



## 6. SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT: FILM IN SOUTH AFRICA

*Think globally, act locally.*



## CONTEXT TIMELINE

- 1896** First public screening of moving images in South Africa in the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg (Maingard 2007:4).
- 1898** First moving images are made, including images of President Paul Kruger in Pretoria (Maingard 2007:4).
- 1910** First South African Feature Film – *The Kimberly Diamond Robbery* by Springbok Films (Tomaselli 1981:139)
- 1915** The African Film Production (AFP) is established by I.W. Schlesinger. AFP had a “...virtual monopoly over the production, distribution and exhibition of films until the late 1950’s.” (Maingard 2007:22)
- Isadore W Schlesinger “pioneered the mass media in this country, creating a nationwide network of cinemas and theatres. He also created the first radio broadcasting organisation run on a commercial basis, and from this the SABC emerged” ([www.sahistory.org](http://www.sahistory.org) South African Film).
- 1916 – 1919** “Gauteng was home to flourishing local production industry” (Gauteng Film Commission 2009).
- 1920’s** The rise of the popularity of American films overwhelmed the South African film industry. This influenced local culture eg. jazz and gangster style in Sophiatown and Marabastad (Gauteng Film Commission 2009).
- 1935** Film about Pretoria: *Inheritance in Pretoria* (IMDb 2009)
- 1948** Film about Pretoria: *Pretoria to Durban* (IMDb 2009)
- 1976** The late introduction of television in South Africa kept local cinemas busier than their American counterparts.
- 1979** Film about Pretoria: *Pretoria, O Pretoria!* (IMDb 2009)
- 1993** Film about Pretoria: *Die Prins van Pretoria* (IMDb 2009)
- 2005** *Tsotsi* (2005) is the first South African film to win an Oscar (Maingard 2007:4)
- 2010** Film about Pretoria: British Footprint Films’ *Inside Out: Escape from Pretoria* will be finished. (IMDb 2009)

## 6.1 THE FILM INDUSTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA, GAUTENG AND PRETORIA

### 6.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Feature films shape the way in which we see the world. Films about South Africa also influence the way people around the world see the country.

The film industry in South Africa has slowly been growing to one of international recognition. Slowly but surely more locally made films such as *Tsotsi* (2005), *District 9* (2009) gain international recognition and more international productions are being filmed in South Africa. South Africa's film industry currently brings in R2 billion annually (www.sahistory.org South African Film). The large *Cape Town Film Studios*, that will open in 2010, is further proof of the growing market.

This is beneficial to South African audiences, as people relate much better to “films which wrestle with [their] own fears, hopes and struggles” (www.sahistory.org South African Film).

Previously just like its monuments – such as Strijdom Square - South African cinema was intertwined with its political history (Maingard 2008:2), which was not very popular with international audiences (www.sahistory.org South African Film).

Fortunately this is changing. The international popularity of *District 9* (2009) - a film about an alien ghetto in Johannesburg – indicates that the unique South African perspective can be interesting to more than just local audiences.

### 6.1.1 REASONS FILMS ARE MADE IN SOUTH AFRICA

> **Economic reasons.** The fact that the Rand has a weak exchange rate against the Dollar, Pound and Euro has had an influence (www.sahistory.org South African Film), as well as the fact that locations up to recently did not charge for shooting. Cheap labour is also readily available.

> **Beautiful and diverse locations** (www.sahistory.org South African Film), that are diverse in nature – everything from deserts to snow covered landscapes and everything in between is available. Certain landscapes and cities can double as something else. The Karoo can be a moonscape and Cape Town can be shot to appear to be many different cities.

> **Good weather conditions.** Good weather conditions during winter, makes this the preferable time for filming, due to light quality (Weavind 2009). At certain times of the year rain is also not a problem.

> **English literacy** (Weavind 2009).

> 25 000 people working in the film industry (www.sahistory.org South African Film).

### 6.1.1 REASONS WHY NOT MANY SOUTH AFRICAN FEATURE FILMS HAVE BEEN MADE

> **Lack of infrastructure** (www.sahistory.org South African Film).

> **A lack of good scripts**, due to lack of funding for script development (www.sahistory.org South African Film).

> **Small budgets for marketing and distribution** (www.sahistory.org South African Film). The large marketing budget for *Tsotsi* (2005) was one of the reasons the film succeeded internationally (Weavind 2009).

> **A lack of respect for intellectual copyright laws** by means of illegal duplication of films (piracy) (www.sahistory.org South African Film).

> **Lack of government involvement** (www.sahistory.org South African Film; Weavind 2009).

> According to David Wicht, producer and owner of Film Afrika, the fact that most films from South Africa have **apartheid themes**, was not beneficial to the industry. He says about the South African film industry; “We need to grasp the fact that we’re in the entertainment business, not sociology” (www.sahistory.org South African Film).

> **Lack of studio space**, in South Africa and especially Pretoria. In Pretoria the State Theatre Opera stage and workshop areas are often used for filming commercials (Viljoen 2009).