Gender Identities and Roles:
The Representation of Women and Children in South African Films about HIV and AIDS

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in African Cinema at the University of Cape Town. It has not been submitted before, in whole or in part, for the award of any degree.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines representations of women and children in South African films about HIV and AIDS, paying particular attention to issues relating to the advancement and empowerment of the two groups. The dissertation focuses on two films: *Yesterday* (Darrell Roodt, 2004) and *Life Above All* (Oliver Schmitz, 2010). These two films represent marginalised communities and identities. *Yesterday* focuses on the experiences of rural women, while *Life Above All* focuses on women and children living in a small town on the urban periphery.

In order to contextualise the two films as well as the textual and theoretical analysis found in the body of the dissertation, the first chapter provides a brief outline of some of the concerns regarding the representations of women and children in South African films about HIV and AIDS. These concerns include the debate surrounding the authenticity of the representations of poor, black women by male, middle-class, white filmmakers, as well as the authenticity of the representations of children by adult filmmakers.

Chapter 2 provides additional contextual information by defining and considering the various concepts and theories on which the study is built. These include the naturalist, humanist and pluralist methods of representing HIV/AIDS, as well as the semiotic and discursive approaches to analysing audio-visual texts.

Chapter 3 consists of a close textual analysis of *Yesterday*. The chapter problematises representations that place too much emphasis on marginal communities‘ need for external help. It argues that the film‘s focus on generating sympathy from external viewers with the

hope that they might be persuaded to help women like the film‘s main character, Yesterday, hinders the promotion of empowerment.

Chapter 4 critically analyses the representation of children in *Life Above All,* with special attention paid to self-development and agency. This chapter argues that the film neglects children‘s self-development and long-term empowerment by placing too much value on the virtues of selfless sacrifice.

Chapter 5 concludes that the use of stereotypes and the prioritisation of easy to understand educational information and narratives in South African films about HIV/AIDS hinder a deeper understanding of identities as well as the promotion of women‘s and children‘s empowerment. Effective collaboration between filmmakers and the represented groups would lead to representations of identities that are more truthful to the complexities of the experiences of those infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. In addition, I argue that increased participation of female filmmakers would lead to more diversified representations of women‘s and children‘s identities and experiences.

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CHAPTER 1: Background, Rationale and Objectives

Background

Filmmakers face great challenges when representing the realities of HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) in fictional films within the African context. This is because the disease has brought immense devastation to the continent, and everyone, including filmmakers, is expected to play their part in the fight against the disease. As a result, filmmakers often sacrifice the complex representation of identities in favour of providing easy to understand educational information or social commentary. It can be argued that such sacrifice comes at a cost because, for films about HIV/AIDS to contribute more meaningfully to the fight against the disease, there is need to pay attention not only to what the films say about the disease, but also to what they say about the communities and people they represent. The representation of identities influence people's self-evaluation, empowerment and attitudes towards those infected and/or affected by the disease. Most filmmakers are fully aware of the fact that HIV/AIDS is not just a medical problem but also ‗a social, cultural, and political' problem (Bleiker and Kay, 2007: 140) as evidenced by the inclusion of such issues as stigmatisation in films such as Darrell Roodt's *Yesterday* (2004) and Oliver Schmitz's *Life Above All* (2010). Considering the quality of represented identities in films about HIV/AIDS is also especially significant because these films often focus on groups that are already vulnerable to negative stereotypes, namely women and children in underprivileged communities. The representation of women and children in these communities is complicated by the fact that they are usually represented by more privileged, often male filmmakers who do not fully understand them and therefore have to depend on established stereotypes. This dissertation argues that the use of stereotypes and the prioritisation of easy to understand educational information and narratives in South

African films about HIV/AIDS hinder the deeper understanding of identities as well as the promotion of women and children's empowerment. Paying more attention to the empowerment of women and children would help significantly in the fight against HIV/AIDS because inspiring women and children to be empowered puts them in a better position to protect themselves against infection and to deal with stigma. Empowerment is also necessary for effective social change. The dissertation will focus on *Yesterday* and *Life Above All*.

The main characters as well as the majority of the supporting characters in *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* are female, indicating that the films were made with the express objective of representing female experiences. This is in contrast with other South African films about HIV/AIDS such as *Beat the Drum* (David Hickson, 2003) and *Themba* (Stefanie Sycholt, 2010), which focus on male children and also have significant numbers of adult male characters. *Yesterday* is set in a rural village characterised by the absence of men, the reason being that men go to the city to find jobs, leaving their wives and children in the village. *Life Above All* is set in an urban environment but it still focuses on females, with men on the periphery of the narrative. Thus, *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* provide an opportunity to study closely the representation of women and girls in films about HIV/AIDS.

The drawback of focusing on *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* is that by mainly representing female experiences, the two films do not fully explore the complex gender relationships that exist within communities; men are reduced to one-dimensional and mostly unflattering characters. But bringing issues that affect both young and adult females to the foreground is very valuable because HIV/AIDS is largely linked to issues of the body, including ownership and sexuality, and, as Lizelle Bisschoff argues, _the African woman has never owned her body...the female body has always been a battlefield of male concerns' (2009: 145). It is

therefore significant to study the representation of women and girls in films about HIV/AIDS as these representations contribute to the discussions of the highly politicised issue of the female body.

Plot Summaries

Yesterday

Yesterday is the story of a rural KwaZulu Natal woman, Yesterday, who finds out that she has HIV. Upon discovering her HIV status, she goes to Johannesburg to inform her husband who works at a mine. Her husband beats her up and she returns to her rural home with bruises. Her husband eventually gets sick and comes home, and Yesterday looks after him until he dies. Yesterday looks after her husband at home because there is no room for him at the hospital; the waiting list of sick people who want to use the hospital facilities is too long. Once the other villagers become suspicious that Yesterday and her husband have AIDS, they stigmatise them in very open and obvious ways. At one point, everyone leaves the water well as soon as Yesterday shows up. Yesterday also has a young daughter, Beauty. The film therefore touches on the uncertain future of orphaned children.

Life Above All

Life Above all is the story of a teenage girl, Chanda, who is forced to take on the responsibilities of heading a household when her mother, Lilian, falls ill. The film begins with the death of Chanda‘s little sister, Sarah. Chanda arranges Sarah‘s funeral because her mother is too shocked and sick, and her stepfather, Jonah, is too drunk. From that moment on, Chanda assumes many adult responsibilities such as taking care of her siblings, running the

household and, finally, looking after her dying mother. On top of this burden, she has to deal with stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, and marginalisation from members of her community. But the film is not just about Chanda‘s tribulation, other stories run alongside hers. There is Esther‘s story, Chanda‘s best friend, an AIDS orphan whose circumstances force her into prostitution. There is also Iris‘ story, Chanda‘s younger sister, a troubled young girl who has to find her own creative ways to cope with losing the people she loves. Although the film focuses mainly on the experiences of children, it also touches on the lives of older women, including Lilian and Lilian‘s friend and neighbour, Mrs Tafa, who is also dealing with her own loss to AIDS.

HIV/AIDS, Children and Childhood

Although this dissertation acknowledges that ‗the meanings of childhood vary greatly across different cultures and are far from universal‘ (Singer and Dovey, 2012: 152), it defines a child in accordance with The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as ‗anyone below the age of 18 years‘ (United Nations, n.d). Chanda, Iris and Esther in *Life Above All,* and Beauty in *Yesterday,* fall within this category. The representations of these four characters highlight the vulnerabilities and experiences of children infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. But it is important to acknowledge that, in both films, it is the adult film directors who have the final say on how these characters are represented. This state of affairs places limitations on the extent to which the voices of children can be represented, and affects the nature of the information communicated through the films. When writing about literature meant for children, Gross, Carruth and Goldsmith state that ‗the presentation of information about HIV/AIDS is complicated by the fact that the discourse is one between two different population groups—adults and youth—and involves subject matter related to

behaviours that traditionally make for difficult conversations for all involved‘ (2009: 68). Most films about HIV/AIDS that focus on children follow the humanist discourse in which the essential quality of children is their vulnerability; they are dependent, powerless and vulnerable to exploitation (Rosen and Rosen 2012: 305). This approach enables filmmakers to avoid dealing with the difficult issue of children‘s sexuality and sexual behaviours. Children‘s sexual activity is often represented within the context of abuse from adults, and children are usually infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS through no fault of their own, for instance, through sexual abuse by adults or through being orphaned, as is the case with *Themba* and *Beat the Drum*. In another film which focus on children, *Izulu Lami/My Secret Sky* (Madoda Ncayiyana, 2008), street children, both boys and girls, live together but there is no hint of any sexual activity amongst the children, instead, the children are abused by adult outsiders. Thus, these films do not meaningfully engage with children regarding their own roles and responsibilities in protecting themselves from the disease. One of the few exceptions in this regard is *Life Above All* in which Chanda‘s friend, Esther, becomes a prostitute. But because Esther is only shown to be involved with adult men, her prostitution is still represented within the realm of child abuse.

It seems the job of tackling children‘s responsibilities regarding HIV/AIDS is largely taken up by documentaries and television youth programmes. South African documentaries which meaningfully engage with the youth include *Thembi* (Jo Menell, 2010), which documents how a young woman, Thembi, who was diagnosed with HIV while still a teenager, deals with the _physical, social and emotional struggle of living with HIV‘ (African Film Festival New York, 2011). Another example is *A Ribbon Around My House* (Portia Rankoane, 2001), which focuses on Pinki Tiro, an AIDS activist, and her daughter, Ntombi (representing the affected). Pinki is very open about her HIV status and tells anyone who would care to listen,

whereas Ntombi would rather her mother kept her status a secret for fear of being stigmatised. Pinki is also shown in the documentary visiting schools to teach children on their responsibilities and roles in preventing the spread of AIDS. *A Ribbon Around My House* was made as part of the Steps For The Future project, which included facilitated film screenings in schools (Steps For The Future, 2012), thus, children were seriously considered as the potential audience for the project's films.

What is perhaps most noticeable in South African fictional films about HIV/AIDS that focus on children is that the children do not remain passive; they actively seek to find meaning in their lives or to better their circumstances. *Beat the Drum,* for example, is about an AIDS orphan, Musa, who discovers that AIDS is the disease that is killing many people in his village and then takes it upon himself to help teach people about the disease, including those in his rural village. In *Themba*, a boy, Themba, contracts AIDS after being raped by his mother's lover, but he eventually manages to achieve his dream of becoming a professional soccer player. *Beat the Drum* and *Themba,* therefore, seek to inspire and empower children, but since the two films' main characters are boys, it is worth exploring whether the same forms of empowerment are evident in films about HIV/AIDS that focus on girls. *Life Above All* provides that opportunity.

HIV/AIDS and Women

Women are more vulnerable than men to HIV/AIDS because of the _patriarchal social ordering of African societies' (Bisschoff, 2009: 178). In most African communities, women are _often less educated than men [...] expected to be married and have children and act as caretakers for the aged and the ill [...and] have limited options for employment which leads to

economic dependency on men who are often migratory, unfaithful, violent or dismissive' (Bisschoff, 2009: 178). Women are also vulnerable 'because of their lack of access to information about health care and treatment' (Bisschoff, 2009: 178). Given these many vulnerabilities, one of the challenges for filmmakers is to avoid confining women within these limitations.

Many African womanists have faulted African filmmakers for 'casting women in roles that limit them to domestic spheres, or portraying them as victims' (Orlando, 2006: 215). African womanists are proponents of African womanism, which encourages women to recognise that 'African women's reality has been inscribed from the West or by men' and must be reconfigured (Marnia Lazreg in Orlando, 2006: 213). African womanists' views have contributed to the recognition that African women's ideas of emancipation do not always coincide with those of women from the West. For instance, 'the nurturing roles of African women are not regarded as problematic in the way that these roles are often critiqued by Western feminist activists' (Bisschoff, 2009: 205). Lizelle Bisschoff states that the term "African womanism" came about as a result of perceived 'disparate agendas of Western feminism and African feminism' as some writers argued that 'the very term "feminism" is misplaced in an African context' and opted for the term "womanism" to 'describe the quest for female liberation in Africa' (2009: 19). In recognition of African women's specificity, there have been calls for the promotion of African female filmmakers as films are often seen as providing women with the opportunity to represent their lived experiences as well as create images that confront and transform their reality. In Africa as well as other continents, the film industry is still dominated by men, and women face the challenge of 'regaining for women the power of self-definition and self-representation' (Bisschoff, 2009: 3). Farida Ayari states that 'the image of African women in African cinema remains essentially that created by men'

and that roles for women are fabricated within the imaginary of the men who make the films, regardless of how close to reality this imaginary at times may be' (Ayari in Orlando, 2006: 216). From these statements, it is clear that some sections of women feel very strongly that men have limited sensibilities when it comes to representing women.

The representations of gender and gender relations in South African films directed by women, for example *Confessions of a Gambler* (Rayda Jacobs, 2007), demonstrate what might be regarded as women's ~~s~~ensibilities." In *Confessions of a Gambler,* both male and female characters share the ~~b~~urden" of looking after Reza, the main character's son who is dying from AIDS. At first, he is taken care of by his gay lover, Patrick, and then later, Abeeda, his mother, and his brother, Zane, take him to his mother's home where they both watch over him. While the film embraces the role of women as nurturers and caregivers, it suggests that the burden of this role does not necessarily have to fall only on women; men can help too. In her film, Rayda Jacobs critiques patriarchal interpretations of gender roles which continue to oppress women', and at the same time addresses the significant issue of the usefulness of gender complementarity as well as the modification of gender roles in contemporary African societies' (Bisschoff, 2009: 18-19). These concerns do not seem to occupy great importance in *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* where male characters are largely sidelined. It then becomes clear that having fewer female directors than men is problematic because it results in an imbalanced representation of socio-cultural complexities as well as disproportionate representations of individual and collective subjectivities and identities' (Bisschoff, 2009: 41). Having more female directors would potentially provide alternative views on gender roles and identities, as well as different ways of looking at the relationships between men and women.

The potential for women to offer different perspectives is also evident in some South African documentaries which represent women infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. Women have managed to express their own alternative visions of their identities in documentaries such as *A Red Ribbon Around My House* and *Masindy's Story* (Lee Otten and Sharon Farr, 2005). These two documentaries represent female HIV/AIDS activists who not only express, but also act out the roles they envision for themselves. As Bisschoff states, female directors have managed to move away from _fixed traditional gender roles' to open up to _new, unfixed identities, changeable and multiple as required by specific situations and contexts' (2009: 9). For instance, in *A Red Ribbon Around My House,* at one point Pinki speaks to men about sex and the use of condoms, and the men open up to her and ask questions that might otherwise have been considered ~~in~~appropriate" for men to ask a woman, especially within the African context. In this regard, the film attempts to open up dialogue between men and women, acknowledging that the fight against HIV/AIDS involves both genders in active roles.

But advocating for the promotion of female filmmakers should not mean that films like *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* should be written off simply because they are directed by men. There have been some noteworthy progressive gender representations in the works of male filmmakers, although _many female film theorists and practitioners would claim that the male vision can never fully represent the female experience' (Bisschoff, 2009: 42). Ousmane Sembene, for example, has been praised for being a _veritable torchbearer for African feminism' (Lindo, 2010: 110) because of his representations of women in his films, including *Borom Sarret* (1969), *Ceddo* (1977)*, Faat Kiné* (2000) and *Moolaade* (2004). In *Faat Kiné,* Sembene explores _the changing roles of women in Senegalese society' (Samba Gadjigo in Lindo, 2010: 111) through his representation of strong, independent and complex women, especially the main character, Faat Kiné. In *Moolaade* he creates dialogue between men and

women through the character of Collé, who directly and publicly challenges patriarchal authority thereby forcing both men and women to engage with her ideas. While there certainly are films by male filmmakers that demonstrate why women need to be in a position to ‗demonstrate their own vision of women's roles' (Bisschoff, 2009: ii), films like *Faat Kiné* and *Moolaade* show that female representations by male filmmakers need to be evaluated individually on their own merit. For this reason, this dissertation will evaluate *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* individually.

Manthia Diawara, in his analysis of African films, states that ‗there are many African images, and it seems trivial to expect filmmakers of different generations, different countries, and different ideological tendencies to see the same Africa everywhere' (1992: 141). The same can be said about the representations of women. Filmmakers cannot be expected to see women's identities in the same way, or represent women only in specific ways. But there is a general agreement that patriarchal societies put women at a disadvantage, socially, politically and economically, and there is need to redress that power imbalance in order to improve women's wellbeing. One of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations is to ‗promote gender equality and empower women' (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2014). It is therefore reasonable to consider whether films that expose the vulnerabilities of women, such as *Yesterday* and *Life Above All*, reflect sensibilities in line with the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Yesterday and *Life Above All* represent communities on the margins, where female leadership is not necessarily measured by ‗highly visible positions of leadership such as...female members of parliament', but ‗includes other forms such as spiritual leadership...women's localised collectives, economic emancipation through small-scale entrepreneurship, and

individual emancipation within the domestic sphere‘ (Bisschoff, 2009: 204). The two films therefore offer an opportunity to investigate the representation of female emancipation at grassroots level.

Investigating the representation of female empowerment at the lowest levels of society is very important in South Africa especially given the country‘s history of apartheid. This is because during apartheid conditions were worse for black women as compared to black men because women were _doubly oppressed, firstly by Black patriarchal culture and secondly by [the] colonising forces‘ (Bisschoff, 2009: ii). Women therefore have a longer way to go than men as far as achieving equality is concerned.

South Africa’s Apartheid History

One cannot speak of South African films without mentioning the country‘s apartheid history. This is because although the first democratically elected government came into power in 1994, the effects of apartheid are still evident in people‘s lived experiences. For example, race still largely coincides with social class, with the majority of black people still significantly disadvantaged. This imbalance is also evident in filmmaking. Although there are efforts to develop what Lizelle Bisschoff refers to as _indigenous filmmaking‘ (2009: 7), South Africa‘s film industry is still dominated by white directors. According to Bisschoff, Ousmane Sembene has said that _[w]hatever its form, subject or content, artistic expression stems from a lived and shared social reality‘ (Sembene in Bisschoff, 2009: 34), implying that _the themes that African filmmakers choose to address through their films [...] often reflect the lived experiences of the filmmakers‘ (Bisschoff, 2009: 34). But because the directors of *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* are both male, white and middle-class, whereas the characters

they represent in their films are female, black and from poor communities, it is obvious that these films do not reflect the filmmakers' lived experiences. In recognition of this complexity, Darrell Roodt commented that _he gets a tough enough time in South Africa as a white filmmaker making films about black people, but now, as a man making films about women, he carries twice the burden' (Roodt in Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 186). The fact that Roodt is aware of his –burden" should perhaps be seen as a positive thing because awareness of, and acknowledgment of one's position as an outsider may potentially motivate the filmmaker to seek greater understanding of the people and communities he represents.

Martin Botha (2006: 15) states that between 1895 and 1994 black South Africans were excluded from South African filmmaking because they had no money to make films and they had no access to equipment. It can be argued that in post-apartheid South Africa, black people are still, to a certain extent, excluded from the industry. However, this dissertation adopts Keyan Tomaselli's argument that a director does not have _the key to a character just because both are black or that a white director or actor cannot portray black realities' (Tomaselli in Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 20-21). For instance, following the Civil Rights movement in the United States of America in the 1960s and 70s, films directed by African-American filmmakers such as *Sweet Sweetback"sBaadasss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971) and *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971) were made with the aim of _reversing the evaluation of popular [black] stereotypes' (Hall, 1997: 271). These films became popular with black audiences because _they cast black actors in glamorous and –heroic" as well as –bad" roles' (Hall, 1997: 271). But these films have been criticised, in retrospect, for their _adoption of an exaggerated –black male macho" style and sexual aggressiveness [...] towards black women' (Hall, 1997: 272). The films are now commonly known as –blaxploitation" films, a reflection of the sentiment that they stereotyped black people and thus exploited them (Hall, 1997: 272).

It certainly does not help that most of these films were produced by white studios, a situation that may imply that white studio owners had some control over the production processes of these films by black directors. The criticism levelled against the ~~b~~blaxploitation" films demonstrate that it is not enough to have black or female directors, there is also need to put measures that promote filmmakers' creative freedom as well as the representation of a multiplicity of voices.

In the case of the South African film industry, _cultural diversity as well as gender and racial inequality of the film industry remains a site of public concern' (Botha, 2012: 195). There has been an increase in the representation of black South Africans in films since the end of apartheid, both in terms of actors and film characters, with popular films such as *Hijack Stories* (Oliver Schmitz, 2000), *Tsotsi* (Gavin Hood, 2005), *Jerusalema* (Ralph Ziman, 2008) and *White Wedding* (Jann Turner, 2009). But most of the films focus on crime, poverty and disease. As the blaxploitation films demonstrate, the question should not just be about whether black people are now more visible in films, but also about the quality of their representations. Drawing on Kristin Pichaske's (2009) doctoral study on the process of racial transformation within South Africa's documentary film industry, Botha notes that in documentary films, _black South Africans remain more often the subjects [... rather] than their makers', and overcoming this barrier _is the only means by which an equitable plurality of voices may reach South African audiences' (2012: 195). Statistics presented at the 2009 National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) Indaba by the Head of Production and Development at the NFVF, Clarence Hamilton, indicate that _a total of 615 documentaries were made from 1994 to 2008, with 2003 and 2004 as the most prolific years (154 productions). White directors still dominate production at 68% compared to black directors at 32%. Male directors constituted the highest percentage at 61% compared to females at 39%'

(Botha, 2012: 195). From these statistics, it is clear that both race and gender inequalities need to be addressed within the film industry.

The continuing racial inequality within the film industry has fuelled tensions with some people arguing that white people should not tell black people‘s stories (Pichaske, 2007: 130). However, although racial equality must remain the film industry‘s ultimate goal, the intent, integrity and approach of the filmmaker is ultimately a more significant determinant of representational accuracy than the colour of his or her skin‘ (Botha, 2012: 196). While referring to documentaries, Botha (2012: 196) lists three factors that are critical to accurate and ethical representation, regardless of the socio-economic status of the filmmakers vis-à-vis subject‘, and these are:

1. First-person and/or reflexive approaches to documentary storytelling which help frame documentary narratives as subjective – that is representations of one filmmaker‘s viewpoint as opposed to objective representations of pure, unadulterated fact.
2. The cultivation of meaningful relationships between filmmaker and subjects that endure beyond the scope of the project – the presence of which elevates the filmmaker‘s level of understanding and empathy towards his or her subjects and also helps ensure a sense of responsibility for their long-term well-being.
3. Collaboration between filmmakers and subjects in a manner that grants subjects greater agency in determining the construction of their images. This strategy helps to mitigate both concerns regarding power imbalance and inaccuracies that may arise through the practice of outsider storytelling.

These factors can also be applied to fictional films. For example Mahamet-Saleh Haroun, in his film *Bye Bye Africa* (1999), manages to draw attention to his status as an outsider; a Chadian living in France, making a film in Chad about the Chadian Cinema and Chadian people. Dayna Oscherwitz suggests that *Bye Bye Africa* is generically ambiguous and might best be characterised as a docu-fiction' because of its embedded narrative structure that complicates the relationship between Mahamet-Saleh Haroun, the filmmaker, and Haroun, the character in the narrative' (2012: 244). The film uses dual cameras, one external to the narrative and the other internal to it' (Oscherwitz, 2012: 244). But the film's reflexive approach demonstrates the potential for fictional films to find ways of indicating to viewers that the represented identities only reflect certain subjective viewpoints and therefore are not to be taken as objective representations.

In light of the existence of alternative approaches such as the self-reflexive representational strategies, this dissertation will consider the approaches taken in *Yesterday* and *Life Above All,* and how these approaches may affect viewers' perceptions of the represented identities. Although the goal should remain to achieve racial and gender equality, the availability of alternative ways of representing identities provides opportunities for filmmakers to counter-balance the drawbacks of representing others from an outsider's perspective. Filmmakers can improve the quality of their representations through choosing approaches, or a combination of approaches, that best suit their needs and aims. As the next section, which looks at the rationale of this study, indicates, better quality representations may lead to better understanding of identities.

Rationale

Men, women and children experience different realities when it comes to living with HIV/AIDS, whether infected or affected. It is therefore essential to look at how these different groups are represented in films, and how such representations impact on their identities as well as their empowerment when dealing with the disease. This dissertation focuses on the representation of women and children, especially female children, because they are more disadvantaged than men due to the patriarchal nature of our societies that gives men more power and opportunities within the social, economic and political spheres.

Studying the representations of women and children in films about HIV/AIDS is important because films have the potential to challenge the status quo and promote gender equality. Through observing people and representing them, filmmakers are in a position to share their own ideas as well as some of the solutions generated within our societies on how to deal with HIV/AIDS and all the related problems, or at least point at our faults so that we may be encouraged to do better. The author of this dissertation hopes to contribute to the development of more meaningful representations that may lead to a better understanding of the circumstances and needs of women and children who are infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Studying the way roles and identities are represented in films about HIV/AIDS is also important because the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS is often linked to personal behaviour ‗rather than a problem of an invading bacterium that cannot be avoided' (Gross, Carruth and Goldsmith, 2009: 80). It is largely for this reason that stigma is a big problem when it comes to HIV/AIDS. There is usually a tendency of linking people with HIV/AIDS to behaviours and identities that are considered ―socially unacceptable", and this makes it easy to assign ―blame." In the documentary *Body and Soul* (Melody Emmett, 2001), Father Jape Heath of

the Anglican church suggests that some church people do not acknowledge the fact when a person dies from an AIDS related illness because of how AIDS is perceived; ‗sex equals sin and AIDS equals sex'. Bisschoff notes that ‗in Christian and Islamic regions, contracting HIV is often regarded as a punishment' (2009: 177). There is a tendency of dividing people with HIV/AIDS ‗into those who can be considered ―innocent victims" and those who are not' (Gross, Carruth and Goldsmith, 2009: 67). It is therefore important to look at how films conceptualise the disease because films have the potential of ‗producing and maintaining new forms of identity and community' (Saks, 2010: 2), something which might be very useful in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Over the years, films have proven to be very useful tools in creating awareness of socio-economic and political issues. For instance, *Blood Diamond* (Edward Zwick, 2006) was very successful in spreading to larger populations the idea that diamonds were used to finance civil wars in African countries such as Sierra Leone. Anna Leander suggests that the film was a very successful ‗advertising campaign' because it contributed to the establishment and solidification of ‗the link between blood and diamonds' (2008: 2). At the time the film was made, the idea of blood diamonds was only mostly well known ‗to those interested in African politics and conflict' (Leander, 2008: 4). But after the release of the film, the idea of blood diamonds became a ‗general negative reference' that the diamond industry had to overcome (Leander, 2008: 7). For instance, the imagery of *Blood Diamond* was referred to by the indigenous population in Ontario as well as Botswana in their protest against diamond-mining projects by the De Beers Group, although the immediate concerns of these two groups had ‗nothing to do with diamonds bloodied by war' (Leander, 2008: 7). The indigenous group in Ontario was concerned with environmental destruction while the one in Botswana was protesting against what they saw as measures to drive them off their traditional land

(Leander, 2008: 7). Thus, film can influence the way people conceptualise their problems and/or solutions. The South African government recognises film's potential to change attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and those afflicted, and to contribute towards creating a 'health-enabling community' (Campbell in Horne, 2007: 189). This is reflected in the fact that *Yesterday* 'became a part of the HIV/AIDS public awareness strategy and was screened free of charge on World AIDS Day 2005 in selected cinemas throughout the country' (Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 187).

This study is also significant because films about HIV/AIDS are not only aimed at local audiences but also at international ones. For instance, *Yesterday* has been shown in Europe, Canada, USA, India, Argentina, Australia and Mexico (Internet Movie Database [IMDb], n.d.). *Life Above All* was shown in Europe, USA, Canada, Brazil, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates (IMDb, n.d.). Films like *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* may work as a source of information to international audiences on the many ways that South Africans are affected and are dealing with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In this regard, it becomes important for these films to provide meaningful and useful information because HIV/AIDS is not only a South African problem; it is also an African as well as global problem.

In international releases, the specificity of South Africa as the location of the films remains significant and, therefore, the representation of identities that are true to local specificities is important. These representations may contribute to the creation of images that help outsiders understand the complex nature of South African identities as well as the heterogeneous nature of African images and identities. Films about HIV/AIDS are however in a rather tricky position. This is because images of suffering Africans often lose their specificity and become associated with the generally perceived "African condition" of unending suffering. Thus,

films about HIV/AIDS have the potential of feeding into the afro-pessimistic views about the continent. Afro-pessimism can be defined as ‗the pervasive feeling in some quarters that Africa is doomed', which has gained dominance with reference to post-colonial Africa (Okigbo, 1995: 111). Considering the rise in afro-pessimism in recent years, it is indeed reasonable to consider the potential effect of these two films on the image of South Africa specifically, as well as Africa in general. Focussing on negative images may be a way of pointing out areas that are in desperate need of improvement, but there is the risk that such a focus may simply serve as confirmation of Africa's perceived gloomy prospects rather than provide insightful views about the complexities of African identities and experiences.

The author of this dissertation hopes to promote more truthful and dignified representations of identities in films about HIV/AIDS, as well as the empowerment of women and children. These goals form the basis for the objectives that guide the analysis of the two case study films, *Yesterday* and *Life Above All.* These objectives are outlined in the next section.

Objectives

The main objective of this dissertation is to consider how the roles and identities assigned to the female characters in *Yesterday* and *Life Above All*, both adults and children, may influence or contribute to the efforts to empower women and children in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The dissertation will examine how stereotypes as well as the depictions of the ―innocence" and/or ―guilt" of those who live with the disease may hinder the promotion of women's and children's agency in fighting HIV/AIDS and the stigma associated with the disease. Also, because *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* focus on marginalised communities and

individuals, the rural and urban poor respectively, the effects of social, political and economic inequalities on representations are also considered.

The dissertation also looks at the ways in which the two case study films deal with the issue of structural violence. Structural violence can be defined as ‗violence exerted systematically - that is indirectly - by everyone who belongs to a certain social order' (Farmer in Horne, 2007: 188). This violence ‗is built into social structures, and [...] is silent, largely invisible and seen to be as natural as the air around us' (Horne, 2007: 188). In this regard, the dissertation considers how Darrell Roodt and Oliver Schmitz deal with the tension between personal agency and structural violence. This is because one of the ways to overcome structural violence is through personal agency that leads to community transformation. Personal agency will also be considered within the support of the community because over the years campaigns by activist organisations, such as Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), have proven that communities, even rural ones, have a better chance of improving their conditions if they come together and work towards finding solutions (Robins, 2007).

Also to be considered are the larger industrial and commercial concerns. Ian Glenn rightly argues that ‗any analysis of films about Africa... has to take larger industry and commercial context into account' (2007: 356). Most South African big budget films are co-produced with people from outside the country, mainly Europe. For instance, *Yesterday* is a South Africa/USA co-production, while *Life Above All* is a South Africa/Germany co-production. As Glenn argues, ‗co-productions inevitably lead to compromises, trade-offs, a return to the security of well-tried formulae' (2007: 357) which guarantee international audiences and therefore a return on investment. Bleiker and Kay suggest that ‗the commercial need for [...] simple stories, inevitably favours stereotypical representations over more complex ways of

representing sociopolitical issues, such as HIV/AIDS‘ (2007: 143). These stereotypical representations sacrifice the quality of information provided.

Although the content of the two case study films, as with many other films, is influenced by ‗the economy and vested interests‘ (Tomaselli, 1980: 2), this dissertation acknowledges that the desire to disseminate information and help in the fight against HIV/AIDS also plays a significant part. In this sense, the films can be said to fall within the same category as *Blood Diamond*, which entertains as an action movie and at the same time raises awareness of the real problem of civil war in Sierra Leone and the exploitation of child soldiers. The dissertation attempts to unpack the complexities that arise when filmmakers negotiate between or try to fuse the commercial and educational demands of their films. The need for educational information cannot be overestimated, especially in Africa where the disease has hit hardest. In 2005, just a year after *Yesterday* was released, Jane Freedman and Nana Poku estimated that in South Africa there were 1,600 new infections every day (Bleiker and Kay, 2007: 140). This dissertation considers the ways that Schmitz and Roodt deal with these competing demands.

In meeting the objectives outlined in this section, this dissertation is guided by the concepts, theories as well as the methodologies outlined in the next chapter, Chapter 2. Chapter 2 will then be followed by a detailed analysis of *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The last chapter, Chapter 5, will summarise the main conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER 2: Concepts, Theories and Methodology

Introduction

The first section of this chapter defines the main concepts used in analysing the two case study films, *Yesterday* and *Life Above All*, and clarifies the relevance of these concepts to the study of the representation of women and children in South African films about HIV/AIDS. The second section considers the theories that guide the analysis of the two case study films. The final section, methodology and analysis, focuses on the methods used in interpreting and analysing the two films, and outlines the limitations of these methods in order to provide any relevant qualifications for the conclusions reached.

Concepts

This study is built on the following concepts: identity, representation, stereotype, socialisation, cinematic realism, marginal people and communities, empowerment, stigma and the ~~–o~~ther." Discussing these concepts will help to contextualise the films under analysis as well as the focus of this dissertation. It will also help in the understanding of the politics of representation within the South African context.

Identity

The term identity is used to refer to ~~_~~the sameness among people belonging to the same collectivity or group' (Zegeye, 2008: 19). This definition presents the danger of imposing homogeneity amongst people within the same group, but it is useful as a starting point when looking at African films about HIV/AIDS because audiences, especially international

audiences, often regard these films as representing the experiences of the millions of people who are affected by the disease on the African continent. This dissertation takes its cue from Stuart Hall who argues that identities should be understood „as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies" (2000: 17). Africa is often treated as a homogenous entity as reflected in the titles of Hollywood films such as *Out of Africa* (Sydney Pollack, 1985), *I Dreamed of Africa* (Hugh Hudson, 2000) and *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* (Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath, 2008). However, the dissertation emphasises the importance of South Africa as the setting for the two films in recognition of the fact that since the end of colonialism, many African filmmakers have made great efforts to overturn colonial representations of African identities on film, one of which was to lump African cultures together as if they were all the same. Such filmmakers include Gaston Kaboré with his films *Wend Kuuni* (1983) and *Buud Yam* (1997), and Souleymane Cissé with his film *Yeelen* (1987).

Bisschoff states that „Sub-Saharan African filmmaking has since its inception in the 1960s been used as a tool in the process of negotiating African identity" (2009: 195). Many African filmmakers consider it their duty to define and assert African identities as a way of decolonising African minds as well as declaring Africa's place in the world. For instance, when referring to the story of Wênd Kûuni in the film *Wend Kuuni* (1983), Gaston Kaboré mentions that „there is a parallel between the story of this young boy and Africa itself muted by colonialism recovering the voice to tell its own history, and story" (Kaboré in Akudinobi, 1999: 37). Ousmane Sembène also demonstrates his dedication to redefining African identities in his films such as *Moolaadé* (2004) and *Faat Kiné* (2000). Bisschoff (2009) mentions female filmmakers such as Senegalese director Safi Faye and Burkinabe directors Fanta Regina Nacro and Apolline Traoré, who contribute to highlighting the heterogeneous

nature of African cultures and identities. There is therefore a pre-occupation with redefining African identities amongst African filmmakers, although this pre-occupation was more pronounced in the early post-colonial period of the 1960s and 1970s. South Africa has a different colonial and filmmaking history from the other Sub-Saharan African countries, but since the end of apartheid, many filmmakers, academics and critics have paid great attention to the representation of black South Africans on film (Botha, 2007 and 2012; Fu and Murray, 2007; Glenn, 2007; Marx, 2010; Saks, 2010). This dissertation will consider how the representations in the case study films may influence people's views on the experiences and identities of South African women and children specifically, as well as African women and children in general.

Bisschoff (2009) suggests that many factors influence identities, and these include gender, ethnicity, social class, language, age, family, profession, religion and nationality. Representations that acknowledge the complexity of identities are therefore those that reflect the idea that individual and social identities are forged at the intersection of these elements and are _always layered, multiple, fragmented, hybrid and even contradictory' (Bisschoff 2009: 195). Identities are also _subject to a radical historicisation, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation' (Hall in Bisschoff, 2009: 195). Identities are therefore never _an already accomplished historical fact', but _a ~~"p~~roduction" which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within, and not outside of representation' (Bisschoff, 2009: 195-196). This means that representations and the interrogations of such representations are limited by the fact that ~~"re~~ality" is unstable, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to come up with a reliable measure of authenticity. But interrogating identities presented in South African films about HIV/AIDS still remains significant, especially when it is aimed, as is the case with this dissertation, at promoting the representation of a diversity of

voices that reveal the multiplicity and complexities of South African identities and experiences, including those of women and children.

Films present the performance of identities in the sense that actors and actresses perform specific roles for the camera and for the purposes of specific narratives. But taking a cue from Judith Butler's concept of _the performativity of identity' in which identity is _not being something that we inherently are, but rather something that we do' (Bisschoff, 2009: 233), films can be seen as extensions of our daily performances of identities. In that case, films can therefore shape how people perform their identities –off the screen", that is, in their lived experiences, by demonstrating new forms of performances. It is therefore significant to look at the ways identities are represented because such representations may influence people's behaviour in their lived experiences. Films such as *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* have the potential of altering people's performed identities and thus help in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Representation

Representation can be defined as the use of _language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people' (Hall, 1997: 15). Representation can therefore be seen as involving the production and exchange of meaning amongst cultures through the use of language, signs and images (Hall, 1997: 15).

Stuart Hall (1997) identifies three approaches to explaining how representation works: the reflective, intentional and constructionist approaches. In the reflective approach, language is considered as functioning as a mirror _to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the

world‘ (Hall, 1997: 24). In the intentional approach, the author of a message is regarded as imposing ‗his or her unique meaning on the world through language‘ (Hall, 1997: 25). In the constructionist approach, meaning is regarded as a social construction rather than fixed (Hall, 1997: 25). These approaches do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. In this case, although AIDS is a reality, its representation on film should not be regarded as simply reflecting ‗a meaning which already exists out there in the world‘, but should be considered as also including what the producer of the representation wishes to say, as understood within a specific social context (Hall, 1997: 15). It is therefore more useful to approach the meanings of the representations in South African films about HIV/AIDS as influenced by both the production and reception contexts. For instance, Treffry-Goatley states that *Yesterday* was generally well received by both international and local audiences, but Tomaselli notes that ‗the Forum for Traditional Healers of South Africa attacked the film for suggesting that traditional healers are uninformed on the causes and symptoms of HIV/Aids‘ (Tomaselli in Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 187). In this case, the traditional healers‘ views on the film‘s representation of a traditional healer were influenced by the way they define themselves; the criticism arises from the discrepancy they see between the way they define their own identities and the way the film represents them.

The concerns raised by the Forum for Traditional Healers of South Africa regarding *Yesterday* demonstrate that representations can have negative effects on the way certain identities are viewed or understood. Bleiker and Kay suggest that the ways HIV and AIDS are represented ‗influence key issues, such as the production of stigma and discrimination‘ (2007: 140). Among other powerful effects, representations can create apathy and fear or empathy and engagement. It is for this reason that careful consideration should be paid to representation processes.

"The Other"

Some South African films, especially documentaries featuring HIV/AIDS activists such as *A Ribbon Around My House* (Rankoane, 2001) and *Thembi* (Menell, 2010), encourage dialogue within communities which generate knowledge to empower people in the fight against stigma and the spread of the disease. These documentaries achieve this by giving the subjects of the films space to voice their own views. Fictional films are however a different matter because the words and actions of the characters are largely determined by the scriptwriters and directors. Therefore, fictional films about HIV/AIDS such as *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* may represent, in essence, other people's views about the characters and the communities represented. The representation of ~~'O~~thers'" identities is complicated by the fact that _meanings are inevitably implicated in relations of power' between those who produce films and those whose identities are represented (Hall, 1997: 8). Those with the resources to produce films are often in a better position to impose their ideas and views on, and about, the underprivileged ~~'o~~ther."

The term ~~'o~~ther" is used in this instance to refer to _people who are separate from one's self, whether in terms of ~~'r~~ace", gender, sexuality, ethnicity, time or space' (Beattie, 2004: 45). In the African context, representations of the ~~'o~~ther" are often associated with colonialist subjectivities that perpetuate African primitivist and other stereotypes. But De B'béri suggests that there are two different types of ~~'th~~e other", namely ~~'O~~ther-other" and ~~'O~~ther-self". De B'béri uses the term ~~'O~~ther-other" to refer to the colonial outsider and ~~'O~~ther-self" to refer to Africans from other parts of Africa (2007: 101). The idea of the ~~'O~~ther-self" suggests that we are all ~~'o~~thers" in one way or the other, even to the people we seem most

similar. For instance, black urban audiences may view the rural people represented in *Yesterday* as ―others" despite the fact that they are of the same race. And also in *Yesterday,* Yesterday's HIV status may make her an ―Other" to those who do not have the disease because they can look at her pain and suffering from an outsider's perspective. The idea of the ―Other-other" is often given more attention because of our colonial history. But in our postcolonial and globalised communities, it is more relevant to consider the idea of the all-encompassing ―other", which includes both the ―Other-other" and ―Other-self", when referring to the complex relationships that characterise contemporary communities.

In the analysis of the two case study films, this dissertation moves beyond the simplistic binary conception of the ―other" to the broader definition which acknowledges the layered and complex postcolonial relationships. For instance, among black South African women there are divisions such as rural/urban, township/suburb, literate/illiterate or lower/middle/upper class. This broader understanding acknowledges that everyone looks at things or situations from their own perspectives, perspectives that are influenced by various, layered as well as continuous socialisation processes. The idea of continuous socialisation processes recognises that individuals and communities are continuously negotiating their identities, and this means that ―otherness" is defined not by fixed but by shifting boundaries.

Socialisation

The concept of socialisation comes from the idea that all people are born into social structures that society _has institutionalized as ―reality"' (Lynch, 2002: 52). Socialisation is the process by which a new member of a society _internalizes that society, making it his or her reality too' (Lynch, 2002: 52). We learn our identities and the identities of others through

the process of socialisation. The problem is that sometimes dominant groups impose identities on other communities and people rather than try to discover their identities through interaction and exchange of ideas. Keyan Tomaselli noted that one of the criticisms levelled against *Yesterday* is that its _lack of nuance reveal[s] a lack of proper research' (Tomaselli in Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 187). Different socialisations therefore call for the need to do meaningful research as way of gaining insight into the identities and dynamics that exist within particular social groups.

On film, African identities have largely been defined from colonial and neo-colonial perspectives. Dayna L. Oscherwitz suggests that images of suffering Africans _constitute images of Africa the West consumes and exports, and that Africa, in turn, consumes' (2008: 236). Oscherwitz's statement implies that in post-colonial Africa, images of Africa produced by outsiders still hold a privileged position as far as distribution and consumption is concerned. It therefore follows that any analysis of the representations of African people on film should consider the question: whose reality is it? This is particularly relevant for films such as *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* that represent the poor but are made by privileged filmmakers and viewed by people from across social classes. This dissertation will not attempt to provide an answer to the question because even people from the same communities may experience different realities. It will however attempt to create an awareness of the fact that Africans have experienced a complex web of socialisation processes and therefore trying to understand African identities and realities is not a straightforward matter. The dissertation will also provide recommendations on possible ways of bridging the gap between the views of the privileged filmmakers and those of the represented underprivileged groups.

Stereotype

A stereotype can be defined as a reduction of people or places _to a few, simple, essential characteristics which are represented as fixed by nature‘ (Stuart Hall in Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 20). Stereotypes reflect another form of a _contract with reality‘ (Callahan, 2010: 33). A contract driven by our own socialisation, and perpetuated by continued limited understanding of others. As Hall points out, _stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power‘ (1997: 258). In this case, power refers to the position to control, or having the authority _to represent someone or something in a certain way - within a certain –regime of representation”‘ (Stuart Hall, 1997: 259). Those in power can use stereotyping to confirm their own ideas about other groups or communities. For instance, European films that were produced in Africa during the colonial era _only served as cultural and ideological justification for Europe‘s political dominance and economic exploitation of their particular African colonies‘ (Botha, 1996: 13). Robert Stam and Louise Spence suggest that _many of the misconceptions concerning Third World people derive from the long parade of lazy Mexicans, shifty Arabs, savage Africans and exotic Asiatics that have disgraced our movie screens‘ (2004: 881). Used in this way, stereotyping can maintain _social and symbolic order‘ (Hall, 1997: 258). Therefore, when analysing films, it is important to consider the identities of those _behind the scenes, creating and influencing the images we watch‘ (Stuart Hall in Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 20).

In post-apartheid South Africa, there are still very limited opportunities for marginalised individuals and communities to represent themselves on film. These communities largely rely on those more privileged to tell their stories. There is therefore an unequal distribution of power in these films‘ production processes. As a result, the films are, to use Bleiker and Kay‘s words, _of an inherently political nature‘ (2007: 142). This is complicated by the fact

that there is a lot of currency in selling ―otherness" to foreign viewers. Treffry-Goatley suggests that the pressure, financial or otherwise, ‗to address an audience that has little association with the reality portrayed on screen' may lead to filmmakers foregrounding the ―otherness" of those represented, and this ‗risks the multiplicity of the identities portrayed on screen' (2010: 21). Thus, the emphasis on ―difference" has led to the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes. For instance, South Africa has come to be defined by the image of the Tsotsi because of films aimed at the international audience, such as *Tsotsi* (Gavin Hood, 2005) and *Hijack Stories* (Oliver Schmitz, 2000), which focus on the character of the tsotsi, ‗a type of streetwise criminal who operated in the larger South African townships... from the 1930s onwards' (Dovey, 2009: 94). In African films about HIV/AIDS, those infected and/or affected by the disease are usually defined by poverty. While the poor are the ones who usually experience the most devastating effects of HIV/AIDS, focusing mainly on representing the poor may create the impression that AIDS is a disease for the poor. If films about HIV/AIDS are to be used in the fight against the disease, they should challenge stereotypes, especially those that disadvantage women and children in poor communities.

In reference to war photography, Susan Sontag suggests that ‗perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it – say [...] those who could learn from it' (2004: 37). The same may apply to images about HIV/AIDS. Considering that South African films about HIV/AIDS are often used locally to create awareness of the disease and ways of dealing with it, it may be useful to create audience identification with South Africans so that the films can ―speak" to the affected and/or infected, otherwise the films become mere spectacle. Stereotypes may alienate the people that the films purport to represent. If, for example, South African rural people do not identify with, or see themselves as represented by the characters in *Yesterday*,

they may view the film as representing ―others" rather than ―us", or an ―us" from the perspectives of outsiders, which may lead to resentment. This lack of identification may limit the effect of the educational messages contained in the film.

Meaningful representations can be achieved not necessarily by single-mindedly aiming at reversing the stereotypes. As Hall argues, this strategy may create another binary structure of representation (1997: 272). It is more worthwhile to explore identities extensively within their specific political, economic and cultural contexts in order to produce more nuanced and well-developed characters.

Stereotyping can hinder positive social change. The analysis of *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* considers ways in which these films confirm or challenge the stereotypical representation of women and children infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. Representing and encouraging the empowerment of women and children is one way of challenging stereotypes.

Marginalisation

The term 'marginal' is used to refer to the peripheral position that poverty-stricken groups or individuals within a society often find themselves. The relative poverty of these groups and individuals increases because they ―are not integrated into the socio-economic system' (Botha, 2013: n.pag.). Both *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* focus on communities that are on the periphery of mainstream society, but they experience varying degrees of marginality. The rural community in *Yesterday* is marginal because it is separated from urban environments and from the economic centre. Although *Life Above All* is set within an urban environment, the community is still on the periphery of the socio-economic system. We can regard the rural

community in *Yesterday* as more marginalised than the urban community in *Life Above All* because it is furthest from the economic and political centre.

An individual is marginalised if they belong to a marginal community. But they may be further marginalised within that community if they are not well integrated with, or are ostracised by, members of the community. For instance, in *Yesterday,* Yesterday is eventually marginalised by her community because of her HIV status. The other villagers are too ignorant about HIV/AIDS to assume an active role in dealing with the disease as a community. Yesterday has to deal with the disease as well as endure the abuse of her fellow villagers. In *Life Above All,* the main character, Chanda, and her family are marginalised by their community because her stepfather and mother have AIDS. Societies therefore have many layers of organisation that work in various ways to put communities and individuals at varying degrees of political, economic and/or social disadvantage.

The term marginal will also be used to refer to the status of silenced voices in film. As Pieter J. Fourie states, film has the ‗potential to powerfully visualise (or ignore)' (2007: 8). Thus, film also has the potential to marginalise voices. The marginalisation of black people's voices was more apparent during the apartheid era where the apartheid government placed restrictions on the distribution of films, such as *Mapantsula* (Oliver Schmitz, 1988), which represented black people's experiences. In the post apartheid era, there has been an increase in the representation of black people but the voices of black people still remain marginalised because very few black people have access to filmmaking resources that can allow them to define and represent themselves on film. In *Life Above All* and *Yesterday*, the voices of black women and children are marginalised because the power to choose what is said and how it is said is largely vested in the white male directors of the two films.

Empowerment

One of the key elements to fighting HIV/AIDS is empowerment. Empowerment can be seen as ‗a process of change on both individual and collective levels that enhances social agency so that people can take purposeful and effective action to change their world and to combat systemic impediments to their freedom' (Presbey, 2013: 278). Promoting empowerment is therefore an area that filmmakers need to consider when making films about HIV/AIDS because the disease does not only spread due to ignorance or carelessness, but also because of unequal power within sexual relationships. Disempowerment can hinder the efforts of women and children to protect themselves and their families from the disease, whereas empowerment may lead these two groups to realising that they have a significant role to play as individuals as well as citizens in the fight against HIV/AIDS, instead of just waiting for the government or other people to solve their problems (Presbey, 2013: 280).

The quality of life of those infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS also depends on the attitudes and behaviour of the people around them. As Presbey argues, empowerment should be ‗on both the individual and community levels' (2013: 279). This is because it is only when empowerment moves beyond the individual to include the community, that community mobilisation can be achieved (Presbey, 2013: 279). *Life Above All* demonstrates how individuals and communities can empower themselves through knowledge and be able to give support to those affected and infected, and to prevent the spread of the disease. As Presbey suggests, ‗self-empowerment grows best in a context of group support' (2013: 279).

There have been debates on how best to empower women, and some of the ideas raised in these debates may be useful when considering empowerment in relation to the representation of women in films about HIV/AIDS. Presbey states that empowerment campaigns tend to focus on education, but ‗within the capitalist framework, promising increased income for girls and improvement of the country's economy,' without paying attention to the ‗kind of schooling the girls will receive' (2013: 283). The power of meaningful education and knowledge cannot be overestimated in the fight against HIV/AIDS and related problems such as stigma because they enable women to be independent and to make informed decisions. There is therefore need to consider the range of information that films about HIV/AIDS disseminate, especially with reference to the empowerment of women and children. As Presbey argues, in addition to formal education, ‗women need educational skills in a range of methods for social expression and agency, to not just fit into the status quo system, but to challenge and change it, for a fuller expression of empowerment' (2013: 283). Sembene's *Moolaade* is an example of films that demonstrate how women and children can challenge and change the status quo system and overcome the ‗marginalization of women's knowledge' (Presbey, 2013: 284). *Moolaade* shows that the shift of women's voices from a marginal status to the centre of communities' discussions and debates is important for the development of women's wellbeing.

This dissertation uses the concept of empowerment to explore ways in which films about HIV/AIDS can help to transform communities for the improvement of the lives of women and children. Empowerment is very important for transformation because it provides the tools necessary to effect social change.

Cinematic realism

Cinematic realism is linked to what Anna Leander refers to as ‗artificial authenticity' (2008: 9), in which care is taken to make a film appear real, that is, as simply recounting reality. When making African films about HIV/AIDS, filmmakers often aim for realism. But this realism is only achieved, to use André Bazin's words, ‗through artifice' (1971: 26). In *Yesterday* and *Life Above All*, realism is achieved through, for example, the use of location shooting, South African actors and local languages. This gives the impression that the films portray the lives of everyday people in their communities. But this impression of reality is not value free. It is grounded within ideologies through which both filmmakers and audiences make meaning of the representations (some of these ideologies are dealt with later in this chapter). Thus, the use of cinematic realism affects how the films are received and interpreted.

Filmmakers use the realist mode of filmmaking perhaps because they are more socially responsible when representing HIV/AIDS on film due to an awareness of the fact that any misleading information may have significant negative consequences. But it is also possible that filmmakers are only too aware that images of these ―realities" of Africa are lucrative in the international market. Susan Sontag argues that ‗the more remote or exotic the place, the more likely [Western viewers] are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying' (2004: 63). Sontag gives an example of how ‗staying within the bounds of good taste was the primary reason given for not showing any of the horrific pictures of the dead taken at the site of the World Trade Centre in the immediate aftermath of the attack on September 11, 2001' (2004: 60), whereas people in the developed West are constantly bombarded with ‗unforgettable photographs' of suffering and dying Africans (2004: 63). In a review article in *The Hollywood Reporter, Beat the Drum* was criticised because it does not show the

_appalling physical ravages‘ of AIDS, and the disease _just seems like a bad flu‘ (2003: n.pag.). This criticism reflects the types of images that some international audiences have come to expect in films representing HIV/AIDS within the African context, or assumptions about how AIDS ought to be depicted. This shows that the effects of inequalities on the representations of identities do not just work on the level of the filmmaker/subject relationship; the international audience also influence filmmakers‘ approach to representing the realities of Africa.

Because of filmmakers‘ use of cinematic realism and viewers‘ expectation of a realistic portrayal of HIV/AIDS and its effects on individuals and communities, films like *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* are often taken as representing real experiences or at least an approximation of real experiences. These films therefore blur the boundary between fact and fiction. One of the consequences is that the identities represented in these films may influence how the identities of South African women and children are shaped within the consciousness of both local and international audiences.

Stigma

Stigma can be defined as _a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person‘ (_Stigma, n.‘, 2014). People with HIV/AIDS are often stigmatised because the disease is usually associated with improper sexual and other behaviours (Gross, Carruth and Goldsmith, 2009: 74). In those cases, infection is then _interpreted as punishment for a personal fault or bad behaviour‘, or as revealing identities _that individuals might have chosen to keep private in some aspect of their lives,‘ such as drug user, prostitute or homosexual (Gross, Carruth and Goldsmith, 2009: 74). Therefore, the fight against

HIV/AIDS also involves trying to change people‘s attitudes towards the disease and those infected and/or affected.

Using Gregory M. Herek‘s framework, Gross, Carruth and Goldsmith (2009: 81) mention three broad categories of stigma:

1. that which is based on instrumental fears, such as casual contact;
2. symbolic fears, related to people perceived as being members of high risk groups; and
3. courtesy stigma, where people associated with people who have HIV/AIDS (for example friends and family) are stigmatized.

Stigma impedes the development of a health enabling community because it hinders the level of openness among community members when dealing with HIV/AIDS related issues. Films about HIV/AIDS often deal with stigma in one way or another. This dissertation will consider the ways in which stigma is represented in the case study films, and explore the suggested ways, if any, of fighting stigma.

Understanding stigma and all the other concepts discussed in this section help to get a better grasp of the production and reception contexts of *Yesterday* and *Life Above All*. These contexts are necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the politics of representation and how power relations may have shaped the images and narratives of the two films. The following section will consider the theories that guide the analysis of the two case study films.

Theories

Images, signs and languages, and therefore films, do not have a fixed meaning. But there are a number of theories that provide insights into the ways meanings of visual presentations are constructed. Outlined below are the theories that provide the basis for analysing the representations of women and children in *Yesterday* and *Life Above all*.

Visual Methods of Representing HIV/AIDS

Roland Bleiker and Amy Kay identified ‗three photographic methods of representing HIV/AIDS, [namely] the naturalist, humanist and pluralist' methods (2007: 139). These methods can also be applied to films about the disease. Martha Evans and Ian Glenn suggest that in films about Africa, filmmakers draw from discourses ‗inspired by photojournalism and television reporting' (2010: 1). Thus, films about HIV/AIDS reflect similar ideologies as those embodied in photographic images representing those infected and/or affected by the disease. The different methods of representing HIV/AIDS identified by Bleiker and Kay (2007) embody different ways of understanding the disease and therefore influence how people deal with the pandemic.

Naturalist Method

The naturalist approach views images ‗as neutral and value free, as reflecting an objective reality captured through the lens' (Bleiker and Kay, 2007: 140). This approach has been rejected even by documentary filmmakers, although it is usually in discussions of the documentary form that the words ―reality" and ―truth" often come up. As Bill Nichols states, the documentary form ‗trades heavily on its own evidentiary status, representative abilities,

and argumentative strategies‘ (1991: 201). But most documentary film practitioners have now moved away from claims of truth and objective representations of reality, and have come to accept that truth is _partial, limited and unstable‘ (Bisschoff, 2009: 9). It is now generally accepted that documentaries are constructions, a result of _the interpretive act of someone who has a culture, an ideology, and often a conscious point of view, all of which cause the image to convey a certain kind of knowledge in a particular way‘ (Ruby, 2005: 210).

While the naturalist approach cannot be achieved in its pure form, it remains useful as a starting point when attempting to understand visual representations. Inasmuch as *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* are not documentary but fictional films, their heavy reliance on filmic realism as a mode of representation strongly links them to the realities of those living with HIV/AIDS, and are often seen as providing valuable insights into the suffering of those infected and affected by the disease. This is why these films are often regarded as powerful tools in the fight against HIV/AIDS, probably just as powerful as documentaries.

Humanist Method

The humanist approach can be seen as largely used to represent the ―other's" suffering. It _hinges on the assumption that images of suffering can invoke compassion in viewers, and that this compassion can become a catalyst for positive change‘ (Bleiker and Kay, 2007: 139). Using Sontag's (2004: 37) argument put forward earlier, it can be said that this approach hopes that viewers will do something to ease the suffering or learn from it. Despite such noble intentions, as I have already indicated, humanist representations can _feed into stereotypical portrayals of African people as nameless and passive victims‘ (Bleiker and Kay, 2007: 139). Bleiker and Kay suggest that the humanist approach revolves _around the

portrayal of people affected by HIV/AIDS as passive victims' and therefore contains _residues of colonial values' and _are more likely to invoke pity, rather than compassion' (2007: 141). Bleiker and Kay define compassion as _sentiments that are directed toward particular individuals', whereas pity is _a more abstract and generalised form of politics' (2007: 150).

The humanist method does not promote empowerment. The images using this approach are designed to enable the outside viewer to look in on the suffering of those who need external help. The search for home-grown solutions is therefore sacrificed for the desire to attract external help. The approach may encourage privileged people to help those less privileged, but the films may also just end up satisfying voyeuristic appetites for looking at the pain of ~~"~~others."

Pluralist Method

The pluralist method is not about representing ~~"~~others"; it is about representing ~~"~~us." It involves _more local and more diverse photographic engagements,' which result when those affected by the disease are given the opportunity to represent themselves (Bleiker and Kay, 2007: 141). The pluralist approach acknowledges the diversity of experiences. The idea is that the participation of local communities in the production of their own images will result in the generation and sharing of local knowledge. This method encourages the representation of a diversity of voices and more creativity, and therefore provides a move away from the stereotypical representations of those infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. Local engagement with representations promotes empowerment by opening up various options for identity construction and identification, and this can _offer more effective ways of addressing

the spread and socio-political effects of the disease‘ (Bleiker and Kay, 2007: 141). This approach could be very useful in representing the diversity of South African experiences as well as in promoting the development and sharing of home-grown solutions to the AIDS pandemic and related problems.

Applying the pluralist method to filmmaking is complicated by the fact that film production requires a significantly larger amount of resources than the production of still images, and very few people have access to these resources, especially within the South African context. But filmmakers such as Abderrahmane Sissako have found ways to incorporate the idea that experiences are diverse and representation is inherently incomplete. In *Heremakono* (2002) and *La Vie sur terre* (1998), Sissako does not focus on any individual story. Instead, he creates a mosaic of individuals‘ stories in a way that complicates the identification of a common identity within the represented communities. Sissako demonstrates that the pluralist method can be applied within a single film.

The visual methods of representing HIV/AIDS outlined above are not mutually exclusive. One film can contain elements of both the humanist and pluralist approaches. In analysing *Yesterday* and *Life Above All,* this dissertation will consider the plurality of the voices represented in these films and how this diversity of voices, or lack thereof, may affect the representations of the empowerment of women and children. All these aspects relating to the representation of the roles and identities of women and children in films about HIV/AIDS will be evaluated using the methodologies outlined in the next section.

Methodology

Two films, *Yesterday* and *Life Above All,* will be analysed as primary visual sources. This dissertation takes its cue from Eustacia Jeanne Riley (2012), who uses a combination of approaches in her study of films set in the Cape Province of South Africa. Riley uses ‗a contextualized, historical and socially framed analysis that pays close attention to ―considerations of power" and the specific discourses of film and landscape in [...] South Africa, and a critical *visual* analysis that examines the interaction of word and image' (2012: 19-20). By adopting a combination of approaches, including those outlined above, the author of this dissertation hopes to provide a comprehensive analysis that not only looks at images, but also contextualises those images within the South African social, economic and political environment.

In analysing these two films, this dissertation looks at film in terms of Marxist criticism, that is, film as ideology (Fourie, 2007: 7), as reflecting the ‗social values, ideas, beliefs, feelings, and representations' (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005: 152) which constitute the world view of those who control the means of film production. An examination of power relations therefore forms part of the basic elements of the dissertation. In this respect, the dissertation will consider the approaches to representation adopted by the filmmakers and how these approaches reflect power relations. The dissertation will also consider whether the two films promote the empowerment of women. However, the dissertation acknowledges that meaning is not fixed, which means it can only offer alternative ways of reading the representations of women and children in the two films rather than prescriptive instructions on how these two films ought to be read.

The focus on women informed the selection of the two films that are central to this dissertation. *Yesterday* focuses on ‗the plight of rural black women – the population group

most affected by [HIV/AIDS]‘ (Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 182), while *Life Above All* builds its narrative around a girl child. The dissertation, however, does not ignore the interrelationships amongst women, men and children, because these relationships are essential for the functioning of communities. These relationships should form part of a filmmaker‘s main considerations, regardless of whether the film is documentary or fictional.

Despite the fact that the two films are fictional, they are viewed as part of ‗society‘s rich visual culture and as a visual documentation and narrative of everyday life and history‘ (Fourie, 2007: 7). The dissertation acknowledges a symbiotic relationship between the media and society, in which media products such as films simultaneously reflect and are reflected by society (Tomaselli, 1980: 1). As a result, it employs semiotic and discursive approaches to analyse closely the audio, visual and narrative elements of the case study films. These approaches are discussed below.

Semiotic and Discursive Approaches

The semiotic and discursive approaches provide a very useful way of looking at how audio-visual elements are used in films to produce meaning. They focus on the ways images and meanings are constructed, be they humanist or pluralist.

The semiotic approach provides a model of how representation works. Semiotics is ‗the study or ―science of signs‖ and their general role as vehicles of meaning in culture‘ (Hall, 1997: 6). A sign consists of two elements, the signifier and the signified (Barthes, 1977: 39). The signifier is a mediator, for instance, sounds, objects, images, or a combination of these, whereas the signified is the concept, idea or thing represented by the signifier (Barthes,

1977). Both audio and visual elements in films act as signs that produce meaning. In analysing *Yesterday* and *Life Above All,* the dissertation considers how these films use images and language to create meaning and represent certain ideas about the identities of women and children infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. However, meaning cannot be understood in terms of audio and images alone; there are also socially constructed discourses that influence how we understand signs. Therefore, audiences construct meanings of the images and speech used in the two films through the discourse screen, in other words, they are guided by certain discourses in their interpretation of the films.

Discourses can be referred to as ‗ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society' (Hall, 1997: 6). Thus, discourses consist of the elements which influence, in the case of films, the choices of the audio and visual components used to construct meanings, as well as how these components are interpreted by viewers. Whereas the semiotic approach is concerned with the ‗how of representation', that is, its ―poetics," the discursive approach is more concerned with the ‗effects and consequences of representation', that is, its ―politics" (Hall, 1997: 6). The discursive approach ‗examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied' (Hall, 1997: 6). The discursive approach therefore considers the historical specificity of the way things and identities are represented.

As Susan Sontag (2004: 63-64) argues, postcolonial Africa is often characterised through images of victims (usually passive) of famine, civil war, and diseases. These images can be seen as part of the neo-colonial representations of the poor parts of the world as evidenced in films such as *The Constant Gardener* (Fernando Meirelles, 2005), *Blood Diamond* and *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George, 2004). The international viewers often see such representations as believable because most of them have never been to Africa and, as Antonádia Borges argues, ‗the emptier the symbolic space separating us from the Other... the easier it is to be convinced by what we are told' (2008: 247). Susan Sontag suggests that these images carry a double message; ‗they show a suffering that is outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired', while at the same time confirming to the international audience that ‗this is the sort of thing which happens in that place' (2004: 64). The poverty and suffering is usually represented as ‗simply part of a larger pattern of misery and gloom that is so deeply entrenched that it cannot possibly be reversed' (Bleiker and Kay 2007: 144). The images also serve to confirm to the wealthier communities their own privileged and ―civilised" existence.

The two films, *Yesterday* and *Life Above all*, do not, therefore, carry meaning just on their own; other representations of African people in the media, be they audio, visual or written, influence how these films are interpreted. As Hall argues, in the media we often ‗see similar representational practices and figures being repeated, from one text or site of representation to another' (Hall, 1997: 232). This can also be said of the two films under analysis; the films carry their own specific meanings, but at the broader level of representation, they link to other texts and sites of representation. For example, the idea of Africans' dependency on external help is also evident in *The Constant Gardener*. Hall refers to this ‗accumulation of meanings across different texts, where one image refers to another, or has its meaning altered by being ―read" in the context of other images,' as inter-textuality (1997: 232). The identities

in *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* are therefore represented within the context of dominant discourses that influence such representations.

In the analysis of *Yesterday* and *Life Above all*, the dissertation will explore the discourses influencing the representations of the roles and identities of women and children infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. A challenge to the dominant discourse would suggest new ways of representing and imagining these roles and identities, and would therefore contribute to the production and dissemination of new forms of knowledge.

CHAPTER 3: Women, HIV/AIDS and the Rural Dystopia in Darrell Roodt's *Yesterday* (2004)

Introduction

Darrell Roodt's *Yesterday* (2004) uses the poor, uneducated and compliant rural woman stereotype to highlight the difficulties that rural people face, especially those infected with HIV/AIDS. These difficulties include poverty, stigma and limited access to health care services. The film exposed a serious social problem at a time when the government was not yet committed to helping people with HIV/AIDS. The film emphasises the need for state as well as the wider society's support. To make his point, the filmmaker used stereotypes to create a worst-case scenario. The greater truth lies in exposing a real social problem. But the use of stereotypes in the film also works against a useful and deeper understanding of rural women that is necessary for effective social change. The film represents the community as a helpless child that not only needs to be saved from the dreadful disease, but also from itself. The aim, it seems, is to generate sympathy from external viewers, with the hope that they may be persuaded to help women like the film's main character, Yesterday. The film does not give room for the rural women represented to come up with their own home-grown ideas that contribute towards finding lasting solutions to their problems. It is true that marginalised groups need help from the more privileged communities, but they also need to participate in problem solving for such help to be effective. This chapter argues that the film's emphasis on the need for external help sacrifices the representation of rural women's complex identities as well as their initiatives to empower themselves.

Roodt's use of a worst-case scenario is in line with the afro-pessimistic representations of Africans and Africa that was common at the time the film was made, especially in films targeting the international audience. Examples of such representations are those found in *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George, 2004) and *Blood Diamond* (Edward Zwick, 2006), which represent post-colonial Africa as more brutal than it was represented in earlier films, such as *Out of Africa* (Sydney Pollack, 1985), which often used racist, old colonial stereotypes (Evans and Glenn, 2010). *Yesterday* reflects feelings of disillusionment with the prospects of the post-apartheid South Africa. With the country's rising crime and the gap between the rich and poor increasing, there is the view in some quarters that the revolutionary hopes for a better South Africa have been betrayed. These sentiments are also reflected in films such as *Hijack Stories* (Oliver Schmitz, 2000) and *Jerusalema* (Ralph Ziman, 2008) in which South Africa's present situation is criticised based on post-apartheid expectations. For example, *Hijack Stories* references the disparity between reality and expectations when Bra Zama refers to Sox's white girlfriend as _Mandela's baby', implying that black people did not get what they expected from the new democratic government, and white people are still in the position of advantage. Also, in *Hijack Stories*, Grace refers to Sox as _whitey', which could suggests that those blacks who were able to take advantage of the opportunities for upward mobility in the post-apartheid period are, just like the white people, a minority. *Yesterday* certainly focuses on people who have not yet significantly benefited from the end of apartheid, the poor rural women.

Yesterday targeted both local and international audiences, but perhaps the more lucrative international market provided the primary target audience. Bisschoff suggests that the use of Zulu in the entire film indicate that _Roodt clearly had a local audience in mind' (Bisschoff, 2009: 178). Compared to other South African films, the film indeed had a wide local reach. It

was broadcast on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC, South Africa's national television) as well as M-Net, a television channel on the subscription-based Digital Satellite Television (DStv). In September 2004, Ster-Kinekor released the film in local cinemas. But it is possible that Roodt realised that the film had a better chance of winning international awards if he emphasised its foreignness. According to Treffry-Goatley, Roodt stated that he wanted to make a _subtitled art film the world could see like *City of God* (Meirelles, 2002) or *Salaam Bombay* (Nair, 1988)' (2010: 185). The film was nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film (IMDb, n.d.). It can be argued that Roodt was thinking more of –the world" rather than the represented rural communities as the primary target audience because the visuals and themes of the film provide the gaze of an outsider looking in.

This chapter demonstrates that while *Yesterday* creates awareness of the marginal position and the plight of the poor rural women, especially those suffering from HIV/AIDS, it does not inspire rural women in similar positions, at least not in meaningful ways, to work towards positive social change.

Setting

The Rural Landscape

Yesterday is mainly set in rural KwaZulu Natal. The rural village is dominated by women who take care of the family homes while their men are away at work in the city. The absence of men means that women have to do all the work including farming and even road construction. Therefore, there is no distinct division of labour along gender lines, not because the community is more progressive, but simply because there are no men to share the labour

with. This situation, perhaps in different circumstances, would have reinforced ‗the dominant role that African women play in the maintenance of the family and community' and thus ‗refute the assumption that African women are completely helpless and subordinated' (Bisschoff, 2009: 18). But in this case, the absence of men further marginalises women because it indicates that women are more confined to the rural space while men can explore other opportunities elsewhere. To compound women's marginality, the rural village is characterised by poverty; it is not presented as a place people would choose to live.

The film opens with a shot of a dry landscape with dry grass and rocky soil that looks unsuitable for farming. This representation of the landscape emphasises the harsh conditions within which the rural community lives. The landscape can be contrasted to the one that Darrell Roodt presented in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1995). In *Cry, the Beloved Country,* which is also set in rural KwaZulu Natal, Roodt presented the rural landscape as a spectacle, that is, as ‗something beautiful and visually pleasant' (Lukinbeal 2005: 11). Ndotsheni, the rural village where the main character in the film, Reverend Kumalo, lives, is indeed, as Renders states, ‗portrayed as a paradise' (Renders, 2007: 237). The opening sequence of the film shows a cloudy sky, an indication of adequate rain, something very important for rural life that is sustained on farming. The fertility of the soil is represented in the panoramic images of a green and beautiful range of mountains that the film's narrator describes as ‗lovely beyond any singing of it'. In *Cry, the Beloved Country,* Roodt created an almost rural utopia whereas in *Yesterday* he created an almost dystopian existence.

By creating a harsh landscape, the film naturalises the harsh reality it constructs. The film's narrative and themes take precedence over the realistic representation of rural women. For instance, the film explicitly goes through all seasons of the year but it never rains, the

landscape is always dry. As Astrid Treffry-Goatley argues, ‗the severity of the landscape serves [... as] an indication of the social hardship and poverty of the people [represented]' (2010: 189). Yesterday, the main character of the film, labours in the field but we never see the harvest, or any fruits of her labour.

The City

Yesterday briefly visits Johannesburg, one of South Africa's largest cities. The city makes very clear the unequal distribution of wealth. The tall shiny buildings are in distinct contrast with the grass-thatched huts in Yesterday's village. At the same time, there appears to be unequal distribution of wealth among the city dwellers, as opposed to the rural space in which there are no huge gaps between the rich and poor. One can only guess that in the city the tall buildings are reserved for the wealthy and affluent, as most of the people walking the streets are casually dressed and not wearing business suits. Mining activities also point to the creation of wealth, which, however, does not seem to significantly benefit the mineworkers as their families still live in poverty in the rural areas. By implying this unmistakable gap between the rich and poor, the film seems to suggest that people like Yesterday live in poverty not because the country is poor, but simply because the wealth is concentrated in the hands of the few. In all this, women seem to suffer the heavier burden because their participation in economic activities is more restricted than that of men.

While the rural landscape is depicted as a harsh environment, for a woman like Yesterday, the city does not offer a viable alternative. When Yesterday visits Johannesburg, she does not feel like she belongs. The city's tall buildings, a symbol of wealth and development, make her feel alienated, and even afraid. The buildings are shown at low and oblique angles,

making them look scary and intimidating. It is also very clear from Yesterday's tense posture on the city bus that she has heard stories of city thieves and confidence men. She holds her bag very close while constantly looking around her. It turns out she need not have been afraid of the people on the street, as it is her own husband who brutally assaults her. Maybe it is the shock from Yesterday's news that turns her husband violent, but perhaps the city hardens even the most loving men; on her way back to the village, Yesterday remembers how loving her husband was when they were together in the village. Also, the reaction of the man at the mine's reception when Yesterday is attacked indicates that domestic violence is a common occurrence on the mine; he turns around to look when the disturbance begins, but instead of doing something to stop the attack, he simply shakes his head and turns back to the newspaper that he is reading.

Yesterday is represented as a _ ~~r~~ural innocent" who is displaced within an urban context' (Paleker, 2009: 101). Yesterday's discomfort in the city can be contrasted to the male mine workers who seem at ease within the urban environment. This representation creates the urban environment as a male space while the rural is constructed as a female space. Yesterday spends very little time in Johannesburg. When she goes back to her home, it is as if order is restored. The gendered representation of the two spaces perpetuates the marginality of rural women by making them look too reluctant to participate in the wider society's developmental projects. Thus, the film suppresses rural women's developmental ambitions.

Filmic Authenticity

Yesterday brings to mind films made within the Italian neorealist tradition such as Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette/Bicycle Thieves* (1948). Italian Neorealist filmmakers applied the

conventions of realism to their films. For instance, they used locations and ordinary people that viewers could recognize from their everyday lives, giving the films a documentary quality. *Yesterday* uses location shooting to create a sense of reality. For instance, the vast landscape in the opening shot helps to create a ―real" space where ―real" people live. Keyan Tomaselli states that in *Yesterday,* _the beautifully shot background landscape; the remote villages, open skies and majestic mountains transport the viewer to rural Zululand and the realities of daily life lived there' (Tomaselli in Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 189). This emphasis on place and space creates a documentary quality where there is a close link between represented events and actuality. The use of a black South African cast also adds to the realism of the film and thus, results in a closer association between what is portrayed in the film and what is happening in South Africa.

Yesterday also deploys a certain rawness and emotional intensity that makes the film a very powerful way of emphasising the plight of those suffering from HIV/AIDS. For example, after Yesterday's husband dies, Yesterday destroys the makeshift hospital that she had built for him in a very emotional scene. This scene is accompanied by mournful music and, as Yesterday hammers the shack, there is no hammering noise, nor do we hear her cries. The scene focuses on the visualisation of Yesterday's anguish and pain without any noises that might have distracted the audience. Yesterday eventually puts the hammer down, kneels and bends over on the ground to cry. At this moment, the mournful music fades out and we can hear Yesterday's anguished cry. Although the use of music in this scene falls within the non-realist realm, it serves to emphasise the ―realness" and intensity of yesterday's pain and isolation.

Yesterday further grounds its representation of rural identities in reality through the use of Zulu, a South African local dialect. Language is a very essential component of identity. It differentiates cultures and communities. To demonstrate the importance of language to African identities, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in 1977, ‗resolved to compose all his creative works thereafter in his native Gikuyu language' because he believed that ‗culture and language are focal sites of colonial repression and resistance in the developing world' (MacPherson, 1997: 642). According to MacPherson, Ngugi spent a year in prison for writing ‗in his own language about common people struggling against neocolonial forces of development' (1997: 642). In the case of *Yesterday,* the Zulu language creates a specificity of place and culture by locating the film in rural South Africa instead of simply creating the impression of a generic African village in an African country. In that way, the film is able to create a close link between the represented identities and real identities in South Africa. But, as already mentioned, the film makes use of stereotypes that may distort the realities of the rural women represented. These stereotypes are discussed in the following section.

The Illiterate and Ignorant, and The Outsider

Yesterday uses two main stereotypes, the illiterate and ignorant rural woman, and the Westernised outsider woman as represented by the doctor and the teacher. As Tony Brown argues, the schoolteacher can be seen as a ‗representative of a larger world brought into the local world' (2011: 244). The outsiders are represented as empowered as a result of having received formal education that makes them more knowledgeable and financially independent. Granted, in Africa ‗rural women are still the poorest and least literate and educated groups' (Bisschoff, 2009: 206). But being illiterate does not necessarily mean helpless and ignorant. In *Yesterday*, the rural women's illiteracy is equated to ignorance, and even an unwillingness

to learn. When the teacher tries to teach the village women about HIV and AIDS, the lesson the women choose to take away is that they should stay away from Yesterday and her family, definitely not the lesson the schoolteacher intended. The fact that Yesterday listens to the schoolteacher does not help much because the community marginalises her and therefore there is no hope that she will be able to disseminate what she learns from the teacher.

The film also suggests that the interests of these two groups of women do not always coincide, or rather, that the educated and empowered women are not always sensitive to the empowerment needs of the ―illiterate and ignorant". For instance, rather than treating Yesterday as an equal, the female doctor treats her as a child. When the doctor finds out that Yesterday cannot read the consent form, instead of explaining what the form says, the doctor dismisses the need for informed consent and simply takes over ―ownership" of Yesterday's body. The doctor asks if Yesterday wants an HIV test, and Yesterday does not say yes, instead, she asks if it will hurt. The doctor does not seem to notice the lack of a clear affirmative answer; she just goes ahead and draws blood from Yesterday. The doctor is the authority figure in the scene and her views occupy a more privileged position. Because the doctor makes it very clear that it is important that Yesterday should be tested for HIV, some viewers may sympathise more with the doctor's position, overlooking the way power operates to disadvantage Yesterday. This scene demonstrates that the body, as Michel Foucault argued, is always a political field where _power relations have an immediate hold upon it' (Foucault in Bisschoff, 2009: 146). Yesterday's illiteracy effectively turns her into a minor who cannot make her own decisions. Thus, her voice is effectively silenced. Yesterday is often described as _childlike' (Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 188; Horne, 2007: 173) because of her cheerful personality, but perhaps it is her passive personality and naivety that effectively makes her a ―child."

In addition, the female doctor would probably have been an inspiring figure, but the only thing Yesterday considers common between them, it seems, is their gender, which explains why she assumes the doctor knows ‗what men are like after they have been away for a long time'. Inasmuch as Yesterday and the schoolteacher are impressed by the fact that the doctor is a woman, it is not a position that they see as possible for them, especially because of Yesterday's illiteracy. They do not bother to think of other ways that Yesterday might be able to empower herself. Hope only lies in the future, which is why Yesterday is determined to see her child go to school. It is almost as if the film is saying the old generation is too set in its ways to ever change; there is no hope of emancipation for them. The film overlooks the fact that ‗the tyranny of hegemonic structures' may be overcome ‗by changing psychic...structures' (Bisschoff, 2009: 11), which, in this case, would be changing the way rural women think so that they can challenge the oppressive hegemonic ideas of the patriarchal authority and institutions in their society.

None of the village women who marginalise Yesterday realise the error of their ways and change for the better. The women do not show character growth as the film progresses. The last time we see them gathered, it is not to offer help but to look at the spectacle that is Yesterday's husband. The women do not demonstrate any form of solidarity in support of Yesterday. As Bisschoff states, ‗solidarity between women is often seen as a characteristic of feminism and womanhood, especially in Africa' (2009: 19). Thus, the lack of solidarity indicates that the women are not interested in working together to further the cause of women's empowerment. This representation undermines the important role that women play within their communities in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The distinctness of the two stereotypes used in the film does not reflect ‗the roles and experiences of women in an increasingly globalised, trans-national and multi-cultural world' (Bisschoff, 2009: 20). The confrontation between the old (rural) and the new (Westernised) does not result in any meaningful and productive processes. The two groups of women remain distinct to the very end, and this, to a greater extent, serves to reinforce the negative rural stereotype. This situation may be seen as indicating the need for more female filmmakers because they may be in a better position to understand the dynamics between the privileged and underprivileged women, especially if they are participants in those forms of relationships.

"Oh Poor Yesterday": Humanist Attitudes

Yesterday represents rural women as uncritical of their socio-economic conditions. Such an uncritical attitude only serves to perpetuate the existing rural stereotypes because the rural women do not voice their concerns or indicate how they wish to be viewed by people from outside communities. Both Yesterday and her community view their marginality as natural. This naturalisation of marginality encourages the film's privileged viewers ‗to make an emotional connection with HIV/AIDS without having to consider or do anything about the structural inequalities driving the epidemic' (Brophy, 2008: 33). Yesterday accepts her position in society. Her only role is to cope and survive. The clinic is too far but Yesterday simply walks the distance, and even manages to smile and laugh while doing it. When she is not able to see the doctor, she just keeps trying. When the hospital is too full to accept her sick husband, she builds her own shack hospital. When her husband beats her up, she simply goes back home and moves on with her life.

We may see Yesterday as a hero simply because we have been socialised into believing that coping with poverty and terminal illness is a display of strength, but it is most likely that she will not be viewed in the same way as the inspiring figure of Mark O'Brien from the film *The Sessions* (Ben Lewin, 2012). *The Sessions* is inspired by the true life story of Mark O'Brien, a North American man who was paralysed from neck down when he was just six years old, but managed to go to college and become a journalist, poet and an advocate for the disabled (Honan, 1999). Perhaps the differences in the representations of the passive Yesterday and the very active Mark O'Brien lies in the fact that *The Sessions* was adapted from O'Brien's biographical article _On Seeing a Sex Surrogate' (1990) which was published in *The Sun Magazine,* whereas in *Yesterday* only Roodt is credited with both writing and directing the film. The biographical nature of *The Sessions* indicate a close, meaningful and productive collaboration between filmmaker and the person represented, a condition that is not evident in *Yesterday*. It is therefore possible that Yesterday's passivity does not reflect the way rural women see themselves. Yesterday's passive attitude and the absence of community activism creates the impression that rural women like Yesterday are helpless and incapable of fighting for socio-economic change, and therefore help can only come from outside.

The rural community in *Yesterday*, whose population is dominated by women, is presented as too powerless or lacking the initiative to deal with its problems, or at least protest against the structural violence that it faces. One demonstration of structural violence is the lack of adequate healthcare services. The rural people have to travel long distances to access healthcare services, and even if they get to the clinic, there is no guarantee that they will receive service. In one scene, Yesterday pleads with the man who controls the queue at the clinic after the man counts the people that the doctor is able to see and sets the cut-off at the person right in front of Yesterday. The man's response is that there is nothing he can do.

Indeed, the implication is that there is really nothing any individual in that community can do because the problem is structural. They need more clinics and more doctors and only the state has the capacity to handle that problem. But while this may be a problem for the government to solve, community members do not necessarily have to be completely powerless. They can mobilise as a community and let the government know of their grievances. However, in this instance, the community members have internalised their suffering so much that they never think of coming together for a solution, rather, they focus on individual survival, and this makes them more vulnerable to structural violence.

The other option for villagers who are unable to see the doctor is to use the services of a sangoma (traditional healer). But that option is rendered futile because the female sangoma whom Yesterday visits is presented as an incompetent charlatan who does not understand ‗Yesterday's personal agony nor even the most basic principles of emotional support' (Wozniak in Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 191). Whereas the doctor who practices Western medicine is very sympathetic to Yesterday and attempts to gain an insight into Yesterday's life in order to offer meaningful advice, the sangoma simply imposes her idea on Yesterday; she insists that Yesterday is angry even though Yesterday repeatedly assures her that she is not. Roodt admits to having the agenda of pushing the idea that it is ‗difficult for traditional healers to consult on HIV when they are not familiar with the fundamentals of the disease' (Roodt in Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 192). This attitude is in line with colonial myths where African traditions and culture were considered inferior and inimically opposed to Western civilisation (Paleker, 2009: 103). In this case, the film suggests that the interests of those suffering from HIV/AIDS can best be saved only by adopting ―modern" ideas. But considering the potential influence of sangomas in South African communities, they could be a potential avenue for dispersing information about the disease. In *Yesterday* they are simply

ruled out as completely useless when it comes to HIV/AIDS. The film therefore leaves no room for incorporating cultural practices in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The film strips the village women of a potential tool found within their own culture. Thus, the film can be seen as supporting the civilising mission of the humanist ideologies. In that regard, it is possible to assume that the film would support Western feminism as opposed to African womanism, especially because the film does not point to any form of localised empowerment related activism on the part of the village women.

The women in this community seem to accept the patriarchal nature of their society. For instance, Yesterday seems to accept the fact that she does not have much control over her own body. When the doctor at the clinic asks her if she –enjoys" a _normal, healthy sex life', she does not respond. The doctor then rephrases the question to _Do you have sex?', at which point Yesterday replies _yes' and goes on to say _you know what men are like after they have been away for a long time'. From her response, it seems sex is something that Yesterday endures simply because it is what is expected of her, and she accepts that as a given. There is a moment in the film when there seems to be a challenge to patriarchy. This occurs when women at the well are gossiping about a village man who has just acquired a new wife but has already put up a new red flag that indicates he is already looking for another wife. One of the women present comments that the man is being very disrespectful. But this moment is undermined by the fact that immediately afterwards another woman comments that it must be an indication of the man's sexual prowess, thus turning the man's escapades into something praiseworthy. And the main character, Yesterday, does not have anything critical to say about the issue. When asked what she thinks she simply says _If they are in love...they are in love'. A moment of critical thought is completely wasted.

Felicity Horne argues that Yesterday's eventual reaction to _the injustice of her fate' shows her transformation from a state of passive acceptance to one of furious protest against what has happened to her' (2007: 180). But then, Yesterday does not direct the _furious protest' at anyone in particular. In both times that she cries or expresses her anguish, she is alone in the field, away from people who might have heard her plight. This suggests that her plight is directed more at the film's audience, rather than at her own community.

The community's participation in problem solving is represented as unimaginable. The women in Yesterday's village simply gossip about trivial issues whenever they gather rather than discuss community developmental issues. When the rural people consider a problem, they never look at the bigger picture. An example is the scene of Yesterday's first visit to the clinic. When, later in the day, a clinic official tells the women at the back of the queue, including Yesterday, that the doctor cannot see them, the women express some disgruntlement, but simply walk away without any significant protest, or an indication that they see this as a problem for the community, a problem that requires them to come together and try to find a solution. The only solution suggested in that scene is to come earlier the following week. This solution shifts the problem from a community one, requiring a community solution, to an individual one, which has to be dealt with by an individual.

In the film, we also see Yesterday socialising her daughter into accepting her marginal position, shaping her into her own image. The mother/daughter relationship between the two _involves a transference of knowledge from the old to the young' (Bisschoff, 2009: 171). But in this case, it can be argued that Yesterday's knowledge is very limiting rather than empowering. In the very first conversation of the film, Beauty, Yesterday's daughter, asks her mother why she cannot _fly like a bird'. Yesterday's answer is, _because you are not a

bird. Because you are you‘. As Horne argues, Beauty asks the question because she is tired, and the dialogue highlights the extent of their poverty; ‗travelling by motorised transport seems as much of a possibility as flying‘ (Horne, 2007: 173). It may be argued that in her reply, Yesterday was teaching her daughter to face reality, but, at the same time, she was also teaching her to accept her position in society. Flying is often associated with freedom and ambition. It can therefore be argued that Yesterday teaches her daughter not to be ambitious. The conversation ends with Yesterday telling her daughter that she asks ‗too many questions‘. Rather than encourage her child to be inquisitive and possibly think outside of the box, she teaches her to be compliant and accept her position as given. Thus, the possibility of the birth of any dissenting voices is reduced.

The presence of Beauty in the film also draws attention to the plight of orphaned children. Yesterday vows that she will not die until she sees her daughter go to school. Perhaps she fears that if she dies before then, her daughter may never go to school. It is indeed a fate that is befalling many AIDS orphans who are stigmatised and have no one to look after them. Films such as *Izulu Lami/My Secret Sky* (Madoda Ncayiyana, 2008) and *Beat the Drum* (David Hickson, 2003) demonstrate what happens to some of the orphaned children; some become street children while others live in child-headed households. Bisschoff writes that ‗it is often stated that all African women are mothers; even if they do not have their own biological children, the communal nature of African societies leads to women, and men, taking on parental roles which can also be non-biological‘ (2009: 170). But most African films that focus on AIDS orphans suggest that this is not always the case. In *Yesterday*, however, Yesterday‘s friend, the teacher, promises to look after Beauty in the event of Yesterday‘s death. In a very humanist way, the film demonstrates that the orphaned children‘s future need not be bleak as there are people within communities, such as the

teacher, who are capable and/or willing to look after the orphans. But then again, for the viewers to find the teacher‘s help comforting, they have to assume that Yesterday will die before the teacher, and that the teacher will live for very long, because it seems the teacher is the only option available for Beauty. Awareness of these variables may create a nagging feeling in some viewers that there is need for a very structured way of making sure that AIDS orphans are well taken care of rather than rely solely on the very few kind-hearted individuals.

Yesterday, therefore, uses a humanist approach because its narrative and images are intended to invoke compassion in viewers. Within the humanist tradition, the hope would be that viewers might be motivated to help people like Yesterday or advocate for social change. This approach may have been, on some level, very useful, especially given the government‘s stance at the time on providing assistance to people suffering from HIV/AIDS. The film makes the emphasis that it is set before 2004, the year when the South African government started providing antiretroviral treatment to the people (Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 181). In a scene where Yesterday visits the teacher at school, there is a date written on the classroom board, which indicate that the day is in October 2003. But focus need not just be on the necessity of external help as this may overlook the agency and therefore the empowerment of rural women such as Yesterday. Even the teacher‘s offer to look after Beauty when Yesterday dies is a form of external help because the teacher comes from outside the village. Such an oversight of the necessity for community participation in dealing with HIV/AIDS reflects that the rural community is represented as an ―Other" by the urban filmmaker. Rural voices in the film are marginalised perhaps because the represented groups are not involved in the creation of the film‘s messages and themes.

The last image that we see in the film is that of Yesterday walking away after witnessing her daughter start school. Considering her declaration that she will only let AIDS kill her after she has seen her child go to school, one can only take this final image as a metaphorical representation of her death. In death, Yesterday is silenced forever because her death is not represented as a voice of protest but rather as an inevitable end for her.

Conclusion

Yesterday presents the rural community from the perspective of an outsider looking in, and is very pessimistic. The community is represented as perpetuating its own marginality. It is too rigid to change. The village women, except Yesterday, are not open to new ideas. This makes an effective solution to Yesterday's problem very difficult to imagine. Perhaps effectively collaborating with the represented group, that is, rural women, would have gone a long way in reducing the blind spots associated with representing the ~~–O~~ther." Of concern in *Yesterday* are not the African primitivist stereotypes, but rather paternalism. Paternalism often involves imposing identities on other communities and people who are deemed inferior, rather than try to discover their identities through interaction and exchange of ideas. *Yesterday* presents a negative image of rural women. Although the main character, Yesterday, is a hard worker and persevering, she is stereotyped as uneducated and ignorant. The other village women in the film are also ignorant. Stereotyping the rural women in the film as illiterate and ignorant certainly puts them in an inferior position. This stereotyping works against a useful and deeper understanding of rural women and their communities, an understanding that is necessary for effective social change. The film overlooks the potential role women can play in improving their own wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of their communities. However, Roodt's film contributes vital knowledge regarding the difficulties faced by rural women,

especially those affected by HIV/AIDS. These include poverty related problems such as lack of proper healthcare, and stigma. The film certainly opened up the debate on, or at least got some people thinking about, the representation of rural women and those infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS, as evidenced by the arguments advanced by Treffry-Goatley (2010) and Horne (2007). Such attention may lead to a better understanding of rural communities and those affected by the dreadful disease.

CHAPTER 4: HIV/AIDS and the Allegory of Three Girls in Oliver Schmitz's *Life Above All* (2010)

Introduction

Oliver Schmitz's *Life Above All* (2010) displays a multiplicity of identities and the various ways that people come to grips and deal with HIV/AIDS. Although focusing mainly on a teenage girl, Chanda, the film links her life to that of other people within her family, neighbourhood and community, drawing parallels as well as differences, indicating that even within the same family and community, people are affected by HIV/AIDS in different ways and also try to cope in different ways. Thus, Schmitz finds a way of employing the pluralist method of representation in the film. But, in this instance, the representation of diverse experiences does not necessarily mean that the communities represented are given an opportunity to self-identify as implied in the description of the pluralist method provided by Bleiker and Kay (2007: 141). The representation of identities in *Life Above All* is subordinated to the pedagogical intentions of the film. The film's narrative is structured as an allegory that emphasises penitence, and the characters are used to demonstrate what people should and should not do when HIV/AIDS becomes a reality in their lives, and how they may amend their ways. This chapter argues that although the varied experiences represented in the film provide greater insights into the heterogeneous nature of communities and identities, the pedagogic purposes of the film's narrative sacrifices a more complex representation of identities, and silences the voices of children. Even the idea of self-empowerment is structured along the lines of ~~"g~~good" and ~~"b~~ad" kinds of empowerment. Although older women are also part of the allegory, this chapter focuses on the representations of three girls, the main character, Chanda, her friend, Esther, and her younger sister, Iris.

This chapter borrows an idea from Roger Ebert (2011) who, in his review of *Life Above All*, describes the film as ‗a parable with Biblical undertones' and suggests that ‗the film's ending is improbably upbeat: Magic realism, in a sense' (2011: n.pag.). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines magic realism as any artistic style ‗in which realistic techniques such as naturalistic detail, narrative...are similarly combined with surreal or dreamlike elements' (‗Magic realism', 2009: n.pag.). At the end of the film, for example, the neighbours erupt into a religious song at the moment of Lilian's passing with such perfect timing that the end, to use Ebert's words, ‗works as a deliverance' (2011, n.pag.). The neighbours sing the same song that Lilian sings at the beginning of the film, but she only sings one phrase of the song: ‗the gates are opening', and, because of the gloomy way she sings, it sounds as if it is a premonition of worse things to come. At the end of the film, the following phrases are added: ‗We come from suffering; and we confess our sins; and they repented. The gates of Heaven are open'. These additional phrases, sung beautifully and powerfully, point to spiritual deliverance, hope and comfort. This ending suggests that the performance of identities is subordinated to the parable purposes of the narrative, and therefore the identities of women and children presented in the film do not ultimately reflect the represented community's voices but rather the filmmaker's idea of "what may be and what could be".

However, the film demonstrates the advantage of conducting intensive research when representing "the other". *Life Above All* is based on a novel, *Chanda's Secrets* (2004), which was written by an "Other-other", Allan Stratton, a Canadian author writing about African experiences. In preparing to write the book, Stratton travelled to South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana where he was able to get in contact and gather information from people ‗living with and working to fight HIV/AIDS' (Stratton, 2005: 207). Stratton makes the claim that the

book was „made possible by the guidance and encouragement of [these people]‘ (2005: 207). Thus, Stratton did not simply impose his own views but also considered the various ways that the communities he represented self-identify. In this way, the production process of the book involved a collaboration of some sort with the communities and people represented in the book. But the fact that Stratton had the final say on the content of his book still places the represented communities in a position of disadvantage. Because editorial control remains in Stratton‘s hands, the empowerment of the represented communities is perhaps more illusory than actual (Jay Ruby in Cain, 2009: 74). Ultimately, the representations of these communities‘ identities are influenced by the way Stratton imagines them. In his concept of imagined communities, Benedict Anderson argues that nations are imagined because „the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion‘ (Anderson, 1991: 6). Although Stratton had some direct contact with the people he represents in his novel, it can be argued that their identities are still imagined because they are based largely on Stratton‘s views, as influenced by his own socialisation. As John Berger et al argue, „the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe‘ (1972: 8). Therefore, despite being based on a well-researched novel, there is still the possibility that *Life Above All* mainly incorporates the perspectives of an ―Other-other". And the fact that both novel and film were authored by men further compounds the ―otherness" of the represented female characters.

Lizelle Bisschoff suggests that „the stereotypical representations of African women [...] often frames the African woman as one of two polar opposites: on the one hand the African woman is often portrayed as passive victim requiring intervention [...] and on the other end of the scale is the image of the African woman as self-reliant heroine, goddess or exotic being‘

(2009: 212). In *Life Above All*, Schmitz uses the character of Chanda as the ‗self-reliant heroine'. Although Iris and Esther are not represented as passive victims, they are, in varying degrees, represented as the stereotypical ―troubled children" whose redemption is very much linked to the intervention of the heroine, Chanda. But these girls' identities play a significant role in demonstrating the intersectionality of identities. The three characters show that people's identities are influenced by the different positions they occupy in the complex web of relationships. These different positions can be found at the intersections of gender, age and family, among other factors. Thus, *Life Above All* is able to represent plural experiences by placing characters in distinct positions within their families and community.

It is worth noting that the South Africa and South African identities represented in *Life Above All* are very different from those in Roodt's *Yesterday*. This difference can be attributed to the films' different historical contexts. Unlike *Yesterday,* which focuses on a period during which the state had not yet began to provide antiretroviral treatment (ART) to HIV-infected individuals (Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 180-181)*, Life Above All* was made in 2010, a time at which state assistance to people with HIV had greatly improved. In 2010, South Africa was considered as ‗having the largest ART programme in the world' and had an estimated one million people on treatment (Treffry-Goatley, 2010: 182). These historical factors, in many respects, affect the level of agency and empowerment given to the represented characters.

Setting

Allan Stratton, in the author's note for *Chanda's Secrets*, emphasises that the community represented in his book is located ‗in a fictional country, which is not intended to represent the unique complexities of any existing country, nor to encompass the wide range of

differences, histories, and experiences to be found within the sub-Saharan region‘ (2005: 6). In his adaptation, Schmitz moves the story from a place –somewhere in Africa” to South Africa by locating the film in a town within South Africa as well as using the Northern Sotho language, a South African dialect.

The film is mostly set in an urban environment, but Chanda briefly visits her mother‘s rural village, Tiro. Both environments are important in understanding the represented identities as well as the significance of place in influencing identities.

The Urban Setting

Most of the action in the film takes place in an urban setting where Chanda and her family live. Although women are more visible in the film as opposed to men, who are largely on the periphery of the action, the urban is not gendered as female. It is represented as a place for both male and female genders. But there is a division of labour along traditional gender roles. Men are represented in the roles of entrepreneur, high school teacher, doctor (even if just a fake doctor) and ambulance driver. On the other hand, Chanda‘s neighbour, Mrs Tafa, is a homemaker (although she drives a masculine truck), Lilian, Chanda‘s mother, is a homemaker who also sews at home, and there is the female nurse at the clinic. Chanda, Esther and Iris are represented within these traditional roles. For example, Esther‘s deviant behaviour is prostitution, a profession that is stereotypically reserved for desperate women. Chanda, who is at one point described by Mrs Tafa as _scholarship material‘, indicating her intelligence and the potential to become whatever she wants in life, becomes increasingly trapped in domesticity as the film progresses; she has to look after her siblings, the household, Esther (when she is attacked and raped), and becomes a caregiver to her mother.

Iris‘ insistence that she talks and plays with her dead sister, Sarah, indicates that she was probably often assigned the duty of playing with the baby when Sarah was still alive.

The film does not emphasise images of poverty, although it is quite clear that the small town has the poor and not so poor, or maybe even well-off, living side by side. Mrs Tafa and Chanda‘s family is one good example. Mrs Tafa lives in a big house with access to digital satellite television and owns a truck, whereas Chanda‘s family lives in a small, dilapidated house. But even the poor seem to be able, somehow, to make ends meet and put food on the table. In the case of Chanda‘s family, Lilian has a skill, sewing, that she uses to earn a living, although her husband, Jonah, usually steals much of her earnings to buy alcohol. Some of the community members even throw parties sometimes, at which young people can enjoy themselves, making the film less consistently bleak than *Yesterday*. But despite its enterprising community, the town is on the periphery of economic development, as indicated, for instance, by the shots of the dusty untarred roads or the collection of small, rundown shops at the shopping centre. However, poverty is not allowed to overshadow the identities of the characters in the film. The film does not follow the stereotypical representations of African communities in which Africa becomes synonymous with poverty, and African children become a homogeneous group of passive victims of poverty. Chanda, Esther and Iris have very individualised identities and are all active agents in their own ways.

The urban community is also represented as very claustrophobic. Schmitz takes his cue from *Chanda's Secrets,* in which Chanda reflects feelings of entrapment by projecting onto a fish. In the novel, when Chanda goes to Mr Bateman‘s Eternal Light Funeral Services (replaced by Mr Chauke‘s Funeral Services in the film) to purchase a coffin for her sister, she finds herself staring at an angelfish in Mr Bateman‘s aquarium and reflects as follows:

> I wonder what it‘s thinking. I wonder if it knows it‘s trapped in a tank for the rest of its life. Or maybe it‘s happy swimming back and forth between the plastic glasses, nibbling algae from the turquoise pebbles and investigating the little pirate chest with the lid that blows air bubbles.
>
> (Stratton, 2005: 8)

In order to visually represent this sense of entrapment, Schmitz mostly uses closed spaces such as Chanda‘s home, and tight shots and low-key lighting in indoor scenes. The community‘s confinement is also reflected in the way news travel very fast even though the community does not have a defined meeting place as is the case with *Yesterday* where women meet at the water well and gossip. However, it is not so much the place that is constricting, as is the case with the fish in the aquarium, but people‘s circumstances. Mrs Tafa is able to move around more freely in her truck. In the scene where Chanda goes to Mr Chauke‘s Funeral Services, she is shown sitting quietly in Mr Chauke‘s dark office, but just outside the door, the sun is shining brightly and people are moving freely, as emphasised by the taxis that drive by. Chanda, Esther and Iris are therefore trapped in their rather corrosive circumstances, with little hope for escape.

The Rural

Aunt Lizbet, Lilian‘s sister who lives in Tiro, a rural village, comes to town to attend Sarah‘s funeral. She is represented as an old-fashioned brute who judges others harshly. She is always criticising Lilian. For instance, she tells Lilian that she can scrub her house but the _dirt won‘t come out‘, and that her baby died because of her sins. But when Chanda eventually goes to

the rural village, in what represents a ―quest" for the heroine, it becomes clear that the aunt's rotten personality is not representative of the ―rural identity". Once again, Schmitz emphasises the importance of circumstances rather than place in determining identities. Lizbet is just a bitter old woman who happens to live in a rural village. It can be argued that her character provides a symbolic affirmation of the old-fashioned nature of the idea that being infected with HIV is some form of punishment for wrongdoing, an idea she espouses consistently. Her ideas are undermined when it becomes clear that her treatment of Lilian is more than just stigma; it is also motivated by resentment. While the novel specifies that the resentment has something to do with a love triangle and Lizbet's feelings of rejection, the film only hints at the idea. When people are having a church service the night Sarah's body is brought home, Aunt Lizbet is in another room, caressing the face of Chanda's father in a photograph of him and Lilian. When Jonah passes by, she quickly puts the album down, an action that serves to highlight that her attitude towards Lilian is motivated by some hidden agendas. Thus, sibling rivalry can be seen as the dominant determinant of Aunt Lizbet's attitude towards Lilian and her family rather than her rural environment. In this allegory therefore, Lizbet's character is represented as the stereotypical ―evil witch" who is motivated by jealousy. But her ―reign of terror" is restricted to members of her family and her domestic space; in the scene where she argues with Chanda in Tiro, she never steps out of the hut, which can be seen as metaphorically marking the boundary of her evil influence.

When Chanda arrives in Tiro, a friendly and helpful shopkeeper welcomes her and directs her to her aunt and grandmother's home. The rural is visually represented as a tranquil place, contrasting the harsh treatment that Lilian receives from her family. The camera moves to a distance to take in the landscape as Chanda walks along, a move that contrasts Chanda's state of mind; she is not calm and she does not seem to notice the landscape, her only concern is to

find her mother. When Chanda finally finds her very ill mother lying under a tree, the camera eventually moves from close-up shots of her and her mother to a long shot that shows the big beautiful tree under which there is evidence of one of the most callous treatment of a human being. Thus, the evil that Chanda has to confront and defeat in the rural village on her quest to find her mother has nothing to do with the rural space, but her own familial circumstances. The rural village is not inherently harsh, nor is Chanda a stereotypical city snob who finds herself lost in a rural environment.

Therefore, as in the urban setting, *Life Above All* acknowledges the plurality of identities and experiences within the rural environment. However, within that plurality, there are identities that are represented as more acceptable than others, and, through the representation of processes of reward and punishment, viewers are encouraged to identify with the "good" characters.

Identification and Empowerment

Life Above All draws the viewer into the action and lives of the people and the community it represents. Schmitz uses a hand-held camera that is usually located in the space occupied by the characters, as opposed to *Yesterday* in which the camera looks at the characters from a distance thereby creating emotional distance between the viewer and the film's characters. Schmitz's strategy does not simply generate sympathy from external viewers, but also generates greater empathy through identification. In this case, identification is defined as an active practice which involves the experience of being able to put oneself so deeply into a character - feel oneself to be so like the character - that one can feel the same emotions and experience the same events as the character is supposed to be feeling and experiencing' (Van

Beneden, 1998: n.pag.). The film encourages the identification to be inspirational, that is, it encourages the viewer to value ‗the personality and behaviour of the [main character], and sees the [character's] power and confidence as providing [him/] her with a positive role model' (Van Beneden, 1998: n.pag.). The film's inspirational aim is in line with other allegorical films that focus on children, such as *Themba* (Stefanie Sycholt, 2010), *Izulu Lami/My Secret Sky* (Madoda Ncayiyana, 2008), and *Beat The Drum* (David Hickson, 2003). These films inspire children by encouraging them to imagine an alternate ―reality," and thus, are change oriented. But the alternate identities are based on hegemonic forms of empowerment, and in that way, these films may be ‗silencing children through dominant models of perception and discourse and according to varied... agendas' (Martins 2011: 435). That is, these representations may reflect adults' dominant ideas on what should be considered appropriate and acceptable behaviour rather than children's views on issues related to HIV/AIDS and their role in the fight against the disease.

It should be noted that Stratton's novel, *Chanda's Secrets*, is narrated in the first person from Chanda's perspective. As a result, the story is very reflective and locates the reader in Chanda's mind. Schmitz's film diverges from this strategy by discarding this subjective narrative form in favour of a more objective one. The result is that instead of the characters being defined by how they think or feel, they are defined by how others see them. This is especially so with Chanda, Esther and Iris, whose behaviours are often judged by other characters in the film, especially by the older women. The film therefore silences children's voices and limits their agency by constructing their identities through hegemonic discourses that are determined by adults. The girls' empowerment and agency is defined in very moralistic terms and those who behave in ways that are deemed good and acceptable are rewarded while those who behave badly are punished.

Iris: Deviant Independence

Iris is the youngest of the three girls. Because of her age, she is very much an innocent child, but not a passive one. She empowers herself in her own childish way, resisting the adults' attempts to restrict her knowledge and actions, and to maintain her innocence. Thus, she can be seen as attempting to define her own identity. But her independent personality is represented in negative terms, and serves to demonstrate that children need parents to shape their behaviour.

The film opens with Iris and her little brother, Soly, playing outside, unaware that their sister is dead. Lilian and Chanda try to keep Iris and Soly in the dark about the death by telling them that Sarah is just sleeping. But Iris eventually begins to suspect that there is something else going on, hovering in the background when adults are speaking, with the hope of getting answers. Later in the evening, Iris suggests to Soly that they should look for Sarah, and tells him that she has _special eyes' and _nothing can hide from [her]'. Iris' claim for "special powers" marks the beginning of her coping mechanism.

Iris comes up with her own coping mechanism because she cannot rely on adults for emotional support. The adults are too concerned with protecting "the kids" that they are unaware that Iris and Soly are grieving too, or, at the very least, confused. They are sent away to Aunt Ruth's place, their father's sister, when it is time for Sarah's funeral. To Iris and Soly, it is as if Sarah just disappears. In order to cope, Iris imagines that Sarah is not gone; she talks and plays with her. She lashes out when Chanda tries to tell her that it is impossible

for her to speak with Sarah. But because the audience is encouraged to identify with Chanda, Iris‘ lashing out is seen less as a cry for help and more as simply deviant behaviour.

Chanda and Iris‘ relationship worsens when Lilian leaves. At one point, Chanda tries to assert her authority but Iris rudely informs her that she is not her mother and therefore has no authority over her. It could be that with no parent present, Iris finds it difficult to adjust to taking orders from another child, even though Chanda is older. But because Iris functions largely as Chanda‘s ~~b~~urden” and viewers are not encouraged to identify with her, her rebellious attitude may seem as if she is simply grabbing the opportunity to manipulate the authority gap for her own interests, and the film punishes her for her bad choices when her friend falls into a hole because of her ~~b~~ad” influence. While no one is paying particular attention to her movements and actions, Iris and her friends drink beer and one of her friends end up falling into a hole because he wanted to see Sarah, whom Iris claimed was in the hole. This incident proves to be so traumatic to Iris that, with tears running down her cheeks, she apologises to Chanda and vows not to be bad again.‘

Thus, it can be argued that Iris gains her redemption by rejecting her own independence and submitting to Chanda‘s authority. Her form of self-empowerment is simply rejected without any qualification because it goes against the dominant norms of acceptable behaviour. No attempt is made to encourage viewer sympathy through giving an insight into why she does the things she do. No attempt is also made to find other ways she can be a positive role model without necessarily disempowering herself.

Esther: Grey Areas

Just like Iris, Esther serves as a cautionary tale in the allegory, perhaps more so because she receives the most severe punishment for her actions; rape and the possibility of having been infected with HIV. Esther's positioning as a teenage girl infected with HIV makes _a powerful statement about the relevance of the epidemic to young people' (Gross, Carruth and Goldsmith, 2009: 73). It is of significance that her possible infection is partly attributed to her own actions and behaviour, because that points to the responsibilities children have in protecting themselves from the disease. But she is a rather ambiguous character. At first, the audience see her through the eyes of the other characters in the film. We first see Esther at a shopping centre in her school uniform, lip balm in hand, making herself beautiful, and nodding and swinging to music, when she is supposed to be in school. Her first statement to Chanda is, _Don't look at me like that! You skip classes, so do I.' So there we have Chanda who misses school because she has real problems, like the death of her sister, and then we have Esther who skips school just because she can. Later, we see Mrs Tafa criticising the way she dresses, indicating that community elders regard her as a deviant. Mrs Tafa describes her as _a wild one' who will _meet a bad end like [her parents]' if she is not careful. The older women, especially Mrs Tafa, only see Esther as a bad influence, the kind of friend no mother would wish for her daughter. It does not help her case that she earns her living through prostitution.

In one scene, Chanda goes looking for Esther and finds her at the truck stop looking for ~~"~~clients" amongst the truck drivers. When Chanda tries to stop her from prostituting herself, Esther rejects Chanda's advice. Esther eventually finds a client in the form of an old man with missing teeth, and gets into his truck in a cringe-worthy moment that serves to prove that she is now a hardened girl.

But Esther‘s behaviour also reflects society‘s failures. The community has not been kind to her. She is stigmatised, with people like Mrs Tafa saying things such as, ‗I hope she burned [her parents‘] sheets‘, and prohibiting her to come to Sarah‘s funeral to support her friend. Her aunt and uncle make her live in deplorable conditions in a shack outside their house because they think she is ―dirty‖ simply because she is an AIDS orphan, although she has not been tested for HIV.

Within the African context, the term ―orphan‖ has become synonymous with ―AIDS orphan‖, especially in cases where the parents‘ illness is kept mysterious or vague, as is the case with *Izulu Lami/My Secret Sky*, in which it is not expressly indicated that Thembi‘s parents died of AIDS. As Susan Sontag states, AIDS is not the name of an illness but ‗the name of a medical condition, whose consequences are a spectrum of illnesses‘ (1991: 102). This characteristic of AIDS creates a situation where any sign of illness can be construed as AIDS related, especially in the African context where the medical condition is most common. Being automatically labelled ―AIDS orphan‖ despite the fact that there are many other causes of death, is another form of stigma that most African orphans experience. Esther‘s reasoning that she does not mind being a prostitute because ‗they all think I‘m doing it anyway‘ indicates her awareness that in the eyes of the members of her community, she is already a disgraced person. Her condition of being ostracised frees her from community‘s constraints, but her freedom from society‘s restrictions makes her a deviant character.

When considering her terrible living conditions, it becomes clear why she resorted to prostitution. Also, we later discover that the money she was making was not just for herself, she wanted to get back her siblings who live with other relatives. Esther can therefore be seen as a child whose circumstances forced her into a kind of emancipation that is way beyond her

age. She makes bad choices partly because she is still too young to think very far into the future. For instance, she does not seem to consider the fact that if she does manage to get her siblings back, she would probably have to continue her prostitution in order to be able to support them financially, and that she would probably get AIDS and die, leaving them in the same place they are now.

Although Esther has to shoulder some responsibility for her actions, she becomes a more sympathetic character as the audience gets to know her better. It also helps with audience sympathy that the possibility of her contracting HIV is attributed to a brutal gang rape in which one of the rapists informs her that he has AIDS. Gross, Carruth and Goldsmith state that rape victims are another ‗version of the innocent victim [that] has recently surfaced' (2009: 79). After the rape, she is treated unkindly by police officers who tell her that she is a whore and therefore got what she deserved. She tells Chanda that she has already been to the clinic but she does not look like she was treated for her wounds. She also indicates that the nurses may have mistreated her when she says, ‗to them I'm just a whore.' The fact that her identity as a prostitute influences the way she is treated by institutions that are supposed to treat everyone equally also makes her sympathetic, especially considering the brutality of her attack.

One of the film's messages is that everyone deserves kindness. By gradually encouraging sympathy towards Esther, the film prepares viewers for her redemption. After her brutal attack and rape, Esther comes to Chanda for help. When she recovers, she still sticks around, helping Chanda to look after the house and her siblings. She does not go back to her old ways or embark on a revenge mission just like the men who potentially infected her with HIV. She

even gives her savings to Chanda when Chanda needs money to go and bring back her mother from Tiro.

But although the film gradually encourages sympathy towards Esther, just like Iris, she does not seek other ‚positive" ways of asserting her independence. Instead, she becomes dependent on Chanda's kindness. This means that rather than having a diversity of voices and more creativity, there is a move towards homogeneity with only one form of behaviour being regarded as acceptable. The ending of the film can be seen as a metaphorical representation of this convergence of identities; the film ends with members of the community gathered outside Chanda's house.

Chanda: The Noble Heroine

Chanda exemplifies the communal nature of African societies. As Bisschoff state, „African cultures are often described as more communal in nature, as opposed to the emphasis placed in Western cultures on the importance of individual identity' (2009: 197). Chanda is largely identified by what she does for others and how others see her, and not by what she does for herself and how she sees herself. She is characterised by her boundless, selfless concern for the welfare of her family and friends. But, as Bisschoff rightly suggests, „overemphasising the communal nature of African culture, especially in the case of women [...] can lead to stifling attempts to gain female emancipation' (2009: 197). Chanda's selflessness is overemphasised at the expense of her own personal development and future empowerment prospects.

Chanda provides the benchmark behaviour that everyone, both young and old, should aspire to. She has an enormous well of strength; she is kind and selfless; she is loyal to her friends and family; and she stands up for what she believes in even if it means defying the adults. Her behaviour is represented as admirable especially because she uses her strength in the service of others. Chanda sacrifices her own needs and feelings for the benefit of others. She finds the strength to comfort her mother even when she herself is in grief. Chanda demonstrates that everyone deserves kindness, despite the wrong things they may have done. After Esther is attacked, Chanda takes care of her with kindness and no judgement, and does not even mention the fact that she had warned her but Esther had chosen not to listen. When Jonah is brought home sick, Chanda is the one who goes to seek help for him even though they do not get along well. Chanda is also there for her little sister even after Iris had been rude and hurtful to her. Chanda's most extraordinary demonstration of her love and loyalty is when she goes to Tiro, confronts the ~~"e~~vil" Aunt Lizbet in a rather violent confrontation and brings her very sick mother back home. In doing all this, Chanda is not too concerned about her own physical comfort. She is even prepared to face stigma for the sake of her mother.

Chanda is also represented as an intelligent girl, but her intelligence does not serve her self-interests. Mrs Tafa describes her as _Schdarship Material' and refers not to her grades but to the fact that she is the one who reads her letters for her. Her ability to read enables her to blackmail ~~"d~~octor" Chilume into giving her mother free medicine after discovering that Chilume was not a real doctor but just an agent for a company that sell herbal medicines. In this case, her blackmail is not considered a bad thing because Chilume is a charlatan who preys on desperate people.

When she defies her elders, Chanda‘s disrespectful behaviour is not represented as bad but a necessity because she has to take on the responsibilities of adults since the adults are not doing what they should do. An example is when she defies Mrs Tafa and goes to Tiro to look for her mother. Chanda‘s defiance makes her an independent thinker, but not in the same way that Iris was before her redemption because Chanda‘s intentions are selfless.

Chanda provides a lesson in humanity. She teaches the people in her neighbourhood how to be helpful and supportive to those in need, especially those who are affected and/or infected with HIV/AIDS. But all this comes at a price; Chanda sacrifices her own personal development and becomes a slave to other people‘s needs. Her future becomes more uncertain, even bleak, as her focus in school diminishes and she misses more and more classes. This has implications for the empowerment of women because personal development through, for instance, education, is very essential in reducing the inequality gap between men and women. Chanda‘s character might indeed be seen as demonstrating why Africa and Africans are stuck is a circle of poverty and underdevelopment. When Chanda‘s character is regarded in this way, the film may be seen as having, just like *Yesterday,* some afro-pessimistic tendencies.

Conclusion

Chanda, Esther and Iris demonstrate the multiplicity of ways that children may be affected by and deal with HIV/AIDS. In that way, Schmitz employs the pluralist method of representation. However, this plurality is not maintained throughout the film. There is a move towards homogeneity as Esther and Iris discard their ―bad" behaviours and, rather than come up with other positive ways of asserting their individuality, simply disappear into Chanda‘s

shadow. The film is structured as an allegory that emphasises penitence, humanity and selflessness. Selfishness is summarily dismissed as undesirable, disregarding the possibility that focusing on the individual may lead to personal development which may eventually lead to sustainable forms of empowerment in the long term. Thus, although the varied experiences that the three girls go through provide greater insights into the varied ways that HIV/AIDS affect children, the moralising mission of the film sacrifices the promotion of diversity and sustainable empowerment. Children‘s voices are effectively silenced by the adults‘ desire to teach good behaviour.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions

Using semiotic and discursive approaches, this dissertation critically analyses the two films, Darrell Roodt's *Yesterday* and Oliver Schmitz's *Life Above All*, and provides insights into the representation of marginalised women and children in South African films about HIV/AIDS. These two films are appropriate for this study because they were made with the express objective of representing women and children's experiences. The films offer the opportunity to investigate the representation of the emancipation of these two groups at grassroots level. The dissertation analyses the representation of Yesterday, a rural woman, in *Yesterday,* and then focuses on the representation of three girls, Chanda, Esther and Iris in *Life Above All*. The focus on marginalised women and girls was motivated by the fact that these groups are amongst the most vulnerable to negative stereotypes. The dissertation highlights the importance of considering not only what films say about HIV/AIDS but also what they say about the communities and the people they represent. This study is significant because the representation of identities influence people's self-evaluation and empowerment, as well as attitudes towards those infected and/or affected by the disease. Considering the patriarchal nature of our societies, the idea of empowering women and girls is very important, especially when their lives and wellbeing are at stake as is the case where HIV and AIDS are concerned.

Filmic depictions of women in marginal communities are complicated by the fact that, for their representation, these women usually rely on more privileged, often male, filmmakers who do not fully understand them or share their socialisation. And depictions of children are complicated by the fact that, for their representation, children mostly rely on adults who often assume the role of guardian rather than try to represent children's concerns from the perspectives of the children. These filmmakers largely depend on established stereotypes, as exemplified by the two case study films, *Yesterday* and *Life Above All.*

There have been campaigns to promote female filmmakers, as they are believed to be in a better position to represent women's experiences and provide a space where women can self-define and self-represent. While male filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembene have made great contributions to the creation of progressive representations of women and the promotion of women's empowerment, having more female filmmakers will certainly go a long way in providing multiple and alternative ways of defining womanhood as well as promoting gender equality. For instance, female filmmakers seem to be more concerned than male filmmakers with the idea of gender complementarity, in which men and women work together in unity to improve the livelihoods of both genders. This is exemplified in Rayda Jacobs' *Confessions of a Gambler* (2007) in which both female and male characters share the burden of caring for an AIDS sufferer, or Portia Rankoane's documentary *A Ribbon Around My House* (2001), in which Pinki Tiro shares information with men on how they may protect their wives and children from HIV/AIDS. The idea behind gender complementarity is that, in order to achieve women's empowerment, men also need to be committed to that goal and play their part. *Yesterday* and *Life Above All* are examples of male-directed films in which male characters are largely sidelined rather than included as part of the solution.

However, despite their shortfalls, the two films make valuable contributions to the fight against AIDS by representing the two most vulnerable groups: women and children. The films also contribute to discussions about the roles of women and children in the fight against HIV and AIDS. A close analysis of the two films reveals various factors which influence representations that filmmakers may find useful when considering representing women and children if films about HIV/AIDS.

Yesterday

One of the challenges filmmakers face when representing women in films about HIV/AIDS is avoiding using stereotypes that confine women within the limitations of traditional roles, or portray them as passive victims. It can be argued that Roodt does not fare well in this challenge. In *Yesterday*, he represents rural women as trapped within their limitations, namely poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and patriarchy. Roodt uses the humanist approach in which representation is aimed at invoking compassion in viewers rather than encouraging empowerment. The film emphasises the need for help from outsiders, which leaves little room for promoting the development of home-grown solutions that can empower individuals and communities to fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS as well as stigma. The rural women are represented in largely negative terms, and as disempowered, with no hope for empowerment. Rural women's complex identities as well as their initiatives to empower themselves are overlooked.

Although Roodt's film contributes vital knowledge regarding the difficulties faced by rural women affected by HIV/AIDS, including lack of proper healthcare and stigma, his humanist approach works against a useful and deeper understanding of rural women and their communities, an understanding that is necessary for effective social change. Perhaps building meaningful relationships and effectively collaborating with rural women would have led to representations that are more complex and a significant contribution to the generation and sharing of knowledge that is useful to communities affected by HIV and AIDS.

Life Above All

In most South African films about HIV/AIDS that focus on children, the children do not remain passive. The films seek to inspire and empower children by showing them that a child can also work actively to improve his/her life. *Life Above All* diverges from this tradition in the sense that it does not fully consider the long-term empowerment goals for children. In *Themba*, for example, Themba is able to pursue a career that eventually pulls him out of poverty. But in *Life Above All,* Chanda, Esther and Iris are stuck in their circumstances. The film is mostly concerned with applauding the virtues of selflessness rather than individual development and empowerment. Schmitz provides many alternative behaviours and identities, but due to the film‘s moralising mission, other forms of behaviour are discarded as identities move towards the point that represents acceptable behaviour. There is therefore a general move towards homogeneity. Schmitz applies the pluralist approach by acknowledging the diversity of experiences, but does not incorporate the spirit of plurality. Esther and Iris are punished for their behaviours and choices, but there are no suggestions on how they may assert their independence in their own individualist but positive, productive and sustainable way. Their only option is to be dependent on and emulate Chanda. Children‘s voices are therefore silenced and their empowerment limited by the filmmaker‘s desire to teach ―good" behaviour.

However, unlike most filmmakers who avoid the issue of sex and sexuality, opting to focus on the ―innocence" of children and including, instead, issues of child abuse, Schmitz makes the effort to engage meaningfully with children regarding their roles and responsibilities in protecting themselves from HIV/AIDS. He does this by including a young girl, Esther, who is sexually active. Thus, *Life Above All* recognises that when it comes to the risk of being infected with HIV, children are not always just passive victims of the actions of adults; they

can also be active agents in their own right. The film therefore teaches children a very valuable lesson: to be responsible and avoid risky behaviour.

Conclusion

In films about HIV/AIDS, filmmakers usually pay more attention to the educational messages or their social commentary, sacrificing a more complex representation of identities. *Yesterday* aims to gain viewer sympathy whereas *Life Above All* emphasises the virtues of kindness, and selfless and morally good behaviour. The two films do not effectively deal with the empowerment of women and children, especially as a long-term goal. Engaging and collaborating with women and children before and during the films‘ production processes may have led to greater considerations of identities and issues of empowerment. Encouraging the empowerment of women and girls would help significantly in the fight against HIV/AIDS because empowerment is necessary for effective social change, and puts women and children in a better position to protect themselves against infection and to deal with stigma. However, the two films have also made valuable contributions in creating awareness of the problems faced by women and children who are infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS.

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