



ZIMBABWEAN VIDEO FILMS AS ALTERNATIVE CINEMA

BY

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Abstract

This study examines the filmmaking practices of selected Zimbabwean video filmmakers across the filmmaking value chain in order to explore how they ‘negotiate’, ‘appropriate’, ‘contaminate’ and ‘violate’ mainstream conventional filmmaking modes. The analysis contextualizes conditions of production from concept to exhibition. Evidence is that filmmaking choices are framed as much by the aesthetics of filmmaking as by the resources that are available. Filmmaking and distribution occur mostly under the radar. The video filmmaker is a hybrid between a “guerilla” and a “hustler” who has adapted his/her means to create a “shoe-string” alternative cinematic practice. The study began with a historical outline of post-colonial film practice and how this did not allow a conducive environment for alternative ‘indigenous’ cinematic practice. It then proceeded to examine the nature of video film practice and its efficacy. The nature of video film practice was examined from concept to exhibition in terms of how video filmmakers navigate their way through the limitations of their resources-in the process creating an alternative cinematic movement. The study concluded by analyzing how the language and aesthetic orientation of the films constitute a hybrid alternative cinematic praxis. Through the lens of Hybridity and Third Cinema theories the researcher argues that as a new form of cultural expression, video film is Zimbabwe’s new ‘Alternative Cinema’ invented by innovative Zimbabweans in remapping the turbulent contours of a troubled post-colony. Through visual analysis, participant observation and interviews, the study demonstrates how creative classes of marginal Zimbabweans have now taken initiative, appropriating and adapting new media technologies in reinventing not just their social and economic lives, but also in revisualizing their social struggles in everyday life for both local and international audiences. In short, the thematic and cinematographic imperfections and shortfalls of the Zimbabwe video film emerges a recognizable Zimbabwean film “movement, a style, a way of doing film”, a ‘subgenre’ worth study and critical appreciation. This is an attempt to find purpose, intention, ‘beauty’ and method out of that which is ordinarily regarded as jumbled, unrefined, ugly and accidental. The researcher concludes that the lack of funding and institutional support has necessitated the creation of a de-centralized and decolonized filmmaking praxis in Zimbabwe. After a past of unsuccessful models that included government and non-governmental organization (NGO) funding, the Zimbabwean film industry is emerging anew in the mold of video filmmaking practice. This filmmaking praxis is not a utopia. Funding, distribution and profitability are in flux, and the future remains unsure and unclear. The researcher concludes that, a traditionally monopolistic, minority and elitist activity is now open to broader participation and innovation.

Dedication

Mom.

Your esteemed acts of personal sacrifice and unsurpassed commitment got me this far.

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Looking back at the path that I have followed while doing this research, I realize how non-linear the route has been. Going from A to B was achieved through trying many routes, sometimes taking U-turns and often walking backwards only to try a new direction. Many times I felt lost, and finding a new route was not always easy. I'm greatly indebted to my supervisor Professor N Mboti (University of Johannesburg) for constantly taking time out of his busy schedule and attending to my queries during the course of the study. Thank you for availing some of your scholarly sources and for opening my mind to the abundances of academic imagination and wisdom in such a short space of time.

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To God be the Glory

Abbreviations

BAZ: Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe

ESAP: Economic Structural Adjustment Programme

CAFU: Central African Film Unit

DSTV: Digital Satellite Television

DVD: Digital Video Disc

GNU: Government of National Unity

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

IIF: International Images Film Festival

FMT: Finline Media Trust

FMGZ: Film Makers Guild of Zimbabwe

MDC: Movement for Democratic Change

NGO: Non Governmental Organization

MISA: Media Institute of Southern Africa

SADC: Southern Africa Development Community

SFP: Short Film Project

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ZANU PF: Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)

ZAPU: Zimbabwe African People's Union

ZBC: Zimbabwe broadcasting Authority

ZIFF: Zimbabwe International Film festival

ZIFTESSA: Zimbabwe Film and Television School of Southern Africa

ZIMASSET: Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation

ZIFF: Zimbabwe International Film Festival

ZIFFT: Zimbabwe International Film Festival Trust

ZTV: Zimbabwe Television

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

1.1 Area of investigation and background

This study examines the filmmaking practices of selected Zimbabwean video filmmakers across the filmmaking value chain in order to explore how they ‘negotiate’, ‘appropriate’, ‘contaminate’ and ‘violate’ mainstream filmmaking modes. The analysis contextualizes conditions of production from pre-production to exhibition. It explores the different ways Zimbabwean video filmmakers appropriated and / or resisted mainstream filmmaking practices and aesthetics between 2010 and 2014.

In the wake of new digital media technologies which have ‘liberalized’ the local film industry, emerging filmmakers seem to have taken it upon themselves to weave out a ‘new’ kind of alternative cinematic praxis. Thus the study contextualizes the conditions of production as an impetus to the prevailing aesthetic choices. The study also examines various narrative strategies by emerging Zimbabwean video filmmakers in order to explore how the narrative strategies constitute an attempt to create an alternative ‘national’ cinematic movement. The research integrates the ideological orientation and agency of the video films linking them to broader questions of popular culture, resistance and hybridity.

The research investigates how the ‘timely’ emergence of the video films in the new millennium and the Zimbabwean ‘crisis’ might have influenced the aesthetics of the films. It also investigates the reasons behind the national appeal of the films despite their criticism by film critics and the media. The study therefore specifically probes the organising thoughts and regimes of authority, both contextual and intertextual underlying Zimbabwean video films by quarantining various language systems and spectrum of techniques used by Zimbabwean filmmakers in conveying meaning.

Four films have been chosen for study. These are *Lobola* (2010), *Think* (2011), *Sabhuku vharazipi* (2012-13) and *Bag Rabvaruka* (2014). However a number of films produced in the same period will be made use of during the course of the study. These films have been produced in the last five years, between 2010 and 2014. All the films were also heavily pirated, being sold on the streets for “\$1-for-2”. Moreover, these films received a lot of publicity and criticism from the media. They were personally funded by young producers and entrepreneurs who saw an opportunity to experiment with new digital video technologies and possibilities for turning a profit from their productions.

The background of the study is that, since the country’s “flag” independence in 1980, the Zimbabwe film industry has been in a search for itself (Mboti 2015, Hungwe 2000, Chikonzo 2005). A recurrent feature has been the search for ways with which to replace the thirty-year old colonial heritages of filmmaking, distribution and exhibition. Initially the state funded the industry by injecting millions of dollars. Part of the state’s strategy involved growing the

industry through marketing the country as a Hollywood location. Financial losses in the mid 1980s, however, caused the state to rapidly retreat from the idea of a state- supported national cinema.

For about a decade, starting in the 1990s, the industry got a new lease of life in western-sponsored Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which used the film industry to teach message-heavy morality films. The new millennium which saw the government implementing the land reform program, followed by the collapse of the Zimbabwean dollar, marked the end of a decade-old dominance of the NGO-film in Zimbabwe. The end of the NGO-film has paved way for the current state of affairs which is mainly characterized by independent filmmaking clusters.

Cheaper cameras and editing equipment, added to a nascent straight-to-DVD model somewhat mirroring the production of Bongo films in Tanzania and those of Nollywood-Nigeria, have seen the Zimbabwean film industry emerge anew in a digitally-based third coming. What was traditionally a minority activity is now open to broader participation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Cinemas from the global South often struggle for validation (Gabriel 1983, Adamu 2007). They are often seen as Hollywood's distant, poor cousins. One result is that inadequate attention is paid to the way in which local filmmaking practices enrich global film languages, often in ways that disrupt and transcend the narrow binaries between "West" and "Rest". African film, in

particular, has too often been trapped within a reductive opposition between Western and African culture (Diawara 1992, 2010, Barlet 2010, Givanni & Bakari 2001, Gugler 2003, Pfaff 2004, Armes 2006, Harrow 2007). Africa is regarded as “shooting back” (Thackway 2003). It is often proposed that an ‘authentic’ African film must not only exclude all things European or Western, but must also set itself up in opposition to them. This study critiques these frameworks of seeing in the context of local video filmmaking.

This study addresses perceptions that Zimbabwean video films are ‘substandard’ (Ngwenya 2013; Kalipinde 2013; Mudzinganyama 2014; Mutanga 2015). Only rarely have these films been construed as constituting an alternative cinematic movement and a site of resistance against established and conventional filmmaking modes. The broader question about whether or not these films are building a local ‘indigenous’ alternative cinematic aesthetic has not been asked.

Rather than treating the films as sites of ‘artistic decadence’, maybe they should be embraced as a reflection of the state of film practice in Zimbabwe and a reflection of post-colonial ‘anxiety’. Should we not look at them in the manner in which the world embraced Italian neo-realism or Third Cinema amidst their condemnation? Is there not a deliberate agency to contaminate and corrupt the Hollywood system and in the process, create an aesthetic that would be remembered in the history of film as ‘Zimbabwean’, however decadent it might be, because when ‘substandardness’ becomes repeated, it is no longer ‘substandardness’, it becomes a movement, a style, a way of doing film (Chikonzo 2014). Perhaps these emerging filmmakers have created a ‘sub genre’ which film critics are failing to embrace.

1.3 Study Aims and Objectives

- to explore how the selected filmmakers ‘negotiate’, ‘appropriate’, ‘contaminate’ and ‘violate’ mainstream filmmaking modes.
- analyze and interpret the aesthetic and narrative strategies that define Zimbabwean videos.
- interrogate the relationship between aesthetics and ideology in selected videos’.
- to evaluate the significance of video films in Zimbabwe’s cinematic history.

1.4 Research Questions

This study turns on and addresses the following research questions:

- how do selected filmmakers ‘negotiate’, ‘appropriate’ and ‘violate’ mainstream filmmaking modes?
- what narrative and aesthetic language do the films speak?
- what is the relationship between aesthetics and ideology in selected videos?
- what is the significance of video films in Zimbabwe’s cinematic history?

1.5 Justification/ Rationale

Zimbabwean video films have been subjected to spirited criticism by the local media and researchers (Ngwenya 2013; Kalipinde 2013; Mudzinganyama 2014; Mutanga 2015) for their lack of ‘competence’ in comparison with Hollywood and other mainstream cinemas. Focus has been on production trends and aesthetic quality of the films. The films have been castigated

without realizing that they are actually a cinematic movement – an alternative model of making films. The study seeks to demonstrate that the video film movement is a guided and committed project which should not be judged in Western terms but in their own right. In this regard it is critical to analyze what informs its production, stylistic and ideological operations.

In their quest to discredit the video film movement critics have partly ignored the significance of the video films in Zimbabwe's cinematic history, their contribution to global cinematic movements and their national appeal. The efficacy of the video film movement has largely been disregarded. It is important to comprehend the continuity of various film movements in Zimbabwe, including video films especially in the face of globalization which may gradually impose foreign standards and aesthetics. This study fills this gap of understanding how indigenous cultures help in enriching diversity in the face of foreign domination.

Despite the research attempts highlighted above, there is still a lack of a comprehensive academic inquiry on Zimbabwean video films, something of a lack of a critical Zimbabwean voice. This lack can be partly attributed to the fact that the industry has only really come into its own in the last decade. Nevertheless, other fairly “infant” video film industries such as the Bongo film industry in Tanzania have fared much better in terms of critical scholarship (Shule 2011). Nollywood, despite only just celebrating its twentieth birthday, has been attended by an extraordinary corpus of scholarship. The industry in general has not generated much visibility beyond Zimbabwean audiences. The present study therefore seeks to add a ‘Zimbabwean voice’, if such is possible. Furthermore, as Chikonzo (2005) notes, film's role in building Zimbabwe's cultural heritage has not been as privileged as that enjoyed by other art forms such as literature,

music and theatre. While these other forms have received a great deal of attention, film has not. The emergence of a popular local video movie industry calls for critically proportionate intellectual work to be done to shed light on emerging issues.

The choice of the period under scrutiny is also not accidental. The period from 2010 brought an economic relief for many Zimbabweans after the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) which saw Zimbabwe's leading Political Parties (Zimbabwe African People's Union [ZANU PF] and the Movement for Democratic Change [MDC T]) forming the Government of National Unity (GNU). It is therefore critical to investigate artistic movements that came with these political developments, particularly- film.

The focus on video films is by no means accidental. After the dearth of funding for Zimbabwean filmmakers on the onset of the new millennium from both donors and the government, there was a severe gap in filmmaking which the video film movement sought to fill (Mboti 2015). Zimbabwean video films are in dire need of academic attention, because unlike other artistic expressions such as theatre, music poetry and literary arts, they require heavy capital injection mainly because of the machinery involved. It is important to investigate how this movement survived in the face of discouraging technical, economic and political circumstances.

Furthermore, the Zimbabwean government has not identified the film industry as one of the catalytic vehicles for job creation and economic growth in its newly reformed economic policy known as Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET), launched in 2013. The continued neglect of the creative industries in mainstream economic and

trade policy must be flagged as a major policy flaw. Creative economies cannot continue to be crumb-eaters at the national high table. A study of this nature is crucial because it enables state intellectuals to understand what video film is, factors that promoted its rise, its characteristics and form. This study offers an opportunity to understand the aspirations, hopes, and intentions of the video film movement.

According to Mark NeuCollins (2006), the ability to picture oneself is a vital need. In fact, if a man were to live without the capacity of forging a picture of himself, he would have no aspirations, no desires, and no dreams of his own. The same applies to a community, a society, and a people. A society daily subjected to foreign images eventually loses its identity and its capacity to forge its own identity (ibid). The development of Zimbabwe implies, among other things, the production, research and interpretation of its own images.

1.6 Methodology and research design

1.6.1 Introduction

This section outlines and evaluates the methodology undertaken during the course of the study. The study used a qualitative, interpretive methodology to examine cinematic practices of selected Zimbabwean video filmmakers across the filmmaking value chain order to explore how they negotiate, appropriate, contaminate and violate mainstream filmmaking modes. In general terms, qualitative research is relevant for this study as it consists of an investigation that:

- a. Collects evidence produces findings that were not determined in advance

- b. Produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study.

The selected methods are visual analysis of specific films, participant observation and interviews with selected filmmakers, actors and film distributors. The section is mainly divided into two sections; data collection and data analysis. Data collection outlines the methods used to collect data whilst data analysis explicates how data was analysed to ensure validity. Details as to how the methods were used are presented in the following sections.

1.6.2 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Qualitative research has several methods of collecting data. Researchers often triangulate these methods so that there is credibility and legitimacy in the data. Bosk (1979) in Maxwell (1992: 279), however, fears that “All qualitative fieldwork done by a single field worker invites the question, why should we believe it?” It is for this major reason that the researcher triangulated principal qualitative data collection methods of sampling, in-depth interviews, and participant observation to collect data from video films, film producers, directors, cinematographers, editors, actors and distributors in order to understand their operations and aesthetic choices . Details as to how the methods were used are presented in the following sections.

1.6.3 Sampling (selection of films)

This study is based mainly on four primary video film texts from the period 2010-2014. These primary texts are *Lobola* 2010, *Think* 2011, *Bag Rabvaruka* 2012-13 and *Sabhuku Vharaziphi* 2014. It was not the intention of this study to cover the entirety of video films during the period

under review. Writing about all the video films would not have been possible in one study. Therefore, the researcher used the sampling method to select films under study.

Purposive sampling is when a researcher chooses specific people within the population to use for a particular study or research project (Silverman 2011). Unlike random studies, which deliberately include a diverse cross section of ages, backgrounds and cultures, the idea behind purposive sampling is to concentrate on people with particular characteristics who will better be able to assist with the relevant research.

This sampling was based on the fact that within a film movement, certain patterns are created (Gabriel 1987). The researcher used the sampling method to purposively select the four video film texts under examination in this study. In visual studies it is acceptable to analyze the identity of the images of a period by judging the whole from a small part. This study measured a sample in order to draw an inference about the whole film movement between 2010 and 2014.

Due to the nature of the qualitative study, it was necessary to keep the number of participants and institutions to a minimum so that detailed qualitative data could be elicited. Zeroing in on specific films allowed an in-depth analysis of the cinematic practices of selected Zimbabwean video filmmakers, created focus and eschewed generalizations. However, to strengthen the arguments raised in the primary text, the researcher made cross reference to other films. These

films were also selected on the basis of manageability, popularity and availability of the key stakeholders in the productions.

A single video film was chosen for each year (2010 *Lobola*, 2011 *Think*, 2012 *Bag Rabvaruka*, 2013 and 2014 *Sabhuku Vharaziphi*). The ultimate choices were purposive and convenient, based on which films the production houses had material on in relation to the study's four research questions. For the researcher, there was no better film or less effective film. The methodology which the researcher had chosen could be deployed to analyze any film of the period under review, hopefully with minimal bias. A perfunctory viewing of these videos revealed that there was not much difference between these films in terms of aesthetics, format, production and distribution. Films produced by a production house during a specific period tended to display generic formatting characteristics. The films selected for the study can be trusted to more or less represent those that the researcher did not actually analyze in this study, though not absolutely.

Owing to the fact that the researcher did not analyze all video films, the findings and conclusions in this thesis do not necessarily cover the entirety of the video film movement in Zimbabwe. These are weaknesses inherent in any research study, which cannot study every unit.

1.6.3 Interviews

To map the outlines of alternative filmmaking in Zimbabwe, the study used the interview method. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews and informal conversational interviews (Silverman, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 1990; McMillan &

Schumacher, 1993) which qualitative researchers view as an amalgam of formal and conversational interviews. The researcher visited selected film producers, directors and distributors at their various workplaces in Harare. It was, however, time consuming, energy sapping and needed a lot of patience to organize the interviews. In a number of occasions, interview dates and times had to be rescheduled because artists often had other pressing commitments.

The researcher conducted twenty six interviews with scriptwriters, actors, editors, cinematographers, film vendors and habitual film audiences. The interviews were guided by a broad outline of topics and issues to be discussed in the form of questions. The questions were, however, not rigidly or systematically followed, but these provided a general framework in which emergent questions were asked. This was to allow respondents greater latitude to express their views. The researcher probed for in-depth responses and guided the interviews to ensure that all topics/areas were adequately addressed. It involved asking impromptu and situational questions. All interviews were conducted in Shona and later translated to English. Using the Shona language allowed interviewees to express themselves freely and filter in a broad spectrum of related issues which the researcher had not anticipated.

The broad areas covered in the interviews included artistic styles, themes, sources of inspiration, acculturation, educational and artistic backgrounds, media use, iconography, semiotic processes, techniques and approaches. The interviews were audio-recorded using a cellphone because of

their relatively lengthy duration. Immediately after the interviews they were transcribed, typed and then coded later during visual analysis.

To ensure that artists expressed themselves freely, pre-briefing calls were made to each of the artists during which, the purpose of the interview was explained. The familiarization visits helped create collegial and non-threatening relationships with the artists. The fact that the researcher had also interacted with the artists at other film forums (such as the Zimbabwe International Film Festival and The Zimbabwe Filmmakers Guild meetings) made the relationships conducive for in-depth interviews. The researcher was, however, mindful of the need to reflexively maintain objectivity and avoid getting too native (Creswell, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) which could have affected collection of credible and trustworthy data.

Informal conversational interviews were conducted where issues were discussed in a more casual manner. These were used during participant observations of artists in their studios and field production and distribution. The interviews were meant to bring a relaxed observation context while at the same time serving a verification purpose as well as soliciting for data not collected during in-depth interviews. The main advantage of this form of interview was that it was contextual. The researcher was able to ask questions relative to what the artists were actually experiencing during production and distribution. These interviews were not audio-taped but were recorded as field notes using pen and paper. The interviews were taken as complementary to the in-depth interviews.

1.6.4 Participant Observation

Participant observation was particularly instrumental in the collection of data during marketing and distribution of films. Observation during fieldwork in a qualitative study falls on a continuum between complete observation and non-participant observation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Vulliamy et al., 1990; Lancy, 1993). The degree of participation, however, rests upon aspects such as the nature of activities, the participants and the goals of observation. Bogdan and Biklen (1992: 96) say that, “over-participation can lead to ‘going native’ that the originally set objectives are lost.” The authors contend that it is, therefore, desirable to limit participation to a level at which the researcher can still objectively collect the intended data. In this study, observations were confined to marketing and distribution practices. It involved visiting film distributors and vendors in their ateliers and observing them as they worked through their projects.

The observations were recorded as field notes and recording took a journal format and developing an observation checklist of available items. The researcher’s participation involved assisting film distributors in designing and distributing marketing material during which discussions on aspects such as artists’ intentions, working procedures, media and styles were held. That constituted the informal interviews meant to complement in-depth interviews. The idea was not to be fully engrossed in the artists’ work such that one would forget the intended objectives by becoming too native (Creswell, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The researcher still had to maintain that requisite social distance to be able to collect the intended credible and trustworthy data.

One of the problems that the researcher as a participant observer encountered was that of dividing time between participation and recording of observations. In this study, recording of the observations were done while the filmmakers, crew and actors were doing work that did not require the researcher's participation. More detailed field-notes were entered soon after exiting the studios. Observations were entered in a journal. The journal was, therefore, a source of critical reflection both during and after the observations. Photographs were taken for analysis later during visual analysis. Critical artistic processes and stages were also photographed for analysis. Photographs provided a vivid visual record of situations and were therefore advantageous in the study (see appendix).

1.6.5 Visual analysis (Data analysis)

Data analysis from filmmakers primarily involved analysing various video films besides the main texts, which Silverman (2011) calls visual data. The researcher watched the selected productions under study in order to identify the various visual styles, approaches, motifs and techniques exhibited within the films. Visual analysis derives concepts from the discipline of semiotics (Ali, 2004 as cited in Silverman, 2011). Analysis of such semiotic data involves decoding the materials for cultural codes and meanings. Visual data in this study included the treatment of time and space, mise-en-scene, camera techniques and editorial techniques and so on. Such data augmented what artists claimed they practised in their productions. The data also yielded valuable information which artists might not have been consciously aware of such as their aesthetic orientation, guiding philosophies, and available technological, cultural and human

resources that impacted directly and indirectly on their practice. The major drawback in visual analysis is in understanding the individual meanings underlying visual works. To this end, the critical notions in visual analysis are, therefore, meaning, form and interpretation.

In visual analysis, it is important to define the recurring semantic aspects of video films, that is, identifying the most relevant “signs” that constitute videos' film language and interpreting their meaning. On the other hand, to understand the relevance that this specific film language has in relation to the Zimbabwean audience, there is need to analyze videos' syntax, that is, films' deep structures of meaning and their relationship with Zimbabwean ‘reality’ and history. The interception of these two spheres of analysis, the formal and the structural, helped the study in defining the specificities of the aesthetics of Zimbabwean videos.

In this study analysis of video films was guided by the differently layered visual cues and clues. Employing visual analysis as a research method on video material has several advantages. The most obvious one is that one watches the performances without being seen by any of the film value chain stakeholders. This eliminates the possibility of the researcher manipulating or influencing the course of the film. Another advantage is that it ensures validity and authenticity in that one will be watching what is happening and interpreting the content “objectively”. Robson (1993: 191) says that ‘one major advantage of visual analysis is its directness. You do not ask people about their views, feelings or attitudes; you watch what they do and listen to what they say.’ However, it should be noted that directly watching what is under investigation does not guarantee an objective interpretation of the content mainly because of the poly-vocal nature (ability to be read in different ways) of the processes of seeing and interpretation. ‘Objectivity is,

in principle, impossible to achieve and that all research is effectively...“fiction” in the sense that it views and so constructs “reality” through the eyes of one person’ (Stanley and Wise 1983: 174). Ali (2004: 266) says that ‘we can think of the field of vision as transparent or neutral space with the job of “visual culture” being to fill this space.’ This means that personal experiences will undoubtedly reflect in the eventual selection and analysis of chosen material. There is always not ‘what is seen’ but ‘what is seen with.’ In other words there are factors that will always shape the process of seeing and interpreting the visual data. Visual analysis mainly involved analyzing the following elements of film.

1.6.6 Mise-en-scene

Mise-en-scene is everything that appears in a frame, sets, locations, actors, props, costumes, light, and shadow are all part of mise-en-scene. Mise-en-scene can be realistic or abstract, purely background or an interpretive active element. Mise-en-scene is contributed to by a variety of talents on the film crew – production designers, makeup artists, set builders, cinematographers, actors. Everything on screen in a film has been deliberately included at an artist’s direction and for a purpose. The researcher looked at what informed the directorial choices of video filmmaking and how they manipulated available resources which give shape to alternative cinema.

1.6.7 Cinematography

Cinematography is defined as “writing in movement” and depends largely on photography Ngwena (2013). The art of cinematography is concerned just as much with how something is being filmed as it is with what is being filmed. Cinematography is not a rudimentary and arbitrary process of filming the actors. The cinematographer, or director of photography, adds to and enhances the narrative through control of the camera. The researcher looked at the way in which shots were framed, lit, toned, and colored, use of pans, tilts, and angles, camera movement or tracking. The intention was to examine how these techniques shaped a practice one can refer to as alternative cinema.

1.6.8 Editing

Editing has been called “the key to cinema” as it is the only formal element that is unique to the medium. The researcher examined how the editors used time and continuity as tools in presenting the narrative. It is the editor’s job to piece the whole film together from all of the scenes and different cameras. The editor connects one scene to the next, and sometimes several shots in the same scene, with a few different editing techniques. The duration of shots in juxtaposition to each other also shapes how we perceive the on screen material was also examined. The possible use and limitations of rapid cuts, long take were examined.

1.6.9 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is the most common form of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or "themes") within coded data. Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated to a specific research question (Lancy, 1993). The themes become the categories for analysis. The aim was to figure out what informed their preference for certain topics and not others.

1.6.10 Establishing Trustworthiness and Credibility

There are a number of strategies that were used to attain trustworthiness and credibility of collected data and findings in qualitative research. These are prolonged engagement at the study sites (studios), triangulation of methods and sources of data, member checking and thick descriptions (Sturman 1999 in Opie, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bennette et al ., 1994; Gomm & Woods, 1993; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). The following subsections detail how the researcher ensured credibility and trustworthiness in the study.

1.6.11 Prolonged Study at the Sites (Studios and distribution centers)

The researcher had prolonged periods with the artists and film distributors in their studios. The prolonged participant observations enabled the researcher to learn about the operations of the artists. Informal conversational interviews were conducted simultaneously with the observations. The observations took twelve months, which was a fairly adequate time for one to learn the cinematic culture and on set and off set operations of the artists.

1.6.12 Member Checking

It was important to ensure that the information from interviews with artists was verified. At the end of each in-depth interview and before the next interview during participant observations, the researcher picked on critical issues that were liable to multiple interpretations and asked for verification and clarification to ensure that what the artists had said and exactly what they meant. This verification process was done both informally and formally with the participating artists during observations in their studios.

1.6.13 Thick Descriptions

The researcher collected as much detail as possible during each data collection process. Visits to artists' yielded data on available equipment and materials, working space and procedures, aesthetics and subject matter. These were recorded as detailed field notes using pen and paper. Still photographs were taken. In-depth interviews which were relatively long in duration were audio recorded to aid analysis later. Such detail assisted the study in bringing out various perspectives during analysis, which focused on critical meanings from the cultural participants' point of view. Such thick descriptions of data from different sources gave a more objective picture of the artists' practice.

1.6.14 Triangulation

Triangulation is an inevitable notion in qualitative research. The researcher triangulated data collection and analysis methods-visual analysis, informal and in-depth interviews as well as participant observation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin in Wragg, 1995). The researcher also

used multiple sources of data to augment the methods. These were complemented with appropriate data collection instruments. Data from interviews were verified with those from observations as well as from visual analysis of films.

1.7 Chapter Delineation

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter one serves as the introduction of the study, stating the area of investigation, problem statement, objectives, research questions, justification and research methodology. Chapter two is the theoretical framework and literature review. Chapter three deals with the contextual background of the study, citing factors that have characterized the development of video films in Zimbabwe, the efficacy of the video film movement and its structures. Chapter four is an analysis of the models of production from concept to distribution, it highlights how selected filmmakers negotiate some of the obstacles that they encounter during the filmmaking process. Chapter five analyzes the aesthetics of selected Zimbabwean video films paying attention to the language of the films in terms of narrative and aesthetic choices. Chapter six is the conclusion; it lays out the implications of the research findings and the conclusions arrived at in terms of how these may influence contemporary video film practice and future research in Zimbabwean cinema.

1.8 Summary

This chapter outlined the major concerns of this study. It highlighted the background against which the investigation is carried out, its aim, objectives and significance. Part of the research

methods and theoretical implements to be deployed in this study and the scope of the research are also outlined in this chapter. This chapter sets the stage for the construction of the discursive vantage points from which the discussion of how local video filmmakers ‘negotiate’, ‘appropriate’ and ‘violate’ mainstream filmmaking modes in their quest to create a local ‘indigenous’ film aesthetic

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1 Introduction

This section outlines and evaluates the theoretical lenses used in the study. It highlights the key theorists and connects the theories to the key objectives and research questions of the study. There is not a single theory that sufficiently addresses the needs of this inquiry, neither is there a single theoretician who sufficiently addresses all the facets of this inquiry. Since this inquiry is located in Postcolonial studies, the study examines the relation of appropriation of the means of production in a post-colonial set up in the light of the twin notions of Third Cinema and Hybridity. Third cinema is critical to this study as it provides ideological grounding in analyzing video films. It is also significant in contextualizing production conditions that characterize video films. Hybridity provides critical perspectives on how video film aesthetics are as a result of the encounter between local and mainstream aesthetics. The two theories are brought together throughout the study in order to investigate the discourse of alternative cinema in Zimbabwe.

2.2 Third cinema

Third Cinema is a set of strategies developed by critical film makers in South America and North Africa (Solanas and Getino 1976; Pines and Willemsen 1989, Harrow 2007). The ideas underlying Third Cinema have only very recently gained exposure in Sub Saharan Africa (Tomaselli and Eke 1995). According to Tomaselli and Eke, First Cinema describes Hollywood entertainment; Second Cinema accounts for avant garde, personal, or auteur movies. On the other

hand Third Cinema is a cinema of resistance to imperialism and oppression, a cinema of emancipation; it articulates the codes of an essentially First World technology into indigenous aesthetics and mythologies. Since the 1980s, Third Cinema has been transplanted into other sites of resistance, including those in First world situations where class conflicts have taken on a racial/ethnic character.

Third Cinema is not a genre but rather a set of political strategies using film (and video) to articulate the experiences and hopes of the colonially oppressed. Its purpose, according to Solanas and Getino (1976), is to create a “liberated space” by educating the oppressed. The term was coined in the manifesto *Towards a Third Cinema*, written in the late 1960s by Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. The principles of Third cinema as outlined by Solanas and Getino (1976) are central to decolonized film aesthetics. The study utilizes these theorists in analyzing how selected filmmakers ‘violate’ and ‘repurpose’ mainstream filmmaking trends from production to distribution.

In their manifesto, Solana and Getino (1976) depict Third Cinema as a cinematic movement and a dramatic alternative to First Cinema, which was produced in Hollywood, for the purpose of entertaining its audiences; and from Second Cinema that increased the author’s liberty of expression. Fundamentally different, Third Cinema films sought to inspire revolution against class, racial and gender inequalities (Solanas and Getino 1976). Spectators were called upon to reflect on social injustices and the process by which their realities occurred, and to take action to transform their conditions. Third cinema decries neocolonialism, the capitalist system, and the Hollywood model of cinema as mere entertainment to make money (Solanas and Getino 1976).

The study repurposes the notion of ‘Third Cinema’ to suit video film movement in Zimbabwe, as the term is now rather dated and does not fully capture what is going on currently. Third cinema did not refer specifically to “video film” since there was no “video film” to speak of at the time.

In this study, Third Cinema is ideal when analyzing and contextualizing the conditions of production in chapter three. Third cinema is central to this research as it critically demonstrates how the staff in a production shares all aspects of the production process by working collectively. In Third Cinema, for example, a Director can be the Cameraman, the Photographer or the Writer at different phases of the production. Since Third Cinema films were highly politicized, they often lacked the funding and support needed for production or distribution and instead sought funding outside government agencies or traditional financing opportunities available to commercial films. The issue of funding is critical in video film production, the study therefore investigates how funding or lack of it motivates filmmakers to enact creative and alternative ways to suit and sustain their craft.

Solanas and Getino reject the view of cinema as a vehicle for personal expression, seeing the director instead as part of a collective. The study examines the role of each member of the production team in light of Third cinema which acknowledges the importance of collective teamwork.

Third cinema allows experimentation of different means of production and distribution, Solanas and Getino argue:

Our time is one of hypothesis rather than of thesis, a time of works in progress unfinished, unordered, violent works made with the camera in one hand and a rock in the other. Such works cannot be assessed according to the traditional theoretical and critical canons. The ideas for our film theory and criticism will come to life through inhibition-removing practice and experimentation. 'Knowledge begins with practice. (9)

Therefore the style of filmmaking in Third cinema includes a radical form of production, distribution and exhibition that seeks to expose the living conditions of people at the grassroots level. The study analyses how selected filmmakers have allowed different experiments to guide their production models by rejecting traditional mainstream filmmaking models, this is reflected in Chapters two and three.

Solanas and Getino argue that the appropriation of models which appear to be only technical, industrial, scientific, etc., leads to a conceptual dependency, due to the fact that the cinema is an industry, but differs from other industries in that it has been created and organized in order to generate certain ideologies. This is ideal in analyzing the significance of video films in Zimbabwe's cinematic history as it has been postulated by Hungwe (2000) that film in post colonial Zimbabwe from the 80s to the 90s was highly dependent on external. The study analyses how the video film movement can be accounted for especially in light of the traditionally dependent film industry.

Third Cinema films were often censored and therefore, the production and distribution of these films had to be innovative to escape official censorship. The study notes that although video films are not ‘explicitly’ concerned with ‘political’ issues, they use alternative and innovative production models. The study contextualizes film production and distribution in Zimbabwe in light of the prevailing informal economy and piracy. It examines how local filmmakers have invented ‘sustainable’ production and distribution models that suit the prevailing informal economic environment.

To attend to the cinematic and editorial aspects of the study, Third cinema films used documentary clips, news reels, photographs, video clips, interviews and/or statistics and in some cases, non-professional actors. These production elements were combined in an inventive manner to create a message that is specific to its local audience. In general, Third Cinema's aesthetic innovations involved the mixing of different genres and visual styles to situate both cultural and political critiques, rather than aiming solely for artistic excellence and expression. The study therefore repurposes these ideals and models in order to define and situate Zimbabwe’s video film aesthetic practice.

Revolutionary opposition to new imperialist conditions was, of course, part of the historical moment in which Third Cinema was born. In the changed world of today, however, this form of oppositional politics and thought can be problematic. For when resistance hardens into the form of binary oppositions, we have in fact adopted the very structure by which global capitalism operates (Jedlowski 2010). To accept this oppositional mode of thought is to become a part of the same kind of binary structure. To the extent that Third Cinema continues to espouse the

rhetoric and thinking of its early days, it is fighting with a phantom that gains strength from every opposition. Hence, Third Cinema becomes not an alternative to Hollywood or capitalism, but merely its mirror, its other. The research acknowledges the limitations of this theory but nonetheless considers its relevance, prospects and challenges in addressing the issues at hand.

Third cinema theories when applied in their raw state in analyzing Zimbabwean video films may be problematic. The inherent argument in Solanas and Getino is the use of film to overthrow tyranny, to motivate the subaltern into action against oppression. However, this is not the main thrust of the video filmmaking enterprise whose main motive is ‘survival’ and ‘profit’. The system of commercialization and profit which Solanas and Getino were fighting, is what the video film enterprise is all about. This therefore calls for critical theoretical reevaluations of the notions of Third cinema. The study repurposes Third cinema in light of recent developments in the development of film in Zimbabwe.

According to Harrow (2007) Third cinema was premised ‘on sacred cows’ which African postcolonial or postmodern film-including Nollywood video-can “combat”, ignore or just circumvent. These ‘sacred cows’ that African filmmakers have to navigate or negotiate include notions that:

- African film is important in the communication of history, in the correction of past misrepresentation of history.
- African film is important in writing back to Hollywood and back to misrepresentations of Africa in the mainstream media.
- African film represents African society , African people and culture

- African film should be the site of truth.
- African film is African. (Harrow 2007: xi)

Third Cinema is a film tradition of engagement with serious socio-political and cultural issues; most of them pitting Africa and the colonial and neocolonial centers of power. It is a film tradition of political consciousness and resistance to all forms of exploitation, repression and humiliation which arise in the encounter between Africa and its former and erstwhile colonial and neocolonial nemesis. Africa's cinema which has also been studied as 'Third Cinema' following the manifesto and thesis of Solanas and Getino (1976), has been identified as 'cinema engage', meaning that it made certain meanings and values important, central, natural and inevitable in line with itself ascribed identity. Those values and meanings are most likely inclusive of the five notions out above. The didacticism in the films selected is essentially moralistic than ideological. Theoretically, the video films selected are not strictly addressing serious ideological or socio-political issues as defined in the 'Third Cinema' manifesto. At best they are social and realist but do not aspire to transform the economic and political status quo.

2.3 Hybridity

To complement Third cinema theory and focus on appropriation and aesthetic aspects of this study, the analysis of video film texts is made through the lens of the theory of hybridity. The theory of hybridity is mainly used in Chapter four which addresses the aesthetic choices and language of the video films. The rhetoric of hybridity is fundamentally associated with the

emergence of post-colonial discourse and its critiques of cultural imperialism. It is the second stage in the history of hybridity, characterized by literature and theory that study the effects of mixture (hybridity) upon identity and culture. The principal theorist of hybridity to be used in this study is Homi Bhabha (1994). In this study, the adoption by Zimbabwean video filmmakers of different styles, narratives and aesthetics is also understood in hybrid terms.

The concept of hybridity has its own variants such as *métissage*, creolization and *mestizaje* (Acheraiou 2011). These variants will not be applied in the study as the concept of hybridity will to some extent sufficiently relate to the research questions and objectives of the study.

Bhabha articulates Hybridity in many different facets, depending on the context and on who defines the situation. It can be seen as a threatening contamination of a much valued ‘purity’, it can be seen as a creative mixture of disparate cultural elements, it can be seen as a subversive insistence on equality through difference displacing the ‘givenness’ of the centred perspective and it can be seen as yet another strategy for upholding existing power relations (Chikonzo 2014). It is within the scope of various appropriations of the means of production and film formal elements that the research investigates how selected video filmmakers violate mainstream conventional cinematographic, editorial and distribution models.

Bhabha (1994) redefines culture, discourse, and identity as fluid and ambivalent, rather than fixed and one dimensional. While emphasizing the hybridity of all cultures, Bhabha closely links the notion of hybridity to the spatial metaphor of the ‘third space’:

All forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (1994, 211)

This passage contains a cluster of theoretical, ideological, cultural, and utopian projections that Bhabha associates with the third space. In its actual formulation, the third space, like hybridity, is posited as a site of subversion, displacement, newness, renegotiation of cultures and identities, and multiple positionality. In relation to this study, hybridity is manifest through different levels in film. In this research, it is investigated through the processes of producing, directing, cinematography, acting editing and distribution. Hybridity also extends itself to mixtures of styles and cultures within the actual content of selected video films.

Hybridity has been a key feature of civilizations since time immemorial. Most civilizations, from the Sumerians through to the Egyptians and Greeks, developed and thrived through the incorporation of foreign ideas, philosophies, and technologies. In a sense, these ancient societies widely practiced hybridity and produced, to varying degrees, hybridized cultures (Acheraiou (2011). The study acknowledges the ‘glocal’ nature of film since the camera is not an African or

Zimbabwean invention; therefore the point of departure for this research is that the means of production have been negotiated and localized to suit local needs.

Stam (2008) argues that, not only values, but also techniques and information of the developed countries such as the technique of film are devoured and negotiated and adjusted for the sake of survival. Hybridity in this study points at the learning from the oppressors and the mastering of their ways and weapons, which reflects the consciousness of the relation between knowledge and power. The understanding of appropriation acknowledges the participation Zimbabwean video films in the global universal cinema, moreover because it assumes the inevitability of cultural interchange.

A hybrid reading of Zimbabwean video films abandons the idea of a privileged point of reference and does not claim a cultural monopoly on means of production. In short, in Bhabha's conception colonial rule and discourse are systems in which coercion and negotiation, authoritarianism and consensus were simultaneously at work. Building on the assumption that colonial discourse is ambivalent and heterogeneous, Bhabha further considers hybridity as a privileged means of resistance and subversion with a strong liberatory potential for the colonized or subaltern subjects (Bhabha 1994). According to Bhabha, then, hybridity is the fundamental tool by which the colonized resisted and subverted the colonizer's cultural, political, and ideological domination. It is within the scope of these theoretical positions that the thesis examines the cinematic practices of selected Zimbabwean video filmmakers across the filmmaking value chain.

Hybridity is taken with caution in the study as it has been attacked as a neocolonial discourse complicit with transnational capitalism, cloaked in the hip garb of cultural theory (Frello 2005). Hybridity has also been the target of attacks alleging that the concept reflects the life of its theorists more than the sites and communities these theorists write about. The intense controversy swirling around hybridity is symptomatic of the no less heated debate over the political potential and epistemological usefulness of postcolonial theory at large. This lingering dispute has pitted proponents of postcolonial theory's emancipatory claims against those who believe, as Spivak (1999) succinctly puts it, that discussions of postcolonial theory "often dissimulate the implicit collaboration of the postcolonial in the service of neo colonialism" (p. 361).

2.4 Review of related literature

2.4.1 Introduction

This section reviews previous work done on the Zimbabwean film and television industry and African video films. The field on Zimbabwe film and television scholarship does not do justice to the number of video film productions that have recently made their way into the market. A few scholars (Vambe 1991; 2000; Hungwe; 2001, Mhando 2000; Burns 2002; Chikonzo 2005 and 2014; Mboti 2010, 2015, Muonwa 2011; Ravengai 2011; Mhiripiri 2013 and Thompson 2013) have consistently contributed to the scholarship of Zimbabwean film and television culture in various journals, dissertations and book chapters, however as the study shall demonstrate-

none of these contributions have interrogated the emergence, aesthetics and ideological underpinnings of the video film phenomena. Although their works cover a substantial section of the post-colonial period, nowhere in their texts do they attempt to interrogate manifestations of conventional Western aesthetics or how video film texts may be viewed as strategies of containment of Western canonical practices and culture within a post-colonial context. This study fills this gap.

2.4.2 Historiography on Zimbabwean cinema

The historical development of film in Zimbabwe has tended to reflect changes in the political history of the country. Vambe (2000) isolates specific phases or periods in the historical development of film in Zimbabwe. These phases range from the days of the then Central African Film Unit (CAFU) (1948-1963) to the days of the Rhodesian Information Service (1963-1979) and then the Zimbabwe Information Services in the post-colonial period. Vambe's study also notes the emergence of Non-governmental organizations such as the Media for Development Trust (MFDT) in the production of postcolonial films. Vambe's findings helps this study in providing continuity on the historiography of Zimbabwean films as the study also seeks to investigate the significance of the video film movement on the history of Zimbabwean cinema

Zimbabwean film reflects regional history. Mhando (2000), in particular, examines post-colonial films from a regional perspective which contrasts trends in Zimbabwean films to those evident in other places in Southern Africa. However Chikonzo (2005) argues that this approach does little in the documentation of Zimbabwean films because more space is given to other Southern

African films than to the actual Zimbabwean films. This study shall be concerned exclusively with Zimbabwean films because there is a need to consolidate researches on Zimbabwean film in terms of its own aesthetic, its own cultural and ideological dynamics, and its own politics before it can actually flow into the larger tributary of African Cinema.

Robert Kavanagh (1986) offers a historical survey of film making policies in Zimbabwe after independence in 1980. Kavanagh concludes that Zimbabwean film inherited a capitalist film distribution system from the colonial or pre-revolutionary society (1986, 11). He also argued that film's commercial and urban based identity meant that it served a minority's interests and was by and large a vehicle for cultural imperialism. Kavanagh's findings provide a critical reference for the study as it relates to preexisting models of distribution before the video film movement, this helps the research in locating the significance of the video film movement in the development of film in Zimbabwe and with particular reference to distribution structures. The study investigates the attempt by the filmmakers to decolonize distribution structures in order to suit the prevailing informal economy.

Hungwe (2001) reviews film-making in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) from 1948 to 2000. He argues that film-making over the last 50 years has been subject to an evolving post-Second World War agenda for development in the former colonies. Hungwe finds that local racial politics that precipitated the war of liberation produced a particularly reprehensible brand of war propaganda films (15). Furthermore, changes in narrative have occurred over time, reflecting changing agendas and relations, and shifting geopolitical interests. Hungwe and Kavanagh's

studies are crucial as they provide a historical account on Zimbabwean films from the colonial to the post colonial era. They emphasize more on how the politics of the day shaped the content of the films. However, having made their observations, the two studies do not proceed to validate their observation through the analysis of specific film texts. They do not take their research further to include analyses of how, among other things, filmmaking techniques became a counter-discursive strategy in subsequent forms of emerging video films. This research intends to fill that gap by analyzing specific texts.

Mboti (2015) argues that the Zimbabwean film industry is a still work in progress. He notes that the thirty year old colonial heritages of filmmaking, distribution and exhibition have not been fully replaced. Mboti's analysis is a panoramic view of the industry mainly focusing on the postcolonial models of filmmaking and distribution. His study offers interesting insights on the emergence of the video film phenomenon which this study will constantly refer to. This study coextensive with Mboti's on the theme of decolonization of the local industry. This study however pays critical attention to selected video films and goes a step further to analyze their aesthetic orientation. The study adds that perhaps more than anything else, it is this ability of the video films to operate behind the official establishment and allow the voice, dreams, fears and other nuanced predicaments of everyday people that make videos fruitful for understanding social change in Zimbabwe and thus fostering national appeal.

2.4.3 Identity construction and resistance

Research on Zimbabwean cinema has also reflected how Africans resisted the colonial and post-colonial identity construction. Chikonzo (2005) explores the construction of African identities in Zimbabwean films from 1948 to 2000. His study analyses how African cultural identities were constructed through filmic content and formal techniques. He classifies films into different genres, which encompass agricultural films, war films, comic films, health films, films for tourism and feature films. His study however emphasizes attention on the agricultural films and war films. He explores how thematic preferences, characterization, the treatment of time and space, mise-en-scene, camera techniques and editorial techniques were instrumental in the construction of African cultural identities in Zimbabwean films. Chikonzo's study however spans over a long period of time and covers films in brief. The study uses the same categories of analysis that are inherent in Chikonzo's study to analyze the video film phenomenon paying special detail to selected video films.

Burns (2002) employs racial prejudice as a thematic category of study to explore how issues of film spectatorship were imbued with the politics of race. The study demonstrates how Africans totally resisted the propaganda that was propagated by the films. The book uses extensive evidence collected from various sources outside Zimbabwe including interviews with some of the people who actually produced the films. The present study can therefore be perceived as extending and interrogating Burns' thematic focus albeit with a much narrower focus on home-grown video productions.

Thompson (2013) reflects on discourses of identity that pervade local talk and texts in Zimbabwe. She explores questions of culture that play out in broadly accessible local and foreign film and television, Thompson shows how viewers interpret these media and how they impact everyday life, language use, and thinking about community. She offers a unique understanding of how media reflect and contribute to Zimbabwean culture, language, and ethnicity. In line with Thompson's findings, this study examines how and why the aesthetics of video films appeal to local audiences across the nation with the possibility of creating a national cinematic movement.

2.4.4 Emerging perspectives on video films

Emerging Zimbabwean film scholars have tended to criticize the local video film movement for its radical aesthetics and unconventional production and post-production practices. Ngwenya (2013) analyzes the cinematographic and editing techniques of the video film *Go Chanaiwa Go* (2012). He uses the Hollywood characteristics of the Action film genre to judge the films aesthetics and techniques. He concludes that the film somehow fails to live to the standard characteristics of the Action film genre. This study however does not use a Western gaze to judge video films but seeks to appreciate the films as a movement in their own right which has borrowed some Western or mainstream techniques as a means of survival resulting in a hybrid film language.

Mudzinganyama (2014) explores the marketing and distribution techniques employed by local video filmmakers. He argues that filmmakers have adopted guerrilla marketing styles in marketing their films. Whilst this study concurs with Mudzinganyama that filmmakers have

utilized guerrilla means of marketing, it adds that the unorthodox means of production transcend from concept to production and form an essential part of the aesthetic orientation of the films.

Emerging Zimbabwean video films have been criticized for their overuse of theatrical techniques. Mutanga (2015) criticizes the film *Sabhuku Vharazipi* labeling it a ‘recorded theatre’ performance. He outlines the elements of film and theatre in relation to the *Sabhuku Vharazipi* and concludes that the film does not conform to the standards of filmmaking based on Western standards. His analysis does not take into consideration that *Sabhuku Vharazipi* might be an attempt to subvert conventional standards of filmmaking. This study examines the same film, however noting that the film is part of a new movement of filmmaking in Zimbabwe which should be judged in African terms.

2.4.5 Television studies in Zimbabwe

Television studies in Zimbabwe have reflected how the country’s sole television station has isolated its audience through poor programming and the interference of the government thereby constantly creating propagandistic discourses. Mano (1997) and Mboti (2010) point out that monopoly public service television programming in Zimbabwe is beset by two major crises: the crisis of finance and the crisis brought on by political interference. Together this crisis ultimately compromises production values. Mano and Mboti provide important insights into how television programming has to some extent encouraged independent film productions since there seems to be resistance from the audience in watching propaganda. Orgeret’s (1998) work in analyzing Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporations’ news broadcasts as an essential instrument of national

development, and perhaps more crucially, of national control through establishing and modifying acceptable values. She argues that in Zimbabwe, the state owned media is structured along a forced consensus discourse. This study argues that ZBC can play a crucial role in the marketing and visibility of the emerging film industry, particularly if it is monetized and depoliticized. Its current state discourages investors and drives away audiences. The accounts outlined above are an important starting point for this research as it shall use their sets of findings to make further propositions in relation to the role that television can play in the development of the local film industry.

Nyoni (2004) analyses the function of television drama production as agitation propaganda. He analyses 'Madzoka Zimbabwe' (2000), a ZTV drama production which used songs, slogans and political chants which he argues sought to arouse political emotions. While Nyoni focuses on visual and aural elements that are in the drama, seeking to fit them into agitation propaganda 'model', this research seeks to analyze the same visual elements and how they sought to construct an indigenous film identity through violating and mediating mainstream aesthetics.

Samuel Ravengai (2011) examines Zimbabwe's first television soap opera, *Studio 263* concentrating on the period 2002-2006. He argues that, the funding of Studio 263 by Western development aid agencies places the developing world in a dependent relationship with the West, making it a prisoner of history. Ravengai demonstrates the difficulty experienced by the scriptwriters where the sponsor's objectives seem to negate fundamentals of television techniques and aesthetics. It is however interesting to note that the television techniques and

aesthetics that Ravengai refers to are Western. Ravengai's articles in the Sunday Mirror review of 7, 21 and 28 March (2004) explore scriptwriting and the structure of Studio 263. In the first article, he questions the authenticity of soap operas in Zimbabwe, giving a comprehensive understanding of soap opera generic codes from a scriptwriting, acting and directing point of view. In the second article, he brings out the fact that scriptwriters in the soap only write scripts following a storyline created by the headwriter. In the last article, he explores the qualities of a good associate writer bringing out ideas such as that they must have talent, obsession and technique. Ravengai though making interesting findings on the interaction and complexities between the donor and the artist however negates the fact that, it is not only in the content but the technique that Western dominance is inscribed. The generic codes that Ravengai refers to are basically Western, however he is justified since soap operas are a Western invention. It is however important to note that it is unfair to judge our productions of any kind using Western yard sticks. This study therefore maintains that Zimbabwe and Africa can still develop its own films without reference to Western codes and still participate fully in the global cultural formations. This is already being proven by Nollywood, Bongo film in Tanzania and the Ghana video film industry, among others. The study further problematises the use of Western methods in the construction of an authentic film language.

2.4.6 Trends in African video film enquiry

Nigerian film scholars have reacted to the video boom in their country by documenting and critiquing the industry's production and distribution models, aesthetics, thematic concerns and quality of films. The most comprehensive work is a collection of essays ranging in discussion

from video antecedents in Yoruba popular theater, culture and art in Hausa video films to ethnicity, class and gender. (Haynes, 2000, 2007). Other significant contributions include those by Ukadike (2003), Lawuyi (1997), Adejunmobi (2002) and Larkin (2004). Haynes and Onokome (2000) and Larkin (2004) in particular touch on aspects of the subversive tendencies and potentialities of video films but provide little focused discussion on the precise manner in which video films offer a counter-hegemonic potential. Babson Ajibade and Ben Williams (2012) in their study of social and visual environments of Nollywood films argue that videos depart remarkably from Hollywood's Western notion. Though the Nigerian videos deploy what Appadurai (1999) terms global technologies and techniques, this deployment is squarely on local terms. It is this anti-local and very un-global ability of the videos that Meyer (2006) highlights when she says that the films occur "behind the backs of both global media industries and the state" (93). Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) contend that video culture approximates the decadent, the fears, the failings and the rich but seemingly unattainable potentials of a postcolony. This study however adds that video film cultures have evolved without the far-sightedness or instinct for talent that may have built Hollywood making them a unique enterprise in their own right. It is also true, as Haynes (2007) has suggested that Nollywood videos aim only at quick returns on minimal investments by pandering to the lowest tastes of their audiences. However the study argues that it is the videos' ability to pander very cheaply and very quickly to audiences that make them vital links between visual culture and national experience.

Chris Ojukwu and Ezenandu, P (2012) explore the origin and evolution of Nollywood movie industry from its inception in 1992 to the present time, drawing from its projection of African

narratives. They examined the synergistic interplay of tradition and modernity in propagating African cultural traditions beyond the African continent. Their paper also criticizes the industry's poor manner of exposing African negative traditions and its inability to use some core shared values and norms to enhance, transform and consolidate the emerging African democracy. They conclude that there should be a paradigmatic shift of Nollywood movies from tradition to modernity since virtually all the African narratives being projected by the industry hitherto are not only pristine and anachronistic but also fall short of the existing realities of the African way of life. From the foregoing, they recommend that conscious efforts should be made by all stakeholders in the industry to think of Nigeria first in all their movies by portraying the good images of Africa and Nigeria in particular. As Ndukwu (2010) submitted, Nigerian film industry can be used as a tool for shaping the messages that Nigeria wish to project to the west. It should also be a key goal of modern public diplomacy and strategy. In support of Nwaorgu's (2010:24) view that, every human society requires system builders and cooperate planners to make progress. This study argues that, institutions like the Nollywood and Zimbabwean video industries should aim at creating films that are critical, constructive, who will be able to harness, criticize, evaluate, and synthesize the strengths and weakness of the African people.

A similar heedfulness towards digital technology in African video films is evident in the writings of expat Ethiopian filmmaker and scholar Lucy Gebre- Egziabher (2010), whose article "*Digital Filmmaking: Panacea or Scourge for African Cinema*" outlines some of the advantages and challenges of digital filmmaking in Africa. She states that the digital age has opened up opportunities for African filmmakers to use digital video, which captures high-quality images and sounds and makes postproduction more accessible. While she acknowledges that many video

filmmakers are in it for the potential profit margins, there are “authentic” filmmakers who can take advantage of the digital age and the market niche that has been created by the video-film industry through the much increased financial accessibility to production and distribution that digital technology offers. For her, a possible solution lies in knowledge transfer from the traditionally trained film-makers to the new crop of video-film directors through training them in creative and technical methods. Whilst Egzibha is concerned with educating filmmakers, this study believes that African filmmakers and in particular, Zimbabwean filmmakers are creating their own language that should be appreciated for what it is not for what it should be. The study appreciates the liberalization of the video technology but adds that the films being produced should be appreciated in their own right.

Brian Larkin (2004) examines the undesirable effects of piracy on Nigerian videos. He notes that pirate videos are marked by blurred images and distorted sound, creating a material screen that filters audiences’ engagement with media technologies and their senses of time, speed, space, and contemporaneity. He concludes that, piracy creates an aesthetic, a set of formal qualities that generates a particular sensorial experience of media marked by poor transmission, interference, and noise. This study contends with Larkin that piracy dictates the pace and aesthetics of video production from concept to distribution. The study however sees piracy as an important creative force behind the films and should therefore be credited for the videos radical production and distribution practices whose impact on the development of an indigenous film language cannot be underestimated

Evidences of Nigerian videos' success with African audiences all over the continent have been provided by numerous academic and journalistic articles (Abdoulaye 2005; Baku Fuita and Bwiti Lumisa 2005; Becker, forthcoming; Boheme, forthcoming; Dipio 2008; Katsuva 2003; Krings 2010b; Muchimba 2004; Ondego 2005; Pype, forthcoming, Adamu 2007). Most of them recognize the fact that, when they appeared in the early 1990s, Nigerian videos filled a consistent gap within the landscape of Nigerian and African popular entertainment. In most sub-Saharan African countries, independently-produced audiovisual contents (that is, not conditioned by the governmental propaganda) produced locally and targeting popular audiences were almost nonexistent. Videos were in fact the first “Black” and African entertainment product that was able to compete with foreign “White” media contents, whose overwhelming presence on African screens had participated in creating various forms of cultural alienation (Haynes 2000). However, while these factors have been incontestably important in generating videos' continental success, this study argues that they should not be considered as the only reason for audiences' enthusiasm vis-à-vis these cultural products. Beyond acknowledging Nollywood's transnational circulation, some of the articles mentioned above also provide tentative analysis of the reasons for videos' success. The hypotheses proposed are numerous. They go from the straightforward assumption that generic African audiences are attracted by Nollywood videos in relation to their “cultural proximity” (Katsuva 2003; see also Straubhaar 1991), to more elaborate discussions of the specific kind of moral and religious values that videos assert and reinforce (Abdoulaye 2005; Dipio 2008; Pype, forthcoming). These explanations, however, leave a number of questions open. As Antonio La Pastina and Joseph Straubhaar have argued (2005), while cultural proximity is often an influential factor in audiences' choices, it is hardly an unailing principle. As Brian Larkin has demonstrated (1997), for instance, in some cases the

perceived cultural proximity might differ from the actual geographical vicinity. These findings help the study in analyzing the national appeal of the video films in Zimbabwe despite their criticism on aesthetic grounds.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEXTUALIZING VIDEO FILM EMERGENCE AND PRACTICE IN ZIMBABWE

"...we must discuss, we must invent..." —Frantz Fanon (1961:16)

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a panoramic evaluation of digital video film development and production in Zimbabwe. The chapter discusses the emergence of Zimbabwean video films, offering contextual and historical background. Film production worldwide is experiencing fundamental changes as ‘new technologies in production, distribution and exhibition’ are prompting ‘a necessary re-imagining of the film industry’ (Connolly, 2008: 2). The chapter examines the possible contribution of residual neo-colonial structures of filmmaking in the form of Non-governmental funding, global proliferation of digital technologies, role of festivals, and the Zimbabwe International Film Festival’s (ZIFF) Short Film Project in the development of the video film movement. This will facilitate an examination of film practice prior to, during and after the adoption of the video film concept and provide a critique of its desirability and efficacy. The central research question addressed in this chapter is: What is the significance of video films in Zimbabwe’s cinematic history?

3.1 An overview of filmmaking in post independence Zimbabwe

The purpose of this section is to offer a brief history of the Zimbabwean film industry. As already noted in the literature review, the historiography of the film industry has already been accounted for (Vambe 1991, 2000, Hungwe, 2001, Mhando 2000, Burns, 2002, Lazer 2003, Chikonzo 2005, Mhiripiri 2011, Mboti 2015). This section offers a summary of the industry in

order to account for the significance of the video film movement in the history of film in Zimbabwe. This will allow for an analysis of continuity and change in the study of film in Zimbabwe. The section is divided into two decades and subsections; the '80s' and '90s'

3.1.1 The 1980s

In the first decade of independence, the state launched an aggressive initiative to promote Zimbabwe as a film making centre for Hollywood studios. Hailed as a “perfect film making venue” with adequate technical support base (Hungwe 2009; 6), the reason for promoting the country was culturally and economically driven. In anticipation of Hollywood injecting capital into the economy and offering training for local film makers thereafter these would form a local film industry. Among the 1980's films were the comic adaptation of Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1985) produced by Cannon Studios and its sequel *Quarter main* (1986).

The state, through the Ministry of Information and Publicity was in pursuit of establishing a local film industry. Another production followed when a partnership was struck with the Universal Pictures¹ which led to the production of an anti apartheid film called *Cry Freedom* 1987² (Hungwe 2002). Failing to achieve its much anticipated success and the government not

¹ Universal Studios Inc. (also known as Universal Pictures), is an American film studio, owned by Comcast through its wholly owned subsidiary NBC Universal and is one of Hollywood's "Big Six" film studios.

² . Other notable productions include; *Allan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold* (1986), *Mandela* (1987), *A World Apart* (1988), *White Hunter Black Heart* (1990) and *The Power of One* (1992).

receiving an adequate payback on its US\$5.5 million investment in the film, the loss went with much bitterness forcing the government to retract its involvement in feature film³.

Mboti (2015) notes that foreign productions did help showcase local actors as well as train local filmmakers. He acknowledges that actors such as Oliver Tengende, Isaac Mabhikwa, Innocent Choga, Brian Kagure and the late Simon Shumba (famous in local television as Mutirowafanza) were among the local actors cast in some of the movies and Godwin Mawuru together with Stephen Chigorimbo gained some exposure as camera trainees and assistant director respectively. The local cast and crew, however, all functioned in more or less menial “servant” roles. It is doubtful that this model was a sustainable foundation for a viable film industry.

The 80s also saw a few local independent filmmakers who had taken part in big budget feature films attempting to make their own alternative films⁴. From the forgoing, it can be observed that the 1980s was not the decade of independent filmmaking. In the absence of cheaper alternatives such as video, filmmaking remained an expensive undertaking not only reserved for a devoted elite but one which resulted in little return on investment. Existing distribution and exhibition formats also did not support the establishment of a solid independent filmmaking alternative.

³ Stung by this loss, the government stayed away from the production of feature films. It continued to sponsor a limited programme of film through the Ministry of Information’s Production Services. These were mostly short documentaries of a cultural and educational nature. The production unit faced severe budgetary constraints and did not make a significant impact locally.

⁴ Mboti (2015) notes that the films were mostly of a documentary nature with a sprinkling of shorts and mini-features. A key figure in independent filmmaking of this era was the late Olley Maruma who produced and directed *The Assegai* (1982), *Quest for Freedom* (1981), *After the Hunger and Drought* (1988)¹² and *Consequences* (1988). *Consequences* is a significant film in that it was the first mini-feature by an African in post-independence Zimbabwe.

3.1.2 The 1990s

The 90s has been acknowledged by scholars (Vambe 2001, Hungwe 2002, Chikonzo 2005 and Mboti 2015) as the decade of the NGO film. The NGO film is a type of film funded by (mostly) foreign Non-governmental Organizations. Both commercial and governmental funding, were not an option for Zimbabwean filmmakers. The only viable sources of capital that remained were development funds run by large Western corporations such as Anglo-American, NGOs, or Western governments⁵. The Media for Development Trust (MFD) pioneered in the efforts to use cinema as a medium of expression for the marginalized community.

Lazer (2003) notes that the foreign funding did not come without conditions, as the American distributors of these films observed on their website, with the characteristic moral complacency of the habitual giver of 'charity', "there is no reason to believe hard-pressed aid organizations would feel justified in subsidizing an African entertainment industry" (California Newsreel, 1996c); justification was found in engineering films that would address specific contemporary issues. Notable films produced and distributed in this era include *More Time* (1993), *Consequences* (1989), *Neria* 1992, *Everyone's Child* (1996), *Yellow Card* (2001)

The Media for Development Trust (MDF) unlike previous Hollywood projects, gave a number of Zimbabwean filmmakers an unrivaled opportunity to learn through their integration of local

⁵ Films were mainly sponsored by organisations such as the European Union, SIDA (of Sweden), DFID (of the UK), USAID, NORAD (Norway) and of course the Media For Development Trust, which provided the infrastructure for most Zimbabwean filmmaking.

filmmakers in the production processes of their films⁶. Local filmmakers were given major roles as actors, directors, assistant directors, writers and technical crew.

The MDF films have been criticized for being profoundly complicit in cultural genocide (Lazer 2003, Chikonzo 2005 and Hungwe 2002). They produced the language of colonial film as well as restructuring ideological and representational hegemonies to suit the post colonial era. They contributed to the capitalization and homogenization of Zimbabwe. In summary, the effects of the domination of Zimbabwean cinema by a narrow ‘development’ ideology have been far reaching and many as summarized by Lazer (2003; 32);

- Film production and distribution organizations setting themselves up for the specific purpose of scripting, directing, producing and distributing ‘development’ films and videos.
- Film directors preoccupying themselves with whether or not the films they are making will sell across national borders before they have yet established the space, place and audience for them locally.
- The metanarrative of ‘development’ which already dominates education, missionary religion, commerce, industry and politics extended to the relatively new media of cinema and video.
- The potential range and power of Zimbabwean cinema remained unrealized, unexplored and unknown.

⁶ Notable filmmakers include; Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nakai Matema, Godwin Mawuru, Ben Mahaka, Steven Chigorimbo, Walter Muparutsa etal

3.2.1 The Zimbabwe International Film Festival Trust (ZIFFT) Short Film Project (SFP)

ZIFF was formed in 1998 through partnerships with organizations such as Southern African Communications for Development (SACOD) (Mujanana 2013)⁷. ZIFF extends its reach to filmmakers and their subsidiary industries such as Information Technology (IT), equipment, distribution, corporate partners, international festivals, and production companies. The festival is a flagship for local film makers to promote products and since its establishment it has become a platform for promotion through its annual ten day film showcase.

ZIFF is an important reference point for this study as it encouraged local independent filmmakers with technical equipment, skills and distribution avenues. It can be argued that ZIFF laid the foundation of video filmmaking in Zimbabwe though video film equipment was not readily available for local filmmakers. The objectives of the festival point to the possibility of a localized and viable film industry, the objectives are highlighted below:

- To showcase the best in international, regional and Zimbabwe films.
- To create a networking platform for filmmakers to facilitate co productions and financing opportunities. To raise and nurture a greater knowledge and awareness of the medium film.
- To nurture the visual culture of Zimbabwe.
- To offer greater diversity of workshops and panel discussions in relevant and contemporary areas of film making.
- To bring together experienced film makers, academics, scholars and aspiring film makers for a beneficial exchange of information and ideas.

⁷ Elton Mujanana is the current festival coordinator; he has been leading the festival's revival since 2013.

- To encourage and instill the need to preserve African cultural identity through story telling.
- To become a necessary venue of African film makers to launch their films in Southern Africa. (www.zifft.org)

From the objectives listed above one can note the localized focus of the festival in facilitating the development of indigenous films. Consequently, the festival heralded the much needed international relationship to springboard Zimbabwe into the circles of global film practice and has become as Matema Nakai (2008) notes “unquestionably the biggest film event in the country.” The festival coordinator Mr Elton Mujanana, noted that the 15th and 16th (2013-2014) editions of the festival had seen a revival of the film industry with more than 15 sponsors ranging from companies to Non-Governmental organization (Interview 04/06/14)⁸. The influx of various sponsors has facilitated a growth of the festival particularly in the number of venues for showcasing films. In 2014 the festival had nine venues these were Pakare Paya Arts Centre, Sam Levy village, Young Africa centre, Alliance Francaise, Spanish Embassy, Copacabana, Bulawayo Center, National Arts gallery and Westgate (Mujanana 2014). This was by far an improvement from the previous year which saw the festival using its offices.

ZIFF has also embarked on a major community outreach project that has seen in excess of 10,000 students and /or community groups being given the opportunity to attend screenings at tents in the park, local community and school halls (Mujanana 2014). Not willing to lament the dwindling opportunities to build new talent, ZIFFT in conjunction with the African Script Development Fund and the UNESCO/ Zimbabwe Film Television Training Project, a proactive

⁸ Some of the sponsors are Old Mutual, Zimbabwe German Society, US embassy, Chinese Embassy, Africalia Belgium, Bohlingers larger, Netone, Culture Fund Trust and the International Video Fair Trust

stance was taken by establishing Short Film Project (SFP). Other platforms to rekindle film production and discussions that were offered by ZIFF are Film Forum, Outreach 2 Educate (O2E), Outreach Screening and Cinema-in-the Park⁹.

Although the Festival has other commitments and subsidiaries, the most popular and relevant to this study is the Short Film Project (SFP). In order to compliment its objectives, the Short Film Project was conceptualized in 2000. It is an initiative to encourage and promote film production in Zimbabwe. According to the organizers, it was conceptualized in response to a growing void in the local film industry. According to Mboti (2015) the political and economic climate of the 2000s, characterized by the landmark land redistribution project, political violence and unprecedented hyperinflation, drove many NGOs from Zimbabwe¹⁰. Most project funding lines for local filmmakers ceased.

Despite the immediate challenges such as inconsistency in funding and lack of skills faced by ZIFFT and SFP, the festival still survives amid economic uncertainty. It still attracts funding from select donor agencies and the corporate world. The Short Film Project can be credited with grooming and motivating young local low budget filmmakers. SFP notable filmmakers are Allan Muwani, Joe Njagu, Tawanda Gunda Mupengo, Patience Tawengwa, Solomon Maramba, Tafara Gondo, Rumbidzai Katedza, Yeukai Ndarimani and Nox Chatiza (Mboti 2015).

⁹ These platforms have however ceased operating due to lack of funding; only the Short Film Project survives to date.

¹⁰ The MFD, for instance, relocated to Tanzania. Even actors such as Dominic Kanaventi were forced into exile. Formal sources of funding for filmmakers became even scarcer.

Njagu as a writer and producer has been involved in more than twenty productions to date and has directed short films such as *Curious Case of the Underwear* (2009) and *Nyaya DzemuHiace* (2009), went on to produce and direct signature feature films such as *Lobola* (2010), *The Gentleman* (2011) (featuring Presley Chweneyagae)¹¹ *Bitter Pill* (2009) *Sores of Emmanuel* (2009) *Something Nice from London* (2013).

Rumba Katedza is the founder and director at Mai Jai Films, and is a writer, director and producer. Her film credits include *Danai* (2002), *Asylum* (2007), *Tariro* (2008), *Big House*, *Small House* (2009) and *Playing Warriors* (2011).

It should be noted that ZIFF and SFP have suffered the same fate as the Developmental films mainly because they were formed through partnerships with donor agencies thus relied more on the funders than the intended consumers (see Hungwe 2000, 2002; Vambe 1991; Mhando 2000 and Mabweazara 2002). The festival has failed to transform itself into a viable commercially-self-sustainable enterprise. When donors could not avail all the required funding, the festival and SFP went into hibernation for four years from 2009 to 2012. The SFP returned in 2013 forging new partnerships with the Zimbabwe Filmmakers Guild and the Zimbabwe Film Television School Southern Africa (ZIFTESSA). The problems facing the SFP and ZIFF highlight the

¹¹ Presley Chweneyagae is an actor and director, known for *Tsotsi* (2005), *More Than Just a Game* (2007) and *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013).

dangers associated with too heavy a reliance on donor organizations and the unsustainability of this dependence in the development of independent filmmaking.

Nevertheless, the SFP laid the foundation for independent low budget filmmaking by providing alternative short film opportunities for indigenous filmmakers who would in turn influence the development of video films in Zimbabwe. The ZIFF in general and the SFP in particular became the meeting place for a new crop of creative local filmmakers who would go on to permanently redefine the local film industry landscape.

3.2.3 Zimbabwean film and the new millennium

The current state of affairs in the Zimbabwean film industry presents a complex picture represented by peaks, troughs and overlaps. Zimbabwean filmmaking is emerging from the state of being the privilege of a few. The new millennium promulgated a radical shift in the Zimbabwe's film industry. The land reform programme accompanied by economic sanctions and political upheavals led to a decline in donor funding which had dominated the industry for two decades (Muonwa 2011). The new millennium therefore brought a new dimension in filmmaking particularly for independent filmmakers who had for a long time worked under the auspices of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

As noted earlier, filming prior to the 2000's decade was an elite enterprise. By this is meant that filmmaking needed extensive capital injection from the government or donor agencies. This was

evidenced by the first films such as *Neria* (1992) and *Yellow Card* (2000) which were made through exogenous funds and partnerships with Non-Governmental organizations. However, the first decade of the new millennium was characterized by a decline in film production. As Mboti (2015:20) noted:

During the early years of the land reform programme which resulted in the exiling of a majority of white farmers, MFD permanently relocated to Tanzania. Tanzania, ironically, is the birthplace of the colonial film in Africa.

Many NGOs that had been active during the decade also shut shop or scaled down operations. The output from established filmmakers dwindled to between a single film or none at all in the whole decade¹².

With a not so conducive socio-political and economic environment in Zimbabwe including the mass exodus of skilled personnel, the local cinema industry suffered a heavy blow (Musodza 2011). Foreign production exchange, which was responsible for equipping the first generation of film makers with film oriented expertise, ceased, lured by better facilities and locations, these global film franchises moved to apartheid free South Africa (Hungwe 2002). The cessation of their investment and sponsorship including the lack of government support left a void in the Zimbabwe film industry. Due to the cost-prohibitive climate, filmmakers sought viable alternatives. Younger filmmakers related far more effortlessly to digital video, which was

¹² However a few filmmakers such as Tsitsi Dangarembga, her production company Nyerai films managed to continue making films – such as the short *Kare Kare Zvako* (2004) and the musical *Nyaminyami amaji Abulozi* (2012) – that were a hybrid between the NGO-film and localized aesthetics.

cheaper and easier to use. It is in this climate that the ‘crisis’ decade became the decade of the low to medium budget independent film.

The Zimbabwean audience has, traditionally, been starved of both local and international film. Zimbabwe Television (ZTV) weekly movies and reruns and the mobile film units only sought to drip feed cinematic content to audiences. ZBC TV films, in any case, are currently disrupted by the constant power cuts which have been systematically carried out since the early 2000s. There is little guarantee that any film will be viewed by an average of the target audiences. The paucity of film entertainment opened doors firstly to Nollywood and then to piracy. Beginning in the early 2000s, Nigerian video films caught the popular imagination, plugging the gaps left by a virtually comatose film industry. Pirated DVDs selling for 50c (popularly known as ‘dollar-for-two’) also quickly made their way onto the streets in response to huge demand.

The government’s position on digitalization is not clear. Digital migration, if implemented by the end of 2015, promises to offer increased spectrum for local content. There is no indication, however, that the local film industry, as currently formally set up, will produce enough to offset demand. The solution seems to lie, more and more, with the clusters of independent filmmakers based in Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru and other small cities who are utilizing digital video filmmaking forms. Arguably, the distance between the cinematic institution and ordinary Zimbabweans has narrowed considerably. On the one hand, the availability of affordable digital cameras and editing software has meant that more people who would not have considered

filmmaking in the 1980s or 1990s have now ventured into the industry. The expensive use of 35mm film (and its variants) has been rendered largely superfluous.

3.3 The emergence of low-budget alternative video filmmaking

The local film industry has generally been characterized by, in Solanas and Getino's words (1976), "lack of equipment, technical difficulties, the compulsory specialization of each phase of work, and high costs." More importantly, there were no viable distribution and exhibition platforms by which to reach most ordinary Zimbabweans. This section defines and outlines the characteristics of Zimbabwean video films. Despite the continental rise of video film production, each country has its own operational environment and culture that has a direct impact on video films (Larkin 2000).

This stage in the development of alternative filmmaking in Zimbabwe can be likened to what Teshome Gabriel (1987) called, *the combative phase*:

The industry in this phase is not only owned by the nation and/or the government, it is also managed, operated and run for and by the people. It can also be called a cinema of mass participation, one enacted by members of communities speaking indigenous languages, one that espouses Julio Garcia Espinosa's polemic of 'An Imperfect Cinema,' that in a developing world, technical and artistic perfection in the production of a film cannot be the aims in themselves (12).

The terms ‘film and video’ are used synonymously and interchangeably throughout the study. Film traditionally is associated with capital intensive technology and the big screen. Video on the other hand is often associated with low capital technology and small screen (mainly the home environment).

The study notes that separating film from video is a tricky proposition. Scholars have even attempted to use the compound word video-film to underscore the ambiguities of classification, and Nollywood video films are a good example of how this classification problem boggles the mind and scholarship. In Zimbabwe it is at times even more problematic as filmmakers adopt theatre for film purposes, and we end up with films with limited settings, made using video technology; hence the view that we have theatre on the screen rather than a proper film.

Haynes (2000) perceives that they are something between television and cinema, and they do not fit comfortably within the North American structures of either. M Mwakangila (2010) observes that video films are ‘local, popular, privately funded and commercially based industry that has been criticized for their orientation towards commercialization and its apolitical stance as compared to African cinema’ (16). Adding to Haynes’ and Mwakangila’s definitions, the study defines the term video film as any movie or motion picture produced mainly in the video format while adhering to ‘particular’ cinematic values and conventions.

3.3.1 Categories of Zimbabwean popular video films

It would be erroneous to interpret Zimbabwean video films as a homogenous entity vying for the same aspirations, audiences and production practices. In this regard, the research loosely and

arbitrarily divides Zimbabwean video films into four categories namely ‘Zollywood’, ‘Theatrical films’, ‘Series’ and the ‘Sequels’. The categories are based on the nature of budgets, background of producers, actors, production practices and thematic concerns. These categories help to identify and interrogate the anatomy of video film practice in Zimbabwe. Although these categories help in understanding video film practice, as the study shall demonstrate, all the categories identified above point out to an attempt to create an alternative cinematic movement that is sustained by Zimbabweans.

3.3.2 ‘Zollywood’

Armed with a bit of knowledge acquired from former developmental production houses and with inspiration from yesteryear films such as *Neria* (1992), *Flame* (1997), and *Yellow card* (2000), some youthful filmmakers have determined to stick to the techniques of production of these yesteryear box office hits. These films have sought for example to align their production practices as much as possible to the conventional Western production and distribution budgets. Examples include *Lobola* (2010), *Think* (2011), *Go Chanaiwa go* (2011), *The Gentleman* (2013) and *Love like this* (2013). The producers of these films often glorify the past whilst castigating Nollywood and other emerging radical filmmakers for their approach to filmmaking. :

When Zimbabweans talk about the greatest films ever made in their country, they almost always refer to the 1990’s decade. This decade produced *Neria* (1992), which is probably Zimbabwe’s highest grossing movie of all time. Other notable movies from this period include *More Time* (1993), *Everyone’s Child* (1996), *Flame* (1996), and *Yellow Card* (2000). Older people

may also recall *Jit* (1990) with a lot of fondness. But they will seldom mention movies from the 2000's, and if they do, it's usually with a lot of criticism. That's because they don't really make them like they used to (Mahaka 22/07/14)

Mahaka makes interesting observations by referencing to yesteryear films which were not in the hands of locals. However he does not take into consideration the potential that the video film movement has and in particular the Nollywood appeal which has seen it taking a share in the global film markets (Haynes 2007).

Filmmakers in this category such as Rumbi Katedza, Ben Mahaka, Patience Tavengwa Joe Jagu, Obrian Mudyiwenyama and Rufaro Kaseke have received training or have gained experience over the years. Rufaro Kaseke for example has previously worked for Mighty movies¹³, Patience Tavengwa holds a degree in film from an American University; Rumbi Katedza holds a Masters degree in film from a British University (Musodza 2014). It is therefore not surprising that these filmmakers have sought to maintain the status core in producing their films in line with 'professional' mainstream guidelines.

None of the filmmakers could avail their budgets for this research as they consider it confidential. However the large cast and crew in their films indicate that they could have used higher budgets than their counterparts. *Lobola* (2010) for example had a cast and crew of 37

¹³ Mighty Movies was set up in 1986 by a group of media practitioners who included Paul Hughes, Geven Dore, Tony de Villiers, Simon Bright, and the late Steve Moyo to service the television production industry. The company was taken over by a Supa Mandiwanzira led consortium in 2002, precipitating a temporary collapse.

people Katedza's *Playing warriors* (2013) had 39, *Sinners* (2013) had 38 (Kaseke 2013). These numbers may appear small in terms of conventional filmmaking but for an underfunded industry like Zimbabwe, the numbers can be regarded as surpassing the average¹⁴.

In terms of sales, some of the films have made significant profits; *Lobola* for example reached over a 100 000 sales with the DVDs being initially sold for \$3 before it was pirated and later sold for \$1 (Jagu 2014). The producers experimented with a number of distribution techniques which will be analyzed in the next chapter. Some of the filmmakers have stuck to traditional distribution procedures and channels. A good example is Chihombori's *Gringo the troublemaker* (2013) which premiered at the Seven Arts Theatre in Harare and waited for six months before releasing DVDs to the public. Chihombori, who says he spent about \$48 000 on the move, is yet to recoup his investment (Mboti 2015). The movie was pirated way before its DVD release rendering it a loss making venture as Chihombori noted:

I will be happy the day I know that I and my partners have managed to recover our invested funds. This film took me more than five years to prepare and it took someone just less than a minute to acquire and duplicate. It's very painful and it's just not worth it for us

(www.newsdezimbabwe.co.uk)

In terms of thematic concerns, Zollywood films touch on a wide range of historical and contemporary subjects. It would seem the belief that in Africa, the concept 'arts for art sake' or art for entertainment sake has not been ignored by the filmmakers (Fairclough 1995). Major

¹⁴ An average film in Zimbabwe can be made up of a cast and crew of ten people with the rest being part time volunteers.

themes include infidelity (*The Long night* 2012), love (*Lobola* 2010), marriage and family (*Think* 2011), tradition versus modernity and sexuality (*Sinners* 2011)

3.3.3 The 'theatrical' video films

Filmmaking and theatre are closely linked or related art forms and usually feed into each other (Diawara 1992). This relationship is even closer in Africa where community theatre artists are known to venture into filmmaking in order to reach wider audiences¹⁵. The second category consists of filmmakers who have deliberately ignored film formal techniques and conventions set by yesteryear filmmakers and production houses choosing to set up their own means of production. However this is not always by choice as these filmmakers *modus operandi* are determined to a larger extent by the conditions of production, which mainly include lack of funding and equipment.

The films are made on scant or zero budgets. This means that they also work with limited cast and crew. Examples of films in this category are *Sabhuku Vharazipi* (2012), *Bag Remhosva* (2010), *Bag Rabvaruka* (2013) and *Saka Muchaita sei* (2014). The film *Saka Muchaita sei* had a cast and crew of eight people, *Sabhuku Vharazipi* had six people and *Bag Remhosva* had twelve. The limited cast and crew effectively means that there is high improvisation and multitasking in terms of duties. According to Solanas and Getino:

¹⁵ According to Abiodun Olayiwola (2009), the Yoruba travelling theatre is partly credited with the development of the Nollywood film industry.

The revolutionary film-maker acts with a radically new vision of the role of the producer, team-work, tools, details, etc. Above all, he supplies himself at all levels in order to produce his films, he equips himself at all levels, he learns how to handle the manifold techniques of his craft (1976, 12)

Solanas and Getino make relevant observations that are applicable to the ‘theatrical’ category of video films. The directors and actors in these films are in fact former theatre performers. Directors and actors such as Freddy Manjalima *Manje muchaita Sei* (2013) who is regarded as the Father of street theatre¹⁶ and David Mubaiwa *Sabhuku Vharaziphi* (2013-2014) are prominent figures in this category¹⁷. To them film is just a medium of expression just like theatre. They use film to reach to a wider audience which theatre cannot reach. Therefore they are not concerned with mastering the formal techniques of film or any laws governing filmmaking.

3.3.4 The ‘television drama series’

The third category in the Zimbabwean video cinema is made up of emerging filmmakers who have realized that demand exists for locally produced television series amongst Zimbabwean audiences. Tapping from the 1990s popularity of television drama series such as *Paraffin*,

¹⁶ Manjalima pioneered the popularity of street theatre on ZBC from 2000, he won the hearts of many Zimbabweans through his popular skits, this was a major turning point for street theatre in Zimbabwe (Gudu 2011)

¹⁷ David Mubaiwa plays the main character in *sabhuku Vharaziphi*. He is the founder of Ziya Cultural Arts Trust. The organization has been involved in information dissemination through theatre for development using social, political and economic tools.

Mukadota and Mutirowafanza, the filmmakers in this category have taken advantage of the entertainment void on ZBC by churning out a variety of video genres ranging from comedy, action and drama series.

As noted in the previous chapter ZBC has not sufficiently and convincingly shown any interest in providing sufficient entertainment. The rise in the number of vendors selling pirated American television drama series on the streets of Harare and other towns suggests the existence of a captive local “series” audience¹⁸.

Noting the increasing demand for American and Asian television shows being sold in the streets of Harare and realizing ZBCs unwillingness to pay them their dues, filmmakers have ventured into the drama series production. However the most notable innovation and contradiction in these films is that they are not affiliated to any television station as is the norm. A television show or drama series as the title (television) suggests, is supposed to be affiliated to a television station or network (Beridge 2010).

Filmmakers in this category produce as many film episodes, not for any particular television station, but to sell to the public on DVD format. A good example is *Fidelis* 2011 which has been running for the past four years and is currently on season 6. The film series is not affiliated to

¹⁸ The researcher generally observed that in Harare DVD vendors sell their DVDs according to demand, the films on demand mainly include American and Asian series with Nigerian movies topping the list.

any television station. The writer, producer and director Steven Masowe owns the production rights. He produces DVDs, selling them for a \$1 each on the streets.

Local video filmmakers have realized the potential of their films to earn extra income besides DVD sales. Advertising space is availed in the video-series. *Bag Rabvaruka* (2013), produced in the high density suburb of Budiro in Harare is a 60 minute long drama series, 45 minutes is dedicated to the film and fifteen minutes to advertising. What is striking about the commercials is that they are all from Budiro shopping centers. This emphasizes the localized nature of the film which makes it resonate well with its audience as it deals with familiar products and services available in the high density of Budiro. The adverts feature local butcheries, hair salons, pre schools, bars and general dealers. In order to make the adverts interesting and entertaining, they feature the main actors of the film clad in their costumes and makeup.

The entrepreneurs that wish to advertise on the films pay for the adverts In *Bag Rabvaruka*. Samaz and Sisters a wholesale shop paid \$ 150 to feature their advert in the film (Baya 2013). The money goes towards production and distribution costs. The impact of advertising on such medium should not be underestimated. In an interview with one of the shop attendants, Makanaka Baya, acknowledged that there had been an influx of customers, most of them claiming that they never knew that their shop existed until they saw it on 'video';

It seems the film has boosted our business; advertising with them has sharply increased our sales because the film has its own market and as such we are feeding from them. Sometimes kids yell at us saying they have seen us on TV. (Interview 21/06/2014)

The local video film series is evidently a hybrid product, produced on a negotiated terrain between mainstream television drama series tradition and technical, political and economic limitations affecting local filmmakers.

3.3.5 The 'sequel'

The concept of movie sequels is not an invention of Zimbabwean filmmakers. It is a popular phenomenon in mainstream cinemas such as Hollywood. This concept has been adopted by Nollywood and Bollywood filmmakers to suit their own conditions and audience expectations. However it is a very recent phenomenon in Zimbabwe. A sequel is defined by Simonoff (2006) as:

A narrative that is written after another narrative set in the same universe, especially a narrative that is chronologically set after its predecessors, or any narrative that has a preceding narrative of its own. While a prequel is a series of works, an installment that is set chronologically before its predecessor especially the original narrative or narrative work with at least one sequel. (34)

Traditionally, a Hollywood sequel prides itself on the popularity of the prequel. The popularity of the prequel in terms of box office success acts as a direct motivation for the production of a sequel. Simonoff (2006) contends that the great variability in the success of Hollywood movies has encouraged the production of sequels, with the hope being that the existence of the original movie provides a captive audience for the follow up movies. The assumption is that movie

studios try to capitalize on the success of an original movie by producing another film that reprises the same characters evolving in a new situation or plot.

Solanas and Gettino (1976) contend that the existence of a revolutionary cinema is inconceivable without the constant and methodical exercise of practice, search, and experimentation. In line with Solanas and Gettino's assertions, local filmmakers have exploited the medium of video film in various dynamic ways. The sheer cost of a single production has forced many to partition one film into various sequels¹⁹. A 3 hour long production may be separated into 3 films, *part 1*, *part 2* and *part 3*. These sequels unlike mainstream films that pride themselves on the popularity of prequels are single films divided into various sequels using the same title. The film *Seri Kwegotsi* (2014) is a good example of the sequel initiative. The film is divided into 3 parts, the story and characters are the same in each film. The first part tells the story of two friends Taka and Tinashe living in the same suburb with their families; it takes us through their friendship which has stood the test of time. Part two introduces the main conflict of the story which is Taka's inability to conceive, it takes us through the pain that Chaka faces and his desire to have a child. Part 3 results in Chaka asking his friend Tinashe to sleep with his wife so that she can conceive²⁰.

¹⁹ The filmmakers that the researcher interviewed were not keen on provide exact figures on the cost of producing a single film, the reason behind this is the clustered nature of the production process which does not follow any sort of procedure. The production processes shall be further analyzed in the next chapter

²⁰ Part 4 has not been released yet, the producer is in the process of acquiring funds from DVD sells to fund the next sequels.

This stands in contradiction to the normative which often maintains the same character and actor in a different plot and story (Mwakangila 2010). This innovation builds upon the suspense created by each respective installment. In essence they are more like a television series since they rely more on continuity of previous story, action and plot.

The concept of the sequel although originating in Hollywood was first applied in Africa by Nollywood film producers, albeit with some inconsistencies (Haynes 2000). Local filmmakers have borrowed, localized and transposed the style of sequels to suit local conditions of production and audience expectations by dishing out a continuous supply of films (sequels) that keep the audience wanting more. Since each sequel is not a complete entity but builds upon suspense created by each film, audiences are left curious and wanting more. This has created a nucleus of audiences in search of the next episode.

3.4 Efficacy of the video concept

Video-film industries have sprung up all over the continent. The popularity and localized accessibility of the films have inspired hope for self-sustainable, ‘independent’, and ‘truly’ indigenous film industries. This concept of “indigenous and independent” film industries must be used with caution, bearing in mind the hybridity of popular culture and the African disposition of openness to and the localized appropriation of foreign influences. John McCall (2008) writes:

Despite their local character, they (the video movies) remain part of a larger global cinematic discourse: soap opera and Hollywood B-movie and horror conventions suggest that their indigenesness cannot be productively theorized without an account of its mediation in relation to a transnational culture industry (45).

A similar point is made by Barber (1994) when she points out that ‘global technology’ is put to local uses, and is amalgamated with existing popular cultural forms” (34).

The specifically Zimbabwean way of digital filmmaking challenges not only conventional approaches to filmmaking techniques but also storytelling. Films are often made on location, with local people, which creates a completely new manner of storytelling. African film scholar and historian Mbye Cham (2000) has stated:

New directors are making films that are more entertaining, less political. There are moves to more cosmopolitan narratives, higher production values, a faster pace, MtV-type styles and language, less sexual prudishness, racial and cultural hybridity, and more stress on the individual rather than the community” (24).

The versatility in the use of video technology has contributed to the collapse of any distinctions between high and low art. Historically, African cinema has been conceived, distributed and exhibited as art films and thus limited to the international festival circuit, art-house movie patrons and very few African audiences in Africa (Haynes 2000). This has been due to a number of factors, some of which such as funding, content, and language and the conception of film with a didactic purpose have been discussed earlier.

The progression of the Zimbabwe video film models underscores that success in video business terms is measured commercially, for video film is above all commercial in orientation, which has led to criticisms of the films on aesthetic grounds (Ngwenya 2013). The commercial focus of video film participants underscores the extent to which the development of the film industry is also a story about entrepreneurship in the developing world that may turn common assumptions about what might be required to foster a film industry and business enterprises in developing countries on their head.

Notably, although many countries have sought to incentivize particular types of film production through direct government funding, subsidies, or film protection schemes involving film quotas, many of these industries have not been commercially viable in the absence of subsidies or other support schemes (Tomaselli and Eke 1995). In contrast, video film in Zimbabwe has created significant volumes of local video film content with virtually no government involvement or subsidies. The progression of video films in Zimbabwe may in many respects be attributable to a lack of government involvement and its decentralized nature, which has permitted video film participants to be highly entrepreneurial, adaptive and innovative.

Video filmmaking opens up possibilities to filmmakers who previously had little hope of entering the elite domain of high- end cinema (Haynes 2007). Yes, it is true that production quality is a problem as many people are now making film with little training or experience in the craft, and with a lack of creative vision. Nevertheless the possibility has numerous positive

outcomes; more Zimbabwean stories are being told, more stories are being watched, filmmaking offers cultural empowerment, and potential economic livelihood.

3.5 Summary

The chapter traced and contextualized the development of low budget filmmaking in post-colonial Zimbabwe. One can count two vacuums since 1980. The first vacuum occurred after the government relinquished direct support of the film industry in the late 1980s. The second vacuum occurred in the early 2000s when NGOs abandoned the country en masse. The second vacuum has been the most important as it has opened the way for genuine independence in the film industry. The new millennium and the availability of digital filming equipment have seen a redefinition of filmmaking in Zimbabwe. The chapter concludes that the emergence of the video film movement requires a redefinition of the Zimbabwean film industry. The next chapter will analyze video film alternative practices from concept to distribution.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCEPT TO DISTRIBUTION

Foreign domination must be swallowed, carnivalised and recycled from a position of cultural confidence (de Hollanda 1998:13).

4. 1 Introduction

The previous chapter analyzed the development of Zimbabwean films from the 1980s when the country gained its independence to the present factors militating for or against the development of independent filmmaking with the intention of examining the significance of the video film movement in the development of the Zimbabwean film industry. In line with the objective of analyzing the cinematic practices of selected Zimbabwean video filmmakers across the filmmaking value chain, the present chapter analyses selected video filmmaking practices from concept to distribution. It explores how the selected filmmakers negotiate, and violate mainstream filmmaking modes from concept to distribution. Third Cinema theory is mainly used in this chapter as it gives critical perspectives on how video films are produced and distributed by grounding the conditions of production as one of the major factors affecting production.

The study defines mainstream cinema as commercially produced mass entertainment cinema as opposed to, for example, avant garde cinema. Mainstream cinema is often equated with the films made in Hollywood, or by companies inevitably associated with Hollywood (Lewis: 2012). This is not necessarily the case, of course, and the rise of films from across the world that could reasonably be classed as mainstream cinema demonstrates that the hegemony previously enjoyed by Hollywood in that regard is now probably at an end. To take one example out of many, the vast number of films produced by the Indian film industry can clearly be described as

mainstream cinema in India. In order to maintain a degree of focus in this thesis, the research has tended to concentrate on those films which have been made by the film industry based in Hollywood or adopting the characteristics of mainstream film most often associated with Hollywood film production.

4.2 Synopsis of the films

Sabhuku Vharazipi

Sabhuku Vharazipi is about a corrupt village headman who manipulates the distribution of food and other inputs in his area to get what he wants including women. He abuses his position and intimidates before he asks for sexual favors. The village headman also uses his position for political mileage to enrich himself and his family. He is the door to the village and anyone, either a politician or otherwise has to pass through him. The Headman approves every activity in the village and in the process he calls the shots. The film is therefore a socio-political critique on several issues like corruption, politics of the stomach and Headman's position in a Zimbabwean village.

Lobola

The movie, written by Joe Njagu, tells the story of three brothers born to a rich United States-based Zimbabwean family who travel to the country of their parents on holiday, before deciding to get married. Sean Muza, played by Chidzonga, is the heir apparent to a vast fortune from his father's granite-import company. He falls in love with Dalma Chiwereva's character, Christine

Moyana, in the “ghetto” of Chitungwiza and decides to marry after a brief courtship. Not fully accustomed to the rituals of traditional Zimbabwean marriage, Sean Muza ropes in equally-ignorant brothers Curtis (Sean Ray) and T-Bone (Tonderai Hakuna), and his Zimbabwe-resident uncle, Sekuru Magaya (Anthony Tongani), as assistants. The movie is an account of the day on which the Muza boys cross town from their affluent vacation home to the Moyana residence in Chitungwiza where the marriage drama unfolds. The Moyanas, meanwhile, are a family not without its problems. Christine’s brother, William, played by Eddie Sandifolo, is seen as something of an outcast. He does not live at home, is not productively employed like everybody else, and he is not invited to the lobola ceremony as with all family gatherings. But William will stop at nothing to make his presence felt.

Bag rabvaruka

Bag Rabvaruka is about three notorious unemployed men, Mabla Ten, Officer Shinda and Sekuru Zvambu. The film takes us through the exploits of the three men. Ma Bla Ten is an unemployed youth staying with his brother. He torments his brother’s wife with various treacherous advances and comic interventions. Officer Shinda is a skinny -corrupt police officer who abuses his position by soliciting bribes, ironically when he is home he is abused and bullied by his fat wife. He is made to perform various duties at home such washing clothes, cooking and cleaning the toilet. Sekuru Zvambu is an old man who uses juju to lure young women in the same community. He becomes friends with ma Bla Ten and they begin to terrorize the community whilst Officer Shinda tries to arrest them to no avail.

4.2 Narrative thrust

From the synopsis of the films, it is evident that Zimbabwean video filmmakers have been consistent in making their films serve pedagogical purposes despite being commercial in outlook²¹. They have demonstrated the fact that being the critical conscience of their society and chronicler of events within that society, they have the duty of recreating the events in artistic forms. Advancing the Third Cinema enterprise, Shaka contends:

They consider their works as part of the pedagogical crusade to create critical awareness and revolutionary fervor among the masses. (14)

It must be noted that this kind of pedagogy is not imposed from outside by Developmental Organizations or aid agencies like was the case with Zimbabwean films in the 90s (see- Hungwe 2002; Mabweazara 2002; Lazer 2003; Chikonzo 2005; and Mboti 2015). The video films' thematic concerns are curved by the filmmakers who are always aware of the society's needs and the critical role that they occupy in the society. As Mubaiwa noted:

As an actor, I thought I was just unearthing the massive corruption and abuse of power by traditional leaders but the feedback was overwhelming. Stories featuring corrupt leaders have always been a part of us through storytelling. (Interview 05/07/14)

²¹ In this context, pedagogy refers to forms of cultural production that are inextricably historical and political. Pedagogy is, in part, a technology of power, language, and practice that produces and legitimates forms of moral and political regulation which construct and offer human beings particular views of themselves and the world.

Video film practitioners thus rearticulate, negotiate and localize Western-invented technologies in the service of African themes, stories, forms of oral storytelling, and cultural expression (Tomaselli and Eke 1995). This preoccupation necessarily entails utilizing the real events as different colors of thread to weave a fictionalized fabric that is relevant to the people and gives them a sense of dynamic hopefulness and profound identity. In relation to themes in Third Cinema, Solanas and Getino observe:

In a world where the unreal rules, artistic expression is shoved along the channels of fantasy, fiction, language in code, sign language, and messages whispered between the lines. Art is cut off from the concrete facts - which, from the neocolonialist standpoint, are accusatory testimonies - to turn back on itself, strutting about in a world of abstractions and phantoms, where it becomes 'timeless' and history-less (1976,21)

Although video films and Third Cinema focus on issues affecting society, video films largely present such narratives in comical and satirical ways. *Sabhuku Vharaziphi* achieves this through the village headman who is never serious, committing all the ills in a comical way.. All the characters in *Bag Rabvaruka* are presented in a satirical manner, through costume, make up and language. Video films therefore differ from Third Cinema by diluting the serious issues they deal with through comedy. The seriousness is therefore concealed through comedy as a way of reaching out to diverse audiences and ensuring commercial viability.

Brereton's (2005) *Hollywood Utopia* points to what could be called the underlying ingredients and the significant characteristics of films to attract audience's pleasure when he states that, 'class, race, politics and gender issues cannot be avoided within film, and in any case, these more

obvious constituents are necessary to attract audiences' attention and drive the narrative forward' (42). For this, video film stories most frequently imply a sense of place and fluidity of perspectives that accompany the imagery and make storylines pleasurable to audiences. The films constitute a tremendously useful storehouse of cultural values in Zimbabwe's cosmology. Ultimately, the films transcend the static framework of 'art-for-art-sake'²² within which Western mainstream films are trapped, thereby not serving the transformative socio-cultural, economic and political needs of the people. As Jangu highlighted:

I wanted the story to be relevant to every Zimbabwean at that time, the characters and the story were meant to go beyond mere entertainment but also delve into the crisis without being too political. (Interview 20/06/14)

Jangu highlights two important factors that guided and shaped his creativity, first his concern for highlighting the prevailing crisis in an entertaining way and secondly the awareness of self censorship bearing in mind the hostility towards 'critical' works of creativity by the ZANU PF government (Muonwa 2011). This concern is also noted by Gabriel in Shaka (2004):

Third Cinema is moved by a concern for the fate of the Third man and woman threatened by colonial wars. In selecting the themes and styles for his or her work, the filmmakers choice is both ideologically determined and circumscribed (23).

In creating their storylines, video filmmakers are constantly aware of the needs of their communities. It is with such a background that the stories are relevant to the socio-political developments of these communities.

²² "Art for art's sake" is the usual English rendering of a French slogan from the early 19th century, "*l'art pour l'art*", and expresses a philosophy that the intrinsic value of art, and the only "true" art, is divorced from any didactic, moral or utilitarian function.

4.3 Development and pre-production

In the production of Zimbabwean video film the two processes of development and preproduction are usually done concurrently. In the development and preproduction phases, the owner of the project or producer, who may later become the main actor and producer of the film conceives an idea or concept and at the same time drafts in friends and colleagues to start the preproduction processes.

In the case of *Sabhuku Vharaziphi*, David Mubaiwa came up with the concept which was an adaptation of a theatre satire (Mubaiwa 2014). The concept went through a workshopping exercise that saw two other members (Wellington Chindara and Kumbirai Chikonye)²³ of the cast taking part in brainstorming possible scenes and scenarios (Chindara 2014). The drafting in of other members as crew and cast meant that the pre-production stage was already underway even though there was no concrete script that was followed. According to Chindara, the absence of a script was due to the improvisational nature of the film and lack of a professional scriptwriter whose role could have been bypassed anyway as actors knew their improvisational roles (Interview 07/04/14).

Another important point to note at this stage is collective ownership. Although Mubaiwa came up with the initial concept of the project, the three other members have equal ownership rights. This means that profits would be shared equally amongst the three members (Mubaiwa 2014). This arrangement is familiar with Third cinema as highlighted by Solanas and Getino (1976):

²³ The two later took on the roles of Chairman and Mbuya respectively in the film.

At least in the earliest stages the revolutionary filmmaker and the work groups will be the sole producers of their films. They must bear the responsibility of finding ways to facilitate the continuity of work. Guerrilla cinema still doesn't have enough experience to set down standards in this area; what experience there is has shown, above all, the ability to make use of the concrete situation of each country. (11)

Bag Rabvaruka also took the same route, Lloyd Kurima indicated that he came up with concept of the production, which is a culmination of various street theatre skits that he performed with colleagues over a period of four years touring some parts of Zimbabwe (Interview 24/05/14). Kurima summed up the preproduction and development stages:

The production was a culmination of various theatre skits so it was easy for us because we combined various fragmented stories that we have been performing for the past four years. (Interview 24/05/14).

In this regard the development process was integrated with the preproduction processes since there was no need for casting and scripting in both *Sabhuku Vharaziphi* and *Bag Rabvaruka*. The most significant aspect about the two productions is that the two actors (Kurima and Mubaiwa) have not acquired any skills in film production thus they both hired and consulted video filmmakers who specialize in filming and editing weddings and events. In the case of *Vharazipi*, Mubaiwa hired Sydney Taivavashe in the formative stages of the film. Taivavashe however indicated that the film was his first as he specialized in filming weddings (Interview 02/07/14)²⁴.

²⁴ Taivavashe noted that the film for him was an experimental exercise as he had no prior experience. He also pointed out that he was not paid enough, so he did not take the project seriously.

However in mainstream cinemas, after identifying a theme or underlying message, a producer works with writers to prepare a synopsis (Ngwenya 2013). Next they produce a step outline followed by a treatment and lastly, a screenwriter writes a screenplay over a period of several months. Consequently, the screenwriter may rewrite it several times to improve dramatization, clarity, structure, characters, dialogue, and overall style. Bordwell (1997) argues that producers often skip the previous steps and develop submitted screenplays which investors, studios, and other interested parties assess through a process called script coverage. A film distributor may be contacted at an early stage to assess the likely market and potential financial success of the film. This therefore means that in the earliest stages of filmmaking, the possible market is considered to avoid loss and project possible profits.

Although local filmmakers are aware of the need to identify the market, they are reluctant to address this challenge and most of them wait until the film is edited to consider market projections and possible audience reach. Consequently films like *Lobola*, *Sabhuku Vharaziphi* and *Bag Rabvaruka* realized the potential of their films when they were already on the market. As the next sections will demonstrate, the filmmakers were overwhelmed by the market response and the vicious cycle of piracy.

Lobola took a slightly different path in the development and preproduction stages. The writer and director Joe Njagu wrote the script and invited his friend Rufaro Kaseke to be the producer

and director of photography (Kaseke 2014). The conceptual stages of the film which began in 2009 also ran concurrently with pre-production which saw Mighty Movies and Ivory Pictures being drafted into the production to cover all the technical aspects. The film went through a number of transformative stages such as casting, consultancy, budgeting and employment of technical crew.

Casting involved a series of auditions before the casting panel, composed of individuals such as the producers Rufaro Kaseke, Susan Makore, Munya Chidzonga and the director Joe Njagu (Kaseke 2014). According to Jangu, “in the early stages of the process, performers presented prepared audition pieces such as monologues” (Interview 04/05/14). These audition pieces were videotaped, attached with resumes, and head shots and then shared with producers, directors and studio representatives. Later stages involved groups of actors attempting material from the work under consideration in various combinations. Consequently it can be argued that there was a general attempt to follow mainstream frameworks in the early stages of the production although financial and technical constraints threatened this pattern.

In mainstream cinema, the development and preproduction stages are usually slightly separated depending on the type of production. In pre-production, generally every step of actually creating the film is carefully designed and planned. The production company is created and a production office established to facilitate all the needs of the film (Jovanovic 2011). The director pre-visualizes the film which may be storyboarded with the help of illustrators and concept artists. A production budget running into millions depending on the nature of the film is usually drawn up

to plan expenditures for the film (Bordwell 1997). For major productions, insurance is procured to protect against accidents. It is at this point that the producer hires a crew. Many Hollywood blockbusters employ a cast and crew of hundreds with various specialized roles.

Debates over how much a production costs in the production of Zimbabwean video films are complex. The fact is that video film production is part of the vast informal economy of Zimbabwe that avoids dealing with conventional banks because of high interest rates and demands for collateral, and seeks to market products directly so that profits will flow strictly back to the small entrepreneurs and their backers (Mudzinganyama 2014). For this reason, the funding to pay actors and production crews comes at times from individual sponsors, often personal friends and acquaintances that come from the same community or even members of extended families who are successful business men.

Sabhuku Vharaziphi, Bag Rabvaruka and Lobola were funded by the producers, family members and friends. Mubaiwa and Kurima noted that they borrowed from their friends and colleagues who had witnessed the potential of their theatre productions to transform into films (Mubaiwa 2014). Jangu however had the privilege of having quite a number of companies and friends helping out with equipment and funding (Jangu 2014). However he lamented that the funding came in inadequate quantities and at varying times during the course of the production. This stifled progress resulting in the film taking 14 months to produce.

For Mudzinganyama (2014: 33), ‘the people who are financing these films in Zimbabwe are business men, entrepreneurs who want to make money. Hence, there is some element of secrecy. Only the makers are the people who know how many copies of their films are produced and how many are sold. They do not publicize this to the general public so that people do not think they made much money.

From the analysis above it is evident that there is an attempt by local filmmakers to appropriate and resist certain procedures of mainstream filmmaking. The filmmakers are therefore aware of Western or mainstream dominant models and procedures of production but still select and mediate through the processes in order to suit their own conditions. Appropriating all the models of production in their raw form may be problematic mainly because of limited resources and lack of skilled manpower.

4.4 Production and post-production paradigms

The study continues to advance the objective of analyzing how video films negotiate, mediate and resist mainstream filmmaking models from concept to distribution. This section deals with production and post production models. As noted in the previous section, production structures in video films are not strictly exclusive processes. This means that the processes do not follow a strict outline of procedures, but processes may run concurrently. Therefore from the moment of concept development of the film, production would also be underway.

The term production, having its functional roots in economics, necessarily implies the directing, shooting, editing and writing of these films and their subsequent circulations in distribution processes. In other words, by these terms, one refers to the details that go into making a successful film from the pre-production stage to its post production sessions to yield dividends. Thus, technically in every production, ‘each shot in the film is continually involved in constructing the relationships which helps the film make sense’ (Turner, 2006: 148).

Zimbabwean video film’s informal strategy involves making and selling video films as cheaply and quickly as can possibly be done. This concept was pioneered by the Nigerian video film industry and has spread across the African continent with Tanzania and Ghana embracing the model (Hayens 2007, Shule 2011). It involves the production of video films from concept to post-production in the shortest possible time ranging from two to three weeks. Local filmmakers have also appropriated this concept. *Bag Rabvaruka* took only two weeks from development to post-production as Kurima highlighted:

We actually spent one week shooting and the following week our editor was done editing. We compiled a lot of pressure on the editor as we feared that piracy would catch up with us. The film *Lobola* gave us a lot of lessons because it was the first film to be heavily affected by piracy, so we wanted to avoid that.

In Hollywood and Bollywood movies, the format used is 35mm and the entire process of filming from start to finish easily takes several months, even more than a year for bigger-scale projects (Haynes 2007).

It would seem that piracy is an important factor in the production of Zimbabwean films. The filmmakers are aware of this and one way to beat it has been to speed up production processes and avoid being predictable. The effects of piracy can be represented diagrammatically as follows;

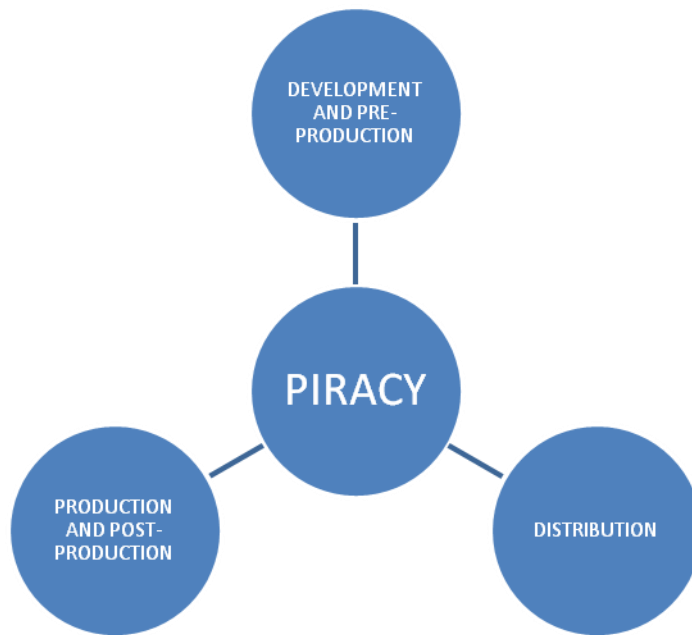


Image 1; Dynamics of piracy

The diagram above demonstrates that piracy controls the filmmaking value chain processes from concept to marketing and distribution. As demonstrated above, piracy determines the pace at which the films are produced and distributed, and in the process affecting the aesthetics of the films. Piracy thus facilitates the process of violating and contaminating mainstream filmmaking modes by increasing the rate at which the films are produced. Although piracy is an equal a problem in the USA and developed countries, it is worse in Africa (Haynes 2000). Therefore

filmmakers and distributors are devising ways to counter piracy from pre-production to post production and distribution.

In the production stage, the video film is created and shot. In mainstream cinemas however, more crew will be recruited at this stage, such as the property master, script supervisor, assistant directors, stills photographer, picture editor, and sound editors (Bordwell 1997). These are just the most common roles in filmmaking; however the production office will be free to create any unique blend of roles to suit the various responsibilities possible during the production of a film, this results in large crews.

In the making of video films, the cast and crew are usually low, performing manifold duties. In the case of *Sabhuku Vharaziphi*, David Mubaiwa initially took the roles of producer, director and the main role or character as the village Headman; the other two members of the cast took on the roles of assistant director and production manager respectively (Mubaiwa 2014). Significantly, the large specialized crew usually found in mainstream cinema is not compatible in the production of local video films.

4.5 Improvisation

Improvisation is an important factor in the production of video films. The study defines improvisation as a process of devising a solution to a requirement by making-do, despite absence of resources that might be expected to produce a solution. In a technical context, this can mean adapting a device for some use other than that which it was designed for, or building a device

from unusual components (Larkin 2003). In the improvisation of video films, the most important point to note is the absence of a script in some productions. *Sabhuku Vharaziphi* and *Bag Rabvaruka* were made without formal scripts, with actors simply making up their lines and improvising dialogue as they went along.

At some instances there may be no rehearsals at all (Ngwenya 2013). If there is a script at all, they are loose and actors simply improvise dialogue in - between. Sidney Takavarasha the cinematographer for *Sabhuku Vharaziphi* noted:

Sabhuku Vharaviphi was initially an improvised community theatre performance, when I was invited to shoot the film; I noticed that there was no script throughout the shoot. I had to make my own notes as the production progressed. Actors relied on improvisation which meant that lines could change anytime. Even during editing it was hard to edit the film especially in trying to relate certain shots and dialogue. (Interview 14/04/14)

The researcher participated in the making of *The Kiss* (2012), during the course of the film, cameras rolled quickly through multiple scenes. To save precious time, many scenes were shot only once, retakes were kept to the barest minimum. There were no retakes as this could have strained the budget. Consequently the film was shot in 7 days and edited within a week. Video filmmakers typically have a very limited time to turn a profit, often not more than a month from the release of the final cut. Mudzinganyama (2014; 24) observes:

Owing to inefficient piracy mechanisms and competition several video releases, Zimbabwean videos need to be sold very quickly for producers to make profits and to

avert piracy. On the average it takes between one week and one month to shoot a video that is, from start to finish. In the course of the shoot, scenes of new social happenings may be added and actors changed.

In his account of the fusion of mainstream conventional practices and innovations in African art, Chikonzo (2014: 43) argues:

The philosophy of African art is premised on that poverty and lack of knowledge/ technological challenges do not bring the creative process to a halt. Rather, our poverty has been inspirational to alternative creativity. We do not stop making films because we have old cameras or we lack knowledge. We do not stop the music because we cannot afford the latest instruments. It is through this spirit...that we have contaminated and disrupted the conventions and aesthetics of production in so doing we have created an African aesthetic decadent or substandard in the eyes of others but none the less an aesthetic which will remain imbricated in the heart of Africa. To this effect let those that produce popular art continue to do so because out of their practice lies the very foundation of what shall be called African in the face of globalization and universalism.

Local filmmakers have created their own ways and procedures of making films whilst at the same time appropriating a few techniques of production from mainstream cinemas. The issue of piracy and lack of funding can be argued to be enhancing these alternative-creative non-conventional means of production.

4.6 Alternative Distribution

As mentioned in the previous sections, the Zimbabwean video industry is based on a straight-to-video mode of distribution, significantly different from the modes of distribution of other film industries around the world. This mode of distribution implies that films are not released in

theatre halls but are recorded in digital format and sold in the street markets on DVD format. While this distribution strategy has constituted the condition of possibility for the existence of the industry itself, because it has permitted avoiding the high costs of celluloid production and bypassing the collapse of cinema infrastructures in the country, it has also condemned the video film industry to a high level of vulnerability. The subsections below will discuss some of the techniques that filmmakers and distributors use in order to reach their audiences. The sections will also discuss how the distributors resist and mediate mainstream film distribution processes.

4.6.1 Bypassing Theatrical exhibition

Theatrical exhibition has traditionally been the primary market for feature film production in mainstream cinemas, offering filmmakers the largest potential for returns, and by implication mass global audiences (Connor 2009). While glitz and glamour are often associated with the mainstream movie industry, the reality for many local independent feature film producers is that production carries the highest levels of risk and is the least commercially successful segment of the value chain.

After *Bag Rabvaruka* and *Sabhuku Vharaziphi* were completed they went directly to the streets for sale. Although *Lobola* took the formal route of theatrical release, there was very limited theatrical release which lasted for two weeks due to (1) the severe dearth of theatres across the country, and (2) the specific audience of these films, the urban poor, who cannot afford to go to

theatres (Mudzinganyama 2004). This model is significantly different from mainstream film industries, where the main source of revenue comes from box office receipts, so the DVD release is postponed till the production company feels that they have made enough revenue from theatrical releases.

In Zimbabwe, there are limited options for formal distribution channels, a phenomenon that has given rise to scores of informal distribution channels which make and distribute illegal copies of the DVDs. There is almost no formal channel for distribution to international markets. The distribution of local films however has a challenging dimension to it due to piracy and almost ineffective systems to checkmate it. To curb piracy, which all media products are prone to, due to ineffective copyright laws, the distribution system allows for a quick distribution of the films before pirates can copy it. This means that most money is made in the first week after the release of films' (Mudzinganyama 2014). This takes lesser number of days when compared to mainstream film distribution.

4.6.2 Convenient pricing

The straight to DVD model, pioneered by the Nigerian film industry, has made the “\$1-for-two” film available to ordinary Zimbabweans. The “\$1 for two” model entails selling DVDs at the price of 50 cents. The street is currently the best movie distribution source and marketplace for locals. It would seem that a proactive relationship with the ‘shadow economies’ of piracy is required, especially since piracy is not likely to go away soon, if ever. Piracy has forced producers to turn to the DVD market.

DVD selling price for video filmmakers is influenced by piracy. The movies *Lobola* and *Bag rabvaruka* were sold at one US dollar and later at 50 cents, a price at which they sell most of their videos as they use it as a way of countering piracy. Magombedze noted:

We noted that piracy was a thriving industry and its key thrust was on pricing, the movie *Lobola* was our case study. After initially selling their discs for \$5, they had to reduce the price to \$1 because it had been hijacked by pirates. The price of \$1 allows us to compete at the same level with the pirates. (Interview 23/05/13)

The pirates who sell their discs in the streets sell them at one dollar and at times for five South African rand. The variance in prices is due to the multi currency system currently prevailing in Zimbabwe²⁵. Kaseke one of the producers of *Lobola* noted:

The release of *LOBOLA* and our subsequent direct public sales has empowered us to clearly define our goals for future productions. We are pushing almost a thousand copies a day, and right now we have sold slightly above 70000 copies in two months. (Interview 23/09/13)

Pricing at Ivory Pictures²⁶ is influenced by maximizing profits at different levels of distribution from premier to DVD sells. Tickets for the premier of *Lobola* were sold at \$ 10 each for their first premier at Seven Arts Theatre in Harare. The premier which was characterized by glitz and glamour like Hollywood movie premiers did not rack in the much anticipated profits owing to

²⁵ The multi currency system came into being in 2009 due to the demise of the Zimdollar which had become worthless. A number of currencies were legalized for circulation these mainly included, the South African Rand, The US dollar, The British pound, Botswana pula and the Euro.

²⁶ Ivory pictures is one of the companies that was involved in the distribution of the movies, *Lobola* and *The Gentleman*

the elite and expensive venue. Had the movie premiered in the High density suburbs where the target market of the film resides, the profits may have been higher. The producers only considered their regular audience for DVD sales. Clearly the tradition of premiering movies using the Hollywood style of investing a lot of money hoping that the film will rack in profits on its first premier failed to work in the case of *Lobola* .

4.6.3 Vending films

As a way of countering piracy and lack of film distribution houses in Zimbabwean cities and towns, filmmakers are selling their discs in the streets as vendors (Lloyd Kurima 2014). Owing to rampant piracy, filmmakers and musicians have resorted to street marketing as they battle to beat piracy that has left many reeling in poverty after their productions had been hijacked by the thriving piracy markets. A recent example is *Gringo the Troublemaker* (2013) which was pirated after Enoch Chihombori, the producer, had decided to premiere it in cinemas around the country. Piracy forced the producer to turn to the DVD market. Zimbabwe's relationship with piracy is unique considering that the 'black-market' was a major source of survival for ordinary Zimbabweans between 2000 and 2010 when the formal economy collapsed. Part of the reason big screen cinemas are closing is due to their failure to deal or live with piracy.

When vending their films, filmmakers show snippets of their productions using projectors in the central business district and shopping centers among other public areas. The most common places in the CBD of Harare mainly include Copacabana and Market square bus terminuses. The bus terminuses usually record a higher density of people during the evening who will be boarding taxis home.

This has ensured the artists earn some respectable income. Von Tavaziva the producer, director and distributor of the film *Go Chanaiwa Go* noted that his average sales per day range from 200 to 300 DVDs (Interview 29/06/13). Street marketing also involves distributing DVD at a wholesale price of 40 cents to airtime vendors who in turn sell the DVDs to the public for 50 cents (Mudzinganyama 2014). The whole experience of marketing and distributing video films in Zimbabwe has largely been an experimental exercise as Rufaro Kaseke noted:

We had to switch strategy to direct public sales that have seen our branded buses travel to several towns and cities around the country including Bulawayo, Harare, Gweru, Chegutu, Kwekwe, Murehwa, Chitungwiza, Chinhoyi, Bindura, and more. One way or another in order to define our market penetration, we had to reposition ourselves and change some arrangements with some leading retailers. This we did in favor of direct public sales as a counter measure to improve our sales. (Interview 23/09/13)

Kaseke's remarks show the realization by video makers of the need to review their marketing and distribution strategies. This is motivated by the prevailing economic conditions that have placed the country in unpredictable complexities characterized by high unemployment, rise of the informal economy and unpredictable political developments.

4.6.4 'Star system'

Some Local filmmakers have attempted to use star in their films as a way of marketing their films. *Lobola* and *Bag Rabvaruka* featured musicians and popular figures such as businessman and actors. In *'lobola'*, Munyaradzi Chidzonga, the Big Brother Africa finalist who had become

a household name in 2010 was the main actor when he played Sean in the movie. They used the same strategy in *'The Gentleman'* as they cast Phillip Chiyangwa, a famous Zimbabwean politician and Business man and Presley Chwenegae who was the main actor in the famous Oscar winning South African movie *'Tsotsi'*. The move also starred the reigning Miss Malawi. Consequently, the film had to be premiered in Malawi and South Africa. This also made the film to gain international recognition and space in festivals. As Njagu highlighted:

'The gentleman' was staged at various film festivals outside of Zimbabwe and both movies are still being aired on Africa's biggest television station like Africa Magic, something that most Zimbabwean movies have failed to achieve. This can partly be attributed to the use of foreign stars in the film (Interview 23/09/13)

In *Bag Rabvaruka*, Jah Prayzah a popular Zimbabwean Musician featured in the first part of the film in which he played an adviser to an upcoming artiste (Kurima 2014). Sulumani Chimbetu also a musician, featured as himself, picks a fight with Sekuru Zvambu when the later falls from a ceiling when Sulu is in his girlfriend's room, Peter Moyo, a musician as well, comes in the comedy when he is mistaken to be one of Mabla 10's "rapists". In a scene from Part 1 of the series, Mabla 10 is sodomised by four men and reports the matter to the police. In his hunt for the suspects, Mabla 10 meets Moyo, whom he mistakes to be one of the rapists. He quickly apologizes when he realizes that the man he accuses is the popular musician. Mabla 10 is elated to meet the musician and showers praises on him. Kurima said he involved musicians in the film because he believes all musicians are actors:

When musicians do their videos, they act out some scenes. I take them as actors who can fit in a film or comedy. I am glad to work with these musicians because they add value to my work. I am looking forward to

working with more musicians in my upcoming productions. (Interview, 03/08/14)

However the downside of using the star system is that it requires excessive funding because most established actors have higher price tags (Jangu 2014). Jangu noted that the use of Presley Chwenegae was costly for the production of *The Gentleman*. He however could not provide figures on how much he was paid. According to the producers, it was costly because of the over reliance on the stars. However *Lobola*, which only used Munya Chidzonga made significant profits because the production costs were much lower. According to unofficial figures from the media, the film sold over a hundred thousand copies. This is a significant feat when compared to other local productions.

4.7 Summary

The chapter has noted that Zimbabwean video films are consequently defined and sustained by the resources available; consequently the videos are produced and consumed in untidy, quick and cheap processes. The untidy processes of Zimbabwean video culture are subtle barometers of the tentative and messy nature of postcolonial change. In their own untidy ways the videos' urban spaces provide a public realm, unaccredited by the state and formal institutions in which producers and consumers can reflect and cast opinions on the nation's socio-political landscapes. Having analyzed the conditions of production and distribution, the next chapter focuses on the aesthetics and national appeal of the films.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE AESTHETICS OF ZIMBABWEAN VIDEO FILMS

Africa is no stranger to image, color and rhythm. Filmmakers, however have to know how to use their art to make a new contemporary expression with style (Sembene Ousmane: 1992:21)

5.0 Introduction

This chapter analyses the aesthetics of Zimbabwean video films, it focuses on the language of the films linking the films to broader questions of hybridity, popular culture and resistance. The chapter seeks to demonstrate how Zimbabwe's video film language incorporates elements coming from an extremely large corpus of narrative experiences resulting in a negotiated and hybrid alternative cinema. As much academic literature has demonstrated, a high degree of heterogeneity and intertextuality characterizes most forms of popular culture around the African continent and elsewhere (cf. Barber 1987 and 1997, Cohen and Toninato 2009, Jelowski 2010). Zimbabwean videos are not an exception within this context, and while they surely introduced a number of original narrative and aesthetic elements, they have also internalized and transposed several aspects coming from preexisting forms of local and transnational popular cultures. The fundamental objectives of this chapter are; to analyze and interpret the aesthetic and narrative strategies that define Zimbabwean videos and; to interrogate the relationship between aesthetics and ideology in the selected videos'.

In line with the discourse on alternative cinema, the chapter addresses the following research questions, what narrative and aesthetic language do the films speak? How do they manage to

address the Zimbabwean public? And what is the relationship between aesthetics and ideology in the selected videos? The intention of this chapter is mainly to deal with these complex questions by focusing on the video film's specific film language and aesthetic. There are a number of key elements in the videos' content that participate significantly in building their national success and orientation, this study argues that Zimbabwean videos' film language has had a pivotal role in this dynamic. The language which is largely informed by production conditions (discussed in the previous chapter) has adopted and adapted a number of discursive practices.

Within this context, the chapter's specific thrust is on two specific narrative modes: melodrama and realism and how these modes constitute an alternative hybrid aesthetic. By making these diverging modes come together, Zimbabwean videos' film language has developed a particular kind of textual and generic openness, whose analysis and definition constitutes one of the main focuses of this study.

5.1 Approaching the study of video film language

Before advancing in the analysis of Zimbabwean videos' film aesthetic, two epistemological problems need to be addressed. The first one has to do with the nature of the conceptual tools that are available for such analysis, while the second is related to the material conditions that characterize video production in Africa (Jedlowski 2010). As many scholars have emphasized, a fundamental epistemological problem faces most of contemporary intellectual production about the African continent. As Mudimbe (1994) puts it,

Western interpreters, as well as African analysts, have been using categories and conceptual systems that depend on a Western epistemological order. Even in the most explicitly “Afrocentric” descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order. What does this mean for the field of African studies? (21)

In disciplinary fields as different as literature, history, film studies and philosophy, scholars have found themselves dealing with this question. The definition of academic disciplines, as it is utilized today in most universities throughout the world, is in itself the product of a specific and geographically-localized history of ideas (Jedlowski 2010). According to Jedlowski, concepts such as authorship and genre in literature, materiality and spirituality in philosophy, or authority and power in history and political sciences, just to name a few examples, become problematic when applied to the African context without epistemological precaution.

Their application seems to be inevitable, but at the same time it cannot but impose an epistemological gesture which risks hiding more relevant local readings and categorizations of the phenomena observed. In what concerns the analysis presented here, the use of concepts such as genre, melodrama and realism is based on the same dilemma. The objective of this chapter is also to question partly the relevance of these concepts within the Zimbabwean context and to modify their definition accordingly. However, the objects to be analyzed here maintain an epistemological resistance which cannot be completely eliminated and whose existence needs to be kept in mind while advancing this research.

The second problem relates to the specific production conditions that characterize Zimbabwean video production that have been largely discussed in detail in the previous chapter. This chapter will analyze and interpret the aesthetic and narrative strategies that define Zimbabwean videos. While doing this, it is important to consider that in many cases these strategies are adopted as a matter of necessity rather than as the consequence of a conscious and explicit decision. An example from the interview that the researcher conducted with Nakai Tsuru²⁷, one of the video directors and producer within the video industry, might make this point clearer. When questioned about the relationship between Zimbabwe's videos' contents and the country's everyday reality, and particularly about the role of witchcraft, infidelity, family and some of the "mistakes" incurred during the course of the production within this context, she emphasized that in many cases the final narrative structure of a film plot depends more on the specific scriptwriter's working conditions (tight schedule, parallel work activities, degree of literacy) than on his or her actual intention to portray some aspects of the reality.

If a scriptwriter has a problem with his script, the only way to solve it is to bring in the supernatural, either through a spiritualist or something else... for me this is easy writing! You could solve the problem without bringing God into it! [But the fact is that] when the story is too tough, and you cannot solve it convincingly, then you are forced to bring in some magic element to solve the plot... they bring in a spiritualist to easily create a solution to the narrative (Tsuru 2014)

As this example shows, then, when analyzing the videos' film language it is important to keep in mind that external observers' speculations can, in some cases, overemphasize aspects whose origin is contingent rather than essential (Jedlowski 2010). This does not mean, however, that

²⁷ Nakai Tsuru has three films to her name, *Think*, *The Long Night* and *Love Like This*, she is currently working on a Television show and a feature film

these contingent aspects are not a relevant part of the analyzed film language. On the contrary, as the chapter will argue and prove, discussing the nature of realism in Zimbabwean videos, they might have an important role in defining the very specificity of this language. They are in fact one of the ways in which the context of production penetrates and modify the medium and its content.

5.2 Negotiating narrative structures

Zimbabwean videos narrative structure has usually been defined by scholars as melodramatic (Chisirimunhu 2013, Ngwena 2013). It is important to consider, however, that within the field of film studies the notion of melodrama is particularly disputed (cf. Langford 2005; Singer 2001; Vasudevan 2010, Jedlowski 2010). Thus, while a number of attempts to define its specific articulation within the video context have been produced (e.g. Haynes 2000; Larkin 2008; Adejunmobi 2010), However it is the opinion of this study that an aura of indeterminacy still surrounds the meaning of the term melodrama when applied to Zimbabwean videos.

As Haynes has emphasized, “more than most genres, melodrama takes different forms in different times and places, and developing the term in this context would certainly not be to cram the videos into some precise preexisting model” (2000: 22-23). This is why, in this and the following two sections of this chapter, the study will try to define the specificity of Zimbabwean video melodramatic attributes and their position in relation to foreign forms of melodrama. This will be done by focusing on a specific videos that appeared during the first years of the video phenomenon because these videos directly participated in setting a series of narrative and

aesthetic patterns that were later adopted, at least in their general aspects, by most productions. The video films to be mainly used in this chapter are *Lobola* (2010) and *Think* (2011) with minor reference to other videos that were produced during the same period.

As the study underlined earlier, melodrama is a disputed category. Its definition has been largely applied so as to risk transforming this word into an empty signifier. Within Hollywood-centered film studies melodrama has moved from an almost derogatory category to a kind of meta-genre which is “at once before, beyond and embracing the system of genre in US cinema as a whole” (Langford 2005: 31)²⁸.

At the same time, according to Ravi Vasudevan (2010), the term has often been used, both by Western and non-Western scholars, to differentiate Third World cinema from Hollywood, becoming then a kind of second-class catch-all category within which films as diverse as those that come from India, Egypt or Latin America could fit. The conflict between these two conceptions of the term obliges one to question the definition of this category. As Vasudevan rightly asks, “how do we situate the move to make over American cinema tout court into melodrama in relation to the differently calibrated rendering of melodrama in post-colonial situations?”(2010: 31). These two conceptions seem in fact to be almost irreconcilable: one of

²⁸ In Linda Williams's terms “melodrama is the fundamental mode of popular American moving pictures. It is not a specific genre like a western or horror film; it is not a ‘deviation’ of the classical realist narrative; it cannot be located primarily in women’s films, ‘weepies’, or family melodramas – though it includes them. Rather, melodrama is a peculiarly democratic and American form that seeks dramatic revelation or moral and emotional truths through dialectic of pathos and action. It is the foundation of the classical Hollywood movie” (1998: 42).

them considers melodrama as the basis of Hollywood cinema while the other uses melodrama as the defining element of what Hollywood is not.

A way of overcoming this complex debate is to recognize the fact that, as Haynes puts it “no one particular culture 'owns' melodrama at this point in history” (2000: 25). While as Brooks (1976) among others have demonstrated, melodrama as a specific theatrical form has a precise history which originates in eighteenth century post-revolutionary France, melodrama as a generic category has become today a popular culture meta-genre, something that informs different narrative genres in literature, theater and cinema all over the world. In this sense Peter Brooks's effort to move from the substantive (melodrama) to the adjective (melodramatic) seems particularly useful. It is in fact by identifying the attributes that define what Brooks calls “the melodramatic imagination” within the context of Zimbabwean video production that one can move forward in this analysis. Furthermore, moving focus from the melodrama to the melodramatic, one can make sense of the continuity that characterizes Zimbabwe's videos' film language, a continuity that transversally cuts through most video genres, from the family drama, to the comedy, from the epic to the religious videos. In fact, while no one specific video genre seems to be a melodrama in the full, classical sense of the term, all genres contain within them melodramatic attributes which make them easily recognizable for largely diverse and hybrid audiences. Within this framework, melodramatic attributes can be identified according to both their formal (semantic) and structural (syntactic) elements.

5.3 The attributes of 'melodramatic' imagination in Zimbabwean videos

The formal attributes of the melodramatic imagination in Zimbabwean videos tend to confirm the general definitions of melodrama as formulated by numerous scholars in the field (cf. Langford 2005; Singer 2001), and as emphasized by Haynes (2000), Larkin (2008) and Adejunmobi (2010) among others in relation to Nollywood. As it will be shown below, however, the structure of meaning these attributes refer to tends to differ from that of the melodramatic imagination defined by Brooks, which much Western film criticism has adopted. Before looking at the specificities of the Zimbabwean videos' melodramatic syntax, however, it is necessary to define the formal melodramatic attributes that local videos incorporate.

It is important to underline that what the study defines as melodramatic attributes put together elements that come from the incorporation of both transnational narrative models and local forms of popular culture. As Haynes puts it:

The claim here is not for any particular pure indigenous tradition of melodrama” or for an unfiltered acceptance of foreign melodramatic models, “but rather for layers of influence and adaptation going back a long way, of which contemporary televised forms are only the most recent (2000: 23).

As emphasized above, popular cultural texts are characterized by a high degree of intertextuality and heterogeneity. This is also, according to many, a defining aspect of melodramatic narratives. The encounter of these different forms of narrative openness is, as the study will demonstrate, a fundamental aspect of Zimbabwean video film language and one of the elements that constitutes

the specific ‘addressivity’ of local videos. Before developing this stream of analysis, however, the study needs to clarify what constitutes the melodramatic in Zimbabwean videos. A first general attribute that defines the melodramatic imagination in the videos is what Peter Brooks calls the “logic of the excluded middle” (1976: 18). The narrative is constructed around a system of radical polarizations. Every narrative device is pushed to excess, and transitions from one extreme to the other tend to be rare, if not absent.

This system of oppositions can be detected in relation to at least three main aspects: the characters' psychological development, the articulation of the plot's structure, and the interrelation between different narrative elements. In all these cases, the melodramatic imagination erases the possibility of the transition by negating the existence of a “middle” space, and thus accentuating a Manichean logic in order to create a radical moral tension (Jedlowski 2010). The characters' psychology is rarely investigated in depth, thus characters' main psychological features are overstated and, to represent them, actors are required to overdramatize their performances. The evil become devilish and the good become angelic.

In Nakai Tsuru’s *Think*, for instance, one of the main characters, Tara uses magical and super natural powers from a traditional healer to lure Tonde, a happily married man. This character incarnates popular fantasies about the violent and occult nature of sexual fantasies, and according to the rules of melodramatic imagination, her defining attributes are pushed to their extreme. During the film, for instance, we see her fantasizing about Tonde and dressed revealingly. A few

scenes later, as if nothing had happened, we see her kissing Tonde in front of his mother (image 1)



1: Think: Tara and Tonde kissing to the disgust of his mother

Through the extremes of her behavior, this character goes beyond the reality to become an archetype of domestic violence, a devilish mask which inhabits popular imaginations of forced polygamy. A similar narrative operation happens also for the opposite kind of character, the angelic one. In Njagu's *Lobola* for instance, the character of Sean Muza, the boyfriend of the film's protagonist, passes through all kind of proofs to show the authenticity of his love for her despite the fact that she belongs to an inferior social class. In numerous scenes his behavior transforms him into the ideal of a Prince Charming. He tolerates all outrages against marrying her and supports his girlfriend and in laws in all situations, even when the in laws insult him and

his entourage. Like the devilish character, the angelic one becomes an archetype, in this example a man that in his exceptionality can incorporate popular fantasies about the ideal female (as partner, mother or/and sister)²⁹.

As a consequence of the melodramatic imagination around which they are constructed, most Zimbabwean videos hardly investigate in psychological terms the characters' transformations during the plot. These transformations, on the contrary, appear in their immediate dramatic consequences. According to the same melodramatic principle, the plots often develop in unsystematic ways and play freely with different genres. As it happens in soap operas and telenovelas (cf. Allen 1995) and as it is also common in popular storytelling, videos often develop multiple parallel plots, which are barely connected. This makes the videos have an episodic rather than linear narrative structure, which accommodates audiences that cannot give the text full concentration.

The analysis of *Seri Kwegotsi* , (2014; 1, 2 & 3) can provide a good example of the melodramatic attributes. The first part tells the story of two friends Taka and Tinashe living in the same suburb with their families; it takes us through their friendship which has stood the test of time as evidenced but the various flashbacks on their lives. Part two introduces the main conflict of the story which is Taka's inability to conceive, it takes us through the pain that Taka faces and his desire to have a child. Part 3 results in Chaka asking his friend Tinashe to sleep with his wife so

²⁹ Further examples of this kind of characterization are the characters of Tendai and Thandi in *No Matter What* and the character of Mercy in *Love Like this* 2013

that she can conceive and to keep it a secret. The plot does not take us through the years that the couple has been married in order to somehow justify this act and we are not sure if it is Taka or his wife who cannot conceive. The elements that push the characters and particularly the women who easily play to this ordeal to deep psychological transformations are not emphasized.

The videos serial narrative can be connected to the *telenovela* and soap opera format, imported from abroad by local television in the 90s such as *Santa Barbra*. It can also be considered as a strategy to open to a partial degree of irresolution the classic melodramatic and evangelical rigid moral structure that characterizes local videos. As John MacCall has written, “while one might treat the new tendency toward sequel cycles as merely another structure borrowed from the American soap opera, the study argues that the endless sequels also result in a Brechtian structure of irresolution, a striking departure from the evangelical conclusions characteristic of the genre” (2002: 90). It must be underlined, however, that in many cases, the irresolution of the plot is due to contingent aspects (i.e. the impossibility to market the sequel because of unpredictable production and distribution problems discussed in the previous chapter), rather than an explicit narrative choice.

This kind of narrative construction, highly intergeneric, discontinuous and serialized, is part of what the study can define as the alternative and hybrid aesthetic in Zimbabwean videos. By operating “logic of the excluded middle”, this narrative structure tends to prefer evidences over nuances, facts over psychological subtleties, *coup de théâtre* over subliminal details Jedlowski (2010: 155). It is populist and ideological rather than artistic or intellectual. It aims in fact at

giving the audiences an easy, immediate and reassuring pleasure, rather than demanding an effort of interpretation. Through its high degree of intertextuality and hybridity it manages to develop widely accessible stories that resonate with audiences that have different cultural backgrounds.

5.4 Melodramatic imagination and the Zimbabwean crisis

As many scholars have emphasized (cf. Brooks 1976; Singer 2001), melodrama entertains a particular relationship with the emergence of European modernity. In Peter Brooks's words, melodrama is a “peculiarly modern form” that can be located “within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath”, and thus in relation to the emergence of a precise epistemological moment which melodrama itself “illustrates and to which it contributes” (1976: 14). This epistemological moment is defined by the affirmation of Enlightenment philosophy, by the “final liquidation of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarch)” and by “the shattering of the myth of Christendom” (Brooks 1976: 15). Within this context melodrama is a narrative form that explores and gives an expression to the “moral occult”, which is, in Brooks' terms, “the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality” (1976: 5). This is not, as Brooks emphasizes, “a metaphysical system; it is rather the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth” (ibid.).

When one looks at Zimbabwean videos, this interpretation of melodrama's deep structures of meaning needs inevitably to be questioned. As Ravi Vasudevan has emphasized in relation to the melodramatic aspects of Indian cinema “if we are to theorize the validity of the melodramatic

mode in the Indian case, it must be in such a way as to reformulate the terms of the modernity within which melodrama emerges” (2010: 42). A similar argument can be advanced also in relation to Zimbabwean videos. While it is undeniable that videos are deeply concerned with the ethical questions arising from the sphere of what Brooks calls “the moral occult”, the reasons for this concern diverges from those that inform eighteenth century French melodrama, and the narrative forms that have been subsequently defined in relation to it. This profound difference makes the Zimbabwean melodramatic imagination communicate a radically original structure partly borrowed from Nollywood, which resonates particularly with Zimbabwean audiences. As the researcher has emphasized on multiple occasions throughout this thesis, the birth of the video phenomenon is partly related to the economic crisis that affected the country in the first decade of the new millennium. In many ways, this crisis generated amongst the Zimbabwean population a widespread disillusionment towards the promises of welfare, land, wealth and general social and economic development that the idea of post-colonial modernity represents (Muwonwa 2011).

While melodrama in Europe appeared as the result of the dreams and anxieties that the new arising modern era had generated, in Zimbabwean video films' melodramatic narrative emerged from the failure of the ideals that same era had universalized and spread throughout the world. If European melodrama arose from the affirmation of a new society, Zimbabwean videos' developed from the acknowledgment that the project of a new society had partially fallen apart. This clearly does not mean that the project of modernity was radically abandoned or refused. The ideal of modernization persists and continues to work, but, as the study will further discuss

below, it started to be inhabited by the awareness of its limits, of its fragmentation, of its haunting opposites (the magic, the irrational, and the violent).

Borrowing Charles Piot's words, we might say that in this phase of Zimbabwe's history, the failure of modernization promises generated a growing "nostalgia for the future" (2010), as if the possibility of dreaming and imagining a better future had become in itself an attribute of the past. This is a radical difference, which gives Zimbabwe's videos' narrative a profoundly original syntax. If eighteenth century European melodrama produced the dislocation of the sphere of the moral from the sacred to the secular, Zimbabwean videos play on a much more ambiguous ground. As the Zimbabwean poet Mbizo Chirasha underlined in a recent interview, the economic collapse that hit Zimbabwe in the 2000s produced the "failure" of the national "sovereignty project" (2014). In Chirasha's opinion, the political measures that were considered to be the prerequisites of the achievement of the national sovereignty process (Land reform and empowerment programs) failed to obtain any durable results, and progressively disappeared from the Zimbabwean political agenda. The pillars upon which the French Enlightenment project, and the European melodrama with it, had been built, that is, the ideal of the individual and of the inviolability of his or her rights, collapsed under the weight of the post-Structural-Adjustment crisis. Thus, Zimbabwean videos' melodramatic imagination did not emerge, as it is the case for eighteenth century European melodrama, from the affirmation of the individual over the collective, of the secular over the sacred. It is instead the result of an affirmation of the collective over the individual.

For this reason, if the European melodrama is “the drama of morality” (Brooks 1976: 20) that the individual has to play when he or she enters the modern condition, the Zimbabwean videos’ melodramatic imagination represents “the drama of morality” that the collectivity has to face once the ideal of a linear and progressive modernity has collapsed. Incidentally, it is important to underline here that, by the use of the dichotomies “collective/individual” and “religious/secular” the study does not intend to reproduce mystifying dualisms whose use in African studies has been widely criticized (Piot 1999). The study refuses schemes based on an evolutionist conception of time (from collective to individual, from religious to secular), according to which the return of the “religious” and the “collective” at the centre of social organization would symbolize a step back on the linear itinerary of progress.

The intention, on the contrary, is to underline how, within a highly modern context such as the Zimbabwean one, the ideal of modernity itself can progressively be dissociated from the aspects that are often considered to be its key attributes, that is, secularism and individualism. As much scholarship on African modernity has shown, the large propagation of ethnic conflicts, occult practices and Pentecostal beliefs in contemporary African societies does not represent the “end” of modernity in the continent, or its radical failure (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993 and 1999; Geschiere 1997, Shaka 2004). It represents instead the fact that, with the failure of state-driven initiative of modernization, the ideal of modernity has become, if possible, more complex, hybrid and plural than ever.

In relation to this debate, it might be useful to underline that the differences between European melodrama and Zimbabwean videos. Melodramatic imagination finds a confirmation in the analysis of the videos' contents and aesthetics produced by two major analysts of the video phenomenon, Onookome Okome and Brian Larkin with reference to the Nigerian videos, both of them connect their analysis of Nigerian videos' film language and narrative structure to the specificity of the Nigerian post-Structural- Adjustment, and more generally post-colonial, reality.

Zimbabwean videos revolve around a radical sentiment of “anxiety”, which is the result of the postcolonial urban experience. Paraphrasing Chinua Achebe, Okome (2004) identifies anxiety as the defining condition of the African man³⁰, and the postcolonial city as the locus of anxiety par excellence. Zimbabwean videos display the city as the universe of limitless possibilities (*lobola* (2010), *Bag rabvaruka* (2013), *City of dreams* (2013) and *Think* (2011), but also of limitless frustration. The portrayal of William, Christine's brother in *Lobola*, reflects the behavior of most unemployed youths in the high density suburbs of Harare, William humiliates the family during the lobola ceremony and flees with all the money. His father refuses to have anything to do with him. Unemployment is the most pervasive challenges faced by youths in Zimbabwe due to the socio-economic and political collapse that characterized the past decade. The overall unemployment rate in Zimbabwe is over 95%, with youth unemployment being pegged at over 70% (International Labour Organisation 2015).

³⁰ In his essay on “Africa and her writers” Achebe writes that the condition of the “anxious African [...] is the source of all our [of African people] problems” (1982: 27 quoted in Okome 2004a: 316). According to his analysis Africans are anxious because “Africa has such a fate in the world that the very adjective ‘African’ can still call up hideous fears or rejection” (ibid).

Within the city, the postcolonial subject faces the modern consumerist world but he is positioned (in most cases) on its margins, deprived of any purchasing power. Thus comes the anxiety that characterizes this condition, an anxiety created by the contrast between an excess of ambitions and desires, and a limited possibility to achieve them. Within this context, as Adejunmobi (2010) has underlined;

The melodramatic narratives of African videos provide a medium for rationalizing the continuing attractiveness of modernity as an ideal notwithstanding the increased poverty and social dislocation that have come to characterize Africa's experience of modernity" (2010: 114).

Consequently by applying melodramatic narrative structures Zimbabwean videos translate the grotesque violence of postcolonial regimes into the sphere of the family. By doing this they amplify and push to their excess the attributes of the melodramatic imagination and they create what Larkin defines as an "aesthetic of outrage" (2008: 6), a film language that uses extreme narrative devices to morally scandalize and physically shock the viewers in order to make them critically aware of the existential condition that defines the postcolony. In this sense, the melodramatic in Zimbabwean videos is inextricably connected to the specificity of the post-colonial crisis, a situation in which the ideal of modernity is defined by the awareness of its potential, looming failure.

5.5 Contingent realism in Zimbabwean videos

The specific syntax of the melodramatic imagination in Zimbabwean videos outlined above is connected to the particular relationship that the videos entertain with realistic modes of representation. On a theoretical level, Western film criticism tends to consider melodrama and realism as opposite (cf. Langford 2005: 38; Hallam and Marshment 2000: 6). While, as evidenced above, melodrama tends to recur to archetypal characters, realism prefers to focus on highly nuanced protagonists, whose behavior and psychological features develop in naturalistic ways in front of the eyes of the video camera.

While melodrama tends toward universalistic settings which could apply indifferently to all geographical and cultural contexts, realist film languages and plots, by trying to present a naturalistic representation of reality, are bounded to the specific context in which they are set and they maintain a certain aesthetic “crudeness” which emphasizes contents over form (Jedlowski 2010). In aesthetic terms this means that a realist film language prefers long-take shots to fast editing and close ups (which on the contrary define mainstream cinema and melodrama), in order to make the action develop in front of the camera in its natural *durée*. Long-take shots, in fact, leave the time and the space for the action to develop in their entirety, without being artificially cut by frame alternation (Ibid). Moreover, they do not drive the attention of the audiences toward a specific dramatic item, but they allow them instead to freely choose where to focus their attention, leaving the complexity of the real untouched and opening larger possibilities of interpretation. To make their representation of reality more credible, realist films hardly use artificial sound and lighting, and in most cases they are shot in open natural settings (Image 2

and three). Furthermore, they employ in many cases non-professional actors, who are employed to play the roles they live in their everyday lives (cf. Bazin 1971).



Image 2 (*Think*): Filmed in natural settings



Image 3 (*Sabhuku Vharaziphi*)

In relation to the attributes that define realist film language, Zimbabwean videos occupy an ambiguous position. While being profoundly informed by a strong melodramatic imagination,

the videos are also implicitly and explicitly connected to a strong concern for sincere and naturalistic representations of reality. This aspect transpires evidently from interviews with video-makers and producers. For many of them, realism is the key aspect of Zimbabwean videos film language. According to Joe Njagu, one of the most successful video directors,

People need to be able to relate with the movie, the crowd wants to be committed with the story. This is one aspect of our films that you cannot take away! Every time you don't use it, then it's not our product. We cannot lose our realism! That is the beginning of our cinema, that is the end of it! (2014)

This particular concern with realism manifests itself both through explicit narrative and aesthetic choices and through contingent technical aspects that make the reality “interfere” with the construction of the videos’ film language. In this sense we can talk of both an “explicit” and a “contingent” realism in the videos. The explicit realism can be identified as a direct consequence of the specific concern for “real- life stories” that Njagu’s statement summarizes. It is connected to Zimbabwean directors and producers’ widespread preference for plots inspired by newspapers articles (*Sinners* (2013), *Think* (2011) and *Seri Kwegotsi* (2014) and street rumors, and it tends to reinforce what one may define as the pedagogical role of Zimbabwean videos (see chapter3). As many forms of popular culture in Africa, in fact, Zimbabwean videos tend to have a didactic orientation, which takes inspiration from everyday life episodes (see Musodza 2012, Ngwena 2013, Chisirimunhu 2013, Mudzinganama 2014). Like many directors have underlined in the interviews during the research, Local films focus on what preoccupies Zimbabwean people in their everyday existence, that is, family matters (infertility [*seri kwegotsi*], infidelity [*Think*], jealousy [*Lobola*], widowhood and corruption [*Sabhuku Vharaziphi*], polygamy and witchcraft [*Fidelis*] and orphanhood [*No Matter What*]), and issues related to the everyday survival in the

city (how to make money, how to get a job, how to get a woman/a man, etc [*City of dreams 2013*]). While the representation of these issues is in most cases informed by the melodramatic imagination and thus metamorphosed by it, the original concern for these real, actual, everyday problems makes Zimbabwean video-makers claim that their films are purely and simply about reality.

During fieldwork the researcher conducted numerous informal conversations with Zimbabwean videos' habitual viewers, and most of them were almost literally repeating the same phrase: "local videos tell it (the reality) the way it is, and this is the main reason why we watch them". The nature of this realistic representation, however, is not transparent. How can in fact a narrative language be, at the same time realistic and its opposite, that is, melodramatic? The particular answer that videos offer to this question constitutes one of the most hybrid features of the film language that Zimbabwean videos developed.

The videos' portrayal of reality is strictly connected to their intention to create, through their specific address, a moral collectivity, that is, a unity that goes beyond ethnic boundaries. Before discussing this aspect of videos' film language, however, it is important to investigate what the study defines as the contingent realism of Zimbabwean videos. Because of the restricted production budgets and the limited availability of high quality technical infrastructures, many videos are defined by the use of natural or minimal lighting, digital handy cameras and nonprofessional extras. Natural sounds, when not covered by heavy digitally recorded soundtracks, emerge strongly, and often in ways not directly related to the plot (sometimes car

horns on the background, the sound of the power generator and the noise of people chatting in the set's vicinities).

Intuitively one would be pushed to think that, in general terms, the combination of the elements listed above would make video films look more artificial and disoriented, because of the absence of the specific craft (in what concerns special effects, extras' acting skills, sound and light tuning, camera technique) that makes the technicality of filmmaking, its "artificiality", almost invisible. But, surprisingly, the result is exactly the opposite. The evident artificiality of some scenes, the fact that the reality that is behind the camera continuously reemerges and interferes with what is being filmed, give the videos a particularly realist flavor, contingent but significantly effective.

An instance of this contingent realism is given by two scenes in *Think*, the first represents one of the numerous occult rituals to which Tara, the protagonist of the film, participates in order to lure Tonde) The other scene is when Chipó, Tonde's wife has an accident. The bare naturalism of this scene is related to the fact that there is no technical mediation to it. The relatively artisanal special effects added to further dramatize the action (an un-naturalistic neon-like green light and an unsettling electronic soundtrack), while creating an almost hallucinatory atmosphere, do not filter the violence of the scenes. Again, paradoxically, the imperfection of the special effects, instead of reducing the images verisimilitude, ends up accentuating it³¹.

³¹ Brian Larkin's above mentioned formulation of an "aesthetic of outrage" which creates a particular sentiment of revulsion in the viewer seems to be particularly fitting in this context (Larkin 2008: 6).

The absence of professional extras and of artificial lighting, the shaky camera movements, and the people's reactions to the accident make the scene, like the previous one, look particularly "true". Again, we have the feeling that there is no mediation between the scene and the reality that surrounds it. In this case, the way the people in the market react make the artificiality of the scene evident (they look into the camera, they crowd around Chipu staring at her in a definitely non-naturalistic way), but as underlined earlier, this particular artificiality, by marking the intrusion of the behind-the-camera reality into the film, has a powerful effect which makes the scene appear as "real". The intrusion of the behind-the-camera reality into videos' film language thus marks videos' production at all levels.

Video film producers and directors have often to deal with unpredictable events that can profoundly condition the production processes and the contents of the videos produced. As a result of this situation, in many cases, directors have to integrate the elements that the reality "imposes" on them into the videos' narrative structure. In *Bag Rabvaruka 3* (2014), for instance, the director Lloyd Kurima indicated that he was obliged to cope with power failures, generators' noise, songs and prayers coming from a church near the set. All these elements are creatively integrated into the film production, and inevitably find their way into the final result.

5.6 Constructing a 'national' alternative cinema

As the analysis developed throughout this chapter evidences, Zimbabwean videos' film language is the result of an original encounter between mainstream melodramatic and realist narrative modes. Developing a highly hybrid, intergeneric and intertextual formula, the videos have created a national appeal. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the contingent technical problems related to low budgets and tight shooting schedules have an effect on the videos' aesthetics.

As Ravi Vasudevan (2010) underlined discussing the melodramatic attributes of Indian popular cinema, while we can hardly analyze melodrama in terms of precise national variations, there is a case for considering the way melodrama, its public/private architecture, and its backward looking temporality, is mobilized to drive epically-scaled works that stage an engagement with the reconfiguration of national imaginaries. These emerge at critical moments in the transformation of social, cultural, and political circumstances, and are bodied forth in key works which place the home, interpretable as a zone of primary affective attachment, at the critical intersection of the narrative relationship between community, public life, and political structure (2010: 58).

The melodramatic focus on the house, the family, the sphere of the intimate that videos develop is functional to the re-articulation of the balance between individual and public sphere. In ways similar to those identified by Vasudevan in relation to Indian cinema, Zimbabwean videos "scatter families and individuals" in order to "bring them back together again in differently

cadenced public format” (2010: 48). Within this process of reconfiguration, the sphere of the national acquires a secondary role evoked by the specific addressivity of video films, which is, at once, open and direct, and which is a consequence of the encounter of melodramatic and realist narrative modes.

The openness of Zimbabwean videos’ addressivity is the result of the already-mentioned high level of intergenericity and heterogeneity of videos’ film aesthetic. As Barber (2000) underlined, text’s openness plays a particular role in transforming audiences into publics. The public is in fact “experienced in ‘reading’ and collaboratively reconstituting the specific textual and discursive field surrounding different genres, while recognizing and appreciating the enormous level of intergeneric borrowing that goes on at all levels” (420). Thus, the multi layered structure that characterizes videos’ film language addresses audiences in multiple ways, offering to them different levels of engagement. As Ashis Nandy underlined in relation to Indian cinema,

The popular film ideally has to have everything from the classical to the folk, from the sublime to the ridiculous, and from the terribly modern to the incorrigibly traditional, from the plots within plots that never get resolved to the cameo roles and stereotypical characters that never get developed. An average, ‘normal’, Bombay film has to be to the extent possible everything to everyone. It has to cut across myriad ethnicities and lifestyles of India and even of the world that impinges on India (Nandy 1998 : 7).

As in the case of Indian cinema, then, the high level of intergeneric borrowing that characterizes Zimbabwean videos tends to orient them towards localized forms of viewership. Being an expression of what can be defined generally as popular cinema, the videos therefore try to

address the largest audience possible, and to do so, they shift their focus from the cultural to the moral. Videos' structure, in fact, through its melodramatic polarization and didactic realism, intend to coagulate audiences around the definition of morality, within which social and cultural differences become secondary. This moral enunciation is oriented, by way of videos' direct address, toward both the collectivity and the individual within it.

In melodramatic narratives, direct addressivity comes from the heritage of theatrical traditions. It is in fact the result of “frontal, iconic modes of characterization of the popular theatrical format” that are “carried forward into the cinema” (Vasudevan 2010: 38). In Zimbabwean videos, this form of address takes multiple forms. While there are a number of examples in which one of the protagonists directly address the audiences looking straight into the camera direct address in Zimbabwean videos mainly takes the form of a general orientation of the narrative, which tends to invoke audiences' engagement and participation through the enactment of a moral drama. As underlined above, the family is in most cases at the center of this drama, but through the film its unity is disintegrated in order to be reassembled and to become the symbol of a larger entity. The drama, through the pathos of its resolution, evokes the audience's direct participation, and transforms dispersed individual viewers into a “public”, that can be defined, as a national, moral community³².

³²It is important to underline here that, while this kind of plots is evidently informed by a general religious mentality, the role of religion in defining Zimbabwe videos' film language and narrative structures should not be overstated. The centrality of didactic moral structures of feeling is common to popular culture in Africa and elsewhere (see Barber 1987; 1997; 2000) and religious contents tend to adapt to this already existing patterns rather than modify them in radical ways.

Within this framework, the space that is given to the individual is functional to his or her subsequent reintegration into the moral frame that structures the narrative. Most videos are in fact centered on individual dramas (Sean Muza in *Lobola*, Tonde in *Think*, the village headman in *Sabhuku Vharaziphi*, Mabla Ten in *Bag Rabvaruka* and Tendai in *No Matter what*), but in most cases it is the excess of hubris of the individual that pushes the plot to its dramatic picks, creating the field for the intervention of the moral community.

An example from *Think* will help to better clarify this point, while driving this discussion to a conclusion. The film's initial focus is on a young modern Zimbabwean family, composed of Tonde and his wife, Chipo. In the first part of the film, Tonde's social fantasies, drive the plot to a dramatic crisis that physically scatters the original nucleus of the family. For Tonde to achieve his ambition Tara is brought in the picture, she subsequently forces Chipo out of her house and takes over. The central part of the film shows Tonde and Tara's quick social success-romance and seemingly 'ideal' Zimbabwean family. At this point, Tara meets one of her ex boyfriends who claims that the child she is carrying is his. In desperation, Tara decides to visit the traditional healer in order to maintain and strengthen her charm and deceit on Tonde. The hubris of Tara's behavior leads her to a ruinous end. This also leads Tonde to drinking excessively and he discovers that he is HIV positive, but when he is near to a final collapse, there is a redeeming turn in the plot. His mother and aunt convince Chipo his first wife to forgive him and return. Tonde rediscovers the reassuring and warm feeling of being loved and accepted for the person that he is. The initial nucleus of affection that was represented by the family, after being

scattered and destroyed, is reconstituted into a larger and transversal constituency, that of the moral collectivity. The individual, within this context, is tried for his excesses, his insatiability and his ambitions. What prevails at the end is a rather conservative and stable moral constituency whose stability is precisely the consequence of a measured control over individual hubris.

5.7 Summary

Through the specificity of their film language and their narrative structure, Zimbabwean video films offer an answer to the social, cultural and economic crisis that defines Zimbabwe's cosmology. In this sense their appeal for the creation of a national moral constituency is an antidote to the widespread anxiety and disillusionment that the suspension of modernization processes have generated. It is in this sense that videos' aesthetics and narrative structures are coherent and adherent to their time. This is probably one of the main reasons of their national success. What, however, is left to understand is for how long the interpretation of reality, of modernity, and of society that videos have produced will still be relevant? For how long will these formulas be able to speak to Zimbabwean audiences? The crisis of production that have emerged in the past few years and, more generally, the progressive audience's disaffection toward a number of the defining elements of Zimbabwean videos' could be read as an answer to this question. New narratives are coming up, and new film languages are being formulated in order to produce new, more relevant interpretation of the Zimbabwean present. It is probably too early to be able to read and understand the social and cultural transformations that new films are "speaking", but their existence is the sign of an ongoing, large-scale transformation. If Zimbabwean videos' film language emerged from a specific disillusionment with the promises of

modernity, it is legitimate to imagine that new films are expressing new projections toward the future, projections which inevitably imply the reformulation of the ideal of modernity within the Zimbabwean context.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The study examined the cinematic practices of selected Zimbabwean video filmmakers across the filmmaking value chain order to explore how they ‘negotiate’, ‘appropriate’, ‘mediate’ and ‘violate’ mainstream filmmaking modes. The study explored how the cheap and affordability of video film technology has facilitated an emerging alternative cinema in Zimbabwe, which has become a site of resistance against the dominance or the cultural hegemony of conventional mainstream film practice. The main findings of the research are chapter specific and are presented in the respective chapters. In light of the above, the research has made several conclusions.

The researched revealed that, until the new millennium, three sites drove production in Zimbabwe: television, donor organizations and foreign film makers. However, this select club is no longer important factor in the Zimbabwean film industry of today. The search for what Solanas and Getino (1976) call a “decolonized camera” has, for now, stopped at the point of a somewhat uneasy coexistence of models (Mboti 2015). The future, though, is unpredictable. Issues of funding, distribution and profitability are far from being solved substantively. Genuine foundations for a sustainable local film industry that is neither state nor NGO dependent are, however, being laid. Because of the opening up of the film landscape, a genuine video boom is now underway in the Zimbabwe film industry. Where the film industry was formerly linear and hierarchical, it is now interrelated.

With the emergence of ‘cheap’ video film technologies, Zimbabwean filmmakers have found an uncontested space to produce and reproduce their own material unmanned by donors or the government to the pleasure of targeted audiences. The study also noted that video phenomenon is not exclusive to Zimbabwe, Filmmakers across Africa have embraced the affordability and accessibility of video technologies in telling their stories that have been trapped in traditional storytelling mediums.

As emphasized in chapter four, the structure of videos’ film aesthetic can be related to the specific historical period within which Zimbabwean videos emerged. The syntax of this language is in fact profoundly influenced by the crisis of modernization processes that characterized Zimbabwean society since the new millennium. This crisis oriented videos’ narrative and aesthetic choices toward specific contents and modes of address whose objective was the reorganization of dispersed, fragmented national audiences into new moral constituencies. The formula that emerged from this context is characterized by a particular openness, whose structure of meaning resonates with Zimbabwean audiences. Within this context, videos are organized around the moral drama of the protagonist and of his or her family. Throughout the drama, the intimate structure of the family is usually scattered by external and internal forces, to be later recomposed in a new order thanks to the intervention of the surrounding moral collectivity or that of the supernatural forces symbolizing it. Within this framework, the destiny of the individual is usually marked by his or her moral wrongdoings. The collectivity intervenes to monitor the individual’s behavior, and eventually to correct it, in order to resurrect the individual to its role within the society.

The research also set out to contribute towards an understanding of how previously technologically disadvantaged communities are utilizing new media technologies to their advantage. It demonstrated that artists are aware of limitations that come with new media accessories and have sought to creatively improvise new methods to counter these limitations and in so doing violating and mediating mainstream conventional production and distribution models thus resulting in hybrid aesthetics.

The study noted that postcolonial video filmmaking techniques are constructed within the confines of hybridity and syncretism, they defy fixation or categorization; they are fluid. It has been observed that hybridity is an ambivalent act which simultaneously resists domination whilst giving room to antithetical values. Owing to this fact, techniques that prevail in a hybridized films are also Janus faced, reflecting both recuperation and denigration. Hybridities are always forced upon differing cultures by circumstances of history which lead to the formation of a culture of compromise which forces dominant film practice to realign its hegemony. This gives recuperative mileage to alternative cinema. The dominant culture uses this shift to contain pressures exerted by a suppressed culture. In so doing hybridities mean both resistance and containment to both sides of the hegemonic equation.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

An ever present implication from this study is the idea of a continuous empowering of the Zimbabwean film industry in encoding pleasure for its numerous viewers who, otherwise, have no other audio-visual stories to relax with after their day's work. By this, communities and individuals alike are constantly affirmed in their cultural membership of the society. This study therefore challenges Zimbabwean video filmmakers and viewers in a specific way to promote cultural remediations by improving the standards of productions and articulating aesthetically the social facts of the society's communalism.

This study has opened up one of the many fronts of research that scholars can undertake on video film praxis in Zimbabwe. It still needs further academic attention. The research has limited its focus on emerging Zimbabwean filmmakers. The term 'emerging' indicates that the video film practice is still at an embryonic stage and with time it will develop into a multi faceted art form with varied genres, practices and stylistic dispositions. This will ultimately call for more research.

Since this study lacked a large sample of statistics, especially in the area of films' cost of production, distributions channels, as well as consumption rates in terms of how many copies are sold of a particular film, other studies are recommended to explore the reasons for this significant absence of records in Zimbabwe's communications landscape and to negotiate a way to help fill

the gap by means of putting government's structures in place and creating a comprehensive database for Zimbabwean cinema

This study has limited its focus on films-filmed and produced in Zimbabwe between 2010-2014. It is critical to point out that in the same period, there has seen a systematic drive by Zimbabwean filmmakers in the diaspora to create films that reflect on their experiences. The films are made with partnerships from abroad. Zimbabweans in the United Kingdom (UK) have been particularly active in this endeavor. There is therefore a need to research on multiculturalism, interculturalism and nostalgic tendencies in the films.

There is also a need for a gendered research on the video films, particularly on the representations of man and women in video films. Video films have facilitated the emergence of an array of topical issues regarding the reconfiguration of the society particularly marriage, infidelity and extended families.

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Appendix



1. *Sabhuku Vharaziphi*



2. *Think*



3. *Saka Muchaita Sei*



4. *Bag Rabvaruka*



5. *Sabhuku Vharaziphi*



6. *Bag rabvaruka*



7. *No Matter What*



8. *Sabhuku Vharaziphi*