

**FILM VIEWING IN SOUTH AFRICA IN 2007: SOME VEXED QUESTIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This article examines the film-going habits and tastes of the South African public, focusing on which films generated the most income and were viewed by the largest public during 2007. It uses the data generated from cinema-going revenues and television viewership of film to engage the theoretical argument between Bourdieu's notion of habitus and the notion of cultural omnivorousness developed by Peterson and others. The article finds that elements of both Bourdieu's and Peterson's positions can be supported from the figures. In particular, the figures of channel switching among the wealthiest and highest educated viewers (indicated by the highest Living Standards Measurements or LSMs) show that this portion of the television audience shows considerable "restlessness" or range in viewing, supporting Peterson's findings that high cultural standing is often equated with cultural range rather than snobbish limitation. Yet this restlessness or lack of loyalty seems to work according to positions that accord quite well with Bourdieu's notion of habitus. In other words, higher LSMs are not equally restless with all cultural products and show a particular impatience with many South African films, to which lower LSMs are far more loyal — though it may be restricted channel choice that accounts for much of this difference. This study thus opens a methodological inquiry into film tastes and film consumption in a developing country and also offers, through an examination of channel switching, a new insight into the debate around cultural omnivores and taste.*

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## INTRODUCTION

South Africa, unusually for developing countries, has a set of sophisticated commercial tools for measuring cultural consumption. One great advantage of this research is that it has been conducted for many years, allowing longitudinal comparisons and examinations of how audiences and their preferences have changed and developed over time. In addition, various commercial researchers have developed innovative ways of measuring changes in audience tastes and preferences and in predicting future developments – and are usually, in this author’s experience, open and generous with academic researchers.<sup>1</sup> Yet the academic literature in South Africa – at least in the humanities – seems largely ignorant of this data and research, meaning that academic research on cultural consumption, particularly of media, is for the most part underdeveloped and impressionistic. As I have argued in a review of one of the local collections of essays on mass media in South Africa, the cultural studies bias of most local media scholarship all too often ignores the major bodies of evidence available (Glenn 2004).

In trying to answer a very tight question suggested by the editor of this journal (What was the most popular film in South Africa in 2007?), this essay can only suggest the theoretical stakes involved in judging cultural consumption in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in the developing world in particular, point to some of the methodological complexities in trying to answer this question, examine the industry evidence, and point to possibilities for further research.

### The theoretical stakes

The most sophisticated sociological attempt to map modern cultural consumption is undoubtedly that of Pierre Bourdieu, and notably his *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984). In this work, Bourdieu examined a huge body of data, much of it dating from the 1960s in France, to claim that there were patterns of cultural consumption linked to background, gender, education and professional and economic status – the sum of ingrained influences he categorised as the *habitus*. In many ways, this analysis, which probably shares something with Lazarsfeld’s concept of latent class analysis (Sintas & Álvarez 2002), gives us our most fruitful way of using local data as it suggests ways of going beyond categories such as social and economic status (conventionally measured in South Africa by LSMs or Living Standards Measurements), language, or race.

We can note some of the obvious problems in applying Bourdieu to the post-colonial situation. He was analysing a fairly homogeneous, mono-lingual society with universal literacy and a strong unitary educational system. He did not have to worry about foreign influences or cultural imperialism or multi-lingualism or globalisation or consider a media universe that was as fragmented as ours is. Though Bourdieu never, as far as I know, examined the problem of multiple fields directly, he did, in an interview he gave me shortly after the French version of *Distinction* was published, say that even in a society like post-colonial Algeria, the literary field would assemble the different traditions of the past into one united field. Insofar as the commercial analysts are concerned, this is the situation for media here and now: All media are analysed into one body of information.

Bourdieu was also dealing with a simpler media world. In his work, for example, he was able to draw a clear distinction between cinema and television viewership, showing that the former was more linked to reading novels and higher cultural status, while the latter was seen as a more typically escapist and a lower cultural status form of consumption. In a world where most films are undoubtedly seen on television screens, and where many television series (such as *The Sopranos* or *The West Wing* or *The Simpsons*) have a greater sophistication than most popular films, these judgments seem to come from a simpler cultural landscape. And might it also be that the French are more hierarchical and judgmental about cultural consumption than other nationalities? Can one generalise about patterns of consumption across cultures and eras?

Recent work, based on several groundbreaking articles by Richard Peterson and various co-authors, suggests that in many modern cases, it may be that the highbrow snob and cultural dichotomies of old have given way to a more modern phenomenon and figure: the cultural omnivore (Peterson & Simkus 1992; Peterson & Kern 1995; Peterson & Kern 1996). In this understanding of cultural consumption, the privileged figure expresses his or her cultural being by sampling widely across culture or cultures rather than sticking to a safe zone of cultural exclusivity. Nor does this seem to be only a North American phenomenon, as research from many cultures suggests that modern media – and, undoubtedly, technological devices like the remote control and satellite television – may be a common factor in breaking up old divisions of culture (Alderson *et al.* 2007; Chan & Goldthorpe 2007; Torche 2007; Sintas & Álvarez 2002; Sintas & Álvarez 2006).

In its simplified form, this suggests that we have two possibilities. At the extreme versions, we have quite clearly defined strata (an intellectual with high symbolic capital who goes to Cinema Nouveau, watches art movies, reads serious novels, watches little or no TV, and attends events like ballet and opera, along with the wealthy person with less symbolic capital who watches and probably plays golf, watches financial channels on DSTV or mainstream Hollywood material, and those with less financial and symbolic capital who watch wrestling on e.tv, read the tabloids, and watch whatever movie is available), or we have a cheerful cultural promiscuity (almost everybody channel hopping and watching big sporting events and Chuck Norris and the latest Hollywood action movie).

While research on South African cinema viewing allows us the chance to test these models against each other, it should be clear that they are by no means mutually exclusive. It may be that, as Sintas and Álvarez found in Spain, Bourdieu's model applies more strongly to older consumers while Peterson's omnivores appear more strongly among younger consumers – particularly given the ways in which young South Africans have been much more heavily exposed to international global film culture than their elders. It should also be clear that cultural omnivorousness may simply be the result of means: One cannot sample a range of films without a television set, let alone satellite television, or a DVD player. (Some recent industry research suggests, for example, that the vast majority of SABC viewers are frustrated by their lack of choice

rather than contented with it.) And cultural omnivorousness may not tell us very much about habitual or preferred behaviour. Does it mean that omnivores sample a wide range on an ongoing basis in a kind of itchy cultural consumptive restlessness, or sample briefly before settling on a repertoire that may be quite compatible with Bourdieu's *habitus*? The South African data, which breaks film viewing on television down into 15-minute segments, allows us to draw quite complex conclusions about the relationship between cultural and social background and cultural sampling – and, thus, cultural omnivorousness.

While my own work in literary and media studies draws more strongly on Bourdieu (Glenn & Knaggs 2008; Glenn 1994), this article is methodologically pragmatic or agnostic, willing to combine the best insights from Bourdieu and Peterson. Peterson's work certainly resonates with the desire, particularly among young South Africans in the new South Africa, to experience a range of opportunities, to break out of cultural confines, to experience living in change. Yet, might this be typical only of certain groups: youth, upwardly mobile, linguistically open? The work of Burgess and Mattes suggests that something like this might be the case – that, in other words, the *habitus* of young South Africans is to be omnivorous (Burgess *et al.* 2002) While the omnivore model may suggest that we have moved to a more democratic, shared, open culture, it may be that we have exchanged one form of cultural division (linguistic, racial) for another (class and financial). But what does the evidence show?

## **TWO APPROACHES TO FILM POPULARITY**

There seem to be two ways to measure popularity: The amount of money the film made, or how many people saw it. Neither of these is easy to gauge, for reasons that will become clear.

### **Show me the money**

If we want to measure the most popular film of 2007, the available research suggests Hollywood's major concern: revenue. Thus the Motion Picture Producers' Association (<http://www.mpa.org/researchStatistics.asp>) announced the five top grossing box office successes of 2007, where for the first time, all four top films grossed over \$300 million: *Spider-Man 3*, *Shrek the Third*, *Transformers*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, while *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* was just below that figure. While this record figure might seem a cause for celebration, cautious observers pointed out that the record gross reflected a dollar that had lost ground against currencies like the Euro and increased prices rather than increased attendance at cinemas. The average American only sees six movies in cinemas a year and consumes about 150 times more audio-visual material at home than in the movie house.

In South Africa, figures provided by Ster-Kinekor show that the leading 2007 box office success was *Shrek the Third* with other mainstream Hollywood films some way behind.

**TABLE 1: LEADING FILMS IN SOUTH AFRICA IN 2007**

	Release	Title	No. of prints	Life to date		Attendances
				Net	Gross	
1	29/06/2007	<i>Shrek the Third</i>	111	19 851 557	22 630 775	1 091 693
2	11/07/2007	<i>Harry Potter &amp; The Order of the Phoenix</i>	87	12 266 849	13 984 208	620 000
3	28/12/2007	<i>I am Legend</i>	65	12 042 187	13 728 093	650 471
4	21/09/2007	<i>Ratatouille</i>	80	11 346 046	12 934 493	636 308
5	31/08/2007	<i>Rush Hour 3</i>	70	11 171 453	12 735 456	691 571

[Chart courtesy of Ster-Kinekor]

*Shrek the Third* made R22.6 million (including VAT) at the box office with almost 1.1 million people having seen the film – with attendance more than 50% greater than that for the other top films. Overall, the cinema industry generated R570 million in 2007 with attendances of 27.1 million. But, given a total population of over 40 million, it is clear that cinema attendance per person is far lower than the American norm and that going to cinemas is not the major way of consuming film here either. Another way of putting the comparison is that the top grossing film here made about 1% of what it made in the US, even though our population is about 15% of theirs.

What the South African list suggests is that the cinema audience here, like that in the US, is heavily driven by treats for middle-class children and by large budget special effects films. The success of *I am Legend* and *Ratatouille* suggests also that the audience for movie-going may overall be more sophisticated than the average American audience.

Another point worth making is that film success here does to some extent a self-fulfilling prophecy, as shown by the number of prints ordered. Past experience, international success, and in some cases prior research determine how many prints of a particular film local distributors commit to and this, in turn, shapes how widely the film in question is shown and, quite probably, how many people come to see it. This is not to suggest that any highly hyped film will work, but it does remind us of the huge proportion of Hollywood costs devoted to marketing, pre-release publicity, and the promotion of hit films.

In dealing with total revenue from a film, there are a host of questions. The US box office is now only about a third of total international box office, and then box office revenue is only a minority (one estimate is 20%) of the total revenue of a film. After international box office come DVD sales, both to consumers and to DVD rental agencies – both locally and internationally. After that new films would be sold to pay-TV channels, then eventually to broadcast television channels. Thus, it may be that the

final success of a film may only be known much later than the year of its release. One example is the ongoing success of films in the Bourne series in the US with new releases seeming to trigger an interest in earlier films in the series. Nor do we have any reliable figures for the amount of money made from pornographic movies, either distributed through DVDs or on the Internet, though 2007 seemed to mark a year of crisis for the DVD porn industry, along with estimates that the adult-movie industry would try to turn to the Third World for revenue, given the trend in the US for free or very cheap broadband material to replace paid for porn.

While we have reasonably reliable figures for box office in the US and internationally, and some informed figures for DVD sales in the US, little material seems available on other sales and costs and any figures would be complicated by issues such as trade confidentiality. And, once again, sales figures raise complex issues. In the US, the lavish and expensive multi-DVD BBC documentary series *Planet Earth* would have rated in the top ten grossing DVDs, but in terms of units sold, it ranked only 40<sup>th</sup>. Are certain kinds of DVDs likely to be watched by bigger audiences or more often? In South Africa, a recent complaint has been made against local DVD rental companies for using parallel imports and thus “invading” the time which should be devoted to local box office. There seems no reliable way in South Africa of aggregating income from DVD sales or rentals as there is no central body or dominant industry player able to give a clear sign of total trends. Local franchises seem to keep their own figures and so we can only guess at DVD rentals from other data that will appear later.

The major international trend now, however, will be for the whole cycle of distribution to be compressed and globalised. Already, the bulk of Hollywood films are released simultaneously across the globe to avoid piracy and the problem of legitimate local vendors and movie-house owners suffering from that. This is likely to make it much easier to calculate global appeal and trends in future than in the past, where there have been quite long delays between US and South African distribution.

### **Viewership of films**

When we get to the question of gauging the popularity of a film by viewership, we have far more useful and sophisticated local material. Through the South Africa Advertising Research Foundation’s (SAARF) AMPS profiles (All Media Products Survey), we have a strong indication of how many South Africans attend films in movie houses, or watch rented or their own DVDs, and we also have, in their television ratings or TAMS measurements of which the most popular films shown on television in South African in 2007.

Yet we face tough methodological difficulties. Do we judge a film by total attendance, or by individual viewers, discounting, for example, the legendary viewers who watched *Titanic* countless times? What are we to make of DVDs where we have some indication of how many people have watched movies during the previous week, fortnight, and month, but very little idea of how many movies they have watched? What about illegal copies of material? (In the US, there is even a website that calculates how many pirated

copies have been made, and here the figure approximates the best seller list fairly closely.) What are we to make of the measurements of television viewership which use sophisticated measurements to indicate how much of any film viewers watch? Are two people watching the first half of a movie and then turning off really equivalent to one viewer who sat through the whole thing in a movie house? More importantly, perhaps, is the question of when we judge the success or failure of a film. If many of the 2007 box office releases will only be shown on “free” television in South Africa in 2008 or 2009 or even later, might it be too early to tell what the most “popular” film of 2007 was? Are there filmic classics, whose worth has to be measured, not over the short term, but over decades – a *Tsotsi* or *Little Miss Sunshine* that will, in time, come to be seen as a *Casablanca* or *Bicycle Thief*?

Let us try to place the different kinds of viewership in relation to each other. In the US, the figures for 2007 suggest that the average American spent less than 1% of time viewing filmed material, both television and cinema, in movie houses – 13 hours per year of a massive total of nearly 2000 hours. Nor did DVD rented or owned viewership come out as a major factor, reaching only an average of 64 hours per year. The vast bulk of viewing was of cable or satellite and broadcast TV, with consumer Internet broadcasts far more significant than either movie-going or DVD viewership.

#### **South Africans as cinema goers**

The South African 2007 AMPS figures give a very clear picture of cinema attendance. Of about 31 million possible cinema goers aged 16 and over, only about 1.7 million had attended a cinema during the preceding four weeks, and 559 000 in the previous seven days. If we return to the Ster-Kinekor figures, our average annual attendance in cinema is less than one viewing per viewer over 16. Cinema attendance is strongly positively correlated with income and with youth. In LSMs 1-5, cinema attendance is negligible, under 1% of the group, till LSM 4 (1.4%), picking up to 5.1% in LSM 5 and rising sharply till, in LSM 10, some 24% of viewers had attended cinema during the past four weeks. Cinema attendance (over the past four weeks) also seems to drop steadily with age, from about 9% in the 16-24 age group to 2.4% in the 50+ age group.

We thus see that if we stick with box office as the indication of popularity in South Africa, we will have a sample that is doubly skewed: towards a wealthy, still predominantly non-African, youthful sample. It is highly likely that this group will find the dominant international media of the day attractive and follow international trends and tastes quite naturally.

#### **South African DVD and VHS viewership of film**

The AMPS 2007 figures for hired video or DVD viewership during the past four weeks came as a surprise to this author. Of 31 million potential viewers, only 3%, or fewer than a million (932 000), were estimated to have hired material or watched hired material in places like hotels – and, of course, many DVD or video hires are not of films but of television series. The figure for viewing during the past seven days, however, was higher than that for going to cinema (726 000 against 559 000). It seems, in other words, that hired video or DVD has fewer total adherents than movie-going does, but

they are watching more regularly. Given the prevalence of video hire outlets across South Africa, it seems likely that many of those watching are watching a significant number of films, but the AMPS figures do not give this detail.

The low numbers reported as hiring film material is particularly surprising given the very high number of households that report having a DVD player and/or video player. Of some 11 million households, over 5 million (46%) reported having a DVD player in the home, while over 2 million (22%) report having home theatre systems. It may be that in economically tough times, the main function of the home theatre system is to make television viewing more attractive, while the DVD player, as an increasingly affordable item, is used only occasionally, but it seems more likely that kinds of viewing are taking place that the figures are not capturing accurately.

What, then, are these people watching? The usual suspects would be bought DVDs, pirated material, and perhaps pornography. As the South African market for bought DVDs seems relatively small, it may be that the phenomenon of “ripped” DVDs of hit series like *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Desperate Housewives*, or *Prison Break* may account for a lot of use of the DVD player. The viewing of international material pirated off the Internet and then exchanged among friends is clearly widespread among students and the IT community in South Africa – one graduate student pointed out that the international hit series *Heroes* was voted second most popular series on a local Facebook group even before the series had been shown in South Africa. This discrepancy between the potential for DVD viewing and the hiring of DVDs needs further investigation and it is a pity that the SAARF All Media Products Survey will no longer include questions about the use of DVDs.

Consumption of film through DVD and video is strongly linked, not surprisingly, to income, reaching some 10.8% of the LSM 10 group, or 208 000 as opposed to LSMs 1-4 (all under 1%). The correlation of viewership with age is not as marked as with cinema going, however, with the 25-34 age group at 3.6% of the group marginally ahead of the 16-24 and 35-49 groups, who come in at about 3%. The over 50 age group, once again, shows a drop – to 1.5% of the age cohort.

What we do not know is whether the use of DVDs and videos for young children might show some surprising trends. This, according to industry sources, is the major genre for bought DVDs, and in the US, for example, the animated comedy *Happy Feet* in 2007 outsold movies that had done better at the box office. Jan du Plessis suggests that one reason that Disney children’s specials do not do better when shown on television is that so many of the potential viewers have the film available and thus are able to watch in their own time – a case of children driving the on-demand viewing phenomenon.

We do not, in other words, have any strong way of measuring viewership of films through DVDs, but it seems likely that most DVD hiring agencies take the lead from Hollywood success and buy stock accordingly. While there may be a few minority or specialist stores such as DVD Nouveau or others dealing with classics or independent film, there seems little reason to suggest that DVD viewership here will do much to alter the pecking order established by box office success.

### Watching films on television

When it comes to film viewership, we face the methodological challenges mentioned earlier: How to judge partial or fragmented viewership of a film and what to do about the time lag between box office and distribution on “free” television. In addition, there are contingent problems which are central to the success of a film: the amount of publicity given to a forthcoming film; what its competition is; when it is shown.

Nonetheless, an analysis of the top 15 rated films shown on South African television in 2007 reveals some key phenomena:

**TABLE 2: TOP 15 RATED FILMS ON SOUTH AFRICAN TELEVISION IN 2007**

Rank	Title	Channel	Audience minute %	Audience total weight	Audience reach %	Audience total reach %	Year of release
1	<i>Tsotsi</i>	SABC 1	20.5	5,527,534	30.4%	8,203,194	2005
2	<i>Sarafina</i>	SABC 1	19.4	5,232,366	28.5%	7,668,781	1992
3	<i>Rush Hour</i>	SABC 1	15.4	4,154,529	28.2%	7,588,842	1998
4	<i>Mr Bones</i>	SABC 1	15.2	4,087,154	26.7%	7,181,459	2001
5	<i>Malunde</i>	SABC 1	14.3	3,845,325	27.4%	7,392,418	2001
6	<i>In Hell</i>	e.tv	14.2	3,825,855	24.7%	6,648,078	2003
7	<i>Hijack Stories</i>	SABC 1	13.9	3,738,134	26.4%	7,099,583	2000
8	<i>Like Mike</i>	e.tv	13.8	3,714,352	24.7%	6,659,808	2002
9	<i>Die another day</i>	e.tv	13.5	3,635,330	27.7%	7,471,703	2002
10	<i>Disorderlies</i>	SABC 1	13.3	3,583,458	24.8%	6,678,219	1987
11	<i>Smal Street</i>	SABC 1	16.5	3,184,364	21.0%	4,044,642	
12	<i>Noko</i>	SABC 1	15.0	2,893,801	20.4%	3,941,300	
13	<i>The Burden</i>	SABC 1	14.5	2,789,348	22.1%	4,265,888	
14	<i>Jackie Chan's First Strike</i>	SABC 1	13.1	2,571,447	24.8%	4,855,856	1996
15	<i>Baas van die Plaas</i>	SABC 1	13.3	2,565,166	19.5%	3,772,155	

*Film viewing in South Africa in 2007: Some vexed questions*

The columns reflect the following in order: the ranking, based on weighted viewership or the AMR (Audience Minute Rating percentage shown in the 4<sup>th</sup> column), the title, the channel, the AMR as a %, the AMR as a weighted number, the total reach as a percentage, the total reach as an absolute figure, and the year of release. (The four films without release dates are all local short films for which little information is available.) The relationship between weighted audience and reach is important as it gives us key indicators about channel hopping or incomplete viewing and thus a useful proxy for cultural omnivorousness.

In the case of *Tsotsi*, for example, the ratio between weighted audience and reach is about two thirds. In the AMPS figures, over 8 million South Africans watched some of *Tsotsi*, but in weighting those figures for those who stopped early, switched channels, or came in late, the weighted figure drops to the equivalent of over 5.5 million viewers. This retention or loyalty or “stickability” factor is higher for the very short films (for obvious reasons) and the South African material than for old action movies, like *Die another day*, where the ratio between weighted and reach is less than half. (Candice Ulrich of AGB Nielsen points out that this factor is seen as increasingly important in industry calculations.)

What conclusions can we draw from this list? The first is that there are three genres that dominate: South African long films; South African short films; and action movies. (*Disorderlies*, as a comic action movie, suggests that this genre could be exploited further.) One could argue that *Sarafina* is a Hollywood rather than a local film, but as it was based on a local musical and has strong South African associations, it seems easier to treat it as a local film. The second conclusion is that the major audience for film in South Africa is the SABC 1 audience, with e.tv pushing into contention – though it should be noted that a significant portion of the viewers of SABC 1 and e.tv watch the channels through DStv. (The reach of Spike Lee’s *Inside Man* on M-Net, its most successful film of 2007, was only about 10% of the reach of *Tsotsi*.) The third conclusion is that this is an audience with a hunger for South African material, as a closer examination of *Tsotsi* and *Sarafina* reveals.

In the case of *Tsotsi*, the Oscar-award winning foreign film for 2005, the SABC was, unusually, able to bid to show the film before it had gone to pay-television. They paid heavily to show the film much sooner than any public broadcaster would usually have been able to as the makers, as an independent studio, did not have to honour the usual Hollywood position that pay-TV sales take precedence over public broadcasters. Although the SABC paid a premium for the rights, Jan du Plessis argues that it did not do enough to promote the film as a premium showing in August 2007. Had it been heavily promoted, it seems likely that it might have beaten all comers quite handily. In the case of *Sarafina*, it clearly benefited from its scheduling – on 30 December in the midst of the holiday season on a Sunday night – and it showed even higher retention rates of viewers than *Tsotsi*.

We can thus probably conclude that the most watched film in South Africa in 2007 was *Tsotsi*, which is a positive note for South African cinema. (It received strong ratings in 2008 when shown on SABC 3 in March 2008, emerging as the top-rated film shown on SABC 3 in the first quarter of 2008, with a weighted rating of about half the SABC audience.) Had the short films been omitted, a film like *Yesterday* might have crept into

the top ratings as it had a weighted reach of over 13%. This suggests that there is a hunger for top quality material about South Africa, perhaps stimulated in the SABC 1 audience by hit series such as *Generations*.

### CULTURAL OMNIVORES, CHANNEL SWITCHERS AND CULTURAL CROSSOVERS

But what of the theoretical debate? When we delve more deeply into the figures and the ways in which various groups move in and out of programmes, it seems that we have several overlapping demographics or indeed movie-watching classes. The figures make some trends very clear:

**TABLE 3: TRENDS IN MOVIE-WATCHING CLASSES**

	Description (grouped)	Adults: LSM 9-10				Adults: LSM 9-10			
		AMR %	AMR	RCH %	RCH	AMR %	AMR	RCH %	RCH
1	<i>Tsotsi</i>	3.70	146,420	13.1	515,008	15.3	642,709	30.1	1,263,521
2	<i>Sarafina</i>	2.50	102,199	8.3	333,654	15.7	632,498	25.7	1,035,965
3	<i>Rush Hour</i>	5.30	209,631	12.1	483,374	16.4	657,535	31.1	1,251,320
4	<i>Mr Bones</i>	5.50	217,605	14.7	580,335	12.1	496,285	26.0	1,068,232
5	<i>Malunde</i>	3.40	132,715	13.7	538,225	8.9	371,811	23.6	984,523
6	<i>In Hell</i>	12	477,100	21.7	861,114	16.7	684,600	29.3	1,205,237
7	<i>Hijack Stories</i>	2.00	77,150	9.1	357,704	13.8	571,995	27.2	1,125,368
8	<i>Like Mike</i>	6.50	258,127	17.8	707,550	17.3	709,550	29.2	1,200,164
9	<i>Die another day</i>	10.4	409,606	24.0	947,611	16.8	684,507	32.0	1,303,993
10	<i>Disorderlies</i>	2.40	93,243	8.9	349,883	10.2	417,662	22.1	904,960
11	<i>Smal Street</i>	3.40	125,834	5.3	196,627	11.9	415,001	18.0	631,460
12	<i>Noko</i>	2.90	106,277	5.7	210,742	13.7	482,928	19.1	674,337
13	<i>The Burden</i>	4.30	159,834	7.4	274,549	13.9	491,302	21.5	758,229
14	<i>First Strike</i>	5.10	202,287	11.8	466,960	11.7	454,596	26.7	1,042,828
15	<i>Baas van die Plaas</i>	3.00	110,735	5.9	218,221	11.0	386,494	18.2	636,513

The first point to make is that this is decidedly a mass and not an elite audience. The weighted audience for a film like *Tsotsi* among the wealthiest and best educated audience, the LSM 9-10 segment, is only 3.7%, though the reach was a hefty 13.1%. We also see that the highest LSM audience has very little taste for South African material. In the case of the longer South African films, the retention or “stickability” factor is only about 25-30%. In other words, about an equivalent of one in four high LSM viewers watches the whole film, as opposed to two out of three for all viewers. In the case of the middle of the road James Bond action thriller, *Die another day*, the weighted factor is about 43% of the total viewership, while of the longer films, the Jean-Claude van Damme prison action movie *In Hell* proved the most “stickable” with the weighted audience equalling some 55% of the total reach.

As we drop in LSMs to LSM 7-8, we see a slightly different adherence factor. A film like *Sarafina* does much better, with its weighted audience at over 60% of its total reach, while *Tsotsi* holds half its audience. The percentage holding onto *In Hell* is almost identical to the higher LSM audience, suggesting that in action movie tastes, these groups, or significant sub-groups within them, are very similar. If we drop down to the LSM 5-6, then the weighted total proportion to reach is much higher throughout, but with a difference that is most strongly marked with *Tsotsi*, where over 70% of the total reach is recorded for the film as a whole and nearly 70% for *Sarafina*. In the case of LSM 1-4, though the universe is smaller and some of the figures less reliable, the figure is roughly 75%. These differences are even more marked if we look at the figure for English speakers (mostly white and Indian South Africans) where the numbers viewing are much lower and the weighted ratio for a film like *Tsotsi* drops to almost 20% of the reach and to 15% or less for *Sarafina*. Afrikaans or both language speakers (typically white or Coloured South Africans) have higher absolute ARs and also “stickability”.

We could use these figures to support both the Bourdieu and the Peterson perspectives. Clearly, wealthier viewers have more choices and are less likely to watch a film through, suggesting that cultural omnivores have remote controls and use them to travel through channels, sampling a range of material. But, at the same time, they are not equally likely to abandon all films or skip through all films on an equal basis.

It seems clear that South African material here is not seen as being as desirable by the higher LSMs, suggesting that the wealth of material at their disposal and their cultural position distances them from local productions or material seen as dealing primarily with black South Africans or even multi-cultural situations here (as in the case of *Malunde*). English-speaking South Africans seem even more distant from local material than other groups.

We could suggest that Bourdieu’s original insights might still be worth exploring here. It seems clear that in many black households, viewership of television (whether of news or other programmes) is a family affair – in part because of economic and space constraints, in part because of lack of choices. In this situation, it makes much more sense that if a film is switched on, it will be watched through by all the members of a

household. In the case of a more privileged household, with other entertainment options (computer games, other television sets, Internet, books, iPods), it may be that an individual “sampling” or idle flipping through channels mode may predominate. The style of watching is thus something that would benefit from more anthropological investigation, but Bourdieu’s argument that cultural capital manifests itself in a kind of aesthetic or even playful or knowing style of watching seems worth further investigation.

Second, it may be that many some black South Africans felt that they should over report or even watch South African material viewership out of cultural patriotism, particularly as *Tsotsi* had won an Oscar. But it seems more likely that this increased viewership rather than reported viewership.

Does this cultural distance in ways of viewing film suggest that we are condemned to an ongoing cultural apartheid, destined never to share the same culture, with white and/or wealthy viewers indifferent or hostile to South African material or productions? Some evidence certainly suggests that South Africans remain racially and linguistically divided, particularly in their attitudes to what we might call cultural and social politics. In Elihu Katz’s terms, we have not been delivered from, but into, segmentation (Katz 1996). Even in watching the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, audiences remained divided with figures and racial divisions in some ways very similar to those watching South African films like *Tsotsi*. It may be that the local Afrikaans and African-language audiences are more loyal to local productions and that English-language material that is palpably South African or draws on other languages will benefit from this kind of loyalty, while English speakers are more likely to see South African cultural products simply as one offering among others.

Yet there is certainly evidence that South Africans share a good deal of their film culture and that this culture is one of the closest things we have to a common culture. Considerable evidence suggests that Hollywood genres, conventions and production values dominate. In their reactions to television advertising, according to local media analysts Millward Brown South Africa (formerly Impact Information), South Africans have been becoming more similar to one another.

## CONCLUSION

Are there film genres or figures with a genuine appeal across racial and economic groupings? Might it be that they give us an idea of what South African films should be to reach a large local audience across racial barriers, or what kinds of foreign films or figures might offer models?

Two figures are worth considering: Leon Schuster and Chuck Norris. Schuster’s film *Mr Bones* did well at box office, was shown widely on DSTv, and drew large black and lower LSM audiences. What did Schuster do right? In playing a range of South African roles, perhaps Schuster makes fun of local identities in a way that people find liberating or intriguing, allowing people both to claim him as one of them yet feel unthreatened by him.

Similarly, Chuck Norris's long-running series, *Walker, Texas Ranger*, has proved more or less impervious to opposition as a late-night e.tv series, drawing a surprising number of high LSM DStv viewers. Jan du Plessis says ruefully that he has thrown everything at it (including *Dexter* and *The Tudors*), but that Walker rules. Clearly also, Chuck Norris has entered some kind of mythic status which helps drive a mix of amused and self-mocking admiration. Recently, e.tv reached the end of this series, only to announce that they would start the whole cycle all over again.

It may be that South Africans are looking for a genre which is at once strongly African, but also optimistic and a lot gentler than most local offerings. Jan du Plessis points out that when given a choice on Sunday nights, most M-Net viewers prefer romantic comedies to sterner stuff such as *Munich* or heavy dramas. If one were to predict, it seems that something like Alexander McCall Smith's *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, soon to be a film and 13 part detective series, might be the kind of thing to unite South African viewers.

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#### *Endnotes*

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