Music, Cinema and the Representation of Africa

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Graduate Program in Film Studies
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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MUSIC, CINEMA AND THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICA

by

Natasha Callender

Graduate Program in Film Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how music is used in cinema to create representations of Africa. It begins by tracing the early importance of musicality and performance in cinema back to other cultures of visuality and socio-political ideologies that were prevalent at the time of cinema’s birth. The result of this relationship means that cinema has functioned as both a tool for portraying Africa as the “Dark Continent” and for reshaping narratives about the nature of African identities, history, politics and cultures. Music in cinematic portrayals of Africa is, therefore, part of a system of representation in which films potentially serve as historico-cultural artefacts. By analysing the musical texts alongside the visual narratives and against the backdrop of the societies in which they are created a more nuanced articulation of the tensions and specificities of African societies can be unearthed.

Keywords: African identities, (post)colonialism, alterity, cultural narratives, representation, visual culture, musical texts, performance
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Introduction

“Make sure you show how Africans have music and rhythm deep in their souls…”
- Binyavanga Wainaina, How to Write about Africa (2005)

Prior to the 1950s, the study of African music –not unlike many of the studies on the musical expressions of the Other– was restricted to the field of ethnomusicology, formerly known as comparative musicology. This “comparison” of musical cultures was focused primarily on the recording of sound and the identification of melodic and metric structures. In particular there was an effort to record so-called pre-colonial music in order to capture what was assumed to be the direct opposite of the aesthetics of European (high) cultures. There was little emphasis, however, on the social fabric in which these expressions originated, thereby stripping them of any meaning that was not purely sonoric. It was not until after World War II that the social underpinnings of African music began to be taken into account in what musical anthropologist Alan Merriam called the “study of music in culture” –though this did not erase the question of foreignness (109).

Though a thorough examination of the history of music in film exceeds the scope of this thesis it is important to note that much of the scholarship on the relationship between film and music has operated within a similar framework of exclusion. The early literature of the 1980s concentrates, for instance, on the silent film era, Hollywood, avant-garde and European art cinema and the roles of the film score, sometimes with case studies of specific composers. Sociological and cultural studies of film music only began to expand in the 1990s, with the former focusing on production and the latter on reception¹. At this time issues of gender and

ethnicity also began to surface along with the question of the use of popular music. Film music research is now approached from a broader range of disciplines including film studies, musicology, cultural studies, music psychology, women’s studies and linguistics/languages. This naturally implies an array of analytical methods such as film and narrative theory, musical analysis, semiotics and reception and perception studies.

However, the paradigmatic structures used to frame representations of Africa largely continue to centre on the colonial encounter and the attendant nationalist discourses of the independence generation. The overwhelming majority of writing on African cinemas has sought to explain the co-option of the cinematic apparatus by imperialist regimes in their quest to bolster aggrandisement campaigns and the “myth of the West”. Subsequent works have explored the pivotal role of visual culture in the destabilisation of this mythology through the re-appropriation of the “camera-gun” by former colonial subjects (Diawara 1992, Ukadike 1994, Thackway 2003, Armes 2006, Frindéthié 2009, Tcheuyap 2011). Furthermore, despite the central place of music in African societies and its mythification in cinema by colonising powers there are not many significant scholarly works that specifically address the subject of music and the cinematic representation of Africa. An analysis of the place of musical expressions in the creation of discursive patterns on/of Africa therefore seems necessary for expanding the discussion on Africa’s relationship to cinema.


As such, this is not a musicological study of aesthetics or of the development of ethnomusicology with respect to Africa but instead, an attempt to uncover the potential of political and culturo-historical texts embedded in the social identity of music used to complement visual narratives. This project aims to analyse the ideological currents behind the cinematic representation of African identities through the use of musical texts in film. It seeks to locate how the latter have been used to construct ideas that reinscribe, challenge or reconfigure discursive currents on race, culture, gender and other arenas where identity is played out. The overdetermining factors that directly influence these debates are important points of origin for locating the socio-cultural and political implications of music, song, dance and performance because

there is no original music belonging to a specific ethnic group or a national entity. Instead musical sounds are chosen for the purpose of setting up necessary boundaries and accordingly the musical performance is often the exact spot in which this can take place. Therefore it cannot be reduced to plain musical analysis of why, how and where a people or a group want to depict themselves in music. Scholarly works must address both the social and the musical layers of performance in order to understand the overall meaning of the music culture. In this way identity is negotiated, often constructed and sometimes stylised in music… (Palmberg and Kirkegaard 10).

Chapter one opens the debate by providing an outline of the roots/routes through which music became a representational cornerstone in cinema. It begins by establishing the intersection between music, the racial imagination and “scopic regimes” and how this was mobilised through science, politics and popular culture. With the advent of modernity, and more specifically from around the mid-18th century, the notion of race began to coalesce out of a variety of visual cultural forms that focused on the meticulous scientific observation of the body. Cinematic precursors such as anthropometry, phrenology and (chrono)photography,
all of which centred on the measuring of the physical, were enmeshed in a pseudo-scientific
project of isolating and hierarchising the so-called markers of racial identity. The strong
emphasis on the bodily meant that musical performances came to play a crucial part in this
documentation and perception of difference. With the revamping of the imperial agenda at the
end of the 19th century when Europe was looking to make new inroads into the African
continent it became necessary to marry science and prevalent forms of spectacle such as
popular museums, circuses, fairs, freak shows and carnivals. This gave birth to the world’s
fairs and colonial exhibitions, which were used to solidify the notion of a distant primitive
Other –and by extension white superiority–thereby justifying the “civilising mission”.

These were the overarching socio-political dynamics that shaped the nature of early
cinema. Travelogues, as well as safari and ethnographic films, all replayed the trope of
colonial conquest of a dark continent full of exotic cultures and peoples that were supposedly
well-suited to the cinematic apparatus because of their perceived propensity for dance and
musical performance. Though this new method of visualising the body of the Other was
powerful the colonial gaze was not a totalising force and Africans often managed to etch out
pockets of defiance and agency, which were otherwise denied them within the
representational framework of the colonising nations.

Chapter two examines the application of this agency by looking at how music was
rerouted by black South Africans under the apartheid regime at a time when cinema was
increasingly censored. Once the object of British cinematic propaganda, the Afrikaners soon
harnessed the power of the camera to consolidate an ethnic identity and form of nationalism
in the build up to the official establishment of the apartheid system of government in 1948.
Afrikaner cinema operated much like that of other colonising forces in Africa and depended
on the same set of racial stereotypes to shore up an untenable system of governance. As the
regime became more oppressive the political and social realities faced by black South
Africans became less and less overtly detectable on screen. In the first decade of apartheid rule a series of black-centred films were produced, the majority of which were organised around the theme of music in order to produce a sort of escapist effect. However, behind the faces of “happy” performing natives were musical subtexts that criticised, confronted and upset the dominant narrative of apartheid.

Music and performance in these films open up a political discourse that more fully represents the experiences of black South Africans. The change in the nature of the performances over the course of the apartheid period also directly relates to the political climate. In *African Jim* (1949), which was produced the year following the legalisation of apartheid, political language is very veiled compared to *Come Back, Africa* (1959), which was much more direct in its criticism of the political situation, and *Mapantsula* (1988), which was the most oppositional anti-apartheid film made before the end of the regime. Due to the question of censorship and the political leanings of the directors there are of course differences in the tone of the films, but the underlying implications that are created through music are what will be focused upon. As the regime became more heavy-handed the musical landscape was altered and this is in effect what is reflected in the films. The musical texts then are a sort of historical documentation with references to actual political events that falsify the official history of the nation.

The final chapter looks at the usefulness of traditional and contemporary African music/performance modes in cinema in the era of postnationalism and the difficulty of separating the two in the case of living cultural products. The film *Sia, le rêve du python* (2001) begins the analysis by looking at the roles played by the traditional, with specific reference to the jelí/géwél figure, and the epic and proceeds to identify the uses of these in the present. The (re)interpretation of indigenous modes is further examined in *Karmen Geï* (2001) where the blending with more contemporary and global sounds introduces the transnationality
of African identities. This is expanded in the pan-Africanist sensibilities of *Babylon* (1988), which attempts to express some of the experiences of being an African in the diaspora. It ends by looking at the urban post-apartheid kwaito soundtrack used in *Tsotsi* (2005) to represent the ambivalences and fallouts of the struggle for democracy as an example of the divergence and collision of political voices in the “new” South Africa. Whereas colonial and independentist cinemas focused on the mobilisation and cohesion of a national space, new African cinemas are now creating more nuanced representations of African identities, which are rooted in both the local and the global.

Historically, the scholarly literature on film music has tended toward a combination of theory, aesthetics and analysis. Rather than trying to demonstrate how an entire film industry works, I propose to investigate how individual films work by examining the specific cultural context in which they were created.
Chapter 1: “Performative Primitives” – Musicality and Performance in Early and Silent Cinematic Representations of Africa

The reproduction of images of “Africa” through various technologies of observation and display spans a wide range of cultural sites that include both the scientific and the popular. Natural history museums, imperial exhibitions, postcards, travel writings, colonial photographs and cinema have all contributed to the construction of a culture of visualisation centred on ideas of difference. Feldman has described this intertextual visual system as being the result of the agendas and techniques of political visualization: the regimens that prescribe modes of seeing and object visibility and that proscribe or render untenable other modes and objects of perception. A scopic regime is an ensemble of practices and discourses that establish the truth claims, typicality and credibility of visual acts and objects and politically correct modes of seeing (224).

Visual culture was an efficient vehicle for the propagation of these burgeoning discursive practices and cinema played a pivotal role in the consolidation of an expansive but sometimes disparate body of visual “knowledge” on African identity. Many early films, therefore, depicted an image of Africa overdetermined by pre-existent racialist currents and were constructed according to the “gaze” of the dominant and the use of the “spectacle” for the performance of ideologies and relations of power. Colonial regimes simply employed the cinematic apparatus for the rationalisation and thus justification of the “civilising mission”. This chapter will examine the relationship between musicality and performance in early and silent cinematic representations of Africa and wider scientific and political debates on race that were prevalent in Europe during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The objective as such is to trace not just the trajectory of Western representations of otherness, and more specifically
African alterity, but also the inextricable exchange between culture, science and politics.

Among the early modernist European representations of Africa perhaps Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s concept of natural man is one of the most influential and an appropriate point of entry as its legacy is clearly identifiable in the documentary practice of early and silent colonial cinema. In Rousseau’s *De l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 1755) he establishes the binary that divides the innocence of the “natural man” from the degeneracy of the “civilised man” (Bloom 1). Rousseau sums up this opposition as follows:

> In reality, the difference is, that the savage lives within himself; social man lives outside himself; he knows how to live only in the opinion of others, it is, so to speak, from their judgment alone that he derives the sense of his own existence…It is enough for me to have proved that this is not at all the original state of men, and that it is only the spirit of society together with the inequality that society engenders which changes and corrupts in this way all out natural inclinations (136).

He posits that natural man lives a more carefree, healthy life as he is unfettered by the demands and artificial constructs of modern society. With nature as his habitat he hunts for food, fights the elements and must ensure his survival without the help of modern technology. His primary concern is therefore survival and self-preservation, which is both responsible for and hinges on his developed physicality and sensuousness. His proximity to beasts is perhaps reflected in the fact that he is motivated by the instinctual. His greatest needs are food, sex and rest and once these are met he is content. Natural man’s existence is therefore centred in the body as opposed to the intellect. This dependence on the senses means that reason and language are not developed in the natural man since these are associated with abstract thoughts and metaphysical ideas of which he has no need and which in fact are corruptive.
Morality, relationship, vices and virtues are not a part of the state of nature because these only come into effect when man taps into his faculty for perfectibility and becomes enlightened. This, however, is seen as the beginning of the process of degeneration associated with the civilised man who has loses the vitality of the “noble savage”, which he enjoyed before modernity.

The influence of Rousseau’s theories is evident in the tropes that “project the West as ‘mind’ and theoretical refinement and the non-West as ‘body’ and unrefined raw material” (Shohat and Stam 14). That civilisation and development should be measured according to narrow definitions of technological advancement, complex economic systems and socio-cultural practices that favour the European is obviously problematic but it nonetheless informs the ideological thrust behind measuring difference –as well as the hierarchisation of that perceived alterity. Various ideological streams that were already seeking to record racial difference drive the presumption of many early filmmakers that the camera merely functioned as a neutral witness. As Winston points out, however, this premise is a severely flawed one and condemns the camera to fail as a scientific device (176). The technological determinism at work here ignores the fact that the cinematic apparatus is embedded in the larger social; consequently, it does not so much alter society as much as it participates in and is overdetermined by social practices. This interaction between science, technology and society provides a more panoramic account of the historiography of cinema, its functions and limitations.

3 According to Emmanuel Levinas alterity refers to that which is “something else entirely”, “absolutely other” and at the same time desirable (33-4). The “exteriority of the Other” places him/her firmly outside of oneself thereby implying that any comprehension of the Other strips away the very difference that constitutes their identity. Distance and distantiation, therefore, recur as methods of consolidation or interrogation in the cinematic. Fanon uses the term “epidermalisation”, which succinctly expresses the black and white construction of alterity based on a Manichaean understanding of race. Exteriority here is not just a function of identifiable difference but of markers and modes of seeing that are imposed from outside.
This exchange and its role in the aesthetic construction of the colonial body is well illustrated in the development of the *idée coloniale* in France, for instance, where a proliferation of visual cultural practices such as colonial exhibitions, posters, magazines, cartoons, postcards and photographs played a decisive role in the creation of a cohesive imperial sensibility (Levine 82). This was eventually extended to documentary practice, which is as old as the medium itself, beginning with the work of the Lumières in the late 19th century. In his examination of the cultural practices of visuality throughout France’s colonial history, Peter Bloom indicates that as early as 1800 budding French zoologist, François Auguste Péron, had used the dynamometer in aboriginal communities in Australia to record some of the first anthropometric measurements of “native” peoples (1). Half a century later his hypothesis that civilisation brings about increased physical strength was rejected in light of new discussions on the theory of evolution started by anthropologist Armand de Quatrefages. The dynamometer, nonetheless, was a preparatory step towards Etienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotography, which was based on a similar physiological premise of measuring the body. His work in turn went on to inform that of another anthropologist, Félix-Louis Regnault, whose studies on morphology were central to the establishment of a racially based evolutionary scheme in which locomotion served as a scientific marker of evolution. His theory on the physical—and the attendant rhetoric of civilisation— is clearly asserted in *Le Langage par Gestes* when he claims that:

All savage peoples make recourse to gesture to express themselves; their language is so poor it does not suffice to make them understood […] With primitive man gesture precedes speech. The gestures that savages make are in general the same everywhere, because these movements are natural reflexes rather than conventions like language (qtd. in Rony 57).
The work of anatomist Franz Josef Gall, who popularised phrenology in the nineteenth century, also falls under this umbrella of physiological typologies. Gall’s work was based on methodical measurements of the cranium and established the brain as the centre of intellectual activity. This empirical approach to understanding mental faculty is part of the same taxonomical impulse that scales bodies in the attempt to localise race. Gall’s work later spurred the conceptualisation of “highbrow” and “lowbrow” cultures, which corresponded to the phrenological notion that the shape of the skull was the key to measuring intelligence. People with high foreheads were thought to be more intelligent because it was assumed they literally had more brains while a low one meant mental inferiority. High culture was inevitably synonymous with Eurocentric cultural aesthetics—and was also later complicated by the question of class—and produced a pattern of cultural elitism that provides a good illustration of the application of pseudo-science to politico-cultural discourses.

An important role in the process of propagating these ideologies to domestic audiences was played by world’s fairs and imperial expositions. These were fora for exhibiting commodities but also functioned as sites for the repeated performance of Africa as a commodity. Over thirty colonial exhibitions were held across the British Empire between 1854 and 1911 in an effort to display why the “civilising mission” was necessary. They were the “social laboratory” where a national narrative began to take shape, one of imperial progress that pacified white British workers by allowing them to feel more integrated into the imperial body with the “voyeuristic spectacle of racial ‘superiority’ compensating them for their class subordination” (McClintock 57). From London’s Great Exhibition in 1851 to the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1889, these sites were a stage for bourgeois and imperial fantasy, which celebrated western science, technology, “civilisation” and their supposed contribution to progress and modernity in the dark corners of the earth.

Post-1851 cultural events and more popular forms of entertainment were incorporated
so as to attract the masses and create a greater sense of a unified imperial body. This fusion of
science and public spectacle was a more effective way to cement the perceived abnormality
and savagery of the Other under colonial administration. The grotesque turn taken by these
exhibitions’ displays can be traced back to the time of antiquity when narratives about
anomalous bodies—which are usually now understood as signs of congenital disease—
projected them simultaneously as objects of awe, horror and reverence. Throughout the late
18th and early 19th centuries they were often appropriated for commercial gain through their
display at popular museums, circuses, fairs, freak shows and carnivals. By the middle of the
19th century, however, a distinctively racial element became more predominant and
crystallised in the creation of human zoos. Like their predecessors, these were not simply a
form of mass entertainment, but also an effective form of media that “helped disseminate
lessons of racial solidarity [and] acted as a hinge between scientific inquiries into racial
essence and the popular desire for images of white domination” (Blanchard et al. 77).

One of the ways in which this can be identified is in the evolution of the exhibitions
themselves. In the 1870s-80s they were typically designed to reflect the course of daily life in
the subjects’ place of origin. Model villages were constructed, complete with thatched huts,
everyday artefacts and samples of indigenous flora and fauna while the subjects were left to
go about their daily routines. Despite the obviously contrived nature of these displays and the
problems of authenticity generated thereby, their design does seem to suggest that the
emphasis was on “educating” the public about the customs of those in distant lands. The
minimal entrance fee and the frequent visits by members of the Paris Anthropological Society
further corroborate the perceived educational value of this activity. By the 1890s however,
these exhibitions took on a notably different character, one that was more akin to that of
circus sideshows. Education had been supplanted, or rather grafted into, entertainment.
As one of the most popular exposition sites in all of Europe, the Jardin Zoologique d’Acclimatation in the Bois de Boulogne area on the outskirts of Paris is a useful example of this transformation. Prior to 1887, when the first West African exhibition took place, displays held there were centred on the typical model villages that attracted visitors who had an interest in different cultures. However, patrons at this 1887 exhibition, which featured the Ashanti, were drawn by the addition of performances such as mock battles, war dances and snake charmers. This emphasis on “sensation, ferocity and savagery” coincided with the race to secure new spheres of interest during the New Imperialism era (Schneider 99). The “Scramble for Africa” was under way and Europe’s new expansionist agenda had to be justified in the public eye. Colonial ethnographic exhibitions hence became a central part of the imperial enterprise through displays that invoked the ideas of Social Darwinism and the pathology of the othered body.

These spectacles were now more than ever part of the “wider context of the collecting, measuring, classifying, picturing, filing and narrating of colonial Others during the heyday of colonialism” and often provided a growing public with their first exposure to “exotic strangers from the far ends of the earth” (Blanchard et al 95; Griffiths 48). This intersection between the worlds of politics and popular mass entertainment is obvious in the origins of the subjects displayed at the exhibitions. Promoters were clever enough to capitalise on the public interest in “faraway lands” generated by the increase in French colonial activity in West Africa after 1890 and which is evidenced in the growing demand for groups from the Ivory Coast, Dahomey and Western Sudan, where France was consolidating its empire. More specific examples of this alignment are the exhibitions of Dahomeans in 1891 and 1893, both of which came on the heels of the two Dahomean wars (these made war dances and military exercises a standard feature of ethnographic exhibitions); of Touaregs just months after the French capture of Timbuktu and the Bonnier massacre in 1894; and an exhibition from
Madagascar in 1896, the year after it was captured. The importance of West Africans as subjects at ethnographic exhibitions can be seen in the following chart (Schneider 100):

MAJOR ETHNOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS IN PARIS
1887-1896

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Ashantis</td>
<td>699,905 (year at J.A.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Hottentots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cossacks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Lapps</td>
<td>854,459 (total year)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senegalese et al.</td>
<td></td>
<td>(World’s fair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Somalis</td>
<td>605,607 (total year)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Dahomeans</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>959,430 (total year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Egyptians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Caribs</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>679,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Pai-Pi-Bris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dahomeans</td>
<td>2,700,000</td>
<td>225,060 frs. (gross)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Touaregs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>372,000 Frs. (gross)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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A similar trend can be identified in Britain where “native villages” became a permanent feature at the great exhibitions, which were an important site for imperial propaganda since the late 1800s. The Greater Britain Exhibition of 1899, for example, featured the Kaffir Kraal and the Savage South Africa display, “a vivid, realistic and picturesque representation of life in the wilds of Africa” (Blanchard et al. 261). The exhibition included an array of almost 180 indigenous South Africans from various groups and even included some Transvaal Boers. Key features that underline the political slant of the event were the reenactments of the Matebele War of 1893, the Rhodesian revolt of 1896-97 and a mining section. 1899 was a
critical year for the British who were moving further into the South African interior in order to secure natural resources. They were met with resistance not just by Africans but by the Boers as well; just a few months after the exhibition the Anglo-Boer War began. As a result, it was crucial to allay the fears of the public over growing tensions in South Africa through a reiteration of past victories, which tempered the realities of war and death through spectacle and entertainment.

The growing government interest and involvement in these exhibitions is also observed in the presence of officials at events. In 1889, for instance, the Senegalese exhibition at the World’s Fair was financed and organised on the initiative of the government though proposals for similar project in 1878 were turned down and a more conservative display of local products exhibited instead. Schneider reports that the President of the Republic, Sadi Carnot, attended both the Dahomean and Carib exhibitions, held in 1891 and 1892 respectively. The Ministers of Finance and Commerce were also present at the 1892 event while the Governor to the Ivory Coast visited the Pai-Pi-Bri exhibition the following year and a host of local officials inaugurated the 1895 Champs-de-Mars Sudanes exposition (102). This also provided the exhibitions with an air of legitimacy that helped to cement the propagandistic element.

Over the course of their existence human zoos attracted hundreds of millions of visitors, which is a clear indication of the potential power and impact of these exhibitions\(^4\). The zooification of African subjects in popular discourse was largely reimagined and consolidated by these shows “because it was common practice to have animals alongside the native people in those exhibitions, the spatial and cultural inscription of the Black body aimed to and indeed succeeded in presenting the Negro as the most attractive animal of the fairs” (Konkobo 369). This compelling example of what Rony calls “fascinating cannibalism”, the ambivalent

\(^4\) Not surprisingly then, it was at one such fair in Paris, the Exposition Ethnographique de l’Afrique Occidentale in 1895, that Regnault used the chronophotographe to film “Negress walking with a light weight on head” and a Wolof woman making pottery, for his study of human locomotion as an indicator of evolution.
sensation of attraction and repulsion at the sight of the so-called savage, is a significant element of how the question of spectatorship in early cinema should be examined. This fixation with visualism is at the heart of the modernist project, which held vision as the “noblest sense”, and the capacity for observation was extended with the technologies that gave way to photography, and then film, as a more accurate medium for “seeing anthropology” (Rony 30).

Photography was considered a source of empirical evidence and also allowed visual signs to become what Barthes refers to as “myth”, a sense of being-in-the-world that exceeds the purported objectivity of the information it is meant to convey (110-111). Photography was first used to evidence racial/racist typologies in the 1840s following the invention of the daguerreotype, with some of the most important examples coming from the work of Swiss zoologist Louis Agassiz in the US and Brazil. Measuring techniques, however, varied immensely, from those traditionally used by painters to that of phrenologists. It was not until the 1870s, through the efforts of British anthropologists, John Lamprey and Thomas Henry Huxley, that standards for the anthropometrical photographing of “natives” were established in response to the Colonial Office’s demand for a system that allowed cross-racial comparisons (Maxwell 30).

Lamprey’s anthropometric system (Royal Anthropological Inst. of Great Britain and Ireland)
Ethnographers and cultural anthropologists, however, favoured photographs that illustrated Africans with cultural artefacts that portrayed their “natural” environment; though this was equally problematic and facile because it simply replaced physical with behavioural traits. Anthropological photographs were often issued as postcards of racial “types” and made available to the Western public otherwise inaccessible images of an empire and of peoples that departed from European norms. Predictably, attractions such as dance/music and other performance rituals were common themes in these works.

The popularisation and commercialisation of these photographs came in the form of a new mass medium, the picture postcard. In Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards, Christraud Geary notes that

In the second half of the nineteenth century physical and cultural anthropology emerged as major academic disciplines that also bolstered expansionist and colonizing efforts. Photography soon became one scientific means to document and survey all aspects of societies that had come under colonial domination. Postcards helped to perpetuate and encode images of Africa, and they greatly appealed to the Western imagination (147).

Postcards with their pictures of semi-nude, scarified, heavily adorned or otherwise exoticised natives accentuated the need for and the benefits of colonial development projects to mass audiences. It is instructive then that the history of the postcard is linked to that of the exposition. The European billet de visite and carte de voeux, which was officially launched during the 1889 Exposition Universelle, potentially extended the reach of the expositions to those not directly present at the event. The novelty was so well embraced that its fabrication quickly became industrialised. In the early 20th century, this was further complicated by improved transportation, communication and mass printing technologies, which fuelled interest in and facilitated travel to “far” corners of the earth. The rise of a new consumer culture, a more affluent society and a growing middle class came together to produce the
The Golden Age of the colonial postcard was between 1900 and 1930, during which time hundreds of millions of postcards circulated between the periphery (colonies) and the centre (metropole). The colonies had always been a popular destination for both professional and amateur photographers and Notes and Queries on Anthropology, published in 1874 by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, influenced the style of many. The book provided instructions on how to capture cranial and facial features and the results often resembled those of earlier or professional anthropological work. This serves as an important illustration of the intersection of the scientific and the popular and accounts for the inscription of political ideologies in the everyday of mass culture.

Despite the objectification and decontextualisation that were involved in the photographic process the photographs remain valuable in that they revealed a physiognomic and cultural diversity that undermined the European narrative of African racial homogeneity. Perhaps ironically, it was the very body of the African—which was meant to cement a rigid pseudo-science of racial typologies– that had begun to subvert the myth about “Africa”. The romantic attempt to capture a vanishing tribal world, which was said to be disappearing in the path of modernising forces, suggested that it had perhaps never existed to begin with. An ambivalent production of knowledge occurred despite the photographers’ efforts to obscure the alternative narratives of Africans’ complexity and the true effects of colonial violence. These pictures then effectively revealed as much as they concealed.

Cinema was therefore contemporaneous with various positivist movements aimed at fixing the parameters of alterity. The importance of the camera is determined by the positivist rationale that the positionality of the human researcher is problematic because it may influence the subject being studied. In this sense machines, which are considered to facilitate an advanced method of acquiring knowledge because they have no personal agendas and improve on human physical senses, appear as more reliable and consistent. Like the telescope
and microscope, the camera can scrutinise its subject and produce an “advanced” system of seeing which is assumed to significantly improve the study of motion because it “provides

The anthropometric style in colonial photographs and postcards (UK National Archives)

a. Racial/tribal types from Nigeria and South Africa

b. Iconic warriors figures of South Africa (Zulu) and Tanganyika (Hehe)
exact and permanent documents to those who study movements ... [and] Acts of locomotion can be translated into geometric graphs in which all is measurable with a precision that observations alone could not achieve” (qtd. in Rony 47; 59). This reification, a central part of 19th and 20th century European cultures, determined the initial conception of film as a superior scientific as opposed to an artistic tool. Social scientists of Regnault’s time equated the empirical with accuracy and considered the camera’s ability to dissect movement a great advancement. According to them:

The film of a movement is better to research than the simple viewing of a movement; it is superior, even if the movement is slow. Film decomposes movement in a series of images that one can examine at leisure while slowing the movement at will, while
stopping it as necessary. Thus, it eliminates the personal factor, whereas a movement, once it is finished, cannot be recalled except by memory (qtd. in Rony 47).

Despite the obvious oversight that machines do not function separately from those that use or even design them, it is precisely from this angle that the co-option of the camera by imperialist regimes must be approached. The overarching relationship between man/society and machine is what earmarked cinema as the perfect device for the consolidation of empirical and encyclopaedic categorisations of race used to justify interventionist policies.

The strong emphasis on the corporeal and the ethnographic in early film corroborates this idea that cinema was a new medium for probing and fixing the body and behaviour of the “primitive”. This can be identified specifically in the extensive foregrounding of cultural performances such as dance/music, which was considered an apt method for “seeing” the anthropological claims about the body-bound identity of the savage/African. Rudolph Pöch goes so far as to assert that “dances are the simplest and most effective subjects for cinematography and the best means of practising the medium since they enable one to record what is most visual and effective when reproduced” (qtd. in Landau and Kaspin 212). Musical and dance expressivity were also seen as among the primary methods by which Africans performed their primitiveness because of the non-verbal nature of this medium. Rony declares the impossibility of speaking of ethnography without addressing race, which “consciously or unconsciously implies a competition involving time, and both cinema and anthropology enabled the viewer to travel through dimensions of space, time and status” (10).

Dance was thought to have a unique capacity to visually demonstrate the discursive system that theorised that the gestural was an indicator of racial and other differences. This physical embodiment of social structures is reflected in Rudolf van Laban’s popular model of kinetic dynamics on which is based the current choreometrics system of dance movement classification (Buckland 103). The partiality shown towards the Western emphasis on shape
and line, however, further explains the contempt shown for African dance forms which privilege rhythmic complexities. The ensuing differences in African dance aesthetics are typically interpreted as “wild, savage, frenzied” movements, which serve as an indicator of a lack of rationality. This is seen as a striking contrast to European forms, especially to high culture dance such as ballet, where precision, restraint and discipline are meant to express and heighten a metaphysical understanding of the performance. The central place of music and dance in African culture, as well as the ubiquity of images displaying exotic African dance practices, also propagated the myth of Africans’ aptitude for dance.

Given the fascination with dance and performance it is perhaps logical that the Lumières sent operators to Africa to begin filming images of the continent within just one year of the first December 1895 screening in France. Known as the inventors of the cinématographe and the founding fathers of cinema, they may also be said to have initiated the documentary tradition in Africa. Their corpus on Africa, which was done in just three years (1896, 1897 and 1903), consists of over 100 films made in and about the continent and is firmly rooted in the political and racial discourses of their time (Sanogo 14).

What is immediately curious about Nègres dansant dans la rue (1896) is its misleading title. The film does not in fact show black people dancing in the street but rather a group of white musicians performing in blackface. This is a particularly poignant representation of several aspects of the racial dynamics of the day. The fact that the first filmic representation of Africa and blackness is based on the condition of the absence of Africans/blacks is significant especially in the light of the minstrelsy tradition represented in the film. It refers to an enactment of stereotypes and a caricaturisation of blacks that was a staple of nineteenth century popular entertainment in the USA where it originated and that

5 Its typical classification as a traditional or folk expression can also be explained using Claude Lévi-Strauss’ theory on the raw and the cooked. These terms meant to differentiate what is found in nature from what is a result of cultural practice, and so the supposed ‘rawness’ of African expressions serves to naturalise them.
also became fashionable abroad, particularly in Britain. As a result, it is not surprising to see this minstrel band in the streets of London, but more for the fact that it invokes comparable racist debates prominent in Britain at the time, than for its entertainment “value”. This early example of staged blackness also underscores the fetishisation and commodification of black bodies and cultural practices within both the American and British entertainment industries. The minstrel show therefore situates the discursive practices on race and Africa of the nineteenth century within a paradigm of referentiality and performance where blackness, as perceived by the white racist imaginary, is acted out as a controlled spectacle and potentially reinforced in the process (Lott 25).

The second Lumière film on Africans, *Nègres Ashanti: danse du sabre* (1897), is couched in the culture of attractions prevalent in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe. With specific reference to cinema, Tom Gunning’s concept of the cinema of attractions underscores an important relationship between the development of film, new spatio-temporal experiences facilitated by improved commercial travel and an emerging modern visual culture (Gunning 1986). This cinema encourages the viewer to remain conscious of the act of looking by privileging the sheer nature of the images’ visuality. Films in this vein are centred on visual pleasure and inform the early moving image practices that deal primarily in spectacle, often through technological innovation. Ethnographic expositions were couched in this culture of looking that was further complicated by the age of imperialism. The power of cinematography/photography is in its capacity to suggest an objective reality and yet replace reality, thereby displacing peoples and their cultures.

The shooting of the second Lumière film at the Ashanti Village series in Lyon in 1897 is also influenced by this ideology. As was typical, the Ashanti group was kept in a village replica of their “natural” environment where the public could come and observe the daily life of the natives. However, it must be kept in mind that these expositions were never meant to be
neutral sites where people of different cultural backgrounds met and exchanged as equals. They were designed to represent the extant power relationships and consolidate the reification of the body of the colonised Other. For this reason, there was often a fence or railing that separated the spectators from the exotic exhibits, which were positioned in such a way that they could be gazed upon. The dynamic then was supposed to be one which positioned the European as a privileged spectator/subject while the people in the exhibits were to be passive objects who were not even supposed to return the gaze as it was considered improper. The literal and symbolic distance between them was merely a reflection of the premise of binaristic difference.

*Nègres Ashantis* was one of fourteen films that the Lumières shot at the Ashanti village over the course of three months. The acute “interest” in African performance can also account for the fact that seven of these films were around the subject of dance. The first thing one notices in the film is the arrangement of the crowd. The men, women and children form a semi-circle, which begs the question of whether this is how things occur naturally or if it was simply done to accommodate the camera operator’s equipment. There is a strong awareness of the camera’s presence throughout the dance and at the beginning, one of the men even seems to respond to an instruction from the operator, which prompts him to look in the direction of the camera and then take a knife from someone in the crowd. The other dancer also turns and looks straight into the camera on three separate occasions as he brandishes his knife in its direction. As Amad points out these acts of looking at the camera are now generally interpreted by scholars as signs that can disrupt and oppose the West’s representational agenda –though this endeavour is also somewhat encumbered by its own limitations, not least of which is the postcolonialist project of salvaging moments of resistance and agency for the once silenced subaltern. This shift away from the myopic 1970s treatment of the “gaze” has since been adopted in other disciplines where “visual riposte” is facilitating readings of
alterity previously flattened, or altogether ignored, by the eye of authority\textsuperscript{6}. This is not to suggest however that the unsettling of the see/being seen binary necessarily results in the overthrow of repressive systems of power (53-63).

The tension and slippage in these moments underscores the interaction between the extra-filmic and the screen space. It immediately interrogates the authenticity of the representation as the direct gaze of the dancers and the promptings coming from the off screen space draw attention to the staged nature of the event. The dancers seem to be aware of the theatricality of the performance centred on their savagery, which is symbolised by their knife play. The viewer, however, can engage in an act of safe voyeurism, protected both by the screen and the darkness of the screening space. Furthermore, the film does not use intertitles to contextualise the dance in terms of its social or other significance. It is therefore stripped of any broader cultural meaning and becomes a mere image of black bodies in choreographed movement, thereby bolstering the ideological framing of Africans in terms of the bodily. One notices as well that the film remains on the level of the group. The long shot aesthetic –due to the bulkiness of early cameras films were often framed as still photography with the camera motionless and subjects placed directly in front of it– means that instead of having just the two performers in the frame, the Africans are presented en masse so as not to privilege the individuality of any of the participants. In this sense it remains very impersonal and keeps them at a safe distance where signs of their subjectivity may be less visible. This idea can also be extended to fact that the Ashanti ethnic group, which is found primarily in the Ghana and Ivory Coast region, performs a synecdochic function. The tropes associated with them are meant to convey images of the several thousand ethnic groups found in Africa as well as all non-whites. The performance brings to life the archetype of the threatening,

\textsuperscript{6} bell hooks (1992), for instance, talks about the “oppositional gaze” as it relates to blackness and perhaps more specifically the womanist movement; Rony (1996) describes it as the “third eye” which surveys the act of turning the ethnographic camera back on itself. Fanon (2008) had earlier described his encounter with the “fact of blackness” as a student in France and which prompted him to write \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, where he examines the psychopathology of colonialism.
bloodthirsty savage as the men play out a scene of aggression with knife in hand. It manages to encapsulate three of the dominant tropes on Africa, which persist even today: dance, war and music.

This overlapping of show business and imperialism is equally glaring in *Landing of Savage South Africa at Southampton* (1899), which “organised the world as a spectacle within an obsessively mimetic esthetic” (Shohat and Stam 107). The film shows members of the Savage South Africa troupe that came to England to perform as part of the Greater Britain Exhibition, a display of colonial products. They offered the public “a sight never previously presented in Europe, a horde of savages direct from their kraals, comprising 200 Matabeles, Basutos, Swazis, Hottentots, Malays, Cape and Transvaal Boers” (MacKenzie 97). The short film captures their arrival at Southampton and shows the group in full tribal wear, chanting and stamping as they move slowly, almost threateningly, towards the camera. Their shields and spears, like the knives of the Ghanaian performers, also draw on the idea of them being a hysterical rather than rational people, with a predilection for war and alleged cannibalistic rituals. The reason for their arrival in England, as well as their bodily adornments and performance for the camera, immediately highlights their alterity and therefore, that they are objects of visual pleasure. Furthermore, in a society where sex and nakedness were highly taboo their semi-nudity is quite a contrast to the suit worn by the White male and to the corseted European women in the 19th century. As with *Nègres Ashantis*, the organisers of the show would have been aware that the semi-naked bodies of African warriors would appeal to several well-known tropes. The stereotype of the black man’s superior virility is perhaps the most prominent of these and is reinforced by their partial nudity and the use of animal skins, which suggest the bestial. The underlying fear of miscegenation that these hypersexualised images were meant to mask can be seen when the authorities ordered that the kraal be closed to women. It was even said in a cable letter to the *Galveston Daily News*, an American
newspaper, that the “vilest orgies took place there” and “this little band of savages has brought home to the English people for the first time the seriousness of mixed marriage” (August 20, 1899 p.3). Hyperbolic as these claims may be they reveal an analogous fear of mixed race relationships that has been a major element of racial dynamics in the US since the time of slavery.

The travelogue is another important part in the scientific tradition of prospecting the world and documenting the body of the Other as it performed cultural activities such as dances and rituals (Rony 83; Staples 393). In the 1920s European and American enthralment with the “discovery” of previously inaccessible regions of Africa was encouraged by the advances in transportation technology which occurred around the same time that increasingly mobile film equipment was being produced. These improvements also facilitated and accelerated a tourism industry that acted as a powerful manufacturer of the exotic and a commodifier of cultures. Many of the travelogues produced during these expeditions hinged on Urry’s argument that “tourism results from a basic binary division between the ordinary-everyday and the extraordinary” and operated according to hierarchical oppositions such as self/other, tourist/host, work/play (12).

The fact that cinema became part of all expeditions into the African continent after WWI also underscores the relationship between cinematographic practice and colonial conquest. Colonial film units began to emerge in Africa at the beginning of the Second World War in an attempt to complement radio broadcasts. The creation of the government subsidised Empire Marketing Board in Britain in 1926 (which had also been involved in the organisation of imperial exhibitions) led to a number of experiments with documentary films about the empire. The EMB was divided into the Crown Film Unit and the Colonial Film Unit at the outbreak of WWII and up until 1952 the two units produced a total of between 3000 and 5000 35mm films. The French authorities also recognised cinema’s propagandistic capacity and
established the Service de diffusion cinématographique (SDC) in Algeria in 1943 to bring mobile cinema units to remote areas. The majority of French colonial films were made in the course of travels, expeditions, missions, voyages and other colonial adventures with films serving as travelogues, the new style of travel writing. Many of these films had a pronounced ethnographic focus and allowed European audiences to gaze at the bodies of the native from a safe distance. Scenes of tribal dances and other musical or theatrical performances were often captured as indicators of the Africans’ primitiveness. In Oksiloff’s analysis of the visualisation of primitive bodies in early anthropological and colonial German films she even argues that “screened images of primitive bodies were in many ways more real than actual bodies, even the ones displayed in the popular live spectacles of fairs, exhibitions, and human ‘zoos’”(29). The immediacy of the film, though abstract, was made to fill in for a reality that was not immediately at hand.

During the interwar period many explorers and naturalists went in search of this African Other. Spectacular dances, colourful tribal costumes, exotic practices and landscape became even more emblematic of the African continent thanks to independent and commercial crossing and safari films. Leading French automobile manufacturers, Peugeot, Renault and Citroën, sponsored expeditions across the Sahara while the Ford Motor Company supported the explorer Aloha Baker and Willys-Knight, another American automobile manufacturer, donated trucks to expeditionary filmmakers, Martin and Osa Johnson (Staples 393; Levine 81). The most famous of the French expeditions is documented in *La Croisière noire* (1926), which became a cultural symbol of the 1920s. André Citroën was able to successfully frame the journey as a national event and described its goal as the production of “colonial propaganda [to]…awaken a taste for travel among [the French] youth and to inspire colonial vocations” (Levine 85).

The epic journey across the Sahara from Algeria to Madagascar is framed as a conquest,
a demonstration of French technological mastery over nature, as well as a catalogue of cultural displays, which reinforce the perceived superiority of French society. Among the dance performances featured are the Saharan musicians at Taourirt, the “Kolo” dance performed by Kanembou women, the “Bandara Boundou” veil dance of the Tebbo, the Koulikouta, a parody of the former human sacrifices practiced in Dahomey, the Gan’za initiation dance of the Banda people in Central Africa and the Ouled-Nail women at Zinder.

The latter two are of particular interest given their place in the Western imaginary. Like a number of other expedition films of the 1920s, *La Croisière noire* features dancers of the Nailiyat tribe from Algeria performing la danse du ventre (belly dance), which is associated with the Orientalist imagination and its stereotypical portrayal of harems in the Ottoman Empire (Lewis 13). In a scene borrowed from an earlier film, *Le Continent mystérieux* (1924), a woman invites the camera/viewer to look at a group of three young bare-breasted women performing the iconic dance. Though the Nailiyat were able to exercise some measure of sexual freedom in their communities and traditionally worked as singers and dancers for male audiences they did so fully clothed and never demanded payment. It was only with the arrival of French tourists that the nature of the performances changed. The French tourist board encouraged women to perform nude for their European clients and by the 1880s the practice was transformed into an erotic tourist spectacle (Bloom 80). Women who performed Nailiyat dances were then officially identified as prostitutes and subsequently, the Nailiyat became associated with prostitution in the mind of the French as the tourist and postcard markets developed. This sequence plays on this common knowledge and invokes the trope of the mysterious, veiled “African woman”, an archetypal figure of erotic adventure and a metaphor for the continent as an available and conquerable body, often used in colonial and travel writings (Schiebinger 160-61).

The Gan’za also occupied a place in French popular culture and “received their
popularity from the erotic and exotic appeal this initiation ritual held for a white metropolitan audience” (Schmeisser 116). The dance was first popularised by Martiniquan writer René Maran in his 1921 novel *Batouala* where it was described in erotic terms in a scene called “danse de l’amour”. The association with sexual transgression was reinforced by the regular presence of African-American jazz entertainer Josephine Baker at the galas held for the film’s release. Baker was by this time known for her “raw, exuberant and frenetic” danse sauvage, which was seen as an instinctual expression of her black identity (Kear 46). Baker therefore functioned as a material sign of the hypersexualised otherness of the “exotic, primitive cultures” presented on-screen.

American safari and explorer films depended on many of the same binaries. A good illustration is the film *Africa Speaks!* (1930), which was shot during explorer-naturalist Paul Hoefler’s 1928 expedition into the Belgian Congo. The narrative centres around the “unusual” customs and rituals of the tribes encountered during the journey into the continent. The opening credit declares that *Africa Speaks!* is “the strangest adventure ever filmed” and then begins with a map of Africa—which is left blank except for the Sahara—overlaid with an invitation into “Africa the sinister, the mysterious, the unknown...Africa the land of savagery and dangerous adventure...where nature is without mercy and deadly beasts of the jungle are supreme”. These tropes that portray the continent and its peoples as savage, exotic and primitive recall Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Henry Morton Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent* (1878). The film enacts these stereotypes and now plays the role of traditional European travel writing, which visualised Africa for European audiences. The principle proposed in the opening titles, however, is that “Africa” speaks for the first time by being captured on film although it is homogenised from the outset through the metaphor of the unmarked map. The identity of Africa will be discovered and inscribed with a series of visual signs that locate African identity.
Two of these signs that stand out are the arrival and welcome of the expedition at a “Pygmy” village and a group of Maasai morans preparing to hunt a lion. Both occasions are celebrated with song and dance and encapsulate the idea of corporeality and performance. Described as the “smallest tribe of people in the world” by the narrator, the “Pygmies” are really members of various ethnic groups such as the Baka, Twa and Mbuti. They were considered to be less evolved because of their comparatively small stature and were popularly seen as the missing link between apes and humans. Their presence recalls the figure of Ota Benga, a Congolese Mbuti man who was displayed in 1904 at the St. Louis World’s Fair in Missouri and later in 1906 as part of a human zoo in the Bronx Zoo. The Maasai on the other hand are the physical opposite of the “Pygmies” and have become the most iconographic figures of East African tourism, though in reality they make up only a small percentage of the population. The romanticisation of their warrior culture, their elaborate beaded adornments and the relative preservation of their pastoralist lifestyle has generated an array of stereotypes ranging from the “wild”, “primitive” and “traditional” to “brave, “beautiful”, “tall and slender”, “physically powerful” and of course, “excellent jumpers” (Nakamura 12). The Maasai, however, are aware of these stereotypes and sometimes perform accordingly, which certainly seems to be the case in the stilted singing and preparations for the lion hunt. In L.A. Notcutt and G.C. Latham’s guide to colonial and missionary filmmaking in Africa they also refer to this artificiality of representations when they say “Our experience of native actors was that at least one in five can give quite a creditable performance of any action which is customary in his life...One native actress [from Zanzibar] acted well the part of a woman of her own type” (qtd. in Landau 158). The implication here is of course that colonial officials and the dominant ruled more over images of Africans than they did over actual Africans who were sometimes able to maintain a level of agency.

Another example of the colonial machinery at work can be seen in the films of
Anglican missionary George Thomas Basden. His work represents the slippery and complex borders dividing the Church, colonial administration and anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century. Basden straddled all three fields and became something of an authority on Igbo culture and customs with the publication of his two volumes, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (1921) and *Niger Ibos* (1938). However, as is to be expected, his work is clearly influenced by the zeitgeist of the early twentieth century given his association with two of the pillars of the colonial system, administration and the Church. In *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* for instance, he describes the traditional instruments of the people as “primitive […] scarcely capable of being termed a band” and talks about the tradition of dance in the following terms:

The instinct for dancing is very developed in every native. Possibly it is the most ancient and most natural way of expressing physical emotion; it certainly has very great fascination for the Ibo (347).

Firstly, it should be pointed out that the excerpt is found under the rubric of “recreations” in the volume. This categorisation is infantilising and not inconsistent with the stereotype of Africans as playful, happy children. This is further complicated by his use of words such as “instinct”, “ancient” and “physical emotion” which frame the Igbos’ use of dance as a natural pre-historic disposition to physicality, which identify them as the polar opposite of Europeans who are intellectual and modern. This indictment can be taken further in his film *Africa Dances* (1930), which provides no historical contextualisation for the centuries-old Igbo masquerade tradition and which therefore frames the dances as a matter of “frenzied movements lacking rationality”. Basden here corroborates the stereotype that Africans have no history and civilisation and are indeed “ethnographiable”, to use Claude Lévi-Strauss’ term. Instead the performance is described in terms of his own cultural referents as a fearsome spectacle, which is indistinguishable from other pantomime acts.
When the Onyeocha mask appears during the performance Basden overlooks another important element. He seems to see it as innocent mimicry—because after all in the racial imaginary the native is an innocent childlike type—or at least he chooses not to give any indication to his European audience that this is in fact an act of resistance. The Onyeocha (which translates as ‘white man’) usually portrays a District Officer and is a direct response to colonial policy in Nigeria. The character is usually portrayed taking copious amounts of notes and reads out loud a series of rules and regulations in a boring monotone, much to the amusement of the Igbo audience. The full extent of what this character represents must be viewed in light of the fact that Basden served as the representative of the Igbo on the Nigerian Legislative Council between 1931 and 1937 after being elected by the colonial government because no “suitable” African could be found (Van den Bersselaar 433). The Onyeocha is therefore as much a direct commentary on Basden himself as a colonial interventionist and
anthropological researcher as it is on the larger political apparatus. This character provides a moment of insight into how the colonised subject views the coloniser and by extension himself. Interventionist policies are seen as derisive and the Igbo assert their agency by choosing to publicly express their opinion. This example is also a fitting illustration of invisibility and hypervisibility according to Maurice Wallace’s concept of spectragraphia, “a chronic syndrome of inscribed misrepresentation” (30). In this system of looking relations racialists look without seeing and exercise a sort of “blind vision” where the virtual imagined image of the black “object”, that which they have been conditioned to see, effectively displaces the concrete reality of blacks as subjects, reducing them therefore to spectres. Basden does not really see the meaning of this character, which is asserting that the power of the coloniser over him is incomplete. In returning the gaze the Onyeocha potentially provides the Western viewer with an opportunity to disrupt the spectragraphic gaze and that which “the racial solipsistic […] will not, cannot see: their own self-serving blindness” (Wallace 31). Situated between the spectral and the spectacular, the Onyeocha is the mirror that potentially allows the coloniser to see his/her reflection through the eye of the colonised.

This relationship between music and racial categorisation can also be seen when one examines the early history of film scores. As of the 1890s, it was common to accompany films with pre-existing music of both the popular and concert-hall types and as a result, publishers began issuing compilations of character pieces by mood or place during the 1910s. Examples of music specifically targeted at reflecting the “darkness” of Africa can be found listed in the Rapée “Encyclopaedia”, which is emblematic of the 1910s and 1920s. The African references in the volume cover a range of categories including Abyssinia, Liberia, Zanzibar, Oriental, and “American (Negro)”, which were often substituted one for the other.

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7 Rapée was one of the most influential music directors in New York in the 1920s. He published two books on the subject, one meant for pianists and organists (Motion Picture Moods (1924)) and one for theatre music directors (orchestra leaders), the Encyclopedia.
It is also intriguing to note that under the rubric “African” there is a cross-reference to the categories “Cannibal”, “South Seas Music,” “Jungle Music” and “Savage Music”. The “jungle music” style emerged around 1900 and is characterised by “pseudo-African musical effects such as throbbing tom-toms, unusual harmonies, “primitive” scales (usually pentatonic and whole tone), and muted, growling brass lines” while the “Cannibal” category suggests “wild dancing, the barbaric jungle, and violence and war, in an undetermined national setting” (Kaye 2). Examples of this generic aural symbolism for Africa can be found in some of the earliest safari-themed films such as Roosevelt in Africa (1910), African Hunt (1912), Symbol of Sacrifice, a South African production, which only survives in fragments and the first Tarzan film entitled Tarzan of the Apes (1918).

The role of musicality and performance in cinema has fundamentally been one of constructing the West as rationality and the non-West as corporeality through the constructions of the spectacle and the gaze. This is particularly true in the case of colonial cinematographic practice where there is a concerted attempt to keep the other at a safe distance through the discourse and display of alterity. Cinema manipulates “symbolic figurations of blackness,” as Morrison puts it, to indicate “the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany the Eurocentric learnings about these people” (6). The interplay between popular modes of visual culture and political ideology therefore solidified expansionist campaigns and played an integral part in mobilising public support for the “civilising mission” in Africa. As successful as the representation of difference may have been these fabrications sometimes broke down or were resisted by those being (mis)represented. Their resistance to the oversimplification of African cultures underlines Africa as having its own narratives on the self and the world and indicates that cinema continues to be a site of cultural and ideological struggle.
Chapter 2: The Sounds of Johannesburg: Music, Cinema and the Apartheid Regime

The growth of African nationalist movements seeking to promote their agenda was significantly affected by the recruitment of cinema to various ideological frontlines. In the case of South Africa cinema played a vital role in the representation of the various political interests operating within the country. From as early as May 1896, just seven years after Thomas Edison’s kinetoscope was unveiled in the USA, motion pictures were being screened in the industrial centre Johannesburg. Between 1896 and 1899 this also became the site for the first short non-fiction films shot in South Africa by Edgar Hyman (Botha 21). These films were primarily street scenes of Johannesburg, which was developing rapidly following the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1884. This led to the heightening of tensions between the British and the Boers as both sides were eager to gain control of the area’s natural resources. The outcome was the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, which the British won with both the Orange Free State and the South African Republic being annexed to the Empire.

On the ideological front the British wielded a clear advantage over the Boers who, at the time, had no cinematographers at their disposal. The cinematic documentation of the war is therefore framed from an entirely British perspective and was seen as a very serious endeavour. Three key British companies (Warwick Trading Co., British Mutoscope and Biograph Co. and Robert W. Paul Co.) dedicated themselves fully to the production of films on the war and in 1902 the Warwick catalogue lists a total of 111 films—a combination of raw documentaries and staged propaganda films— that cover the event. Cinema proved to be the perfect platform for the deployment of Victorian England’s colonialist iconography and myths with these films being shown all around the empire as a mean of “whet[ing] the imperial appetite” (Strebel 264). This colonial propaganda did not begin with the depiction of
the Boers however. It was also recruited for the representation of black South Africans and early productions such as *Savage South Africa: Savage Attack and Repulse* (Warwick Trading Company, 1899) and *The Landing of Savage South Africa at Southampton* (1899), discussed in chapter one, document the beginnings of this trend.

It was not till 1916 that the Afrikaners would get their first chance at consolidating a national identity through film in an effort to promote the apartheid model of government. *De Voortrekkers/Winning a Continent* (Harold Shaw, 1916) has been described as “one of the foundations of Afrikaner nationalism” and its title clearly indicates the expansionist impulse and the imperial myth of discovery and conquest in the “noble” battle to establish civilisation were there was none (Botha 24). Its importance as a “mass consciousness builder” and cultural signifier in the Boer community can be seen in the mythical nature of Shaw’s depiction of the Great Trek. Farmers trying to escape the control of the British are portrayed as heroes of epic proportions who defied not only the imperialism of the British but also the “darkness of the savages” that they met, and of course defeated, along the way. This image of the Voortrekkers created, justified and cemented the legendary journey and the foundation of

![De Voortrekkers (1916) poster](image)
a new nation. The villainisation of black identity –here in the form of the archetypal savage Zulu warrior– was, of course, part of the bedrock of Afrikaner nationalism and the cornerstone of a larger white supremacist ideology.

*De Voortrekkers* refers to a process of displacement of indigenous peoples that began with the establishment of the Dutch East India Company at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 – and continued by the British after 1795, when the Empire assumed control of the Cape Colony. Incursions into indigenous territory were an essential step in the formation of an unbalanced system of economic growth, not unlike that practised in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. The mineral revolution prompted an accelerated expansion into interior territories and by the end of the 19th century the African population was under European political and economic control. Low wages, pass laws requiring black men to carry documents indicating where they were allowed to work and live and employment restrictions limiting Africans to menial labour were some of the early characteristics of the economic model that was preserved and intensified under apartheid. The segregation period (1910-1948) under the governments of Louis Botha, Jan Smuts and J.B. Hertzog was the preparatory stage to the official implementation of this ideology. Legislation such as the 1913 Natives’ Land Act, which prevented Africans from purchasing land and forced them into “reserves” after ninety-three per cent of the South African territory was allocated to the white minority, foreshadowed the creation of the “homelands” during the Grand Apartheid era (Clark and Worger 59-60). This dispossession and the swift industrial growth in urban areas induced a massive rural exodus in the inter-war period. The black urban population increased by 14 percent in Johannesburg from 1911 to 1921 and by almost 100 per cent in the next fifteen

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8 Peter Davis “In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema’s South Africa” p. 124. The image of the savage Zulu became a staple of Afrikaner cinema that Davis describes as ‘Zooluology’, the white myth of the brutish Zulu that needed to be domesticated. The political use of the image was therefore to present the African as “an ever-present chimera”, which could potentially revolt at any time if the white population was not careful to keep it on a very tight leash, in this case the leash being apartheid.
years. The authorities responded with laws promulgating urban residential segregation such as the Native (Urban Areas) Act and the prohibition of unions.

The mobilisation of Afrikaner identity after the Anglo-Boer War and its intensification during the 1920s-40s was also a major influence on the transition from segregation to the more hardened and extensive application of pre-existing racial divisions. The Afrikaners, who considered themselves “a nation planted in this country [South Africa] by God’s hand and [that] is destined to remain as a nation with its own character and its own mission”, had never ceased to clamour for independence after falling under British rule⁹. Consequently, the first three decades of the 20th century were focused on the issues of republicanism, language equality, white poverty and the development of a complex network of Afrikaner organisations, which encouraged the material and cultural consolidation of the Afrikaner community, and fostered this nationalistic agenda. Initially therefore, Afrikaner nationalism was more directed against the British but as the influx of African labourers began to threaten the privileged position of Afrikaner workers this changed significantly. The sheer size of the black presence in the work force and their burgeoning political mobilisation represented a real attack on white power. This hastened the formulation of the apartheid bulwark and was consolidated during the Second World War, which precipitated the retreat of colonialism and the advancement of liberalism. To Afrikaner socialists the spectre of social integration seemed all the more menacing under Jan Smut’s United Party. Although he was also an Afrikaner, Smuts was pro-British and encouraged collaboration with them. As such he was the object of many Afrikaners’ frustrations at the failure to achieve Afrikaner independence and became an emblem of British domination. His decision to enter the war on the side of the British in World War II, his public denouncement of the Broederbond as “a dangerous,

⁹ Important historical events such as the Great Trek and the Anglo-Boer War, which commemorated their struggle against the British, were sacralised as authentication of their divine destiny. Later, as the apartheid agenda intensified, battles against the Zulu would be represented similarly.
cunning, political, fascist organisation” and the detention of some of the most conservative Afrikaner nationalists during the war facilitated the rise of the National Party, which worked swiftly to have the policy of “apartness” institutionalised in 1948\textsuperscript{10} (Harrison 145). Over the course of its rule apartheid separated not only whites and blacks (which included coloureds and Indians) but was also used to divide the black community along tribal lines.

In the midst of this stormy political climate, the importance of the relationship between cinema and ideology increased and in 1940 Afrikaner nationalists created their own film company, the Reddingsdaadbond-Amateur-Rolprent-Organisasie (RARO) –which was initially a reaction against Anglo-American imperialism. The deliberate politicisation of Afrikaans-language films was therefore a conscious decision and is reflected in RARO’s first feature, ’n Nasie Hou Koers/They Built a Nation (1939), one of a series of culturally specific films meant to reinforce the growing tide of Afrikaner nationalism\textsuperscript{11}.

For much of the early twentieth century the question of the relationship between black South African audiences and the world of cinema was couched in this ideological framework. White producers and missionaries saw film as a platform for educating and moralising the black population, particularly with the onset of urbanisation linked to the gold industry and the desire to contain a growing black presence no longer limited to the remote, and therefore safe, peripheries of the country. Cinemas in urban areas were for whites only and those in the townships only showed films deemed appropriate for black audiences and consisted primarily of productions that sustained the myth of white superiority (Maingard 71). This “preoccupation with policing the African imagination” was extended to mine compounds where screenings were organised in order to regulate migrant labourers’ leisure time (Masilela

\textsuperscript{10} The Afrikaner Broederbond (Brotherhood) was the earliest conservative Afrikaner group to align itself with Nazi Germany and was influential in the founding of apartheid in 1948. The Broederbond started in 1918 as a fraternity devoted to the Afrikaner cause and developed into a secret organisation in 1924.

\textsuperscript{11} Botha points out that the film was shown 285 times in 144 different venues and seen by a minimum of 50,000 viewers in the year of its release alone (29).
20). However, Solomon T. Plaatje, a black intellectual, saw film as an instrument for black advancement. Independent African publications played a decisive role in providing an alternative space for the articulation of this oppositional response to modernity and a number of publications that appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, often at the initiative of an emerging African elite, were used as an avenue for political negotiation. Some of the earliest newspapers include *Imvo Zabantsundu* (African Opinion), the first black independent newspaper, which began in 1884, *Izwi Labantu* (Voice of the People) established in 1897, *Koranta ea Becoana* (Bechuana Gazette) begun in 1901, *Tsala ea Batho* (Friend of the People) set up in 1910 and *Abantu-Batho* in 1912. Though protest journals constituted the majority of the alternative press till the 1930s, financial restrictions, limited access to the means of production and distribution, provincialism, low indigenous literacy rates, buy outs by white businesses, the inability to compete with white-owned commercial press and restrictions on what black journalists could say about the white power structure all affected readership considerably (Switzer 1).

To some extent the gap that was necessarily produced by these constraints was filled by socio-political organisations representing the interests of non-white communities. These included the African People’s Organisation (APO), which mobilised coloureds, the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), later called the African National Congress (ANC) and the Natal Indian Congress. The New African Movement, of which Plaatje was a founder, was perhaps the most diverse, dynamic and influential organisations to fill this role. What is more, from 1912, when the ANC was founded, until the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960, when it was banned by the state, the ANC and the New African Movement functioned as different articulations of the same call for liberation. The ANC performed the political

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12 Plaatje launched both *Koranta ea Becoana* and *Tsala ea Batho*. *Abantu-Batho* functioned primarily as the official mouthpiece of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), of which Plaatje was the first secretary-general.
functions of the New African Movement whilst the latter was the cultural voice of the ANC.

These opposing ideological currents of paternalism and black agency that characterise the early 20th century largely account for the ambivalent nature of early representations of the national community as it pertains to black South Africans. However, given that the daily practice of identity is much more slippery and nuanced than the neatly defined borders of apartheid suggest it is not surprising that the first cinematic complications of black South African identity were formulated at the interstices of this racialist social system. Furthermore, South Africa provides a useful instance of the intersection of cinema and music, which must be understood within the context of increasingly strict apartheid state surveillance post-1948. The roles of culture and censorship in the social engineering process were pivotal and meant that performance was often used to camouflage the struggle for black self-determination via cultural forms that made the political stakes identifiable and accessible to the oppressed yet less susceptible to policing by the oppressors (Coplan 2). This masking was possible because apartheid, like other systems of racial discrimination, relied on cultural expressions such as music to “participate in many of the aesthetic and discursive constructions of race” (Radano and Bohlman 8). As discussed previously, music was used as an indicator of the racial inferiority of Africans from as early as the late 17th century and black South Africans’ knowledge of these stereotypes –because the Other is inevitably made aware of his ‘inferiority’ seeing as labelling is part of the process of conquest– would have permitted them to formulate a cultural response which navigated the dialectic of disguise and surveillance. This was often done through the appropriation of stereotypes, concealment and euphemisation, all of which could produce texts that seemed to reinforce the hegemonic vision of their identity while at the same time challenging them. The experience of subordination is, therefore, often phrased through the cultural vocabulary of the underclass in the form of “hidden transcripts”, which potentially speak different messages to different
audiences. James C. Scott uses this term to describe how power relations are negotiated “from below” and this is a relevant concept, which will be used here to outline the critique of apartheid that is woven into the film texts primarily through the disguise of music.

The first cluster of films that attempted to showcase the life of black South Africans occurred from 1949 to 1959 and despite the difficult production context, the taint of paternalism and the apolitical stance that was seemingly adopted, they enable an alternative reading of black South African identities. It is noteworthy that five of the six productions are strategically set in Johannesburg, the centre of South Africa’s entertainment industry and hub of black urban culture – African Jim (1949), Zonk! (1950), The Magic Garden (1951), Song of Africa (1951) and Come Back, Africa (1959)–, and are musicals that rely directly on township culture to “valorize the image of the smiling, singing, dancing, unthreatening black person” (Dovey 46). African Jim (also commonly referred to as Jim Comes to Jo’burg) was produced by two white British immigrants, Donald Swanson and Eric Rutherford, and was originally envisaged as an entertainment film. It was marketed as the first all-African production made specifically for black audiences and is the story of a young man named Jim Jabulani Twala who leaves his rural village to seek employment in Johannesburg. The opening gives a brief outline of Jim’s life in the country before he is seen leaving on a train that takes him to the city. On arrival, Jim is identified as a newcomer to the metropolis by three black conmen who trick and beat him after stealing his clothes and money and leaving him for dead. Jim is later found by a night watchman who befriends him and helps him to find a job at the home of a white man as a domestic worker. He is fired when his boss finds him listening to the radio instead of working but is able to secure another job, this time at a nightclub. There he meets and falls in love with Judy, a singer and daughter of his watchman friend. She convinces her boss to give Jim a set during the evening performance when she discovers that he can sing. At the club Jim also comes across the men that robbed him and learns of their plan to rob the
factory where Judy’s father works. He informs him, they catch the men and Jim makes it back to the club in time to do his song. His former employer, a talent scout, is in the crowd that night and, impressed with Jim’s voice, he offers him a contract. The film ends with Jim and Judy recording a song in studio.

Jane Feuer’s concept of the myth of entertainment, which is central to her analysis of the ideology working behind the musical, is useful for unearthing the political commentary at work in *African Jim* on the generic level though it is somewhat modified by the context of South Africa. Feuer asserts that the spontaneous expression of performers in the musical obscures the highly choreographed nature of the cultural products on display. She declares that “we are never allowed to realize that musical entertainment is an industrial product and that putting on a show (or putting on a Hollywood musical) is a matter of a labor force producing a product for consumption” (13). This, when combined with the identification of the musical as a “folk” expression, is particularly relevant to the logic of South Africa’s racial schematisation. Spontaneity naturalises the artistic skills of the performers and replaces what is learnt cultural practice with a discourse of genetic predisposition. When this happens it is possible for the non-dominant group to exploit the assumption that they are performing simply for the joy of it so as to interweave texts that destabilise this stereotype. In this sense, therefore, *African Jim*, and the musical in general, goes beyond simply *being* entertainment and reveals that it is more *about* entertainment. Instead of mere performance there is performativity –the conscious act of performing a scripted and often offensive version of one’s identity in order to critique it– which complexifies the seeming conservatism of the film and displaces the markers of black identity. Moreover, the fact that music is presented as the only avenue through which self-realisation is possible in the film begs the question as to why other options are unavailable or less desirable. Jim’s former employer’s decision to give him a contract partially answers this question as it points to the reason why Jim retreated to the club.
in the first place but it also demonstrates the desire of the apartheid regime to control even these safe spaces. The recurrent allusions to the reality of the apartheid regime made through the performances further solidify this response and undercut the utopian setting of the film, in which glamour and romance are used to gloss over pressing social inequalities. The result is a potential unsettling of the grand narrative of apartheid, and the expression of a black political consciousness (Maingard 6).

From the very start of the film this black cultural context is underscored through a legend stating that this is “the first full length entertainment film to be made in South Africa with an all-native cast. It is a simple film, and its quaint mixture of the naïve and the sophisticated is a true reflection of the African Native in a modern city”. This opening statement invokes the binary opposition that pits rural against urban, tradition against modernity and, predictably, African against European in a simplified racial schema. However, as will be demonstrated, the musical subtexts supplant this naivety by opening pockets of alternative readings, which challenge the hermetic social classifications of apartheid. This was particularly important in 1949 because there was still no large-scale political mobilisation against apartheid such as boycotts and civil disobedience and direct confrontation was not yet possible. The Defiance Campaign would come later in 1952 and so contestation at this stage was still often subtle. The practice of relegating black expressions to the dustbin of cultural experience also potentially protects these texts from the peering eyes of the dominant who see them as worthless.

As a typical ethnic idyll, the film’s opening sequence frames the protagonist Jim against the tranquillity of a pristine, rural setting. The narrator declares that “[Jim] lived in the freedom of the wide hills and valleys tending the crops and herding the cattle…” and that his

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13 Historically, Jim was one of those names that some white employers preferred to use for their black servants purportedly because they could not pronounce African names. Other common ones were Jack and John. This practice was in fact meant to deny the individuality of Africans.
was “a simple life and a good life and Jim was happy”. Jim, the poor, innocent native from the country, however, yearns for better opportunities and a more sophisticated life that is only available in the urban areas. He therefore embarks upon a journey to the ‘Golden City’, Johannesburg, looking for work. The scene is accompanied by a simple melody sung in Zulu, which provides the backdrop and is meant to authenticate the narrative and the Africanness of the setting. There is, however, a note of dissonance in that the pre-industrial nature of the scene, with Jim in tribal dress, the thatched huts and plough-laden oxen, does not correspond with the choice of music. While the visuals are intended to display the otherness of Jim’s traditional origins the music is in fact more reflective of an urban space and the cultural hybridity that was commonplace there. Though this may have been an attempt to appeal to urban audiences, where the film would have been screened primarily, such a conclusion homogenises and stabilises the urban space. The prevalence of migrant labour meant that there was also a potential set of viewers from rural areas in various stages of their resocialisation and with a set of cultural references not necessarily embodied in this music. What is more, the inaccuracies in style of dress, architecture and geography suggest the constructedness of a tribal identity being viewed from the outside and refer directly to how the mechanism of apartheid “understands” blacks. It should also be noted that this underlying tension is reinforced by the rupture between the lyrics of the song and the cheerfulness of its melody that presents the scene as innocuous. It was likely chosen for the mood it conveys and this veneer of gaiety is maintained by the fact that the song is not subtitled. Though the resulting nuances would have been obvious to most of the black cast the producers were unaware, as they had no knowledge of the language. The agency of the cast, therefore, interweaves an additional layer of meaning that falsifies the claim that Jim’s departure for the city is simply a whimsical desire for adventure. The song expresses a different sentiment altogether:
O-sala sala njalo    Stay as you are
sizobonana-ke     we will see each other again
sizobuya sibonane    we will come back and see one another again
phatshike lami nGi(li)thathe ntombini I will take with me a photograph of you, my girl
Izula bayayeGoli I will go to Johannesburg (Dovey 67)

Here, the mournful tone established through the lyrics allows for an interrogation of the public transcript of apartheid and highlights the ongoing battle between power and subordination. Jim’s song reinscribes the larger political framework that the narrator attempts to efface and begins the process of undermining the metanarrative of apartheid. Jim’s longing emphasises the idea of displacement and the Zulu term for Johannesburg, “eGoli”, which means place of gold, is a reminder of the socio-economic impulse behind migratory labour and its relationship to the system of government. Even the romantic tone of the song, which is often used in musicals, is potentially misleading in that it cites a Zulu musical practice of using the theme of lost love to mask references to the displacement and alienation that directly resulted from the politico-economic system.

The juxtaposition of the rural with the urban provides another important subtext, which can be seen when Jim leaves his village and boards a train for Johannesburg. As he looks out at the landscape passing by the scene is overlaid with racing western classical music in order to represent Jim’s geographical and cultural relocation to the metropolis. However, the excitement suggested here is undermined by the symbolic undertone of the mode of transportation. For black South Africans the train is emblematic of the (forced) migrant experience precipitated by the growth of the gold mines in the Witwatersrand area. Erlmann points out that “for millions of black South Africans stimela, the steam train, has been the key vehicle and, at the same time, the archsymbol of physical bondage and spiritual alienation. For many the train is the most fundamental image produced by the encounter with western
technology and worldview” (127). This complicates the narrator’s earlier claim that it is a “spirit of restlessness and adventure” that prompts rural South Africans to go to the cities and would have been easily understood by black urban viewers of the time, many of whom would have had this experience. In this light, the music is more suggestive of the traumatic black experience of modernity, represented by the train, and of the hostility that Jim will face in the city than it is of genuine excitement.

When Jim gets to the city he is robbed and beaten by three black men –who appear to be urbanised from their style of dress– pretending to want to help him find a place to stay. He is found some time later by a kind watchman who looks after him for the night and promises to help him find a job next day. While they sit around a fire trying to get warm, they are approached by a guitarist who is in fact General Duze, a legendary jazz musician first known for his sets on the South African Broadcasting Company’s (SABC) “This is African Jazz” programme. During the 1950s and 60s he worked with some of the top South African artistes including the Jazz Dazzlers, Miriam Makeba and the Manhattan Brothers, and Hugh Masekela as part of the all-black jazz opera, King Kong. He is therefore an identifiable figure and a symbol of the film’s claim to authenticity. He encourages Jim to sing a song. Jim, who was earlier introduced as a “singer of African tribal songs” declares that “where I come from we sing all the time”. The attempt here is to invoke the stereotype that music forms a central and inherent part of black identities. However, Jim’s song is not reflective of Nguni musical conventions and complicates, if not completely belies, his supposedly pure tribal origins. The use of Western melodic structures –which would potentially appeal to Afrikaner as well as Western audiences thereby making the film more marketable– and Zulu lyrics attests to cultural cross-pollination that can be traced back to the missionisation initiative in rural areas.

14 South African jazz musician, Hugh Masekela reinvokes this experience of migrant labour in his 1994 song entitled “Stimela”. The song deals with the phenomenon of displacement in all of Southern Africa and suggests that the ‘stimela’ can be easily replaced by the image of the slave ship to parallel another phenomenon of forced migration of African peoples.
Jim, therefore, uses the cultural idiom of the dominant but creates a counter discourse through the use of his own language with lyrics that upset the narrator’s claims about the allure of the Golden City. Instead, Jim sings about his misfortunes in Johannesburg:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lyric</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngahlupheka eGoli</td>
<td>I have suffered in Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangiphuca zonke izinto</td>
<td>They have stolen all of my things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nghalala ngonjalo</td>
<td>I have been left just like this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngigena</td>
<td>I have nowhere to go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eSwazini kumnandi</td>
<td>Swaziland is beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iZinkomo ziningi</td>
<td>There are plenty of cows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akufani naseGoli</td>
<td>It is not like Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngizwelokhu hluphekayo</td>
<td>Which has given me troubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abantwana bayahlala</td>
<td>The children are all there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayiko intombi</td>
<td>Here I have no girlfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kodwa eGoli siyahlupheke</td>
<td>Because Johannesburg has made us suffer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Dovey 65)

The sense of nostalgia expressed by Jim may initially seem to be consistent with the apartheid policy of separate development, which romanticises the values of traditional African rural societies that are supposedly more suited to the black South African than the city. However, the narrative reveals that it is not the “sophistication” of Johannesburg that proves difficult but the alienation blacks often encounter there. Despite this however, the film ends with Jim and Judy recording a song together in studio and suggests that Jim has been integrated into city life and will remain in Johannesburg where he has found financial and romantic success. This commercialisation of black cultural expressions however cannot be taken for granted. It represents the classic image of white benevolence and the attempts by a white-dominated media to exploit and control black music. What is more, the musical typically portrays the city as an environment that can bring people of diverse backgrounds together and a place of
opportunity where small town inhabitants can realise their dreams if they work hard or are talented. In *African Jim*, the reality of labour migration and apartheid clearly undermines this myth. Though people do form new alliances in the city it is often part of a process of recuperation, which implies familial, ethnic and cultural loss.

Long before Jim’s transformation, however, we see him daydreaming about the pastoral life he enjoyed back in his village as he listens to the radio one day at his employer’s house. The radio announcer identifies what Jim is listening to as the Bantu music programme and in so doing indicates how the SABC participated in the social engineering of apartheid through the fetishising of ethnicity. Radio Bantu was part of a “complex radio network ensuring that each person would have easy access to a state-controlled radio service in his/her own language, dedicated to ‘mould[ing] his intellect and his way of life’ by stressing the distinctiveness and separateness of ‘his’ cultural heritage – in other words, to promoting the mythology of Separate Development” (Hamm 169). The objective was to “ethnicise the airwaves” but the makwaya choral music often featured by the SABC as part of its Bantu programming is paradoxical on several levels.

Firstly, makwaya is derived from mission school singing and reflects the influence of Western music on black South African culture therefore undermining the discourse of ethnic purity central to state policy. Moreover, the Africanisation of what began as Western musical practice and a method of cultural domination demonstrates agency and disturbs the conventional image of Africans as passive recipients of European culture. South African music had long been one of encounter and documentation of the indigenous refashioning of European music dates back to the early 19th century in the Cape where city life first started to develop (Coplan 14). As the political disenfranchisement of black South Africans worsened makwaya was further recontextualised to reflect political dissent. According to Blacking, this “appropriation of the triads and cadences of European hymn tunes expressed the new
relationships and values of urban groups, who expected fuller participation in the social and political life into which they had been drawn economically” (qtd. in Erlmann 198). For instance, after the Native Lands Act of 1913, R.T. Caluza, a minister and hymnodist, wrote “Silusapho Lwase Afrika (We Are the Children of Africa)/ iLand Act” in response to this piece of unjust legislation and the SANNC adopted it as their official anthem. “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” (God Bless Africa), a hymn composed by Enoch Sontonga, a Xhosa Methodist lay preacher, also functioned as a petition for help in an oppressive social environment and was taken up by the ANC (formerly the SANNC) in 1925 as their new official anthem. It became an important song of protest during the anti-apartheid struggle and was popular in other parts of Africa as well. It became the national anthem of Tanzania and Zambia and a Xhosa-Sotho version has been the national anthem of South Africa since 1997. The political application of Christianity, which was misused as a colonial tool, must also be recognised as a marker of the agency of African subjects. The scene highlights an additional ambivalence in that the westernisation of the ‘savage’ was seen as essential –after all the sole reason for the European presence in Africa was the benevolent civilising mission– yet Africans were expected to remain grounded in unpolluted traditional life. This is but one instance of how colonial/apartheid rhetoric often broke down and contradicted itself.

The Ngoma Club offers useful illustrations of the constructedness of this discourse. As the primary site where the film plays out, the club is a space of contestation that is closely linked to the emergence of urban black identities and their relationship to the power structure. The black urban presence and the entertainment culture that grew out of that are not nearly as new as the film suggests and can be traced back to as early as 1652 when city life began to develop in Kimberley. Since that time, taverns, dance halls, gambling dens, saloons and working men’s clubs have constituted a space for the (re)socialisation of Africans and the development of popular performance culture. Moreover, despite the segregated setting of the
Ngoma Club, it is a well documented fact that these spaces were traditionally interracial given the diverse origins of the workforce (Java, Malaya, India, Madagascar, Mozambique, West Africa, poor whites). Spatial segregation was also difficult because the exponential growth and cramped conditions of the slumyards made them notoriously difficult to administer. By the 1920s however, white liberals thought it necessary to create a cleavage between the growing black middle-class, who had aspirations of social recognition and integration— and working class Africans. As such, culture and entertainment became more divided along economic lines with alternative spaces created for the middle class. However, with the Grand Apartheid policies of the 1960s the focus ostensibly returned to race with the prohibition of interracial mixing in public places.

The fact that the Ngoma club is a racially segregated space reserved for non-whites therefore stands out as a symbol of the tendency to exploit blacks as a source of cheap labour and at the same time deny their presence and contributions to the national community. The club then is something of a cultural refuge within the city and a site where identities are reorganised according to the new cultural paradigms. The patrons, for example, are smartly dressed in Western attire and are seen ordering food and drink to the sounds of live entertainment; and seems to replicate the nightclubs in Hollywood dance musicals, which were popular in the townships and the Bantu Men’s Social Club, which was associated with the westernised black elite. They can therefore be seen as acting out a sort of new South African identity which draws not so much on ethnic but class aspirations, namely the desire to ascend to the burgeoning black middle class. Markers of modernity such as 1940s swing jazz and Western clothing are the primary signs of this wish. The club functions as a site for exercising modernity, albeit at the margins, and the incongruence between the club and the effect of the power structure on the daily lives of the majority of the black population.
potentially reinforces the film’s hidden transcript by obliquely pointing to the real impact of apartheid.

In this sense, the film’s musical performances operate as a medium for re-imagining oneself not just in terms of race or ethnicity but also class. Music as such was more than a means for social cohesion, it was also used for possible social mobility. African jazz, a fusion of marabi and swing, is reflective of this double objective. Marabi developed in the 1920-30s in the slums of Johannesburg and is a hybrid of the local and foreign musical influences that converged in South Africa’s rising urban centres. Its syncretism was evidence of emerging and transgressive South African identities that contradicted the state’s policies of segregation. Its close association with criminality, low social status and vices such as prostitution reflects some of the adverse socio-economic conditions endured by those that produced and consumed it. According to Gwen Ansell “on the one hand, marabi was an environment that provided comfort and helped its communities make sense of brutal and bewildering new circumstances. On the other hand it existed within a social and legal discourse where simply to survive was defiance. The music reflects both those conditions of its creation” (38). The shebeens, illegal drinking houses, were the central breeding grounds for new forms of urban entertainment that were received somewhat ambivalently. They were condemned by the black elite as ‘backwardness’ primarily because the gatherings were notoriously rowdy, given the large quantities of alcohol consumed, and the strong rural influence of the music played there; whereas the working class saw them as a way to reorganise social relations and mitigate the challenges of urban life.

While the working class favoured marabi, the African middle class developed an interest in the more socially respectable swing, which boasted professional musicians such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Count Basie and was embraced by the intelligentsia as well. The influence of American movies was also notable and Hollywood’s two all-black
musicals, *Stormy Weather* (1943) and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943), were a resounding success in the townships. It is easy enough to draw a parallel here with *African Jim*, which is closely modelled on this idea of showcasing black talent at a time when lead roles were reserved for whites. As with its American counterparts, *African Jim* features a number of well-known acts such as Dolly Rathebe (Judy), the Jazz Maniacs and the African Inkspots. These performers would have lent a measure of authenticity to the film but would also have been aligned with their Hollywood ‘doubles’, which suggests the possibility of overcoming the stranglehold of apartheid.

Paul Gilroy’s concept of a black Atlantic provides a useful theory for examining the implications of the cultural framework mirrored here. Gilroy asserts that black Atlantic culture transcends ethnicity and nationality, thereby producing something new because it is a hybridisation of Africa and its diasporas (16). This multi-national and multi-ethnic description of identity positions itself as a sort of political and cultural defence against static notions of selfhood. The fractal, rhizomorphic network refers to a decentralised, distributed pattern of human organisation, which intertwines in a complex way and is neither easily nor even fully uprooted nor divisible. The inability to effectively control migration, transnationalism and the more dispersed identities that they produce significantly undercuts the tight classifications of apartheid. Furthermore, there is a political association between jazz and the Civil Rights movement, which implicitly critiques the South African government. In the era before the 1940s the popularity of jazz and male vocal harmony groups was based primarily on racial and cultural identification between blacks in South Africa and those in the United States. After the mid-1940s, however, it became more of a political identification. African Jazz had become known as

a music of equality and cosmopolitanism, black unity, and not ‘tribalism’. Then too, jazz was the music of oppressed black Americans, and South African exponents were
quick to express the parallel…..Localised jazz also validated the black consciousness that was promoted to overcome class division among blacks at at time of rapid expansion of African urban working class and the trade unions. ‘New Africanism’ advocated pride in and incorporation of indigenous features in black urban performance, and African jazz provided an ideal example of an alternative ‘African’ modernity (Coplan 197).

The ideological value of the stylistic fusion of South African jazz would prove even more useful in the future as the brutality of apartheid increased in that it reflected the importance of challenging and eradicating reductive binaries.

The coexistence of the traditional and the modern is also seen in the décor used in the Ngoma Club. It features a number of images commonly used to characterise Africa such as huts, masks, shields and loincloth-clad figures. These visual tropes exploit the stereotype of a pre-industrial, rural Africa and create a façade that seems to support the preconceived notions of the producers. They therefore serve to better mask the subversive nature of the lyrics and performances through which a different picture of South Africa is created. This interrogation of the notion of pre-modern “tribal” identity is also evident in the inclusion of two performances of indigenous dance and music –Zulu ingoma and timbila– that are less conservative than they appear. Firstly, they recall the increased efforts to control cultural practices and by extension the native body. As urbanisation increased retrabilisation was deemed necessary to preserve the myth that the Bantustans were the true home of black Africans. New urban music was associated with Africans who were not traditionalist and so, beginning in the 1940s, there was a concerted effort by the Chamber of Mines to retrabilise cultural expression and reinforce tribal affiliations among mine workers so as to discourage them from settling in the city. This was in direct response to the development of a new sense of working class identity and burgeoning solidarity among black urban dwellers who
identified less and less with rural South Africa. These dances played a part in constructing the perceived difference of the miners by displaying their “‘cultural otherness/difference’ - from whites and from each other” (Ansell 39). In the case of ingoma Erlmann describes the creation of these native dance spaces as “the story of a remarkable transformation, of the domestication of ingoma dancing from a militant, oppositional and suppressed form of popular culture to a tourist attraction” (260). The containment of this dance that was traditionally associated with a war ethos within a designated arena –and in the case of the film this can be seen as the club setting as well as the controlled frame of the camera– indeed corroborates the producer’s desire to present the black body as a mere entertainment spectacle and demonstration of the primitive pre-modern. The fact is, however, that by the late 19th century Zulu dance was perhaps more of a neo-traditional form that had been significantly transformed by the impact of dispossession, scarcity of land and labour migration. Ingoma was already part of the discourse of modernity precipitated by missionisation, industrialisation and the mineral revolution that began in the late 19th century. The regional and ethnic hostility it once generated among groups was now largely replaced by social dislocation and the competition for jobs in the growing urban workforce (Erlmann 261).

The film’s only direct insight into the attitude of the working class presents itself in the form of a spontaneous moment captured on the streets of the township. In this scene, Jim

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15 The artificiality of these tribal identities can be seen in the fact that many of the costumes now associated with the different tribes were invented by the compound manager of Consolidated Main Reef Mine, Lewis Hallett.

16 However, inherent to this naturalisation is the ‘fascinating cannibalism’ associated with the black male body, which is presented in ambiguous terms, being a site of pleasure/desire and at the same time fear, which elicits the need for it to be constrained in public life. In 1929, for instance, Durban’s Native Affairs department opposed and later banned ingoma dancing because of the hostility it was claimed to generate among groups from different towns. The prohibition of ingoma marks a significant shift towards more stringent policies of regulating black bodies. As such in 1933 the Native Welfare Officer devised a strategy whereby ingoma dance competitions took place in open-air arenas selected by the authorities and held under the supervision of the Borough Police. This was also designed to integrate ingoma and its practitioners into the lifestyle of the city though somewhat ironically, Zulu nationalists recuperated the form as a means of mobilising the largest ethnic group against the Boers.
and Judy leave the club and as they are walking along they come across a group of black labourers who are singing while loading a truck. The lyrics are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lyrics</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanibo qhaqe</td>
<td>Hello/loosen up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nansi poyisa</td>
<td>There are the police/supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They call us Jim!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abelungu goddamn!</td>
<td>White people goddamn!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They call us Jim!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bheka phansi!</td>
<td>Put it down!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donsa!</td>
<td>Pull!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phansi!</td>
<td>Down!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These words were incomprehensible to Swanson and Rutherford and were not subtitled in the film. The scene was filmed rather for its “authenticity” because had they understood it would have been omitted so as to avoid bringing the producers into direct conflict with the agenda of the Department of Native Affairs. The only line they would have understood is “they call us Jim”, which might have appeared as a fortunate parallel to the protagonist and a sign of the film’s valid depiction of black South Africa though it is really pointing to the unwillingness to truly represent black identities. The irony is also intensified by the fact that the Johannesburg City Council often encouraged the use of work songs such as these because they were believed to appeal to the natives’ love of music and would therefore motivate the labourers. This scene unwittingly invites the viewer to scrutinise the artificiality of the film script and by extension the public transcript of the white superstructure. Here it becomes obvious that the musical expressions of the oppressed have power partly because of their ability to conceal displeasure with the political arrangement. This ability lies in the stereotype that music is a reliable index of Africans’ childlike nature, which in turn potentially casts black musical expressions in a generally unthreatening light. It is this assumption that is often capitalised upon in a sort of masquerade and which allows these workers to make a simple yet pertinent
observation about their outsider social status. Moments such as these highlight the complexity and skill of the subject people who demonstrate “a measure of access to the dominant culture that is denied in reverse...[because] the master, in his conviction of racial superiority, remains culturally limited, even if the limitation is voluntary. By having to deal with European culture in all its aspects on a daily basis, the African has a sophistication automatically denied to whites, an extra dimension” (Davis 22). The fact, therefore, that the majority of black viewers would have understood the song reverses the daily power dynamic whereby the voice of the establishment dominates public discourse. The use of English, which is associated with the former colonial regime, further divests this voice of its authority in that the language of the oppressor is reappropriated by the oppressed in order to comment on the former. The hybrid lyrics of the song challenge the line between master and subject and reveal a level of proficiency and dexterity not possessed by most of the dominant group, which does not grasp the nuance created in Zulu.

Such challenges to white power began to intensify during the 1950s through the African National Congress Youth League. Moderation had proven ineffective in the face of the NP’s resolve to enforce more restrictive apartheid policies therefore forcing leaders such as Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Mangaliso Sobukwe and Nelson Mandela to organise mass mobilisation activities in the form of demonstrations, civil disobedience and strikes, the most noteworthy being the Defiance Campaign of 1952. The government swiftly crushed this attempt and proceeded to introduce yet more policies with some of the most controversial being the Bantu Education and Native Labour Act in 1953, the Natives Resettlement Act of 1954, the Natives Administration Amendment Act of 1956 and the Immorality Amendment Act of 1957. These laws demonstrate an attempt to control not just the public but also the private lives of individuals and certainly reflect a growing anxiety over the hardening of political lines and galvanisation of the majority under the Freedom Charter in 1955. With H.F.
Verwoerd, the ‘architect of apartheid’, assuming office in 1958, the decade culminated with the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act in 1959, which separated black South Africans into eight (later ten) distinct ethnic groups and effectively stripped them of the right to parliamentary representation.

Unlike African Jim, which does not engage directly with the political landscape, Come Back, Africa tackles the situation head on as a true “state of the nation” film (Bickford-Smith qtd. in Maingard 106). Independent American director, Lionel Rogosin, wanted to reflect the fascist nature of apartheid through a docudrama that allowed black South Africans to construct their own image of life under this political regime. Rogosin had to allay the suspicions of the authorities by presenting his work first as a travelogue and then as a black musical in which he wanted to portray Africans as a fundamentally “happy people” (Come Back, Africa extras). This was enough to gain the approval of the authorities as it seemed to coincide perfectly with their policy of representing Africans as childlike, happy natives. In order to prove his story Rogosin shot hundreds of feet of film that capture some of the types of street performances common in Sophiatown. Though this was only meant as a façade he did incorporate some of the material in the final edit of the film because the cultural landscape of the township was an essential offshoot of the capitalist apartheid economy. Some of these key musical forms will be examined as indicators of the continuum of cultural responses to apartheid and urbanisation.

Come Back, Africa centres around the life of a migrant mine worker, Zacharia Mgabi, who sees an opportunity to escape the “poverty and starvation” of the reserves when some recruiting officers come looking for labourers to work in Johannesburg. Like Jim, he decides to leave his family behind but the romantic tone of African Jim is discarded immediately in that Rogosin clearly identifies the economic force behind labour migration in South Africa. Zacharia manages to find work as a miner then decides to get a permit that will allow him to
work off the compound. He secures another job as a domestic worker but does not get along very well with his fussy employer who soon fires him for his “cheek”. A friend then helps Zacharia to get a job at the garage where he works but Zacharia loses this as well after they go on a joyride with one of the cars. Meanwhile, his wife Vinah arrives from KwaZulu with their children and they must find a place for the family to stay in Sophiatown. With his employment trouble Zacharia finds that he cannot adequately support his family so Vinah gets a job as a live-in domestic worker. Zacharia is arrested for spending the night with her at her job and she returns home to Sophiatown where Maramu, a gangster from the area, murders her. Zacharia returns home from the station and finds her dead. The film ends on a note of despair as he breaks down, crying and smashing his fists against a table.

Perhaps the first significant sign of the film’s investment in this more realistic socio-political setting is that it was shot on-location in Sophiatown—shortly before the area was completely destroyed following the forced removal of blacks to the South Western Townships (Soweto) of Johannesburg under the Resettlement Act. By the time it was completely destroyed in November 1959, it was home to about 70,000 many of whom had come during the 1920s-30s to work in the mines. As a freehold area, Sophiatown offered African families a rare chance to own property or become long-term tenants and this in turn engendered a “sense of community, with institutions and a social identity that served as a defence against the dehumanisation of the labour system” (Coplan171). Africans were determined to hold on to the alternative lifestyle and mores that they had created in the city and the very act of living in Sophiatown was a political protest against the totalising reach of the authorities. Sophiatown was a veritable cultural crucible during the 1950s and an emblem of cosmopolitanism that defied separatist apartheid policies. Not only was the area multi-racial but it also acted as an arena for cultural and intellectual expression that was otherwise unavailable during the 1940s-50s. The fringe culture that developed was a space of mediation between rural and urban
practices of identity and a bridge between various ethnic and cultural expressions. For this reason Sophiatown is symbolic and

...lingers in South African argot as a short-hand for 1950s cultural brio— for the journalists and fiction writers, the shebeen queens presiding over speakeasies, and the jazz artists and gangsters who revered style…the legacy of Sophia defies simple resolution. It is a sign of apartheid at its most calamitous, yet also a guiding memory of possibility—a gravestone that doubles as a beacon (Nixon qtd. in Balseiro & Masilela 91).

The significance of black cultural expressions to the very character of Sophiatown indicates the extent to which black South Africans left their mark on and effectively altered ‘white’ cities. The opening sequence hints at this cultural superimposition by alternating between images of the mines and city that are accompanied by the distinctive sounds of the balafon, drums and mbira and images that have no accompanying sound. The scenes that are not accompanied provide a sense of the desolation and dehumanisation that is inherent to the process of denying black identities and their place in the urban tapestry. When juxtaposed with the scenes that are musically accompanied there is a further suggestion of the state’s dependence on black South Africans who are in fact the lifeline of the city and economy, despite attempts to keep them on the outskirts.

It is important to note however, that middle and working class Africans did not have a homogenous view of city life and the range of performance cultures captured in the film reflects this differentiation. The musical forms referenced in Come Back, Africa foreground the experience of migrant workers and the working class and will be used to outline the various phases and responses to resocialisation into city life. These provide a look at how performance was reinterpreted and used to respond to power by a majority that was often only
able to intone their protestations using the phraseology of culture. Unlike African Jim where the enclosed, controlled space of the Ngoma Club provided the stage for veiled political protest the streets are featured as the main stage in Come Back, Africa and this was an important part of staking claims to public space and the right to a political voice. This is perhaps due to a combination of factors: Rogosin’s liberalism; the collaboration between him and the Sophiatown intellectuals Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi and Can Themba, all journalists with the popular Drum magazine developed in Johannesburg in the 1950s for a black urban readership; and the more central role of trade unionism and the mobilisation of the working class during the 1950s anti-apartheid struggle.

In their haste to disavow anything they saw as a throwback to a tribalist past a void was often created in the work of the Sophiatown intellectuals. Sophiatown, though, was not so much a space removed from its ethnic ‘past’ as it was one in which these origins were synthesised and mobilised to create something more reflective of the experience of the city and of the liminal nature of these black urban centres. Gumboot performance, for example, provides an important reference to mine culture –the strictly controlled world of both work and leisure– that developed alongside the gold industry. The aesthetics of this dance are shaped by the context of the workspace and “narrate the details of the rigid labour relations found within the confines of the mine” (Muller and Fargion 92). Its mixed origins –the dance performance aspect was derived from the Bhaca and the music from the Zulu– already refer to the cultural contact and exchange that often occurred in areas surrounding the mines. Apartheid’s economic impulse was therefore directly, though inadvertently, fostering the very intermingling it sought to restrict and a recontextualisation of so-called tradition, which was also essential to its discourse. The influence on gumboot of American culture, which is seen in the elements of minstrel performance, missions, tap dance and other popular dances that accompanied jazz of the 1930s and 40s, extends this process of cultural interrelatedness.
beyond the shores of South Africa to produce a palimpsest that testifies to the networked practice of black identity. However, it is the work environment of the mines that was most crucial to the development of gumboot performance. The gumboots, overalls and hardhats worn by mine workers, the construction of the dance sequence through the use of fanakalo commands that were often shouted by white supervisors and the presence of a team leader that calls out these commands to the other performers, all make clear reference to the larger master/servant relationship that characterised the status quo in the workplace. By performing their supposed subservience miners were in fact satirising their work conditions by transforming it into a form of spectacle. Other commands also made reference to the homes and loved ones the miners had left behind and these attest to a sense of memory and nostalgia similar to that encountered in African Jim, though it is more directly referred to here. When juxtaposed with the early scenes of the miners’ working conditions underground, the gumboot performance demonstrates the relationship between the economic impulse behind apartheid and the cultural methods of rehumanisation used by these same workers.

Fanakalo was a sort of lingua franca used in the mines and was often used for writing miners’ manuals. Its use therefore serves as a reminder and satirisation of the socio-economic system during performance. Africans often saw it as a defilement of their indigenous languages.
The kiba performance, another instance of working class culture, complicates this however. It is a rural dance considered as characteristic of northern Sotho traditional music and remained very ethnicity-bound even in the mixed urban context where it was performed primarily by male migrant workers newly arrived from their home villages. This, as well as its role as a social support system for these migrants still unfamiliar with city ways, perhaps accounts for its less incorporative nature and relative preservation as an ‘authentic’ form. For the Sotho, the importance of preserving their ethnic identity may also be related to the fact that they were one of the few nations to withstand the Difaqane –the expansion of the Zulu kingdom under king and military leader Shaka Zulu–, the voortrekkers and the British. Facing a new threat of dislocation, this time generated by apartheid, the military idiom of traditional kiba acquires a new relevance and is used to stave off the effects of a dehumanising socio-economic system. In this sense the collective ethos that is typical of kiba in its original context where it is used for social and political negotiation and for the initiation of members into the community, also extends to the urban environment. The function of this social mechanism is also evident in the fact that once migrants become more urbanised or attain greater mobility and the security that this affords they often abandon their kiba groups because these are now seen as socially inappropriate (James 462).

A similar disdain was exhibited towards the kwela pennywhistlers, who were held in low esteem by the more professional middle-class jazz artists. Kwela was the domain of young boys, often street urchins who had come to Johannesburg to work as domestics and who could only afford the cheap pennywhistles. Unlike kiba, however, it was a distinctively urban sound and not associated with any specific ethno-regional group. As is often the case with popular music, which is seen as frivolous because of its mass appeal and association with low-culture, the latent political potential of kwela was underestimated. For one, it was an example of the appropriation of a European instrument –which was not really dissimilar to
African reed pipes to begin with that was now inscribed with the signature of African inflections. Even the dance that came to be associated with it, the patha patha (Xhosa for touch), was conceived as a satiric imitation of police frisking. It was not until Miriam Makeba’s “Pata Pata” became an international hit in the late 1960s that kwela came to be regarded as more classy and acceptable. The non-ethnic nature of kwela should have irked the apartheid regime but the SABC’s black urban programmes often aired kwela songs. This can be interpreted as a discreet admission that there were now black urban identities that the authorities could do nothing to erase but which also provided an opportunity to promote a type of urban tribalism, which played more on class as opposed to ethnic differences. However, as pan-Africanism advanced, kwela was embraced by the black elite as a truly African cultural expression and an inter-ethnic political tool that challenged the core of apartheid. Furthermore, it became a point of inter-racial contact – white South Africans often had their first encounter with township culture through the street pennywhistlers – and a form of rebellion for young, white liberals. The white Liberal Party even went so far as to invite pennywhistlers to perform at their social gatherings as an act of defiance.

*Kwela boys (Come Back, Africa)*

Come Back, Africa, also develops on the relationship between music, politics and religion introduced in *African Jim*. The group of men from the Bantu Methodist Church
(dubbed the “Donkey Church” after the symbol they adopted to represent the holiness of Christ who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey) singing hymns through the streets of the township recalls this overlapping and the increasingly important role of the Church in the fight for African self-rule as apartheid became more restrictive. The BMC was formed in Johannesburg in 1933 after breaking away from the Methodists and is part of the Ethiopianist tradition of African religious independentism that became prevalent in South Africa in the late 19th century (Anderson 56). The alliance between colonial regimes and European churches undermined the missionaries’ Gospel of “neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free” thereby prompting secession and the indigenisation of Christianity (New International Version Gal. 3.28). The pan-African ideals and black consciousness associated with Ethiopianism, a politico-messianic movement seeking cultural and political liberation, were considered a real threat by whites who feared it would lead to widespread black revolt (Elphick and Davenport 214). The pervasiveness and political influence of the movement is seen in that it transcended ethnic, economic and social categories with many members holding important positions in the

Sophiatown “Donkey Church” (BMC) members singing local hymns (Come Back, Africa)

undermined the missionaries’ Gospel of “neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free” thereby prompting secession and the indigenisation of Christianity (New International Version Gal. 3.28). The pan-African ideals and black consciousness associated with Ethiopianism, a politico-messianic movement seeking cultural and political liberation, were considered a real threat by whites who feared it would lead to widespread black revolt (Elphick and Davenport 214). The pervasiveness and political influence of the movement is seen in that it transcended ethnic, economic and social categories with many members holding important positions in the

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18 Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (eds.) “Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History”. ‘Ethiopia’ is derived from the Greek for ‘land of burnt faces’ and was commonly used to refer to all of black Africa. Numerous Biblical references to Ethiopia such as Psalm 68:31 “Let Ethiopia stretch forth her hands to God” and the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip (Acts 8) were interpreted to mean that Africans did not need Western churches to act as intermediaries for them. As the only African country that was never colonised, Ethiopia also became a symbol of the possibility of African self-determination.
ANC. Part of the Africanisation of Christianity was through the translation of hymns into local languages, which was particularly common in Ethiopianist churches because of their emphasis on preserving cultural identity. For this reason, a key symbol for Ethiopianists is Ntsikana, an early 19th century Xhosa imbongi (praise poet), who accepted Christianity but rejected its Western cultural imperialism, who composed hymns in the Xhosa izibongo style (Kashcula 111). As a form of political and socio-regulative importance, izibongo celebrated Africanness and the politicisation of religious lyrics in order to reflect the lot of black South Africans is a part of this philosophy19. The defiant slant of this izibongo poetic style is accentuated by the fact that it was revived during the 1980s when it was often used in protest demonstrations and toyi-toyi performances, which will be examined later. The blurring of the line between the secular and the sacred is also a foundational feature of African society that contextualises this use of religious music. The men’s presence in the same streets where the secular kwela, kiba and gumboot are performed, cements this sense of cohabitation.

The sense of a thriving politico-cultural climate soon came up against the Grand Apartheid policies of the 1960s and 70s, which attempted to ensure that such disruptions of hegemonic discourse were made virtually impossible. The Sharpeville massacre of 1960 – which came just a few months after the film’s release–, the subsequent banning of the ANC and the Pan African Congress (PAC) and the Rivonia trial of 1963 in which ten ANC leaders, including Nelson Mandela, were sentenced to life imprisonment, all cleared the way for Prime Minister Verwoerd to implement his vision of a multi-national state. Nothing of the political situation was dealt with overtly in the comedies, war romances, adventure stories and wildlife features produced in the early 1960s. Furthermore, the South African film industry functioned according to a system of state subsidies that mirrored apartheid strategies by establishing a

19 This is exemplified in the BMC’s “An Exultant Song of the Donkey Church”: We are children of black Africa/ We rise from all the lands south of Africa/ We are the black Wesleyans, we come from all nations/ We approach our God while offering our prayers/ We are children of black Africa/ We come to pray for the deliverance of the Blacks (Elphick & Davenport 216).
clear distinction between films produced for black audiences and films for Afrikaners (Maingard 125; Botha 50).

In the late 1960s, however, there was a resurgence in resistance activities, and with the 1976 Soweto student uprising a period of intensified armed struggle was ushered in that would be sustained till the abolition of apartheid. The revival of black opposition was due in large part to the Black Consciousness Movement, which, ironically, grew out of the blacks-only universities established after 1959 by the NP in fulfilment of its system of racially separate education. The ideas came from a variety of ideological sources such as Black Power exponents Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, and Malcolm X, Liberation and Black Theology\textsuperscript{20}, Léopold Sédar Senghor’s negritude, Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda and Kwame Nkrumah (Hirschmann 3). Moreover, following the Soweto uprising, thousands of young people fled South Africa with many joining uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) – the military-wing of the ANC formed after the Sharpeville massacre– at their training bases in Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania. Many of these returned in the 1980s and played a central role in the guerrilla offensive mounted against the South African Defence Force (SADF).

The government continued to widen police powers of detention and in 1983, under P.W. Botha, made the mistake of creating a tricameral parliament, which did not allow for black South African representation –seeing that their political rights were restricted to the so-called homelands. This triggered the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF), which headed mass civil society protests, and by the mid-1980s action campaigns such as strikes, protests and boycotts were making the country “ungovernable”. The political tension

\textsuperscript{20} Black Theology was closely aligned with Black Consciousness. It sought to replace the principle of a universal theology mediated by rich oppressors/whites/colonisers/racists with a situational interpretation reflective of the suffering of the oppressed and of their struggle against apartheid. This would retain the black man’s faith in the Christian religion, and allow him to find resources in the Gospel to reinforce his resistance to domination.
eventually led to a state of emergency being declared in 36 magisterial districts in July 1985 and over the entire nation on June 12, 1986. By the end of that year over 30,000 activists had been detained, curfews imposed, political gatherings prohibited and censorship made more widespread. In the midst of this national upheaval a growing anti-apartheid coalition of cultural, youth, church and political organisations, as well as trade unions, continued to attack the apartheid structure head-on. Cultural mobilisation began to occupy a more central post in the political movement against apartheid with the Culture of Resistance Conference organised by the ANC in Botswana in 1982 and the formation of the Amandla dance troupe. This was further consolidated by the oppositional filmmaking fostered by the Film and Allied Workers Organisation (FAWO) created in 1988; a cultural call to arms had been made and progressive filmmakers were now better positioned at the frontlines of the apartheid resistance.

This “decade of defiance” was the political crucible in which early oppositional films began to take form. *Mapantsula* (1988) is the most important anti-apartheid film to emerge before the dismantling of the regime and it is vital to situate the musical tone of the film within the events leading up to the volatile political environment of the 1980s. By then music had moved from being a mere reflection of the early years of apartheid in the 1950s to a tool with which to confront the state and construct an alternative political and social reality. For the first half of the 20th century songs were experiential rather than confrontational and commented on political issues such as land expropriation and forced removals, the perils of labour migration, about Acts like the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, the Slums Clearance Act of 1933, and the Group Areas Act of 1950, government-controlled drinking halls and ethnic quarrels (Gray 89). As seen in *African Jim*, protest during this period remained subtle and was articulated primarily on a musical level through the use of distinctively African material. With the intensification of political oppression protest songs began to emerge and became increasingly popular and overtly critical of apartheid. By the 1980s, music and song
were being used to confront the state apparatus directly in order to further weaken its failing
authority. Music now sought to actively push through political change and to alter the
political landscape in South Africa (Schumann 31). Several examples of the militancy of this
music can be seen in *Mapantsula* through the use of liberation songs and the iconic toyi-toyi.

Due to the censorship conditions under the state of emergency, however, the Directorate
of Publications was presented with a fake script that fit a set of censorship practices
historically designed to portray whites as civilised and benevolent and non-whites as savages.
*Mapantsula* was presented as a black gangster film similar to those encouraged by the
authorities. The generic slant of these films was seen as a favourable allegorisation of the
need for and the efficiency of the system of law and order and was particularly resonant in a
police state such as South Africa. Moreover, such pulp films were seen as devoid of
politically subversive material and often portrayed the state as the ultimate victor because of
its ability to recontain the outlaw who was usually captured, punished or even killed at the
hands of the police. Schmitz’s film, however, subverts the iconography of the apolitical
criminal who is eventually subjugated by the law. Though the film does centre on a gangster,
Panic, who at the beginning of the film is not engaged with the political climate, his path is
eventually redirected by the events around him.

Panic rents a room in the township from Ma Modise –played by Dolly Rathebe almost
forty years after her film debut as Judy in *African Jim*, a much less militant film– who lives
with her son Sam, an unemployed and increasingly politicised young man²¹. Panic’s
girlfriend, Pat, works as a live-in domestic worker in a white neighbourhood. After a dispute
between Panic and Pat’s employer, who objects to him visiting Pat at work, he breaks a

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²¹ Rathebe was dubbed the “First Bantu Film Star” by Drum magazine after her role in *African Jim*. She also
featured in *The Magic Garden* (1951) and had a successful recording career that was cut short by the Sharpeville
massacre. In her latter years she was involved in community work and development as a member of the Ikageng
Women’s League. The change in the nature of the characters played by Rathebe is notable and alludes to the
hardening of the apartheid struggle. While Judy has no political affiliations in *African Jim* the Ma Modise
character in *Mapantsula* suffers directly from the impact of the social unrest.
window in retaliation, causing Pat to lose her job. Tired for some time now of his behaviour, Pat decides she has had enough and ends the relationship. Sam introduces her to Duma, an activist who works for an organisation that defends the rights of domestic workers. Meanwhile, Sam goes missing during a police raid in the township. Panic decides to help Ma Modise and goes looking for him. In his search he is advised to find Duma, who may have some information. As he does so he happens to find out that Pat is now seeing Duma and is now even more determined to find the latter. He does eventually catch up with him but the police have been trailing Panic who leads them straight to Duma. The two escape together and Panic puts Duma up at his place for the night. Next day they go to a public demonstration with Ma Modise who still has no news of her son. The police try to break up the gathering, an illegal political funeral, and Ma Modise is shot. Panic is arrested in the confusion that ensues but Duma manages to flee. In prison he shares a cell with some militant UDF comrades. In exchange for his freedom the police try to coerce him into signing a document to the effect that Duma is an arms smuggler. The film ends with Panic’s refusal to cooperate.

When it came time for distribution the final edit was, predictably, deemed unacceptable and would only be passed on the condition that overtly political scenes be cut from the film. It was then approved for adult audiences only with a limited number of screenings to a restricted set of viewers during the Weekly Mail Film Festival in 1989 (Maingard 150). It was, however, passed for video distribution because the censors concluded that the real threat lay in “the large screen [which] amplifies the dangerous political effects the film could have on probable viewers in this country” (Davis 121). This fear admits to the political capacity of cinema and to an assumedly differential pattern of audience reactions based on well-known racial stereotypes. The “likely viewer” euphemism was a common one, which allowed the state to talk about race without mentioning race (Rivers 112). The conclusion here is that blacks would constitute the major audience for the theatrical version and would necessarily
react in a violent way because they are irrational ‘savages’. This would be particularly problematic in a cinema where fairly large groups could gather to look at the film and is, therefore, an extension of the state’s strict policing of the right to assembly. The decision in favour of video certification also makes reference to another set of “likely viewers”, whites, who presumably could afford video players, and would not react in the same way as blacks because the apartheid system was designed to protect them (Rivers 116). General release of the original cut only came in 1992 as the apartheid regime was on its way out.

As with African Jim and Come Back, Africa, it was the idea of musicality that was used to veil the film’s anti-apartheid message. The mask used is that of the mapantsula, which the film begins by defining as a phenomenon of “South African street gangs identified by their style of clothing and music”\(^\text{22}\). However, Mapantsula is not a mere celebration of this culture, rather, it was the first film “to both recognize and explicitly disavow insurgent consumption, theft, and fashion as an adequate basis for political radicalism, and the first film to make the tsotso the figure in and through whom the question of political oppositionality is framed as one of consciousness (of interest and shared interests) and not only form and desire” (Morris 102). Panic, the protagonist, is first framed within this culture of criminality and consumerism but begins to change when he finds himself in a cell with UDF members who embody the direct alignment between culture and militant political resistance.

These detainees express their political convictions and the context of the late 1980s primarily through the songs that they sing. Initially Panic stands out from the ‘comrades’ because of his smart suit, two-tone shoes and use of tsotsitaal. The first time he is seen as a part of the group he is singing with them as they embark on a hunger strike. The song is:

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22 Though it initially referred to a style of dress, pantsula grew into a culture (fighting skills, recklessness, proficiency in tsotsitaal argot, success with women) and eventually a dance form. In post-apartheid South Africa pantsula culture has become an important voice of the youth and offers opportunities to young men who otherwise have no support.
Ibambeni we bafana       Take part in the battle young me
Ibambeni we sinziswa     Get into the battle you boys
Isibamu zala bafana      The guns of these boys
sinkhumbuza eMozambiki   remind me of Mozambique

This song references Mozambique, which was an important symbol for South Africa because the Frente de Libertacão de Moçambique (FRELIMO), the Mozambican guerrilla fighters, had defeated the Portuguese and won the country’s independence in 1975. It also calls to mind the black party politics and socialist ideas –brought back by ANC guerrillas trained in Mozambique under FRELIMO– which were desirable alternatives to apartheid. The song, therefore, acts as a sort of recruitment strategy and signals the beginning of Panic’s re-evaluation of his political indifference. This scene occurs after the confrontation between Panic and his girlfriend’s employer and before an interrogation session where Stander, the Afrikaner officer, tries to intimidate him into cooperating. When he is returned to his cell he is accused by one of the comrades of being a sell out and the song begins again as if to remind him of where his allegiances should lie and the urgency of the decision before him. It also situates this discourse of violent resistance within the context of aggression facing black South Africans.

Another such example of political induction is seen when Pat attends a union meeting after being fired by her employer following the incident with Panic. Before the meeting everyone is singing a popular refrain from “Siyaya ePitoli” (We are marching to Pretoria), which was a popular defiance song in the 1950s. The “siyaya” call was later revived in the song “Sasolburg”, which was composed following the coordinated attacks against four South Africa Coal, Oil And Gas (SASOL) plants carried out by MK Special Operations forces on 1 June 1980, South Africa’s Republic Day. The cry consequently became a metaphor for
challenging the narrative of South Africa’s history and validity as a nation and the exploitative capitalistic system with which this is intertwined. The trade union setting also highlights the growing power of the South African working class, which in itself complicates the apartheid question as one based on the racialisation of what were ultimately economic interests.

The collective and therapeutic aspects of the use of freedom songs are also revealed as important in the film. “Dubula Nge Mbayimbayi” (Shoot them with Cannons), for instance, begins on a note of lamentation with the comrades singing in a dimly lit cell. The pathos is accentuated by the presence of the very young prisoners who have to be assisted with their washing by the older men. This introduces a theme of brotherhood and unity, which were at the heart of the UDF slogan “apartheid divides, UDF unites”. As they sing the rhythm increases and they transition into a typical toyi-toyi routine, which was possibly the preeminent model of collective performance of the 1980s. Though the UDF did not participate in the armed struggle and these prisoners have no means by which to shoot anyone, the message of resistance at all costs is clear.

Perhaps the most direct reference to the radicalisation of cultural forms is through the toyi-toyi, which became part of the cultural offensive in the 1980s. Toyi-toyi was first introduced to South Africa by MK soldiers who had trained alongside ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army) in Zimbabwe where it was originally used as part of military routines to sustain the pace of training drills. The basic leg movement of the toyi-toyi is similar to marching thus creating an image of the performers as soldiers. On arrival in South Africa it was appropriated by young militants and infused with elements of traditional dance and political slogans to produce a new form of protest performance that was part of a “highly visible political discourse” that directly challenged the tyrannical political climate (van Schalkwyk 3). The state inadvertently confirmed the potential power of toyi-toyi to influence
and communicate political ideas when it attempted to portray performers as unruly, violent mobs. The supposed threat of the “swart gevaar” (black danger) that was embodied in the toyi-toyi became a justification for the growing militarisation of state apparatus deployed for the protection of white society and property.

In this light, the film’s opening sequence of a police round up of people attending a political funeral during which the crowd was toyi-toying illustrates the immediacy of the setting and strikes a very clear note. The scene begins with a police van driving through the street of a township, children running away hurriedly as it approaches. The detainees are then seen enclosed in the van as the voice of a policeman orders the crowd to stop their nonsense and return home. He describes their activities as illegal and in breach of the Internal Security Act and warns that they will be removed by force if they fail to comply. This warning is then disrupted by a cut to the crowd shouting slogans that call for the direct and violent confrontation of Boers. Also, as was often done in real protests when facing members of the SADF, they enact a shooting scene using their hands whilst dancing, and shouting “ta” repeatedly to mimic the sound of an AK-47. This routine was a metaphor for militant political struggle with the toyi-toyi performers as freedom fighters in the then ongoing people’s war.

Toyi-toyi offenders ‘shooting’ at the SADF (Mapantsula)
With the initiation in 1923 of Pass Laws that classified urban areas as white spaces the movement of black bodies was under constant state surveillance and the strict administration of public space became a marker of political control. Given the collective and dynamic nature of the toyi-toyi in which crowds move from one destination to another the performance was a symbolic reclaiming of public space. Furthermore, given its history as the object of violent repression under apartheid ideology, the body operates here as an important site of resistance and counter-hegemonic political force that resists domination.

The openly defiant nature of the toyi-toyi was often complemented by the use of liberation songs and by integrating the toyi-toyi into the funeral processions of anti-apartheid supporters. During the burial of Ma Modise’s son, Sam, MK militants are seen bearing the coffin of the slain young man whilst singing “Oliver Tambo thetha na Botha, akhulul’ uMandela, uzobusa”. This topical song from the mid-1980s calls for Oliver Tambo, the president of the ANC, to get Botha to release Mandela so that he can be the country’s ruler. By the time of the film’s release in 1988 the apartheid government had been forced to open dialogue with jailed leaders of the struggle though Botha was unwilling to release Mandela unless he renounced the use of violence, which Mandela refused to do. The UDF flags and political banners further transform this into an event in which “deceased leaders become martyrs and their funeral assumes a political character…[and] by attending the funeral, mourners were showing solidarity with and support for the cause of liberation” (van Schalkwyk 54). Religious structure then is resignified as a cultural outlet that can facilitate a type of discourse that was being prohibited by the state. The scene also subverts what was commonly depicted as black irrationality and savagery by locating the militants within a superstructure of violence perpetrated against them because it was the police that killed Sam. Whereas the state used violence to construct and maintain an unjust method of government the opposition was fighting to restore a system that represented all equally.
It is also important to note that this event is broken up into three parts in the film and traces the growing politicisation of Panic, who initially had no affiliations. In the opening scene he is detained because he merely decided to accompany Ma Modise to the funeral. He is not seen singing or performing with the rest of the crowd and is even half asleep in the police van as they are being transported to the station. His apathy clearly contrasts with the fervour of the crowd around him, a juxtaposition that is reinforced in his prison cell. The event features again after he is tortured by the police who threaten to throw him out a window from the upper floors of the station if he refuses to cooperate. His reticence is evidence of a growing transformation given that he had previously helped the police as an informant. It all culminates in the final scene where the police make him look at a video of the funeral where he is clearly identifiable among the “terrorists”. Ironically, what was supposed to intimidate Panic into helping the police seems to be the tipping point. What they see as evidence of an illegal activity brings back for him memories of their heavy-handed response to the crowd and causes him to finally voice a resounding “no” to his torturers. This ending underscores not just the link between political empowerment and public performance but also the need for collective responses to systemic discrimination. This is precisely what was feared by the Directorate of Publications, which banned the theatrical release of the film.
Even under apartheid the business of cinema was not as black and white as the authorities would have liked to make the public, or themselves for that matter, believe. Despite the seemingly apolitical agenda of the texts, which may appear as straightforward entertainment films that shun meaningful discussions of social injustices through the creation of utopian spaces, the socio-cultural subtexts of music and performance often managed to complicate what may otherwise have been misinterpreted as fairly unsophisticated texts. The narratives of music aid in the reconfiguration of black identities that could never be fully contained by the myth of apartheid’s impenetrability.
Chapter 3: Tracing Traditional African Orature and Popular Music in National Cinemas

Nationalist mythology—and its attendant agenda of homogenising the national body, frequently through historical falsification— is often deployed through the careful construction of representational narratives. Hegemony’s version of national identity can, therefore, be described as an essentially fictitious portrayal of nation as a cohesive, linear and hermetic space (Hobsbawm 6; Balibar 87). This chapter will examine the potential of counter-hegemonic depictions to contest, complicate and expand the conventional notions of African national identities. It will examine the ways in which the traditional and the contemporary in the form of indigenous patterns of African orature and contemporary popular music are integrated into cinema to create more nuanced representations of African identities by reconfiguring “imagined communities”. These films recover sites of history, interrogate postcolonial treatments of exile, diasporic communities and the increasingly slippery domain of practising identity in hybrid spaces. These factors are diametrically opposed to the monolithic, rigid structure of conservative visions of belonging, hence their capacity to initiate a remapping of the borders of nation.

Mphande describes African orature as a “strategic communal tool for non-literate societies in their consolidation and socialization processes” that can be used to both praise and criticise those in authority because of the flexible nature of its performance and interpretation (580). African oral forms can be separated into those that adhere to a strict set of performance aesthetics enframed by religion or ritual and those that are more freely interpreted and shaped by both the performer and spatio-temporal context. The former includes genres such as incantations and praise and funeral songs with a strong emphasis on stylised language because of the non-everyday nature of the events and the significance of the spoken word in traditional society. The second category is often comprised of creation myths, legends and folk tales,
which perform an array of philosophical, moral and didactic functions. Myths and legends usually reflect an attempt to organise and explain human and natural phenomenon that exceed the rational and mundane world, which is often done through the language of the supernatural. Epics are designed as a repository of historical and genealogical material that preserves the collective identity of the group.

The primary mode of enacting orature is performance and this in turn hinges on the presence of a communal space, which is often mediated through song and dance. Performance therefore acts as an integrative agent that brings together performer, audience, text and mode of execution. Consequently, it is vital that the total performance context be taken into account in order to peel back its layers of meaning. This endeavour more efficiently captures the ideational world of nyama –a complex African concept referring to a vital power/force that imbues and controls everything including the word/language– on which these performances are often predicated and is a necessary approach to oral literary studies “because it [is] ultimately aimed at representing social man in a creative capacity within the context of a system of signs recognized by his community” (Okpewho 3). Finnegan corroborates this viewpoint when she states that “we are now more sensitized to the importance of looking to the ‘communicative event’ and its inner dynamics as a whole, to the constructive interaction of many participants ... and to a whole range of non-verbal as well as verbal stylistics ... and of ways in which ‘performance’ may need to be seen not as an ‘extra’ to the poetic genre but as of its essence” (x). This can be related to Victor Turner’s theory of performance based on a system of social drama according to which traditional ceremony works to both cement communal ties and to highlight areas of fundamental social tension. Social dramas are conceptualised as measures of harmonic or disharmonic social practices that are generated by conflict situations and as a carefully designed method of public action that incorporate four phases: rupture, trauma/crisis, mediation and either reintegration of rival forces and a return to
normalcy or a remaining split between them (92). His assertion that the main modes of cultural performance and narration are rooted in the social drama, which continues to sustain them, will be examined against four films that represent various manifestations of this process. *Sia, le rêve du python* (2001) is perhaps the most firmly anchored in traditional performance sources while *Karmen Geï* (2001), overlays the traditional with more contemporary modes. The other two concentrate on modern urban popular expressions with *Babylon* (1981) examining the transposition of African performance aesthetics to the diaspora and *Tsotsi* (2005), the impact of the post-apartheid era on music, which was directly engaged with the battle for equality.

The jeli emerges as one of the central figures of the West African “communicative event” because of the responsibility entrusted to his/her office23. As Thackway explains:

In a culture in which the word takes on [such] importance, it is unsurprising that there are people who ‘specialize’ in the word. While commonly referred to under the generic term griot, this non-indigenous term masks a multitude of roles and statuses that vary from one ethnic group or region to another. A griot’s functions may range from that of scholar, mediator or advisor to that of musician and storyteller or parasitic scandalmonger; hence the fact that the griot is sometimes revered, sometimes despised. Irrespective of status, however, the griot is always considered capable of manipulating the sacred force of the word (233).

Jelis are important figures in the musical landscape of Mali, Senegal, Guinea and the neighbouring countries and their skills usually encompass speech (this usually consists of history, stories, genealogies and proverbs), song and instrument playing. Their office is

23 This term, and the designated functions of its practitioners, often changes depending on the ethnic group involved eg. guwel or géwel (Wolof), mabo or gawlo (Fulbe), geseré or jaaré (Soninké), jeseré (Songhay) and marok’i (Hausa). The term griot is often used in the West but is reductive and not recognised as an African term.
passed on through bloodlines—as it is traditionally an inherited position assigned to a particular family that functions as part of a specific social group—and specialised training. Though often described as mere “praise singers”, since this is the most obvious of their functions, jelis actually perform many other duties. For instance, in the 1352 expedition of the Berber explorer Ibn Battuta to the Malian empire, which provides the first clear documentation of the jelis, we find that they also served as councillors to leaders, negotiators in fragile socio-political situations and teachers of the king’s male offspring. Hale further catalogues their various duties as being those of “historians, genealogists, advisors, spokespersons, diplomats, interpreters, musicians, composers, poets, teachers, exhorters, town criers, reporters, and masters of or contributors to a variety of ceremonies (naming, initiation, weddings, installations of chiefs, and so on)” (Hale 250). Though they do not all fulfil all of these functions—some of which are gender-specific or have become obsolete with time—they are most commonly regarded as “artisans and shapers of sound...[that] shape and transform events through their words and music” (Charry 90). This will be examined in terms of Hymes’ “ethnography of speaking” which examines language in specific “situations and uses, [and] the patterns and functions of speaking as an activity in its own right” (101). This approach serves to demonstrate more comprehensively how the jeli’s performance enacts a directed socio-regulative function, which continues to hold sway in the cultural contexts of the societies in question.

As “masters of the word” who are granted poetic licence and have an obligation to the truth, jelis produce acts of communication that may be intended for praise or defiance in a process that parallels social and political protocols and hence are often seen in ambiguous terms because of the fear of the words spoken or sung by them. Licence in the context of ritual, however, underscores that “it is not the performer that is licensed but the performance” (Vail & White 57). Public social action against authority is permitted solely within these
parameters and each performer is therefore “licensed by and in the act of performing, it is
never the social status of the performer as such which sanctions the critical content of action,
it is the medium” (Kresse 182). In this sense the performances constitute a flexible tradition
of interweaving art and politics into social life, which challenges the notion of traditional
authority as static and fixed (Bloch). This must be understood within the framework of
African customary law that was practised in most indigenous societies. Under this system
political offices were considered sacred and kings and chiefs were not held above the law but
had to respect the significant limitations on their power, which had been established in order
to protect the interests of the group. Performers, therefore, often played a part in socio-
political regulation, a role that was more than simply symbolic because in a culture of
leadership through consensus their relationship to power could seriously undermine those in
authority (Elias 98-99). The idea that ritualised opposition supplants actual aggression is
perhaps “the greatest shortcoming of the safety-valve position…. The argument that offstage
or veiled forms of aggression offer a harmless catharsis that helps preserve the status quo
assumes that we are examining a rather abstract debate in which one side is handicapped
rather than a concrete, material struggle” (Scott 187). As Wise points out however, the
nyamakala social group is not limited to the jeli, as is often argued in the West. It includes
blacksmiths, tanners, hunters, basket weavers and Islamic praise singers and so any discussion
of the jelis apart from this reality “not only exaggerates their social significance, it also
promotes a distorted image of the West African bard as a kind of folk troubadour” (21). The
ambivalent position of the jelis also comes from the conception of nyama as an “apparent
contiguity between power and filth [which] implies the danger harbored by the power. The
world’s energy allowed to get out of hand could leave the world a fetid ruin” (McNaughton
qtd. in Wise 30). As such, the jeli potentially embodies a transgression of conventional
binaries that is both necessary yet scorned and highlights social paradoxes where issues of power are at play.

These traditional oral narrative codes have often been rearticulated in the form of “return to the source” films that are typically set in a pre-colonial, village space and rely on African history, legends and culture to develop the narrative (Diawara 140-166). Some have criticised these films as being representative of a pre-industrial Africa that reinforces many of the European myths about the continent and are sometimes seen as irrelevant to present-day issues. However, many directors, such as Gaston Kaboré, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Souleymane Cissé and Cheick Oumar Sissoko use these settings to connect past and present in multi-layered texts that pay homage to indigenous systems of knowledge while commenting on current events in a way that reinvigorates the old and authenticates the new.

*Siya, le rêve du python* is based, for instance, on the 7th century Wagadu epic that recounts the rise and fall of the Soninké empire though it incorporates elements that can also be easily applied to a contemporary setting. It is then the director’s personal interpretation of a collective cultural artefact that functions as a metaphor, which can be easily used to comment on a more current political climate in Burkina Faso. Many saw in *Siya* a direct reference to the December 1998 assassination of Norbert Zongo, an investigative journalist and editor in chief of the Burkinabé newspaper *L’Indépendant*. Zongo was killed along with three associates following his paper’s publication of a story linking members of the Presidential Guard and President Blaise Compaoré’s brother to the murder of the latter’s driver. Investigations were ongoing at the time of the film’s release and so Kerfa, the madman who spoke the truth and was killed for doing so, was interpreted as Zongo. According to Kouyaté, every time Kerfa came on screen viewers in the cinema would shout out Zongo’s name (Philippot Jan. 2002). A review in the Burkinabé newspaper *Le Journal du Soir* corroborates this in an article called the “Norbert Zongo affair and Political Strategy On Screen” and describes Kouyaté as a
“witness of his times” and \textit{Sia} as “a topical film of great relevance that invites introspection and demands that we look closely at the management of public affairs” and a “realistic and authentic portrayal of public life today” (Z.W. 14 Feb. 2001). The political implications of the filmic text even resonated across the border in neighbouring Ivory Coast where it was described as “a scathing attack on dictatorship in any form” and was said to recall the events of 1999-2000 when the coup d’état led by General Robert Guéï ousted President Bédié subsequently paving the way for Laurent Gbagbo to assume leadership (Boguy, \textit{Notre Voie} May, 2002).

In the film, Kaya Maghan, the king, is advised by the royal priests to sacrifice Sia, the virgin daughter of a noble family, to the python god as a form of appeasement. When the king’s jeli goes to inform Sia’s parents she overhears their conversation and runs away, finding temporary refuge at the house of the local madman, Kerfa. When she is finally found by the king’s soldiers, her fiancé, Mamadi, himself a soldier and nephew of the chief commander Wakhane, decides to rescue her by cutting off the python’s head and asks his uncle to help him. Wakhane, whose own daughter was sacrificed in the past, agrees because he sees it as an opportunity to portray his nephew as a national hero that can depose the wicked king. Meanwhile, Kerfa is arrested and killed and Sia is taken away in preparation for the ritual. On the night of the sacrifice she is led into the forest by the seven priests who rape her, as they did to the others before her. As she is being taken to the cave where the legendary python lives, and where they were in fact going to kill her in order to keep their actions secret, Mamadi arrives with some men and they pursue and kill the priests. Sia breaks the terrible news and reveals that there is in fact no serpent. When Mamadi tells Wakhane what happened the soldiers that accompanied them are killed so that the events can remain undisclosed. Mamadi is presented as the hero that defeated the god and Kaya Maghan is ousted. Sia, however, has lost her mind since the traumatic affair and is unwilling to play along despite
being coaxed by Mamadi. She leaves the palace after it is publicly announced that she has gone crazy and continues where Kerfa had left off as the local madwoman.

In *Sia* the multiple roles and responses to the jeli are represented through the use of different characters that take on aspects of this figure’s traditional duties. This is seen for instance in the oppositional characters of Kerfa, the madman, and Balla, the king’s jeli. Kerfa’s insanity represents a trespassing of borders, instability and a heightened sense of awareness and creative production. While Kerfa finds power and freedom of speech in his madness Balla is corrupt, and therefore impotent, because his words are corrupted by his sycophancy. From the very outset the film establishes Kerfa’s superior mastery of speech in the form of clever wordplay and a refrain that acts as a warning and cohesive narrative thread. He is first seen singing the recurring line “Misery, misery/ he who sows hardship will reap misery” as he walks through the town whilst stopping at intervals to sing to passersby. This interaction is typical of traditional performances in which the audience is addressed directly and encouraged to participate in the event. The political suggestion in the refrain is also evident as Kerfa publicly denounces the reign of Kaya Maghan as unimpressive and declares that it will soon come to an end. The unrest caused by the Zongo affair continued into 2000 when, despite a report by an Independent Commission of Inquiry that named six suspects and revealed that Zongo’s death was purely political, no arrests or charges were made (Amnesty International Report 2001). In the build-up to the film’s release the political landscape had been marked by pressure from various social sectors to end such impunity and police brutality. Though Compaoré was well into his twelfth year in office by this point, it was by no means his first encounter with public dissent. He had served under popular socialist president Thomas Sankara as Minister of State before deposing and killing him in a 1987 coup backed by the French. The 1991 elections that saw Compaoré officially elected as president had an abstention rate of over seventy percent in protest at the controversial means by which he
originally came to power. His regime was never quite able to get rid of this bloodstained image that was further tarnished by human rights abuses throughout his presidency and public support was at an all time low at the time of the film’s release given the latest excesses committed under his regime.

The underlying power of Kerfa’s words can be seen in the fact that he is beaten by the king’s soldiers because of his provocative actions. By engaging with the public Kerfa/the film invites a public response, which points to political engagement as a communal responsibility. This is reinforced at the close of the film, when Sia takes up his mantle. By this point she herself has gone crazy and is seen at a busy intersection addressing the public in the same words Kerfa used earlier and singing the same chorus about the rewards of creating hardship for others. His use of witty language and proverbs embellished by the sonority of repetition and rhymes further adds to the musicality of his performance given that in the African conception of music spoken language is considered musical (Bebey 17). Proverbs also play a regulatory role in society and form part of a codified knowledge system that is respected and held as a source of authority. For this reason, participants in indigenous African judicial rituals often presented their case through the use of proverbs. As part of a collective heritage, proverbs cite a cultural past and function as a tested foundation of wisdom that still holds true in the present (Arewa and Dundes 61). When Kerfa makes use of them he is therefore admonishing the return to a reliable path of guidance and justice that has been abandoned by the king.

The integrative nature of performance is also well illustrated when the king finds out that Sia has fled. He sends Balla and some of his soldiers to warn the town that accomplices will be punished severely and to announce that there is a reward of eighteen kilos of gold for anyone who can help find her. The scene cuts from them walking through the village with Balla making the decree to an enclosed area where a group of people is gathered. One man is
playing the fileh, a half calabash hand drum, while another is playing the bolon, a three-string instrument often played by jelis, as he sings “Don’t be afraid of death/Death spares no one/If you fear death, you will die/And if you are not afraid, you die all the same”. His singing is interrupted by Balla’s voice and then someone else begins singing “Human sacrifice is loathsome/Human life is sacred/I solemnly declare this!” These two instances of song function as a clear response to Kaya Maghan’s quest to find Sia and reflect his disconnection from the wishes of his subjects. When the scene then cuts to Kerfa singing his refrain about misery as Balla continues to walk about the village there is a further suggestion that Kaya Maghan’s ruthlessness will turn against him. The sequence finally ends as Balla returns to the palace with the music of the bolon heard earlier playing over the visuals. This piece not only introduces the public into the royal courtyard but also seems to portend Kerfa’s earlier declaration that Kaya Maghan is already dead. What may have seemed to refer to Sia’s fate earlier may in fact be a prophetic warning to the king.

Gaï Ramaka’s Karmen Geï also draws on traditional narratives but it perhaps goes a step further in that it fuses local African and external cultural expressions. In this instance the Carmen opera, which has become one of the most popular film adaptations with over eighty versions being produced to date, is overlaid with a distinctively Senegalese inflection that attempts to define some of the contours of its national identity. Interestingly, despite the association with Africa in Prosper Mérimée’s original work of 1845, where he makes many references to Egypt (the etymological source of the word “gypsy,” because the Roma were commonly thought to have originated there), and Nietzsche’s comment that Bizet’s opera had a clear African sensibility, Karmen Geï is the first to feature an African Carmen. In this retelling of the story Ramaka uses indigenous Senegalese music and dance to relocate the cultural overtones of the piece. Among the artistes featured are the sabar drumming ensemble of Doudou N’Diaye Rose, pop musician El Hadj N’Diaye, Julien Jouga’s choir and well-
known géwél Yandé Coudou Sène. The recontextualisation of a supposedly European classic challenges ideas about race, ethnicity, nationality and modern European aesthetics where blackness functioned as a measure of cultural relativism used to justify a set of supposedly universal, aesthetic judgements meant to distinguish between “authentic music” and, in the words of Hegel, “the most detestable noise” (Hegel 371)\textsuperscript{24}. At the least, therefore, \textit{Karmen} attempts to resist this symbolic violence by questioning orthodox histories of Western aesthetic judgement, taste and cultural value by resituating the myth in an undeniably African context\textsuperscript{25}.

The primary marker of this setting is perhaps the use of sabar in the film. In Senegal the jeli is known among the Wolof, the largest ethnic group, as a géwél and is most closely associated with the playing of the sabar drum, which also lends its name to the associated dance and event. Men traditionally perform the drumming while both the sabar event and dancing remain largely the domain of women. This distinction renders it a popular and slippery site of performance, which reflects gender politics and embodies many of the other aspects of appropriateness defined along lines such as caste, age, education and marital status (Heath 88). Heath describes it as “an apparent struggle for control” and an expression of resistance that allows women to exercise some measure of agency that is not otherwise accessible to them. This ritual licence is enacted in the provocative sabar performance in the opening scene where there is a clear attempt to portray the protagonist as emblematic of this autonomy.

\textsuperscript{24} Jacques Attali’s \textit{Noise: The Political Economy of Music} examines this distinction between the “official” music which represents the interests of hegemony and works to pacify and get people in alignment with that order and counter-musical “noise” which gives voice to the dissatisfaction of those excluded from power and trying to create a new social order. Attali claims that changes in the fundamental character of music often foreshadow wider social changes.

\textsuperscript{25} Otto Preminger’s \textit{Carmen Jones} (1954), which is one of the best-known adaptations, \textit{Carmen: A Hip Hopera} (USA, dir. Robert Townsend, 2001), starring Beyoncé Knowles and \textit{U-Carmen eKhayelitsha}, a 2005 South African operatic film by Mark Dornford-May, are other attempts to do the same.
The scene begins with Karmen assuming centre stage as she smiles directly at the camera and sits in a provocative manner, legs apart and thighs swaying to the music. In a reverse shot it is revealed that she is staring defiantly at a woman seated some distance away. Karmen then stands to her feet, much to the pleasure of the cheering inmates, and proceeds to dance erotically towards her. Karmen succeeds in getting the woman to dance with her and soon they are surrounded by a shouting mass of women in an array of colourful dresses. It is later revealed that Karmen manages to seduce the woman, who is in fact the warden, and subsequently secures her own release from prison. In a number of ways the scene is an attempt to openly flout the parameters of appropriateness and power. Firstly, the fact that Karmen’s dancing is framed as the main spectacle displaces the predominance often afforded drummers. Here they not only occupy the background and operate as a supporting mechanism for Karmen but a number of female drummers are also featured thereby accomplishing a double displacement of traditionalist values which tend to efface the feminine, especially from sites of public discourse. The expressivity of Karmen’s dancing also establishes a clear association with the ñeeño (lower caste) –géér (higher caste) women generally perform with more restraint– and suggests that there is a freedom that the lower castes enjoy in spite of their inferior social position. Her seduction of the warden is therefore a potential symbol of the victory of the dominated, which is reinforced by the fact that all of the inmates celebrate with her. However, the historical significance of the location, the fortress on Gorée Island where slaves were stored before being shipped to the Americas during the 15th to mid-18th centuries, complexifies this network of discourses. Though Ramaka is attempting to depict the black female body as liberated and resistant there is also a sense of its commercialisation and fetishisation, which he too exploits as a filmmaker, that can be traced back to the history of chattel slavery and that continues to be an underlying factor in the dynamics of patriarchy. The imbrication of dance, power and sexual politics is further highlighted when Karmen
attends the wedding ceremony of the corporal Lamine Diop. The suggestive dance moves she performs would traditionally be reserved for female-only gatherings but Karmen boldly disregards this boundary much to the displeasure of Lamine’s new wife, who attempts to challenge her rival when Lamine’s enthrallment becomes clear. Karmen is arrested and taken to the prison in an attempt to recontain her but it is already too late for Lamine who seems to be bewitched by her from this point on. The result is therefore ambivalent in that Karmen’s dancing brings an abrupt end to Lamine’s marriage. Whereas the traditional géwél is shown singing his praises she dares to expose him and the authorities as oppressive agents who will eventually be defeated.

Nonetheless, the scene underscores a sharp turn in the conception and representation of African sexuality. Karmen enjoys a certain level of freedom in the exercise of her sexuality and suggests therefore an overt challenge to patriarchy and heteronormativity. This is significant because in traditional African society the sexual pleasure of the man came first and sex was treated as a very private matter and was mainly seen as a means of reproduction. Since independence, however, discourses pertaining to sex and sexuality have become increasingly public, even though they remain somewhat uncertain. As Celestin Monga states:

…it remains a delicate exercise to speak about sexuality in Africa and in the black world. The subject is often obscured by phantasms and myths fabricated and peddled by ethno-political mythology dating back to the era of slave trade and black oppression. It is thus not easy to offer a reading of behaviours bereft of hasty generalisations. It is necessary to avoid the double pitfall of voyeurism and clichés, to stay at equidistance to the racialist discourse which feeds collective phantasms in the West on ‘black sexuality’, and to the reductionist and self-flagellating discourse of many African authors concerned with ‘political correctness’ (qtd. in Tcheuyap 180).
Despite the discursive transformation in the wake of independence, filmmakers were more concerned with the representation of collective identities and the process of nation building and development than with what was considered mere entertainment. Ramaka’s endeavour, therefore, is to situate the potential political power of sex and sexuality and the postnationalist turn of the 1990s in African filmmaking where individual subjectivities now populate the cinematic landscape as opposed to national types deemed necessary for development. In this light one of the more significant elements of the film is Ramaka’s reliance on what he describes as a raw energy centred in the body, particularly that of Djeïnaba Diop Gaï who plays Karmen. He claims that his intention is to “show many bodies, naked bodies, dancing bodies, young bodies, old bodies, but the camera will seize in them the desire which they inspire rather than the libido they might unleash” (Ramaka qtd. in Powrie 285). He goes even further to suggest an important relationship between the body, desire and music saying “I always start with sounds, rhythms, syncopations, which are accompanied by textures, colours, gestures, movements, dialogue…I don’t really differentiate between words, movement and song; it is like a scale in which you choose the notes; what matters is the tempo… I looked for a rhythm close to song in the dialogue”.

However, his discussion of the body largely seems to ignore the issue of the gendered body, specifically the female African body, and the sometimes difficult task of transposing cultural frameworks in foreign contexts. It is complex and potentially counterproductive to divorce the question of Karmen’s performance from the “gaze”, especially with respect to its conservative masculinist cultural setting and the fact that the work was primarily screened in film festival circuits. This is immediately identifiable by the fact that the film was often featured in African-centred or gay and lesbian festivals, marked categories of difference which clearly identify it as both a racial and sexual Other. Despite the director’s intentions, therefore, the hypersexualised/racialised female body continues to operate here as a source of
spectacle and of controversy over the question of control of that body. As a social arena where women have some measure of agency and can express their sensuality, sabar is often perceived as a very real threat by the more conservative members in Senegal’s majority Muslim population. Devout Muslim women often shun sabar and Islamic religious leaders have responded to its perceived power as a sexual catalyst by identifying it with the devil and banning its performance in the areas they control directly. The controversy over Karmen began approximately six weeks after its 22 July, 2001 premiere in Dakar when a Mouride religious leader, Serigne Moustapha Diakhité, accused the film of blasphemy because the burial scene of Angelique, the lesbian warden who committed suicide, was accompanied by a religious khassaïde penned by Cheick Ahmadou Bamba, the founder of the Mouride movement (Maasilta 185-189). He demanded that the chant be removed and threatened that there would be protests if his call went unheeded. On the day the film was supposed to be screened a group of 300 Mouride members—including Abdoulaye Babou, a government minister, prominent Mouride and founder of Jamra, a religious NGO that focuses on the moralisation of state and society—showed up armed with sticks and knives outside the Bel Arte cinema, where they destroyed Karmen posters and threatened to burn down the cinema if the film was shown. After a meeting with the Minister of the Interior, religious leaders and the proprietor of the cinema the film was banned because of the threat of further violence. It was the first film to be banned due to pressure from a religious group in the history of Senegalese censorship and provoked important debates about freedom of expression and democracy. Though Karmen flouts these reactionary religious and cultural ideas of appropriateness and incites debates that may be enabling for the creation of more nuanced representations of African female identities Ramaka’s treatment remains ambivalent. Karmen’s open and unapologetic bisexuality may in fact work to further situate her as Other.

26 The Mouride sect began in 1883 and is one of the most powerful Senegalese Islamic brotherhoods today.
27 Khassaïdes are religious songs written by or in homage of the founder of the Mouride movement and together with the Koran and Sunni form the main body of the movement’s holy texts.
in a society where homosexuality is taboo. The ambiguity is further consolidated by the fact that she is ultimately punished for her free-spiritedness when the jealous Lamine, who can find no other way to contain her, murders her in the final act.

As an urban form sabar also alludes to the (perhaps inevitable) transformations in Senegalese society and the manner in which cultural forms reflect these changes. In the post-independence era the organisation and control of leisure often perpetuated colonial models of separation with street dances such as sabar being banned from “civilised” spaces like the European and middle-class neighbourhoods. With the rapid growth of the urban population in the 1990s, however, there was a significant relaxation of social mores regarding sexuality and various forms of so-called impropriety, which facilitated the repopularisation of sabar (Biaya 75). This recontextualisation of the traditional also led to sabar being appropriated by nationalists as a symbol of Senegalese identity. This is clearly referenced in the music of master percussionist Doudou N’Diaye Rose, whose sabar group plays during the opening. Descended from a family of géwéls, Rose is Professor of Rhythm at Dakar’s Institut National des Arts, Director of the Ballets Nationaux and composer of the national anthem of Senegal. His music has played a pivotal role in the celebration of sabar as a national and identifiably African form and his work was greatly praised by Senegal’s first president Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the founders of the Negritude movement. As such, this school’s ideology of revalorising black identities and cultures in the face of colonialism can be said to continue in the work of Rose and other sabar performers to some extent. Though sabar is usually recognised as a symbol of Wolof culture it is in fact a hybridised form that has borrowed significantly from neighbouring ethnic groups such as the Mande, Serer and Sosse (Tang 32). This multiethnicity is further referenced by the appearance of other popular musicians such as Yandé Coudou Sène, a Serer singer –and géwél of the president Senghor–, El Hadj N’Diaye who is known for his fusion of various ethnic forms and Julien Jouga’s choir which performs
Catholic, Muslim, classical and traditional repertoires. Sabar is also known to have contributed to the development of mbalax, a fusion of Latin dance music, Wolof lyrics and sabar rhythms, which was popularised internationally by Youssou N’Dour and is one of Senegal’s major exports. Sabar has thus been instrumental in providing géwél drummers with the opportunity to participate in the new context of the Senegalese music industry thereby situating the musical landscape of the film within a vibrant network of local and international exchange (Tang 164).

The other notable feature of *Karmen Geï* is the free-jazz musical accompaniment used throughout the film and which establishes a dialogue between David Murray’s sound and indigenous Senegalese music. Murray is a prolific African-American tenor saxophonist who became popular during the 1980s. He is known for blending different musical styles and started drawing on African music in the early 1990s with his album *Metamorphosis*. The album included a number of prominent Senegalese drummers and among them was Karmen’s Doudou N’Diaye Rose, whom Murray had met earlier in 1994 at a French jazz festival. That meeting led to a trip to Senegal, where Murray and N’Diaye Rose recorded *Fo Deuk Revue* (“fo deuk” means “where do you come from?” in Wolof). Murray says of the politics of identification in this work: “This group is a political statement about how I perceive the world, how I see myself as a person of African descent relating to people who live in Africa” (Powrie 290). In a 1995 interview he had already stated that his interest in Senegalese music was in part a personal search for identity. This proved to be a complex journey that combined the feeling of First World guilt and nostalgia:

The things that [the Africans] have to sell, the only people who want to buy it are black Americans, because they understand the guilt that we have from being ripped out of Africa and becoming Americans. We have a certain yearning to know where we came from, so they play on all of those feelings . . . I wrote this composition called “Dakar
Darkness” ... We were affected by being African Americans that once housed Africans being transported to the United States and islands around the world. To sit there in those cells [on Gorée island] knowing that this went on for 300 years, existing as a camp to house Africans as a point of departure (Murray qtd. in Powrie 290).

Murray’s music complicates the idea of African identities as static and even the notion that identity is bound by geography. His hyphenated identity and identification with Africans accentuates the affective and imaginary ties that shape the transnational sense of being. Ramaka’s use of jazz has a doubly important political connotation therefore28. Like Carmen Jones before it, Karmen locates the narrative in a specific ethnic context and one whose lowness was seen as beneath analysis and positive representation. This is reinforced in the film by the use of the words from the “Habanaña”. The song is a leitmotif frequently sung by Karmen, but in Wolof, the mother tongue of the majority of the population, as opposed to French, the language of the ex-colonisers. Moreover, by weaving jazz, perhaps the most iconic American music, into a Senegalese context, it is rerouted and transplanted suggesting the plasticity of culture and identity. Its modern First World connotations as opposed to traditional music also suggest that the film is calling into question the strict boundaries of traditional values, in which case, music and postcolonial politics come together. Jazz diverts the Carmen narrative from its typical Western path and inscribes the myth with a distinctly non-European embodiment.

From a postcolonialist perspective, which essentially concentrates on “the cultural interaction between colonizing powers and the societies they colonized, and the traces that this interaction left on the literature, arts and human sciences of both societies” Gaï Ramaka’s Karmen Geï certainly tests the boundaries of African identity (Gauri Viswanathan qtd. in

28 The political dimensions of the use of jazz in creating transnational networks of identity have already been explored in relation to African Jim in the previous chapter.
Stam 292). Leaving behind the First World-Third World dichotomy typical of the 1960s independentist movements, postcolonialism examines the imbrications of these two geopolitical entities via processes whereby:

Purity gives way to contamination. Rigid paradigms collapse into sliding metonymies. Erect, militant postures give way to an orgy of positionalities. Once secure boundaries become more porous;...Colonial tropes of irreconcilable dualism give way to complex, multi-layered identities and subjectivities, resulting in a proliferation of terms having to do with various forms of cultural mixing (Stam 295).

By definition, therefore, postcolonial practice cannot be consigned solely to the Third World given that the master-colonised relationship was one of interdependence. As a result, diasporic communities in metropolises such as London are suitable sites for exploring the role of contact zones in generating intercultural positionalities, as will be seen in the film Babylon.

The ideas of remembrance and postmemory expressed by Murray are central themes in exilic spaces and the cinema of the African diaspora. Cultural recollection of the homeland, as well as the reconstitution of the Self/self in an alien space, plays a pivotal role in the transition from communitas to societas. In Turner’s work on signs and rites of passage, he classifies communitas as a space that represents absence/past, liminality, isolation/alienation, meta-narratives and homogeneity (96-7). It is the initial stage of displacement, which

29 According to Shohat (1992) third-worldist film theory of the 1960s was largely masculinist and was primarily concerned with an anti-colonial/imperialist agenda, which ignored the question of internal dissonance along lines such as gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. A more nuanced post-third-worldist approach became popular during the 1980s-90s and acknowledged and dealt with the intersectionality of oppression, which replaced these meta-narratives of national liberation.

30 Hirsch first used the term postmemory to refer to the psychological aftermath of the Holocaust. It examines the relationship of the “generation after” to the personal and collective trauma of those who came before and the role of imagination and creation in the production of various narrative forms that facilitate the remembrance of these events, which, though inherited, come to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory can play a powerful role in shaping the identity of those that come after and highlights the potential influence of past traumas that continue to be felt in the present.
eventually gives way to a different sense of place called societas. Societas is more often associated with the second generation whose connection to the trauma of separation is less direct, resulting in a relationship of presence, stability, assimilation, self-narrative and heterogeneity in the country their parents adopted.

The third space characteristic of the diasporic condition “displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives” and new enunciations of selfhood and otherness (Bhabha 211). Diaspora, in the view of James Clifford, “involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home” and “diasporist discourses reflect the sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes the homeland, not as something simply left behind, but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity” (308; 311). It is important to note that Clifford’s definition of diaspora differs from exile in its understanding of home and return. While exilic identity adopts a more unequivocal attitude with respect to the question of return to the homeland, diasporic identity sees it more as a source of shifting and ambivalent attachment. In this sense, the past comes to serve as a common base around which diverse communities can connect and reorganise themselves. The altered subjectivity of the second generation is therefore supposed to complicate the traditional definition of diaspora based on a construction of collective suffering and the urge to return to a national homeland.

*Babylon* is a good illustration of the complexity of understanding and representing identity and belonging in hybrid communities. This perhaps begins with respect to the creative agents involved in the production of the film as the screenplay was co-written by two white men, Franco Rosso and Martin Stellman. Director Rosso is of Italian descent but his immigrant background gives him some appreciation of the experiences of the characters in *Babylon*, despite their difference in ethnicity. He asserts that
A lot of the film is close to autobiographical... There’s a very natural sympathy, because a lot of my experiences are very similar, even though they may not be exactly the same –visually I’m not that different from English people, for example...So I suppose that must have been one of the reasons why subconsciously I wanted to do the film (Salewicz, n.d.).

Moreover, during the 1970s when an informal network of progressive black and white film practitioners was emerging, Rosso had worked on a number of films that were centred on the black community in London. He edited, for instance, the documentary Reggae (1970) by Trinidadian-born director Horace Ové and directed the television play The Mangrove Nine (1979), before doing the controversial Dread, Beat An’ Blood (1979), which featured the work of Jamaican dub poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson.

The film highlights the fact that the transition into and negotiation of the diasporic space is neither smooth nor complete. It offers a glimpse into the poverty and systemic racism faced by the black British community during the 1980s through the challenges faced by the protagonist, Blue, and the members of his Ital Lion reggae sound system. Blue, a first-generation Briton, works as a mechanic by day and a deejay by night but his life begins to take a downward turn when he is fired by his racist boss. As he wanders about the town one night in frustration at losing his job he is chased, beaten and arrested by the police for no good reason. His father is angered by his mother’s decision to bail him out and seems to think Blue must be at fault if he was arrested. Blue decides to leave home as they continue arguing and once again finds himself wandering about the streets. Meanwhile, the location where he and

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31 The film refers to the police harassment of the popular Caribbean restaurant Mangrove, started by Trinidadian Frank Critchlow in 1969 in Notting Hill. The restaurant became a symbol for black radicalism and civil rights and also attracted white liberals. It was produced by Trinidadian activist John La Rose.

32 A sound system is a portable record deck, amplifiers and speakers used for street parties and other social gatherings. Competitions, called sound clashes, were often organised between rival sound systems and now take place on an international level.
his group meet to practice is broken into and their material destroyed by racist neighbours who had threatened them earlier. Blue then sets out to find the suspected parties at their housing estate where he is confronted by one of them. A scuffle ensues, Blue stabs the man and flees the scene. The film ends when the police raid the dance hall where he is performing with his crew.

The Rastafari paradigm that is used as the framework for organising the themes in Babylon provides a useful point of entry for examining the socio-cultural stakes at play. Van Dijk points out that

Like all cultures, [Rastafari] travelled with those who journeyed around the globe. Through migration and travel, Jamaican Rastafarians personally carried their ideas and beliefs to sometimes unexpected places and created new bridgeheads for the movement’s further dissemination…Sometimes they inspired others but often they encountered incomprehension or even hostility (178).

Rastafari first came to England during the 1950s but began in Jamaica where it grew out of Garveyism as a response to the systemic application of oppressive practices –often rooted in the legacy of plantation society. In order to fight this colonial hangover, one of the basic tenets of the movement is the revalorisation of African culture and history and its adherents often identify themselves as Africans, not West Indians. The film’s title is therefore important in that it highlights the insider-outsider positionality of the black British. In Rastafari language Babylon refers to both a system of exploitation and its practitioners. The title is as such a direct reference to Britain’s history of (neo)colonialism and the inevitable tension and

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33 Jamaican Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the Black Star Line, part of the Back-to-Africa movement, which advocated the return of the African diaspora to their motherland. Garvey employed a Pan-African philosophy to inspire a global afro-centric movement. Garveyism would eventually inspire other groups such as the Nation of Islam and Rastafari, which incorporates his teachings and identifies Garvey as a prophet believed to have foretold Selassie’s coronation as emperor of Ethiopia in 1930.
eventual breakdown of societal relationships based on such a system. The term is also often used to refer to the police and in this sense it foreshadows the confrontation in the final sequence when the police raid the dance hall. The antithetical figures of the Rasta man and Babylon are highly symbolic of the spirit of national conflict and succinctly allude to a longstanding tradition of surveillance and subordination of black bodies, which is perceived as necessary for repressing diversity in order to maintain an uncomplicated illusion of sameness (Balibar 92).

In this light, the Rasta-reggae subculture is used as a discursive fulcrum that challenges the tidiness of identitarian narratives. When analysed through the work of Dick Hebdige, who explores how subcultures act as a form of refusal that complicates and enriches the meaning of revolt, it becomes clear that reggae, especially when it became international, made accessible a socio-political ethos of resistance to white domination and discrimination, the rejection of Western materialism and calls for solidarity among the poor and powerless that were easily understood and integrated by the disenfranchised everywhere (Van Dijk 195). Reggae music and the cultural milieu provided by the sound system became the refuge of a new generation of black youth caught in a diasporic no man’s land (Karamath 2008). The film, for example, is set primarily in Brixton where there is in fact a large immigrant community and which was the site of race riots during the Thatcher era. Against the 1970s-1980s urban decay Rastafari culture emerged as a refuge and anchor that allowed migrants to recreate and define their difference with pride. This is solidified and further authenticated by the fact that the main character, Blue, is in fact played by the son of Caribbean immigrants and one of the founding members of the famous British reggae group, Aswad34. In Blue’s room posters of Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley and Haile Selassie are all further markers of this

34 This idea in fact permeates the film as the music is scored by Dennis Bovell, a Caribbean immigrant who was part of the reggae band Matumbi and owner of a sound system, who often performed with Linton Kwesi Johnson, a militant Jamaican dub poet.
There is a significant moment when he leaves home after the falling out with his father who is not very sympathetic about his arrest the previous night. After roaming through the city trying to find a place to stay, without success, he stumbles into a Rasta reasoning session. This space provides a striking contrast to the inhospitable streets outside and emerges as a source of solace with the Rasta elder as the only one who seems to understand the cycle of despair in which he is caught. The elder’s words also point to the double displacement of the black community that is neither at home in the Caribbean nor in Europe; a fact which complexifies their subjectivity as members of two different diasporas.

Rastafari, however, cannot be analysed effectively through a purely culturalist lens. Its spread in Britain occurred at an important moment in the politicisation and mobilisation of black subjectivities around the world. The 1970s Black Power movement had made its way to Britain where Michael X’s Racial Adjustment Action Society and Obi Egbuna’s Universal Coloured People’s Association were active during this short-lived period. Black nationalism was consolidating pan-African identities transnationally and these organisations paved the way for the later Rastafari movement. With the dissolution of Black Power many turned to Rastafari, as it promoted similar beliefs about justice and equal rights for black communities. It was also common at this time for community groups to come together as the term black also referred to South Asian minorities who faced discrimination as well.

The potential of the movement produced very concerted efforts on the part of the police to discredit the Rastafari movement through criminalisation (Weaver 6). In Babylon there is reference to the abuse of the infamous sus laws, which permitted a police officer to stop any “suspected person”, especially from around 1974 onwards through the infamous

35 In some sects of Rastafari Selassie is regarded as the head of the Trinity. Ethiopia holds a special place in Afro-centric thought, as it was the only African nation that was never colonised.

36 A reasoning is an event where Rastas gather to discuss and “reason” among themselves. They will often play drums and read scripture during such meetings, which are a both spiritual and cultural.
Special Patrol Group (SPG), the “paramilitary” wing of the Metropolitan Police. This was often done according to racial profiling as we see in *Babylon* when Blue is chased, beaten and arrested for no justifiable reason. This desire to observe, discipline and normalise is part of the panoptical thrust of modern societies and one of the paradoxes of cosmopolitanism that upsets the transition from societas to communitas. The multiplication and destabilisation of bounded identities sometimes produces a “reach for groundings” which reflects an unwillingness or incapacity to react positively to the new cultural needs necessitated by globalisation (Cohen 170). This process of self-sanitisation is not carried out solely by the authorities but can become a more generalised mechanism used by everyday citizens whose attitudes and perceptions of so-called others are perhaps a more insidious method of exclusivism. There is a clear example of this when the white female resident confronts the Ital Lion crew at the garage where they meet to listen to dubplates. She accuses Ronnie of being a traitor to his “kith and kin” while hurling racist insults at the other members of the group and telling them to go back to their own countries because they are spoiling the neighbourhood.

What also emerges from this incident is a generational and cultural conflict that is part of the difficult process of hybridisation. When Ronnie, a white Briton, tells her that she is no relation of his he is in fact challenging the appeal to ethnic alliances as an appropriate formulation of identity. He seems to share more with the Caribbean British than with someone of a similar ethnic background, which represents the capacity of diasporic identities to bridge cultures. It is also significant that Beefy, who, like Blue, is a first-generation Briton, responds by saying that England has always been his country and that it was never as lovely as she claims. The attitude of the two young men is evidence of a deterritorialisation of social identity that undermines the hegemonising tendency of the nation-state’s definition of citizenship (Cohen 157). The tensions generated by the twoness of the Black British hybrid subjectivity must be approached as inherently oppositional as they generate anxiety across
different frameworks of cultural reference. The desire to transcend both the structures of the nation-state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity are inherent to modern political and cultural loci such as global cities. These signs of strain, moreover, can be interpreted as the symptoms of a nation entering a new phase of modernity in which transnational senses of identity are taking root because of the phenomenon of migration and subsequent alienation (Fisher 191). Ital Lion’s struggle to make a name for themselves identifies the formation of a unique and militant identity amongst the first generation to fully have come of age under the banner of black Britain. Born and raised in a country that was often reluctant to claim them as their own, yet separated from the homelands of their parents, the hybrid culture they created for themselves was an essential part in defining their selfhood.

The sound system culture also provides an important reference that recalls the indispensable role of black British popular culture in the formation of British youth culture as a whole during the 1980s. With the arrival and integration of immigrants into the British workforce it was more and more difficult to hold on to traditional colonial notions of (cultural) supremacy over formerly colonised peoples. This is crucial because ideas about race, ethnicity and nationality form an important seam of continuity with the doctrines of modern European aesthetics that are often used to appeal to national and often racial particularity. The history and role of the image of the black in the debates at the heart of modern cultural axiology appears in different forms in the aesthetics of Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as well as in the work of Burke and Kant in their philosophical debates over the nature of beauty and the sublime (Gilroy 483). The use of cultural relativism to support the production of aesthetic judgements of a supposedly universal character often draws the dividing line between “authentic music” and what Hegel calls “the most detestable noise”. When the white neighbour calls their music “jungle music” she is in fact reinvoking the conventional ideas of Western aesthetic judgement, taste and cultural value. Dreadlocks –perhaps the most
important as they were considered contrary to the rules of decency and appropriateness—, the red, green and gold colours and the tam headdress worn by many in the film complete the homologous display of a countercultural sensibility based on an ideology that countered Eurocentric forms of beauty.

However, despite the popularity of reggae and sound systems it remained commonplace for ethnocentrism and racism to coexist with a fascination for blacks and for West Indians through an exoticisation of the Other that had been cultivated since the early days of colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean. Black Jamaicans displayed their distinctive music, clothing and gestures on the street thereby making inroads into a social space that was once dominated by white working class youth culture. The film, though, seems to question the usefulness of the multiculturalist debate if there is no real adjustment to the power structure. When their equipment is destroyed and Ronnie’s relationship with the group breaks down the abstraction of cultural debates and practices becomes clear. The director seems to suggest that though culture can provide a useful meeting point for people from different backgrounds it must be used for greater consciousness raising and as a catalyst for change, which concretely addresses inequality. When the police storm the sound clash, the quintessential black hybrid cultural form in 1980s UK, the film ends on a note that suggests the need for such sites of contestation and identity to have a material impact on social conditions.

The British experience, and more specifically that of being black in Britain, undermines the fiction that national margins are permanent and impenetrable. The fluidity of communities that continually reimagine and reshape themselves has brought significant changes to the national landscape of many European countries thereby revealing anxieties and tensions surrounding definitions of national identity. These shifting markers locate the formation of a transnational citizenship, which has its own internal complexities, that poses multiple challenges to the desired homogeneity of nationalism. Going beyond exclusivism is
no longer a choice and the proliferation of hyphenated cultural identities seems to be one of the major building blocks to the destabilisation and generation of new expressions of belonging that are more dynamic and inclusive.

This issue of national transition and the political weight of representation that this implies can be identified in a somewhat different context in Gavin Hood’s *Tsotsi* (2005) which is set in post-apartheid South Africa. The film chronicles six days in the life of Tsotsi, a young gangster who inadvertently makes off with the baby of a woman he carjacked at gunpoint. Hood’s is essentially an attempt to examine the social fallout of the apartheid era and the hope of transition into a new “rainbow nation”. Allen argues that for South Africans one of the most productive sites for this restructuring was popular music and as such *Tsotsi*’s soundtrack is useful in unearthing the complexities of the psychic relocation necessitated by the advent of democracy. The film’s use of music is meant to complement and reinforce the political work that Hood is trying to accomplish.

This complex web of socio-political issues is effectively signified in the kwaito genre, which makes up the majority of the soundtrack. Kwaito is South Africanised hip hop, with influences from European and American dance, pop and reggae, emerged in Johannesburg during the 1990s and is central to urban youth culture. What is immediately identifiable here is a process of multi-directional appropriation that perhaps complicates the fixedness of identity even more than the previous films discussed and which therefore serves as an appropriate ending point. Since kwaito functions at both the local and the global levels and there is a clear dialogue on issues common to both American and African listeners, it establishes a transnational sense of identity that challenges the rigid binaries of North and South. Furthermore, the periphery’s appropriation of cultural material from the metropole challenges the balance of power by positioning South African culture as part of an accelerated global flow of cultural material, which performs an important function in today’s
understanding of identitarian practices. The adaptation of the “foreign” material to local preferences and circumstances highlights the slippage that often occurs with the cross-cultural translation of hybrid forms as well as the fact that peripheral consumers do not uncritically or homogeneously receive cultural material. Here kwaito is used to perform the emergent identity of post-apartheid society as well as acknowledge an international youth culture, though this is done largely through the eyes of black males. Kwaito is also primarily an urban and electronic sound, which refutes the pervasive anti-modernist approach to African culture that reinforces notions of tradition, primitiveness and rurality.

This move towards new expressions of cultural identity is further noted in the marginal role of South African jazz in the film. There are only two such tracks, which are credited to Vusi Mahlasela, one of the most important South African jazz musicians whose anti-apartheid lyrics are well known. Like kwaito, it is a hybrid and began in American jazz. However, this genre is differentiated by the self-conscious ideological value of its stylistic fusion. During the state of emergency of the 1980s, it was often called crossover and reflected the importance of challenging and eradicating reductive binaries. Post-apartheid, however, the complexity and validity of this designation seemed more nostalgic than relevant. Themes of freedom and racial equality, which were an essential part of its ethos, were now a reality—or officially at least—and the oppositional thrust of the genre was therefore lost. In fact, post-apartheid crossover became associated with the new ruling elite and reflected the political rhetoric of nation building. Its use in the film therefore seems to indicate the failure of the post-apartheid regime and reinforces the frustrated hopes of the larger population. Due to this radical shift in the political environment crossover no longer performed the same function in terms of the embodiment of identity, thus giving way to the youth orientated kwaito.

However, despite the youthful brashness of kwaito the social reality of the film undercuts its use as a sign of regeneration, producing an inadvertently ironic tone. One of the
major associations with kwaito, for instance, is alluded to in the very title of the film. The figure of the tsotsi emerged in the townships around the 1940s and was originally inspired by American zoot suiters. These expressions of young, urban masculinity coincide with the demographic rise in city-born youth in the 1930s onwards and the increasingly stringent apartheid regulations that started coming into effect in the 1950s. Even though they are frequently described as apolitical, because they often shunned movements like the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress, their confrontational stance was no less important as an example of cultural resistance. Their lifestyle became a powerful form of counterculture, which is still vibrant today, and was part of “a larger process by which Black youth appropriated, transformed and reinscribed coded oppositional meanings onto styles derived from the dominant culture” (Kelley 168).

Their resistive style practices, which have today been extended and complicated through the practice of kwaito, are still nonetheless bound up with ideas of a deviant masculinity, which are often embedded in the lyrics of kwaito. The opening sequence of the film, for instance, takes place in Tsotsi’s home in the township where his gang is playing dice, smoking and drinking. Soon after they are seen strutting through the township, Tsotsi in the middle and flanked by his three friends, as they defy the jeers of a rival gang in a display of tough masculinity. The loud kwaito track that accompanies the scene is used to reinforce the authenticity of this portrayal of urban, black masculinity because kwaito is known as the music of this particular demographic (Allen 2004).

Furthermore, Hood attempts to capitalise on the market aspect of fan culture in that the soundtrack is mostly comprised of music by South African musician Zola, a real-life kwaito artist who plays the character Fela, the leader of another gang in the township. The potential of Zola’s star persona goes even further in that he is known to have grown up in a Sowetan ghetto. This construction of authenticity, therefore, is couched in and bolstered by an
extra-cinematic text, which both strengthens and undermines the film. Zola/Fela is part of a complex machinery of cinema and consumption, which is predicated on the illusion of authenticity. Though his character suggests agency in that he used his talent to create a better life for himself, kwaito cannot be separated from the question of performance. Perhaps this is evident in the exaggerated display of bravado by Tsotsi as he walks past Fela and his gang. This can also be compared with the final scene of the film where Tsotsi returns the baby. The aural cue used here is not a kwaito track but a more conventionally arranged film piece – though with African vocals– which is used for its emotional effect and to signify his transformation into a better man. The conservative nature of the track, however, may also be read as a containment of the excess of kwaito and its culture, an idea that is also operating at the literal level with Tsotsi’s arrest.

The fragmentation, and subsequent fragility, of the urban space is another element captured through the soundtrack. The changing musical cues reinforce a shifting sense of black subjectivity and refer to the social divisions that still operate along class lines. What Chaudhuri calls geopathology or “the problem of place and of place as problem” is detectable in the aural tracks used to distinguish between the cityscape, the ghettoscape and the middle-class suburbs (55). For instance, when Tsotsi and his gang go into the city centre from the township a superimposed kwaito track acts as a (sound) bridge between these two spaces. Kwaito’s association with violence suggests the toughness required for surviving in Johannesburg but also points to the failure of urbanity which in turn rationalises criminality. The suturing together of the two spaces also underscores the interdependence of these two worlds. In the scenes where Tsotsi is in the suburbs, however, the softer, more traditional film pieces composed by Mark Kilian and Paul Hepker are used. They represent the difference of this social setting by replacing the edginess and aggression of kwaito by a more soothing,
emotional tone as this is a less threatening world. It also opposes the deviant masculinity of Tsotsi and his gang with the decency of the stolen baby’s father.

The complexity of the task of representation cannot be reduced to a facile North/South dichotomy. Though tensions between external representations of Africa and the efforts of Africans to re-present themselves remain considerable, these films indicate that the diversity of both African and transglobal identities generates a multiplicity of discourses that are more reflective of labyrinthine ways of being—African, Other or diasporan, for instance. Despite the many areas of slippage and the sometimes faltering application of cinematic language the result is a more nuanced and conscious approach to capture with some degree of authenticity the new challenges facing Africa. Due to the history of Africa with the West these new narratives are often inevitably anchored in the past though they offer effective and more comprehensive ways of understanding and portraying the nature of African identities today. With the development of cinema in Africa, cineastes of both the colonial and post-colonial eras have actively resisted colonial fabrications and have reappropriated musical practices to create discourses that attempt to subvert the conventional representations of Africa.
Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the role of music in cinema as it pertains to the representation of Africans and how this is largely couched in the social and political currents of the day. Firstly, it set out to establish why music first came to play such an integral role in the cinematic portrayal of the African continent. By determining the nature of cinema’s relationship with wider socio-political factors in Europe at the time that film was created, the invention of an image of Africa consistent with ideas of racial alterity can be understood as an extension of the ideology behind both visual culture and imperialism. The preliminary finding therefore is that early and ethnographic films were a means of justifying the “civilising mission” through the consolidation and perpetuation of racist stereotypes, which reflected the power relations of the day.

Despite the agenda of the colonising powers, however, it is possible to identify examples of resistance and of political texts, which produce fissures in the metanarrative of domination. This is approached through an analysis of how black South Africans used performance under the apartheid regime to point to a political reality that was otherwise absent from the media. These films function as historical artefacts and political memoirs in that they document aspects of South Africa’s social landscape and the evolution of the apartheid system of government. That this was achieved through the use of various musical genres testifies to the fact that culture and performance are closely associated with and shaped by the larger currents around them.

The role of music is not always one of resistance to foreign powers however. In the post-independence era music is also at the heart of creating more sophisticated arguments about the nature of African identities. The nationalist agenda sometimes had a homogenising effect as African nations sought to reorganise and rebuild themselves after colonisation.
Postnationalist films are now contributing to a more inclusive debate on African identities by interrogating the traditional and broaching taboo subjects such as sex and sexuality and gender equality. The question of transnational African identities is also engaged through the relationship between continental and diasporic Africans. The role of music here is to mediate the trauma of exile and to help reformulate (collective) identities that straddle different spaces. Music cultures then play a part in the processes of hybridisation and globalisation that are part of the contemporary face of Africa.

By using individual films as case studies it was possible to determine how specific examples of film music function in relation to the cultural framework in which they were made. Instead of an in-depth study of the aesthetic or psychological implications of the musical texts there was an attempt to describe their relationship to the political setting in terms of how they corroborate, contest or complicate the official story of power. This is by no means, however, a comprehensive investigation of the topic. The diversity of the African continent and diaspora and the ever-changing nature of living cultural forms make for a complex, long-term area of research in order to tease out the possible array of specificities.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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