

Imaging Africa: Gorillas, Actors And Characters



Africa is defined in the popular imagination by images of wild animals, savage dancing, witchcraft, the Noble Savage, and the Great White Hunter. These images typify the majority of Western and even some South African film fare on Africa.

Although there was much negative representation in these films I will discuss how films set in Africa provided opportunities for black American actors to redefine the way that Africans are imaged in international cinema. I conclude this essay with a discussion of the process of revitalisation of South African cinema after apartheid.

The study of post-apartheid cinema requires a revisionist history that brings us back to pre-apartheid periods, as argued by Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela (2003) in their book's title, *To Change Reels*. The reel that needs changing is the one that most of us were using until Masilela's New African Movement interventions (2000a/b;2003). This historical recovery has nothing to do with Afrocentricism, essentialism or African nationalisms. Rather, it involved the identification of neglected areas of analysis of how blacks themselves engaged, used and subverted film culture as South Africa lurched towards modernity at the turn of the century. Names already familiar to scholars in early South African history not surprisingly recur in this recovery, Solomon T. Plaatje being the most notable.

It is incorrect that *'modernity denies history, as the contrast with the past - a constantly changing entity - remains a necessary point of reference'* (Outhwaite 2003: 404). Similarly, Masilela's (2002b: 232) notion that *'consciousness of precedent has become very nearly the condition and definition of major artistic works'* calls for a reflection on past intellectual movements in South Africa for a democratic modernity after apartheid. He draws on Thelma Gutsche's (1972) assumption that film practice is one of the quintessential forms of modernity. However, there could be no such thing as a South African cinema under the modernist conditions of apartheid. This is where modernity's constant pull

towards the future comes into play (Outhwaite 2003). Simultaneous with the necessary break from white domination in film production, or a pull towards the future away from the conditions of apartheid, South Africans will need to re-acquire the 'consciousness of precedent', of the intellectual and cultural heritage of the New African Movement, such as is done in *Come See the Bioscope* (1997) which images Plaatjes's mobile distribution initiative in the teens of the century. The Movement's intellectual and cultural accomplishments in establishing a national culture in the context of modernity is a necessary point of reference for the African Renaissance to establish a national cinema in the context of the New South Africa (Masilela 2000b). Following Masilela (ibid.: 235), debates and practices that are of relevance within the New African Movement include:

1. the different structures of portrayal of Shaka in history by Thomas Mofolo and Mazisi Kunene across generic forms and in the context of nationalism and modernity;
2. the discussion and dialogue between Solomon T. Plaatje, H.I.E. Dhlomo, R.V. Selope Thema, H. Selby Msimang and Lewis Nkosi about the construction of the idea of the New African, concerning national identity and cultural identity;
3. the lessons facilitated by Charlotte Manye Maxeke and James Kwegyir Aggrey in making possible the connection between the New Negro modernity and New African modernity;
4. the discourse on the relationship between Marxism and modernity within the context of the Trotskyism of Ben Kies and I.B. Tabata and the Stalinism of Michael Harmel, Albert Nzula and Yusuf Mohammed Dadoo; and
5. the feminist political practices of Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi, Phyllis Ntantala and others.

In the building of a South African national cinema, therefore, it is imperative that South Africa's new phase of modernity does not deny history but seeks to situate South African film practice and film scholarship within African film history, where they naturally and historically belong, rather than in only European or Hollywood film history, as Eurocentricism and supremacy have attempted to impose them (Masilela 2000b: 236). This task of indigenisation is one that I have set myself for this book for, as Masilela argues:

Although the context of 1994 represents a political triumph, it is questionable whether it has been accomplished by commensurate intellectual and cultural achievements. Our present is the reverse mirror of the past of the New African Movement. In this light it is all the more necessary for the African Renaissance to

establish a dialectical connection between past and present (ibid.: 234).

Romancing Africa

Africa is considered in the popular imagination to be an undeveloped continent, a contemporary representation of humankind's 'past'. The continent has been an enormous source of mythical imagery since the birth of the film industry in 1885. The readable, engaging, and often irreverent Africa on film: *Beyond black and white*, by Kenneth Cameron (1994), charts and evaluates recurring patterns of such representation by American, British and some South African films. Amongst the recurring patterns are:

1. the presence (or more noticeably, the absence) of women, both black and white;
2. the recurrence of the Great White Hunter, a classless individual who often represents counter-racist tendencies;
3. Imperial Man, who represented British governing confidence during the colonial era;
4. the Good African, Imperial Man's trusting and doting servant; and
5. American self-aggrandisement via a male landscape. In these 'jungle movies' negative images of black women and race hatred are a speciality.

A key contributor to myths of Africa in both British and American fantasy films was the nineteenth century South African-based British novelist H. Rider Haggard. He exported bizarre descriptions of Africa and Africans, writing about volcanoes, treasures, hunter-heroes, demonic black witches, lost white civilisations, white goddesses, and so on. These images reappear in endless remakes of his books on film and television, and they are imported into other titles and media as well. Films like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), now a Disneyland ride, for example, to some extent derive their imagery and characters from writers like Haggard. Contemporary images of Africa found in world cinema are thus inextricably linked to the nature of the encounter between early writers and this mysterious continent. Many such writers were based in South Africa during the late nineteenth century.

Another key historical influence on images of Africa came from the pen of American Edgar Rice Burroughs. Burroughs's twin sources for Tarzan were Haggard and Rudyard Kipling, writer of the famous *Jungle book* (Cameron 1994: 32). Tarzan is cast as a 'noble savage', an exemplar of an aristocratic British bloodline, in many early Tarzan films, and in the much more nuanced Greystoke:

The Legend of Tarzan Lord of the Apes (1984). The American interpretations eliminated Tarzan's aristocratic imperial origin and made him 'American'. As an American, Tarzan expresses white Americans' racial fear of blacks. The American Tarzan films are a depression-era fantasy, and those featuring Jane provide narratives of a stable couple in which the husband is stronger than the chaotic forces of life (ibid.: 43).

The role of monkeys and gorillas is also instructive in the Tarzan and other films. My experience in talking to primary school children at two schools in Indiana, Pennsylvania in March 1996, bears this out. One class of 10/11-year-olds had formed their impression of Africa with the help of PG-rated films such as *Congo* (1995), *Outbreak* (1995) and *Jumanji* (1995). Africa for them was a jungle inhabited by diseased gorillas and monkeys that threatened Americans' health! Once they had succeeded in obtaining an admission from me that monkeys indeed visited my garden in Durban, no explanations contradicting their stereotypes could repair the damage done. (I explained that Durban is sub-tropical, our gardens have wild bananas and other fruit and that monkeys were being displaced by massive urbanisation - no one looks out for monkey's rights!) My daughter, who started high school in Michigan in 1998, came up with the defensive analogy that '*squirrels are to East Lansing what monkeys are to Durban*', as we had previously only seen these small furry creatures as comic book characters. However, once she admitted the fact of monkeys in our garden, the moral high ground could not be retrieved, despite the analogy. Now that one theory on the origin of Aids is sourced to transmission between chimpanzees and humans, Africa again becomes associated in the United States (US) with incurable globalising pandemics. Muhammed Ali's '*Rumble in the jungle*' (where he fought George Foreman for the world heavyweight boxing title) owes its origins to the kinds of films set in Africa which shaped the early American imagination.

In the late 1940s after he became a little too saggy to fit into a Tarzan loincloth without depressing popcorn sales among cinema audiences, the great Johnny Weismuller filled the twilight years of his acting career with a series of low budget adventure movies with titles like *Devil Goddess* and *Jungle Moon*, all built around a character called Jungle Jim. These modest epics are largely forgotten now, which is a pity because they were possibly the most cherishably terrible movies ever made ... My own favourite, called *Pygmy Island*, involved a lost tribe of white midgets and a strange but valiant fight against the spread of

communism. But the narrative possibilities were practically infinite since each Jungle Jim feature consisted in large measure of scenes taken from other, wholly unrelated adventure stories. Whatever footage was available – train crashes, volcanic eruptions, rhino charges, panic scenes involving large crowds of Japanese – would be snipped from the original and woven in Jungle Jim's wondrously accommodating story lines. From time to time the ever-more fleshy Weismuller would appear on a scene to wrestle the life out of a curiously rigid and unresisting crocodile or chase some cannibals into the woods, but these intrusions were generally brief and seldom entirely explained (Bryson 2002: 1-2).

Bill Bryson (ibid.: 2) thrusts the point home: *What is especially tragic about all of this is that I not only watched the movies with unaccountable devotion, but also was incredibly influenced by them. In fact, were it not for some scattered viewings of the 1952 classic, Bwana Devil, and a trip on a Jungle Safari Ride at Disneyland in 1961, my knowledge of African life, I regret to say, would be entirely dependent on Jungle Jim movies.*

The later Greystoke restores Tarzan's British lineage, while simultaneously revealing aristocratic viciousness, and Tarzan's escape from it, by returning to the wild, back to his gorilla family, and a social and environmental integrity long lost to the West. While Burroughs never set foot in Africa, Tarzan visited South Africa in a television series (1997) shot at Sol Kerzner's *Lost City*, part of the Sun City hotel, casino and entertainment complex that became infamous for boycott busting during the 1980s by international music celebrities who performed there. Black South African actors on a promotional television programme, which preceded the television series, insisted that *'this is the real Africa'*. Their PR came to mind when I visited the Disneyland feature of the Tarzan Tree House under attack from a gorilla, which in 2004 seemed to have replaced the more stable Swiss Family Robinson set. These actors thus undermined nearly a century of African criticism of the racist dimension of the bulk of the Tarzan genre. However, as Rob Gordon reminds a forum of documentary filmmakers, audiences do not always assume the imperialism of the director or characters as

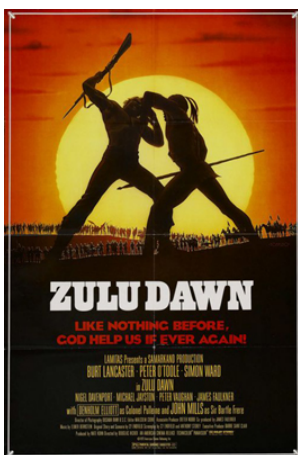
... the meaning of race (and of culture) is ultimately a matter of local grass-roots interpretation. The most striking example here is Rambo, a film which most of us would find offensively imperialistic. Yet it's a hit in Vietnam and among Australian Aborigines because they see Rambo as fulfilling important kinship obligations and fighting an obstinate bureaucracy. Rambo is currently the training film of choice for the sad child soldiers of Sierra Leone. So too, on the South African platteland

[‘countryside’] Tarzan was popular, not because it reinforced notions of white superiority (although it undoubtedly did) but because the audiences loved to find fault with the film’s representation of Africa. Let us always be aware that every production has unanticipated consequences (cited in Tomaselli 2001).

South Africa: Protecting its own

In 1995, cinema in South Africa was exactly one hundred years old. Early projection devices were frequented around the Johannesburg goldfields from 1895 onwards (Gutsche 1972). The first cinema newsreels were filmed at the front during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) by the British Warwickshire Company. Others simply fabricated the war scenes in England itself. The world’s longest-running weekly newsreel, African Mirror (1913-1984), was in the mid-1980s broadcast as history on national television. The first ever South African narrative film was *The Kimberley Diamond Robbery*, made in 1910.

Between 1916 and 1922, I.W. Schlesinger produced forty-three big-budget technically high-quality features. Schlesinger had arrived penniless on South African shores from America at the turn of the century and proceeded to build an international insurance empire from Johannesburg. In 1913, he consolidated total control over the South African entertainment industry – theatre, cinema, and later radio (Gutsche 1972). The cinematic themes and images chosen by Schlesinger were rooted in the ideological outlook of the period prevalent in European and Anglo-American culture. Haggard’s novels were a recurring source for film scripts, and continue to be so a century later.



Zuludawn

In Schlesinger’s own historical epics, Boer and Briton stood together under the flame of unity and civilisation against barbaric black hordes (e.g. *De Voortrekkers*

/ *Winning a Continent*, 1916 and *Symbol of Sacrifice*, 1918). Though *De Voortrekkers* was the model for the later American epic, *The Covered Wagon* (1923), it was the sheer magnitude of *Symbol of Sacrifice*, with its 25 000 Zulu warrior extras, that set early technical standards for this genre. Foreign productions such as *Zulu* (1966) and *Zulu Dawn* (1980), docu-dramas based on the British-Zulu Wars of 1879, followed *Symbol of Sacrifice*. These films continued the West's fascination with the Zulu, mythologised in the South African television series and US cable hit, *Shaka Zulu* (1986) (Tomaselli 2003; Shepperson and Tomaselli 2002).

Production declined after 1922 because, despite high technical standards, obtaining footholds in British and US markets proved difficult. However, unlike other countries, the South African film industry remained in local hands until 1956, when 20th Century Fox bought out most of Schlesinger's cinema interests, including the Killarney Films production house. In 1969 the South African-owned Ster Films bought Fox's South African holdings and retained near monopolistic control of the industry until the mid-1990s, when it sold its interests to another South African group, Primedia (cf. Tomaselli and Shepperson 2000). This unusual situation of very long periods of domestic ownership resulted in South African producers enjoying some leverage with the local distributors and exhibitors when it came to securing screen access for their films.

A thirty-year lull was broken in the early 1950s by Jamie Uys (of *The Gods Must be Crazy*, 1980; 1989 films) when he succeeded in attracting Afrikaner capital to establish independent production. In 1956 he represented a consortium of producers in persuading the government to provide a subsidy for the making of local films. This subsidy was modified through the years and continued until the late 1980s. The subsidy was paid against a percentage of box office income and deliberately favoured Afrikaans-language films over English. Later, in 1975, a specific subsidy was also introduced for films using black South African languages (Tomaselli 2000b; Murray 1992). The subsidy system was terminated at the end of the 1980s, and as was discussed in Chapter 3, a new system was introduced in 2004.

It was the government subsidy that resulted in films supportive of the military such as *Kaptein Caprivi* (1972), made while the South African Police (SAP) propped up the white Rhodesian regime. One of the sub-genres within these 'jeep operas' is what Cameron (1994: 145) calls the 'mercenary film', such as *Wild*

Geese (1977). These kinds of films reveal clear racism on the part of their directors, as a handful of usually ageing American and British actors playing mercenaries wipe out hundreds of pursuing blacks. The myth of the mercenary remained strong amongst older whites in Africa, rekindled by the idiotic exploits of French, English and South African has-beens in the late 1980s, early 1990s and 2004 with regard to their aborted attempts at coups d'état in the Comores Islands, Seychelles, Equatorial Guinea and elsewhere. These continuing escapades indicate a residual pattern of destabilisation of African countries during apartheid and the Cold War. Mercenaries, 'dogs of war', to use Frederick Forsyth's (1974) term, conducted the work of Imperial man in the twentieth century, taking on communism, barbarism and rescuing all manner of victims of the 'dark continent'. Where the Great White Hunters are a social and sexual ideal, as in *Out of Africa* (1985), the anachronistic young and old fools in Jeeps are nostalgic throwbacks to mythical cinematic times when a few white (and black) mercenaries armed with machine guns could control an entire continent. Indeed, one soldier/actor/mercenary, Simon Mann, arrested with sixty mercenaries in Zimbabwe in March 2004, had even played the role of a parachute regiment colonel in *Bloody Sunday* (2002), a re-enactment of the 1972 massacre of thirteen Northern Ireland demonstrators by British troops (Sunday Times, 14 March 2004: 6). Antoine Fuqua's film on African genocide turned into another mercenary-type film, owing to pressure from the film's star, action hero Bruce Willis, and the production studio, who were hoping to outdo their 2001 success, *Black Hawk Down* (2001). The result, *Tears of the Sun* (2003), is an action film with a humanitarian angle, resembling the American western. Bruce Willis plays a Navy SEAL sent to rescue a mission doctor - the female love interest (Monica Bellucci) - in Nigeria, which has come under military rule. After witnessing the brutality of the rebel forces, the hero undergoes a change of conscience and decides to help the villagers leave the mission station to the safety of a neighbouring country, thereby putting his own life at risk. The film once again portrays America as the world's saviour (Bruce Willis's character at one stage remarks that 'God already left Africa'), at a time in world history when US intervention in Iraq was a contentious subject.

Afrikaner concerns

While many subsidy-driven films were of appalling quality, rarely returning their costs, those made by Jamie Uys were always box office successes. In large measure, Uys's grasp of the rural Afrikaners' taste in humour benefited from the

relative lack of alternative sources of entertainment before the advent of television in South Africa in 1976. His comedic themes, which usually made fun of inter-ethnic rivalries, especially those between English-speakers and Afrikaners, consistently outperformed titles from Hollywood. Uys's studio, in fact, provided a training ground for young Afrikaans-speaking directors, scriptwriters and technicians, who later contributed to the development of the conflict-love genre. These films engaged social issues via genre structures, and are much less conspiratorial than commentators like Peter Davis (1996) would have us believe. Where international films on Africa and South Africa have tended to ignore women, the insider-outsider genre, wrapped up in a conflict-love plot, consistently depicted headstrong females. Cast as boeredogters ('farmers' daughters', daughters of the earth), these femmes fatales traumatically broke with the tradition and close social and community cohesion centred on 'the farm', 'family' and volk ('nation') as propagated by Rompel (1942a; 1942b). Rather, and with the directors' approval, they sought their uncertain futures in the sinful city populated by the victorious English enemy. The boeredogter's relocation heralded the onset of Afrikaner cultural modernity. The cities were where the real political and economic struggles between English and Afrikaner were occurring and where Afrikaner power was negotiating its ascendancy. The boeredogter indicated the strategic need for Afrikaner nationalists to secure their interests in this new ideological and economic battleground.

The boeredogter storylines captured the imaginations of the Afrikaner public and, more recently, the rise of South African actress Charlize Theron to Oscar-winning success can be likened to the plots of these earlier films. Theron, who apparently said in an early interview that she left South Africa when apartheid ended for fear of not being able to find a job as a white person, was raised on a smallholding on the outskirts of a working class part of the country. After a brief modelling stint, which included her baring her breasts for the editor of the South African edition of *Playboy* magazine, she moved to Hollywood with her mother, dropped her accent in favour of an American drawl, and worked her way to the top, ultimately gaining Oscar recognition for her performance in *Monster* (2003). Her Golden Globe award acceptance speech played on this romanticised rags-to-riches tale when she cried, 'I'm just a girl from a farm in South Africa!' In her Oscar acceptance speech, Theron thanked 'everybody in South Africa' and promised to '[bring] this [the Oscar] home next week'. To many proud South Africans, this was a sign that she was acknowledging her cultural roots despite her American

accent. The media hype that surrounded her visit 'home' highlights the African inferiority complex when it comes to cultural production, where the ultimate measure of success is to 'make it overseas'. 'Making it overseas' is the equivalent of the boeredogter 'going to the city', a necessary though culturally alienating social trajectory in class struggle and personal emancipation from the tyranny of the Community. Theron, for example, travelled with an entourage, her itinerary was kept secret, and she was pressed for interviews by the media. South African Airways donated her and her entourage the first-class cabin, and both President Thabo Mbeki and former President Nelson Mandela met her in person to thank her for 'putting South Africa on the map'. Theron is now considered South Africa's most successful film export, thereby dislodging Jamie Uys. This is the fate that awaited the boeredogter in the earlier genre - success results in cultural distance, enculturation into an alien environment, and consorting with the enemy. Theron's achievement is secured at the expense of, but on behalf of, the group, Afrikaner culture and economy. Theron has adapted herself to suit Hollywood standards: even her dress and styling on Oscar night made deliberate reference to the Hollywood sirens of yesteryear, appealing to American femme fatale iconography. (However, in fairness, the local industry is perhaps not able to support many actors and actresses, especially those after big-budget box office success.)

Intercultural mediations

Intercultural conflict underpins many a South African film. For instance, the sympathetic treatment of the conflict between Roman-Dutch and African Customary Law is the theme of *Uys's Dingaka* (1964). Commentators such as Mtutuzeli Matshoba and John van Zyl recognised at the time of the film's release a cultural authenticity in the film (cited in Tomaselli 1988: 134). *Dingaka* (which means 'traditional healer') was the first South African film made in Panavision, and it introduced actor Ken Gampu to the world. The story begins in a remote and tropical African village where two men are publicly engaged in a stick fight. The resentful loser of the fight, Masaba, seeks the help of the village traditional healer, who tells him that in order to regain his stick-fighting prowess, he needs to eat the heart of a twin child. When a twin from the village disappears, father Ntuku (played by Gampu) sets out to find Masaba, who has fled to the city.

From here the plot revolves around Ntuku's experiences in the city: he is conned out of his money and forced to find work in the mines. Here he encounters and attacks his rival and is subsequently arrested. At this point the white male lead,

legal aid lawyer Davis (Stanley Baker), enters the plot. After failing to convince Ntuku to follow legal procedure and accept his professional services, Ntuku is imprisoned for again attacking Masaba (Paul Makgoba), this time in open court. Ntuku escapes from prison and Davis and his wife (Juliet Prowse) travel to his village to seek him out. At the village, Davis urges Ntuku to kill the sangoma ('traditional healer', played by John Sithebe), who is 'only a man'. Amid the sounds of thunder, Ntuku eventually does so, despite fearing the wrath of the gods, and peace is restored, 'proving that [Davis's] white-European rationalism was correct: the "witchdoctor" is only a man, and he has no magical power' (Cameron 1994: 125).

The film is severely criticised by Davis (1996) for its unrealistic and overly stylised portrayal of African village life, which glosses over the realities of apartheid inequalities as they were experienced in everyday life. He objects to the film's racially patronising and binaristic depictions of African people and their spiritual beliefs (in particular the stereotypically 'evil' sangoma), which reveal 'a syncretising of apartheid's delusions' (ibid.: 66). He points to Uys's Nationalist political leanings, and the apartheid legislation that was being enacted at the time, to further his point. During the 1960s, the apartheid government developed a scheme to replace the traditional leaders in the tribal homelands with appointed Bantu Authorities, 'puppets who would dance on the government's strings' (ibid.: 67). For Davis, this suggests that 'what is being played out in Uys's melodrama of African life is very much an unconscious metaphor for what was happening over the broader landscape of South Africa - the overthrow of not only the traditional but the popular leadership of the African people' (ibid.: 68).

While the film does have the mandatory African travelogue feel in places, as required by the US market, it offered a thematic breakthrough at the time with regard to the portrayal of the African encounter with Western tenets of justice, and also in terms of depicting an interracial friendship. The white layer, the bearer of Roman-Dutch Law, is by no means Imperial Man, and the black character, Ntuku, is no-one's dotting servant. While 'white justice' rules, 'black justice' is revealed as being less impersonal. As Van Zyl concludes in his review in *The Chronicle*: *'This is the stuff of Nordic sagas, and all credit is due to Jamie Uys and Ken Gampu for pulling it off. It hardly matters that an "impression" of an African tribe was created which can be faulted by ethnologists'*.

Cinematic treatments of the San (or Bushmen) have indicated a different encounter with white South Africans to that of the Zulu, or with regard to

traditional law. The remote, unforgiving Bushmen in *Lost in the Desert* (1971) are very unlike the endearing characters Uys constructed in his *Gods Must Be Crazy* pseudo-documentaries (cf. Tomaselli 2006). In propaganda movies, men, the patriarchal stalwarts, are well served by their submissive women. In the conflict-love genre they betray their men. In Uys's films they are either absent or bemused by the anxiety and ineptness with which suitors interact with them. While foreign anti-apartheid critics have not always been kind to Uys's few international releases, especially Dingaka and the first two *Gods Must Be Crazy* films, they did provoke discussion about race and racism of a kind which also left its mark on debates in South Africa (Davis 1996; Blythe 1986). More relevantly, these films were negotiating ways of approaching intercultural relations at a time when racial conflict had hardened into the intractable binary frame which characterises much of Davis's analysis.

In contrast to the kind of politically correct critique that characterised attacks on the two *Gods Must Be Crazy* films, Cameron (1994: 155) argues that these titles reject the more pervasive stereotypes of jungle, savage dancing and witchcraft which typify the majority of Western film fare on Africa. *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980), in theme, narrative structure and comedic device is very similar to Uys's earlier films in which people of colour hardly featured at all. He basically repeated the story he made of himself and his family in his first amateur film, *Daar Doer in die Bosveld* ('Far Away in the Bushveld' - 1951), and embroidered it in each retitled and more technically sophisticated reincarnation in a different environment over the period of his forty-year career.

Key to the Uys idiosyncratic intertext is the lead male Afrikaner character's awkwardness with women, inter-ethnic Afrikaner-English rivalry, and a preference for pastoralism. Uys, as an interpreter of Afrikaner foibles and social anxiety, thus inaugurated a set of peculiarly South African themes. These drew on Buster Keaton's films, where machines seem to have minds of their own and engage in all kinds of bizarre, uncontrollable and unpredictable behaviours. Machines are products of modernity, itself a mystery to ruralites. Uys sensitively highlighted Afrikaner anxiety of entering into modernity through using these machines (vehicles, winches, etc.) as metaphors for social and cultural insecurity. Pastoralism was held to be the protector of pure Afrikaner identity in the face of uncertainty brought about by massive industrialisation where 'self conscious' machines could herald the destruction of traditional societies. Uys's use of machines as Keaton-type comedic devices subverted via slapstick the previously

dominant images of die Boer ('farmer'/Afrikaner), created by Afrikaners of themselves in their propagandistic amateur feature films of the 1930s and 1940s.

People defining themselves as Afrikaners are known for a certain austerity. Uys's early cinema offered the first light-hearted self-depreciating cultural moment after the severity of the historical processes this group is historically known for, as it attempted to be humorous rather than overtly ideological in its approach. His self-depreciating humour was continued in the 1990s by Afrikaner comedian Leon Schuster whose racial politics shift as fast as does the political landscape in films like *Oh Shucks, Here Comes Untag* (1990), *Sweet 'n Short* (1991), *Panic Mechanic* (1997), *Mr Bones* (2001) and *Mama Jack* (2005). All these films, from a variety of directors, interrogate white Afrikaner fears about a Mandela 'black government' and white loss of political control. Slapstick and, increasingly with Schuster, a narratively developed Candid Camera genre, denotes one trajectory in post-apartheid cinema (cf. Steyn 2003). A clear introspection and engagement of South African themes such as in *Chikin Biznis* (1998), *Shooting Bokke* (2003), and *E'skia Mphahlele* (2003) accounts for another more culturally serious post-apartheid trajectory.

Another film in the Schuster-type genre, written by Mfundi Vundla and directed by David Lister, is *Soweto Green* (1996) with John Kani playing the returned exile. *There's a Zulu on my Stoep* (1993), written by and starring Schuster, was one of the few in the genre that effectively interrogated racial issues via blackface casting and identity exchange. A promising start, where the returned black exile (John Matshikiza) switches identities with his early white boyhood friend to outwit their friends whose car they have stolen, degenerates into over-the-top slapstick chaos. Slapstick heaven also mars the conclusion of *Soweto Green*. Is it possible that this idiotic chaos was a metaphor for political times to come?

International African actors and voices

Films set in Africa provided opportunities for black American actors such as Paul Robeson, Sidney Poitier, James Earl Jones, Denzel Washington, Danny Glover and Morgan Freeman, to redefine the way that Africans are imaged in international cinema. Cameron (1994: 182) mentions the later films of Robeson especially, who brought dignity to his roles, and created spaces for African female characters to emerge in their own right. South African singer Miriam Makeba, for example, shot to international fame in *Lionel Rogosin's Come Back Africa* (1959) (cf. Balseiro 2003). Another vehicle to an international career for a South African was

Zoltan Korda's *Cry the Beloved Country* (1951), based on Alan Paton's novel. Lionel Ngakane made his name as a supporting actor alongside the lead played by Poitier (cf. Ngakane 1997). The contribution of Michael and Zoltan Korda to the British image of Africa was less racist than contemporary American representations, and Zoltan's break with Empire stereotypes of both British and blacks in *Cry the Beloved Country* challenged the industry internationally to rethink its representations of Africans in cinema. Davis (1996: 2), however, notes the deep influence of imperialist literature on Zoltan Korda who later made *Sanders of the River* (1935), *Elephant Boy* (1937) and *Four Feathers* (1939), 'all of them celebrating heavily romanticised aspects of white rule'. However, as Hees (1996: 178) observes:

This may be true, but Zoltan Korda also directed and himself produced *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1951), a version of Paton's novel totally lacking the sentimentality of Darrell Roodt's more recent version; the other films mentioned were produced by his brother, Alexander Korda. I am not making a point here about the factual content of Davis's book, but rather expressing a concern about its tendency to present material in a way that reduces racial issues to white exploitation of victimized blacks.

Very little has been written on the contribution of actors in South African cinema. Ken Gampu, who starred in *Dingaka*, gets a brief but long overdue mention from Cameron (1994: 124) as a great performer. Gampu's interpretation of the roles into which both South African and international directors had cast him generally lifted the tenor of the films in which he acted. In contrast is Richard Rowntree's *Shaft in Africa* (1973), with its blaxploitation characters in which Africa was merely a convenient backdrop to American storylines. Such was the popular impact of the Shaft films in South Africa, however, that a beer label and some shops briefly named themselves thus.

Even less has been written on female South African film directors and actors, some of whom have also doubled up as directors. Entries in The feminist companion guide to cinema including Katinka Heyns, Helen Nogueira and Elaine Proctor are offered by Ruth Teer-Tomaselli and Wendy Annecke (1990). Heyns, directed by Jan Rautenbach, played particularly significant roles in Afrikaans cinema that critically interrogated Afrikaner bigotry and political expediency (e.g. *Wild Season*, 1968; *Katrina*, 1969; *Jannie Totsiens*, 1970 and *Pappalap*, 1971). Heyns later directed films that continued this thematic analysis in *Fiela se Kind* ('Fiela's Child') (1987), and *Paljas* ('Clown') (1997).

Cinema as the voice of the people is much younger than cinema the institution. That voice was facilitated by producers located elsewhere in films like *Cry the Beloved Country* and the clandestinely shot, chilling docu-drama *Come Back Africa*, which reveals the brutality of apartheid's structural violence in the psychological breakdown of its central protagonist Zacharia (Zachariah Mgabi) (cf. Balseiro 2003; Beittel 2003). Later, Euzhan Palcy's *A Dry White Season* (1989, based on the novel by Andre Brink) and Richard Attenborough's *Cry Freedom* (1987, based on the friendship between journalist Donald Woods and slain black activist Steve Biko) were the first films to bring the horrors of apartheid repression to the big screen and cinema audiences on a mass scale not previously achieved.

These international and other productions employed South African actors such as Zakes Mokae, amongst others. Lionel Ngakane made his mark as a director with the British-made, award-winning *Jemina and Johnny* (1966), a short cinematic statement on non-racialism, which followed his documentary on apartheid, *Vukani Awake* (1964). Ngakane served as technical consultant on *A Dry White Season*. Ngakane, who died in late 2003, however declined an invitation from producer Anant Singh to act in the Darrell Roodt remake of *Cry the Beloved Country* (1995) due to other commitments. Ngakane's influence on African cinema through his involvement with the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI) (while he was in exile) that occurred after finishing the Korda film was significant. This pan-African work was recognised in 1997 when Ngakane was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Natal. He had earlier been awarded a lifetime Achievement Award by the M-Net Film Awards on which he was also a consultant for its New Directions short film series.

Between 1956 and 1978 genre films (especially in Afrikaans) earned higher returns than did imported Hollywood fare. Exceptions which interrogated apartheid exposed white South Africans to new critical styles. Amongst these was the unique expressionism of Rautenbach's *Jannie Totsiens*, in which a psychiatric asylum inhabited by white inmates is an allegory for apartheid. A thin, comedic neo-realism is found in Donald Swanson's *African Jim* (1949) and *Magic Garden* (1961), both of which emphasise black characters and stories in urban settings. The more obviously bleak neo-realist style of Athol Fugard and Ross Devenish is evident in *Boesman and Lena* (1973), *The Guest* (1978) and *Marigolds in August* (1980). These are films with tortured characters, whose angst is perhaps of a more existential origin than of apartheid. Fugard's last film, *Road to Mecca*

(1992), directed by Peter Michel, is his best yet. Its swirling camera which focuses on interpersonal relationships between an old, eccentric, secluded white artist and her hostile small-town conservative Afrikaner community (based on Helen Martin of 'the owl house' fame, Nieu Bethesda), reveals the inner Fugard, a solitary artist also alienated from the society in which he then lived.

The first domestic black-made film was theatre director Gibson Kente's *How Long (must we suffer ...?)* (1976). It was shot in the Eastern Cape during the Soweto uprising. *How Long* was briefly shown in the Transkei Bantustan. The whereabouts of the print are unknown. Other films made by whites and aimed at blacks tended to be appallingly inept, exploitative and patronising, such as *Joe Bullet* (1974), which kicked off the South African blaxploitation genre. This marginalised sector of the industry literally consisted of butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. It emerged in 1974, milked the government subsidy pot dry, and collapsed at the end of the 1980s (Murray 1992; Gavshon 1983; Tomaselli 1988).

However, black director and actor Simon Sabela, employed by Heyns Films, injected a degree of cultural integrity into the films he made, such as *U-Deliwe* (1975). It was only towards the end of the 1980s when it became known that Heyns Films had been secretly infiltrated, Nazi-style, by the apartheid government, which was responsible for funding Sabela's films, though this was not known by him. The contradictions are clear - even state-sponsored films had a degree of integrity of content, in contrast to the blatantly opportunistic racism of many of those privately financed low-budget films made by some whites for the 'black' market, and funded via post-release subsidy claims made by their makers. Such films sometimes consumed less than a weekend in production time.

Emergent anti-apartheid cinema

White South Africa, observes Cameron (1994), tends to see itself as a reflection of white American values; hence the obsession with Theron and to a lesser extent Arnold Vosloo, star of *The Mummy* (1999; 2001) films. Breaking with these values indicates to Cameron a maturing of South African cinema as seen particularly in the post-1986 anti-apartheid films directed by Roodt such as *Place of Weeping* (1986), *Jobman* (1989), *City of Blood* (1986), *Sarafina* (1993) and the *Cry the Beloved Country* remake starring James Earl Jones. Anant Singh, a South African of Indian extraction, produced these films, and many others. His activities extend to the US, one of his most technically sophisticated being *The Mangler* (1994),

based on a Stephen King novel.

The years following 1986 saw the sustained development of a domestic anti-apartheid cinema financed by capital looking for tax breaks and international markets, mainly driven by Singh's financing. Simultaneous with this emergent oppositional trend, Canon Films responded with a new wave of Haggard's explorer titles like *King Solomon's Mines* (1985) and *Alan Quartermain* (1987), before eventually going out of business (see Yule 1987). The 1980s saw host to over 800 foreign-made films in South Africa during this time, all pursuing loopholes in South African tax law. South Africa offered relatively cheap, but highly sophisticated technical labour, which was a deciding factor in the use of South African locations and facilities. Ninjas in the Third World, voodoo killings, psychotics and other themes also emerged from South African directors during this time (Taylor 1992).

Multiracial teams have made films such as *Mapantsula* (1988) and *Hijack Stories* (2002), both directed by Oliver Schmitz, *Ramadan Suleman's Fools* (1997), *Wa Luruli's Chikin Biznis* (1998) and Les Blair's *Jump the Gun* (1996). Productions like these have for the first time given South Africa a sustained and sophisticated examination of the full spectrum of South African history and everyday life. These examinations include:

1. Historical dramas, for example Boer prisoners held by the British during the Anglo-Boer War in Dirk de Villiers's *Arende* ('The Earth', 1994), cut into a feature from the SABC-television series, and Manie van Rensburg's *The Native who Caused all the Trouble* (1989). Also see *De Voortrekkers/Winning a Continent* (1916), *Bloodriver* (1989), *Zulu Dawn* (1980), amongst others;
2. Films depicting the liberal opposition to apartheid that occurred in the 1960s, for example, Sven Persson's *Land Apart* (1974), *Broer Matie* (1984), Chris Menges' *A World Apart* (1988), Roodt's 1995 remake of *Cry the Beloved Country*, *Cry Freedom* and *A Dry White Season*;
3. The psychological impact on white South Africans of the wars waged against South Africa's neighbours, for example Roodt's *The Stick* (1987) and urban violence in *City of Blood*. These are films about pathology as normality. Opposed to the psychological analysis offered by these films were the jeep operas like *Kaptein Caprivi*, *Grenbasis 13* (1979) and the two *Boetie Gaan Border Toe* (1987; 1988) films directed by Regardt van den Bergh;
4. The popular anti-apartheid struggle of the 1980s was imaged in *Mapantsula*, *Sarafina*, *Place of Weeping*, *Bopha* (1993), the BBC's *Dark City* (1989) and scores

of documentaries. *Land Apart*, which predicted the Soweto uprising of June 1976, provided a benchmark for anti-apartheid documentaries made within South Africa. Nana Mahamo's *Last Grave at Dimbaza* (1973), shown clandestinely throughout South Africa during the 1970s, offered South Africans a very different, indirect address style of documentary. The 1980s in particular saw many more, for example, Jurgen Schadeberg's *Have You Seen Drum Recently?* (1988) recreated the energetic days of Drum magazine of the 1950s. Many others have contributed to a growing movement of critical and historically sensitive film and video makers;

5. Comedic films critical of white racial attitudes and experiences, for example, *Taxi to Soweto* (1991), *Soweto Green*, *Panic Mechanic* and *There's a Zulu on my Stoep*;

6. Both the historical origins and the contemporary effects of apartheid are found in *Procter's Friends* (1994), Heyns's *Fiela se Kind*, and Van Rensburg's *The Fourth Reich* (1990), constituted into a cinema release from the four-part television series. Andrew Worsdale's *Shot Down* (1990) reveals the inner turmoil of South Africans of various races as a consequence of apartheid (see Savage 1989b).

Signposts towards post-apartheid cinema

The future of South African cinema was established in the 1920s. A short film, directed by Lance Gewer, *Come See the Bioscope* (1997), based on Plaatje's endeavours to bring the visual technologies of modernity to black South Africans, signposts this post-apartheid revisionist aim. The film is set in 1924, by which stage Plaatje, founding member of the New African Movement and first secretary of the African National Congress (ANC), was already a well-educated and well-travelled politician, historian and author. After returning from his travels, Plaatje toured the country for several years using sponsored equipment (a Ford motor car, a generator and film projector) to educate people in both towns and rural areas about the New Negroes in the US and the unfolding political situation in South Africa (Masilela 2003). Just as Plaatje pioneered mobile cinema distribution, so have many filmmakers since, ranging from the producers of features 'made for blacks', through HIV educational movies such as the STEPS for the Future series, to Roodt's *Yesterday* (2004). Development of audiences is a major project of the Film Resource Unit based in Johannesburg.

Come See the Bioscope depicts Plaatje (Ernest Ndlovu) as an inspiring leader and educator who takes on the role of 'the bioscope man' in order 'to show people a

world they do not know'. Plaatje appreciated early on the powerful role that cinema could play in propagating and shaping beliefs: he protested outside the Johannesburg Town Hall at the showing of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), asking why such an anti-black film, banned in some parts of the US, could be shown in South Africa (Masilela 2003: 21). Although the film itself could be criticised for being a somewhat sentimental portrayal, it is a well-made account of how an influential black leader overcame political obstacles and distribution constraints in order to expose black people to cinema, and in so doing educate them about their situation in relation to American developments. *Come See the Bioscope* brings to life a significant and previously neglected episode in South Africa's cinema history.

Most documentary crews working in the Plaatje vein work with subjects and sources as ends in themselves, rather than as means to ends. Everyone, prostitutes, street children, gangsters, people with AIDS, villagers, torture victims, experts and others, are all revealed to have personalities, identities and feelings. They are seen to have hopes, fears and disappointments. I call these encounter videos - 'being there' - we learn what it is like to be a victim, a social actor, a survivor. We also learn, mainly via the video makers, what it is like to be an activist, a facilitator, an advocate, like Plaatje. Videos can be empowering - for their subjects, their communities and their producers. The STEPS For the Future series on AIDS videos for example, are gut-wrenching and disturbing visual sociologies of the ordinary. As sociologies, experiential, personal, visual, they are also explanatory, theoretical, methodological, and are compelling studies in and of themselves. They are innovative both in terms of form and practice, taking intertextuality to new heights. The 'actors' are sometimes the HIV/AIDS educational facilitators, and are recognised as such by audiences to whom they are screening their films.

Infrastructural developments

Part of the revitalisation of South African cinema since the late 1990s was the establishment of the National Film and Video Foundation in 1998. This body arose out of an industry-wide consultative process, which brought all sectors of the film and video industry into productive if often tense discussions over the post-apartheid structure of the film and video industries (cf. Tomaselli and Shepperson 2000; Botha 2003). The Foundation, administered by the Department of Arts and Culture, Science and Technology, allocates development grants for training, production and audience development purposes. The Foundation is responsible to

a board of governors drawn from the film and video industry and civil society. This initiative encourages state and private financing partnerships with regard to production projects.

In South Africa, unlike in other African countries where broadcasting is part of the civil service, the film and television industries have always been closely integrated. This relationship therefore provides a much greater set of financing and market opportunities to South African filmmakers than is available in the rest of Africa. The impact of television, therefore, also needs to be assessed in relation to the development of South African cinema in a companion study.

Taking advantage of the relatively economic production cost structures of television, the public-service South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the commercial subscription broadcaster M-Net, and the commercial free-to-air channel, e-TV, all encourage, develop and market the work of South Africa's fiction filmmakers and documentary and short film producers. All three companies invest directly in production of feature films, and all kinds of innovative projects emerged in the 1990s from within the film and television industries as a whole. With Jeremy Nathan's *Africa Dreaming* project of 1997, and his subsequent *DV8* projects, the SABC combined with commercial entertainment giant Primedia, the Film Resource Unit, and other sponsors to produce a series of short features for broadcast. The SABC project placed South African filmmakers within the broader context of African cinema's rich history. Thus, the first batch of films under the *Africa Dreaming* rubric all dealt with the theme of love, and combined female South African director Palesa ka Letlaka-Nkosi's *Mamalambo*, with Namibian Richard Pakleppa's *The Homecoming*, Mozambican Joao Ribeiro's *The Gaze of the Stars*, *The Last Picture* from Zimbabwean Farai Sevenzo, *The White and the Black* by Senegalese Joseph Gai Ramaka and *So Be It* by Abderrahmane Sissako, from Tunisia.

M-Net, a South African-based multinational pay television corporation, initiated an annual *New Directions* competition for directors and scriptwriters in the early 1990s. In the first half of each calendar year, the company solicits proposals from first-time directors and writers. Proposals are scrutinised by a panel of experienced professionals, which included Lionel Ngakane, and through a process of mentored refinement six proposals are selected for production. The final products emerge from a further refinement session, in the form of thirty-minute dramas broadcast on selected M-Net channels. One project was later remade into a cinema feature, *Chikin Biznis*. The script was written by Mtutuzeli Matshoba,

produced by Richard Green of New Directions, and directed by Ntshaveni Wa Luruli. The plot revolves around Sipho (Fats Bookholane), a retired office worker, who sells live chickens on the street in Soweto. He gets up to all kinds of tricks and crosses swords with everyone in his path. *Chikin Biznis* is not a political film. The freedom of the transition to democracy offered filmmakers an opportunity to make films about ordinary people engaged in everyday ordinary activities.

Another M-Net initiative was its annual All Africa Film Awards, an event first held in October 1995, following its earlier Awards, which only considered South African fare. Films from everywhere but South Africa were nominated in every category for the 1995 awards. The following year, the Cape Town ceremony saw one partial South African production, *Jump the Gun*, funded by Britain's Channel 4 and directed by an Englishman, Les Blair, receive awards for best leading actor (Lionel Newton) best sound (Simon Rice), and best English language film. In 1997, an Egyptian film, *Destiny* (1997), piped the South African-made *Paljas*. The Awards showcased a range of producers, directors and products (even if only once a year) and brought the diversity of African cinema home to an audience which mostly watched sport and anything M-Net contracts from a variety of Hollywood sources. The Awards were discontinued in 2000.

Yesterday / tomorrow

The technical golden age of South African cinema epics occurred between 1916 and 1922. The period of sheer quantity at thirty films a year occurred between 1962 and 1980, the heyday of apartheid. However, the South African industry's political and aesthetic coming of age was signalled by a sustained movement towards historical interrogation that began in 1986. The mid-1990s saw the next phase facilitated by the new democratically elected government, which for the first time created a development strategy for the wider development of the industry as a whole, from grassroots video to international co-production. The new millennium has already seen the production of top quality local films and promises to be an exciting time for South African cinema. The local film industry is growing, owing to the regular filming of foreign productions in Cape Town and Durban where production costs are comparatively low. In April 2004 the government's Department of Trade and Industry announced plans to provide financial incentives to increase foreign investment, to encourage the production of local content and boost job creation. In 2004, ten years after the country's first democratic election, South African audiences were able to see the first full-length Zulu feature film with English subtitles. The film *Yesterday* tells the story of a

mother who confronts her recently diagnosed HIV status in rural KwaZulu-Natal. The aptly-titled *Forgiveness* (2004), gives a compelling fictional account of an ex-policeman, granted amnesty at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), who approaches the family of the man he murdered in the name of apartheid for their forgiveness. The film highlights the moral issues raised in post-apartheid South Africa.

As someone privileged to have consulted for the government on its post-apartheid cinema and video development strategy, I see the fruition of my life's work in these infrastructural developments, in that film and video are being developed as growth sectors within the broader economy, but in ways that are democratically inclusive rather than racially and sectorially exclusive. Within just a few years the fruits were clear to see: aesthetically, in terms of themes, and in terms of the infusion of refreshing new talent into both the television and cinema sectors. The role of new film schools and university courses, of course, played a key role in such developments.

However, as Jeanne Prinsloo argued in 1996, filmmaking in post-apartheid South Africa faces particular context-specific challenges. Following the demise of apartheid there was a renewed understanding of nationhood as a potentially unifying force in South African society. In this 'renarration of nations' (1996: 34), the discourse of the anti-apartheid struggle is frequently invoked in attempts to constitute 'the rainbow nation'. However, this reconciliation discourse often 'speaks to a condition as not yet achieved' (ibid.: 47). In reality, apartheid has left its mark on the South African film industry. Therefore, Third Cinema aspirations need to be viewed against the infrastructural and institutional challenges that exist, such as unequal economic power relations, inadequate non-urban and black township distribution networks and competition from cheaper (American) entertainment options (Prinsloo 1996). Prinsloo contends that at the discursive level, there is a need to balance celebratory reconciliation discourses with more critical engagements with the process of transformation, while at the same time resisting the pressure to always be politically correct. South African films need to draw on a range of narratives and a plurality of meanings.

Keyan G. Tomaselli - Encountering Modernity - Twentieth Century South African Cinemas

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A book describing the history of South African cinemas can never be about cinemas only, for the subject will always be intimately intertwined with its context, in this case 20th century South Africa.

Keyan Tomaselli, one of the founders of cultural studies in SA, explores in this book how South African cinemas and films have been decidedly shaped by the country's history. In turn, films have inspired their makers and audiences to understand, and come to terms with, the complex phenomenon of modernity.

Discussing film theory, narratives, audiences and key South African films and filmmakers, Tomaselli aptly demonstrates that the time has come to adapt a more 'African' view on African cinemas, since western theories and models cannot automatically be applied to an African context.

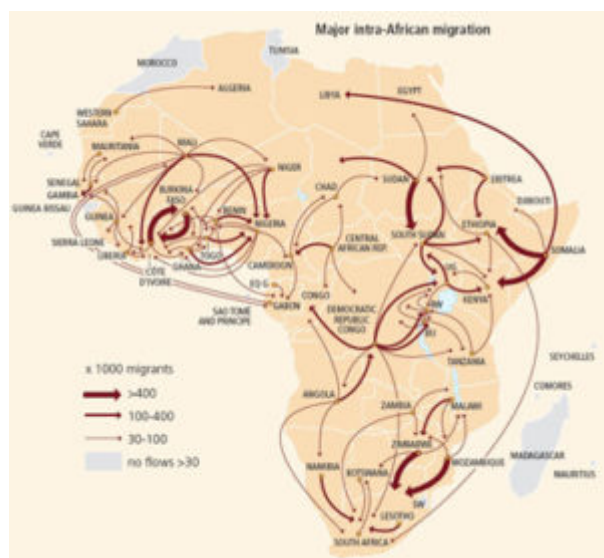
Far from shying away from the personal, Tomaselli gives a conscientious and telling account of how his own experiences as a film maker, a cultural studies scholar, and a South African, have inevitably influenced his academic viewpoints and analysis.

About the author:

Prof. Keyan Tomaselli (Culture, Communication and Media Studies Department, University of KwaZulu-Natal) previously worked in the film industry and was co-writer of the White Paper on Film. His seminal books include *The Cinema of Apartheid* and *Appropriating Images* (1996). His interests are political economy, African cinema and visual anthropology.

**Ton Dietz ~ Working Paper:
Destination Africa. The Dynamics**

1990-2015



In September 2017 the African Studies Centre Leiden published a Thematic Map about Africa's international migration in 2015. At the backside the 2015 data published by UN-DESA were used to show the total international immigration data per country, linked to the position of these countries on the Human Development Index for the same year. Also the data for intercontinental immigration per country were given.

These were clearly showing that immigration was much higher for the African countries with a relatively high HDI score than for the African countries with a low HDI score. Intercontinental immigration was much lower than international immigration, because most international migrants stay within Africa. The thematic map showed that out of 20.4 million people who were stated to be 'immigrants' (= born in another country) only 2.5 million came from outside Africa. A map was shown with all major intra-African migration flows as measured in 2015. And two maps were included showing how many people had immigrated to the 54 African countries, and what the numbers and relative importance was of inter-continental (non-African) immigrants per country, linked to the 2015 HDI scores. So far so good. But there is much more to show.

For this preparatory note for the 'Destination Africa' conference we added a dynamic picture: looking at the changes between 1990 and 2015. And we also looked at the dynamics of the patterns of migration: where did the people come from who have been counted as 'immigrants in Africa' in 1990, 2000, and 2015. An interesting question can also be answered: what is the colonial hangover? And is it true that Europe is losing ground?

This is volume 141 of the series ASCL Working Papers.

[Read the Working Paper.](#)

Africa's Youth And Conflicts: A Sub-Saharan Spring?



Recent travels to Chad, Cameroon and Mali confronted me with the conflicts in these countries as well as in the Central African Republic, and the youth's involvement in them. How are we as researchers to analyse the conflicts and protests, what questions and fields of study should we explore? Are we observing a Sub-Saharan spring?

Opposed youth groups in CAR

In Cameroon I worked on a [project](#) with researchers from CAR. Since 2013 CAR has entered a new cycle of violence. Seleka and anti-Balaka are opposed groups of mainly youth who fight in a rhythm of vengeance. The government controls the capital city Bangui, but other parts of the country are under control of the diverse 'rebel' groups. Both sides are mainly filled with young (wo)men.

Salaries cut in Chad

In Chad I met young men who had just been released from prison where they had been tortured on accusation of disturbing the order. Since January this year Chad has entered a new period of protests and strikes. It was not acceptable for most people that salaries were cut by half and indemnities were not paid. Families could no longer pay for the school fees of their children and some families could only afford one meal a day. It was another period of scarcity in a long sequence of protests in, what is in fact, bankrupt Chad since November 2015. Youth are raising their fists against the regime, but they have little power as the oppression is far more powerful. Since a month now the internet has been cut down again. (This [research](#) done in Chad from 2014 to now about youth movements/hardship gives more insight.)

Read

more: <http://www.ascleiden.nl/mirjam-de-bruijn/africas-youth-and-conflicts-sub-saharan-spring>

Indigenous Oral Traditions From The Huasteca, Mexico



This paper deals with indigenous oral traditions in Mexico. It addresses issues of indigenous languages and how they can be documented, preserved and revitalized through projects about oral traditions in a national context in which there is a renewed discussion on multiculturalism and cross-cultural understanding.

In Mexico, the discussion of multiculturalism centers on 'indigenous issues', specifically on how indigenous peoples should integrate into the so-called modern, more westerly-orientated rest of the nation. In Mexico, indigenous cultures and languages are still systematically discriminated, as they are often seen as irrelevant remnants of a past that have, at most, mere folkloristic value. Since the 1990's, public policies regarding indigenous issues underwent a change and now focus on concepts of multiculturalism in order to favor a more equal position for indigenous languages and cultures.

The new policies were adopted after national pressures like the 1994 Zapatista uprising, and followed up on international interests in the situation of indigenous peoples, such as shown through the festivities around the 500th Anniversary of the Discovery of America by Columbus in 1992, or in the declaration of the UN's First and Second Decade of the Indigenous Peoples (1995-2014). They enhance a novel discourse that includes concepts like cultural diversity, interculturalism, intangible heritage, and other terms that are in accordance with the terminology of international conventions on indigenous issues.

Of course, discourse is tacit, and the mentality that instigated centuries of discrimination, assimilation and exclusion of the indigenous segment of Mexico's society has not yet vanished. One of the many areas in which indigenous communities will have to demand the fulfillment of their rights and contribute

actively to the foundation of a more equal interaction regards their languages. This paper presents the situation of the indigenous languages in Mexico, which will serve as a context to two projects that have been carried out in the Huasteca area on indigenous oral traditions. The projects triggered a discussion on the role of oral resources in the documentation, preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages. This discussion includes thoughts on Mexico's linguistic politics, the issue of how to deal with the existing linguistic variants, the well-known problem of fixation of oral material when recorded, and the role of modern technology in the documentation, preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages and cultures.

Indigenous languages in Mexico

Every time a language dies, we have less evidence for understanding patterns in the structure and function of human language, human prehistory and the maintenance of the world's diverse ecosystems. Above all, speakers of these languages may experience the loss of their language as a loss of their original ethnic and cultural identity.

(Language, Vitality and Endangerment, UNESCO Document, 2002)

Language and culture are two phenomena that are intricately entwined. Each language contains unique cultural, historical and ecological knowledge of the group and its vigor is closely related to the strength of the group's ethnic identity. In Mexico, policies on cultural diversity are directly linked to the existence of the indigenous languages that are spoken in its territory today, as language constitutes the main criterion to confirm the existence of a culturally diverse society. In this respect, the reasoning is that because of the fact that there are many languages spoken, there must be as many cultures in the country.

One language, one culture

This criterion 'one language, one culture' is merely operational as it allows the Mexican government to quantify and make a first inventory of the country's many cultures. Academics have criticized the simplistic, rigid, and a-historic procedure: within the same people there may be various languages spoken, and not all Indians still speak their mother tongue. Indeed, the relationship between language and ethnic affiliation is less and less obvious in a world in which indigenous languages are endangered. Mending this erroneous procedure is especially important because of its far-reaching consequences, as it is the starting-point for policies concerning indigenous rights, bilingual and

intercultural education, as well as the implementation of all kinds of cultural programs, among others. The pressures have led to a reconsideration of the government position, and now several of its institutions are in charge of designing new methods of measuring the presence of indigenous languages and indigenous peoples.

It is true, however, that Mexico is an especially rich country as far as languages are concerned. Though estimates vary according to the source and its particular way of defining the means of distinguishing variants from languages, I would like to list a few figures. First of all, the country counts eleven linguistic families - almost 10% of the total number of existing linguistic families in the world -, with sixty-eight linguistic groups that count 364 living languages (INALI 2008).

Regarding the number of speakers, the rather low percentage of speakers of an indigenous tongue - 8% according to *Ethnologue* (Gordon 2005) - is compensated by the rather large number of individuals: in 2005, official figures say, Mexico counted 6 million speakers of indigenous languages from the age of five onward (INEGI 2005), which represents the highest number of people per country in Latin America.³⁰ The indigenous population is mostly concentrated in the center and southern part of the country.

Linguistic diversity

A good example of Mexico's linguistic diversity can be found in the Huasteca area, where our projects were carried out. This rural area, characterized by its multilingual setting in which six different indigenous peoples live among non-indigenous persons called Mestizos, is the scene of six linguistic groups that stem from four different indigenous language families and which contain at least ten different languages. Though not each indigenous people has contact with others, all languages somehow interact, and several cultural features are shared among the inhabitants.

Mexico is not the exception when it comes to the subordinate position of indigenous languages: they are not recognized as official languages, have little speakers in comparison to the dominant language, generally lack standardization, are oral more than written, and have no prestige at the national level, where only Spanish connotes social and economical success. Most of the indigenous languages are endangered and in different stages of a disappearing process. In each particular case, the situation of language loss has specific historical and political origins, yet the result is nearly always the same: speakers change to Spanish as vernacular, i.e. the language of day-to-day interaction, and do not

transmit their mother tongue to their children anymore. Some of the factors that contribute to this process are linguistic politics -both within the speaker communities as well as at the national level-, contact with a dominant Mestizo culture, economic forces, ideology and identity issues.

Language and oral tradition

Not only in order to find a lending ear in the national funding institutions, but also because I am seriously concerned with expressions that enable me to study the relationships between language and culture (or language *in* culture, as several scholars propose), my projects are usually justified in terms of interculturalism, cultural diversity, and preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages.

One of the ways of working with these language expressions is through the study of indigenous oral traditions and, more specifically, oral tales. While at first I was interested in what kind of cultural knowledge is transmitted through tale telling and how this cultural knowledge is valorized by both the narrator and his or her audience, now my interest lies more in the better understanding of the language itself as a vehicle for transmitting cultural knowledge. I want to illustrate this by presenting the experiences of two group projects that I have coordinated about oral tales from traditions of Tenek and Nahua Indians from the Huasteca area.

In 2000-2001 we developed a project on Tenek and Nahua oral traditions in the Huasteca area. In this area, the Tenek Indians, who are the original inhabitants, have been living together with Nahua Indians for almost six hundred years. Just before the Spanish Conquest, this last people - then called Aztecs - came to the region during their last expansion period. Close and constant cross-cultural contact followed, and quite a few Tenek people even became Nahuatl-speaking citizens under Aztec rule.

This process of close contact influenced cultural processes, among these the oral traditions of both peoples. When we saw that many Tenek and Nahua tales drew upon the same themes (like the origin of fire, the origin of corn, or the coming of floods) and followed nearly the same sequence of episodes, we wanted to collect a sample of these tales in order to have a register of the existing production and be able to study the current dynamics of tale telling as a living tradition. This would give us an idea of the existing literary genres, themes, the narration context, valorization, and mutual influences.

Tale telling as a living tradition

Apart from these academic aims, the project pretended to contribute to the

strengthening and revalorization of tale telling as a living tradition within the indigenous communities. This more applied part of the project carried out through the organization and implementation of a series of workshops for children, and was justified as a contribution to revitalize oral traditions. In this context, revitalization was defined as *'the process of favoring the continuity of indigenous traditions, assuring its transmission through the generations within the intimate spaces and extending its use to more and other spaces in order to secure an integral development of its speakers'*. With the term integral development is meant a process that includes economical security, ecological integrity, life quality, and a responsible management of resources.

It was the aspect of inter-generational transmission that determined our choice to work with children; the workshops took place at elementary schools and in other public spaces within the community, such as the communal house, which means that at times we coordinated the activities with schoolteachers and at others with the local authorities. During the workshops the children drew pictures regarding local tales we had previously told them, narrated to us and to each other, and wrote down tales they had heard from family members.

Sometimes we invited elderly persons from the village to join us during the workshop and tell locally known tales to the children. We did not analyze the products of the workshops, and thought that our mere interest and collaborative work with the children would somehow transmit the idea that these tales were appealing and valuable.



Circulation of indigenous oral tradition

When these first two parts of the project - a reasonable compilation and an incipient contribution to revitalization - were covered, we still had to fulfill the third part, concerning the circulation of indigenous oral tradition. We thought it fundamental to make the tales known, both within and outside the indigenous communities. The work with the children in the workshops were very labor-intensive and time-consuming, and we wanted to be able to give something back to the communities that was more tangible and durable. In the same way, we wanted to address the non-indigenous segment in Mexico, for we think that it is important that this part of the population - the great and dominant majority learns about indigenous traditions, for knowledge is a foundation on which mutual respect might be gained. When talking about Mexico's multicultural society, the subject of interculturalism is always mentioned, and I think that in this respect non-indigenous Mexicans should interculturalize as much as indigenous Mexicans do.

So we published a popular science book with a selection of tales in Nahuatl and Tenek languages, with a translation into Spanish (Van 't Hooft & Cerda 2003). Each chapter of the book dealt with a different theme, which was accordingly introduced so as to further a better comprehension of the tales for non-specialist readers. We hoped the book would contribute to the understanding and positive valuation of indigenous oral traditions, both within and outside indigenous communities. The publisher would take care of its distribution to every public library in the Huasteca, and we did our share through the presentation and distribution of the book in several Mexican States. We considered the third goal of our project to be accomplished.

Oral traditions as a written text

In several ways the mentioned publication can be regarded as a contribution. Academically speaking, the selected tales are singular for their themes, narrative structure, and creativity, and we trust the book to reflect these characteristics. For non-indigenous persons, the book might represent a refreshing change to already known tales. For the indigenous communities, the publication concerns a register of tales that are considered to be important. Their register is relevant in itself, because they constitute a written testimony of a part of the oral tradition of a group 'so it will not be lost'. This way, people have access to material that represents a part of their cultural heritage. Access to one's oral tradition provides a means to get to know and discuss this cultural expression, which is -people say- less and less popular among young people.

Though aware of the disadvantages that exist when turning a verbal source into a written one - in the 1970s Goody (1977) already mentions the transformations in contents, structure and language suffered by an oral tale when transcribed - the availability of written material permits a discussion about indigenous languages that now can be revised, studied, reinterpreted and reflected on. Despite official discourse about the richness of indigenous languages and its fundamental role in Mexico's multicultural society, the current position of these languages is one of great disadvantage in relation to the dominant one. Mexico's situation of asymmetrical bilingualism stands for a vigorous, prestigious Spanish language, which has a normative alphabet and a solid written tradition. The dominated languages are commonly characterized by their lack of a standardized alphabet and an unfortunate obstruction of the process of standardization e.g. due to multiple dialectal variants, divergent ideologies of their promoters, and their condition of being frequently more oral than written. In this context, written material constitutes a new way to transmit these traditions, which means that the use of both language and the cultural expressions it beholds is extended to more spaces of interaction.

Huasteca area

When we presented the book in indigenous communities in the Huasteca, people were happily surprised by the fact that we had published their tales, and also because we had done so in the indigenous languages. They believe it is important to have this material in a written form, and repeatedly say that this kind of publications prevents their traditions from becoming lost. At the same time, the existence of their tales as a written text makes them 'important', as it places their tales next to the content to be found in other published material in Mexico. From time to time, the tales are taken up as teaching materials during workshops with indigenous children as a part of the program of health brigades or anthropological fieldwork in the Huasteca area, much in the same way as we did during the revitalization-phase of our project.

However, it is a fact that the book as such is not read: indigenous people in Mexico generally do not have a habit of reading, and they do even less so in their mother tongue. The use of the book is found in terms of the material being a symbolical reference to the relevance of the tales depicted in it and of the indigenous language in which it is written. It is usually stowed away as a kind of trophy and is perhaps taken out solely to show it to strangers who arrive and want to know about the local culture. I do not qualify this use as being irrelevant:

the existence of published materials about indigenous cultures written in indigenous languages as symbols for the dignifying of indigenous expressions in Mexican society is very important indeed. Due to a series of reasons, indigenous languages are still greatly underrepresented in Mexican written culture (Montemayor 2001). If our publication contributed to this process of dignifying, we will have, in part, succeeded in our goal.

Yet, the other part of our goal was that people would really use this material in the ways they deemed fit as a means to discuss and thus revitalize and revitalize their oral tradition. Published books were definitely not the indicated means to do so, at least not under the current local circumstances in which reading in the mother tongue is not a common practice.

Orality and the oral traditions

Like any other oral tradition, in the indigenous communities in the Huasteca tales are transmitted as part of an always changing living tradition, in which all tales are adapted to the audience's expectations, the motives for narrating, and the linguistic competence of the narrator, as well as other local circumstances.

Regardless of the general structure of the tale, which generally does not change, and the fact that the narrator cannot deviate from the literary canon of his or her tradition (Jason 1977), oral traditions are characterized by their heterogeneity in representations, versions and possible interpretations, in which every tale telling session is unique and unrepeatable. The tales express and discuss current issues that a community has to deal with, often through tales set in the past. At the same time, the representation (i.e. the act of narrating) is a verbal art, in which elements such as creativity, style and rhetoric become relevant.

In coming to terms with the oral character of this material, we considered that the means of getting this material 'back to the field' in a more fruitful way would have to correspond with the dynamics of these oral expressions. It would have to be something close to the natural setting of telling and based on local habits of representing orality. The thought came up to make an Audio CD with the tales in its original audio recordings in the indigenous languages. This approach would give the indigenous communities a material that was not only familiar to them but also popular-people often listen to the radio and commonly play tapes or CDs with music. Perhaps they would be more inclined to listen to a CD with tales than to read them in a book.

Recreating the verbal representation

A second consideration of creating material in an audio format concerned the advantage of recreating the verbal representation itself, as one would now be able to listen to the oral forms and conventions of the tales, and thus hear ways of expression, emotions, rhythm, and other characteristics. This might make the material more attractive to both indigenous and non-indigenous audiences, and would perhaps make them more sensitive towards the existence and value of indigenous languages as a way of oral expression.

We set out to achieve this goal in a second project. We wanted the audio material to offer a varied sample, so we selected the most representative tales, as far as we were able to observe during fieldwork. According to the length of an Audio CD, 74 minutes, only the shorter versions of three tales in the Nahuatl language and another three in the Tenek language were chosen, together with presentations of the Spanish translations that had been published in the already mentioned book. The details of the production process of this Audio CD were already discussed elsewhere (Van 't Hooft 2004).

It is relevant to stress that it was not only necessary to record the Spanish translations of the tales, but also to re-record the original indigenous versions because of their poor technical quality. These new recordings or re-recordings were made by professional radio-people who work at an indigenous radio station in the Huasteca, and permitted the audio to accompany the written text literally.

Variants in indigenous languages

The recorded material expresses only one of the existing variants of the two indigenous languages in which they are transmitted. Even though the Huasteca is a relatively compact and interconnected area, both Tenek and Nahuatl languages have several variants. In the western part of the Huasteca (in the State of San Luis Potosi), the Tenek language is spoken differently from the variant known in the eastern part (in the State of Veracruz). Huastecan Nahuatl knows three variants, and even though they are part of a language continuum, linguists enlist them as being not variants but rather different languages (Gordon 2005; INALI 2008).

In this respect it is important to take into account that the defining of a particular way of speaking as either a variant of a certain language or a proper language in itself is often a socio-political matter, and does not rest upon linguistic features only. People say not to understand persons who they consider to be different, even though linguistically speaking their variants might be mutually intelligible. Also, there might be political reasons to distinguish variants as separate

languages instead of variants of the same language, as is for instance the case with Danish, Swedish and Norwegian, which, linguistically speaking, are variants of one sole language that are more or less mutually intelligible.

In the Mexican context, the lack of standardization of indigenous languages through available written or oral material is one of the factors that stimulates linguistic diversity. People write the language 'the way they speak it', and the available publications, little as there is, use different orthographies and, at times, even different alphabets. Oral sources, such as the programs transmitted by three indigenous radio stations in the Huasteca, each make use of a specific local variant, mostly the one of the presenters. These programs have little presence outside the micro-regional level, and do not generate a standard way of speaking the indigenous tongue.

The Tenek Tales

In the case of our audio production, the Tenek tales were recorded in the western variant, and the tales in the Nahuatl language were from the eastern part of the Huasteca. In both instances, people from villages where a different variant is spoken say to have trouble with the understanding of the recorded tales. This narrows down the target public that will be enjoying their way of tale telling. On the other hand, the distribution of the CD in the whole Huasteca area also gives the opportunity to demonstrate the richness of both languages and their oral expression to everybody involved.

To get involved in the standardization process of the indigenous languages - in speaking or writing - was not part of the aims of our project. Yet, inevitably we had to take into account the existence of language varieties and make decisions regarding which variants to use and which alphabet to write in. Every publication, in oral or written format, is a contribution to existence of materials in the indigenous languages and, as such, has an impact on the representation of a specific variant or of a particular way of writing over others. The limited production of materials in indigenous languages makes this situation even more noticeable. Standardization processes have symbolic importance and convey ideological interests, and by taping tales that belong to a particular variant and then writing them down in a particular alphabet we had to take a stand.

Orality and fixation

We thought that the audio CD would constitute a means to better represent orality than a written text could do. Yet, during its production we learnt about

particular conflicts that exist between orality and its reproduction in an oral format. I want to discuss this point briefly.

As attractive as an audio production may have seemed to our purposes, this means of transmission of oral tradition suffers the same problem as written sources do: it tends towards fixation of oral tales. Both written and recorded versions, though oral-derived, lose their flexibility, i.e. their faculty to adapt to the circumstances of the moment. While the natural tale telling context is a place of discussion in which all actors may participate to reconstruct a particular tale, the tales on the audio CD are mono-directed tales. Even though they still might be a starting point for the discussion of oral traditions in society, this discussion cannot develop during the narration but has to be held afterwards, without the original narrator being present and in a different setting. Also, recordings that stem from a particular narrating context might not be able to address the interests of an audience different than the one that was present during recording, the variant in which a tale is recorded might not be the one its later audience knows, and this variant might not reflect their particular tradition.

The printed word is the truth

On the other hand, the transmission of a particular tale in an inflexible, published format enhances the idea of 'officialization' of the narrated events. In a society where publications are thought of highly - 'the printed word is the truth'- a recording of a tale that can be reproduced over and over again on CD might make that version an authoritative one. This means that a specific version of a tale, told in a particular context and for particular motives but recorded and distributed on CD, could be considered as *the* tale and taken as a model for its future telling.

The problem of 'officialization' is indeed present in the Huasteca area, where the tradition of publishing materials in the indigenous languages is just beginning. On the other hand, the current situation in Mexico regarding the severe disadvantages of indigenous languages in relation to the dominant Spanish tongue calls for strong actions in order to demonstrate the linguistic and cultural value of these languages. Publications in these languages are an important way of letting indigenous people feel their language is important and making these languages known to a general public. In answer to this possible process of officialization it is necessary to continue producing Audio CD's so as to create materials that contain different versions of a tale, from various narrators, in all language variants. Only when people have access to a diversity of tales can they see that tale telling is a dynamic activity and value this tradition as such. And only

then they might want to add their own versions, telling them to family members and friends, and thus preserve their tales as a living tradition.

Orality and the new technologies

These days, new technologies have made it more affordable to carry out projects aimed at language documentation, preservation and revitalization. We can now go into the field, make near-professional recordings and produce materials like written publications or audio CDs without much effort. Technology has also paved the way for the creation of interactive materials on indigenous languages and cultures, like DVD-ROMs or websites with information that is accessible worldwide. At San Luis Potosi State University we are exploring all these technological options and the ways they might be of assistance to further the documentation, preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages.

The production of materials about indigenous oral traditions with the help of these technologies is part of this effort, as tale telling concerns one of the oral expressions that is highly valued within the indigenous communities. It should be noted, however, that written and audio publications are not the only materials we have been aiming to create about indigenous oral traditions. Also, we are making a series of radio programs in which we talk about indigenous oral traditions, transmit recorded tales, and invite people to discuss related themes such as how to recover the youth's interest in tale telling, the importance of the indigenous language as a means of transmitting oral tales, the desired qualities of narrators, and the significance of certain tales, among others. This way, we try to contribute with materials in indigenous languages that stimulate the process of reflection on indigenous languages and cultures, especially in the communities in the Huasteca area but also among other people in Mexico, and thus display part of the cultural and linguistic richness of Mexico's indigenous population.

However, because of the fact that these tales - as well as the languages in which they are transmitted - are primarily oral, the presentation and use of these materials should promote a discussion about orality as an integral part of transmitting knowledge, next to writing. This discussion must part from the linguistic policies of every community, which involves a continuous dialogue among representatives of the communities in order to work on themes such as the valuation of the spoken word and its most adequate ways of transmission.

The joint existence and circulation of all kinds of materials in oral languages - live oral transmissions, published texts, radio programs, video productions, DVD-

ROMs, audio CDs, websites, and so on - may contribute to the preservation and revitalization of oral traditions. These materials should be diverse, include different versions of a tale, and represent different linguistic variants, so as to serve as a basis for the reflexion on and narration of tales within the indigenous communities and thus stimulate the continuity of this cultural expression. The production of materials from oral traditions is a viable contribution to the process of revitalization of both these traditions and the languages through which they are transmitted.

Conclusions

Strategies to document, preserve and revitalize indigenous languages are not neutral, for they interfere in the situation of a particular linguistic variant. The ones to develop these strategies are usually researchers, who consider that there are academic reasons to justify their interference. Yet, indigenous communities are not always interested in the linguistic or cultural bearing of their languages, they might not necessarily welcome the good-will of academics to empower their communities through projects about language, or they might have moral objections to the ways in which the research-aims will be achieved. Also, when they do feel this interest and share the aims of the project, it is not always clear which is the best way to document, preserve and revitalize this heritage (Linguapax 2004).

However, it is crucial to carry out these kinds of projects if we want to contribute to the protection and strengthening of our linguistic diversity. A key factor in their effectiveness lies in the direct involvement of the local people. Each project should be participative in all respects, from the very early stages of its design on until the distribution and employment part of its final products, and should part from an intensive exchange of views between local people and scientific researchers about issues that are important to all participants in the project, and not only to those of scientists. Together with academics, the community should participate in working on language documentation, preservation and revitalization. This can be done through the training of local researchers, whose expertise on their language and culture engage all participants in a process of mutual learning and understanding, which generates results that are beneficial to both actors. A community-based project that includes collective action guarantees a more profound study by focusing on something that is of real interest for the community and, therefore, a better quality of its products (Herlihy & Knapp

2003).

Dialogue

I want to stress again the relevance of the fact that these products do not only seek an indigenous audience, but also a non-indigenous one, for interculturalism should work both ways. Non-indigenous people will have to learn about indigenous languages and cultures: only when our partner in the dialogue respects us can we start an exchange based on equality and mutual understanding. Our contribution to this process of interculturalism is through the production of bilingual materials, in indigenous languages and in Spanish, which may serve to both population groups. Furthermore, the materials pretend to reinforce ties between distinct indigenous peoples, in this particular case between Tenek and Nahua Indians in the Huasteca area. By joining the two traditions in one publication, the two indigenous peoples involved will know about a different but similar tradition of persons that live nearby. The written format and the options provided by the new technologies (DVD-ROMs, websites) constitute new ways of transmitting these traditions. This situation expands the spaces in which these languages and cultures develop, which is one of the aims of language revitalization. The existence of these materials increases the presence of indigenous languages and contributes to the assessment of their merits. Together with appropriate public politics on linguistic matters and corresponding educational programs to carry them out, revitalization projects that work with local communities create the foundation of the preservation of the linguistic diversity that characterizes Mexico today.

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About the author:

Anuschka van 't Hooft is Professor of Anthropology at the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, Mexico, since January 2003. She is a specialist on indigenous oral traditions, especially from Mexico. She studied Amerindian Languages and Cultures at Leiden University, the Netherlands, where she got her doctorate in 2003 on the topic of Huastecan Nahua tale telling under a combined mentorship of Prof. Dr. Mineke Schipper and Prof. Dr. Jarich Oosten. After having finished the

research projects that are the topic of this paper, she started a multimedia project on Huastecan Nahuatl language and culture (2007-2010) that includes a vocabulary, photogalleries, videos, audios, articles and a commented bibliography, and which can be consulted at www.avanthoof.net

See also: Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas: <http://www.inali.gob.mx/>

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Jarich Oosten has been a major propagator of the influential Leiden school of anthropology. More than just being inspired by structuralism, this approach stresses the importance of extensive fieldwork, and of the comparison of research findings within a culturally relevant regional realm. Jarich stressed the importance to go beyond preconceived ideas. Essential to his approach was to proceed from the data that emerged in the course of the research. This ensured that the focus was not diverted, as so easily occurs, towards the existing body of academic literature, and remained with what anthropologists call 'the field.'

Traditions, and the way these are interpreted, play a crucial role in people's experience of who they are, what social groups they belong to, how they are connected to the place they live in, and what claims they can advance to their social and physical environment. Consequently, ideas about tradition, bodies of knowledge, not only serve to interpret the past, but have great significance for the relationships that people maintain in the present as well. The contributions to this volume explore various ways in which traditions are created and transmitted. 'Traditions on the Move' allows Jarich Oosten's former PhD students to celebrate his influence on their work

Journal Of Anthropological Films



Film cameras, video and sound recorders have for decades been used by anthropologists as research tools, for collecting data, for documentation, for advocacy, for representing a case or a group of people, for disseminating empirical insights and for communicating

research findings. For the first time in the history of Visual Anthropology anthropological film can now be published on par with written articles, assessed by peers, and inscribed in international credential systems of academic publication as the Nordic Anthropological Film Association (NAFA) has launched this first edition of Journal of Anthropological Films (JAF)

Go to: <http://boap.uib.no/index.php/jaf/index>

Editorial

The Nordic Anthropological Film Association (NAFA) has launched the Journal of Anthropological Films (JAF)

Film cameras, video and sound recorders have for decades been used by anthropologists as research tools, for collecting data, for documentation, for advocacy, for representing a case or a group of people, for disseminating empirical insights and for communicating research findings. For the first time in the history of Visual Anthropology anthropological film can now be published on par with written articles, assessed by peers, and inscribed in international credential systems of academic publication as the Nordic Anthropological Film Association (NAFA) has launched this first edition of Journal of Anthropological Films (JAF) published by Bergen Open Access Publishing (BOAP).

JAF publishes films that combine documentation with a narrative and aesthetic convention of cinema to communicate an anthropological understanding of a given cultural and social reality. JAF publishes films that stand alone as a complete scientific publication based on research that explore the relationship between “contemporary anthropological understandings of the world, visual and sensory perception, art and aesthetics, and the ways in which aural and visual media may be used to develop and represent those understandings” to borrow words from Paul Henley (in Flores, *American Anthropologist*, Vol 111, No.1, 2009:95). While most films will stand for themselves, only accompanied by an abstract, supplementary text will be accepted when it adds productively to the anthropological analysis and in case the peer-reviewers will ask for it.

Reviews of entries for JAF will assess the film’s ability to communicate social and cultural analysis and to explore and develop anthropological methodologies and film genres. The anthropological approach to fieldwork very much goes along with the ideas of observational cinema, and this genre still inspires much

anthropological filmmaking today. However, theories and ideas generated within the discipline influence on what modes of representation will be relevant and how written text and film interplay. Reflexivity was an issue within visual anthropology years before feminism and later postmodernism made it a concern for mainstream anthropology. Postmodernism, furthermore, focused on ethnography and the particular, more than on abstraction and generalisation, and these ideas work well with visual anthropology. The later so-called ontological turn within anthropology also opens for interesting contributions from visual anthropology as film can give voice to the protagonists, share their experiences, the activities, the rhythm and sound of their life, their ideas and understandings and how they interpret aspects of their culture. Today technologies develop at a rapid speed and offer still better technical solutions for using audio visual means to collect anthropological information, conduct anthropological analysis, and develop the field of Visual Anthropology.

The films published in this first edition of JAF, represent near all continents and deal with various anthropological themes, such as local politics, climate change, gentrification, cultural heritage, gender, castes, religion, as well as methods and theories on representation. Each film is a unique representation of a particular place and people combining documentation with an anthropological narrative.

The Fish that Disappeared by Bjørn Arntsen (Norway), based on research among fishermen on the Cameroon side of lake Chad, deals with issues on climate change, local politics and what Garrett Hardin (Science, Vol 162, 1968) once labeled Tragedy of the Commons. The film shows the dilemma of people finding ways around governmental regulations of the resources to make a living from the lake. Bente Sundsvold's (Norway) *To Think Like a Bird*, is a full-length feature film on cultural heritage. The film follows a woman activist and shows the reciprocal practices of people and birds using the tradition of manmade huts in eider conservation. *Grabbing Dignity* by Cristian Felipe Roa Pilar, (Chile, Denmark) is a film on moving people by force before destroying illegal settlements. This is a hot political issue, not at least in South America. The film focuses on women and their dignity in this relocation process. In Nepal the government abandoned the caste system by law already in 1963. Still the system is very much part of peoples everyday life. *Why Dalit*, by Berit Madsen, (Denmark) shows the situation from the point of view of the Dalit, the untouchables, as well as seen from the higher castes.

The Possibility of Spirits, by Mattijs Van de Port (The Netherlands) is not an ethnographic film in a traditional way, but an explicit, self-reflexive exploration into the mystery of spirit possession. The kind of experimental film, based on material from Bahia, Brazil, is also a critic of the observational ethnographic film genre. JAF therefore publishes *Between Islam and the Sacred Forest* by Martin Gruber and Frank Seidel (Germany), which is an observational film exploring two ceremonies of different traditions. The film, shot in Guinea, West Africa, follows closely the ceremonies step by step in a chronological order. It is also a self-reflexive film involving the filmmakers as part of the narrative as they try to catch and understand what goes on. The two films approach related anthropological themes from using different theoretical perspectives and demonstrate how visual anthropology and filmmaking can contribute to debates within the discipline of anthropology.

JAF will first of all publish films that present new empirical and theoretical insights within the field of anthropology. Many of the films may inspire comments and debates on particular or general anthropological issues. JAF will open for such debates, where also edited versions of reviews and filmmakers' replies, may be included. We look forward to feedbacks and inputs, so please get in touch with the editorial staff if you have any suggestions for JAF. Enjoy the films.

Health Communication In Southern Africa: Engaging With Social And Cultural Diversity



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Authors

Henk Boer

Henk Boer is Associate Professor in Health Communication and Health Psychology at the Department of Psychology and Communication of Health and Risk at the University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands. His main research interests are the applicability of social cognition models in Africa and the development and evaluation of HIV prevention communication, specifically in developing countries.

H.Boer@gw.utwente.nl

Tanja Bosch

Tanja Bosch is a lecturer in the Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Her research interests include youth and new media, health communication, and alternative media practices and processes, including talk radio and community radio.

Tanja.Bosch@uct.ac.za

Tessa Custers

Tessa A. Custers studied in the Master programme Sociology of Culture at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She graduated in 2007 with a thesis on scripts on appropriate sexual behaviour and on the influence of cultural and social capital on the experiencing of sexuality among young adolescents in Kayamandi Township, where she lived for three months.

tessacusters@hotmail.com

Ros Dowse

Ros Dowse is an Associate Professor in Pharmaceutics in the Faculty of Pharmacy at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. She graduated from the same university with a PhD in pharmacokinetics. Her current research interests include the development and evaluation of medicines information for low-literate patient populations, the design of visuals to illustrate health information, and health literacy testing in developing countries.

r.dowse@ru.ac.za

Emma Durden

Emma Durden specialises in Entertainment Education as a scriptwriter/director and project manager. She is a guest lecturer and external examiner at the University of Cape Town and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and consults to a number of NGOs and research organisations.

emmadurden@magicmail.co.za

Merel Groenenboom

Merel Groenenboom (Amsterdam School of Communications Research, ASCoR, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands) obtained her masters degree in communication science and currently studies Business, also at the University of Amsterdam.

merel.groenenboom@gmail.com

Hanneke Hoogwegt

Hanneke Hoogwegt completed a Bachelor programme in Business Communication and Digital Media and a Research Master in Language and Communication at Tilburg University, the Netherlands. She graduated in 2007 with a thesis on the interpretation of abstract elements in pictures in health-related intervention materials aimed at low-literate audiences in South Africa.

hannekehoogwegt@gmail.com

Daleen Krige

Daleen Krige is a lecturer in the Department of Communication Science, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa with a PhD in Communication Science. Apart from health communication, she is also keenly interested in languages and theatre and has extensive experience as a medical writer in the pharmacological research environment.

krigem.hum@ufs.ac.za

John-Eudes Lengwe Kunda

John-Eudes Lengwe Kunda is a PhD student in Culture, Communication and Media Studies at the Center for Culture, Communication and Media Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He is also seconded to the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine as a commonwealth scholar. His research interests are in the fields of culture, communications, health promotion, medical anthropology and epidemiology for planning.

lengwe.kunda@gmail.com

Luuk Lagerwerf

Luuk Lagerwerf (PhD, Tilburg University, the Netherlands) is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Arts of VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Prior to this he worked as an assistant professor at the universities of Utrecht and Twente. His research interests include marketing communication, persuasion, and journalism.

l.lagerwerf@let.vu.nl

Alfons Maes

Alfons Maes is a full Professor in the Department of Communication and Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities at Tilburg University, the Netherlands. His work includes research on the design of multimodal documents in different communicative domains, including advertising, health communication, instructive communication and websites.

maes@uvt.nl

Mia Malan

Mia Malan is a journalist and media trainer. She is a PhD student in Media Studies at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. She headed media

programmes for the media develop organisation Internews Network, in Kenya, Namibia and the US, and served as the organisation's Senior Health Journalism Advisor from 2005-2008. Ms. Malan is the 2009 Knight International Health Journalism Fellow in South Africa, where she's working with local media on reporting health policy.

miamalan@yahoo.com

Viola Milton

Viola Candice Milton (PhD, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA) is a senior lecturer in the Department of Afrikaans at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. She completed her PhD dissertation, on representations of HIV/AIDS and people living with AIDS in South Africa, at Indiana University in 2005. Her current project, entitled The televised public sphere: Afrikaans television and identity formation, looks at the impact of Afrikaans television on identity formation in Afrikaans communities.

viola.milton@up.ac.za

Claire Penn

Claire Penn is the founder of the Health Communication Project and holds an endowed Chair in the Discipline of Speech Pathology and Audiology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. She has a special interest in health communication research in multilingual and multicultural contexts, as well as in ethical and cultural issues.

Claire.penn@wits.ac.za

Bas van den Putte

Bas van den Putte is Senior Associate Professor in Health Communication and Commercial Communication at the Amsterdam School of Communications Research (ASCoR) at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His main research interest is health communication, specifically development and evaluation of mass media health campaigns.

S.J.H.M.vandenPutte@uva.nl

Rachel Smith

Rachel A Smith (PhD, Michigan State University) is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Arts & Sciences and member of the Center for Infectious Disease Dynamics at the Pennsylvania State University. She directed a research arm, Community Characteristics and Networks, aimed at evaluating the

Presidential Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in Namibia. Her research focuses on how communication serves to facilitate and is shaped by social phenomena's influences on health message diffusion and behavioral adoption in both domestic and international contexts.

ras57@psu.edu

Cecilia Strand

Cecilia Strand is a PhD candidate at the Department of Media and Communication Science at Uppsala University, Sweden. Between 2003-2007 she worked in Lesotho and Namibia on HIV/AIDS and communication-related issues. Her dissertation will focus on HIV/AIDS in the field of mass media in Southern Africa.

cecilia.strand@dis.uu.se

Hugo A. Tempelman

Hugo A. Tempelman is a medical doctor and CEO of Ndlovu Care Group, a nonprofit healthcare organisation in the township area of Elandsdoorn, 160 km north of Pretoria, South Africa. He is also visiting professor in Education and Health Care in Resource-Poor Settings at the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences and at the Faculty of Medicine of Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

tempelman@ndlovu.com

Keyan G. Tomaselli

Keyan G. Tomaselli is a Senior Professor of Culture, Communication and Media Studies. He has served on the Minister of Health's Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS and STDs and developed the Beyond Awareness Campaigns instituted by the Department in the 1990s. He is currently research Director of the Centre for Culture, Communication and Media Studies (CCMS), University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. His research interests and expertise are visual anthropology, cinema, semiotics, and the philosophy of health communication.

tomasell@ukzn.ac.za

Adri Vermeer

Adri Vermeer (PhD) is professor emeritus in Special Education at the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

a.vermeer@uu.nl

Herman Wasserman

Herman J. Wasserman (D.Litt., Stellenbosch University) is a Senior Lecturer in Journalism Studies at the University of Sheffield (UK), and a visiting Associate Professor Extraordinary at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. His research interests include global journalism ethics, journalism in emergent democracies and media, culture and society in Africa.

h.j.wasserman@sheffield.ac.uk

Jennifer Watermeyer

Jennifer Watermeyer is a speech-language pathologist and a researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. She has an interest in communication processes in multicultural healthcare interactions and her PhD focused on pharmacist-patient interactions in an HIV/AIDS context.

jennywatermeyer@gmail.com

Julia van Weert

Julia van Weert is Assistant Professor in Health Communication at the Amsterdam School of Communications Research (ASCoR) at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. After having graduated in Sociology (health care & management), and having obtained a PhD in Health Psychology, her research interest has become health communication.

j.c.m.vanweert@uva.nl

Johann de Wet

Johann C. de Wet is professor and current chairperson of the Department of Communication Science at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. He holds a doctorate in literature and philosophy, specialising in Communication Science, from the University of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. Much of his research output has focused on persuasive communication and general communication theory. Professor De Wet is the founding and current editor of *Communitas*, a South African accredited academic journal on community communication and information impact.

dewetjc.hum@ufs.ac.za

Carel van Wijk

Carel van Wijk has a position as associate professor of discourse studies at the faculty of Humanities at Tilburg University, the Netherlands. He is a psycholinguist with a special interest in the conceptual processes of writing, the analysis of text structure within the framework of Rhetorical Structure Theory,

and the persuasive effects of document design variants.
chvwijk@uvt.nl