

A Depiction of the Ghetto in Feature Film: A Cinematic Platform for Confronting
Contemporary Representations of Ghetto Occupancy

Karla Ward (WRDKAR002)

A minor dissertation submitted in *partial fulfillment* of the requirements for the award of the
degree of MFA in Film & Television Production

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2008

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate

Date: 13/10/08

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

A Depiction of the Ghetto in Feature Film:

A Cinematic Platform for Confronting Contemporary Representations of Ghetto Occupancy

I. Introduction:

Themes and Topics

The thesis film project, *Mile in My Shoes*, is a narrative depiction of a particular South African experience that consists of broader implications. It utilizes the ghetto/township setting to illustrate diverse, counter hegemonic depictions of black and especially black African characters, lifestyles, images, love, gender, and their position/focus in film. In attempting to achieve this, the film endeavours to create a cinematic platform to confront contemporary issues facing the people that occupy these areas and convey/explore notions of survival and reclamation within these ghettos. In *Mile in My Shoes*, the ghetto is portrayed as a central element of the film, contributing critical connections with the identity of the characters. This constructs a representation of the townships and provides differing portrayals of township life, thus inciting a dialogue with other films which utilize a ghetto setting to emphasize issues of importance to black people and find themselves situated within the 'hood' film¹ genre. The film project aims to create a realistic, well balanced rather than excessively dramatized depiction of South African ghettos while still maintaining a conflict driven, interesting, and entertaining film narrative. In attempting this, the film highlights social issues and endeavors to provide self identity and self examination for black South African viewers. It also seeks to inform, educate, inspire, and create connections among other audiences. Written, directed, filmed, and edited by a black American female, it inevitably faces restrictions and questions the notion of a filmmaker creating an accurate depiction of an area where she has had limited personal experience. The filmmaker attempts to avoid past mistakes of reiterating oversimplified and denigratory depictions of black people in film. She also strives to avoid the subjugation of black women that often characterizes the 'hood' film genre. The development and production of the film has been meticulously designed to accomplish these goals and restrict these limitations.

Learning from past films made in both America and South Africa, *Mile in My Shoes* seeks to employ the positive while rejecting the negative attributes of both Hollywood mainstream and 'hood' genre films toward confronting relevant issues and creating diverse portrayals of black individuals in film. These portrayals are meant to defeat prior codes of racially derogatory depictions of black persons in film and open the way for new representation. There are films which utilize the ghetto setting that have merely

¹ "Hood" film is a film genre originating in the United States in the late 1980s, which features aspects of primarily African American urban culture, including hip hop music, street gangs, racial discrimination, and the problems of young black men coming of age or struggling with a predominantly white society,' (Wikimedia, 2004).

re-empowered the past stereotypical images of black people. Other 'hood' films have broken certain negative codes while simultaneously upholding others. The difficulty then becomes taking the theory which proposes for more diverse, accurate images and placing it into practice. Analysing the final product of *Mile in My Shoes* uncovers the difficulties and plausibilities for one creator and opens the dialogue among others for more accurate, beneficial representations.

Background

The film project is a practical application of the research articulated, in part, in the paper, "Cinematic Portrayals of Survival in the Ghettos of South Africa and the United States: A Comparative Analysis." (Ward; 2007). The research and subsequent film project examine how the use of the ghetto as a setting in film can be a means to both tackle relevant issues regarding the inhabitants of the ghetto and reject past representations of black people, thereby creating new ones. "In America, the use of the ghetto as a setting in film sparked a new genre in which the stories and concerns of black Americans, that were previously overlooked and underrepresented, rose to the forefront and even paved the way for further depictions of black livelihood to be featured in film." (Ward; 2007). Jacqueline Maingard describes in her book South African National Cinema, how a tendency has emerged in post apartheid South African filmmaking to place films in the townships. She observes, 'A trend towards films set in township locations focused on gangsters, or with gangsters as an element, including *Hijack Stories*, *Tsotsi*, *Drum*, *The Flyer*, is developing.' (Maingard, 2007;178). Many post apartheid films have followed this 'hood' genre form and are located in the ghetto. The films use the ghetto as a setting to explore the issue of gangsterism within the townships. It is important to evaluate the setting and the influence it may have on the cinematic identities of black South Africans and black experiences. It can reveal the types of messages these films are relaying concerning black livelihood. Past films have diverged problematic ideologies in their representations and it may be useful to determine whether and to what extent these new films allow for the breaking and reinforcing of negative codes. *Mile in My Shoes* practically explores the depiction of a ghetto in film, while attempting to utilize the advantages and navigate through the complications involved with the use of the location as a setting in film.

This dialogue the filmmaker hopes to create between filmmakers as a result of the film is merely a means to limit past problematic representations from resurfacing and/or dominating. The filmmaker presumes that the reason these stereotypes are still in continual perpetration is in part due to a lack of knowledge. It suggests that people have become largely acquainted with these images and lack of diverse portrayals that they are now passive supporters or worse, subscribers. Others argue that it has to do with the hegemonic power relations still in place, which also contribute to the problem. However, much more freedom is currently allotted than in the past since black individuals are now able to be involved in the actual creating of images. In the case of South Africa, although still in the process of empowering, a great

opportunity has arisen with the fall of apartheid and the rise of black leadership to negate stereotypical images in favour of more accurate, variant ones. Since *Mile in My Shoes* is an independent production, it is restricted only by financial and time restraints and the limitations of its filmmaker, producer, et cetera. Since the filmmaker is not an inhabitant of the areas she portrays, it does not limit the filmmaker to that necessity. Perhaps due to financial and power relations that may still exist, many films depicting South African ghettos, have been made by individuals of various races and backgrounds.

Ghettos/ Townships & Their Ties to Film

There is a distinct reason for the correlation between the ghettos in America and South Africa. The New American Oxford Dictionary defines a ghetto as 'a part of a city, especially a slum area, occupied by minority groups' and also 'an isolated or segregated group or area' (McKean, 2007). South African townships, isolated and pushed to the periphery of the metropolis are generally disregarded, unexplored, and unventured by those that do not reside there (outsiders). These ghettos (and their inhabitants) are viewed on the news and recently on television as places (and people) of crime, violence and unrest. Apartheid once restricted people of differing races from entering these areas and after over ten years since the repealing of apartheid laws, the townships are still almost entirely segregated. Since these areas are scarcely visited by outsiders, much is speculated about life there. As a result, filmic representations carry a weight of responsibility as audience can often limit their knowledge of the areas to media representation- what they see behind the safety of the screen.

That does not differ much from the representation of the ghettos in the United States. According to Wikipedia, 'Thirty years after the Civil rights era, the United States remains a residentially segregated society in which both blacks and whites [largely, not wholly] inhabit different neighborhoods of vastly different quality.' (Wikimedia, 2004). Other oppressed groups also reside in such areas in America but ghettos are still racially disproportionate in terms of minority race to white race. Many people do not visit the impoverished areas unless necessary. South Africa has suffered under a difficult Apartheid system much like the American Jim Crow laws, which sought to separate and oppress black people. In the research seminar paper mentioned earlier, it is described how black people in America and South Africa were both also portrayed negatively in film. Their past representations were demeaning and based on power relations. Black people were victimized and continue to be by the binary oppositions of 'whiteness' versus 'blackness' in film. The images favour white stories and experiences over black experiences as well as physical attributes. The images are also significant because of the separation and the fact that the people that were in power created negative codes which many people believed due to the lack of exposure to alternate or real images of black people, in actuality or depicted in the media. Robert Entman writes,

'Images of Black males and females receive criticism not merely for calling upon stereotypes of irresponsible and irrepressible Black sexuality and criminality, but for presenting one dimensional characters who lack the rounded complexity of real people...Whites already

know that members of their group come in all moral and intellectual shapes and sizes. They know much less about Blacks and the critics suggest that film reinforces white's ignorance of Blacks' variety and humanity.' (Entman, 2000;182).

The past images were problematic in this two-fold manner not simply being one-dimensional but also placed oppositional as inferior to white. This reveals the necessity and common goal of black people regarding filmic representation, which transcends geographical borders. Boulou Ebanda de B'beri supports,

'Black cinema is not a concept that defines a particular film's themes or a specific audience. It is rather a *signifying* practice that delineates the regularity of specific practices of expression in films, and comprises films made in Africa and in the West, including the Americas. I anticipate such practices to be trans-geographic articulations of identity that produce differentiated contexts of expressions, geo-politically and culturally.' (B'beri, 2006; 3,4).

This common goal finds importance in the recent surge of Hollywood films depicting African life. Unfortunately, many of the recent films did not render responsible representations but continue to favour white individuals' stories and points of view above those of black people. Robert Entman discusses the implications of such filmmaking with respect to African Americans in an American film, *A Time to Kill*. He states, 'When it [the film] subordinates the Hailey family's [black] suffering to that of Jake and his family and friends [white] in order to secure the involvement of the dominant audience, the film signals that White pain is more important, more interesting, more meaningful.' (Entman, 2000, 186). One of the qualities of the 'hood' film (though black cinema should definitely not be confined to this genre) or the use of the ghetto as a setting in film, is that it often positions black experience at the forefront of the film. It doesn't display black stories or communities from a white person's perspective, which gives ownership to black characters within the films to tell their own stories.

The 'Hood' Film

The 'hood' film is used to define the type of film that uses the ghetto setting as a means to illustrate black life. Paula J. Massood describes how the ghetto has been utilized as a metaphor for African American experience first in literature and then film, (Massood, 1996). *Mile in My Shoes* is an exploration of depicting survival within the ghetto in film but it also serves as this metaphor of black experiences. The notions of reclamation within the film are central to the metaphoric quality. In order to achieve this, the livelihoods of the characters, the illustration of the environment and the options available to the inhabitants is crucial. The research paper informs of the reasons for the project centering on the 'hood' film. It states,

'The cinematic portrayals of the area capitalize on the curiosity of the outsider toward life within the locations. This gives such works a significant crossover appeal enabling them to attract a large and diverse audience. The setting also forces the narrative to centre on black experiences and black characters, which were previously a scarcity in film. It provides a means to highlight the issues and hardships faced by those the privileged community (black and white alike) rejects.

Finally it allows an effective and popular platform for past cinematic misrepresentations and faulty filmic conjectures of ghettos/townships, black people and their way of life, to be reinforced, broken, and/or reformed.' (Ward, 2007; 2).

The project has been carefully designed in order to reveal both these advantages as well as the complications of working within the 'hood' film genre toward highlighting issues of interest to the marginalized inhabitants of the ghetto.

II. Process and Procedure

A. Research: Discoveries and Influences

Research was focused on the past filmic representations in order to gain a more complete understanding of the previous codes and images the film project seeks to supplant. The beginning of cinematic representations of black people in Africa and America is detailed in many books and articles concerning these cinematic representational ideologies. They provide insight on how these stereotypes evolved over the years. There have been differing though equally disturbing portrayals of black Americans and black Africans. The American characterization of blackness consisted of the following:

'Among these portrayals that emerged over time were the domestic workers- male servants and female nurses/maids (even matured to 'friend'), the sexual transgressor- female prostitute and male desiring of a white woman, and very important to this study- the black deviant or criminal. The type of criminal could often take the form of a gangster.' (Ward, 2007;3).

These were often the only and definitely the dominant depictions and, as a result, black people were often ideologically portrayed as masses of unchanging people with qualities symptomatic of all who bear the colour. The standard was set in the early twentieth century through the films of Griffith, *Birth of A Nation* (Griffith; 1915) and *A Zulu's Heart* (Griffith; 1908). These codes are still in existence though not as widely accepted today. The African model of blackness in mainstream film is also explained.

'The black South Africans in the film were portrayed as an animalistic people that either needed to be reined and broken in to society or decimated. There were two dominating stereotyped characters portrayed which led to the filmic expression of this ideology- 'the Savage Other and the Faithful Servant' (Tomaselli, 2006:132).' (Ward, 2007;7).

These separate portrayals have simultaneous effects on both black people in America and Africa, because in both cases it was their being black which relegated them to such demeaning depictions and by their being black that they are identified by the world regardless of region.

There are also helpful readings on early films that began to deconstruct and counter these portrayals. Films of Oscar Micheaux² were influential in delivering diverse representation and one of his techniques was to utilize the ghetto as a setting to achieve this. He placed black narratives at the forefront and helped pave the way of the many films to follow. Other films like *Mapantsula* (Schmitz, 1988), *Boyz*

² Oscar Micheaux was an African American independent filmmaker from the early twentieth century. (Register, 1995:427)

N the Hood (Singleton, 1991), *Juice* (Dickerson, 1992), *Set It Off* (Gray, 1996), *Poetic Justice* (Singleton, 1993), *Hijack Stories* (Schmitz, 2000), *The Wooden Camera* (Wa Luruli, 2004), *Tsotsi* (Hood, 2006), and *Max and Mona* (Mattera, 2004) use the ghetto and convey ideological illustrations of the areas, the people that reside there, and the obstacles and choices of the people. There is theory related to the 'hood' film and the ghetto as a setting in film, the likes of which has already and will continue to be discussed throughout the explication. One scholar claims, 'As with other ghetto films of the early 1990s, the narrative thrust of [*Straight Outta Brooklyn*] is centred around the experiences of the three black male characters and is specifically related to the general hopelessness felt by black men which turns inwards to the family and results in the subjugation of female family members, including physical assault.' (Ross, 1996;73). Many films are characterized by their extensive violence and unintentional glorifying of gangster culture more than their accurate and insightful depiction of ghettos and black people. Women are often done great injustices in these films as they rarely allow women to abstain from their previous negative stereotypes. Study of most of the films, reveal situations that face men rather than those faced by women. In many circumstances, the issues themselves are overshadowed by the exaggeration and elevation of criminal behavior within the film. The theories, which investigate the 'hood' films, respond to the semiotics and ideologies of these films. They have influenced many considerations that were taken by the filmmaker during the creation of *Mile in My Shoes*.

After reviewing the written research of the topic, filmed interviews were conducted with eight individuals from six different areas that were from (and many still reside in) townships. Over a period of two years, the filmmaker volunteered in three townships, which enabled her to develop a fraction of familiarity with the structure of the areas and helped her to understand some of the issues faced by the inhabitants. The interviews became a major resource, which built on the observations and topics the filmmaker wanted to raise as a result of the research and even more so her volunteer experience. The interviewer asked questions about the areas where the interviewees grew up and consider(ed) home. In this way, diverse accounts of life in the townships were provided. These accounts also came from the residents' experiences- their own words and thoughts. Shortly after conducting the analysis of the two films *Boyz N the Hood* (1991; Singleton) and *Tsotsi* (Hood, 2006) in the research paper, a basic premise for how the story of the film was to develop had been devised. The stories and descriptions as well as inner struggles of the interviewees were then injected into the premise. It tested the filmmaker's storylines with the truths they told and adjustments were made accordingly.

Several difficulties immediately presented themselves as a result of these interviews. Although the filmmaker is trying to negate past damaging portrayals, the townships are places that have serious, detrimental, and unfavourable issues. There are problems of crime, abandonment, teenage pregnancy and abuse as well as poverty and disease. Avoiding the inclusion of these issues risks an unrealistic

illustration of the ghetto and the actual concerns of the people that inhabit the area. It doesn't allow the intended confrontation of the issues. It also denies the very strength of the individuals that continually overcome such obstacles. The interviewees felt very much affected by these issues. In order to illustrate crime, there must be the criminal. In highlighting abuse, there is the likelihood of the violent perhaps animalistic being. In each of the issues, there is the distinct possibility of re-establishing the too often portrayed stereotyped definitions of black people. Yet when asked how living in the areas affected them positively, interviewees spoke with pride about their strength, passion, ambition, and ability to overcome. In their eyes, this is a critical part of their identity.

In addition, the interviews revealed that these negative issues are not the only aspects of life in the townships. There is an entire livelihood that happens and exists around these issues. There are relationships, celebrations as well as daily life routines, which define the area as much as the negative aspects. Also, the individual nature of humanity, regardless of race emerged, as different issues and experiences were revealed as more pertinent based upon whose point of view it is and which township that person is from. For those from Gugulethu, gangsterism is a big issue. For the interviewee from Ravensmead, drug and women abuse are the main issues. Poverty is a consistent issue regardless of which area. Yet there are variant classes and levels of income even within the townships. Male and female interviewees were also faced with some differing issues based on gender roles. This reveals the complexities that exist and further question the flat, one-dimensional representations of the past.

B. The Script

Content

The research phase had a substantial influence on the concept of the script. The content of the script came from taking these descriptions and creating a story, which depicts a diverse representation of the areas and even more so, the residents. The script takes place in several locations, two main locations being townships. It tells the stories of two main characters, each from different townships. By including more than one township, the story can illustrate how although similar issues exist, each township is its own place and has its own unique identities. It allows for more varied representation. Not only are there different individuals in different ghetto communities but also there are different ghetto communities that produce still a variety of individuals. The common theme again lies in the common goals of overcoming difficult conditions. This also serves to metaphor the issues of blackness and black cinema, which transcends geographic borders because of the commonalities of race and goals though distinctly different in region and culture. The script aims to place a black person's experiences, issues, and emotions at the forefront of the film, a privilege not often afforded to them, even in South African film history where black people comprise the vast majority. When writing the script, there were key illustrations in mind that the filmmaker wanted to convey. These choices are crucial in any film because the manner in which the

filmmaker chooses to show the ghetto will reflect in the fashion that the characters interact with(in) it. This will affect the manner in which the audience receives the issues of the film. The decisions made for images and representations of ghettos in *Mile in My Shoes* were made based on that premise.

The ghettos in the script are shown to be the norm rather than the exotic. The characters exhibit more comfort in their own surroundings, knowing the ins and outs of their township. The township is also where the main female character is at home. Paradoxically, the ghetto also needed to be explored- the surroundings needed to be established because it correlates with and influences the identity of the characters. As a result, the story involves several external scenes including scenes where the characters walk through the location. The two main characters have to introduce one another to their respective neighbourhoods through their own accounts. This helps bring some context and maybe even familiarity to audience members but also subjects the audience to the characters' view of their respective homes. The audience can see the areas but not by an abundance of wide, beautifully scenic views of the aesthetic pleasures of poverty, but instead alongside the character. One main character loves and takes great pride in her community. The other character cares too much for his family and has had enough of the trying experiences that living in his area brings. Through the articulation of their feelings, emotions, experiences and divulged views- the spectator explores the township. This is not to imply that the audience are unaffected by their own constructs or the framing and mise en scene techniques of film production which will be discussed later. However, the point of view that is strongly established- through the manner in which the main characters view the areas- becomes the standpoint through which the issues are confronted within the film. The issues of the communities are personal and significant to the characters and this becomes the manner in which they are related to the audience.

Poverty needed to be a clear aspect of both townships. It is a common thread throughout the interviews though in varied levels. The interviewees are aware that it is no longer just race but now economic situations which determines their still being situated in the township. Yet the ghettos should not be static unchanging environments. Within the story there are differing depictions of homes in the townships. Moses' family lives in a home although overpopulated, whereas Tameryn's family lives in a servant's quarter, which has been transformed into a home. Moses also indicates that his family hasn't always had the house, which reveals that there is room for some growth and improvement even within the township. This also carries a political reference as the South African government attempts to provide its many underprivileged citizens with more adequate housing. There is another reference to this process that reveals the alternate view as Tameryn complains that the government has long been promising houses to the people in her community. This difference in the homes of the characters reveals different living conditions within the ghettos themselves. It is not unlikely in the township to see a house right next to a shack or a family living in a shack located in the backyard of another home. There is also a different

housing situation, which is Moses' dorm. It is outside of the ghetto and this provides opportunity to reveal spatial differences. Here Moses can find privacy and quiet, but not at his family's home in the ghetto where there is a constant fight for space.

Within the script, the locations of the ghetto were treated almost like a character itself. It plays a role within the story as a home, a trap, and a responsibility for various characters. It is both a focus and a backdrop for the film. For many minor characters, the ghetto has been a hindrance, a place that has limited their self-confidence and stunted their ambition. For the lead female character it is the place where she feels most comfortable being herself. The place has seriously challenged her but also provoked and inspired her to create change. In depicting individuals from the area, a balance was sought for emphasizing a place where people suffer and a place where strong people emerge. The ideological view of survival was well thought out but also twofold. It combines the two main aspects of survival, which involve the crossroads decision of every able member of whether to move out of the ghetto or stay to create change. This decision to include this crossroad was made even before the interviews. The interviewees confirmed its importance as people differed on where they stood with the issue. It became the central issue of the film though not explicitly the story's main focus. It is actually a more universal topic. There is an entire world, where does one situate one's self? Does a person stay close to home or venture into the big world? Does one create change locally or globally? Can both be accomplished and if so at what price? Yet in the end, only some people from the ghetto are even given the option to choose.

Structure

Aside from the content, the script's form is a critical aspect of the film project. The way in which the filmmaker decides to tell the story is as important as the story she tells. Eleanor Rehahn enlightens, "In terms of narrative it is important to recognise the influence of the institutional and production context on what is achievable in terms of narrative, and also in terms of what is 'allowed', for example, due to financial, structural or ideological constraints, and also target audience." (Rehahn, 2006;105). There were certain advantages and freedoms enjoyed in the making of the film because it did not have an institution or film studio dictating its content and filmic parameters. Several written accounts reflect upon the difficulties Spike Lee³ encountered in gaining support and control over his films, their marketing, and content⁴. There was no set hierarchical authority that required the filmmaker to follow certain conventions for *Mile in My Shoes*. It was the decision of the filmmaker. The only institution was the University of Cape Town, which did not impose more than a deadline on the privileges or artistry of the filmmaker. The

³ Spike Lee is 'one of the very few black filmmakers to consistently challenge the white hegemony of the commercial film industry on its own turf and terms...' (Guerrero, 2001:21).

⁴ William Grant's essay, 'chronicles Spike Lee's battle to maintain his artistic integrity' and 'describes his struggles with the studio and New York trade unions', (Reid, 1997:17).

film itself is thus an independent film. Rehahn describes, 'They [independent films] are likely to challenge the 'norms' established by mainstream films, disrupting the typical normality/disruption/normality narrative structure and subverting the stereotypes of "good" guys and "bad" guys.' (Rehahn, 2006;110). The freedom allowed the filmmaker to consider alternate methods of depicting the film's narrative which some Hollywood features do not possess.

Hollywood films act within the institution of the production studios. These studios have input on which films to produce. Many studios require films to fit the basic Hollywood narrative format. The films consist of a situation of equilibrium. A force enters or a circumstance occurs which disrupts the balance and then the hero seeks to restore order. Robert McKee writes, 'A story is a design in five parts: The *Inciting Incident*, the first major event of the telling, is the primary cause for all that follows, putting into motion the other four elements- *Progressive Complications*, *Crisis*, *Climax*, *Resolution*.' (McKee, 1997:181). Within the storytelling utilized by Hollywood, the one incident propels the rest of the story forward creating a constant set of actions, oppositions, and consequences. The result is that many ideas expressed within the films are not questioned. Gillespie observes, 'Part of the power: [power relations encoded in texts and how texts exert power over the us and society] comes from the ways in which media texts represent and construct knowledge, values, and beliefs.' (Gillespie, 2006:2). The Hollywood narratives carry ideology which elevate these viewpoints as good versus bad, white versus other. The white woman is often shown as fragile and pure. The black woman is constantly illustrated as wild and deviant. Likewise white male leads are often heroes while black men are criminals.

Most Hollywood films have historically been aimed at a target audience of white middle class males ages eighteen to thirty-five. Every scriptwriting course the filmmaker has attended has stressed this target audience as idyll, of which the filmmaker herself does not fit. Most Hollywood films are made by white males and cater to their understanding and point of view with regard to the issues examined within the films. This is the framework through which women, black people, and other members not included within the hegemonic group are conveyed. Issues that affect persons outside of this frame and even their representation in film has then been presented as other or outside the focus of mainstream films.

Hollywood has made attempts to include the previously discluded audience through specialty or niche films which target those audience groups. However, these films are often failing to fairly depict black people and often fail to attack relevant contemporary issues. Most of these films are comedies in which issues that affect people are laughed at but not seriously addressed. The opposite is the gangster themed 'hood' films, which have had the tendency to frame certain issues around elevated gang life presenting them in a manner where entertainment often sacrifices accuracy. Mike Davis claims that these films serve as a 'voyeuristic titillation to white suburbanites.' (Reid, 1997:45). The gangs appear

appealing in many of these films and the negative behaviour is perhaps only shunned at the end of the film as opposed to its glorified position throughout.

There is an entire discourse regarding independent productions and alternative methods of creating black film following the Third World cinema. Tommy L. Lott remarks, 'Third Cinema representations of black people are presented from a wholly black cultural perspective instead of through the racist frame imposed by studios on mainstream film.' (Lott, 1997:298). This Third World method began and is based on a notion that the only manner in which narratives which favour and subvert images of oppressed people are outside of Hollywood conventions. This notion and the Third World techniques were adopted by African American film students and began a wave of independent black films (Diawara, 1993:110). There were certain techniques the filmmaker could have employed in keeping with this method. It would involve alternative narratives that reject Hollywood's cause and effect structure.

Tommy L. Lott states,

"The idea that genuine opposition to the aesthetically coded racist ideology in Hollywood films can only be expressed through overt contestation and rejection of films styled after Hollywood movies has influenced the general practice among black film critics of positioning modernist films by black independents over realist Hollywood films." (Lott, 1997:283).

The filmmaker did not however, choose to make a film solely in the Third World genre for several reasons.

The audience of Third World films tend to be a narrow group of intellectuals. Lott claims, "Although many explanations can be given of the lack of a black audience for independent black cinema, aesthetic considerations are paramount." (Lott, 1997:288). The individuals that these films should empower and allow to finally view relatable images and issues, generally do not view or recognize the full worth of the films. The films are not as widely viewed as Hollywood films and have mainly had a limited crossover appeal. The films' main aims are not often entertainment and some narratives can be difficult and challenging for the viewer to follow. This is not a problem when the intention of the film is to be studied and or quite actively interpreted by the audience. However, audience is not acquainted with this type of viewing. In order for the filmmaker of *Mile in My Shoes* to exhibit the film to family, friends, and even the cast- the film needs to meet expectations. The filmmaker chose to adhere to the fact that the more a film deviates from the conventions and expectations of the audience, the less they tend to enjoy and understand the film. It is a false dichotomy to separate black independent films and black films made in Hollywood⁵ that promote the complete objecting of Hollywood techniques in order to create fair depictions. It implies that fair depictions cannot exist in the most popular domain of feature films. The

⁵ Diawara states that the relation between Hollywood film and black independent film 'parallel those between Blackness and Americanness; the dichotomy between the so called marked cultures and unmarked cultures; but also the relations between "high art" and "low art", (Diawara, 1993:4).

filmmaker does not oppose these alternative films that definitely contribute toward defeating stereotyped depictions but asserts that black stories also have a place in mainstream narrative film.

The filmmaker rejects the notion that black films cannot be both entertaining and render non-stereotypical depictions. Many 'hood' films attempt to capture that balance. It is interesting to see to what extent the films that take place in the ghetto can achieve it. In the end, it is the love of these Hollywood styled films and the desire to see them accurately reflect black life and reform the depictions of blackness, that has attracted many filmmakers to the art of film. The filmmaker also rejects the notion that black stories are unrelatable or that only white stories are universal. Many black audiences identify to an extent and find pleasure in mainstream films although they largely do not reflect characters and instances that adhere to particular circumstances of importance to those audiences and often berate, belittle, and disparage them. The filmmaker is against the notion that black artists must reject the mainstream cinematic techniques and be shipped or discarded into a corner and marked as an alternative or niche film. Black stories do not have to be considered as other when they can also be part of the norm. The goal is to provide these audience members with stories that they can enjoy which appropriate the forms that they like and have grown accustomed, with positive portrayals and relevant issues. The filmmaker finds that a compromise where differences are introduced while the audience still finds forms and structure that gratifies their expectations is the best means for this film project.

The filmmaker chose the mainstream cause and effect narrative for *Mile in My Shoes* but interrupts the narrative with excerpts of the interviews. It follows the storyline of the typical romantic movie in which the seemingly incompatible boy and girl that can't stand one another are forced by circumstance to tolerate the other. They soon fall for each other, break up only to find out things aren't the same without the other, and then get back together. The very ending of *Mile in My Shoes* puts an extra twist at the conclusion of the story, which can certainly cause its unpopularity with audience members.

Target Audience

The filmmaker considers the Uses and Gratification model when determining the target audience of the film. It seeks to fulfill three of the prescribed pleasures that films can provide an audience. It seeks to provide gratification in personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance. (Rehahn, 2006:122). The film allows a certain portion of the audience to identify with the characters and/or their experiences. Black females may identify with the main character because her appearance resembles their own. A black male may identify with her because of her race as she tries to rise above the oppressive situation in which apartheid has placed her. They may relate better to Moses, the male lead. Females may identify with the struggle of a woman in a male dominated world as the main character is constantly challenging the chauvinistic views of male characters. Any child may relate to their desire to please and honour their parents but still find their own way. People from ghettos or other impoverished communities may identify

with the location, issues, or other characters also in the ghetto within the story. South Africans can identify with the context of the township and the racially segregated communities. There are also universal themes of love, family, friendship and overcoming obstacles to which most people can generally relate. The emotions of the film are universally human. But there are certain audience members that may relate more due to the particulars of the story, the characters the story sympathizes with, and the issues and experiences the film conveys. The film is purposely designed to provide greater identity for black individuals since in many mainstream films, they are marginalized as well as unfairly and inaccurately described, often disallowing them to identify with filmic portrayals of black people and black life.

In addition to personal identity, the film seeks to build on personal relationships. There are many issues that the film raises, not only concerning black representation in film but rape, alcohol abuse, domestic and child abuse, hanging with the wrong crowd, and issues of upward mobility. The film aims to be a 'basis of conversation' (Rehahn, 2006), which brings these social issues to the forefront. There should still be discussion after the film has ended.

The film also serves as a means of surveillance. That's where the outsider is educated and made aware of the differing livelihoods, personalities and experiences of black people as well as the complexities of the issues within ghettos. The main characters also go through this process of surveillance when they visit the other character's township. As the character learns, the audience does as well. The characters quickly judge one another. Tameryn thinks Moses is lazy and cares little for his community but finds that he is actually a hard worker that is concerned about the well being of his family. Moses thinks that Tameryn is an angry woman but finds that she is simply guarding a very generous but much abused heart. The audience, especially those that do not live in the ghettos get to peek at life in these areas at a personal level they may never dare to in actual life.

The lacking component of the Uses and Gratification model is escapism. The filmmaker does not consider it one of the film's aims to provide its audience. This is unlike most Hollywood films that seek to entertain above all other goals, often at the expense of fair and accurate portrayals. They create worlds and instances that are different from people's everyday life but still carry ideological meaning. Should the audience member be satisfied with escapism within the film project, it is a latent effect. The film deals with difficult, weighty issues. The goal of the film is to cause people to think, though they should be entertained. The film purposely steals the neat resolution that usually accompanies Hollywood films. There is no absolute closure for the characters in the film. This denies the audience the pleasure of a neat, happy ending. The manner in which Hollywood films neatly resolve a story causes many audiences not to question the ideologies they have been presented. The emphasis on entertainment and escapism disguises the fact that messages have been conveyed throughout the film. *Mile in My Shoes* makes the issues it explores and the messages it relays a priority in order to carefully and responsibly present them rather

than ignore, exploit and/or improperly depict them. However, to somewhat satisfy the audience, the filmmaker leaves hope at the film's end as Moses sends her a letter that he does plan to return to the ghetto someday in order to sew his success back into the community. This gives the impression that he feels they have unfinished business and that the love story has a chance of a happy ending. However, it is open ended hope, much like the realities of those living in the ghetto that honestly do not know if they will make it out. The quest to provide satisfaction for the audience requires the filmmaker to adhere to their expectations and work within a structure they can enjoy.

Financial Restrictions

Audience isn't the only determining aspect for the filmmaker. As with most independent films, finances were a hindrance. The film project was rewarded a five thousand rand budget. Even this money is reimbursed rather than given up front. That greatly limited the choice of actors, locations, costume, equipment, transportation, and crew. The filmmaker acted as producer, writer, director, and camera technician. All of the crew and actors were unpaid volunteers. This led to a few incidents where actors behaved less than professional about being quiet on set and unfortunately in two cases, did not show up for scheduled shoots. The financial factor did cause restrictions with the script. There was no money for fancy stunts or a very large cast. Considering the options, the filmmaker opted for a simpler story.

Language

Another huge limitation of the film is the language factor. Because of the limitations of the filmmaker, the screenplay is written in English. This is a major obstruction toward the authenticity in the depiction of the ghettos. The townships are vibrant in language. The languages spoken in South Africa are critical to the identity of black people. In the one township within the film, Afrikaans is spoken; while in the other isiXhosa is the main language. Even during the interviews, several participants struggled to articulate their meaning in English. Several mentioned that language was central to what made the area different. They confirmed that there is dialogue or slang that is created in certain areas and only individuals from the areas can understand. Already, denying the use of the languages robs the community of its uniqueness and own way of communicating but there are also elements that are lost in translation. The real sounds of the ghetto are influenced a great deal by speech. This is evident in the 'hood' film genre in which street slang is often used. It has allowed people to identify with the characters. Because the filmmaker does not speak these languages, the script is written in English. The only possible advantage of the English script is that all of the characters and many of the audience, especially the outsiders, can understand English before they can understand Afrikaans or isiXhosa if it is not their home language. Otherwise, the film would have had to be trilingual to accommodate the realities of the languages spoken in the ghettos and University setting. Despite the great disservice the language aspect does toward the representation of the people that live in the ghetto, the film moves forward with other strengths.

Characters

The characters of the film fit within the categories of the six 'spheres of action' or character roles initially defined by Propp which are the hero, heroine, villain, helper, donor, and false hero (Rehahn, 2006;11). The main character is Tameryn. She is a young black female from the coloured community of Ravensmead. She is the film's hero/heroine. She is not the traditional passive, powerless female. She is strong-minded and stands up to her classmates, her partner, her mother, and men in her community. She is independent, educated, and driven. Despite this, she is not portrayed as masculine. She is attractive but there is also no instance of her utilizing her sexuality for gain. However, she does find herself in several situations where she needs rescue from a gentleman. This reveals her humanity. There is an element of vulnerability.

Moses is also the hero/heroine of the story. He is the secondary character within the film. Yet he is the one who wins the love of the heroine and faces several villains, once rescuing Tameryn. Moses is a very hardworking, educated man. He is able to rescue the main character but she also rescues him by helping him to do well on his assignment and encouraging him to follow his dreams.

The dispatcher is Professor Martins. She assigns the characters to work together. She is tough on both of the characters, which causes them to need one another in order to pass the class and graduate from school. This task she gives the characters disrupt their lives and stands in the way of their futures but eventually helps them find the path to their purposes.

The donor is Mr. Chauncey. Mr. Chauncey gives the great advice that "every man has to choose for himself" whether to stay or go from the ghetto. This advice helps toward the story's end when Moses leaves and their lives continue apart. He also helps the characters find a venue for the meetings, which turns out to be the path to Tameryn's idea successful future.

Moses' helper is Brandon. He is Moses' best friend. He is the person to whom Moses confides. He reveals the truth to Tameryn about the opportunity offered to Moses who then is able to steer Moses toward his dream.

There are multiple villains within the story. Moses' villain is Wanda, the man that used to be his best friend. Wanda threatens Moses by being a negative influence on his brother, Vuyani. Moses dreams of getting his family out of the ghetto. This involves them not getting trapped by the mistakes that often hinder individuals from leaving. Wanda and members of his gang threaten Moses' dream when they hang out with Moses' brother when Moses is not around. Wanda wants to teach Vuyani how to survive in a manner that Moses does not consent. He fears Wanda's way will land his brother in jail or get him killed.

Another villain in the story is Tameryn's brother, Sam. Sam stands for everything Tameryn wants to change about her community. He is violent and abusive. He is a womanizer that tries to keep Tameryn

and other women oppressed. He defines his manhood in the way he dominates others. When he cannot beat Tameryn's spirit, he attempts to choke her.

Other villains in the film are the ghettos themselves. The areas threaten to keep Moses and Tameryn apart. Tameryn makes the decision that she needs to stay to achieve her goals when Moses cannot stay in order to reach his. It is also the place where dangerous things occur which is a 'threat to the safety and virtue of the heroine' (Rehahn, 2006; 11). The township is a hindrance to Moses. He cannot find peace of mind there. He is in a constant struggle against the elements as he sees his family suffer from unemployment, teenage pregnancy and gangsterism. The ghetto is a place of danger to Tameryn as she is nearly raped there. Yet the ghetto is revealed as reclaimable. Tameryn has found her place there and though Moses must leave, he speculates returning after some time.

Shane and Wanda play a role similar to the false hero. Moses initially believes that Wanda is helping his family. He thinks that Wanda is keeping an eye on his brother to make sure Vuyani is safe. He then learns that Wanda's views on how to be a good brother to Vuyani is different than Moses' idea. Wanda hangs out with Vuyani way more than Moses. He has begun introducing Vuyani to members of his gang. Moses knows that the association to the gang alone is a danger to Vuyani's future. Moses confronts Wanda and a battle for the influence over his brother ensues. Wanda becomes an enemy instead of a friend.

Shane is a longtime friend and ex-boyfriend to Tameryn. They share a connection and Tameryn still has some feelings for him. That is why when Tameryn finds that Shane has been beating his wife, she feels betrayed. He isn't the man she thought. In both cases, the main characters are deceived by the appearance of the characters, which is opposite to their actions.

Although these are characters that fall into typical categories of storytelling, they are not flat stereotypes. Although Wanda is a gangster, in his mind he has good intentions with Moses' brother, Vuyani. The script also reveals that Wanda was not always the gangster but chose it as a means of survival in the ghetto. Sam is not the only womanizer in the story. Sam does not find redemption but the other character Shane does make a step toward changing. This illustrates that not all men that abuse women are the same. While some men are not willing to change, others are willing. The diversity of characters within the film reveals that black men are not only the villain or the helper but can also be the hero or heroine of the story.

The story itself has a main plot but also a 'b' and 'c' story. The film portrays two individuals from separate townships that attend University. This already provides the characters a level of status because University education is not afforded to everyone. The main plot is the assignment of the community development project, the struggle to work together and succeed with the assignment and the love story that blossoms between the two main characters as a result. Other narratives form, however,

between Tameryn and her life in Ravensmead and Moses and his life in Khayelitsha. Tameryn has issues with her mom and her best friends. Moses struggles to please his dad and take care of his siblings (cousins and brother). Obstacles such as the interference of Wanda with his brother threaten his success in this objective. Moses succeeds in satisfying his father because he leaves the township. Tameryn tries to find harmony with her mother and deals with the issue of spousal abuse between her two married best friends. Her involvement with the community project to counsel abused women acts as a hindrance to both of those relationships but later helps her to preserve one with her abused friend.

The Cast

The actors that were chosen were mostly University students studying theatre and performance. They are either being trained at the University of Cape Town or New Africa Theatre. The younger actors have been trained through a community based theatre company called Pulpit, which was started many years ago by UCT graduate, Thembile Pepeteka. The main actress is in her final year. She actually comes from Ravensmead and has a great deal in common with the character that even her interview helped inspire. Moses is also a drama student from the township of Soweto. Most of the actors actually live in or are from a township. This added a great deal to the production.

These actors are familiar with the lifestyles of individuals that are from the areas. They know what it means to have grown up in such an environment. The main actors were given liberty to alter the dialogue to fit phrases and terms they felt were more appropriate. This allowed them to add more authenticity where they felt it was needed. The actors bring their experiences to the characters. The characters that play the gangsters do not have to imagine a stereotyped image and try to portray it on the screen. They have seen or experienced the gangsters firsthand. Truthfully, a couple of the actors in the film used to be in gangs. Many have lost friends to violence. The actors cared about the work they were doing. There was no compensation for it, only experience and enjoyment. Most of the actors were also black (or coloured which is politically characterized as black). These issues confronted within the film are very relevant to their lives and they understood how to portray them.

The Locations

The two locations that were chosen reveal the variety as well as the uniqueness of every ghetto. The filmmaker chose two townships of which she was somewhat familiar. Since there was no compensation, the filmmaker had to request permission to use various people's homes with which there was a personal connection. People were very accommodating, making their homes available for long shoots without monetary compensation. In Khayelitsha, a home of a granny was chosen that is in a somewhat dangerous though more formal section of the township. This allowed for more control over the surroundings. The house is a nice place of residence, characteristic of the more financially stable habitants of Khayelitsha. There are advantages and disadvantages of using this location. The advantages are that it

had more space to shoot than the smaller shacks that occupy large areas of Khayelitsha. The house had power and plenty of outlets for lighting equipment, which many of the shacks do not. There was also space for the owners to still move around on the inside while the shooting took place. Since it rained most of the days, the house proved to be a better shelter for the equipment and crew. It also provides that alternative image of homes in the township. Many may expect only shacks and may be surprised to see an area where the people have made improvements. The positive thing about the area is that just next door to Moses' house, there is a house being built. In the yard there is a shack. This shows the diversity even in proximity.

The location of Tameryn's house in Ravensmead was more enlightening of the poorer side of the ghetto. It was useful because it is close in size to a shack but it is made of stone, which provides better shelter. It is also very much a home as there are curtains and pictures hanging. There is a distinct feeling of warmth that conflicts with the hard cold stone walls. The walls of the place are stained with dirt, which contradicts with the tidiness of items inside the place. Tameryn's friends Charmaine and Shane live financially better than Tameryn even though they are located on the same street. Again this reiterates the variety even within the townships.

The locations outside of the township contrast with the locations within them. The walls in Moses' room are very white and sterile. The apartment is spacious and uncluttered. It also appears more modern and pricey than the house chosen for his families' home. Some of the locations are site specific like the lecture hall and the library. There are a couple of scenes on the Jameson Hall steps at the University of Cape Town. This location is famous to those that attend the school. It also greatly contrasts with the littered environment of the ghetto.

The external locations were the most difficult. They, like the houses, were actual locations in the townships. However, most of the space in the ghetto is public, not private. While shooting a scene, any person could pass by or decide to occupy that expanse. At the same time, drug dealers and even law abiding citizens were not always keen to have a camera infringe on their space. Safety is an issue when shooting in the ghetto. When shooting there, the crew is not outside of the happenings there. Unfortunately while shooting in one of the homes several actors witnessed spousal abuse in action. Lack of control for the locations is a definite setback. However, with more resources, the proper parameters and security can be set in place.

Production

There are many aspects of production or the shooting phase that affect the manner in which images are received. The way a film is shot directs the audience to what is important and what is not. It tells the audience where to focus their attention and who to empathize with in the film. It therefore has a great effect on how the ghetto and the characters are received. In this production, agency, framing, mise-

en-scene, directing, as well as types of shots are among some of the important features in influencing the interpretation of the film. The manner in which the camera captures, whether it is close-ups, long shots, moving pans, mirrored shots, low, high, or point of view determines the manner in which the information is communicated to the audience.

The more a character is shown on the screen and the longer the duration of screen time, the more opportunity the audience has to connect and identify with that character. The dominant images and screen time belongs to the main character, Tameryn. She is shown in the very beginning and the very end, implying that it is her story. She has ownership over it. The people that have the least screen time other than the extras, are the villains (except the townships as villains). The audience is not afforded much time or occasion to identify with them. The film then gives more power to the educated students trying to create change than the 'bad guys' of the story. The woman's experience is also given more focus than that of the man. During the first meeting to stop abuse, one woman gives her account of being abused. The camera remains on her for a good duration of time. The filmmaker implies that her story is significant.

The mise en scene is also an important element that guides the viewers reading of the story. The mise en scene is everything that the director decides to put in the frame. Equally important is what is purposely left out of the frame. These are decisions made by the director to create a sense of environment or restrict the audience from losing focus of the characters. There is a scene where Tameryn and Moses are walking in her community and the temporary houses are shown in the background. They are purposely included in the frames and Tameryn mentions them later. Gillespie enlightens, 'Mise-en-scene analysis is crucial to understanding how information is conveyed in the process of watching a film. It establishes the relationship between seeing, telling, and knowing,' (Gillespie, 2006:107). The houses that are spoken about are pictured in the background. The words themselves are spoken more matter of fact but it is evident by the image that it is a serious problem that people are living for years in houses that are only meant to be temporary.

The framing of the image is also an important aspect of filming. In the film, often the ghetto is a backdrop for the actors. The actors are usually framed in close proximity to the camera with the surroundings behind them. This gives greater regard to the characters as opposed to their setting and the scenery. This framing is intended to provide the interpretation that they are more important than their setting and able to rise above it. It gives more power to the people than the ghetto itself. The filmmaker was also careful not to film the women as objects by framing only their body parts as many films do. There are no decapitated limbs accentuating the beauties of the female body, subjecting the women to the male gaze. The end reveals Tameryn's legs as she is walking but does it only to illustrate the walking. Otherwise, the only extreme close-ups of the women are their eyes, which increases identity to look directly into the eyes of a character.

The types of shots used are also very significant. There are a wide variety of shots used in the film. There are many close ups of Tameryn. Robert M. Entman states, 'Close-ups are a mechanism for "focalization," for concentrating the audience's attention and identification...' (Entman, 2000;186). The close-ups are meant to bring the audience close to her. It allows the audience to enter her space at an intimate level. Several extreme close-ups of her exist and one of Moses. There are also several point of view shots where the audience experiences brief moments through Tameryn's eyes. The audience then identifies more closely with this character. There are several shots that have a long depth of field whereas Moses or another character are in front of the image but the scenery way behind him is clear. This makes certain that you don't forget the area that person is in since location is a big part of the film. The scene between Brandon and Moses on the Jammie stairs is purposely shot with a long depth of field. It reveals how the school sits up looking down over the city. The school is separated from the city. It is shot with much open space while the shots in the township tend to be more small and confined. These choices illustrate the construct of these locations by the filmmaker that then get projected onto the audience. Another scene on the stairs with Tameryn first shows a wide shot of the many stairs which is meant to be intimidating as Moses in a difficult situation, moves to talk to Tameryn.

Editing

Where the language falls short of capturing the authenticity of the area, the filmmaker hopes to make up for it through the music. The majority of the music in the film is done by two local artists. These artists are also from the township and one is also an actor in the film. This brings a touch of local flavour and allows free expression and greater input from individuals whose images are actually being portrayed on film. The songs are about the issues and experiences that the artists have within the township. They are also supposed to be a form of upliftment. The songs bring attention to the issues. One song is titled *Vukas'bali*, which means wake up brother. The song advises people to choose the right path instead of allowing themselves to be involved with negative activities. The song plays at a moment when Moses warns his brother about hanging out with the wrong crowd. Another song in the film *Ubomi*, encourages people to follow their dreams. It plays toward the conclusion of the film. There is also a song sung in the film by one of the young women. It is a hymn *I Don't Feel No Ways Tired*. The song states that the road has been traveled too far to turn back now, or to give up. The music of the film assists with the film's theme of perseverance. The music is not used, however, as a means to render the audience passive. The film does not contain soft music under scenes to heighten the emotion or add to the pace to the film. This relates the fact that escapism is not an intended focus of the film.

Individual opinions of the ghettos from people that live there are also edited into snippets throughout the film. It forces the viewer to take a step back from the story and hear some truths about the actual ghetto directly from the inhabitants rather than just the filmic representation. This allows the

filmmaker to capitalize on the fact that the film is an independent feature in order to introduce to the narrative an aid toward better representations, which is actual representation. However, which snippets are chosen is still the decision of the filmmaker which means it still caters to her point of view, however unassuming or well intentioned those choices may be. It supports some area she felt was important to present. Yet the words and opinions articulated still come from the inhabitants. The snippets add authenticity to the film as they often act as a confirmation of what is happening in the film. They also add a further element of explanation to that which the audience is viewing. It renders more control in the interpretation of the film.

The pace of the film is designed to keep interest and still divulge all of the information that the filmmaker wishes to convey. The grading inside the homes is meant to give a warm feeling with more yellow lighting and tint. The scenes outside but within the ghetto are more colourful and bold. The ones at the school tend to be brighter. This is meant to stress the safe, serene, sheltered world of the University versus the edgy, busy ghetto with its many issues and exposures. It also contrasts a more boring University environment against a more vibrant township environment. It is bringing out the natural colours of the locations as the townships have colorful homes and walls while the school buildings are neutral.

III. Film Analysis

The success of the film- which set out with well intentions to create a platform to confront social issues and provide empowerment- can only be determined by an analysis of the final work. It should reveal the issues explored in the film and the messages the film conveys concerning them. It should also show the advantages and setbacks for the filmmaker to place the feature in the ghettos. It should uncover which problems and complications of representation were overcome, which still proved to be a hindrance, and whether or not the filmmaker could have avoided them. It may also help clarify what benefits if any arise from the use of the ghetto as a location. Then it will help either support or negate the filmmaker's claims that the location is an effective method of creating diverse counter hegemonic depictions of black people. Exploring the representations throughout the film of the ghettos and the residents of these ghettos reveals these and the ideologies of the filmmaker expressed within the text.

Depiction of the Ghetto

The depiction of the ghetto in the film is diverse, almost ambiguous or contradictory. In the beginning, the ghetto is shown as a dirty unkempt place. The main character is seen walking through rubbish at the side of the street. She walks through the rubbish on a pathway surrounded by overgrown weeds. The camera shots are at times shaky handhelds, giving a raw edge to the images. Then as Tameryn stops and waits for a taxi, she is in a neat place. The mountain can be seen in the background. She has not left Ravensmead yet, but this image contradicts with the earlier sequence. It is as if she has walked to a

nicer part of Ravensmead. The taxi ride reveals more of the area. The ghetto is seen from a more impersonal view as with a voyeuristic eye. However, the shots are point of view shots enabling the audience to see through Tameryn's eyes.

This ambiguous inside, outside depiction view of the ghetto continues throughout the film. The ghetto can appear as merely a backdrop, as many close-ups bring the viewer up close to the characters, limiting the visual of the township. Most of the film, the characters are framed foreground and the area is merely a distant barely visible background or backdrop. Occasionally the camera will remind the viewer that the scene takes place in the ghetto. Yet it is not continuously explicitly proving this fact by showing long pans of shacks and barefoot children. This reinforces the fact that this area is the norm, not the extraordinary for the characters. They know where they are as it often imposes itself on them but they carry on with their daily lives and relationships as anyone else does.

The negative aspect of this is that the ghetto does have many makeshift shelters and underprivileged children. A long pan may highlight these social concerns. The choice the filmmaker makes to limit these images may be considered a sugarcoated version of the ghetto. It may be seen as inauthentic because it does not reflect the serious deprivation of the ghetto. This may be the case despite the fact that the film shooting actually takes place on location in the ghetto.

Likewise, images such as the ones of the shacks and the barefoot children may alternatively be viewed as irresponsible and exploitative. Such images contribute to the stereotype of the starving African children. It's not to say that some children are not suffering but to what means do we commercialize their suffering. At the children's home where the filmmaker volunteers, they have adopted a rule that no one can take a picture of a child that they do not know. That eliminates the desire some people have to simply take random pictures for the sake of the gaze. The pictures permitted are then taken of the person, not the icon. Simply put, the characters in the story and the story itself did not warrant the excessive use of such images. After revealing that the shacks exist in establishing the township setting, they are not really included in the further depiction of the ghetto. Perhaps it is a weakness in the story not to include them more, as they are a reality of the township where a large number of marginalized people reside.

Another way the ghetto is represented ambiguously is as both a place of danger and a place of hope. In the morning when Tameryn leaves, it is illustrated as a different place than the ghetto of the night, when she returns. The ghetto is depicted as an extremely dangerous place for women. During the day, it was okay for Tameryn to walk alone. No harm comes to her. There is a sense of ownership. A critic mentions that power and possession regarding the walk in the beginning of *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* (Singleton, 1990). She writes, "...the long sequence with the opening credits shows Chantal traveling across town...there is a sense of ownership, articulation, and visibility." (Mahoney, 1997). In the beginning, Tameryn walks freely. At night, in the shadows, men are waiting to attack her. This implies

that there are men at night in the townships that stalk about with the intention of sexually abusing helpless women. Argument may arise that this is an extreme situation rather than an everyday occurrence such as the discovery of the dead body or the morning walk through the crime scene before school in *Boyz N the Hood* (Singleton, 1990). Just including these images in the film representation may impose upon the imagination of the spectator that it is a normal occurrence, especially the manner in which it is treated by the character. Tameryn gets over the initial shock and trauma and simply moves on from the experience. At the same time that this may be an extreme case, it is not an unlikely one. The scene itself is based off of a true scenario that happened to one of the actresses. Rape is a huge problem in South Africa and people go missing in the Townships. Girls are not safe walking by themselves at night. This is illustrated in that dramatic scene. The ghetto can be both a place of acquaintance and surprise. Many interviewees mention the constant fear that is underlying but not always visible.

The ghetto is also depicted as a place of hope in the film. The film shows the areas as redeemable and reclaimable. There is a scene where Moses plays football (or soccer for the American) with his brother Vuyani in the street. This is the same street where he fought with Wanda. Now it's a place of bonding. It no longer seems a threat or an encumbrance. It is the place where there is construction happening. Moses shows Tameryn the different space where memorable events happened in his life. There are positive and negative accounts but the space is mainly revealed as neutral. Moses even creates a new space of memory between him and Tameryn. It gives the impression that the townships are in transition. There is a propensity for both positive and negative space now. Likewise, Tameryn builds a place of safety for women. By the end of the film, her strides are strong as she walks to her project. The reclamation becomes visible.

The ghetto is represented as a home of heroes and a hub of villains. Different characters exist within it. However, a slight dichotomy surfaces which appears to give power and privilege to these individuals that have pursued higher education. It is almost as if they are the hope of the other members of their communities. In reality, the other members of their community have helped and supported the educated a great deal. There is one scene where Moses acknowledges how lucky he is to have his father even though his father is not the traditional financial supplier of the household. Tameryn likewise recognizes that without the sacrifices of her mother, she would not have been able to pursue her education.

There is an ethics involved when dealing with characters. There is the constant battle to depict the true negative aspects of the area without grasping onto to the past problematic depictions. Ghettos are areas that do have serious social issues. Yet it is only one, albeit large aspect of living there. The balance is attempted in this film to show both negative and positive characteristics of the area. Yet the manner in which it is done determines whether it reinforces historically disparaging codes. The character of Wanda

is a criminal and a gangster. It is never fully revealed what he does. There are no guns, no drugs shown in his possession. These are items not shown in the film. This also questions authenticity. Guns can be a frequent sight in ghettos. In fact, while picking up an actor for a shoot from Gugulethu, the filmmaker heard gunshots and witnessed a man running away with a literally smoking gun. What does this absence of guns say about the film? Guns are so often associated with the criminal that it is actually implied that even though the gun is not seen, the danger is there. Wanda is first seen as he pretends to be robbing Moses. It is not explicit that this is what he does normally. However, Moses mentions later that Wanda robs the people in his own community that once helped him. Moses tells Wanda that he is not surviving but has given up. Crime is thereby portrayed as an inferior option. Wanda signifies the road that the youth like Moses' brother should not choose.

Wanda and other negative characters are not really explored in the film. Sam, Tameryn's brother is another character that is not shown as having a redemptive side. At least his character is not redeemed in the story. This may cause male viewers to dislike male representation in the film. Many of the men in the film are minor characters, which does not allow them to be shown in depth. The violent animalistic man may be implied with Sam. Moses can be viewed as the more domesticated man that cooks for his woman. These can be problematic interpretations based on the filmic portrayals. What was meant to empower the women and subvert male/female roles in the lovely dinner scene can be read as something that is never intended. Yet Moses is illustrated in no ways as effeminate or threatened by Tameryn's dominant attitude. They meet somewhere in the middle where mutual respect lies. It is Shane who is supposed to reveal the other side of Sam. Shane is not merely a monster but a person with a problem. The film *Hijack Stories* (Schmitz, 2002), shows the same characters which embody the stereotype (but that of the criminal gangster and female deviant) but it also gives them more depth. It reveals that they exist at a superficial level but deeper, there is more. *Mile in my Shoes* at least gives this impression though not as explicitly as Schmitz. Through the representations in *Mile in My Shoes*, deviant girl is more than a sex crazed nymphomaniac but a young girl that made a mistake. The criminal is more than an immoral being but a person who once victimized, became the victimizer. The abusive man is a person that needs to learn how to deal his anger. A manner in which the film reveals this is that it allows the audience to meet the character before it reveals which role they play in the film. That is the case with Shane and Wanda.

The characters that are going to be redeemed such as Vuyani, Thembani, and Thandeka are not shown to the audience significantly before their issues. In the same scenes where these characters are introduced, their problematic behaviour or situation is revealed. These characters are all young individuals. They grow throughout the story. In the story, their youth does not excuse their mistakes. Moses tells Tameryn how they are not afforded that privilege in his community. The choices they make have large repercussions. Thandeka is college minded until she ends up pregnant. However, she does the

responsible action and decides to keep the baby. These reveal a possible ideology about abortion. Tameryn reminds Thandeka that she doesn't know whom her baby can grow up to be. Thandeka also tells Them bani that they made a mistake by having sex even though they are in love. It shows that she understands her behaviour has consequences and shows remorse for acting irresponsibly. A portion of her innocence is revealed in the scene where she places a pillow under her garment to see how she will look when she is fully showing. She admits to Tameryn that she is scared. Thandeka does not fall into the category of the deviant girl because she is not portrayed that way. It is the issue highlighted, not the immorality of the person.

Them bani is another character that is redeemed. When he first finds out that Thandeka is pregnant, he walks away from her and the situation. He is in danger of repeating the cycle of abandonment that he later reveals his own father commit. At first he appears as the concerned boyfriend but when Thandeka tells him the truth, he reacts the same way she feared that he would. He walks by her in another scene, makes eyes contact but then turns and keeps walking. This reinforces the idea that he is not willing to face responsibility. Later, however, he comes and shows her support. He also reveals to Moses that he is scared. Moses assures him that it's enough that he is there. This reveals another ideological view of the film that stresses the importance of the presence of the male and the father.

Vuyani is a male character that is in danger of heading down the wrong path. At first he is shown as the innocent, stubborn boy being led astray. When Moses tries to talk to him, he turns a deaf ear. He is more prone to listen to Wanda than Moses who is never around. This also supports the importance of the presence of the male figure. However, Moses spends more time at home and even stands up to Wanda in front of Vuyani. Though Moses loses the fight, he wins the war as Vuyani sees the truth behind his new gang of friends. Vuyani tells Moses that he no longer hangs out with them. He sits and actually listens to Moses whereas before he disliked being instructed. Vuyani is evidence that the youth of South Africa are redeemable. It stresses that they need to see by example how to behave and succeed. It also reveals that the youth are in danger as they could also choose the wrong road based on influences. Because Wanda was behaving like more of a big brother to Vuyani than Moses, he almost chose the wrong path. It was Moses teaching him through taking a stand to keep Vuyani away from such influences and the subsequent time Moses invested with him that makes Vuyani's future appear more hopeful. Shane is somewhat redeemed toward the end of the film as he pours out his alcohol revealing a possibility of change. This only happens after Charmaine stands up to him. She didn't do it alone but with the knowledge that she could get the help and support that she needed. The film reveals that women that are abused need support to overcome. It shows that they are not alone and can seek help that may be available as Mrs. Vann demonstrates through her story. These stories within the film are still left open because the audience hopes that they have happy endings but there is no saying what will become of these characters as time

passes. This is a deliberate intention of the story. It leaves open the possibility as a metaphor for the ghetto and where it is heading especially in the context of South Africa. Unlike other films, it does not condemn the ghetto or its inhabitants but presents it as a difficult place with redeeming qualities.

It is also important to investigate the rendering of the female characters on film. In the past, females have been portrayed negatively in many 'hood' genre films. Ross enlightens, '...women are routinely abused, both physically and verbally and rarely emerge as credible or creditable characters.' (Ross, 1996;74). The women in the film project are shown in a process of reclaiming power. The women are not promiscuous. They are all in monogamous relationships and only one female character has sex outside of marriage. This character confesses that she has only been intimate with one guy. The women are also not shown to be undeserving of respect. Tameryn is trying to win over her past. In the past, she was a victim of domestic abuse. Now she takes a stand against it and tries to bring the other women in the community to a place of victory over it. Tameryn's mother, Taryn, was abused. She wants to forget about what happened in the past. The story favours Tameryn's way of handling the past better than her mothers. The film places the notion of forgetting the past beneath the better option of facing it and transforming it for good. Tameryn uses what she has been through to uplift others that are going through the same. Her mother finds shame in her past. Tameryn does not allow shame, yet she has to forgive in order to move forward with her future.

Parents are revealed to be key elements in the story. The parents play large roles in the lives of the two main characters. Moses' mother, however, is virtually unseen and barely referred to throughout the film. She is mentioned as working. It is his relationship with his father that takes center stage. Moses wants to please his father and appreciates his role in the family. Moses' father encourages his son not to be like him, unable to provide financially for his family. This is an issue in the township as very many fathers have abandoned their families and others are not able to provide due to the large unemployment rate. The traditional role of the father as provider has been replaced as other members have become the breadwinners such as the wives and even the children. This causes issues of self-esteem among the men such as that that is displayed through the father in the film. He drives Moses' desire to leave the township for better opportunities. The absence of the mother undermines her importance as a member of the family and an influence on Moses' life. There is instead a focus on the balance between the father being an unemployed man and a honourable father within the film.

Tameryn's mother is shown but not her father in the film. This helps display the role of the mother, which is neglected in the portrayal of Moses' family. Tameryn's father does exist in the story, as he was an abuser of her and her mother. Tameryn and her mother's relationship is strained because Tameryn is very much her own person. She doesn't respect the wishes of her mother to stop bringing awareness to the woman abuse issue. It creates a strong tear in their family. Tameryn tries very hard not

to become her mother. Her mother also encourages her not to end up that way by making sure that she is wary of men. Tameryn does acknowledge that her mother sacrifices a great deal for her.

Power Relations

Power relations are depicted throughout the film. Tameryn is shown to be powerful and powerless. The township is the same place where Tameryn is nearly raped and her best friend beaten. Tameryn therefore has limited power. It is an aim for her to provide more power to the women in the community. She gains more power in the film as she begins to create change and the women unite. She influences Charmaine to stand up against Shane. Shane although physically powerful as evident in the bruises he inflicts on his wife, is revealed to be rather weak as he is controlled by his consumption of alcohol. Shane takes back some authority when he pours the alcohol out near the end of the film.

Wanda has a great deal of power as the criminal. He manhandles Moses and does as he pleases within the story. Since his gang members follow him, he is a person of influence. Yet although Wanda has more power within the township, Moses has more options outside of the township. Moses possesses the power to overcome the circumstances. In the end, Moses still shows strength by standing up to Wanda and winning the respect of his brother.

Overall Message

The catchphrase of the movie is every man must choose for himself. This refers to how the characters will survive the ghetto. Moses chooses to do this by leaving the ghetto to gain peace of mind and follow his dreams outside of the township's restrictions. Tameryn decides to stay and impact change within the ghetto. That is how she plans to survive, by reclaiming the area. The film infers that not every person can tolerate both choices of survival but rather one choice is more suited to particular individuals. This is a concern of upward mobility. What then happens to those that are left behind in these ghettos? Should the person that has the opportunity to leave be obligated to stay? In this way the film remarks that it is the job of the individual to determine his or her own method of survival. This is not meant to overshadow the social impacts of their surroundings, many of which are addressed in the film. The message is rather that there is no clear answer as to what individuals must do- whether they must stay or go. The film reiterates that only privileged individuals even have the choice. Yet the film is meant to encourage the individuals that are from the areas. It encourages young people that cannot tolerate the area to work hard and go to school so that they may have the autonomy to leave as Moses does. The story is also meant to empower those that for whatever reason or another do not or cannot leave. Tameryn's story reveals that change is possible and the area is redeemable.

Conclusion

As the film content has begun to change in South Africa due to the leading of the nation by a democratically elected African National Congress instead of the oppressive apartheid regime, film has

seen the surge of the 'hood' film (Maingard, 2007;178). This has opened an opportunity for filmmakers to present contemporary issues facing inhabitants of marginalized areas as was once restricted in film. It is the hope of this filmmaker that they will learn from past mistakes in South African and American film what not to repeat and from cinematic successes what is good toward accomplishing this goal. The South African film industry, like the American film industry has an opportunity to transform negative representations. It is important to realize that these character types behave in relation to one another on the screen and especially with the social realities of oppressive hegemonic discourse context. The primary intention of this particular film project was to achieve a cinematic portrayal of a ghetto, which reveals black characters as normal, non- exotic characters containing and confronting real concerns in a contemporary setting, and possessing a future hope. This goal is achieved in many ways in *Mile in My Shoes*. The film is set in a contemporary era and the problems that arise are issues that actually face many of the inhabitants of the ghetto. A weakness of the film is that it tries to tackle many issues at once. The result is that many topics are not heavily explored but lightly treaded upon. However, there are distinct messages of encouragement and warning. The film warns young people not to get distracted by sex or gangsterism in the pursuit of their dreams. The film also encourages adults to not settle for oppressive situations but work toward bringing change to their circumstances and their area.

The characters in the film are not outlandish. They are diverse and have strengths that correspond with their weaknesses. For instance, Tameryn is strong minded. This leads Moses and many in her class to believe she is evil and unrelenting. Yet this strong mindedness is what helps her press on regardless of the many oppressive words of those around her. Her mother tells her to give up school and get a job but she will not. Her stubbornness is both a blessing and curse in her life. However, there are certain characters like Sam and Wanda that are not given redemption within the stories. Sam in particular appears rather one-dimensional. In the attempt to not elevate gangsters and other villains the filmmaker did not allow them be not explored enough. The focus of the story is instead on relatively 'good' characters. In order to show social issues, have to risk stereotypes. However, the story itself is not about it and creates multiple characters like Michaeux. These many representations help against stereotypes but do not defeat them altogether within the film. In the end the film does attempt and mostly succeeds in conveying that there is no specific man like the racist. Rather there are the problems such as racism, gangsterism, alcoholism, and teenage pregnancy.

The second ambition is to create a realistic illustration of the ghetto to which black South Africans from these areas can relate and identify while still maintaining the interest and entertainment value for a wide audience. This identity factor is difficult to measure. It is a subjective occurrence that is only realized by the viewers. An issue with a representation of the ghetto may be that the film does not show explicit scenes of the abuse it confronts. Shane is never seen hitting Charmaine. This may also be

strength, as the film doesn't demote violence by filling the film with it. Audience members may have found this to be less entertaining as films especially in the 'hood' film genre generally contain murderous scenes. Even the fight that Moses enters with Wanda isn't much of a fight. This may alter how realistic the film is received. However, the depiction is a reality based one and as the film states, the ghetto is relative. People may identify more with the ghetto in this film than in many others where there is only constant death and decay. The ghetto is successfully illustrated as a place that is not static.

The third objective is to create the dialogue where filmmakers from both South Africa and the United States can draw on each other's experiences in filmmaking and work to build upon representations of black people in film. The intention is not to suggest that South African films be confined as shadows or imitations of black American films. It is not to create a definitive method of how to make a 'hood' film. Balancing the objectives above, the project seeks to create a film that confronts issues of importance through the use of the ghetto as a setting in film, on both a practical and theoretical level. It likens the South African township to the American ghetto merely in the terms of combating negative racial representation. It is now up to future filmmakers to continue the dialogue. Hopefully together we can see the ghetto as a setting in film as an advantage toward finding a cinematic platform to address issues of concern to still marginalized people.

Bibliography

Books

- Balseiro, Isabel & Masilela, Ntongela (eds.). (2003). *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*. Michigan: Wayne State University Press.
- bell Hooks. (1996). *Reel to Real: Race and Sex at the Movies*. New York: Routledge.
- Bobo, Jacqueline (ed.). (1998). *Black Women Film and Video Artists*. New York: Routledge.
- Botha, Martin & van Aswegen, Adri. (1992). *Images of South Africa: The Rise of the Alternative Film*. Pretoria: Sigma Press.
- de B'beri, Boulou Ebanda. (2006). *Mapping Alternative Expressions of Blackness in Cinema*. Bayreuth Germany: Pia Thielmann & Eckhard Brietinger.
- Entman, Robert M & Rojecki, Andrew. (2000). *The Black Image in the White Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Diawara, Manthia. (1993). *Black American Cinema: The New Realism*. New York: Routledge.
- Gianetti, Louis. (2005). *Understanding Movies*, 10th ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.
- Gillespie, Marie & Tonybee, Jason. (2006). *Analyzing Media Texts*. England: Open University Press.
- Guerrero, Ed. (2001). *Do the Right Thing*. London: British Film Institute.
- Lott, Tommy L. (1997). 'Aesthetics and Politics in Contemporary Black Film Theory' in *Film Theory and Philosophy*. Allen, Richard & Smith, Murray. Oxford University Press.
- Maingard, Jacqueline. (2007). *South African National Cinema*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Mahoney, Elizabeth. (1997) 'The People in Parenthesis: Space Under Pressure in the Post Modern City' in *The Cinematic City*. David B. Clarke. London: Routledge.
- McKean, Erin. (ed). (2005). *The New Oxford American Dictionary, Second Edition*. Oxford University Press.
- McKee, Robert. (1997). *Story*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
- Rehahn, Eleanor. (2006). *Narrative in Film and TV: A Teacher's Guide*. Auteur Publishing.
- Reid, Mark A. (1997). *Spike Lee's Do the Right Thing*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Ross, Karen. (1996). *Black and White Media: Black Images in Popular Film and Television*. Polity Press.
- Smith, Valerie. (1997). *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Tomaselli, Keyan. (2006). *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinemas* Netherlands: Rozenburg Publishers.

Websites

Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. 22 Jul. 2004. Wikimedia Foundation. 10 Aug. 2004
<<http://en.wikipedia.org>>.

Article

Massood, Paula J. (1996). "Mapping the Hood" *Cinema Journal* 35 No. 2 p85-97.

Regester, Charlene. (1995). "The Misreading and rereading of African American Filmmaker Oscar Micheaux: A Critical Review of Micheaux Scholarship" *Film History* Vol 7, No. 4 pp 426-449.

Unpublished Papers

Ward, Karla. 2007. "Cinematic Portrayals of Survival in the Ghettos of South Africa and the United States: A Comparative Analysis." University of Cape Town.

Films

Dickerson, Ernest. (1992). *Juice*. Paramount Pictures.

Gray, Gary F. (1996). *Set It Off*. New Line Cinemas.

Griffith, Dwight W. (1915). *Birth of a Nation*. Epoch Film Co.

Griffith, Dwight W. (1908). *A Zulus Heart*. American Mutoscope and Biography Company.

Hood, Gavin. (2006). *Tsotsi*. Miramax Films.

Materra, Teddy. (2004). *Max and Mona*. Ice Media.

Rich, Matty. (2004). *Straight Outta Brooklyn*. American Playhouse.

Schmitz, Oliver. (1988). *Mapantsula*. One Look Productions.

Schmitz, Oliver. (2000). *Hijack Stories*. Black Forest Films.

Schumacher, Joel. (1996) *A Time to Kill*. Regency Enterprises.

Singleton, John. (1991). *Boyz N the Hood*. Columbia Pictures.

Singleton, John. (1993). *Poetic Justice*. Columbia Pictures.

Wa Luruli, Ntshaveni. (2004). *The Wooden Camera*. Odelion.