Once Upon a Time in the Veld:
South African Westerns in Context

by

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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.

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Abstract

Historically westerns have been one of the most popular film genres in South Africa but very few features have been produced locally. In addition, the few productions that exist have not received significant attention from researchers and scholars. Thus, this study aims to contribute to South African film research by contextualizing the origin, content and distribution of western genre films conceived and produced by South African filmmakers and companies. It does so by exploring two avenues of inquiry that are intrinsically connected. First, by establishing these films' historical background in relation to the development of the South African film industry and the evolution of the western genre as a whole; and second, by determining how, or if South African ideology and culture have influenced the narrative and aesthetic structure of such films by comparison and contrast with established conventions of the genre's corpus.

The study ultimately argues that, despite their popularity westerns have not been a major influence in the development of the South African film industry due to nationalist and ideological discourses that stifled the genre's growth in country, relegating it to a marginal position. The study also concludes that the narrative and aesthetic structure of all South African westerns reveal larger socio-political trends at work during their inception. In this way they function as indirect chronicles of the country's history and its relation to the world, alluding to cultural norms, popular beliefs and governmental mindsets. As such, their importance lies not in their outstanding contributions to the canon of South African production, but instead as examples of experiments in the negotiation and adaptation of national ideology, or a critique of it, utilizing cinematographic tropes.

Introduction

The western appeared in South Africa almost, if not at the same time, as cinema itself. When the first kinetoscope machine developed by Thomas Edison premiered in Johannesburg in April of 1895,[1] the *Standard and Digger*s' *News* newspaper "confirm[ed] that cowboy images were among the earliest moving pictures to appear in Africa."[2] According to Glenn Reynolds, in the following two decades the genre's popularity grew quite quickly, with "distributors... import[ing] six-shooter thrillers exclusively for the ocular pleasures of white settlers and colonial officials."[3] The genre's influence was such that, in retrospective analysis James Burns concluded "no product of Western culture could challenge the popularity of the cowboy in the waning decades of the colonial era."[4]

Yet, despite almost six decades of popularity in South Africa westerns only began to be produced locally after their prominence had declined significantly in the early 1960s, and ever since features have been few and far in between. Most productions took place in clusters of activity during shorter periods spread over decades, such as Peter Henkel's three productions between 1970 and 1973 and Tonie Van Der Merwe's all-black cast westerns shot in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, the westerns that do exist have received little attention from researchers and academics. While notable scholars such as Keyan G. Tomaselli and Martin Botha acknowledge the existence of these films and have mentioned them in passing, they have not been analysed both as individual examples of a cinematic genre or as products of the specific cultural and ideological landscape of South Africa.[5] The scholars that have concentrated on the western in their studies, such as James Burns and Glenn Reynolds, have focused on its popular appeal and spectatorship during the colonial era, excluding most post-1960s, locally produced films from their works.

Thus, this study seeks to contribute to South African film research by contextualizing the origin, content and distribution of western genre films conceived and produced by local filmmakers and companies.[6] It aims to do so by exploring two avenues of inquiry that are intrinsically connected. First,

1 Thelma Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa 1895-1940* (Cape Town: H. Timmins, 1972) 8.

2 Glenn Reynolds, "Playing cowboys and Africans: Hollywood and the cultural politics of African identity," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25, no. 3 (2005): 401.

3 Ibid., 401.

4 James Burns, "The Western in Colonial Southern Africa," in *The Western in the Global South,* eds. MaryEllen Higgins, Rita Keresztesi and Dayna Oscherwitz (London: Routledge, 2015), 17.

5 Tomaselli includes most of the westerns in the filmography of *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film* (London: Routledge, 1989) but does not discuss them in the body of the book; Botha also mentions a few westerns in the list of key features included in *South African Cinema 1896-2010* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), however no analysis is provided.

6 The distinction is minute but relevant, especially taking in consideration the globalized landscape of the film industry in

to establish these films' historical background in relation to the development of the South African film industry and the evolution of the western genre as a whole; and second, to determine how, or if South African ideology and culture have influenced the narrative and aesthetic structure of such films by comparison and contrast with established conventions of the genre's corpus. Based upon said guidelines, the study's ultimate intention is to situate South African westerns within the wider chronology of film production in the country, evince how social and political trends affected its development and provide a proper understanding of their significance and contributions to the South African film industry.

Setting parameters: The western genre

In order to establish a framework for analysis the western as a genre will be deconstructed into its most relevant components, so that upon the identification of its characteristics the reader can discern what South African westerns appropriated from the genre, aesthetically and/or narratively, and what they added to the generic corpus from their own specific cultural milieu. The breakdown of components and their significance in the classification of westerns will also clarify and substantiate claims attached to certain films in the study, which at first might seem to not meet basic requirements to be labeled a western, but upon scrutiny reveal stronger ties to the genre than to any other possible generic variation.

Since the purpose here is not to produce an in-depth analysis of the western, but rather assess and elaborate on its place and significance in South African film history, the following paragraphs will restrict their evaluation to arguments and concepts relevant to the matter at hand, as opposed to provide a thorough breakdown of genre theories and their applications to the western. The intention is not to define the genre in its entirety, but to build an analytical blueprint to identify and contextualize the selected filmography.[7]

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the new millennium and the increased internationalization of location shooting. The intention is to limit the study's scope to films it considers inherently South African, as opposed to any western that happens to have shot some of its scenes on South African soil or received technical support – but no artistic input – from local crew or assorted hired personnel.

7 The theories selected to support the thesis proposed by this study are all based or built on the works of previous researchers, including Robert Warshow, who was one of the first genre theorists to promote recurring patterns and audience expectations as inherent characteristics of genre, an approach emulated by Gruber decades later; Lawrence Alloway pioneered the idea of iconography as a means to recognize genre identity, the heart of Buscombe's approach; Rick Altman proposed studying genres as systems containing semantic elements (common traits such as sets, characters and attitudes) and syntactic elements (how these common traits interact to form a coherent whole), and Thomas Schatz hypothesized genre patterns and characteristics as a type of "grammar" used by film to communicate with the audience, both theories that contributed to Neale's concepts of "verisimilitude" and "transgression" as defining features of a genre. See Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (New

At its most basic level, the western has been defined as stories taking place from the aftermath of the American Civil War (1865) to the end of the 19th century, situated predominantly west of the Mississippi River and north of the Rio Grande, both locations which place the action completely within the borders of what is now the United States of America.[8] Its historical setting generates a number of expectations, iconographic and narrative signifiers that evoke the period in question and render its characters readily identifiable. In his assessment of the genre, Edward Buscombe highlighted the western's graphic aspects as the most important elements of its composition, for while storylines were likely to vary significantly, the western could not exist unless certain visual markers were on display. He went on to enumerate several persisting iconic elements, such as settings, "often outdoors... deserts, mountains, plains, woods... [or] special kinds of indoors: saloons, jails... ranch-houses, hotels, riverboats," and the specificities of the cowboy look, the "wide-brimmed hats, open-neck shirts with scarves, tight jeans... [and] the various tools of the trade, principally weapons, and of these, principally guns."[9] He also remarked that "all these things operate as formal elements. That is to say, the films are not 'about' them... [but] they provide a visual framework within which the story can be told."[10] While recognizing the role of iconography, Buscombe also admitted aesthetics were only part of the genre, not its full expression.

Around the same time that Buscombe was investigating the genre, pulp writer Frank Gruber observed that certain storylines re-occurred consistently in western films and writings, and proposed them as guidelines to analysis. His initial appraisal narrowed basic plots to seven categories, four of which are of interest to this study, as they cover almost all of the western films produced in South Africa. They are "The Ranch Story," relating the conflicts between small-time ranchers/farmers and cattle rustlers or landowners after their property; "The Outlaw Story," where robbers or ruffians disturb the peace through violence or other unlawful activities; "The Revenge Story," centred around one individual's quest to vindicate past wrongs, either against him or someone he knows; and "The Marshall Story," where a Sheriff must uphold the law against whoever threatens it.[11] Gruber's list is far

York: Atheneum: 1971); Lawrence Alloway, "Iconography and the Movies," *Movie* 7 (1963): 4-6; Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" and Thomas Schatz, "From Hollywood Genres: Film Genre and the Genre Film," both in *Film Theory and Criticism*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford U. Press, 2004).

8 Janet Walker, ed., *Western: Films Through History* (New York: American Film Institute, 2001): 1. John Kitses also limits the western to the same historical and geographical coordinates in "Authorship and Genre: Notes on the Western" in John Kitses and Gregg Rickman, *The Western Reader* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999). Both authors agree that the definition is not absolute and there are exceptions, in particular Mexico, which becomes a popular scenario of Revisionist and Spaghetti westerns in the 60s and 70s, but by and large it applies to the majority of western films.

9 Edward Buscombe, "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema," *Screen* 11, no. 2 (1970): 36.

10 Ibid., 38.

11 Frank Gruber, *The Pulp Jungle* (Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1967). Aside from the ones described in the body of

from comprehensive, but both Philip French and John Cawelti acknowledged the usefulness of it as a starting point to more comprehensive inquiries.[12]

Gruber's framework, along with Buscombe's assessment delimitated visual and narrative elements they considered integral to the genre, but their respective theories did not explain what was the precise function of these elements in the composition of the western as a genre. A possible answer to this question appeared in the 1980s in the work of Stephen Neale, who argued visual and narrative elements to be "systems of verisimilitude," putative qualities film audiences utilize as "means of recognition and understanding... a way of working out the significance of what is happening on the screen... why particular actions are taking place, why the characters are dressed the way they are [and] why they look, speak and behave the way they do."[13] The implication is that a genre acquires, over years of duplicating the same elements, a particular "look and feel" that not only allows for visual recognition but also offer a plausible explanation for the film's narrative developments. Neale's theories complemented Buscombe and Gruber's work, linking iconography and narrative patterns to audience recognition, which derives from reiterations developed organically over years of film history. More specifically, plots and icons reinforce verisimilitude, strengthening the link between repetition and conventions. They also contribute to the establishment of antecedents, for once the audience can identify the film's basic visual signifiers and plot line it is able to adjust expectations accordingly.

Finally Neale, along with Hans Robert and Ralph Cohen advocated that genres should be seen as processes rather than static sets of formulas and icons. "Each new genre film constitutes an addition to an existing generic corpus," explains Neale, "and involves a selection from the repertoire of generic elements available at any point in time. Some elements are included; others excluded." Neale also believes that "each new genre film tends to extend his repertoire, either adding a new element or by transgressing one of the old ones."[14] The theory goes a long way to explain not only genre evolution in general, but in the specific case of the western substantiates the variety of sub-genres that have spawned over the decades, from the singing cowboy variation of the 1930s and 1940s to the nihilistic Spaghetti westerns of the 1960s and 1970s, whose mercenary's attitudes contrasted with the heroic,

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this study, the remaining basic plots are: "The Union Pacific Story," which revolves around the construction of a railroad, telegraph line or stagecoach line; "The Empire Story," epic rags-to-riches tales of farming or oil entrepreneurs turned tycoons; and "The Cavalry and Indian Story," with settlers or soldiers engaging in battle with Native Americans over territory.

12 See Philip French, *Westerns, Aspect of a Movie Genre* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973), 17-18 and John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (Ohio: Bowling Green State U. Press, 1999), 19.

13 Stephen Neale, G*enre and Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 31.

14 Stephen Neale, "Questions of Genre" in *Film and Theory, an Anthology*, eds. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2000): 165.

noble values of the traditional Hollywood cowboy.

Iconography and transgressive elements are crucial concepts to validate the analysis of South African westerns proposed by this study. While a few of the films presented here abide by the historical and regional prerogatives stipulated above, setting their stories in American soil and featuring American characters, the majority of them take place in South Africa or in unspecified lands, concern local characters and are steeped in local ideological discourse. Based upon these characteristics, labels such as "historical drama" or perhaps "colonial adventure," a genre often associated with Africa, would seem more appropriate.[15]

However the iconographic quality and narrative structure of the films to be discussed fit no category better than the western, their verisimilitude to the conventions of the genre immediately leading audiences to associate them with a western above any other possible classification. These films do not present colonizers venturing into unknown African lands in search of riches as colonial adventures tend to, nor are they based on historical events or famous individuals, as it is the norm in historical dramas.[16] They are instead tales of heroic gunslingers facing off against outlaws in small dusty towns, of ranchers defending homesteads and lawmen restoring order with the fiery might of a six-shooter. Compelling generic congruence overshadows the geographical and cultural displacement of characters and settings, and the films' historical disparities can be reasoned as transgressions of the corpus, extending the genre's repertoire with the addition of new a sub-genre, the South African-based western, the traits and particularities of which are the main concern of this study.

Popularity during the colonial era

The western was a prevalent film genre in southern Africa during the first half of the 20th century. The genre's presence in the country and the attitudes of South Africans towards it elucidate why the western was so popular and also the reasons no western was made in the country before the 1960s. Although the previous statements seem to be at odds with each other, being that a beloved genre would be an enticing prospect for local companies wishing to produce lucrative films, the development of the South African film industry precluded such an outcome. A combination of racial and ideological prerogatives and major historical events colluded in this state of affairs, leading the western to become

15 See N. Frank Ukadike, "Western Film Images of Africa: Genealogy of an Ideological Formulation," *The Black Scholar* 2, no. 2 (1990) for a comprehensive breakdown of the imagery western audiences associated with African settings, which more often than not included, aside from a plethora or animals and black man dressed in leopard skins, adventurers *a la* Allan Quatermain and the ever popular noble wild man, Tarzan.

16 Neale, *Genre and Hollywood,* 235, 249.

a local favourite that was nevertheless avoided by local producers.

Westerns – and the bulk of films imported to the region – were primarily enjoyed by white audiences in the first decades of the 20th century.[17] "Cinemas for non-Europeans in Southern Africa were few and far in between before the 1930s," writes Burns, "[and] economics dictated that most movie houses catered to the relatively affluent [white] settler communities."[18] This situation was a result of British racial policies towards black South Africans, which systematically repressed, via discriminatory legislation, attempts by these groups to achieve upward social, economical and political mobility.[19] Policies included, but were not restricted to, paltry wages, land appropriation and overtaxation.

Albeit avid consumers of film fare, South Africans did not produce an abundance of pictures during the first few decades of the medium's existence. At first locals lacked the technical wherewithal to produce commercial quality products. And much like most other regions of the globe, the country's movie theatres, also known as "Picture Palaces" or "Bioscopes"[20] were well supplied with American and European films, mitigating the need for local productions.[21] Therefore in its first decades filmmaking was limited to newsreels – shot exclusively by British companies – which covered such events as the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and later short documentaries by various small producers. The first fiction feature film came only in 1910. Entitled *The Great Kimberley Diamond Robbery* (also known as *The Star of the South*) little is known about the film or its contents, except that it was received "without much fanfare"[22] and "inauspiciously"[23] by local audiences.

Within this cinematic landscape brimming with foreign productions, the western was king. As early as the 1910s the western "was the dominant film genre across the continent. To many Southern African people the western was synonymous with the movies," writes Burns, "and the cowboy was synonymous with Americans."[24] Cowboy films saturated local screening venues, especially a plethora of B-Westerns which were cheaper to purchase, their generic formulas seen as "an anodyne form of entertainment that pleased censors, distributors and audiences alike."[25]

17 Reynolds, "Playing Cowboys and Africans," 401.
18 Burns, "The Western in Colonial Southern Africa," 13.
19 "The Pre-Mandela Period: Colonial History of South Africa (1652-1917)." *South African History Online,* accessed July 15, 2015, http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/pre-mandela-period-colonial-history-south-africa-1652-1917.
20 Gutsche, *The History and Significance*, 27.
21 Keyan G. Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Production in South African Cinema" (PhD diss., University of Witwatersrand, 1983): 38.
22 Ibid., 94.
23 Gutsche, *The History and Significance*, 125.
24 Burns, "The Western in Colonial Southern Africa," 17.
25 Ibid., 17.

The ideological and political divide between the two prominent white factions of South Africa, the British and the Afrikaner, along with their alliances and disagreements is at the core of the development of the film industry in the country. In addition to centuries of animosity, contemporary relations were severely influenced by the events of the First Anglo-Boer War in 1880 and the Second Anglo-Boer War in 1902, the latter ending with British victory and the incorporation of Boer territories, formalized as the Union of South Africa in 1910.[26] From then on, British and Afrikaner populations co-existed under an unease alliance. The British possessed most of the economical and political power, and maintained an imperialist outlook, prioritizing expansion and the accumulation of capital. The Afrikaner, on the other hand, experienced a dire crisis, with segments of its population impoverished due to forced relocation and little influence on the political spheres of the colony. The status quo began to shift in the late 1910s, altering the film culture of South Africa and with it the history of the western in the country.

The first major relevant event was the onset of the First World War in 1914. The explosion of hostilities that engulfed Europe brought to a halt most major film studios in the continent and cut down production to a fraction of its pre-war years.[27] Moreover, Britain's involvement in the conflict hampered the distribution of films to the Union, the bulk of which came from British companies that saw the region, in Tomaselli's words, as a "dumping ground" for dated films already exhaustively screened in England.[28] The problem was compounded by the status granted to American films (provenience of the majority of westerns), which were now highly coveted, difficult to import and expensive to acquire.[29]

The most direct consequence of the predicament was a scarcity of new films. Bioscope theatres, which relied on the internecine competition[30] model of rapid turnovers and short-term profits, clamoured for new products, lest the audience would grow bored with reruns and withdrawn their support. Speculation became reality and the industry experienced a hard economical downturn by 1913.[31] "Independent enterprise with the inevitable internecine competition had finally been proved

26 See "South Africa War – British-South Africa history," *Encyclopædia Britannica,* last updated May 5, 2015, accessed August 01, 2015, http://global.britannica.com/event/South-African-War for a concise breakdown of the conflict.

27 Stuart Klawans, "How the First World War Changed Movies Forever," *New York Times*, November 19, 2000, accessed August 03, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/19/movies/film-how-the-first-world-war-changed-movies-forever.html.

28 Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Production," 41.

29 Keyan G. Tomaselli, *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinemas* (South Africa: UNISA Press, 2006): 126.

30 A basic model of market competition in which individual theaters would cater and compete for the same audience, as opposed to strategic alliances between theaters or programs targeted at specific audience groups (family-oriented shows, children's programing, etc.). See Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance*, 112-119.

31 Neil Parsons, "Investigating the Origins of *The Rose of Rhodesia,* Part I: African Film Productions," *Screening the Past*, last modified August 25, 2009, accessed July 21, 2015, http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/25/rose-

impracticable," writes Gutsche, and "[if] the many empty theatres were again to prove revenue-producing instead of wasted assets, this entire aspect of entertainment would have to be reorganized."[32] That meant not only a new business strategy, but also enticing prospective entrepreneurs willing to invest in both theatres and film production, since screening venues with no films would render the entire reorganization of the industry meaningless.

Among the entrepreneurs approached by the industry was I. W. Schlesinger, an American who found his fortune selling insurance, mortgages and loans in South Africa. A shrewd businessman, Schlesinger saw an golden opportunity to establish a foothold in a segment of the entertainment industry in straits, and proceeded to engage on a Bioscope acquisition spree, buying over 50 movie theatres in the next 7 years.[33] In 1913 he founded the African Theatres Trust (ATT) in order to combine all his assets under one company, and in the following years expanded the enterprise to include the African Films Trust (AFT, which handled distribution) and African Film Productions (AFP, in charge of film production). Schlesinger's rise to the top of the South African film industry was meteoric. By 1917 his company dominated distribution chains to his and the majority of movie theatres in the country and the surrounding regions,[34] in addition to accomplishing the remarkable feature of vertical integration, monopolizing production, distribution and exhibition.[35]

Eager to capitalize on his new enterprises Schlesinger initiated a wave of film productions between 1916 and 1922, releasing thirty-seven features during the period.[36] Among the first wave was Harold Shaw's notorious *De Voortrekkers*, also known in America and England as *Winning a Continent*, a landmark film that Jacqueline Maingard affirms "set the course for South Africa's national cinema for most of the twentieth century."[37] The epic retells the momentous historical event known as "The Great Trek," a mass exodus of Dutch farmers, also known as Boers, from the British Cape colonies towards the north and northeast of southern Africa in 1838. During their travels they encounter the Zulu king Dingaan, who at first welcomes the trekkers to his lands but eventually betrays them, culminating in the famous Battle of Blood River, where the Boers wage war against the Zulu army and win gloriously despite overwhelming odds.

De Voortrekkers is as close to a western as South Africa produced in the first 60 years of its

of-rhodesia/parsons-1.html.
32 Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance*, 117.
33 Ibid., 137.
34 Parsons, "Investigating the Origins of *The Rose of Rhodesia*."
35 Burns, "The Western in Colonial Southern Africa," 13.
36 Tomaselli, *Encountering Modernity*, 127.
37 Jacqueline Maingard, *South African National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2008):18.

film industry, but not quite one. Although upon release the international media did label it an African western and later said it to have inspired James Cruze's classic *The Covered Wagon* (1923),[38] the film has been more often associated with D. W. Griffith's historical epic *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Considered Griffith's masterpiece, the film depicts the ravages of the American Civil war and the abolition of slavery in the Southern states of the US, and promotes the genesis of the Ku Klux Klan as the salvation of the country from otherwise inevitable miscegenation and chaos. Shaw's film was almost immediately pronounced the South African equivalent by critics, who highlighted the abundance of white supremacist rhetoric both productions share.[39]

While *De Voortrekkers* overall structure, pioneers on a trail, resembles that of a western, its deviations and exotic local elements discourage such classification in favour of that of a colonial adventure, or a historical drama such as Griffith's. First and foremost there is no cowboy in Shaw's film, one of the most basic and important elements of the western. *The Covered Wagon's* backdrop might be a trek, but the film is very much centred on cowpuncher and ex-cavalry man Will Banion (J. Warren Kerrigan) and his brave attempt to get the pioneers to their destination. There is no such focus in *De Voortrekkers*, whose most prominent characters are trek leader Piet Retief (Dick Cruikshanks) a middle-aged man who is certainly no cowboy and dies halfway through the film, and the Zulu Sobuza (a black actor simply known as Goba), who betrays king Dingaan and converts to the white cause. In addition to the African setting, Zulu antagonists are icons primarily associated with the caricatured "dark continent" stories popularized in pulp magazines and novels such as *Tarzan* and *King Solomon's Mines.*[40] Thus the transgressive elements, to use Neale's term, are far stronger than those of the western's generic corpus, placing *De Voortrekkers* more comfortably into another cinematic category.

Similarities with *The Birth of a Nation* are more pronounced, especially regarding ideology, and that is where the importance of the *De Voortrekkers* lies, for the racial ethos it promotes will influence filmmaking in South Africa until the end of the colonial era and beyond. In conceptualizing his film, Griffith opted for depicting the "uncivilized" black masses of freed slaves as the harbingers of social unrest, as opposed to blaming the North states for the degradation of the white South. Likewise in *De Voortrekkers* Shaw shifted the cause for the trek from British colonial oppression, historically acknowledged as the main reason, to a simple desire by the Boer to settle northward, and blamed the

38 Parsons, "Investigating the Origins of *The Rose of Rhodesia*." However see Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Oklahoma: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1992): 253, for an alternative view, which claims Cruze's film was based on a novel by Emerson Hough.

39 Edwin Hees, "The Birth of a Nation – Contextualizing De Voortrekkers (1916)," in *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, eds. Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela (Detroit: Wayne U. Press, 2003): 60-61.

40 Ukadike, "Western Film Images of Africa," 33-35.

Zulu attacks on the savage, war-like nature of blacks and the machinations of Portuguese traders, a breed of European that both Afrikaners and the English disliked.[41]

The film's "historical license" also reflected the outlook of Schlesinger, who openly supported the political alliance between Britons and Afrikaners to the detriment of the black masses of the continent, who were perceived as a possible threat to white hegemony if not properly contained and subdued.[42] "Perhaps the overriding feature that the two films have in common," explains Hees in his analysis of the films, "is that they both use black people to represent the negative qualities against which whiteness and true civilization are defined."[43] In downplaying disagreements between whites in favour of a united front against blacks, *The Birth of a Nation* and *De Voortrekkers* function as ideological vessels, promoting white supremacy and black oppression as the building blocks of a new nation.

International commercial success was critical for Schlesinger, who banked on the box-office generated by *De Voortrekkers* to expand his operations worldwide and secure new revenue streams. The strategy worked and spurred by the film's success Schlesinger moved on to capitalize on the popularity of the colonial adventure genre, producing a lavish adaptation of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (Lucoque, 1918), which he expected to rival those of 'The famed Hollywood studios' from America.[44] He followed the trend with *Allan Quartermaine* (Lucoque, 1919) and *Isban Israel* (Albrecht, 1920), among others.

Observing that *De Voortrekkers* had galvanized the nationalistic fervour growing among Afrikaners around the country, Schlesinger also decided to invest on a string of jingoistic productions for the local market, beginning with the short *Sarie Marais* (Albrecht, 1931), South Africa's first sound film, and *Moedertjie* (Albrecht, 1931), the first Afrikaans language film.[45] Positive returns led to *Die Bou van 'n Nasie/They Built a Nation* (Albrecht, 1938) which exulted the efforts of British and Boer to transform South Africa into a country. The latter was released to coincide with the 100 years anniversary of the Great Trek and drew divisive reviews from critics, who believed that the film downplayed British contributions to the nation and inflated the accomplishments of the Afrikaners.[46]

41 Tomaselli, *Encountering Modernity*, 129. The original script, conceptualized by Afrikaner nationalist Gustav Preller, was reportedly much closer to historical accuracy and therefore less sympathetic to the British. The changes were made during pre-production by the director, likely at Schlesinger's request, seeing that Britain would be one of the film's most important overseas market.
42 Maingard, *South African National* Cinema, 20.
43 Hess, "The Birth of a Nation," 55.
44 Tomaselli, *Encountering* Modernity,136.
45 Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, 44.
46 Ibid., 57.

Around the same time a group of Afrikaner nationalists led by Dr. Hans Rompel founded the *Reddingsdaadbond Amateur Rolprent Organisasie* (RARO), an institution solely dedicated to create films that fostered Afrikaner nationalism. Its emotionally charged productions such as Rompel's *'n Nasie Hou Koers* (*A Nation keeps on course,* 1940) were designed to undermine British and American influence and exalt the Afrikaner way of life.[47] RARO was joined by several other Afrikaner companies such as Utolo and S.A. Rolprent Mts., all producing Afrikaans language films.

The beginning of the Second World War in 1942 turned British concerns away from the film business, and the Empire directed its resources to the war effort in Europe rather than productions in South Africa. Afrikaans cinema grew to dominate local production in the next few years, with no English-speaking films from 1939 until *Jim Comes to Jo'burg* in 1949.[48] In an attempt to foster the development of the industry and strengthen the status quo, the government instituted a regulated film subsidy system in 1956, in which producers received back a percentage of their costs based on box-office takings.[49] Simply labeled "A-Scheme," the subsidy is largely responsible for the existence of the westerns produced in South Africa, since most films of the genre were shot by independent filmmakers or small companies which would have struggled to secure investors without the subsidy shelter.

Nevertheless, none of these developments increased the popularity of westerns, and they gradually lost ground to colonial yarns and patriotic films. The association with America further limited the genre's appeal now that filmmaking practices in the country consistently veered towards local subjects and national pride. Foreign westerns still made the rounds at local Bioscopes, but a combination of over-saturation and new genres such as the noir and war films curbed the audience's enthusiasm. By the 1950s the western had lost its top billing among white audiences, with most of its runs at prestigious cinemas were restricted to Saturday afternoon matinees.[50]

The western and black audiences

In order to understand the western's rise to prominence with indigenous audiences some historical backtracking is needed, for the gradual waning of white audience's fondness for the genre was almost directly opposite to its increase in popularity with black mine and migrant workers. Initially, westerns were not readily accessible to non-white audiences. Already in 1900s South African

47 Botha, *South African* Cinema, 28-29.
48 Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Production," 477.
49 Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, 33.
50 Garth Jowett, "Apartheid and Socialization: Movie-Going in Cape Town, 1943-1958," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 26, no. 1 (2006): 12.

white intellectuals and policymakers grew concerned that allowing indigenous populations access to films without properly regulating and supervising viewership could bring undesirable results. Their concerns were strengthened by reports from foreign countries where film audiences reacted negatively to racial clashes of the screen, such as that of African Americans rioting in response to the outcome of the Johnson-Jeffries boxing match in 1910, which led local authorities to ban the film depicting the fight and call for immediate action to prevent a similar outcome in South Africa.[51]

The first wave of censorship laws were harsh on westerns. After intense debate by colonial officials and Afrikaner intelligentsia, the government of the Union took steps to restrict and control film production, distribution and exhibition to black and coloured audiences. It began by ratifying censorship ordinances in the Cape Province and forming the Bioscope Advisory Committee in in 1910 and 1913 respectively.[52] Its policies revolved around reducing the "'corrosive influence' of foreign films which were bound to show 'the least ennobling aspects of western culture'"[53] as well as censor pictures "likely to disturb the relations between white and black or to lower the prestige of the Europeans in the eyes of the native or to excite their passions."[54]

Within the censorship framework outlined above the western was one of the most scrutinized genres, since in its pre-Hollywood incarnation it contained, in addition to generous amounts of violence, sympathetic portrayals of native Americans.[55] This combination of racial tolerance and gunfights did not please colonial authorities, and the consistent exhibition of westerns to indigenous audiences only occurred after American missionaries such as Frederick Bridgman and Ray Phillips established film as one of the key components of their "civilizing mission" in South Africa.[56]

Phillips in particular was one of the pioneers in the dissemination of films to mining compounds during the 1920s. A member of the American Mission Board (AMB), he came to South Africa intent

51 Gutsche, *The History and Significance*, 108-109. After winning the heavyweight championship in Sydney in 1908, black boxer Jack Johnson returned to America to challenge undefeated white former champion James Jefrries. Johnson's victory led to a series of race riots across America, one of the worst episodes of racial violence in the history of the country.

52 Gainroonisa Paleker, "Creating a 'black film industry': State intervention and films for African audiences in South Africa, 1956-1990" (PhD diss., University of Cape Town, 2009): 32-33.

53 Ibid., 31.

54 Letter from the Secretary of Native Affairs, quoted in Paleker, "Creating a 'black film industry'," 41.

55 George N. Fenin and William K. Everson, *The Western – From Silents to the Seventies* (New York: Penguin, 1973): 32-33. Although the predominant image of the Native American in the classic western is that of a brutal antagonist, in the formative years of the medium's history the "Indian" was portrayed as a hero or symbol of nobility and courage. Most films depicting Indians at this early stage are love stories or tales of daily life. For example *The Red Man and the Child* (Griffith, 1908), depicts an Indian saving a white child. Similarly in the Pathé short *Justice of the Redskin* (1908), an Indian is falsely accused but eventually absolved of the murder or a white girl. For more comprehensive analysis see Larry Langman, *A Guide to Silent Westerns* (California: Greenwood, 1992).

56 Reynolds, "Playing Cowboys and Africans," 402.

on "'moralizing the leisure time' of urban Africans, specially migrants working in mining operations."[57] He believed that by providing miners with harmless practices like sports, he could preclude them from engaging in the unbecoming habits of drinking and violence. Film played an enormous part in Phillips' plans. While sports were able to keep workers distracted during daytime, nights were problematic. Without any activities to keep them busy, they flocked to local bars and ended up either binging, fighting or more likely a combination of the two. However the introduction of nightly screenings proved to be an effective solution, maintaining the crowds entertained and reducing both alcohol consumption and violent behaviour.[58]

Of the films shown in compounds, westerns were the most popular. Nicknamed "Jack films" by the black audiences, who would label the cowboy star as "Jack," "Lo-Jack" or "Jeke" regardless of what its name was, the genre's appeal quickly spread to black audiences elsewhere in the country.[59] "By the 1920s," writes Burns, "the western was firmly established as the genre of choice among African audiences."[60] Reynolds further illustrates the genre's influence, commenting on how black and coloured youth gangs revered westerns to the point of emulating their fashion and mannerism. "[gangs] began sporting the more benign accoutrements of the cowboy image: a colourful handkerchief tied around the neck, cowboy hat (or a homemade equivalent)... and pants tied just below the knee to imitate breeches."[61] The cult of the cowboy continued to grow among indigenous Africans, specially after the opening of Bioscope theatres catering exclusively to black and coloured audiences in the beginning of the 1930s.[62]

By the mid-1940's a split in cinematic preferences developed among black audiences, caused primarily by urbanization. New black intellectuals emerging in urban townships purposefully distanced themselves from cultural aspects they considered "impediments to the engine of African progress."[63] Modelled in part on the "New Negro"[64] promulgated by American intellectuals such as Langston

57 Paleker, "Creating a 'black film industry'," 33-34.
58 Ibid., p. 34.
59 Reynolds, "Playing Cowboys and Africans," 404. There is no clear origin for the "Jack film" phenomenon, but a number of researchers including Reynolds believe the label derives from either the actors Jack Holt or Jack Hoxie, whose films were staples of the mining circuit. Hoxie in particular played cowboy heroes called Jack no less than 22 times between 1921 and 1933. Regardless of the origin the label stuck, and according to Tonie Van Der Merwe, who produced and directed all-black cast westerns during the B-Scheme heydays, the label was still in common use well into the 1980s.
60 Burns, "The Western in Colonial Southern Africa," 14.
61 Reynolds, "Playing Cowboys and Africans," 401.
62 Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance*, 228-230.
63 Robert Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (London: Rutledge, 1994): 16.
64 A term coined in the 1920's by American black intellectuals. Strongly associated with the Harlem Renaissance, it implied a new ideal of citizenship for African Americans, who were cultured, politically aware and refused to abide to segregationist laws or racial discrimination. See Henry Gates and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds., *The New Negro: Readings*

Hughes, the African movement attempted to distance itself from its people's rural roots and tribal practices. The push included a certain disdain for westerns, considered rather childish and associated with the unsophisticated, "unemerged"[65] blacks from the homelands.[66] Instead they favoured modern, grittier Hollywood genres like gangster and noir films, the aesthetics and themes of which resonated with their current milieu and circumstances.[67]

Nevertheless, the western maintained its status as the most demanded of genre pictures everywhere other than urban centres. "More than twenty years of film exhibitions on the mine circuit," wrote Gutsche around 1948 "failed to cure the 'boys' of their affection for a mythical cowboy called 'Jack' (no matter what his real name) and his always-successful deeds of daring."[68] Schlesinger's AFT, which was responsible for supplying films for the mining circuit and the majority of itinerant film shows maintained a steady supply of westerns until the early 1960s, when the genre's preponderance began to decline.[69]

By the mid-1960s a combination of factors played a part in the genre's loss of prestige. Since coming to power in 1948 the apartheid government systematically amended its censorship laws with ever more restrictive measures, and in the mid-50s singled-out westerns as a mains target. For example, an announcement by the Censor Board in 1952 enumerated several instances where scenes would be removed from films or result in bans. Those included "capture and tying up of members of one racial group by those of another group," "deliberate murder at close quarters" and "all scenes where attacks are made or threats made with the aid of a knife"[70] Such examples were commonly found in western features, a trend that intensified in the following years with the generous amounts of violence encountered in the Revisionist and Spaghetti Westerns of the early 1960s to late 1970s, rendering most of those impossible to screen to African audiences.

The institution of a governmental film subsidy scheme for filmmakers to make films that catered to black audiences in 1973[71] further weakened the western's former dominance. With dozens of new films of the most diverse genres being released in vernacular languages every month, black

on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1982-1938 (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2007) for more information.

65 Term used by both black and white intellectuals to label uneducated blacks, mostly associated with rural dwellers and mine workers. See James Burns, *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Ohio: Ohio U. Press, 2002): 181-183.

66 Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, 35.

67 Ibid., 33.

68 Gutsche, *The History and Social* Significance, 60.

69 Burns, "The Western in Colonial Southern Africa," 16.

70 "Censorship of Films shown to Africans," *African Weekly*, Feb. 1952, quoted in Burns, *Flickering Shadows*, 154.

71 Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid,* 40.

audiences had now a bounty of films to choose from, including crime and action flicks with copious amounts of action and stories and dialogue in their native languages. Coupled with the worldwide decline of western productions, such factors effectively relegated the western to the fringes of the industry, where it remains still.

Researchers and observers have attempted to explain the phenomenal success of westerns with black audiences, and therefore a number of theories have been put forth. Colonial officials tended to believe, rather patronizingly, that black audiences enjoyed westerns because they could understand its physicality. The overwhelming majority of films hitting the mining circuits were in English, a language most indigenous Africans at the time did not speak nor could understand. Moreover, films destined to the compounds were "ruthlessly censored"[72] to the point of shredding their narratives and rendering it incomprehensible. "Cowboy films [are the] only popular ones, but they are not understood," said colonial official Stephen Peet in a letter, "[the] audience does not follow the story, but stops conversations, etc., to watch the screen whenever fights, chases, etc., crop up. Films judged by [sic] amount of general mayhem in the story."[73] His assessment resonates with the general consensus by white observers, who noted that other film genre's were much less successful and tended to yield bored looks and contempt from the audience.[74]

Anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker on the other hand, who spend years studying the living conditions of Africans in mining compounds, believed that indigenous audiences saw in the cowboy a symbol of resistance that recalled the heroes in folkloric tales. "The repetitive quality of the plot in cowboy films is not unlike the same in many African folk tales" she writes, "the brave hero, always on the side of the good people, fights hard, sometimes infatuates a girl, and always triumphs through his mainly strength."[75] She concluded that even though the cowboy was invariably white, he was not seem as British or Boer but recognized as American, and therefore different, from their oppressors: "The cowboy is white, but not European. Through identification with him, the African can fantasy, consciously or unconsciously, being as white as the dominant group and always winning over them."[76] Reynolds agrees with the anthropologist's assessment, adding that "the African underclass gleefully co-opted and emulated American cowboy machismo to subvert the authority of Boer settlers and British

72 Burns, "The Western in Colonial Southern Africa," 16.
73 Quoted in Burns, *Flickering Shadows*, 159.
74 See Reynolds, "Playing Cowboys and Africans," 409. The author relates an episode is which a screening of Zoltan Korda's *Cry the Beloved Country* (1951) was received extremely poorly by miners, who demanded "cowboys and not ministers."
75 Hortence Powdermaker, *Copper Town: Changing Africa – The Human Situation in the Rhodesian Copperbelt* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962): 261.
76 Ibid., 262.

officials."[77]

Although an absolute explanation for indigenous audiences' fondness for the western would demand a more thorough investigation, it is likely that Powdermaker's hypothesis, the result of years of careful ethnographic study, are somewhat closer to the truth that Peet's or most other colonial officials, who according to Burns usually based their conclusions of casual observations or conversations with camera/film technicians working in the compounds.[78]

The Hellions (1961)

Shortly before South Africa began to produce westerns the genre underwent radical transformations, both aesthetically and narratively. After a decade-long slump in the 1940s, Hollywood attempted to revive the genre with a string of Widescreen epics.[79] These massive productions, which included *The Big Sky* (Hawks, 1952), the 3-D experiment *Hondo* (Farrow, 1953) and the Oscar-winning *Broken Lance* (Dmytryk, 1954), were also a reaction to a disastrous crisis in the industry due to new Antitrust legislation and the rise of TV.[80] Diminished box-office returns and rising production costs led the major studios to restructure their production system, reducing output and investing on the television market. Among the casualties of the change were B-Westerns, which were now too expensive to produce and thus slowly faded away throughout the 1950s, making way for serialized TV programs.

South Africa contributed to the genre in 1961 with the help of one of its most famous filmmakers, Jamie Uys. After achieving remarkable success with independent productions like the comedy *50/50* (1952) and overseas recognition with *The Condemned Are Happy* (1956),[81] Uys was contacted by the production company Warwick Films. The English company offered Uys a deal to produce their upcoming feature, a western entitled *The Hellions.* Directed by Ken Annakin and starring Richard Todd along with Lionel Jeffries, Uys believed the film would be his ticket to an international career.[82]

77 Reynolds, "Playing Cowboys and Africans," 413.
78 Burns, *Flickering Shadows*, 155-159.
79 Fenin and Everson, *The Western*, 335-337.
80 Antitrust laws effectively ended Hollywood monopolies by breaking the vertical integration (production, distribution and exhibition) all major Hollywood studios enjoyed. The new laws also brought about the demise of the "B movie," cheap generic productions designed to fill the less prestigious slot in a "double bill" film screening, which was the norm before the 1950s. For more information see "Part 4: The Decline of Movie Culture" in Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Social History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975).
81 Outstanding Film of the Year at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1956.
82 Jan-Ad Stemmet, "Sangoma of the Silver Screen: Jamie Uys as Film Maker 19500-1964," *Ensovoort*, *Journal for Cultural Studies* (2015): 8.

Warwick's decision to invest in a western was most likely informed by the unexpected success of the British/American production *The Sheriff of Fractured Jaw*, a western comedy directed by Raoul Walsh in 1958. It starred Kenneth More and Jayne Mansfield and it was one of the very first westerns shot in Spain, which would become a hotbed of Spaghetti productions a few years later.[83] The pastiche is a variation of the "Ranch Story," with More as an English gun seller who comes to America and through a series of comic interludes becomes Sheriff of the small town of Fractured Jaw. As the law he must now intercede in an ongoing range war between locals with the help of the town's hotelier, played by Mansfield. The film made no waves in America but did surprisingly well in England, ending up as one of the country's top ten box office hits of 1958.[84]

The film's success, coupled with the dearth of new westerns being imported from America led European producers to bet on the genre, hoping to fill a gap on the market. Around the same time Warwick green lit *The Hellions* other westerns were on the way around the continent, such as the British/Spanish co-production *The Savage Guns* (Carreras, 1961) and the German *Treasure of the Silver Lake* (Reinl, 1962). The success of both endeavours would lead Cinnecitá Studios in Italy to invest in a few more western experiments in the early 60s, which culminated in Sergio Leone's *Dollar Trilogy* and the birth of the Spaghetti Western sub-genre, to be discussed in later sections.

The Hellions intermixes "Outlaw" and "Marshal" plot lines in a tepid narrative that follows classic B-Western formulas. A family of out-of-work miners turned outlaws, led by patriarch Luke Billings (Jeffries) invades the small town of De Wylt, causing havoc and pestering the citizens. Local law officer, Sgt. Hargis (Todd) requests the town's men to join him in rebuking the menaces. No one is willing to stand with him, and Hargis must decide between his honour and self-preservation, either upholding the law in what is likely a suicidal offensive or shirking his duties and abandoning the town. The overall story resembles that of Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952), where Gary Cooper plays a sheriff in the same situation as Hargis, drawing near to an impending showdown but unable to enlist deputies to aid him.

Different to Zinnemann's rather nihilistic film, *The Hellions* stays away from complex moral and ethical evaluations and sticks to a straight good vs. evil narrative, where bad guys have no

83 An estimate 500 Spaghetti Westerns were shot in the 1960s and 1970s, and the vast majority utilized the Spanish countryside as a backdrop. See Alex Cox, "Once upon a time in Almería," *The Guardian*, October 1, 2005, accessed July 13, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2005/oct/01/onlocationfilminspiredtravel.spain.guardiansaturdaytravelsection, and Jonathan Robbins, "Shooting First: Talking Spaghetti Westerns at the Italian Cultural Institute," *Film Comment,* June 14, 2012, accessed July 13, 2015, http://www.filmcomment.com/blog/shooting-first-talking-spaghetti-westerns-at-the-italian-cultural-institute/ for more information.

84 "Year of Profitable British Films." *Times* [London, England], 1 January 1960, p. 13.

redeeming qualities and justice prevails. Through most of the first half of the film the viewer is served plenty of reasons to dislike Billings and his offspring, who are portrayed vandalizing a local saloon, harassing women and drinking profusely. When bumbling shop owner Ernie Dobbs (Uys) accidentally kills one of Billing's sons, Hargis tells the terrified man to gather his family and skip town. As he flees Dobbs discovers that Billings' attempted to assault his wife Priss (Anne Aubrey), knowledge that fills him with enough rage and courage to return and join the Sargent in his offensive. The film ends with the entire town backing Hargis and all outlaws deceased.

The populist approach is a staple of classic westerns such as *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939) where a group of strangers from different class backgrounds crossing the desert on a coach bands together to overcome the travails of their journey, or *The Magnificent Seven* (Sturges, 1960) with its selfless heroes who unite to defend a poor community assailed by outlaws. *The Hellions* also contains a variation of a common plot device utilized by westerns to justify narrative reversals, that of the "good woman" who inspires or "straightens out" a character gone askew. As explained by Richard Slotkin, the device usually involves "an outlaw, gambler, or just a hard costumer – who finds redemption through the love of a good woman (or a pure young girl)".[85] The structure applies perfectly to Dobbs' storyline, who although a coward rather than a criminal still needed his wife's assault by Billings as incentive to find his guts and stand up for justice.

The Hellions did not make a substantial addition to the genre, but it is historically significance in its position as the first western produced in association with a South African company and shot in the country. It also sets a number of precedents that reoccur in local productions of the genre for decades to come. Its structure, blending classic elements with domestic divergences reflects the standard format of South African western productions during the 20th century. While visual and narrative variables obey conventions faithfully, the African setting and characters qualify as transgressive elements to the genre's corpus. However different from *De Voortrekkers*, here iconographic authenticity, traditional storytelling and plot devices offset the possible estrangement of its incongruous elements. Despite the Dutch name, De Wylt's wide main street configuration mimics that of any small frontier town in Texas, tumbleweeds and all; Sargent Hargis does not have a sheriff's star but his behaviour and demeanour are comparable to that of any American lawman; the Billings band's murderous acts leave no doubt

85 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 244. He gives as examples William S. Hart westerns of the early 1910s and 1920s such as *Hell's Hinges* (Hart, 1916) and *The Testing Block* (Hillyer, 1920), but the device is present in an enormous amount of films, from classics like *Jesse James* (King and Cummings, 1939), where Jesse's wife convinces him to reconsider his descent into criminality, to Rachel Welch convincing an American sheriff (Jim Brow) to fight against oppression in Mexico in the Revisionist *100 Rifles* (Gries, 1969) all the way to Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992), where the main character is a reformed outlaw who abandoned criminality because of the love and care of his deceased wife.

comeuppances are on the way, as their vicious behaviour mounts towards an inevitable – and classic – turning point, where good men can no longer stand by, and feel compelled to restore order. The immediate recognition of these tropes allows audiences to rationalize the transgressive changes as novel but compatible with the larger corpus of the western, thus maintaining generic cohesiveness.

Another significant precedent is the depiction, or rather, absence of race relations in the film. Although a few black Africans appear as extras, including soon-to-be-famous black actor Ken Gampu[86] in one of his first bit parts, the racial stratification of South Africa is ignored. Black actors are depicted as part of the scenery, pacing in the background as the white characters drive the narrative forward. Interactions are limited to two lines of dialogue by Gampu alerting Hargis that Billings and his thugs are making their way to town. There is no significant screen time shared by black, coloured and white characters and the subject of race is never addressed. There are not even interactions between English and Afrikaner characters, a feature that is also recurring. And while the omission of race relations is in itself a critique, it is one that corroborates with the national film policies and ideologies of South Africa. The trend extends to westerns made to both black and white audiences, and so far only one exception appears on record, Peter Henkel's *They Call Me Lucky* (1973), that will be discussed in later sections.

The bet on the western paid dividends to the British company but had disastrous consequences for Uys. The film was a success overseas and turned a handsome profit to Warwick, but it led Uys to the brink of bankruptcy due to contractual traps he did not realize beforehand.[87] Stipulations dictated that Warwick would deal with above the line expense (actors and producers' salaries) and Uys would shoulder the rest, but without any control over the actual budget. The result was a massive below the line cash pit that left the South African director, according to Stemmet, over R250 million in debt.

Voor Sononder (1962)

The entire ordeal with *The Hellions* did not seem to embitter Uys towards the western. Once he was able to secure funds from Afrikaner investors such as SANLAM and Bonuskor[88] his next project was yet another foray into the genre, *Voor Sononder* in 1962. Written, produced and directed by Emil Nofal and released by Jamie Uys Films, it is the first Afrikaans language western on record. The film

86 Along with Simon Sabela, between the 1960s and 1980s Gampu was one of South Africa's most popular black actors, having acted in dozens of B-Scheme films and a few A-Scheme films as well. Highlights include *Dingaka* (Uys, 1964), *Joe Bullet* (Van Der Merwe, 1974), *Zulu Dawn* (Hickox, 1979) and *A Reasonable Man* (Hood, 1999).

87 Stemmet, "Sangoma of the Silver Screen," 8.

88 Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Production," 209.

was set in the direct aftermath of the Second Anglo-Boer War in 1902. Also modelled on classic western narratives, but this time infused with Afrikaner culture, *Voor Sononder* utilized traditional tropes as a backdrop to a subtle discussion of nationalist rhetoric.

The film stars Dawid van der Walt as Flip Lourens, a Boer who fought for the Afrikaners during the War and is now heading to the diamond mines of the Transvaal, hoping to strike it rich. On his way he becomes embroiled into a feud between Kurt Bester (Tromp Terre'blanche), a crooked urban businessman, and the young farmer Daan le Roux (Vonk de Ridder),[89] both of whom fight for the attention of local beauty Martie (Marie du Toit). Soon it becomes clear that Bester's designs are much more elaborate than winning the girl's heart and his real goal is to coerce local farmers to sell their property for a pittance. Lourens sides with le Roux in his attempts to frustrate Bester's plans, but in the process develops feelings for Martie as well.

The plot structure strongly resembles that of George Steven's *Shane* (1953), with the stranger who rides into town, befriends the local settlers and takes on a fight he has no stake in. In the case of *Voor Sononder* the stranger befriends the Afrikaner farmers who find themselves suffering at the hands of Bester. Much like cattleman Rufus Ryker (Emile Meyer) in *Shane*, Bester has the law in his pocket and constantly harasses the farmers in an attempt to buy their land at drastically reduced prices. The relationship between Lourens and le Roux also resembles that of Shane with settler Joe Starrett (Van Heflin) and his son Joey (Brandon De Wilde), both of whom look up to Shane just as le Roux admires Lourens. Finally, the sexual/romantic tension between Shane and Starrett's wife Marian (Jean Arthur), which riddles Shane with guilt and at the same time entices him to help the settlers, is mirrored by Lourens and Martie, who throughout the film exchange meaningful glances and tellingly awkward dialogue.

In the same way that *The Hellions* did not plagiarize *High Noon*, *Voor Sononder* did not plagiarize *Shane*. On the contrary, what the agglomeration of tropes evinces is the extent to which certain artifices had become intrinsic staples of the genre by the 1960s, even before Gruber noticed their intermittence. *Shane* in fact did not invent nor popularized any of these tropes, but like *Voor Sononder* appropriated them from previous films. The cattlemen vs. settlers, otherwise known as the "Ranch Story" is classic plot that dates back to the 1910s;[90] Shane and Lourens embody "the stranger

89 Although he never became a famous actor, de Ridder still made a career out of westerns as the main character of *Ruiter in Swart,* probably the most famous Photo Story Magazine in the history of South Africa, spanning over 400 issues since 1966, all starring de Ridder as the eponymous Rider in Black. See http://www.softcoverbooks.net/ruiter%20in%20swart%20reeks%20fotoverhaal.html for an assorted collection of covers.

90 Early examples include John Ford's 1917 *Straight Shooting* and Edward Sloman's *Reclamation* (1916).

who rides into town," another staple device as old as the genre itself; and Shane's relationship with Marian, and Lourens' with Martie are variations of the "good woman" already explained in the analysis of the *The Hellions*, in this case with both women leading men into taking their side of a conflict due not only to amorous feelings but also their virtuous stand against evil.

What makes *Voor Sononder* a unique South African take on the genre is the ideological context that overlays the established tropes. At the heart of the film are ingrained Afrikaner beliefs and attitudes that reflect the nationalistic rhetoric in effect at the time, which can be traced back to Hans Rompel's ideal of the "Eden film" as the essence of Afrikaner cinema. As explained by Robert Greig the Eden film, which takes its name from the biblical Garden of Eden, revolves around the idyllic life of rural Afrikaners and the connection between traditional Boer culture and the land. "Once upon a time, the Afrikaner was the independent master of his own pastoral destiny," says Greig, "he lived, as in common myths, in amity with nature and his surrounding. Neither blacks nor the English disturbed the idyll."[91] This bucolic scenario relates to the trauma suffered by the Afrikaner in the hands of the British, who after the Second Anglo-Boer War appropriated their land and thrust many of them into poverty and forced urban migration. According to Tomaselli, the Eden of the farm, associated with peace and abundance, contrasts with the squalor and hardship of the city and provides Afrikaners with a reason for their tribulations and a possible solution in the retrieval of the lost paradise.[92]

As a "Ranch Story," *Voor Sononder* revolves around land claims, a plot line that fits the Eden concept quite well. Bester in the story functions as the *uitlander* or outsider, a well-known adversary in Afrikaner films, usually consisting of an urban Afrikaner or another disruptive force foreign to the local rural community.[93] Although a Boer himself, he is despised by the locals as a *hanskakie,* a traitor who sided with the British during the War. All of his power and influence, including ordering around Hannes (Piet Bezuidenhout), the local law officer, and having access to firearms otherwise prohibited to the populace comes from turning on his own people. In addition halfway through the story Martie reveals that before the war she was engaged to Bester, but once he betrayed his people she rejected him, declaring that "*verraad kan nooit vergewe word nie"* ("betrayal/treason can never be forgiven").

True to the Eden thematic, the film also contrasts the merits of urban and rural lifestyles. Bester comes from Cape Town, a capitalist who seems to represent all that is insidious in urban settings. He

91 Robert J. Greig, "An approach to Afrikaans Film," *Critical Arts* 1, no. 1 (1980): 16.

92 Keyan G. Tomaselli and Mikki van Zyl, "Themes Myths and Cultural Indicators – The Structuring of Popular Memories," in *Movies Moguls Mavericks: South African Cinema 1979-1991,* eds. Johan Blignaut and Martin Botha (Johannerburg: Showdata, 1992): 406-410. Examples of the Eden Film for reference include *Dit wa Aand en Dit Was Môre* (Marx, 1978), *Boland!* (Retief, 1974) and *Somer* (Odendaal, 1975).

93 Ibid., 411-418.

has no scruples, believes himself above the law and utilizes dirty tactics to achieve his goals, like bribery and torture. He also derides farm life. After coercing Le Roux's father to sign his farm over, Bester comments sarcastically to his henchmen that "*ons gaan nou boere word... Ek gaan lekker vet word van al die vars vleis en groenmielies"* ("now we're going to be farmers... I'm going to grow fat on the fresh meat and on the green corn"). Bester sees the farm as nothing more than a source of leisure, a direct contrast to Le Roux and Martie's parents, who see the land as their most treasured possession and are willing to die to protect it.

On the other hand, Lourens is eagerly embraced by the community as a *boereseun* (son of the soil) once his past as a Boer soldier surfaces. Ties are further cemented by the fact that he knew Martie's brother, who fought and died in the war. Without knowing anything else those are enough emblems of integrity to grant Lourens sincere solidarity. The vociferous contempt directed at Bester and the admiration for Lourens resonate with Afrikaner ideology, whose tenets revolve around the concepts of patriotism and *volk* unity.[94] Bester's portrayal as a British sympathizer (as opposed to a deserter for example, which would still make him undesirable) is also revealing, as it indicates that despite the conjoined efforts of English and Afrikaners to build the future of South Africa, the divide between both cultures remains non-negotiable and old wounds are still painful.[95]

At the centre of the film is also another pillar of Afrikaner cinema, both of the Eden variation and otherwise, the concept of the *boeredogter,* or daughter of the earth, which is embodied by Martie. In most Afrikaner films the *boeredogter* is a representative of the conflict between tradition and modernity. In her stories she usually breaks away from her community, either by rejecting the Boer way of life or by the lure of the *uitlander*, resulting in excommunication by her peers, much like the fall from grace Eve suffers in the biblical Eden story. In order to redeem herself she must suffer the consequences of her selfish act against the group, which might include unnatural death, suicide and unwanted pregnancy.[96] On an ideological level, she is the connection between capital and culture, reflecting the clash between old Afrikaner values and the realities of the rapidly changing political and economical landscape of South Africa.

Martie appears to be an embryonic form of the archetype, a bastion of tradition still untainted by

94 Martin Botha, "The South African Film Industry: Fragmentation, identity crisis and unification," *Kinema* 2, no. 3 (1995), accessed August 03, 2015, http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/article.php?id=355&feature.

95 Tomaselli and van Zyl, "Themes Myths," 412. The multitude of factors that affect Afrikaner-English relations goes beyond the scope of this study, and the relevant aspects have already been discussed in previous sections. See Pierre L. Van Den Berghe, *South Africa, A Study in Conflict* (California: U. of California Press, 1967) for a more detailed analysis, in particular chapter 5.

96 Ibid., 420.

outside influences, a *boeredogter* before the fall. She also embodies the "good woman" device, enticing Le Roux and Lourens to stand up against the foul tactics of Bester and his men. Throughout the story she maintains her steadfast resolve to reject the *uitlander'*s advances and joins Lourens and Le Roux to protect the farm in the final shootout. In fact she is the one to save Lourens when he is cornered by Bester, putting herself between the two of then and disarming the villain, whose last words before death are "ek het dit alles gedoen vir jou" ("I did it all for you"). Distinct from the personification of socioeconomic trauma represented by the established *boeredogter*, Martie symbolizes a mythic ideal of Afrikaner society, an atemporal "never never land" of plenty unblemished by the *volksvreemde* (alien) interference that underlines the ideological basis of Afrikaner nationalism.[97]

The Jackals (1967)

Around the same time the subsidy system was created in 1956, 20th Century Fox's took control of the local industry by acquiring Schlesinger's film holdings. The Hollywood studio had operated in country since 1938 as a distributor, but diminishing returns at home due to antitrust laws and the popularization of TV led Fox to seek alternative avenues of profit. The South African market was particularly enticing since it had a stable movie-going audience and no prospect of televised broadcasting in the near future.[98] Recognizing the increasing importance of foreign revenue, Fox bought ATT and Killarney Studios, proceeding to produce Afrikaner films for the burgeoning local market and a few English-language films for worldwide distribution, among which was the western *The Jackals* (Webb, 1967), an almost scene-by-scene remake of *Yellow Sky* (Wellman, 1948).

Framed as an "Outlaw Story" with a strong "good woman" element, *The Jackals* revolves around a group of bank robbers led by 'Stretch' Hawkins (Robert Gunner), who after avoiding capture cross a desert and end up into a ghost town. There they encounter the only remaining residents, gold miner Oupa Decker (Vincent Price) and his granddaughter Willie (Diana Iverson). Upon discovering Decker's gold cache the band aims to steal it, but Stretch's infatuation with Willie splits the group's allegiances. The narrative structure echoes those of many William S. Hart films, where a "good bad man," (in this case Stretch) begins the film as a villain but after falling in love with a pure girl redeems himself by turning on his past partners and abandoning his criminal ways for good.[99]

97 Tomaselli and van Zyl, "Themes Myths," 418.
98 Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Production," 164.
99 The good bad protagonist was particularly popular in the 1910s and 20s. Examples include Hart in *The Cold Deck* (Hart, 1917) and *The Toll Gate* (Hillyer, 1920) and Douglas Fairbanks in the aptly named *The Good Bad Man* (Dwan, 1916).

Shot on location at Killarney Studios, the film merges references to South African society and history with genre tropes. It alludes to Afrikaner and English culture without making them explicit, while at the same time betting on the exoticism of Africa as a selling point. Introductory sequences highlight the unusual setting for a western through a montage of animals (zebras, elephants, lions, etc.), interspersed with shots of African people in traditional attire and a voiceover that indicates the story takes place in South Africa. Animal shots reoccur later when the outlaws are sleeping in the open and joke about the possibility of being attacked by wild beasts. No attack ever happens and those shots, like the opening montage, remain unconnected to the narrative, acting as reminders of the film's backdrop. A more direct regional reference appears in a sequence involving the Shangaan, an indigenous people that inhabited the Transvaal during the 1800s. Halfway through the movie a group of friendly Shangaan drop by Decker's house to visit him, and in order to avoid a battle Decker lies to their chieftain, saying that Stretch and his men are working for him.

A subtler inclusion of cultural elements occurs at the narrative level in what seems to be purposeful ambiguity. Although all characters speak English and there are no evident ethnic distinctions between them, aspects of Afrikaner culture are peppered throughout. Willie refers to Decker as "Oupa," the Afrikaner word for "grandfather;" Decker's prospecting operation consists of a surface, single shaft system, a mining model commonly utilized by Afrikaners in the 1890s, before massive British capital transformed gold mining into an industrial enterprise;[100] when outlaw Stoffel (South African actor Bill Brewer), whose bearded face and dress style resembles that of a Boer, sings the ballad "I'm Sad and I'm Lonely" one of the verses is rendered in Afrikaans; while explaining his family background to Willie and Decker, Stretch confesses to have grown up on a farm, which he was forced to abandon because of disease and war, events that within the timeline of the film likely refer to the Second Anglo-Boer War.

Yet none of these aspects of the story are spelled out and unless the audience has previous knowledge of South African culture it would not be able to contextualize them properly. And albeit most of the scenes described above were adapted from *Yellow Sky*, the cultural innuendo is wholly local. Oupa Decker is simply "Grandpa" in the 1948 American version; "I'm Sad and I'm Lonely" is sang completely in English in the original, and the war Stretch (played by Gregory Peck in the original) refers to is the "Bloody Kansas" border war (1854-1861) which he mentions by name.[101] The inclusion

100 Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Production," 405.

101 In the American version Stretch also mentions Gen. William Quantrill as being responsible for the destruction of his farm, most likely a reference to the famous "Lawrence Massacre" of 1863, otherwise known as "Quantrill's Raid," in which the General led a militia that ransacked the town of Lawrence in the state of Kansas.

of indirect cultural elements was certainly aimed at South African viewers, a strategy that indicates Fox bet on the local market to recover part of its investment. Otherwise the studio did not seem to have great expectations for the film, releasing it straight to television in America.[102]

The Jackals was one of Fox's last productions in South Africa, along with *The Cape Town Affair* (Webb, 1967) a remake of Samuel Fuller's 1953 film *Pickup on South Street* and *Majuba* (Millin, 1968) a historical film about the first Anglo-Boer War. At the time the American studio faced a number of challenges it could not overcome. Changes in audience behaviour, which now preferred small movie theatres in the suburbs as opposed to Fox's Picture Palaces located in central business areas resulted in profit loss, with the studio being unable to sell enough seats to offset the up-keeping costs of these massive venues[103]. In addition the rise of independent competitors, in special Ster Films, a local company backed by the Afrikaner insurance behemoth SAMLAM, threatened its market dominance, further diminishing returns. The downturn led to Fox's buyout by SAMLAM in 1969.[104]

Scotty Smith (1970)

After Fox's buyout SAMLAM merged with Ster Films to form Satbel (the Suid-Afrikaanse Teaterbelange Beperk or South African Theatre Ltd.). The company now controlled 76% of all film distribution in the country, with the remaining fourth in the hands of UIP-Warner.[105] While Satbel's control over distribution was substantial, independents were still able to keep afloat thanks to the subsidy system, which did not discriminate against small-time producers and allowed them to recoup as much of their costs through government payouts as the major studios did. As such, new production companies flourished, like Icarus Films, created in 1970 to produce the western *Scotty Smith*. It was the first of three westerns directed by editor-turned-director Peter Henkel, followed by *Three Bullets... for a Long Gun* (1971) and *They Call me Lucky* (1973). His output makes Henkel the most prolific director of westerns in South Africa.

Released a few years after *The Jackals,* Henkel's films enjoyed enough box office success to justify the production of three successive features. According to Vincent G. Cox, cinematographer of *Scotty Smith* and *They Call Me Lucky,* Henkel had a strong interest in the western genre and saw the

102 "Yellow Sky," *AFI Catalog of Feature Films*, accessed August 25, 2015, *http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=25818*.

103 Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Production," 176-177. Many of Fox' Bioscopes, build or acquired by Schlesinger during the early days of cinema, when Picture Palaces were few and thus needed to accommodate great numbers of spectators, could hold over 1000 people.

104 Botha, *South African Cinema,* 50.

105 Ibid., 50.

closing of the Chisholm Trail in America during the mid-1880s and the discovery of the Johannesburg gold fields around the same time as transforming South Africa in a symbolic new frontier.[106] Along with a passion for the West the director was aware of genre trends worldwide, as it is evident in the diversity of his work, each film introducing new elements drawn from the various aesthetic and ideological variations that permeated western productions at the time.

Based on a book by Frederick C. Metrowich detailing the adventures of the eponymous South African folk hero and scoundrel, *Scotty Smith* consists of a collection of loosely connected episodes from Smith's life (played by Joe Stewardson, who also wrote the script), as he and his occasional sidekick, Jetty Black (Adrian Steed) scam their way through the Northern Cape province in search of riches to plunder and horses to steal. The frame is that of an "Outlaw Story," with Smith as a lawless drifter similar to Jesse James or Billy the Kid, except that his crimes have little to do with accumulating wealth and more to do with self-satisfaction and altruism, as he explains to his partner Jetty: "Do you know why I steal horses, because I love them. But I don't love gold. When you start loving gold for its own sake you might as well be dead." This backward logic infuses much of the character's actions throughout the film, with Smith stealing money from a bank and then giving it back to collect the reward for his own crime or absconding with a drove of horses and returning it when he discovers a young military officer would be in trouble otherwise.

Set in Kimberley in the Northern Cape and the wild surrounds of Senekal in the Free State,[107] the urban scenes were largely shot at the Kimberley Mine Museum, a massive open-air complex that, in addition to other attractions, contains Old Town, a mock city designed to emulate the urban landscape of the region during the mining boom of the 1880's.[108] Original period buildings were relocated from different areas of the city and restored to create the most accurate possible replica, which resulted, indirectly, in a ready-made backlot for westerns, complete with props, costumes and wagons. Among the many buildings in town, the Australian Arms Guest Lodge features prominently as Smith's friend Ginger Sid's (Tony Jay) saloon and the front yard of a Lutheran Church serves as a temporary horse paddock.

Like *The Jackals* before it, the Henkel's film highlights its African origin through a stereotypical wild animal montage and a scene featuring indigenous Africans. The animal sequence, depicting

106 Vincent G. Cox, e-mail message to the author, September 15, 2014.

107 Locations were derived from the mise-èn-scene and further corroborated through e-mails by industry insider Thorsten Wedekind.

108 The Museum is also home to the famous Big Hole mine. For more information see The Big Hole website, http://www.thebighole.co.za.

rhinoceros, springbok and giraffes, is superfluous and inconsequential to the narrative, being unconnected with any event or plot device. The scene with the black actors on the other hand is part of an episode based on the real life exploits of the historical Scotty, who after stealing firearms from British soldiers sold them to local Basotho tribesmen for a profit.[109] The black locals are yet again utilized as background characters, having no dialogue or integral part in the plot of the film.

Even though the overall legend of Scotty lends itself to a western treatment, Henkel and Stewardson made significant alterations to the character's personality and backstory, alterations that reveal the intent to craft a credible, traditional western protagonist out of a dubious scoundrel. As fascinating an individual as Scotty was, he was no western leading man, at least not in the classic American sense. Mean-spirited and brutish, he was famous for being a ruffian and, as described by Lawrence G. Green "an unrepentant and murderous old freebooter."[110] Such qualities are at odds not only with Stewardson's boisterous and altruistic incarnation but also with the predominant western protagonists popularized by Hollywood, men considered "bulwark[s] of physical and moral strength,"[111] fighting for justice and protecting those unable to do so for themselves. To achieve the desired level of righteousness, the most perfidious chapters of Scotty's life were eliminated,[112] which allowed Stewardson to portray Smith as a benevolent drifter who steals from the rich and kills only when it is absolutely necessary, such as when he puts an end to his nemesis Snowy (Ian Yule) to avenge the death of Rickie (Dirkie van den Bergh), the young son of his love interest Sarah (Diana Wilson).

In order to complete Scotty's western revamp, Henkel and Stewardson also eliminated unorthodox or alien elements from the character's background. Smith is known to have been married and fathered at least seven children,[113] a detail ignored by the film, which portrays him as unmarried and unwilling to settle down with Sarah, who owns a blacksmith shop. The artifice echoes the classic image of the western leading man: "The universal cowboy. Alone, riding easy, guns tied low and packing easy,"[114] as researchers Raymond Durgnat and Scott Simmons put it, reiterating the myth of the loner whose place is on the trail or on the plains rather than in a household. Or, as Lee Marvin defines it in *Monte Walsh* (Fraker, 1970), "cowboys don't get married, unless they stop being

109 Frederic C. Metrowich, *Scotty Smith, South Africa's Robin Hood* (Cape Town: Book for Africa, 1962): 45-48.
110 Lawrence G. Green, *To the River's End* (Johannesburg: Howard Timmins, 1948): 133.
111 Fenin and Everson, *The Western*, 27.
112 An episode which characterizes and substantiates Smith's ruthlessness is the famous "Bushmen Skeletons" story. According to the tales, Smith provided European museums with pristine exemplars of Bushmen skeletons, which he reportedly shot dead in order to acquire the bones and sell them. See Metrowich, *Scotty Smith*, 203-206.
113 Ibid, 137.
114 Raymond Durgnat and Scott Simmon, "Six Creeds that Won the West," in Kitses and Rickman, *The Western Reader.*

cowboys," a sentiment that can also be applied to Stretch in *The Jackals* and Lourens in *Voor Sononder*, both of whom end their wandering "cowboy" days upon choosing to stay with their mates in the end of their respective movies. The historical Smith was also a spy for the British Empire, operating during the years that led to the annexation of the Bechuanaland region to the colonies in early 1885,[115] a period of his life that was left out of the film, since spies are unusual characters in westerns and in the cinematic world the archetype is much more likely to evoke images of James Bond rather than Jessie James.

Like *The Jackals* before it, *Scotty Smith* is a quite straightforward western that emulates the classic Hollywood style faithfully, and this conventional approach was actually contrary to global trends at the time. Elsewhere in the world the western was undergoing a radical revitalization thanks to two "waves" of productions with fresh approaches, the Revisionist and the previously mentioned Spaghetti waves. Revisionism took place in America, with directors questioning the basic tenets of the genre and rethinking its stereotypes. Building on early experiments like Delmer Dave's *Broken Arrow* (1950) and Samuel Fuller's *Forty Guns* (1957), Revisionist westerns flourished in the 1960s, producing classics such as John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) and Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969). Spaghettis on the other hand began in Europe, where the massive success of Italian director Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) resulted in a surge western productions in Italy and Spain that would last roughly a decade. Characterized by misanthropic or sardonic protagonists and substantial amounts of graphic violence and gore, Spaghettis were the antithesis of the classic Hollywood western, de-mythologizing the frontier and intensifying its worst elements. Together, the two waves kept the western alive and well through most of the 1960s and 1970s, providing the genre with a period of enormous fertility and innovation.

Three Bullets... for a Long Gun (1971)

Henkel "gets on with the times" in his follow-up feature, *Three Bullets... for a Long Gun,* which purposefully discards classic Hollywood elements and adopts Spaghetti-style aesthetic and narrative conventions. The European variant took the genre's realism and cynicism to exacerbated levels, in addition to substantial doses of nihilism and extravagant violence. "Europeans, particularly Italians," writes Walter Przybylowski, "challenged the dominant film conventions of an American-based genre by complicating the morality of the characters, blurring the lines between good and evil, and

115 Green, *To the River's End*, 142.

complicating the narrative, visual, and aural structure of westerns."[116] Where classic westerns were the territory of unambiguous stories with inherently good heroes and invariably wicked villains, Spaghettis introduced volatile protagonists whose motivations were often fuelled by greed, anger or personal gain rather than the common good or justice.[117]

Furthermore, Spaghettis' particular brand of storytelling tended to subvert the romanticized aesthetics of classic westerns. For example, Hollywood heroes were usually immaculate in appearance and perfectly groomed. "In the American westerns of John Ford or Howard Hawks," writes Alireza Vahdani, "no matter how unfavourable the situation, the characters still have time for a shave and bath."[118] Their appearance reflected the dominant ideology of the American western, where the hero's unsullied outward appearance reflected its inner resolve and rectitude. In Spaghettis on the other hand the opposite was the rule. Characters were utterly filthy and disheveled, which reflected their ambiguous nature and the brutal world that enveloped them.[119] To that Giovanna Trento also added a number of recurring features, including "ghost towns... frequent and often grotesque killings, the absence of clear moral parameters, the fetishism of dead bodies... a general lack of Indians, no founding of history through the building of the city and the railway, abundant use and abuse of coffins, crosses, and cemeteries."[120] Finally, the environment was treated with a similar callousness, presenting decrepit, mud-caked towns, squalid adobe dwellings and either dusty, rocky hills or ochre deserts with patches of dried-up bush that resemble neither the ponderosa pine forests of California, the Great Plains west of the Mississippi River nor the majestic mesas of Monument Valley.

Set in Mexico, *Three Bullets...* is the tale of a nameless stranger nicknamed "Major" (South Africa actor Beau Brummell) and the Mexican vagabond Lucky (Keith G. van der Wat), both of whom possess half of a map detailing the location of a treasure buried within an abandoned gold mine. The plot has more than a passing resemblance to Leone's *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966), where an unnamed gunslinger dubbed "Blondie" (Clint Eastwood) and a Mexican miscreant, Tuco (Eli Wallach) join forces to find a gold cache hidden somewhere in a remote cemetery. This "Outlaw Story"

116 Walter Przybylowski, "The European Western," *Dialogues* 5 (2006): 91.

117 Examples abound. Leone's entire Dollar Trilogy is based on greedy characters looking to profit off each other. Similarly Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1966), Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (1966) and Giulio Petroni's *Death Rides a Horse (1967*) all deal with bloody revenges.

118 Alireza Vahdani, "European Western vs. American Western," *Offscreen* 14, no.1 (2010), accessed July16, 2015, http://offscreen.com/view/european_american.

119 See Corbucci's *The Mercenary* (1968) and Enzo Barboni's *They Call Me Trinity* (1970) for good examples of downtrodden, dilapidated outfits and throughly sodden, dirt-smeared characters.

120 Giovanna Trento, "The Italian (Southern) Western – From colonial cinema to spaghetti western," in *The Western in the Global South,* eds. MaryEllen Higgins, Rita Keresztesi and Dayna Oscherwitz (London: Routledge, 2015), 44.

of sorts does not fully concur with any of Gruber's basic plots, which is expected of a film of the Spaghetti sub-genre, characterized by rejecting and/or subverting the most basic tenets of its classic Hollywood counterpart. Instead, the story resembles that of the "Transitional Plot," a variation of the "Italian Plot" proposed by Frayling in order to categorize novel, reoccurring narrative structures related to the Spaghetti sub-genre.[121] It usually involves two factions, one Mexican and one white, who team-up to pursue a common goal, be it to defeat a villain or material enrichment. The Mexican's motives are often to provide for his people or to aid in a revolution, while the "Gringo" tends to have greedy or selfish motives that contradict those of his partner.

Henkel's characters fit the "Transitional Plot" with a few changes in intent and mannerisms. Brummell's Major is as taciturn and devious as Eastwood's Blondie in Leone's film, an expert marksman with a calm demeanour and a cynical smile hanging from his parched lips. Likewise van der Wat's Lucky apes Wallach's Tuco as a foul-mouthed, loud buffoon who bumbles through the screen both as comic relief and a sympathetic underdog the audience can relate to. Both characters are after monetary gain and spend most of the film looking for ways to backstab or exploit one another. Early on in the film Major saves Lucky's life only because the Mexican memorized the location of the gold and he needs him to find it. Later on Major gives Lucky a vote of confidence and releases him from a set of shackles, a gesture reciprocated with a rifle butt to the back of the head and Lucky absconding with Major's half of the treasure map. The interplay between the characters matches Frayling's proposed narrative structure – and the attitudes of Blondie and Tuco in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* – except that in *Three Bullets*... Lucky's ultimate goal is not to provide money for his *compadres* or freedom fighters but like Major he simply wants to get rich and call it a day.

Visual similarities between the characters and their Spaghetti equivalents are also evident. Both Major and Lucky (and every other character on screen) are a mess of bedraggled attires, unkempt beards and bodies glistening with rancid sweat and dirt. There are no cities in the film, but the basecamp of a local gang leader, Hawkeye (Patrick Mynhardt) is composed of a few poorly constructed adobe huts, unadorned and uninviting. Several of the recurring elements Trento mentions are also present, such as a ghost town, a grave digging scene and the appearance of a semi-decomposed corpse in a cave complex.

121 Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns*, 50. Frayling did not build upon Gruber's work, but instead developed his variations based on the work of Will Wright in *Six-Guns and Society* (Berkley: U. of California Press, 1975). Instead of seven basic plots, Wright came up with a structural model that divides westerns in four different time periods, which he believed largely informed the types of narratives and variants found in American westerns. Those were "The Classical Plot" (1930-1950), "The Vengeance Variation" (1950-1960), "The Transitional Theme" (a few films in the early 50s) and "The Professional Plot" (1968-70). Frayling's "Italian Plot" would be somewhere in between Wright's latter two periods.

The Mexican setting was a common displacement device of the era, and it had both practical and ideological purposes to it. Slotkin observes that Mexico had been part of the western genre since the pre-Hollywood productions of the 1910s.[122] At this stage the country largely existed as a mythical space, a land populated by humble peons and cruel *banditos* that was commonly alluded to but seldom seen on screen. That changed in earnest with the Revisionist and Spaghetti waves, which consistently located their films "across the border." For Revisionist directors, mostly Americans shooting on location or in Hollywood, the Mexican milieu was a backdrop for political narratives addressing the plight of Third World nations, several of which underwent bloody revolutions during the previous decades.[123]

For Spaghetti directors the Mexican setting had an additional purpose. While political commentary was certainly a concern, the barren landscapes southwest of Texas resembled the arid Spanish plains and mountain ranges of Almería and surrounding regions, making it an ideal backdrop for a western film promoting the illusion of a North American setting.[124] In adopting the Spaghetti model, Henkel adhered to the sub-genre's landscape strategies as well, finding an equivalent backdrop in the Richtersveld (Figure 1) area of the Northern Cape, as well as stretches of the Orange River just below Augrabies Falls and the Namib desert.[125]

Figure 1: Scene from Three Bullets... shot in the Richtersveld.

Figure 2: The Chihuahuan Desert.

122 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 411.
123 Ibid., 407-408.
124 The Almería province is home of the Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park, setting of several cinematic towns and Spaghetti Westerns, including Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. For more information see *Unique Almería,* http://www.unique-almeria.com/deserts-of-the-world.html.
125 Locations confirmed by mise-èn-scene and industry insider Thorsten Wedekind, e-mail message to the author, September 14, 2014.

The local geography is composed of slopes strewn with basaltic rock chunks and/or low clumps of shrubbery, which noticeably contrasts with the sandy hues of the soil and the proclivity of hills disappearing in a blue haze in the horizon. The result is an uneven, spotted scenery atypical to that of conventional western environs but believable enough as part of the vast Chihuahuan Desert (Figure 2 in the previous page) that straddles the border between the US and its Latin neighbour. By shifting the narrative to Mexico Henkel demonstrated his acute awareness of the limitations of South Africa's geography in mimicking that of the US, and in order to maintain the illusion he wished to create a change of scenery was needed.

Despite the political implications of a Third World setting and an ethnically diverse leading duo, Henkel stayed away from complicated discussions in favour of a straightforward treasure hunt punctuated by an occasional gunfight. We learn almost nothing of Major's and Lucky's backgrounds nor the larger context of the land where they are and their circumstances. The film's first scene hints at a possible national or at least regional conflict, with a group of military soldiers about to execute Lucky, but neither the reasons for Lucky's predicament, nor who the soldiers are or what army they belong to is ever revealed. Instead, Henkel saves all of his controversial material for his final western feature, *They Call Me Lucky*, a film permeated with subtle critiques of the ills of racial discrimination and social inequality.

They Call Me Lucky (1973)

Keith G. van der Wat reprised his role as Lucky from *Three Bullets...*, but in this feature Brummel's Major is nowhere to be found and the story focuses on Lucky and his circumstances. Where Henkel's previous western only brushed over the dynamics between different ethnicities with the relationship between the leads, *They Call Me Lucky* addresses it directly, building the narrative on the interactions between character from different ethnic backgrounds.

Somewhat based on the “Outlaw Story” framework, the plot concerns the aforementioned Lucky, who this time around makes his living by hiding criminals in his tiny compound in exchange for a cut of their unlawful earnings. He shares his dwelling with a few peasant women and Chino (Trevor Edwards), the compound's half-Apache, half-white foremen/enforcer. His circumstances change when a group of kidnappers shows up with Beth (Cathy Usher), a young white woman they expect to exchange for a handsome reward. When the bandits decide to rape Beth before returning her to her family Lucky stops them, causing a showdown in which Lucky and Chino to kill the kidnappers. Over

the next few days Beth falls for Lucky and decides to stay in the compound, leading Lucky to turn to crime in order to get money to provide for their future family. To that end he enlists a bunch of local peons and a wandering Irish priest, Kelly McDade (Andrew Roberts), creating a bank robbery operation. But events set into motion even before Lucky ever met Beth come full circle in a tragic denouement.

Ethnic dynamics between whites and non-whites are a key feature of the narrative, and along with the setting align Henkel's film with a variant of Spaghetti and Revisionist Westerns, the Zapata Western.[126] Named after the famous Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, these films were characterized by politically charged storylines – usually involving freedom fighters – set in Mexico during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-34. Hollywood explored the variant sporadically in the 1930s and 1950s, but its popularity peaked during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Revisionist directors such as Peckinpah and several Spaghetti filmmakers experimented with it.[127]

Lucky as a Mexican protagonist is an exception to the rule of western leads, American or otherwise. Non-whites as sidekicks or in major supporting roles, like Lucky was in *Three Bullets...* were common from the mid-60s onwards, but as protagonists they were rare even in the Zapata Spaghettis of Sergio Solima, perhaps the most political writer/director of westerns working in the 1960s and 1970s.[128] Lucky's depiction as a kind, strong and astute individual is also atypical, skewing from the stereotypical portrait of Mexicans either as "weak, bumbling fool[s]" or "complacent... illiterate peons whom the heroes could variously rescue, defend, organize, or slaughter – depending on the plot."[129] That is not to say that the stereotype is not partly present. Despite his intelligence Lucky is still depicted as a disheveled, greasy and foul-looking buffoon, the standard "style" of the Mexican bandit, and all the other peons in the film fit the dumb simpleton standard of the *chicano* peasant.[130]

Beth represents the "good woman" with a twist, leading Lucky into more criminal activity

126 Frayling mentions the Zapata Western as a variation of his "Italian Plot" in *Spaghetti Westerns,* 52. However, as it is also a recurring storyline from American Revisionist films it is fit to label it a separate category common to the western in general, as opposed to just the European sub-genre.

127 Slotkin, 414-415. Famous early Hollywood examples include *Viva Villa!* (Conway, 1934), *Juarez* (Dieterle, 1939) and Robert Aldrich's *Vera Cruz* (1954). Once the Revisionist wave hit, Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Guns of the Magnificent Seven* (Wendkos, 1969) a sequel to Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven* are the most well-known features. On the Spaghetti side, *A Bullet for the General* (Damiani, 1966) and Sergio Corbucci's *Compañeros* (1970) are classic Zapatas and some of the finest examples of the sub-genre.

128 Sergio Solima was a Italian writer and director known for his political storylines. His work tended to favor leftist ideals and contain harsh critiques to capitalism. Among his most famous work was the script for Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and the Zapata Spaghettis *The Big Gundown* (Solima, 1966) and *Face to Face* (Solima, 1967).

129 Jesús Salvador Treviño, "Latino portrayals in film and television," *Jump Cut* 30 (1985): 1-2.

130 Treviño, 1. One of the few exception to the "foul and greasy" Mexican stereotype was the *Cisco Kid* film and TV series produced in the 1930s-40s. Played by Duncan Renaldo on TV and usually Cesar Romero on the big screen, Cisco was a dashing, well-groomed and cavalier gunslinger, and along with his sidekick "Pancho" (sometimes called "Gordito")

rather then redeeming him from it. Her willing relationship with him contradicts the norm, reversing the western standards of miscegenation that established as permissible for white man to have relations with non-white women while considering the opposite to be taboo.[131] Henkel critiques the double standard in the film as he subverts it, by having Beth declare, as she seduces Lucky, that "my people would never accept me again... to them, I would be another *muchachita,*" implying that sexual relations, or the mere possibility of it, with a non-white will automatically destroy her reputation and social standing.

Aside from Beth there are no "good" white characters in the film. The kidnappers, all of them white, prove their utterly villainous nature when they attempt to violate Beth, and the priest McDade is instrumental in bringing about Lucky's tragic end. During the prologue of the film, the kidnappers are shown rampaging through the city of Yuma. As they flee they kill a Mexican peasant woman. Determined to get revenge, her husband Diaz (Tulio Moneta) asks the locals who is responsible, but all he discovers is that she was shot with a silver pistol. His pursuit of the killers leads him to Lucky's compound. Once there McDade devises a ploy to have Diaz kill Lucky so that he can escape with the money from the bank robberies. The crooked priest's plan succeeds, resulting in Chino and Lucky's death. McDade rewards Diaz with a bullet to the chest, but as he is leaving he is shot down by Beth, the only survivor of the entire compound by the end of the film.

The ideological implications behind the plot are conspicuous. Lucky's death is brought about due to white characters manipulating Mexicans to turn on each other, a microscopic mirror of the macroscopic canvas of the Mexican Revolution, where the US alternatively aided and attacked successive Mexican regimes according to economic and political prerogatives.[132] The same critique was prominent in the Zapata Westerns of the era. For example, Peckinpah addressed his country's hypocrisy in *The Wild* Bunch (1969) where a band of ageing American mercenaries led by Pike Bishop (William Holden) help the cruel regime of Mexican General Mapache (Emilio Fernández), hoping to make enough money from their dealings with the dictator to retire. However Angel (Jaime Sánchez) a young Mexican *campesino* part of Bishop's band, double-crosses the General and steals a case of rifles to give

would roam the countryside helping folks in the frontier to deal with outlaws and other assorted criminals.

131 See Douglas Pye, "Double Vision: Miscegenation and Point of View in *The Searchers,*" in *The Searchers: Essays and Reflection's on John Ford's Classic Western*, eds. Arthur M. Eckstein & Peter Lehman (Michigan: Wayne State U. Press, 2004): 223-237 for a thorough discussion on miscegenation and western films.

132 See Slotkin, Chapter 13, "Imagining Third World Revolutions," for a breakdown of American interests in Mexico throughout the decades and the effect of it in Hollywood westerns. While before the Second World War relations revolved around lucrative trade agreements and the security of US borders, after the War Mexico became a mouthpiece and model for American interactions with the Spanish-speaking peoples of latin countries, part of the struggle to prevent the spread of Communism in the 1950s and 1960s and foster American values and democracy in Third World countries.

to the peons of his village. Angel is captured, tortured and eventually killed, which propels Bishop and his men to turn on Mapache and go on a killing spree, symbolically letting go of their greedy agenda and joining the downtrodden masses in fighting oppression. Similarly in Damiano Damiani's Spaghetti *A Bullet for the General,* Bill Tate (Lou Castel), an American mercenary hired by the local Mexican government dupes a revolutionary gunrunner, 'El Chuncho' Munoz (Gian Maria Volonté) into leading him to their leader, General Elías (Jaime Fernandez). Bill assassinates Elías thanks to Chuncho's help, effectively crippling the peasant resistance. Once he realizes his mistake, Chuncho kills Tate and attempts to instigate a rebellion.

There are no *coups* or revolutions in *They Call Me Lucky*, but Lucky's tragic ending, indirectly caused by the acts of the kidnappers in the beginning of the film and directly by the machinations of McDade, reflects the same dynamic of non-whites (and on larger scale Third World countries) being assaulted and plundered for the enrichment or political interests of (white-dominated) First World superpowers. In Europe the progressive Third World discourse had also an additional function as a surrogate metaphor to the decolonization of Africa and the revolutionary sensibility of the late 1960s, epitomized by the student movements of 1968.[133]

Henkel would have certainly been aware of the socio-political upheaval in Europe and America, as they affected South Africa directly, particularly after United Nations passed Resolution 1761 in November of 1962, deeming the country's racial policies to be in violation of the UN Charter. The decision resulted in increased pressure by foreign governments and organizations, which imposed economic sanctions, restricted import and export transactions and enacted boycotts against local sports teams, academics and the entertainment industry.[134] In addition, the ethnic and political divide that underlays the entire Zapata variant would have resonated with the director, who could witness the same dynamic at work in his own land, with blacks and other non-whites being systematically exploited and disenfranchised by the racist ideology promoted by the apartheid government.

133 Trento, 44. The protests of 1968 were characterized by general dissatisfaction with the bourgeoisie elites and opposition to colonization and military dictatorships in developing countries, leading to several civil rights and environmental movements that galvanized the youth of Europe and America. According to Trento, the protests inspired Spaghetti filmmakers to create metaphors for the real revolutions in their works. Frayling also supports the theory, adding that the Zapata Western was "the first explicitly political form of popular cinema in Italy since the Mussolini era."

134 "The Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa," can be downloaded from the United Nations General Assembly webpage, http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/17/ares17.htm

Dingetjie is Dynamite! (*My Naam Is Nog Steeds Dingetjie*, 1975)

Henkel's ethnically diverse cast and political metaphors were an exception to the popular formulaic formats of the South African industry throughout the 1970s. The vast majority of films released for white populations at the time fell into two major categories, dramas and comedies.[135] The trend began in the 1960s and in the following decade most features adhered to what Botha defines as an "idealistic conservatism... characterized by an attachment to the past, to ideals of linguistic and racial purity and to religious and moral norms."[136] Stories were imbued with nationalist rhetoric and sponsored patriotic pride and traditional Afrikaner community values. Comedy in particular had become a wildly popular mainspring, thanks to the charisma of actor Al Debbo[137] and the success of Jamie Uys.[138] Debbo's pastiches, such as *Alles sal regkom* (de Wet, 1951) and *Stadig oor die Klippe* (Daneel, 1969) drew large movie-going crowds throughout the decades, extending well into the 1970s. Likewise Uys rose to fame with a string of comedies in the 1950s, beginning with *Daar doer in die Bosveld* in 1951 and *50/50* in 1952. His oeuvre diversified into several genres overtime, but comedy remained his most popular format, reaching blockbuster heights in 1976 with the candid camera phenomenon *Funny People.*[139]

Overseas the western experienced its own tryst with hilarity. Small incursions into comedy peppered the classic Hollywood decades, mostly produced by comedians wishing to expand their portfolio, such as Buster Keaton's *Go West* (1925) and *Son of Paleface* (Tashlin, 1952) starring Bob Hope. However the 1960s and 1970s brought an unprecedented explosion of comic westerns in the wake of the Revisionist and Spaghetti waves. Famous examples include the Oscar-winning *Cat Ballou* (Silverstein, 1965), Mel Brooks's unabashed 1974 send-up, *Blazing Saddles* and the incredibly popular Spaghetti series of *Trinity* films directed by Enzo Barboni, *They Call me Trinity* (1970) and *Trinity Is Still My Name* (1971).[140] [141]

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135 Tomaselli, "Ideology and Cultural Production," 285.

136 Martin Botha, "The South African Film Industry: Fragmentation, identity crisis and unification," *Kinema* 2, no. 3 (1995), accessed August 03, 2015, http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/article.php?id=355&feature.

137 William Pretorius, "Afrikaans Cinema - Soothing Images," in Blignaut and Botha, eds., *Movies Moguls Mavericks,* 379.

138 Botha, *South African Cinema*, 43.

139 According to Johan Blignaut, "We Are Who...? What! - The South African Identity in Cinema" in Blignaut and Botha, eds., *Movies Moguls Mavericks,* 99*,* up to 1990 *Funny People* was still one of the top ten all-time box-office successes in South Africa. Uys' other massively successful comedy, the international favorite *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980), and its sequel, *The Gods Must be Crazy II* (1989) were also part of the same list.

140 The list goes on and on. While in the previous six decades of film history around 30 comedy western features were released, in the 1960s and 1970s alone there were over 50 films. The bulk of it were Spaghetti parodies, often times spoofing their own sub-genre, such as *Ciccio Forgives, I Don't* (Ciorciolini, 1968), a parody of *God Forgives... I Don't!* (Colizzi, 1967) and *For a Few Dollars Less* (Mattoli, 1966), a spoof of Sergio Leone's *For a Few Dollars More.*

141 The success of the *Trinity* series was indeed remarkable. Both films are largely responsible for initiating the wave of

Influenced by Barboni's work, South African director Ivan Hall jumped onto the parody bandwagon with the Afrikaner western *Dingetjie is Dynamite! (My Naam Is Nog Steeds Dingetjie)* released in 1975. The second entry of the series initiated by director Dirk de Villiers in the same year,[142] the *Dingetjie* films were modelled on the buddy formula popularized by the Italian actors Terence Hill and Bud Spencer.[143] But while the first film took place in 1970s Cape Town among other places, the second transported the story to 1930s Marikana, a small town in the North West province of South Africa. There newcomers Dingetjie (Roelf Laubscher) and his brother Daan (Don Leonard) get tangled up in a "Ranch Story" set up when an old Boer widow, Hessie (Wena Naudé) hires them to protect her farm and cattle from a wealthy local villain, Zane (Hal Orlandini), who has been harassing her in an attempt to steal her cattle and usurp her property.

The film borrows freely from Barboni's series, something it admits in the opening credits, where the sentence, "[Writer] C.F. Beyers-Boshoff copied the story... sorry to Terence Hill and Bud Spencer" appears painted on the side of a wagon. The protagonists' characterization, which carried over from the first film in the series, mimics the brothers Trinity (Hill) and Bambino's (Spencer) physical appearance, with Trinity-like Dingetjie as a skinny, easy going idler, lightning fast on the draw, and Daan a burly, grumpy pessimist *a la* Spencer (Figures 3 and 4 in the next page). It goes as far as copying Spenser's trademark "Hammer Blow" to the head of enemies, repeated over and over during fighting scenes in the *Trinity* series, which Daan also uses liberally in *Dingetjie is Dynamite!* The story also utilizes a common subplot of the *Trinity* series, that of Trinity accepting to help a group of people due to the charms of one or more young ladies while Bambino joins him in hopes of monetary gain. In *Dingetjie is Dynamite!* Daan takes the job as Hessie's muscle in hopes that she will adopt him and leave him the farm and cattle when she dies, while Dingetjie falls for a local blonde, Lola (Alexandra Bungey) and decides to help the local regardless of a possible reward.

Spaghetti comedies and upon release the second entry, *Trinity is Still My Name* broke all box-office records in Italy, becoming the top-grossing film in the history of the country at the time. See Roberto Rombi, "La vita è bella regina d' incassi," *la Repubblica*, December 29, 1999, accessed July 14, 2015, http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1999/12/29/la-vita-bella-regina-incassi.html?refresh_ce.

142 De Villiers released the first entry, *My Naam is Dingetjie*, just months before Hall, which means the features were shot back to back or with a very short break in between. The stories are not related, and the only connection between *Dingetjie is Dynamite!* and De Villiers' film are the protagonists, the eponymous Dingetjie and his brother Daan. A third, non-western film, *Dingetjie en Idi (de Villiers, 1977)* brought the series to a close.

143 The duo became famous for their partnership in the *Trinity* series but went own to star in over 15 films together, all of them action comedies in the most varied settings, from race drivers in *Watch Out, We're Mad!* (Fondato, 1974) to police officers in *Miami Supercops* (Corbucci, 1985).

Figure 3: Daan (Leonard) and Dingetjie (Laubscher).

Figure 4: Bambino (Spencer) and Trinity (Hill).

The film's South African flavour derives from established cinematic stereotypes easily identifiable by local audiences at the time, thanks to the precedents set by Debbo, Uys and the escapist formulas both helped to popularize. Where the *Trinity* films dabbled in comedy but stayed away from overt slapstick, *Dingetjie is Dynamite!* is positively vaudevillian, with bad guy Zane shooting the pants off an adversary and Dingetjie breaking Daan out of jail by blowing up the entire jail cell and his brother along with it. Their lampoonery evokes Debbo's antics in films such as *Fratse in die vloot* (de Wet, 1958), with the main characters accidentally landing in disastrous or embarrassing situations due to aloofness or lack of common sense, such as when Dingetjie and Daan, after successfully recapturing Hessie's stolen cattle, end up drunk at a saloon and loose the cattle all over again. The style was developed by Hollywood screwball duos such as the Abbott & Costello and Laurel & Hardy, but Debbo's work with his partner Frederick Burgers was the Afrikaner standard for it at the time.[144]

The film also emulated another trope from the era, that of the *plaasjapie* (country bumpkin). Quirky and droll, these light-hearted depictions of rural folk delighted audiences in 1970s productions like *Tant Ralie se Losieshuis* (de Villiers, 1974) and *Kom Tot Rus* (de Witt, 1977), among others. The characters' nature and personalities were deeply rooted in traditional Afrikaner archetypes dating all the way back to the Eden film, and the transition into comedy is seamless. Ouma Hessie comes across as an amusing variation of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the people/nation), the revered archetype of the Afrikaner matriarch whose wisdom must guide younger generations and inspire them to preserve the tradition and ideals of their people.[145] In her comedic form however she dishes out wisdom through painful doses of tough love, ordering Dingetjie and Daan to do her biding and smacking them around

144 Pretorius, "Afrikaans Cinema," 379.
145 Tomaselli and van Zyl, "Themes Myths," 421.

when they fail to do so. Other archetypes follow suit, with Lola as the timid and dainty *boeredogter* threatened by the advances of the arrogant and sophisticated – i.e. "urban" – *uitlander*-like Zane and Dingetjie and Daan as good ol' *boereseuns* getting into mischief but ultimately working to preserve the stability of the community. Like the Eden drama before the provincial comedy, these films reminded Afrikaners of their roots and provided pleasant examples of their heritage on screen, allowing the audience to engage in vicarious nostalgia.

Dingetjie is Dynamite! seems to have fulfilled local interest in the western for filmmakers and audiences, at least for the time being. There were no westerns on record for approximately a decade. The development is not surprising though, as it followed current cinematic trends inside and outside of South Africa. Western popularity gradually decreased by the mid-1970s worldwide. European productions fell from over 30 films in 1973 to less than 5 in 1978. In America, Clint Eastwood's rise to stardom helped the genre to regain some of the footing it lost to television in previous decades, and the push towards revisionist narratives by directors such as Arthur Penn (*Little Big Man*, 1971), Sidney Pollack (*Jeremiah Johnson*, 1972) and Eastwood himself (*The Outlaw Josey Wales*, 1976) kept the western alive. However the number of productions continued to diminish, and the disastrous box-office failure of Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* in 1980, which almost bankrupted United Artists, led Hollywood studios to stay away from westerns through most of the 1980s.[146]

Within South Africa, another action genre was on the rise, that of the war film. The immediacy of the Border War with Angola, which dragged from 1966 to 1989 absorbed the attention of locals and permeated cinema and TV productions with war propaganda: "The emphasis [was] in the justification and heroism of the war," said William Pretorius, "and the sacrifices that whites have to make in order to maintain the South African way of life."[147] Examples include *Grensbasis 13* (De Witt, 1979), which dealt with the heroic rescue of a captured SA soldier by his brave comrades and the international production *A Game of Vultures* (Fargo, 1979), where a white businessman risks his life to smuggle helicopters into Rhodesia in order to aid the S. A. military in their offensive against black insurgents. The industry's continuous leaning towards nationalistic productions and unobjectionable storylines left little room for westerns, a historical genre whose immediate association was with foreign values rather than local tradition. Its already small niche narrowed further with the drastically reduced influx of new western features from America and Europe and the status of the war film as the action genre *du jour*, leading to a hiatus that would not be broken until the late 1980s.

146 Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel,* 100.
147 Pretorius, "Afrikaans Cinema," 387.

B-Scheme and Black Westerns

Westerns resurfaced in South Africa thanks to developments in filmmaking for black audiences that began in the early 1970s. Under pressure from (white) filmmakers, in 1972 the government established a second subsidy, this one specifically for the creation of films for the black population. The secondary fund was labeled "B-Scheme," and its criteria and organization were similar to those of the A-Scheme, with returns based on the number of tickets sold. However the program came with a built-in glitch. Traditionally, blacks could not attend the majority of cinemas, which were located in strategic locations within urban neighbourhoods. "Major cities were reserved for whites... thus black, Indian and coloured people were effectively barred from attending cinemas in 'white areas,'" writes Astrid Treffy-Goatley, "and the infrastructure outside of such areas was so poor, and the people were so impoverished, that very few cinemas were able to survive."[148] That meant that in order to reach those audiences, producers and distributors had to find a way to exhibit their films in those destitute locations. And that they did, by any means necessary. "Films were shown in beer halls and sheebens," remembers producer James Murray "churches, community centers [sic] and even open-air cattle kraals in some remote areas."[149] Filmmakers would strike deals with local officials, who would allow a showing in exchange for a percentage of the door. Most of it was done under the table and without any legal grounds.

A side effect of these dispersed, improvised venues was that the government had few to no means to maintain control over ticket receipts, and once filmmakers caught on to the loophole the B-Scheme became a money machine. "Controls and checks were virtually non-existent" says Murray, "at worst, a producer could influence [a venue] operator and indicate the type of 'returns' he would like to receive by offering a cash incentive based on the number of tickets shown to be sold on the [government] daily return form."[150] The final result was an opportunistic hodgepodge of profit over production value. To maximize gains, filmmakers churned out shoddy, amateurish films in the shortest possible time, then took them out to black areas and worked the system.

At first the nature of the B-Scheme, with its emphasis on rapid turnovers for quick profit did not entice filmmakers to produce westerns. Historical genres demanded extra expenditure in costume and setting, budget bloaters that did not make sense in the current production landscape, where a cheap

148 Astrid Treffry-Goatley, "South African cinema after apartheid: A political-economic exploration," *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research* 36, no. 1 (2010): 39.
149 James Murray, "Ethnic Cinema: How Greed Killed the Industry," in Blignaut and Botha, eds., *Movies Moguls Mavericks*, 260.
150Murray, "Ethnic Cinema," 260.

action flick could earn maximum subsidy returns with minimum production value. Still, a number of directors and producers did care about the quality of their work and strived to provide decent cinematic entertainment to their audiences. Simon Sabela, one of South Africa's first black filmmakers, was responsible for several polished productions such as *uDeliwe* (1975) and *Setipana* (1979). Another was Tonie Van Der Merwe, one of the proponents of the B-Scheme and the producer of four westerns, the entire genre output of the industry during the 1980s and 90s.

Van Der Merwe began his career in 1974 with the release of *Joe Bullet*, a crime film moulded after Gordon Parks' pre-blaxploitation classic *Shaft* (1971). The film was a tremendous success but also ran into trouble with censors, who at this early stage of black film production were extremely cautious. The film's depiction of violence and black affluence (Joe, played by Ken Gampu, owned an apartment and nice clothing) resulted in a ban after a few showings in Soweto.[151] Nevertheless the audience's response confirmed Van Der Merwe's theories regarding the viability of the black audience market, and he began producing films in large scale by the mid-1970s. His endeavours met with success, and by the late 1980s he claimed to have produced and/or directed over 400 features films.[152]

Van Der Merwe decided to invest on the genre to satisfy his personal desire to make a classic Old West film.[153] Believing the market to be small in South Africa but viable overseas, he originally aimed at international distribution and was able to secure a group of local investors interested in the project. Along with friend and producer Steve Hand, Van Der Merwe constructed a cinematic western backlot on the outskirts of Mooirivier, a small town in the municipality of Mpofana, KwaZulu-Natal. His plan was to produce a traditional – i.e. "white" – western to meet the specifications of the A-Scheme subsidy, so as to recoup costs within the country, subsequently sell the film to the foreign market and re-utilize the backlot for as many B-Scheme westerns as he could find producers for.

The timeline here is not exact. Both Van Der Merwe and Hand are not sure of the films' production and release dates, but both agree it to be somewhere in the early 1990s.[154] Blignaut and Botha however place the production date of *Umbango* around 1987, a timeline that Gravel Road Entertainment, who has recently restored Van Der Merwe's westerns for digital release, also confirms. The most likely scenario, if all parties are to be taken into consideration, is a production date contrary

151 Gavin Haynes, "Sollywood: the extraordinary story behind apartheid South Africa's blaxploitation movie boom," *The Guardian*, April 14, 2015, accessed Jun 07, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/apr/14/apartheid-south-africa-black-cinema-blaxploitation-b-scheme-subsidy.

152 Ibid.

153 Tonie Van Der Merwe, interview with the author, July 21, 2015.

154 Hand had addressed the topic in an interview in Paleker, 'Creating a 'black' film industry', 160, while Van Der Merwe related a similar date in an interview with the author.

to Van Der Merwe's recollection, with the black western being filmed and released first and *Barrett* being released last. If this is not the case, the director's reasons for the film's failure to qualify for subsidy, as it will be discussed shortly, do not match its production timeline.

For the sake of organization let us deal with *Barrett* first, since it was the only one of Van Der Merwe's westerns destined for white and foreign audiences. It starred Mark Mulder as the title character, a former sheriff who quits his job after accidentally killing an innocent young woman during a shootout. He wanders aimlessly through the countryside until arriving at the small town of Silver Creek, where he begins to work as an enforcer at a farm owned by the young widow Dolores (Janine Denison) and her father Don Carlos Cortez (Stuart Parker).

In order to increase the film's marketability overseas Van Der Merwe was advised by his producers and potential distributors to extricate any references to South Africa from the film. The continuous boycotts imposed on the country due to apartheid policies had severely hampered the import and export of films, which were also being affected by governmental restrictions and blacklisting by foreign production companies such Equity from Britain, the major trade union for performers and creative professionals in the Commonwealth which – beginning in 1976 – refused to sell programs featuring its members to South Africa, and the Associated Actors and Artistes of America, who also blocked members from working on South African productions from 1981 onwards.[155] The general consensus was that distancing *Barrett* from its national roots would facilitate and benefit business. Van Der Merwe complied and adapted the production accordingly. He directed it under the English sounding pseudonym "Antony Bond" and set the story in a fictitious town in a non-specific part of America.

The plot adhered to traditional conventions and did not stray. Its structure is that of a "Ranch Story," with an unscrupulous landowner, Mont (Peter J. Elliott) harassing Don Carlos and Dolores into selling him the farm and Barrett as the mysterious stranger who intercedes in favour of the underdogs. The "good woman" subplot is also prominent. Reluctant to get involved in Don Carlos and Mont's feud at first, Barrett's feelings for Dolores override his stoicism, and he believes that by saving her he can atone for his past mistakes and find contentment.

The aesthetics correspond closely to that of the American western, with the exception of Don Carlos' farm, which – despite the name "La Casa Espanhola" (The Spanish House) – has a decidedly Dutch colonial style to it. The discrepancy is hardly intrusive. More jarring is a small episode towards

155 "Boycotts," *ANC.org*, December 1, 2010, accessed July 09, 2015, http://www.anc.org.za/themes.php?t=Boycotts.

the beginning of the film, which seems to be there solely as an iconographic reference. While camping at night Barrett is attacked by two generic Native Americans for no discernible reason. He defeats them and they flee. The next day they attack him again. Barrett kills one and renders the other unconscious. He then continues his journey and that is the last we see or hear of the episode. The encounter is never contextualized, it has no connection with the main storyline or its branches, nor are there any other encounters with Native Americans. Similar to the "African images" of endemic animals in *The Jackals* and *Scotty Smith*, the presence of the "Indian" in *Barrett* acts as a cultural marker, reinforcing the film's association with American and, in this case, also with the western genre as whole.

If the film was set to be released in the early 1990s as Van Der Merwe's recollects, there were reasonable chances *Barrett* would succeed in the international market. After scraping by in the 1980s, when the western experienced an all-time low in popularity and production output, the genre crawled back from public apathy and into the prime time spotlight with a string of big-budget blockbusters. The renaissance began in 1985 with Lawrence Kasdan's *Silverado*, a love-letter to the classic Hollywood western full of soon-to-be superstars, including Kevin Kline, Danny Glover and Kevin Costner. The film's positive reception enticed 20th Century Fox to give the genre a new go, and the studio commissioned *Young Guns* in 1988, casting the so-called "Brat Pack" in the leading roles and successfully attracting younger audiences.[156] With the release of Costner's Oscar-winning *Dances with Wolves* in 1990, the western's rehabilitation was complete. Several productions were underway in the following years, including Clint Eastwood's Oscar-winning *Unforgiven* in 1992, the star-studded *Tombstone* (Cosmatos, 1993) and the Mel Gibson vehicle *Maverick* (Donner, 1994).

However Van Der Merwe's film was never officially released. By the time the film was ready for distribution the subsidy system in South Africa was at the centre of a major scandal. Rampant corruption in the Schemes led to a crackdown by the Department of Home Affairs in the late 1980s, which uncovered a massive amount of irregularities.[157] Subsidy payments were suspended until the investigation was over and in 1995, when the extent of the swindle became evident, the government buried the Schemes.[158]

Unable to capitalize on government incentives, Van Der Merwe and his producers opted for granting exclusive rights to a famous local distributor who would sell the film overseas. It was an

156 "Brat Pack" was a nickname given by media outlets in America to a group of young Hollywood stars that emerged around the same time in Hollywood during the 1980s. Prominent members included Emilio Estevez, Anthony Michael Hall, Rob Lowe, Demi Moore and Molly Ringwald. See David Blum, "Hollywood's Brat Pack," *New York Magazine*, June 10, 1985, accessed August 1, 2015, http://nymag.com/movies/features/49902/

157 Murray, "Ethnic Cinema," 264.

158 Ibid., 265.

unfortunate decision. The distributor absconded with the film's only print and Van Der Merwe claims never to have received any royalties from the film.[159] Recently in 2015, the director discovered a copy o f *Barrett* in VHS from the American distributor Complete Entertainment. Now with the help of entrepreneur Ben Cowley from the production company Gravel Road, Van Der Merwe is exploring legal means by which he can claim the ownership of the film and request compensation.

Immediately after (or before) *Barrett* Van Der Merwe filmed a total of three more westerns, all of them in the Zulu language and destined for local black audiences. The order of production is uncertain, but all films where shot within weeks of each other. They are, in no particular order, *Umbango, Imusi* and *Revenge*. All three have been recently restored by Gravel Road Entertainment and are now being prepared for released on DVD and possibly online digital distribution.[160] All three films possess ideological undercurrents that resonate with the history of black westerns outside of South Africa, especially those produced during the early years of Hollywood.

Set somewhere in the South African countryside, *Umbango* utilizes the "Ranch Story" setup. Young cowboy Jack (Hector Matanda) has found an unclaimed piece of land on which he wishes to build. Local rich crook KK (Popo Gumede) has his sights on the same stretch of earth. Both request ownership rights from the local sheriff, who is reluctant to grant it, uncertain of whose claim is valid. To solve the dispute, Jack and KK decide to debate with gunfire, last man standing takes it.

According to producer Steve Hand, *Umbango*'s story was designed to address the revolutions taking place in South African society at the time. Since the years preceding the unbanning of the ANC by President F.W. De Klerk in 1990 the question of land ownership, illegal to blacks due to a series of parliamentary Land Acts instituted as early as 1913, was a topic of heated debate. "That was the time you know in '91, '92, when we knew that there was going to be a change," said Hand, "so we decided that the land that belongs to all the white people, we wanted to show that there are black people that can get in there and there are land grabbers who try to get the land."[161] After more than a year of discussions De Klerk finally repealed the acts in June of 1991, abolishing all racial property right restrictions.[162] Even if Hand's timeline is off by a few years as previously explained, the land debate would still have been within the right time frame to have impacted the film's release, which Van Der Merwe remembers as a great success.[163]

159 Van Der Merwe omitted the name of the distributor during interview to avoid possible legal complications.
160 See Gravel Road's "Retro Afrika Bioscope" website for more information: http://retroafrika.com.
161 Hand, quoted in Paleker, "Creating a 'black film industry'," 160.
162 Ruth Hall, "The Politics of Land Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa, 1990 to 2004: A Shifting Terrain of Power, Actors and Discourse" (Phd Thesis, St. Anthony's College University of Oxford, 2010): 137.
163 Haynes, "Sollywood."

Imusi (directed by Van Der Merwe under the pseudonym Carlton Spielberg) has a similar premise. Also a variation of the "Ranch Story," the film concerns a family living on a small farm in an Old West version of KwaZulu-Natal. A group of local outlaws plans to invade the property, wishing to take over and claim it as their own. When the father and older son go to town for supplies they are ambushed by three of the bandits, while the remaining two head to the farm and take the wife and the youngest son hostage. The father is able to escape the ambush and defeat the thugs, galloping back to the farm immediately in time for the final showdown.

The third black western breaks the land-related pattern of the previous films. As the title suggests *Revenge* (directed by Van Der Merwe under the pseudonym Coenie Dippenaar) revolves around a unnamed protagonist (Alex Ngubane) whose family moves into a small plot of land outside the lawless town of Sunrise. Local thugs see an opportunity for malicious fun and attack the newcomers, raping and murdering the wife, burning down their shack and leaving the son and father for dead. They are saved by a local beggar and former gunslinger. The old timer nurses them back to health and teaches the father how to shoot, after which the father returns to Sunrise to get even.

Like most B-Scheme films, all three westerns had all-black casts. With a small exception of one inconsequential white character ("Gringo," played by stuntman Danie van Rensburg) who is shot dead minutes after its appearance in *Umbango*, the remaining actors and extras in these films exist in a separate world devoid of whites, an African Wild West consisting solely of indigenous people. The decision to limit interactions between blacks and whites on the screen was a practical one for Tonie Van Der Merwe. Censorship in the country at the time was as restrictive as it was vague. Its parameters encompassed a vast number of possibilities, used by censors to control industry standards. Section 47(2) of the Publications Act of 1974, which regulated public entertainment was particularly onerous in its stipulations, objecting to any entertainment work that, among other situations, "brings any section of the inhabitants of the Republic into ridicule or contempt" and "is harmful to relations between any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic."[164] What it considered "ridicule" or "harmful to relations" was not specified, leaving interpretation wide open to fit any given objection a censor might raise. To complicated matters, censorial scrutiny was enacted only upon the final product, as opposed to vetoing or approving scripts before the commencement of production.[165] By then money had already been spent and the prospect of having the film censored, or worse, banned outright worried producers, who could find themselves with a money pit of a film they could not distribute. Therefore most B-Scheme

164 Joyce Ozynski, ed., *Film: What the Censors Think* (Johannesburg, Anti-Censorship Action Group, 1989).
165 Paleker,

producers erred on the side of caution, avoiding controversial themes and specially racial conflict, the touchiest of subjects with the Censor Board.

The decision to exclude racial interactions placed black westerns was in line with an American precedent, the wave of all-black westerns of the 1920s and 1930s. Beginning in Florida and eventually Hollywood, a handful of films were produced, with *The Crimson Skull* in 1922 launching the cycle and ending with a series of four "singing cowboy" films starring black actor Herbert Jeffrey, *Harlem of the Prairie* (Newfield, 1937), *Two-Gun Man from Harlem* (Kahn, 1938), *The Bronze Buckaroo* (Kahn, 1939) and *Harlem Rides the Range* (Kahn, 1939). In her analysis of the Jeffrey's series, Julia Leyda observes that these black westerns were part of a larger filmmaking trend of black audience movies produced in America at the time. African Americans comprised a large chunk of movie audiences Hollywood was not targeting. Recognizing the niche, independent white companies and directors stepped in and produced films exclusively to the black audience market, to be screened at segregated theatres across the country.[166] The situation mirrors South Africa almost perfectly, with white producers and directors making films for the black population to be distributed in the homelands.

American black westerns had a series of recurring features that can also be applied to Van Der Merwe's films. The most immediate was that they allowed black characters to be heroes. Although blacks were not rare in Hollywood westerns, even appearing in high-profile productions like *Cimarron* (Ruggles, 1931) and *Destry Rides Again* (Marshall, 1939), Michael K. Johnson observes that "more commonly [black] characters are associated with domestic spaces or duties, appearing as cooks, maids, servants, and/or as messengers, and they most often function in comic roles."[167] In *Destry* for example Lillian Yarbo played the maid Clara, while in *Cimarron* Eugene Jackson plays Isaiah, a young stowaway that idolizes white cowboy Yancey Cravat (Richard Dix). The strategy was also true of the few images of black Africans in South African "white westerns," who mostly consisted of lowly, barely educated servants (as Ken Gampu in *The Hellions* and the farmhands in *Voor Sononder*) or exotic, uncivilized "savages" (as in *Scotty Smith* and *The Jackals*) whose status is that of inferior in both British imperialist and Afrikaner nationalist rhetoric. On the other hand B-Scheme westerns (and most B-Scheme films) allowed blacks to rise above servitude and into powerful, upward mobile roles as land settlers and business owners.

On top of the patronizing, subaltern roles, American white westerns emasculated black males by

166 Julia Leyda, "Black-Audience Westerns and the Politics of Cultural Identification in the 1930s," *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 1 (2002): 48.

167 Michale K. Johnson, *Hoo-Doo Cowboys and Bronze Buckaroos: Conceptions of the African American West* (Mississippi: U. Press of Mississippi, 2014): 103-104.

forcing them into "a domesticity that preclude[d] [them] from participating fully in the masculine adventures of the white male characters."[168] Black westerns sought to remediate these denigration, empowering black man with the mystique of the brave and dauntless cowboy. The argument applies to British and Afrikaner South African westerns where even the "savages" depicted in *Scotty Smith* are harmless traders from the homelands and the more aggressive Shangaan tribesmen from *The Jackals* are easily appeased and dismissed with a lie by their white friend Oupa Decker. Van Der Merwe's black westerns on the other hand echo the empowerment granted to black protagonists, with Jack in *Umbango* challenging KK to secure his land claim, the father in *Imusi* defeating the outlaws threatening his family and farm, and Ngubane's unnamed character in *Revenge* relying on his own gunfighting skills to eliminate his wife's murderers.

The above westerns also acted as what Manthia Diawara called a vehicle of "reterriorialization" of black on film. In his article "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," Diawara argues that white audiences drew pleasure from the nonthreatening, naive and comedic representations of blacks characters, who were deterritorialized from a Black milieu and transferred to a predominantly White world, that is, a harmonious world were there was no racial tension and blacks accepted their "place" as inferior beings relegated to the lower strata of society.[169] Black-audience films reterriorialized African Americans into an all-black reality were they could see positive images of themselves and enjoy positions of power. In the case of the western, it allowed black women to imagine themselves as romantic leads, entitled to jewellery, fashionable dresses and a handsome cowboy to sweep her off her feet. And it allowed males to step away from the sidekick shadow of the white protagonists and, more importantly, "invited Black Americans to see black men as fully vested American citizens and righteous heroes."[170] In the case of *Umbango* and *Imusi* in particular, the core issue of the story itself – the land – implies reterritorialization. The systematic disenfranchisement of black Africans was intrinsically connected to their forced relocation to segregated, government-designed "homelands." Thus to retrieve the land was a crucial step into the reintegration of black Africans into the economy not just as labourers but as legitimate, equal, upward mobile members of society. Within this framework, Jack's heroic, successful land claim in *Umbango* and the father's successful defence of his property in *Imusi* functioned to black Africans as a step towards the fully vested type of citizenship African Americans associated with the leading roles of westerns.

168 Ibid., 106.
169 Manthia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988): 70-71.
170 Ibid., 61.

The reterritorialization process could only work if aesthetic verisimilitude between white and black westerns allowed for immediate recognition. American black westerns adhered closely to the iconography, both in costumes and setting. “Bob Blake [Jeffrey's character] rides the range on his white horse, Stardusk,” writes Leyda, “decked out in a tailored western shirt with fringe across the chest, high-heeled cowboy boots, a white hat and a shiny pair of guns.”[171] If the black audience member is to relate to the black cowboy and believe possible for him to stand as tall as its white counterpart, verisimilitude is key, for it entitles him to the same power and status embodied by the iconic figure. Van Der Merwe's black westerns obey genre prerogatives well, sticking to Stetson hats, six-shooters, horse-drawn carriages and repurposing the cinematographic city constructed for *Barrett* without significant alterations other than the paintwork of building facades.

Van Der Merwe made a conscious decision to exclude all possible visual references to Zulu culture from the films, save for the language, which had to be vernacular in order to qualify for subsidy.[172] He believed that one should either make a traditional western or not make a western at all, and that local characters such as sangomas did not have a place in a western film.[173] His efforts were largely successful but also resulted in peculiarities. For example, although *Umbango* and *Revenge* are entirely spoken in Zulu, all the establishment signs in the towns are in English, no doubt a design decision related to the English-language *Barrett* for which they were originally created. Gairoonisa Paleker also noticed that women in *Umbango* wore traditional African *doek* headgear, as opposed to the typical sun bonnet commonly found in westerns, a possible oversight by the director in view of his last statement.[174] The detractions do not affect the film significantly, but they still represent cultural staples not much different than the animal montages of *Scotty Smith* and *The Jackals*, except that here they might be accidental continuity mishaps rather than deliberate inclusions.

The western in South Africa in the New Millennium

Westerns would not resurface in the Rainbow Nation until the new millennium. The turmoil that permeated the country in the last years of apartheid in the early 1990s slowed down the film industry as a whole, and with both subsidy systems suspended due to investigations of corruption few productions made all the way to release. Once the dust settled after the 1994 democratic elections, the ANC

171 Leyda, “Black-Audience Western,” 56.
172 Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, 40.
173 Tonie Van Der Merwe, interview with the author, July 21, 2015.
174 Paleker, “Creating a 'black film industry',” 161.

government initiated proceedings to revitalize the industry. Based on the recommendations of a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), which resulted in the policy document entitled *The White Paper on Film,* the government instituted a new body to promote and manage filmmaking in South Africa, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF).[175] In addition, it reverted tax matters concerning international film productions to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), which prioritized the institution of a new tax rebate plan in order to attract foreign investment.

The incentives provided by the DTI worked remarkably well, creating a surge of international co-productions in the country.[176] According to Botha, since 1995 a minimum of five co-productions were shot in South Africa per year, and the number has been growing substantially every since.[177] Among the productions benefited by the new rebates was the first western filmed in the country in almost a decade, the British production *Glory Glory*, also known as *Hooded Angels* (Matthews, 2000). Shot just outside Johannesburg, it combines "Outlaw" and "Revenge Story" conventions in the tale of an all-female gang of bank robbers pillaging small towns in Texas shortly after he end of the Civil War. The girls become the target of a posse of bounty hunters led by Wes (Paul Johansson), who also believes the leader of the gang, Hannah (former Miss South Africa Chantell Stander), killed his father. The feature follows on the footsteps of a number of female-centred westerns produced in the wake of the 90s revival, such as *The Ballad of Little Jo* (Greenwald, 1993), *Bad Girls* (Kaplan, 1994) and *The Quick and the Dead* (Raimi, 1995), which often presented stories of women banding together to protect each other and/or exact revenge on males who have wronged them in the past.[178] *Glory Glory* is not really a local western, as its production was entirely conceived and bankrolled by an English company that merely used South Africa as a backdrop, so it will not received much attention in this study.

Likewise the Danish/UK/South African co-production *The Salvation* (Levring, 2014), the last western shot in the country to date, can also hardly be considered a South African film, despite having a local company attached to it. Largely produced by Lars von Trier's Zentropa, in association with the UK's Forward Films and the South African Spier Films, *The Salvation* focuses of former Danish soldier and farmer Jon Jensen (Mads Mikkelsen), who after killing the murderers of his wife becomes the target of a sadistic gang leader (Jeffrey Dean Morgan). The film tackles an often-ignored aspect of westerns, the circumstances of first-generation European immigrants to America, many of whom ended

175 Treffry-Goatley, "South African cinema after apartheid," 41.
176 DTI Financial Incentives Brochure. Can be downloaded at https://www.thedti.gov.za/financial_assistance/docs/Foreign_Film_Guidelines.pdf.
177 Botha, *South African Cinema*, 171.
178 The trend continued into the 2000s with *Gang of Roses* (La Marre, 2003), *The Missing* (Howard, 2003), *Ride or Die* (Hill, 2005), *Bandidas* (Ronning and Sandberg, 2006) and *Gang of Roses 2* (la Marre, 2012).

up in the frontier. *The Salvation* premiered in Cannes in 2014 and has since made the rounds at film festivals, followed by a limited theatrical run and subsequent DVD release.

A predominantly Danish endeavour, the production's involvement with South Africa was logistic rather than artistic. Spier Films was a bantam production partner, restricted to providing equipment, crew and liaise with the DTI to secure tax rebates.[179] In interview director Kristian Levrig said that working in South Africa was above all an economic decision, not an artistic one, mentioning that the film's tight budget precluded them from shooting in America.[180] Instead, the production used a massive farm in the highveld north of Johannesburg to build real sets, and blended footage shot in Utah and Montana with the grassy plains and occasional ridges of the region, removing local trees in post production to complete the illusion.[181] Like *Glory Glory*, it has been addressed for the sake of completion but its status as an essentially foreign film falls out of the parameters set for analysis in this particular study. Instead, both films merit mention as examples of current western genre trends and, more importantly, part of a new chapter in the history of South African film, a chapter deeply enmeshed in the globalized landscape of cinematic productions worldwide.

Spoofie! Die Wilde Weste (2012)

By the mid-2000s the western fell into a pattern that it maintains up to 2015. Having rekindled public interest in the 90s, the genre has also captured the attention of major Hollywood directors and stars, something it was not able to do since the 1960s. Renewed prestige has maintained its status in small batches of high-profile productions, which now tend to merge Revisionist themes with Spaghetti-style realism. Recent highlights include the controversial *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005), the Coen Brothers remake of the John Wayne classic *True Grit* (2010) and the blaxploitation-inspired *Django Unchained* (Tarantino, 2012).

In this climate appeared in South Africa one of the strangest westerns in recent memory, Remano de Beer's *Spoofie! Die Wilde Weste*, a foul-mouthed, self-financed Afrikaans language feature that threads the line between parody and exploitation. The film is comprised of an overdubbed, re-edited version of *McLintock!* (McLaglen, 1963) and newly-shot footage, in the same style of Woody Allen's debut, *What's Up Tiger Lily?* (1966) and the more recent martial arts comedy *Kung Pow! Enter*

179 Elsa Keslassy, "International Financing 'Salvation' for Danish Producer," *Variety.com*, May 19, 2013, accessed August 03, 2015, http://variety.com/2013/biz/news/international-financing-salvation-for-danish-producer-1200483990/. See also Spier Films website for information of their production services and connections to the DTI, http://spierfilms.com.
180 Wendy Mitchell, "Into the Wild," *FILM,* accessed August 29, 2015, http://www.dfi-film.dk/cannes-2014-the-salvation.
181 Ibid.

the Fist (Oedekerk, 2002). Bursting with pop references, *Spoofie!* is so deeply rooted in local culture that it is nearly impossible to follow it without the proper context.[182] From quotes from the songs of Kurt Darren to jokes about the Afrikaans tabloid Huisgenoot and the sexual escapades Steve Hofmeyr, de Beer packs in as many allusions to South African society as possible, creating a gauche flick that draws its comedy from the contrast between the pristine imagery of a classic, Technicolored Hollywood western and the crude lingo associated with Afrikaner "Zef" culture[183].

The story, as far as there is one, revolves around Jan-Hendrik Verwoerd Wyn (John Wayne), a drunkard in the process of divorcing his estranged wife, Sarie Marais (Maureen O'Hara). Their strained relationship grows tenser with the return from college of their daughter, Rebecca (Stephanie Powers), who seems to be attracted to Jan's newest farm hand, the handsome Nkosi Tshabalala (Patrick Wayne). The narrative seems to follow the plot of the original film, which was loosely based on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*[184]. However de Beer's re-dub (all voices performed by the director himself) uses the story as a flimsy excuse to launch into offensive diatribes, satirizing local celebrities and engaging into gutter-humour sequences punctuated by a wealth of expletives and sexual innuendo, including two scenes dedicated exclusively to enumerating euphemisms to male and female genitalia.

Spoofie! is juvenile to the extreme and it has very little connection – if any – to western genre trends or Afrikaner filmmaking. It seems to reject every possible archetype present in the genre and its local incarnation. Wayne's re-dubbed Jan comes across as horny troglodyte that not even the crudest of Spaghetti leads ever stooped down to; the re-dubbed narrative reduces the female characters to little more than window dressing and the butt of sexist jokes; the story loses much of its coherence due to shots being re-arranged in post-production, a fact de Beer admits during the film, when after a scene depicting a city fair the story abruptly jumps to a brawl near a mud pit, and the characters themselves question why they ended up there for no reason.

A comparison to Afrikaner westerns derails into similar territory. One would be hard-pressed to label Sarie and Rebecca as *volksmoeder* and *boeredogter,* their behaviour in the film utterly

182 As a Brazilian who do not speak Afrikaans, in the occasion of analyzing the film I was accompanied by a native Afrikaner who translated the film line by line to English. Even then she had to constantly stop and explain the myriad of cultural references so that I could follow the plot and understand the film's context and subtext.

183 Roughly translated from Afrikaans slang as "common," zef is considered a counter-culture movement appropriated by emerging Afrikaner artists such as Die Antwoord and Jack Parow. It consists of a conscious rejection of culturally-accepted norms of taste and quality and the exaltation of what is seen as lowbrow as a source of artistic innovation and social critique. See Dylan Culhane, "Die Antwoord – Zef so Fresh," *Vice*, September, 2009, accessed July 20, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20110813131343/http://www.viceland.com/int/v16n9/htdocs/die-antwoord-154.php. Also Hermione Hoby, "Die Antwoord: 'Are we awful or the best thing in the universe?'," *The Guardian,* September 12, 2010, accessed July 20, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/sep/12/die-antwoord-music-feature.

184 Commentary track on the *McLintock! Authentic Collector's Edition* DVD.

incompatible with those archetype's roles as a guide to new generations and the embodiment of tradition and/or cultural trauma, respectively. Instead, their part in the film is reduced to fetishism, with Sarie constantly rebuffing sexual advances and Rebecca lusting after Nkosi. There is no character that can suitably be considered an *uitlander* and Nkosi can only be seem as a *boereseun* in the loosest of terms, his only qualification for the label being that he is a man and ends with Rebecca at the end.

An argument could be made that in his rejection of traditional archetypes and emulation of fringe culture de Beer is making a critique to current South African society. The "Zef" movement is characterized by appropriating what is commonly deemed to be unsophisticated and kitsch in Afrikanerdom and utilizing it as a source of originality and rebellion, in this way subverting notions of privilege and pride.[185] The approach found its way to film in 2008 with the Afrikaner non-western black comedy *Triomf,* directed by Michael Raeburn (adapted from Marlene van Niekerk's multi-award winning novel). The story concerns the Benades, a highly dysfunctional working-class family experiencing a major crisis in the months preceding the end of Apartheid. The film received positive reviews for its portrayal of the often-ignored poor white community of South Africa, and according to critics successfully applied the principles of Zef to an artistic critique of social inequality and prejudice.[186] However, different from *Triomf*'s poignant setting and socially-aware narrative, *Spoofie!* merely pieces together topical cultural material rather than contextualizing it into a coherent metaphor or satire, rendering any message it could contain unintelligible or at least extremely ambiguous.

Regardless, what is certain is that *Spoofie!* can be only considered a western by iconographic association. The film's entire historical background and language have been stripped away, rendering it a celluloid shell loaded with culture-specific material utterly alien to its original content. As it is, it stands as an oddity in the history of South African western – and probably South African film in general – not likely to be emulated nor given much more attention than the paragraphs addressing it above.

Conclusion

Almost every theorist who has dedicated his or her time to investigating the western has come to agree that the genre's ideological undercurrent is an imperialistic narrative unconsciously designed to justify American expansionism and its subjugation of Native Americans, Mexicans and any other

185 Rossouw Nel, "Myths of Rebellion: Afrikaner and Countercultural Discourse" (Master thesis, University of Cape Town, 2010): 132.

186 Links to reviews of *Triomf* can be found in the film's website, http://www.triomfmovie.com/.

peoples found in what it is now US territory.[187] The "myth of the frontier," a conceptual, moving border between American territories and the untamed west of the continent, for a large part of its existence consisted of lands brimming with possibility, adventure and riches entrusted to Anglo-Americans as their "Manifest Destiny," a testament of God's favour and the racial and cultural superiority of whites over all other races.[188]

In view of such demagogic paradigm it is not hard to see why white South Africans in the beginning of the 20th century felt attracted to the way of the cowboy. Its exultance of the pioneer spirit, praise for white, European descendant entrepreneurship and especially its concept of divine entitlement resonated with British and Afrikaner communities. Despite their differences, both believed themselves to be racially superior to the indigenous people, the British acting under the expansionist banner of its Empire, proclaiming to be their duty to bring civilization and religion to the barbaric peoples of far-flung lands, and the Boer seeing the land as rightfully granted by God due to their victorious stand against the savage unbelievers in the field of battle.

On the other hand black audiences saw in the American cowboy a symbol of resistance, an "other" with whom they could identify and through whom they could live vicarious fantasies of rebellion. "Jack" was noble, brave, indomitable. Like the heroes of traditional folktales, he could get himself out of any predicament, defeat any enemy and conquer any damsel. And he was also free. The legitimization of white hegemony inherent to the genre's makeup was completely obfuscated by its iconographic power. The same films, read under divergent lenses, yielded alternative connotations that sustained the genre's popularity for over five decades in South Africa.

Through most of its production output in South Africa, the western was used as a vessel for the dissemination of local ideas and ideals relevant to country's cultural milieu, adapting its features to encompass discourses alien to its original ideology, such as the reterritorialization effect in *Umbango* and the Third World politics of *They Call Me Lucky*. Its malleability while maintaining a distinct shape attests to the genre's mythical quality, able to adapt to the regional ethos of creators or public without loosing its universal character. As a local cinematic product though, the genre's place in film history is marginal at best. Its reach was limited by the genre's antithetical cultural background, that clashed with the relentless patriotic zeal and promotion of cultural pride sponsored by the government, curbing its

187 Several of the bibliographic resources utilized in this study address the topic. See Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 232-237; Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel,* 19-29; Raymond Durgnaut & Scott Simmon, "Six Creeds that Won the Western" in Kitses & Rickman, *The Western Reader* for more detailed examinations.

188 The theory was popularized by American historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his influential essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." It can be found on Project Gutemberg at http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/22994.

appeal to the masses and discouraging local entrepreneurs to invest on it. Those that were produced were unfortunately rather unremarkable, lacking production value or innovation, rehashing traditional formulas and without enough artistic flair to stand out. In addition many have long been out of print of deemed lost until recently, further precluding accessibility by researchers and audiences.

Nevertheless, from the most faithful attempt to reproduce an American western like *Barrett*, which excluded all references to South Africa from its script in hopes of bypassing the international cultural boycott, to the Afrikaner *plaasjapie* caricatures of *Dingejtjie is Dynamite!*, the construction of all South African westerns reveal larger socio-political trends at work during their inception. Some, like *Voor Sononder*, reflect deeply rooted archetypes; others like the ethnic jumble of the *The Jackals* or the emulation of Spaghetti aesthetics in *Three Bullets... for a Long Gun* reflect foreign influences on the industry. They are indirect chronicles of the country's history, alluding to cultural norms, popular beliefs and governmental mindsets. Their importance thus lies not in their outstanding contributions to the canon of South African productions, but instead as examples of experiments in the negotiation and adaptation of national ideology, or a critique of it, utilizing cinematographic tropes.

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