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**Documenting Gay Identity through the Cinematic Lens: An Investigation
of Representations of South African Gay Identities through Film.**

by

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Abstract

As expressions and interpretations of a complex, rapidly developing society, post-apartheid cinematic texts have become significant sites of study that demand fresh scholarly analysis (Barber 2000: 177)

To echo Barber's sentiment, a post-apartheid South African cinematic culture has since evolved and continues to shape its own identity within a global cinematic space. Very few scholars have shown an interest in a sub strand of these post-apartheid cinematic texts; that sub strand being queer cinematic texts. This paper looks to delve into a rounded exploration of a queer cinematic culture in the post-apartheid era.

Through an appreciation of South African cinematic history, the socio-political seems intertwined in the very fibre of this cinematic history; with factors such as race, class, wealth distribution, policy, legislation and conditions of production etc. playing an active role in shaping this history. Sexuality is another facet, in very subtle terms, which has contributed, influenced and scripted the historical make up and character of South African Cinema. I undertake to focus on the interplay between sexuality, cinema and history in an attempt to contextualise (for the purposes of this investigation) how strategies of representation are appropriated in a post-apartheid queer cinema. The queer is political and consequently queering of any sort, entails a clear engagement with a political discourse. Therefore this dissertation takes into consideration the influence of the socio-political on the development and evolution of a queer cinematic culture and appropriately employs a cultural studies approach as a theoretical framework to address this multi-disciplinary concern¹.

Through an investigation and exploration of this particular cinematic culture, this dissertation arms itself with investigating, more specifically, representations of South African gay identities in films. Moreover, investigating the ways in which gay filmmakers frame², position and represent gay identity and experience in a South African context.

¹ Multi-disciplinary in the sense that it not only focuses on film but also recognises the necessity to engage in other disciplines to address the socio-political and cultural concerns of this research.

² I essentially make use of the term frame, through the understanding that frames are basic cognitive structures which guide the perception and representation of reality; as is defined by Thomas König (2005). I further follow on Entman's definition of frame to shape my understanding. Entman defines it as follows: "to frame is to

This discussion will focus on fictional and narrative based films as well as documentaries: (*Apostles of Civilised Vice* Part 1 & 2 (1999) by Zackie Achmat, *Beautiful Contradictions* (2009) by Fanney Tsimong, *The Man Who Drove with Mandela* (1998) by Greta Schiller and Mark Gevisser and *A Normal Daughter: The Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six* (1997) by Jack Lewis) providing textual readings of the films. These films deal strongly with a homosexual subject matter further offering unique representations of gay identities. It is imperative to note that I have chosen to analyse these films because of the different identities within the gay sub-culture they represent; an aspect I comment on in the latter parts of this dissertation. Additionally, I have considered the cultural and ethnic profiles of the filmmakers and have delineated the works of these filmmakers as interesting sites for discussion which will possibly provide rich material to decipher and make meaning in the context of this research endeavour.

In addition to a textual reading and focusing on the different gay identities represented, I will attempt to understand how these films challenge or deconstruct cultural representations of gay identity and whether they consciously offer a counter representation to what is being represented and portrayed in mass media. It will also explore Dyer's argument that representation, representatives and representing have to do also with others and how others see members of a group and their place and rights (1993: 3). This argument will be explored with regard to how these films and filmmakers engage with the cultural forms of representation; questioning how cultural forms of representation shape the way these social groupings and identities are represented on the screen. This line of argument will look to posit these representations (as portrayed in mass media) as mediums of cultural production in which the films are formed from the filmic and sub-cultural images, assumptions, styles and feelings available to them and the context, "as these aspects characterize cultural production" (Dyer, 1993: 2). The narrative argument of this dissertation ultimately focuses on how these films look to break free from heterosexist audiences and speak with a language that speaks to and for the gay community.

select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation." Entman, Robert .1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm". *Journal of Communication* Vol 43, No 4: pp51-58.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Cape Town. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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February 2012

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Glossary

Cultural Production: is a process which entails the symbolic elements of culture being shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved³. It entails observing the “the field of power” theorised by Bourdieu as a social space imbued with high levels of economic and social power.⁴

Discourse: a discourse consists of large groups of statements that govern the way we speak about things and perceive a specific historical moment or moments (Salih, 2002: 47). Foucault (1979) understands these statements as repeatable events that are connected by their historical contexts, and therefore attempts to discover the continuities between statements that together make up discursive formations such as sexuality.

Gay: a synonym for homosexual describing males who are attracted to other males.

Gender: is the social construction and understanding of cultural codes used to distinguish between what a society considers masculine or feminine conduct.

Heteronormative: is a term used by social theorists to describe a cultural bias in which gender and sexuality are separated into hierarchically organised categories⁵. This hierarchy places heterosexuality as the norm and therefore in a privileged position at the top of the hierarchy. Subsequently, other alternative sexualities at the lower end of this pyramid are marginalised.

Homosexual: a person attracted primarily to people of the same sex.

Heterosexism: the belief that everyone is assumed heterosexual, or, if not, that they should be.

Homophobia: Irrational fear of or hatred against and disgust towards homosexuals or homosexuality. This fear or hatred is expressed in the form of prejudice.

LGBTI: Acronym which refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Intersexed.

Mass Media: Media that is intended for large audiences via mass communication such as broadcast media comprising of television, film, radio, CDs, DVDs and some other gadgets like

³ This is a succinct paraphrase of the writing of Peterson and Anand. 2008 in *The Production of Culture Perspective*.

⁴ Paraphrased from the writing of Hesmondhalgh (2006). For a more thorough overview of Bourdieu's understanding of cultural production and the media, Hesmondhalgh provides a comprehensive discussion of of these issues as is outlined in Bourdieu's work. Hesmondhalgh, D. 2006. “Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production”. *Media Culture Society* Vol 28: 211.

⁵ As is defined by Emily Gray. n.d. “What is Heteronormativity”. <http://www.genderandeducation.com/issues/what-is-heteronormativity/>

cameras or video consoles. It further encompasses newspapers, magazines, brochures, newsletters, books, leaflets and pamphlets.⁶

Queer: Often used as a slur in the English language to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. The term Queer has been reclaimed by many people in the US and other countries as an expression of pride in one's homosexual sexual orientation and gender identity. Furthermore, descriptions of queer are widely used as an expression to make reference or describe a grouping of individuals who identify with alternative sexualities deviant to heterosexuality.

Queering: An attempt to provide a queer perspective, accounting for the existence and expression of a wide range of positions focusing on queer theory, identities and perspectives, within a culture that is non-queer. Therefore occupying a queer presence and recognizing queer positions within existing canons of culture, literature, theory. More so, in this dissertation, queering entails asserting a queer reading/perspective in the fields of media and film studies.

Queer Cinema: is a cinema that signals itself as a queer product, which openly focuses on queer characters, queer communities and including queer audiences. Howes describes queer cinema as “a manifestation on celluloid of the new queer consciousness, not closeted or apologetic, responding with energy and imagination to a changed social, sexual and political landscape”⁷

Queer Cinematic Culture: A queer cinematic culture is an embodying term to refer to the wider practices within a queer cinema that set out to explore queer perspectives, attitudes, approaches, strategies, further including cinematic institutions and communities involved in the representation, production, distribution and reception of queer films, establishing itself as a counterculture within cinema.⁸

Representation: refers to the construction of qualities that mark identity. Moreover representation involves not only how identities are represented within a text, but also how construction of these identities in representing is the process of production and reception.⁹

Sexual orientation: the way in which a person's sexual and emotional desires are directed. The term categorises according to the sex of the object of desire – that is, it describes whether a person is attracted primarily toward people of the same or opposite sex, or to both.

⁶ This definition is a loose summation of the concept of mass media observed in Potter, W. (2008). *Arguing for A General Framework for Mass Media Scholarship*. SAGE.

⁷ Howes, K. 1993. *Broadcasting It*.

⁸ This definition is reworked from Ricardo Peach's definition of queer cinematic cultures; “queer cinematic cultures therefore signify all the cinematic institutions and communities involved in the representation, production, distribution and reception of queer films” Peach. 2007 as cited in Botha. *Marginal Lives and Painful Pasts: South African Cinema after Apartheid*.

⁹ As cited in Baldonado, A. 1996. *Media Representation*.

Introduction

Letties, moffies, stabanes, skesanas, injongas. . . make their own history but under conditions that are not of their making – [Hoad as cited in Hoad, Martin and Reid, 2005: 19].

I posit Hoad's quotation as a necessary starting point for this dissertation as it reflects the multiplicity of terms available for identifying homosexuality in South Africa. Moreover, these terms indicate different configurations of identity, practice and identification for homosexuals in South Africa. It further reinforces Gevisser and Cameron's argument that there is "no single, essential gay identity in South Africa" (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994: 3). Most importantly, Hoad highlights the agency of gay men in shaping, creating, imagining, acting and documenting their own history in a socio-political context where their histories have been marginalized and silenced for decades. The current socio-political climate in South Africa allows for gay men and queer identities to be active agents in the collusion of history; freely challenging, re-charting and at times writing their own history. This assertion goes beyond just a speculative argument, but is supported by the constitutional protection afforded to queers as is enshrined in section 9 (3) in the bill of rights¹⁰.

This dissertation will provide a critical discussion of representations of gay identities in films, specifically by filmmakers who identify as gay. The emphasis on focusing on films by filmmakers who self identify as gay is a key focal enquiry of this paper. I choose to focus on films by gay filmmakers because I am most interested in the way in which gay filmmakers look to address self-representation¹¹. The general sentiment is that gay filmmakers take it upon themselves to furnish the screen with counter representations of sexuality and identity to what pervades mainstream media. This sentiment is what I recognize to be the cornerstone

¹⁰ Section 9, Clause 3 reads: "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth." Read more: <http://www.constitutionalcourt.org.za/site/constitution/english-web/ch2.html>

¹¹ Almaas provides a more philosophical account of how in experiencing the self, we determine self-representation. He articulates: "The experience of the self is actually determined by the self-representation. The phenomenology of the self's experience presents itself through this representation, and hence, what the self perceives and experiences as itself, in its present experience, is greatly determined by it. The self-representation actually sculpts the forms that arise as the phenomenological particulars of the self's experience of itself. (2000: 59). It is an interesting way of articulating self-representation. Almaas touches on some interesting notions. What the self perceives and experiences as itself is reflected in what we can term; self-representation.

of queer cinema¹². I will argue that mass media, and by mass media I mean media that is intended for a large audience, is a carrier of dominant discourses and ideologies reflective of the society in which those media texts are produced in. As Dyer argues, mass media undergoes a process of cultural production (1993: 7). That is to suggest that in the production of media texts, a considerable amount of meaning is inferred through culturally and politically weighted ways of making meaning. Following on Dyer's argument, this dissertation will hone in on the "cultural production of images and texts representing homosexuality" (Dyer, 1993: 8). In my writing and investigation, I will furthermore explore the way in which queer cinematic cultures engage (whether in their production, context of production, thematic concerns) with history, representation of queer identities, film and representation in light of theoretical considerations in film and media studies.

Context of Research: Setting the Scene

1.1 Introductory Passage

With a history of oppression, marked by the institution of apartheid, the South African gay movement; characterized by the gay community, activists, liberation movements, artists, writers etc., identify the role of the media in either perpetuating stereotypical representations of gay identities or in oppressing queer identities. Richard Dyer writes of how the gay movement has insisted on the centrality of the media as "a carrier, reinforcer or shaper of our oppression" (1993: 15). Moreover, scholars such as Herek have implicated the media as agents in what he terms cultural heterosexism. He defines heterosexism as "an ideological system that denies, denigrates and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship and community" [Herek as cited in Levina *et al*, 2000]. As Lacey observes; "Media Studies gives us a crucial understanding of our world" (Lacey, 1993: 3) in the way that it represents – representing a world view that becomes a reference point for society. The media's role in this cultural heterosexism is further reflected in the way that it represents a world in which everyone is assumed to be heterosexual. Larry Gross makes a powerful statement regarding mass media culture and representation: "representation in the

¹² Throughout this thesis, I will interchangeably use this term of cinema to either refer to what Willemsen and Vitali (2006) explain as two understandings of cinema, (1) cinema as an industry, and (2) cinema as a 'cluster of cultural strategies'

mediated 'reality' of our mass culture is itself power" [Gross as cited in Ringer, J (ed). 1994: 143]. I find Gross' statement quite important for two particular reasons. He firstly makes mention of this concept of a mediated reality and secondly he interrogates the ideological meaning of power in representation. These are necessary considerations when looking to engage within the fields of media culture. The first consideration then, is to carefully dissect Gross' statement. Gross suggests that what is represented in mass media culture is a mediated reality. In his writing, Gross challenges analyses of media culture to instead approach media culture with the belief that it does not reflect a whole and true reality. He propagates for any analysis of media to uphold the understanding that the media constructs reality, either at times as 'exact' or distorted. Moreover, Gross suggests that in inferring readings of this (media) culture, one needs to absolve thoughts and an inclination to believe that mass media reflects reality. This is something he repetitively emphasises so as to drive the point home.

The concept of reality is, in itself, slippery and empirically contested from different schools of thoughts. I tend to favour this conception by Gross because it suggests, and this is where the second consideration comes in, that power is at the epicentre of this mediation. I present the idea that the media mediate this reality through a process of 'reality construction' and in this process; power is at the core. It leads to question; who is behind the driving force of what is mediated? How does the media mediate and in turn shape constructions of reality? These are questions that demand a more thorough discussion and will probably result in elaborate constructivist discourses within this field of media culture, which unfortunately cannot be synthesised into the body of this dissertation. Nevertheless, these are still useful questions to bear in mind.

Stefan Weber in his writing of *Media and the Construction of Reality* reviews both ontological and epistemological understandings of construction. In his discussion he brings to the fore the concept of dualism, as a balanced stand point between the opposing discourses of constructivism and realism¹³. In media and in the construction of reality; dualism is to assume "the dualism of media (as a reality generating and/or depicting agent) and reality (as the product and/or precondition for media reporting)" (Weber, 2002; 5). I find this an interesting conception of the modalities of reality construction in the media.

¹³ Realism is a philosophical theory which argues that reality is independent of subjects and the observer.

In light of the above, the key argument I make at this juncture as a means of establishing some of the critical areas of discussion for this dissertation, is that this heterosexism is reinforced through a certain kind of media pedagogy¹⁴. This media pedagogy, which shapes culture, is initiated through the media's mediated construction of reality. This media pedagogy is one which serves as a symbolic form of subjugation, not of its own accord, but rather enforced by the socio-cultural/political effects and broadly the society which it reflects. Luhmann writes that "The reality of the mass media is the reality of second order observation." (2000: 85). By second order observation, Luhmann further explains it to mean "the observation that a society which leaves its self-observation to the function system of the mass media enters into precisely this way of observing" (2000: 85). What this passage by Luhmann hints at, is this idea that mass media institutes a kind of media pedagogy, allowing for individuals in a society to observe their reality, which I argue can be referred to as culture, in the way that mass media functions to observe this 'reality'. To further clarify, that is to mean that the way mass media has framed and constructed this reality, is the way a society observes itself.

Luhmann, who insists on mass media being a system, explains that this 'system' "can produce changes in values; it can give preference to minority opinions that push themselves to the fore, perhaps especially because they appear as spectacular, full of conflict. . ." (2000: 89). Through closer analysis, I will delineate that mass media culture demonstrates how the dynamics of power and domination are encoded in cultural texts such as television and film to produce inadvertent ideological frames such as heterosexism.

1.2 Why Focus on Film?

I have chosen to focus on the medium of film as I believe film is one particular kind of medium which nurtures and allows for the creative self-expression of the artist. Film affords the individual, in this case the filmmaker, to be the axle of the inner workings of representation. The power in what is represented lies in the control of the artist, most of the time anyway. This argument is notwithstanding politics within the greater workings of film

¹⁴ Media pedagogy is the theory of the way in which the external influence – teaching and upbringing – can change the object of this influence especially in the media. Lars Qvortrup's (2007) writings on Media Pedagogy. Suggest this concept of media socialisation, though it has to be noted that he Qvortrup channels his focus on the educational purposes of the media when utilising this idea of pedagogy. In the context of this dissertation; I focus more on this idea of upbringing, as media is a custodian of disseminating information which in turn has a significant factor in 'upbringing' and therefore results in media socialisation.

production, namely influences from the political economy such as funding, policy, regulation etc. - which may influence what is being represented and framed. Therefore, in the light of media culture and particularly mass media culture, I argue that film is one of those mediums that allows for representation to be determined by the artistic vision, intentions and objectives of the filmmaker. This is in line with the objective of this dissertation. Having argued that mass media has been a reinforcer of the oppression of homosexual and queer identities, film is that medium which most queer communities have utilised as a space to resist and counter those oppressive forces.

Historically, queer cinematic cultures have also showcased an independent spirit, primarily due to the fact that such cinematic cultures do not garner the kind of economic backing in the form of structured industry reforms. Queer cinematic cultures do not exist in isolation, they exist within greater industries and systems which have their own mechanism. Therefore queer people, within these greater industries, have been involved at every level of production at establishing queer cinematic cultures; often being immune to external factors which may influence representation. This is because the very intention of queer cinematic cultures is to present on screen representations that are rebellious, tongue and cheek and bold in nature.

Therefore, film is a more difficult medium to mediate, certainly during the filmmaking process of such texts, more especially when the authoring of the text is by individuals with a clear mandate to defy any sort of mediation. It can be argued however, that mediation of film texts comes into effect at the next level, either in the distribution or censorship of such texts reaching specific audiences. By this stage, the film would have already been made and feeds into existing bodies of work.

1.3 The Scene

Research conducted and managed by Deborah Walter for *CMFD* (Community Media for Development) and *GALA* (Gay and Lesbian Archives for South Africa) interrogates the role of the media in its coverage and representation of LGBTI communities. Walter notes that “media has the ability to increase understanding or the power to re-enforce negative perceptions that contribute to discrimination.” (Walter, 2006: 4). Walter’s research affirms that “there is still widespread discrimination against LGBTI communities in South Africa.”

(2006:6). The findings reiterate Dyer's sentiment, as does Botha who specifically writes about representations and images of gay men in the film industry. He comments:

Our images of gay men and women are limited and still on the margin of the film industry. One ends up with less than fifteen short films, a few documentaries, less than five features with openly gay and lesbian characters and virtually no television programmes during the past hundred years of South African cinema. (Botha, 2006).

South Africa is a paradoxical space where liberal ideals, as enshrined in the bill of rights, are still hindered by a conservative nation. It would appear as though gay identity has been denied a presence on screens and if channeled and represented, these representations remain on a superficial basis shaped according to heteronormative and heterosexist ideals. These heteronormative ideals are arguably prescribed by our oppressive history built on Afrikaner nationalism. Through further interrogation, one notes that the presence of gay characters/identity on South African screens is almost non-existent¹⁵, although it has to be acknowledged that there are an increasing number of gay characters on South African television screens and cinema. This observation is supported by South African scholar, Christo Cilliers as he notes: "There appear to have been a shift in the South African Media towards a more emphatic representation of gays and lesbians, although more research is needed" [Cilliers as cited in Fourie (ed), 2008: 357]. Other scholars also bemoan this very sparse representation of South African queer identities. In 2011, Tamale notes that it's only in the past years that gay and lesbian people have been more visible in the media and also makes mention of the fact that what existed before appeared to have been mostly negative and sensational¹⁶.

Walter's research rightfully acknowledges that "the major criticism is that gay characters are still treated differently than straight characters, often with little affection shown between gay or lesbian couples." (Walter, 2006:11). It is important to also note that gay visibility in main stream cinema remains limited. It is only at film festivals dedicated to LGBTI and LGBTI friendly audiences do we see bold images of homosexuality that brace the screens positively affirming gay identity. In most cases, these films are produced for and by homosexuals.

¹⁵ There is an absence of research that provides a quantitative measure that documents the exact number of gay characters in different television series, dramas, films and documentaries to further substantiate this claim. However it remains something that is widely known is the case.

¹⁶ As reflected in her book; 2011. *African Sexualities: A Reader*.

I further make another key argument; that mass media's neglect of consistent coverage and accurate representation of gay identities sparks the necessity for queer cinema to assert itself in South Africa. Moreover, it perhaps also suggests the need to recognise queer cinema as a platform that gives a voice by and for queer experiences and identities in South Africa. I further place mass media alongside South Africa's history, as the catalyst for the empowerment of gay filmmakers. The role of mass media sets up the platform to discuss the different strategies gay filmmakers employ: questioning whether these strategies are in resistance or as counter measures to the images of gay identities presented in mass media. A more thorough discussion of the role of history and the development of a queer cinema will be provided in following paragraphs.

This current landscape paves the way for this dissertation to engage in terrain that is rarely explored in South African media and film scholarship.

Methodology

2.1 Introductory Remarks

Having contextualised the context of research, it is important to outline the theoretical considerations and methodological approaches employed in this investigation.

To reiterate, the key concern of this research is investigating and detailing the way ideology and cultural hegemony¹⁷ has influenced the ways in which gay filmmakers have chosen to represent gay identities. As the discussion on the context of research should suggest; I positively identify mass media and history as significant factors that have influenced the way in which gay filmmakers represent their own identities. I will in turn assert that ideology is something that is embedded in history and particularly reinforced throughout the subsequent years which result in a canvas of history.

¹⁷ Hegemony is a concept by Gramsci which holds that the power of a dominant group "continuously tries to persuade subordinate groups to accept its moral, political and cultural values" [Gramsci as cited in Fourie, 2008: 279].

If we are to deconstruct the definition of ideology, as defined by O'Shaughnessy and Stadler:

ideologies are sets of social values, ideas, beliefs, feelings and representations, by which people collectively make sense of the world they live in, thus constituting a world view. This world view is naturalized, a taken for granted, common-sense view about the way the world works. (2008: 307).

Societal values and ideas thus constitute a world view which develops over time – therefore embedded in history. If we are to examine the ideological concept of patriarchy, we become aware that it has been an ideology that has been reinforced throughout history, just as democracy is an ideology that garnered momentum as a political system throughout history. To expand on this concept of ideology, Terry Eagleton writes of the range of useful meanings to define ideology. He defines ideology as “a text, woven of whole tissue of different conceptual strands; it is traced through by divergent histories” (1991:1). Eagleton further provides alternative ways in which ideology may be understood. One of the ideas is the way in which ideology is an idea which helps to legitimate a dominant political power or as a process of the production of meanings, signs and values in a social life¹⁸. Eagleton's formulations of the different meanings of ideology prove compatible with the way Agger writes about how “dominant ideologies serve to reproduce social relations of domination and subordination” (1992: 4). Agger's writing encourages us to look into the system of ideologies and the power dynamics inherent in ideologies. Tomaselli succinctly summates, what I believe is the key thread of ideology, that it “functions to reinforce a given relation within a society's conditions of existence and adapts individuals to the tasks that society sets for them.” (1980: 2).

Thus the need to explore ideologies and the way in which they take shape through different threads that make up history and are elucidated within history. This argument demonstrates a clear concern that goes beyond film and media studies as it looks to engage with issues of ideology, representation, cultural production and identity; a cultural studies approach becomes a favoured framework to work within.

2.2 Foundations of a Cultural Studies Approach

¹⁸ This excerpt is paraphrased from Eagleton, T. (1992). *Ideology: An Introduction*.

Richard Johnson defines cultural studies as an “intellectual and political tradition, in its relations to the academic disciplines, in terms of theoretical paradigms, or by its characteristic objects of study” (1986: 1). Perhaps Johnson’s definition is clouded by a certain air of verbosity; however what is most poignant in his definition is citing cultural studies as an intellectual and political tradition as opposed to a theory. It is ultimately a set of theoretical paradigms, feeding off diverse approaches, literary movements and disciplines. It is this multiplicity and uncertainty regarding cultural studies that makes it an exciting theoretical paradigm to explore; littered with paradoxical tensions that make it even more of a challenging approach to make use of.

Arnold Shepperson makes an interesting observation relating a cultural studies approach to the South African context. He writes of the challenges the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies (CCMS)¹⁹ at the University of Natal encountered when applying a cultural studies approach to a South African context. He indicates that research in South Africa has shown that “conditions we had to deal with were rooted in a much more violent history of dispossession and exploitation than existing cultural studies approaches were able to explain”. (Shepperson, 1996: 1).

This centre was at the heart of pioneering a cultural studies approach in a South African context. However, Shepperson’s writing and his observations prove useful to carefully consider their ingenuity in applying a cultural studies approach. It encourages one to be mindful of the context (which will be similar for contemporary studies which undertake a cultural studies approach) where they had to confront a situation “where a minority had almost complete power and where this power was exercised in all spheres of life” (Shepperson, 1996: 1).

In response to this unique challenge of context and culture, the centre’s approach to cultural studies, studies the relationships between texts and contexts which synthesizes British cultural studies²⁰ with what they term as an Africanisation of cultural and media studies. It has to be noted, that what that actually means in practice still remains submerged under

¹⁹ CCMS was established in January 1985 as the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit (CCSU) at the University of Natal. It is widely recognised as one of the first centres focusing on Cultural Studies in South Africa.

²⁰ British cultural studies arose in the 1950’s with the work of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson, heavily influenced by Marx’ work, that analyzed the significance of working-class cultures in Britain and the negative effects of mass culture.

murky waters devoid of clear cut approaches and guiding principles in application of this stance.

Texts are understood to mean media, literature, performance and patterns within urban phenomena that imply some sort of textuality. The world is therefore studied as texts and discourses which emerge from particular contexts. Context means studying the textual phenomena in relation to social sciences, politics, economics, sociology, anthropology and history (Shepperson, 1996: 2).

I find this text-context schema a fitting model for the application of cultural studies in a South African context.

2.3 Why A Cultural Studies Approach?

Taking into account the abovementioned assumptions, the natural question that should follow is why a cultural studies approach? A cultural studies approach is important, more so to this dissertation, as it arms itself with the task of “deconstructing, investigating and analysing representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality in cultural texts, including media culture.” [Kellner as cited in Dines and Humez, 2003]. Moreover, cultural studies “also looks at oppositional identities, defining themselves against standard models.” [Kellner as cited in Dines and Humez, 2003].

Kellner, in his own independent writing highlights the usefulness of a cultural studies approach in media studies;

Cultural studies can show how media culture manipulates and indoctrinates us, and thus can empower individuals to resist the dominant meanings in media cultural products and to produce their own meanings. (Kellner, 1995: 11)

Adam Katz engages in the critical discourse concerning the development of cultural studies as a scholastic movement. In his critiques and discussions he highlights a very important attribute of cultural studies, which in essence affords us the means to investigate how the individual resists the modes of production, in which the subject is constituted. Therefore, through cultural studies we are able to take into account how at the individual level resistance to the modes of production, namely inherited in the political economy, is undertaken. This proves an imperative necessity in this investigation considering the broader hypothesis that

gay filmmakers resist the heterosexism and heteronormativity that is inherent in representations of homosexuality carried out in mass media's representation. In order to address and confront this hypothesis, a cultural studies approach will aid in understanding and identifying the ways in which, through their own counter-representations of this identity, these representations manifest as deliberate acts of resistance.

Although, I posit the fruitfulness and appropriateness of the cultural studies approach to this research, it is also important to note and address some of the fault lines inherent in cultural studies and curb these fault lines with the self-reflexiveness of an astute researcher and writer. Furthermore, such a transparent concession of the problematics of cultural studies as a discipline and how I address these problematic tensions within the context of this research, will shield the research from critiques that will undeniably be based on arguments that the research lacks to acknowledge the limitations of this approach. Further being aware of these contentious issues within cultural studies as a discipline, have ultimately guided and shaped what I choose to extrapolate and omit in my theoretical and methodological framework.

2.4 Limitations of a Cultural Studies Approach

The first point I wish to bring to the fore is the fact that this research looks to use a cultural studies approach because of its understanding and approach to culture, which I feel is best fitting. With that said, this dissertation is primarily rooted in film and media studies. As mentioned earlier; in order to fully address the concerns of this investigation, which far extend beyond the basic principles of film analysis or media theory; the cultural context is ultimately an overarching concern and an important site of investigation. What perhaps makes this investigation even more exciting is dissecting the collusion of culture in a field such as film and media. Kellner, in a more nuanced fashion, highlights the strength of a cultural studies approach in interrogating the dynamic at play between culture, politics and agency. He writes: "cultural studies provides a broad, comprehensive framework to undertake studies of culture, politics, and society for the purposes of individual empowerment and social and political struggle and transformation." (1995: 6)

One of the primary features of cultural studies has been the analysis of the political economy. Theorists belonging more to what could be referred to as postmodern approaches to cultural studies, believe that cultural studies has undergone a radical paradigm shift (which it has) and

therefore identify the problem of economism²¹ when analysing the political economy. This critique is mainly directed towards the Marxist influence in analyzing the political economy; which purports that cultural production is essentially a mode of the capitalist production at play, focusing on labour and class struggles and neglecting the importance of other cultural artifacts⁷. Traditional readings and analysis of the political economy therefore concern themselves with the conditions of the production from an economic point of view. Secondly, one of the contentious problems of analysis of the political economy is in what Johnson terms; productivism (1986: 55). He explains: “the problem here is the tendency to infer the character of a cultural product and its social use from the conditions of its production, as though in cultural matters; production determines all” (Johnson, 1986: 55).

As much as the capitalist and the economical climate need to be observed when analysing the political economy; there lies a danger of placing undue emphasis on a classical Marxist approach of merely reducing this analysis to economic reductionism. I argue that the political economy far extends into issues of class or the political power of the ruling elite. I choose to follow on Stuart Hall’s insistence that culture is not a set of texts defined by the political economy; however it is a system of meanings embodied in all social practices (1982).

As much as this research employs a cultural studies approach, looking to enrich it through a multidimensional approach, audience reception studies pose an area that is laden with an interesting quagmire. Firstly, the first consideration when focusing on audience reception, is to ascertain how delving into audience reception studies would benefit this investigation?

In essence, audience reception studies look to engage with the politics of encoding/decoding as was first presented in the work of Stuart Hall²². Hall’s writing on encoding and decoding laid the foundations of what would be known as audience/reception studies. His theory on encoding and decoding is written on the premise that meaning is not simply fixed or determined by the sender; secondly the message is never transparent; and thirdly the audience is not a passive recipient of meaning (1980: 57). Hall presents interesting ideas concerning the consumption of media and the subjects (individuals) agency in making meaning and interpreting media texts through ‘common sense’. Hall’s work yields rich insight and an

²¹ Economism refers to a political theory to reduce to social factors being tied down to a simplistic economic understanding.

²² Hall’s writing on encoding/decoding is best documented in his book: Hall, S. (ed). 1980. *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Hutchinson

added dimension of understanding how media is interpreted. Including a component of audience/reception studies, as has been an important dimension to a cultural studies approach, is an element I feel the need to overlook, not simply because it is an arduous and labour intensive addition to the methodology but due to my belief that audience/reception study remains unwarranted in this research. In the context of this research, I see the necessity to include a component on audience reception absent as the way in which wider audiences interpret and consume media texts focusing on queer communities and their impressions and readings; not within the parameters of this research.

2.5 Research Design

The research design follows a cultural studies model, (diagram as designed by me) taking into account the context-text schema model; demonstrated in the diagram below:



Diagram 1

I essentially utilise this two tiered model as a skeletal research design working on each tier to analyze the context in the form of analysis of the political economy of culture and cultural texts (in the context of this research: films). I make use of this term of political economy, albeit with the problematics relayed in the previous paragraph, as it holds a congruent meaning attached to it in the field of cultural studies. That is to say that, it is a widely recognized term within cultural studies to mean broader environment that texts are shaped in to include socio-cultural aspects as well.

A more through discussion of the research design is provided below.

2.5.1 Analysis of Socio-Political Economy

An analysis of the socio-cultural and political economy entails carefully examining how cultural texts, which if one is to follow the basic systematic approach to cultural studies, emerge in reaction to this political economy. These texts are shaped, moulded and are in reaction to this political economy of culture. Through this analysis, one begins to unravel some of the conditions which lead to the conditions of cultural production. What the analysis of the political economy allows is for a solid understanding and awareness of how these texts are ultimately products of a textual system. Kellner adds “inserting texts into the system of culture within which they are produced and distributed can help elucidate features and effects of the texts that textual analysis alone might miss or downplay” (Kellner; 1995; 6).

In more specific terms, reference to ‘the political economy’ in this research means and takes into account history, socio-political climate, the film and broadcast industry, legislation and the active political agents at play. Most importantly in my analysis of the political economy, I stay away from a common tendency in cultural studies which looks to validate that media culture is a mere incubus for the ideologies of the ruling economic elite that controls the culture industries and therefore deduces this to be merely a capitalist framework. This framing is rather narrow and, I argue, fails to ascribe the influence other factors such as society and politics have on media culture. Instead, I look to flesh out how these factors mentioned above, are in actual fact, strong denominators in shaping meaning and prescribing ideologies which seep into mass media. This is an initial observation, which stands to be disproved.

The analysis of the political economy of culture will be provided through a historical appreciation of the South African cinematic landscape and therefore contextualize the current state of the cinematic landscape. Through a discussion of the production of culture and the political economy, I will demonstrate how gay films as cultural texts emerged in reaction and opposition to mainstream media. It is imperative to note that the bulk of the analysis of the political economy is fulfilled in the literature review and followed by a brief historical overview of the South African film industry.

2.5.2 Analysis of Cultural Texts

The analysis of cultural texts is through a series of readings of the films: *Apostles of Civilized Vice* (1999) by Zackie Achmat, *Beautiful Contradictions* (2009) by Fanney Tsimong, *The Man Who Drove with Mandela* by Greta Schiller and Mark Gevisser and *A Normal Daughter: The Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six* (1998) by Jack Lewis, in which I consider the relationship between text and context. Thompson writes how “analysis is moved by the pleasure of understanding what fascinates us during our viewings of a particular film” (1988: 28). As Thompson suggests, I will detail precisely what ‘fascinated’ me during my viewings of these films and further substantiate why I have chosen these texts. In my analysis of the these texts I make strong use and reference to Samantha Searle’s descriptive topology for the analysis of queer cinematic cultures²³ which consists of the following strategies:

- Visibility
- Documentation
- Positive/Negative Images
- Mobilisation
- Access
- Self-critique/self-recognition
- Diversification
- Pleasure

In actual fact, Peach’s summations of Searle’s topology is so comprehensive and one of the very few texts that detail the different strategies that queer filmmakers make use of, it forms the basis of my analysis of the cultural texts. In this light, this thesis in part, identifies this as the main objective of inquiry, a detailed look at how these strategies are reflected in the representations, tying them back to their political objective and how they are deployed in the state of the political economy.

²³ I have to note, that Searle’s descriptive topology was largely understood under the details Peach presents of these strategies. The original text, as published in *The Moving Image*; No 5, Australian Teachers of Media, St Kilda, 1997 is next to impossible to locate.

Searle, as cited by Peach, argues that queer cinematic strategies need to be evaluated within their framework of the queer political objectives (2005: 48). I look to provide a summation of the strategies, discussing their political objectives.

2.5.2.1 Visibility

Searle defines the strategy of visibility as a strategy which was theorized from the early stages of the gay and lesbian liberation movement as early as 18th Century. This strategy of visibility was employed to curb the rife invisibility of homosexuality. Therefore this strategy, particularly as employed in film and broadcast media, seeks to validate the presence of homosexuality and further acknowledge the multiple queer identities. It is important to discuss the emergence of such a strategy. Historically, queer identities were identities existing in a veil of invisibility. The unmasking of this veil is what queer politics, as propagated by Dyer, refers to as the act of “coming out” (1990) which symbolised the positive affirmation of one’s sexuality. Peach explains that this “coming out” process is translated into the visibility strategy, as “both the presence of queer characters on screen and the presence of queer people at film festivals” (2005: 53). The key characteristic of this strategy is to simply portray and represent queer identities and place these identities at the centre of their filmic stories. Further telling stories about queerness is in itself an attempt to be visible in reaction to decades of silence.

2.5.2.2 Documentation

Documentation, to mean documenting reality, particularly refers to documentaries. Earlier gay and lesbian filmmakers were interested in producing documentaries as these affirmed the real and actual existence of queer identities, further reinforcing the lived experience of these groups. The pervasive theme of such a strategy is to document reality more than anything else, as this was providing a different way of affirm this visibility. Reality as opposed to a fictional or imagined reality fictional film would tend to suggest. Knudsen makes this statement regarding documentary films: “if knowledge and awareness were key motivations in creating documentary work, then it is not merely a question of showing the outside world, and its immediate layer beneath, but about getting into the very heart and soul of who we are and what we are” [Knudsen as cited in Austin and de Jong, 2008: 109]. The undertone of this quote is the way in which documentaries supposedly demonstrate the reality of who and what

we are. This was exactly the premise of this strategy, to demonstrate and document the heart and soul of who queer people are.

Therefore, documentaries continue to be understood as consciousness-raising modes of film production portraying real characters and real stories.

2.5.2.3 Positive/Negative Images

The necessity of images of queer identities on screen is owing to the history of what was initially argued to be negative images of homosexuality. The trajectory of representations of queer identities, especially those of gay men is understood to have developed in different phases. At first, representations of homosexuality were understood to be negative, which was then followed by a phase which was in reaction to those negative images. Representations that followed that phase were those that looked to exclusively present representations that positively affirmed homosexual life experiences. However, these positive affirmation politics were critiqued, more so by some queer critiques and scholars, as not being wholly reflective of queer identities nor the lived experiences. Therefore, a concern for representing truth (I use the term truth quite loosely, as I believe that in representation; the concept of truth proves to be quite a contradiction). However, this need to represent truth, as a balanced perspective between positive and negative images ushered in an interest in documentaries; as they are perceived to provide ‘truthful’ and real representations.

Peach notes that this dichotomy between positive and negative images is still a contested area of discussion: “the argument for ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ characters has continued into the 00’s and is still part of queer cinematic cultural debate” (Peach, 2005: 62). It will be interesting to note, how this strategy manifests in a South African context.

2.5.2.4 Mobilisation

“Cinema as a social institution has been seen by many activists and liberation theorists since the beginning of the gay and lesbian liberation movements as a significant place of mobilisation” (Peach, 2005: 65).

Searle, as explained by Peach, suggests that queer cinematic cultures have overreaching influence beyond the screen and cinemas and fulfil an important role in mobilising and engaging queer communities to some of the challenges facing their communities (2005: 66).

Queer cinematic cultures have the ability to incite an energised and self-aware community through dialogue which ultimately emanates from screenings. The *Out in Africa* (OIA) film festival is a fitting example in the South African context in terms of how the earlier screenings of films mobilised the masses to engage with the queer political agenda. These screenings were political and certainly platforms to reinforce solidarity and through that inspire mobilisation.

2.5.2.5 Access

According to Searle; access within this context of queer cinematic culture means a variety of things. It would mean access to the viewing and screening of films. Secondly, it would mean “access to filmmakers, their ideas, and knowledge’s around queer filmmaking”. (Peach, 2005: 66). It further means access to funding and other necessary elements in the process of filmmaking such as equipment, funding and post-production elements. All these elements are argued to influence and allow access to control self-representation.

Peach writes of how the development of local film products has significant bearing in terms of accessing our own local cultures. How then do queer filmmakers in a South African context access their own histories through film?

2.5.2.6 Self-Critique/Self-Recognition

The change, in what could be cited as a thinking shift within queer cinema, is suggested to have emerged from the aesthetic style that infused post-modern thought to queer cinema in what became a hip new term (though it may have never gained cultural momentum)

HomoPomo²⁴

²⁴ An abbreviation of Homosexual and Post-Modernism.

This shift of thinking is understood to have brought about a style of self-critique which was more in line with queer politics in the 1990's. This shift in thinking essentially opened up spaces, certainly in filmic representations, for more self-critique and recognition. New queer cinema, in an attempt to address ill's within queer subcultures such as promiscuity, self directed homophobia by gay men, prejudice within queer communities 'created a richer tapestry dealing with a wider range of human experiences and characters' (Peach, 2005: 71).

2.5.2.7 Diversification

A trait I attribute to new queer cinema, queer cinematic cultures held a desire to reflect the diversity within queer communities. Diversification includes diverse representations including gender, race, class and ethnicity.

Peach notes that Queer Film Festivals consequently, have been theorized as important in creating room for the representation of difference within the queer communities. The role of film festivals in the early 1990's for lobbying for more representation in films, enabled through the selection of films and their content matter, is recognized by Peach as pivotal in the emergence of diversification (2005: 73).

What this strategy alludes to is a pressing concern within the 1990's to explore more diverse representations within queer cinema itself. A self-reflexivity emerging within this queer cinematic culture, observed as globally, was more aligned with liberation politics. Diversification looks to show, more openly, the complex and internal differences within queer communities in which new types of images across the spectrum of race, class and gender; in order to encourage multiple modes and styles of self-representation which were/are important within queer communities/cultures as a means of empowerment of further marginalized communities within the queer milieu.

2.5.2.8 Pleasure

The concept of pleasure within queer cinematic culture is supported by Rich who points this attribute to be an important feature of queer cinematic as an intervention in the process of producing queer images.

The act of creating pleasure (as I suggest should refer both to the process of making film and in creating images of which incite pleasure) is a necessary feature in queer cinema. Peach explicates that pleasure assists in making bearable marginalized lives and helps to counter some of the damaging ‘queerphobic’ experiences that many queer people experience on a daily basis (2005:77).

I offer here, a personal experience that helps to bring this point to substantiation. I re-count the immense pleasure I experienced while watching *A Normal Daughter: The life and Times of Kewpie of District Six*²⁵. The film beautifully takes one on a journey with the protagonist ‘Kewpie’ into his lived experience during the historical times of District Six. What was most pleasurable about the film and the sense of pleasure derived from watching was how this personal tapestry was woven into a fabric of such harsh times; particularly for the subjects (Coloured cross dressing males). Through my viewing, I gained a sense of triumph and joy, in that the spirit of the subjects, their joyful recollections of times in District Six, the freedom in which they lived - all in a backdrop of what we know would have never been an easy time for Coloured queer identities at the height of apartheid. In that, I can affirm to have experienced what Peach writes of, that as a queer myself ingesting these images of a colourful queer identity created “a sense of reflection and thus a sense of community and self in the face of stereotypical, negative images in the media” (2005: 78) which I emphasize is something that aids in creating pleasure.

With regards to pleasure in the process of filmmaking, I argue that this process should bring pleasure to the filmmaker. Pleasure as theorized by philosopher Katz explains it to be “a simple uniform feature of momentary conscious experience that is obviously good in itself and consequently attractive to whoever experiences it” (2009: 3). He expands on this definition by expressing that it is a subjective feeling and interestingly, pleasure is the object of wanting to do good or worth seeking. Following on this definition of pleasure, I again broaden this argument that the process of filmmaking should bring about pleasure to the filmmaker, in the sense that their objective of producing their filmic texts should be thought of as bringing about pleasure in their reception. Moreover, for queer filmmakers, this feeling of pleasure should emerge from the knowledge that they are producing texts and furthering a queer canon in film. In essence this feeling should be coupled with the ideation that as a

²⁵ A film by Jack Lewis (1997).

queer filmmaker, queer films serve as liberating texts that form the greater body of queer culture. As Peach concludes, “pleasure and its origin in different filmic experiences, is vital for a political movement to develop, survive and thrive” (Peach, 2005: 78)

Literature Review

3.1 Introductory Remarks

In the quest to discuss representations of South African gay identities it is imperative to fully contextualize and ground this investigation within existing literature and engage with the discourse surrounding issues of representations, the problematics of stereotyping and the diversity of gay identity and queer theory . Most importantly this literature review functions as the foundations of the analysis of the political economy.

Martin Botha notes: “there is a substantial lack of information on the developments in local short-film making” (1995). Moreover, there is a lack of literature discussing South African gay cinema. This terrain is one that has not been explored in its entirety except by a few South African Scholars such as Martin Botha and Ricardo Peach. Questioning how and the ways in which gay filmmakers document gay identity through the cinematic lens contributes to fill this void and hopefully grow a body of literature that documents and scripts gay experience in South African cinema.

3. 2 Mapping the Terrain: Existing Discourse on South African Cinema

Exploring the character of South African cinema and locating gay filmmaking within this terrain is a challenging endeavour due to the lack of documentation. However Ricardo Peach and Martin Botha assert themselves as two leading scholars that attempt a historiography of South African gay cinema. With this said, it is therefore necessary to begin with an appraisal of literature focusing on South African cinema taking into account the history.

In Jacqueline Maingard's book: *South African National Cinema* she writes of how she is concerned with "the more porous terrain for identity, both within theoretical frameworks and screen representations" (Maingard, 2007: 3). She expresses how she focuses on "moments in cinema where the hegemonic stranglehold on identity has been broken through" (Maingard, 2007:3). However, Maingard neglects to discuss gay filmmaking and how queer cinematic culture has contributed to fragmenting the hegemonic stranglehold on identity she writes of. Maingard, who is the author of one of the very few published books that document South African cinema, does not take into account the contribution of queer voices in 'cinema' in fragmenting the hegemonic stranglehold on identity. This neglect of gay filmmaking seems to echo true what Martin Botha writes of South African cinema and the film industry. Botha expresses the sentiment that within cinema there are still traces of the long history of repression and regulation of sexuality. Furthermore, Botha notes that "At the time of writing, it is sad to say South Africa still has a deeply fragmented film industry" (Botha, 1995). Though Botha's statement may seem dated, considering that it was written in 1995, I argue that this is still sadly the status quo in South African cinema.

Therefore it would appear that the existing literature on South African cinema arms itself with the task of focusing on the history of South African cinema, yet further marginalising queer identities, stories and experience from their discussions. The literature follows a trajectory that focuses on post-apartheid representations of identity, just as Balserio and Masilela explore in their book *To Change Reels: Film and Culture in South Africa*. Balserio and Masilela acknowledge the lack of literature on South African Cinema and the marginalisation of certain groups; noting that there have been six book-length studies on South African Cinema published at the time of publishing (2003). They too neglect to afford any space to queer cinematic in their discussion. They rather choose to "problematize the absence of the black voice in South African cinematography" (Balserio and Masilela, 2003: 1) as their main strand of interest.

The literature not only clearly illustrates the marginalization of queer experience, cinema and filmmaking in South African Cinematic history; it further highlights the disregard, by most scholars, to engage the discourse of queer cinema in South Africa.

3.3 Culture/ Identity – The Tension

Johnson argues that “culture has a value as a reminder but not as a precise category” (Johnson, 1986: 42). There is, as will become apparent, a polysemy in the word culture. Multiple meanings derive from the word; there is no finite definition for culture. Mistry resonates this very sentiment: “The issue of culture is a complex one mostly because it is a slippery term, malleable, morphing, growing and developing expansively, embracing all the facets of our existence, thus constantly denying any fix’d mark.” (Mistry, 2001: 8). Stuart Hall, offering a differing conception of culture, which he pinpoints to being the product of lived experiences (1982). He defines culture as: “practical ideologies which enable a society, group or class to experience, define, interpret and make sense of its conditions of existence.” (Hall, 1982: 7).

Again, a key theorists who writes about culture; Homi Bhabha, borrows some key ideas from philosopher Jacques Derrida. Derrida introduces the concept of “liminal” spaces that culture occupies, which becomes a transient site for the contestation of culture:

What emerges as an effect of such ‘incomplete signification’ is a turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated.” (Bhabha 1990:5).

Imprecision when using the word culture is almost certain either failing to correctly describe what one means by culture or in attempting to categorise certain patterns of practices or belief. Where other scholars may suggest, subjectivity as an alternative to the word culture, I would suggest that in this context; identity becomes the closest key term that carries with it the same kind of meaning culture attempts to infer. Culture remains an abstraction, which is easier to deploy to conjure a meaning of a common subjectivity. Within the broader scheme, culture suggests a shared consciousness through codes of belief, practices, ideology. However, within this shared consciousness, Marx coins this idea of a “subjective aspect of social processes” [as cited in Cerulo, 1997: 386] where human beings also possess consciousness, it would suggest that the subjective aspect of social processes hints at an experience at the individual level. That is to suggest that within this social process of ascribing a culture, the individual is impressionable. This is what characterises identity, an impressionable awareness within the milieu of the codes of culture. The thing about identity is that it is largely self-determined. An individual self-identifies to a culture. Hall in his chapter; *Who Needs Identity?* In du Gay, Evans, and Redman, 2000 continues this discourse of identity and this idea of constituted unity which the term culture suggests. He explains:

precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity – an ‘identity’ in its traditional meaning. (2000; 92).

Halls quotation clearly suggests a distancing of this concept of constituted unity, which I read as an alternative reference to culture, and the need to “read identities against the grain” (2000, 2) and the modalities and fixedness of the concept of culture. However in reading identities within a culture or subculture, he proposes that one makes use of this idea of identification into a culture as a process of articulating and pledging an allegiance on the grounds of solidarity and recognition of a common origin (2000).

In the context of this investigation, talking of culture and identity, it is important to consider that individuals employ identification into a certain culture or subculture. Therefore I will negate any temptations to assume that individuals fall into clear categories of culture. With that said, I will also not attempt to breakdown cultural configurations but will make use of general notions of sub-cultures within gay communities. For example, I will loosely make reference, at some points, to a black gay subculture. I note that it would be naïve to think that all black gay males have the same experiences which translate into a unified subculture where trends and cultural codes are all shared and recognized. However in most cases, when I make reference to a sub-culture I will mostly refer to a grouping within the gay community that shares something in commonality and largely that would be factors such as race, gender identity and further informed by class.

3.4 The Politics of Identity: The problematic nature of framing a South African Gay Identity

There comes a challenge in trying to contain gay identity in South Africa under one umbrella term, especially if one takes into consideration this concept of identification that Hall proposes. The question that emerges is what is a gay identity and more specifically what is a South African gay identity? One would assume that a gay identity is contained within the gay subculture. Kolker elaborates that subcultures and cultures become the texts of identity. (Kolker, 2006: 173). Isaacs and Mckendrick make a key argument in saying: “the gay sub-

culture is the womb in which the gay identity construct is fertilized . . . thus the subculture is, metaphorically, the procreative factor that gives rise to the gay identity” (1992: 71).

Isaacs and McKendrick provide a differing voice that states: “a subculture nearly always exists as a marginal or liminal entity” (1992: 68). Bronski as cited in Isaacs and McKendrick argues that “over time, this culture creates and recreates itself – politically and artistically – along with, as well as in reaction to, the prevailing cultural norms” (1992: 69). Kolker further adds that “culture keeps generating itself, how vital groups within it created its art, and how that art changes and transforms the culture” (2006: 174). Therefore subcultures undergo regeneration whereby their own cultural norms, codes and conventions change. This in turn influences identity. Therefore identity is not a constant “it is local and global, moving and changing” (Kolker, 2006: 8).

In broader terms, Botha suggests that any author on the study of homosexuality should see the larger forces that contributed to the modern sense of gay identity and community. I note these and find them interesting factors to consider in reading gay identities. He lists the following factors as those that have shaped gay identity:

- The rise of secular societies
- The arrival of a sexual revolution
- The rise of the political left
- The growing self-awareness of racial and ethnic minorities and women
- Valuable contributions by activists, writers and thinkers such as Simon Nkoli. (Botha, 2007: 8).

In light of Botha’s above comments, it is useful to consider how these factors are active in the modern sense of gay identity in a South African context.

What Isaacs and Mckendrick highlight is the influence of the homosexual subculture on identity formation. However it is important to note that in a South African context, the gay subculture is not a uniform subculture with generic characteristics. More importantly in a South African context where the construct of identity is not fixed and diverse; trying to refer to a South African gay identity becomes problematic. Therefore if the gay sub-culture is the womb of gay identity, which part of this gay identity is being represented in the films I wish to explore? With this in mind it becomes increasingly difficult to discuss identity as if it were

a constant marker. The literature demonstrates the necessity to focus on the diverse strands of gay identity, whether defined by race, culture or class. Furthermore, this also directs this inquiry into focusing on how gay identities and the representation of gay subcultures have responded and regenerated themselves in accordance to mainstream media and the wider socio-political climate of the time.

3.5 New Concerns for Queer Filmmakers

Levy cites the stereotyping of homosexuals as one of the core instigating factors which resulted in the emergence of queer cinema not only as an artistic movement, but as a political movement as well. Levy's key argument purports that "under the studio system, gays and Lesbians suffered from stereotyping of the worst sort" (1999: 442). Therefore it is important to note that queer cinema, largely in an American context, emerged as a reaction to skewed representations of homosexuality and stereotyping. This is particularly relevant in a South African context as well.

However, the concerns of gay and lesbian filmmakers change and evolve according to the times. This changing thematic concern and content in what gay filmmakers were focusing on propelled scholastic investigations on the changing complexion of queer cinema. Dyer argues that "gay/lesbian films exist only in and through the confluence of ways of making sense, the terms of thought and feeling available to them" (1990: 1) highlighting just how queer films and queer cinema reflect the particular historical and socio-political climate of the time.

Hubbard argues that in the evolved cinematic landscape, especially queer cinema, interests and concerns have changed. Hubbard furthers his argument by stating that lesbian and gay men have begun to explore media in such a way that gender, identity and sex are "infinitely malleable and unfixed" (2003:10). Gevisser and Cameron perhaps provide an even more relevant account of South Africa as they discuss homosexual presence and an affirmation of a queer identity as "defiance of the fixed identities – of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality that the apartheid system tried to impose on us." (1994: 5).

Even gay/lesbian film-makers such as Lisa Daniels talk about the different themes that become prominent as times changes. Furthermore, Richard Watts talks about how "Queer films have become more about general life experience, rather than specific queer

experiences.” [as cited in Karena, 2003: 122]. It has to be said that this observation is made in a first world country, where the queer cinematic culture may experience different conditions of culture and may be existing in a different stage of development. On a global sphere, it would appear that the trend for gay filmmakers is to normalise gay identity by dealing with general life experience as opposed to indulging the wider societal imagination of the queer as the sexual deviant. It will be interesting to note, if this is the same trend in a South African queer cinematic culture, which is arguably still in its infancy.

DeAngelis adds to this discourse by writing about the concern of queer cinema in the new millennium as one that is “shaped by the ways in which a subculture constructs and imagines its own history – relations of past, present and future certainly” [as cited in Aaron, 2004: 41]. What DeAngelis purports is the agency of gay filmmakers; the power of self-representation and construction of the imagined subculture and identity.

3.6 Issues of Representation: Stereotyping, Typification and Self-Representation

Gregory Currie writes: “Film is a representational medium, it is a means by which representations, themselves distinctively cinematic, are produced and displayed” (1995: 1). Currie adds that film “trades essentially in pictorial representations” (1995:1). Pictorial representations are what characterize film and make film an interesting medium for representation. As opposed to other representational mediums, films deal with pictorial representations that are made up of images, images that are not static but images that reflect reality. What Currie theorizes as “realism” (1995: 79). Currie furthers this argument by stating that film depicts space and time or can represent space and time realistically (1995: 79). The contentious issue that emerges from Currie’s theorization of the functions of the representational function of film is his claim that film represents reality. Key questions come to the fore: how true to reality are film representations? Richard Dyer, who is at the foreground of dealing with issues of representation, provides a contesting voice. He writes of how the gay movement has insisted on the centrality of the media as “a carrier, reinforcer or shaper of our oppression” (Dyer, 1993: 15). Dyer places mass media at the centre of the power relationship in the representation of out groups. Dyer further recognizes the role of the media in the process of cultural production. Essentially recognizing the power dynamic that mass media has in representation. Can the media represent reality in a realistic way? Graeme Turner adds to this argument by writing:

Mass media have progressively colonized the cultural and ideological sphere. They increasingly provide a basis on which groups construct an image of the lives, and accomplishment meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes, as well as the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality can be coherently grasped as a whole. [as cited in Donald and Renov, 2008: 270].

Dyer notes the role of stereotypes and stereotyping in these representations. Shughart notes how representations of homosexuality in mainstream media conform to a heteronormative audience with heteronormative ideals. Shughart's paper argues that:

in these texts, homosexuality is not only recoded and normalized in these representations as consistent with privileged male heterosexuality but is articulated as extending heterosexual male privilege. In so doing, blatant sexism is reinvented and legitimized, and gay male identity simultaneously is defined by and renormalizes heteronormativity." (2003: 69).

In his focus on the representation of the gay subculture, Dyer argues that typification "is a near necessity for the representation of gayness, the product of social, political, practical and textual determinations" (1993: 19). Typification according to Dyer refers to "visually recognizable images and self-representation" (1993: 21). It is important to note that the typification of 'gayness' is informed by stereotypes. Moreover, Dyer does acknowledge the advantages of typification in the cultural production of images and texts representing homosexuality. He identifies typification as a mode of representation. However, I note the problematic nature of typification in films as typifications may conform to stereotyping of gay identity. However in self-representation I point to the fact that queer filmmakers are reflexive and in tune to combat possibilities of stereotyping in typification.

In Dyer's other book: *Now You See It*, he makes an important point in stating that "gay/lesbian films exist only in and through the confluence of ways of making sense, the terms of thought and feeling available to them" (1990: 1). Dyer treats these films as expressions of the identity of the subcultures: lesbian or gay. What is important about the way in which Dyer understands these films is in the way which he acknowledges the cultural forms that inform the representation of homosexual subject matter and a homosexual identity. Dyer in examining some of the gay filmmakers and in his analysis of their work considers the socio-historic context which contextualizes the cultural forms that affect the self-representation of homosexuality

Dyer's paper confronts some of the thematic concerns my research looks to explore. Dyer theorizes representation and asserts the prominence of societal values in this 'cultural production'. What Dyer does not engage with is how out groups represent themselves through media platforms. In this regard, Graeme Turner writes about the influence of cultural studies in film scholarship which allows for the interrogation of the cultural function of films. Turner looks at the:

self-conscious cultural activism in which cultural material is used and strategically deployed as part of a broader project of political empowerment, providing a 'third space' for indigenous and minoritized groups as well as what some have called 'third cinema' often created in circumstances in which choices are heavily constrained and political mobilization is incipient. [as cited in Donald and Renov, 2008: 276].

Again, the literature showcases a concern with issues of representation and further delving into the cultural production and freight of film. What the literature reflects is an appreciation of queer film that takes into account greater socio-political dynamics in the production and readings of film.

As Peach looks at the effectiveness of the cinematic strategies employed by queer communities with regard to liberation and self-representation; I am mostly interested in how and which cinematic strategies South African contemporary gay filmmakers employ in their self-representation. Peach furthers his discussion by mapping out an analytical framework, based on the work of Samantha Searle, as has been discussed before. It is essential to note that Searle and Peach consider these strategies in relation to their political efficacy. Peach's core argument places South African and Australian queer cinema as the fifth cinema, a cinema which he argues "seeks to decolonise discriminatory and dominating representations that come from within a society of origin or a society lived in by choice." (2005: 327).

My research looks to expand and further this interest particularly focusing on the strategies employed by gay filmmakers. What Dyer does well is craft an argument that reinforces the idea that out groups are represented largely due to images that are stereotypical in nature. This echoes my initial sentiment that gay identities are mostly permissible in mass media and therefore the need to focus on how and what informs how gay filmmakers represent a gay identity. Film scholars such as Hanson and Turner further place importance on the cultural production that is a key feature in representation. Film scholars and theorists come to recognize mass media as a contemporary cultural force engaged with the mediation of

hegemonic forms and resistance to them: the growth and transnational circulation of public culture; the creation of national and activist social imaginaries with the development of media as new arenas for political expression and the production of identity. [Ginsburg as cited in Donald and Renov: 2008: 221].

Post-Apartheid Cinematic Culture in South Africa: Towards a Political Economy at Present

4.1 Introduction

Marginal spaces emerge in reaction to hegemonic ideology, they are responses to a situation; socio-political, cultural, historical. Such spaces by virtue of their nature to challenge and protest erupt, are taken, usurped, seized, and not designated to be given. (Mistry, 2001: 5).

In order to fully understand the state of South African cinema and within that locale, also as a means of understanding how Queer Cinema is positioned within this industry; one first needs to excavate a brief history of South African cinema and the more recent developments which have resulted in what post-apartheid cinema is today. Moreover, it necessary to take into account the way a queer cinematic culture has developed in accordance to the character of the industry as Botha notes: “queer filmic developments of this nation therefore, must be viewed within this broader, racialised history” (Botha, 2007: 52). In the context of this dissertation; this signifies the beginning foundations of an analysis of the political economy where commentary on key developments will illustrate how the context-text schema is shaped. This is to otherwise allude that a thorough discussion of the context (political economy) will yield better evidence as to correlate the way meanings and the conditions for cultural production of texts (analysis of the films). More explicitly, understanding the way a queer cinematic culture has developed under which conditions, makes it more apparent as to how the texts to be analysed have come to speak with a voice that they do.

In taking into account the history of South African cinema, which dates back to as early as 1895 and recognized to be one of the oldest in the world by authoritative scholarly voices in the field such as Prof Martin Botha; I do not claim to offer a holistic history of South African

cinema. I look to chart how this cinema came to being by providing an overview of this history. I will instead highlight some key developments within the development of South African cinema and then channel my focus specifically on the emergence of queer cinema within this context.

4.2 Pre-Apartheid: 1896 – 1940's

South African cinema is widely acknowledged to be one of the oldest in the world. What characterizes one of the world's oldest cinematic cultures? This historical timeline can be traced back to Lingard's Waxworks, who is said to have first started screening these 'penny-in-the-slot' variety in August 1895 in Durban (Treffry-Goatley, 2010). These viewings were an earlier apparatus which showed (motion pictures coupled with sound) in the form of the kinetophone and the kinesiograph²⁶. The early foundations of South African cinema will illustrate how as times progressed, cinema in itself was evolving into a context unique to South Africa – in accordance to the political climate.

Ntogela Masilela establishes a compelling argument in his writing of the history of South African cinema. In its infancy, cinema in South Africa was available to viewers in the 'urbanized' centers of Johannesburg and Durban. Masilela posits the mining revolution as a key shaper of South African film culture. The argument develops on the premise that the mining industry provided the initial audiences of films in South Africa (2009: 2). The cultural configurations of these audiences were mainly white agricultural workers and black peasantry labour in what he terms as a 'reservoir audience' (2009: 2). Although Masilela does not explicate how this audience was reservoir, I interpret this as a means of suggesting that such an audience was susceptible to the "imperialist transplantation of film culture" (Masilela, 2009: 4). Masilela makes mention of these facts as a means of setting up the argument that "it was the mining industry which gave impetus to the development of film culture in South Africa" (2009: 2). Masilela, in an attempt to qualify this argument, notes that it was the white middle class, who exclusively had ownership of the mining industry and benefactors of this wealth, who in turn "patronised film" as an opportunity to exploit this new art form and its gaining popularity. He asserts that this interest in the film art form, which had replaced musical art forms as the form of entertainment for these audiences, was primarily "governed

²⁶ The Kinescope (a box which people could see a moving image) invented by Thomas Edison in 1895

more by profit motive, rather than for purposes of cultural enlightenment” (Masilela, 2009: 2).

What I find interesting about Masilela’s argument is a perceptive reading of issues of ownership and power. Not only is Masilela providing a discussion of the development of South African film history, but he does so with the intention of intercepting the cultural conditions in which the film industry took shape. I intentionally chose to begin with Masilela’s conceptions and readings, because he leads the path for engaging with issues such as the production of ideology, which is a similar approach I undertake.

4.3 The Anglo-Boer War and Resulting Influence

The Anglo Boer War, which began in 1899 – 1902, is what led to the true formation of South Africa as we know it today. In the development of cinema in South Africa, the war played an interesting role in the formation of this cinematic culture. Tomaselli suggests that the first cinema newsreels ever were filmed at the front during the Anglo-Boer (1997). During the war W Dickson (a British filmmaker) had set out to record the war on film²⁷. This text would serve as a medium for propaganda as Masilela agrees that ‘The Boer War of 1899-1901, between British imperial interests and Afrikaans (Boer) nationalistic interests, gave the historical context in which perhaps for the first time propaganda films were made.’ Propaganda and the intentional framing which, demonstrates the power of film as a medium to represent perceived ideology” (2009: 6)

The resulting iconography is quite key. The British imperial film iconography really looked to portray Afrikaner people and culture as barbaric through these recorded accounts of the war and what in turn resulted was Afrikaner people, in defence of their state interest, had developed film iconography where Africans were depicted as demonology itself (Masilela, 2009).

Treffry-Goately, in her overview of the history of South African cinema, comments that by 1913, New York-born Isidore W. Schlesinger controlled all film distributors through his company, *African Film* (2010). Tomaselli documents the true extent of this monopolisation:

²⁷ As documented in *Timeline: A History of the South African Film Industry 1895-2003*. Accessible from <http://sahistory.org.za/arts-and-culture/timeline-history-south-african-film-industry-1895-2003>

Schlesinger produced 43 big budget high quality features, themes were rooted in the ideological outlook of the period, with Boer and Briton standing together under the flame of unity and civilization against barbaric hordes (Tomaselli, 1997: 5).

In fact, Schlesinger's monopoly dominated for the next forty-three years, with his control extending from production (*African Film Production*), to distribution (*African Consolidated Films*) and exhibition (*African Consolidated Theatres*) by 1930. These foreign influences in the industry's development are reflective of similar forces present in the country at large, since South African cinema was originally framed within a society divided between two British colonies and two independent Afrikaans republics (Balseiro and Masilela 2003: 1).

4.4 Apartheid

The Boer War (1899-1901) and the defeat of the Afrikaner people proved to be the seed to what would later be a political system that sowed deep divides and separation in the future history of this country. Through years of systematic mobilisation and political organisation, the sprouts of Apartheid were quietly waiting to blossom and in 1948, the Afrikaner National Party (NP) was seated into the ruling hand of this country and through the vision of Hendrik Verwoerd the institution of *Apartheid* was sewn into the legal and cultural systems of South Africa. This would change the course of this country's history. Masilela writes of the immeasurable influence of Apartheid on South African cinema. "From the moment of its emergence, the South African cinema has been obsessed with the ideology of Apartheid." (Masilela, 2009: 8).

Post-1948, cinema was used as a propaganda tool to normalise the racist Afrikaner regime that was formalised as apartheid. In this environment, the voices of the indigenous black African people were seldom included as Treffry-Goatley notes (2010).

Ideology and how it became dispersed into the social strata becomes a key focal point. Peach writes: "Cinematic Cultures were not immune to the ideologies of *Apartheid*. In addition to having segregated cinemas, the percentage of cinemas available to non-white people, Queer and non-Queer alike, were minimal." (Peach, 2005: 105).

In 1961, South Africa became a republic and officially broke ties with Britain. However, rather than reforming its racist ways, it continued with the apartheid regime. In fact, by 1963 the film industry became even more controlled by apartheid ideology with the introduction of the Publications Control Board, which controlled the circulation of all filmic material (while the 1931 Act was focused only on imported content). This board effectively rejected any product that was seen to be ‘undesirable’ by the Apartheid government. This had a major impact on the diversity of films available to the public. (Treffry-Goatley, 2010).

How then did the advent of apartheid influence queer cinema? Most interestingly, through the work of Ricardo Peach (who again seems to be a stand-alone scholar who valiantly attempts to provide a historical account of South African queer cinema) we can understand that there were strands of an existing queer cinema in existence in the 1950’s. Although these films were widely dispersed, making it difficult to claim that there was an established queer cinema at the time, what it shows is that even during this time there were existing films dealing with queer subject matter.

Moreover, Peach notes that the importance of the cinema as a space for the congregation of queers and building a sense of community is illustrated in the following quote:

“For cinema going Queer people of the 50s and 60s, Queer culture was not only influenced and responsive to the content of the movies screened at the cinemas, but also by the physical reality of the cinema as a meeting place.” (Peach, 2005: 104)

It should be noted, that queer identities during the time of apartheid were highly dispersed and often existed on parallel planes which in most cases experienced unique experiences of oppression. Cinemas as meeting spaces to foster discourse around issues of sexuality were predominantly a locus of white queer identities. For non-whites queer identities, the oppressive structures of apartheid weighted heavily on race in addition to sexuality. These identities were not afforded the luxury of spaces such as cinemas to discuss and engage in the politics of being queer. Therefore for queer people of all races faced continuous social, judicial and personal intimidation due to sexual orientation or transgender issues in addition to race. Moreover, it would be an injustice to suggest that white queer identities were able to translate the mobilisation that cinemas provided into political agency. Although privileged to

these spaces and a breeding ground for ideas on queerness to transpire, this in effect meant nothing politically.

There was further state participation in the formation of the wider film industry.

In 1956, a subsidy system supported by the Nationalist government and large corporations was established as a means of regulating the film industry. *Timeline: A History of the South African Film Industry* elaborates:

“Government and big businesses collaborated to keep SA cinema a cinema for whites only; of the glut (60films) made between 1956 and 1962 most were in Afrikaans – four were bilingual and the remaining 13 were in English”

This system, with its regulatory power influenced majorly by the state, reinforced racist Afrikaner nationalist ideals. During this time, as Treffry-Goatley notes, an exclusively white Afrikaans audience developed and became favoured to distribute racist ideology through the medium of film and broadcast media (2010). This audience practically guaranteed the success of films that provided light, escapist entertainment and an idealistic portrayal of the Afrikaner way of life (McCluskey, 2009: 24)

One of the first films documented to have a queer theme, not exclusively a queer film, is *Kom Saam Vanaand*²⁸ (1949). In the film, there are a number of scenes which hint at this subtle queer theme. The first recorded is a scene between actor Frik Burgers and Al Debbo described by Peach as follows: “in a bus scene half way through the musical, Burgers debuts in a cross dressing outfit that becomes a trademark feature for many of his following films” [Peach as cited in Botha, 2007: 56].

Burgers and Debbo are touted to have given performances in future collaborations that playful flirt with renditions that are queer. What is perhaps notable about their documented performances is firstly, the element of cross dressing to suggest a queer theme by virtue of challenging gender stereotypes and secondly performances that relied on slapstick humour to resonate with their audiences.

Peach, in his queer analysis of the subsequent performances and films that Burgers and Debbo performed such as *Hier's ons Weers* (1950), *Alles sal Regkom* (1951), *Altyd in my*

²⁸ An Afrikaans title translated to *Come Together Tonight* in English directed by Pierre de Wet.

Drome (1952), *Dis Lekker om te Lewe* (1957), *Fratse in die Vloot* (1958), *Piet se Tante* (1959) argues that what those films achieved at the time was a sophisticated and complex exploration of gender and suggested notions of same sexuality, I find that the films intentions, based on the writing which is admittedly limited, were not deliberately those dealing with a queer agenda. Slapstick humour such as two men cross dressing takes away from the seriousness of queer issues, even if it was deployed as a cunning strategy to put this queer agenda at the fore.

In contrast, a film such as *Faux Pas de Deux* by Ernst Thorpe is one I believe was a more daring exploration of queerness during a heavily regulated and hostile environment. Peach's description of the film reads as follows:

Faux Pas de Deux is a short super 8 about two men doing, of all things, ballet in a back yard. There is no narrative or sound, simply a *pax de deux* between the one dressed as a ballerina and the other taking on the 'male' role. The dance itself is a tongue and cheek romp in the lawn with pirouettes and falls, *sans* elegance. [Peach, as cited in Botha, 2007: 56].

Here is a film that, through its description, is a bold and daring display of an alternative sexuality and love. The filmmaker portrays a sensual and homoerotic image of two men dancing; one feminised dressed as a ballerina. It strongly hints at same sexuality affection in play and it becomes a symbol of the repressed desires of many men at the time. The absence of sound in the film may even imply a silenced subculture still quietly existing within the greater social order. What this film evidences; is that there was an underground and minute queer film culture in existence even if the films were produced out of personal interest and without the intention for mainstream audiences.

The first explicit anti-queer law is believed to have emerged from the 1966 Forrest Town raid. The raid was at a house party in Johannesburg where an estimated 300 men were arrested for improper and homosexual conduct. Historical accounts claim that the then minister of Justice, PC Pelsler, ordered for the revision and amendments to the *Immorality Act*.

The amendment to the act read as follows, making homosexual conduct punishable by law.

Any sexual acts between men at a party were... banned: the age of consent for male homosexual acts were... raised from 16 to 19 [excluding anal intercourse]; and the manufacture or distribution of any article intended to be used to perform an unnatural sexual act was... prohibited [As cited in Treffry-Goatley, 2010]

What this act managed to achieve is to entrench queer life, certainly for white queers, to be hidden and highly repressed as other queer identities were already silenced in the depths of the homelands, townships and salons of District Six. In reaction, what this amendment translated into was queers meeting at clubs instead. Club culture saw an evolution. This would be a subject for some queer films in the later years such as Luiz DeBarros' *Clubbing* (1994).

4.5 Legacy of Apartheid: 1960's moving into the 70's

South African made films in the 60s and 70s, were strictly regulated by censorship and experienced less of an open environment. In addition, multi-racial funding was not even established until 1973, making black representation unheard of for the majority of the period between the 60's and early 70's.

The 1970's saw further fragmentation in the national industry when the 'Bantu film industry' was created. Although more diversity was created with the advent of the 'Bantu'²⁹ film industry film, this industry was subject to a parodying of the Bantu as these films were of poor quality. Moreover the audiences were treated differently and the screenings of these films were in informal venues such as churches, schools and beer halls as suggested by the *Timeline: A history of the South African Film Industry*. This industry was responsible for the creation of films of an inferior quality and made in indigenous black languages targeted at black audiences.

4.6 Early Signs of a Queer Cinematic Culture

Army films in the 1970's became sites to slyly embed homoeroticism in film texts which give room for multiple queer readings. The army is a rich site to explore homosexual relationships and films such as *Seuns van die Wolke* (1975), *Ses Soldate* (1975), *Mirage Eskader* (1975) demonstrate that. These films politically were a jab at the very heart of the pride of the nationalist party; where young fertile men embodied and represented the strength of the nation, bravery and the fortitudes of a masculine identity. This interest in military films and

²⁹ A term used to describe black people and the different ethnic groupings.

the act of queering in these films would continue into the eighties; more directly illustrated by Matthew Krouse's film *The Soldier* (1988).

Peach notes: "Military films from the 70s and early 80s, therefore, seemed to lay the groundwork for a more aggressively Queer Filmic counter-culture in the late-eighties" (2010: 116). What Peach writes rings true that through a historical appreciation of the development of a queer cinematic culture, the military films of the seventies played a pivotal role in establishing a more active cinematic culture that endeavoured to provide queer imagery, iconography and make subtle suggestions of same sex sexuality at play. This trend would garner momentum more forcefully in the eighties.

There was an increase in queer political activity in the early eighties which was due to the increased harassment by the police in raiding lesbian and gay clubs. The homophobia of the military increased confidence and visibility amongst Queer people in 'pink' suburbs like Hillbrow was at a peak of unimaginable heights. In addition, the Mandy's Raid, is believed by many to be South Africa's Stonewall, an event that mobilised many groups of people into political action resulting in the formation of broad based gay organisations. (Peach, 2007).

4.7 Queer Cinematic Cultures taking Shape

The evening screenings of videos of queer films and educational materials mark a point in , not only the history of queer cinematic culture, but also in the greater history of liberation politics for the queers. The eighties, politically, was a charged period with the state of emergency mentality pervading all facets of South African society. Botha furthers this sentiment as he writes:

Those years, despite two States of Emergencies, saw the beginnings of deracialisation and the establishment of anti-apartheid countercultures, which questioned, vociferously, the religious and political restrictions of the previous forty years. Within gay politics gay movements such as LAGO (Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression), which became OLGA (Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists), as well as black gay activist Simon Nkoli's GLOW (Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand) became part of the broad democratic movement. (2005).

There was what Gevisser terms a "queer confidence" (1994). The Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) functioned an important role in arousing discourse within the queer

communities regarding liberation politics and representation. The key feature of GASA was their mandate to “use film as a form of entertainment and discussion” [Peach as cited in Botha, 2007: 64].

Queer communities were very active during this time, with queer people arming themselves politically by being affiliated to queer organisations or community groups. The Weekend Theatre run by a group of queer Wits³⁰ Drama Students, is positioned as “one of the first manifestations of a small queer resistance film culture” [Peach as cited in Botha, 2007: 65]. Peach also argues that the Weekend Theatre, created a space for queer sensibility, where engaging the broader queer cultural sphere with domain of film (2007: 66). Further developments came in the form of the first gay film festival in 1985. This festival was named the *Gay OK '85* convention.

4.8 Towards a Post-Apartheid Queer Cinema and *Out in Africa*

1990 proved to be a momentous year in the history of South Africa. This is the year that Nelson Mandela was released from prison and also marks the first Gay and Lesbian Pride March. The pride march signified new directions and as Anthony Sher accounts: “we were witnessing a new country taking shape” [Sher as cited in De Waal and Manion, 2006: 72]. By 1994 South Africa had its first non-racial elections and this event saw the implementation of a new democratic South Africa. Post-apartheid South Africa was born. 1994 would also see the first *Out in Africa* Film festival organized by Jack Lewis and Nodi Murphy emerge and entrench itself in South African queer cinema history. Severe censorship of gay material eased with democratic influences allowing The *Out In Africa* Film Festival to become a beacon of gay expressions; a platform for voicing gay experiences. Peach notes that the birth of the *Out in Africa* Film Festival was the “first time that a national and inclusive queer film festival was held and officially recognized and celebrated” (Peach, 2005: 144).

The role of the *Out In Africa* Film Festival in developing and sustaining queer cinema in South Africa is imperative and essentially functions as the heart line, even to this day, of queer cinema. Therefore the development of the *Out In Africa* Film Festival paved the way for the current queer cinematic climate.

³⁰ Acronym to denote the University of the Witwatersrand

With the former Publications Control Board now a distant memory, the post-apartheid state brought about policy and structural changes to the South African film industry and cinema. One particular structure that emerged from research and the restructuring of the industry was the South African Film and Video Foundation (SAFVF). Masilela states the aims of the national film and video foundation as follows:

“the aims of the constitution and the Act supporting the formation of the National Film and Video Foundation serve to make possible representation where previously (historically) this access and power was located in the hands of a white minority. This was a political and economic endeavour to further marginal” (2009: 11)

Queer cinema does not exist in isolation to the greater film industry. The film industry continues to grow; however Queer cinema continues to lag behind in terms of reaping some of the advantages of the expanding film industry, albeit miniscule the growth impact maybe. In 2004, the government made provisions for the growth of the film industry under the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative.

Treffry-Goatley notes that “access to wider markets has become a priority for filmmakers due to the poor performance of South African Films at the local box office” (2010: 47).

Moreover, for filmmakers in the South African film industry, commercial failure is a daunting reality. It also does not remedy the situation that institutions such as NFVF account for about 12 and 15 percent in terms of investment in local films. How then does this impact Queer cinema? The above make it quite self-explanatory to understand how this impacts queer cinema. In an already struggling industry and the emphasis on commercial success as prerequisite to attain funding, it means that even in the post apartheid era, Queer cinema is still at the very bottom of the hierarchy. If the basic tenants to secure funding for films mean that a film has to be economically viable, which basically means that the film has to do well at the box office and also appeal to wider markets to attain this commercial success; then that sadly means that queer films will remain in the background. It is a rather flippant comment to make, however it is no secret that the queer agenda is not essentially prioritised. Jack Lewis, in his production of *Proteus*, had to struggle for funding and made countless pleas to stakeholders to fund what was truly a remarkable project. In the end, Lewis collaborated with a Canadian production company. Treffry-Goatley makes valuable industry insights available as she interprets that “the need to make market/audience-orientated films is linked to the neoliberal vision of GEAR” (Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 47).

The industry is still widely recognised as still bearing the traits of inequality. Writers attribute this inequality to be along racial lines. There is very little accounted for, with regards to further inequalities within this industry such as inequality on the basis of gender and sexuality. Treffry-Goatley further writes that the industry is highly fragmented. She suggests that this fragmentation is one of the biggest obstacles to the growth of the film industry:

it is clear that the state has an interest in developing the film industry and this interest is motivated by two sometimes conflicting forces, namely in the iconic new constitution, which is reflective of the states desire to build the nation through public communication systems and to create a cinema that supports equality, freedom of expression and multiculturalism.” (2010: 44).

What is unique about the South African queer cinematic culture is an emphasis in producing local films and presenting them to more receptive audiences at film festivals, In rare occasions, films will be produced for commissioned briefs by broadcasters. This negates the objective for commercial success in producing films.

Botha notes that : “Current post-apartheid cinema is very much a cinema about marginalised people.” (2005). Throughout the infancy of a post-apartheid queer cinematic culture and even into the teenage years of this cinematic culture, *Out in Africa* Film Festival continues to be at the forefront of developing and reinforcing a queer cinematic culture.

There have been dozens of films in this rich era dealing with queer identities ranging from feature films such as *Proteus* (2004) by Jack Lewis and recently by new emerging queer voice Oliver Hermanus in *Skoonheid* (2011). Numerous short films and documentaries form the bulk of films utilised for self representation.

These films dealt with themes of “internalized homophobia, the homophobic oppression of institutions such as the South African army, different understandings of sexuality linked to race, representations of HIV/AIDS. These films transformed historical documentations into relevant political tools” [Peach cited in Botha, 2007: 81].

As a means of concluding, I cite Ricardo Peach:

What becomes clear when analyzing the number of queer films produced in South Africa, post apartheid until 1999, is that there is a significant increase in queer films

and their quality, creating a unique South African cinematic culture. This South African Queer Cinematic Culture continuously referenced and integrated queer histories into the legacies of apartheid and history of apartheid, linked its themes to the homophobic oppression of institutions such as the SA military and attempted interventions into the representation of HIV/AIDS. (Peach, 2005: 155).

4.9 Concluding Remarks

Through reading and coming to make an understanding of the South African context, Apartheid stands at the arch of influences of the queer movement and subsequently the emergence of queer cinema in South Africa. The effects of Apartheid are repeated in almost every authored exploration of homosexuality in South Africa as is expressed below by Jacklyn Cock: “the divisions of gender, race and class which still scar South African society militate against any powerful representative gay and lesbian movement” (Cock, 2001: 204).

What appears is that because of a fragmented film industry, it becomes difficult for a unified queer cinema culture to emerge. This is due to lack of infrastructure and further support of marginalised film movements. Treffry-Goatley supports this notion by expressing: “the film industry is one of social and economic fragmentation” (2010, 46).

Treffry-Goatley, embarked on a political-economic exploration of the South African film industry post-apartheid. Her journal article made interesting observations regarding how the film industry intersects with the political economic agenda of the state and the socio-cultural history of the country. She came to the conclusions that:

- 1) The state has a clear interest in developing the film industry by interrogating the role of the NFVF, IDC, and DTI. She notes that the states interest is motivated by two, at times conflicting forces - being the desire for the film industry to reflect the principles of equality enshrined in our constitution. Secondly the states free market and export driven approach to growth and development, ironically overshadows the first intention of building a film industry that is distinctly South African,
- 2) This neo-liberal focus has certain repercussions to the film industry as a whole. Firstly, the market emphasis of this paradigm means that greater goal is to tailor-make the film industry to be commercially viable and also appeal to the international

market. What that means, is production is intended for export and that the local market is deemed unprofitable.

In response to the above mentioned, Treffry-Goatley forecasts that “there is a danger that this may result in voices of the historically suppressed black majority being censored to meet the commercial demands of the industry” (2010: 54).

I follow on from Treffry-Goatley’s quotation to break open this space and suggest that not only black voices are at risk of being censored, but the greater queer artistic community and films face even greater danger of being neglected due to a focus on a neo-liberal drive. The political economy does not seem favourable, in light of the state’s political and economical agenda on film.

How then do the above mentioned influence the development and well-being of queer cinema in South Africa and what effects does the current political economy have on queer cinema? It seems that queer cinema will always be on the periphery as an alternate film culture. It will remain as a relatively undeveloped, independent foray for queer filmmakers. In as much as the state desires to build a national cinema that is reflective of the multi-cultural society, I believe that queer cinema can never really be integrated into a wider national cinema.

Socio-culturally, I argue that queer cinematic cultures are still in states of opposition and resistance. That is due to the fact that for years, queer voices have been silenced and will continue to speak out against oppressive systems and prejudice. I delineate queer cinematic cultures in a constant flux of counter representing, as they look to challenge discourses and prejudices.

Deconstructing Filmic Language – Analysis of Cultural Texts

5.1 Introduction

“Images are everywhere. They are inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies as well as with definitions of history, space and truth” (Pink, 2007: 21)

Having provided a comprehensive discussion of the political economy, it is at this point that this paper will look to answer, through readings of cultural texts (*Apostles of Civilized Vice*, *Beautiful Contradictions*, *The Man who Drove with Mandela* and *A Normal Daughter*) how these gay filmmakers have chosen to represent gay identities. I will provide a reading of each film.

In writing about analysing films; Campsall states: “we don’t merely ‘read what we see’ – we bring to our interpretation of moving images a range of pre-existing expectations, knowledge and shared experiences that shape the meaning we take from what we see.” (Campsall, 2002: 1). This alludes to recognising the process of cultural production in the readings and analysis of films as texts. My pre-existing expectations are that queer filmmakers in South Africa still look to counter stereotypical representations of homosexuality and queerness.

Dyer elaborates: “the aesthetic and the cultural cannot stand in opposition. The aesthetic dimension of a film never exists apart from how it is conceptualised, how it is socially practised, how it is received; it never exists floating free of historical and cultural particularity.” (Dyer, 1990: 9). Moreover, Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis claim that films are conceived in a textual system, in which the film is organised through codes within this system. They elaborate to explain this concept in detail:

Every film has its peculiar structure, a web of signified around which it builds its own coherence, even if the system is deliberately incoherent. The structure is the sum of the choices made by the filmmaker among the codes. The textual system is constructed by the analyst; it is not inherent in the text. [1971 as cited in Pezzotta, 2010: 11].

I am particularly mindful, as expressed by Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis that the textual system is constructed by the analyst. As I delve into an analysis, I am aware that the textual system I construct is influenced by a cultural studies approach. Therefore in my analysis, I will be employing a reading viewpoint that looks to confirm the influence of cultural production. With that said; I choose to work on two different modes of reading, namely a contextual mode and a textual mode. Having discussed the political economy; I feel it is necessary to relate the conditions of the political economy - what effectively shapes culture and society, and revisit the term of cultural production where I consider the production context of the film.

I will then revert to a more detailed reading on a textual level, where I look to interpret through paying attention to subject matter, strategies, main themes, stylistic choices and characterisation, just as Treffry-Goatley³¹ did in her thesis. In actioning a textual reading, I will most importantly look to investigate the different strategies used by these filmmakers as detailed in Samantha Searle's topology, summated by Ricardo Peach. It should be noted, however, that these two levels of reading are not rigidly separated since they are often related, interdependent and overlapping.

Moreover, in my readings of the films; I will do a theme based narrative reading in an attempt to provide a more synthesised and contained discussion, as opposed to delving into separate narrative strands of discussion of each film. In my understanding of narrative, I employ this concept of postmodern narrative analysis. Postmodern ways of understanding narrative can be a bit tricky to navigate as any postmodern endeavour is amorphous in nature. Instead of looking for linear narrative structures within a text; postmodern approaches to narrative rather, in true postmodern style, look to challenge structuralist approaches to narrative.

5.2 Note on the Choice of Films

It should be a curious interest for the reader as to the process I undertook in selecting the films for reading. As mentioned in the introduction, I have chosen these particular films because I feel they are interesting sites for excavating interesting readings. Moreover, in my interpretations and readings, I expect to discover how these gay filmmakers explore self-representation. Again, by self-representation I don't mean nor suggest that they represent their own cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds. Instead I use the term self-representation with regards to their sexuality; by virtue of them identifying as homosexual or rather gay³².

In the process of selection, I was concerned with what kind of identities were being explored and represented in the film. I have to rightly admit that I made an effort to select films that portrayed a variety of gay identities. In this regard I encountered a number of problems.

³¹ I take inspiration from the way Treffry-Goatley approached case studies in her thesis.

³² I don't concern myself with the fact that these filmmakers are out or not, although through my general assumption and observation, is that these filmmakers are out gay men barring the case of *The Man Who Drove with Mandela* which is directed by a Lesbian woman.

Firstly, archived visual queer histories of marginalised queer identities is scantily resourced in South Africa. Although GALA is a useful resource for archived material concerning queer history in South Africa, this material is still hard to come by. Moreover, I intentionally gave preference to films that foregrounded marginalised identities/communities which I consider to be of those of black, coloured and of Indian descent. This preference was based on the grounds that images of white queer identities (these images, whether local or international have been dominant on queer screens) have taken precedence in the history of queer cinema. I have taken this stance in order to critically discuss how other more marginalised identities are being represented, in light of the above. With that said, I also recognise the need to be inclusive in my selection thus a selection which also incorporates a film that deals with white gay identity though not necessarily dealing directly with a thematic concern of ‘whiteness’ is also included.

5.3 The Man Who Drove with Mandela

5.3.1 Notes on the Director

The Man Who Drove with Mandela is an interesting selection because it is a joint artistic statement by Mark Gevisser (Writer and Journalist) and Greta Schiller (a Lesbian filmmaker). Schiller is a widely acclaimed international director, with many accolades to her name. Her directorial resume includes award winning documentary films such as *Before Stonewall* (1986), *Paris Was A Woman*, (1995)³³. Schiller is the director of the film, however Gevisser’s role in the production as a researcher, writer and producer is pivotal. I therefore suggest, that the reason for the selection of this film; although it contradicts my aim at specifically focusing on gay filmmaker and their products, is because Gevisser’s vision and his research has really shaped and framed the angle of representation. The film is a clear queering act; representing gay identity in the historical fabric of apartheid, dealing with an act of defiance against oppression, is written by a gay man and directed by a lesbian women. This is a queer text in its true sense of the word.

The intention is to provide a brief biography of the director when introducing a film, in this instance I choose to focus more on the writer/producer who was actively involved in all areas

³³ For further reading on Schiller’s biography, a detailed biography is available from the Tribeca Film Institute. www.tribecafilminstitute.com.

of production. Mark Gevisser is a prominent writer and journalist in South Africa. Gevisser has also authored key texts in South African gay experience such as *Defiant Desire* (1994)³⁴. Gevisser was fundamental in the research and development of the script of *The Man Who Drove with Mandela*. Gevisser has concerned himself with history, identity, sexuality and many other themes.

5.3.2 Introduction and Synopsis of the Film

The Man who drove with Mandela is a full length documentary film directed by Greta Schiller, a lesbian woman and written by Mark Gevisser - a leading gay writer.

This film is recognized as one of the key queer films to have been produced in South African queer cinema alongside films such as *Proteus* by Jack Lewis and *Out in Africa* by Melain Chait. Botha writes the following about this film: “No other film in South African history chronicled the lives of lesbian and gays in the way Gevisser's documentary has done” (2006). Why has *The Man who drove with Mandela* garnered such acclaim?

The film is an interesting site of discussion as it engages with history in a unique way. Written in 1998; the writer reconfigures a character's history through re-imagining the life of a gay man in the 1950's. Rishika in her review of the film notes that this is an “unusual documentary covering new ground in the investigation of South Africa's history” (n.d: 1).

The film is a semi-biographical portrait of Cecil Williams. Who is or was Cecil Williams we may ask? The filmmaker puts at the fore of this film a relatively unknown Williams, who was a communist and African Nationalist Congress (ANC) activist. Williams was also a prominent theatre director and at the same time he was a dedicated campaigner and recruiter of ANC members and in addition an openly gay man. Kieron Corless provides a biographical account of the man: “he became a communist and a schoolteacher, switching to journalism during World War Two. After the war, he entered the theatre and joined the Springbok legion³⁵” (1999).

The style becomes an interesting choice here by both director and writer, who are responsible for constructing this portrait of Williams' life. A brief review of the film, found on Mark

³⁴ Co-authored with Justice Edwin Cameron.

³⁵ The Springbok Legion was an anti-fascist organisation with no colour bar.

Gevisser's website, describes the style as consisting of "dramatized accounts of key incidents in Williams life, with archival footage, home movies and contemporary interviews to tell the story of the personal and political bravery of a forgotten hero" (as cited on www.markgevisser.co.za).

Gevisser and Schiller become archaeologists in discovering hidden truths about our history – excavating the queer histories in the face of layered foundations of our history. Although the film is about a lone figure, it doesn't overtly represent a greater queer community or identity. However, what the film is able to achieve is a representation of queerness and particularly a queer identity's involvement in "the negotiation of a changing political landscape" (Rishika, n.d: 1). Moreover, Rishika notes the significance of this film in foregrounding a queer identity as one of the initial links that marks allegiance of a queer agenda with a political agenda is an important contribution to our history. This link would later lead to the recognition of homosexuality in South Africa's new constitution. I boldly claim that this film is a representation of the wider gay community in its contribution to the struggle, not necessarily ascribing to the essentialised concept of identity, but rather as a more abstract and penetrating insightful representation of gay identity.

Not only is it a wider representation of a gay community, but what the film achieves is a very rare representation of gay experience during a time where the cloak of invisibility was heavily ascribed on gay identities or experience. Botha writes that the film is not just about Williams life, "but it is also a fascinating, deeply moving chronicle of how political and intellectual dissenters of the 1950's and 1960s lived and operated in South Africa" (Botha, 2007).

There are little next to no representations of gay identities in the 1950's but through the documentaries interviewees and reconstructions of William's lived experience. We get a privileged, albeit reconstructed, glimpse into a gay identity - which in its solitude can stand to represent a wider gay identity that was closeted at the time. Footage from a home video in the documentary depicts white men who are assumed to be the theatre-going type in displays of campness on the beach. This serves as a subtle representation of gay identities of the time, though it should be noted that this speaks more to a white gay community. What the film also does, to great effect, is paint this picture through narratives spoken by his contemporaries in

interviews re-counting of secret gay life during apartheid South Africa, highlight just what a role Williams played to contribute to the freedoms we as queers enjoy today.

The fact that the film cunningly suggests that Williams led a closeted life also reflects the reality of other gay men at the time. Moreover, it places Williams at the hub of cosmopolitan Johannesburg, one of the urban centres where vice was teeming and homosexual experiences seen to thrive. Botha adds on to these voices: “the rapid urbanization of especially whites, offered urban gays and lesbians a way, away from their families and predominantly conservative homes to ‘come out’ as part of a gay subculture” (2007: 17).

This fragmented and highly fractured account of Williams life is an act of history construction. Gevisser and Schiller are agents in the construction of Williams’ biography and identity. This act of construction is a strong thematic concern as the filmmakers candidly makes use of fiction in a documentary – presenting somewhat of a post-modern aesthetic. Within the rich archival footage, interviews with friends, lover and some of his political comrades; the film gives insight into Williams life through excerpts from a biographical one man play performed by Corin Redgrave. Botha writes this wonderful description of the film:

The film becomes a wonderful kaleidoscope of stories fitted vividly together but hinged on the fact that on the day Mandela was captured the comrade in the car with him was a white gay man, whose lifestyle was known to prominent leaders like Walter Sisulu and Mandela in the ANC and South African Communist Party. (Botha, 2006).

Although little is documented with regards to the production of the film, one notes that the film was a collaboration in association with Chanel Four (UK), AVRO (Netherlands), SABC, VRT-Canvas (Belgium), Corporation for Public Broadcasting (USA). The funding is reflective of a trend in post-apartheid cinema, which Treffry-Goatley writes about. Co-productions between “developed countries from North America and Europe because they have more budget to offer” (2010: 45) is an increasing occurrence. The fact that a film of this nature, had to rely primarily on international funding, highlights the political-economic conditions in the process of production. What it further looks to say; is that queer filmmakers embarking on large scale productions will struggle to fund or attain funding from local initiatives and donors. Sadly, I have to concede that this is a fate indigenous to queer filmmakers and marginalized voices.

5.4. *Apostles of Civilised Vice*

5.4.1 Notes on the Director

Zackie Achmat, born and raised in Cape Town in a Muslim community is famed for founding the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). He is an activist. The most interesting fact about Achmat is that he is not a filmmaker by profession, but has on a few occasions donned the hat of filmmaker. Achmat's involvement in queer advocacy is unprecedented and is further reflected in his contribution to the establishment of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality. Achmat is testament to the fact that the personal is political and has demonstrated an interest in queer issues not only in his writing as a scholar on sexuality, but also translating this interest into film projects mostly working closely with Jack Lewis.

Achmat stands as a symbol for resistance. He has engaged with resistance not only in his political allegiances, but also in his personal life by fighting for HIV rights³⁶. In 1997, Achmat vowed not to take his anti-retroviral medication until it was available at an affordable price for the greater masses. Moreover, Achmat has been openly gay for a number of years despite his upbringing in an Islamic family.

This spirit of resistance has continued and emanated in his work as a director in the form of *Apostles of Civilised Vice*.

5.4.2 Introduction and Synopsis of Film

It is difficult to provide a synopsis of *Apostles of Civilised Vice*, simply because no other film deals with an array of such multi-dimensional representations and complexity of homosexuality in South Africa like *Apostles* does.

Peach writes that the film is “ a seminal history of South African lesbian and gay lives. . . the film brought the diverse histories of queer subjects from all races, classes, genders and

³⁶ Zackie publically disclosed his HIV positive status and remains a rooted cause in lobbying for HIV/AIDS treatment and non-discrimination through his work with TAC (Treatment Action Campaign).

backgrounds to South African consciousness for the first time in this nation's history.” (2007: 83). I would have to agree with Peach, that this film becomes almost like an encyclopedia of homosexual experiences in South Africa. *Apostles* is most certainly, in my opinion, one of the more enthralling films that looks to document gay identities in South Africa. It is rich in diversity, charting experiences of *bukhontxana*³⁷ in mine compounds to colourful cross dressing displays in District Six.

The description of *Apostles of Civilised Vice*, as cited on the Out in Africa Film Festival website, reads as follows:

An important film, cunningly presented, endlessly revealing, it reclaims and rewrites the place of gays and lesbians in history, presenting a new one that is celebrated, not criminalized or marginalized. (<http://www.oia.co.za/films/gl-film-festival-2009/feature-films/apostles-of-civilised-vice/>)

This description alludes, again, to this idea of rewriting and reclaiming history.

Apostles is a montage of gay voices and identities. Peach notes: “directors Zackie Achmat and Jack Lewis, show that white, black and coloured South African histories, have always existed in sections of the broader community, but were often hidden not just from the mainstream, but also from each other.” (2005: 107).

5.5 A Normal Daughter: The Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six

5.5.1 Notes on the Director

Jack Lewis has been a pioneer of engaging history, culture and sexuality through film. This interest is evident in his other films such as *Sando to Samantha aka the Art of Dikvel* (1998) and most notably in *Proteus* (2004). Lewis is an acclaimed South African director, particularly sung as a key individual that led to the development and emergence of queer cinema in South Africa.

Lewis in partnership with Nodi Murphy organised the first *Out in Africa* Film Festival in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. In an interview conducted by Peach, Lewis explains

³⁷ A zulu term referring to a marriage between two mine workers [as cited in Luirink, B. 2000. *Moffies – Gay Life in Southern Africa*.]

the intention for the *Out in Africa* film festival was to capitalise on the political times and also take action on the queer front (2005).

Although Lewis is a white male, he chooses to focus outside the parameters of his own race and explores issues of race and gender in his films, particularly in *A Normal Daughter*. Here he places the Cape Malay and salon drag culture as his main point of interest.

5.5.2 Introduction and Synopsis of Film

A Normal Daughter follows on the life of Kewpie, a hairdresser and a popular figure in salon drag cultures, who was born and lived in District six. This documentary fuses archival material, interviews and stories to re-imagine a life during the vibrant yet troubled times of District Six. The film begins with Kewpie, now aged, welcoming us through the door of her salon. Kewpie, while doing the hair of the narrator; a younger *koffiemoffie*³⁸ begins the journey down memory lane, effectively taking the viewers on this journey as well. This is obviously a stylistic directorial choice Lewis has employed. The narrator is on screen as opposed to an almost omnipresent voice that pervades the screen with commentary. This stylistic tool also symbolises quite an interesting way of unravelling the narrative. Kewpie is in conversation with a client (obviously this conversation hinges on the borders of dramatisation) and in response the client (narrator) quizzes Kewpie about life, lived times during apartheid and general banter which reveals a rich history. I further read this stylistic choice as a symbolic passing of the baton of history. Kewpie in this interaction almost assumes a fairy godmother figure, sharing a fabric of a queer tapestry and in essence educating this 'new school' *Mavis*³⁹. In essence, this is what the film also hopes to achieve on a broader level.

Lewis comments on the necessity for producing texts and films such as *A Normal Daughter*:

There is a need to do queer products such as *Sando to Samantha*, because that's had a fantastic impact in South Africa precisely because it has a black or specifically coloured vibe about it and aesthetic characters, mannerisms and responses that people relate to and they look at this and say they can see themselves. They see people they know in films in a way that they don't when they watch a West Coast film or

³⁸ A term used to describe a coloured homosexual.

³⁹ Colloquial cape Malay slang referring to an effeminate gay men.

something that has come out of a Californian School. [Lewis, 1999 as cited in Peach, 2005: 83]

Lewis though not a coloured man, identifies the need for queer visual histories especially of marginalised communities to be told and find expression on screen. The film is colourful with many anecdotes of the time. What Lewis is able to represent is a gay identity (not an essential identity) that is stepped into curlers, blow dryers, sequins and bold declarations of flamboyance.

5.6 Beautiful Contradictions

5.6.1 Introduction of the Director

Fanney Tsimong is a young film director who is relatively unknown in the film industry. Tsimong represents emerging black queer voices. His biography on www.underdogproductions.co.za reads as follows: “His introduction into film and television began as a production assistant for both the annual gay and lesbian film festival and the encounters documentary festival.”

Tsimong has concerned himself with gay issues in his films, which include *Mountain Shade*, *A Page from My Journal*. Both films having been screened at the *Out In Africa* film festival and London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. Other films include *Finding the Power of Rain & Bull's Eye*. Tsimong entered the MultiChoice VUKA programme and emerged as the winner for the Raw Talent Award. The award “was introduced by Multichoice to create opportunity for young filmmakers who have entered the VUKA Awards and have had their work judged ‘of industry standards’ by the industry judges. But who as disadvantaged competitors, have never had the opportunity to attend a film school or any other tertiary institutes” (*The Star – Tonight*, 17 September 2004).

Wilmien Rossouw, then Directing Champion at AFDA, describes Fanney’s work as culturally moving and further suggests that “Fanney’s desire to tell stories is a strong belief in the fact that he has a definite contribution to make new, fresh narratives that are culturally relevant and moving” (as cited in *The Star – Tonight*, 17 September 2004.). I argue that Fanney has gone on to do just that, with his subsequent films; *Black Beuhlals* (2004),

Beautiful Contradictions (2009) and *Imfihlo*⁴⁰ (2011). Tsimong has also directed a gay themed 13 part talk show series *Intimate Connexionz* (2005) screened on SABC 2 and hosted by gay socialite Somizi Mhlongo.

Tsimong's thematic interest seems to be the contentiousness of homosexuality and a gay identity in an African context. I identify Tsimong as one of the few black gay filmmakers still engaging this discourse, but from a vantage point of view of understanding and knowing the intricacies of black communities and the interplay of culture.

5.6.2 Introduction and Synopsis of Film

Beautiful Contradictions presents contradictions at every level. Firstly, the film explores contradiction at the individual level; a protagonist struggling to come to terms with his sexuality - claiming to be straight yet "fucking men". The protagonist's main struggle is in dealing with being so conflicted. His state of mind contradicts the cultural and familial expectations. The film further explores and presents contradiction between an African belief system and the denial of homosexuality.

This 24minute short, enters into this state of conflict and glaring contradictions of Tony Nkosi's life. The film opens with artistic shots of a dreamscape of sorts, where Nkosi's 'contradictions' weight on him physically and in an almost dance like vignette, he struggles against this. Stylistically, this tableau deviates from realism. Nkosi awakes from the dream and so the narrative begins. What the dream-like scape achieves is to metaphorically allude to the inner conflict of the character.

Through his interaction with his psychologist, we would assume that Nkosi is there due to some sort of inner struggle. His session with the psychologist allows us insight into some of his schemas and thought patterns. In this liminal space, his contradictions lie bare. He speaks to his psychologist, "Dr Stacey, that he doesn't date men, and yet he can neither let his shag-buddie Thabo go nor give him the emotional commitment he needs" (www.oia.co.za).

Tsimong, articulating his thoughts on filmmaking and explaining his particular stance on what he wants to achieve with one of his films (*Black Beulahs*) is interesting:

⁴⁰ A Zulu word translated to mean hidden or something repressed. It can even mean secrecy.

Everything we see about gay life is white. My first gay movie that I ever saw, *Get Real*, had a white cast. I really wanted to show people that homosexuality exists in the black community. And that being gay is not about sex – it's so much more than that. I'm one of those people who believe that black queer filmmakers must be stimulated. Especially lesbian stories – no one is telling or documenting lesbian stories. Film and documentaries are a history – an archive of our lives. (Tsimong, 2007 in Mambaonline.com).

Tsimong achieves a whole lot more than just representing sex. Although, Tsimong does include a steamy scene between the protagonist Tony Nkosi and his casual sex partner Thabo, (there seems to be a lot more emotion than just casual sex) this portrayal does not trivialise sex. It's complicated, sensual and also an act of placing two masculine bodies in homoerotic imagery.

Strategies in Reaction

What strategies do these film-makers employ in their representation of gay Identities? How do they contest histories and fracture heteronormative ideals in their own ways of representing gay identities? Using Samantha Searle's topography; I will construct arguments that identify documentation, diversification, postmodern aesthetics, self-critique/recognition as the key strategies employed to represent gay identities in these films.

6.1 Documentary – Contesting History as Positive Affirmation of Identity

The focus on documentaries and the reclamation of South African Queer histories was a key feature of the moving images that emerged in this decade, argues Peach (2005). I refer back to Searle's queer cinematic strategy of documentation. It is interesting to note that of the four films I have chosen to discuss, three are documentaries. This is particularly interesting and suggests that queer filmmakers have favoured documentary films. Dyer in part, may have an answer to as to why Documentary is a favoured genre.

Documentary offered itself as the form par excellence for affirmation film, partly because it is cheaper and easier to do tolerably than fiction, partly because of its historical relationship with progressive movements. . . and especially for its supposed special relationship with reality. (Dyer, 1993: 26)

As a strategy; documentary is a political and consciousness raising medium. Moreover, documentaries when considering the socio-cultural and political economy, are cost effective and relatively easy ways of documenting identities.

“So understanding and explaining these highly varied visions of the past requires knowing not only something of the histories they ostensibly discuss, but also of the individuals who made them (film industry, historical, social) contexts in which this happened.” (Bickford-Smith and Mendelsohn, 2007: 5) this quote highlights the need to consider the conditions for cultural production and the greater historical, social and political contexts. To address this concern, I note that these films were produced in the post-apartheid context. During this period and even today, queer cinematic culture is still asserting itself in South Africa. Considering that these films were produced in the late 1990’s, not more than six years post the birth of the new democracy, I can observe that queer filmmakers during that time, were excited to exercise their freedoms. In doing so, one of the thematic concerns was how history has been a carrier of oppressive ideologies and a silencer. The objective became to disempower this power. In the climate of freedom, it makes sense how one would want to unveil the effects of that history in actively oppressing marginalized communities.

Keyan Tomaselli defines representation in documentaries as a series of interrelated messages, produced and coded within a perceived discourse of realism (1996:49). The use of documentary as a stylistic consideration for these three films (*A Normal Daughter*, *The Man Who Drove with Mandela* and *Apostles of Civilised Vice*) is significant as through documentary, a tangible form of history is documented. Through this act of filmic documentation, queer histories and identities forge a canon of works that will be significant texts in the future of the queer movement. The films’ ability to converse with history is even more significant, as all three documentaries look to critically engage with questions of a queer reading history and as Achmat states; “A history of invisibility, fear and struggle” (2010 – telephonic conversation with Zackie Achmat).

Peach concludes by mentioning that “what researcher and filmmakers such as Achmat, Lewis and Gevisser have been able to offer are glimpses of some discovered fragments of these early South African Queer lives. Their stories offer fractured vignettes into an undoubtedly more complex past.” (Peach, 2005: 108). Moreover, Linda Williams has suggested that, in the postmodern era, documentary films are increasingly foregrounding the processes of

manipulation of the film medium, a strategy which calls into question the very documentary nature of the subjects they purport to present (Williams, 1993: 14). This quote leads me into the next strategy.

6.2 Postmodern Aesthetics

In my readings of the texts, I posit that South African filmmakers employ and engage with postmodern aesthetics, whether as a deliberate artistic choice or unknowingly employing distinct postmodern influences in their work. At times, where these aesthetic postmodern influences are employed unknowingly, it is often as a result of either through being ingenious and inventive in representation due to budgetary constraints which may not allow for grandiose expenditure on art departments or costumes. It is as if South African filmmakers are forced to practice 'poor' film, much like Grotowski's Poor Theatre.

Inferring post-modern readings, Kvale in the *Fontana Postmodern Reader* identifies legitimation, narratives, language and knowledge, expansion of rationality, pastiche and collage, surface and attitude as characteristics of postmodernism [Kvale, as cited in Anderson, 1996: 19] particularly in the arts.

In addition, David Wingston identifies the qualities most common in postmodern narrative:

- The narrative lacks any conventional plot structure.
- The story is incoherent in terms of form, structure and traditional narratives.
- The referents are usually grounded in culture and history.
- The narrative rejects and defies meaning (Wingston, 2009: 303).

In inferring a postmodern reading of the films, I choose to argue that as a strategy of resistance, queer filmmakers rally behind a postmodern approach because it rejects and defies pre-existing meanings and puts power back in the authoring process. Moreover, I identify these postmodern qualities evident in the way the narrative is structured, often employing bricolage and collage.

Apart from *Beautiful Contradictions*, all the films I have chosen to explore all concern themselves with history. Hal Foster writes in his exploration of postmodern polemics that

“postmodernism is marked by an eclectic historicism, in which old and new modes and styles (used goods, as it were) are retooled and recycled” (Foster, 1984: 68).

In *A Normal Daughte: The Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six*, Lewis provides a “history of gay life in the Western Cape Coloured communities” (Botha, 2006). It is a film that provides a visual history. Much like other queer filmmakers traversing the contours of history in film; the way Lewis engages history is not through a linear historical account. Lewis’ approach to filling an absence of a particular voice in history does what Foster claims to be through “old and new modes”. He interfaces personal narrative and the knowledge that drag queens performed an integral role in the cultural space and activity of District Six. Botha notes that; “In District Six, gays were an accepted part of racially and religiously diverse community.” (Botha, 2006). This narrative is often lost and not expressed. The style in which Lewis does this, is indicative of a deviation from absolute truth modernism would have wanted to contain.

In this representation, he also uses some clear postmodern techniques. I posit that one can gage a sense of collage in the way Lewis captures this personal history and infuses it into the wider history of District Six. Snapshots of Kewpie’s personal narrative in the form of anecdotes, interviews and archival material is a marrying of old and new modes. Stylistically, Lewis also makes use of the split screen effect in editing. The split screen is something that cuts and fragments. It is also a clear postmodern technique.

The Man Who Drove with Mandela follows in this vein. Gevisser, influenced by his research undertaken to produce *Defiant Desire*, also challenges the notion of an essentialised history. In the process, Gevisser in collaboration with director Schiller, engage with a postmodern aesthetic in the realization of their film and in the representation of the individual in the face of history. Documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction” (Nichols, 1993: 176). It is indeed a recollection and a subjective construction.

Apostles of Civilised Vice is a text that quite clearly is intentionally postmodern. Firstly, like Wingston (2006) suggests; this text is quite firmly grounded in history and culture. What Wingston suggests as incoherent in terms of structure, form and traditional narratives, I claim

to mean collage in postmodern aesthetics. *Apostles* is particularly cunning in the way it dictates its own terms for structure, form and style.

What *Apostles* and Achmat do is suggest and open up the possibilities of divergent histories to be placed into the broader history of the land. At times, it is a classic documentary with standard interviews and at times it freely plays with the dramatizations, not attempting to be truthful to how those events unfolded in history. The re-dramatization of one of the same sex marriages in the mind compounds, juxtaposes a dated and historical re-enactment in a clearly contemporary setting. That is the point, to symbolically suggest the impact of history on our contemporary situation. If one were to think that this is a careless mistake by the director, one has to see this same trait repeated with a re-enactment of a *Klora* parade down Constitution Street, with the backdrop of contemporary Cape Town in the shot. This is symbolism at work. It is Achmat's cheekiness that reflects a clear post-modern playfulness that rejects the seriousness of modernists' structures.

Postmodern ways of structuring narrative and this particular concern of revisiting and rewriting history is part of postmodern thinking which proposes the necessity, when reading histories, to implicitly recognize the multiplicity of differently embodied histories.

6.3 Visibility and Diversification – 'Gayness' at the Forefront of Screens

Lesbian photographer, Zanele Muholi in her photographic collection of lesbian women, states "it is important to mark, map and preserve our movement through visual, histories for reference and posterity so that future generations will note that we were here" (2010: 3). Muholi highlights the importance of visibility and growing the canon of visual history of queerness.

Samantha Searle defines visibility as a strategy characterized by "the move by queer people to ensure acknowledgement of their lives on film, historically absent due to censorship and social discrimination." [As cited in Peach, 2005: 49].

The presence of gay identities on screens is a strong signal of positive identity affirmation. Gevisser and Cameron discuss the liberation that results in asserting a gay identity as it is a

“defiance of the fixed identities – of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.” (1994: 5). These films also make use of diversification, which Searle defines as “strategies developed by queer cinematic cultures to assist in the representation of internal differences within the queer community.” [As cited in Peach, 2005: 49].

Therefore these documentaries, particularly Achmat’s *Apostles of Civilised Vice* portray the demographic divergences our country reflects. Achmat gives equal voices to the *kloras* of district six, mine workers who engaged in same-sex marriages, activists, transsexuals, white gay elites, black gays in the townships and to those stricken with HIV. Achmat affords each the space and medium to tell their own history. Therefore, empowering each to represent their own identities. The drag queens flaunt their pretty dresses and let us into their own world, often candidly informing us of the dynamics of their subculture, which in turn influences their identity. Former mine workers talk about the common practice of homosexuality and again detail the dynamics of this cultural phenomenon. Achmat does not attempt to weave together a synthesized quilt of gay identities, but rather looks to showcase the intricacies and the differences in gay/queer identities in South Africa.

Tsimong in this selection stands alone as particularly being interested in black gay identity. Though Tsimong does not engage with history, what he continues to do is create a canon for black gay works. Taking into consideration the issue of visibility and diversification, Tsimong’s film aids in adding a black gay perspective to the body of queer films in a South African context. This fictional film represents something of a wider concern.

Research towards an MSociSci⁴¹ into the area of black male homosexuality in South Africa has helped to bring to the fore, certainly from a sociological viewpoint, the complexities of black male homosexuality. Insights provided by XinLing Li’s thesis regarding the disjuncture between blackness and gayness is one I find interesting and will aid formulate my reading into how *Beautiful Contradictions* engages this disjuncture with the same kind of sensitivity. Li research reveals that for the majority of black male homosexuals, what they encounter in their communities and for themselves is “that the major impediments for the acceptance of homosexuality in the black South African community are issues related to Christianity, masculinity and family (i.e. reproduction and kinship)” (Li, 2010: 170). Moreover, Li notes

⁴¹ Master of Social Science degree.

that “there seems to be a contradiction between being black and being gay: for them, because the burden of being black is somehow inescapable, the burden of being gay is somehow optional” (Li, 2010: 171). I argue that Tsimong’s film seems to engage directly with this contradiction that Li writes of, as is suggested in the title of the film.

Tsimong’s protagonist (Tony Nkosi) reflects a wider conflict for black gay men. That is not to say that, this struggle of contradiction and disjuncture between being black and gay is endemic to every black gay male. However, it is worthy to note that this is a common struggle amongst black males especially for those who consider themselves ‘straight-acting’⁴². Li furthers this argument: “For black men who experience same-sex attraction but who subscribe to the conventional definition of masculinity, there seems to be a belief that being masculine is incompatible with being gay; and for this reason they often choose to live on the. . . down low”. (Li, 2010: 173).

Again, Li’s sentiment is echoed in Tsimong’s representation of his protagonist who in appearance, is quite rigorously masculine. I am tempted to even suggest that Nkosi fits into discourses which belong to sexist paradigms that suggests that the black male body is sexual in nature often feeding archetypal ideations of the black male body as tall, dark, hyper masculine and sexually charged. Tsimong rather provides a counter discourse to this, by instead (during various moments of the film) framing this masculine male body, in moments which speak a story of fragility. Even in the love-making scene, these two black male bodies are sensual and delicate, passionate as opposed to raw and hyper masculine.

For *A Normal Daughter*, Lewis brings to the fore a visibility of a Coloured queer identity and community that once flourished in the streets of District Six. What is also quite interesting about visibility, is to showcase some identities that still exist now under different conditions. In the film, the focus is on the historical narrative. However, the subjects who have lived through Apartheid, experienced their birthplace and a place they call home destroyed and displaced thereafter are perhaps images we needn’t forget. I argue that these subjects/individuals may be displaced in the contemporary post-apartheid climate as well. It is something I never considered, but in trying to relate to some of these subjects I asked myself the question: “I wonder how Kewpie maybe dealing with life as a gay man today?” I

⁴² Homosexual men who assume a heterosexual demeanour and persona to avoid experiences of prejudice and judgement on the basis of their sexuality.

think figures like Kewpie needn't not be forgotten and their visibility as symbols of gay unsung heroes is important.

6.4 Self-Representation - Reactions Against Stereotypical Representations.

Self-Representation has become a widely used tool by gay film-makers. Ricardo Peach talks of the need for self-critique in representations of gay identities. This self-critique hints at an aesthetic vocabulary that is moving towards a "homo-pomo" approach, as coined by Ruby Rich [as cited in Peach, 2005: 71]. Homo-pomo refers to homosexuality and a post-modern approach. It presents a critical space created by queer cinematic cultures as a way of providing texts, "that challenge and critique current queer cultural practices and offer images of, in which the audiences can recognize themselves and their lives." [Searle as cited in Peach, 2005].

Apostles of Civilised Vice and *The Man Who Drove with Mandela* are films that challenge the history of South Africa. *The Man Who Drove with Mandela* places a gay figure at the centre of a key historical moment in South Africa's history – the moment Mr. Mandela is imprisoned. It writes the script on its own terms, not according to secondary sources of how the incident unfolded, but by constructions of how a gay writer (Gevisser) imagined this. Moreover, utilizing monologues from a biographical play that accounts Williams' identity. Zackie Achmat's *Apostles* chooses to place gay identities within this history in terms that they understood. There is duality of self-representation in both films. Not only do the gay film-makers self-represent their community in a way that is unique to their stylistic repertoire, but also allows for self-representation of the identities they choose to represent. In the case of *The Man Who Drove with Mandela*, Williams speaks of his own accounts of the political and cultural situation of the time (1950's) through his own monologues. In *Apostles*, the identities featured in the film, varied as they are, are given the freedom to negotiate the terms of self-representation. These films stay clear of typifications of gayness, which Dyer defines as "visually recognizable images" (1993: 21). They clearly resist the stereotyping that is embedded in representations of gayness as it is prone to be a "product of social, political, practical and textual determinations" (1993: 19).

Beautiful Contradictions, employs much of the same approach in terms of self-representation. It becomes indicative of self-representation by virtue of the director being a black gay male

and the protagonist also being a black gay male. However, that is too simplistic an argument. I wish to make an interesting observation regarding the possibilities of self-representation in the film. In the interview between Luiz DeBarros and Tsimong regarding his previous film (*Black Beuhlals*), Tsimong makes somewhat of a contradictory statement regarding his sexuality. DeBarros asks, in response to an answer from a previous question: “But you don’t like to identify yourself as gay? Isn’t that a contradiction?” In response, Tsimong says: “No. I just don’t like to be put in a box. I have no problem telling people I sleep with men. I love men. But I don’t really feel comfortable calling myself gay or being in the gay world all the time” (www.mambaonline.com). I find this response most interesting to deconstruct, though I wonder whether I am well equipped to truly decipher the meanings encrypted between the lines.

It’s somewhat of a contradictory response, it doesn’t quite add up, though I partially understand the viewpoint Tsimong comes from and the politics inherent in gay identification. Not in an attempt to cast the eye of judgment upon Tsimong’s means of self-identification, but in reading that response, I perceive a sense of unresolved or contradiction reminiscent of the protagonist in his film. I do not assert that Tsimong is portraying or representing his own identity ‘crisis’ in the film, but I feel that there are interesting parallels to make meaning from that statement. Moreover, Tsimong explores a layered account that takes into account the emotional aspect. It is this perceptiveness to the complexities and difficulty of some closeted gay men that make it an interesting film to read.

Alternatively, the film could be read as a text that employs self-critique/self recognition. The strategy of self-critique is one that creates a critical space in which queer cinematic cultures create texts that challenge and critique queer cultural practices and in turn also offer images which audiences can see themselves and lives [Searle as cited in Peach, 2005]. What I particularly enjoy about *Beautiful Contradictions* is that it avoids stereotypical representations of homosexual encounters. As Li’s study points that there is a tendency to apply a post-colonial masculinity and heterosexist ideas of the configuration of gay relationships, often assuming the masculine and effeminate model (Li, 2010). This masculine/effeminate model presupposes that in a homosexual relationship there is a masculine player (active) and the effeminate or feminine player who assumes the role of the ‘woman’ (passive). As a counter to this, Tsimong casts two attractive and masculine (for lack

thereof a better word) black men who don't easily qualify to stereotypical markers of 'gayness'.

Through the platform that the documentary provides, Kewpie in *A Normal Daughter* becomes an active agent in his self representation. It has to be noted that Lewis plays an important role in shaping this narrative through the process of directing the film and making directorial choices which ultimately influence representation. However, the film in its re-writing of the history of District Six, enables for the director to provide a text that openly self-represents a coloured community.

The filmmakers look to present images and representations of gay identities that are natural, because through self-representation; they have the agency in deciding what kind of images are best real as modes of representations. Moreover, in self-representation, queer filmmakers are key in the authoring of these texts, which offer representations, stories and texts about queer life that are relevantly reflective of queer life experiences and address some of the concerns of the queer identities and communities.

6.5 Mobilisation

“The achievement of gay rights, on the one hand, has failed to advocate gay identities and lifestyles in public and media, on the other hand; so that the cultural intolerance and social apathy to homosexuality has remained unchallenged.” (Li, 2010: 5).

Li's comment highlights just how much of the struggle remains for queer identities in South Africa. De Waal and Manion write that the protections offered by the constitution “have yet to become a part of the daily lives of all South Africans at every level of society” (2006: 10).

What results is a queer community provided with the protections and an enablement to exercise these freedoms and rights, yet in practice the paradox becomes even more glaring when one still reads of corrective rape, hate crimes and horrific homophobic murders. If anything, for any queer person in South Africa to think the struggle is over, would be premature.

Li writes of struggling to locate homosexuality in contemporary South Africa. In an appraisal of homosexuality in South Africa in the contemporary times, he notes that “the post-apartheid

constitution cannot by itself encourage the coming out of gay people; neither can it systematically eliminate the cultural intolerance of homosexuality.”(Li, 2010: 13). What he proposes is the need to produce knowledge, “a knowledge that not only explains who we are sexually, but also improves how we can relate and understand one another better in terms of sexuality.” (Li, 2010: 43). I posit here that queer films and the greater queer cinematic culture in South Africa, still serves the purpose of mobilising the queer community as a whole to make them aware of these very facts.

Li suggests that there is a need to produce knowledge; I argue that queer films feed into this knowledge. I argue that films are by nature sources of entertainment and triggers of pleasure. I feel that in spite of the above, queer films and filmmakers still foster an activist spirit in their work. This is a strategy that I believe queer filmmakers will employ for as long as anti-gay prejudice is still widespread and experienced.

Interestingly, the films I have chosen to read in fact look to produce a newfound knowledge. In *The Man Who Drove with Mandela*, *Apostles of Civilised Vice*, *A Normal Daughter* the writers/directors endeavour to provide representations of gay identities that have never been witnessed before. As my discussion of the common theme of re-writing history or adding to the historical political canon of our country, these films produce such knowledge to counter existing discourses and narratives surrounding our history.

Tsimong should not be left out of this movement of mobilisation. As mentioned before, Tsimong’s work does not share the commonality of engaging with history. In a different way, Tsimong has also looked to produce a different kind of knowledge. He reacts: “A lot of people (in the townships) are curious about gay men. They have a lot of questions and misconceptions about gay people. For example, they think that all gay men are feminine” (Tsimong, 2007). He tasks himself with providing knowledge, as is evidenced in his films, which breaks down such misconceptions especially around black homosexuality, hoping to reach the black community. His documentary *Black Beulah’s* looked to offer different representations of black gay men to suggest that they are different configurations of identities within the black gay subculture. *Imfihlo* also explores the after-nines⁴³ phenomena and again

⁴³ Refers to homosexual males, most commonly used to refer to black males, who lead a facade heterosexual life in the public domain during the day, yet secretly engage in homosexual sexual activity in their private spaces

explores the closeted relationship between two men in the township. This film was produced for *Ekasi Stories*⁴⁴ on the free-to-air channel; ETV.

6.6 The Overarching Influence of the Political Economy: Cultural Production in Effect

Essentially, gay films; particularly *Apostles of Civilised Vice*, *The Man Who Drove with Mandela*, *A Normal Daughter: The Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six* and *Beautiful Contradictions* are in confluence with the greater socio-cultural and political economy. Queer film scholars have argued that the political economy has been a significant space for mobilization and social formation for queer cinema. The political climate/economy has a great influence as gay filmmakers are in constant interaction with this space, whether consciously or unconsciously in the formulation of their film concepts, issues and themes explored and the inherent message embodied in their texts. Producers of texts are ultimately influenced by the political economy. The process of cultural production takes effect as we produce texts conversely the cultural texts we produce are as a result of the process of cultural production.

Conclusion

7.1 Concluding Remarks

With regards to Queer cinema, I have identified the mass media as a shaper of culture. Media articulates the dominant values, political ideologies, and social developments and novelties of the era. As Mark Gevisser articulates, “our identities are constituted much in the event as what we watch” [as cited in Peach, 2005]. In essence we watch a world view, shaped by a number of denominators and one being mass media culture which mediates a reality constituted by a world view it wishes to express.

I chart the issues inherent in representation, especially representations of identities and come to discover that identity and culture feed into each other, and therefore culture needs to be understood as an incubus for the formations of identity (not entirely). What that meant is a need

during the night. The term after nine emerges directly from township slang that suggests that these ‘closet’ cases would emerge after nine pm to showcase their true colours.

⁴⁴ A weekly series providing a platform for black ‘amateur’ voices specifically targeted at a black audience; often showcasing films using indigenous languages. *Ekasi* is translated to mean township or location in urban township slang.

to understand the cultural conditions, which shape queer identities. Moreover, in considering the role of the media and representations of gay identities inherent in the media, there are issues of stereotyping and as a means of addressing those issues; queer cinematic culture looks to self-represent.

In understanding how the post-apartheid cinema came to be and further placing a queer cinematic culture within this greater body of cinema, it became apparent how this cinema (South African cinema) becomes a breeding ground for the effects of a political economy including the socio-cultural context.

- 1) Apartheid has sowed a deep divide, naturally, with its legacy reflecting a deeply fragmented industry at present.
- 2) Through historical writings by two scholars (Botha and Peach) on the emergence of a queer cinema in South Africa; it also becomes apparent that there are traces of a queer cinematic culture in existence as early as the 1950's.
- 3) These queer cinematic cultures, gained momentum and agency as the queer agenda was also developing politically. Therefore there is an alignment of the queer cinematic cultures with a political agenda suited to its own communities.

In understanding issues of queerness in films and the greater media culture, Through a historical appreciation of queer cinema, it becomes evident how earlier gay films were concerned with issues of visibility as a means of placing gay identities on television and cinema screens; in the South African context this strategy still ranks highly.

With the evolvement of the political economy and conditions for cultural production there too is a changing concern for queer communities; the thematic concerns change. In the 1970's military movies were prevalent to make commentary on conscription and a blatant homophobic stance. With the new post-apartheid queer cinema, Peach writes that the concerns were the integration of previously hidden queer histories and linking race and sexuality. As the move towards a more tolerable society, gay men have abandoned the stronghold on focusing on visibility. Instead they grapple with issues more pertinent to their current struggles within the current political economy. As Richard Watts expresses: "Queer films have become more about general life experiences" [Watts as cited in Karena, 2003: 122]. But the question that remains unanswered at this point; is whether this rings true for South African queer cinema? My impressions is that it is not so, however who knows what will emerge in the next coming years. I also cannot conceive of a queer film merely being about general life experience.

Botha notes the key themes of a post-apartheid cinema in South Africa. He recognises that marginalised communities get a voice. He also acknowledges how in post-apartheid cinema “South Africans are dealing with the traumatic past and how they are adjusting to the dramatic socio-political changes in contemporary South African society.” (Botha, 2007: 37) and lastly an experimentation with form. In discussing *Apostles of Civilised Vice*, *The Man who Drove with Mandela*, *A Normal Daughter* and *Beautiful Contradictions*, it is clear how these films engage with these very themes of marginalised communities regaining a voice. Secondly, three of the four films “confront the past and present” (Botha, 2007: 37) and actively experiment with form in dealing with postmodern aesthetics.

My readings of the films noted that the strategies employed by gay filmmakers are in resistance (not an active resistance) and look to offer counter representations of heterosexual images. This was my initial hypothesis. They achieve such counter representations through a number of strategies.

- 1) Through documentation, the documentary genre provides gay filmmakers with the ammunition to contest history and to also act as positive affirmation of identity. The documentary genre is a cost-effective and relatively more accessible means of creating stories and narratives, therefore empowering more queer voices.
- 2) Queer filmmakers in their representations of identities utilise and cunningly make use of postmodern aesthetic styles which are rebellious in nature. Moreover, through a postmodern approach and in determining different styles, the power is given back to the authoring process, in this case queer filmmakers.
- 3) The strategy of visibility and diversification put gayness at the forefront of the screen and remains an important strategy for gay filmmakers as it ensures acknowledgement of their lives on the screen. It further adds to the queer visual history.
- 4) Self-representations of different gay identities become reactions against stereotypical representations. In self-representation, queer filmmakers provide representations that are layered and more complex than skeletal stereotypical representations.
- 5) In representing gay identities, queer filmmakers attempt to provide a different kind of knowledge, one which speaks with an activist tone in the hope of not only mobilising queer communities, but also the broader society in which these texts exist.

In framing this investigation on a context-text schema, I have found that context shapes the conditions, themes, styles, approaches inherent in the text.

7.2 Screening Ahead

Cameron Edwin writes “our history as gay and lesbian people has its most potent significance in relation to our future” [Cameron as cited in De Waal and Manion, 2006: 6].

With history having paved the way forward for queer filmmakers, I would like to believe that the cultural activism that was born, one that looks to define itself, continues to inspire queer filmmakers to produce works that forge a strong history of gay cinema in South Africa.

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