Trends in South African Documentary Film and Video: Questions of Identity and Subjectivity

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This paper focuses on the development of an anti-apartheid documentary film and video 'movement' in the period spanning the late 1970s to the early 1990s. It discusses the growth of independent film-making as well as a number of organisational developments, which formed the basis of this 'movement'. The paper broadly describes some of the trends that have emerged and places these within a theoretical framework that identifies and examines questions of identity and subjectivity. It proposes that new theoretical work is needed to represent South African 'hybridity' and examines what seems to be a shift towards representing 'hybridity' in recent forms of anti-apartheid documentary film and video.

Introduction

The focus of this paper is South African anti-apartheid documentary film and video in the context of the period spanning the late 1970s to the early 1990s. Charting the development of South African documentary, though seemingly simple and linear, is a complex process and this paper represents only one aspect of a larger research project on South African documentary. The beginnings of anti-apartheid documentary film in South Africa have been traced back to the making of Come Back Africa in the 1950s and the few documentaries made in the 1960s.1 The first significant anti-apartheid film of the 1970s was Last Grave at Dimbaza made by Nana Mahomo in 1974.2 Its significance was largely due to its subject matter which represented the 'genocidal' effects of the bantustan policy, but also to the clandestine way in which it was made and the film-maker's membership of the Pan Africanist Congress in exile. Later however, the film was seen to represent particular stylistic features that South African anti-apartheid documentary film-makers were to oppose.

Towards and up to the late 1970s foreign television producers such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were engaged in producing films about South Africa for foreign audiences. Films like In Search of Sandra Laing3 and The White Tribe of Africa are examples of this. There are a number of significant stylistic elements to films such as these:

they are characterised by a strong narrational presence in the form of an omnipotent off-screen male voice speaking in what is perceived to be a ‘white’ English accent; representation of South Africans in stark categories—all blacks are victims of oppression, all whites are oppressors; and they rely on crude statistics and stereotypical images of apartheid. Although Last Grave at Dimbaza was not a BBC film it shares these characteristics. These characteristics do not necessarily diminish the value of such films. Rather in representing apartheid on international television screens and especially in underlining the exploitative nature of foreign businesses in South Africa, they played a crucial role in relation to the international pressure that was brought to bear on apartheid. For example in Last Grave at Dimbaza British-owned companies in South Africa are represented as complicit partners in the state’s apartheid policies and the hunger, poverty and infant mortality rate associated with them.

From the late 1970s and into the 1980s the unprecedented growth of independent documentary film-making as well as a number of organisational developments in South Africa, entrenched the documentary ‘movement’ against apartheid in the country. There are a variety of approaches to defining this ‘movement’. For example, there are a number of individual documentary films that may be identified as especially important in developing this ‘movement’. These include Generations of Resistance, Fosatu—Building Worker Unity, Mayfair, and The Two Rivers. Identifying the organisations that developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s is another way of defining this documentary ‘movement’. Here, the establishment of Afrascope is one example. This was a film organisation established to document events from an anti-apartheid perspective and to develop community-based film programmes; its opposition worked primarily through a focus on opening up access to training possibilities for community representatives. Its footage was seized by the state and finally used in the Delmas treason trial, is one example. Another example is the establishment of the Community Video Resource Association (which later became the Community Video Education Trust) at the University of Cape Town in the late 1970s. It was the first organisational attempt at making community video in South Africa and played a significant role in the development of this particular approach to documentary film-making. Yet another means of definition might be to identify individual film-makers and trace their work over the period. This paper favours the former approach.

The documentary ‘movement’ in South Africa has not developed in a linear, homogeneous way that can be easily categorised, but rather has formed around diverse trends that relate to a number of variables: aesthetics and style, content, censorship, the states of emergency, funding and distribution, audiences, equipment and technical resources, education and training, networking, the film and broadcasting industry, and access to screening and broadcasting outlets both locally and internationally. Mindful of these variables my intention in this paper is broadly to describe these trends. This is an attempt to begin to write a history of South African anti-apartheid documentary and is to a large degree selective of specific elements in the developments it examines. The paper focuses on some of the individual documentaries made in the period under review and identifies their key stylistic features. It also examines the major organisations established to develop anti-apartheid documentary film and video. This work to ascribe historical significance to certain of the processes in the development of anti-apartheid documentary in South Africa is located within a framework of theoretical ideas that facilitates an exploration of questions of

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4 The existence of a ‘movement’ is being ascribed here with hindsight and was not necessarily perceived or experienced by anti-apartheid documentary film-makers in this period.

identity and subjectivity in documentary film. These questions relate both to the context(s) within which South African Anti-apartheid documentary film and video has developed and most specifically to the ways in which documentaries have been made—their stylistic strategies. In a broad sense, documentary film and video in South Africa now appears to be grappling with its own transformation from being an oppositional genre, where individual subjects have been used to represent and juxtapose people in dialectically opposed categories—workers/bosses, blacks/whites—to using an investigative stance that seeks to represent as yet undefined, or in the film context unrepresented, ‘structures of feeling’, to borrow Raymond Williams’ term referring to the subtextual elements of cultural work,6 where cultural representation seeks to identify as yet almost unnameable features of experience. Culture is always in flux, always changing, and this tells us that there are ‘structures of feeling’ beneath the more obvious surface that cultural work can begin to portray with relative impact. I am interested in analysing how documentary film and video has begun to represent ‘structures of feeling’ in its various stages and types of development.

The broad strokes of the early to mid 1980s have been replaced with, in some respects, finer detail and more intimate views of the lives of South Africans across the cultural spectrum. To some extent this mirrors the shifts and transformations in the socio-political shape of our society. In other senses, these developments in documentary film may be seen as an intervention on the part of film-makers and film organisations into ‘ways of seeing’ our world(s) especially with access to national broadcasting having become more possible. How is documentary being used to represent the increasing complexity and multiplicity of the subject positions that seem to exist? What are the effects of the work of some film-makers who have held onto the broader representations of the 1980s in relation to those who have chosen to reflect the lives of ordinary people in greater specificity? How might documentary film-makers mediate the various subject positions of South Africans for national audiences? These are some of the questions which my paper attempts to address. My approach is strongly one of work in progress and rather than prescribing definitive answers or solutions to the questions implied in my paper, and in this study altogether, I am foraging for what might be found in attempting to historicise anti-apartheid documentary film and video in relation to questions of identity and subjectivity.

**Identity and Subjectivity**

I am using the concepts ‘identity’ and ‘subjectivity’ as a way into thinking about or theorising around both the subject matter and the subjects represented in South African documentary as well as those who have done the work of representation in this form. South African documentary represents a particular narrative of apartheid and of its resistance and as such it is in itself selective of particular events, people and processes. No single cultural form is able to express the full experience of apartheid although specific representations may seem to fulfil a sense of the totality of the experience (for a specific audience).

Documentary film however, unlike fiction film, claims a certain access to reality.7 This is the key issue in debates about documentary film. The notion or concept of reality is a contradiction in terms, and it is so submerged in contestation that on the one hand its representation cannot stand for reality itself. Yet on the other hand, because documentary

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7 Increasingly however film uses documentary ‘reality’ to propose truthfulness in their narratives. *JFK* made by Oliver Stone is an example of the extensive integration of documentary footage constructed to look like documentary as well as a fictional story to highlight the truthfulness of his contention that the assassination of John F. Kennedy was a U.S. government plot.
Film represents reality or aspects of reality so directly it is often perceived to be reality itself. The potential for documentary film to represent truth(s) therefore needs to be noted here since this feature is significant in analysing the meanings that South African anti-apartheid documentary has produced about apartheid. In a major sense, this issue relates to the representative-ness of documentary subjects and subject matter as well as to the need to identify who makes documentary. In addition, because of the shape of political developments in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s and the concomitant need for identifying and defining political positions, anti-apartheid documentary film can be seen to have been ‘burdened’ with the need to be representative. The films of one organisation, Video News Services (VNS), exemplify this documentary approach. In the films made in the mid to late 1980s VNS tended to use representatives of workers such as union organisers and shop stewards to speak on their behalf with images of mass meetings to verify and illustrate the points being made. The documentary Compelling Freedom exemplifies this. Here, individual workers are not represented as speaking subjects, but are rather spoken about in representative terms by union officials. Ironically, documentary film has also been constructed and ‘read’ as being representative even when it purports to represent ‘ordinariness’. The series Ordinary People is an example of this. The farmer in the part called Tooth of the Times, is forcefully represented as an individual in his own personalised human circumstances, but is constructed, and therefore ‘read’ to be a type representing many other white farmers by the voice-over narration at the beginning of the film. The policeman in the part called The Night Shift is ‘read’ as representing all (white) policemen and his representation as being kind, helpful and non-violent is open for questioning by audiences. The divide between the personal and the political, which was so strongly represented in the VNS documentaries of the 1980s has given way to an integration of the two in the Ordinary People series of the 1990s. This series seems to suggest to viewers that the stark categories of the political struggle of the 1980s now have to be re-examined and new forms of identifying people and processes have to be tested.

These recent moves in documentary film suggest that Chantal Mouffe’s conceptualisation of the multiplicity of subject positions8 has some relevance for analysing South African documentary film and video. Her work is derived from a post-Marxist position which proposes that transformation towards democracy is not necessarily class-based. The Marxist notion of a revolution of the working class which would overthrow the ruling class is represented in Mouffe’s work as being limited to a unidimensional perspective of the individual subject as well as to a narrow perspective of the various antagonisms and struggles in advanced capitalist societies. For Mouffe, individuals are inscribed within multiple subject relations by the numerous discourses within which they exist. The value of this theoretical position for analysing South African documentary is that it opens up the possibility of new terrain for identifying who is represented in documentary films and by whom. To lay out the trajectory of documentary film and impose on it various subject positions that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, space or geography, leads to significant discoveries about the representativeness of South African documentary. Without necessarily becoming detailed at this juncture it is plain to see that the majority of South African documentaries have been made by white males, or within collective situations where white males have been in the majority. This point leads however to the need to identify, for the purposes of this analysis, the difficulties with Mouffe’s approach.9 Her focus on the multiplicity of subject positions tends to suggest a kind of discrete quality to

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9 Space does not permit fuller explication of the critiques of Mouffe’s theoretical position.
each subject position. Her theory does not seem to account for the spaces between different subject positions, which are neither one position nor the other but are nevertheless experienced. This is true also of her conceptualisation of struggle, where she self-consciously grapples with how solidarity between struggles can be achieved, in order to effect social transformation.

Here Bhabha’s notion of ‘hybridity’ is valuable, since it embraces the multiplicity of subject relations that Mouffe proposes and at the same time defies the separation of each from the other, providing an all-encompassing and far more complex notion of identity and subjectivity. In a complex argument he firstly poses questions about how differentiated subjectivity, and social movements, can be represented in a ‘collective will’ and secondly explores the need for critical theory to ‘demonstrate ... a different engagement in the politics of and around cultural domination’. He proposes that theory be relocated in the field of ‘cultural difference’ not ‘cultural diversity’ and emerges with a position that recognises a ‘Third Space of enunciation’, where what is in between the differentiated subjectivities, becomes the space of writing or representation: ‘It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this “Third Space”, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves’.

This is a theoretical position that relates strongly to the hybrid nature of South African experience and that identifies what might seem to be the project of the series Ordinary People—to represent the hybridity of South African identities. Nevertheless to accept theoretical work that sits comfortably with the cultural form being analysed does not necessarily provide all the answers and can in itself become an exercise in masking theories that might sit un-comfortably with the work being analysed but that need or warrant exposition. One of these theoretical positions that on many levels mitigates against the notions of both multiple subject positions and hybridity is the concern of some cultural theorists at the seemingly easy appropriation of critical perspectives that entrench the notion of multiplicity within identity at the expense of national, international and indeed global movements for transformation. In particular this relates to the work of African-Americans and black people in the diaspora to represent the unity of their struggle against Western imperialism and colonialism. In the South African experience of cultural work, one in which very little scholarship has emerged, we need to examine the work derived from subjectivity under colonialism in other parts of Africa and the world and from the experiences of marginalised people who have life experiences similar to those of South Africans, particularly those based on race, in building towards and writing new theoretical work within the South African context.

In the field of cinema one of the theories (and cultural practices) that has emerged in this way and that is therefore useful for analysing cinematic developments in South Africa is Third Cinema. The concept was first identified in the 1960s as a means of naming cinema of the Third World that was born of political struggle for socialism. Two film-makers and film theorists Solanas and Getino wrote, in 1969, that Third Cinema ‘recognises in (the anti-imperialist) struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time ... the decolonisation of culture’. For them, Third Cinema was a militant, didactic cinema that opposed the cinema of Hollywood, which they termed First Cinema,

11 Bhabha, ‘Commitment of Theory’, p. 125.
12 Bhabba, ‘Commitment of Theory’, p. 131.
and the cinema of film artists, such as the films of the European film circuit, which they called Second Cinema. In Solanas and Getino’s terms these kinds of cinema were ideologically unsound, particularly First Cinema, being a cinema that promoted the passive consumption of bourgeois values in audiences across the globe. Third Cinema was represented as a cinema that should forge a new aesthetic, a new cinematic language which would promote the cause of socialism by representing the experiences of colonialism and its more contemporary forms.

In the 1980s the concept was elaborated in relation to the cinema of marginalised groups in other parts of the world. In Britain, where black cinema had begun to emerge, at least two conferences were held on Third Cinema in the late 1980s, that sought to debate the relevance of Third Cinema for cinematic practices developing at that time.14 The first of these conferences seemed to have facilitated a number of polemical interventions in debates about Third Cinema, which were apparently never resolved, but published reflections of the conference and the process of identifying the different positions taken is valuable for the exploration of the relevance of Third Cinema in the South African context. One of these is the concern with the term being ‘kidnapped’ out of its Third World context and ascribing it to essentially First World cultural developments thereby entrenching First World cultural imperialism. Another concern is the role of theory in relation to Third Cinema practices explicated in the argument that ‘rather than search for a black or third world film esthetic we should interrogate the western concept of esthetics as such, should recognize its determination through specific western historical experiences and cultural exigencies’.15 Both these concerns are important in elaborating Third Cinema within the South African context. Firstly, the context within which the original conceptualisations of the term were developed are not entirely matched within our context, thus its relevance needs to be cautiously examined and its usefulness carefully negotiated. Secondly, the issue of aesthetics and the relationship of aesthetic concerns to western notions of aesthetics touches on a critical feature of the development of any epistemological basis outside of the west and begs the question as to the possibilities for the development of an aesthetic independent of western aesthetics.

The accounts of the second conference held in Birmingham in 1988 seem to indicate that the direction for dealing with these issues was focused closely on questions of identity, articulating what is called a ‘Third Scenario’ that recognises the politics of space or location. Stuart Hall proposed ‘Third Scenario’ as a way of discussing cinematic representation ‘which clearly comes from voices, people, experiences which have been … systematically marginalised, systematically displaced from the centre of the cultural industries that have dominated both the west and … the cultures of colonised peoples’.16 Bell Hooks, locating herself in a position of marginality, distinguished between ‘that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance— as location of radical openness and possibility’.17

These positions in relation to Third Cinema open up the terrain for analysing South African documentary film on the basis of the questions: who speaks? for whom? how? and in whose ‘voice’?18 Drawing conclusions about South African documentary with respect to

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14 Mention is made in some of the literature about various debates and discussions that took place in the late 1980s in Britain and the U.S. around questions of Third Cinema, suggesting that the two conferences that I deal with are only part of the broader discourse on Third Cinema.
18 I use the concept ‘voice’ here in the sense that Bill Nichols explicates it in ‘The Voice of Documentary’, Film Quarterly, 36, 3, pp. 17–30, where he proposes the need for film-makers to express their ideological positions more forcefully in the documentaries they make.
these questions, an overview of the period with which I am dealing confirms that the ‘voice’ of white male film-makers is most often represented and the subjects that are least represented in documentaries are black, rural women who may be seen, in virtually every aspect of existence, as being most marginalised. The ‘voicelessness’ of the subaltern in this context needs some focus. To some extent, film and video educational programmes are beginning to recognise the need to extend access to resources through affirmative action policies, but the largest impetus for empowering the subaltern through media in our context is coming from initiatives to develop community radio. The conceptualising and practice of ‘subaltern media’ however needs elaboration, particularly in relation to identity and subjectivity and the mediation of the spaces inhabited by the subaltern—but the breadth of this field can only be noted at this juncture.

I will now move to a large degree outside these theoretical notes to trace some significant features of the films and organisations that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. The merging and integrating of these terrains—theory and practice—cannot be satisfactorily fulfilled in this paper. Rather, my aim is the citing of possible theoretical excursions within which identity and subjectivity can be explored as crucial notions in examining the development of anti-apartheid documentary film and video, so that we may emerge with possibilities of enunciation from within our own space.

**Individual Documentaries**

The first film I will deal with is *Mayfair* which was made in 1984 on a shoestring budget, assisted by the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa, by a small collective which was concerned to document a specific event in Mayfair, a suburb of Johannesburg. The government had decided to redefine Mayfair as an Indian Group Area, in terms of the Group Areas Act. The film collective set out to make a documentary that would not only document the responses of Mayfair residents to the government’s decision but that would also defy the naturalised conventions of television documentary. The film has no title—a shot of a signboard with the name ‘Mayfair’ on it, serves as the film’s title. There is no narrator, rather the images and the voices of the residents are allowed to speak for themselves in a loosely-constructed narrative style. The camera is mostly hand-held, the images having a sense of being ‘captured’ rather than constructed—it is as if a news team is gathering footage which is subsequently loosely assembled. In this film the responsibility for the production of meaning is relegated almost entirely to the viewer.

The second example of films made by South Africans in the early 1980s is *The Two Rivers*, made by Mark Newman and Edwin Wes. By contrast with *Mayfair*, this documentary stretches the role of narrator to encompass both on-screen narration and the subject of the film—narrator and subject are collapsed into one. This is not the case throughout the film, however, and there are parts of the film which lose direction altogether when the narrator-cum-subject is seemingly absent. The film is in two parts—the first is located in Venda, a rural space, where the narrator-cum-subject reflects on his origins and that of the Venda people, while the second is in Johannesburg and Soweto, an urban space, where the ravages of urbanisation are explicated. The underlying motif of the film is that urbanisation and apartheid have destroyed the inherently harmonious Venda community. Although the

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The film tells the viewer at the beginning that it is about Rashaka Ratshitanga, the Venda poet, and the film’s narrator, stylistically the film is ‘a kaleidoscope of images’. The editing style links short individual shots into a series of sequences framed by an opening where the narrator-cum-subject introduces himself to the viewer in a direct-to-camera shot, and an ending that returns from the urban environment to the rural space. At this point Venda is exemplified by ethnographic imagery of the ‘snake’ dance, which represents the coming to puberty of young women. This closing entrenches the film’s romanticisation of rural life before urbanisation and before apartheid, especially at the point where the narrator is placed in mid-shot in the foreground of the dance imagery. Here he makes his final statement, again direct-to-camera:

So speaks grandfather’s voice softly yet loudly in the ancient rhythms of the drum, where a people tread between two worlds struggling for survival. But the teachings of our ancestors, humility and dignity, will not be overcome by the waters of the other river, on that day when the two will flow as one mighty river.

He then turns his back on the viewer and walks out of the frame—an action that, coupled with his absences from earlier parts of the film, undermines his authority as narrator.

This is a complex film text. Its style exteriorises the viewer and its construction of the subject as narrator is confusing. It is never clear whether the film’s subject is Rashaka Ratshitanga or whether it is the power of urbanisation and apartheid to destroy rural life and tradition, or whether these two themes are to be read concurrently. In addition the film’s extensive use of illustrative material that provides visual confirmation of the narrator’s comments ‘fixes’ the text’s meaning for the viewer. No-one in the film, apart from the narrator, is asked an opinion nor given the opportunity to represent individual views—people are represented as images rather than subjects and are thereby objectified.

These two examples show that films that were made in this period did not always achieve their aims within the documentary ‘movement’ against apartheid. This was not only due to the relative lack of experience in film-making but also, and perhaps more so, was a result of the extreme difficulties in gaining access to finance and resources, as well as the terrors of making anti-apartheid films within the oppressive apartheid state.

These early ‘independent’ films are an example of one of the ways that anti-apartheid documentary film and video has developed—individual documentary film-makers making one film and sometimes more, either alone or with others, but not always within structured or formal organisations. For example, in the early 1990s Liz Fish, who had been an organisationally-based community video-maker during the 1980s, made a documentary film as an ‘independent’ film-maker called The Long Journey of Clement Zulu, which was released in 1992. Stylistically it reflects her community-based approach developed in the 1980s and is one of many examples where the shifts and changes in people’s lives and relationships, both personal and political, affected the kinds of documentary film and video emerging.

Organisational Developments

While individuals and groups were making anti-apartheid documentaries a number of organisations began to emerge. In the mid to late 1980s, these organisational developments were entrenched despite the attempts by state bodies to act against them and prevent their

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21 A comment made by Edwin Wes, one of the film-makers, at a presentation about the film held at the School of Dramatic Arts, University of the Witwatersrand in the mid-1980s.
22 It is interesting to note that the film was only broadcast by the SABC at the end of 1994.
work of representing the realities of the South African experience under apartheid from a populist perspective.

The first of these was the Community Video Resource Association (CVRA) which was established in 1977 at the Adult Education Unit of the University of Cape Town. It was a response to the need for community organisations and activists to document their experiences, their work and the socio-political effects of apartheid and was catalysed by the visit of members of the Canadian Film Board’s Challenge for Change Programme. This programme had been engaged in developing methods of community film-making in working-class communities in Canada in the 1970s and had established approaches to ensuring that the means of representation was ‘in the hands of citizens’. Mark Kaplan, who established the CVRA, embarked on a programme that gave community activists access to video equipment and trained them in its use in an experiential way. As they set about documenting events, for example, he would meet them and view their material, discussing with them their approaches and decisions. Mark Kaplan was deported in the early 1980s and his successor, Liz Fish, shifted the organisation’s focus from training to doing the documentary work herself. She also facilitated the organisation’s independence from the university and changed its name to the Community Video Education Trust (CVET). CVET continued its existence through the 1980s and into the 1990s. Recently, due to organisational problems, its closing has been considered but it is now reshaping organisationally. In the time that Liz Fish directed the organisation a number of community documentaries were made. I will identify and discuss two of these.

**Bellville Community Health Project** focuses on the establishment of this community health project, ‘advertising’ it for to the Bellville community and similar communities. The documentary examines the need for community-based health projects by reflecting on the cost of hospital-based medical services and describing the Bellville Community Health Project from the community perspective. Stylistically the documentary is confused—sometimes having a community point of view represented direct-to-camera in a television news reader style, while at other times having a community representative present his or her point of view to an off-screen interviewer. These points of view are interspersed with images of community meetings about the project and with images of people from the community receiving treatment and consulting with staff at the project. The documentary attempts to make a link between the broader socio-political context and an extremely localised community-based project. In many ways it succeeds, its major weakness being the stylistic confusion and technical inabilities it displays. This was due in part to the approach of the organisation to act as ‘the people’s camera’ since Liz Fish approached the documentary work of the organisation on the basis that ‘...the community determines exactly what they want and you operate the camera and they make all the decisions’.

A documentary made by Liz Fish at CVET in the late 1980s called *Wannedan*, indicates a shift in her approach. It documents a ‘go-slow’ of the Cleansing and Transport Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA), an affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). The documentary had been commissioned by the union’s cultural officer who worked closely with Liz Fish in editing the final product. The striking feature of this documentary is that it documents differing perspectives on the union’s decision to stop the ‘go-slow’ and to accept the increase offered by management. Where documentaries made at that time by another video unit, Video News Services, were representing an entirely

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24 Interview with Liz Fish, September 1988.
26 Interview, 1988.
unified perspective on union decisions in order to mobilise workers, Wannedan takes a less seamless stance, allowing the viewer to determine his or her own position in relation to the issues under discussion.

The second significant organisational development was the establishment of Video News Services in Johannesburg in 1985 which made documentaries for the ‘urban black proletariat of South Africa’. Its documentaries focus on worker issues and worker organisation, documenting in particular, union congresses and events as well as worker strikes. It distributed these documentaries to international television networks but its major focus was their distribution within the union structures that were being represented in the documentaries themselves. It was linked with Afravision based in London. In the era of political reform which began in 1990 VNS changed its name to Afravision and engaged in more open documentary work. This included the documentary *Hlanganani: A Short History of COSATU* which was commissioned by COSATU and screened on the CCV-TV (Contemporary Community Values—Television) channel of the state-owned national television broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), in 1991. In this period Afravision was also commissioned by the African National Congress to document its history in a five-part series called *Ulibambe Lingashoni: Hold Up The Sun*. The first two parts in the series were screened on national television prior to the elections, but after complaints from the National Party, the Democratic Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party, the remaining parts were held back for screening after the elections. The Afravision collective disbanded in mid-1994.

In the mid-1980s a collective of independent film-makers called Free Film-Makers established itself organisationally. Various projects, both fiction and documentary, have been made under its auspices, many of these broadcast on channels overseas. In 1993 the *Ordinary People* seven-part series was made in collaboration with Weekly Mail Television, and screened in a late night slot on the TV1 channel of the SABC. At the time it was described by an ANC spokesperson as ‘premature’ suggesting that it was ‘a cosmetic action by the SABC to gain credibility in the run-up to an election’. This hints at the enormity of the debates that have been taking place around questions of access, particularly since the new SABC Board was established in 1993. A second thirteen-part series of *Ordinary People* was broadcast late in 1994, again on TV1 in a late night slot. In May 1995, marking the passing of one year since the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as President of the South African Government of National Unity, a documentary called *A Day with the President* was broadcast under the umbrella of *Ordinary People* in the prime time slot immediately after the TV1 news at 8.30 p.m. New meaning was given to the term ‘ordinary’ in the South African context on that night. Until then this series had represented another trend in South African documentary—one to which documentary film-makers have aspired in the 1980s but that only in the post-apartheid period was able to he fully realised: the representation of ‘ordinary people’ on national television screens. This is a complex issue since it could he argued that the documentaries of the VNS collective and CVET were representations of ‘ordinary people’—workers and communities. On the one hand this is indeed the case, even though these representations were mostly politically expedient. On the other hand, precisely because of the political nature and basis of the projects making these documentaries, they were representations of representatives of ‘the masses’. In the political times of the 1980s this was important, now in the 1990s when the politics of unity has given way to the politics of difference, documentary film-making can itself become more differentiated. This might seem to suggest that the *Ordinary People* series has not had a political basis. On the

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27 An informal comment made to me by Brian Tilley, a member of the VNS collective.
contrary, the task of representing seemingly ‘ordinary people’ within the extremely politicised South African context of the 1990s becomes fraught with political overtones, even where the ordinariness of the individual represented is blatantly exposed. An example of this is the representations of the farmer in an episode of the first series entitled Tooth of the Times, mentioned earlier.

After the ‘Culture in Another South Africa’ Conference held in Amsterdam in 1987 the Film and Allied Workers Organisation (FAWO) was formed, in September 1988, and its concern with increasing access to film and video education was made manifest in a community video education project, which developed into the Community Video School.29 Recently this School has broadened its mission and is now called the Newtown Film and Television School.30 The aims of this School embrace not only the provision of education of film education to people previously marginalised from film and video education, but also the provision of opportunities for telling the stories that have been silenced by apartheid, as well as to enable new aesthetics to emerge. It was not the only educational project to emerge in the 1980s however, rather a number of projects and programmes that emerged within the anti-apartheid documentary ‘movement’ testify to the perceived need for educational opportunities to extend the range of accessibility. Some of these programmes include those of the Afrika Cultural Centre, Dynamic Images, VNS, Free Film-Makers, the audio-visual unit of the South African Council for Higher Education (SACHED), as well as a number of university-based programmes.

Towards Conclusions

I have attempted a rather fragmented and abbreviated exploration of trends in South African anti-apartheid documentary film and video in relation to selected theoretical debates on identity and subjectivity. It is, of necessity, an unsatisfactory account—the transitional space of the pre- and post-election periods has opened up numerous questions about who has access to the media and in what forms, and about where the power to mediate our worlds for national audiences lies. There are numerous related questions—how ‘national’ is television in South Africa? Is television the only choice for presenting documentary’? How might other forms of production and distribution for wide audiences be developed and sustained? At the same time, the theoretical horizons that we could reach have hardly been seen and there is an urgency to create new theoretical work from within our own ‘hybridity’. This paper is a small excursion towards those horizons.


30 The school is presently under threat of closure since its funding, initially from Channel 4 Television and more recently from major overseas funders, has stopped. Along with other non-governmental organisations it is a financial impasse where foreign funding developed under apartheid is now being channelled by foreign governments into the Reconstruction and Development Programme, and where governing structures have not been sufficiently established to allocate financial resources.