

Towards a Ghetto Fabulous Township Aesthetic in South Africa: Neoliberal and Nation-Building Archetypes in DStv's *Lokshin Bioskop* and eTV's *eKasi: Our Stories*

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Abstract

Television films in South Africa such as the series *Lokshin Bioskop* and *eKasi: Our Stories* represent the township space as fabulous and rife with economic opportunity. This is in contrast to the representations that are often depicted by mainstream film, in which the township space is portrayed as manifested with crime, unemployment and decay as in the case of *Hijack Stories*, *Wooden Camera* and *Tsotsi*. This study demonstrates the way in which neoliberal and nation-building archetypes are central in the creation of a ghetto fabulous representation of blackness and the township space. The study employs a close textual analysis of *Taxi Cheeseboy* and *Maid for Me*. It is informed by the “ghetto fabulous genre of black film” by Mukherjee in its reading of these new forms of grassroots expression. Moreover, the study delves into the representation of a post-apartheid township amidst the economic and social woes faced by the majority of its dwellers who are still significantly underprivileged. The selected films represent the township exclusively from its quasi-suburban areas which promulgate a picture of a township that has not been neglected by gentrification in post-1994 South Africa.

Keywords: television films, township space, ghetto fabulous, post-apartheid South Africa, middle-class aspirations, representation

Introduction

Post-apartheid South Africa has led to the implementation of several neoliberal economic policies while nation-building remains central to the government in the creation of a progressive South Africa. This study demonstrates the way in which neoliberal and nation-building archetypes are central to the euphoric representation of the township and blackness. The township in the films, *Taxi Cheeseboy* by Digital Satellite Television (DStv) and *Maid for Me* by eTV, is represented as a space that has developed through the use of its quasi-suburban spaces as film location. Less developed spaces such as informal settlements are omitted. This kind of representation of the township space and black identity by television is not a new phenomenon but it emanated from the late 1970s. Television and film were indispensable to apartheid in the plot to co-opt the black majority into a partnership with capital through the provision of dramas and documentaries that glorified middle-class aspirations (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1989). During apartheid, the National Party (NP) government, through the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), was able to create television content that supported the national interest. The B-Scheme film initiative created films that were helmed by white film-makers who failed to rigorously engage the politics of apartheid¹.

Mhlambi (2012) reflects on the way in which African languages television dramas of the mid-1980s were deployed to promote policies of neoliberalism with the main objective being to co-opt the black township middle class into an alliance with capital. In this study, I argue that aspirational narratives similar to those arising from the 1980s African languages television dramas are rife, depicting a utopian society that has progressed significantly from the end of apartheid. Moreover, the inclination by the films to represent middle-class standards leads to the conclusion that the texts propagate the government agenda of proving that black mobility has been on the rise since 1994. The omission of poor spaces conceals township realities and points to a new fetishisation with gentrified spaces that depict capitalism as triumphant. Furthermore, the fetishisation with neoliberal principles and nation-building by so-called “popular film” in the context of *eKasi: Our Stories* and *Lokshin Bioskop* seem to be lucrative business justifying advertising spending and promising a progressive career path for novice film-makers. Against this background, the following question is posed: In what way is the township represented through narratives and aesthetics that are aligned with neoliberalism and nation-building?

1 The B-Scheme subsidy was introduced at the request of white film-makers who saw an opportunity to make money by producing African-language films starring Africans for mass African audiences. The scheme was an opportunity for the apartheid government to subsidise white entrepreneurs and, as a result, the film products of this subsidy can be viewed as the collaborative output of the NP government and some of the white citizens of apartheid South Africa (Paleker 2010).

The representation of black spaces and identity has also been a concern to American scholarship that has attempted to comprehend the co-optation of Black Cinema and black celebrities by Hollywood. Mukherjee (2006) examined the representation of black spaces and black identity in the films *Barbershop* (Story 2002) and *Barbershop 2: Back in Business* (Sullivan 2004) created by Hollywood. These new ghetto fabulous films, according to Mukherjee, tend to invite hip hop stars and established black stand-up comics to appear in them. The rationale being that these films can capitalise on “rich cross-market synergies, drawing in racially mixed audiences, both urban and suburban” (Mukherjee 2006, 606). Cultural co-optation in this regard entails winning over black icons into the capitalist fold and making such icons advocates of excessive consumption and defenders of neoliberal hegemony. The ghetto fabulous aesthetic provides intuition into the way in which neoliberalism works to create a society that is in line with its objectives of consumption.

The films, *Taxi Cheeseboy* and *Maid for Me*, were exclusively shot in a township, particularly in its quasi-suburban spaces that were erected in the 1980s as the apartheid government augmented the wages of black civil servants as part of its co-optation ploy. In their representation of affluent spaces, the films move towards denialism of inequality in the South African township. Their aspirational narratives, to some degree, shield neoliberalism and the inadequacies of nation-building. Moreover, the films are critical as they offer insight into the borrowing by popular film from the mainstream circuitry such as Hollywood with the ghetto fabulous aesthetic approach.

These films provide a perspective for understanding the way in which film and television in post-apartheid South Africa conform to global capital demands. Moreover, the one-dimensional representation of the space does not conform to the aesthetics of a liberating cinema such as Third Cinema (Solanas and Getino 1970). The lack of multidimensional spatial representation allows for the arrested development of blackness and its everyday experiences, resulting in an apocryphal form of representation. Class issues are a scorching subject in post-apartheid South Africa as government policies have resulted in a few citizens that have benefited from the new democratic dispensation. However, the films present a developed space that is used to exclusively represent blackness. Also, these grassroots films that are funded by television conglomerates are significant as they demonstrate, through their aspirational narratives, the way in which popular formats have been co-opted into neoliberal and nation-building narratives that cement and justify the extant status quo.

Synopsis of *Taxi Cheeseboy* (Taxi Tycoon) (Mogola 2014)

Taxi Cheeseboy is a South African comedy adaptation of the Hollywood film, *Barbershop* (Story 2002), as it presents a young man by the name of Reggie (Riky Rick) who stands to inherit a multi-million rand taxi business from his late father. He spent much of his life in the United States of America and his return to South Africa makes him experience a culture shock. At first, he does not understand his roots which are in South Africa but after learning about the people in his Soweto community and the taxi

business, he decides to stay in the country. Pule is a white taxi driver who was raised by Reggie's father (Mthimkhulu) and is an *isikhothane*². He teaches Reggie about the commitment his late father put into his taxi business and the way in which that resulted in the wealth he accumulated before his passing. In the end, Reggie decides to share the taxi business with him as his new-found brother. Aunt Linda is Reggie's aunt and also the domestic help at the Mthimkhulu estate. She is the only blood relative Reggie has left. She plays a pivotal role in informing Reggie about individuals that might want to steal his inheritance by making him believe that the taxi business is worthless. Bra Zakes is a township criminal who wants to steal Reggie's business and plans to shut down the community centre that was sponsored by Mthimkhulu to open a nightclub in the same space. He engages in many criminal activities to coerce Reggie to sell him the taxi business including assaulting Pule but to no avail. Thandi is Reggie's childhood sweetheart whom he seems to have forgotten as he was away from home for a long time. She becomes his life partner and helps him to realise his true potential as a taxi boss who is also a philanthropist.

Synopsis of *Maid for Me* (Zwane 2014)

This drama film is centred on the lives of two middle-class families in a quasi-suburban township. Tebogo is a state prosecutor by profession and has a daughter (Sammy) from his first wife. In addition, Tebogo has remarried and his wife (Fiona) is a housewife who is obsessed with excessive consumption. Tebogo is trying to cope with his stressful profession; he receives no support from his wife in this regard but receives sympathy from his domestic helper (Keneilwe). Fiona is selfish and seems to not even show affection for Sammy. She is having an affair with Tebogo's brother (Julius) who is a womaniser and fails to impregnate his wife (Phindi). Moreover, Fiona does not get along with the domestic helper as she is envious of the relationship the helper has with Tebogo and Sammy. Julius has been lying to his wife about focusing all his energies on them conceiving a baby while he spends most of his afternoons engaging in sexual intercourse with Fiona. Julius is a local businessman who owns a pub and a car wash and he cares less about the well-being of his stressed wife who is a chief executive officer (CEO) of a reputable organisation. Sammy is a respectful young lady who does not get along with her stepmother (Fiona) because she always imposes her values on Sammy. Sammy is strained as she has to write her matriculation exams and must decide on a companion for her matric farewell. In the end, Julius and Fiona are discovered for their infidelities by Tebogo and Phindi at a surprise birthday party that was planned for Julius. The plan to expose Fiona and Julius was instigated by Keneilwe who was the first person to discover the affair.

2 *Isikhothane* is the singular term for an individual who belongs to a township subculture that engages in conspicuous consumption regardless of their socio-economic status.

The Political Economy of Television

Browne (1984) discusses the origins of the made-for-television film in the United States. He states that such productions became feasible in the late sixties and they had the potential to draw in significant audiences. Their production was cheaper than acquiring the licensing of theatrical films for the television networks. Browne (1984) adds that the made-for-television movie has a format that efficiently deals with and reaches commercially significant segments of the television audience. This is the audience that uses products that are advertised on national television.

In addition, Browne (1984) states that these movies tend to have narratives that fall into the genres of drama, comedy, crime mystery, and biography and that they are significant variants of the family melodrama. The made-for-television films on *eKasi: Our Stories and Lokshin Bioskop* seem to be composed mostly of the forms of the genres highlighted by Browne for the made-for-television film. The made-for-television film is cost effective for television networks as it attracts audiences who are captivated by the popular genres put forward by these made-for-television films. Also, television, as a medium, is considered to be linked to the economy as it disseminates information that helps sell products and it facilitates the socialisation of citizens. In essence, television is viewed as “active in the material and symbolic reproduction of capitalist relations” (Rajagopal 2001, 4).

Ives (2007) provides an understanding of South African television discourses that sought to forge a foundation for neoliberalism and nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa. This work is significant as it focuses on nation-building and neoliberalism as reflected in the medium of television. Ives (2007) posits that South African television, since its inception in the 1970s, played a role in entrenching ideologies. First, it was employed to guard the apartheid establishment and later it was deployed to promote the idea of a new South Africa. During apartheid, television was used to project a divided South Africa and to promote nation-building that embraced the segregation of the different races in South Africa. In the new South Africa, it seems to be deployed to build national unity and to advance neoliberal objectives. The construction of the nation put forth by some South African television programming can mask enduring racial and economic inequalities and move responsibility for these inequalities from the state to the individual. These material effects play a role in reasserting hierarchical relations of power, especially along race, class, and gender lines (Ives 2007).

Television, in post-apartheid South Africa, seems to be engaged in depicting a successful black society. This masking of inequalities in the new South Africa helps to shield the status quo and the position of the ruling party which is what this current study seeks to explore through its examination of township films. Television, in a capitalist society, to a certain degree, promotes neoliberalism which deviates from criticising the state for the lack of service delivery. These observations by Ives were based on studying content from the SABC, a public broadcaster which should have been at the helm of highlighting inequalities created by apartheid.

Cultural Co-Optation and Conspicuous Consumption

Taxi Cheeseboy provides a chronicle of a black middle-class citizenry that indulges in conspicuous consumption and which advocates that consumption is justified when one has worked industriously. The production company, Don't Look Down, that was tasked with the making of *Taxi Cheeseboy* is based in South Africa's economic hub, Johannesburg. Moreover, the entity is involved in many media production platforms from broadcast, internet platforms to events management. In addition, it is involved in productions such as *The Voice South Africa* and *Idols SA* and it has an international outlook when it comes to production as it is at the forefront of adopting internationally efficacious television programmes and facilitating their local adaptation by networks such as the Mzansi Magic and the M-Net channels. With *Taxi Cheeseboy*, the production company chose to cast two South African celebrities Riky Rick, a South African hip hop icon, and Pule Welch, a white South African comedian.

Stars in films are signifiers of meaning such as symbols and codes because they manage the audience's expectations. The score of the film is based on South African hip hop with beats that are synonymous with Riky Rick's music. The score complements the film as the protagonist (Reggy) is presented as a hip hop enthusiast. In addition, hip hop as a music genre is notorious for its music videos that lionise conspicuous consumption at the expense of challenging the status quo. Township amateur actors were not selected in the leading roles for *Taxi Cheeseboy* but instead, Riky Rick and Pule Welch were chosen as celebrities that engage in conspicuous consumption in reality.

The ghetto fabulous genre suggests creating films that cast black stars with credibility in other entertainment platforms with the hope of benefiting from cross-market synergies (Mukherjee 2006). Riky Rick released a song titled *Sidlukotini* (we wear designer clothing) which mainly bolstered the fact that black youths should consume expensive designer clothing³. In the case of *Taxi Cheeseboy*, Reggie is played by the South African hip hop mogul Riky Rick who is known for wearing designer labels that are mostly produced in the United States. In this instance, while popular arts or culture is recognised for providing opportunities for novice actors (Barber 1987), in this instance individuals who are already in the public spotlight, to be cast. By casting Riky Rick (Reggie), the film was able to have mass appeal as the celebrity is well known in South Africa.

3 Rikhado Makhado (known as Riky Rick) is a hip-hop artist, actor, fashion pundit, and music producer who was born in KwaMashu (Durban, South Africa) and most of his upbringing was in Austria. In 2016, the artist released the hit single "Sidlukotini". Moreover, the artist has been featured in many fashion editorials because of his fashion consciousness as an artist. The performer first released a single "Barbershop" as a mainstream artist which can be linked to the adaption of the film *Taxi Cheeseboy* from the American *Barbershop* franchise. Popular arts or popular culture is understood for its borrowing of content from other geographies and boxing it for local audiences.

In the film, Reggie and Pule wear bright-coloured clothing which is a convention of the comedy genre that also includes bright tones and the use of bright music. In most obvious terms, the ghetto fabulous genre has been proven fruitful with black audiences. In addition, the ghetto fabulous aesthetic was initially used to symbolise youth rebellion but lately it has been co-opted and transformed into “a formulaic, and profitable, market commodity” (Neal as quoted in Mukherjee 2006, 604). According to Mukherjee (2006, 605), the ghetto fabulous genre films have been successful because they present “light-hearted tales of working-class black life in the urban ghetto”.

Reggie in the film is presented as a young man who is fashion conscious in the sense that he is always dressed in designer apparels that are created by international conglomerates which also symbolise the entrenchment of global capitalism in post-apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, conspicuous consumption is evident in the film with the character Pule who claims to be an *isikhothane* and who is always dressed in designer labels although this lifestyle is not realistically affordable for a working-class taxi driver. *Izikhothane* are young South African males who reside in townships and are known for their expensive bright-coloured designer label clothing (Naidu and Mazibuko 2015). These young men are said to be obsessed with fashion and styling their bodies. Moreover, they are excessively clean and well-groomed. According to Naidu and Mazibuko (2015, 212), “clothes play an important role in the representation of who and how they see themselves and appearance is perceived as the ‘first skin’, as they believe that ‘what a person wears says a lot about who they are’.” In their representation, clothes play an important role and the *isikhothane*, who wears the most expensive designer labels, is given the utmost respect. It is about the price of the designer labels and the appearance of the clothes is less important (Naidu and Mazibuko 2015, 219).

Pule is the embodiment of conspicuous consumption with his assertions of being an *isikhothane* and highlights excessive consumption ideals that are propagated by the film. Mnisi (2015) states that *izikhothane*⁴ engage in aspirational consumption to depict their yearning for a better life and wealth. This better life was derailed by apartheid and recently by the failures of the economy under the new dispensation to improve the livelihoods of the majority. Pule, as a taxi driver, is not earning a substantial amount of money but his consumption of expensive clothing reflects the desperation to ascend to a better economic standing. In addition, Pule as a white *isikhothane* brings to the fore the poor white problem in South Africa, as generally the *izikhothane* are not wealthy but are individuals who, through their spending, reflect the way in which they hope to spend in future.

The subject of whether Pule can afford the lifestyle he is living in terms of his excessive consumption as an *isikhothane* is never raised in the film and ultimately narratives that challenge conspicuous consumption are not presented. The sole explanation is to

4 *Izikhothane* is the plural form of *isikhothane*.

comprehend that *izikhothane* engage in aspirational consumption regardless of their circumstances. Also, *Maid for Me* depicts Julius as an older version of an *isikhothane*, as he wears gold chains, bright-coloured clothes and has a gold tooth. Moreover, he drives a Volkswagen Microbus which is associated with *izikhothane* and their dance battles, in which they engage in various group rituals. Julius is a township entrepreneur who has the money to buy expensive clothes and one can assume that he is illustrative of what the young *izikhothane* envision themselves to become in their adult lives (Mnisi 2015). Julius is no longer the aspirational consumer but is the nouveau riche consuming from abundance. Ironically, the young *isikhothane* we see being depicted through Pule in *Taxi Cheeseboy* has an older version in *Maid for Me* through Julius.

The central theme in both films is that excessive consumption is worshipped through the embracing of the controversial *izikhothane* subculture that has swept the township landscape in post-apartheid South Africa. Moreover, the subculture is notoriously associated with consumption at all costs regardless of one's financial sustainability. This allegory of aspirational consumption can be applied to the gentrified images of the township that we witness in the two films, whereas in reality the space remains significantly underdeveloped. Ellapen (2007) argued for hybridity in the representation of the township space and these films, *Taxi Cheeseboy* and *Maid for Me* engage the space from one dimension which is that of the quasi-suburban areas that communicate the existence of black mobility. *Izikhothane* are not wealthy individuals but engage in conspicuous consumption only to reflect their aspirations and the township through its gentrified spaces also reflects an unrealistic perspective of wealth. As the *izikhothane* are a subculture and a minority in the township, the gentrified images in the films are also representative of a small proportion of the township landscape that has improved since the 1980s and onwards into the post-1994 dispensation.

Township Rainbow Nationalism

Township rainbow nationalism is established by *Taxi Cheeseboy*, as Pule is a white young man who is staying with the Mthimkhulus and his origins are not explained in the film except mentioning that he was assisted by Mthimkhulu. This aspirational narrative depicts the township in virtuous light as white people also reside in the space previously assigned to black labourers during apartheid. Pule, played by Pule Welch who is fluent in African languages, contributes to the notion of a rainbow nationalism envisioned by Nelson Mandela and the ruling African National Congress (ANC). The ANC government and former President Nelson Mandela encouraged the celebration of the "rainbow nation" at international sports events such as the 1995 Rugby World Cup (Nauright 1998; Steenveld and Strelitz 1998). Rainbow nationalism, as a concept, proposed unity among all South African racial groups after 1994, regardless of the injustices experienced by selective groups during apartheid. According to Bornman (2006, 383), "symbols such as the Rainbow Nation and the new national flag have been hailed worldwide as representative of optimism that the new political dispensation would bring reconciliation and unity in the diverse South African society."

In *Taxi Cheeseboy*, the myth of a “rainbow nation” is made to come alive through Pule. The character epitomises the notion of a rainbow nation, as he is multilingual. However, it is essential to note that a few white people can speak African languages in South Africa. Also, the concept of the rainbow nation is endorsed by Pule being able to speak African languages fluently which allows one to easily associate him with the township space. Pule’s character provides a depiction of the township space as not solely the domain of black citizens but more as a space of racial unity. Pule is the signifier of the township space as deracialised. This is on the backdrop of the exodus of several black middle-class citizens from the township in post-1994 to seek settlement in previously white-only suburbs (Modisha 2007; Seekings 2010).

Ironically, a white “*isikhothane*”, Pule, appears to have also been deprived opportunity in South Africa which works to create a narrative that since 1994 there has been a shift towards equilibrium in the standards of living for both black and white citizens. However, Statistics South Africa has been continuously recording that white households remain affluent in comparison to other racial groups in South Africa. In 2017, Statistics South Africa stated that the annual household income of black households was R92 893 when compared to that of R444 446 for white households. Disappointedly, the film does not deal with issues of reconciliation between black and white people in the new South Africa. The film deviates from critical debates about race and Pule is never at any point addressed as white in the film. Furthermore, the film highlights the poor white problem in South Africa and this is demonstrated through Pule who was adopted by a black taxi owner, Mthimkhulu. Pule points out that Mthimkhulu took him off the streets, implying that he was a street kid, and brought him into his home to raise him as his own. In this representation, it is implied that Mthimkhulu was well off financially, as he could shelter a white child and raise him in the township.

Also, the film explores the philanthropy of township dwellers, as Mthimkhulu is renowned in the film for his contributions to the local community centre. In the beginning, Reggie does not know that the taxi business his father operated maintains the community centre. In this regard, black township business takes charge of township upliftment and depends less on state intervention. The curbing of welfare from the state that intervenes to improve the lives of people who are deprived of the means to better their lives is an economic strategy, founded on the principles of neoliberalism. Black business is ushered in by the film as the messiah of the township in the absence of the state and the black majority that has voted politicians into power is left to depend on corporate social investments. The film does ideological work by exonerating the state and politicians from the failures of the socio-economic system. In addition, two of the intriguing issues about *Taxi Cheeseboy* are the interracial friendship and the way in which Reggie’s social distance from the taxi industry is bridged by his white friend Pule. This is significant to note, as these issues illustrate that the conscientisation of the Americanised Reggie is mediated by a white consciousness that can perform Nativity.

The Township as a New Homeland and a Space for Black Salvation

The films further engage in a political ploy by embarking on the exclusive representation of the township quasi-suburban area as a superlative space that has undergone restoration, which results in its inhabitants being content with the space. In the films, black spatial mobility is restricted to the quasi-suburban township space. *Taxi Cheeseboy* repudiates the notion of black flight from the township as Mthimkhulu demolished his four-roomed house and built a mansion in the old township of Soweto. Furthermore, *Maid for Me* has professionals in the case of Phindi who is a CEO and Tebogo who is a state prosecutor, who continue to reside in the township regardless of their upward social mobility. Their professional achievements do not motivate them to live in a space that surpasses the township in terms of stature. Moreover, what is conveyed in these films is that black flight to the northern suburbs of Johannesburg is not a simple decision for one to make, hence, the professionals in *Maid for Me* remain in the township. In addition, Mthimkhulu in *Taxi Cheeseboy* had acquired considerable wealth but he still chose to remain in the township. Reggie has been away working in the United States and he returns to find that he is to inherit a mansion in the township of Soweto. Reggie never at any point in the film mentions that the mansion should have been bought elsewhere or built outside of the township. He is immediately impressed by the structure and does not question its location although he comes from a developed country in which the majority of the infrastructure has undergone gentrification.

These films do not provide any alternative to the township space and do not even show any images of affluent Johannesburg. With the alternative space, which is the city and its well-developed infrastructure being absent in the film, there is no choice but to perceive the township as an unrivalled space. The affluent spaces that are omitted by the aesthetics of the films are the suburbs in which the bourgeoisie resides. In essence, the films do not allow for the contrasting of the township with opulent suburbs and hence these films do political work of not representing black mobility in its entirety in post-apartheid South Africa. Most political ruling elites visit the townships around election times to campaign for their incessant stay in parliament with the masses who are confined in these spaces. When the elections have ended, the politicians return to parliament and their posh lives in affluent suburbia and fail to work on the implementation of their election manifestos that assured a better life for the masses.

Lately, increased service delivery protests have erupted in the townships due to the lack of service delivery and the consequences include the majority of black township dwellers that are disgruntled (Alexander 2010; Mkhize 2015). This is the reality the films do not deal with and in that way they fit into the government's agenda of reworking perceptions to say that the townships are fine and only black people need to work toward a middle-class trajectory. It is important to note that these discomforts around the lack of service delivery are the cause of black flight from the townships (Phadi and Ceruti 2011). On the contrary, the township is depicted by the two films as a permanent space for black settlement and salvation which Mukherjee (2006), through

the reading of the *Barbershop* franchise, highlights about the black ghettos in the United States.

For Reggie, the United States is a place he worked and his return to South Africa and particularly his return to the township offer the impression of the township as the new homeland⁵. Reggie, in this instance, is back home in Soweto to use his skills to better his community and is no longer in a space he does not belong to. This representation is similar to that of “Back to the Homelands” films by Tomaselli (1989) which were hell-bent on portraying the homelands as progressive to convince people to stay and not flock to apartheid South Africa. The recycling of themes is an integral component of popular arts or popular culture (Barber 1987). To easily usher in this change on the part of Reggie, we are not introduced to Reggie’s life in the United States or made aware of any of his acquaintances there except the bank that calls him concerning his mortgage repayments. City life was depicted as difficult for black people in some of the films under the “Back to the Homelands” umbrella which allowed for the homelands to receive greater prominence. In the case of *Taxi Cheeseboy*, Reggie’s stay in the United States is demonised to endorse his settlement in the township space.

The fact that Reggie owes money in the form of a mortgage shows that he never settled well in the United States and that Soweto is his salvation space. He also falls in love with Thandi in Soweto. Soweto, thus, offers him insight into what he needs in his life and it introduces him to philanthropy like his father. This shows that there was nothing worthwhile for Reggie in the United States and the obvious choice for Reggie is Soweto. In an earlier scene, Reggie arrives from the United States being chauffeured in a Chrysler vehicle into the township of Soweto. The brand Chrysler⁶ on its own symbolises the United States and the fact that the driver is rude and leaves Reggie deserted in the streets of Soweto latently communicates some form of deportation. This can further be linked to the apartheid era in South Africa, where if a black person failed to have the necessary legal papers (Dom pass) in the cities, they were arrested and deported to their homeland. The protagonist gets dumped in Soweto to signify that he is somehow in his motherland and at this juncture, the township is his only home.

Conclusion

The films, *Taxi Cheeseboy and Maid for Me*, present progressive and aspirational narratives that are in support of neoliberal and nation-building ideals that have been adopted in post-apartheid South Africa. Black professionals and black businesses are celebrated as enablers for black economic sustainability. Furthermore, excessive

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- 5 The apartheid government granted black workers permits to work in the cities and not be permanent residents of those cities and upon the termination of employment, these black workers were expected to return to their homelands or Bantustans. The rationale was that these workers should go back home to improve their land and leave the white South Africa to white inhabitants.
 - 6 The brand is a successor of the Maxwell Company which manufactured automobiles in the United States from about 1904 to 1925. Currently, the brand trades as Fiat Chrysler Automobiles.

consumption is represented through Pule and Julius, who are *izikhothane*, individuals who believe in the excessive consumption of designer clothing. The two films, unlike the *Barbershop* franchise, fail to deal with the predicament of conspicuous consumption but rather adore it as it symbolises the existence of black mobility which is essential when proving that the ruling ANC has made significant socio-economic strides.

The nation-building narrative of rainbow nationalism is depicted in *Taxi Cheeseboy* through the white character Pule who collapses the boundaries of spaces that were based on apartheid spatial planning. Pule represents the imagined post-apartheid South Africa in which all races are united and live alongside each other in prosperity and harmony. Also, through the character Pule, the township is depicted as a deracialised space and poverty as transracial.

The films *Taxi Cheeseboy* and *Maid for Me* further reject the notion of a black exodus from the township to the upmarket suburbs of Johannesburg. The apartheid B-Scheme films tended to portray the homelands of black people as peaceful in comparison to the cities. Alternative spaces for settlement are not provided by the films which allow the notion that the post-apartheid township is the new homeland and a salvation space for black people. The deployment of a ghetto fabulous aesthetic can be viewed as a shield against the realities of the township space in its entirety and black identity. Aspirational narratives and aesthetics are central in positioning the current regime in good standing with the electorate as images of gentrification feed the perceptions of progress. Moreover, these films imply that the bidding for neoliberalism and nation-building that was historically conveyed by a public broadcaster has now been inherited by private broadcasters in post-apartheid South Africa.

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Filmography

Barbershop, directed by Tim Story for MGM Distribution Co., released on 2 September 2002.

Barbershop 2: Back in business, directed by Kevin Rodney Sullivan for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, released on 6 February 2004.

Maid for Me, directed by Muntu Zwane for Due South Entertainment, aired 2014 on eKasi: Our Stories: eTV.

Taxi Cheeseboy, directed by Tebogo Mogola for Don't Look Down Productions, aired 2014, on Mzansi Magic/DStv Lokshin Bioskop.