

LIONEL ROGOSIN:

When I started to do CBA, I had already done "On The Bowery" but OTB was a rehearsal film for CBA. I made it only because I wanted to learn how to make a film, I hadn't done any films. But my plan was to do a film about CBA, this is wah.... how I started in cinema in a way. I heard about South Africa and the rise of apartheid and the National Party, and it sounded very ominous to me, and I was very concerned fa.... the re.... the rise of... the reawakening of fascism. Because we had defeated fascism in WW 2, but I didn't feel it was defeated. It was only a temporary victory. I felt it would re-emerge and continue in different forms. So I was alarmed at what was happening in SA, and um, but I wanted to practice making a film, so I did OTB in New York.

And uh, then after I'd done that, that was fif....started in '55, I finished the film in '56 and it was '57 before I had cleared things out of the way to go to South Africa cause I was to South Africa and uh, I went by boat, it took six weeks. I took a suitcase full of books, and read all those books on the way, so by the time I got to SA I knew it. As a matter of fact it was strange, cause I walked off the boat....particularly in Johannesburg, I thought. I've seen this place. It was all familiar to me. Of course the blacks were very familiar. The way they sounded, their sound, their laughter. There were a lot of familiar things and I felt at home. And it was strange also because I felt so familiar with the black, uh, culture, mannerisms, laughter, everything. You know, it was like, it was like being back in America.

PD: Had you seen "Cry, the Beloved Country"?

No, I hadn't seen the film...

PD: Maybe you could say in regard to....

I hadn't seen any films about South Africa before I got there, I'm pretty sure I didn't see "Cry, the Beloved.... Cry, the Beloved Country, I think that was done after.....no I'm not sure, do you know what year that was?

PD: Yeah, it was done before CBA.

Well, that's strange I didn't see it, for some reason I didn't see it. I read the book and I didn't like the book. And when I got to South

Africa I was pleased the Africans didn't like it. It was very paternalistic, the book is very paternalistic. What I found so strange about the book was that the Africans who are being mistreated and abused, and the white man still remains the father figure, the great white man. There wasn't enough sense of what it was to be black, I think that's the great problem.

PD: How did you get into black society? Did you have an in? How did that happen?

I had no in. There was nobody I knew there. I had a few names.

PD: I'm sorry, there was a little sound on the mike.

I had no in with the Africans beforehand. I had the names of quite a few very radical, perhaps revolutionary whites, some blacks, people in South Africa given to me by Rev. Michael Scott or Father Huddleston and others like that, in England. I had decided not to contact any of them because I felt that South African being somewhat of a police state, um, I didn't realize how inefficient they were at that time, that if I started seeing these people, I'd be trailed, I'd be spotted, my license plates would be taken down, and the next thing you know, if I went to get permission, they might know of me or be aware of me. So I didn't contact a single person or recommendation. In fact, for two or three weeks, I didn't know what to do. I sort of wandered around doing nothing. And I think that's a good thing to do sometimes when you're in a situation like this. Nothing is better than the wrong thing. To do nothing. Because I realized that as soon as I did the wrong thing they'd know I was there. If I didn't do anything they'd never know I was there. So I, I operated on that premise that they don't know I'm here and they never will know until I make a mistake, so I don't have to go slowly not to make mistakes.

And then I bumped onto somebody on the street by accident who knew me and invited me home. I went to their house and they said, why don't you go see the U.S. Information Service, American Embassy, which was puzzling you know, I thought I don't know if I want to go to see them because they support South Africa more or less. But on the other hand, why not? They're probably O.K. That's what I did. It all began with the U.S.I.A. And....overseas it's U.S.I.S. I think, I'm not sure. So I went to see them, particularly David Dubois, and he gave me a whole list of people. He said, you should go see the

African journalists on uh, The Golden City Post or Drum Magazine, and that's where I began. So it was with people who were not on the government list exactly, but were not pro-government, um, but who were not political activists, but who were of course investigating racism, and knew, and knew all the people. And so I, the first person I met was Bloke Modisane.

PD: Tell us a little about him, who he was...

Right, the first person I met was Bloke Modisane, and we hit it off beautifully. It was a perfect rapport. He loved the idea of the film and my attitude towards it, and I was, As I said, I didn't come there without preparation, I didn't come there not knowing what I was doing, I came there to do a film against apartheid, to expose apartheid. And that, the reason for that was because I was thinking globally and I was concerned about the rise of fascism, uh..... we had just come through WW 2, and I.....the period of the holocaust. Also I had grown up in America and I knew all of the racism, I had been surrounded by racism there. So the two phenomenon motivated me. The Nazis, the holocaust, and racism in America. And I tend to think globally, so for me the situation in South Africa was connected to everything else - imperialism, racism, etcetera.

So when I went there and I told Bloke I was going to do a film against apartheid, a few little jokes because you know he loved humor, I mean the Africans love humor. And we were laugh.....we got laugh...we were laughing right off the bat. I was saying, well I'm not sure the U.S.I.A. knows what I'm doing here, but I'm doing this film. So he said, O.K. I'll take you all around. So that was it, it was just that simple. In twenty minutes I was in. Cause Bloke knew everybody in the community. Being a journalist and a critic, and he did theatre, he wrote articles about Miriam. He was the one who discovered Miriam. And then I met some of the others through Bloke, other journalists, and I started going out to Sophiatown with him - to parties, there were parties, a lot of parties in Sophiatown, it was a great party place.

The problem was there was a bit of danger because there I was exposing myself because I was not legally allowed to go into Sophiatown. As a white I was not allowed to go into Sophiatown. And I was concerned that if I went in there and I was stopped and questioned, again I'd go on the list....my name would be down in Pretoria, the capital, under the Special Branch, the police.

So Bloke and I, and Lewis Nkosi, by the way, at that time I met Lewis, who was another journalist - African - there both African journalists (coughs) on Golden City Post. I met Lewis, so it was Lewis, Bloke and I who were sort of going around everywhere. And again they were the ones who solved the problem for me. It's always good to have people who know or live in the place to figure things out, cause they know the situation there. They said listen, whenever we go into Sophiatown, we'll sit in the back and you drive as if we're not with you, and we're going to be your servants, and you're bringing us back to - you know - to where we're living, because the buses are not running, it's after dark. So we had our story. We had a story, we came in and out all the time with no problem. We were stopped one night, the police opened the boot, you know the trunk of the car, looked in there looking for al...whiskey, because there was a lot of smuggling, they thought maybe I was a bootlegger. They looked in there, nothing. And I thought they had taken my license number and then I was worried.

From that point on I started to be nervous about - did they have their finger on me. Because this is the first confrontation with the police, getting my number. It turned out that they didn't, because later on I was investigated by the Special Branch and they didn't have any information on me. So I was clean in the sense of when the Special Branch interviewed me, they knew nothing about me. So then it was....they questioned me.....thoroughly. Asked me - you know - me financial rating etcetera - by that time they knew I was trying to make a film, I had applied to make a film. There was no evidence against me in terms of -- except I had been on a -- with Bloke - I had been on a queue at the bus station during a strike, and they said, what were you doing on that stri---on that queue during the bus strike, and I breathed a sigh of relief because if that's all they have I'm home free.

I said, well I was on the queue, I'm looking for my actors, and casting. That's the way I do it. Which was true, I was there -- of course they probably thought I was nuts, you're on a bus queue to cast your actors. (laughs) They went along with it, and of course that's how I found Zachariah, my main character. I found him in the railway, in the railroad station.

I found Zachariah, my main character, the African, he's a Zulu, in the railroad station. Because I told Bloke...Bloke and I were looking all

over the city, months and months we were looking for our main....I wanted somebody perfect for that part. I knew exactly what he looked like before I found him. So I could see him. I would know him immediately when I saw him, but I couldn't find him. I imagined him. And we kept looking and looking and couldn't find the right person, and I said Bloke, I'm not seeing enough faces. We went to the bus queue, it was about fifty or a hundred, and I said, I've got to see thousands of faces to find the right one. And we stood in the railroad station and it was absolutely literally probably 20,000 people in that hour, past me, very rapidly. And I saw two people, and I picked them. Like him and him, and Bloke ran over and they looked very frightened. They probably thought we were the police, because the police were always stopping for passes, and they were running away and he was grabbing them. And he said, do you want to be in a film? So they were amazed at that. I mean that was a bit unusual. So we made appointments to meet them. And sure enough, they were perfect. Both of them were absolutely in character, and profession and way of life, they fit the part.

PD: I'm getting a bit of rustle....

Is that from my moving?

I was extraordinarily pleased with the choice of Zachariah. There was another fellow, David something, who was very good but for some reason didn't work out, I don't remember now. Um, but Zachariah was perfect, his acting was unbelievable, although he was not an actor, wasn't professional, had never acted before. He was perfect, anything you asked him to do, he did it, and it was believable. Of course I had decided not to use actors, well this was my style, I started out doing that and working modelled on the neo-realists - DeSica, and going back further, Flaherty was one of my first inspirations. So that's the way I wanted to work, with non-professionals, with ordinary people. And of course in South Africa I wouldn't have had any choice, there were no professional black actors at that time that I knew of, or I never heard of since then. Uh, since then of course there are black actors, and there are many theatre groups, but then there were none. And also I did the same with whites too. I used ordinary people. I was going to use white actors, I interviewed a few of them, and they seemed to be so conventional, middle class, that I was afraid they might give me away if they knew what the film was about. I don't think they would have but I didn't want to take the risk. So I ended up by

using all the very left wing radical whites who were members of Congress of Democrats, Communists, revolutionaries, what have you. The people I knew who wouldn't give me away.

PD: How did the script evolve?

Well that was very simple. From the beginning I had an idea of what I wanted to show, a very simple story, I decided I wanted a very simple story from the point of view of an African, to show simply what life was like for an African, what pressure he's under, what humiliations, what pain, what suffering Africans have under apartheid. That's what I wanted to show in a simple story. So I knew - that was already clear. So after -- I didn't write anything for six months, and after I was there six months I knew how the system worked, how things -- what happened -- a million people were arrested each year for pass violations, so that's a big issue. And then I told Bloke and Lewis that I wanted them to help me write the script, and I wanted them to give me the story. And so the three of us sat down on a Saturday afternoon and talked it out. And I made notes, it was about six hours, and that was it. That was our story. And then I wrote

down, I took what they had told me and made an outline, a very short outline of twenty two pages, very thin -- you know -- description, no dialogue, yeah, no dialogue, because my idea was to improvise the dialogue. You know that was the neo-realist method. And that's what I wanted. I wanted to improvise dialogue, which I had done on OTB. And uh, so we improvised the dialogue and we got that dialogue sequence, it's everybody's favorite, which pleases me because it's my favorite. To me it's the core of the film, that dialogue sequence is the heart and soul of the film.

PD: You're talking about the shebeen scene...

Yeah,

I'm talking now about the shebeen scene, because that was a scene in which I had Bloke, Lewis, Can Themba. These were all heavyweights, intellectuals, theorists, journalists. Uh, and I had heard them talking many, many times. So I more or less knew what they said and what they thought. And it pretty much coincided with my ideas and with the concept of the film. So I knew what to do. I knew that I'd just have to get them together and we'd start talking about this thing and that would be it. We'd get it. It was nothing.

You know it was just a piece of cake, very quick. So we shot that scene in one sitting with two cameras. And then of course we had Zachariah in there and Miriam at the end of the scene, and she sings. That scene has become quite famous now. Many people have been buying clips from the film, they all buy that same one. And South Africans when they see it, they love it. They seem to like that particular sequence. Africans or whites.

And uh, so I'm very pleased. I saw it recently, the last two years, and a strange thing happened, I liked it much better than I did when I first did it. I thought it will get worse as it goes along, it'll get further away from reality, and oddly enough, I like it better. At first it bothered me, there were things I didn't like in it, and things I didn't feel I had quite gotten what I was -- you know -- they were saying it, but I wanted them to say things I had thought of, that were part of my concept and philosophy. And I felt we had missed it somewhat. But seeing it now we didn't miss it. It's very strange.

PD: ...It gains in historical value....

But that isn't what is impressing me. It's not the historical value, I don't notice that because I've seen it all through the years. What pleases me is -- it comes pretty close to what I wanted to say and what they were saying and what makes sense. It has a strong feeling I think. I'm talking about other people's reaction. But when you're the filmmaker yourself, and you feel the same way about something, then you know you've got it. Because you don't always feel right about your own work.

PD: If you can elaborate a bit about what happened to those people.

Yeah, well. What happened to the people in that scene, that was a bit of a tragedy. For some of them it was a tragedy. For Bloke, who escaped from South Africa, walked -- in fact he and I planned this out together. That he would take the train to Bechuanaland. I don't know what the new name is, I think of it....

PD: Botswana.

Botswana, yeah. He would take the train because they didn't stop. They didn't search -- the borders were very open then, you could drive or walk across. So his idea was to take the train to Botswana, the capital, and from there go by truck or hitch rides to Dar es

Salaam or someplace. And so he walked, he got to Bechuanaland, and he walked a long distance, he said he walked for days and days, slept at night in the veldt and it was very rough. Got some truck rides and then in Dar es Salaam he sent me a cable and I talked to Michael Scott, and Michael Scott, Reverend Michael Scott got him papers to come to England. And I sent him a ticket and he came to England, and he lived in England for many years, and he had a hard time adjusting, earning a living. England is a hard place for Africans. And uh, had difficulty getting going, and he wrote his book, you don't make much money out of that, you don't get paid while you're doing it. And he did plays. He'd get 50 or 100 pounds a play from the BBC. He acted in some things. He acted in four or five films. He was in "The Blacks", Genet's "The Blacks". And then he went off to Germany to do research on the German occupation of Africa, Tanganyika. And so he met a German woman there, married her later. Then he eventually went to Germany and uh, I don't know, the pressure of all that, he died a year or two ago. But he was under stress the entire -- most of the time that I knew him here.

Lewis Nkosi had better luck. He became quite well known as a journalist. Wrote for a lot of Euro--- important papers -- The Observer, The Times. Has written some books. He's doing research now on Conrad. He's married and living in Warsaw. So it's quite a saga. He's now an authority on Conrad. A black Zulu is now a Professor of English on Conrad. There's an irony there.

And of course Miriam, she of course became very successful, and I brought her out and introduced her to the West. It was through me and through CBA that she got her start. She met Belafonte, became a great star in New York, overnight. Just incredible how fast, through Belafonte mainly. Then the rest of her story is a nightmare and a horror story. Because she's of course successful and doing well but in her personal life she's had lots of tragedies, her daughter became ill and died, her grandchild died. Then she had all the trouble with the American authorities because she was connected to Stokley. She married Stokley and they started to hound her and harass her. She went on a visit to Cuba and they wouldn't let in back into the country. And the day after she married Stokley, the mafia broke her contract with every nightclub she was engaged with, she had to leave. That was only the beginning of her horror with a combination of personal and political things. Now she lives in Africa, in Conakry, and she does a lot of concerts in Europe, and I think she's starting to get back to the States and do things there too.

PD:just go over the last few phrases.....

(Repeats last lines)

Oh yes, I can't forget Can Themba. Because Can was in that scene and he was also a journalist on Golden City Post. Can was a very important writer, he'd written short stories and he was quite brilliant. He had the shortest career on all, he died a few years after CBA was finished in Swaziland. He was drinking very heavily. It's one of the hazards of being political, being a revolutionary or a radical, is alcohol. A lot of people I had known who were exiles or -- like Rashid Hussein, died of alcoholism too. He's in that film I did, "Arab-Israeli Dialogue."

DR: Is Nat Nakasa in the film?

No, Nat is not in the scene. The others in the scene did not attain the achievements of Bloke and Lewis, Can Themba. Except for Zachariah, who is the leading man in the film, I don't know if he's done anything since, but he was brilliant in the film. I got great write ups about him. Time Magazine describes him as a black St. Peter. Somebody told me, and this isn't very humorous, that he became an actor. (laughs) So that's like nature following art or something. That's the last I've heard of him.

END TAPE 1

TAPE 2

Talking about Zachariah, I have no idea where he is, I haven't heard from him. Well I got postcard a couple of years afterwards, or a year after. And then nothing. I wrote back, and so I haven't heard or seen him in over 30 years. And it would be marvelous to meet him. I would think it would be, we'd both be thrilled. So he's now I'd guess 50 or 60, something like that. I heard he was an actor, which is extremely amusing, gratifying to think he became a great actor in South Africa. Right.

DR: Can you recall the impressions you had of Sophiatown when you first came there?

I'm trying to remember my first impression of Sophiatown. I can see it how it looked, the houses there. They were small houses, it was a community of small houses, it wasn't a slum. It wasn't like Harlem. Uh, it was private houses, it was the only place Africans could own their own houses, freehold, which is why the government wanted to take it away and destroy it and make a suburb. Both because they wanted the convenience, the proximity to Johannesburg, and they didn't like the fact that the only place where Africans owned their own property, they didn't want that. They wanted Africans to be transitory, coming into, you know, coming into these locations that were made for them and going out, and when they stopped work go back to their reserves. They didn't want any permanency, families. And that's how the mine workers were organized, the hundreds of thousands of mine workers would come into the mines, live in barracks without their families, so that when they were finished with their tour of duties in six months or a year, they had to go back to the reserves. They couldn't stay, or they wouldn't stay because they didn't have their families. That was the reason, or seemed to be the main reason for the destruction of Sophiatown. They built a white suburb.

And I felt very comfortable there. I mean I went in and out and walked around sometimes alone. And the people seemed friendly. The thing is, they must have known what I was doing. The word must have gotten around some way, because no one ever said a word to anyone. They never gave away our secret, even though the whole community knew, and I didn't talk to them, I didn't know them, but I began to worry, I used to think, God there's so many people who know what we're doing or seeing what we're doing, somebody's going to talk and the next thing you know we'll be deported or we'll have trouble. And we never did. And that was a very strange experience. And I think what happened was the community decided to keep quiet. Although there are informers, so I don't know how it worked. Well they didn't know exactly what we were doing, because we didn't broadcast it. The only people that knew, really knew was Bloke, Lewis Nkosi, Can, even the other small actors and even Zachariah didn't know. I never told them what it was exactly so that they wouldn't be able to tell about it and they also could say they didn't know and it would be protection for them. If they didn't know they could say 'we didn't know', that could be their excuse, so uh--

As we were filming it they started tearing Soph-- Sophiatown down. As I was filming On The Bowery they started tearing town the Third

Avenue El. And we were racing to finish before the El was gone. And I was thinking, every place I go to make a film, they tear it down as I'm filming. But we finished. You can see in the film that it's half destroyed, and it went on a bit afterwards, and it's now a white suburb, it has a very peculiar name, something like salvation - Triumph. That's it Triumph.

DR: Can you do that again without comparing it to the EL.

So as I was filming there, they started tearing down Sophiatown. And you can see that half of it is down. And then they continued after we were finished and I think

PD: I'm going to interrupt you again Lionel....

They were tearing down Sophiatown because uh, it was the only place in South Africa, or one of the few places where Africans owned their own home, they had freehold, and they didn't want them to own their own places, they wanted everything to be transitory for Africans, not to have -- sort of like in the gold mines, they had to -- hundreds of thousands came in without their families and lived in barracks, so they would just go back at the end of their tour of duty.

PD: And what they named the town....

Soon after I arrived in South Africa, and when I started going out to Sophiatown with Bloke, almost at that time I was told that they were tearing Sophiatown down. Because they were starting to tear it down before I even got there. And uh, at the beginning, I didn't know I was going to film in Sophiatown. But I think pretty soon after I realized it would be a good place to film because of that, because that was going on at the same time. It fit into the story. And it was a very moving thing, the Africans were very sad about it, they were very upset. It wasn't just a matter of moving a minor thing. They had roots in Sophiatown, and Sophiatown had become, I didn't realize then, it's only recently that I've become aware of it that Sophiatown had become a great cultural center in a way. Like Harlem in the 30's, you had the Harlem renaissance. In Sophiatown you had that kind of cultural upheaval. You had artists and singers, it was a shantytown, not a shantytown but it was uh -- almost a slum. But you had -- it was the only place Africans lived so you had all grades. You had no class structure. It was a mix between

journalists and singers like Miriam, all together with workers from the railroad. So you had this incredible mixture of people and they all mixed together. And they were very --- there was a great nostalgia about it. Of course I was so caught up in the film I wasn't thinking about that too much. There's a film that's been made since called -- it's a whole film about Sophiatown, they go into that in detail.

PD: What about the distribution of the film....

Well, distribution for this kind of film or any kind of film, is an ordeal. In fact I think we're masochists to even get into it. On The Bowery, I had to wait and wait to even get a cinema to show it. And then CBA, uh, I couldn't get any cinema to show it particularly. Or the terms were no ~~good~~ ^{good}. They gave these house deals which were killers which you as the filmmaker had to invest like 20 or 30 thousand dollars to open the film. And then there was a good chance of losing a lot of that.

So that's how I got involved with the Bleecker Street Cinema. That was an interesting story. I started the Bleecker Street Cinema in 1960 because of that difficulty. I'm going to have to start my own cinema so independent filmmakers don't have to go through this, we can open our films, we make our film we can open it. And that's how I started the Bleecker Street. And ran that for 14 years. So we finally got an opening for CBA. It ran 12 weeks.

By coincidence, we started it uh -- the week of the Sharpeville riots - Sharpeville massacre - it wasn't a riot. It was a massacre, the Africans were not rioting, they were peacefully demonstrating and the police shot, shot, shot them down. 200 and some odd Africans, and the film opened that week by accident. And the headlines were, Sharpeville. We ran 12 weeks. 8 were good and we carried it a few more weeks hoping to promote it around the country. And then it never showed in more than 3 or 4 other cinemas.

But then for 30 years it's been going around to universities in 16mm. And television all over Europe. And art film cinemas in Europe, England, France. Television in Germany, Italy, all over Scandanavia. And then 10 or 15 years later, unknown to me, it started going all over Africa. It started to be seen throughout Africa, don't ask me where, why or how. But I know that 300,000 people saw it in Algeria during, perhaps right after the independence. And it was shown through the army. And it was shown all over Africa because I

kept getting letters from African filmmakers saying how great it was, and how important - - I showed you the letter. So it me about 15 years to discover that it was being shown. I didn't even know that. So it got shown all over Africa which is very gratifying, that's where it was made for, and uh, I don't know how exactly, it wasn't the usual way, it must have been 16mm or God knows. It's been shown throughout mostly Europe mainly on television. It's going to be shown on Channel 4 in August. Probably reopen in Paris. It had a very big opening in Paris in 1960. It ran very well for a few months and I'm getting more requests for it than ever. And I have the feeling that from now on it will be seen far more than it was in the last thirty years, which is ironic.

PD: During all that time it was not shown on American television and was not shown in South Africa.

During all this time, while it was being shown all over Europe, it was never shown on American television, and there's something wrong with that too. There's something definitely wrong with that. It shows everywhere and not on America. Well, to explain it would be very complex but sometimes you don't have to be complex you can just analyze the result. The film doesn't show for thirty years there must be some kind of censorship operating. There is censorship on American television, I know it, but it's not a clear-cut kind of censorship, it's not censorship you can see or explain. It's subtle. It's subtle. It's not like the censorship in a third world country. Under a dictatorship, like an Egypt or in the Soviet Union, or in China. It's another kind of censorship. But it may be opening up now. I know that cable is opening up things and I know that all these new channels, that's the thing about America that's positive. It's so dynamic, you always find a new thing happening. I'm hoping perhaps that cable will show this film sooner or later.

PD: Tell us a little about its first showing in South Africa.

Well, an African professor of cinema and sociology wrote to me a couple of years ago from Berlin. His name was Masilela. And we started to correspond. He loves CBA, he's a South African, thinks it's a great film. He said, well there's a distributor who might want to show your film. I got in touch with that distributor, he asked for a video, I sent him a video, he said well I like to show it. He got it through the censor, which surprised us. He showed it to the censor, it was O.K.'ed. He opened it last June in Johannesburg. It got a great

review which said it's still relevant, that was important. And we had very successful showings to black and white audiences. About a 90% positive reaction from blacks and whites. But we had a little trouble in getting it shown because of the South African situation. Because most of the Africans would see it in the locations, and in the locations it's difficult to reach the audiences and disseminate it for some reason. And they are coming to the cinemas outside which are mixed, they are coming, but not in as large numbers. But it seems to be continuing to run, so it may run for many years.

Well, we had some difficulties in filming beyond the normal difficulties in filming -- but we had the difficulties of security and remaining hidden from the authorities, we were nearly discovered a few times. But my main uh, method was to uh, of dealing - of throwing them off the track -- was mainly telling - - I was doing something else. Rather than hiding, it's very hard to hide, and we decided not to hide at all. Come right out in the open which I've always done with all my films. Not to hide but to tell them we were doing something else. And so we started -- as a matter of fact we had -- we ended up with four or five different stories which became a little dangerous because I started worrying well maybe they'll compare notes. But there wasn't that much cohesion, so we got away with it. So the stories were, first we were doing a musical comedy, that was the easiest, that was --- they would like that, they would buy that. There were some places we couldn't tell that because it wouldn't make any sense -- in the gold mines. So we told the gold mine people we were doing a series for television. So that's a different story. And then another story -- but we were nearly discovered once or twice.

One time we were shooting in a garage and a white person, who wasn't South African, and became very drunk during the shooting. He was not part of our team, he was an employee of the garage, he was watching over it. Suddenly at the end of the filming he started running around screaming "I know what you're doing, I know what this is all about, I'm going to get you, I'm going to the police, etc. etc." And one of the Afrikaners who was with us, who was, you know, against apartheid, threatened this guy and scared him off and he run out of the garage, and I thought oh my God, we've had it -- you know, nothing could stop him from telling the police the next day. And I was waiting all day Sunday and Monday. And Monday came and there was no phone call from the police and I figured we'd got away with it somehow, this guy forget, he was drunk, he decided

not to bother -- so that's it, that's all that ever happened. And then the cameraman was arrested two weeks after we finished. I don't know exactly how that happened, except that uh, we had told the newspaper what we did there, we wanted to get the publicity. It was somebody we could trust so we said don't break the story until we leave. And I don't know if they printed it a little too soon, he were still there, and then they picked him up and said, do you know the Bermans, do you know so and so and so. And he said, ask them. They said, well you be on the next plane out Johannesburg. So its good it didn't happen while I was shooting.

We had a bit of luck and we also had good support from the Africans, sort of hidden support.

DR: What about the characterization of whites in the film.....

As I say, they improvised and they improvised what they thought the whites were, these whites improvised the way they saw whites around them. And some of them were pretty extreme. So that's part of-- secondly, the acting was a little weak among those people, which may add to the stiffness, not so much the way they're saying it than perhaps the way they did it. Because we shot those scenes with no preparation. We were running out of time and I left the white scenes til the end, I did all the African scenes first, the white scenes I left to the end, -- for security reasons. I felt I didn't want the whites to know about it til the end, You know, that was the most dangerous area, so I left all that. And then we started running short of time. Then we started having to cast, uh, bring the people to the set in one day. Find the person and come the next day for filming, with no rehearsals and uh, so, it was a bit crude those scenes.

In fact I was very upset with it, because I felt -- it used to bother me a lot when I'd see those scenes -- I would cringe and say, oh my god. But yet it didn't seem to bother the audience too much.

Oh, there's one women there who seems like a maniac.....

PD: I'm going to pause a second....

I was very aware of it soon after I got there, there was an enormous influence of American culture, particularly on the blacks. It was like a mecca to them. Which I found ironic, that America was so racist, yet for the Africans it was like some paradise almost. Because they

saw Louis Armstrong and the great American famous blacks and they thought that was pervasive. They weren't as aware of the racism and the problems as they would be when they came, when they'd visit. Then they had shocks. That's what happened to Nat you see.

But I was very aware of their interest in American culture and their fascination with it very soon after -- the music, the films, all these different things. Funny things would happen, I'd be walking along the street and somebody would be pulling on my coat. I'd wonder, what the hell is going on - - I'd look around and there's this African, young African, pulling my coat, saying "boss where'd you get that coat" -- he wanted to buy my coat! But that happened to me several times, it was so funny. Because I had sort of a khaki jacket on and they liked -- so there was always sort of that romance. And it also helped me too. I mean I think it helped me with the people I was working with - with Bloke and Lewis - Bloke particularly. -- It helped open the doors.