Expository Documentaries as Representation of Democratic South African Socio-Economic and Political Challenges

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Abstract

This article chronicles research findings of a study on the representation of democratic socio-economic and political challenges in two South African social issue expository documentaries, *Miners Shot Down* and *Dear Mandela*. Media represent real events to influence audiences to make sense of the social, economic, and political world around them. Media represent societal events using framing and reconstruction, which calls on media audiences and scholars to examine the cinematic expression in documentaries to interrogate how reality is represented. These documentaries address unemployment, poverty, lack of housing, poor health care services, and human rights abuses by employers that are not addressed by government. Interpretivism philosophy, ideological film criticism and framing theoretically grounded the study. The methodology combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies, executing embedded and convergent parallel research designs. Content analysis was the research method. The documentary analysis focused on language, context, setting and subject themes. Conclusions include that the stories in these documentaries were represented through storytelling, voice overs, interviews, montage, sound, music, camera shots, visual effects, and scriptwriting. Expository documentaries remain important in democratic South Africa to advance cinema *en vérité* and represent experiences of citizens in the absence of effective legislative and judicial provisions.

Keywords: media representation, corporate social responsibility, expository documentary, human rights, South Africa, *Dear Mandela*, *Miners Shot Down*

Introduction

Essentially, media representations are media constructions of society, influences and persuasions that are reported or portrayed in various forms of media such as print media, television show debates, and different film genres (Nkomo, 2016). Through these constructions, the media can expose maladministration and multiple forms of corruption in governance to increase economic efficiency and stability for citizens to prosper (Wasserman, 2013). Film features as a representation system that mirrors socio-economic and political challenges in different societies. The realist genre (including documentary film) has become an effective tool for advocacy and lobbying in many contexts. For example, filmmakers use it to frame social problems, to broaden awareness and to prompt corrective action from inactive government. This is evident in some international documentary films such as *Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004)* and *An Inconvenient Truth (2006)*. To highlight social issues in documentary films, filmmakers exploit different features that consider film holistic products such as cinematography, sound, aesthetic elements, narratives, and impact factors (Diesner & Rezapour, 2016). It is important to examine the relevance of the documentary as a medium that reflects socio-economic and political challenges affecting communities in South Africa.

Reflective documentary case studies

This study analysed the representation of democratic socio-economic and political challenges in two documentaries, namely *Miners Shot Down (2014)* and *Dear Mandela (2011)*, to highlight that a documentary can mirror socio-economic and political challenges that affect democracies with dysfunctional governments. A reflective practitioner case study values the embodied knowledge and experience of the practitioner and their reflection on and call for action, alongside the collection of integral materials related to the case study context – in this case, the analysis of the content of documentary with reference to language, context, setting and subject themes.

The documentary educates and explains, consequently facilitating a shift of perspective by challenging the status quo and creating a definitive alteration in perception when circumstances and information prove the former viewpoint or worldview is no longer valid. Documentaries that show underlying causes can be part of this process, as cause-related documentaries hold the potential to provoke action and evoke an emotional response (Faulcon, 2012). Documentary filmmakers usually have no direct personal interest in resolving a particular problem but may be sympathetic supporters

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acting as second-order advocates (Hackley, 2012; Cheng 2016). They may become involved because of a range of other concerns, including their artistic satisfaction, their wish to entertain, instruct, enlighten or mobilise groups, their capacity to advocate and influence government leaders, and the advancement of their professional reputation and the winning of awards.

Expository documentaries

Expository documentary film refers to the basic information that underpins every documentary story: who are the characters, what is the conflict, when is it taking place, why is it worth telling this story, and why are these events happening (Salazar, 2008). Expository documentaries are mostly produced for television and are organised to follow the classic narrative techniques of the exposition. The expository documentary film has a narrator who addresses the viewers in a very direct way, quite often in the form of an authoritative commentary, employing voice-over narration (Cheng, 2016). The mode of practice in expository documentaries is mostly to persuade the audience about an opinion or argument and to promote the filmmaker's point of view. Expository documentaries have, as a genre, maintained a high degree of prominence, and have become a major form that every filmmaker dreams of producing (Salazar, 2008). They consistently provoke controversy and widespread public debate about the meaning of human existence, about the limits of dramatic interpretation, and about the power of film to influence popular understanding and to promote national traditions.

Expository documentaries are composed of dramatic feature elements in which the primary plot is based on actual events, or in which an imagined plot unfolds in such a way that the event is central and intrinsic to the story. However, there are still large variations in the types of films that can be considered expository documentary films. Because the genre overlaps with other well-established genres, it is useful to consider the expository documentary film in terms of several subtypes. These include the epic, the biographical film, and the period or topical film that presents conflicting viewpoints to illustrate the complexity of the ongoing challenges citizens face (Corrigan & Corrigan, 2014).

Socio-economic and political challenges

In South Africa, the strife over scarce resources has contributed to increases in youth unemployment levels, service delivery protests and xenophobic attacks which are considered governmental failure to oversee

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important issues faced by South Africans (Choane, Shulika & Mthombeni, 2011). Other societal challenges include poverty and poor living conditions. These problems remain unaddressed and some South Africans pin hopes on the Government of National Unity (GNU) created after the 2024 national elections to address these challenges speedily.

Philosophical Perspective and Theoretical Grounding

Theories in film communicate the value of cinema and provide the conceptual framework to understand the relationship between film, reality, and audiences. We applied theories of ideological film criticism and framing based on their conceptual assumptions which are useful to film criticism, particularly in South Africa (Fourie, 2007; Devereux, 2014). Interpretivism grounded the study as a philosophical perspective and epistemological orientation. Interpretivism focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals within their social context (Carter & Fuller, 2015; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2019; Pillay, 2019; Rogers, 2020; Nickerson, 2024). It includes contentions that the social world cannot be understood fully from the standpoint of an individual; that realities are multiple and socially constructed; and that there is inevitable interaction between the researcher and their research participants.

Elaborations of these points by writers like Liddicoat (2020), Drew (2023) and Nickerson (2024), include:

(a) understanding the beliefs, motivations, and reasoning of individuals in a social setting is essential to decoding the meaning of the data that can be collected around a phenomenon.

(b) interpretivism in Media Studies has relied mainly on hermeneutics, phenomenology and ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism.

(c) Theorists that adopt an interpretivism approach to the study and analysis of Media Studies include Goffman, Bulmer, Weber, Garfinkle, Mead and Husser (Jansen, 2023).

Interpretivists use both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies but believe that there is no one perfect way of gaining knowledge, thus rejecting the idea that there is one methodology that will get to the absolute "truth of a situation" (Pillay, 2019; Rogers, 2020; Nickerson, 2024). Interpretivist approaches to research differ from positivist ones mainly in their emphasis on qualitative data and focus on explaining the context of the situation.

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Theories that support the present researchers' interpretivism, philosophical orientation, ideological criticism and framing are discussed next, to assist in analysing how democratic challenges are represented or portrayed in the documentary films.

Ideological film criticism

While the study of ideology assists in protecting certain individuals, majority goals and sections of society, especially the elite, such study is essential in understanding the role of class dynamics. Dominant ideology protects certain individuals and ruling ideas in any society, and it is therefore important to study conflicting ideologies, including participatory communication, transformational leadership theory (Khan et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2023) and decoloniality theory. Participatory communication promotes two-way communication between corporate leaders and workers within a corporation, and other development communication stakeholders, and discourages top-down communication from corporate leaders to the workers without negotiating issues with the workers (Servaes, 1996, 2009; Dikeocha, 2024). Transformational leadership means "an approach in which a leader transforms his followers, inspires them, builds trust, encourages them, admires their innovative ideas, and develops them" (Khan et al., 2020). Decoloniality promotes African values in business, corporations and institutions; it is "a political and epistemological movement aimed at the liberation of (ex-) colonized peoples from global coloniality but also a way of thinking, knowing and doing" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Decoloniality speaks to the deepening and widening of decolonization movements in those spaces that experienced the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, apartheid, and underdevelopment (ibid.). Therefore, dominant ideology depicted in the two films could be replaced by a construction of films, for African audiences, from these ideologies such as decoloniality.

In Media Studies, this makes every film a political expression since it incorporates the ideology of those that produced it. Filmmakers control film production, which means that they may control the beliefs and mindsets of film audiences. Devereux (2014) thus argues that film can be viewed as an ideological construction, as it is informed by film text that invites the audience to experience a specific reaction. In the context of South Africa, ideology is also characterised by the engagement in government of active citizens, the practice of majority rule (which existed when the two documentaries were produced), and media freedom which is legislated by the

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Constitution of 1996. Lemon (1991) contends that films are created based on the background, experiences and knowledge of both the creators and the subjects within such an ideological context.

One common critique of film theory is its bias and subjectivity. To analyse ideology, films critics should understand what ideology means. Generally, an ideology is a collection of beliefs that express the aspirations and objectives of a person, a group, a class, or a culture (Lemon, 1991). Ideology is commonly linked to political parties and their platforms, but it can also refer to a certain set of values that permeate all human endeavours, including the creation of films (Hefner, 2012). This study aims to show how ideas are connected to material conditions by concealing or distorting them, shifting them into terms falsely resolving conflicts and contradictions and presenting these situations as natural and unchangeable.

Framing theory

Framing refers to the process of selecting and highlighting elements of reality to define a problem, diagnose its causes, suggest judgments and propose suitable solutions and actions (Entman, 2017). It describes the influence the media have on public opinion when media practitioners report on issues focusing on the interpretive, ideological and contextualisation of news reports and visual productions (Khan, 2017). Filmmakers can thus frame social problems in a particular way to advance preferred solutions, and Fourie (2007) notes that there have been many complaints by people that media reports have framed them negatively. Still, scholars have shown that media framing can indeed have an effect in the way audiences interpret an issue or events (McQuail, 2010).

Methodology, research design and method

Our study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodology and a descriptive interpretive design (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). The approach assisted the principal researcher in providing a description and interpretation of the visual and audio-text of the selected documentary films. The descriptive interpretive design was selected based on its appropriateness in the study of documentary films, which consist of images, conversations, speeches, audio and music. Each documentary film was divided into scenes that composed a table of scenes which facilitated thorough analyses of filmic features, visuals and narratives. The data were collected through content analysis which has quantitative and qualitative aspects. Qualitative aspects in the documentaries were found in words

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expressed in each film and quantitative aspects involved the length of the documentary.

Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the filmic elements used in the documentaries to depict South African socio-economic and political challenges. These includes film construction and techniques, camera shots and angles, colour, visual effects, visual scripting, and voice-over narration as part of the composition of the films.

Film techniques and articulation of meaning

This study found that both *Miners Shot Down* and *Dear Mandela* have the technical qualities that confirm that film as an artefact is a marriage between technique and meaning. This is evident when producers of both films use aesthetics such as sound, colour, and camera work to represent the socio-economic challenges faced by the South African populace post-apartheid. We acknowledge that not all meanings in a film are deliberate because some of these meanings come from the background or culture of filmmakers themselves who unconsciously infuse their views into the production. This is important in film production because audiences live in a culture that shapes how they think and what they believe in as the contextual setting that ultimately informs their behaviour. Both documentaries are influenced by the apartheid historical contestations that are laced with racial prejudice, which determine the choice of technical aspects used in the production. Thus, the meanings of both *Miners Shot Dead* and *Dear Mandela* films are shaped by thematic or aesthetic necessity including visuals, shots, sound, and audio elements which seem to be neither entirely unconscious nor entirely deliberate.

Voice-over narration

Both films adopted voice-over narration as an active agent that helped to represent the democracy anti-thesis through corroborative themes in a way that an actor's performance or scenery would not be able to do. The films appropriately used a voice-over to provide the viewers with audio-visual information through the film's soundtrack, which is paired with important visual aids such as the colour of the sky and dried or green grass to enhance the viewers' mood. Thus, in both documentaries, the voice-over is used as a technical imperative to assume the role of uncovering or solving the (democratic) mystery; meanwhile, the images are either rolling or revealing accompanying footage. In this case, both films relied on voice-over

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narration, audio-visuals and camera works to tell the story of abuse of authority, human rights violations, and unfair labour practices in the new South Africa.

This technique provided filmmakers with a range of abilities in storytelling that they otherwise would not have been able to deliver in its absence. In both films, the application of the voice-over indicates that the power of a voice-over is its ability to communicate directly with the audience. Hence, the films relied on the voice of an actor (narrator) who played the invisible controlling role of storyteller without participating in it directly. In so doing, the voiceover in *Miners Shot Down* had the role of uncovering the mystery that characterised the protracted strike whose demands were met with lethal state power. Furthermore, we found that the voice-over could not be restricted to one form but may include actors' roles to corroborate the perspective of the protagonists and so strengthen the cause of the narrative. This technique is used in *Miners Shot Down* to retrospectively reflect on the proactive actions that could have been taken to avoid the Marikana tragedy. .

Camera shots and angles

In *Miners Shot Down,* several close-up shots are used to represent emotional frustrations when the Lonmin management failed to respond to the grievances of the miners and when striking miners wielded traditional weapons of war including knobkerries, spears, and shields while registering their grievances. *Dear Mandela* also exploits numerous forms of camera shots such as medium and long shots to provide the viewer with both medium to long focus as well as wide shots to capture the background of the events as they unfolded.

Colour

The films serve as clear examples of how colour is used to provide more revealing scenes and details of the emotional state of the police who claim that they were provoked by the miners. This confirms that to date the use of colour in cinematography remains a vital part of creating films owing to the aesthetic and complementary features it brings to the film composition process. The findings revealed that the producers of both documentaries astutely used colour to depict numerous aspects of the transformation discourse in South Africa, especially in terms of the whiteness or blackness of actors to portray racial prejudice, inequality, and poverty in the mining environment and informal settlements. In both documentaries, black workers

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are the only group shown as suffering injustice and low pay at work; these economic ills result in the life of chronic poverty and social ills that these workers find themselves in. In both cases, evidence shows that the use of colour involved a combination of artefacts with respect to space, time and locations as attractions that serve as explanations of events and associations that augment existing frames at different levels. The use of the physical aspects in both films involved the way specific aspects, issues and colours such as the informal settlement, poverty and racial prejudice are employed to affect the viewer and one's ability to interpret the films with a pleasant impression.

Visual effects

Both films made use of visual effects which were added to live-action, captured through techniques such as interactive video compositing, rear- and front-screen projection and practical effects. *Miners Shot Down* used live-action: interactive video compositing, rear- and front-screen projection and practical effects in conjunction with computer graphic objects, characterisation, and environments, as well as the compositing of images recorded in several ways. *Dear Mandela* exploited some of these technical aspects, particularly interactive video compositing and practical effects, to reconcile the past events which occurred during the apartheid era and contemporary transformation challenges in South Africa. Despite the negative encounter with law enforcement, the Marikana ordeal continues to serve as a cumulative cultural heritage over the apartheid legacy, as it carries the unintended purpose of (re) opening wounds which had otherwise virtually been closed after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of 1996. Ideologically, we frame both films as objective renditions of worker realities in terms of their aptitude to serve as sources and documentation of transformation challenges in South Africa.

Visual scripting

In both films, the producers adopted scripting features engendered in the context of popular protest deliberately designed to highlight the socio-economic and political grievances among disgruntled citizens. The scripts are designed and executed in a manner that is aligned explicitly to the reality genre with the intention to represent real issues affecting the welfare of contemporary South African society. For example, the socio-economic difficulties of the workers are clear in *Dear Mandela* when the writer uses the narrative style of adaptive scripting to highlight how the democratisation

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process fostered great hope for the people that never materialised, an injustice to the workers when thirty years of democracy have not changed their disadvantaged lives and government offers them empty promises. This is juxtaposed with the legendary President Mandela who championed the freedom project in South Africa and inspired hope in the citizens for a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, and just society. Furthermore, it is against this background that the production and scripting of these films aimed at challenging the colonial and discriminatory tendencies of the past, which the writers use to motivate the poor and marginalised groups of society to confront the current and chronic injustices.

Furthermore, the films have exploited specific verbal and non-verbal scripting features including choice of language, tone, drama, music, conflict, vulnerability and resistance antics to confront undemocratic practices. *Dear Mandela* does this using music and dance (sloganeering), verbal articulation and commentary where actors denounce how the local leadership of the ANC has reneged on its promises of basic providing social amenities such as housing, water, and toilets to the citizens. In both documentaries, visual or screenplay scripting has succinctly presented a compilation of the social and economic realities. This further helped to expose the malpractices of the democratic government, which has abandoned the socialist approach to national development. The style allows the present researchers to emphasise the concentration of power on individuals (i.e., politicians in government) in South Africa who happen to focus on creating personal wealth at the expense of the citizens. Moreover, both films thrive on the use of protagonists (such as Mgcineni "Mambush" Noki in *Miners Shot Down* and S'bu Zikode in *Dear Mandela*) who rose to be community heroes by challenging the symbols of monopoly capital and dominant class ideology over the pressing circumstances affecting the working class and marginalised communities. For these reasons, both films can be viewed as ideological constructions informed by film text, which invite the audience to be influenced in specific ways, including social mobilisation and political activism.

Governmentalism: Poor Governance in Democratic South Africa

The films reflect contemporary socio-economic and intricate political processes that preoccupy the progressive space, a tendency that often negatively affects the delivery of the National Development Programme (NDP, 2009) in South African communities. The NDP was the government's plan to transform South Africa by improving poor communities and reducing poverty through job creation, starting in 2019 with

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goals to be achieved by 2024 (the period of South Africa's "sixth administration" since 1994). However, in 2025, most NDP goals have not been achieved. Unemployment levels are increasing, for example, leading to the mobilisation of some sections of civil society, particularly poor homeless and other marginalised people, who seek alternative means of voicing their frustrations. The leadership deficit that exists between the citizens and the government prompts apolitical individuals mong the grassroots to help organise and direct the protesting communities to register citizen grievances.

Similarly, the Marikana miners were subjected to inhumane living conditions including lack of decent housing, health care and access to education for their children, which have been unresolved for many years. The rhetoric in political statements by those in authority shows that mining operators operate in solidarity with other formations (e.g., business and labour unions supporting the government) to exploit the workers. Political commentators and civic organisations in the documentaries expressed their displeasure over the increasing gap between policy and practical material conditions of citizens. Human living conditions have come under great scrutiny for over three decades (1994 – 2024) in South Africa. The films reflect the national service delivery outlook where the relations between elected leadership and residents are characterised by mistrust arising from the failure to fulfil social transformation promises such as access to housing, schools, healthcare, and clean water for the formerly marginalised communities. Hence, the ideological stance of staging collective protests was to mount pressure on the elected government led by the African National Congress (ANC) political party to be responsive to the demands of citizens.

Maladministration in government and poor service delivery
The two documentaries show citizens as witnesses of weak socio-economic systems, largely blamed (by workers speaking in both films) on maladministration, government corruption and the failure to implement of development policies. Both films make a convincing case that the democratic era has largely failed to meet the transformation expectations of the working class and people in the margins of society, and to ensure effective checks and balances where those in authority are made to account for the needs of the citizens. This is the backdrop to popular claims that there is said to be rule of law in the country, but still lack of accountability and violation of human rights have been on the rise, particularly in informal communities. This has compelled citizens to adopt alternative means of communication outside of

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the electoral process, including as violent protest and vigilantism, to register their grievances. The films show that the authorities have reneged on their promises of establishing a developmental state framework with which to redress colonial injustices and move towards a new democratic social order.

Violence and Insecurity

The analysis of both films indicates that whereas South Africa has a long and gruesome history of different forms of violence pre-1994, the democratic dispensation came with the hope and expectations violence would be minimised after the country attained freedom in 1994. However, because government has failed to satisfy the socio-economic needs of its citizens, the citizens often take it upon themselves to engage in violent protests accompanied by multi-faceted anti-social behaviour in a bid to attract the attention of other stakeholders including the media. Both documentaries present a negative picture of the socioeconomic and political environment that characterises South Africa as an unstable nation largely due to class conflicts and inequality. Both scripts reflect characteristics of black-on-black violence, where law enforcement agents deal with violent protests with lethal force as a form of 'general standard' in the country. As a result, service delivery protests and labour disputes in both films display various forms of violence often compounded by acts of intimidation, vandalism, and murder. In both *Dear Mandela* and *Miners Shot Down*, viewers are presented with the narrative that the government has failed its people.   Both documentaries depict violence laced with social unrest mixed with agitated trade unionism, particularly in the Marikana massacre (2012), whose outcomes tarnished the integrity of the South African democratic government.

Inequality, high unemployment and poor working conditions

The findings of the study show that the underlying elements of the producers' intentions in both documentaries were not to depict race relations in South Africa because there is limited conflict based on colour. However, race dynamics are clandestinely implied, particularly at the Lonmin setting where miners were shot dead. The films suggest that race and class continue to be used to justify the exclusion of some sections of the South African population, specifically most deprived people. Both documentaries reveal that inequality in South Africa is like that existing in pre-democratic times. This inequality denied most black people access to viable economic activity including access to land and labour inequality and entrenched white privilege

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in the country. The producers of the documentary *Miners Shot Down* highlight the socio-economic milieu of the democratic era through giving workers a voice with which to object to prejudice against them.

Both documentary scripts highlight how South Africa faces the challenge of providing access to quality education for most of its poor population that live in townships and informal settlements such as those in the outskirts of Durban. The study notes that most of these challenges have been caused by a lack of sustained investment to transform institutions of the state, which continue to reflect apartheid trends that were based on prejudice. This is compounded by the challenge of unfair labour practices in the form of poor wages, poor living conditions and economic exploitation of mine workers by employers. Both film scripts clearly illustrate the protesters' overall dissatisfaction with the socio-economic circumstances reflective of inept governance practices in democratic South Africa.

Recommendations

The authors recommend that directors of related films, in future, could invest in extensive academic research to delve deeper into understanding how the documentary genre is influenced by multiple disciplinary contestations across many disciplines. These multiple contestations and critical reflections in documentaries could include an analysis of contemporary apartheid (because apartheid is not totally over and manifests itself in various work environments) and neo-colonial tendencies within the current government and corporate sector(s), since these ideological tendencies would benefit from the infusion of some practical transformational leadership and democratic values incorporated in corporate governance. The study findings reveal the producers' ability to communicate multi-faceted meanings on the socio-economic and political challenges in South Africa based on the dissimilar but contextualised scripts of both films. The study suggests the following as recommendations that could improve scripting techniques:

(a) To uncover or resolve the mystery that characterised the long Marikana strike and the demands of urban shack dwellers such as *Abahlali Basemjongolo* (i.e., shack dwellers) (*Abahlali* is a Zulu language word for Residents, *Basemjondolo* is a Zulu language word for Shacks), who live outside the city of Durban in the KwaZulu Natal Province and whose story of homelessness is told in the documentary *Dear Mandela*, the producers needed to invest into

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extensive academic (in this case sociological, historical or political) research to delve deeper into understanding how the documentary genre is influenced by multiple-disciplinary contestations often premised on racial prejudice, abuse of authority, human rights violation or labour practice to tell the story of the democratic South Africa. For example, in *Dear Mandela*, *Abahlali Basemjondolo* experience violation of their human rights and are not assisted either by government or business (some their employers) to build homes; and so they remain homeless, staying in poorly and quickly constructed houses made of galvanized zinc, plastic and other unsafe and unsustainable materials. These structures affect their safety and health during periods of natural disasters and other environmental challenges. The focus of the documentaries is on the protests rather than on the real lives of the protesters which influence them to do protest actions.

(b) The researchers recommend the application of reconstructed or blended scripting formats, which would help to effectively achieve the composition and *cinema verité* that the producers intended through collective dissent and popular protest.

(c) Both political and socio-economic contestations in the South African political landscape pre-occupy the narratives in the two documentaries located in a democratic constitutional order. A critical reflection of contemporary neo-colonial and apartheid tendencies within the current government and corporate sector(s) would benefit from the infusion of some theoretical underpinnings in worldviews, namely post-colonial theory, feminism, critical theory, and so on, to inform a holistic scripting process that addresses abject poverty, violation of human rights, inequality and social injustice in South Africa, which are underrepresented in both films.

Conclusion

The films use symbolism and juxtaposition that highlight former President Nelson Mandela as a true revolutionary symbol of sacrifice, nation building and selfless leadership, qualities lacking in today's political leaders. Ideologically, the films demonstrate a shift of power relations, framed in both films as popular humanistic demands placed on authorities to become responsive to the will of the citizens, particularly the working class and homeless people. The films show that political and socio-economic contestations in the South African political landscape

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have led to untenable confrontations among key role players such as mining corporations and labour unions, to the detriment of the aspirations of the democratic constitutional order. The documentaries are a critical contribution to society's understanding of the unjust practices by corporate companies which lack corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies and government authorities which fail to serve public interest though they are expected to work towards uplifting the lives of citizens nationally.

Both documentary scripts succeed in presenting a critical contemporary reflection of the perpetuation of colonial and apartheid tendencies against human rights, economic equality and social justice in democratic South Africa. This is achieved through scripting formats that lay bare the extractive corporate practices, especially in mining, that fail to curtail the influence of narrow political interests that negate social justice, equality, and human rights in labour environments. Failure to honour constitutional obligations by the elected government and corporate companies can yield anti-social mobilisation against the elected government with potential threats to national stability as evidenced at the Marikana massacre. The film producers critique South African contemporary governance practices and leadership shortcomings to dissuade authorities from pursuing narrow interests at the expense of collective national goals to benefit all citizens. Both documentaries should be acknowledged for illustrating deep societal dissatisfaction with the socio-economic situation caused by inept governance in democratic South Africa.

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