African films have traditionally struggled to recoup the money spent on production during their premiere. The interest for this project was in films that stood out at the box office, qualifying them as mainstream (*Internet Movie Database*; Dovey), and also won awards attesting to their popularity. For instance, *Tsotsi* won an Academy Award, and according to Lindiwe Dovey, the film "outperformed Hollywood blockbusters in South Africa, where it brought in US$70,000 in its opening weekend" (145). *Yesterday*

was nominated for an Oscar, and *Jerusalema* was equally well received by critics when it premiered in 2008. Therefore, these three films, outlined in Table 1, comprise a sample that privileges viewer preferences rather than my subjective choices as a researcher:

FILM	YEAR	DIRECTOR	SETTING	SYNOPSIS	STARRING
Yesterday	2004	Darrell James Roodt	Rural, Post-apartheid	A married mother lives with her 6-year-old daughter in their rural village and has difficulty getting proper health care.	Leleti Khumalo, Kenneth Khambula
Tsotsi	2005	Gavin Hood	Urban, Post-apartheid	A violent teen-age gangster regains his sense of humanity after discovering a baby in the car he hijacked.	Terry Pheto, Presley Chueneyagae
Jerusalema	2008	Ralph Ziman	Urban, Post-apartheid	A promising scholar, who has been admitted to university but faces financial constraints, sees working at increasingly risky and/or illegal jobs as his only option.	Nambitha Mpumlwana, Rapulana Seiphemo

Table 1: Matrix of Selected Films, Directors, Key Characters, and Year of Production

Written and directed by Darrell Roodt, *Yesterday* (2004) tells the story of a married mother who lives alone with her young child in a remote village. It deals with the difficulties of raising children in a poverty-stricken environment, the challenges of getting proper health care, and an absent husband, due to the migrant labour system, who denies his culpability in infecting Yesterday with HIV but succumbs to the illness before she does.

Directed by Gavin Hood, *Tsotsi* (2005) explores topical issues of crime, HIV/AIDS, and child and spousal abuse. The film focuses on the fast-lane life of a young Black boy who runs away from his abusive father after his mother dies of HIV/AIDS. In

his new life in the streets, the boy acquires a new name, Tsotsi, which means *a thug or gangster*. When he is introduced to the viewer at the beginning of the film, he is a fierce leader of a small group of violent thugs. Tsotsi's sensitive side is revealed when he decides to look after the child he discovers in a car he hijacks. A young unemployed mother whom Tsotsi coerces to breastfeed the baby ultimately convinces him to return the child to its parents.

Jerusalema (2008) is based on a screenplay written and directed by Ralph Ziman. Set against a violent background, it comments on what happens when the dream of liberation fails to materialize. The film's protagonist is a promising student who has been admitted to university, but experiences financial constraints, and therefore sees increasingly risky/illegal jobs as his only option for survival. He is raised by his unemployed mother who struggles on a daily basis to provide for the boy and her other siblings. The story is told from the perspective of the main character, initially portrayed as an honest and good boy, who dreams of furthering his studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. We get to know the young man when he is about to complete his high school studies. He is offered admission to the University of the Witwatersrand but fails to secure a bursary, which means that he will not be able to study, as his single mother is unable to support him financially. His only alternative is to find a job, but with the high unemployment rate, it seems unlikely that a young and inexperienced boy from the township will get any decent job. He is enticed by his friend's brother, a gangster to whom he looks up as a role model because he owns flashy cars and carries cash around with him, and becomes involved in a host of illegal activities.

Focus of Inquiry: Characters and Elements of Analysis

This article focuses on the portrayal of the following characters: Yesterday (Leleti Khumalo) in the film of the same name; Miriam (Terry Pheto) and Pumla (Nambitha Mpumlwana) in *Tsotsi*, and Lucky's mother Mama Kunene in *Jerusalema*. The important scenes discussed here are listed below.

- In *Yesterday*, Yesterday visits her husband in the mines and he viciously assaults her in full view of one of his colleagues. In another scene, a female teacher offers to help Yesterday, enabling her to go to the hospital and finally to the mines to see her husband; and in another, we see Yesterday's husband arriving from the mines.
- *Tsotsi* features two breastfeeding scenes. In one, Tsotsi forces Miriam to feed the abducted baby at gunpoint. In the second, Miriam unbuttons her blouse almost seductively while Tsotsi looks on, provoking questions of the gaze and voyeurism. Two other scenes are important for this study: in one, Fela, Aap, Boston, and Butcher are drinking and playing cards while a scantily dressed woman is busy massaging and fondling Fela, and in another, Tsotsi hijacks Pumla's car.

• In *Jerusalema*, the significant scenes include a striptease performed by young Black women for the amusement of their male spectators, Lucky's visit to his White girlfriend's parents, Lucky's visit to the owner of one of the dilapidated buildings in Hillbrow, a bold female journalist's interview of Lucky, asking him to start his story from the beginning, and Lucky saying goodbye to his mother as he sets out on his way to start a new life in Johannesburg.

Some of the specific features explored in each scene include narrative elements, codes such as dress, gestures, or colour, use of shots/cinematography, props that function as signs, and the cinematic genre codes, social roles, and statuses assigned to Black women. The discussion also focuses on screen time and space, characterization, and narrative roles such as relationships to other characters or roles in furthering the plot. These elements are crucial as they carry denotative and connotative meanings for the viewers, in keeping with Elam's assertion that "every aspect of the performance is governed by the denotation-connotation dialectic" (7).

Modes of Representation and Delineation of Gendered Themes

The portrayals of Black women in these three films fall into five broad categories. The first is the single mother, usually unemployed, who tries to fend for her offspring in the midst of a bleak environment. Yesterday, Miriam, and Mama Kunene are all examples of this character type, as they all raise their children in the absence of their spouses. The second category is the almost invisible, constantly busy Black woman cutting a lonely figure in the background as she continues with domestic chores while the family for whom she works enjoys quality time or does something that is presented as exciting, enjoyable, and/or valuable. These women can often be seen in the background, helping to advance the action of the protagonists. The third category relates to women's solidarity/sisterhood, in which women stand together or work against each other. The fourth category is the domestic woman represented as primary caregiver, and the fifth, derived from the concept of voyeurism, limits the Black woman figure to sexual objectification, as the previously invisible Black woman suddenly becomes visible, parading herself half-naked for male patrons. In Laura Mulvey's terms, the women in these types of roles provide sexual pleasure both for the characters within the film and for the gazing eyes of the spectator. For example, in *Jerusalema*, half-naked women fondle their bosses while others function as strippers and prostitutes.

Single parenthood is embodied in these films by a lone mother, usually unemployed and raising children singlehandedly in her husband's absence. Mama Kunene (Gladys Mahlangu), who is raising her offspring on her own, exemplifies this mode of representation in *Jerusalema*. Although her actions and dialogue do not explicitly establish that she has been working hard to provide for her family, the audience

suspects that she must have been doing so. It is actually Lucky whom we see hustling, first selling sweets on the train, refusing to gamble his money in a game of dice as his friend does, getting involved in the car hijacking business, reverting to safer work as a petrol attendant, trying one last score in breaking into a shop, and then leaving for the city (Hillbrow). He tries to make inroads into the taxi business, but when that fails, he decides to hijack buildings. Property mogul-turned-US president Donald Trump's book seen in the car in which Lucky drives away is a prop that signifies Lucky's entrepreneurial streak, which is evident throughout the film. We cannot make the same claim about his mother, however. She is a silent presence, and she appears suspicious when suddenly Lucky earns money and the family lives comfortably. When she confronts Lucky about the source of his income, he lies, and she fails to suspect him. The gospel music associated with her is very important in signifying her values. In *Tsotsi*, Miriam is the representative of single parenthood, as she is the widowed mother of an infant and her husband was killed in what was apparently a crime-related incident. Yesterday's husband, by contrast, is alive but absent due to work commitments that take him away from the family for months, leaving her with the responsibility of looking after their five-year-old daughter Beauty on her own.

These representations of single parents carry several significances and significations. The first is the favourable orientation of the sturdy single woman in *Yesterday*, who works constantly to care for her child by herself amid a bleak environment of abject poverty and deprivation. In *Tsotsi*, the resolute Miriam cares for her child after his father was killed, and is also a resourceful entrepreneur who makes and sells ornaments and merchandise. Her resourcefulness contests the notion of men as providers and simultaneously deconstructs the image of a hopeless woman whose survival is threatened once her main source of income (her husband) is absent. Tsotsi makes plenty of money, which he offers Miriam as payment for caring for the stolen baby, but she refuses to take it, which can be interpreted as a reversal of the stereotype of women who subsist on handouts from men at the expense of their own independence. Thus, Miriam's refusal to take money from Tsotsi can be regarded as resonating with the feminist concern that financial dependency on men makes women vulnerable to control, cohesion, and oppression; therefore, by refusing money from Tsotsi, she resists his controlling power and asserts her virtue as an independent woman.

Despite the positive images of single motherhood in these three films, the proliferation of such a family situation does raise concerns of another stereotype, that of the Black superwoman who is able to survive all the difficulties she confronts. This becomes complicated in the light of the assertion in mass communication that when people are constantly exposed to certain images, those images appear "normal." Such a portrayal can thus become problematic, even though there are millions of Black women who raise their children on their own, since this imagery may endorse the stereotypical notion that caring for children is the primary responsibility of these women. As Gunter argues, "stereotype divides neatly into two types; gender-role ste-

reotyping and gender-trait stereotyping" (86). Similarly, my article "Gendered Roles, Images, and Behavioural Patterns in the Soap Opera *Generations*" explores how fictional representations of women within the home environment in terms of their roles and occupations calls back to gender-role stereotyping that limits women to the private sphere while men can succeed in public.

Jerusalema does not show the audience what Lucky's mother, Mama Kunene, does for a living, but the audience gets to know her as a God-fearing and responsible parent who is trying to raise Lucky according to Christian principles. However, her inability to send Lucky to university and Lucky's subsequent departure to Hillbrow disrupts the dynamic portrayal of his mother that the film has achieved up to that point. Thus, her parental skills are subtly rendered invisible due to her perceived failure to prevent Lucky from becoming a criminal, despite her earnest attempts. Again, this could be seen as implicitly validating the notion that a strong male in the family is the only way to raise children properly. Although Lucky's mother tries very hard, she fails to ensure that he is able to make a success of his life. This failure, however, does acknowledge that many poor young Black people are unable to further their studies or pursue other fundamental training because their families subsist on a single income or even none at all. It can be argued, therefore, that in spite of obvious flaws, Mama Kunene's character is complex and dynamic for the most part.

In both *Jerusalema* and *Tsotsi*, the Black female characters appear mainly in the background, away from primary activities and secondary to the subjects that the camera captures rather than being the focus of the camera's gaze. This "invisibilization" is an example of a critical technique used to portray these women as "silent others." According to Stephen Littlejohn, "the silencing of women leads to women's inability to express themselves eloquently in the male parlance" (240). Such obliteration of women by and in the media resonates with the concerns of muted group theorists that male-dominated society has silenced, and continues to silence, women through different forms of communication. These theorists postulate that by exerting control over women and forcing them to abandon their own views and aspirations, men have made women think like men.

Muted group theories criticize such a portrayal of women as silent others as an effort to keep women away from decision-making processes and in what is perceived as their "proper" place. Nicole Richter echoes this concern when she points out: "The ability of women to create themselves as subjects on the screen is not equally shared among women" (7), further noting that "while it is true that White women have had the ability to find a voice on the screen as speaking subjects, Black women have had a more difficult time." This observation is further supported by bell hooks, who discovered that "[w]ith the possible exception of early race movies, Black female spectators have had to develop looking relations within a cinematic context that constructs our presence as absence" (310). In this context, the roles of Black female characters rise to prominence only when they drive the story that serves to elevate other groups. The presence of their absence is therefore both revealing and symbolic. The most fre-

quent image orchestrated in these films is the constantly busy woman who is always occupied with something in the background. Curiously, we are never truly shown what they are doing, except in passing when they do the laundry, wash dishes, or make tea, with the camera positioning them in the farthest distance away from the central activity. Such depictions can be read on the one hand as devaluing the type of work these women do, and on the other as portraying Black women as selfless and always labouring for the good of others. This is also a problematic stereotype because it could potentially suggest that such women can endure almost anything.

Apart from Pumla Dube in *Tsotsi*, who is presented as having a professional job, the only Black woman constantly present in these films is the domestic servant. Even at her home, she is always busy with domestic chores. These women are clearly invisible in terms of being represented in various professions, which does not seem to reflect, for example, the changing role of women in general, and Black women in particular, in modern South African society. However, one must also concede that this has so far only happened for a minority, since the vast majority of Black women in South Africa are still poor, marginalized, and doing unskilled work. Nonetheless, one would still expect to see the positive changes that are taking place reflected on film because of the intrinsic importance of film in inspiring confidence, action, and the pursuit of constructive work. For instance, South Africa has been intensifying its efforts to level the playing field with regard to careers, and as a consequence, it now boasts many women who are CEOs and directors of multinational companies, leaders of political parties, premiers, bus drivers, engineers, and other professions. Even so, these developments do not seem to have manifested in images constructed by contemporary films.

Women appear in cutaway shots as facilitating mechanisms for the plot, not as central characters, except in the domestic sphere, where their work is also devalued. Therefore, their presence exists only to confirm their own inferiority in relation to the abundance of virtues ascribed to other groups. Their presence is also illuminated as they seem to provide freedom for other groups they appear alongside, for example, by taking care of errands and an array of other chores while their husbands and bosses have the time for leisure and to do whatever they want to do. For instance, in the car-hijacking scene in *Jerusalema*, Black women doing laundry can be seen in the background. Similarly, when Lucky visits his girlfriend's parents, a Black woman is working in the background. This trope is evident in the majority of South African films; in terms of hegemonic theory, these images serve to obtain consent from women in these positions so that they see such roles as their natural place that they do not need to challenge.

Thus, the presence of marginalized Black female characters creates the undertone of insignificance as compared to other genders and races, reinforcing not only traditional sex-role stereotypes but also racial and class stereotypes, especially in comparison to Black male and White female characters. This sort of orientation is also present in *Jerusalema* when Lucky Kunene goes to see one of the property

owners about the dilapidated condition of his Hillbrow building. A female employee, who is busy in the yard, greets him at the gate and then goes off to alert her employer. The framing of this shot is interesting, showing the woman standing at the table while the rest of the family is seated. She addresses her boss in a manner that reveals much about the master-servant relationship with him: "Master, there are men to see you at the gate." For Black women, the home generally remains a place associated with work, while for others it is a place of comfort, security, and family,, typified in the film when the Black woman's family is seated and having coffee while she is seen at work in the background.

Furthermore, Black women appear to be debased as sex objects to satisfy a male audience. The representations of Black women in *Jerusalema* as strippers for male tycoons and as prostitutes support the notion that women are objectified and paraded for the pleasure of men, or the male gaze. In *Jerusalema*, women are not only "fetishized" as icons displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, but are also the object of fetishes to be used in cinema and packaged into saleable products, resulting in the valuation of women's bodies, to use Marxist terminology. Marxists use the term *valuation* in the context of commodification of goods and services. In *Jerusalema*, the objectification of Black women characters sometimes accompanies suggestions of insatiable libido. For example, the seduction of Lucky prompts him to reveal the seductress as a potential thief. This interaction can be regarded as men's resistance to being tricked by wicked women, with Lucky thus represented as a victim of the woman's rampant sexuality. What is depicted here is the notion of good and evil, with one (male) character refusing to succumb to another (female) character who is trying to tempt him, thus reinforcing another stereotype.

The callous treatment of women by men in *Jerusalema* is reflected as a male character rudely addresses the half-naked woman who was fondling him: "Hey, f**k off; go and make money." This happens when Lucky Kunene arrives, as Lucky and the drug dealer apparently have "important" business to discuss. Although it is to be expected that in this genre of film, the gangster boss will be bullish and callous when it comes to women, the scene could also be taken to imply that women should not be around when important business is discussed. In this sense, the scene reduces women to mere appendages whose presence is considered a distraction from serious matters and is required purely for the pleasure of the males.

Thus, it is made clear that in business matters, even the supposed "seductive power" of women is weakened, putting men firmly in control and giving them power over women for both business and pleasure. From this point of view, such representation is a reversal of the conventional mode of representation in which women in these roles use their seductive power to exert control over men. Furthermore, the propensity to fetishism in these films evokes the notion of the male gaze, which positions a woman's body as an erotic image to satisfy male fantasies. Thus, there seems to be a relationship between the male gaze and the colonial gaze in terms of the manner in which both position their "subjects"; as Ann Kaplan concludes, both the colonial gaze

and the male gaze are objectifying and laden with stereotypes (79-80).

In both *Tsotsi* and *Jerusalema*, the gaze at a woman's body is instigated as pleasure for male spectators; for instance, *Jerusalema* features close-up shots of naked women, while the cameras in *Tsotsi* zoom in to focus on Miriam's breasts in one of the breastfeeding scenes. In this sense, her breasts may be seen to symbolize her as a nurturer, sustaining life. However, it is not clear why she is shown with the whole of her blouse unbuttoned, exposing her entire upper body and giving the film a pornographic quality. For a brief period in this scene, the camera reveals to us, the spectators as audience, and Tsotsi, the spectator in the film, far more than just the breasts. Miriam's instant metamorphosis from a respectable mother to a sexual object for the male gaze detracts from the narrative trajectory of the film itself, as the filmmakers emphasize her sexuality rather than her agency. Thus, the longstanding assumptions that film and television are products of a sexist society and frequently depict eroticized and stereotyped images of women are validated. It is therefore not farfetched to argue that this explicit shot of the woman's entire upper body is orchestrated to titillate the spectator, particularly the male spectator, and this could account for part of the film's commercial success.

In balancing this revealing shot, the director emphasizes Miriam's body first by allocating more space on the frame and placing her on the right side of the shot, and then by balancing her in the middle of the frame, while alternating between medium closeup and closeup shots that highlight details of her face and body. Lighting is also used for contrast, with a bright light illuminating her body while Tsotsi's region is not as illuminated. Miriam's colourful blouse also attracts attention, which can be seen as directing the focus of the gaze. When she turns from looking at the window and moves towards Tsotsi, the movement creates depth. The final and most interesting detail in this scene occurs when Tsotsi takes the chair from the kitchen table. He does not sit at the table, but instead puts the chair in the middle of the room, positioning it directly towards Miriam before sitting and gazing at her without saying anything. For a filmic tradition that is deeply rooted in the patriarchal system, such a portrayal of woman as object becomes significant in the manner in which it underscores her sex appeal, which, according to Laura Mulvey, is intended for the male eye. This kind of gaze transforms her from the innocent hardworking, single mother that we have come to know into a sexually arousing spectacle.

The use of women's bodies as erotic objects of desire for male spectators is similarly discernible in *Jerusalema*, particularly in the scene in which the drug kingpin (Eugene Khumbanyiwa) is fondled by scantily dressed Black women. This scene epitomizes the representation of Black women as sexual commodities and fetishized objects for the pleasure of male eyes. According to Annette Kuhn, fetishism functions in two ways: it allows the woman to be objectified for sexual pleasure at a physical level, and it allows the image to be packaged in a saleable form, such as a film, and sold as a commodity.

Disjuncture, Continuity, and Signs of Dynamic Images

It is difficult to say that the films discussed here are progressive in terms of deconstructing the stereotypical narrative of Black women in films, because the Black female characters in these films are largely confined to the home as domestic workers. They are demeaned, exploited, and used as sexual objects, thereby entrenching similar stereotypical images to those present in colonial and apartheid-era cinema. It is important to compare the portrayals of Black women to those of their White counterparts. All three films feature White characters portrayed in positive and inspiring ways. Yesterday's compassionate doctor (Camilla Walker) and Lucky's girlfriend, Leah Freidlander (Shelley Meskin), a nutritionist by profession, and Anna-Marie van Rensberg (Louise Saint-Claire), a professional who helps Lucky to open a trust account, are all professional, well educated, and helpful in all situations. Camilla even speaks to Yesterday in proper Zulu. Such dynamic portrayals of White female characters are evident in many post-apartheid films and co-productions. These characters hold positions in different professional fields such as medicine and banking; they are well dressed, neat, and sophisticated, which provides a stark contrast to many of the Black female characters.

There is, however, a subtle hint of the strong Black woman present in these films. The depiction of strong female figures, such as Lucky's mother Mama Kunene in *Jerusalema*, suggests some understanding of women's ingenuity, spirituality, and resolution to stay away from crime. I argue that Lucky's mother's perceived Black matriarchy (see Bogle) and invisibilization, while constraining and problematic in some areas, can nonetheless be seen as a departure from the portrayal of a superwoman who can take it all. Mama Kunene represents the silent voice and wisdom of the elders that resonates in the background throughout *Jerusalema*, as she is constantly reproachful of the actions of her son, whose main weaknesses, like that of most youths, seem to be his inexperience, naïveté, haste, and failure to explore situations more realistically before getting involved. In that context, Mama Kunene is the moral embodiment in the story, and through her portrayal, the film salvages what is otherwise an indictment of Black women. Unfortunately, the positive depiction of Mama Kunene appears to be a rare exception.

Despite her hard work, her endless advice to young Lucky not to get involved in any criminal activities, and her desire to have her children educated, she is nonetheless limited by her inability to provide for them, reflecting the frustrations of the dream that never came true. The same can also be said of Yesterday, whose absent husband returns home dying, dealing a blow to the dream of a happy family envisaged in Beauty's asking Yesterday about her father's return and whether he is going to buy a car. As their long wait and hopes for a united family are dashed, we witness some of the jeopardies of what Njabulo Ndebele calls the "three pillars of a South

African woman's life […] departures, waitings, and returns" (87).

Conclusion

The issues highlighted in this article reflect several shifts in the filmic representation of Black women in South African film, while at the same time pointing to the problematic manner in which these women are being reinscribed as subservient on the big screen. What is clear is that the portrayal of Black female characters largely resonates with traditional expectations that confine them to roles that limit the range of their experiences and capabilities, such as the home, where they raise children with very little at their disposal. Their position is precarious in a society that has made them a source of cheap labour. They suffer from complex relationships with men, who do not seem to think twice before abandoning them or their children, as seen in these three films. In addition, these films represent Black female characters as victims of sexual objectification and voyeurism.

There has not been much advancement in terms of a shift in the representation of Black women in commercial films, as the images of the "mummy," the "Jezebel," and the "Black matriarch" (Bogle; Motsaathebe, "Gendered Roles") are still being circulated. Ultimately, South African cinema from 1906 to the early 1990s established a multiform racist narrative, while cinema since 1994 seems to be struggling to provide an equally multiform antiracist counter-narrative. Post-apartheid cinema seems to have merely updated the racialist and gendered stereotyping inscribed in the structures of domination of both the colonial era and the years of apartheid. Therefore, the embodied practice of concerned filmmakers, in terms of signifying practices by which Black women are portrayed, remains a historical legacy of both colonialism and apartheid, which the current waves of post-apartheid South African films have largely failed to deconstruct in a meaningful way.

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