

MFUNDI VUNDLA

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Mfundu: Well, I cannot talk for the 'Fifties, or the 'Sixties, I was just a kid, I was growing up then. I would imagine that like any other significant area of activity in SA, it was closed to the African people, save for opportunities where, you know, they were necessary, for that activity, you know, in the segregated sectors of the industry where there would be black radio, or maybe - yeah, significant black areas. There was a small movie industry that to all intents and purposes was closed to Africans save for actors the blaxploitation movies which were done at the time.

Davis: Technicians?

Mfundu: No, no, absolutely not.

No, black people couldn't get in as technicians. You have to understand that the craft unions were white unions, and Africans could not have unions, whether it was the railroads, or whether it was mines, or working on the farms, or manufacturing, or - Africans were not allowed any union representation in those areas. Now, you're talking about an elite industry, I mean, forget it, forget it. How do you have a union in the film industry when there are none, except maybe as actors (of Africans)

Davis: Subjects? about Africans?

Mfundu: Most of the films made inside SA were - you see, the industry inside SA is controlled by white people, white SA, <sup>white SA capital</sup>. So, the priority is white subjects. And where there are African subjects, it's in the area of you know, blaxploitation movies. You know, movies which propagate apartheid, subtly propagate apartheid policy. You know, the savage African, the superstitious African, the exotic African, nothing really of substance. Basically in the area of exploitation, whether it is sexually inclined movies, or crime movies, movies about voodoo, you know, African voodoo, that sort of thing. <sup>So falling within that area,</sup> nothing of social or political relevance, <sup>to the Africans</sup> as far as their trying to liberate themselves politically. Nothing of the kind.

Davis: Whites profited from the government subsidies.

Mfundu: The thing that you have to understand is that the industry is controlled by whites. There are a number of film studios inside SA, state of the art film studios, in SA, um, er, which are controlled by whites, indigenous you know white corporations. Related to the entertainment business, whether it be hotels, anything related to entertainment OK. In addition, these companies control the exhibitor network, OK, and in SA there are two major exhibitors, there are Ster-Kinekor, which is indigenous SA, which is indigenous SA character, and there's also Nu-Metro, which is another chain. Now, they monopolize the cinema chains inside SA. There are a number of independent companies, but for all intents and purposes, they are not part of a - they are not major players. And of course these two exhibitors, Ster-Kinekor and Nu-Metro each of them have their connections with international film studios I mean, they have contractual relationships with some of the Hollywood studios, that's one part. Now, the indigenous film industry in SA, for a while, in order to encourage the development of the industry in SA, SA government instituted a subsidy system, um - it's too complicated to go into now, however, basically what it meant is that the investors could recoup part of their investment through some tax loopholes, which the SA government created in order to encourage investors to throw money into production in SA. Now, the people who took advantage of this were not only SA businessmen, but also foreign businessmen, the most famous of which used to be the Cannon, which was controlled by these Israeli businessmen. And they were the most prominent of the foreign companies that took advantage of the subsidy system inside SA, and yeah, that's basically how it worked, tax-loopholes which

Davis: Profits?

Mfundu: Yes, the people who benefited from the subsidy system were individuals who invested in these movies, taking advantage of the loopholes created by the subsidy system, of the SA government. And er there were all manner of shenanigans, get-rich-quick businessmen who had all this capital, and wanted some form of quick return on this investment. And of course this went on for a while, and there were movies like we were talking about earlier, which were done in 3 weeks, scripts which were written in a week, I mean, very bad movies, I mean, people were throwing in money not so much because they wanted to see the movie made, but just to take advantage of the tax loopholes. So people were not even remotely interested in seeing whether this movie hits the screen, but mainly as a tax dodge. So that's what - eventually the SA government caught on to this, and decided to modify the subsidy system somewhat. It still exists, but it's been modified.

Mfundu: The films which were made at the time under the subsidy system, definitely the agenda, the raison d'etre for making these movies, was to propagate the back-to-the-homelands ideology of the apartheid regime. And back-to-the-homelands being, that Africans in SA have no claim to all of SA, but to thirteen percent of the land area which was located out there in the rural of reserves. So you found movies like all these happy Africans, you know, voluntarily migrating from the urban centres, from areas of wealth, and going back to these rural reserves. You know, which is like a er you know, there were the kind of movies which were being done. So it was you know like so false, you know, like, er, revisionist, very revisionist look at African culture, you know, that we belong, we belong out there, the white government is telling us we belong out there. And we knew where we belonged to the whole of SA. So basically yeah, the movies of the time had covert and overt themes of Africans going back to the reserves. Yes.

Mfundu: The thing is about these gangster movies done under the subsidy system on one level, one has to take the poor production values, very poor production values, out of focus, music is very bad, the sound system is very bad, so one could conclude that the people who were making these movies were neophyte filmmakers, who were basically learning on African subjects how to make movies, OK, that's the conclusion I draw. On one level. On another level, I draw, as a SA who knows some of the gangster stories some of which I would like to do myself, the people who wrote, <sup>whatever her name is,</sup> McCarthy, who wrote JOE SLAUGHTER'S REVENGE, she obviously has no inkling whatsoever, zero, of SA, African gangster life. So what she has there in that thing is sheer fantasy, which has no basis, you know, in the real thing.

Well, the thing is that the people who are writing these scripts about African gangster life in SA have absolutely no experience about it. They have never lived in those communities, because apartheid segregates people by race, so they never lived there. OK. So I question the extent to which they know African gangster life. OK. For me, as a black SA watching that story about African gangster life, it's extremely incredulous to me, as a writer, it strikes me as extremely implausible, it has no basis in reality, it is a tangent, it is a distortion, it is all those things that come about when somebody is writing about something from their imagination, rather than knowledge. So I am native to the territory she's trying to explore. So I know it, so - no, these movies were basically done by people who were trying to learn how to make movies on the backs of black people, these are stories which have nothing to do with black people except in the back of their mind, their fantasies.

Davis: Why were stories like this considered innocuous?

Mfundu: Movies are very powerful in terms of the messages they transmit, they could be overt they could be subtle, whatever, but SA being what it is, being an issue, internationally as well as domestically, it seems to me that what comes across the screen is almost like its truth, particularly to somebody who is not really in touch with what is going on inside SA. So I would imagine that on one level, some of these movies got made because they propagated the view that Africans are simple-minded, uncivilised, politically unsophisticated, and in a way they deserve their stature inside the contemporary SA. I would

imagine that the equation is taken into consideration as to whether that particular movie's greenlighted, either by the production house, which has thrown in the money to of course make this movie, or even the government censors, in that it doesn't raise any, there's nothing in them that confronts the political reality of apartheid in terms of changing it or in terms of making it better for the majority of the SA people. So that innocuous as they seem, they have, there's a subtext there, and the subtext is, These are simple-minded people, with base instincts, maybe they deserve what they got.

Davis: Tie it in with MAPANTSULA?

Mfundi: This is not to say that whilst there are these gangster movies which are exploitative in character, and tend to propagate the views of the SA apartheid regime, um, there are, there's one movie in particular, which is my favourite SA movie, incidentally, up to now, it's called MAPANTSULA, which is basically the story of a gangster, you know, of somebody who - a pickpocket, who survives upon the streets of SA on the basis of his wits. He pickpocket whites, exploits his girlfriend, who basically lives a lumpen kind of existence of living off others. Which is a very interesting thing to explore, because other writers, you know, Bertold Brecht in THREEPENNY OPERA, Mack the Knife character. So it's a very interesting area to explore. And in the case of MAPANTSULA, this man finally gets arrested, and when he gets arrested, he ends up in prison of political prisoners, and his political consciousness grows. So that struck me as a gangster movie as very very plausible, because I know characters like that, I've seen characters like that in the course of my growing up in SA. And the director of the movie, who is a white man, Oliver Schmitz, had the sensitivity and insight to realize that he would have to collaborate with an African script-writer to try and get some truth into this, and er really he came out with a very very very nice, very fine movie, which tells the SA story in the perspective of black SA, and it's er one of the best movies about SA to date, and that, quite different - certainly the motive for making that movie was different from that of the SA

Mfundi: When MAPANTSULA was made, of course the script had to be submitted to the censors, I would imagine that when the censors took a look at the script, they said, Oh, yeah, this is another of these gangster African movies. And they let it pass, and ~~they let it go~~ <sup>made. And they</sup> - And the subtext of the story-line escaped them, that it was a very progressive, fine, SA movie. With very good production values, by the way, low budget, but very good.

The symbol of the gangster, the gangster is a figure worth exploring in the literature of film. Because you see when we grew up in SA, there were people who were prominent in society, there was the teacher at school, maybe the priest, the political leader, and the gangster, who was this debonair figure, this - you know, had all the girls, maybe had money, but what struck you was that he, you know, he didn't have to work for the white man. You know, he didn't have to work for the white man, and therefore he cast a very romantic figure, and very idealized figure, you know, and I guess that's what makes him so attractive. Er er er what made him so attractive to us. This is no - this has happened in other societies, certainly in American society, in the gangster genre, you find these characters being explored there, whether it be fiction, literature, and so on, because they are powerful figures worth exploring. I'm actually writing a musical on them, where I have a character, and my exploration I try and explore is, you know, who is being more effective in terms of inspiring people, the gangster, or the political leader who thinks we have to go with petitions to the great leader, you know, to redress our oppressive conditions. And certainly, from the perspective of people who want to see immediate results, the gangster appears more glamorous, because you know he doesn't really need the white man in order to survive, and of course he's got all the girls, he's got

The gangster appears in MAPANTSULA as a figure of protest, but not in that way, in a sort of subtext way, because, you know, we see him, you know, pickpocketing white people in town, you know, and we just generally see him like stealing, stealing suits from white stores, you know,



just getting by, you know, on his wits, you know, I mean, he doesn't have to put in a day's work working for the white man, and that makes him attractive. And of course, he's subverting the system, you know, in the character MAPANTSULA, and of course, it catches up with him, he gets arrested, but when he gets arrested, he ends up meeting political prisoners, and a struggle goes on in terms of consciousness, in his rapport with his prisoners, and he ends up a better man after

Mfundu: I guess SA has its version of the newsreel movie, the newsreel documentary, that propagates apartheid ideology. In the same way in the United States you found prominent filmmakers doing anti-Nazi movies. Capra, and these guys, so I guess all governments have done that sort of thing, and SA, in this way, is no exception in terms of selling apartheid domestically in SA or abroad.

I DON'T THINK THE ABOVE IS ON VIDEOTAPE

Mfundu: In ANATOMY OF APARTHEID, you see a scene

In ANATOMY OF APARTHEID there's a scene there of demolition of a of what what looks like a shanty town. And that looks like progress. You know, nobody deserves to be in squalor, so on the surface it looks good. The SA government looks good in this respect. I happen to have experienced ~~um + seen~~ the demolition of a community. I was born in a place called Western, Western Native Townships, which is in Johannesburg, and adjoining Western was Sophiatown. Now, Sophiatown was, you know, some people, you know, have romanticized the place like it was this Mecca, and you know it was a very exciting community, I mean, you know, there were prominent people living there, there were artists, writers, journalists, it was a very vibrant community. And that was, you know, a ghetto - a ghetto. However, the difference is, it was one place where Africans still owned their freehold rights. So despite the fact that it was a ghetto, Africans owned land, I mean at least the landholders, which at that time was quite something, because the government was trying to take away land from African people. And Sophiatown was declared a "black spot", which meant it would be demolished. So Africans were moved away from there, and Sophiatown is now a suburb called Triomf, which is Triumph, so people were moved 10 miles away from where they were, to a new community of rows and rows of monotonous urban houses, which looked more like barracks, or concentration camps, actually. So, no, the history of relocation of Africans in SA is not an act of progress, it is part and parcel of the ripping off of African land from Africans for the benefit of whites.

The scene in ANATOMY OF APARTHEID where you see the shanty town being torn down, to the uninitiated gives the impression that, Look nobody deserves to live like that, that's progress, it's legitimate, it's a good government doing that, obviously the government cares for those people, but what in effect happened in SA in Sophiatown and all other places like that, where Africans were forcibly removed, under the guise of, you know, doing away with squalor, actually what was happening there was land-theft. Sophiatown was nothing but a land-grab off an area where Africans had freehold rights. It had nothing, absolutely nothing to do with ~~the fact that~~ that the Afrikaner government cared too much about the squalor the Africans were living under, it had absolutely nothing to do with that. The white government wanted that piece of land for white settlement. And that was the reason for demolishing that community. So ANATOMY OF APARTHEID is really creating a false impression there, because the mass-removal of Africans from areas where they've been for years is one of the sad pages of SA history.

I would say that from the point of view of propaganda film, ANATOMY OF APARTHEID is extremely successful, because for the uninitiated, I mean, you see that community being torn down, that shanty town being torn down, and it looks like progress, nobody deserves to live like that. But the reality of the matter is, that after that community was torn

down, no progress followed, there was no progress. It was pure land-grab, you know. And I can almost bet you that that community where we have seen in the film is probably quote unquote a "white area". Or was declared a white area. I can almost bet you on that, because that experience with Sophiatown, that was also experienced in other areas

throughout SA.

Mfundi: DINGAKA is, what, early 'Sixties SA, um prominent producer, Jamie Uys, who also produced THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY, very prominent AFrikaner figure, and um good production values, um, very good, good music, very good AFrican actors, so it was quite an advance in SA, you know, DINGAKA. And I guess it was tied into the international market as well, I don't know how it did internationally, however, you know, I mean there are scenes there I mean, like when the man is in the country there, he's like an artisan, a prominent artisan in his community, he seems to have a pretty stable African family life, well-contented daughters, and you know, food seems to be plentiful, there's a lot of stamping of food there, and you know, I don't know whether, beautiful river, you see the kids playing in the river, that sort of thing, and it looks like a nice, beautiful, rustic, rural community somewhere out there in SA, probably the Eastern Transvaal. Er, the scenes where Ken Gampu goes to the city, where he walks through Kruger National Park, and some picturesque, very picturesque scenes there in the Eastern Transvaal of SA. And of course the movie goes on to show like er this is basically a revenge movie, someone trying to get justice, he goes to the city, and you know there's the whole thing of the white legal system, which looks very humane, indeed, particularly for someone who's looking at this thing from outside SA. It's a very humane legal code here, coming to the rescue, at least, trying to help an African man from rural areas get justice. So that's a kind of distortion, you know, because er er to Westerners, you know, a law, the law, particularly in democratic societies, the law is an instrument of good, because it's created by democratic institutions democratic society. You see what I'm saying? Whereas in SA, the law is not an instrument for good, the law in SA is an instrument for oppression. So that's the difference. So that when you see that er that that scene there, where it looks like the tradition is available to this tribal African man who is out for justice, it's a distortion of the fact: you know, because law in SA is not like the law in a democratic society, because SA is not a democratic society. The law exists to oppress. So that's a very misleading element there. Another misleading element is all these contented Africans in the rural areas, this man has a good life and everything, food is plentiful, contented kids and everything, in the rural areas of SA there's 90% malnutrition, there is mass starvation there, children have kwashiorkor, rickets, there are all manner of diseases out there, and children, the mortality rate of African children there is extremely high, so in fact it's a gulag out there, that's what these rural areas are, there's no no, it doesn't bear any resemblance to the reality. Current reality. So the subtext of that movie is er misleading.

Mfundi: Very misleading, the er he leaves - he makes a decision to leave his rural area. Now, in the SA I know, you don't just pick up and leave, you know, and go to the city, you know. First of all you have to get the permission of the local authority in your village to go out there. Then upon getting out there, you know, your pass has to be stamped that you, to certify that you have permission to be in the city, no, he just picks up and leaves and enters the city. You know. Which has no basis to the reality of the SA of the time. It's er, it's very misleading. You know. In the SA of the time a man like that would have had to go to his chief, and his chief would send him to the local Bantu Affairs Commissioner, and the Bantu Affairs Commissioner would quiz him on why he wants to go to Johannesburg, and if the Bantu Affairs Commissioner figures it's OK for him to go, he'd stamp his pass, and there's a whole bureaucratic thing about getting in touch with the authorities in the city, and there's a whole bureaucratic process for that man, for an African man to finally end up in the city. You know. And nothing of the kind is in that movie DINGAKA. So it's just a patent er you know, display of er patent lie about the reality of SA, it has nothing to do with the reality of SA of the 'Sixties, nothing.

The thing is that um Jamie Uys had a lot of contact with Africans, I mean, he's done a lot of movies, he has worked probably there's no major producer in SA who has as much experience with working with Africans as Jamie Uys has, probably very few. And er which means that Jamie Uys must know the conditions inside SA so that er, you know, he has

obviously made choices to tell his story, like everybody has to make choices, you know, it's your story you are telling, and you make your own creative choices. So the creative choices he has made in DINGAKA conform to the vision he wants to - to his vision

That's his story, he is telling the DINGAKA story, and he has made certain choices, like all creative people do, and he has this vision about the telling of the story, where it takes place, and er how his movie has to look, and er which of course has nothing to do with the reality of the SA of the 'Sixties of the time. You know. To live in that sort of condition, OK, in that condition which is portrayed, that man, in the SA of the 'Sixties, you'd probably have to be some - maybe a chief, or some maybe a prominent teacher, or maybe a prominent preacher or churchman in the village to live like that. But from the way the man's portrayed, in the movie, he's an ordinary peasant, you know, artisan, creative person. It doesn't strike me as credible in the SA of the 'Sixties, not to me. Because I know these kind of communities, I mean I went to school, I went to boarding-school in a community like that in the Eastern Cape. So, no, it doesn't strike me as credible at all. But it's a certain vision he's presenting, and er like I say, no-one, no movie producer in SA has worked as much with Africans as Jamie Uys has, and he has traversed that country and he knows deep down, if he's honest, that what he portrayed in that movie doesn't conform to the reality of the 1960s, inasfar as people in the rural areas of SA at that time, it is pure fiction.

Davis: GODS

Mfundi: From a creative point of view, everything is fair game, and er so I guess as a creative person, Jamie Uys has as much right to make fun of the liberation movement. Um there are a number of things I guess worth making fun of in the liberation movement, just as there are a number of things one can make fun of in the Nationalist government, you know. And er so however, one has to look at the subtext, what is the underlying message here. And er first off he makes them look like bungling incompetents, the guerrillas incompetents. You know. I bet you the Minister of Law and Order didn't look at the guerrillas of the ANC, of SWAPO in Namibia, as bungling incompetents, you know, you talk to them, they regarded those people in very serious terms, you know, they had a major draft to fight these "incompetents". And so er so er er like I say, he er he er maybe is catering to the delusion, or creating the impression that Oh, man, don't worry about it, the white man is still going to be in power for years, you know, those men on the border, those Africans on the border trying to cross in, they don't know what they're doing, I guess he's creating the impression that everything is fine, don't worry about it. It's not an issue. Er um maybe that's what he is trying to say, I don't know. Um and er - and then of course there's like er the guerrillas, there's a - I don't know, there's an attempt to show one is a Cuban or something, they are not even er completely African, these people who are trying to come in here and stir up trouble they they have some Cubans with them, you know, coming in here. And so it's a lot of distortion I guess, and disinformation about in SA at the time, you know. You never saw a Cuban cross inside SA to fight the apartheid regime, you know. The people crossing in there were SAs. Um er, yeah.

I would imagine there's some element of when conditions are tough, I guess, there's a place for escapist art, in very tough conditions. So in some respect THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY serves that function. You know, because at that time, you know, you must understand that it was a great deal of mass resistance, the United Democratic Front was out there, and I mean the country was militant then. People were out there in the streets, you know, and that's one element of the resistance against the apartheid government. They understood that there was this small you know army of the people, Umkhonto we Sizwe, coming in from bases in Mozambique and carrying out military operations inside SA. So that is the context in which you are finding this, and of course the government at that time is talking about the Total Onslaught that Communism, International Communism is out after



SA, is after SA, and the West is being duped by these Communist-controlled liberation movements, and er and so on and so on, you know. So that a movie like that, coming out of SA - THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY is a well-crafted movie, it's a well-crafted comedy, er I mean that's the context in which it comes out of, it just completely, again, nothing to do with what is going on in SA at that time.

Mfundi: I would say that since 1976, which is the Soweto Student Rebellion, er, I mean that that was the er er major watershed period in SA. And even abroad, we because of the power of television, we saw how young people were taking to the streets of SA protesting against Afrikaners, the imposition of Afrikaners as the language of instruction, but basically what those people were protesting was the apartheid regime. Against the apartheid regime. And er er those kids were after you know, the creation of democratic order in SA, I mean, that's what it was, I mean, in essence. Electronic journalism, that was all over the screen I mean we saw how SA was electrified by this, and er that excited the support communities

but it excited, you know, here was another area for exploration of stories by Hollywood, whether it be television, made-for-TV movies, mini-series, or dramatic features. And er er , you know, er, you know, by my own personal count, I would say that there were probably 20 to 30 SA projects in development around SA. In television, you know, er as well as features.

I would say that the story of Hollywood was basically looking for SA was - they wanted a commercial story, whatever that means. But I would imagine that in their calculations, the story would - if it came with a story that had a major white character, who was like a major civil rights or human rights person, and somehow this person's life intertwined with African life to a great degree, and was an exciting , action-packed story, and er poignant, moving, er the chances are that you would have gotten attention at some level here in Hollywood. And er I mean, CRY, FREEDOM was a story likethat, where there was white man and a prominent African activist Steven Biko.

Riesenfeld: Why did they see a white story instead of a black story?

Mfundi: It goes back to what I said initially, like, for instance, Hollywood - Hollywood is a commercial venture, it's a business, so they are not really into the charity business, or into the business of making people conscious about things. So it it is all rides on whether they can make money on this thing. And er Hollywood - and this is nothing actually to do with SA - Hollywood, until recently, Hollywood is also of the opinion that black leads in a motion picture do not make money. Black films - until recently - 1991, now they seem to be changing, but for a long time, a black film doesn't make money. So that if you are going to make a black film, you've gotta have a black with a white guy. You know. Have Danny Glover with Mel Gibson, have Kevin Kline with Denzel Washington, have Danny Glover with Martin Short, Have Danny Glover with William Defoe, have Sidney Poitier with Tony Curtis, you know, there's a tradition with that kind of movie, in Hollywood, because they basically don't trust the fact that a black movie by itself will make money. That that that's almost like a tradition, you know, in Hollywood, so that the SA er coming in as a subject for Hollywood now, that was, that was, that was a consideration. How do you proceed to tell a movie about SA where you can have a part for a Kevin Kline, where you could have a part for Jack Nicholson, or Richard Dreyfus, or whatever the leading, Alec Baldwin or whoever is the, because you know, I I wrote a movie, and I had a big producer here, Tom Mount, who has done TEQUILA SUNRISE, BULL DURHAM and all those kind of movies, my um er er er he told me point-blank, This lead has got to be a white, I want, because I want Alec Baldwin for this movie, Alec Baldwin is is is getting big, just before Alec Baldwin did THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER, Alec Baldwin, the new kid on the block is going to be a major star so this - the the main guy here is Alec Baldwin. OK, you can have some black people, but this is, we're going after Alec Baldwin. That's what I was told, uh. And er er - so I, you know,

so that's what I did, uh, I mean, it never got made, this time, But um um the thinking here, there's stories by Nadine Gordimer which have never been made, BURGER'S DAUGHTER has been floating around Hollywood for years, JULY'S PEOPLE has been floating around for years, those stories, BURGER'S DAUGHTER and JULY'S PEOPLE there's major leads, white SAs, so again, it makes them attractive to Hollywood, in terms of story-lines, but to my mind, again, that's what made MAPANTSULA refreshing to me, was that, here was a movie coming out from the black perspective of an African lead, you know, and it just made it more authentic to me, and it worked dramatically to me, as opposed to movie: like er CRY, FREEDOM, er CRY, FREEDOM didn't work for me, er -

I would say, CRY, FREEDOM, from the perspective of performance, Denzel Washington is great, you know, in fact, initially when I heard that Denzel Washington had got the role, I I I was kind of pissed off, You know, I've done plays with African-Americans with you know playing Africans, it doesn't really work, so I was like very suspicious about how Denzel Washington was gonna do the whole Biko, and I was pleasantly surprised. I found Denzel Washington's performance very credible and very good. And um er - having said that, you know, CRY, FREEDOM was a complete rip-off you know, um er first it started off as a story about Steven Biko, then about Donald Woods, and there's no decision actually about what's going on here. First of course like er er the Biko character dies about 45 minutes into the movie, and the Biko character is dead, and the story becomes er er - the story of the white guy, the Donald Woods character. You know. And that's very interesting, you know, because I - I've been in this country for 20 years, and I remember when I arrived in this country, speaking at various places about SA. You know, you found white audiences er I don't care who they were, students at universities, communists at some club, or trade unionists, or whoever, you know, a wide spectrum, you know, they posed that question as to Actually, how many whites are there in SA who support you there? You know, and the question was, you know, very few. And you could always see, I could always see that pain, that disappointment deep in their eyes, about this about this, you know, about this kind of answer. There aren't too many whites that are supporting the movement in SA, you could see the pain amongst progressive whites here, who are concerned about SA, you know. And I guess it seems to me, the powers that be, the people who get movies made, that pain was in them too, they had to find a vehicle for this courageous white SA who would defy the and go out there and be the standard-bearer of human rights and black freedom in SA. I - that is what informs, got informed against part of the equation that informed the making of those movies. Yeah, that's what I would say - and the the the thing is, there were whites who who who were active in the struggle, there's no question about it, you know, but infinitely more blacks were, you know, and there were more blacks who were involved in the struggle. So who's gonna tell their story? You know - Hollywood is not gonna tell their story, I guess Africans, people like me will have to tell their story, at some point, but certainly Hollywood is has no interest in doing that, because quote unquote, "the black movie doesn't sell". So you have to have a vehicle for the white activist.

Certainly there is an apartheid which informs the decision-making in what gets made and what doesn't get made, and certainly there is an apartheid in terms of the thinking here. I mean, I mean, like this preoccupation about like telling African stories through whites, I mean, that's er, that's apartheid's thing. So it's not good enough to tell the story through black eyes, for it to be legitimate, it has to be told through white eyes. That's that's the message there. The story is illegitimate from the screen unless it is told through a white lead. Because the market out there won't go for a movie starring an African actor or an African lead, unless maybe you have a Mandela-type figure. And even if you have like a - so that's the perspective here. So Hollywood has done also like er I mean the black, I mean Mandela, the Mandela movie, which was done on HBO, with Danny Glover playing Nelson Mandela, and Alfre Woodard playing Winnie Mandela. Both fine actors. <sup>These two individuals,</sup> fine actors. But, you know, the movie was garbage. I hated that movie, I hated, I hated that movie from HBO, three minutes into the picture I hated that Mandela.



Three minutes into it, I hated it. Um - er

Davis: Using SA as a base, can you change this?

Mfundu: Oh, certainly, certainly, I mean like, I mean -

Davis: Put it in context of your returning

Mfundu: I think like for instance there's a there's a there's a - if things go well in SA, if SA does turn out, as most of us do expect and hope, sooner than later SA is gonna become a democratic society, and er taking into account the industrial infrastructure there, and this in regard to motion picture production, that there's enormous potential there, for the kind of movies, the kind of stories we want to tell. And er and already I mean I know I'm just one of the people returning who are in this business, and I already have a project which is, which is a complete break from all this garbage of the past, in terms of how you tell an African story, mine is completely different, I'm doing a, I'm doing a story about music, popular new SA music, the new SA music, in the context of the turbulent 1980s, and my take is completely different, my movie is er - I'm entertaining people, you know, and er, and er I want people to out there and go and buy the sound track after seeing my movie, and people are going to dance after seeing my movie, but I pull no punches about what is happening politically, in SA at the time. I don't pull any punches, no compromise, and er but you know I'm writing a story about a musician, and er and I don't gloss over, I don't make things look good when they're not supposed to look good, and there are a number of us like that who are going back, you know, er er with an interest to working in motion pictures in television, and I think that there is an opportunity here.

Davis: Distribution?

Mfundu: Well the thing is that er, the thing is that er it's almost like er you know that er the people in the business community of SA, the motion picture business, er, some of them, er, er have realized that apartheid hasn't done them any good. In terms of - businesswise, anyway. But er, when you come to think of it, SA, when you compare SA with Australia, there's no reason why SA couldn't produce the same caliber of movies as Australia has. But it didn't. It didn't. And er and er, the reason that it didn't is because of apartheid. And er, their priorities were completely different, and er and er because of apartheid, nobody wanted to have any connection with them. Now with the death of apartheid, the SA film industry is gonna become legitimate, it's not only going to be able to do the movie business in SA, it's gonna open up, you know, and then, in order for them to be legitimate, they're looking at the new voices which are coming in, people who have been trained in the area, of the movie business, who are black, who are not, you know, who - the people they should have trained in the first place, but they have been trained outside. They're coming back, they're looking towards an industry which will legitimise them, you know. So that er er er ample opportunity for some of these with the right stories to take advantage of that strategic disadvantage that they find themselves in. Because DINGAKA is not going to sell out there in world markets, these other stupid movies they did during the subsidy period, they are not going to fly, you know, the people out there are just waiting for the true story, as it were, and the true story is to cover SA from this period on.

Davis: Raising capital?

Mfundu: Oh, yeah, there's always those, there's always that. But there is, there is, the capital in SA for for making movies, and you just have to know how to find it. Find the er these sources. I just happen to be in with one faction, in SA, business faction, which is making movies, but there are others. And er er - yeah, it's always a problem getting movies done, but I'm very optimistic about the new movies which are going to come out, because I mean there are people who are going back there who have been trained abroad, you know, who who feel that it is time for the world, for SA itself, to see.

Mfundi: No ax to grind, kind of thing, but just to tell the story in um - you know, people are looking for - tell the story honestly, you know, because up to now the stories about SA have been dishonest stories, they've been guided by Is there a white character there who make the story credible, that has been the bottom line. You know. So in that respect, that's dishonest, that's dishonest ~~story-telling~~ <sup>possible</sup> story-telling, kind of thing, and the way I look at it now, there is a chance, ~~possibilities~~ <sup>possibilities</sup> coming up, where there's a chance that we will begin to change this thing. Yeah. I know that's my mission as a creative person, that it looks like now, for once, there is a chance that I'll be able to tell my story from an African perspective, away from the oppressive constraints of the Hollywood market place. And go on to tell my story honestly, because the bottom line is that a good story, a good story will fly. You know. That's how I look at it. If it's a good story, it's a good story. You know, that's the bottom line, can you tell a story you know. That's the bottom line to me.

Mfundi: The thing about the black SA as victim has a long history, you know, it goes way back in SA in literature, progressive literature, liberal progressive, progressive literature of Alan Paton, a number of white people, writers, you know, were preoccupied with showing the African as victim of the oppressors, of the structure, and of course it could be a peasant who is caught up in all this bureaucracy, who can't understand the apartheid state and is trying to make sense out of it, you know. And um sometimes you know he bumps into some kind white man who tries to navigate his way out of this maze of oppression, you know. Er and er er er so it's a tradition, you know, to show the helpless African who is a victim and cannot address himself out of the condition he finds himself in. And and and and I guess there was some <sup>social</sup> value to that, er that kind of thing, ~~it's not my social value, but I guess~~ I'm willing to grant that maybe there's some social value, maybe in terms of educating Western audiences about what was going on inside SA, certainly CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY was a best seller in this country, a lot of people have read that book in the United States. But having said that, you know, like the er African character in CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY, like this loyal, good ~~servant~~ <sup>servant</sup>, you know, who doesn't ~~rock~~ rock the boat, kind of thing, certainly the kind of black man, you know, who wants to accommodate everything, and the privileges, whatever ~~privileges~~ <sup>Western</sup> Western civilisation provided. So certainly those are some of the messages which have been sent

And of course to new generations, to people like me, we are tired of that perspective, certainly, you know, my generation, or even people before me my generation, I mean we went out there, politically, trying to change things. We had no white leader, we did it ourselves, we didn't want a white leader, we even didn't want anything to do with the National Union of SA Students or any of the student organizations, we just did it, we just went out and did it. So er er there aren't too many stories about those kind of people. Um um I guess those are the stories we have to write ourselves. You know. But no, er there are stories like that, because it's a new situation, you know, like, you know, we are of the view that er I'm not a victim, I'm trying to change the condition of oppression, you know, I don't want to be looked at as a victim, because I don't want to be pitied, and er - I want to be supported as somebody who is fighting for human rights, but I don't want to be pitied, er er because once you pity me, already you assume that you are superior than me, and I won't tolerate that so that has been the main thrust, you know, of African as victim, and er you saw it in a lot of stuff, I mean, the stories of Alan Paton, some of the documentaries, like LAST GRAVE AT DIMKBAZA, and you know, and er I mean, in LAST GRAVE AT DIMKBAZA, you see all these graveyards, you know, where people were dying and I will admit that that did some good in terms of showing the brutality of the apartheid state, you know, but at the same time there's also another flip side to that documentary was, Oh, god, yeah, these poor Africans dying of malnutrition and kwashiorkor, and they're in such pathetic state, you know, and don't they deserve our pity, you know, and er and you got tired of that, I got tired of that because certainly there's another reality of SA, which is my reality, certainly my reality of people in my generation taking things into their own hands, to change the conditions. That's what I write about, you know, my stories, and that's what my writer friends write about, er, other playwrights, er, you know, so I write about, I wouldn't write about the black man as a victim, er, my black characters, my black characters are in control of their situation, and if I have to show a black man as a victim, of course it goes with the terrain of the story, if he's a victim he's a victim, but that's not what informs my

vision.

The challenge is that, when I grew up, when I grew up, I had role models, when I started going to school, I had role models I can tell you about, African role models OK, teachers, political people, sports people, whatever, and not all people I have seen victims has not been er er the staple diet, you know, that went on to shape me. You know. Er, er, so from that perspective, it's false to, the notion of the character as a victim is false to me, er, the perspective so I grew up, none of the people I saw were victims, and er, er, er, so that the the the challenge for for in the 1990s certainly is to explore that terrain of the new African character, to go into the true story, you know, the real story, er er there's a lot to explore, the contemporary setting, or whatever, it's er it's wide open. That's the challenge for for for people right now.