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NV Developing Film and Television_ Policy For Social
Transformation in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Towards A
' Techno-Cultural Paradigm

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April 26, 1993

The NP is determined to contest the inexorable movement of history, but it can only delay the inevitable...Film and video will always be crucial legitimating agents and will hopefully be able to take their place in helping to forge a new, free and peaceful society in the years to come. 7

Film and television always had strategic role in the structuring and widespread dissemination of attitudes that legitimate and perpetuate existing socio-economic relations. In South Africa, these attitudes and perceptions are embodied in apartheid, a system of institutionalized racism that has turned South Africa into a massive concentration camp for Black and poor people.

To justify and rationalize the exploitation and political repression of Blacks in South Africa, the apartheid state crafted a film policy that had the effect of obscuring the situational determinants underpinning the Apartheid regime. Thus films were (and still are) banned, censored, and destroyed under the guise of upholding "morality" and "protecting virtues of Western civilization". In fact, the colonialists had always deployed cinema as a powerful tool to maintain economic and political influence over the colonized in Africa and everywhere else.²

An assessment of the role played by film and television
Keyan Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film*. Radix, 1989 at 11.

jg. at 53

in the socialization process must take cognizance of the major trends impacting the entertainment industry as a whole. The recent geo-political trends provide an impetus for the rapid development and production of film and audio-visual programme that is appropriate for addressing the cultural distortions and misperceptions about Black South Africans in particular, and African history in general. The evolving legal and regulatory framework must encourage creation of relevant productions to promote a nationally cohesive culture. Most important, however, are the recent advances in communications technology which enable instantaneous and widespread dissemination of film and video materials anywhere in South Africa and the world over.

A cursory examination of the South African film and television industry reveals glaring distortions and inequalities both in the production and distribution processes. Generally, statistics indicate that Blacks are in an appalling position in the industry.³ Of the approximately 150 production companies, only three (3) are Black-owned.⁴ Yet, over eighty percent (80%) of the 40 million or so South Africans are Blacks.⁵

³No black producers at SABC

Only a handful of Black directors at SABC

^tThe figures are a rough approximation, since newcomers have not been included in the survey, nor are the ones that have outlived their usefulness excluded.

⁵ Seventy percent (70%) of Black families own a TV set, a majority of the families have a video cassette recorder, while a significant number attend cinema.

As a matter of fact, Blacks play a miniscule role in the film industry. There is a lack of significant involvement by Blacks in all the films and television programmes that have been produced in South Africa. Yet the majority of the films that have been on or are on circuit are not relevant to conditions and existence of the majority of South African viewers. On the contrary, these films and TV programmes display distorted pictures and utterly disregard the truth in respect to Africa and African people in the Diaspora. Most films and TV programmes are overtly racist in nature, casting Blacks in inferior roles... or as comedians not to be taken seriously.

I. History of the Film Industry

The history and development of the film industry typifies the uneven development characteristic of Apartheid South Africa. While early black film makers were forced into exile by the apartheid system, white filmmakers were allowed and encouraged to develop through massive state infusion of capital in their productions.⁶ Precisely because Black filmmakers were concerned with pressing issues of economic exploitation and social repression, their works were discouraged when the state started appreciating the strategic ideological importance of cinema and the media in general. In order for apartheid repression to be legitimized, film

⁶An excellent documentary on the film and television environment was done for TopLevel, a new SABC talk show.

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and television had to play an important role to present a lifestyle that viewers should aspire to. Hence, apartheid was portrayed as an acceptable way of life. While massive state repression and political repression took its peak after the ascendancy of the Nationalist Party to power in 1948, the film industry deliberately sought to ignore the reality facing Blacks in South Africa. -Some mainstream Film organisations actually refused to recognise the existence of a cultural boycott that was internationally enforced at the time!⁷

II. The Geo-Political Trends Impacting The Film Industry
The struggle to eradicate apartheid and usher in a new dispensation in South Africa intensified amid the political turmoil that discouraged creativity in the film Environment. The lethargic film industry was forced to join the battle against apartheid due to international pressure. As the sanctions movement gained momentum and a significant number of American companies started divesting, the South African film industry had to adjust to the new realities.

One major player in the industry, Kodak, divested completely and left South Africa. Two main distributor-exhibitor chains, responsible for the bulk of American products, actually closed cinemas in towns which refused to allow integrated audiences. As a response to these trends, cinema chains started showing films critical of apartheid, for example, A Place of Weeping (1987) and Night at the Palace⁷ Tomaselli, at 13.

(1987). The Weekly Mail organized a South African Film Festival and giving progressive non-commercial work a high national profile a

It must be noted here that these efforts were still white-dominated, with Blacks completely ignored in the whole process. Today, however, Blacks and other heretofore marginalised groups are making inroads into the industry, although traditional stereotypes and entrenched control still pose major stumbling blocks to full participation(

III. The Legal Trends Impacting on the Film Industry

Television operates within the framework imposed by legislation. It is also subject to the ordinary law of the land which limits freedom of expression in a numerous ways.⁹

On February 1990, De Klerk announced substantive legal measures undertaken by the Nationalist Government to nullify some of the legislative pillars of apartheid. The Group Areas Act and other laws that were designed to separate the people of South Africa were no longer to be enforced. Overt political activity was allowed with the abolition of the security legislation that had barred the liberation movements from organizing inside the country. The ANC, the PAC, the SACP, all could now operate legally inside South Africa. Most important, thousands of political prisoners were freed . including Nelson Mandela pursuant to agreements reached .⁸The first Independent Filmmakers Conference was also organized to promote the art.

⁹Colin R. Munro, Television Censorship and the Law, Saxon House, 1979, at vi.

between the Government and the ANC.

The introduction of the new South Africa and the destruction of racist legislation held the promise of equal opportunities for all, but also produced some undesirable effects. This trend toward liberalisation created a conducive atmosphere for the privileged class to seize the opportunity for personal aggrandizement. m 1

,In apartheid South Africa, Blacks (and the poor) were unable to gain experience in film and television industry.

Numerous statutes regulated the film and television environment toward this result, since control was concentrated in the NP government. Both the 1952 Radio Act¹¹ and the 1976 Broadcasting Actⁿ entrenched the monopoly power of SABC over the airwaves in South Africa, entrusting both the service and regulatory functions in the Corporation. Thus, SABC was m Employees of the SABC formed production companies, using their contacts at the SABC to guarantee themselves work. They then expanded into advertising and corporate video and cornered the market, thus leaving small room for black entrepreneurs to develop. This trend was a result of the advent of SABC in 1976 as a government-controlled propaganda machine from which Blacks were excluded.

¹¹The Act provides the Post-Master General with regulatory powers over radio services exercised under the direction and control of the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs (now the Minister of Home Affairs). The Post-Master General may not, however, issue licenses and certificates to any person other than the SABC without the express approval of the Minister.

¹²This Act empowers the SABC to carry on television broadcasting services. The Government exercises effective control by appointing Board members who in turn appoints a General Manager and the Executive to carry out the functions of the corporation. Hence, the issue of government control of the editorial content of the transmitted programmes looms large in this regard. see, e. , Yvonne Burns, Media Law, at 351.

provided the sole power to determine who else can broadcast in the country, the nature and content of the distributed programme, as well as serving the interests of the NP government and its financiers by restricting coverage of news and events to those favourable to Government policies and

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practices.

On the other hand, the film industry has been stultified by the enforcement of the Publications Act" which regulates the content of films that are to be shown in the country.⁹ Before any film can be screened, the Publications Board must approve such a film as desirable. This exercise has resulted in censorship measures that have crippled a positive development of an indigenous film industry. Films that were critical of apartheid, or could be seen to be critical, 'were censored, thus depriving South African viewers an opportunity of learning about the living conditions of their compatriots, as well as other cultures. Thus the nature and relevance of the Publications Board need to be evaluated in any new film dispensation in post-apartheid environment.

In 1990, the Department of Home Affairs commissioned a study "to survey and report on broadcasting policy, strategy, a controlling structure, future needs, and other relevant 13As a government mouthpiece, the SABC has been responsible for biased and prejudicial reporting that requires the serious attention of every person interested in a new dispensation for the Corporation to discharge its public service mandate.

"Act 42 Of 1974. The Act prohibits the production, importation, possession and distribution of undesirable matter. Periodicals and publication have also been declared undesirable under this Act, even though it was primarily intended for electronic media.

a controlling structure, future needs, and other relevant aspects of broadcasting in South and Southern Africa."¹⁵ The Viljoen Report contained recommendations guided by the following principles:

- t the need to provide greater access for more voices and to stimulate competition in the broadcasting industry;
- t the need to restructure broadcasting in South Africa, while retaining the extremely important public service broadcasting function of the SABC;
- t the desire to establish a broadcasting industry free from political control and influence;
- t the need for an independent regulatory authority to oversee broadcasting in South Africa.¹⁶

The Task Group found out that broadcasting in South Africa has been hampered by outdated legislation, lack of comprehensive, long-term policy on broadcasting, as well as fragmented control over aspects of broadcasting.¹⁷ Based on its finding, the Task Group recommended that more television and radio services be allowed in South Africa on a local, regional and national levels. It also called for broadcasting to be removed from the political arena and political decision-making process. To achieve these objectives, the Group motivated for and outlined a structure and objectives of an

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Report of the Task Group on Broadcasting in South Africa and Southern Africa, August 1991. (hereinafter, "The Viljoen Report") at x.

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Id.

proposed Institute would serve the South African audience well.

IV. The Technological Trends Impacting the Industry

In South Africa significant achievements in terms of population coverage with respect to sound broadcasting have been made, there is a serious lack of quality television broadcast reaching the majority of Blacks. Most viewers in South Africa can only receive one or two channels, and the programming on these channels is not satisfactory. The rural population is virtually unserved.

Television programme production has been virtually non-existent. Development has been slow, with a dire need to significantly improve the local content of broadcasting programmes. The potential of TV broadcasting for educational and health purposes is yet to be fully exploited.

Community viewing centers need greater attention in view of their wide applicability in the rural areas. ACAC, in conjunction with BFTF and other progressive film organisation, plans to assist in developing these community viewing centers, by using the existing community arts centers infrastructure. These centres can also serve as programme production and distribution networks, which should be considered an essential component of a healthy living environment.

Recent advances in satellite technology enable communities to establish these centers at minimal costs. South Africa needs to take advantage of the latest advances in

Allied Workers Organisation (FAWO), and even SAFTI have in principle agreed on the need for the establishment of a National Film Institute that would draw up policy and administrative guidelines for developing film and television policies for the benefit of the South African film and video industry.

The primary role of the Institute, in the last analysis, would be to provide a comprehensive structure to regulate the growth of cinematography in the country. This role would best be accomplished by interlinking the Institute with existing community-based organisations interested in promoting community arts and culture. For example, in order to create a conscious community about cultural issues, the Institute would give due weight to films that have the primary aim of promoting culture. Such a film would then be distributed to all the cinemas and community centers for viewing. This is presently being done by the Chamber of Mines through its TEBA Film Project, which has the primary aim of entertaining distraught miners and their equally bereaved families by glorifying work at the mines.

The future of embattled and intimidated filmmakers lies here, not just with the commercial industry which does everything it can to smother progressive ideas and perpetuate passive Black and white audiences. By interlinking filmmaking with the daily concerns of the people, and working toward an atmosphere conducive for leisurely cinema-going culture, the

communications technology to increase the availability and quality of television service in underserved communities in the country. Regions linked by satellites are able to follow directly major global events in realtime. Satellites provide broadcasters all over the means for worldwide coverage, collection, transmission, and dissemination of news. The technology thus create conditions for the mass media and institutions all over the world to cooperate for the exchange of news and coverage of current events. Educational opportunities are created by the widespread distribution of audio-visual materials and demonstrations from a central studio, and where special courses or special instruction methods are required, programs can be delivered in real-time to all corners of the country. It is easy to establish instructional TV with a satellite link-up. A satellite TV network is more cost-effective than terrestrial broadcast service. Signals are broadcast over a wide area: virtually any user within the satellite's "footprint" can easily access the network at the same cost. Thus the potential to distribute programs in health, environment, education, energy issues, and also disaster response services is greatly enhanced. SABC, and M-Net, have recently announced plans to utilize the new Ku-Band satellite to be launched and operated by INTELSAT in the few years. To what extent these moves will complement the efforts of independents to disseminate relevant programme is still to be seen.

V. Towards A Techno-Cultural Paradigm

The film and television media must be used to enhance the quality and standard of life of the African youth. This mission can be accomplished by providing video programming that addresses the educational, economic, political, and social expectations of young South Africans, especially those in the townships and the rural areas.

Communities must be encouraged to utilize the latest state-of-the-art technology, including satellite services to acquire and transmit video programs around the globe. Thus viewers are assured an informative coverage of global entertainment, educational material, news and interesting events, as well as world-class sports coverage.

At a practical level, concerned members in the Film and television environments need to embark on programmes with clearly objectives. These can include, among others, the following in order to take advantage of technological advances in communications technology to bring to South Africans quality films and video programming:

- to establish a network consisting of ground receiving stations- Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs)- and related technology for establishing community TV centres for the production and distribution of video programming;

- a to provide modern, low cost films and television service to South Africa and its people;

- to provide jobs and create a meaningful outlet for local artisans, musicians, film-makers, video programmers, as well

as technicians in South Africa.

t adopting a new regulatory structure that delineate the administrative, legal, and social roles of broadcasters as service providers, including the community service obligations attended to using a public resource such as the electromagnetic frequency spectrum;

tt the need to take advantage of technological advances to provide global news and information, educational and health video programming to a wide spectrum of the very diverse South African communities;

t assist in establishing, equipping and maintaining community TV centres by acquiring and installing Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs) and terrestrial VHF services for the provision of quality video programming.

These preliminary recommendations are enumerated to enhance both the depth and growth of African television service with the primary aim of improving both access to and the quality of video material, especially in Black areas. Regulators and members of the industry need to appreciate the role satellite technology has to play in the development of a coherent pan-African oriented sound and TV broadcasting programme distribution network interlinking Africa and the world.

A complementary broadcasting service of existing terrestrial and the envisaged satellite-based TV system would contribute positively towards the development of an integrated African communication network. By concentrating on serving the underserved, and providing audio-visual services to the

isolated, the new techno-cultural paradigm would facilitate the objective to improve the quality of life for a majority of Africans in South Africa.

.VI. Conclusion

,The apartheid system crippled the Black person's education and thus his chances of competing in the film industry, and has systematically excluded Blacks from gaining power positions in both the film industry and SABC, the only broadcasting company in the country. The result is Blacks are effectively precluded from the privileged position that their white counterparts enjoy, viz, the ability to form production companies and gain inside work, the knowledge to take advantage of the liberal policies being presently introduced, especially in regard to privatisation of state monopolies such as SABC and Telkom.

Could it be said that there any significant changes in the industry as far as blacks are concerned? They still continue to stereotype Blacks in their films, while conventional sources of investment, both domestic and international, continue to produce bland and racist feature films, films which legitimate current political processes or show American, colonial and white myths-- fantasies and wild dreams-about Africa and the Africans.

There has been a trend to make funds available by Western

churches, foundations and foreign embassies to stimulate a progressive film and video movement at grassroots levels. These efforts need to be harnessed in a comprehensive effort to make film and video available to all the residents of the violence-torn townships. Crews drawn from repressed communities have always documented resistance to apartheid and the very struggle for existence itself without significant funding. Now is the time for all the progressives to join hands with community-based cultural organisations such as ACAC, the trade union movement, as well as the liberation movements to create a national culture for cinematography that would put humanity first, and financial considerations in a proper perspective.

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